

*Contemporary Relevance of Dance  
Form in Palghat District*

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## CHAPTER 7

# CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF DANCE FORM IN PALGHAT DISTRICT

This Chapter explains the contemporary relevance of dance form in Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu in Palghat District. Pavakathakali is a traditional glove puppet theatre from Kerala.<sup>1</sup> Paruthipully and Kodumbu Villages in Palghat are two places, which are home to Pavakathakali. Basically a nomadic performance of Aandipandarams, this artform has performers using glove puppets, weighing two kg.<sup>2</sup> Tholpavakoothu, the olden art form of the shadow puppet theatre of Kerala, provides a continuance to the oral tradition through the performing arts.

### Pavakathakali



The traditional glove puppet in Kerala is known as Pavakathakali. It has developed into its present form in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century from Paruthipully Village of the Palghat District, after Kathakali reached that region.<sup>3</sup> As in Kathakali there, is also a class differentiation between good and evil characters in Pavakoothu.<sup>4</sup> Pavakathakali is

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview with K.C. Ramakrishnan (Pavakathakali (Artist), Paruthipully, Palghat, dated on 24/09/2019.

<sup>2</sup> *The Hindu*, 14/9/2012.

<sup>3</sup> Sampa Ghosh, Utpal. K. Banerjee, *Indian Puppets*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p.40.

<sup>4</sup> [www.ccrindia.gov.in](http://www.ccrindia.gov.in).

simplified a version of the Kathakali and hence it was welcomed by the uneducated rural people, for whom Kathakali was unreachable, owing to its complexity. At the same time, it proved to be a novel amusement for the rich and educated.<sup>5</sup>



It was almost certainly born in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, one hundred years after the practice of Kathakali. The theme of the theatre mainly concentrates on the Kathakali. In Pavakathakali, puppeteers adapted Attakathas, texts of Kathakali and only four or five stories. Glove puppeteers have some ten puppets, ready in their stocks, which are essential characters (Vesham) for the performance of Kathakali, such as Thadi, Kari, Kathi, Pacha and Minikku etc. The decoration technique and its costume art, designed for different types of characters, have been directly borrowed from Kathakali.<sup>6</sup> They do present the Kathakali characters in full vigour and variety.<sup>7</sup>

Using puppets like Kathakali actors, drawing from the repertoire of Kathakali, including vocal music and percussion support, these puppeteers keep alive an art form that was on the verge of fading into history. Kalyanasaungandhikam, Duryodhanavadham, Dakshayagam and Utharaswayamvaram are the plays performed by puppeteers of Natanakairali, perhaps the sole practitioners of Pavakathakali in Kerala.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [www.Keralatourism.Org](http://www.Keralatourism.Org).

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview with K.C. Ramakrishnan (Pavakathakali (Artist), Paruthipully, Palghat, dated on 24/09/2019.

<sup>7</sup> Chummar Choondal, *Towards Performance*, Kerala Folklore Academy, Thrissur, 1988, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> *The Hindu*, 14/9/2012.

With the passing away of famous performers and because of the socio-economic stress, this traditional art was on the verge of destruction.<sup>9</sup> It is very important to nourish and nurture a new generation in Pavakathakali. This cannot be the livelihood anymore. Only those, who have another regular job, can pursue this. Rigorous training for at least six years is essential, to be able to perform with rhythmic modulations and gain mastery over the art.<sup>10</sup> In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, Pavakathakali was a moribund art form but recently there have been attempts to revive it. Pavakathakali has also been performed in International Puppet Theatre festivals outside India.

Though Pavakathakali now has numerous stages in India and abroad, only the small troupe of Ramakrishnan is keeping it alive. According to Ramakrishnan, “It is not easy. You have to be a specialist both in Kathakali and Puppetry. Because of poor support from the State Government, we are struggling to recruit youngsters”. According to Gopinath Parayil “The Bharathapuzha basin used to be a fertile ground for a lot of art forms including, Pavakathakali. Efforts to revitalize the dying river also must include steps to promote this art form”.<sup>11</sup>



Today it has carved out a niche for itself in the vast folk art canvas of the State. A performance of this art abroad has also fetched much acclaim.<sup>12</sup> There are orders for

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<sup>9</sup> *Welcome Kerala*, Vol-VII, Issue-6, 1/11/2015.

<sup>10</sup> *Vihangama*, The IGNCA Newsletter, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, 2012, p.11.

<sup>11</sup> *The Hindu*, 1/7/2016.

<sup>12</sup> [www.KeralatourismOrg](http://www.KeralatourismOrg).

dolls too from out of the country. On the international scene, Pavakathakali occupies an important position, along with Chinese Puppetry.<sup>13</sup> Today, Pavakathakali artistes speak Malayalam outside home and in the house, however, they speak a mixture of Malayalam and Telugu. They now live scattered in some thirty villages around Palghat but in each village, they live as one solid group. In Paruthipully Village itself there are about a hundred Andi Pandaram families, of whom only three or four practise the art of Pavakathakali. None of the other families of Paruthipully and the other villages is known to have ever practised or performed this art.<sup>14</sup>

The temples have been able to give only very little remuneration and encouragement to the practitioners of this art. Young man today is not attracted to this art because of the lack of encouragement, meagre remuneration and unattractive prospects. They are, therefore, very unwilling to take up their ancestral and traditional profession.<sup>15</sup> IGNCA, in its efforts to popularise this art form, has made a documentary film on Pavakathakali and has also conducted festivals and workshops in villages and helped to art to flourish in the 1960s. Today Pavakathakali has an audience both at home and abroad, having already staged performances in 29 countries.<sup>16</sup>

### **Tholpavakoothu**



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<sup>13</sup> Padma Jayaraj, *Dancing Dolls: Pavakathakali*, April 7, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Venu, G., *Puppetry and Lesser Known Dance Traditions of Kerala*, *Op. cit.*, pp.15-16.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview with K.C Ramakrishnan (Pavakathakali Artist), Paruthipully, Palghat, dated on 9/1/2018.

<sup>16</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 16/8/2014.

Tholpavakoothu is as old as Adi Dravid culture.<sup>17</sup> Tholpavakoothu ritual performance is believed to have originated in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. The Kerala style of puppet is on the decline and presently, practised by very few families, residing in the Palghat and Thrissur Districts in Kerala. Intricate workmanship, numerous punches and darker colour palette, make the Kerala puppets distinctly different from their counterparts from the neighbouring regions.

Deer skin, used to create the puppets, has been replaced by oxen skin and vegetable paints are still used, as they last long. They have also diversified into making items such as chains, cards, door curtains, hand fans and key chains, using leather.<sup>18</sup> Figures are drawn on the material, which are later cut out, and adorned with dots, using fine chisels.<sup>19</sup>

The shadow puppet theatre belongs to the genre of art forms, that are trained by a few. The training imparted includes the traditional method of presenting Tholpavakoothu as well as the making of the puppets, out of animal skin.<sup>20</sup> Scholars are unclear about Tholpavakoothu's exact time of origin.<sup>21</sup> The Tholpavakoothu art has been dexterously practised and fostered, during the last five generations, by the members of the Koonathara family.<sup>22</sup>



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<sup>17</sup> *Calicut University Folkloristics Journal*, Vol-4, Issue-4, May 2015, p.77.

<sup>18</sup> *The Hindu*, 14/6/2012.

<sup>19</sup> *The Hindu*, 6/5/2019.

<sup>20</sup> [www.keralatourism.org](http://www.keralatourism.org)

<sup>21</sup> *Nartanam*, A Quarterly Journal of Indian Dance, Volume XIV, No.4, Sahrdaya Arts Trust, Hyderabad, October- December, 2014, p.113.

<sup>22</sup> Krishnankutty Pulavar, K.L., *Ayodhyakanda of Tolpavakoothu*, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1983, p.xi.

Tholpavakoothu or Leather Shadow Company, from the Palghat District of Kerala, is under the direction of master puppeteer, Krishnankutty Pulavar.<sup>23</sup> He also encouraged his family and successors, to bring the art form to venues outside. This drastic step was met with a lot of criticism at first. He trained many young men and women in the craft.<sup>24</sup>

Today, with his son, Ramachandra at the helm, the Company continues to struggle with the complex issues of preservation, that faced them, which have become more pressing in the last decade during India's rapid economic growth and accelerated transformation of traditional lifestyles. Ramachandra's Company exemplifies the challenges facing traditional Indian puppeteers.<sup>25</sup>

While the Indian government and other organizations like the Sangeet Natak Academi (India's National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama), have programs to help traditional artists, in the end, it falls to individuals like the practitioners and caretakers of these forms, who often must dedicate their entire lives to the work to make choices about their commitments and whether to preserve, transform, pass on or abandon their heritage. Ramachandra, in response to present circumstances, embodies a new and perhaps increasingly prevalent model of the artist-entrepreneur.

He combines artistic skills and practises, passed down from generations, with a modern aptitude for seizing new opportunities, to bring visibility to his art and promote it to a wider audience, hoping to make it economically viable. He shares his knowledge and skills liberally so that Tholpavakoothu can be widely recognized. In 2008, when he resigned from his post office job, he became the first Tholpavakoothu performer to devote him full time to puppetry. Under his leadership, this art form is no longer solely a ritual form but also a wider secular occupation, reaching beyond local interests, to connect with the national and international artistic world. He has committed himself to

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<sup>23</sup> Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell, *The Routledge Companion To Puppetry and Material Performance*, Routledge Taylor and Francis group, London and New York, 2014, pp.205-206.

<sup>24</sup> *The Hindu*, 6/5/2019.

<sup>25</sup> Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell, *Op. cit.*, pp.205-206.

refashion this art and way of life, handed down over twelve generations, into one that can engage fruitfully with the contemporary world, hoping that his children will carry on the family tradition.<sup>26</sup>



The ancient Aryankavu Temple in Shornur provides a complete backdrop for Tholpavakoothu a two thousand year old puppet art form, practised in Palghat District of Kerala. The temple, owned by a family is perhaps the only place where all episodes (Kandams) of the Kamba Ramayana are staged. Viswanatha Pulavar reported that “We use almost two hundred puppets for the two hundred puppets for the twenty one day show, each representing a character in sitting, standing, walking or fighting posture. In other places we use less than hundred and you can stage a Koothu with ten to fifteen too”.<sup>27</sup>

It is reported that there used to be forty artistes on the Koothumadam, which include those who sing, those who declaim the dialogues, the musicians and the percussionists. A group stands for one hour and one more batch steps in after that. But now you find just two people on the Koothumadam, who declaim the shlokas.<sup>28</sup> It was Ramachandra Pulavar’s father, Krishnankutty Pulavar, who gave this art a new lease of life years ago. A museum in memory of him in the village shows visitors the evolution of art, using puppets made of leather. The fifteen member outfit designs and manufactures the puppets they use.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell, *Op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>27</sup> *The Hindu*, 4/11/ 2017.

<sup>28</sup> *The Hindu*, 14/6/2012.

<sup>29</sup> *The Hindu*, 14/6/2016.





According to Ramachandran “In olden days, the puppets were made of deer skin. It was because of the belief that deer skin is sacred. Now because of the unavailability of the deer’s skin, puppeteers use goat, cow or buffalo’s skin for making puppets.<sup>30</sup> According to Ramachandran, “If puppetry and its history are trained in schools, this art would stay alive. Maharashtra does this. But nothing is being done in Kerala”.<sup>31</sup> In a world where scientific fiction and hi-tech special effects rule the roost, Tholpavakoothu operates in the traditional mode.<sup>32</sup>

In the past, puppeteers would have been embarrassed in front of their colleagues if they did not know the text by heart but Ramachandra’s children were not subjected to the same rigorous early morning memorization sessions as their father was. With many other commitments of today’s young puppeteers including formal education and full time jobs and the dwindling interest of performers willing to dedicate themselves to the form, the tradition must accept accommodations if it were to continue.<sup>33</sup>

According to Viswanatha Pulavar, Speed, spontaneity and coordination are the most important factors while performing. Vipin revealed that the procedure behind each performance is complicated and precise. Tholpavakoothu Sangam has, in an attempt to become more modern staged plays on campaigns against ragging, drug use, deforestation, water misuse etc. K.L Ramachandran observed that “There were times when we used to

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<sup>30</sup> Personal Interview with Ramachandra Pulavar (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat on, 14/3/2018.

<sup>31</sup> *The Hindu*, 23/6/2003.

<sup>32</sup> *The Hindu*, 23/6/2003.

<sup>33</sup> Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell, *Op. cit.*, p.210.

have at least fifteen artists on stage. Today for majority of the performances, we have at the maximum eight artists on stage, including puppeteers and musicians”. Viswanatha Pulavar points out that Tholpavakoothu has become an uneconomical art form and that is the reason why the number of performing groups has come down from thirty, not too long ago to just one or two these days. Viswanatha Pulavar’s wife M. Pushpalatha says Puppet making is also time consuming and uneconomical.<sup>34</sup>

In the olden days, performers were very dynamic and many performers were also related this art form. Now performers are rare and only during the festival time, two or three members perform. Tholpavakoothu puppeteers pin the puppets in the screen and recite poems, as a ritual.<sup>35</sup>



Tholpavakoothu is slowly beginning to experiment with new techniques and different stories and the lead, in this direction, has been taken by Ramachandra Pulavar. To make Tholpavakoothu more accessible and inclusive, Ramachandran and his team have managed to use ancient techniques in contemporary forms. Some of his original work includes stories depicting Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom struggle, the legend of Mahabali, the life of Jesus Christ, the life of Gandhi, Stories of Panchathantra, the Mahabharatha, Swami Ayyappa, and the Buddha etc. He has even done puppet shows for social awareness, including road safety and women empowerment, AIDS awareness and against alcoholism. At his home in Palghat he trains fifteen students in a government sponsored program, where he tries to impart the importance of cultural heritage.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Times of India*, 25/7/2015.

<sup>35</sup> *Calicut University Folkloristics Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue 4, May 2015, p.82.

<sup>36</sup> Personal Interview with Rajitha (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat on 25/9/2019.

Thematically, puppeteers have begun to introduce current and secular topics, to make it appealing to the youth. Topics from social issues, communal amity to stories from India's freedom struggle have been featured in present years. Performances are no longer confined only to temples but they are also held in secular places such as colleges and at the International Film Festival of Kerala.<sup>37</sup>

To help this art form alive, the support and encouragement of the government and cultural organizations are highly essential. His son, Rajeev, has initiated new themes and contemporary ideas, that appeal to the youth and this art form is no longer confined to temple premises but it is performed in many colleges and other venues. While the performers are changing, the society also should do its bit by encouraging the puppeteers.<sup>38</sup>

Many things can be done to encourage youth to take up Tholpavakoothu. One of the things is to raise the performance money by the rich temple authorities. Society must take the initiative to preserve this art. Government can promote the art, by marketing handicrafts and designer apparel, with Tholpavakoothu imprint. This will create an alternative source of income and also encourage youth to participate. The profit can be shared through self help groups and societies of puppeteers. They can also patent their designs by using the clause of geographical origin.<sup>39</sup>

Youth are not prepared to learn traditional arts.<sup>40</sup> With the lack of interest among the youngsters, coupled with poor financial returns, the fate of this fascinating art form underwent drastic negative changes. Facing fast decline, it again received new lease of life from 1978. National status was conferred on it and with the awakening of national and international interest, many artists have come to its fold and they are keenly involved in propagating it. The leather puppets have once again won the day.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Spirit Blog, 26/5/2016.

<sup>38</sup> Personal Interview with Ramachandra Pulavar (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat on 14/3/2018.

<sup>39</sup> *Nartanam*, A Quarterly Journal of Indian Dance, Volume XIV, No.4, Sahrdaya Arts Trust, Hyderabad, October- December, 2014, p.120.

<sup>40</sup> Personal Interview with Ramachandra Pulavar (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat, dated on 14/3/2018.

<sup>41</sup> Princess Aswathi Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, *Glimpses of Kerala Culture*, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2010, p.138.

Today, with the emergence of TV and new media, the majority of the temple art forms and rituals have lost audience. A traditional Tholpavakoothu performance in the temple requires the audience to sit through the whole night. Moreover, the nuclear family set up and busy jobs are enormous deterrents. Then there is an enormous shortage of puppet players. Earlier there was an entire troupe to carry out the performance. Today, Tholpavakoothu artists get money from the sponsor but it does not reach the players. They are given only a nominal amount. Without adequate number of performers, the puppets cannot be manipulated. Such a performance will innately fail to attract audience. That is why it was decided to perform modern stories, with puppets of animals, birds etc. Such a performance, that is not very long and causes something to be part of moving puppets, attracts the audience.<sup>42</sup>

The Sangeet Nataka Academi provides nominal grant, every year, to prepare new scripts for puppet play. Thus a narration, based on all the major events in Gandhiji's life, was scripted. Narration, based on Jesus, stories from the Panchathantra and also on social issues like AIDS, deforestation etc, Shakespeare's plays, has been attempted. Modern technology like projector etc, is employed in the narration. There is demand for Tholpavakoothu on Jesus's life in churches. In this way, the artists too can get a livelihood throughout the year.

Now there are about thirty practising artistes of Pava Koothu in Kerala. This art form, which was once confined to the temple, as a votive offering, is at present welcomed outside the temples by the people of Kerala and other States of India.<sup>43</sup> According to Vipin, in the past, there were thirty families doing shadow puppetry, but now only four families, including his, are continuing this art form. "If we, the younger generation, do not carry onward, this art will expire."<sup>44</sup>

The art of Tholpavakoothu is not appreciated in Kerala. They look down on this art and think that it is destined for children. In fact, this art form is appreciated outside Kerala and in other parts of the world. Ramachandran, his wife Rajalakshmi, his sons Rajeev and Rahul, his daughter Rajitha have performed in several international theatres.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Personal Interview with Ramachandra Pulavar (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat, dated on 21/11/2016.

<sup>43</sup> Venu, G., *Op. cit.*, p.36.

<sup>44</sup> Deccan Herald, 28/7/2019.

<sup>45</sup> Personal Interview with Ramachandra Pulavar (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat, dated on 21/11/2016.

## The Future

Formerly, the puppeteers did not consider this art as a source of livelihood. They had land of their own and farming was their major source of livelihood. They were trained in puppetry during the intervals when there was no work on the farm. They took part in the puppet performance because of their devotion to god and their yearning to earn an honourable place in society. The payment offered from temples was pitifully nominal but they honestly believed that their performances would bring material prosperity to them and also to those who encouraged and witnessed their performance. Now the entire pattern has undergone a radical change. Many artists, who participate in the art form, are poor and in dire want. They no longer have their family land. The income from the performance is too meagre to support a family. Interest in their performance is on the decline, owing to the popularity of the cinema and the television.<sup>46</sup>

## New Opportunities for Women



**Rajitha (Tholpavakoothu artist)**

In ancient times, women are not involved with puppetry in anyway.<sup>47</sup> Krishnankutty Pulavar also worked against the idea that women should not enter temple premises or to be entrusted with puppetry anyway. But now women started are being trained to make puppets.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Venu, G., *Op. cit.*, p.35.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with Rajitha (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat, dated on 25/09/2019.

<sup>48</sup> *The Hindu*, 6/5/2019.



**Pushpalatha (Tholpavakoothu artist)**

Even today very few women are involved in the performance and manipulating the puppets.<sup>49</sup>Pushpalatha (wife of Viswanatha Pulavar) was the first woman to be associated with Tholpavakoothu, which is traditionally an all-male bastion. Currently involved with the performances, she trains students in puppet making. Her daughter learnt the art form since a child.<sup>50</sup>One of the first women, performing this art was Rajitha (daughter of Ramachandra Pulavar). Women too have begun finding slots in the performance as well as backstage activities. However, even today, very few women are involved in performance and manipulating puppets.<sup>51</sup>

When Krishnankutty Pulavar moved shadow puppetry out of the temples, he opened another important door for the transformation of his art. The sacred temple venue had always prohibited women from acting as puppeteers. As Dr. F. Seltmann reports that only the male members of the family are connected with the profession of shadow play. Women have nothing to do with it and they should not come in touch with the figures, and they are not allowed to enter the special area where the performance will go on. One explanation for this, offered to me by Ramachandra's daughter, Rajitha, is that the goddess herself wishes to be the main female presence at the show. But there are many regulations and prescriptions concerning women in Hinduism, especially keeping them

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<sup>49</sup> *The Hindu*, 6/5/2019.

<sup>50</sup> *The New Indian Express*, 23/7/2019.

<sup>51</sup> Personal interview with Rajitha (Tholpavakoothu Artist), Koonathara, Palghat, dated on 25/09/2019.

from sacred areas and practices when they are menstruating and this prohibition is not surprising. Ramachandra however, has extended the role of women in the art form, by involving them in puppet building.<sup>52</sup>

Today Rajitha performs alongside her brothers, in shows, done outside the temple grounds. She is also, like her mother and aunt, an excellent puppet maker and in 2013, she was awarded a two year grant from the Sangeet Natak Academi, to create a new show of her own using her traditional skills. Her show might focus on women's issues. Ramachandra is generous about letting women from abroad who are interested in puppetry to accompany him to the drama-house. Ramachandra persists in sharing his art in a multitude of ways rather than sequestering it, thus creating more opportunities for future life.

Ramachandra's acceptance of women in the tradition may derive partly from necessity. But it is also timely, reflecting larger changes taking place for Indian women. According to a global poll of experts, "Infanticide, child marriage and slavery make India the worst" country to be women among the world's leading countries. Tholpavakoothu temple performances remain off-limits to women performers and Rajitha suggests that it may be only a matter of time before she and other women are accepted in temple shows.<sup>53</sup>

Today, young women also accompany the team to learn manipulation and performance. According to Vipin, the artist of Tholpavakoothu, there is a positive shift towards more visibility and awareness, though financially, it is still a struggle to sustain only through puppetry. But contemporising the artform has definitely attracted more audiences, from different parts of the world. The idea is to make it accessible and thereby protect it from disappearing, like many such art forms before Tholpavakoothu have.<sup>54</sup>

This Chapter narrated the contemporary relevance of the dance form of Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu in Palghat District. All performances depend on spectators. Without spectators performance cannot exist. Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu attract less audience and sometimes no audience. The next chapter is on the conclusion.

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<sup>52</sup> Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell, *Op. cit.*, pp.213-215.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.213-215.

<sup>54</sup> *The Hindu*, 6/5/2019.

*Conclusion*

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## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The summing up part of the entire thesis is the major objective in the concluding part of the thesis. The objective of the study was to examine Kerala dance forms through the ages and the origin of Palghat dance forms, especially Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu. The Scholar has tried to focus on the dance forms of Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu in Palghat District. The work brings to focus the changes in dance forms in Palghat District and its socio cultural importance with the above objectives in mind.

Every culture has its own dance forms, rhythmic stylized ways of using the body to communicate and celebrate. Many cultures have perpetuated their legends, mythology and history through dance. Dances are a form of coherent expression of human feelings. Dances are created according to our fundamental values, aesthetics and mores. Dance as an art is a deliberate activity that involves purpose, rhythm, culturally patterned sequences and extraordinary movements of aesthetic and inherent value. One of the oldest artforms, dance, is found in every culture and it is performed for purposes ranging from the ceremonial, liturgical and magical to the theatrical, social and simply aesthetic. Dances give richer recreational content, to daily relaxation and seasonal jubilation.

Gods created dance as a device for entertainment. Dance is the synthesis of human life, depicted by human agencies for the delectation, appreciation and understanding of the people. Dancing is a general means of enjoyment and a means of re-affirming social unity. Dance gives dignity, refinement and charm, as it is invested with idealistic rather than realistic quality. The use of dance is explained as it adds beauty and grace. Dance forms are not static and they move across time and space and adopt new classifications and meanings and they naturally change. Some dance forms are reshaped to such a degree and they are undocumented for such a long time, that tracing their roots presents an enormous challenge.

Dance itself is a ritual in all its manifestations and therefore, has to be developed and cultivated in the masses from the grass root levels itself so that the rich culture, tradition and heritage continues to live and should be propagated to such an extent that it

takes over all sections of the society as it has in the past few Centuries, irrespective of the religion, economic or social statuses.

Dance has been a regular activity of the human race from the primitive to the most advanced times of today. Today, although dancing has been resolutely reinstated, gurus and dancers are faced with the task of extending and enlarging the classical repertoire to include subjects which will be pertinent and meaningful to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Today the dance artists create dance compositions, from the inspiration, obtained from such beautiful dancing sculptures. They give a form to their inner creativity. They also devise costumes after carefully examining these ancient dance sculptures.

The history of the dance, as an expression of emotion natural to man, is almost as old as the history of man himself. Primitive people danced in the forests in simple imitation of nature as they found it. Tradition and culture of a country are generally seen in the art of the dance. India, being a huge country, has a great and rich culture, that has been handed to the present generation by the preceding ones. The diverse cultures have enabled the emergence of a huge number of folk, traditional, classical, martial, devotional, ritualistic dance and theatrical forms. Over the past two millennia, the dance, as a formal art, has evolved in India through a process of negotiation between a highly formalised tradition and a looser, broad based practice. Indian dance has evolved from Divinity. In India, dance has a message for the audience. In ancient India, the dance was presumed to be of such aesthetic richness that it was thought to be a direct gift of gods to men. The Indian dance survives today as one of the world's most fascinating and complex forms.

The Dance is a form of expression and communication, that brings out the innermost feelings, depicting the cultural aspects of civilization. Each dance style draws inspiration from stories depicting life, ethics and beliefs of Indian people. There are many types of dances in India, from those which have deeply religious content, to those which are based on more trivial happy occasions. Classical Indian dances are commonly always spiritual in content, although this is often true also of folk dances.

The Indian classical dance forms mainly translate our philosophical ideals, legends and mythological stories into Bhava as well as Tala. Indian classical dance

reflects the deep philosophical and religious nature of Indian people. The classical dances of India are widely practised and regarded as art forms descended unchanged from the earliest period of Hindu culture. The classical traditions of all the regions of India are inspired by Bharata's analysis of the aesthetic of dance.

The traditional and ritualistic dance forms attribute importance to the lower sections of society, who are otherwise a neglected lot and go unnoticed. The tradition and culture, that have propagated the very system of folk dance and theatre in India, must be preserved with utmost interest and care. They are deeply rooted in the rituals and the religious practices, as a result of which they must be nurtured and developed for the further generations. Folk dance forms are not as complex as the classical dance form but they are beautiful because of the rawness in it. The most interesting part of the folk dance is the attire required for its performance. These dances range from simple joyous celebration to ritualistic dances.

The Hindu dance is referred to repeatedly in the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. The Jaina tradition is known for its contribution to the arts of India, and majority of dance texts come from the Hindu tradition. Some Buddhist communities do admit dancing, as a part of worship, as we see in the religious practices of Tibetan Buddhism today.

Kerala is a land of different cultures and at times, one comes across certain traditions, that are untraceable in the pages of history. Arts forms of Kerala reflect the customs and traditions, that are indigenous to Kerala. The State has countless number of art forms, which represent a rich repertoire of performing arts, reflecting man's intense relationship with nature and his constant desire for communication with the unknown. Kerala has evolved from very old days its typical dance forms, which are highly expressive of the way of living and the outlook of its people. From the earliest times of human settlement in Kerala, people danced to the village goddess, for protection, to the sea god, for successful trade and to the land gods, for fertility and good harvest.

The performing art forms of Kerala have a special attraction among all audiences. These arts are significant pillars of Kerala's heritage. For centuries, the performing artists have colourfully presented great epics. The ritual art forms of Kerala are the cultural benchmarks, that have helped shape the very sense of right and wrong in the society.

Our folk performing arts forms are famous for their vibrant and insightful glance at the stories, legends and traditions of the past. Their mysticism lies in the intricate preparation, natural setting and the overall serene ambience of the display. Folk performing arts and traditions have contributed significantly to national integration, social change, socio economic development and overall preservation of cultural heritage and deposits. The contemporary forces of social change have affected the folk culture.

A common cultural phase can be identified in the folk art forms like Kalamezhuthu, Pooramkali, Theyyam, Thira, Padayani, Mudi yettu, Kannyarkali, Paana, Thidambu Nritham, Sanghakali, Thattinmelkali and Kummatti. In social hierarchies and inequalities, these down trodden people needed a voice, a place to hold on. The art forms of the educated and elite group began to flourish. These artforms grew interacting with each other. The saviours and well-wishers of classical artforms like Koothu, Kudi yattam, Krishnanattam, Mohiniyattam and Kathakali thus became the elite class of society.

The theatre of Kerala is strongly influenced by the Victorian theatres. Kutiyattam, Krishnanattam and Kathakali, ritual art forms like Theyyam, Mudi yettu and Padayani and folk thetres like Kakkarisi Nadakam, Porattu Nadakam, were under the tight grips of Victorian theatre. Some of the ancient classical arts such as Koodiyattam, Nangiarkoothu and Ottan Thullal were staged within the precincts temple theatres, called Koothambalam, which were out of reach to the lower castes for long. Many were based on the Epics and performed in Sanskrit, the tongue of the higher classes. Thus these classical performances effectively shut out the lower classes, until hybrid art forms that employed Malayalam and tackled issues to which the common man could relate emerged.

Puppetry is a popular theatre art form, which has its own unique styles all over the world. Puppetry is close to the hearts and minds of the people, as it has a personal and intimate attractiveness, along with a common format and content because of the colloquial dialects used. Puppetry is a traditional art form and it is used as a useful medium of entertainment and communication. It was perhaps the primitive urge of men to create life like movement through figures, which later developed into theatre form, imbibing elements of all arts forms. The puppeteer uses his or her skills to make the puppets, an inanimate object, talk, sing, dance and behave the way humans do.

Puppetry is the most outstanding division of theatre in India. The earliest puppet shows in South India are said to have used shadow puppets, which drew on tales from the Ramayana and Mahabharatha. The puppet tradition is very popular in many regions of India such as in the State of Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamilnadu and Rajasthan and in other States also. Palghat has played a significant role in preserving the tradition of Kerala. Thullal, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and Chakyarkoothu are the most important dance forms of Kerala and the District has contributed many worthy artists to the mentioned dance forms.

Pavakathakali is a famous classical dance drama of Kerala. Pavakathakali is a traditional glove puppetry show, native to Kerala. This artform is performed commonly in the rural areas. This tradition can be traced back to almost 18<sup>th</sup> Century, from Paruthipully village of the Palghat District, after Kathakali reached that region. Pavakathakali is so simple a version of the Kathakali that it was welcomed by the illiterate rural people for whom Kathakali was inaccessible owing to its complexity. Few families of Andi Pandaram community in Paruthipully village of Palghat District are the traditional practitioners of Pavakathakali. It was Mr. Venu of Natanakairali, who adopted and effected innovations in this art form.

In Kerala, one can see the symbols of Tamil culture. Mainly Palghat and nearby places are the areas of traditional style of shadow puppetry performance. Among the ancient art forms of Kerala, Tholpavakoothu holds a position of significance. It is presented in temples not so much as entertainment as to propitiate the Goddess. Tholpavakoothu is an art form, which has been practiced since centuries. Since information is available everywhere in the Modern World, people do not like that type of narrative form and the duration and the time of performance. If they show interest, in the face of other communication media, the art form will have some hope for continued existence.

Today it has carved a niche for itself in the vast folk art canvas of the State. The performance of this art abroad has also fetched much acclaim. Today traditional puppetry is dying a slow death. Modern puppetry, on the other hand, is gaining momentum, albeit slowly and it is often used as an instrument for imparting social messages. Thus the performance of Tholpavakoothu is a vanishing performance tradition.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

More opportunity must be provided to Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu artists, in performing the programmes in temples and other places. They could be enabled to conduct the programmes in schools and colleges in Palghat and other Districts. The Government protects and helps the art forms and artists. The Government and cultural organisations may honour the senior puppeteers, with awards and recognise their skill in shadow puppetry and glove puppetry. Women, from the puppeteer's family, may be given training in puppet work and other activities through self-groups operating in the respective areas and other areas. A training workshop, on the new technology of presentation for the younger generation through the dances to different academic institutions, will give new life to the existing performance as well as motivate the youngsters.

## **Suggestion**

- It is suggested to the future researchers to take up similar study so as to bring the minute aspects of the Pavakathakali and Tholpavakoothu and its influence on the peoples in Palghat District.