

The Ritualistic Performance as Root for Actors Movements and Energy

Prasanth M N

Research scholar, Department of theatre, SreeSankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady

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I. INTRODUCTION

The origin of theatre is from man's imagination. It is through his imaginative power man starts to imitate what he sees around him. According to different cultures and climate, different styles of ritualistic performances originated and practiced. The richness of all these can be found today in Kerala state. Tribal, nomadic, folk, and classical performances are staged and protected without losing its identity. Some of the nomadic performance are sprouted. Even today some of such nomadic performances we can find. KakkarassiNadakam is one of the nomadic kinds of performance and it is even today performed in the streets. Ritual and performance are co-relating it can be noticed in the performance Mudiyyettu. This article concentrates on different aspects of ritualistic performance by focusing on Mudiyyettu and also observing the knowledge of performance training in Mudiyyettu, which way helping the modern actor to improve his acting, movement skill and to keep the energy throughout the performance without losing it. we can see the intervention of the Kalari system of physical training in Mudiyyettu. The performer-audience correspondence or mutual give and takes in this art form is closely related to drama. This aspect of Mudiyyettu attracts wide interest from the modern theatre. In 2010 Mudiyyettu was inscribed in UNESCO's representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. These types of ritual performance studies are showing the real face of Kerala's Social and Cultural condition.

FOLK THEATRE OF KERALA

One of the important features of Kerala folk performing arts is its close association with the rituals. Most of them are the products of magical or religious rituals. Theyyam, Padayani, Mudiyyettu, Kaliyootu, PoothanumThirayum, Kothamoori, Mariyattam, Kalikettu, Kentronpattu, Gaddika, etc. are either magical or religious rituals. We are having very few folk theatre forms belonging to the category of pure performing arts. The folk dramas in Kerala have an inalienable relation with the social life of the people. The folkloric dramas have widespread and they are like the many branches that emanate from the same main trunk.

TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE AND SOCIETY

M S Pinosa, the great theoretician and exponent of folklore and culture has said that folklore is the straightforward and truthful presentation of early societies. Traditional performances also like that. Folklore constitutes the study of the traditional beliefs, tales, myths, and legends of a particular people and their social and cultural interactions. Folklore is an essential part of the cultural aspects of anthropological sciences. Folklore is a constantly changing tradition. Although it changes constantly, we can see that the folklore of people often has different levels of creation. There is, then some folklore that retains their uniformity in the mental and working levels of society.

MUDIYETTU



Mudiyettu has a structure closely associated with drama. They act as per the singing of the drummers except for Koyimbidar and Kooli. The fight between Kali and Darika-Danvendra, the possession of kali, extinguishing the anger of kali, the dialogue between Koyimbidar and drummers, and the comic acts of Kooli the ceremonial of the entrance of kali and Darika and taking off the crown (the symbolic act of cutting the head of Darika) are the important episode of Mudiyettu. Notably, Kaliyootu, Kalikettu, and Kali-Dharika are having the same content as Mudiyettu. Mudiyettu is a ritual, worshipping the Goddess Bhadrakali. Mudiyettu is performed in various districts Bhagavathy temples/Kavus. (Idukki, Thrissur, Kottayam, and Eranakulam). Male members of the Marar and Kuruppu families in these districts are performing this art form. Mainly three traditional families of regular performers of Mudiyettu at present in the country. PazhoorDamodharaMararSmarakaGurukulam at Pazhoor, SankarankuttySmarakaMudiyettu troupe at Keezhillam and VaranattuMudiyettu Sangam and Sree Bhadra Mudiyettu Sangam at Koratty (led by KizhakkeVaranattu Narayana Kuruppu and VaranattuSankara Narayana Kuruppu).

To have an idea about 'Arangu' or performance area we must know the ritualistic performance done by the priest of the ancient period and how the ritualistic area changed into the concept of the acting area.



RITUALISTIC PERFORMANCE AREA AND SPECTATORS IN MUDIYETTU

Here the chief priest with his assistance comes to the acting area where the chief priest takes the center position and starts to perform rituals and others assist him. Here we find a style of performance with action and words. The costume he uses brings out the aspect of faith. And the fire at the altar makes the chief priest face brighter and a divine atmosphere is created and the word he uses has the power of God. The acting area is used here for ritualistic function and performance. The people who participate in the ritual become the audience and concentrate at the altar and the performance and we find a totality of spiritual atmosphere.

Here in the ritualistic style of performance, we find no written rules and regulations. It was in its growth process. For example, the sitting of the chief priest and the area of his look to a particular area, the area where they have lit the lamp and the number of wicks, we finding the lamp and the timing of all of the rituals where it starts and ends. In fact, we find the ritualistic performance had an aim to create bhakti or faith among the audience. So, we find the concept of theatre is from rituals.

In almost every ritualistic performance we find the participation of the devotees. Their presence is essential in the performance and they observe the rituals with a faithful mind. So actually, this concept slowly moved to a performance where the actors with the audience build a relationship. The traditional performance is more related to nature and they create every performance accordingly. The participation of the actor and audience is the major attraction of this performance.

People use abusive words against the goddess Kali and the people want to see Kali with a full furious state. At the time of performance, people inform the goddess Kali of all grievances. So, people see in Kali the incarnation of the god. Even today Mudiyettu takes place, especially in Bhagavathy temples. It is these ritualistic festival people gather together around Kali Goddess and bring all the petitions related to their personal and social problems and find a remedy from the goddess. Mudiyettu was performed by Kuruppanmar. The cast system in Kerala was very deeply rooted and it was very rigid in Kerala than any other part of India. We can clearly find this in the performances. All the rituals were not allowed to perform by all the cast. Even though the rigidity we find we can find also find a change in the attitude of the people to come together breaking the bondage of the caste system.

KALAMEZHUTHU



Pulluvar caste in Kerala is Known for their Kalamezhuthu for the performance. They are experts in artistic talents and we can find it in their work with colors (Panchavarna). They are creating wonderful artwork in the temples for the performance (Huge furious image of the Goddess Kali).and wherein the spirit of the Devi is invoked through Kalampooja and Kalamezhuthupattu.

Mudiyettu is known as a dramatic performance with dance, music, and design with colors are done by these people. This performance is usually performed during the month from Vrischikam to Meenam(April-May). Mainly two families who

perform Mudiyettu i.e. VaranattuKuruppanmar from Koratty, Thrissur district, and Pazhoor family from Vaikkaom, Kottayam District.

RITUALS AND PERFORMANCE STYLE

Before starting from the Mudiyettu drum beat starts. It's a kind of announcement part of the ritual. The people gather together to watch the performance which starts in the evening and concludes in the early morning before sunrise. For the ritual performance, a separate area of the temple is used. In front of the stage, two people holding the small curtain and stand behind the main lamb. Thiranottam is the actor's entry on stage. Behind the curtain, we can see the head of Shiva and Bull. Narada comes Infront of the curtain and starts the acting. The song for Naradha is sung by the chorus and dance according to the music and during this time complaints are raised by Naradha and Dharikan. The singers and instrument players are seated behind the stage.



Lord Shiva, Naradha, Bhadrakali, Dharika, Koyimbidarar, Khandakarnan, and Kooli are the main actors in this performance. The performance is divided into eight parts.

1. Shiva Naradha Samvadham
2. Journey of Dharika
3. Entry of Bhadrakali
4. The entry of Koyimbidarar
5. Journey of Kooli
6. Fight between Kali and Dharika
- Taking the crown
- 8 The crown is offered to Bhoothaganas

The speciality of this performance is that only Kooli is having the dialogue. The other function of Kooli is to reduce the tension of the audience through his funny acting. No artificial lights are used for this performance. Oil lamps and lanterns are used. In between the play actors mingle with the audience by moving amidst the audience.

In Mudi yettu three kinds of movements namely Irunnattam (movements by sitting), Pathinjattam (acting by standing which knee is bent forward and both feet are placed parallel), Ilakiyattam (Through acting the actor brings emotion on the face). By the end of mudi yettu we find Goddess Kali becomes furious and very powerful movements are used and finally cut the head of Dharika and the story comes to an end. Mudi yettu is known as a traditional art and even in this post-modern age we find not much change has affected in this art form and still performance is pure.

The music in mudi yettu has followed the style of Sopanam and also used Sanskrit slokas in between. The combination of both gives variety of movements by the actor on the stage. The renowned mudi yettu performer Varanattu Narayana Kuruppu had given an interview that is given below. Understanding of this training will help the modern actor.

PERSONAL INTERVIEW



Mudi yettu performer (Varanattu Kuruppu)

Question: What are the preparations before the performance.

Answer: Whether it any art, there is a preparation before performance. Especially when those art forms are related to temples and rituals, the order of these preparations are to be strictly followed. The artist has to take a fast before the performance. He has to be punctual in going to bed and rising and should eat only vegetarian food. Earlier the fast used to be seven days long but these days it has come down to a single day. On the day of performance and before the day he has to eat the 'nivedhyachoru' from the temple. In the evening he can have only water and no food. Meditation and prayer are there in the morning and evening. I get by 4.30 in the morning and sleep by 11 at night.

Q: What is the order of training for Mudi yettu? At what age does it start? How long should be the training for this?

A: There is a strict order of training for mudi yettu. This is transferred traditionally. There is no written rule (Attaprakara). A training of four to five ears is essential for comprehending and learning these art forms; especially for performing the purappadu of Kali. The performances vary depending on the ritual of the temple where it is performed. Ten years is the basic age to learn mudi yettu. Before training is made to understand the art form; what is mudi yettu? What are the rituals behind? What are the legends behind? How to perform it? How to behave in temples and so on. The training starts after this only. Rhythm, steps, eye training etc. are present in this like any other art forms. A candle is lit in the dark room and the trainee has to move his eyes along with movements of the flame. For steps, some positions and movements from kalari are used. A tribute is paid to teacher on the day of starting the training. According to the beats and chants steps are taught. The practice of steps begins after getting up 3 o'clock in the morning and oiling the body. Expressions are taught first in training. After this only

the trainer is told that this expression corresponds to this rasa. For the steps the feet are used in a standing position. Feet are oiled and massaged before training. This is essential in a performance that last for almost six hours, since it might strain the legs of the performer.

Q: Is there any special preparation in the green room before the performance?

A: After the make-up respects are paid to the teacher (guru) and Ganapathi. After that the goddess is invoked by offering a tender coconut. Till then the performer is just an actor. After the prayers at the temple only he becomes the character.

Q: When is one ripe for debut?

A: It differs according to individuals. One is ripe for debut in mudiyettu only after a training of at least a year. It cannot be done without learning it completely.

Q: How is physical training understood?

A: The aim of the physical training for mudiyettu is the realization of one's self. The actor/performer has to realize the potential of his body and mind. Graceful movement of the body is essential. There is also grace on the face of the performer. This would not be there on the face of an untrained actor. Hence the physical training for mudiyettu is very significant. Training better the performance.

Q: Is Mudiyettu a traditional art form or folk-art form? How it is similar to art forms like Kathakali?

A: Mudiyettu is a temple art form, older than Kathakali and Koodiyattam costumes adapted from Kathakali and Koodiyattam. The costume of the upper body from Kathakali and lower body part from Koodiyattam. The character of Koyimbidanair in mudiyettu is a primitive form of Chakyarkoothu. The primitive language style in mudiyettu signifies its permissibility.

Q: How is the spiritual impact experienced in the performance?

A: It might not be experienced always. But when the character is in a state of trance, the actor's individuality is transcended. That is when the character starts to speak. It is the involvement of the audience that enables the actor to enter this state of trance.

Q: What is the yardstick that is used to admit when someone comes up for studying mudiyettu?

A: Their lifestyle, background, behavior, habits are very important. Every one cannot do it because a performer has to stick to certain routine.

Q: How does the study of an art form like this benefit a modern actor?

A: As I mentioned earlier, training for steps, rhythm, eye training etc. Which are essential for any actor is there in mudiyettu. This kind of training can also be seen in Kathakali, Kalari, and Koodiyattam. This benefits an actor in that it better their movements, flexibility, concentration and sense of rhythm.

Q: All the classical arts have a structure with written rules for acting and such. They follow that too. Is not there an unwritten structure and rules for Mudiyettu? Why cannot thus be written?

A: Mudiyettu is an art form can be seen as a classical one. Mudiyettu follows a strict training tradition and rules. It is just that it is unwritten. There are some changes coming in the presentation style with the changes of times. Like any other field, anybody who is interested has a right to learn this. Then only art forms like this can survive. It is the need of this art also to make more people to understand and know this art form.



Performer in relaxation position after the performance

II. CONCLUSION

In Kerala we can see all the art forms roots start from the rituals. They please the deity and thank him for giving these wonderful talents and begin the performance. All the rituals may be from the tribe culture, nomadic, folk and classical culture everywhere we can find a touch of ritualistic approach to performance. When the character is in the state of trance the actor's individuality is transcended. That is when the character starts to speak. It is the involvement of the audience that enables the actor to enter this state of trance. Training

better the performance. All the art forms have its own rhythms, styles, music, expression and its own identity. Without lacking it modern actors also have to practice it for upgrading their acting skill.

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