

Avinash C. Pandeya



THE ART OF

Kathakali



Natraja

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Avinash C. Pandeya

with a Foreword by
Guru Gopi Nath

with an Introduction by
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The Art of Kathakali

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Kathakali literally meaning "story-dance" is the pantomimic dance-drama of Malabar comparable to a great extent with the European ballet in the West with an additional advantage of having rich gestural code necessary to convey the theatrical pleasures to the spectator.

This book is a detailed analysis of the dance and art of Kathakali, its origin, technique, the costume, make-up and the gestural code, with a separate chapter on "Evolution of Kerala's Art" by Krishna Chaitanya.

This edition has been completely revised and enlarged and contains new set of illustrations to further facilitate understanding and appreciation of the Art.

The Art of Kathakali

In the long history of the origin and development of *Kathakali*, the contribution of the rulers of Kèraḷa is monumental. Their personal participation on individual basis, writing of the *Kathakalis*, maintenance of troupes in the palace and encouragement to artistes and composers—all these direct efforts helped in removing any stigma from the practice of this art and invested it with decency and dignity. They also added the desired lustre to the dance-drama to catch the attention of the common people.

To suit the modern concepts of life and to conform to the changed times, dynamic *Kathakali* is writing its history anew.

THE HOME OF KATHAKALI

Bharatnatyam or Kathakali !

South India claims two classical dance-forms. If Tāmīl-nād in the south-east boasts of Bharatanatyam, Malabar in the south-west has offered the country a highly developed histrionic art, Kathakali.

From Cape Comorin to Calicut, at the extreme tip of the Great Indian Peninsula, runs a belt about three hundred miles long and covering an area of roughly 9,100 square miles, along the western coast. It is the home of Kathakali.

Its white sand and bright red soil, luxuriant vegetation, soaring trees and tangled lianas, perpetually green foliage, envying the crowning blue sky, lagoons and waterways—all combine to make this land scenically the most beautiful and richly endowed in the world. It is the "Kashmir of South India."

Malabar, as this part of the country has been traditionally called, is now culturally and politically known as Kēraḷa—a modified form of "Cheraḷa", a nomenclature originally given by the great Cherā Kings, who ruled over a portion of South India along with the Pāṇḍyas and the Imperial Cōḷās.

The land rises out of coral reefs. In the east, backwaters separate it from the Western Ghats and gradually slope down in the west to the flat seaboard of the State. A chain of navigable lagoons, stretching from Ponnani to Trivandrum, are connected by canals. The Arabian Sea lies in its west and the Indian Ocean sweeps its shores in the south. Bright red soil gleams through the mighty coastal hills on the one side and the sand bar on the other. Both the land and the sea smile here agreeably and the rays of the sun dance on the waves of the sea and the suave ripples of lagoon waters.

No doubt, the Nature urges in the people of Malabar a natural instinct—to muse and dance.

Since the dawn of civilisation, Malabar is known for its luxuriant forests in which nearly 600 varieties of timber trees grow. Ironwoods, such as teak, blackwood, ebony, sandalwood and rosewood, are exported as well for use in the construction of ships and railway slippers. A variety of softwoods for making tea-chests, packing cases, paper-pulp, match-boxes and toys are also found.

Masts and beams of ancient ships manufactured in Egypt and Greece used Malabar ironwoods exported from the many ports on the Malabar coast. Cochin was one of the most important outlets. And Mattanchery, Alleppey, Quilon, Cape Comorin too.

Muchiri, near the present Cranganur, the capital of the Chera Kings, is described by an ancient Tamil poet as “a thriving town where beautiful ships of the Yavanas bringing gold come splashing white foam in the waters of the Periyar, which belongs to Kéraḷa, and return laden with pepper.” Biblical King Solomon’s “ivory, apes and peacocks” came from Malabar about a millennium before the Christian Era.

Since the earliest times, Malabar has thus been the natural gateway to the western world. Also to the eastern. The early Tamil Dravadians, who were matchless navigators and builders of ships, “faultless in construction” with broad beams and strong rudders, as the *Atharva Ved Samhita* records, sailed in either direction invoking the blessings of Aditi—“With Thy Blessings, we embark on this ship.”

Indian mercantile marines traversed the vast seas washing the shores of Ptolemaic Egypt, the Hellenic world, Greece and the Arab countries in the west; and of Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, Java, Sumatra in the south-east. Romans under Augustus and Egyptians under Ptolemy Philadelphus built large vessels. Other West Asian nations constructed or purchased smaller junks from them.

In the wake of trade and commerce, foreign travellers and writers poured into India. Phoenecians, Egyptians, Syrians, Jews and Romans—in fact, all adventurous people of the western

world who communicated with India during the centuries immediately preceding and following the Christian Era—braved the storms and rode the rough seas in quest of the wealth of India—and they anchored their ships in the ports of Malabar.

In the early centuries before the Christian Era, Roman and Greek writers, like Pliny, Strabo, Arrian and later Greek ambassadors to the Mauryan Empire, entered India through Malabar. So did Megasthenes and the Arab travellers. In the third century, Indian traders, travellers, monks and writers reached China and in turn brought Chinese contemporaries.

The history of the Dutch, the French and the English seafarers is more recent to be thrilling.

Kérala became the axis of eastern and western cultures, the impact of which is reflected in its social structure, art and architecture and dance and music.

Chinese contribution to the Malabari life was significant. They bartered silks for spices, and introduced the new arts of porcelain making, building methods, cloth making and make-up. The architectural concept of the temples of Malabar speak of this impact to a great degree. It has upward tilting roofs and windows of paper secured by wooden slates. The make-up and costume of the *dramatis personae* of the Kérala stage are equally eloquent of the Chinese influence.

Cochin fishermen employ large square fishing nets which are lowered into the sea and channel waters by means of weighted ropes and beams to catch fish. These are still known as "Chinese nets."

The History

Malabar's political history turns the pages of the Vedas, and is shrouded in the mist of antiquity, legends—Puranic and mythological. Its unchronicled past is written in the didactic poems of the ancient Tamil works, in the *Mahabharat* and the *Ramayana*.

Tradition has it that this part of the country was originally submerged under the sea-water. Mythological Parasurāma, the

sworn enemy of the Kshatriyas, axed it out of the sea-bed and reclaimed it for the habitation of a new race of Brahmins. He did it in *Dwāpar Yuga*. And he expiated his life's sins.

Who these Brahmins were? Fishermen! Their conversion was a result of this gratuitous boon by Parasurāma, called the spiritual head of the new Brahmins, "Namboodris". These Namboodris became fathers of Kérala's learning, art and culture. They continue to be the repositories of every art, Kathakali, from its earliest history to the present day.

Thus far the myth. Beyond it, the history of the founders of Kérala is to be read in the Tamil epic, *Silappathikaram* which deals with dancing as well.

On the downfall of the Chera Dynasty in the sixth century A.D., Kérala was split up into three independent kingdoms: The first two were Travancore and Cochin, and the third State was of the Zamorin of Calicut, the maker of the history of the histrionic art of Kérala.

Later the Portuguese and the Dutch came, settled and vanished. The beginnings of an era of peace and prosperity ushered in with the advent of the British and the conclusion of the Subsidiary Alliance. After Independence, the two States were finally welded into one indissoluble political, geographical, geological and cultural unit on July 1, 1949. The present State of Kérala was formed after the States Reorganisation Act on October 1, 1956.

Racially, Malabar is a mixed race, principally of Aryanised Dravidians and foreigners—Greeks, Romans, Arabs and the Western Christians, who from time to time settled in Malabar. For the persecuted Jews this land was haven. African Negroes who came as slaves, sailors or adventurers also settled down here. All these communities of different shades and beliefs are since then living here in complete peace. In the colourful life for Malabar various foreign influences are thus discernible.

After the Dravid, Aryan, Buddhist, Jain and Brahmin impacts came the Christian influence. Several Christian Missionaries visited Malabar and converted many families to Christianity. Saint Thomas the Apostle began his evangelical work and claimed

the credit of bringing some of the most distinguished families in the Christian fold. The principal contribution of the early Christian to the Malabari way of life was in dress. The Kathakali actor, drew largely of the Christian woman's gown and skirts.

Religiously the myth of Malabar's origin and the varying effect of different beliefs do not matter so much as that cumulative influence on the social structure of the Malabaris and Kérala's art and culture. The Malabari developed a peculiar social custom quite foreign to the orthodox communities in the rest of the country. It was the custom of matriarchy. Though it has now been dissolved by legislation, the position of the Malabari woman still remains strong.

Physically, the Malabari is a beauty. He is active, clean and fond of massage and oil baths. Massage is an important part of his daily life. His glistening brown skin adds charm to his well-cared-for body. The Malabari woman is also keen to caress the glossy sheen of her long luxuriant locks which give a tropical foliage look to her pleasing countenance.

Malabaris clothe themselves sparsely. Women are often than not bare-breasted and without, sometimes, an undergarment. Men's usual wear is the *mundu*, a strip of cloth hanging from the waist to the knee. The Malabari washes his clothes as many times as they get soiled. He takes bath twice a day, and sometimes cleans the cloth while a part of it is yet on his body. The Malabari woman loosens a part of her *sāri*, washes it and ties it again loosening the other part which is then washed. By this process one *sāri* is kept clean by her for a number of days while yet it is being worn.

Malabar is richly endowed with coconut, the kernel of which is variously used. Coconut oil is used by the Malabaris in massage, shampoo and soap. The green kernel is used in cooking. It is flaked and dusted and mixed in vegetables and *dāl*.

This is the land and the people of Kérala. Its theatrical art, like that of most other countries, has roots buried deep in religion. Some such theatrical varieties as *Kuthu* and *Kutiyāttam* are still confined to the precincts of temples. The excellence

of these lies not so much in *mudrās* as in the discipline of story-telling.

Nevertheless, Kéṛaḷa's dramatic art reaches the summit of perfection in the language of the signs and symbols of the hand, In the paradisaical atmosphere sumptuously endowed by the beauty of Nature, indubitably Malabar has nurtured one of India's finest art-forms. Kathakali, literally the art of story-telling, rises as the summum bonum of Malabari life and surroundings, and as the ultimate Kéṛaḷa cultures; nay, it appears as added beauty to that of art and gods on earth.

Bhāṛatanāṭyam

In Tamil Nad, much earlier to the evolution of Kathakali, the Brahmanic view of life had developed a theory of art which found expression in its temples—and a class of girls dedicated to the presiding deities became, in course of time, the repositories of the finest tradition of that art.

Culturally, Tamil Nad of the old represented the highest of three symbiotic civilisations which thrived in three distinct areas of south-east India, currently known as the States of Madras, Andhra, and Mysore. The Tamils, with a profound knowledge of the *Vedas*, delineated a disciplined philosophy of life in the bronze model of Nataraja, the Lord of Dance—Śiva, one of the Hindu Pantheon. Their own culture favoured the dance; the Telugus of Andhra Desa, who were more attuned religiously to the Buddhist way of life, developed a musical *lingua franca*, Telugu, in which almost all South Indian songs, like the *kritis* of Swami Thyagaraja, were composed; and the Canarese of Greater Mysore (or Karnataka or the Kannada-speaking area) called it Karnatak music.

This region has since the Classic Period of India's history nursed a dance-form now commonly known as Bharatanatyam, literally meaning "the dance of the actor"—a name perhaps derived after the magnificent, encyclopaedic canonical work of uncomputable antiquity, Bharata's *Nāṭyā Śāstrā*. In 36 chapters, the *Śāstra* deals with drama, music, dancing, aesthetics, rhetoric,

grammar, and allied subjects. Bharatanatyam closely conforms in spirit and procedure to the classic texts. How the principles of the classics have been honoured by it is provable from the close affinity that exists between its physical attitudes and one or the other of the 108 *Karānās* (attitudes of the body) inscribed on the *Gopurāms* of the holiest temple of Śiva Natarāja at Cidambaram or in the Brihadeshwar Temple, Tanjore. Though it is difficult to determine the precise date of origin of its main shrine, the Natrāja temple as it stands today grew up through a period spread over 1,300 years, reckoning from the sixth century A.D. About 90 *Kāranās* are also found inscribed on the walls of the Kesavacanna temple of the Tañjore which dates back to the thirteenth century A.D.

The Pallavas of Kāñci who were saddled in power until the end of the ninth century A.D. were great builders. Their territories were annexed by the great Cōḷā kings of Tañjore, Āditya I (c. 870-906) and Parāñtaka I (c. 906-953). The Cōḷās fell in the thirteenth century when their territory was shared by the Hoysalas of Mysore and the revived Pāñḍya dynasty of Madurai.

The Cōḷā kingdom was one of the three great kingdoms of Tamil tradition giving the maximum political security to its people and supporting a new trend of social and cultural life. The Tamil culture developed unabated. The famous Hindu reformers Sañkarācārya (A.D. 788) and Rāmānuja (A.D. 1100) both appeared on the horizon of the Brahmanic culture with a force that lasts even today.

In the midst of this cultural renaissance, growth of a religious *motif*, merged in the social behaviour of the people, for the Cōḷā architecture was a foregone conclusion. The style of the Pallavas was further developed and some great temples of the finest specimen of architecture were built. The temple of Śiva at Tañjore, built by Rajaraja the Great (985-1013 A. D.) and the temple built by his successor, Rajendra I at his new capital of Gangaikondacolapuram near Kumbakonam are a few examples.

And the Cōḷās' successors, the Hoyasalas, furthered the architectural activities and some ornate structures were erected at Belur and Halebid in Mysore. These are examples of exquisite beauty.

All these temples are repositories of dance poses. They bring to mind the Tamil's belief that the celestial Gandharvas and Apsaras (musicians and danseuses) were an inseparable part of the godly world; that where there was a symbolic god there were the danseuses. This gave rise to the concept of adorning the walls of the temples inside and outside with dancing figures for the amusement of the installed presiding deity.

Until recently temple festivals were inseparable from dance; and perhaps this practice helped the devout sculptor to carve the dancing figures on the stone and the craftsman to chisel bronze models of powerful body movements ever known to the world history of sculpture. These pieces of art are perpetual record of the philosophy of the rhythm of life. They recall to mind the sanctity of dance; that it is more to please the gods than the man.

The figurines on the stones and bronze of the past live. They live as if in the flesh of today. They will live thus for ages to come.

In the Middle Ages, the temple god was treated like an earthly king. He had ministers, a court, musicians and dancing girls. As a hereditary practice, the musicians and danseuses were the children of the servants and maidservants of the same profession, born and reared as in the temple precincts, but they might be sons and daughters of ordinary citizens offered in the service of the god, as a pious gift. They sang and danced before the presiding deity, just as the mythological Gandharvas and Apsaras did to entertain gods in the heaven. They were the *Brahmin Bhāgavatas*, literally "the servants of God", and their female counterparts Devadasis or maidservants of God.

Brahmanical autocracy during the Cōlā rule furthered the institution of Devadasis, who indulged in orgiastic dancing. It would be a debatable point whether they later fell from their ideals and purpose of life and aligned themselves more with the biological needs of the human life. Whatever the truth might be, they were, until very recently, the preservers of dance tradition, which came to be called *Dāsīattam*—a preponderantly *lāsya* variety of dancing—as distinct from *Nātyā Mela* or *Sadir*.

Bhāgavatas' principal contribution was a dance-drama, called *Bhāgavata Mela Nāṭaka* based on the canons of the *Nāṭya Śāstra*. It was a community dance-drama in which all the participants were men. Bhāgavatas represented one side of the whole Bharata's art, while the non-Brahman *nattuvannars* (dance teachers) and their pupils, Devadasis, represented another branch of the art. Both these arts flourished side by side in Tañjore district which has produced some of the greatest dance teachers India has known.

The 'men's only' dance-drama is on the verge of extinction—and if it is lost, India's loss in the dramatic traditions would be irreparable. *Dasiattam*, on the other hand, underwent minor modifications, resulting in the modern Bharatanāṭyam. It was standardized and its repertoire crystallized and regulated into a sequence dance of three to four hours' duration by two prodigious brothers of Tañjore, Ponniah and Vadivelu Pillay, pupils of the famous musician Muttuswami Dikshitar, who lived about two hundred years ago. Its greatest exponent-teacher is Minakshi Sundaram Pillay of Pandanallur (since dead), Chokalingam Pillay and Ellappa.

In standardizing Bharatanāṭyam, the Tañjore brothers took *nāṭya* of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* as the foundation on which the structure of the dance was erected. *Nṛtt* and *Nṛtyā* being two complementary parts of *nāṭya*, they weaved the various patterns of Bharatanāṭyam under them. Under *nṛtt kāraṇās*, the 108 body postures, some calm and gentle others fierce, orgiastic and terrible, *aḍavus*, the various forms of floor contacts by the feet, weaving rhythmic patterns (*jāṭis*) and *tirmaṇas* (concluding rhythmic flourishes); and under *nṛtya*, *abhinaya* action or expression of body, including *mukhābhinaya* (expressions of face) and *mudrās* (expression of hand) were classified.

Keeping this classification in view they standardized a Bharatanāṭyam programme in seven items : *Alārippu*, *Jāṭiswara*, *Śabda*, *Varṇa* (or *Swarajati*), *Pada*, *Tillānā*, and a concluding *Śloka* (or *Astapadī*). The outline of a *Varṇa* was fixed thus : *Swara* (*nṛtt*), *Sollukkatu* (*jati*; *nṛtt*), *Sahitya*, i.e., *Pallavi* (*abhinaya*; *nṛtya*), followed with *Swara* (*nṛtt*), *Anupallavi* (*abhinaya*) followed with *Swara*,

and *Carana* (abhinaya) followed with *Swara* (*nṛtt*), *Jāti* (*nṛtt*) and *Tirmana* (*nṛtt*).

Such a programme of Bharatanātyam is apt to be characterized by energy, speed, exuberance and abandon. It is rich with emotional content, complemented by succession upon succession of body pattern of marked clarity and sculptural precision. It is a treat to the mind and the heart; it is a synthesis of the intellectual and emotional content; it has mathematical accuracy; it is a blend of the dance pure and the dance emotional.

As distinct from this, Kathakali has a different appeal. Though its connection with Bharata's *Natya Shastra* is clear, its relation is not so direct as that of Bharatanātyam. It is more dramatic and mundane than the latter which is pure *nṛtt* and *nṛtyā* and extra-mundane. Kathakali is purposeful by entertaining by dramatising the activities of God in a climate charged with supernatural art-behaviour. Bharatanātyam is devotional. Kathakali being preponderantly Tandava, it is energetic, active, virile, violent, and athletic; Bharatanātyam is *lasya* and erotic. Kathakali's feminine counterpart dance variety is Mohini Attam which lately fell into disfavour. Bharatanātyam technique stresses interpretation of *sringara rasa* and its variations; Kathakali is an interpretation of *viārāsā* and its variations.

Body movements in Kathakali seem limited than those used in Bharatanātyam. The former, however, employs more *mudras* than any other form of Indian dancing. In Kathakali, the actor uses heavy make-up, while in Bharatanātyam the danseuse is content with the normal flourishes of facial beauty. In Indian dancing Kathakali alone is performed in a ballet form; Bharatanātyam is a solo dance. The former relates a story; the latter is a fragmentary mood. Though the origins of the both is from the same source, in the former dance-drama, the actor remains mute (or at worst, if he is an evil character, shrieks); in the latter dance, the interpreter may sing. The antiquity of Bharatanātyam is provable from its sculpturesque body movements. The recent growth of Kathakali is an established historical fact.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF KĒRALA ART

THAT dancing was prevalent among the early inhabitants of India, before the advent of the Aryans, in one form or another, is provable from the gestural code of the existing dance forms. During the earliest days of humanity, before man spoke a language, gesture was the most effective source of expressing thoughts. When man evolved effective symbols, the art of gesture was further developed. Even today when the languages of the civilization have achieved the highest marvels for expressing thoughts, the art of gesticulation persists and remains a predominant and an intimate associate of the be-all and the end-all.

Functional gestures were developed to a high degree, and the old Sanskrit codifications copiously deal with them. Added to them are elaborate commentaries and glosses. On the decline of the Sanskrit drama, folk dramatic forms have preserved them. Rudimentary gestures are found embedded in all folk arts. Folk theatre, like folk poetry, is an improvement on them. When the spoken part of a theatrical show is translated into gestures, the consolidated art is eloquent of the life and culture of a people. The pattern of these gestures conforms to naturalistic behaviour or is influenced by religious practices, which, in fact, made a lasting impact on the crude tribal gestures. Religious thoughts made an inroad in art forms and directly or indirectly influenced the motive force of regional theatrical arts.

Religious Perspective

In the Middle Ages, with the modification of Sāṅkhya dualism and the fundamental atheism to harmonise with the prevalent monism and theism, *Puruṣa* and *Prākṛti* became the positive

and negative—the masculine and feminine—forces personified in the man and the woman by the tāntric sects. Small groups of initiates gathered at night, often in a temple or elsewhere where they offered evening prayers, propitiated ghosts and performed other rites. The gathering dispersed after a social meet in which the five Ms (*pañcāmākārā*) courses were *madya* (alcoholic drink), *māṃsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (symbolism) and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). The sexual significance became morbidly religious; and the “Six Syllables” (*Sadaḷṣara*) : *Om mani padme hum* (“Ah ! the jewel is indeed in the lotus !”) is indeed the sexual significance, mystically reminding the divine coitus of the Buddha and Prajañā-paramitra, and of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā.

These concepts seem to have had the impact of Sāṅkhya metaphysics, with its rigid dualism and fundamental atheism, teaching the existence of 25 basic principles (*tattvas*), of which “matter” (*prakṛti*) is the first, and “the person” (*puṛuṣa*) the twenty-fifth. Its important feature is the doctrine of the three constituent qualities (*guṇas*) : *sattva* (virtue), *rājas* (passion) and *tāmas* (dullness). Cosmic matter contains these in an equilibrium in its undeveloped state, but, in the process of creation, one or the other of these preponderates in different beings which accounts for divergencies in the nature of man. *Sattva guṇa* is present in all things good, wise, beautiful and true. *Rājas guṇa* inheres in things active, energetic, forceful, violent and fierce. *Tāmas guṇa* is associated with darkness, ignorance, stupidity, unhappiness, gloom and wretched. By a process of permutation, the three *guṇas* become nine : that is, *sattva*, *sattva-rājas*, *sattva-tāmas*, *rājas*, *rājas-tāmas*, *rājas-sattva*, *tāmas*, *tāmas-rājas*, and *tāmas-sattva*. Each of these nine *guṇas* identifies itself with a *rasa* : *śānta*, *sr̥ṅgāra*, *karuṇa*, *vīra*, *hāsyā*, *adbhuta*, *raudra*, *vibhatsa* and *bhayānaka*.

Tāntrism on a mass scale manifested itself in numerous patterns. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism believed in all feats of sorcery and necromancy. Tara, the Saviouress, became the chief divinity of this sect of the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt. A host of lesser divinities sprang up. These were called by demoniac names, such as *matangis* (outcaste women), *pisācis* (demonesses), *yōginīs* (sorcer-

esses) and *dakinīs* (she-ghouls). This led to depicting the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with their Tārās, with many arms in ferocious poses, like the lesser gods of the Hindu Pantheon. Votive offering flourished during this period. The t̄antric sects worshipped feminine deities and gave to women an important place in their cult, besides instituting orders of female ascetics.

Against this background, the cultural history of Kérala develops in the centuries preceding and following the Christian Era. It is largely clouded in the mist of mysteries and mythology. It cannot be ruled out that the gradual socio-religious disintegration on the decline, infatuation and rise of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism gave the society a licence to indulge in superstitions and blackmagic of the T̄antric Age. That Kérala responded to it with alacrity was due largely to its geographical and climatic conditions.

Sociological Bearing

When the first Cérā ruler of Malābār consolidated his kingdom, the society was seething with t̄antrism and tribal rivalries. Constant internecine wars, however, reduced the society to shambles. To give it some stability, after the pioneering work of Shaṅkarācharya in the field of consolidation of the Hindu society, the patriarchal system during the Cérās shifted to *Marumakkattāyam* (matriarchal) in the twelfth century. With this social change the women of Malābār wielded a superior position. This superiority became more conspicuous in theatrical arts, which were confined to men alone for the elation of men and women alike. The costume of the actors, it is no surprise, expressed the essential femality.

Masks and hideous make-ups were inspired by the tribal "awakening" and the t̄antric needs. Another reason for their rise was that t̄antric Buddhism, before merging itself completely in Brahmanism, grew suspicious of all external phenomena that were engulfing its influence. Likewise Brahmanism feared the likely survival of Buddhism. The result of mutual fears was the

growth of hideous personages from which sadistic pleasure was derived.

Partly to communicate their views and partly to popularise a new movement in socio-religious art, the medium of mass communication—the theatre—came in handy. Purely Brahmanic plays were written in the language of the noble, that is, Sanskrit, and others in the spoken language. They had a decided religious bias. Some revolved round secular subjects as well. The general theme of these plays was the victory of Good over Evil. And the conscious approach of all was to give a pleasing look to the virtuous character and a quaint appearance to the evil. Another distinctive feature was the assignment of female roles to men. This approach to the socio-religious problem gave rise to many patterns and forms of head-gears and masks.

The Crowns

It was for this reason that one of the oldest dramatic forms in Kérala was called *Mutiettu*, meaning “wearing the crown”.

Theatrical functions of the masks apart, they have its religious and ritualistic purpose as well. In north Kérala, the masks are worshipped in a shrine with lights, offerings and invocations, just as the sword and the gun-rifle are worshipped in Coorg and Rajasthan or the penholder and ink are worshipped amongst the Kayasthas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In Kérala, every god has a distinctive dress, but by the head-dress alone can he be identified. Cathan wears a circular halo crown five feet in diameter; Gulikan's rectangular crown is two feet broad and 20 feet high; Bhagavati's crown is massive than Gulikan's. With such enormity of the crowns, no doubt Kérala actors must have appreciable athletic dexterity to execute rhythm, however slow. But when they are in the role-type, there emerges a new personality—that of a superhuman whose endurance and prowess rightly portray their godly character. Camundi bears 16 flaming torches stuck in front of the actor perpendicular to his

body; and Hanuman crawls on his knees for hours together. Brahmins do not attend these performances.

Early forms of Theatre

Theatrical activities, in course of time, gradually developed to embrace the world of socio-religious life of the people of Malābār. What of these remain even today include (i) ritual and cult plays, such as *Bhagavati Pattu*, *Tiyattu*, *Panai Pattu*, *Kaniyar Kali*, *Tukku*, *Kali-attam*, and *Daivattam*; (ii) non-ritual though religious. *Cakkyar Kuttu* and its variations *Parabandham*, *Nangyar-Kuttu* and *Kutiyattam*; *Krisnattam*; *Tattilme-Kali* and the Ramayana shadow play; and (iii) secular plays, like *Mohini-attam* (a localised adaptation of the Tanjore School of dancing by women), *Korati-attam*, *Kai-Kotti-Kali*, *Thullal-Patakam*, *Kol-Kali*, *Kalyanakkali*, *Kayukottikkal*, and *Parisa Muttum Kali*.

Religious dances, such as *Bhagavati Pattu*, *Tiyyattu*, *Pana Pattu*, are those which are performed in the precincts of a temple dedicated to goddess Bhagavati, or even at homes in honour of the goddess on some holy or auspicious day of a festival. The second type includes highly technical dramatic performances like *Kattu*, *Krisnattam* and *Sanghakkali*. These are semi-religious owing to the presence of the atmosphere of sanctity and holiness, perhaps, on account of the abundance of Sanskrit, the language of the gods, in their compositions, or the incorporation of religious and *puranic* themes. The secular type of dances are the most popular ones.

DAIVATTAM is the dance of the gods. It is given the first importance in religious festivals called Tirayattam in north Kēraḷa. These are the many gods and goddesses like Bhagavati and her several forms—Kali, Camundi, Bhadrakali, Sri Kurumba, etc.—who dance, bestow their blessings and prophesy events. In this night-long dramatic pageant, hereditary priests impersonate the actors. They are experts in exorcism, sorcery and dancing. In Tira festivals, they are assisted by their assistants, called *Munnuttas*.

Goddess Bhagavati appears in the Radiant Form of *Prasannarupi* at the *Kavu* (the shrine). She wears a silver diadem, and a pair of armlets and anklets. Her breast is entirely covered by a huge circular collar of gold set with red stones. Wreath of sacred red flowers provide a crown and a garland of white *Erikku* flowers adorn her.

Black and white geometrical patterns decorate the borders of her red skirt. Two attendant-priests hold her hands. The drums beat. The Goddess is invoked. A *Toottam* song progresses. Her divine attributes, acts of benedictions and valour are narrated. The actor-priest now possessed of the divine spirit is led to a nearby river to perform the initial rites and to bestow blessings on the people.

With the fall of the night, the ritual dance begins. The steps are measured, gestures are rhythmic, graceful and impressive. She then rests on the stool facing the shrine and meditates. The gathering is later blessed. She withdraws.

In the dramatic intermission following, two warrior gods appear with clubs and shields. They put on huge head-dresses. The faces are painted mask-like. Lips are elongated by fixing black, protruding, furry lips. Their costume consists of circular girdle provided with tassels and a skirt made of pleated pieces of red cloth. Their dance is vigorous and rhythm sustaining. At its close, they go about in audience to collect coins and distribute *prasadam*.

After midnight, Bhagavati reappears. Now, she is *Walia Tamburatti*, the Great Goddess. She is furious and trembling. The drums synchronise her vigorous dance in which she shakes her sword. At the end, she resumes her seat on the stool and pronounces benediction.

In the interlude now following, a torch dancer, who is a spectacular demon figure at every *Tira* festival, appears with 12 flaming torches around his waist. He dances to ward off evil spirits.

Bhagavati makes her final appearance at dawn. She puts on a magnificent head-dress made of interlaced palm leaves. Her retinue of gods, goddesses and demons surround her. The proces-

sion is led by a group of drummers. Flowery pagodas set in earthen pots are carried by the processionists who joyfully shout throughout the three circles they make of the shrine. Finally, the huge "mudi" is removed. Only the jewelled *mukat* remains. The goddess blesses the assembly and makes prophecies. Thus ends the festival and with it, the dance-drama.

Of the ritual plays, *Darika Vadha* (slaying of the demon Darika) is the most popular one. It is connected with the Bhagavati or Kali cult and is in the nature of a votive offering, a religious rite which follows a ritual worship. It is a two-act mythology : (i) Narada relates to Śiva the misdeeds of Darika. Śiva promises to end it by deputing Kali. (ii) Darika challenges Kali : It is an elaborate scene in which both ride in war-chariots. A wordy duel starts. It accentuates provocation and intensifies passions. Now fight ensues and with the dawn Kali slays Darika. It is a ghastly scene in which the demon's abdomen is ripped open and the avenging goddess drinks his blood. She adorns herself with the garland-like entrails of the *asura*.

PATAKAM : Of the secular dance-dramas, *Patakam* is a unique mixture of singing, dancing and acting. Technically, it is like *Prabandham*—from which it appears to have stemmed, except for the language of the play. In the former, it is Malayalam that predominates; in the latter it is Sanskrit. *Patakam* has, however, not entirely neglected Sanskrit. A *Patakam* actor is not merely an entertainer, but also one who is well-versed in mythology and religious lore and is possessed of a fine timbre of voice. His make-up is simple. A thin layer of sandal-paste is applied on his body and *kohl* round the eyes. He puts on a plain loin cloth hanging down the knees, with a girdle of another cloth. A small, conical crown adorns his head; arms and wrists are provided with ornaments. The play is staged in the open and the actor stands by an oil lamp to expound the story. He may act and dance a little.

CAKKYARKUTTU : Cakkyars enjoy the distinction of being the only Sanskrit stage artistes left. *Kuttu* covers both *Prabandham-Kuttu*, also known as *Vak* (word) as well as *Kutiyattam*, the art of storytelling : highly dramatic and characterised by elegance of

style, erudition and a profound sense of wit and humour. Stories are from the *Puranas*. The art employed is *Vacikabhinaya*, which deals with *Kaku*, the musical rendering of *Kavya* to surge emotional situations, and is supplemented by gestures. Music was provided by occasional drumming on a huge copper drum, *Milav* (an exact counterpart of which would be found in the Chinese theatre, judging from the illustration in Mr. Arlington's *Famous Chinese Play*). It has no dancing.

KUTIYATTAM is the most significant phase of the Cakkyar's art. The term signifies "joint action" by Cakkyars and Nangyars in propounding exclusively Sanskrit dramas.

Literally, the name means "composite dancing." It is a composition of dramatics, *abhinaya* and dancing. It is Kèraḷa's "artistic fossil" still hidden in the rock of ritual traditions of old temples. Yet, it is broad in outlook, prepared to accept external artistic and literary influences. Like the *Ramlila* of the North, which runs into numerous chapters of enactments for a fortnight or so, a single act of a *Kutiyattam* play may be staged for 10 to 15 days, each day for two to three hours. But unlike the voluminous theme of the *Ramlila*, the Malabari has a small story for *Kutiyattam*. It offers a peg on which the entire technique of a performance hangs. A play in which only three characters are involved and between them are fourteen verses and a few prose lines might take eleven nights of about 2-3 hours each to complete. An interesting one-act story is woven round Arjuna, the hero of the *Mahabharata*. It is from the Sanskrit drama "*Subhadra Dhanajayam*" wherein Arjuna woos Subhadra. The act begins with return of Arjuna after wooing the famous bow called Gandhiva when he is told of the exquisite beauty of Subhadra. He falls in love with her and sets out to search her. He is assisted in this by his friend and companion Kunndinya, the court jester. On the way they meet a *bhoot* flying away with the ballet. Arjuna bends his bow to shoot down the *bhoot* who drops her and flies for safety. She literally falls into Arjuna's arms. He fails to identify her but falls in love all the same. Suddenly she disappears. Arjuna sits to search for her in Dwarka where if she would not be found he might meet Subhadra.

Such a small story may take eleven nights; surely *Kutiyattam* is a highly evolved art of great artistic and dramatic potentialities. *Kutiyattam* plays deal with varied situations—humorous, satirical, especially on social and official life, moralistic for the youth, serious thoughts on the life's purpose and ribaldrous attack on sexual propensities of man. They have educative value : a whole audience responds to the theme.

Until the first quarter of the present century, a seven-act *Kutiyattam* play generally took a couple of months, each act taking between 8-9 days. It is preceded by a four-day precatory actions which are confined to *stapana* and *nirvacana* (preliminaries extending to the first two days of the play by the *sutradhara*). On the third day commences the *purusartha* in which the *Vidusaka* (comedian) is the sole character. Its scene is drawn from the "Village of Illiteracy" headed by a priest who is innocent of all knowledge of *mantra*, *tantra* and *vidya*. Discussion amongst the villagers is given in the form of a discourse high in dramatic qualities. The *vidusaka*, who is normally a man of extraordinary skill, mimes several characters and makes the atmosphere for the play absorbingly interesting. Beyond this he does not have any role, because what he relates has no relation with the theme of the drama. The Cakkyar presents in this introductory part all the essentials of the play—the *summum bonum*, called in Sanskrit *purusartha*, of life. It is entrenched round the social hypocrisy in four main divisions—*vinoda*, *vancana*, *asana* and *rajaseva*. *Vinoda* is enjoyment of pleasures and may extend from minor to major actions of pleasures; *vancana* includes deception in all its minor and subtle shades, besides self-deception; *asana* signifies satisfaction of the palate; and *rājāsevā* is the service under the Crown. It is on the completion of the fourth category of *purusartha* that the conversation in the story cleverly leads to the emergence of the first scene of the drama to be enacted. The Cakkyar applies all the wits, humours and sarcasms in his discourses. Like the consummate cartoonist, who drives home his thoughts through the lines, Cakkyar raises humour and the hidden meaning. Whereas *purusartha* unfolds social hypocrisy on the one side, it indirectly asks for certain morals.

The Cakkyar, therefore, recognises no law in enacting this piece. Everyone, from the commoner to the king, comes under his fire. By a sacred convention for enacting this, the *Cakkyar* enjoys complete immunity, for whatever he says it in *deva sabhas* (assembly of the gods) and in *Brahman sabhas* (assembly of the Brahmins). His observations go on uninterruptedly, and if anyone interrupts in any way, he will remove his headgear and walk off the stage. The votive offering of *Kuttu* thus comes to a sudden end, indicating sacrilege and profanation of a sacred right. Such a defiled *Kuttu* requires expiatory ceremonies for its revival. In the case of *Prabandham Kuttu* of the Cakkyars, this introductory piece is also enacted.

Kutiyattam performances, which begin at the conclusion of this "introduction" in the temple theatre (*kuttambalam*), a well-constructed wooden structure. Its raised dais is covered by a wooden pavilion, the ceiling of which is richly carved and painted with floral and other decorative motifs. The pavilion stands on four lacquered pillars (brilliantly coloured) and surmounted by *amalaka* capitals. They are decorated with plantain leaves, flowers and other articles. Its auditorium is provided with two tiers, the upper one for the Brahmins and the royalty and the lower one for the commoners. Behind the dais, a green room enclosure is provided with a door in the partition wall through which the actors can come in or go out; the dais is open on the other three sides.

The *vidusaka* translates the Sanskrit text of the play in Malayalam, so that the people may, in general, understand the story. *Kutiyattam* is almost free of music. The verses are chanted. To create a supernatural atmosphere with it, the chanting is in monotone. The Cakkyars have in it *abhinaya* as their main foret. They employ *angikabhinaya* (gestural action), *vaciabhinaya* (narration of words in a speech) and again *angikabhinaya*. In this, *Kutiyattam* resembles to a degree with *Doha* or *Roha* theatrical traditions of Saurashtra and U.P. respectively.

As a story progresses, to the accompaniment of song or a prose line, actors enact a dumb show dance. Full emotional effects are brought about by a synthesis of rhythmic steps, elegant gestures and meaningful facial expressions. The commentary that follows

these at places where scope is for improvisation is an example of erudite scholarship, deep philosophy and shrewd observation of social behaviour. It gives it freshness and flavour.

To a good extent *Kutiyattam* costume resembles with that of Kathakali. It is traditional : No changes are effected on the modern stage. Standard stylised representations of the role-types have come to stay. Arjuna, for instance, is dressed with a crown, kingly ornaments and garlands. His eyes are reddened and face painted in appropriate colours to present the whole figure. Subhadra, the sister of Sri Kriṣṇa, is likewise dressed on the *minnukku* pattern. The court jester in a *minnukku* play attires himself in a perfect clownish manner. His make-up consists in giving a background of white rice paste on the face and hands, circular red marks being placed in the middle of the forehead, cheeks, tip of the nose, breast and fore-arms. The eyes are elongated up to the ears. Double moustache, with ends raised and then lowered, are provided. If flowers are stuck in one ear, betel-leaves are in the other. There is no skirt but a *dhoti*. The *Kutiyattam* stage is a permanent one. From Kathakali it surprisingly differs at least in this that it offers opportunities for women to play feminine roles—an opportunity which is denied in the former art-form. In between these two forms of dance-dramas, there was in Kèraḷa another dramatic art wherein male characters remained dumb but the female ones did all the talking.

KRSNATTAM is said to have been organised by Manaveda, a member of the Royal family of Zamorins of Calicut and it marks a stage further in the development of the Kèraḷa theatre. Manaveda is credited with writing this play in Sanskrit. It was first staged in about 1650 A.D. continuously for eight nights. The story is woven round the many activities of Sri Kriṣṇa which have lent it a sacred position in the hearts of the actors and the audience. It is now surprising to find that the actors observe fast for the days of the performances and the pious amongst the audience on the day the birth of Kriṣṇa is enacted. Mimicry is the basic trait for expression. Certain of its characters wear wooden masks while others have their faces painted.

RAMANATTAM: Until now *Aharyabhinaya* in Kèraḷa theatre has been rather crude. A step ahead was thus taken by the Raja of Kottarakkara who subsequently dramatised the story of Sri Ram in eight plays and called it *Ramanattam*. It marked the initiation of a new movement, second in the series, in the Kèraḷa theatre and the modifications and requirements that followed were too conspicuous and national. Notable reforms were first introduced in the Kèraḷa stage in the eighth century A.D. by Kula Sekhara Perumal, the monarch-playwright and the author of *Tepati Samvarana* and *Subhadra Dhananjaya*; and by his Brahmin minister, Tolan, a collaborator and an actor who wrote *Atta-prakara* (a guide to *Natya*) designed to help the actors.

In the new phase, Sanskrit yielded to Sanskritised Malayalam, just as in North India spoken language underwent modification from Sanskrit to Hindi and from Hindi to Urdu. The actors originally wore masks, sang and chanted dialogues, but gradually changes were effected in the whole presentation. Speechless acting or pantomime was the natural development. Several other changes were effected in the technique of presentation and stagecraft. Music became a necessary component of the dance-drama. The scope of *abhinaya* was enlarged and dancing was introduced. The techniques of the histrionic traditions of Kèraḷa were consolidated and the ultimate was brought to the fore. Themes for it were drawn from *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata*, *Siva Purana* and *Ramayana*. The new technique, originally called *Attakatha*, came to stay as *Kathakali*.

A number of Princes and Namboodris have since contributed in enriching Kathakali. They have written plays, acted in them and maintained troupes of erudite actors. The schools which were largely responsible for bringing about *Attakatha* were Vettam, Kallatikotan, Kaplingatan and Kotta.

Attakatha, a dance-play, or *Kathakali*, a story-play, is thus the crystallized form of Kèraḷa's rich theatrical tradition which has culminated in highly pantomimic art.

It intimately associates itself with the secular and social life, culture and traditions of Kèraḷa. It would be no exaggeration

to say that the summit of Kèraḷa stage has been achieved in Kathakali. It reflects the martial character of the Malabari, and it uniquely expresses the national genius of Malabar in the realm of art, suggested by exquisite rhythm and beauty, literature, imagination transmuted in the emotional content of a story, and beauty combining the grace of *abhinaya* and *nritya*. The whole show produces a lively realisation of a story and affects the inner feelings of the audience.

Kèraḷa Actors

Though the early life of Kèraḷa actors cannot be definitely stated, some light can be thrown on the origin of the Cakkyars.

Like the Kathyaks of the north or the Kaganwalas of Rajasthan, Cakkyars are a community of dramatic artistes and storytellers. They developed a caste-heritage art, more comprehensive and enlightened one. Cakkyars belong to the Ambalavasi (temple-dweller) caste, and "intermediate caste" between the Brahmin and the Nayar. Their services were assigned to the temples. Cakkyars form a separate sub-caste within this fold, with the vocation of the temple artistes.

When a Namboodri woman was suspected of adultery she was at once placed under "suspension" till her guilt or innocence was proved. A trial was conducted by competent judges drawn from recognised members of the Namboodri society. When the guilt was proved she was out-casted. The judges decided the "period" which was the interval between the date of her offence and the date she was out-casted. Any child born during this "cusp period", was a Cakkyar if a male one or a Nangyar if a female one. This is believed to be the origin of this caste. Their status is next to Brahmins. They are *Ottillengil Kuttu*, or those who, having been deprived of the right to learn the Vedas (*Ottu*)—because they are non-Brahmins—have taken to the vocation of *Kuttu* or *Natya*.

Cakkyars claim descent from the story-telling *Sutas* mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. *Silappathikaram*, a Tamil classic refers to Cakkyars. This work centres round a danseuse, Madhavi, who

danced in a gathering of the elite of the city of Kaveripumpattinam the capital of the great Cōḷi country. The King himself as the supreme patron of the arts presided and as was customary presented Madhavi with 1,001 gold coins and in recognition of her great skill, the fresh leaf garland that he was wearing. The confidante of Madhavi took this garland to the aristocratic quarters of the city and offered the love of her mistress to anyone who could purchase the garland for 1,001 gold coins. Kovalan, the hero of the poem, happened to pass by and heard the announcement. He promptly paid the amount. He was led to the presence of Madhavi whose exceeding beauty and great skill in dancing and music captivated him. He fell in love with her so deeply that he neglected his faithful wife, his parents and his duty. From this infatuation of Kovalan the story moves to its tragic climax.

According to the popular version of this story, Madhavi was invited to dance at the marriage festivities of Kovalan and Kannakai (the son and daughter of two merchant princes of the city). She agreed to dance on condition that the person round whose neck the necklace she would fling at the conclusion of the dance, would be hers. This strange condition was accepted. The necklace fell around the neck of the bridegroom, Kovalan, whom she claimed. From this the tragic sequel developed.

MUSICAL HERITAGE OF KÈRAḶA

Clues about the musical tradition

Elankovadikal's *Śilappathikāram* is the first work to give clues about musical development during the period of Céran Cénkuttavan in Tāmīlākam comprising the kingdoms of the Cōḷās, Pāṇḍyas and Céras. *Kuṭṭu* was enacted and it provided some music, however limited and elementary. Traces are available of at least 20 *rāgas* which were sung during the performances of *Kūthu* and *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. These were sung according to a specific rule.

Kèraḷa kings, though greatly assisted in the furtherance of dramatic arts, did not entirely neglect music. Sangrama Dhīra

Kulasakhara Varmā (end of the fifth century of the Malayāḷam Era (M.E.) corresponding to the first quarter of the fourteenth century A.D.) wrote a few works on music, of which *Saṅgīt Śāstra Paradrīṣva* is important. His younger brother, Āḍitya Varmā was a versatile musician.

The palm-leaf manuscripts on music found in the West Coast of India give commentaries on the Sanskrit texts in old Malayāḷam prose. They include *Saṅgīt Śāstram*, *Saṅgīt Cōōdāmaṇi*, *Saṅgīt Vidhikal*, *Saṅgīt Maṅjari*, *Sapta Swara Sancārangal*, *Swara Taladi Lakṣaṇam* and *Tālavīdhital*.⁹

Musical compositions of Kèraḷa Varmā of Kōṭṭayam (North Malabar), who came to Travancore during the reign of Umayamma Rani (about 1678-1685 A.D.), and produced the immortal work *Kèraḷa Varmā Rāmāyanam*, are of great significance.

Jayadēva's *Gīta Gōvind* exerted a proselytising influence on the religious thought and the arts of Kèraḷa. His *āstapadis* are sung in temples even today. No doubt, Manaveda, Zamorin of Calicut, would have conceived *Kṛ'nāṭtam* through these. So might have been the case with *Gīta Ramam* by Ramapanivadan. This work contains several compositions set in *rāgas* and *tālas*.

In the Malayāḷam translation of *Gīta Gōvind—Bhasatapadi—* by Rampurath Warriyar, the erudite author of *Kucela Vṛttam Vancipattam*, several songs have been assigned different *rāgas* and *tālas* from the original ones.

The Golden Age for Kèraḷa music is reckoned with Kārtika Tirūnal, nephew of Mārthanda Varmā, the maker of the former Travancore State (now merged in Kèraḷa State) and known to the Malayāḷi as "Dharma Rājā". He wrote more than 150 songs, set in different *rāgas* and *tālas*, into his seven *Kathakāḷis* and *Kīrtanas* which were until recently sung by *Gāyakas* at Shri Padmanabhaswami Temple. In the early portion of *Balarama-Bharatam*, a treatise on dancing, Kārtika Tirūnal expounds several aspects of music, supported with quotations from Sanskrit works. It informs about the musicians and *vainikas* in his court. Amongst them and other scholars and poets was that genius of humour—the Birbal¹⁰ of the South—Kuñcan Nambiyar, the great writer of *Thullals*.

THE ORIGIN OF KATHAKALI

WHEN the remote progenitors of Kathakali traced its origin to the *tantric* (ritualistic) period of the Vedic Age or when they connected its growth from the popular, folk dance-dramas, they were not, in a way, far from the truth. The Malabari, an austere being, who has always identified himself with Nature, has developed histrionic arts for his enjoyment and spiritual elevation.

Enthralled by the beauty of Nature, the early Malabari danced in the forests : His dance was a power—a mixture of his passions, erotic pleasures and inner talks with the beautiful Nature, and his natural and graceful movements, elaborate gestures, picturesque costumes, grand harmonic make-up suggested by herbal plants of the forests and the vigorous and triumphant music emerging out of crude instruments manufactured by him : the dance-drama of Kèraḷa was apt to become ultimately a unique art of gallic grace and melodious music.

Folk dramas superseded the ancient Sanskrit dramas which were the exclusive preserve of a special class of people, for the former were more realistic and nearer the people than the latter which were abstruse. But it was not until the twelfth century that the art that was simmering in the woods of Malabar could assume a definite form. Jayadeva appeared on the cultural horizon of Tāmīl Nād with his immortal work, the *Gīta Gōvīnd*¹¹ which epitomised the worship of Kriṣṇa and Radha. A current passed through the entire folk art-world; its emotional appeal revitalised folk music, dance and drama. Later, in the seventeenth century, another devotee of Kriṣṇa, Chaitanya, appeared on the scene. He gave the *Gīta Gōvīnd* such an operative form that it exists as a beloved song book even today. People translated its songs in dances, and in dramas. These two centuries are landmarks in the history

of the South Indian drama. Since then a variety of folk art-forms flourished in the South. *Vak'sagāna* developed in Karnāṭaka; *Terukuṭṭu* in Tāmil Nād and *Kuttiāttam* in Kēraḷa.

In the context of this dramatic ferment, the birth of the immediate forefather of Kathakali is seen. *Kriśnāttam* was the dance-drama on the life and activities of Lord Kriśna created by the Zamorin of Calicut. The date as computed in the *Kali Chronogram Grahya Stutirgathakaih* shows that *Kriśnāttam* was first staged in 1657. Its technique had the foundation of the folk drama, as its content had a religious inspiration. It is believed that the Zamorin had a vision of Lord Kriśna who gave the chieftain a peacock feather, which became the living symbol of this dance-drama.¹² *Kri'nāttam* players wore a peacock feather and thus commemorated the vision of the chieftain.

Kriśnāttam's pattern of art was based on the *Gīta Gōvind*. It caught the imagination of the people. Its fame spread all over Kēraḷa. Its success induced the neighbouring chief of Travancore—the Raja of Kottarakkara—to request the Zamorin for the loan of a troupe of performers on the eve of some festive occasion. It is said that due to internal feuds and political rivalry between the chieftains of the neighbouring States, the Zamorin, besides refusing to send the performers, insulted and humiliated the Raja of Kottarakkara with the remark : It is useless to depute the troupe, because your (Raja of Kottarakkara's) court would be neither able to appreciate nor understand anything of the highly artistic *Kriśnāttam* and the high standard of the performance.

Here the political rivalry between the two chieftains took a new turn. Now began the art rivalry.

Kathakali was conceived.

Kottarakkara Thampuram, for that was the name of the Raja, initiated a parallel mode of entertainment, which he called *Ramanattam*. It was this name which was later transformed into *Attakatha*, and yet later into *Kathakali*. While the Zamorin of Calicut, Manaveda's *Kriśnāttam* was a series of eight pieces based on the story of Lord Kriśna's activities, *Ramanattam* was also a series of eight pieces covering the complete story of Lord Rama-

chandra starting from the *putrakamesti* sacrifice (sacrifice for obtaining a son) of Dasaratha and ending with the fall of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. *Kriśanāttam* was written in Sanskrit, the "language of the gods"; *Ramanattam* was in Malayalam, the language of the people.

Ramanattam became more popular.

To bring his creation on the stage, the Raja of Kottarakkara enlisted the help of Malabar's dramatic talent, an actor—the Raja of North Kottayam and two Namboodri Brahmins. By the end of the seventeenth century, the finished product of the new experience was placed before the world under the title *Kathakali*.

Under the aegis of Kottarakkara Thampuram, the revolutionary revival of the ancient folk dance-drama of Kèraḷa in a new garb and an improvised form gave impetus to other folk traditions to play themselves up. This helped Kathakali's development on a sound basis. In acting, the principles of Bharata's *Natya Sastra* were freely implemented; in *mise en scène* and dress and deportment the conventions of the folk theatre were meticulously preserved.

Much earlier to the introduction of *Ramanattan*, two older forms of dramatic representations in vogue in Kèraḷa were the *Cakkyar Kuttu* and *Kutiyattam*. The history of their origins dates back to the period of the Perumals, the Imperial Suzerains of Kèraḷa. These dramatic forms still preserve the most of the ancient traditions of the classical drama. The costume of Kathakali has been much influenced by them. "The whole scheme of *abhinaya* (acting) and the use of *mudras* (hand poses) and gestures were bodily adopted in Kathakali from them in addition to its borrowing and refinement of facial make-up and costume. Kathakali became more attractive and popular than the *Cakkyar Kuttu* and *Kutiyattam*, in course of time, as unlike them, its performance was not restricted to the precincts of the temples."¹³

Dramatic traditions of Kèraḷa flourished under the royal patronage, and Prince's active participation in dance-dramas has entitled them to a permanent fame in the field of art and literature of Kathakali. The Raja of Kottarakkara was himself an accomplished actor, and a great dramatist. Once he took the

Zamorin of Calicut off his guard, so a legend goes. He was jealous of the growing popularity of *Ramanattam*. To satisfy his curiosity, he invited a troupe of *Ramanattam* actors for a performance in his court. The Raja of Kottarakkara conceded the request and the troupe was deputed to Calicut.

In the performance, the Raja, without the knowledge of the other participants, took an active part. The Zamorin was pleased with the artistic skill of this actor. He announced the award of a prize to him (the Raja). When he was about to offer it, he recognized the actor as none other than the 50-year old Raja of Kottarakkara. The Zamorin was struck with surprise.

Ramanattam, with all its defects and crudities, was acclaimed as a great art.

In course of time this art was purified of all impurities. In this task, the personal contribution of Kèraḷa rulers has been remarkable. Other men of genius also contributed their mite.

As in earlier dramatic forms, *Ramanattam* players also sang the *padas*. But for the vigorous Kathakali, demanding tremendous physical exertion, singing by the actors was exacting and tiring. A change in the practice was conceived by Prince Vettathu Thampuran, who introduced a few fundamental innovations. He provided separate singers, and introduced the *Cenda*, a percussion instrument, to announce a performance and give background sound effect. This drum's powerful and penetrating sound heightened the acting of supernatural characters appearing on the stage in hideous and fantastic make-ups. The religio-theatrical reforms brought *Ramanattam* performances outside the temples for the enjoyment of all sections of the community. Masks were replaced by make-up; *mudras* were accentuated; a variety of percussion instruments and characteristic costumes were introduced; singers and musicians formed an independent part of a show; and mime developed to a perfect art of mimicry.

Kathakali became a word-tone drama, a dumb show.

Legend has it that the Raja of North Kottayam, Kottayathu Thampuran, had a dream for the costume of each class of dramatic characters. The dream showed only the upper part of the actor's

body, and, therefore the skirts of all Kathakali characters are identical in form and cut.

Kottayathu Thampuram was, as the story goes, an idiot in his childhood. But, in later years, he emerged as the most talented actor and a great Kathakali composer of all time.¹⁴ He composed four great works, viz. *Kirmeeravadham*, *Bakavadham*, *Nivathakavacha Kalakeyavadham* and *Kalyanasaudandhikam*. These are hailed as fine specimen of the *Kathakalis* judged from the ease and the adaptability in reading, singing and acting them. Literally these compositions are of high quality. They are the first *Kathakalis* to blend the flavour of the finest poetry in *slokas*, *dandaakas* and *padas* and to exhibit the niceties of *sabdalankara* and *arthalankar* in equal proportions. As an actor-dancer, Kottayathu Thampuram had no equal. His superb execution of the role of *Urvashi* has left an imprint on the history of Kathakali acting.

Ramanattam, on its road to blossom into Kathakali, had a golden period between A.D. 1665 and 1743.

Remarkable contributions were also made by the King of Travancore, Kartika Thirunal¹⁵, to Kèraḷa's literature, art and dance. He wrote seven *Kathakalis*, viz., *Rajasooyam*, *Bakavaddam*, *Subhadraharanam*, *Gandharava Vijayam*, *Kalyanasaugandhikam*, *Narkasuravadham*, and *Pancaliswayamvaram*; and a treatise on dancing in Sanskrit, *Balarama Bharatam*. Numerous scholars and poets received his royal patronage and were in his court. Two of them, Puthiyikal Thampañ and Ittirarissa Menon wrote first class *Kathakalis* *Kartavirya Vijayam* and *Santanagopalam*, respectively.

Kartika Thirunal's efforts were also directed to popularising Kathakali among the people. He instituted a tradition of arranging Kathakali performances at various festivals and on the Navaratri night. For the last over 200 years people of Malabar have been enjoying this dance-drama on these occasions at no cost.

Works of rare merit are also credited to Prince Aswati Thirunal, nephew of Kartika Thirunal. Many in the art world had pinned their hopes on him on his succeeding the throne, but the Providence willed otherwise and cut him off in the prime of his

youth. He, however, lives in the *Kathakalis*. His Sanskrit *prabandhas*, *Vanci Maharaja Vijayam* and drama *Rugmini-parinayam* and another work *Sringara Sudhakaram* are immortal. He also wrote in beautiful Malayalam *Rugmini Swayamvaram*, *Ambarisha Caritam*, *Poothana Moksham* and *Poundraka Vadham*.

Virakerala Varma, the ruler of Cochin (984-1003 M.E.),¹⁶ wrote *Kathakalis* at the rate of one *Kathakali* a day. He also maintained a troupe of Kathakali actors. Fifty of his compositions have been collected so far. No composer ever produced so many *Kathakalis*.

No significant contribution was made by Swati Thirunal, who composed innumerable music pieces. But his younger brother Uthram Thirunal, the heir-presumptive, was grooming himself to play a historic role as a patron of Kathakali. During his reign, Kathakali had a Golden Era, like which was never before or after. He wrote *Simhadhwaja Caritam*. His court poets, Irayimman Thampi and Kilimonoor Koil Tampuram, wrote several *Kathakalis*. Thampi produced *Uttara Swayamvaram*, *Keecaavadham*, and *Daksha Yagam*; and Tampura, *Ravana Vijayam*.

Uthram Thirunal's encouragement to the phenomenal growth of Kathakali was in two directions, maintenance of a troupe under the able supervision of Vilayikot Namboodri, and employment of a good number of gifted artistes, like Nalan Unni, Damayanti Nanu Pillay, Bhiman Paramu Pillay, etc. New recruits were examined and approved by the King himself. They swelled the ranks of the troupe. Permanent court artistes were assigned permanent character roles, for they had achieved perfection in executing those roles.

Another landmark created in the history of *Kathakali* by Uthram Thirunal was making available to the public scripts of the *Kathakalis*. Under his royal patronage, the Kèraḷa Vilas Press, the first printing press in Malabar, brought out an edition of fifty-four *Kathakalis*. The lead given enthused other presses to bring out books on the *Kathakalis*. A large collections of the *Kathakalis* in book form are available now, and yet hundreds of *Kathakalis* remain to be printed.

In the long history of the origin and development of *Kathakali*, the contribution of the rulers of Kèraḷa is monumental. Their personal participation on individual basis, writing of the *Kathakalis*, maintenance of troupes in the palace and encouragement to artistes and composers—all these direct efforts helped in removing any stigma from the practice of this art and invested it with decency and dignity. They also added the desired lustre to the dance-drama to catch the attention of the common people.

To suit the modern concepts of life and to conform to the changed times, dynamic *Kathakali* is writing its history anew.

THE ART OF KATHAKAḢI

ALL forms of Indian dancing derive authority or the purity of their art-content from Bharata's *Nāṭya Śāstra*. But each of them is characteristically different from the other, both in content and form. *Bhārat Nritya* of north India and *Manipuri* of east, for example, belong to one family of the emotive dance (*nrtya*) and of the pure dance (*nritt*), and claim the *Śāstra* as their source, but are widely apart in technique. The former is more mundane than the latter; but both extol and portray the activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa; both have gestures which conform to no canon of *abhinaya*. *Bhārat Nritya's* *Natwari* dance is essentially erotic in approach; *Manipuri* is full of pathos; *Bhārat Nritya* has drive in it, *Manipuri* is passive; *Bhārat Nritya's* *Natwari* style conforms to *Tandava* variety, and its mutilated version of *Jaipuri Kathak* style to *lasya*, whereas *Manipuri* is *lasya*.

What is true of *Bhārat Nritya* and *Manipuri* is also true of *Kathakalī* and *Bharatanatyam*. And there is no similarity between either of these pairs of the four forms of dancing. But what makes *Kathakalī* a unique art is its ballet character. *Manipuri* is also preponderantly a group dance; but *Kathakalī* is a meaningful pantomimic dance-drama. It has, therefore, rich gestural code.

Kathakalī's preponderantly pantomimic nature has developed a highly stylised mimicry. It employs the four *abhinayas* with ease. *Abhinayas*, or modes of conveyance of theatrical pleasure to the spectator, are, according to Bharata, four, viz. *Sattvika*, expression of thoughts by the efforts of the mind (*Bhava* and *rasa*); *Angika*, conveyance of ideas by the movements of the various parts of the body (gestures); *Vacika*, spoken words, singing, shrieking, etc.; and *Aharya*, the dress, deportment and *mise en scène*.

Psychic conditions which accompany the incidents of a story, like perspiration, tears, trembling, horripilation, petrification and

such other emotional causes, are classified under *Sattvika Abhinaya*. Incidents of a story are told through musical dialogues and verses (i.e., *Vacika Abhinaya*). This vocal accompaniment is interpreted in acting by means of *mudras* (hand symbols) and gestures. This is known as *Angika Abhinaya*. All these three *Abhinayas* together with *Aharya Abhinaya* have a peculiar combination in Kathakali; and these make it an interpretative dance drama to the accompaniment of music.

The art of Kathakali is the art of acting and mimicry. It is a compound art. Its preponderative dramatic character is vividly reinforced by dance, music, poetry and painting. A meaningful Kathakali expression is, therefore, never without the expressive movements of the organs of the body (accompanied with facial expressions), and various other physical attitudes (combined with *mudras*)—all governed by the laws of rhythm.

In Kathakali, stress is laid on gestures to allow striking dramatisation of the incidents of a story. It first expresses itself into a dramatic art and then in the dance-art. It comprises a variegated movements of the body. There is nothing vaguely mystic or casual in its gesture-apparatus; the dance in it is visible as the art of movement is made rhythmic and logical. *Natya* and *nritya* are blended in one movement, although mime predominates. The use of colour, costume, and make-up, peculiar and suitable to Kathakali's singular requirements, present a unique show and create an unearthly atmosphere. The grace of facial expression leaves a deep impression on the spectators' mind. Symbolism and gesture express not simply the most subtle emotions of man, but also of the object, realisation of human personification, scenes, etc., around. In the present-day *nautch*, the dancer is concerned mainly with the froth and facile radiance of the surface; and it lacks in the expression of an idea and in depth and subtlety. Kathakali embodies the art of all these, because it does away with speech altogether.

In the development of the art of mimicry, symbols of the hand have played an important role. With their help a whole literary expression is reduced to elementary notions.

There are sixty-four basic hand poses which connote five hundred words, while the alphabet of the eyes express emotions. *Mudras*, as the hand poses are called in Sanskrit, are a passport to alluding a Kathakali story and, therefore, their code neatly completes the grammar of gestures. Their permutations can be employed to convey any number of meanings requiring any detailed explanation in the modern concept of story-telling. They are used both statically and in movement to convey some meaning or to weave a pattern of dance. They are a miniature dance in themselves. A perpetual motion of graceful arabesques is created by flowing and fluttering fingers and the movement of the wrist. They culminate in an emotional experience and paraphrase the complicated syntax of a Kathakali.

In the art of Kathakali, all emotional qualities, and psychic conditions acquire remarkable outward manifestation, and *mukha-bhinaya* (facial mime) is cunningly, sometimes lightly, employed: face remains the only index of the heart and the mind of the role-type. While the *Kathakalis* use elaborate similes and hyperboles, and fingers permute into *mudras* to represent words of comparison such as *like*, *as if* and *same as*, the eye-balls roll evanescently to tell the miracles. "The dark eye-brows utter the hidden secrets of the heart. Contending feelings speak with a brace of tongue in each eye and even the same eye delivers opposite moods at the same time. The face becomes the open drama in which the story is drawn in successive shades and touches of lineament. And then there is the dance."¹⁷ It has only a few sections of *nritt*, but a vast treasure of *abhinaya* of the hands, the face and the eyes.

According to the theme, a Kathakali song suggests the rise of a particular *bhava* and *rasa* (aesthetic delights), and the dance and mimicry are rendered most effectively in harmony with these aesthetic appeals. The powerful music heightens the moods of the actor and adds life to acting. He dances to the melodies of the song and executes the various passages with well-defined *padaghats* (footwork), attractive, graceful and harmonious movements and gyrations. The footwork, intricate at that, accompanies thumping movements and angular "walks." It provides

scope for the amplification of an emotion and the abridgment of the climax of a story. In the heroic sentiment, for instance, the powerful footwork trembles the earth below and cuts short the final action.

In the whole repertoire of mimicry, there is a conglomeration of different elements borrowed from the various indigenous dramatic sources, like *Cakkyar Kuttu* and *Kutiyattam*, after a thorough modification in them in accordance with the conditions under which they were preserved. In interpreting a common idea in a fascinating manner, a skilled Kathakali actor, therefore, presents "a cream of art" of the blended compound complexities of creative energy, of literature, language, poetry, drama, dance and music, aesthetics and vital and harmonious movements, full of suggestive mime, symbolism, melody, colour, grace and magnificent intricacies and subtleties of dramatic expression and architectural and pictorial beauties. Kathakali rises as a dynamic and passionate art-play that casts a trance on the audience and holds it in its grip for hours together.

As Kathakali is a story-play, interpreting a *drśya kavya*, its various contrasting characters are presented. There are good and bad characters, demons and gods, worldly and unworldly role-types. Kathakali's religiosity is a forerunner to the glorification of the virtuous and the gods. This religious fervour had a social purpose. On the art-plane, it circumscribed any temptation to develop complex characterisations and minimized the depiction of "inner conflicts" in the human being. Kathakali developed as a positive art relating the activities of divine and semi-divine beings. There is no individual characterisation : all characters are grouped under role-types according to their castes, quality and nature. Each group is distinguished from the other by specific make-ups.

In India, the term "dancing" does not fully connote the classical sense when it is applied to the four forms of "classical" dances prevalent : Kathakali is more than dancing; it is a dance-drama, appropriately called in Sanskrit *nataka*. The basic attributes of *nataka* are offering of salutation of invocation to the God

of the stage, use of physical gestures, gaits, exposition of emotions, employment of minor limbs and hand-poses, arrangement of drums, recitation of poetry, mode of speech and intonation, flowering out of a play, costuming and make-up. When a drama is a pantomime, dialogues are not spoken but danced or interpreted through gestures. Kathakali is the art not of *nritya* (interpretative dancing), which expounds a story by propounding different emotional situations and their ultimates the *Rasas* (sentiments)—, for the story is told by gestures of the hand and the climax for different characters is heightened by shrieks or facial mimes, leave alone the “pure” dance interludes, called *Kalasa*s. Like the Persian and Moghul miniatures, which carry insets called *Hasiya*, *Kalasa*s serve as windows to Kathakali pieces. As the story moves, so are the gestures displayed. The movements are lyrical but the poses relapse the actor into stationary positions which are like punctuations in prose. This subtle difference from the rest of the dance-forms is to be recognised in a study of the Kathakali dance-drama. It is the actor’s whole body that vibrates to the rhythm of the drum for the exposition of *nritya*; it is the interpretation of a study by facial mimicry that delineates moods to express thoughts and to heighten dramatic effects—enriched, of course, by the lyrical song and music. Virtually, this overall picture of Kathakali makes it a “rhythmic drama”, rich in design and colourful in appeal.

Kathakalis

The *Kathakalis* combine the excellence of both the literary and the dramatic flows. Themes are woven round tragedies and comedies. The dialogues are in songs and the intermediary incidents of the stories in verses. These dialogues are in Malayalam; the incidents in Sanskrit and Malayalam. Verses introduce the actors to a scene and end with the words : “And so they spoke.”

Thematically, the *Kathakalis* are dominated by violent and angry scenes in *vir* and *raudra rasas*; love (*sringara*) is perched somewhere within them. An actor’s weird make-up, unwieldy

costume and virile gestures may seem inconsistent to love or gentleness, but in tender situations, "a sensitive atmosphere of affection" gives a contrasting life to a Kathakali play and relieves the audience of sustained vigour tending to boredom.

Be as it may, a Kathakali performance is fragmentary in nature, weaved in a pattern of several sectional scenes. From a literary drama it differs in two respects : In a written drama the characters are not introduced in the beginning and there may or may not be a moral or religious conclusion; in a Kathakali dance-drama, these two elements lay its foundation.

Kathakali literature affords a wide scope for the development of music and contemporary arts. Dancing to the tune of the singer and the rhythm of the drummer, and using a stylised gestural language, an actor executes well-defined foot-strokes attractive and harmonious movements and gyrations. The whole organic organization of rhythm renders aesthetic delights to a dance piece, the mimicry transcribes words into a code of artistic pantomime. The transmutation of both emotion and motion into the narration of the play increases the rhythmic vitality, sweet cadence and the beauty of the art; and, with these flow the eternal joy of the audience. The swift movement of the limbs is acrobatic, but it adds to the dramatisation of a play. The religious sanctity behind this dance-drama, preponderance of mimicry, absence of the personal factor of the actors, unique craftsmanship in *aharya abhinaya*, vivid understanding of the application of aesthetic delights and mastery of the laws of rhythm—are some of the significant factors lying at the root of the most exciting dance-drama of Asia, Kathakali.

As a picturesque art, Kathakali has won full admiration and wide attention of all art connoisseurs who are greatly impressed by its originality and systematised plastic movements bringing to life the ancient arts of painting and sculpture. It has made as distinctive a local variant as the *Wayang-Organ* of Java and Bali has done to the parent art of *Bharatanatyam*. It also exerts a marvellous cultural influence on the western dramatic art to which it has contributed the most essential principles of dramatisation music, acting, language and dance, so as to make each subject an

integral part of the whole. A remarkable change was introduced by Adolph Appia while staging the famous operas of Wagner by developing his own *Theory of the Word-tone Drama*. He introduced simple rhythm of music in acting and dancing. It has reached a state of perfection and achieved graceful acting of the Kathakali's type. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Appia wrote with great admiration of the art of Kathakali that the people of the West Coast of India delighted in spending nights in aesthetic enjoyment of a Kathakali performance.

THE TECHNIQUE OF KATHAKALI

ALTHOUGH the enthusiasm of the people in socio-religious activities is fast on the decline, on almost any night during the dry season, especially on the full moon nights, the silence of a Malabar village will be disturbed by high sounding and piercing bursts of drums. The waves of sound across the ether broadcast the news that a play would be staged. It may be religious, semi-religious or secular.

Kathakali performances are not confined to a temple's courtyard; they are held in the open under the sky. Before a performance begins, *Cendakaran*, the instrumental musician, beats the drum to announce the news that a dance-drama will be held shortly. This "nervous and insistent tattoo" is called *Kelikottu*. It makes every one ready to witness the performance. The village-folk—men, women and children—begin to assemble.¹⁸ They are drawn from as wide an area as the sputtering bursts of drums and advance news-broadcasters cover. The eager audience crouches on the land in a circle around *Cendakaran*. The night's "standium" has the covering of a clear, star-studded sky; cool breeze rustling through the jagged patterns of palm fronds; children wandering back and forth aimlessly or running to a hawker or pestering their mothers or aping a character of a previous play; people discussing a role-type, an actor, a character, a story or a matter of current or religious interest. And those among the audience who are tired from the day's hard work on their fields go back and sleep until they are awakened by a relative or a friend or by the noise from the stage, to witness the favourite hero play or a climatic battle scene.

A near-the-climax atmosphere thus surcharged with extra-activities and expectancy is shaken by drumming "to please the

atmosphere and the deities." It is done free at the temple of the village deity. For this *Sevakali* (literally, service play) serves three main purposes, viz. first, pleasing the gods; second, creating silence in the audience; and, third, "making *reclame* for the actors by giving a foretaste of their wonderful work of art." In its indigenous form, Kathakali has no stage in the modern sense. The centre of the "stadium" is the stage provided with a huge brightly polished brass lamp of coconut oil. It has several crevasses in which run the wicks. It stands three to three-and-a-half feet above the ground. The wicks burn in a number of flames, but cast a shadow below. The upper half of the actors, however, draws enough light to be visible to the members of the audience sitting at the farthest corner of the "stadium." The audience sits in darkness.

There are no back-curtains, no stills, no sceneries. But behind the lamp, there is a simply designed *Therissila*, a rectangular silk curtain, held by two members of the troupe. Actors who have to appear first stand hidden behind it. During scenes the curtain is dropped to the ground and removed by the two men. The job over, these men go about on other errands of the stage, like pouring oil in the lamp-well, adjusting the thick wicks which constantly threaten to gutter and burn out, arranging the banana tree trunk support against the wicks gliding down in the well, and assisting the actors on odd jobs. The stage is also provided with a small stool. This is used for many purposes. In the "curtain-look," for instance, the actor stands on it; on other occasions an actor may rest on it.

Musicians stand in a half circle behind the actors. They number four to twelve. The orchestra is normally composed of a pair of heavy cymbals, a gong, a drum called *Maddalam* (which is a counterpart of the *Mridanga* used in *Bharatanatyam*) and the *Cendal* played with sticks; and, in addition, a couple of singers. An elaborate orchestra consists of four drums, flutes, a time-beater, a pair of cymbals, a gong and singers. Musicians do not wear any special costume. They are normally bare-chested in a village show or with a *kurta* on the modern stage. The actors are pro-

fusely dressed mostly in billowing skirts, crowned with massive head-dresses and provided with the accessories of the face and finger nails. The "actresses" are adolescent boys, for they are nearest to femininity and have simple dress. On the modern stage, of course, many dancing troupes have women to enact female roles. The whole atmosphere is thus set for the dance-drama to start.

In the repertoire of its technique, Kathakali has seven items to be presented in the following sequence:

- (1) *Todayam*—the basic *nritt*;
- (2) *Purappadu*—debut of the hero and the virtuous character;
- (3) *Tiranokku*—"curtain-look" by evil characters and demons;
- (4) *Kummi*—preamble for the female character's appearance;
- (5) *Kathakali*—the main play;
- (6) *Kalasam*—a passage of vigorous dance which serves as a hyphen between two pieces of verse-play; and
- (7) The concluding benediction dance

KATHAKALI DANCE-DRAMA BEGINS

The night has fallen. It is nine or ten. The call of the drums has rent the air. The audience is alerted. Critics wake up for a critical scrutiny of the actors' skill.

Therissila is drawn by two men. Music begins. Drummers display their cleverness. Religious songs are sung. They purify the atmosphere. And dancers covert behind the curtain.

They are young students, sometimes children of the actors. The preliminary dance behind the curtain is commonly referred to as *Purva-ranga* by Bharata in the *Natya Sastra*; in the language of Kathakali it is called *Todayam*. And, when the actors are seen on the stage, *Todayam Puraffaln* (which resembles to the performances termed *Nandi* by Bharata), is performed.

Todayam is a devotional piece of dance and an integral part of the sacredness of the Kèraḷa stage. The young artistes don no costume. A simple white *mundu*, the loin cloth, is tied round their waist.

As in *Alarippu* of *Bharatanātyam*, the basic technique of Kathakali lies in *Todayam*.¹⁹ It contains the genesis of every difficult passage of pure *nritt* sequences in Kathakali, with no element of *abhinaya* or meaningful *mudras*.

This graceful and energetic dance over, the singers are heard chanting the *Manjutara*, a selection of some verses from Jayadeva's *Gita Govind*.

Drumming continues. Music is powerful. Wicks are bright and the royal ensign glitters. The whole climate enralls the audience who will assuredly witness the play with rapturous delight !

All await the appearance of the hero.

Purappadu or the debut, signifies the first appearance of a character on the stage. It is a piece of a preliminary dance. It serves to announce the virtuous qualities of the hero; the audience is assured of the ultimate triumph of good over bad.

In this presentation dance, actors stand sideways with their knees bent. The technique of presentation is all the more intricate if the debut is of a hero or a heroine.

The three preliminaries before the commencement of a Kathakali drama—*Maddalam*, *Todayam* and *Purappadu*—have a tradition, which has lost its significance for reasons not peculiar to Kèraḷa alone but common to all dance-forms of India, namely, political and socio-religious. These preliminaries have been borrowed from the Sanskrit-cum-Prakrit stage—the authority for which might have been drawn from the *Natya Sastra*. A play was originally enacted before an audience as a socio-religious necessity and, therefore, the invitation was free, by beating the drums rhythmically. The practice continues, though in a modified form, and the "invitation" is to the audience and the characters alike. It was the usual belief of the ancient dramatist that drumming pleased the Lord of the stage, Śiva, who sent two of his emissaries to perform a divine dance and bless the assembly. The drama began with a *geyapad* (singable verse in Sanskrit), portraying the creative, amorous activities of the deities. They produced music and rhythm—and completed the story.

With their uncanny make-up, other actors stand waiting for their entry. They recreate an unearthly world of demons and gods, cowards and heroes, monkeys and human beings.

And amongst these if a demon is to appear violent drumming of high pitch drums is incessant. The curtain is drawn as high as the arms of the attendants can stretch. The whole atmosphere is surcharged with earth-shaking and hair-raising activities. The sound of quick and heavy foot-steps can be heard from behind the curtain. Its synchronization with the sound effect of the drums heightens the climax. The entire climate forebodes that a terrific personality is about to appear. Suddenly a coloured canopy appears, as if from nowhere, over the curtain and a rumbling growling noise is heard. Drums burst into shattering sounds. Here is a shriek; and there a groan! But before the eyes can catch the character, fingers are seen rising in the centre of the curtain. The left hand fingers are covered with long thimbles. The two hands are kept about three feet apart. They clutch the curtain. Fingers glide across its top.

There is deafening drumming; but no singing.

To the accompaniment of the drums, the anti-hero shakes the curtain violently, and breathless the audience catches an occasional glimpse of the top of a glittering head-dress, which seems to be gyrating madly in some infernal whirlwind. He pulls the curtain towards him; then plugs forward and fans flames. With gusto, the fire illuminates the character's face and enables the audience to spot him out by his weird make-up.

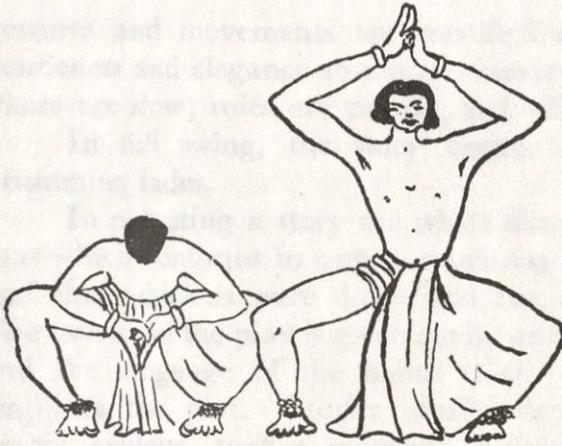
The feverish pitch of excitement over, the curtain is dropped and the whole figure of the character emerges after a great deal of suspense. The curtain is pulled off the stage from its right wing.

Gesticulation begins. Muscles tremble. The actor takes a few paces back and forth; looks at some object or remembers some thing or is struck with some idea.

Thus develops *Tiranokku* or "curtain-look".

For male anti-heroes *Tiranokku* is prescribed and for female characters there is another standard dance—called *Kummi*. In it,

KALASAMS



gestures and movements are modified and smoothened to lend gentleness and elegance so much necessary for feminine characters. Paces are slow; roles are passive, and subsidiary.

In full swing, the story begins to unfold itself. Violent drumming fades.

In narrating a story the whole dance is divided into parts : that which conforms to *nartana* employing the accessories of drama, and that which is pure dance and has all the subtleties of *nritya*. The essence of the play is given out by *mukhabhinyā* and gesticulation and the language of the hands relate the story, while *abhinaya* amplifies the plot. Stories usually depict love scenes, battles, heroic exploits, tender moments, religious activity—in fact, all scenes of life that occur from birth to death. For dramatic realism, a few actual accessories, such as red liquid for blood, are used. Such situations as death, birth, fondling of child, playing of instruments and drinking are enacted with stark realism. In these, the tenets of the *Sastra* are violated and the narration is turned into a graphically mimetic art.

Kalasams are pure dance passages performed in pure *tandava* style. They punctuate two verses, two scenes. It is here that in Kathakali an important role of *nritya* is discovered.

Now, the play concludes. An actor dressed as a god appears. He preserves the religiosity of the Kèraḷa stage. Maybe, he is an integral part of the play or is especially imported character. The objective of this traditional practice is to shower blessings on all those who participate in the play and those who witness it. It keeps alive a spirit of godliness in Kèraḷa.

From the sequence detailed, Kathakali's basic characteristic of a dance-cum-drama is unfolded. How the various limbs of *sangita* have been synthesised to bring about an underlying unity of all Indian dramatic arts in Kathakali is unique. It is the only form of the histrionic arts in India, which adumbrates, in principle, the three essentials of the Sanskrit drama, *natya*, *nritya* and *nritya*.

DISCIPLINE FOR THE PUPIL

INDIAN dancing is essentially moulding of the human body in successive patterns of rhythmic and emotionally beautiful swings. These patterns are beyond the functions of a normal body. Special discipline for the body is needed to enable it to respond to unusual forms weaved in the course of dancing. An intensive dance training is called for to make the body flexible and supple.

To achieve fluidity, a Kathakali pupil undergoes extensive and vigorous training from an early age. A complete alteration in the behaviour of the body is effected. Massages and oilbaths are an essential aid to awaken muscles, joints and nerves and to control their behaviour. Each part of the body is reconditioned to call it into play at a slight actions of the actor. For a free play of emotions each *upanga* and *pratyanga* minor and accessory limb is treated separately; each finger, for instance, has an independent movement, and no two fingers move in sympathy with each other.

Thus remodelled, the human body is adept to cast itself into the actions of gods and demons.

Between the age of 11 and 14 years the pupil goes to an *Asan*, the teacher of a *Kalari* (a kind of gymnasium) and offers to him *danam* (a present) either in cash or in kind—clothes; and with his *guru-diksha* (benediction) he enrolls himself for training. The pupil receives a *kutchā* (a piece of rough cloth, 3 yards long and 6 inches broad) from the teacher, and ties it round his waist. Afterwards, oil sesamum is lightly rubbed over his body, and then he is taught to stretch, move, and wave his hands and legs so that nimbleness and agility may be obtained in movements. When the pupil begins to perspire through this exercise, he lies flat on the floor with face upward, and later turns to the ground, knees resting on a soft matting of straw and plantain fibre. The preceptor, supporting

himself by means of a rope above, “shampoos” the pupil with his leg massaging, or, rather with his big toes going dexterously and elaborately all over the joints and muscles for more than half-an-hour. This massaging brings flexibility and relaxation in the muscles and joints of the body. In the noon, he is trained in dexterous and rhythmic movements of the body and legs.

For a pupil, the most painful part of the training is body massaging. But if he has to learn Kathakali he is to submit to it humbly, because of all the various types of massage the most important is the one which is designed to call the body into the basic Kathakali pose. It is as follows :

- (i) hold the chin tight against the throat, face in the normal front position;
- (ii) stretch arms to the full, straight and parallel to the ground;
- (iii) hold the wrists at right angles between the hands and arms;
- (iv) as against the apparent stiffness of the body, hold the hands rather limply and with relaxation;
- (v) push the buttocks back forming a concave curve by the spine, keeping the knees widely spread apart;
- (vi) split the legs, knees widely spread out;
- (vii) curl the toes of the feet, tilting the inside of the soles upward; and
- (viii) hold the entire posture thus on the sides of the feet forming a 15-degree angle from the soles to the ground.

To mould the limbs into this stance, the pupil is required to place his knees in two circles drawn three feet apart on the ground. He lies flat by the belly, holding the soles of his feet together. The hands are held in the same but inverted position. The masseur begins his job by massaging the joints of the feet by his big toes. The process is repeated several times daily until the legs are flattened and the knees outstretched on a level with the buttocks.

Following the massage is the split leg training. It resembles acrobatics, but in reality it is an essential feature of any dumb-drama, wherein jumps of a certain class of animals are to be presented. The Kathakali actor in the role of a monkey, for instance, has to make jumps in the air, with split feet quick leaps are taken in the air and on descent on the ground the legs are held spread out, the instep being in *sampad*. To balance the body, hands have quick motions to perform.

In the curriculum of training the third course consists in the discipline of the movements of eyes, eye-brows, eye-balls, cheek, neck, lips and such other accessories of the body employed for the expression of different emotions. The training is arduous. The pupil opens his eyes nearly double the normal size; rolls the eye-balls to and fro and sideways, sometimes rolling the iris back completely through the upper or the lower lid, the eyes remaining wide open so that the whites of the balls are visible; trembles the eyelids with half open eyes as in rage or the flight of a bee; and moves the eyes slowly across the eye-corners, up and down and in a circle. The strenuous practice makes the actor's eyes obedient to his mind.

Disciplining of the body over, the pupil is set to "see" and to "show" the letters and the spirit of a story. The pupil sits facing a blank wall, while the teacher sitting beside him improvises the story. With his eyes, the pupil portrays the words that the teacher speaks. Thus the narrative passage is first practised by alluding its contents by the eyes, and later with gestures and movements.

In the final stage of training, the pupil is taught the formation of *mudras* and their use. Movements in keeping with *tala* are also taught. Both hands and feet follow the rhythm of the drum. It takes the whole childhood of a pupil to learn these courses of training.

When a pupil proves his skill in gestures, he is presented in a Kathakali performance.

Proficiency is achieved in course of years after strenuous practice and rehearsals known as *Colliattam*, i.e. acting with the

accompaniment of song and rhythm. The minimum period of practice for a Kathakali actor is six years; and every year during the rainy season (June to August) he has to undergo an elaborate massaging in a *Kalari*. The whole process is repeated over again.

It is only when an actor achieves a free and dexterous movement of the various limbs of the body and a mastery over the formation, combination and permutation of fingers into single and double hand poses that he is called upon to play a Kathakali role.

An actor is considered to be skilful if his acting is elaborate—an acting which demands long experience, vivid imagination and complete mastery over presentation.

Components of the limbs of the body gestural,
rhythmically to produce some aesthetic effect.
Not that all components visible or act set into
motion to create an appeal. But eyes, fingers
and feet—these three categories of limbs—
major, medium and minor—individually and
collectively co-operate in *Bhava* (deline-
ation of mood).



Dances of India

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Make-up and Costume

As the characters in Kathakali are divine and superhuman, they are depicted in a larger than life manner, with extraordinary make-up and costumes. Marked by intricate stylisation, it is only appropriate that the character type should appear on stage neither as human nor as one imitating the actions of humans, but rather as representing certain moods or characteristics of a particular aspect of life in its abstraction. Kathakali tradition has evolved a highly complex and symbolic system of both costuming and make-up for this. The Natya Shastra refers to facial make-up several times and an entire chapter is devoted to aharyabhinaya, where it considers the symbolism of colour in costumes and make-up.



After all, the radical transformation of the human face and figure using facial make-up and costume, intended to transport one into the distant realm of the imaginary, is not imitative of any living or non-living being. The characters are conceptual creations to which a rupa or form is imparted.

The costume is intended to transform the well trained and lithe body, into a circular and hemispherical shape. The crown is thus circular, and the skirt predominantly hemispherical. The bulk of the skirt and the rolled-up cloth hangings on the chest tend to exaggerate even the slightest tilts of the performer's feet, so that when the body is inclined to one side, the cloth hangings go far beyond the tilt. The silver nails on the fingers elongate the fingers and accentuate their movements.

Colours are associated with moods and sentiments: Green represents sringara or love, red raudra or anger, yellow adbhuta or wonderment. Kathakali follows these basic colour patterns and has developed an intricate system of make-up. Its use is not merely to cover or beautify the face but rather to transform the actor into a demon or a god.



Once the make-up is applied, the actor is no longer himself, but has already transformed into the character he is playing. He is no longer to be addressed by his name once the make-up is applied. An attempt is made to enlarge the actors' body proportions by using heavily plaited, bellowing skirts. But beneath the awe-inspiring make-up, huge headgear and spectacular costumes is a pliable, lithe, slim and well-trained body.

The artiste who guides this make-up is an important person both at the training stage and also at the performing stage. Chottikkaran as he is known, is a revered teacher who as been through an excruciating training in the art - from drawing designs on a pot and a coconut shell to mastering the complexities of preparing his own colours by grinding, soaking and mixing them to desired consistency.

The characters are divided into three categories according to their qualities of satwika (pious and virtuous), rajasa (royal, heroic, but aggressive) and tamasik (rude and brutal). For convenience, these are further sub-divided into the following six groups:



Paccha (Green make-up): Noble and pious characters fall under this group. There are four given paccha characters.

Halo-like round headgear (kireedam): This has a yellow mark on the forehead. Eyes and eyebrows are widened and elongated with black and the rest of the face is painted green. There is an extended white border on either side of the cheek, beginning from the upper side of the cheek and ending at the chin. The lips are coloured pinkish red. The effect is that of a mask. The characters in this category are Nala, Indra, Rugmangada, the Pandavas.

Conical shaped headgear (mudi): Similar to the paccha make-up, the headgear is conical, with peacock feathers on the top. The skirt is golden yellow and the jacket dark blue. Lord Rama and Krishna and their sons are dressed in this manner. The other good heroes wear a more elaborate low, conical crown with a small disc.

Pinkish yellow (pazhupu): The only change is that the face is painted light pink and yellow, instead of green. Otherwise the make-up and costumes are the same as paccha. Lord Shiva, Balarama, Lord





Ayyappa and the Sun-god are part of this group.

Kathi (knife)

Valorous, aggressive and romantic, evil characters form part of the kathi make-up. On either cheek and forehead of these characters are knife-like red patches, edged with a white border. On the tip of the nose and the middle of the forehead are fixed white knobs, chutti poove. The rest of the make-up and costumes are like that of paccha characters. There are two types of kathi.

Kurum kathi: Here the knife shape is curved and graceful. Ravana, Duryodhana, Keechaka, etc. under this group.

Nedum kathi: The knife's shape is long and straight. Akamba, Ghatotkkacha, Kumbhakarna, etc. are part of this group.

Thadi (beard)

There are three types of thadi characters:

Chuvanna tadi (red beard): Evil and crude characters sport red beards with faces too painted red with black streaks. The black is



applied on either side of the forehead, eyebrows and outlines the eyes. The streaks are divided into two lines of 4 to 5 inches length with contoured paper pasted on both cheeks. The lips are also coloured black. The red bearded characters wear a headgear similar to those of noble characters, but the crown is higher and the disc larger. The headgear of villains and demons assume huge proportions and a distinctive headgear is designed for them. The red fur coat and large headgear bestow a rather fierce look. Demon Baka, Kalakeya, Dussasana, and the monkey kings Bali and Sugreeva—are red-bearded characters with slight variations.

Karutha tadi (black beard): The entire face is painted black, with a few red streaks on the cheeks and forehead. The red streaks are demarcated by white raised outlines or chutti. The lips are widened in pinkish red, encircled by yellow or green lines. On the tip of the nose is affixed a white paper-flower. The black beard is attached to the lower part of the face to widen its size. The costumes are black. The headgear is cylindrical, but curved inward and decorated with silver and peacock feathers. All the primitive characters, such as forest dwellers and hunters, etc. belong to this group.



Vella tadi (white beard): The face is painted red with streaks of black encircled by white curved lines of rice paste. White beard, white fur coat and a broad, hat-like headgear with a dome bestow serenity on the countenance. The monkey-god Hanuman, Dwivida and Nandikeshwara are part of this group.

Kari (black)

The face is painted black, with the eyes and eyebrows in yellow. On the forehead are three yellow horizontal lines, demarcated by red. The nose and chin are highlighted by red spots. The cheeks are marked with red and outlined with white border.

The costumes and headgear are the same as for Karutha tadi (black beard) but without a beard. Large-sized, swinging ear ornaments and large protruding breasts bestow a grotesque look. Ogresses like Nakrathundi, Surpanakha, and Simhika are in this category.

The characters in kathi — chuvanna tadi, vella tadi and kari—all have artificial canine teeth, which are capable of being pushed in and out to exhibit ferocity.



Minukku (polished)

The face is gently polished and smoothened in light pinkish-yellow sheen. The eyes and eyebrows are elongated in black, and the lips coloured red. This is the normal minuku make-up. All female characters except female demons, form part of this group. Rishis, saints, brahmins, messengers, wrestlers, charioteers, servants, etc. also come under this category. However, there are slight variations in the costumes. Wrestlers, charioteers and messengers sport a moustache and wear a turban. Rishis have a long beard with a small headgear resembling matted hair, secured on the top of the head. A breast-plate, veil, jacket and white saree in bright borders, are the normal costumes for a female character. Ear ornaments, different garlands, bangles, shoulder plates, waist ornaments and ankle-bells are the decorative items worn by these characters.

Theppu (painted)

Theppu characters are painted in different colours. Birds, snakes, animals and a few special characters are included in the group. Birds have artificial wings and beaks. The costumes are in colours suited to the particular character. For example, Jatayu (the heroic bird of



Ramayana) is clothed in a costume of peacock colour, Garuda (the carrier-bird of Lord Vishnu) is in light pink; and the swan of Nalacharitam, golden yellow. The make-up of Narasimha (the fourth incarnation of Lord Vishnu), who is half-lion and half-man, has a special make-up which is meant to evoke the ferocity and the look of a lion. The make-up of Sudarshana (the divine weapon of Lord Vishnu) and the clownish character called Bheeru too come in different types of theppu.

Sequence and method of make-up

A simple, unfurnished room of 20 feet by 16 feet is enough for a Kathakali greenroom. Even a temporary arrangement like a tent can also be used as a greenroom. On one side of the greenroom, starched clothes, ready to wear, are kept in piles and on the other, all ornaments and headgear are hung on a rope or beam. In one corner of the greenroom a lamp is lit to collect smoke carbon on pieces of tiles. In the centre of the room, palm-leaf mats are spread for the artistes to do make-up. In between the mats, three or four bronze oil lamps are lit.



Late in the evening, young artistes prepare the make-up materials under the guidance of seniors. First, the hard minerals are ground into powder. By adding coconut oil, these powders are made into a thin paste. Even though there is a fixed ratio for preparing these pastes, it needs proper understanding to make colour combinations with primary colours. Chayillyam (red pigment), manayola (yellow pigment), chenchelliam (dried glue from a particular tree), indigo and condensed smoke black collected by burning gingili oil are the ingredients for the make-up. Kathakali has a very scientific colour mixing method. The bloodish redness of chayillyam is diluted with rice and lime powder. Manayola mixed with indigo gives green. A mixture of manayola and chayillyam gives a yellowish pink colour.

The actor prays to the lit lamp, which represents the deity. Looking into a hand-held mirror, he outlines his face with various colours as per the character he has to play. Then he lies down on the mat facing the specially trained chutty or make-up artiste. The chutty artiste then uses the prepared rice and quick-lime paste as a base to fix the contoured paper according to the different characters. The actor himself gives the final finishing touches.





There is a traditional method to make the eyes red. The small dried ovule of a special plant, chunda, is inserted under the lower eyelid to make the eyes sparkling red. The make-up takes at least two to four hours to complete, depending upon the character. The work of the chutty artiste magically transforms the face of the actor into different characters. Another 45 minutes are taken to adorn the artiste with costumes and ornaments. The actor proceeds to the stage after a short prayer and on seeking the permission of the make-up artiste, who is supposed to have the position and status of Lord Brahma (the god of creation) in the premises of the greenroom.



Music

The music system of Kathakali has originated from the various forms of music prevailing in the 17th century and is influenced by the ritual music of Thotampattu, Kalamezhuthumpattu, Sopana sangeetam, Shastramnga, Kudiyattam, Krishnattam and, of course, classical music systems. Kathakali vocal music is a slightly varied rendition of the south Indian Carnatic music. There is a tradition in most temples in Kerala to sing in praise of the deity while rituals are being performed in the sanctum sanctorum. To keep the sanctity and peace of the temple, the rendition is in soft, slow tempo. This purely devotional style is called Sopana sangeetam. With added emotional variations, this has been adapted for Krishnanattam through to Ramanattam and then to Kathakali with sufficient modifications.



Even though it follows the grammar of Carnatic music, it varies in its rendition. To complete one raga in Carnatic style, it must go through the different levels of notes and must express various emotions (bhava). In Kathakali, the raga must limit itself to suit the emotions that are appropriate to the characters and situations. Consequently, the same raga differs from one scene to the other. The intention is to evoke and enhance suitable emotions in the actor before ultimately reaching the audience.

Most of the popular Carnatic music ragas are commonly used in Kathakali music. And thanks to this, some of the ancient ragas, which have become rare on the Carnatic music platform, have been preserved. Some of the techniques of north Indian Hindustani music have also been adopted, for example, the technique of raga alapana—elaborate singing of a musical note without text. In both Hindustani music and Kathakali, it is sung to the rhythm of the percussion instruments, but in Carnatic music, the same is done without the rhythmic beats. The rendition techniques also have some similarity to both styles. These styles give stress to creating emotions rather than sticking to the grammar. The powerful Kathakali orchestra



includes three different drums, chenda, maddalam and edakka, two metal instruments called chengila and elathalam, and a wind instrument, the conch. All these instruments are adapted from the temple orchestra ensembles.

Chenda: Chenda is a vertical wooden drum with cow-skin stretched over it and tightened with jute strings. Hung from the shoulder, it is played with two sticks. One of its sides has a loud and hard sound, used for dramatic effects and the other resonates with a soft sound and is played for the Divine on auspicious occasions. Due to its powerful sound effects, chenda is called an asura vadyam (demonic instrument). But it can also render the sound of thunder, the murmur of water, breeze, terrifying sounds of storm, the roar of the ocean, galloping horses, a fast chariot, flying of planes, snoring of a human being. Other dance disciplines too have started using the chenda because of the range of sound effects it can create.

Maddalam: Maddalam is a heavier drum covered with buffalo skin. Hung from the waist horizontally, it is played with both hands. Cloth hardened with the paste of cooked rice is wrapped around the



fingers of the right hand to produce a heightened sound. The sound of the maddalam varies on both sides. This helps generate different sound effects. For example, it can be used to make the sound of humming bees, singing cuckoos, churning buttermilk, etc.

Edakka: Edakka is a small wooden drum played on one side with a stick to produce musical notes. In Kathakali, edakka is played for female characters only. It can create different variations of the sweet and the subtle to support vocal music. Both sides of the drum are covered with the softer inner skin of cows and tightened with cotton strings. Two very thin vibrating strings are tightened on the rim of the instrument, just inside the skin, and are manipulated to elicit finer musical notes.

Chengila: Chengila is akin to a gong. Made of bell metal, it is played with a stick by the main vocalist. He directs the musicians by giving proper rhythmic (talam) base with this instrument.

Elathalam: Made of bell metal, elathalam is a type of cymbal played by the second vocalist, and has a powerful bell-like sound.



Conch: The conch is played while lighting the lamp on the stage to start the Kathakali performance and on presenting divine characters, etc.

Talam rhythmic patterns

Kathakali follows almost the same tala system of Carnatic music. But it slightly differs in name and usage. There are the following rhythmic cycles in Kathakali:

1. Chempata - With eight mastras
2. Chempa - With 10 mastras
3. Atantha - With 14 mastras
4. Panchari - With six mastras
5. Triputta - With seven mastras
6. Muriyatantha - With five and six mastras
7. Eka - With four mastras

These tala cycles are used in various speeds, according to the character, situation and mood. For example, chempata can be used in 32 mastras (8 x 4) in a romantic situation, 16 in a heroic mood and eight for ferocious mood. The same method is used for atantha and chempa as well, but for panchari and triputa, there are only two



speeds, i.e. second and third speed and for muriyatantha only the fast tempo is used. Eka tala is used for Ilakiyattam, and the enactment is without vocal support.

Different kalasams or units of dance patterns are composed in these rhythms.

An example in rhythm chempata would read like this:

THEI	YAM	DA	THA	THI	—	THI	—
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
X	x	x	x	X	x	X	z
dhi	tha	tha	tha	dhi	tha	tha	tha
dhi	tha	tha	tha	dhi	tha	tha	tha
l	thi	l	tha	l	thi	thi	tha
l	thi	l	tha	l	thi	thi	tha
l	thi	l	tha	l	thi	thi	tha
l	thi	l	tha	l	thi	thi	tha
dhi	tha	tha	tha	thi	tha	tha	-
dhi	thi	l	tha	dhi	tha	dhi	
ki	tha						
thi							



Bhava Abhinaya (expression of emotions)

Expression of emotions play a predominant role in Kathakali. In Indian theatre like Natya Shastra or Dasaroopaka, the aim of the art-form is to create rasanubhooti (the experience of the aesthetic) in the audience. Kudiyattam as well as Kathakali give special attention in this aspect. The acting is of two kinds.

Lok Dharmi (without stylisation) is in realistic mode. This style is followed by cinema and stage-dramas other than the classical.

Natya Dharmi (stylised): Rasabhinaya or the subtle expressions of the various emotions in a stylised manner is the most important part of the abhinaya or enactment in any performing art.

The highly stylised format of Kathakali follows the natya dharmai (the dramatic stylisation) in its make-up, costumes, dancing and music, right down to the expression of emotions.

According to the Natya Shastra, there are eight static prevailing emotions or sthayee bhava, which in combination with vibhava



(cause), anubhava (reflective activities) and sancharibhava (temporary mood) create rasa. There were eight rasas mentioned in the Natya Shastra. Later, one more addition was made taking the total to nine, called navarasas. Each sthayee bhava has its sthayee drishtis and each rasa has rasadrishitis.

The eight rasas, the corresponding sthayee bhavas and drishtis are as follows:

RASA	RASADRISHTI	STHAYEE	BHAVASTHAYEE	DRISHTI
Sringara	Kantha	Rathi	Snigdha	
Hasya	Hasya	Hasam	Hrishta	
Karuna	Karuna	Sokam	Deena	
Raudra	Raudri	Krodham	Kruddha	
Veera	Veera	Utsaham	Dreptha	
Bhayanaka	Bhayanaka	Bhayam	Bhayanvitha	
Beebhatsa	Bheebhatsa	Juguptsa	Juguptsitha	
Athbutha	Athbutha	Ascharya	Vismitha	



Eight satvik bhavas: reflections of inner feelings

Sthamba (still like a pillar)

Sweta (sweet)

Romancha (exhilaration)

Swarasada (broken voice)

Vepatu (trembling)

Vaivarnyam (colour change)

Ashru (tear)

Pralayam (confusion)

Four mukha ragas (colour of face)

Swabhavika (natural)

Prasanna (pleasant)

Rakta (blood red)

Shyama (dark)

These are the essential elements for creating rasanubhooti (aesthetic experience) in the audience. Rasanubhooti is considered akin to brahmanubhooti (ecstasy of realisation), the ultimate aim of human beings, according to Hindu philosophy.



Kathakali has a very scientific methodology to produce rasanubhooti. First, the actor by strenuous and prolonged continuous practice, gains control over his eyes, eyebrows, eyelids, cheek muscles, lips, chin, etc. He also learns to develop appropriate pressure control of the face by special breathing exercises. By a thorough study of the epics and the Puranas, the actor acquires knowledge about the situation and background of a particular character. While doing make-up and wearing the costumes, he has time to imbibe the specific mood of the role. Before the enactment begins, he listens to the singing of the appropriate melodious tune, which also helps create the mood relevant to the situation. The dialogue and interaction between the other characters on the stage also help him to bring out the aesthetic expression of the emotions, on the face as well as in the body movements. With all these prolonged processes, a skilled actor produces and creates rasanubhooti in the sahridaya or receptive audience.

The passages are interspersed with purely percussive musical accompaniment. After the padam has been sung and the abhinaya has been done, the singer pauses, while the actor goes on to interpret



the literary content through gestures to the accompaniment of the percussion instruments. This manodharma affords imaginative and well-trained actor can hold an audience over a sequence for hours. This is followed by pure nritta passages where only the kalasams or the dance cadences are performed.

In this respect the Kathakali dance-drama is perhaps the only real survivor of the classical tradition of presenting a particular rasa as the only content of a dramatic performance.