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KAIKOTTIKALLI - EMBODIMENT OF FEMININE GRACE

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ABSTRACT

Arts are key to preserving culture, with folk traditions like Kaikottikkali playing a vital role in Kerala's cultural heritage. This women-centric art form promotes female empowerment and community bonding, celebrating cultural values and fostering social harmony. Thiruvathirakali, another graceful Kerala art form, was traditionally performed by Malayalam Brahmin women and involves specific postures and movements aligned with raga and tala. Kaikottikkali is deeply associated with Thiruvathira day, a time linked to the divine story of Lord Shiva and Parvathy, and is celebrated through rituals and fasting. The performance of Kaikottikkali during this period underscores its cultural and spiritual significance.

KEY WORDS: kaikottikkali, Ragam, thalam, dhanumaasam, vratham, vilamba, madhyama, dhrutha, thudi, aandaruthi, onam, vishu, mangalyasthri, poothiruvathira, makeeryam, ettangaadi, paathirapoovu, dashapushpam, malarvarukkal, panchaskhara, ammikuzha, mangalaathira, swayamvarapaatugal, Avanakkinkuru, pachamanjal, panchaarimelam.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Arts are the relics of culture and the hallmark of a cultured society. It is a tradition of enumerable arts that keeps Kerala alive even today. among these artforms, the importance of folk plays a vital role to preserve the culture and tradition. Notable among these is the kaikottikkali, a unique artform of women, promoting female empowerment and solidarity. It offers a platform for women to express themselves artistically and socially. The collective performance fosters community bonding and social harmony, as it involves women from different backgrounds coming together to celebrate, share cultural values. Thiruvathirakali is a graceful performing art of Kerala. Malayalam Brahmin ladies in their house premises for self-indulgence with certain rituals. From ancient times, it was practiced, performed, and learnt in different auspicious occasions and was an oral tradition. Even though it is not a classical artform, it has specific methodology to present each posture and movements, with appropriate raga and Thala which was traditionally sung and performed.

The memories of Kaikottikkali from childhood remain vividly engraved in the mind, resonating with a profound sense of nostalgia and cultural significance. In the context of kaikottikkali, it is challenging to separate the recollections of Thiruvathira day (in the month of 'Dhanu' Sagittarius) as they are intricately intertwined. It is believed that it was on Thiruvathira day that lord shiva appeared in love with Parvathy and Kamadeva was reborn. Since the Thiruvathira day is ideal for



the wellness of the husbands of the married women, they performing Thiruvathira vratam(fasting) and Thiruvathira pooja by singing and performing kaikottikkali.

2. MYTHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The origin of Thiruvathirakali is something that have heard through the oral traditions passed down by the ancestors. “*Thiruvathiramoolam*” is the song which portrays the origin of Thiruvathirakali, which includes the conversation between Rukmini and Krishna in DWARAKA.

Rukmini asks Krishna -

“Kelierunna thiruvathira

Kevalam nottavaraaru pandu

Nolpatinenthoru moolamennu”

These lines indicate: who traditionally observed the rituals and fasting associated with Thiruvathira, and what was the significance of these practices?

Krishna replies,

“Vishweshwariyaaya devi pandu

Yaagatnitannil dahicha shesham

Annu himavaan putriyaayi

Vannu pirannu satideviyum”

once a upon a time, after the sacrificial fire consumed her, goddess sati was born as the daughter of himavan.

One day, Sri Narada Maharshi, went to himavangan and said to sati devi about the problems:

“Logangalellam nashikum munbe

Sarveshwarane nee sevikyavenam”

When devi asked how, maharshi said:

“Keliyerunna thiruvathira

Kevalam eeswaran thirunaalallo

Annushakaale kulichuvannu

Thumba tulasium koovalavum

Chembakam nalla malaripoovum

Evayellam kondangu poojikenam

Mangalamaaya dhanumaasathil

Poornamaam vaavumangathirayum

Onnichukoodi varunna naalil

Mangalya streegalonnichittu

Paalum nilaavathu urakkozhippaan

Vattathilninnu tannishtamode

Kaikotti paadi kalichidenam

Mattalarbaanande koothuthanne

Ochathil paadi kalichidenam

Ishtamithu etreyumeeshanennu

Ippaattu paadunna mangamaarkku



*Arthavum puthrarum bandukalum
Bharthaavumaayi sukhichirikkam''*

As per Narada Maharshi's instructions, Shri Parvati came to bathe at early morning on Thiruvathira day in the month of Dhanu and worshiped him with auspicious flowers to lord Shiva. Parvathy sung and danced on songs about lord manmatha along with her friends. Lord Isha likes to hear all this on this day, so he blesses those who sing it with all kinds of blessings.

Reviving this memory, even today, Kerala's family members performed kaikottikkali without falling asleep on Thiruvathira in the month of Dhanu to seek the blessings of lord shiva.

3. RITUALISTIC ASPECTS:

Onam, Vishu, Thiruvathira -Malayali festival days known as 'Aandaruti' of Keralites. Kaikottikkali, a ritual art performed with great pomp and fanfare at the festival venues, has become a popular art, but the sanctity of Thiruvathiranal, which is Lord Shiva's birthday, is being neglected even today. Thiruvathira star in Dhanu is a very important annual festival for Mangalyasthri or married women. This special day is more about rituals than celebrations. Even today, Married, or unmarried women gather and celebrate the rituals and celebrations of Thiruvathiranal in the month of Dhanu by remembering those hard days when Shri Parvati lived in the forest and the good luck that came later.

The first Thiruvathira after marriage is called 'Poothiruvathira' or 'Puthanthiruvathira'. Puthiruvathira is celebrated in the house where one gets married (husband's house). On the evening day of Makeeryam Nakshatra (previous day of Thiruvathira) relatives and women of the neighbouring houses are invited for the offering of 'Ettangaadi' (auspicious dish with 8 different kinds of vegetables) and the ritual of decorating the hair with a particular flower called "Paathirapoovu".

Seven days before Thiruvathira, one should get up early in the morning and take raw turmeric (Pachamanjal), castor bean (Avanakkinkuru), garland made from ten different leaves (Dashapushpamala) and Sandalwood while Going to take bath. Ladies go under the water and the two hands collide and make a distinct swish sound. This process is called THUDI. This is why there are special songs to sing when it is beating. Everyone dances along to the beat of each song. All these songs are sung by one person and all the others receive them. After splashing, standing in a circle in all the incoming water, lowering and raising both hands in the water and moving it like shaking and splashing the water upwards is called 'Malarvarukal'. On the stone, facing east, pachamanjal(raw turmeric) and avanakkinkuru(castor seed) should be ground on the stone and applied three times on the forehead, chest and outside of both hands in that order. Immerse again into the water and recite the Pancha Shara and beat for 108 counts. Scientifically speaking, the lower body till the waist should be under the water thereby strengthening the backbone and uterus. The offering of Ettangaadi is done 'Cow Dung is applied in the Courtyard, the floor is decorated with paste of rice flour. Then on that floor, Ammikuzha (a grinding stone) is decorated with rice flour paste which is placed in the east-west direction. On a sitting board with a floor lamp and a fire lamp attached, facing east and offerings to Lord Ganapati, Shiva, and Shri Parvati, is done. Everyone eats juice and fruit. Then Ganapati, Saraswati, Swayamvarapaatu and other songs are



sung and kaikottikkali is performed since it is performed on the auspicious day of Thiruvathira star, it came to be known as 'Thiruvathirakali'.

If the Thiruvathira night starts and the day is the whole day, there is no regular rice meal on these two days. On the thiruvathira star day night, the women should stay awake and they should decorate their hair with paathirapoovu and eat 108 betel leaves. On that day they all sing Ganapathi, Saraswati, Mangalathira, Swayamvarapaatugal etc and perform Thiruvathira Kali the whole night.

4. TECHNIQUES OF THE ARTFORM:

Anyone who has interest in enjoying the artform have a profound interest in exploring the intricate techniques of the Thiruvathirakali art form. Due to the limited availability of formal instruction and practice opportunities for the technique, we must be relied on oral traditions and narratives passed down through generations to deepen the understanding of the art form.

The steps in clapping are crucial for maintaining rhythm, as missing a step can disrupt the rhythm and, consequently, the harmony. If rhythm and harmony are lost, the performance is compromised. Clapping involves specific, organized steps, including lateral movements and progression toward and retreat from the lamp. The dancer's body must move in all directions—forward, backward, and side to side—integrating the entire body, not just the hands and eyes, which differs from classical dance forms. The steps are executed in three phases, alternating between Vilamba (slow), Madhyama (Medium), and Dhrutha (Fast) rhythms. This alternation creates a profound sense of beauty and grace, especially in slow tempos where the movements are graceful. The performance may transition to a middle beat or double time, achieved through soft singing and playing, reminiscent of pancharimelam. The tempo and style of the performance adapt to the mood of the song and the dancer, with some songs starting in a middle beat and ending in a fast beat. Ultimately, the execution is influenced by the performers themselves.

The exponents of kaikottikkali, whose personal stories and experiences offered a profound and enriching perspective on this art form. Their accounts were not only deeply engaging but also provided invaluable insights into the traditions and nuances of kaikottikkali. It is the responsibility of future generations of art enthusiasts to ensure the preservation of this artform.

5. CONCLUSION:

Kaikottikkali is an ancient performing art form, passed down orally through generations in Kerala. Originating many years ago, it is a significant tradition rooted in Hindu Brahmin culture, highlighting the importance of cultural heritage and tradition. This paper explores the traditional methods of performing Kaikottikkali, focusing on its associated rituals and thematic elements. It delves into the authentic practices that have been preserved over generations, emphasizing how each aspect of the performance is intertwined with cultural and spiritual significance. By examining the intricate details of the dance, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Kaikottikkali continues to uphold its traditional essence while reflecting the values and customs of the community. The traditions, techniques, and rituals of Kaikottikkali are gradually fading over time. It is our collective responsibility to preserve this cultural heritage for future generations.



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