

REPORT

SAFEGUARDING THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DIVERSE CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN INDIA

**From,
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Sub: CHAVITTUNATAKAM- A 16TH CENTURY PORTUGUESE MUSICAL DANCE DRAMA OF KERALA.

I am here by submitting my first report of my research project on **Chavittinatakam** – a 16th century Portuguese musical dance drama of Kerala.

I was started collecting the datas from the month of February after getting the sanction letter from Sangeet Nataka academy.

I have visited the places of Kerala especially in Kochi to see and study the performances, talking to Chavittunatakam artists, performance space, seasons for the performance, audience etc.

- The main objective of my research is to study the Chavittunatakam form by analyzing the acting styles, aesthetics, costumes, make-up, and training in detail.
- The research also explores the origin, evolution and factors affecting this dance drama form.

- The other objective is to look and study the relevance in the modern day scenario and attempts to provide suggestions for innovation

Following methodology are adopted during the first phase of my research

- Comparative research method
 - Descriptive research method
 - Analytical research
 - Artistic approach
- Most of the data are collected from direct interviews with artists, knowledgeable and resourceful people.
 - Secondary data sources are books, journals, newspapers, websites etc.

- **METHODOLOGY**

- The methodologies that I adopted for the study of this theatre art form are
 - (a) Observation
 - (b) Participation
 - (c) Interviews
- The survey was done in the five main islands along the coast of Kerala where elements of the art form survive named Kothad, Goduruthu, Vadutalam and Mutampilly. The main masters of the art were sought and they were interviewed, photographed and viewed so that their songs and thalams, chuvadus could be documented. I also had the good fortune to video different performances of the Chavittunatakam plays. After recording the whole process of analyzing the chuvadus and their thalam, and documenting these movements with the help of line drawings.

- The islands and the asans (Masters) residing there (who are the reservoirs of Chavittunatakam) who were visited and interviewed were:

Islands	Asans
1 Kothad	Raphal Asan
2 Goduruthy	Anirudhan Asan, George Kutty, Jubby Jose
3 Vadutala	K.V. Paul Asan
4 Vallarpadam	T.V.Paul Asan, P.V.Varghese, T.A.Mathai
5 Mulampilly	Antony A.A, Paju Augustine, K.V.Chellapan

Also Studies done the most famous Chavittunatakam plays like

- Carelman Charitham (Charlemagne the Great)
- Brijeena Charitham (Life of Queen Brijeena)
- St. Sebastian
- Daveedhum Goliyathum (David and Goliath)
- Mahanaya Alexander (Alexander the Great)
- Veerayodhakkalude Anthyam (Death of Great warriors)

During the research visited to these Chavittunatakam groups to observe training, preparations for the production etc.

- Gothuruthu Chavittunataka Sangham
- Cochin Chavittunataka Kalari, Fort Kochi
- Navaratna kalasamskarika Vedi, Thuthipuram
- St. Rocky's Nirthakala Sangham, Pallipuram.

Also interviewed Chavittunatakam Artists and performers like:

- Roy Georgekutty Asan - Gothuruthu (North Paravur)
- A.N. Anirudhan
- Jijo John
- Chumar kunjappan

Literature (books) Reviewed like

- (1) “Chavittunatakam” by Sabeena Raphy
- (2) “Christian Theatre in India” by Chummara Chundal
- (3) PhD thesis of Dr.Jolly Puthuserry
- A study of the available literature on Chavittunatakam exposed the lack of in-depth study on the same. Being a theatre researcher and practitioner, I felt the necessity to study this theatre form, and hence help to a certain amount in filling the void on the information available regarding this wonderful and vivacious art form.
- The transition of the art form from the high popularity in the earlier days to almost oblivion today, spurred me to at least make an attempt in my own little way to save it from total oblivion and at least make an in-depth research of the art form so that it could be used for posterity. Chavittunatakam as an art form has not received much attention from scholars working on performing traditions.

In the First phase of the study my observations and facts.

When the Portuguese missionaries arrived in Kerala, they felt that their efforts suffered from a vacuum in the cultural arena. They needed a medium to spread the myths and the legends among the local community. "Kathakali", the classical dance form, was the most impressive art form in those days. So, the Portuguese missionaries blended the local dance drama with their own mythological stories. They created a distinctive dance drama of their own, which spoke of the heroic exploits of legendary Christian warriors. This western concept of drama was inspired from the western opera and miracle plays, which was very influential at that time. Even the themes of them were based on western concepts. But the texts used were written in old Tamil language.

Chavittunatakam used the western acting techniques; stage structure and treatment of the plot were all also Western. The performance of Chavittunatakam involves energetic fighting scenes, which shows the influence of kalaripayattu. The artists were needed to sing their dialogues. It uses mainly the adventurous themes such as Charlemagne, St. George, etc. Hence, there were lots of opportunities to make use of the local kalaripayattu both for the fighting scenes and total kinetic design. Most of the performers used to be very aggressive in their real life as they were sometimes used for fighting intruders on private land. This art form was hugely influenced by the local Kalaripayattu.

In the performance of Chavittunatakam, the actors often stamp the foot to represent the heroic mood. It is done in a very dramatic and effective way. As it is an opera, gestures are never used to communicate ideas. The steps, stamping and the locomotion of the body continued along with the vocal singing. The

instrument 'chenda' is used to create a very energetic dramatic effect. The female roles were also done by the male members. The stage of Chavittunatakam had a very low platform and it was made of the strongest wood. It measures about twenty yards in length, eight yards in breadth and half a yard high. There was a peculiar and popular belief regarding the performance. It is said that after the performance if the stage was not wrecked fully by the tremendous pounding of the actors' feet then it was a complete failure. It is believed that the chief guru known as Annavi or Asan gave the training in the art of Chavittunatakam. The artists were first trained in the basic martial and then he introduced them to the text.

The palm leaves or paper were used to preserve the texts. They were known as 'Chuvati'. Now coming with new medium of entertainment, the popularity of Chavittunatakam has decreased a lot in Kerala. Moreover, there are hardly any people to encourage this art form. The troupes and the number of artists are also decreasing sharply. It was the influence of Portuguese that helped the Western culture to propagate here in Kerala along with the southwest coast. The western influence in the Chavittunatakam art form is evident in the stage settings, introduction of curtains, costumes, masks etc. Some of the important plays of earlier period were that of Genoa, Coalman Chari tam, Napoleon Chari tram, etc.

Thanking you

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Chavittunatakam Performers pictures taken by the researcher.





