

Kutiyattam

Living Heritage

March 2016



Discover India Program
2015-16

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Authentication Certificate

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report, titled 'Kutiyattam: Living Heritage,' submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my supervision. The information obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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Abstract

Kutiyattam is the oldest surviving art form in existence. Although it is a theatre form from Kerala, it uses the Sanskrit language in its performances. While looking for a topic to investigate for the Discover India Program, these were the aspects of the art form that caught our attention. The rich history and the painstakingly elaborate nature of Kutiyattam got us interested in it. We were curious about how an art form so deep-rooted and intricate would be viewed in the modern era. We also found out about the UNESCO declaration that proclaimed it as ‘A Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage,’ and this only heightened our excitement to look into its growth.

Our research was based on the transformations that the art form has undergone over the years. Owing to the fact that Kutiyattam is an art form, and that we had scarce knowledge on the topic even after secondary research, we decided to interview people who were well-versed with it, using open-ended questions in semi-formal interviews. Doing so enabled us to ask about the specific queries while being able to find out new information on the topic in detail. During the trip to Kerala, our group visited Thrissur and Cochin. We interviewed six performers and four scholars, attended a performance and witnessed two demonstrations.

We concluded that Kutiyattam is essentially still evolving. It is still in the process of finding the right balance between the old and the new. In attempting to attract a broader audience, Kutiyattam has had to reduce the older elements of its origin, of which easing the caste restrictions and taking the performances outside the temples are only a small part.

Chapter 1: Overview



Image 1: Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai



Image 2: Mizhavu players at Kerala Kalamandalam

Chapter 1.1 Introduction

The term ‘Kutiyattam’ is one telling of its own brand and historicity. The prefix ‘Kuti’ in Malayalam stands for combined or together and the suffix ‘Attam’ stands for acting. Thus, Kutiyattam quite literally means Combined Acting. The validity of this term shall be examined in detail further on, but at this juncture it is necessary to establish an initial understanding of what exactly is Kutiyattam. Kutiyattam in the simplest sense is a Sanskrit theatre tradition that originated in Kerala in uncertain antiquity; an estimate of 1500 years in the second millennium BC is a generally accepted one. Sanskrit is not simply a language of conveyance for this theatre tradition, but rather its single most defining feature, one that has not only dictated its origins but also holds stake to its immediate future (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

The performance

It has been mentioned above that the term Kutiyattam or Combined Acting is reflective of the brand and historicity of the art form. What that implies is that not only is the performance a culmination of several divergent theatre forms and performing arts that were assimilated by the dominant Brahmin class at the time and since, but also that this amalgamation has become a recognizable identity of Kutiyattam itself. Kutiyattam as discussed in various sources is a performing art with a practice of heredity wherein the performers are taken only from two tribes- men from the Chakyar caste and women from the Nambiar caste. The musicians too have caste restrictions; they can only be men from the Nambiar caste (Krishnamurthy 2015). This aspect shall be discussed in detail later and yet what is important to mention at this point is that Kutiyattam also incorporates elements from the Nangiarkoothu, the theatre exclusively performed by the Nangiars, and Prabandha koothu (or Chakyar koothu, as it is otherwise known), the verbal narrative drama of the Chakyars. At the same time it integrates the histrionic aspect of the elaborate acting of the hero and the other main characters based on classical Sanskrit and the verbal narration of the Vidushaka, the comic character, in the regional language of Malayalam (Chiba). The effect of such an effusive identity on the performance itself can be summed up with a simple term- complex. The complexity at a time served to distinguish or ordain a particular type of audience and yet today has become an Achilles heel to the very existence of the art form in the modern era.

With a mind-set of complexity, how does a traditional Kutiyattam performance unfold? The performance is both a theatre form and a performing art, and has elements from both. The actors communicate with the audience through complex gestures, chanting and exaggerated facial expressions, which are enhanced through elaborate makeup and costumes. Kutiyattam employs the style of neta abhinaya (eye expression) and hasta abhinaya (the language of gestures). These 'Mudras' or gestures alongside the other elements enhance the understanding of the performance, supporting narrative or even in certain cases replacing it (Paniker 1992). This in effect supplants the assumption that a language barrier need exist for appreciation of Kutiyattam. An aspect well exemplified by Ramayana Samkseparam, a work by esteemed Kutiyattam artist G.Venu, it is an amalgamation of three separate works - 'Ashcharya Chudamani', 'Pratima' and 'Abhishekam'. It retells the story of Ramayana with little to no narration; much of the story is told through Mudras which carry relevant meaning regardless of what language you use to interpret them. This performance is often used as training material for new performers.

The performances are extremely elaborate and may sometimes take forty days to complete. This is one of the reasons actors undergo ten to fifteen years of rigorous training in order to become full time performers. The duration of the performance and its elaborate nature have much to do with a rather significant aspect of storytelling in Kutiyattam - the fact that the performance is not based so much on the full text itself but rather individual acts which expand into full plays. For example, 'Mantrankam' a popular mainstay of Kutiyattam performances is the third act of Bhasa's Pratijnayaugandharayana (the vow of Yaugandharayana). Bhasa's plays have found a popular following in the Kutiyattam audience in large part to its inherent conciseness of dialogue, open-ended language and the scope for the actor to an elaborate presentation, complete with personal interpretations that stray from the norm. This is opposed to the intricate and elegant poetic richness of Kalidasa, who finds a somewhat strained following due to the lack of leeway for the performers to deviate (Venu 2002).

At the same time the performance keeps pace with its musical accompaniment- typically mizhavu drums - which set the mood for the play, heightening its drama and keeping the talam (rhythmic pattern). The main verses of the drama are sung, and cymbals act as accompaniment. Other accompaniments may include the kuzhal (an oboe-like wind instrument), the itakka (an hour-glass shaped drum), and the shankha (conch shell).

The role of the audience

Imperative to the understanding of a Kutiyattam performance is an understanding of what is expected of the audience which plays a much more comprehensive and involved role in the performance than what would be considered standard. Much of this is a result of the deep complexities in the performance and its varied interpretations - multiple layers of meaning, figures of speech, oblique or obscure expression and implied meaning all add to the prerequisite an audience member must meet to comprehend the scale of the performance that is beheld. The audience member is expected to hold an intimate knowledge of the play that the performance has been adapted from to understand the variation that is performed, often subtle but integral to the performance. This in the context of its origins can naturally be seen as exclusion, yet again highlighting an art form built for the patronage of the educated Hindu Brahmins of Kerala (Richmond 1993).

Where is Kutiyattam performed?

Kutiyattam originated in Kerala and was originally only performed in temples, usually in the Northern and Central parts of the state. However, today the art form has become more commercialized and so performances take place outside of the state, in venues other than the temple premises. In Kerala, the main hubs of Kutiyattam are Kochi, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram. Thrissur is known as the cultural capital of Kerala and is home to several prominent Kutiyattam performers' schools such as Margi, Ammannoor Gurukulam and Mani Madhava Chakyar Gurukulam.

The UNESCO recognition has for the first time put forth an action plan for global audience and marketability. The specifics of the action plan shall be discussed in Chapter 4.2. It is relevant to note at this juncture the geographic portability for the art form that the recognition offered. Since the 1980's Kutiyattam performances are held abroad frequently with many centred on Japan (for reasons that shall yet again be elaborated upon later) and workshops held in locations as abstract to the concept as Sweden (Venu 2015). Performances in Japan have also seen an integration of local culture with the integration of the nuances of Noh and Kabuki among others to localize and diversify performances (Gopalakrishnan 2015).

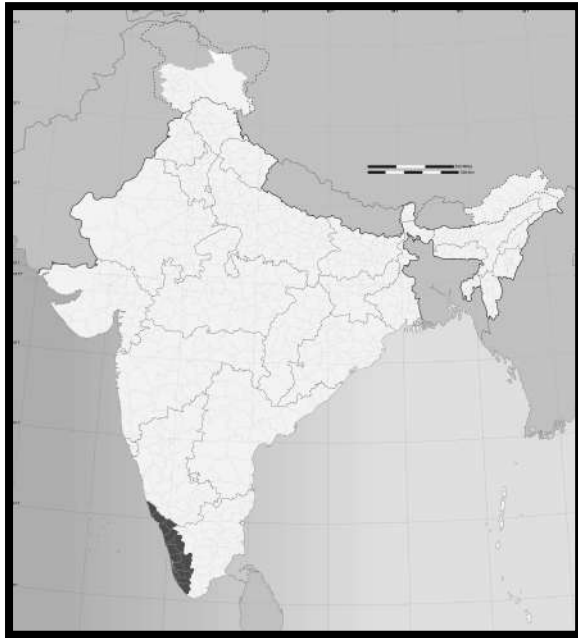


Image 3: Map marking Kerala in India
(Maps of India 2016)

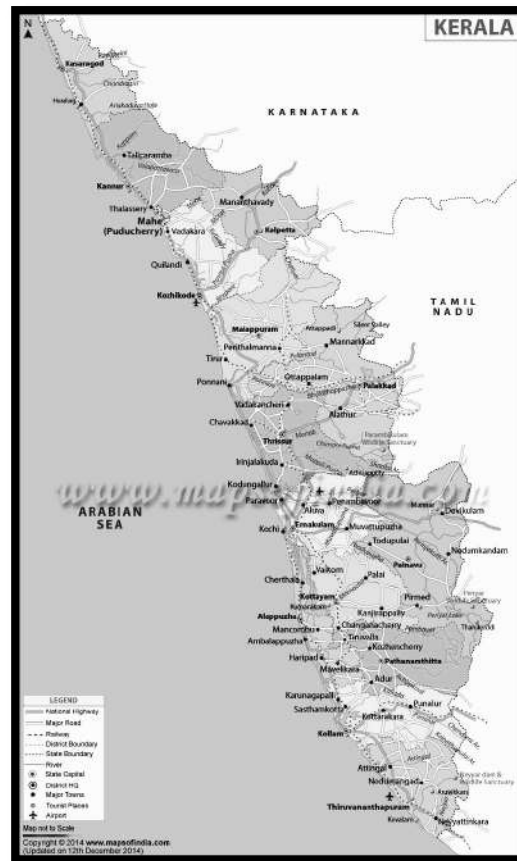


Image 4: Map of Kerala
(Maps of India 2016)

Socioeconomic aspects of Kutiyattam

Kutiyattam is traditionally performed by men from the Chakyar caste and women from the Nambiar caste. The musicians too have caste restrictions – they can only be men from the Nambiar caste. This gender and caste specification not only restricts other people from performing the art form, but also serves as a means of determining occupation, as it is hereditary. And yet now with the UNESCO recognition paving the way for a more expansive potential audience born of a more flexible art form, these restrictions are losing relevance. The process began with the Kerala Kalamandalam in 1965, where for the first time Kutiyattam as a workshop and then as a full-fledged subject. Debate is underway to determine viability of a full course that comprehensively covers the training of artists while still making compact the training period. Naturally at the time of inception of the workshop, conservative opposition was apparent and heavily stemming largely from the Chakyar community itself and yet this has enabled traditional schools such as Margi and Ammannur

Gurukulam to train a new generation of artists and teachers of relatively varied backgrounds, which shall ensure the sustenance and continuation of the traditions that these schools hold as paramount.

The economic aspects are relatively straightforward for an art form so profound in scale that it requires a surplus of both capital and manpower. This is an obstacle faced by performers today, in an age where traditional patronage for the art form is virtually non-existent. The patronage not only includes costs to set up the performances itself, but also living expenses for the artists who have limited avenues of financial sustainability in the modern era where living expenses have only scaled. Patronage in the modern age largely flows from government grants or agencies such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi in Delhi (Gopalakrishnan 2011). The adequacy, or lack thereof, of said grants is a matter for thorough investigations, shall be detailed subsequently.

The Future of Kutiyattam

The waning of the patronage of Kutiyattam as a result of the declining number of Sanskrit speakers has led some to believe that Kutiyattam is a dying art form. However, there have been some efforts to revive it in recent years. In 2001 UNESCO declared Kutiyattam a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.' This increased awareness about the age-old tradition on a global scale. In 2012 author, artiste and researcher, Sudha Gopalakrishnan published a book, 'Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India.' This was a valuable addition to the academic discourse on the subject and helped to popularize the art form. At the same time Kutiyattam itself is in a tangible state of self-imposed evolution. The process is slated to be a difficult one, as the evolution has put into process a change that holds an unknown outcome for its respective shareholders. Evolution may well be considered nature's absolute truth and yet it must be tempered with due diligence and perseverance replete with stopgaps to ensure a contiguous and uncompromising transition favouring evolution and not revolution. Kutiyattam as it stands, at the very least as a ground reality for its stake holders, may well persevere through to the modern age, but will it share only a remote resemblance to the art form that was conceived 2000 years ago? Thus, it may be conceded with certain liberty for panache that the old ways are indeed dying and yet the art form itself is conceptually in the throes of forceful resuscitation.

Chapter 1.2 Research Statement

Tracing the evolution of Kutiyattam as an art form, and exploring the impact of this evolution on its stakeholders

Deconstruction of the Research Statement

Evolution: Our perusal of the secondary data has led us to the conclusion that the art form is in a state of evolution. This is not a baseless assumption; rather most scholars, performers or quite frankly anyone relevant to the theater form, can stand in agreement to the notion of some significant change affecting the practice and enterprise of Kutiyattam. Most would simply consign it to being a transformation rather than an all out evolution, such as the preeminent scholar Sudha Gopalkrishnan, who in her book 'Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theater of India,' highlights this transformation as a prominent aspect of her study and exposition. Thus if anything the use of the term 'evolution' is a mild interpretation on part of the group (one which was never refuted by scholars and performers alike after multiple uses in interviews and such, as a matter of fact may have coopted the understanding of the term for their answers during the interviews.)

Stakeholders: The stakeholders in question are those who have a vested interest in the art form. This includes gurus, students, performers, audience members and scholars.

Impact: This refers to the effect of the changes that have taken place in the art form, on the aforementioned stakeholders. This includes the effects on the performers' livelihood, the audience, and the patrons.

Chapter 1.3 Aims and Objectives

- 1) To research the evolution and progression of Kutiyattam
- 2) To gain insight into its apparent 'commercialization'
- 3) To research the socio-economic factors affecting the performers
- 4) To establish the reason behind caste restrictions and test their relevance today
- 5) To establish the tangibility of the performance for modern day audiences
- 6) To understand the effect of the UNESCO recognition that the art form received

Chapter 1.4 Research Methodology

Our research on Kutiyattam focused on tracing the evolution of the art form, and exploring the impact of this evolution on its stakeholders. Through our research we aimed to gain an insight into the apparent commercialization of Kutiyattam, the socio-economic factors affecting the performers, and the tangibility of the performance to modern day audiences.

We prepared for our field visit for about four months, in which time we learnt more about the art form through articles, books and videos about Kutiyattam. We also had a few theory-based classes about how to prepare to be on field, what methods to use on field, and how to categorize and analyze data after the visit. We did a few classroom activities that highlighted the difference between observation, description and analysis. We also had to do an interviewing exercise on campus, which made us aware of what we can, or should not, ask in an interview, how we should ask questions, our body language and tone. These pre-field exercises helped us develop the skills we needed to refine our research.

The preliminary reading that we did indicated the prominent people in the field. We were able to contact gurus, practitioners, scholars and schools, and set up appointments with them. On field, we were also able to interview students and audience members. We planned to use video cameras and voice recorders during our interviews, but some respondents were uncomfortable with these recording devices and asked us not to use the camera at all. We used semi-structured interviews in. We had a set of common questions based on our research question to pose to all our respondents, as well as personalized questions for each individual based on their role in or relationship with the art form. We also used unstructured interviews while speaking to audience members as we tried to gauge how familiar they were with Kutiyattam. We also used participant observation when we were part of the audience and in the workshop, which gave us a better understanding of the art form.

All the data we collected was recorded through videos, audio clips, photographs, notes and/ or sketches. This report is an amalgamation of primary data, secondary data, and our own observations and inferences.

Chapter 1.5 Limitations of the Study

Although we tried to prepare ourselves as best we could before going on field, there were things that we did not anticipate or account for.

One of the biggest limitations of our study was the time constraint. As we were on field for only eight days, we could only visit the two most important cities, Thrissur and Cochin. If we had more time, we could have spent more time in these cities, and visited other places in Kerala and see how the art form was being taught and performed there. More time would have enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the art form. We might have been able to watch more performances, as on our visit we had more theoretical than practical exposure.

Some of the respondents were cynical and/ or skeptical of our study, which may have made them hesitant in their responses. This is because, after the UNESCO recognition, the art form received excessive media coverage and attention from researchers. However, this did not have much of an effect on the artists themselves, which made them apprehensive of our study.

Most of our respondents were from the group of performers in the Kutiyattam community that are generally better off than others. This could have left us with slightly skewed results, with regards to the grants given to, and the financial stability of, the performers.

We had planned to video record all our interviews, but some respondents were not comfortable with this. In the temple space too, the use of cameras was prohibited. As a substitute, we used audio recorders, notes and sketches, but some data could have been lost.

The language gap was another problem we faced on field, as two of our respondents could only speak in Malayalam. Although one of our group members could translate the questions and answers, some data could have been lost in translation.

All the data we collected was purely qualitative. Quantitative data could have been useful in our study. This could have been in terms of a comparison of the number of students enrolled in training, average size of the audience, number of schools/ patrons, amount of funding

received etc. This sort of quantitative data would have given us a more comprehensive understanding of the changes that the art form has been through.

We acknowledge that our research findings are based on a limited sample size, which accounts for only a few of each of the stakeholders of Kutiyattam. In this report, we have not made any generalizations about Kutiyattam or its stakeholders, our findings being qualitative in nature.

Chapter 1.6 List of Interviewees

At this juncture it is necessary to introduce the people we interacted with on field. This will give the reader a better understanding of the context as the interviewees are referred to later in the report.

Performers

Margi Madhu Chakyar

Margi Madhu is one of the leading Kutiyattam performers today. Having a post graduate degree in Kutiyattam, he has travelled to venues in Japan, Korea, Israel and certain European countries. He is the recipient of awards such as Sanskriti National Award for young artists, Theatre Pasta International Award, Kerala Kalamandalam award, and more. He is currently an assistant professor in Sreesankaracharya University of Sanskrit.

Mr. Sooraj Nambiar

Sooraj Nambiar was initiated into Kutiyattam at the age of 10 by Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar and had his debut performance in 1991 at Natanakairali, Irinjalakuda. An established performer, he usually takes on lead roles in Kutiyattam and Chakyar Koothu performances. Mr. Nambiar was also one of the two actors who represented India at the World Theatre Project, Sweden, and has also conducted workshops at Theatre Training and Research Programme, Singapore.

Mrs. Usha Nangiar

Usha Nangiar is a practitioner of Kutiyattam and is specialized in Nangiar Kuthu. She is the winner of the Kalashree Award for Kutiyattam by the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi.

Mrs. Nirmala Paniker

Nirmala Paniker is a dancer and choreographer. As a research scholar, she has investigated the links between the dance forms practiced by the women of ancient Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Her main contribution consists in the revitalisation of those Mohiniyattam techniques that had largely been overlooked in the recent repertoire. She is the founder of Natanakaisiki, a research and performance centre for female dance and theatre forms of Kerala.

Mr. G. Venu

Known as a research scholar, author, performer and director, G. Venu is involved in the rejuvenation of several traditional art forms in Kerala. He has written several books and also created a system that can be used to notate theatre forms such as Kathakalli, Kutiyattam and Mohiniyattam. He has received awards such as the Sahitya Akademi Award and Senior Fellowship in the Indian Government Department of Culture.

Mrs. Kapila Venu

She is a practitioner of Kutiyattam. She performs solo, as well as with an ensemble across India. She has performed Kutiyatta in prestigious venues across the world, including Dance Hakushu, Japan and Asia Society, New York. She is currently a visiting faculty as the National School of Drama, New Delhi and the Intercultural Theatre Institute, Singapore. She has received the Sanskriti Award and the Ustad Bismillah Kahn Yuva Puraskar Award.

Scholars**Mr. Chandradasan**

Mr. Chandradasan has directed 35 plays in Sanskrit, Malayalam, Tamil, English, Lithuanian, and Finnish. He won the National Award for the best play at Mahindra Theatre Festival for his play Karnabharam, New Delhi in 2008. He has achieved many awards for best play, direction, acting at theatre festivals all over India, apart from being a resource person in many theatre institutes, and universities. Chandradasan received the State Award of Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi for his outstanding contribution in Theatre.

Dr. Sudha Gopalakrishnan

Dr. Gopalakrishnan is a scholar and founder of Sahapedia, an online resource centre for Indian arts, culture and heritage. She has her PhD in Comparative Drama. She has also worked with Sahitya Akademi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and the National Mission for Manuscripts (as founder Mission Director), and has more than thirty years of experience in the field besides having several publications to her name, including Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India (2011).

Dr. K. G Paulose

K. G. Paulose was the first Vice Chancellor of Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed University for Art and Culture. He has held positions like Registrar of Sree Sankaracharya University and Chief Editor Publications for the Aryavaidyasala Kottakkal. He has specialised in the areas of Comparative Aesthetics, Natya Sastra, Ancient Theatre and Kutiyattam. He has authored twenty and edited over fifty books and published many research papers. He was the Chief Editor of three research journals - Purnatrayi, Aryavadyan and Dhimahi. Two of his important publications are – Natankusa: Critique of Dramaturgy (1993) and Kutiyattam Theatre: The Earliest Living Tradition (2006).

Mr. Vinod Narayanan

He is the head of the School of Drama in the University of Calicut. He holds an MA in Drama and Theatre with a focus on classical theatre, direction, acting and theatre management. He has organised international workshops at the Dr. John Mathai Centre in Kerala. He is the winner of the Fulbright Fellowship in Performing Arts.

Others

Audience of the Margi Madhu Performance

Selected randomly in order to answer a questionnaire.

Students of the Calicut University

Students from the School of Drama were interviewed in order to understand the mind set of students.

Sandra

A student of Nirmala Paniker who demonstrated mudras and facial expressions.

Teachers and Students of the Kerala Kalamandalam

Founded in 1930, The Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed University for Art and Culture trains and conducts performances of the classical arts of Kerala. The Kalamandalam has been functioning as a grant-in-aid institute for the Cultural Affairs Department of Kerala.

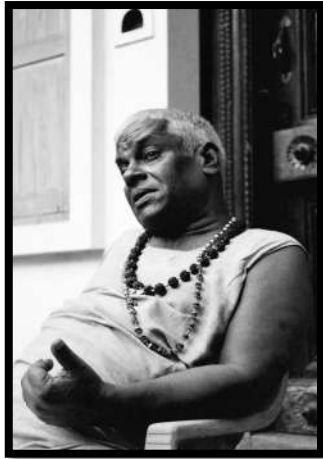


Image 5: Mr. G. Venu



Image 6: Mrs. Kapila Venu



Image 7: Mr. Sooraj Nambiar



Image 8: Mrs. Nirmala Paniker

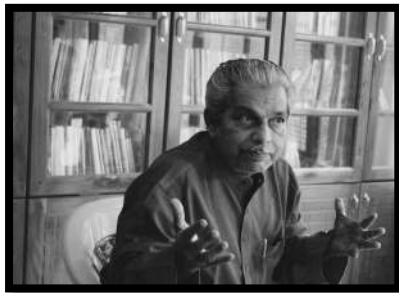


Image 9: Dr. K.G. Paulose



Image 10: Mr. Vinod Narayanan



Image 11: Mr. Chandradasan



Image 12: Students of Calicut University

Chapter 2: Literature Review



Image 13: Koothambalam at Vadakumnatham Temple



Image 14: Wall Carvings at Kerala Kalamandalam of Positions from the Natya Sastra

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many scholars and performers, who are in contact with the art form Kutiyattam, have published several articles and journals providing information on the art form. These scholarly publications, both via text as well as audio-visual medium provide a wide spectrum of information. These publications, that will be elaborated upon below, will cover various themes and attempt to mention the specifics of location and origin of the art form, as well as its present day context. A historical perspective on the art form, including the evolutionary process that the art form itself has undergone, will also be presented. In addition to the above, this literature review has attempted to cover the social, economical and political aspect of the performers, patrons and audience of Kutiyattam. This has enabled the identification of the gaps in the existing literature in order to put forth a viable research question.

2.1 Geographical Aspect of Kutiyattam

Kutiyattam has originated from the ancient Indian treatise of theatre and performing arts known as the Natya Shastra in classical India. In the book “Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India”, Sudha Gopalakrishnan writes about the location of the Kutiyattam performances and their prevalence all over the South Indian state of Kerala. Till the 10th century, the state of Kerala was combined with the land of current day Tamil Nadu. In Kerala they are often performed in Hindu Temple in the Sanskrit language (Gopalakrishnan 2011). This artform is a pioneer amongst the classical arts in Kerala. Today, establishments have been devoted to reviving this art form. These establishments and organisations are centered in Thiruvananthapuram. However, we were not able to find credible sources regarding the specificities of the geographical location of Kutiyattam. Through our research, we have aimed to provide information on the various centres, schools, and temples throughout the state of Kerala that involve themselves with the art form.

2.2 Origin and Historical Understanding of Kutiyattam

Arya Madhavan, in his book “Kutiyattam Theatre and the Actor's Consciousness,” dates Kutiyattam back to the 2nd century BC, boasting on more than 2000 years of continued existence. Indian historian V. Raghavan mentions the earliest Sanskrit drama as early as 3000 BC. During the next five centuries were the Golden Age of Classical arts when the performances also paved the way into texts. This led to the glorified literary and aesthetic theories of today. However, from 1100 AD onwards, the author has noticed a disappearance

in the classical arts as they existed. This is owed to the Muslim invasion which largely affected the cultural aspect of India. Islam as a state religion discouraged theatrical performances. This in turn led to the decrease of royal patronage and the performances resorted to being less sophisticated (Madhavan 2010).

The exact period of origin is obscure and not known. However, the first reference to Kutiyattam was the term “Chakkayyan” that refers to the term “Chakyar” or male performer of the art form. This reference was found in the 2nd century, in the South Indian epic “Chilappathikaram” which is written in Tamil. It is believed that the first performance of Kudiyaattam was written by King Kulasekhara who ruled certain regions of Kerala at the time (Raghavan 1993).

In the account by Madhavan, ancient Kerala was divided into 21 villages of which 18 were important, namely Sukarpuram, Peruvanam, Irinjalakkuda, Panniyoor, Karikaddu, Trissivaperur, Venganadu, Alathiyur, Tiruvalla, Kumaranallur, Kidangur, Paravur, Muzhikullam, Aavittattur, Kuzhur, Payannur and Easanamangalam. In each of these villages, resided one Chakyar and Nambiar family that were involved with the Kudiyaattam. These families were linked to the temples and they were constantly performing and engaged with the art form (Gopalakrishnan 2011). In the sources stated by Arya Madhavan, V Raghavan and Sudha Gopalakrishna, there were no gaps in the literature found with regard to the origin and historical background of Kudiyaattam.

2.3 Social Aspect of Kutiyattam

Kutiyattam has many social restrictions imposed on the performers. The right to perform Kutiyattam is vested in the members of two castes: Chakyars and Nambiar. Men from the Chakyar caste play male roles and women from the Nambiar caste play female roles. The importance of the caste of the performers has been emphasized in the book “The Epic Civilization” by R. K. Pruthi as well as in Belinda Dunford’s essay “The Kutiyattam/ Kutiyattam Sacred Dance Tradition.” Pruthi also mentions that the musicians who accompany the performers must be from the Nambiar caste. Dunford later explains how the caste restrictions have been less rigid since the 1950s. At this time Kutiyattam master Mani Madhava Chakyar attempted to revive the art form by giving opportunities to people from other castes to perform. In her book, “Kutiyattam: UNESCO Proclamation and the Change in Institutional Model and Patronage,” Sudha Gopalakrishnan explains how the establishment of

three Kutiyattam schools in the 1980s has popularised Kutiyattam amongst people of other castes who are taking up the art form as a profession. These schools are Kerala Kalamandalam in Cheruthuruthy, Marhi in Thiruvananthapuram and Ammarnur Chachu Chakya Smaraka Gurukulan in Irinjalakkuda. Although scholars have explained how the caste restrictions have evolved, none have mentioned how they originally came about. Why were the performers historically restricted to these two castes in particular? Why were women of the Chakyar caste and men of the Nambiar caste not allowed to perform? Did the Nambiar musicians have to be specifically male or female? These unanswered questions were addressed in our study on field.

2.4 Political and Economic Aspect of Kutiyattam

Kutiyattam performances were originally arranged at the request of temple authorities or local rulers. In his book “Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance,” Farley P. Richmond explains how the royal patronage developed into an arrangement between performers and landowners. The performers and their families were granted the land in exchange for staging performances in specific temples. The performers received monetary payment for their work, and were also given a large share of the land’s annual produce. In an interview, Professor Shulman states that although temples were the natural patrons of the art form, today they cease to be so. After the decline of royal families, wealthy influential citizens have taken on the role of being the patrons of the art form. The establishment of institutions that promote Kutiyattam has helped popularise the art form and widen its audience. Performances are no longer restricted to temple premises; performance troupes showcase their work in more commercial settings and even travel abroad to stage performances.

In her book, “Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India,” Gopalakrishnan notes that in the 1930s Kutiyattam was not popular with the audience in Kerala. It was seen as more of a ritual of the performers than performance for the audience. In 1949, Paimkulam Rama Chakyar was the first performer to venture out of the temple premises and stage a performance in other public places. Although this was widely criticised at the time for tampering with the purity of the art form, it was a revolutionary step in the history of Kutiyattam.

The politics of the audience of Kutiyattam is an important aspect of the art form. In her paper, “Fifty Years On: Arts Funding in Kerala Today,” Diane Daugherty explains that originally, only men of royalty and Brahmins were allowed to watch the performances. Gradually, non-

Brahmins were also allowed to spectate, but from a distance. Brahmins still had reserved seating within the temple premises, whereas non-Brahmins and women could sit or stand in the empty spaces in and around the performance area. As more women started coming to watch the performance, the audience was divided into two parts: right of the house for men and left of the house for women. Today, when performances are staged in commercial centres there are no restrictions imposed upon the audience.

Kutiyattam gained popularity on a global scale in 2001 when it was proclaimed a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO. After having gained this recognition, the Kutiyattam community in Kerala came together to acknowledge this revitalisation. The three major schools (Kalamandalam, Margi and Ammannur Gurukulam) began adapting old plays to create new productions and develop new choreographies. The major schools and institutions in the field formed a network with the performers and patrons, for the first time in the history of Kutiyattam. This network helped to promote the art form and build on a sense of community amongst the people (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

Gopalakrishnan notes that the Indian government has also taken steps to promote Kutiyattam as an art form. The Department of Tourism announced Kutiyattam as a heritage landmark in Kerala, and started advertising performances. The UNESCO recognition encouraged the Minister of Finance to create a special provision of Rs. 5 crore for cultural expressions declared as Masterpieces by UNESCO for the fiscal year 2006-2007.

In his book, “Into the World of Kutiyattam,” practitioner G Venu writes about his experiences with his guru, the legendary Ammannur Madhava Chakyar. Venu discusses the international recognition that Kutiyattam, and in particular Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, had gained far before the UNESCO recognition. For example, the ‘India in Switzerland’ festival in Switzerland in 1987, ‘River Mela’ in London, ‘Holland Festival’ in the Netherlands, ‘Festivals of India’ programme in Britain, United States and France in 1987, ‘Festival of India’ in Japan in 1988, ‘Kutiyattam Week’ in Zurich in 1997, and ‘Summer Festival’ in Sweden in 1998, are a few events at which Kutiyattam was performed for an international audience. Most of these performances were self-funded or sponsored by the event planners. In this way we can see how the patronage has shifted from the traditional rulers of the kingdoms in Kerala, to art enthusiasts across the globe.

After reviewing the literature available on Kutiyattam we have a general understanding of the art form in terms of its origin and history, as well its socio-political aspects. A survey of the literature has raised certain unanswered questions about the art form, which we gained answers to on field. These unanswered questions were the gaps in the field that we studied through our on-field research project.

Chapter 3.1 Travel Through the Pages



Image 15: Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai



Image 16: Vadakumnathan Temple, one of the few that has a koothambalam

Chapter 3.1 Travel Through the Pages

The historicity of Kutiyattam is an uncertain one. There exists no definite chronological sequence of events to tell its history. Much of its history is recorded and preserved through word of mouth, carvings and uncertain accounts. Historians still struggle to place the origins of Kutiyattam to a definite time period, yet 2000 years is a generally accepted supposition, one which is often repeated to establish Kutiyattam as the oldest surviving theatre form in the world. As mentioned previously the conservative estimate for the same is 1500 years and a more plausible one 1800 years which squarely puts its origins in the state and royal courts of the Chera dynasty, an ancient Dravidian line of rulers of Tamil origin (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

The Cheras were known to be great patrons of art and therefore much of the art composed in their day was composed in praise of their rule. Sangam literature was the collective term for such literature. Coincidentally the same term was used to describe an assembly of Tamil poets and scholars carried out in this period also known as a kootam or gathering. The earliest recorded mentions of the practices and rituals that form Kutiyattam are in the recording of a performance of Sangam literature- the Silappatikaram, composed around 500 AD. This same text not only details eight types of ‘nadippus’ or dramatic actions associated with women performers at the time but also makes a reference to a performance of Tripuradahanam (Tripura condemned to flames) given by Parayur Koothachakkaiyan before the Chera King. The description details how “With his rare skill, the actor depicted simultaneously, the vigorous and powerful dance of Siva, ‘with the clanging of his anklets’, clamoring of his drum, movement of his eyes and the shaking of his matted locks of hair, and then the graceful and delicate dance performed by Parvati, ‘with the anklets, tiara, ear ornaments and waistband remaining silent, breasts not heaving in excitement or hair in disarray’” (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

This is characterized by the intricacy of the performance, something locked to expressions of the eye and hands, a feature centric to the performance of Kutiyattam. Further research by scholars led them to summarize that Parayur Koothachakkaiyan belonged to the Chakyar community, and that while Kutiyattam may not have existed in its codified state, the theatre culture that would lead to its conception was already well in place. But what truly started the process was the migration of Brahmins from the north to the south. Details about this migration (the why and how) remain unclear and indeed many historians challenge the full

facts and extent of this migration. What is certain is that they brought along with them their elitist culture and learnings including Sanskrit. This came at a time when Jainism and Buddhism were gaining a niche in the cultural imagination of the south. Over time however, the Brahmins in the south became the face of a new brand of intellectuals, which appealed to the aristocracy and helped edge out the influences of other religions. The language of Malayalam was born of a mixture of Sanskrit and native Tamil. This growing monopoly naturally affected theatre and many of the most prominent playwrights and scholars' like-Asvaghosha, Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bodhayana, and Mahendravikramavarman used Sanskrit as their chosen language of conveyance. With their monopoly all but secure the Brahmins worked to inculcate the aspects of the local theatre forms with the existing culture of theatre they had brought from the north. The Brahmins, due to their expertise and available capital, were able to facilitate the dramatization of Sanskrit plays for the Kerala stage. Skilled as they were in theatre forms of the north, they played a vital role in early choreography of such dramatizations. However the Brahmins gaining monopoly lead to the realization of the inherent idea of stratification of knowledge. Performances that were once held in the streets were now restricted to the cloisters of the temple courtyard, a space that came to be known as a Koothambalam. While the local dance form of koothu was heavily modified, with an elevation of status and codification of its conventions in a way that detracted from its origins as a participatory art form, its roots are firmly embedded in the practice of Kutiyattam (Venu 2002).

At this juncture it becomes necessary to give a brief introduction as to how temple performances of Kutiyattam came to be a hereditary profession for the Chakyars. The Chakyars entered the scene when the Perumals, the ruler of the second Chera Empire in Kerala brought the Chakyars along with them as the first lineage of actors somewhere between the seventh and twelfth century. The Chakyars then established their dynasty and lineage by adopting children born from illegitimate wedlock in the kingdom, for example- The child of a Brahmin male and non-Brahmin female. By making the practice of their art form hereditary the arts of the Chakyar, Nangiars and Nambiars were preserved through time.

Reformation

The first major reformation of the art form since its inception came in the reign of Kulasekharavarman between 978 and 1036. This ruler of the Second Chera empire brought the temple art form of Kutiyattam to court. This was a way of codifying and refining the art form, and molding it to suit a decidedly upper class palate. Many of the characteristics that form the general understanding of Kutiyattam- its intricacies and its depth came at such a time. Kulasekhara to begin with expanded the repertoire of Kutiyattam by adding more Sanskrit plays. He wrote and choreographed two plays- ‘Subhadradhananjaya’ and ‘Tapatisamvarana’. Additionally the now well-known practice of using single acts as material for full plays, came into effect during the reign of Kulasekhara. This was done with the addition of a fourfold interpretation given to each verse within the act- first the actor would recite the verse, then stage gestures would carry across the same verse leading into an exploration of the inner meaning, both vocal and gesture driven ultimately closing with the exploration of all possible or implied meanings held within the verse. This in effect, eliminated a need to ‘read between the lines,’ as for the experienced spectator the act with all its intricacies was painstakingly laid bare (Coward, Hahn 1998).

Kulasekhara was known to possess an uncanny stage sense, which he used to write two texts collectively known as the Vyangyavyaka, that serve as choreographic manuals, which detail the minutest aspects of the presentation allowing a full unveiling of the text that is performed. In the following centuries, which are marked as the golden era of Kutiyattam, new productions were to be composed under royal and temple patronage (with no dearth in donations by wealthy Brahmins) and new production manuals were made to further codify the art form. The two manuals which shall find detail elsewhere are the- Attaprakarams and the Kramadeepikas; the latter deals with logistical details of the production such as rituals, stage decoration and remuneration for the performers while the former is the stage manual for the performance itself (Paulose 1991). This it does through detailing the performance of a play- citing each shloka, the established methods and conventions for the performance of the play are listed in full with attention given to each possible mood, situation and character.

At the same time, the community recognized the dangers of limiting the experience of Kuttiyattam to only an exclusive, sophisticated category of audience, thus the choreographers introduced the role of a Vidhushaka, the comic character which was meant to appeal to a wider audience. The Vidhushaka had the luxury of free speech which shifted from Sanskrit to

the vernacular Malayalam often interpreting Sanskrit words for the amusement of the audience (Venu 2002).

The following centuries saw the setup of many new Koothambalams in and around Kerala with the majority coming up around the 15-16th century. This concludes the vast majority of shifts the art form went through its early and Middle Ages. The next shift for the art form was not to come until 1965.

Chapter 3.2 A Testament to Time



Image 17: Beginning of a Kutiyattam Performance



Image 18: Mizhavu, the main accompanying percussion instrument in a Kutiyattam performance

Chapter 3.2 A Testament to Time

The UNESCO recognition has frequently been referenced throughout the documentation of Kutiyattam, and hence its operational specifications and background need to be adequately stated.

The setup is a recent one. Kutiyattam at the turn of the 20th century was reeling from a steady depletion of sources of adequate patronage. A change was required to alleviate the deadlock, and yet as with all traditions, salvation through change is a brittle road. This translated to not only a compromise in operational integrity of the art form, but also a gradual decimation of the traditional system of Gurukula Sampradaya (the disciple living and training at the house of the Guru), which was given the ground realities. A concentrated effort was thus made to port the essence of Kutiyattam into a more compact, efficient, (if somewhat or quite) abbreviated version. Against fierce conversationalist opposition, much of it from the traditional schools that would potentially benefit from the plan, the effort bore fruition with the institution of a dedicated Kutiyattam department at the Kerala Kalamandalam in 1965 (Krishnamurthy 2015). Among other notable changes brought to the fore, it was mainly the introduction of the institute model of teaching, one that would translate to at first workshops and seminars with a gradual shift to a full-fledged class with a debatable shift to a full course covering all the finer aspects of the performing art through modern methodology. Naturally this was in direct opposition to the hegemony held over Kutiyattam by the traditional schools. Thus, to retain relevance and gain benefit from the wave of reform that would tide over, they too adapted and modified age-old teaching methods. Thus by the early eighties the three established schools of modern era Kutiyattam- the Kalamandalam in Cheruthuruthy, Margi in Thiruvananthapuram and Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam in Irinjalakkuda came to adopt a change in the teaching method incorporating relevant teaching methods to the age old art form while keeping the essence of the traditional content intact. This influx and subsequent shift made possible a new avenue of patronage for the art form, support from the government and its agencies such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi who provided patronage through various initiatives aimed to be dispensed through these three schools. In particular, the Akademi targeted the latter two as its grant- in- aid institutions with Margi providing ongoing performances and the Ammanur Gurukulam acting as a training institute for the next generation of performers. Attention was also devoted to the musicians in this regard such as

P.K. Narayanan Nambiar, a prominent performer of the Mizhavu. This culminated in the 1990's with the opening of Padmasri Mani Madhava Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam- a training school for the instrument established in memory of Mani Madhava Chakyar, a late master performer. Kutiyattam finally gained a nationwide recognition, if not among the masses, at the very least in academic circles, domestically and even abroad, with a plethora of lecture- demonstrations and performances supplementing the process (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

In early 2000, UNESCO launched a new unprecedented initiative called the “Intangible Cultural Heritage”, a means of declaring distinctive forms of cultural expression as the collective heritage and responsibility of the world, a testament to humanity rather than one nation or creed. The so-called “Proclamation of Masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity” was designed to encourage governments, local communities and other organizations (NGOs and such) to identify, preserve and promote their own intangible heritage. ‘Intangible heritage’ as such is defined by the UNESCO to be “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.” It hoped to conceive a system that encouraged individuals and organizations alike to make exceptional contributions to the management, preservation and propagation of the aforementioned heritage (UNESCO 2002).

Sudha Gopalakrishnan, prominent scholar and practitioner, and more pertinently author of “Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India,” became the coordinator for the application, which started its process in 1999 when she was Vice president of Margi. She related how after a performance in Paris in the same year the Margi troupe was exposed to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage initiative. The nomination dossier was prepared the following year by the initiative of the Margi.

In May 2001, an International Jury proclaimed Kutiyattam to be among the 18 selected ‘Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of humanity.’

The recognition led the way for an imminent revitalization of the art form or at the very least provided common ground for the entire community to discuss and rationalize the revival. All three of schools dedicated themselves not just to reviving earlier plays but also in creating new choreographies meant for diverse international performances. As is the case with each

stage of the revitalization, many more centers for Kutiyattam were established at this time, including but not limited to, Krishnan Nambiar Smaraka Mizhavu Kalari by V.K.K. Hariharan and Usha Nangiar, Nepathya by Margi Madhu and Indu G., Koppu Nirmana Kendram in Vellinezhi. The latter is dedicated to carpentry and design of the costumes (Venu 2002).

Logistical aspects of the recognition

The recognition brought forth an action plan of revitalization engineered by UNESCO through one of several Funds in trust that the Japanese government has permanently pledged in support of UNESCO operations whether they be educational, cultural or scientific. A ten-year action plan was drawn up, partially funded by the grant, which seeks to support and consolidate the community of stakeholders over time so that they may continue to safeguard the existence of the art form. Furthermore, UNESCO identified the following objectives: assist and support the creation of a network of Kutiyattam institutions involved in the preservation of this art form; foster further academic research and publish texts and audio-visual documentation; assist in establishing a centralized archive and library on Kutiyattam and set up schemes to raise awareness amongst the local community in the role that they must play in preservation for their intangible heritage (Kurien 2013).

UNESCO sought to create a system of support, channelled through the six institutions of Kutiyattam present in Kerala- Kalamandalam, Margi, Ammannoor Gurukulam, Mani Madhava Chakyar Gurukulam, International Centre for Kutiyattam, and the Department of Ancient Theatre in Sree Sankara University. This involved the organization of training courses, performances, festivals and international seminars. Other related efforts included making traditional theatre houses available for public performance and the creation of Academic resource centres for the six schools, which would be involved in bringing out publications including new research, translations of manuscripts, and original writings on Kutiyattam, or even the upgrading of existing infrastructure for these institutions (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

National initiatives for the same were soon to follow. In 2006 the national budget set aside an initial provision of 5 crore rupees for the 'Intangible Heritage Fund' which targeted Kutiyattam among Vedic Chanting and Ramlila which were given similar recognition. A detailed scheme was set to follow this provision which was set in place by the Sangeet Natak

Akademi which was given charge of the process of grants in the field which culminated in the Akademi opening the National Centre for Kutiyattam in Thiruvananthapuram in 2006 (Sangeet Natak).



Image 19: Madhava Chakyar Smaraka Koodiyattom Research Centre and Art Gallery

Experiential Studies

Our fieldwork in Thrissur and Cochin brought us to level with the ground reality of the UNESCO recognition. Before leaving for the trip our general understanding of the recognition was a positive one at least based on the understanding that no press is bad press as regards an art form that was once on the verge of extinction. What we came to learn helped reveal a systematic divide of opinion that exists regarding the UNESCO recognition and its effects on the art form between the performers and the scholars.

The performers, to say the least, did not hold the recognition in fair light. Margi Madhu regarded the UNESCO recognition as a sign of dark change. He assessed that the declaration and the resulting grants have attracted many 'fake' artists that do not aim to work for the benefit of the art form. He was also decidedly against the press attention and how it could have manifested itself before and now only considered coverage and research of Kuttiyattam due to the recognition. Any benefits, according to him, that were forthcoming are yet to arrive (Chakyar 2015).

G. Venu sees the effect as less malevolent and rather simply asserts that it has done nothing or added nothing to the original art form. He points to performances abroad which were already being organized before the recognition in 2001. He asserted that it was foolhardy to expect change to magically take place over night. At the same time he also critiqued the nature of the grant system that was setup in the aftermath of the recognition. With UNESCO no longer overseeing the system, the grants have become erratic, a support only in namesake. He shared with us his experiences of government and organizational grants in the field of arts abroad using Japan as an example. Japan, he exuded, takes care of all its art forms, providing full equipped modern facilities for all the traditional art forms practiced in the country to the modest of towns (Venu 2015).

In contrast, however, are our interactions with scholars and students at the John Mathai Centre and the Kerala Kalamandalam, who painted a different picture. A general consensus existed that the recognition had injected life into the practice of Kutiyattam by revitalizing the system of patronage and setting up appropriate channels for the same. The scholars visibly hesitated in regard to the allegations that the grant system was inefficient and for token value. Many were simply resigned to the fact that the recognition was one only the artist themselves would understand, but that on the surface of it there had been a visible revival of the art form and its practice (Narayanan 2015).

In many ways the contrast revolves around the disagreement of whether Kutiyattam was in fact an art form that needed a helping hand. Most scholars would objectively reply positively to such, and our secondary research seemed to support that, however many of the performers disagreed even on this fundamental point.

Chapter 3.3 The Show Must Go On



Image 20: Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai



Image 21: Kutiyattam Demonstration at Kerala Kalamandalam

Chapter 3.3 The Show Must Go On

A background for this time period must be provided as regards the art form. A decay of traditional patronage had marked the ascent of Kutiyattam to the 20th century. The traditional practice of the Gurukulam was in decay largely due to a steady decline in patronage by the twentieth century. The reasons for the same are patently obvious, as by this time the income earned by a full time student and performer fell well below the minimal income required for sustenance. Thus, even if a new entrant replete with aptitude and creativity in the field was discovered, they were often lured away to other lucrative professions. G.Venu, in his book 'Into the World of Kutiyattam,' recounts a time when the costumes for performances were old and unattractive due to lack of budget. With the practice of Gurukulam in decline, a full time student of the art form and a fully trained performer were a rarity. G.Venu further recounts, that by this stage a fair to good knowledge of Sanskrit was deemed sufficient for many minor parts. These artists, who were not subject to regular trainings or full rehearsals, would often fumble for words or at other times incorrectly render certain verses. This state naturally precludes the ideal state of the performer, who has trained for over a decade, and aside from knowledge of verses and gestures, also holds a complete understanding and insight into the character that is portrayed on stage. G.Venu remembers that it was not uncommon in the day for a person to be standing somewhat hidden by the Mizhavu drum with a script in hand, promoting the lines furtively to the actor on stage.

A change was required and it had to come from the most basic component of the art form, the training process itself, and extend outward to the performance. A change would not directly come to Kutiyattam however; rather it would start in one of its affiliate art forms- Kathakali. Kathakali during the early half of the 20th century faced similar problems of patronage and decline of the Gurukula Sampradaya. In an effort to expand viewership of the art form

several changes were introduced. The first of these changes was the introduction of a school model for training of new students; the second was curtailing the length of the performance from all night to one's lasting four to five hours, and the third was the shift of venue to large theatre halls, which dramatically reduced the reciprocity between the actor and the spectator during the performance (Gopalakrishnan 2011). These changes worked to dramatic effect as Kathakali became the first among the classical art forms of Kerala to receive attention from those outside the tradition. The 1930's saw patrons from both within India and even outside visiting Kerala in droves.

The change however was not universally acceptable. For some like Kathakali master, Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair, it was a most desirable result, which while coming at the cost of tradition, had helped the art form gain a status which came with a rise in financial position for the performers themselves. Others thought the cost to be too high. Debates along the same lines would once again come to forefront with the opening of a Kutiyattam department in the Kerala Kalamandalam in 1965. The Kalamandalam, which had opened in the year 1930, was an attempt to give an institutionalized form to the traditional systems of training prevalent in the classical art forms of Kerala, while still keeping the age old practice of residential tutelage (Krishnamurthy 2015). The Kalamandalam in time would be credited with the achievement of giving second wind to three decaying classical art forms- Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and Kutiyattam. For Kutiyattam, the move to the Kalamandalam and an eventual evolution of the art form was started by Paimkulum Rama Chakyar, who took the initiative to lead Kutiyattam out of the secluded cloisters of the temple. Naturally there was fierce resistance to the move, much of it originating from the traditional performer communities who saw this as an invasion of what they perceived as their birthright. Regardless the institution of the Kutiyattam School in Kalamandalam was swiftly followed

by accompanying changes, such as the admission of students outside the traditional castes, and introduction of a school system with fixed syllabus, and specific (but reduced) duration of learning (Venu 2002).

The course for Kutiyattam at the Kalamandalam was fixed to a six-year diploma course with a one-year post diploma course, while the training for the Mizhavu drums was set to a four year course with a one year post diploma. The curriculum for the performer not only covers all the ground aspects of stage action, but also works to give a functional base for Sanskrit and Malayalam. Aside from these traditional courses students are also given education such as English, Hindi, Mathematics, etc. as electives to provide a full rounding of education which was a feature that was not prevalent in the Gurukulam system before Kalamandalam (Nambiar 2015). At the same time the Kalamandalam had the likes of Mani Madhava Chakyar and Ammannur Madhava Chakyar serving as visiting faculty. As of 2010, the Kalamandalam is the only university in Kerala given the 'A' category certification by the University Grants Commission of India (Gopalakrishnan 2006).

Ultimately Kalamandalam can be seen as an event that broke the flood barriers and a wave of reform for Kutiyattam swept through, affecting even the surviving traditional schools of learning- Margi in Thiruvananthapuram, and Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam in Irinjalakkuda. Both diversified their student base and also played their part in the induction of the practice of lecture demonstrations for art form. These demonstrations, which could be attended by those not even learning or performing the art form, helped spread awareness of Kutiyattam by way of elucidation, in both practice and theory. Among other things, the intricate theatre grammar and narrative with a performer demonstrating movement and gestures gave it context (Venu 2002).

The sum total or the culmination of these efforts led to the first international performance in 1980 headed by Paimkulam Rama Chakyar with a group of thirteen artists from the Kalamandalam. Since then, many trips have been sponsored by institutions and universities both in India and abroad.

What followed next would be a wave of reform that would mark a new era for the art form characterised by the UNESCO recognition in 2002.

Realities as we saw them

Our own perspective on the problems of patronage was developed under somewhat restrictive circumstances. The list of those who had to be interviewed was drawn up before we left for our field and our limited knowledge at the time did not allow us to make any value judgements about the socio- economic aspects pertinent to our list of interviewees, particularly with regard to the performers themselves. What has become apparent now, as it will with the next chapter, is that the performers we interviewed were those caught on the relatively better half of the reforms spoken of in this chapter and the next one. Due to a decline in traditional patronage the performances themselves frequently do not find funding and thus have to be funded by the performers themselves. The expenses for Kutiyattam are telling of its Bourgeoisie roots, with costumes individually costing lakhs of rupees (in the modern day) (Nambiar 2015). The performers we interviewed were those who could still afford to keep the practice as unadulterated as possible, they could afford the weight of tradition with the use of modernity. While some had regular demonstrations, performances and workshops abroad, in places such as Japan and Sweden, others benefited from grants from various government and non-government institutions. The realities of such grants is a topic for the next chapter. However, we must recognise that we did not in fact meet those

who are truly struggling as they practice the art form. It may well be considered a gap in our research leaving us to only speculate on secondary research on this great drying up of patronage that characterised the 20th century, which continues to be allegedly felt in the 21st century. The Kalamandalam itself can be said to be on the fortunate side of the process of modernisation, as at its time of inception in 1930, Vallathol Narayana Menon and Mukunda Raja (founders of the Kalamandalam) had solicited donations from the public to build the institution. The land itself was given by the Maharaja of Cochin at the time and the institution is a grant in aid institution affiliated and supported by the Cultural Affairs Department, Government of Kerala (Gopalakrishnan 2006). Ultimately this research in no way points to a relaxation of caste boundaries simply because those of decidedly more regressive socio-economic standing were never covered by the research itself.

Chapter 4.1 All the World's a Stage



Image 22: Koothambalam at Kerala Kalamandalam



Image 23: Kutiyattam Demonstration at Kerala Kalamandalam

Chapter 4.1 All the World's a Stage

“...one of the bravest and most outrageous pieces of acting I have ever seen. Who else would dare take 15 minutes to die on stage and get away with it?” - Kenneth Rae, former theatre critic for Guardian, reporting for Guardian London on the performance of Balivadham at the Riverside Studio in London on 26th July 1982

The discourse has run the gambit of the historical aspects of the age-old art form. This chapter shall attempt to provide a workable discernment of the most fundamental aspect of the art form, and one that has seen extensive research- the performance itself. The sheer breadth of artistic expression present in Kutiyattam cannot be overstated, the intricacy being the pride and identity of the performers. This naturally makes an extensive understanding of the art form and its intricacies, essential not just for the performer, but for the audience itself. While in the past the audience was largely composed of wealthy upper class Brahmins and other patrons with extensive knowledge of Sanskrit literature, now with the art form stepping outside closed confines, the nature of the performance has shifted to cater to a new category of audience- the casual kind with little to no knowledge of the relevant material; the comprehension and enjoyment of the performance for such a member being besides the scope of immediate discussion.

To begin contrasting historical performances with the performances of the modern age, it is necessary to understand what used to drive a performance of Kutiyattam. The answer is evident even if one were to only glance over the history of the art form- religion drives Kutiyattam (Venu 2015). While the current day relevance of such a statement is questionable (with performances abroad now inculcating local culture and traditions), historically such a statement holds functional truth. Many aspects are arraigned to express the religious nature of the performance starting from the rituals that demarcate the sacrosanct and exclusive nature of the art form, right down to the script itself which conspicuously or inconspicuously attempts to assert upper class Hindi hegemony. The composition *Mattavilasa* is an example of this, as the play has a blatant undertone highlighting the degeneration of Buddhism and its practices, which is shown through Nagasena, who holds an insatiable lust for food and women (Paulose 2000). The composition of this play roughly coincides with the phasing out of Buddhism in South India (particularly Kerala). The performance of this play thus may be observed to have political and religious agendas, concepts that intertwine more often than

not. Ultimately the consigning and performance of the play may be seen as a show of power, a glorification of the dominant religious group at that time and locale. Today this play is still performed in the temples of Kerala and is considered particularly auspicious if performed to celebrate child birth (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

Religion shaping an art form is not an entirely original concept if one considers the planes of world history; however the relation here, not just for Kutiyattam, but for performing arts as a whole in the Indian subcontinent, can be argued to have religion as their very basis. In his book “The concept of Ancient Indian theatre,” Christopher Byrski draws the link between the concepts of natya or ‘dramatic act’ and the yajna- ‘sacrifice’. The Natya Sastra speaks of the concept of theatre itself emerging from festivities undertaken for the Indradhvaja festival and later gaining individual identity over time, while still maintaining an integrally ritual oriented base. Examples of this can be seen in the reverent status given to the mizhavu drum. The drum is consecrated with sixteen rites or ‘sanskaras’ that find common ground with many of the rites performed during a traditional yajna. The drum is thus accorded a status above all other stage instruments and props. These sixteen rites accord it the status of a celibate Brahmin, a whimsical play of hierarchy amongst the accessories to the art form. The ritual purity attributed to the performers shall be covered in a dedicated chapter (Chapter 4.2) working to discern the identity of these stage actors, and yet the associated purity of the performance itself shall be elaborated upon summarily, providing a base to study the other aspects of the performance similarly moulded, even in the modern age, by religion (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

Mani Madhava Chakyar, in his book “Introduction to Natya Kalpadrumam,” introduces another dimension linking the performance of Kutiyattam to the observance of the yajna. The ritual fires or lamps that are lit before the performance of Kutiyattam (observed even today in performances outside temples, in India and abroad) correspond with the three sacrificial fires of the yajna. The three wicks of the lamp are positioned such that two point towards the performer and one towards the audience. And just as a yajna is followed by a ritualistic bath or cleansing, a performance of Kutiyattam is always laid to an end with the performer sprinkling water on the stage to purify it.

A temple performance of Kutiyattam typically began with the performer taking a purifying bath in the temple pond, which is followed by a visit to the ‘green room’, a place to pay

deference to the gods through the worship of eight auspicious items or ‘ashtam- angalayam’. The green room is also the symbolic corridor to transcendence. The performer would be handed a change of clothes by the traditional washer man caste (mannan), and then put on an auspicious red cloth, at which point he ceases to be a man. Ultimately a performance of Kutiyattam is a visual sacrifice or ‘chakshushayajna’ and thus the performer must leave behind worldly, ‘mundane’ concerns such as loved ones, desires, vices and such; he must transcend to a domain of ‘meta- reality’ where the world cannot pollute him. Until the end of a performance he inhabits a ‘privileged’ time and space where no man is greater than the performance or the performer itself. This is why the Vidushaka or comic character has the freedom to criticize and ridicule even royalty during the course of the performance even if said royalty was present as a member of the audience. The reverence of the ritual and its faithful observance had such power to make humble even those who consigned it (Gopalakrishnan 2011).



Image 24: Student and Teacher at Kerala Kalamandalam

With a base firmly ground in objective reality of the nature of the Kutiyattam performance, an understanding of the performance itself is possible. This progression shall in due course work to establish the 'evolution' of the performance, as is the intention of the report.

As mentioned previously it was Kulasekhara who made the changes that became the defining traits of a performance of Kutiyattam. Prominent amongst them, especially with regards to the aspect of evolution, is the length of a performance. Kutiyattam is an art form that is exhaustive in nature; it takes individual acts of a play and expands them to full feature performances. The longest recorded performance of Kutiyattam is the 'Ramayana', an epic poem that is regarded as one of the two great works of Sanskrit literature, which could last up to a year (Paulose 1991). A quote that was frequently used regarding the length of the Ramayana (by scholars and performers alike) was that a potential heir to the throne of Cochin could not ascend to Kingship without watching the full performance of Ramayana. The breadth and scale of the performance is in many ways truly incomparable to any contemporary art form; a summarization for the reasons for the same can simply be put down to the fact that in a performance of Kutiyattam, hidden context and reading between the lines does not exist. This is not to say the original source material or indeed the script itself does not have any, rather these hidden contexts are elaborated upon in such painstaking detail that individual interpretation on the part of the audience itself is rendered unnecessary (Paulose 2000).

This is done through the use of the nine basic emotions or 'Navarasa' prescribed by the Natya Sastra. These nine rasas are Shringara (love), Adbhuta (Wonder), Vira (Valour), Raudra (Anger), Hasya (Ridicule or Joy), Karuna (Grief), Bhayanaka (Fear), Bibhatsa (Disgust), and Shanta (Tranquillity). These are rendered with the appropriate Bhava (facial expression) to create an ethereal scene only discernible to the trained eye. The artist brings a much wider variety of emotion into play by controlling the intensity of the rasa and the bhava (Nandan 2008).

And yet Kutiyattam does not limit itself to only this facilitation of discourse; it makes use of histrionic acting based on the use of an elaborate code of gestures and bodily movement, which roughly corresponds with the alphabet, leading to formation of words and sentence as prescribed by Hastalakshanadipika, a text on theatre language. These movements strictly divide themselves into three categories, which are differentiated by the type of discourse

required in the scene, these three categories being- Irunnatam (action while seated), Patinnattam (action corresponding to a slower tempo) and ilakiyattam (action based on improvisation). This may be seen as characteristic of Kutiyattam that draws together regional influences and detractions into its fold. A further point of detraction from the Natya Sastra that Kutiyattam inculcates is a varied and significantly detailed routine of chari and gati (gait). The gati is vital to presentation in evolving not just the emotion prevalent in the scene (a character pacing to and fro with anxiety for instance), but is also the means of presentation of the species, class and character (Paulose 1999). For instance, if the character of Hanuman is to be introduced the performer must portray the gait of a monkey, characterised by leaping or agitated movements, even before he can get into the character exposition and development of Hanuman. So detailed is this convergence of mudras, bhavas, gati, netrabhinya etc. that within the language of Kutiyattam even simple words such as 'I' and 'You' can be presented with different connotations and emotions, all without saying a word. An example of this would be a contrast in the use of 'You' by Ravana for Sita and then for Hanuman. For Sita his use of 'You' would be mingled with lust, fear of rejection and ultimately love and to Hanuman the same address carries rage and indignation (Hanuman had just been caught breaking into Lanka) (Gopalakrishnan 2011).



Image 25: Kutiyattam Demonstration at Kerala Kalamandalam



Image 26: Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai

The role of rhythm in creation of this world

Rhythm or 'Tala' is a concept that is deeply intrinsic to the performance of Kutiyattam, as it not only keeps time and pace for the performer to correspond to with action, but it also aids in making the audience receptive to the sheer multitude of expression that is unfolding before them. This is done at the level of what may almost be considered hypnotic suggestion, considered closer to svara (pure sound) rather than raga (melody) though the terms are used interchangeably (Nandan 2008).

The instruments used during the performance of Kutiyattam are mizhavu, kuzhitalam, etakka, kurumkuzhal, and sankhu. Of these, the mizhavu drums and the kuzhitalam (cymbals) are used more prominently, others featuring in certain parts of the act or in performances of special significance (such as the Kuzhal, a wind instrument only played on special occasions). The caste restrictions historically present for performing with such instruments shall be dealt with in the next chapter on the 'performer'. While the mizhavu is played throughout the performance to keep rhythm, the kuzhitalam is only played to modulate the rhythm while reciting chants or passages of the text. The sankhu finds use at the very beginning. The conch, which is considered sacred, is played to mark an auspicious beginning to the performance (Chakyar 1999).

A short note on stage props and makeup

In due part to the rise in prominence of Kathakali, the aesthetic tradition of Kutiyattam including the costume, are well known. These are elaborate set pieces comprising of multiple individual pieces that must be assembled and disassembled with diligence. A specialized caste of artisans was historically charged with creating and maintaining these costumes and props, which may take several months to prepare. Makeup is used to further compliment the portrayal of the nine rasas by the performer (Raghavan 1993). For instance, painting the characters face green marks him as a character embodying both shanta and royalty.

And yet it is necessary to mention that the costumes and props do not in fact become the character for Kutiyattam regards performance as transcendence, even from the external aspects of the stage itself. This in turn makes possible a scenario where the performer dressed as Hanuman, replete with a tail, swiftly and fluidly switches to the portrayal of Sita, as she longs for Rama. His mannerism changes to that of delicacy and elegance, of longing and hope. Emotions and images are evocated by abstract movement, nonlinear and often

improvised narrative, and exaggerated or conversely subdued delivery (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

And yet this is not to say that these props and costumes stay only as accessories to the performance. There are certain acts and performances that detract Kutiyattam's usual methodology of drawing meaning from the abstract. These acts are called Ninam, which literally translates to blood display. These can be conventionally understood to be violent and gory scenes. An example of this is the scene where Lakshmana, to punish the 'wicked' Surpanakha, cut off her ears and breasts. The scene is meant to evocate the agony of the mutilated demoness. This is evoked not only through the performance itself, but also through the use of specialized stage props. Blood is typically prepared for these scenes by mixing lime, rice paste and turmeric; mutilated and mangled organs are prepared through immersing tender coconut leaves in the stage 'blood'. Thus unfolds a gruesome yet gripping scene made complete with dimly lit torches and loud drumming as Surpanakha wails in agony with faltering steps splattering blood and viscera onto the sacred stage- a macabre yet masterful scene (Chakyar 1999).

Performance in the modern day

The evolution of the performance is integrally linked with a change of patronage and then, the very system of Gurukulam. Kutiyattam had the living example of the reforms Kathakali had adopted to become relevant in the modern era of 'casual consumerism'. In effect it is simply a matter of length, and yet because it is a matter of length everything about the performance must be readjusted to keep the essence of the work intact, even as it compressed into a significantly shortened duration (Nambiar 2015). Most performances of Kutiyattam in the modern day do not exceed four hours. These are naturally the performances are held in large halls with varied attendance. Temple performances still somewhat retain length and complexity of the performance, delivering works that may take over a month to fully dramatize. The performance has also 'evolved' by integrating contemporary aspects of theatre, such a 'director', the concept of which did not formally exist in Kutiyattam (Venu 2015). Performances have been reduced to excerpts, designed to provide maximum exposure to the most detailed and technically impressive performances. With Kutiyattam troupes travelling abroad, asynchronistic aspects of local culture have also been inculcated, seen as collaborations or interpretations. A popular example is that of G.Venu's work in incorporating the traditional Japanese dance form Kabuki into performances held in Japan.

The art form, and particularly the performance, has evolved to cater to a wider audience. It has compromised on its close knit structure to allow a greater access to the art form, a change that has subtly but surely drawn the performance, and indeed the theatre form itself, away from its religious core.

Our own experiences

Perhaps the only real merit to our research is personal experience which is gained as a member of the audience witness to a new age of Kutiyattam. On our field trip we had the opportunity to witness a performance by pre-eminent performer Margi Madhu. The performance was held at the Kerala Varma College on the 4th of December as part of a larger seminar on the modern theories of drama and theatre. The performance depicted the kidnapping of Sita by villainous Ravana and the subsequent killing of Jatayu as he attempts to rescue her. Margi Madhu played a greedy, violent Ravana who even in the dreadful costume of the demon king embodied the gentle aspect of a sage as he coaxes Sita to leave the 'Laxman rekha'. The costumes were vivid, the action unusual yet gripping, and the steady beat of the mizhavu drums created an atmosphere of urgency, and yet the meaning was still largely incomprehensible. It took no more than 15 minutes of the two hour performance to establish the sheer challenge faced by the modern day casual audience. Much of our interpretation of the progression of scenes involved a lot of filling in the blanks with our knowledge of the Ramayana and for all intents and purposes much of it may well have been wrong (we incorrectly identified a character for the better half of the performance). An investigation of our fellow audience members revealed that eight out of every ten shared our plight, the only difference being that they were even less invested in the performance than us. We took to sorting potential our target group by asking audience members if they could point out Margi Madhu. A brief round of questioning and it turns out that most that couldn't were there by pure coincidence (waiting for someone, wandering into an event taking place at their own college, etc.)

Those that could answer were a decided majority and many of those were teachers or certain students from the performing arts or Sanskrit division. We further sorted our audience by identifying true patrons from passive consumers. This we did by enquiring as to how many of them would watch the extended rendition of the same scene at a temple (which can take up to a week) if given the opportunity. All but two of our respondents replied negatively, the two who gave affirmation were teachers who had already been to such a performance.

Ultimately what we drew from our experience as first time audience members is that the interplay between performer and audience has diminished and understandably so. They must performer in larger auditoriums that detract from the sacred space of the stage, to larger audiences with uncertain expectations, background, and above all, level of expertise in being an audience member to such art forms. The interplay may exist, but as is the case with us, may simply be lost in translation. Ultimately a relaxation of boundaries may have brought 'dramatic' perceived changes as regards the community of performers and scholars but for a member of modern day audience, this relaxation means little. The art form and its performance comes across as incomprehensible and certainly catered to a niche audience and yet even as a first time audience you cannot deny the grandeur and complexity of the act unfolding before you.

Chapter 4.2 Taking Center Stage



Image 27: Costume Gallery
at Madhava Chakyar Smaraka Koodiyattom Research Centre and Art Gallery



Image 28: Sita in Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai

Chapter 4.2 Taking Center Stage

Ultimately the performer forms the last and perhaps most relevant part of the link that connects the shareholders of an art form. As such, this chapter itself will be dedicated to be a brief exposition, that shall not only detail the training process, but also address caste restrictions that historically dictated roles on and off stage for a performance of Kutiyattam. To make comprehensive this exploration of the socio economic realities, a brief sub section shall be dedicated to the role of the woman performer. As this report as a whole deals with evolution, the discussion within the chapter shall cover the relaxation of caste restrictions and attempt to give some perspective to modern day realities of the same.

Lineage

As mentioned in the section of the report highlighting early history of Kutiyattam, certain castes were assigned the role of keepers of the art form, a lineage that has continued to present day. Kutiyattam preserves lineage by following a matrilineal system wherein the children are part of the mother's family and their maternal uncle acts as their 'guru' or teacher. This keeps with 'Guru shishya parampara' (master disciple tradition) which is the basis of the Gurukulam model of teaching (Venu 2002).

Temple support being a reality back in the golden era of the art form, a guru had many years to comprehensively pass on his skills to his pupil. This support came in the form of specific Chakyar families having exclusive performance rights to a particular temple. These performance rights still exist despite the fact that from the eighteen families that historically practiced Kutiyattam, only five remain; these five beings- Pothiyil, Ammanur, Koypa (Paimkulam), Mani (Perinjellur) and Cheriyyaparisha. These families in due course of times came to have their own specializations as regards the components of the performance of Kutiyattam, their traditional forte with some gaining aptitude with histrionic acting; others became adept at speech or even humour (Gopalakrishnan 2011).

In the modern age, three families remain with influence in the art form on the basis of representing the major performers of recent times, they are- Mani Madhava Chakyar, Paimkulam Rama Chakyar and Ammanur Madhava Chakyar.

The training process

Lineage ultimately plays the first step in the training process. Chakyars and Nangiars are exposed to the art form and its constituents from the time they are born. Knowledge of plays, their texts, acting techniques and even certain roles is inculcated into them from an early age. A child in a Chakyar family is traditionally initiated into Kutiyattam at the age of seven. Formal education starts by the age of eight and continues throughout his life. A student's typical day starts at four in the morning and continues till eight in the evening. The curriculum spans all the necessary aspects of the performance and typically covers- learning of the text, modes of chanting, speech patterns, mudras, body movements, facial expressions and the elaboration of dramatic situations. Since the face represents the main field of display for dramatic action and thus special attention is paid to the individual training for the movement of the eyes, the brows, cheeks and lips to provide a wider palate to compose an emotion (Nambiar 2015).

As the child grows older, he is given an education in theatre grammar and basic Sanskrit. Slowly he is exposed to the plays and in due time it becomes routine to train oneself by repeating small units of a performance.

Next a complete and thorough understanding of every part, situation and play is imbibed in consultation with the performance manuals. The ultimate goal is to bring the performer to stage where he is an interpreter rather than a simple narrator for the character. To this end, the performer begins with small roles and ritualistic dance sequences and is allowed to gradually grow into more complex roles. Ultimately the mark of a 'good' actor becomes to bring novelty in repetition, to present the audience with something new, even if the play is performed multiple times, and a level of creative control over imaginative faculties is required, which can only be honed over a life time of dedicated practice (Venu 2002). This is where 'Netrabhinya' becomes a mark of a well-rounded performer, a master of the art can bring life to his eyes and can ultimately just use the movement of his eyes to make the audience imagine for instance, that he is gazing upon a mountain, replete with streams, trees jutting at odd angles or the grace of a deer as he prances in the distance, all of this conveyed at the same time.

Of equal importance is manipulation of breath, which allows for the process of 'infusing breath' into aspects of the performance. Breath manipulation undertaken through the storage

of air at varied pressures throughout the body, and its slow, pressurized release allows for a variation to be created in the rasa performed. Breath manipulation is also what allows the crass, yet commanding tone of Ravana to suddenly shift to the gentle, yet determined voice of Sita (Chakyar 1999).

Kutiyattam and its wide variety of movements require an uncommon level of flexibility and control, which is slowly built up over the years. Regular exercise for limb flexibility (Sadhakam) is necessary for the same. In addition aspects from the gymnastic practice of Kalari are included, such as massage patterns. In this case oil is liberally applied to the body and the student lies down on a mat that is spread on the ground. The master then massages the pupil's body with pressure applied on organs, sub organs and muscles. This is done every day for one month during monsoon season and helps prepare the body for rigors and demands of Kutiyattam (Venu 2002).

Musicians and stagehands

While much of the chapter deals with the actor and their training process, a short note is necessary on the traditional castes entrusted with role of musicians and stage hands. The Nambiar caste was traditionally entrusted with the responsibility of the playing the instruments, in particular the mizhavu which keeps rhythm with the use of tala. Their own training is a gruelling one based on learning rhythm patterns for different works and occasions, for these rhythm vocalizations are practiced daily starting with a slower tempo with a gradual build up. The musicians are accompanied by a Nangiar a female performer, who is present on stage at all times to provide recitation of akkita slokas, bhramari songs, churnikas and other verses at the play. At the same time the nangiar also makes use of the cymbals to keep rhythm during the recitation of shlokas. Interestingly, in longer and more intricate works such as the Ramayana, the Nambiar goes beyond the orchestral duty and also takes on the role of a sutradhara (one who directs action). Often he also takes on the role of explaining verses in Malayalam to a less initiated audience in a manner akin to that of a reporter (Paniker 1992).



Image 29: Death of Jatayu in Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai



Image 30: Musicians in Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai

The role of the female performer

The Nangiar community are the women members of the Nambiar tribe. Historically they have held the distinction of playing every female part in a performance, a distinction that is uniquely true of Kutiyattam. As performers they hold their own exclusive performance rights as regards the temple performances. They also hold their own theatre form called Nangiar Koothu which while has been incorporated into Kutiyattam even while it holds true to its own individual identity (Nangiar 2015).

Nangiar have historically been afforded privileges afforded to no other women at the time such as the freedom to strike temple bells and to pray. They also held a financial status independent of male influence, having land holdings of their own that gave them a comparable position to their Chakyar contemporaries (Paniker 1992).

The confluence of women performers in Kutiyattam is responsible for the development of theatre grammar and a brand of histrionic acting based solely upon the exposition of the female character.

The modern day reality of the performer

Since the latter half of the 20th century, caste restrictions have steadily given way as the art form relaxes its hold and allows people from outside the traditional castes to learn and practice Kutiyattam. The Kalamandalam was first amongst the great institutions to allow such a practice, but soon enough the traditional schools followed suit.

Ultimately what this means for the traditional castes is that they have become the precursors, teachers and gatekeepers for the art form, and are deeply involved in the teaching, propagation, and research of the theatre form.

The curriculum for the new age performer has also shifted. The first institutionalized syllabus for Kutiyattam was introduced by the Kalamandalam, and it worked to incorporate the traditional subjects with more contemporary schools subjects, such as mathematics, science, English, etc. This is done to provide a well-rounded education to the performer of today that more likely than not is looking to supplement a profession with less than flattering pay and attached standard of living. The duration itself has been made compact and systematically deals with many of traditional subjects taught to students since the inception of the art form.

This aspect of evolution in Kutiyattam can be seen to be among the more conspicuous ones though our report cannot claim to really test this aspect of evolution as any 'true' student of the art form had gone on from the institutionalized study to a more traditional model studying under one of the great performers of the traditional castes. This without question held true for the respondents for our field trip as well.

To close, one may not with certainty speak of on an absolute relaxation of the role of traditional castes in Kutiyattam. While theoretically, anyone is free to train and practice as Kutiyattam performer, it is a matter that simply requires time to validate the extent of this relaxation and its ultimate effect on its primary share holders- the performers.

Chapter 5: Conclusion



Image 31: Mr. Sooraj Nambiar conducting a workshop on Kutiyattam mudras



Image 32: Jatayu in Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai

Chapter 5: Conclusion

To conclude, it is necessary to circle back and retrace our brief summarization of Kutiyattam through a perceived, and in our case assumed, state of evolution. The art form can more or less be seen as being under progress as regards its evolution. The reasons for the evolution are patently obvious- an eloquent way of introducing it is that the art form is seeking relevance in the face of the all-consuming force of modernization. The less measured, but perhaps more accurate way of presenting the situation is that the art form is commercializing itself to compensate for the loss of traditional patronage. The attempt is to fast-forward to the modern age an art form that has remained relatively unchanged for the better half of a millennial and naturally this process has left casualties in its wake. Obsolete traditions have been scrapped away from the art form to make it efficient, but to many performers this has been akin to tearing away that which makes Kutiyattam what it is. Ultimately an appeal for wider audience requires Kutiyattam to minimize the more regional and native influences of the culture that shaped it, relaxation of caste boundaries and performances outside temples are only one aspect of it. Kutiyattam has not yet found the right balance of the new and the old to fully lead this art form into the age of the modern audience. A visit to the Kalamandalam further revealed the story of an art form that is still trying to find its place in the modern age. Students of performing arts in Kalamandalam confessed that their involvement and understanding of Kutiyattam is fairly minimal but they did mention that it is helpful to take a work shop in Kutiyattam as the sheer breadth and range of the movements and expressions inherent in the art form benefit a student of theatre in the pursuit of other theatre forms by expanding stage vocabulary and diversifying methods of delivery.

Ultimately it paints a rather banal picture with the portrayal of an art form considered sacred, with considerable historicity lasting nearly two millennia, to back up its existence, and how this art form (a victim of its own exclusivity) must, for the lack of a better word, find its 'use' in the modern day.

But the problem may well lie with identifying if there is in fact a problem at all. Our interaction on field drew several detracting views, especially concerning the relevance of the UNESCO recognition for the art form, which is deemed by many performers as unnecessary to the destiny of the art form while others (particularly scholars such as Mr. Narayanan) give a more straightforward version to the situation. Kutiyattam was in fact in need of the press

provided by the recognition and this may well be the factor that propels the art form into the twenty first century and beyond. Ultimately however, it is a matter of perspective, one that we cannot objectively claim to have the necessary expertise to resolve.

The art form may well survive this period of transition; it may well expand its potential audience and patronage base through the use of international performances, demonstrations and workshops aimed at popularizing the art form, but will it emerge on the other side, identity still intact? That is the question that continues to plague all the potential stakeholders of the art form, and one that we were ultimately left with at the end of our brief, if informative, investigation of this remarkable art form that is in a stage of transition. It may be considered truly on our part that we did catch the art form in the midst of its gruelling pathos as we had the opportunity to observe how an art form and an enterprise stand the test of time.



Image 33: Demonstration by Sandra, student of Nirmala Paniker



Image 34: End of Performance by Margi Madhu Chakyar at Kerala Varma Kodai

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Glossary

Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam: A renowned training and performance centre for Kutiyattam

Angika Abhinaya: Movement of the limbs, which include facial expression

Attam: Acting

Attaprakarams: A guidebook on histrionics, which vividly describes the method of action, movement, recitative mode, gesture, elaboration and every other detail of performance

Bhava: The emotion or mood conveyed by the performer

Chakshushayajna: Visual sacrifice

Chera: An ancient Dravidian line of rulers of Tamil origin who ruled parts of present day Tamil Nadu and Kerala

Gurukulam: A type of school that is residential in nature, with the pupils living near the guru, often within the same house

Hasta Abhinaya: Language of gestures

Itakka: Hourglass shaped drum

Kerala Kalamandalam: A public institution in Thrissur, imparting training in and conducting performances of the classical arts of Kerala, including Kutiyattam

Koothambalam: Traditional theatre built in some temples for the staging of Koothu and Kutiyattam performances

Koothu: Dance or performance

Kramadeepikas: A guidebook on histrionics, which gives an account of practical matters such as stage organization, stage production, use of costumes and payment to the artists

Kulashekhara: King of the Chera Dynasty

Kuzhal: Traditional oboe-like wind instrument

Margi: An organization in Thiruvananthapuram dedicated to the revival of Kathakali and Kutiyattam

Mizhavu: Big copper drum played as an accompanying percussion instrument in Kutiyattam and Koothu

Mohiniattam: Classical dance form from Kerala, performed only by women

Mudra: Symbolic hand gesture

Nadippu: Dramatic actions associated with women performers

Nangiar: Women from the Nambiar caste

Nangiarkoothu: Allied traditional art of Kutiyattam, performed only by women

Nataka: The heroic comedy that is the chief of the ten main types of the drama in India

Natya Shastra: Detailed treatise and handbook on dramatic art that deals with all aspects of classical Sanskrit theatre

Nepathya: Costume

Neta Abhinaya: Eye expressions



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