

**THE PROMOTION OF TRADITIONAL
THEATRE ARTS:
PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES**

Submitted to

Kerala Research Program of Local Level Development
Centre for Development Studies
Uloor
Thiruvananthapuram

Submitted by

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4 January 2002

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

Our acknowledgements due to numerous persons and institutions who helped to formulate the ideas and suggestions of this project. We are sincerely thankful to all of them. Our special thanks to Dr K Narayanan Nair, Co-Ordinator of Kerala Research Program of Local Level Development and his associates for funding this project and all other encouragements. The secretary, principal, staff and students of Kerala Kalamandalam; Persons of the Ammannur Gurukulam, Krishnanattam Kaliyogam of Guruvayoor, Sangeet Natak Akademy, Margi, Sanskrit University, various Kathakali clubs; freelance artists et al deserve special thanks. Some of the individuals who deserve special thanks are: NPS Namboodiri, LS Rajagopal, NP Unni, KG Paulose, P Rama Iyer, P Venugopal, VR Prabodhachandran Nayar, Ayyappapanikker, Kavalam Narayana Panikker, VKB Nambiar, G Venu, Margi Madhu, Usha Nangiar, Margi Narayanan, Kalamandalam Krishnakumar, Silpi Jenardhanan, Ramesh Varma, Sati Varma, P Appukkuttan, N Radhakrishnan Nair and others who helped us by filling the questionnaire. We are very thankful to all of them.

preface

Preface

This project on the promotion of traditional theatre arts is an attempt to study the socio-economic aspects of the arts as Kathakali, Kudiattam and Krishnanattam by the guide lines given by the expert committee of Kerala Research Program of Local Level Development, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. Traditional artists have problems. Since they are an extreme minority, their demands are often neglected. This study highlights their problems and suggest solutions to the incumbents.

Maximum efforts have been taken to represent issues without bias. Our position is neutral. There are different schools of thoughts in this field and we respect each school of thought. Political issues and the issues related to power relationships among the artists are not projected in this report.

Dr Jose George
Project Director
4 January 2002.

ABSTRACT

Hypothesis / The Research Problem

The existence of the traditional theatre art forms of Kerala is now in a critical juncture. Developed and patronaged under the feudal system, traditional theatre art forms are at present struggling to cope with the modern socio-aesthetic realities of Kerala. The decline of the feudal system terribly affected their conventional mode of existence. Their ritual values are neglected, regular audience are considerably reduced, and the new modern generation is not properly trained to enjoy these complex forms. The growth of the modern theatre, popular films and television encroached into the venues of traditional performances. As a result, traditional artists are not in a position to earn their livelihood by practicing their arts. Many of the artists and their families abandoned traditional theatre practice and sought other professions. Art is neglected and the promotional measures of the government or cultural bodies or agencies cannot completely succeeded in preserving and popularizing art forms as if in the time of feudal system. This project will study mainly the reasons and problems of the decline of traditional theatre arts and then identify and suggest promotional measures and further possibilities for a healthy sustaining of the traditional theatre arts.

This project specifically enquires the conventional function of the traditional theatres, reasons for their decline in different periods of history, the present condition of the art and the artists, survival strategies adapted by the artists, promotional

measures taken by organizations, institutions, cultural agencies and government; and at last suggestions and guidelines for promotion.

Methodology

The methodology applied for the investigation of this project is ethnography. Apart from this, the methodology of the social science and humanities is used for the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. Primary data is collected from interviewing the artists and resource persons. Secondary data is collected from newspaper analysis, television reports, abstracting ideas evolved in seminars, conferences, symposiums, etc. Specimen/representative analysis is also used to arrive at a conclusion.

Objective/Relevance of the project

In order to promote the traditional theatre arts from their present state of stagnation, a conceptual change among the artists and a policy level paradigm shift among the incumbents are inevitable. In the third wave of globalization, economic reality of a performance cannot be marginalized as if in the second wave or in the third wave. The economic potential of the performing arts of Kerala is to be explored retaining their ritual values and aesthetic performance scores. This project gives guidelines for achieving these objectives.

Project Design

The project has been divided into three analytical chapters apart from the formal introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, the research problem is clearly defined and explored how market forces overrules classical theatre genres.

Traditional theatre arts are defined in their historical contexts from their origin to the present crisis situation. By delineating the history of the arts in three waves, experimentation, politicization, regionalization, secularization, feminization, nationalization and internationalization of the arts are briefly introduced.

In the second chapter entitled “ From Feudal Historicity to Institutional Maneuvering” the ongoing process of negotiation of transformations and adaptations of the arts are elucidated. The main thrust of this chapter is the presentation of the functioning of institutions like Kerala Kalamandalam.

In the third chapter entitled “Ethnographic Reality Check: Interplay of Cultural Ideology Versus Image Politics” is basically a psycho-socio analytical unit in which the modus operandi of the festivities of traditional theatre arts in competitive venues are examined by using the ethnographic technique of participant observation.

In the fourth chapter entitled “The Promotion of Traditional Theatre Arts: The Role of the Incumbents”, the role of the incumbents are clearly enumerated. This chapter gives suggestions for the promotion of the arts.

The last chapter “Conclusion” sums up the project. It advises the concept of ‘paradigm shift’ of the arts in accordance with the ongoing process of linear evolutionary change.

A list of Kathakali schools, Kathakali clubs, Kudiyaattam centers and a select bibliography are given in the appendix.

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

When Market Forces Overrules Classical Theatre Genres

Killimangalam Vasudevan Namboodiripad, a former superintendent of Kerala Kalamandalam and a connoisseur of classical theatre spoke in the inauguration of a three day Kathakali workshop held on 18-20 Oct.1999 in Karikkad, Malappuram:

Kathakali and such traditional classical performing arts of Kerala have already entered or atleast are fast moving into a new phase in their evolution. The main characteristic of this new phase is the influence of the

market forces and of the commoditisation [sic] of the art forms. The 'use value' of art forms is slowly but steadily being replaced by the 'exchange value'. This creeping process of monetisation [sic] affects all aspects of the performing arts. It may be relevant to mention here that among the objectives of *kavya* listed by the famous Sanskrit scholar Mammata in his *Kavyaprakasa* (a treatise on poetics), the present day tendencies seen in *drisya kavya* forms like Kathakali and Koodiyattam is to be concerned with only *artha*(money) and *yasa*(fame) forgetting the higher and nobler purposes like *sadyahparanivritti*(immediate aesthetic bliss) and *sivetarakshati* (destruction of evil).¹

In his speech, Killimangalam Vasudevan Namboodiripad shares the angst and anguish of the lovers of classical arts and aesthetics. The noble aims of the traditional classical theatre is feared to be swept away in the heavy winds of commodification of values based on the ever flexible 'market forces'. Many connoisseurs believe that the economic liberalization of the Indian economy adversely affected traditional and classical arts. Rather than considering art as an instrument of aesthetic up lift, it is considered as an industrial produce with defined market values, manufactured for public consumption. Basically classical and traditional theatre arts are ritual arts or feudal arts emerged in a particular undefined

¹ Quoted from Sruthi, Jan.2000, P.31.

historical context. Kathakali is the only exemption to this statement. Kathakali, which is evolved in a particular defined historical context is the only art form simultaneously undergoing extreme appreciation and abuse. That is, throughout the world the histrionics of Kathakali is appreciated and in the art world, Kerala is symbolized as the land of Kathakali. Where as with in Kerala, the general opinion of the Kathakali lovers is that it is the most abused art form.

The tourist industry of India, particularly Kerala is fully or partially responsible for the present state of being of the traditional arts like Kathakali. When the tourist industry understood the market value of cultural tourism, it unleashed all the rules and regulations of the performance score of the art. The industry encouraged any mode of enactment that entertains a tourist. In the process of earning “fast bucks” the promoters of tourism totally ignored or forgot the value of tradition and culture.

The emergence of the new patrons as multinational companies and their product advertisement using Kathakali icons without any sanctity paved a way to the deterioration of the arts. Either the images of Classical arts or their fragments are widely used in the product advertisements in order to give an ethnic/classical/cultural touch. Usually the designers do not bother about the decorum of the art.

The appearance of the living Kathakali veshams in the political rallies, cultural pageants, fashion parades are quiet common in the contemporary scenario. An onlooker can easily realize that these “post modern” scenes are created with the guidance and support of the experts of the arts. Many art lovers who are unaware about the cultural politics of the visual text shocked when they saw the role played by the Kathakali veshams during the miss world competition held at Bangalore. The status of the pacha veshams was reduced as “stage boys” whose duty was defined to assist the “world beauties”.

Video music is another genre which employs the icons of the traditional classical arts for visual beauty. Popular India video music albums like A R Rahman's *Vande Matharam* and Alisha's *Made in India* cleverly employed the symbols of Kerala classical arts.

Kathakali veshams are exceedingly used in the dance and music sequences of contemporary Malayalam films without any performative logic. The mundane presentation evokes a common feeling among the laymen that what they have seen in the screen is real.

The romantic concepts prevailed among the “pseudo intelligentsia” of the classical theatre practitioners are also responsible for the present “decay” of the arts. Innovations of classical theatres are branded as the politicization of the art, experimentation of the art, religionization of the art, secularization of the art, marketization of the art, nationalization of the art, internationalization of the art, feminization of the art and so on.

The aesthetic aspects of the traditional theatre arts are the main focus of the studies of earlier times. The socio-economic aspects of the traditional theatre arts in the present cultural context are going to be analyzed in various units.

Traditional theatre arts are classified into three waves in this project. The first wave is to consider traditional theatre arts are a product of the Feudal system or Feudal arts. When feudalism declined, artists cannot continue their traditional profession because of many reasons, especially of financial

vulnerability. Traditional theatre arts cannot exist without a patronage of support. When the traditional patronage is lost, they failed to get proper support to sustain as if in the time of their origin. As a result, the art is declined and the artists move away from their profession.

The second wave is to consider traditional theatre arts in the Democratic system. In the post-independent era, either the government or some cultural agencies supported the art. For instance, Kerala Kalamandalam was undertaken by the government in 1957. Guruvayoor Devaswom adopted the Krishanattam troupe of the Zamorins of Kozhikode. Kathakali clubs were formed to appreciate the art and encourage the artists. Cultural organizations like Margi were established to promote the vanishing arts as Kudiattam. Eventually the Central and State governments subsidized their activities. Because of these promotional measures, a group of artists could maintain their life. During this time wide popularity is received by popular commercial films and television channels. The aesthetic attention of the new audience is shifted to the new

media. Government encouraged cultural tourism. The second wave of the traditional theatre arts ends in this point.

The third wave is the age of globalization. The advancement of the electronic media and internet/information revolution affected the arts to a certain extent. The live audio visual culture of the classical traditional theatre arts are dominated by the shoot-edit-reproduce culture. A new market has formed for the recorded performances. The sacredness of the art is overpowered by consumerism. The new agenda of globalization that 'market forces determine the value' affects the age old traditional arts. A new world order is coming up. Here arrives a fundamental question: where can we identify a space for traditional theatre arts in the new world order of electronic media and consumerism? Who/how can we sustain our traditional arts? The answer is the result of enquiry of this project.

Chapter II

From Feudal Historicity To Institutional Maneuvering

Folklorist Richard Bauman noted long ago that traditions of performances like Kerala, India's Kathakali dance-drama, have always stood available to participants and spectators 'as a set of conventional expectations and associations' which can be 'manipulated in innovative ways, by fashioning novel performances outside the conventional system, or working various transformations and adaptations which turn performance into something else'. A system of cultural performances such as kathakali is, like the concept of culture itself, not a set of fixed conventions and attributes, but rather, a dynamic system of human action constantly in an ongoing process of negotiation.²

As far as Kathakali is concerned, both Richard Bauman's and Phillip B Zarrilli's observations are right. Kathakali,

² Quoted from Phillip B Zarrilli, *Contested Narratives*, P.101.

generally classical theatre arts underwent various transformations and adaptations and moved far away from a set of fixed conventions and attributes. These changes are directly related to the socio-political changes of the society and the economic status of the patrons who vary from time to time.

Among the select traditional theatre arts, Kudiyaattam and Krishnanattam have ritual origins. Kudiyaattam is performed inside the Koothambalams(Temple theatres) by a specific class namely Chakyars. The monopoly of the rights of the Krishnanattam performance is still possessed by the Hindu community. Since its inception onwards, Kathakali got the individual identity as an aesthetic art patronaged and popularized by the feudal lords. Among the classical theatre arts, Kudiyaattam was an endangered species or a museum piece³. Promotional measures taken in the second and third wave make Kudiyaattam a living theatre. Now Kudiyaattam is survived from extinction.

³ Western art historians use these two words as adjectives of Kudiyaattam.

Kudiyattam is an ancient form of Classical theatre intended to enact Sanskrit dramas in accordance with the canons of Bharatha's Natyasastra. Though scholars of have Difference of opinions, it is believed that it was originated in Sangam age itself and continuously enacted at this time by the Chakyar community in the Koothambalams or temple theatres. In this theatre form, Chakyars play the male roles, Nangiars play the female roles and Nanmbiars play the drums namely Mizhavu. Formerly this theatre form was enacted as a ritual offering only at Koothambalams. Since 1949, it has been performing outside Koothambalam for aesthetic purposes.

Kudiyattam was a typical Feudal art. More than that it is a ritual. The decline of the Feudalism was the fundamental cause of the extinction of this form. In many temples, kudiyattam is performed as a ritual sponsored by the temple authorities. The decrease of the revenue of the temples also affected its decline.

As if Kathakali is saved in the second wave through institutionalization, Kudiyaattam is also saved by the same method.⁴ Few institutions were formed for the promotion of this art and these institutions are in one way or other functions differently. There are six accredited institutions or centers in Kerala Which promote Kudiyaattam.⁵

Krishnanattam is a dance drama enacted in 8 episodes at Sree Krishna temple, Guruvayoor. Among the three traditional theatre arts selected for this study, Krishnanattam is the less known but ritually rich.

Krishnanattam is the product of the Vaishnava Bhakthi movement of the 17th century. Inspired by this movement, Manaveda, the Zamorin of Calicut composed Krishnageethi in 1654. He himself choreographed it by absorbing many elements from Sanskrit Theatre Kudiyaattam, various classical dance forms, and folklore. Until 1958, this dance drama was patronized by the Zamorins of Calicut. In 1958

⁴ In district level youth festivals there are hardly any participants.

⁵ The list of the Kudiyaattam institutions is given in the appendix.

the Zamorins handed over the performance rights and plays to Guruvayoor Devaswom. Today this is only one troupe that practices Krishnanattam.

Kathakali is unanimously considered the representative classical theatre or dance drama of Kerala. As far as the history of the performing arts of the world is concerned, it occupies a chief position. There are no other art forms in the world as unique as kathakali. Literally, kathakali means 'story play' or 'playing a story'. As Prof. Phillip B Zarrilli calls, it is a complex- Kathakali complex. Since there are numerous books and articles available on Kathakali, general information on Kathakali as a performing art or theatre is not discussed in this project.

The origin of the story of Kathakali is a legend. It is a combination of different fine arts fused into one form. It is evolved from Ramanattam a form of folk theatre prevailed in the 17th century Kerala. Kottarakkara Thamburam (Maharaja of Kottarakkara) popularized it by forming his own company and

performing it in different places. Eventually stories from various Hindu epics were adapted into the Kathakali repertory. Maharajas, feudal lords and rich Namboodiri families were the patrons of kathakali in the early stages. The golden ages of Kathakali were 18th and 19th centuries. The decline of the Kathakali is directly related to the British political colonization of Kerala. Along with the abolition of Feudal system, Feudal art forms like Kathakali too declined. In the first half of the 20th century, Kathakali was facing extinction. There were no one to support or patronize classical arts. At this juncture Mahakavi Vallathol founded Kerala Kalamandalam in 1930 in order to promote classical arts like Kathakali. It is a landmark in the history of Classical arts. His aim was to save the glorious extincting classical arts of Kerala. In short, he institutionalized Kathakali.

Kerala Kalamandalam

Kerala Kalamandalam is a synonym of Kathakali. A suggestion came from the thematic workshop of KRPLLD

held at CDS on 17 Nov.1999 was to consider Kerala Kalamandalam as the main resource center for studying the Kathakali related problems and issues. We seriously considered this suggestion and decided to focus main attention on Kerala Kalamandalam rather than giving prime emphasis to other institutions of similar kind. As a part of research, we had a very detailed discussion with the Secretary, the Principal, some staff and students, alumini and many others who are directly or indirectly related to Kerala Kalamandalam.

Kerala kalamandalam began as a private institution funded solely by the art-loving public. As it grew over the years in terms of its Staff and students Poet Vallathol found it difficult to meet even the maintenance expenditure. In 1941 Vallathol handed over Kalamandalam to the then Govt of Cochin. He still continued to be its President till his demise in 1958. Kalamandalam was, in the course of time, converted into a grant-in-aid institution fully financed by the Kerala Government and assisted occasionally for Projects by Department of Culture, Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India and by the Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi. Currently Kalamandalam is managed by an executive Council headed by the Chairperson, members nominated by the Govt., elected members from the General Council and the Secretary appointed by the Govt. for administration.

[Quoted from Kalamandalam pamphlet, P.3]

At present with 68 teachers, 40 non-teachers and 301 students in different disciplines (1999-2000), Kerala Kalamandalam is still trying to continue the gurukula system of training. Each

Aasan (Teacher) is given his/her Kalari (class room). Unlike other institutions where teacher is going to the students class rooms, in Kerala Kalamandalam students are going to their Aasan's Kalari for learning. An Aasan is following his/her method/style of teaching.

The main problem of Kerala Kalamandalam is, at present, it cannot maintain the teacher student ratio as 1:4. Since it is a government institution, there are a lot of technical barriers to appoint staff either permanently or as guest faculty. Prior permission from the government is needed for appointment and it takes a lot of time.

Kalamandalam is yet to be recognized as a deemed to be university. Now this institution is giving diploma courses in Kathakalai Vesham, Kathakali Samgeetham, Chenda, Maddalam, Chooti, Kudiyattam, and Mizhavu. It also offers courses on Mohiniyattam, Thullal, and Panchavadyam. For academic improvement, now Kalamandalam is trying to make a tie-up with Sree Sankara University of Sanskrit. According to

the term and conditions, Sanskrit University will give its degree to the students of Kalamandalam; and Kalamandalam will remain as an autonomous institution.

According to the former secretary, Mr Radhakrishnan Nair, Kalamandalam needs about Rs. 100 lacs for its annual maintenances and recurring expenses. At present the government is granting only Rs. 40 lacs. The main problem of Kalamandalam is the finding out of the remaining balance of Rs. 60 lacs. This amount is accumulated from many sources as donations, grants from other cultural institutions, revenue from touring in India and abroad, diverting funds from other projects and so on.

The revised pay scale of the main faculty of Kalamandalam:

Secretary: 10000-300-10600-325-15150

Principal: 8250-250-9250-275-13650

Professor: 7450-200-7650-225-11475

Asst Prof: 5550-150-6100-175-9075

First grade instructor: 5000-125-5750-150-8150

Second grade instructor: 4500-100-5000-125-7000.

Kalamandalam has a website and E-mail address and moves in accordance with the trend of information technology.⁶

“All our financial problems can be solved, if we make Kalamandalam a tourist center. But we are not willing to do so” said the secretary.

To participate in the government’s MANAVIYAM program, Kalamandalam has come out with a project. The project is to conduct appreciation courses in each panchayat with the cooperation of the local body. The local panchayat should bear the expenditure as travel allowance and local hospitality. Human resource is given by the Kalamandalam. In this way Kalamandalam is promoting the art among the villages.

In 1965, Painkulam Ramachakyar introduced Kudiyattam in the curriculum of Kalamandalam. The whole credit of the democratization of Kudiyattam goes to Painkulam

⁶ The URL : www.kalamandalam.com

Ramachakyar who invited non-chakyar community members to study Kudiyaattam at Kalamandalam. (Sivan Nambudiri is the first male artist who studied Kudiyaattam from outside Chakyar community and Girija is the first woman artist who studied Kudiyaattam from Nangiar community. They are the members of the Kudiyaattam faculty of Kalamandalam.)

Margi

Margi, a School for classical arts, was established at Valiyasala, Thiruvananthapuram in 1970 by late D Appukkuttan Nair and his friends. As if Kathakali is to Kalamandalam, Kudiyaattam is to Margi. The fundamental aim of Margi was to recuperate the ancient glory of classical arts in modern times. For this purpose they are re-enacting the classical texts in original in order to promote indigenous aesthetic. An intimate space is structured in and out of the institution for closely observing the minute histrionics of the performer. With the financial support from Sangeet Natak Akademy, Margi is performing regularly and gives

opportunities for trained artists. Margi and its activities show that a private organization can excel any one in promotional activities of classical arts with concrete action plan. Within a span of a few decades, Margi produced few brilliant young Kudiyyattam artists as Margi Madhu, Margi Narayanan, Margi Sathi and so on.

Recently UNESCO recognized and accredited Kudiyyattam as one of the fourteen heritage arts of the world. Kudiyyattam achieved this fame by the promotional and documentation team of the Margi.⁷

The transference from feudalism to democratic institutionalism overly benefited Krishnanattam. The present the Krishnanattam troupe contains 54 members

⁷ Padmasree Ammannuur Madhava Chakyar , the living legend of Kudiyyattam is not documented in the film of Margi. When UNESCO declared the award, media took it up as an issue about the authenticity of the documentation. Noted film maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan was the maker of the documentary for Margi.

including 19 trainees. The trainees for vesham is selected at the age of five through newspaper advertisements. Any Hindu can apply. If a child is found fit to be an actor, he is selected for training. During the training period boarding and lodging and Rs.300 will be given. Teenagers are selected for Chooty, Sangeetham and Madhallam. When they reach at the age of 18, they were absorbed into the troupe as third grade artists. They get the service benefits of a third grade employ of Guruvayoor Devaswom. The members of the troupe are classified into five as Aasan, first grade artist, second grade artist, and third grade artist. The retirement age is 60 but after 55 their increments are cut off. In 1992, there was a strike of the Krishnanattam Employees Association. Their main demands were to equate the salary and service benefits of Krishnanattam employees to Kalamandalam artists. Because of the mediation of Mr K Karunakaran, former chief minister of Kerala, the strike was called off and the employees demands were accepted. Before the strike, there was a category called fourth grade

staff among Krishnanattam artists. That post was cut off after the strike.

According to the present Aasan, the troupe at Zamorin's patronage was more powerful. There was strict discipline in the troupe. They were getting good food. But the present situation is not like that. The petty politics affects many decisions.

When compared with Kathakali artists and Kudiattam artists, Krishnanattam artists enjoy more privileges. First, they are graced to work for Guruvayoorappan. Secondly, they get salary and regular performance.

Almost all join as trainees at Krishnanattam Kaliyogam(troupe) is due to economic reasons. Practically the Vesham artists do not even get elementary education. Once they joined as trainees, they cannot continue secular higher education. So majority of the

artists do not wish to choose their children to be Krishnanattam artists. Many trainees passively suffer the problem of their higher education only with a hope that they will be absorbed as staff of the Guruvayoor Devaswom when they reach the age of 18.

In addition to the salary benefits, the artists get TA and DA when they go for outside performance. Usually in a year they get 30-40 outstation programs. After the retirement the artists cannot continue their profession. The only job an Aasan can practice is massage in an aurvedic hospital.

Generally Krishnanattam artists are satisfied in their social position. All admit that they can have a decent life with their earnings.

Among the three represented institutions, each has specific historicity. Kalamandalam is still in its second wave of progress and in the gate way of the third wave.

Though the political system and space are changed, Krishnanattam is still retains its ritual tradition and aesthetics due to the strong financial support. It still retains its first wave symptoms. Kudiyattam moved far away from the first wave and now mainly exists in the flux of the second and third wave.

Chapter III

Ethnographic Reality Check:

Interplay of Cultural Ideology Versus Image Politics

In the contemporary democratic socio-cultural context of Kerala, Kathakali is de-historized. Though it is a feudal art, it cannot sustain its feudal identity in reality when it is represented as people's art. The representation of the art in its ideological sphere versus the pragmatic reality that it encounter today are the thrust of this chapter.

As it is said in the introduction and the first chapter, in the first wave and the second wave operated art with specific social concern which is related to a religious ideology or political manifesto. Literally traditional arts are "used"

politically to create an image which is always pleasant, cultural friendly and entertaining that convert an outsider insider. The real patrons and the assumed patrons of the art project a cultural image with a hidden agenda. The hidden agenda of the ideological manifestation is to be ethnographically “reality checked”. For this purpose we encountered a few situations which are projected by media and the image politicians. For instance, youth festivals. Kerala Government promotes youth festivals and the educational department celebrates it. But in reality, the promotions and celebrations are an interplay of ideology versus politics.

Mahatma Gandhi University North zone Youth festival (Suvarnam 2000) held at Ernakulam Maharajas College main hall on 21 February 2000 was closely observed as a case to study the modus operanti of the youth festival culture of Kathakali. Five students from five colleagues participated in the competition. The competition was scheduled at 7.00 PM and all the competitors were ready for the competition at 7.00PM itself. At 7.00 it was announced that the competition

will start at 10 PM. It was again postponed and it started at 0.30 AM. The competitors had to wait for 5.30 hours. The organizers say that the delay is due to the late coming of the judges of competition.

The student came and started make up at 3.00PM itself and they were given a teacher's staff room as green room in which the toilet cabin was locked. There were no toilet facilities in that building. The students and their guardians were demanding to open the toilet room and their cry went in dumb ears. Students with full Kathakali make up cannot go out for toilet purposes. When I contacted the office bearers, they told that the key of the toilet was with the head of the department and he will be expected in the next working day. They cannot open the room without his permission.

When the Kathakali competition started in the next day early morning, there were hardly any audience except the guardians and well wishers of the students. The hall which was crowded for other items was empty. When the last student was

performing only two persons remained in the auditorium: Myself and a French man who came to see what is Kathakali. I overheard the voice of a mother of a participant who spoke to herself: “ Ithu nammude kala aayathukonda aarkum veeddathathu” (This is our art, that is why no body wants it) when she experiencing the total neglect of this art in the competition space when other venues of performing arts were crowded with audience.

A participant has to spend minimum Rs. 5000 for participating in the competition. If the student wins a prize, sometimes the college management may share the expenditure. Otherwise the student has to bear all the expenditure. The fees of the guru/teacher to train a student for a school or college competition is about Rs. 5000 and incidental expenses. Since Kathakali competition is highly expensive, the number of participants is always less. More than that the organizers do not know the special requirements a Kathakali participant needs. Participants always share bitter experiences about competitions.

Mahatma Gandhi University's 16th Youth festival (Sopanan 2001) held at Kottayam from 28 February to 4 March 2001. In this festival Kathakali competition was scheduled on 2nd March 2001 at Darsana Auditorium at 6PM.

As usual the competition was started very late. This competition got much media attention because there was a strong dispute regarding the judgments of the judges. A few participants argued that the judges were shown partiality and eventually the arguments developed into scuffles and manhandling. The organizers beaten out a few participants. All regional newspapers sensationally covered this news. The venues of Kathakali competitions are not free from disputes and grievances. They are doing more harm to the art than anything good. That is why in our survey all people spoke against Kathakali competitions.

The politics of gender is another area to be concerned in the third wave. The fragmentation of the art in terms of gender politics cannot be overlooked. The ideology behind the

functionality of the Vanitha Kathakali is a classic example to study the influence of western gender politics in the traditional arts.

Vanitha Kathakali Sangam (Women Kathakali troupe) of Trippunithura is functioning at Trippunithura since last 25 years. This ladies troupe broke the historical Kathakali myth that only upperclass men can perform Kathakali. Today the troupe is having about 20 members.

On 25-27 August 2000, Thrippunithura Kathakali Kendram Ladies Troupe celebrated its Silver jubilee. We were invited into that function. On 26th evening, there was a special session for thinking about the promotional aspects of Classical arts. The main thoughts shared in that seminar were:

1. Why the brilliant artists of the Youth Festivals cannot succeed in the professional field? Even though they succeed, why should they leave the field after some time? The example is the actress Manju Varrier.

2. Why professional artists are not recognized by the society as other professionals like Doctors or Engineers?
3. Why there are not enough venues for artists in Kerala?
4. Why the art groups (kalasqmthikal) that fostered the performance culture of Kerala is particularly silent regarding making venues for classical arts?
5. Why there is not a minor/children's troupe for the lady Troupe?

These queries of the seminar were not satisfactorily answered except making some general assumptions and speculations.

Kerala Sangeet Natak Akademy conducted a three day Kudiyaattam festival at Thrissur on 3-5 June 2000. We were officially invited into this festival. The discussions on Kudiyaattam organized as a part of the Kudiyaattam festival brought out many thought provoking arguments. When connoisseurs argue that Kuditattam is declined and lost its fame and reputation, artists like Padmasree Ammannur

Madhava Chakyar argued that it has now restored its fame and reputation as if at the time of its glory.

Another strong argument came forward in that festival is to consider whether Kudiyaattam is still a ritual/temple art or not. The general conclusion reached is that, though it is a temple art, it is now taken outside from Koothambalam and consider as theatre art.

Scholars like Ayyappapanikker shared of the opinion that Kudiyaattam is to be changed in accordance with the time and taste of the audience. He was one of the principal co-ordinators of Kudiyaattam festival organized in Delhi in 1995.

When Kudiyaattam is taken from Koothambalam to outside performance space, it gets “export” value. The “export value of the Kudiyaattam is to be explored” for its promotion, a few persons argued.

In form, Kudiyyattam is now moving towards the popular classical theatre forms like Kathakali. Like other art forms, it is now engaged in a process of give and take with other similar forms. Now it adopts a pedagogical design in order to practice it in classrooms.

As an outsider, Dr Kapila Vatsyayan who has been observing this artform since the last 50 years believed that it is shrinking, though her continuous effort to revitalize it by awarding awards and fellowships to the concerned artists and institutions.

The general opinion came out in that festival is that the government should take initiative to support the artists and institutions by giving grants, pension to the senior artists and so on.

Chapter IV

The Promotion of Traditional Theatre Arts:

The Role of the Incumbants

The promotional aspects of the traditional theatre arts incumbent upon the following institutions and persons. Ideas and information gathered here are from our field study.⁸

A. Government

The result of our study reveals that majority of the people have ardent faith in the ruling government and they think that all their problems can be solved if the government wants to. Now the cultural Ministry of the State and Human Resource Development Ministry of the Central government

⁸ Since many people shared same ideas, individual foot noting system is avoided in this chapter. Some people personally requested to us not to disclose their identity. We honor their request.

are giving scholarships and fellowships to junior and senior traditional artists. As far as Kerala State is concerned, the promotional measures of culture and performing arts assigned to the MANAVIYAM project. The feed back of this project is yet to be analyzed. These are the suggestions to the government:

1. Allocate special fund for the promotion of traditional arts in the budget itself.
2. Give pension to the senior artists.
3. Appoint a lover of the art as the administrator or secretary to the cultural affairs rather than a “ Politician” or a “ Bureaucrat”. Many people accuse that government officials are often indifferent to art and cultural affairs.
4. De-link the administration of cultural institutions like Kalamandalam from party politics. If elected persons/members are needed, they should be from a college of eminent art persons and their tenure should be fixed for a certain period.

5. Publish a paper or monograph on the effect of MANAVIYAM project among the people.
6. Prepare a balance sheet on the amount government spent for the arts and the revenue government received from the arts (like foreign tour, tourism,etc.)
7. Form a foundation for the arts and fund eminent artists permanently. This will encourage them to stick into their profession without leaving for other lucrative professions. Accept and popularize the truth that commercial concepts cannot apply to traditional arts. That is classical arts cannot sustain with the revenue of selling tickets. Some other source of income is essential and inevitable. If the profession is lucrative, artists will remain in the profession and encourage others to join in their profession.

B. Kerala Kalamandalam

Kerala Kalamandalam can do a lot of things to promote traditional theatre arts as if in the time of its

inception. Kalamandalam's role in this area is well appreciated throughout the world. They can do more without any major financial commitments. The suggestions are:

1. Make it as a deemed to be University and offer graduate and post graduate courses in Classical arts.
2. Give post curriculum support to the alumni. The mother institution should help the alumni to find a way of living in their specialized area. Thus Kalamandalam can prevent the chances of trained artists work as auto drivers and cooks.
3. Kalamandalam should conduct refresher courses to its alumni. This will enable them to cope with the present tendencies of the art world.
4. Fix a day in a week for performances. Public is to be invited for watching the performances. They should retain their performances on the Republic day and independence day.

5. Popularize the appreciation courses designed as a part of people's planning. Kalamandalam's appreciation classes are very much appreciated by the general public.
6. Popularize Kalamandalam as a "sacred tourist cultural spot" retaining its sanctity like Tagore's Viswabharathi.
7. Kalamandalam should form a company of Puppet Kathakali artists. Puppet Kathakali is now almost extinct. It is the duty of the Kalamandalam to revive it.

C. Sangeet Natak Akademy

Since a government institution, Sangeet Natak Akademy also should play a significant role in the promotion of traditional theatre arts. Some suggestions:

1. Give the same importance to the traditional theatre arts as modern theatre.

2. Develop and popularize the concept of the importance healthy interaction among the artists. Akademy should always act as the role of a mediator.
3. Special workshops and courses should be conducted for the freelancers and amateur artists.
4. Improve the library by collecting all related materials on traditional theatre arts.
5. Revive the documentation project of the famous actors and forms.

D. Role of the University

Universities can play a significant role in the promotion of traditional theatre arts among the higher educated people. Suggestions:

1. Offer graduate and post graduate courses in traditional theatre arts and the allied subjects like the university offer degrees in Music, Painting, Fine Arts, and drama. Avoid the diploma concepts. Classical arts are as important as any other subjects.

2. Orientation should be specially given to the college teachers on how to enjoy classical arts and how to generate interest among students.
3. A piece of performance also may be taught as a part of teaching attakkatha. Possibilities of practical demonstrations also may be incorporated in the syllabus. Performance of a student can also be considered for internal evaluation.
4. Popularize the classical literacy program like the Sree Sankara University of Sanskrit.

E. Kathakali Clubs

Kathakali clubs are doing great service to the society regarding the promotion of classical arts. One of the limitations of Kathakali clubs is, it is only limited to a set of people who are thinking in the same way. They are popularly known in Kerala as Kathakali Branthanmar. Suggestions to the clubs:

1. Make clubs democratic by including all art lovers.

2. Make different venues for each performance. Some performance should be organized in the villages to introduce the form to the villagers.
3. Give concession tickets to the beginners and students.
4. Arrange a special introductory session for the beginners in the beginning of each performance. Even a seminar can be arranged prior to a performance.
5. Make special projects to introduce classical theatre forms to the marginalized class.
6. Form children's Kathakali clubs as a part of major Kathakali clubs.
7. React against the "violation of art" by commercial enterprises, television channels, and pseudo experimentalists.

F. Media

Film and electronic media should aware of the limitations of the media. Shoot, cut and edit culture really spoils the score of the traditional theatre arts. They should

accept that electronic media are a very poor substitute for presenting the real. The publicity given by the media cannot be underestimated.

The general accusations against the print media are that they go after publicity of the super stars and grade the artists. Activities of the amateur artists are often neglected. Just for publicity, a lot of pseudo experimentations happen in the field of art. Media over project them. Many of the reviews are either biased or politicized. The editors can at least avoid negative publicity.

G. Youth Festivals

The nobility of the art is lost in the youth festivals. Youth festivals develop a sort of negative and unhealthy competition culture. No winners of the youth festival come to the field as a major artist. The aim of the competitors is to get credit for professional courses. Venues of classical arts are often converted into “battle fields”. The only

advantage of the youth festival is, it gives some chances for artists to train some students with fees.

H. Schools

Kathakali was taught in schools in 1960s. FACT high school is still continuing that system. The school management can revive this system. If the management has many schools, they can appoint teachers of different specialization in different schools. On one day they can gather together to do a full performance. The cluster system of training is advised for schools.

I. Event Managers

Once a festival is organized, proper representation should be given to the traditional theatre. Travancore Devaswom's insistence that fund is given only if the organizers schedule Kathakali or any other classical arts as a part of the celebrations is welcomed by the traditional theatre artists. Kudiyattam and

Krishnanattam have space in temple festivals. Impresarios can explore this area.

J. Tourism

Classical theatre arts as tourist consumer produce is exploited by a group of business people. Tourists are given fake performances as if artificial Thrissur Pooram is organized for the tourists. These fake performances create negative impact. It destroys the artistic value. Suggestions for the cultural tour operators:

1. Try to present a sample piece rather than a sensational piece.
2. Cultural experience should be aimed at rather than “selling the art”.
3. Tourist operators should make a tie-up with a reputed cultural agency for presenting the art. For instance, Margi’s services in this area is well respected.

4. Do not limit the propaganda that Kathakali is the only popular form. Present Kudiyaattam, Krishnanattam, Mohiniyaattam and so on.

K. Guruvayoor Devaswom

Since the patron of the Krishnanattam troupe, Guruvayoor Devaswom can do the following things:

1. Make one more troupe of Krishnanattam. When one troupe enacts inside the temple as ritual, the other troupe can go out for aesthetic performance. The Devaswom can afford one more troupe.
2. Proper school education should be given to the young artists. Secular education cannot be denied for an artist. As if Kalamandalam introduced facilities for higher education to the students, Devaswom can also introduce some facilities.
3. Appoint a lover of the art as the administrator or superintendent of the troupe in a time bound

basis. The superintendent should be a trained art manager who has some contribution in this area.

L. Kathakali Artists

The suggestions to the Kathakali artists are applicable to all artists who are working in the field of traditional theatre arts.

General suggestions to the artists:

1. Do not intoxicate in the performance space.
2. Do not discourage their children who wish to come to Kathakali studies. Encourage them to practice Kathakali. Like Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, each artist should say, “ If I had one more birth, I wish to be borne as a Kathakali artist”. Avoid negative publicity regarding the life of a Kathakali artist.

The artist should understand and accept the present situation that it is a part of the duty of the artist himself/herself to teach the audience how to appreciate an art form. The duty of the artist is getting doubled in every age. The time needs some sacrifice for the art.

M. Other Clubs/Fine Art Societies

Lion's Club, Rotary Club, Fine Art societies can participate in the process of the promotion of art. Once in a while, give a chance to the traditional artists to perform and encourage them to continue their art. British council, French Alliance, and Max Muller Bhavan are promoting their culture. Similarly our clubs and art societies can model them for the promotion of the arts.

N. General Public

General public should erase the impersonal attitude towards the traditional theatre arts. Try to assimilate the art rather than reject it. Get into the world of art. Primarily, traditional classical theatre arts are people's art and they should be sustained by the people for ever.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Conclusion

Traditional theatre arts are undergoing a linear evolutionary change from feudal age to the “generation next”. The change happens in the patronage system, texture of the performance, and the context of the enactment. New patrons emerged from various historical contexts, new texts appeared with romantic revolutionary concepts, new performance space identified for new audience. The matrix of the art is an ongoing continuous flux.

A universal notion is that anything great that is morally and ethically correct can withstand space and time. The traditional theatre arts of Kerala withstand space and time. With its 2000 years of history, Kudiattam is still flourishing by transcending the geo-political boundaries. Krishnanattam is

ever vibrant since its recorded history of 400 years. Kathakali exemplifies a successful story of 150 years. The effervescent existence of these arts reveal in itself the merit of these arts, the aesthetic capabilities of the artists, and the art lovers.

When market forces overrules the classical theatre genres, the art is commodified and its use value is merited than its aesthetic value. The tourist industry, electronic media, commercial films compete one another for giving a pleasant evening for their customers. They are not bothered about the art after that successful evening or when the box office is closed.

Arts have different functions in different historical periods. Feudalism enriched the aesthetic concept of the art. The propagation of the ideology of the social realism was the area of thrust of participatory democracy of the communist regime as far as the history of Kerala classical arts are concerned. Globalization makes a space to sell art in the

international market to any customers who are willing to pay money for entertainment.

An ethnographic reality check of the contemporary paradigm of socio-cultural discourses and functionality of classical arts reveal the modern rituals of the *modus operandi* of the arts and the role played by the “saviors of the art”. The establishments move in accordance with the laws formulated by the establishments. Those who are affiliated to the establishments can benefit always from the bargain power entrusted in the structure of the establishments.

This study reveals that the first grade artists of the art institutions and establishments can survive in the present socio-economic situation. The second grade artists who cannot establish their identity in the present competitive world turn to the cultural incumbents for support and sponsorship to sustain in the field of their specialization. The third rate artists cannot survive in the present world. They either quit the art or willing to dilute the principal art for existence.

Though feudalism has vanished, its symptoms still exist in the contemporary art world. Artists always seek an external patron for support rather than depending their own innate abilities. The democratic government establishments retained the hangover of feudal concepts about 50 years after independence. Now these establishments are in a verge of freeing themselves from the feudal hangover. This is the present crisis situation.

In order to overcome this situation, the artists should identify some other agencies to promote the art. Suggestions and the role of the incumbents are enumerated in the fourth chapter.

Economically, it is hard for an average artist to have a decent life in the present socio-cultural context. Only a few artists are well paid in the entertainment industry. A mediocre artist is often hired for a purpose and fired after that purpose.

Traditional artists do not have a powerful trade union as if in the film industry. Art is not an integral ingredient or basic necessity of the society but it is only a subsidiary component. The mode of entertainment of a person is directly related to his/her social status and economic background. Classical arts are ever remained for the entertainment of a select few and is appreciated by a select few. The performance scores of the traditional arts are historically designed for a select few and to sacrifice their aesthetic concepts for promotion really deteriorates them. Traditional arts should always remain in their sublime bliss.

Appendix

Famous Kathakali Schools

There are many well established Kathakali Schools in Kerala whose reputation is akin to Kerala Kalamandalam. Some of them are:

1. Margi Thiruvananthapuram
2. Unnai Warriar Smaraka Kalanilayam, Irinjalakuda.
3. Sadhanam Kathakali Academy, Palakkad.
4. PSV Natya Sangam, Kottackal.
5. Vazenkada Kunju Nair Smaraka Kathakali Kendram, Kaaralmanna.
6. Kathakali Kendram, Pakalkuri.
7. RLV School, Trippunithura.
8. Vanitha Kathakali Samgam, Trippunithura.
9. Muthappan Kathakali Sangam, Parassinikadavu.
10. FACT Kathakali School, Udyogamandal.

Famous Kathakali Clubs

1. Kathakali club, Thrissur
2. Drusyavedi, Thiruvananthapuram.
3. Kathakali Club, Ernakulam.
4. Drusyavedi, Kottayam.
5. Kathakali club, Kollam.
6. Kathakai Club, Karunagappalli.
7. Trippunithura Kathakali Club
8. Palakkad Kathakali Club.
9. Kathakali Club, Puthenkode.
10. KM Pishareddy Memorial Kathakali Club, Irinjalakuda.
11. Nambishan Memorial Kathakali Club, Chalakudy.

[This is not a complete list.]

Famous Kudiyaattam Centres

1. Margi, Thiruvananthapuram
2. Kerala Kalamandalam
3. Ammanur Gurukulam, Irinjalakuda
4. Mani Madhava Chakyar Gurukulam
5. International centre for Kudiyaattam, Trippunithura.

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