

An Analysis on the folk art –Kummattikali

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Declaration

I Soubhagya Lakshmi , hereby declare that the project work titled “ **An Analysis on the Folk art – Kummattikali**” submitted to the University of Calicut in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English & History, is a bonafide research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of Mr. Sagive Varghese, Assistant Professor, department of B.A English and History (Double Main) Christ College (Autonomous) Irinjalakuda.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the project entitled **An Analysis on the Folk Art-Kummattikali** is an authentic record of research work carried out by Ms. Soubhagya Lakshmi under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English & History submitted to the University of Calicut.

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Introduction

Art and culture has always been a part of history, where history means the study of past. Art encompasses the literary, visual and performing arts. Kerala has always been famous for its cultural diversity, its uniqueness and also for its beauty. And it is also known for its special festivals, the festival of harvest celebrated by all the Keralites. Just as the monsoon bids adieu to the land of Kerala, the atmosphere gets ready to welcome the arrival of Onam.

Onam is also believed to be a celebration of welcoming King Mahabali whose pious sole is believed to visit Kerala during the 10 day festival. On this prosperous occasion, the state vibes with so many folklore and traditions. One among them is *Kummattikali*.

Kummattikali is a folk art form of Kerala. This colorful dance is performed mainly during the harvest festival of Kerala. The dancers cover their bodies with leaves, sprigs and flowers and cover their face with wooden mask. Numerous such groups start from different places in the district and move in processions visiting homes. Cheerful visitors also join them, making the celebration joyful. The themes of the folk art include mythological and satirical. The divine and human characters are presented in the performances. In some places *Kummatti* is danced for a quite a long time, narrating mythological stories. *Kummattikali*, an appealing delightful treats of Onam celebrations is actually a visual treat to all the malayalees in the month of *chingam*. It is believed to be originated 150 years ago in Palakkad and later on spreading to the cultural capital. This ritualistic dance has its roots in Indian mythology.

Kummattis is believed to be known as “Bhoot Gan” of lord Shiva. As Mahabali was a devotee of lord Shiva, these *Kummatti* got associated with Onam celebrations. They visit the subjects of Mahabali to know their whereabouts. And it is also believed that bhootganams are instructed by lord Shiva to welcome the banished king Mahabali with a special dance, resembling tribal art forms. This famous art form became an appealing part of the cultural capital.

For its uniqueness this art form has flourished to small villages ,and is known to be *Desakummatti*, now it is celebrated by different residential associations to give a visual pleasure to all the natives and all tourists as well. Thekkumuri and Vadakkumuri are major desams associated with it.

Review of literature

There is no authentic works about the history and knowledge of *Kummattikali*. The available source or literature related to *Kummattikali* is in the form of some magazines, Reports and other online sources.

Objective of the study

To understand the history behind the folk art, and understand the ritualistic importance related to the art. Also to know the socio-cultural importance of the art, and also to study the influence of the art in today’s generation.

Scope

The study of *Kummattikali* as a local history helps to understand the concept of history behind the folk art. The cultural and social aspects were also discussed.

Sources

The sources available for the understanding the folk art of *Kummatikali* included mainly reports, and other online portal.

Chapterisation

The project deals with the interpretation of history based on the facts. It is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with what this art form is, and the history behind the origin of *Kummattikali*. Folk art of Kerala is classified into two, ritualistic and non ritualistic. The famous dance of *Kummattikali* belongs to the ritualistic art forms. It is performed during the harvest season of Kerala, seen in the Malabar districts and Thrissur during Onam season.

In the second chapter, about the ritualistic attires they use for the play and its importance. The famous art form from the past follows a traditional way and method in its presentation. *Kummattikali* uses special masks and instruments in its performance. *Kummattis* seen performing and entertaining people, they visit home and collect gifts and cash from the people. A variety of things are seen related with their ritualistic attires and also with performance. Jackfruit and Beech wood are most commonly used wood for making masks for *Kummattikali*. There is also special music instruments seen associated with the dance.

And in the third chapter, it deals with the cultural aspects and how this art form influences today's generation. It also gives details about the significance of the famous folk art *Kummattikali* performed during the month of *chingam*. Like every art and culture which tried to spread cultural aspects this ritual art also tried to influence many, this is discussed in the third chapter.

Folk art plays a major role in influencing young generation. *Kummattikali* has tried to maintain the tradition and was able to convey the importance of the ritualistic folk art to the next generation.

Chapter 1

The Folk Art and its Origin

The festive season begins during the Malayalam month of Chingam also it is the season of harvest. The celebration marks the Malayalam New Year. *Kummattikali* is folk dance performed in Malabar districts and Thrissur during Onam season and its performers are known as *Kummattis*. Nowadays it's most popular in Thrissur, the cultural capital of the state. Kerala is famous for its distinct art forms worldwide like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Kaikottikali, Kalari payattu, Thumbithullal, Krishnanaattam, Thullal, Kaduva kali, Thiruvathira kali etc and most of them are more or less related to its state festival, Onam. It's a traditional art form widely practiced now also, though in remote areas.

Folk arts of Kerala are widely classified into two groups - ritualistic and non-ritualistic. Ritualistic may be purely devotional done to please deities of Hindu mythology while the other one just add some sort of fun. *Kummatti* belongs to devotional ritualistic art forms of Kerala.

It's believed that *Kummattikali* originated 150 years ago in a Devi temple of Palakkad district. Its main deity is Bhadrakali and later spread to middle Kerala, particularly the cultural capital, Thrissur. Another story is related to Vadakkunnatha temple of Thrissur. It's believed that Siva, the main deity instructed his Bhoothaganam to welcome their banished King Maveli with special dance. That's why the dance form resembles tribal art form a lot, though it's not a tribal one.

The famous colorful mask dance *Kummattikali* is much older than the Vadakkumnadan temple's history. This classic art form has been practiced from the earliest times. This art form is believed to have its origin associated with the myth of lord Shiva and his Bhootaganas. The mask dance begins after offering prayers to lord Shiva.

Shiva appeared as a hunter before Arjuna during the 13year exile period of Pandavas in Mahabharata. Shiva and Arjuna hunted the same boar. Both Arjuna and Kirata shot arrows on the Boar. One arrow hit the boar and it fell down dead. Both Arjuna and Kirata made the claim to kill. A battle of words ensued between them. Soon it turned into fierce fight with bows and arrows and later with sword. All attempts of Arjuna were thwarted by Kirata. Nagastra was minimized by Garudastra.

Finally both took to hand to hand combat. Arjuna was easily overpowered by Kirata. Soon Arjuna realized that Kirata was no human. Arjuna immediately collected some clay, created a Shiva ling, and started showering it with forest flowers. The forest flowers flew to Kirata's head. Arjuna at once fell on the feet of Shiva. Shiva and Parvati appeared before him and blessed him with divine weapons.

Shiva Bhootaganas who witnessed this divine incident started dancing and singing. This later came to be known as the famous folk art known as *Kummattikali*.

Shiva temples in Palakkad, Thrissur and Malabar region have strong association with Kiratarjuniya legend concept based on this. Another popular legend is that king

Mahabali or Maveli was an ardent devotee of lord Shiva. Onam is based on the story of king Mahabali returning to visit his subjects.

Kiratarjuniyam

The Kiratarjuniyam predominantly features the Vira rasa, expanding a minor episode in the “Vana Parva” of Mahabharata. While the Pandavas are exiled in the forest, Draupadi and Bhima incite Yudhishtira to declare war with the Kauravas, while he does not relent. Finally Arjuna at the instruction of Indra propitiates god Shiva with penance in the forest. Pleased by his austerities Shiva decides to reward him. Lord Shiva takes the form of Kirata, an inhabitant of the mountainous regions and along with Uma, who also takes the form of Kirata woman went to see Arjuna.

As he was approaching Arjuna, a demon named Muka, taking the form of a boar, sought to kill Arjuna. Arjuna immediately took up his Gandiva and aimed towards it. Beholding Arjuna about ready to kill the boar, lord Shiva ordered not to kill the boar as he had aimed it first. However Arjuna disregarded that order and shot the boar. The Kirata also let loose his arrows at the same time, and both arrows hit the boar, resounding like Indra’s thunderbolt. When the boar was hit, it gave up its life assuming the original form of a rakshasa.

Arjuna mocked at the hunter for firing the arrow from the back. Having great pride of his valor, he was also angry at the hunter because he aimed at his prey. The hunter responded that attacking an animal from the back is not against rules of hunting. An argument broke out. They decided to fight deciding who was more valorous between

them. The hunter cut the string in Arjuna's bow with his arrow in the fight. Angered and excited Arjuna¹ started wrestling. He couldn't match the lord and the lord enjoyed his fighting.

At one point of time Arjuna collected some clay and created Shivaling and offered flowers on it which fell on Kirata's head. Then he prostrated and held the foot of the hunter. The lord is pleased when somebody catches his holy feet. He stopped wrestling appeared along with Parvati. Arjuna was shocked and pleaded for forgiveness, as he was trying to fight with the supreme out of his ignorance. However the god, who is pleased by devotion blessed him and gave him the invincible Pasupatastra. This witnessed by the Bhootaganas of Shiva praised the moment dancing and singing.

Later Parasuraman, who was an ardent disciple of lord Shiva it was on his request the Parvatiparameshwara arrived and gave blessings to the people and not only that during the time of kiratavesha , the Bhootaganas are reminisced, the dance and the song sung by the Bhootaganas are performed. Following, the Bhootaganas of Shiva the bhringi, the nandi and the chandikeshwara took the shape of Kirata and performed and celebrated with the lord Shiva and Parvati. Shivaparvati who became overwhelmed by the performance offered them various precious gifts.

These Bhootaganas were asked to celebrate and perform and give blessings to the devotees. It was this Bhootaganas whose performance later became the famous folk art of Kummattikali.

¹ Chatterjee Sukumar, Arjuna and Kirata classic, folktales,10 july 2020, <http://www.4to40.com/folktales-for-kids/folktales-in-english/arjuna-and-the-kirata/>

Most interesting facets of *kummattikali* are the peculiar way in which the *kummatti* performers clad themselves. The avatars of Krishna, Narada, Kiratha, Darika or hunter are performed.

ORIGIN

Kummattikali is believed to be originated 150 years ago in the Devi temple of Palakkad district, and later widely spread to middle Kerala. In Pudukkottai region of Palakkad, where it's believed to be originated, *kummatti* is ritualistic offering in Badrakali temple as a part of their annual celebrations of Malayalam month makaram. Here it's preceded by *tholkummatti*, done by a group of children by making designs over the face using lime and rice. On the seventh day is the real *kummattikali*.

In the Devi temple of Chittoor also *kummatti* is an indispensable item. In Urakam temple of Thrissur it's conducted as *kummatti* maholsavam, just before onam and again, it belongs to different desams participating in the celebrations. *Kummattikali* became an integral part of Thrissur's culture as Thrissur is the holy abode of lord Shiva. Vadakumnadan temple is the heart of Thrissur town is dedicated to lord Shiva and is also a pilgrimage for Shiva devotees.

Chapter 2

The Ritualistic Attires and its Importance

An Introduction to Folk Art

In India, the Kerala state is famous for *Kummattikali*. This is a famous art form of Kerala. Actually it is a colorful dance form which is common during the Onam seasons. In general we can say that it is devotional art form of Kerala. This art form is common in the districts like Thrissur, Palakkad etc situated in the state of Kerala.

Kummattikali is also known as the mask dance of Kerala. Anyone can perform this without actual training. A large variety of mask and variety of melodious songs are used in *Kummattikali*. This is an art form associated with temples.

Kummattikali is one of the colorful elements associated with Onam. *Kummattis* are quite popular in Malabar regions. *Kummattis*, believed to be the bhootaganas of lord Shiva visit every home just before Onam starts. Colorful masks of gods, devils, Kathakali etc and *kummatti pullu* to cover the whole body are the major highlights to this art form.

When lord of Kailas Sree Parameshwara arrived in Thrissur along with Parvathy Devi, he was extremely pleased by the beauty of forest land. Along with his bhootaganas, Lord Parameshwara in the disguise of a Kirata, the hunter celebrated his joy dancing with the Bhootaganas; this event has come down to be celebrated as *Kummattikali*.

The famous dance of *Kummattikali* seen during the Onam season, the *Kummattis* move from home to home entertaining people and collect small amount of cash, gifts and some food items like jaggery and rice in exchange. The dance form is thoroughly enjoyed by the people and everyone around, especially children who are found taking great delight in their performances.

The dance is most common in the Thrissur district of Kerala, mainly Kizakkumpattukara is the known place for the folk art.

The costume and the performance

In the former period of *Kummattikali*, there weren't any masks like now. The dance form uses the mask covered made of wood from the trees such as Jackfruit tree, coral tree, hog plum tree, saprophyte or *Alstonia scholaris*. The performers cover their body with a special grass called "Kummatti pullu" which is known for the medicinal properties.

The Mask

The performers wear wooden masks and sport garbs made from grass and dry leaves. Earlier the mask was made of areca nut wood and now it has been replaced by the thin branched 'murikk'. Almost 15 kg weighs one of the masks. Shiva, Hanuman, Sugriva, Bali, Hunter, Garuda, Ganapati, Kali, Sri Krishna, Brahma and Thalla are the disguises seen in the *Kummattikali*.

We can see most of the masks used for the folk art is, traditionally followed ones. The branch of Jackfruit and Gooseberry is refined from the oil designed with Charcoal and Slaked lime, and thus used for creating the masks for the *Kummatti* dance. It was in 1941 that the folks of Kizhakkumpattukara Thekkumuri desam made three masks of their own.

The three *Kummatti* masks of Kizhakkumpattukara Thekkum Muri desam turned 75 years old. *Kummattikali* has the claims of more than 100 years and every three masks are the oldest among all which still participate in every year celebration. Masks of Hanuman, Thalla and Kattalan were the masks; these three masks were made for the first season of *Kummatti*. They were originally made from the wood of Jackfruit tree and are very thin. They were made by Karappurath Madhavan Nair, Raman Nair and Ramankutty Nair, apart from Viswanathan Achari. They were first worn by Krishnankutty Nair, Kuttipurath Karunakaran Nair and Karapurath Kochunni Nair.

Carving out masks for *Kummattikali* in the traditional old way was hard. A model of it is first made on the clay, then refer to the model to decide the level of detail and then start chiseling the wood. Any confusion or a part coming off may render the entire work useless. And hence every work has to be done with extreme care and precision.

Kummatti masks mostly carved out of beech wood because it is well suited for carving masks. The advantage of beech wood is that it barely has grain; it can be carved out in any way the craftsman pleases.

The wood becomes very light once it dries, reducing its weight that's what makes it wear and perform easily. It's carved on the outside first and then to accommodate the head, so that it can be worn as a mask. Carving a *Kummatti* face requires immense concentration and patience. It doesn't get over with the carving itself, painting these *Kummatti* masks require as much effort as making them. The colors used in earlier times has medicinal importance, there were about 12 colors used now it has been replaced by normal colors. Preserving the age old look of the mask in the painting it is a big deal. *Kummatti* masks reach the completion only after this stage. The legacy of carving masks for *Kummattikali* is still followed in the same manner.

The main sculptors known for the creation of mask are Karapurath Raman Nair, Madhavan Nair, and Govindankutty Nair. Present day uses the branches of kumizham plant for making masks for the kummatti dance.

The Attire and the Dance

The attire for *Kummattikali*, earlier it was dried banana leaf that was used to cover the body of *Kummatti* performers, then it was replaced by the ayurvedic plant called the snake-needle grass, a special type of grass also called *Kummatti* pullu which is used for covering body. It is said that the grass has medicinal importance. It produces more amount of oxygen to the atmosphere. As the performance of *Kummattis* may take long time the grass used for covering their body plays a major role in maintaining their energy level. The grass is plaited and tied onto the performer's body.

It is a ritualistic dance and has its roots in the Indian mythology. The dance related to the myth of Shiva and a notable character in the play thalla can be seen, an old toothless woman who walks with the support of a stick. She is considered as the mother of everything. Parvathy Devi along with Shiva disguised in the form of huntress in the Kiratarjuniya, they were known to be the compassionate tribal man and the Himalayan nectar mother” goddess Parvathy is actually presented in the form of mother or as the thalla.

The mask of thalla looks like old woman and has hair tied on the head and wears a huge ear ornament. The theme mostly performed for the *Kummattikali* is obtained from the epics such as Ramayana and other folk stories.

The instrument and the songs

There are many instrument which acts major role in the dance of *Kummattikali* such as thakillu, chengila, nadaswaram. It was a culture, songs of different rural styles accompanied by “Onavillu” comprising of bow and strings. The bow is made from the pith of the Palmyra stem and the bow strings are bamboo slivers. Onavillu is considered as sacred instrument by the performers.

This instrument provides the music for the dance. The strings are beaten with a narrow bamboo stick. Since it is an ancient art form, themes of the *Kummattikali* performance are borrowed from Indian mythology. The stories may include epics such as Ramayana, the story of Darika Vadham, story of Shiva and the folk tales of Manjan

nayare pattu. The songs are very melodious that have the devotional themes and is very attractive. The first song is sung praising the Vadakumnadan or the lord Shiva,

“The compassionate tribal man and the Himalayan nectar as mother, the Bhootaganas as *Kummattis* celebrate along their master dancing and getting the thrill of it...”

Usually the *Kummatti* songs are sung in praise of lord Shiva, Ganapati, Saraswathi and songs mentioning that tale of Mahabali for Onam celebration. Also about variety of songs related to Onam. Apart from these songs from other ‘desams’ with a rural style are also mixed with it. The songs are modified a little from their original versions and performed here. Singing particular parts from Ramayana and Mahabharata like, the slaying of Bali (Bali vadam); the quest for Sita and the like are presented in the regional slang has been in the art form of *Kummattikali*.

Popular songs associated with the art form is “*thalle thalle evade ponu*”, “*pandaaru munivara homam cheythu*”, and “*chaadi hanuman ravanande munnil*”. Like Hindu mythological figures, many songs carry stories related to Hindu religion.

It is sung by the leader of the group and the songs of Mahabali are the famous as this is associated with Onam. The *Kummatti* players who wear masks do NOT sing the songs. The dancers move from one house to another and collect gifts like money, cash, rice etc. The spectators also move along with the dancers and celebrate it as they consider this as a part of cultural procession. *Kummattikali* belongs to the category of devotional art form.

Legend of Kummattikali

The annual visit of the legendary lord Mahabali to Kerala is celebrated as a ten day festival called Onam. ¹Legend has it that lord Shiva of Sree Vadakumnadan asked his bhootaganas to perform dance to honor Mahabali on his annual visit to Kerala. A particular day is assigned for each region to stage the art form.

According to the legend, it is said that on seeing the celebration the gods and goddesses joined in the celebration and henceforth commemorated as *Kummattikali*.

At the time of king Mahabali's arrival, his subjects used to perform *Kummattikali* as an entertainment in order of welcoming his arrival.

Kummatti has a great importance in Onam festival. They visit home by home to know about his subjects just before Mahabali's visit on Thiruvonam. They are just coming to know the welfare of each home of Kerala is happy or not. The arrival of them often indicated as indicators of Deva asura wars of Hindu mythology.

In the Cultural Capital of Kerala

Every year more than 25 groups perform in the main town both of Thekkumuri, the south and Vadakkumuri the north sides. Just like the tiger play, Kummattikali has different groups belonging to different Desams – Chembukavvu, Kizhakkumpattukara, Chelakkotukara, Mukkattukara, Nallankara are some of them. As a part of festival

¹ Sandy, what's the story of origin of kummattikali?, july 19 2016, my words and thoughts, <http://mywordsnthoughts.com/myworld/all-about-kerala/whats-the-story-of-origin-of-kummatti-kali/>

celebrations, in the witness of a large group of people it is conducted on Thiruvonam day evening.

During the festival season, *Kummattis* covering the whole body with *Kummatti* grass, covering the faces with fierce masks ‘*Kummatti Kootams*’ across Thrissur getting ready to conquer the streets during Onam. Desakummatti – a highlight of Onam celebrations of the cultural capital of Kerala visits different streets and the outskirts of Thrissur, and it’s solely meant for each desam. Each desam celebrates *Kummattikali* in their way, and definitely an art form exclusively each for each desam; so called *desakummatti*.

Kizhakkumpattukara is the ancestral home of *Kummattis*. Kizhakkumpattukara is the oldest desam of Thrissur town associated with *Kummattis*. In Kizhakkumpattukara, Thekkum muri *Kummatti* is the oldest. 5 *Kummattis* come from famous Thaikkatt Moosa’s Illam (home belonging to Kerala Brahmins). As per the belief, Kiratamurthy, an avatar of lord Shiva is the basic for all. It’s based in the belief that *Kummattis* are the bhootaganas of lord Shiva.

During the procession of *Kummattikali*, the troupes from different places stage a tableau of their own. They often enact ancient tales. Nowadays, a lot of tableaux narrating the stories of epics are done with moving statues on lorry. The tableaux are dragged by a vehicle like that in the old times, in *Kummattikali*. This way the present generation gets to see the age old ways of *Kummatti*.

Now every year, as a part of Onam celebrations, *Kummattis* are arranged by different residential associations to give visual treat to Thrissur people and tourists as well. Thekkumuri and Vadakkumuri are the major groups and different desams associated with it include Nallankara, Kizhakkumpattukara, Chelakottukara,

Chembukkavu and Mukkatukara. The Vettekaran; the hunter deity representing lord Shiva is worshipped just before commence of *Kummattikali* celebrations at Thrissur by Kizhakkumpattukara association. The famous pond attached to Thaikkattu mana is also culturally linked to this celebration. *Kummattikali* is normally conducted one day after Thiruvonam or on the eve of Onam, and different associations conduct the event in different ways.

Chapter 3

The Cultural Aspects and Present Generation

The festival of Onam is celebrated throughout the state of Kerala. Kerala during Onam is marked by happiness, excitement and enjoyment among all sections of people. Onam is celebrated as an outcome of reasons that have to do with mythology as well as old agrarian practices. If one is to go by the myth, then King Mahabali or Maveli was a generous and virtuous ruler, who had once ruled Kerala. During his rule, the kingdom became so prosperous that devas (gods of the Heaven) felt jealous about this and also for the reason that King Mahabali was an Asura - a member of the demon clan - who were the enemies of devas. So, they sent Lord Vishnu in the guise of Vamana (a dwarf) to King Mahabali.

As an offering from the generous King, Vamana requested Mahabali for three feet of land. And at the time of measuring the three feet of land, Vamana grew so huge that he measured all the worlds in two steps. Since he had nowhere else to place his third step, Mahabali asked Vamana to place it on his head. Pleased by his benevolence, Vamana blessed Mahabali before he was sent to the nether world and granted him permission to visit his dear subjects once in a year. This occasion is celebrated by all Keralites as Onam.

And the other cause for celebrating Onam is because it is the time of the year when a good harvest has been gathered all over Kerala, resulting in plenitude and happiness. Sharing this happiness the arrival of *Kummattis* happens.

Colorful *Kummattis* appear from Uthradam to Avittam days of Chingam month, and it may vary for different desams of Thrissur. *Kummattis* believed to be the bhootaganas of lord Shiva who reach Kerala during the season of Onam to know the welfare of the subjects; this is the myth behind the folk art. As per the popular beliefs, Lord Shiva instructed them to welcome and entertain King Maveli using tribal dance, when he visits his subjects once every year. But definitely *Kummattikali* is not a tribal art form and celebrated by all people. *Kummattikali* became an integral part of Thrissur's culture as Thrissur is the holy abode of Lord Shiva.

As said the performers go from house to house performing for a little while and then move forward. Their dance is related to Thamma – the symbolic representation of an old woman walking with stick. It's also believed that she is the mother of all human beings and other living things on earth. Her mask is toothless and gets attention most. Thamma is also known as thalla, meaning old woman.

Rhythms are given by Onavillu, an instrument particularly used for dances as a part of Onam celebrations in Kerala. 'Villu' means bow and since this musical instrument with strings is bow shaped, it's known as Onavillu. Wood of Arecanut known as 'Kamuku' is normally used to make 'Villu' while its strings are made from very small bamboo sticks. When its strings are vibrated, performers start dancing according to its tunes and songs sung.

It's a dance-drama item telling stories of characters related to Hindu mythology and it has a lot of kid followers everywhere. It can said to be a street dance just for fun

and entertainment, yet carrying messages of unity and integrity and something related to festival season which both kids and adults love to perform. Though themes of this art form give first preference to Ramayana, Dharikavadam by Kali, Kirathavadam by Bhima and hunting stories related to Lord Siva are the next choices.

Anyhow, it represents the victory of good over evil. Yes, *Kummattikali* is performed both at houses and streets and no formal training is required. Even spectators can join the group adding more spices. If it's played in homes, thalla will lead the performers. Also, this lady without teeth and brinjal ear rings makes everyone laugh. She is the main comic character around which whole *Kummattikali* revolves. Yet, ladies won't perform this art form. All are males, even the main entertainer of the group, 'Thalla'.

Present times and the changes

As per present generation where a lots of folk art is losing its traditional value, *Kummattikali* one of the oldest form of folk art which is maintaining its cultural and religious tradition from the very past. The folk art seen in the east side of the cultural capital of Kerala, celebrating the joyous and prosperity through the dance form of *Kummattikali*. This art form not only attained value in the cultural capital of Kerala, it has gained importance and recognition in other states and various other parts of India. Its cultural importance was very able to prosper throughout other parts of India as well as other countries.

The art form has begun almost half a century ago in Kizhakkumpattukara of Thrissur. The folk art which was performed for the entertainment and spreading positivity among the people, it gained so many acceptances in and around many places.

The *Kummattikali*, likewise the old tradition it has changed in certain ways. *Kummattikali* believed to be originated 150 years ago in Devi temple of Palakkad district and later widely spread to middle Kerala. Like popular sport kaduvakali, performers hide their identity using masks. Thamma, also known as thalla is the main entertainer who guides each group from front. The whole *Kummatti* troupe revolves around this funny toothless character with brinjal ears. She also carries a long stick in her hand. Actually all the performers are males. During those old cheerful days masks were so cheap and not made of metal or wood. Now only things available are used for the purpose, and as time passed by several replacements occurred. Chenda melam became a part of the celebrations later it was accompanied by other musical instruments.

Over the years Thrissur Corporation has tried to level their best to integrate all these local festivals under one roof. But organizers and residents of each desam are not ready with new alterations and want to celebrate the fest exclusively in their areas only. For this single day even non resident Indians reach Kerala to wear *Kummatti* masks. Presently, apart from Kerala such *Kummattis* have been organized by many Malayali associations in Delhi, Mumbai and other foreign countries too, as a part of Onam celebrations. *Kummattis* entertain people during Onam celebrations of Kerala schools and colleges too.

Kummattikali is organized by different desams and they conduct it in their own way different from the traditional way. Wearing the masks of character related to Hindu mythology it also symbolizes deva – asura wars of Hindu mythology. The popular mask faces of hanuman , lord Krishna, kathakali, Ganapathi, Vishnu, Narada, Shiva, Garuda, Narasimha etc. characters of Ramayana are most frequently used apart from demons of epics like Darakan and Kirathan etc. males are seek to perform mostly as *Kummattis* and mostly toothless masks are preferred.

Kummatti and desam exhibition

There are two types of *Kummattis* existent in different parts of Kerala. *Kummatti* in these regions are celebration oriented, while *Kummatti* in the Chittoor region of Palakkad is in reminiscence of Bhadrakali and the bhootaganas who accompanied her.

On the Thiruvonam evening, *Kummattikali* is held in the main town Thrissur. Before this function, different teams conduct exhibitions of their items known as *Kummatti Pradarshanam*. It's nice to see Kerala's traditional items displayed in an order and arranged manner. Before Thrissur Pooram and Tiger Play also, Thrissur desams arrange such exhibitions, truly dedicated to Kerala culture and its variety. They organize tableaus narrating the epics. Tableaus are shown as moving on vehicle. The main purpose of the tableau is to understand and give knowledge to the younger and upcoming generation about the tales of epic and the culture and the tradition.

Significance of the ritual art

Things have changed with time in other places, but *Kummattikali* has maintained the tradition. This way the present generation gets to see the age old ways of *Kummatti*. It is the highlight worth mentioning.

The festival gives the messages of unity and integrity as people irrespective of caste and creed are associated with the event. Earlier it is seen that *Kummattikali* was performed by the members belonging to the Nair community, and now people from all other community are also engaged in this play. The spectators move along with the dancers and celebrate it as they consider this as a part of cultural procession.

According to the legacy of each clan, in order to cleanse humans of their basic egoism and to get into character and dance and get a thrill out of it, a face mask was necessary. That is how masks became part of the drama and dance history, thus introducing the art form of *Kummattikali*.

Art culture and traditions of Kerala are loved by millions of people all over the world. *Kummattikali* has tried to spread its cultural value outside that had led to attract many tourists from foreign lands to visit and enjoy the dance of *Kummatti* held during the harvest season in Kerala. Tourists come to the state and take part in its celebration. So such functions are arranged to attract tourist to god's own country, giving more preference to cultural art forms of Kerala.

It is seen that at the present condition where folk art and culture is losing its value, *Kummattikali* is trying to hold the traditional performance and making efforts to spread its knowledge and importance to next generation. Knowing the value of art and culture younger generation is making attempts to conserve the tradition and convey to the next.

Conclusion

This is the study about the famous folk art *Kummattikali* performed during the harvest season of Kerala. During the season of Onam *kummatti* moves from home to home give blessings, collecting gifts and knowing about the welfare of the people. This joy bringing play is a kind of beauty filled vision to the people. *Kummatti* dancers are sight to see. They move around the streets creating delightful performance in the eyes of the spectators.

The folk art related with the myth of lord Shiva and his bhootaganas. According to the legend, this dance is the enactment of the dance performance by the bhootaganas of lord Shiva. Themes of *Kummattikali* include stories from Ramayana and Darika Vadham and other famous epics.

Here, I got the golden opportunity to study and write the history of the ritualistic devotional art form of *Kummattikali* as a history student. I also got the chance of understanding the facts related to the traditional art form, to know its importance and also got many ideas for the construction of this study.

The chapters will help to understand about the art form and its history related to it. The art form has tried to keep its legacy throughout and has always made attempt to share the knowledge about the traditions and cultural importance to next generation. In the present time where not much importance is given in preserving art and culture, *Kummattikali* can be taken as a beautiful example to show as an example where people are trying to put maximum effort to make understand about the social and religious

aspects of the state. It aims at bringing unity and integrity among people. A society without any caste as barrier.

Kummattikali , as per popular beliefs is a myth related with lord Shiva who instructed his bhootaganas to welcome and entertain the arrival of king Maveli using tribal dance. The history taken for the study is related to my native place. I believe this project has almost tried to cover all the peculiar details related to the historical events, social impacts of the art.

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