

Folk Elements in Classical Artforms of Kerala- A Study Based on 'Krishnanattam'ⁱ

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Abstract: In Natyasastra mainly consists of natya. But Bharatha opines that three types of dance forms natya(dancing accompanied by playing on instruments), nrta,(dance) nrthya(dance-drama). In the Natyasastra,14th chapter, which is called dharmmi, there is two different types of dharmmi existed in natya which is mentioned above by Bharatha. They are called Natyadharmmi and Lokadharmmi. Lokadharmmi deals with the actions of normal life which are used in natya. Natyadharmmi is the demonstration of those holistic stories in Natya. While discussing about Lokadharmmi and Natyadharmmi, the folk items are considered under the Lokadharmmi. Basically, almost all classical arts form is developed in kerala from the folk arts. Classic stage and classic dance which are included each particular content in its folk elements. In classical theatre, mainly used some elements, which are makeup, costumes, ornaments and characters etc are influence of folk arts. Perhaps some elements are taken from folk arts for build of classical arts forms. In krishnanattam, some characters are folk types. Ex; vivida, ghanda karnna, puthana, jambava, and others. Not only have these, but the Angika abhinaya of the folk arts had a staunch influence on krishnanattam. These folk elements in krishnanattam are studied by taking Natyasastra as a tool.

Keywords: Folklore, Krishnanattam, Lokadharmmi, Natyadharmmi, Natyasastra,

I. Introduction

Krishnanattam is a dance drama based on the *Attakatha*ⁱⁱ written by Zamaorian Raja of Calicut. This visual art was innovated on the basis of *Krishnagiti*, a poetry collection. Manaveda, who was an ardent devotee of Krishna said to have been forced this dance drama and named it on the devotion to lord Krishna. The *Ithivrita* (plot) comprises eight parts extending from krishna's *Avathara*(birth) to his *Swargarohana*(death). As it is Krishna dance, so the name *Krishnanattam*, also the story of Krishna has been divided into eight parts, so it is also known as *Krishnanashhtkam*. Art forms of kerala can be usually divided into two groups, classical arts and folk arts. *Krishnanattam* is included in classical arts category. But folk elements are also seen in it. This folk elements actually means the expression which *Bharatamuni* has described as "*Lokadharmmi*"ⁱⁱⁱ

This paper/article attempts to study the folk elements, especially the characters in *Krishnanattam* with folk features. By this, the intention is to reveal the similarities and difference between expressions 'folk lore' and 'lokadharmmi' and to have a discussion on the thought that western perspective on folk lore and eastern view of *lokadharmmi* is similar in aspects.

For this, first a clear discussion on the expression 'folk' should be done, and later "*lokadharmmi*" should be defined and both this should be discussed on basing folk characters of *Krishnanattam*.

II. Folk lore

Folk lore is the Knowledge about the lives and cultures of common people. As a traditional knowledge branch, folk lore has represented as an indication for the aesthetical, genuine models and ethics of a group of people. So it is related with the emotional, social, and cultural lives of people.

Any place or community have their own life style and culture. Such culture is known as the popular knowledge of that place. The popular Knowledge was perceived as a branch of Knowledge in nineteenth century. The English antiquarian William Thomas introduced the word folk lore in a letter published in the London journal the athenaeum on 22nd August 1846; and he used the word folk lore to denote the folk Knowledge of *popular antiquities*.

Some narrows down the concept of folk lore into special reserved walls. When it is argued that myths, beliefs and customs are meant by folk lore, scholars like Julius Krohton are of the opinion that these are not only the components of folk lore. His view is that every customs, plays, arts, dances, ritual practices, villages, house and kitchen equipments, and institution which survives times are included as folk lore. Like that people like William R Bascom, who had been folk lore as a mere oral art, had to change their opinions later. He argued that folk art, folk handicraft, folk equipments, folk medicine, folk dressing style, folk belief, folk custom, folk dance and folk plays are also part of this branch of knowledge.

The English word folk mean people also lore indicates knowledge. So folk lore can be defined as popular Knowledge or folk knowledge.

Customs, rituals, beliefs, devotion, entertainments, art performance,- on such situation where the complexities of human mind are expressed emotionally, a small society where it unites and similarises on these moments is Known as folk. So folk can be called as any gatherings of people with common nature or any groups of people. Such an art performance is done by the united endeavours a group of people. Folk can be described as the communities / groups who work behind the art formed which are before performing an art and after performing it. Each small societies behind each art performances, gather some specific knowledge traditionally or racially, which are transmitted to generations, and this is known as the culture of these arts. Art faces changes according to present times. Art exists as the powerful strength, which directs the past art traditions that flow according to societal lives, and leads them to present times and also to changes to have incorporates into changing times and places.

The boundaries of folk lore are infinite. Whatever is heard or seen in the world is imagined to be folk. Classification of folk lore extends as folk literature, folk traditions, folk arts or art knowledge, folk science and technology, etc.

Every culture is based on namingly three factors, known as social culture, physical/worldly culture and oral culture. Worldly culture is the knowledge about constructed worldly objects; it involves agricultural tools, kitchen equipments, textile and clothing, architecture, cookery and musical instruments etc. Oral culture involves folk songs, folk saying, folk idioms, ballads, proverbs, and riddles. Societal culture is formed out of communities in society. Customs, beliefs, rituals, festivals, death rites, folk dances, folk operas, and folk dramas, are part of socialite culture.

But Richard .M. Dason clarifies performing arts as the fourth category of folk life. They create a different space apart from folk live. Art forms of Kerala like *kudiyattam*^{iv}, *krishnanattam*,^v *kathakali*^{vi} and *Mohiniyattam*^{vii} are art forms with importance given to performing or acting. These art performances has some differences from folk arts, yet the communities/ groups who take part in these can be called as folk. The common activities of people are enhanced by Rasa (sentiment) and Bhava (expression) to create interest/pleasure in viewers through those performances of *Puranas* (*holy poetical works*). Art performance act as a method to sustain communities. Most of the factors in an art performance are itself a reflection of communities. A sense of unity is perceived in the rites before an art performance, rituals, and other off stage activities.

Kerala has a genuine tradition of art. Most art forms like developed from the base *Natyasastra*. But most of the classical art forms in Kerala have evolved from the text *Hashtalakshanadeepika*. Bharatha has described two traditions in *Natyasastra*, when *lakshana*(*definition*) is established which is a part of acting. They are *Natyadharmmi* and *Lokadharmmi*. Art is classified into classical and folk on the basis of these acting traditions.

III. Natyadharmmi

Natyadharmmi is considered as the esteemed aspect of *Abhinaya*(*acting*), and its *Lakshana*(*definition*) is like this-exaggerated word usages should be added to entrance the imagination. The *karmas*(*action*) should be teemed with extraordinary aspects. Mental activities should be *unwordly* and overflowing with emotions which should please *Sahridaya*^{viii}. The sentence-performance-expressions which are intertwined with great amusement and ornaments should create *Rasa* in *Sahridaya* with *Bhavas*. Others Bhava can be imitated to express *Bhava*. *Natyadharmmi* is known as making use of these *unwordly* in *Natya*. That is *Natyadharmmi* is the the *Abhinaya* (acting) without expressing imitating the worldly discourse, by only expressing *Bhava* and making use of it magnificent acting tools.

IV. Lokadharmmi

There is no classification as beautiful or ugly in *Lokadharmmi*. There will be natural *karmas* in it. The story part or characters only experiences worldly discourses. Organs are not modified or sophisticated And also women and men joints to perform this *Natya*, which is known as *Lokadharmmi*.

Art can be classified into two based on these principles of *Bharatha*. Art forms which give more importance to *Natya* are known as classified arts and which doesn't give much importance to *Natya* and only bases on the acting out of worldly discourses is known as folk arts. Yet arts which leave given more importance to *Natya*, has *lokadharmmi* characters and performances. Such characters can be considers as folk characters. *Natya* incorporates direct evidences of folk arts and common people lives so the influence of folk arts behind classical arts is evident. It *Bharata* has emphasised on two *dharmmis*., *Natya*, *Loka* in *Abhinaya*, the art forms and performance style which hadn't given importance to *Natya* should have said to be existed. In short, it can be understood that, today's classical art has derived from the modification of certain folk art and regional arts. Dance forms of India have similarities as well as differences with each other. Each dance evolved from each

place may have adopted elements from the village dances of these places. Folk art clearly reflects the culture and geography of a place. It may have included the changes according to the diversities of each place. The similarities may be due to the fact that these art forms co-jointly followed conditions of one of the oldest authentic book *Natyasastra* by *Bharatamuni*. So, the dance forms of India may have evolved from a same case. The art forms which have developed after *Natyasastra*, are mostly the *attaprakaras* (literary works) of Sanskrit drama performances. But, *kutiyattam*, which has evolved from Kerala, is the performing stage of Sanskrit dramas. After that, characters and events who depict worldly affairs intended the classical arts like *Ramanattam*,^{ix} *Kathakali*, *Krishnanattam*, and *Mohiniyattam*. The reason behind that may be the regional art forms has existed as a part of Kerala cultures in abundant. These regional art elements directly or indirectly incorporated with the art forms developed in Kerala.

V. Krishnanattam

Only one of the classical art forms of Kerala, where prominence is given to *attam*(dance). The statement of every attam (dance), *krishnanattam* is better' strengthens this concept. *Krishnanattam* is the *attaprakara*(literary work or script) of *krishnagiti*, written by king of Zamorian. The main theme is *krishnasthuthi*. (Praise the lord of Krishna) *Krishnanattam* is performed on an eight part story line, extending from *krishna's* avathara(birth) to *swargarohana*(death). *Krishnanattam* is the visual representation of *Krishnagiti* written by *Manaveda*. The *attaprakara* of *krishnagiti* which based on *srikrishna's* story of *Dashamaskandha*, has also penned by *manaveda*. The story is narrated in *Krishnanattam* by sustaining the visual interpretation feature. *Manaveda* tried to make each visual, each picture. Because to incorporate these into stage, the events are convened to stage and to add beauty to it, they are further changed to pictures. *Manaveda* makes that *picturize*, a series of molling images; and moves them by making them moving sculptures, and avoiding *vachika*(speech) and making use of others three factors of *chathurvedhabhinaya*^x, and also depends on the *thouritrika*^{xi} to fulfil these activities.

The situations which lead to create *krishnanattam*, is seen differently in various myths and histories. Some unbelievable opinions on its imgence can also be seen on the history of art forms. Art was only to be enjoyed and in some special occasions these arts were hold by the elites and they intentionally created a godly image around arts.

A historically prominent myth sustains behind the emergence of *Krishnanattam*. *Villwamangalamswamiyar* and king *Manveda* were living together that time and once king requested to *swamiyar* to make *Krishna* appear, By asking permission to God, *Swamiyar* fulfilled kings wish. When God appeared before king, he with greatest pleasure tried to hug the *Krishna* but he disappeared by saying that was not told by *villwamangalam*; A peacock feather, dropped out from the God's head reached to king. By using that feather he made a crown and created *Krishnanattam* to perform *Krishna's* stories, This is said to be one of the myths.

Krishnanattam is an art form of *Bhakthi rasa* (sentiment of devotion). So it is known as *Nivedyakala*^{xii}. The art which has transported from palace to temple still hasn't got outside and situation behind this is clear. When training centre for this dance drama was held on *Zamorin's* palace, practice and performance was done from there and after that, a nine day performance was held annually in *Guruvayur*^{xiii} temple. Now *kaliyoga* (training centre) has transported to *Guruvayur* temple property. So even the first public performance of an artistic form is held from there. Especially, in recent times *krishnanattam* is performed as an offering by devotees.- the opinion of *Prof. P. C. Vasudevanilayath* clearly indicates the proofs behind *Krishnanattam's* complete transformation as a temple art.

The performing style of *Krishnanattam* is mostly related with *kudiyattam*. *Krishnan's* story is ordered in eight parts in dance form. Definite laws and rules are held to performs these arts from *Avathara*(birth) to *Swargarohana*(death). Like that, the customs in *Krishnanattam* demands certain orders; *krishnanattam* is performed in the order of *kelikottu*^{xiv}, *kelikayyu*^{xv}, *thodayam*^{xvi} and *purapadu*^{xvii}.

VI. Kelikottu

Kelikottu is performed to indicate that *krishnanattam* is going to be held. Though this people of near region are informed. It is usually takes place in dusk time.

VII. Kelikayyu

After *kellikottu* actors, go into dressing room and get ready for performance. The artists of *krishnanatta* puts *chutti* by sitting. After 9'O clock, by lighting 'vilakku' on stage, *kelikayyu* will be started.

VIII. Thodayam

The word means 'starting', begging etc. A song to praise God is sing. It is accompanied with dance according to rhythms. *Cholliyattam* is performed by women characters of *minukku*

IX. Purappadu

The ritual held after Thodayam. It is the beginning of the story itself.

All the eight story parts of Krishnanattam follow this order. Each eight parts haven't any specific performing styles.

X. Folk elements in Krishnanattam

"A visual and stage activity language was given to Krishnagiti based on the popular art forms of Kerala. It is obvious that Koothu^{xviii} and Kudiyyattam were prevalent even before the arrival of Krishnanattam. But kudiyyattam as a temple art stood only for a specific elite audience. So a popular art to be formed on the mere basis of kudiyyattam was not possible. So Krishnagiti's writer has to depend on folk art forms like: - Theyyam,^{xix} Thira^{xx}, Theyyattam,^{xxi} etc."

Manaveda was imbibed most of the elements from folk arts. There is little chance that any scholars would deny with argument. According to Sukumar Azhikode, Krishnanattam is one of the intermediate dance forms evolved by the genius of Kerala when it dried out to integrate the classical and native elements which were then alive.^{xxii}

Krishnanattam, very evidently shows the elements of folk arts like Kalaripayattu^{xxiii}, Mudiyyettu^{xxiv}, Thiyyattu^{xxv}, Theyyattam, Thirayattam,^{xxvi} Thiruvathira kali^{xxvii}, Kummatti^{xxviii}, Kalamezhuthupattu^{xxix} etc.

To enhance the physical efficiency for Kalaripayattu, trainees undergo foot massaging for two or three months. This style owes debt to Kalaripayattu. Krishnanattam artists are foot massaged for making their body movement in order to function according to rhythm and raga.

The dance in Mudiyyettu and Krishnanattam seems similar though. Especially war scenes depict more similarity. Kariveeran is such a character found in Thirayattam. The war tool usages along with dance in war scenes and jumping have similarities with some characters in Krishnanattam. Even in the war field and outside, some characters in Krishnanattam makes roaring sounds like the roles played in the Theyyattam and Thira. Characters in such roles include Jambavan, vividhan, poothana and Narakasuran etc. some folk art influence can also be seen in the usage of masks. Masked art forms of Greece, Rome, China, Srilanka, Itali, Africa, can also be seen in Indian model too. Pootham kali of Northern Malabar and kummatikali of mid Kerala are art forms which use masks. M.V Vishnu nambuthiri has pointed out that folk arts like Theyyam, Thira, Kolamthullal^{xxx}, Kothammuriyattam^{xxxi} involves, using masks. As Krishnanattam has originated in the north and Guruvayur is a place situated in mid Kerala, it is beyond any arguments to say that usage of masks clearly influenced Krishnanattam. It resembles greatly with the structure and production style of kummatti, pootham, thira, which are popular in Thrissur.

Also, one of the oldest folk art of Kerala, kalamezhuthupattu, has also influenced it. The same colours used to write 'kalam' (floor decoration) is used in the 'mukhamezhuthu'^{xxxii} of Krishnanattam. Similar colour spectrum is used both for artist and masks.

A magnificent world of colours opens which enthral the eyes of audience. mukhamezhuthu of Krishnanattam is like that of temple gods and goddesses face art. The colours used in Kalamezhuthu and Mukhamezhuthu are black with burned dust, yellow with turmeric, green with powdered leaves, white with rice powder and red with yellow mixed and shell paste.

The costumes and ornaments used in folk arts like Mudiyyettu and theyyattu resembles a lot with that of Krishnanattam, also the performance style and dance parts are also similar to that of Mudiyyettu.

Thiruvathirakkali and kummiyadi^{xxxiii}, which are dance forms done along with the dhanumasa^{xxxiv} oath of Kerala woman, we can see also in Krishnanattam. As woman can't take part in Krishnanattam, men themselves perform this parts that is the only difference.

A special dance part known as a set of jasmine flower wear on the head in Rasakreeda^{xxxv}, displays much similarity also in Dances of maids too. We can see the movements and clappings of Thiruvathirakkali. Even natya hasn't got much importance in Krishnanattam, characters can be classified on the basis of Nritha as natyadharmmi characters and Lokadharmmi characters. There are only three actors in Krishnanattam- Pacha^{xxxvi}, Kathi^{xxxvii}, and Minukku^{xxxviii}. Kari^{xxxix} and Thadi^{xl} appear as masked characters. As for Bharatha's view, Kari and thadi are Lokadharmmi characters. Brahma, Murasura, Narakasura, Yama, Ghandakarnna, Bhoothams, Poothana, Jambava, Vivida, Bakapakshi are masked characters. Masked characters lack chances of abhinaya(acting) especially satvikabhinaya(good expression). Audience can only feel this Angika(gestures) and movements according to rhythms. The humorous characters in Krishnanattam are Jambavan and Vivida. They make audience laugh with their apparent similarities in features and actions of monkeys. Gandakarnna of Krishnanattam resembles a sportive demon of folk arts. According to Bharatha, Jambava, Poothana, Gandakarnna, Vivida are examples for lokadharmmi.

XI. Conclusion

In short, we can say that Krishnanattam was formed using all elements of arts existed on that time in Kerala. Classical arts like kutiyattam, (the oldest one) *Ramanattam*, *Mohiniyattam*, *Thullal*, and other folk arts clearly influenced its production. But *Krishnanattam* differs from other arts as it was carried up on the threads of devotion. Folk arts of Kerala Sustained in ooru and *kavu*(shrines). So the dances in them were *Thandavanrithas*^{xii} which featured roles of *Roudra* and *Bheebatsa*. Folk arts lacked ordered, systematic styles of performances. The story and context of *Krishnanattam* was based on Bagavataham. *Krishnanattam* was developed on a clear and systematic *Natyasatra rule*.

The orderings according to *Natyadharmmi* make Classical arts difficult to convey. In appreciating stylized forms one should be aware of *Natyadharmmi* more than knowledge on *Natyasastra*. For a common audience, classical arts like kutiyattam becomes more enjoyed when hilarious conversation and funny arrival of cakyar happens on stage. Like that some peculiar roars in *Kathakali*, the typical art form of Kerala ,is still remembered by people. The main reason behind the stagnation of *Krishnanattam* within *Guruvayur* premises is economical adversities. Also belief has also influenced on it. Yet today, *Krishnanattam* is being performed in several stages, especially in temples. In story part is shorted to perform and yet it can people get easily communicated by the art. No doubt the reason behind that may be the traditional awareness in people about *Nritha (dance)*, *Thala (Rhythm)*, *Abhinaya (Acting)* and *Aharya (Costumes)*. This itself is Folk touch; also *Lokadharmmi*.

Notes

- ⁱ It is one of the classical dance drama in Kerala. This dance drama is about the Lord Krishna
- ⁱⁱ Literary work meant for Krishnanattam performance.
- ⁱⁱⁱ It is a part of acting.
- ^{iv} It is a classical art form of Kerala
- ^v It is a classical art form of Kerala
- ^{vi} Classical dance drama of Kerala
- ^{vii} It is a classical art form of Kerala
- ^{viii} Able to appreciate literature and the arts
- ^{ix} The old form of Kathakali
- ^x The four kinds of histrionics(gesture, speech, dress, and substantially)
- ^{xi} Combination of music, dance, and accompaniments
- ^{xii} The art offered to a deity
- ^{xiii} It is a famous Krishna temple at Kerala
- ^{xiv} Beating of drums to announcement that a Krishnanattam performance is soon going to be held.
- ^{xv} Customary form of worship behind the screen just before the beginning of a Krishnanattam performance.
- ^{xvi} The commencement of Krishnanattam performance.
- ^{xvii} Appearance of a character in Krishnanattam before the story begins.
- ^{xviii} Story telling by the Chakyar community in temples of Kerala
- ^{xix} A form of ritual art in north Malabar of Kerala
- ^{xx} A kind of religious performance in north Malabar of Kerala
- ^{xxi} A kind of offering performance in the goddess temple in north Malabar at Kerala
- ^{xxiii} It is a martial art of Kerala
- ^{xxiv} A famous ritualistic art form of middle of Kerala, especially in Thrissur district
- ^{xxv} A kind of ritual worship of goddess Kaali
- ^{xxvi} It is ritual dance in north Malabar of Kerala
- ^{xxvii} A kind of ritual dance performed by girls and married women
- ^{xxviii} A kind of folk art which is using by mask in face at Kerala,
- ^{xxix} A floor decorated with figures of deities in powders of various colours as part of tantric rituals.
- ^{xxx} A rustic devil dance
- ^{xxxi} A rustic devil dance of Kerala
- ^{xxxii} Writing on face which using by variety colours
- ^{xxxiii} A kind of dance accompanied by singing and clapping of hands.
- ^{xxxiv} The month of Dhanu in the Malabar era.
- ^{xxxv} It is a part of Krishnanattam
- ^{xxxvi} One character in Krishnanattam who wearing costumes and writing in face used by green colour.
- ^{xxxvii} A demoniac character in Krishnanattam
- ^{xxxviii} A particular type of character in Krishnanattam
- ^{xxxix} One type of character who wearing black colour dress and writing black colour paste in his face
- ^{xl} It is a character of Krishnanattam
- ^{xli} The frantic and violent dance of Siva

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