

**TRADITIONAL  
SANSKRIT THEATRE  
OF KERALA**

**(SKT3 E03)**

**III SEMESTER**

**MA SANSKRIT (SAHITYA)**

**(2019 Admission onwards)**



**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

*School of Distance Education*

*Calicut University P.O.*

*Malappuram - 673 635 Kerala*

**190262**

**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

**School of Distance Education**

**Study Material**

**III SEMESTER**

**(SKT3 E03)**

**MA SANSKRIT(SAHITYA)**

***TRADITIONAL SANSKRIT  
THEATRE OF KERALA***

**Prepared by:**

*Smt. Sarannya. V,  
Guest Faculty of Sanskrit,  
SVR NSS College, Vazhoor, Kottayam.*

**Scrutinized by:**

*Dr. P.V. Rajee,  
Associate Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit Sahitya,  
SSUS Kalady.*

***DISCLAIMER***

“The author shall be solely responsible for the content and views expressed in this book”

## **CONTENTS**

|                 |          |           |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|
| <b>UNIT I</b>   | <b>-</b> | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>UNIT II</b>  | <b>-</b> | <b>10</b> |
| <b>UNIT III</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>15</b> |
| <b>UNIT IV</b>  | <b>-</b> | <b>19</b> |



# UNIT- I

## Kūṭiyāṭṭam

Kūṭiyāṭṭam is a traditional performing art form in the state of Kerala. It is a combination of ancient Sanskrit theatre with elements of Kūttu, an ancient performing art from the Sangham era. In the year 2001, UNESCO recognised it as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity officially. It is traditionally performs in temple theatres known as kūtṭaṃbalams. Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Cākyār kūtṭu were among the dramatized dance worship services in the temples of ancient India, particularly Kerala. There are two types of Kūttu in Kerala, the Prabandhakkūtṭu, popularly known as Kūttu and the traditional Sanskrit play Kūṭiyāṭṭam.<sup>1</sup> The Prabandhakkūtṭu consists of the exposition of Puraṇic stories the actor in a role of Vidūṣaka (Cākyār). Naṅṅyārkkūtṭu is not a distinct form of Kūttu but it is a mono acting of a Naṅṅyār

### Origin and Development of Kūṭiyāṭṭam

The term Kūṭiyāṭṭam, literally means ‘combined acting’ in Malayalam. It combines Sanskrit theatre performance with elements of traditional kūtṭu. The term Kūttu denotes ‘dance or drama’ and the word Cākiyan means the dancer or performer. It is traditionally performs in temple theatre known as kūtṭaṃbalam. Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the only surviving art form that uses drama from ancient Sanskrit theatre. It has a documented history of a thousand years in Kerala, but its origins are yet not available. Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Cākyār kūtṭu were among the dramatized dance worship services in the temples of ancient India, particularly Kerala. Both Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Cākyār kūtṭu originated from the ancient art form kūtṭu, which mentioned several times in Sangham literature, and the epigraphs of the subsequent Pallava, Pandiyan, Chera, and Chola periods. The pallava king

---

<sup>1</sup> *Kuṭiyattam An Introduction*, K. Kunjunni Raja, P.6

Mahendravidikrama himself wrote the famous Sanskrit plays *Mattavilāsaprahasana* and *Bhagavadjūjūkīya* and both dramas were commonly performed in stage at that time. The staging of some Bhāsa plays might have started at the Pallava Court at this time. Inscriptions related to kūtūtu can see in temples at Tanjore, Tiruvudaimaruthur, Vedaranyam, Tiruvurur, and Omampuliyur. They were treating as an integral part of worship services, alongside the singing of Tevaram and Prabandham hymns. Ancient kings are among those listed as authors of works for these services. There is evidence of these across the ancient subcontinent during the Chola and Pallava periods. A Pallava king called Rājasimha had been credit with authoring the play *Kailāsoddhāraṇam* in Tamil, which has the topic of Rāvaṇa becoming subject to Siva's anger and being restrains harshly for this. Kerala tradition does not says that king Kulaśekhara invented Sanskrit stage performance in Kerala, it only says that he revived it and reformed it. This also shows the antiquity of the heritage of Kerala traditional Sanskrit drama performance.

### **Kulaśekhara's Contribution**

Kulasekhara Varma (A.D. 900), a medieval king of the Chera Perumal dynasty, renewed Kūṭiyāṭṭam. He wrote two plays, *Subhadradhanañjaya* and *Tapatīsaṃvaraṇa* and arranged for their presentation on stage with the help of a Brahmin friend called Tolan. The king himself demonstrated each characters in the play to explain his ideas about the staging of these dramas in front this Brahmin friend. These dramas played a huge role in reforming this Sanskrit art form of Kerala and they still perform. The major reformations made by King Kulaśekhara and Tolan in Kūṭiyāṭṭam are as follows:

- The introduction of local language by Vidūṣaka to explain Sanskrit and Prakrit passages.
- The addition of the humorous elements by introducing extraneous matters such as parody in the four Puruṣārthas.

- Confining of staging of Sanskrit plays as a temple-art to be performed exclusively by the Cākyār and Nambyār community.
- Pointing out in detail the procedure for acting many of the popular plays of the time.<sup>2</sup>
- Each important characters in the drama should have an introductory song like Nāndi when they entering the stage.
- Hero and other important characters should recite the meaning of verses in common style and pronunciations.
- Introduction of Pratiśloka-s in Maṇipravāla.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Kulaśekhara fixed the rituals of stage performance along with these reformations.

### **Texts used in Kūṭiyāṭṭam Performance**

The Sanskrit dramas used in performing Kūṭiyāṭṭam are the discussed below:

- *Subhadrādhanan̄jaya* and *Tapatīsaṃvaraṇa* by Kulasēkharavarman.
- *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra
- *Nāgānanda* of Śrīharṣa
- *Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa*, *Svapnavāsavadatta*, *Pratimānāṭaka*, *Abhiṣekanāṭaka*, *Avimāraak*, *Cārudattaṃ*, *Pañcarātraṃ*, *Dūtaghaṭolkaca*, *Madhyamavyāyoga*, *Dūtavākya*, *Karṇabharā*, *Ūrubhaṅga* and *Bālacarita* of Bhāsa.
- *Mattavilāsaprahasana* and *Bhagavadajjukīya* of Mahendravikrama
- *Kalyāṇasaugandhika*

Only single Act from these was used to perform at a time and each has a separate name to denote the particular act. Mantrāṅka (*Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa* Act, III), Svapnāṅka (*Svapnavāsavadatta*, Act IV) Aṅguliyāṅka (*Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, Act VI) are some remarkable example for this.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Kuṭiyattam, Abhinayathinte Thudarchayum Valarchayum*, K.G. Paulose, p. 109.

*Āscaryacūdāmaṇi*, *Pratimānāṭaka* and *Abhiṣekanāṭaka* used to perform in Thrippunithura temple in the name *Rāmāyaṇa Nāṭakaṃ* within a period of one year.<sup>4</sup> *Bālacarita* was used to the *Araṅgheraṃ* (debut performance) of the Cākyār boys. Apart from these dramas *Śākuntalaṃ*, *Kṛṣṇacaitaṃ*, *Unmādvāsavadattaṃ* and *Mahānnāṭaka* also rarely used to perform in the stage.

### **Nañnyārkkūttu**

Nañnyārkkūttu is an allied traditional art of Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ. It is performed traditionally by the women of the Ambalavasi Nambiar community of Kerala, known as Nangyaramma. Nangiarkoothu, an offshoot of Kutiyattam, is a solo performance with an antiquity of 1500 years. It is the solitary field of female artist. The stories for the performance are from the text *Śrīkṛṣṇacaritaṃ*, depicting the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa. During the performance, the actress presents the lengthy stories of Kṛṣṇa through hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements. The instrument uses in Nañnyārkkūtt is the resonant pot drum called mizhavu.

### **Āṭṭaparakāra- Acting Manual:**

The word means Āṭṭaparakāra denotes ‘the way of acting is to be done’. Āṭṭaparakāra indicates acting methods, the meaning of passages in the text and is in the form of a continuous, moving story, enabling the actor to expound the text accurately. This is mostly written in simple Malayalam and is not to be spoken on the stage. Besides these, there are text in Malayalam which is to be spoken by the Vidushaka; it explains the meanings of the Sanskrit passages spoken by the hero, and contains the matter which is added to produce humour as well as the Malayalam parody of the verses spoken by hero.<sup>5</sup> Some of the commentaries on Sanskrit dramas also contain much useful material for the actor. The story of the scenes, which are to be enacted, is summarizing in old Malayalam language. This part should recite by the Nambiar at the beginning of

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.180

<sup>5</sup> *Kutiyattam An Introduction*, K. Kunjunni Raja, P.5

the performance and this part is named as ‘Nambiāruṭe Tamil’. The actors themselves act the verbal part as in the text in prescribed ragas. The actor explains every verse elaborately in four ways:

- Recites the verse with hand gestures
- Enacts it without recitation
- Narrates the meaning in prose order
- Elaborates the meaning and significance of the verse

While describing, the actor can deviate from the text and explain things according to his imagination is known as ‘Manodharmaṃ Āṭal’.

### **Kramadīpikā and Rituals**

*Kramadīpikā* explains the procedures to be adopted in the staging of the play and it deals with the songs, dances, the ragas and the various stage directions. This manual is written either in Sanskrit or in Malayalam or in both. It gives directions about the costumes of characters, the points to be noted when an actor does a role, assumes the roles of different characters, like when he remembers old events, how to hide digressions, annotations and descriptions with the story proper, the dance steps to be done at different points, the svara to be used.

## UNIT – II

### Kūṭiyāṭṭam Performance

#### Kūttambalaṃ

Kūttambalaṃs are the temple theatres which can still be seen in temples like Vadakkunnatha, Irinjalakuda Koodalmanikyam in Thrissur. It has been argued that Kūttambalaṃs have been built according to the rules of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* as denoting to the dancing halls as 'Nāṭyamaṇḍapa'. The Nāṭyamaṇḍapa had no connection with temples and was a centre for the staging of various art forms. Kūttambalaṃs in Kerala are different from these Nāṭyamaṇḍapa. They have been built according to the rules of three works such as *Śilparatna*, *Tantrasamuccaya* and *Mayamata*. Kūttambalaṃs were to be constructed ahead of the Śrīkovil (shrine) of the temples.

The inside of a Kūttambalaṃ is divided into two equal portions; one for the audience-the Prekṣāgrhaṃ and the other the stage – Raṅgamaṇḍapaṃ. The latter has then been divided into three-

- Abhinayasthānaṃ - The area for performance.
- Mṛdaṅgapadaṃ- The space for placing the Mizhāvu.
- Nepathyam - the green room.

There are steps leading to the Maṇḍapa. An ideal Kūttambalaṃ is so constructed, that the performance can watched and perceived very clearly from any corner inside. The place of the performer's feet was to be at the same level at which the idol's feet were placed in the Śrīkovil and this equating him to the deity. The purity concept in India caste system restricted that any impurity for the Śrīkovil meant the same for the Kūttambalaṃ and vice versa. The lamp placed in front of the stage during performance had three flames signifies the trinity of Brahma, the creator, Viṣṇu, the protector and Śiva the

demolisher. The popular belief maintained that at the time of the performance the Gods would leave the Śrikovil to come to the Kūttambalaṃ to watch the performance, which ended with the Cākyār, removing the flame from the lamp.

Unlike in Bharata's 'Nāṭyagr̥ha' only Kūttu and Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ can be performed in the Kūttambalaṃ. Most of the Kūttambalaṃ met devastation over the years. Kūttambalaṃs are to be found in the temples of Guruvayoor, Thirumandhamkunnu, Koodalmanikyam, Tirunakkara, Peruvanam, Punnattur, Tiruvegappuram, Moozhikkulam, Kidangoor, Haripad, Tiruvarpu, Arapukkara and Chengannur.

### **Four Abhinayas in Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ**

Abhinaya literally means 'to lead forward'. It is an apparatus for the transmission of the character's emotions to the spectators. It can be divide into four types – Āṅgikābhinaya, Vācīkābhinaya, Sātvīkābhinaya and Āhāryābhinaya.

- ❖ Āṅgikā (Gesture) - This is the vivid expression through the natural movement of limbs and sub limbs.
- ❖ Vācīkā (Vocal) - This is the verbal expression through svara and rāga.
- ❖ Sātvīkā (Internal) - This is the prominent part of Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ and it is based on Rasābhinaya. For expressing the Rasa-s different parts of the face eyebrows, eyes, cheeks, lips, chin etc., should thoroughly practice. For instance, when expressing Śṛaṅgāra Rasa the eyebrows should move, in the time of Raudra the cheeks should quiver, the lips will shiver for Śoka, the chin moves rapidly in Bhaya. The iris of the eye have nine type of movements- Bhramaṇaṃ, Valanaṃ, Pātanaṃ, Calanaṃ, Praveśanaṃ, Vivartanaṃ, Samavṛttaṃ, Niṣkramaṃ and Prākṛtaṃ. Even though there are nine Rasa-s, Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ uses only eight sentiments, excluding the Śānta

Rasa because Śānta means emptiness. All other sentiments are begins and ends in Śāntarasa and consequently it is not expresses in performance.

- ❖ d) Āhārya (Extraneous) - The Āhārya division consists of Stage devices, background, costume, make up. The different characters have their specific costumes and make up.

### **Nāṭyadharmi and Lokadharmi**

It is difficult to clarify these two styles. Generally, Nāṭyadharmi can be defined as ‘acting in accordance with the rules and techniques’. In this, all the actors perform according to the predefined rules and regulations. But, Lokadharmi is the imitation of things and events from the ordinary world. Scholars have different opinions about the superiority of these two styles. According to some scholars the Nāṭyadharmi is superior because it provides a classical touch to Kūṭiyāṭṭam. But, some others opines that the Lokadharmi gives an aesthetic and artistic completeness to the art form. Meanwhile it involves proper Cāri-s (steps) for different occasions; it can be assume that Kūṭiyāṭṭam mostly follows the Nāṭyadharmi style though there is a mix of Lokadharmi too.

### **Abhinayaprakara – Modes of acting**

#### **a) Patiññāṭṭam**

Patiññāṭṭam is perform with a ‘Samāvastha’ (normal posture). The representation of the Rasa-s like Śṛṅgāra, Karuṇa and the Sthāyibhāva of noble characters are in this way. T

#### **b). Irunnāṭṭam**

Irunnāṭṭam is performs through the Vīrāsana in accordance with the different characters. The actor stands up at the time of dance. Irunāṭṭam is also performing to portray the sorrow of the characters like Śrīrāma and Rāvaṇa by sitting on the floor.

### c). **ᱱakiyāᱡᱦam**

ᱱakiyāᱡᱦam performs by keeping one leg forward and the other backward. The Rasas like Vīra, Raudra and Adbhuta are represents in this style.

### **Pakarnnāᱡᱦam**

‘Pakarnnāᱡᱦam’ is a performing style in Kerala theatre forms such as Kūṭiyāᱡᱦam and Kathakali. It involves the same actor enacting compound roles and obviously a challenge for the performer on stage. For example, when there is a performance of the Aṅgulīyānka from *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, there is only the character of Hanumān on the stage. His character should be change into Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sugriva, Bāli and Tārā etc. while explain the incidents after the abduction of Sītā. Kulaśekhara introduced this way of acting into Kūṭiyāᱡᱦam. But, the author of *Naṭāṅkuśa*, a critique on Kūṭiyāᱡᱦam questioned the authenticity of Pakarnnāᱡᱦam. According to his view, if an actor who is in the costume of Hanumān is transforming into the gestures of Sītā, is not reasonable to enjoy.

### **Nirvahaṇābhinaya**

Nirvahaṇa, is a unique practice in Kūṭiyāᱡᱦam, in which the character introduces himself by presenting his personal history, sometimes including his previous life. The actor is free to choose which of the legends associated with his character he wishes to emphasize, allowing him to explore the character to a degree unusual in Indian theatre.

### **Instruments**

Kūṭiyāᱡᱦam most commonly uses two ‘Mizhāvu’ as the supplementary percussion instruments. One keeps up the rhythm and the other follows the movements of the actor. A Mizhāvu is a copper drum with its mouth covered with animal skin. Previously, clay Mizhāvu were used and later, perchance owing to difficulties in carrying, they replaced by copper drums. Similar to the percussion instruments like Maddalam, Mṛdaṅgam, Tabala, Gañcira and

Ghaṭam Mizhāvu also use fingers to create sound. But, the playing style of Miāhavu resembles Timila. Moreover, Iṭakka, Kurunkol and Kuzhittāḷam are also used as percussion instruments in a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance with Mizhāvu. Earlier Śuddha maddaḷam and Timila were have been used with Mizhāvu.

Different Tālā-s accompanies different Rāga-s. After the recitation of verses the Mizhāvu is played in a rhythmic style mentioning at these raga-s. The major tālās in Kūṭiyāṭṭam are –

- Ekatāḷa (4 mātra),
- dhruvatāḷa ( 14 mātra).
- Tripuṭa (7 Mātra)
- Aṭanta (14 Mātra)
- Caturaśrajati Tripuṭa
- Lakshmi.

## **Conclusion**

In 1949, the foresight of Painkuḷam Rama Cakyar helped in the resurrection of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. In the decades of 1960's Kūṭiyāṭṭam began its victory run all over India and in 1980 it performed in Paris, the capital city of France. Nowadays Kūṭiyāṭṭam is free from the restrictions of temple art-form and now it is a universal art.

## UNIT-III

### Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam

Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam is a temple art in Kerala. It is a dance drama and based on the story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam is a combination of both art and ritual. After kathakali, it can be considered as the popular temple art form. Moreover, even the development of Kathakali also was inspired from Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam. It performs as a series of eight plays. Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam was created by Mānaveda (1585–1658 AD), the then Zamorin king of Calicut in northern Kerala. It survives in its glory at the Guruvayur Sri Krishna temple (Thrissur district, Kerala, India). The troupe of players, once maintained by Zamorin of Calicut came to Guruvayur Devaswom in 1958. Now Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam is performed as an offering in the temple.

#### ***Kṛṣṇagītī***

*Kṛṣṇagītī* is the Sanskrit text created in the model of *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva. It was written by Mānaveda in 1654 A.D, the then Zamorin king of Calicut.<sup>6</sup>

The theme of *Kṛṣṇagītī* is based on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> skandha-s of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* dealing exclusively the story of Kṛṣṇa. It has also gained inspirations from *Gīta Govinda* of Jayadeva, *Srīkṛṣṇavilāsa* of Sukumārakavi, and *Nārāyaṇīya* of Melpattūr Nārāyaṇa Bhattatiri. Apart from śloka-s it also embellished with padyagīta-s like that of *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva.

#### **The Eight Episodes in Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam**

The eight plays are:

It consists of eight plays:

- Avatāraṃ
- Kāḷiyamarddanam
- Rāsakṛīḍā

---

<sup>6</sup> Kṣetrakalakal, Valsalan thillankeri

- Kāṃsavadhaṃ
- Svayaṃvaram
- Bāṇayuddhaṃ
- Vividavadhaṃ
- Svargārohaṇam

The various benefits of Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam as an offering are as follows.

- Avatāram for a birth of a child.
- Kāḷiyamarddanaṃ to remove the effect of poison.
- Rāsakṛīḍā for wellbeing of unmarried girls, to end disputes between couples.
- Kāṃsavadhaṃ remove enemies.
- Svayaṃvaram for a happy marriage.
- Bāṇayuddhaṃ to remove impoverishment
- Vividavadhaṃ to eliminate poverty and increase yield from farms
- Svargārohaṇam for peace of a departed soul.

### **Costumes, Makeup and related Rituals**

All the four aspects of acting, as articulated by Bharata Muni- Āṅgika, Vācika, Āhārya and Sātvika are synchronized in it. The teachers and artists themselves made the costumes. The basic costume differed for male and female characters. The dress of male characters consisted of

- A starched gathered petticoat
- A gathered white skirt with orange/orange- red and black horizontal stripes near the bottom
- Bells attached to leather pads to tie below the knees
- A long- sleeved shirt open at the back, secured by ties

- A breast-plate
- Chest ornaments of beads and fresh flora
- A girdle
- Upper arm and wrist ornaments
- One shawl or more with a mirror at each end
- Ear and forehead ornaments; and
- A head dress.

For the female character's basic costume includes

- A long, almost floor-length white gathered skirt with red border, wrapped so that the material crossed in the back
- A long sleeved blouse which was open in the back, secured by ties
- A girdle
- Arm ornaments
- A wooden breastplate with the breasts covered in red cloth and with ornamentation above and below the breasts.
- Female characters tie strings of bells around their ankles. These are called chilanka.

The actors used any or three colours for their basic make-up.

Pazhuppu, an orange with more red than yellow

Minukku, an orange with more yellow than red

Pacca, a particular shade of green which has more yellow than blue.

The green for Kṛṣṇa as a young child has more yellow than blue. Before applying make - up the actor prostrated himself before the oil lamp and thought of the God Guruvayoorappan.

The most sacred part of the Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam costume is the head ornaments. There are two basic kinds of headdress a, 'hair that has been wound into a bun and a kirīṭam 'a crown'.

### **Performances**

Night performances in Guruvayur temple in north to Lord Guruvayurappan occurs as offering by devotees. Apart from performing all over India, its reaches are spanning over Europe and the United States. Europe-1980, U.S.A-1985 and Singapore.

## UNIT-IV

### **Kathakali, Mohiniyāttam and Cākyārkkuttu**

#### **Kathakali**

Kathakali is a traditional classical dance of Kerala. It is a "story play" genre of art. It is famous as the 'King of Arts' because of its unique style in performance and content. Kathakali is one of the eight classical dances of India. The fully developed style of Kathakali originated around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but its roots are in the temple arts such as Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam. A Kathakali performance, blends with music, vocal performers, choreography, hand and facial gestures together to express ideas. However, Kathakali differs in that it also incorporates movements from ancient Indian martial arts and athletic traditions of South India. The traditional themes of the Kathakali are folk mythologies, religious legends and spiritual ideas from the Hindu epics and the Purāṇa-s. The term Kathakali is derived from Katha which means "story or a conversation, or a traditional tale", and Kali means "performance" or "play".

#### **History**

Kathakali shares many elements like costumes with other arts like Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Krishnanattam, even though there are too differences. A myth states that Koṭṭārakkara Tāmpuran Vīra Keraḷa Varma requested the services of a Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam group, but his request was denied. Hence, he created another art form based on Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam, called it Rāmanāṭṭam because the early plays were from the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, and later became popular as 'Kathakali'. Kathakali also combines numerous fundamentals from other traditional and ritualistic arts like Muṭiyērru, Teyyaṃ and Paṭayaṇi. The south Indian martial art of Kaḷarippayaṅgu also influenced Kathakali.

In spite of the relations, Kathakali is diverse from the above mentioned temple arts such as Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam and Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Because, unlike these arts

Kathakaḷi allows the actor to excel in and keep attention on choreography when the vocal artists concentrated on delivering their lines.

Kathakaḷi is based on the plays called Āṭṭakathā literally, "enacted story". It may write in Sanskritized Malayalam. These plays are written in a specific arrangement that helps recognize the "action" and the "dialogue" parts of the presentation. The verse part is the metrical verse, often entirely in Sanskrit - describing the action part of the choreography. The Pada part contains the dialogue part. These Āṭṭakathā texts contributes significant flexibility to the actors to improvise. Historically, all these plays were derived from the texts such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. prominent Āṭṭakathā's are given below;

- *Kirmīmīravadhā*, *Bakavadhā*, *Kalyāṇasaugandhikā* and *Nivātakavacakālakeyavadhā* of Kottayattu Tampurān,
- *Naḷacarita* of Unnayivāriyar
- *Uttarāsvayaṃvara*, *Dakṣayāga* and *Kīcakavadhā* of Irayimman Tampi.
- *Santānagopāla* and *Rugmāṅgadacarita* of Iṭṭirāriśśa Menon.

Traditionally, a Kathakaḷi performance is long, starting at sunset and continuing until the dawning. Some plays continued over several nights, starting at evening every day but nowadays-modern performances are shorter. The stage with seats typically in open grounds outside a temple, but in some places, temple theatres called Kūttampalaṃ have been in use.

### **Stage and Rituals**

The Kathakaḷi performance happens in the front of a huge Kaḷiḷakku with its thick flame sunk in coconut oil, burning with a yellow light. Traditionally, before the advent of electricity, this special large lamp provided light during the night. As the play progressed, the actors would gather around this lamp so that the audience could see what they are expressing. The presentation consists of dancers in the front, accompanies by musicians in the background stage on right (audience's left) and with vocalists in the front of the

stage. It contains some technical rituals Aṣṭāṅgaprayoga (Eight rituals) in Kathakālī like:

- Kēḷikoṭṭu – The proclamation about the performance using the percussion instruments like Ceṅṭa, Maddaḷa, Chēññila and Ilattāla.
- Śuddhamaddalaṃ (Araṅṅkēḷi)- The percussion performance just after the lightning of Kaḷiviḷakku.
- Toṭayaṃ - The prayer for the completeness of the performance without any obstacles, by two male and female performers representing the Śivasaktī concept.
- Vandanaślokaṃ - It performed by the singers Ponnani (main singer) and Śīnkiṭi (associate singer)
- Purappāṭu – It performed by two junior male and female characters which gives hint about the upcoming story.
- Mēḷappadaṃ - It gives equal importance to both singers and percussion artists. They performs the verse ‘Mañjutara kuñjatala keḷisadane..’ from *Gītagovinda*, also known as Mañjutara.
- Kathābhinayaṃ - Characters come to the stage based on the situations of the story.
- Dhanāśī – The final part of the performance presented by the remaining artist on stage.

## Costumes

The makeup follows an accepted code, which helps the spectators easily recognize the representative characters such as gods, goddesses, demons, demonesses, saints, animals and characters of a story. Seven basic makeup types are used in Kathakālī - Pacca (green), Katti , Kari, Tāṭi and Minukku are the five major costumes in Kathakālī. These vary with the styles and the

predominant colours made from rice paste and vegetable colors that are applied on the face.

- Pacca (green) with lips painted brilliant coral red portrays noble characters and sages such as Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Rāma, Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna, Nala etc..
- Tāṭi (red) is the code for somebody with an evil streak such as Duśśāsana and Hiranyakaśipu. Some characters have a green face (representing heroic or excellence as a warrior) with red dots or lines on their cheeks or red-coloured moustache or red-streaked beard (representing evil inner nature), while others have a full face and beard coloured red, the latter implying excessively evil characters.
- Kari (black) is for the characters like forest occupants, hunters, and middle ground character. Demonesses and unfaithful characters are also painted black but with streaks or patches of red.
- Yellow is the code for monks, mendicants, and women.
- Minukku (radiant, shining) with a warm yellow, orange or saffron characterizes noble, virtuous feminine characters like Sītā, Pañcālī and Mohini.
- Vella Thadi (white beard) represents a divine being, someone with virtuous inner state and consciousness such as Hanuman.

## **Acting**

Ancient Sanskrit texts such as *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Hasta Lakṣaṇadīpikā* discuss hand gestures or mudrās. Kathakali follows the *Hasta Lakṣaṇadīpikā* most closely.

There are 24 main mudras, and numerous more minor ones in Kathakali. There are nine facial expressions called Navarasas, which each actor masters through facial muscle control during his education, in order to express the emotional state of the character in the play.[

### **Songs and musical instruments**

Three types of percussion instruments of Kathakali: Maddalaṃ (left), Ceṅṅa and Iṭakka (right). The play is in the form of verses that are metered and lyrical, sung by vocalists whose voice has been trained to various melodies (raga), music and harmonised with the dance acting on the stage. Music is central to a Kathakali performance. It sets the mood and prompts emotions resonant with the nature of the scene. Some major musical patterns, that go with the moods and content of the scene are: Cempaṭa, Cempa, Pañcāri, Tripuṭa , Aṭanta and Muri Aṭanta. Various musical instruments are used in Kathakali. Three major drums found are Maddalaṃ (barrel-shaped), Ceṅṅa (cylindrical drum played with curved sticks) and Iṭakka (hourglass-shaped drum with muted and melodious notes played when female characters perform).

### **Sampradayam (Styles)**

Kathakali has ancestries or characteristic schools of play version and dance performance called Saṃpradāyaṃ. These developed in part because of the Gurukula system of its transmission from one generation to the next. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many such styles were in vogue in Malayalam speaking communities of South India, of which two major styles have crystallized and survived into the modern age. The Kidangoor style is one of the two, that developed in Travancore, and it is strongly influenced by Kutiyattam, while also drawing elements of Rāmanāṭtam and Kallaṭikkoṭan. It traditionally attributed to Nalanunni, under the patronage of Utram Tirunal Maharaja.

The Kalluvazhi style is second style, which developed in Palakkad (Olappamanna Mana) in central Kerala, and it is a combination of the older Kapliṅgāṭan and Kalladikkoṭan presentations. It is traditionally attributed to Unniri Panikkar, in a Brahmin household, and became the dominant style established in Kerala Kalamandalam – a school of performance arts. Kerala Kalamandalam is a major centre for Kathakali studies.

Kathakali has traditionally been an art that has continued from one generation to the next through a guru disciples (gurukkula based training system. Artist families tended to pick promising talent from within their own extended families, sometimes from outside the family, and the new budding artist typically stayed with his guru as a student and treated like a member of the family. The guru provided both the theoretical and practical training to the student, and the disciple would accompany the guru to formal performances.

In modern times, professional schools train students of Kathakali, with some such as those in Trivandrum Margi school emphasizing a single teacher for various courses, while others such as the Kerala Kalamandalam school wherein students learn subjects from different teachers. Kathakali schools are now in all over India, as well as in parts of Western Europe and the United States.

Kathakali is still hugely male-dominated, but since the 1970's, women made their entry into the art form on a recognisable scale. The central Kerala temple town of Tripunithura has women's troupe (Tripunithura Kathakali Kendram Ladies Troupe) who perform Kathakali. The troupe won a national award, i.e. Nari Shakti Puraskar, for their work.

## Aṣṭapadiyāṭṭam

Aṣṭapadiyāṭṭam is a temple art form of Kerala based on the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadevakavi. It includes the love story of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and their Rāsakrīḍā from the 10<sup>th</sup> skandha of *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The content of the story depicted in Aṣṭa Carāṇas (eight stanzas) and thus it became famous in the name Aṣṭapadiyāṭṭam. It includes 24 songs with 8 stanzas per song, which also divided into 96 verses and totally 12 sargas. They are-

- Sāmodadamodaram
- Aklēśakeśavam
- Mugdhamadhusūdanam
- Snigdhamadhusūdanam
- Sākaṃkṣapuṇḍarīkākṣam
- Sotkaṇḍhavaikuṇḍham
- Nāgarīkanārāyaṇam
- Amarugovindam
- Caturacaturbhujam
- Sānandagovindam
- Suprītaptāmbaram

These sargas were performs in three days as Rādhāviraḥam, Rādhāsandeham and Rādhāsamāgamam. Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and her friend (Sakhī) are the major characters in Aṣṭapadiyāṭṭam. Maddalam, Iṭakka and Iṭattālam are the main percussion elements in this art form. The whole play will take three days to perform.

## **Mohiniyāṭṭam**

Mohiniyāṭṭam is a classical dance form that developed and remained popular in the state of Kerala. Mohiniyāṭṭam dance gets its name from the word Mohinī – a mythological enchantress avatāra of god Viṣṇu, who helps the good triumph over wicked by developing her feminine powers. Mohiniyāṭṭam follows the Lāsya style described in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It is traditionally a solo dance performance by women. The performance of Mohiniyāṭṭam includes music in the Carnatic style, singing and acting a play through the dance, where the recitation may be either by a separate vocalist or the dancer herself. The song is typically in Malayalam - Sanskrit mixture called Maṇipravālam.

The first reference of the word was found in the 16<sup>th</sup> century legal text *Vyavahāramāla*, but the probably the origins of the dance may older. The dance was organized in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was derided as a Devadāsī prostitution system during the colonial British Raj, banned by a series of laws from 1931 through 1938, a ban that was protested and partially repealed in 1940. The socio-political conflict ultimately led to renewed interest, renewal and renovation of Mohiniyāṭṭam by the people of Kerala, particularly the poet Vallathol Narayana Menon.

## **Etymology**

The word Mohiniyāṭṭam was derived from the word ‘Mohini’ – a famous female avatāra of the Viṣṇu in Indian mythology. Mohini refers to a divine beauty or a supreme deity. She appears in mythologies during a battle between Devas (good) and Asuras (evil) after the evil had won control of Amrita (nectar of immortality). Through her youthful bloom and ecstatically dressing appearance, she uses her charms to seduce the Asuras, who seeking her favours,

give her the Amrita to distribute among the evil forces. Mohinī after gaining the Amrita gives it to the good instead, depriving the evil from gaining immortality. Āṭṭam is a Malayalam language word, which denotes rhythmic motion or dance. Mohiniyāṭṭam thus con note as "a dance of an enchantress, a beautiful woman".

## **History and Development**

The text *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes the basic elements and the structure of two types of dance: the vigorous, high energy Tāṇḍava dance (Śiva) and the gentle, pacifyingly graceful Lāsya dance of (Pārvatī). Mohiniyāṭṭam follows the structure and aims of the Lāsya dance in *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Kerala, the region where this dance genre developed and is popular, has a long tradition of lāsya style dances whose basics and structure may be at the root. The first proof of Mohiniyāṭṭam, or a Mohiniyāṭṭam -like dance tradition is found in temple sculptures of Kerala. The 11<sup>th</sup> century Viṣṇu temple at Trikodithanam, and the Kidangur Subramanya temple, has several sculptures of female dancers in Mohiniyāṭṭam pose. The textual evidence from 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards suggest that Malayalam poets and dramatists included Lāsya themes. The 16<sup>th</sup> century *Vyavahāramāla* contains the first known mention of the term Mohiniyāṭṭam in the context of a payment to be made to a Mohiniyattam dancer. Another text, *Ghoṣa Yātra*, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century also remarks the word. The 18<sup>th</sup> century *Bālarāma Bharata*, a major secondary work on *Nāṭyaśāstra* composed in Kerala, mentioned many dance styles including Mohini Naṭana. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century protection and structure of a joint and Bharatanāṭyam team of artists by the Travancore king, poet and music composer Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma contributed to the development and organization of modern Mohiniyāṭṭam. With the spread of colonial British rule in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century India, all classical dance forms of India were derided and dejected, leading to their relentlessly decline.

Mohiniyāṭṭam was invigorated and renovated particularly in the 1930's by the nationalist Malayalam poet Vallathol Narayana Menon. He helped cancel the ban on temple dancing in Kerala, as well as established the Kerala Kalamandalam dance school and encouraged Mohiniattam studies, training and practice.

### **Performance**

Mohiniyattam is a lāsya subgenre of dance, performed in the Kaiśikī vṛtti (graceful style), as discussed in texts such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. More specifically, it is a dance that excels in Ekāhārya Abhinaya form, that is a single dramatic dance performance assisted by singing and music. The dance includes nṛtta (pure dance, solo), nṛtya (expressive dance, solo) and modern productions sometimes include nāṭya (play, group dance).

The Nṛtta performance is abstract, rhythmic aspect of the dance that appears early and at the end of the dance range. The spectator can enjoy with pure movement, wherein the emphasis is the beauty in motion, form, speed, range and pattern. This part of the performance has no explanatory aspect, no telling of story.

The Nṛtya is the expressive aspect of the dance that attempts to communicate a storyline, with emotions and feelings, with spiritual themes. In a nṛtya, the dance-acting (Abhinaya, Vaittari) expands to include silent expression of words through hand and facial gestures and body motion set to musical notes. The dancer articulates a legend or a spiritual message, aiming to engage the emotions and mind of the viewer.

The basic posture of Mohiniyattam is parted feet, knees bent outwards, an erect upper torso, gentle 8-shape side to side swaying of body along with hips

(Ati Bhanga). The footwork is soft, sliding, synchronous with the musical beat, and acting. The body movement is sometimes described in terms of calming images of nature as the swinging of the palm leaves, and the gentle undulating of ocean waves.

The basic dance units in Mohiniattam are known as aṭavukal, and these are grouped into four: Taḡaṇam, Jagaṇam, Dhagaṇam and Sammiśram. The hand and facial gestures of the dance follow the classical text of *Hasta Lakṣaṇadīpikā*, which has elaborately described various mudras.

## **Costumes**

The costume includes plain white or off-white such as ivory or cream coloured sari embroidered with bright golden or gold-laced coloured brocade (similar to a ceremonial Kasavu saree). She wears a fitted blouse matching the sari, below which at the waist is a golden belt, which tucks in the end of the sari, and highlights the waist. In front of the saree, below the belt is pleated sheet with concentric bands in gold or saffron colours, which allow freedom of movement and assist in visually communicating the mudra to distant audience.

The dancer wears comparatively simple jewellery and no masks. Her jewellery typically includes items on fingers, wrists, neck and ears (which may have bells). The face makeup is natural, but lips are brilliant red, she has the tilaka (Gobi) on her forehead and her eyes lined to help prominently highlight the eye movements during the dance. Her ankles decorated with leather straps with bells (chilaṅka), feet and fingers coloured red with natural dyes. Her hairdo is gathered and tied into a smooth tight round chignon on one side of her head (typically left) and the bun then ringed with fragrant flowers (typically jasmine).

## **Music and instruments**

The vocals (music) of Mohiniyāṭṭam involves various rhythms. There are abundant compositions for a Mohiniyāṭṭam performance, most of whose lyrics are in Maṇipravālam, a mixture of Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam.

The musical instruments usually used in Mohiniyāṭṭam are Mrdaṅgam or Maddalam (barrel drum), Idakka (hour glass drum), flute, Veeṇa, and Kuzhittālam (cymbals). The rāgas (melody) are rendered in the sopāna (steps) style, which is a slow melodic style with roots in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

## Cākyārkūttu

Kūttu means dance which is a contradiction, as facial expressions are emphasized and there is minimal choreography. It performed in the temple theatre Kūttāmbalaṃ specifically designed for performing Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ and Cākyārkūttu. Ideally, the performance takes place in conjunction with festivals, presented by members of the Cākyār community along with the Ambalavasi Nambiars.

Cākyārkūttu is a solo performance, by a narrator in a distinctive headgear and black moustache with his torso smeared with sandalwood paste and red dots all over the body. The headgear resembles snake's hood, to symbolise the narration by Ananta, the thousand headed serpent.

The Cākyār narrates the story based on the Sanskrit style of "Campu Prabandha" - a mixture of prose (gadya) and poetry (padya). He begins with a prayer to the deity of the temple. He then goes on to describe a verse in Sanskrit before explaining it in Malayalam. The description uses wit and humour to draw parallels with current events and local situations.

Kūttu has traditionally been performed only by the Cākyār community. Two instruments accompany the performance - a mizhāvu and a pair of ilattālam. Cākyār Koothu was originally performed only in Kūttāmbalams of temples.