

**THE IDENTITY OF AUDIENCE IN A KERALITE
PERFORMING AREA**

*Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
For the award of the degree of*

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IN THEATRE ARTS

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the Thesis titled *The Identity of Audience in a Keralite Performing Area* is a bonafide record of original research work carried out by me, under the valuable guidance of Dr. Shibu. S. Kottaram, Assistant professor, School of Drama & Fine Arts, University of Calicut. No part of this has been submitted for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other similar title of recognition.

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*Acha, your guiding hand on my shoulder
remain with me forever.*

DEDICATION

It's for You Only
Riyas & Poopaalu

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PREFACE

To live is the most violent challenge that one faces in life. Similarly, to take place on the stage is a challenge for a play awaiting the theatre. A play comes into being only when the audience and the stage come to a mutual understanding. And, any stage arises from its audience, while an audience evolves from its stage to find an identity. This argument is further strengthened in Kerala with the well known stage history of both KPAC and the plays of VT Bhattathirippadu. Even a person without any direct experience of any stage, shares this particular stage history of Kerala unawares, wherever he hails from. How the theatre environment of Kerala society influences or even forms the identity of an audience is the focal area of this study. It seeks to analyze various stages of development in contemporary drama, which has often undergone drastic changes due to the influence of the theatre goers. They have occupied the performance spaces and played a major role in the evolution of the stage. As part of the study, it analyses how the identity of an audience determines one's performance space. In this regard, it traces the age of Dravidian arts to specifically find out the peculiarities of the stage of Kerala theatre. Rituals, various folk art forms and the status of classical theatre audience together make the audiences of modern Malayalam theatre. And, it has a history of around hundred years, in which it has evolved from the melodious musical drama to the postmodern new theatre experiments. The colorful visual effect of Tamil sangeetha natakam and the western theatre also appealed to the imagination of Kerala audiences.

The thesis includes five chapters. The first chapter titled *Keralite, Identity, Audience and Performing Area* functions as the introduction to the thesis and defines those crucial terms central to Kerala's theatre activity. The second chapter tries to find out spectatorship of the traditional folk art forms of Kerala in the theoretical background of the South Indian performance history. The concept of ideal audience of Natyasasthra and the performance

history of Kerala classical theatre are studied in the third chapter. Chapter four cross-examines the identity formation of audiences of Kerala's Modern Drama in the background of social, cultural and historical peculiarities. The fifth chapter concludes the thesis with an analysis of the findings of the second, third and fourth chapters with the support of the keywords defined and determined in the first chapter.

As the study is about the theatre in Kerala, where Malayalam is the mother tongue, the thesis analyses many literary works and quotations in Malayalam. Most of them were translated by the researcher herself. And, some typical Indian theatre terms and words such as rasa, bhava, natakam, etc. are also used.

INTRODUCTION: KERALITE, AUDIENCE, PERFORMING AREA AND IDENTITY

This thesis tries to understand the identities of audiences of contemporary Kerala drama. The area of research is the social and performance history of Kerala. The study concentrates on the drama and dramaturgy Kerala has witnessed. In the process of the audience choosing drama and drama forming the audience, the term *space* has an important role to play. Similarly, the term, *performing area*, refers to the performance space, where the culture, identity and audience meet together. The keywords Keralite, Audience, Performing Area and Identity have different significance from the usual meaning they carry.

1.1 Kerala and Keralite

Kerala is a southern state of India, where people speak Malayalam. It is said that the earliest reference about Kerala is found in the rock edicts of Emperor Asoka of the third century B.C. In the ancient past, the southern Indians used one language, i.e., old Tamil. During this period, South India was under the reign of dynastic kings such as Chera, Chola and Pandya. And, Chera Kings ruled Kerala. There are so many texts like Chilappathikaram, Manimekhalai, Jeevaka Chinthamani, Valaiyapathi, Kundala Keshi, etc. written during this period. They function today as the historical references of ancient South India. There are thirty eight poems written by women in the text Purananuru. It is interesting that the women and people of low castes also wrote poems. The people grouped according to their jobs or regions and engaged in all cultural activities alike. The land was divided into five Thinas as per its geographical specialties such as Kurinchi (hillside), Mullai (Jungle), Marutham (field), Palai (the land without rain) and Naithal (seaside). The Gods were Muruga, Mayon, Indra, Kottave and Kadalon. The Kuravar of Kurinji was hunters; the Maravar of Palai were warriors; the Mullai people were cowherds; the people of Marutha were farmers; the Paravar

of Naithal were fisher men. In Tamil, there were three forms, iyal, icai and natakam. Iyal was literature, Icai were verses set to music and natakam was dramatic literature. It is said that there were Brahmin invasions in south India and Brahmins had found it difficult to communicate with those people with different languages and had mixed Sanskrit words to old Tamil and other regional languages. Thottams or chants were naturally in the traditions of oral poetry and continued to influence the evolution of Malayalam even when it came into contact with Tamil and, later, Sanskrit. The literature formed with a mixture of Sanskrit and regional languages is known as Manipravalam. The influence of Manipravalam was very strong in literature. It took 500 years (i.e., only after A D 700) for Malayalam to evolve, though with a heavy influence of Brahmanisation. The influence can be seen in other areas also. The Chola, Chera, Pandya kings were weakened over years and their land came under Buddha and Jaina religions for many years. PK Balakrishnan maintains the view that there were no kingdoms until the 9th century AD in Kerala. The places, Venad and north Kolathirinadu, popular as Chera kingdom were outside Malanadu, which became Kerala later. Kerala was a land, where various tribes lived, using diverse tribal dialects and with different lifestyles, which are different from those of today. Kasarcode, Wayanad, Palakkad, Venad and the Sahya hills were their demarcations. Brahmins invaded Kerala from the north in the 6th and 7th centuries. Their presence and the spread of religious concepts and practices promoted the caste system and the mode of social institutions like property holding, family governance, etc.

1.1.1 Brahmins secured their power on the people

The Brahmins, who entered Kerala, seemed different in sensibility and talent. They approached natives in a sophisticated manner in the earlier days. The ancient society in Kerala was superstitious, god-fearing and readily believed everything unquestioned. Banking on this condition of the natives, Brahmins gradually obtained power and exerted it on the

people around AD 8th century. Their knowledge on vedas was helpful in this regard. Besides the sixty four villages that they said to have built, they introduced their Gods to the locals. With the people's money, they built temples and became their owners. They had started schools around the temple walls for their children to study vedas, martial arts and fine arts. Their temples became the nerve centers of the society. The educational system was very strong among them. They organized educational programs through Karmi sabha madams, Sasthra sabha madams and Sanyasi sabha madams. There were eighteen institutions of the kind. Thrissivaperur and Thirunavaya had the Karmi Sabha madams. They used to conduct examinations on Rigveda, which is known as Kadavallur Anyonyam. Sasthra sabha madams were in Chovannur, Edakkalathur, Kumbalam and Udayathungeswaram. There were always disputes among rulers in Kerala. All men were forced to join fights except the Brahmins; and, they engaged in relations with women belonging to other classes. This is the early beginning of matriarchy in Kerala. Brahmins never participated in wars physically. They were the brains behind all disputes and they shaped the society. A caste based and economically imbalanced society evolved slowly as the result of Brahmin intrusion. Gender inequality was a feature of Brahmins' philosophy. It is believed that the Paravur Sakkayyan, one who acted Sakkayyankoothu in the Sangam period, was a Brahmin. As the Brahmins had a luxurious and relaxed life, they had enough time to engage in arts, cultural and scientific programs.

1.1.2. The structure and the system existed

A threefold or four fold political system was maintained in the civil rule. Thara was the basic unit. A thara is a village. Villages together form a desam. Many desams together form a nadu. From south Venadu, Odanadu, Nantruzhainadu, Manjunadu, Vembolinadu, Keezhmalainadu, Kalkarainadu, Nedumpurayurnadu, Valluvanadu, Eranadu, Polanadu, Karumpurayurnadu, Purakizhanadu, etc. were formed. There were rulers like naduvazhis and desavazhis. Disputes were common and the poor working people (Nairs and Thiyyas) were

trained for fights to settle them always. Venad and Kozhikkode were the most prominent kingdoms. Cochin and Kolathunadu were always forced to accept this. When the Portuguese arrived in A D 1498, Kerala was under so many rulers, who were quarrelling with each other. The Portuguese found it as the best opportunity and took advantage of the same. The land went through continuous wars. With the help of Arabs and Muslims, Samuthiri ruled with unquestioned power. Nilambur, Manjeri, Malappuram, Kottackal and Thalappalli were under his rule. The Brahmins had some issues with Samuthiri as Muslims supported him firmly. The feudal Nambudiris and the Nairs were the real rulers. No king could rule a Nambudiri, and, no law could touch him. He was beyond the kingdom. Only Azhvanchery Thambackal, men from Azhvanchery Brahmin family, could do some observations and make some comments about Nambudiris. Economic and caste inequality existed during this period. There were no direct communication channels between the public and the governing authority. The public were totally neglected without even recourse to public water source or traffic system.

During this period, various styles and dialects existed in the case of language. In fact, there was no single language like Tamil or Malayalam. As PK Balakrishnan observes, “Malayalam language originated from the attempt for vocalization, when the high caste Namboothiris met and subdued the low caste aboriginal classes in Kerala.” (Jathi vyavasthayum Kerala charithravum, 270). So, the Brahmin named his child as Sreedevi or Narayanan and the backward people named theirs as Chirudeyi or Naanu. The names, attitude, dress code, language, gestures, artistic aptitude, arts, etc. were remained differently as indicative of the caste. From two documents, it is clear that the norms for social and cultural life in this area were framed and determined by the Brahmin heads. The foreigners with the help of these feudal people ruled here for many years. Thomas Apposthalan came to Kerala in AD 1st century and converted people to Christianity. Maruan Sapeer Esan, a

Christain priest, came to Quilon in AD 823 and built a church there. The Venad King announced his offers to Christians and allowed them some official rights and positions in the society in AD 849. Arabs came here between AD 700 and AD 900 for trade. As the Buddha and Jaina spread the languages Pali and Prakrith, Arabs spread Arabic. When Marthanda Varma ruled Thiruvithamcore, he had conquered the provinces from Kanyakumari to Kochin. The congenital right of Brahmins on land and wealth made room to the King himself. In the meantime in 1792, British rulers captured Tippu Sultan from Malabar, and, it came under the Madras Presidency. And, a British collector was appointed to look after it. But the social structure was never affected by the British rule. The great poet, Kumaranasan, made comments in 1903 on the manner the society existed in Kerala:

Due to the caste system, most of the lower class people in Kerala withdrew themselves from the society, lost their day to-day transactional language and even abandoned the sight of human beings. They went up to the safety of hills and forests. And, they (even proved against Darwin's theory of evolution) gradually became beast-like in the process (62).

The new movements in literature and culture in the 19th century brought about the rise of a new perspective in the political and social structure. Aruvippuram Prathishta (1880), Malayali Memorial Samarpanam(1891), Malabar marriage commission activities (1891), Channar Lahala(1859), Kallumala Samaram are some glimpses of the changing social structure. The different hair style, dress code and ornaments for different castes were for supporting the untouchability. It is worth to note that the backward women were not even allowed to cover their breasts as late as in the 19th century. By the 20th century, the individual and society were looked up to the new light of the British education spread here. The electricity, road transportation, new marketing methods, etc. helped to develop an educationally and culturally reformed society. The thinking, laughing and emotional human

beings seen today, according to the evolution theory, are from the animals. Desmond Morris says of human behavior:

In the different stages of social formation the very innate yet wild gestures, behavior patterns and emotional expressions are suppressed in the human body. But they were never destroyed; only kept hidden. In the most apt time, it will come out (People watching, 3).

Likewise, those nostalgic social body patterns, even though buried in the past, may have rebirths within a Kerala body on apt occasions. The term, Keralite as a collective noun, means the people who live in this land and have the historical and geographical memories with them. The Malayali with this new identity wants to be addressed in a new situation by theatre as well. What is or who is this Malayali? KN Ganesh, a historian, says:

Malayali is not a single figured one. It is a complicated concept. There are different types of contrasts. But it is true; there is an identity as 'malayali'. In the formation of 'malayali', the past has an important part. But that history hasn't any unique nature. It has different kinds of sub-nationalities with complex differences, castes, class, communities, languages, cultures, geographies, feudal and colonial power forms, business deals, savings...etc. Its totality is 'malayali' (my trans.;5).

In the contemporary Kerala society, this Malayali identity seems very important to be addressed. It is important to understand which Malayali audience is going to be addressed. The fast growing Kerala society is far ahead from that of the nineteen sixties. The caste, community and financial identity of one are very clear and important. All these are products with equal entertainment value. The products demand its value. The theatre is also a product. It can create demand, if it works well, or when someone needs it. Thus, the production and presentation demand the finance, caste or status-based audience group. In certain cases, some

performances also have the background of the life-styles. In the memories of Joy Mathew for a famous film-theatre person, it is very clear:

In childhood days we used to go to temples to see thira festivals. There I liked velichappadu (one who personified as God), most. He is the one who clicked the fire with great eruption and frenzy. Sometimes, I also reach the eruption and excitement like the velichappadu while on stage (my trans.;7).

As a person in the audience, Joy Mathew experienced the excitement and frenzy of Velichappadu. Even though a Christian boy, he got chances to go to temple festivals. His homely and regional atmospheres helped it. The velichappadu influenced his unconscious mind and when he became an actor, he could discover the energy and the mood of that particular experience in life on the stage. In that mystic space (stage), he personified the characters. It is natural to be influenced by the usual icons of the daily routine. In this way, performers bear their habits, lifestyles or geographical peculiarities in their body. Maya Taen Berg, the Swedish theatre person, says while working with Chinese women: “It was clear that they have a unique body language different from the Europeans” (Personal interview). Similarly, all the people bear different body and mind. So, the cultivated culture may be different. But their tastes are decided by the body, which is closely committed to mind. Naturally, this is applicable to the audience group now-a-days, which differs from the old days.

1.2 The Audience

One cannot produce a performance without audience. A performance needs one actor and one spectator at least. Audience encourages, influences and even provokes a production. Natyasasthra demands from the audience the temperament, atmosphere and talent. He must

keep the standard of a show. The process of enjoying a performance is different in every person. Bharatha said:

Nana sheela: prakruthaya:

Seele natyam vinirmmitham

Uthamathama mathyanam

Vridha balisa yosishitham (“the quality of one performance is several for many.

Noble men, wicked persons, middle class (madhyama) men, old, young, and women are different from each other”; my trans.; vol.2, 210).

They have different tastes and attitudes. According to their attitude, the acting will be performed. depends upon the person who watches it. The purification and sublimation of the audience’s emotions are called Catharsis. In a way, Aristotle idealizes and universalizes audience’s emotions. He demands that an audience should have a certain degree of culture, experience, maturity, and training. Bharatha also insists these qualities on his audience. Those who are possessed of good character, high birth, serene temper, learning, desirous of fame and virtue have those qualifications. The audience must be “sumanasa”, i.e., one with a refined mind. Abhinavagupta called them as “Sahrudaya”, that is, one with a feeling heart. So, an audience with trained and attuned sensibility comes under this group. The concept of sahrudaya/sumanasa is quite meaningful here to the enjoyment, appraisal, and appreciation of drama.

As part of the revaluation of modern society itself, a contemporary interest in popular theatre is not a great one. The popular theatre dates from a pre-literate rural society. It may be called folk theatre. It is traditional, close to ritual and the everyday life of the common people. The theatre of ancient traditions got a form and system. The country life shades gave

them the rough styles of life. They had a formless form, i.e., an informal structure. They can be classified as classical and folk forms. And, the classical forms come under some rules and structure. They were performed by trained artists for a well-versed reputed audience, whereas folk forms came into being from the down-trodden people and from their farm lands, where they toiled. As industrialism reigned and the cities grew, the popular theatre found its new form in the nineteenth century. Theatre underwent a huge transformation world wide as the society began to demand a form of commercial working class theatre. It was the era of melodrama also. Melodrama became an identity of popular drama. As Melodrama is crude in its emotions and simplistic in its morals, it cannot be considered as an adequate form of theatre. The audience may undergo emotions such as terror, wonder and pathos. But they are for their own sake. Many times they may not be arising from the situations. In Kerala, the theatre was not transformed as a mass medium until the 1930s. Along with the development of film, television, social networks, internet, Google and new generation trends in Kerala, we have reached a mass media era now. The physical distance between the performers and the audience was not increased. There was an intimate audience for every theatre form. Today, media, especially, visual media, is doing healthy criticism to encourage theatre in Kerala. It is a very hopeful development in the area. In the long history of drama, the audience is the basic element of play productions. There were so many theories, institutions, isms, that were in and out of vogue. And, the general public was the silent witness to all these developments. The development of theatre is based on the attitude of them. There are different kinds of audience; each of them is connected with different types of the theatre groups. The style of the play production, performance, etc. differs. Theatre practitioners have tried to change not only the future action of their audience, but also the structure of the audience community and the nature of the audience culture. Experimental theatre includes academic productions. Major lab productions and different innovations are taking place there. In India, it is called amateur

drama as it is experimental. There are two major kinds of plays staged prominently in Kerala, amateur and commercial.

1.2.1. Audienceship

As a cultural phenomenon, audiences are concerned with the diversity of theatres emerging from different cultures and the socio-political background attracts them. The cultural status of theatrical events and the audience change, when the society's culture changes. Greek theatre history marks Thespis as the first protagonist. From the ancient dithyramb group, he came forward as if he had a fix. He performed and spoke out loudly the truths from the bottom of his mind. Solon, the lawmaker, who was in the first row, was irritated. He warned Thespis not to repeat it. Thespis was a real artist. He had found a way to express the ideas. He introduced mask and costumes and established the idea Character. What happened beyond all these is the form of theatre itself. They became very political, and can't exist without involving the public life. In the development of theatre, it faces so many struggles and strains. After Greek and Roman theatre, medieval theatre restricted drama to biblical plays. The church was the power above all. It ruled theatre in that era. The world began to realize theatre as a political weapon in the 1900s. It was after the formation of the theatre of revolutionary satire, the first political theatre in 1919 was formed. Then there was a flow of political theatre groups. Amateur Cosmmol Theatre, Blue Blouse and Soviet Republic theatre were some of them. That movement was exactly for the working class. The communist ideology guided it. Mayakovski, Meyerhold, Sergei Eisenstein, Frederic Angels , Shang Bapiste Wane Shwetswer, Laske, Earnest Toller, Joseph Wane Philits, Henrick Ibson, John Haward, Piscator and Bertolt Breht were the active theatre activists of the era. The classical theory of *catharsis* is questioned by Brecht's epic theatre theory. The theory of alienation was widely accepted. The theatre had worked on its pedagogical aspect in political theatre. Political theatre demands spectators to involve in the action. Classical Aristotelian

audiences maintained their emotions to themselves. Politics in theatre wants to provoke and make the people respond to the situations they witnessed. It may be the thought exercises which evoke the brains not hearts. So the classical imaginations about the play had to be broken. Samuel Beckett, through his absurd theatre, proved it well. The narrator from epic theatre played a vital role in political theatre. It is accepted all over the world. In India Jana Natya Manch, IPTA, Samudaya, Theatre Union and Sreejan are some examples of the political theatre groups. Richard Schechner, Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, Safdar Hasmi, Habeeb Tanwir, etc. are some who contributed to political theatre. In search of easy communication with the common people, political theatre went through the popular theatre forms like *commedia de'llarte*, circus, gymnasium, puppet theatre and traditional folk comedies. The street plays were widely accepted as political theatre. Political theatre gradually grew as a popular theatre. As Theodor Shank observes:

In the exuberance of the revolutionary zeal, it is natural that certain political theatre groups should turn to forms of entertainment associated with fun, with the common man, with people in general regardless of social, economic, or educational status, in contrast with the traditional aristocratic forms that have artistic pretensions and tend to be more contemplative than energetic (Political Theatre as popular entertainment, 110).

Feminist Theatre, Subaltern Theatre, etc. are political. Political theatre involved with the issue-based contents. They have something to tell beyond the art. If a theatre strongly addresses some issue, a group or a nation, it is considered as political. The class, gender, language and religion mark a performance politically, if it communicates a genuine issue. From the beginning itself, theatre was political. Augusto Boal says it as:

Theatre was the people singing freely in the open air; the theatrical performances were created by and for the people. It was a celebration in which all could participate freely. Then came the aristocracy and established divisions: some persons will go to the stages, and only they will be able to act; the rest will remain seated, receptive, passive- there will be spectators, the masses, and the people (Theatre of Oppressed, Forward).

Many developed theories about audience emerged since the 1980s. The most prominent one is the performance theory. Performance theorists say that the cross line between the viewer and doer gets blurred as the spectators enter the performing spaces. The spectator's experience in the thematic premises of drama is inseparably linked with the aesthetic concepts of the particular audiences and the place, where the play is performed. The term audienceship is used here to mean the participation of an audience, in whom there are various elements of a *performing area* such as education, age, sex, experience with the medium, social status, caste, religion, nationality, etc. They determine the performance space. They can be broadly classified into three, Active Audiences, Passive Audiences and Spectators.

1.2.2. Active Audiences, Passive Audiences and Spectators

The active audiences are more like the ideal audiences of Aristotle and Natyasastra. They are involved in the watching process and enjoy. They cannot be stagnant or silent during the performance as they are imagining and speaking more to themselves than to the outside world and must be alive in the process of drama going on in a performing area. Only with this, there is drama. A mere watching doesn't make an ideal audience. In the invocation of Mathavilasa, a Sanskrit play, Sree Mahendra Vikrama Varma writes:

Bhashavesha vapu: kriyaguna krithanasritya bhethan gatham

Bhavaveshadha nekarasadam thrilokya yathraamayam

Nrutham nishprathibadham bodha mahimaya: prekshakascha ghayam

Savyapthavanibhajanam dishathuvo divya: kapaleeyasha: (31)

In close examination, these lines mean that Lord Shiva was a great audience while he was acting. The sloka, eulogy, gives some important aspects about audience. The first thing is that it does envisage audience as actor and vice versa. As Ayyappa Panicker states, “where there is a gap between actor and audience the acting fails there”. (Prekshakan, 252) Me half and actor half is the best belief which makes a good audience according to this statement. In Natyasasthra there are some lines about audience:

Avya grairindriye: sudha

Uhapoha visaradha:

Thyaktha dhoshonu rage cha

Sa natye prekshaka smrutha: (Bharatha, vol.2, 209)

This sloka aimed at some trained audiences or actor-audiences of different kinds of performances, and, it says that the audience should be a person with good eye sight and hearing capacity. He should be able to distinguish the best and worst things and must be an art loving person and a conqueror of his desire. In this context, Ayyappa Panicker’s comment that the actual audience is the one who takes the duty of creation himself/herself is significant (252, Prekshakan). It gives clarity to the position of Natyasasthra as both of these arguments state audiences are actors, too. Vanden Dries says:

The production of human (inter)action in a common operation executed by actors and the spectators, the course of which both partners could be considered as the producers and the products of the other (4).

The consciousness of *advaida*, the Sanskrit word means, they are not two, but one. Similarly, that an actor is an audience and an audience is an actor, too, is an important one in this study about active audiences. An audience is an extension of an actor. Actor is growing towards auditorium, i.e., towards the audience, which means acting. Abhinaya, the Sanskrit word, for acting means to lead. If this growth is considered as a long thread, audience are holding one end, while actors on the other. This thread is called enjoyment. Natyasasthra indicates this with two terms: bhava and rasa. Bhava is created in actor and he/she gives it to the audience. After receiving this bhava, rasa is created in the audience. The invisible character of the actor's performance comes to the audience's mind. While the actor acts out a scene, characters get formed and become visible. Analysis and compiling happen simultaneously in the minds of an ideal audience, society and on stage. The analysis is for compiling. It is the basic psychology that leads an audience to be an active one.

Passive audiences are the people, who happen to watch a performance accidentally. They may enjoy it or not. The hawkers, the traders, etc. may be there in some performing areas. They come under this group. They are also audiences, but are passive. As Natyasasthra says:

Na chaivathe guna:sarve

Sarvasmin prekshke smrutha:

Kasmath, bahuthwath njanana-

Malpathwadhayushasthatha (Bharatha. vol.2, 210)

Knowledge is different in types and life is so short. So, a person may not achieve all the knowledge and enjoyments in the short period of one's life. The third, spectators, are people, who watch and participate in a performance with a sportsman spirit. This demands a live watching. Live watching according to Theodore Shank is:

Performance may depict the evils of the establishment, the system, the status quo, the event surrounding the performance creates a community between the performers and spectators, demonstrating the society that can exist and the means of bringing it about it (Political theatre as popular entertainment, 112).

It opens the area of the relationship between audience and performer. Shank used the word spectator instead of audience. Spectator literally means a person who is watching something, especially a sporting event. The spectators are those who make it live with their sporting spirits towards it. The spectator should have a sportsman spirit to the performance he/she who watches. It makes the performance live. Live performance means the communication between the performer and the spectator by keeping the performance open so that the performer can respond directly to the spectators and the situations that arise in the immediate area during the performance. These spectators are free to respond to the performers so that they make the show alive. Folk theatre performances demand these kinds of spectators. Augusto Boal says that spectators are actors of the spectacular. They are watching a performance while participating in it. Dual action takes place there at a time. Acting and watching a performance are done:

I, Augusto Boal, want the Spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the character on stage. I want him to occupy his own space and refer to solutions. By taking possession of the stage, the spect-actor is consciously performing a responsible Act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the spectator is not

fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality (Theatre of Oppressed, preface).

A relaxed air covers the spectator, whereas in the traditional theatre the expected behavior of people is contemplation. This ambience encourages spectators' reaction and interactions more than in a noisy situation. They feel free to share their enjoyment mutually. There is no restriction. People are free to do anything they want. This freedom makes them energetic and alive. It is a specific feature of the popular entertainment. They bring life to the atmosphere and surroundings. The audience may vary. Different religions, races, even different nationalities may be represented. Theodor shank examines them as:

The feeling of community between the performer and spectator is enhanced by keeping the performance open to improvising so that the performer can respond directly to the spectators and situations that in the immediate area during the performance. This is in much the same way that a political speaker might respond to taking advantage of a particular movement. (Political theatre as popular entertainment, 111)

The forum theatre of Augusto Boal focuses on this. They design their works for popular appeal and select some specific locales. The performers and spectators being together, two-way communication can occur. Frequently, communication continues after the performance in a discussion on the pertinent political issues. Augusto Boal wants to break the barriers between the actors and audience since all must be actors and spectators to him.

1.3. The Identity

It is the word this century deals more. All human beings have body, mind and their rhythm, and have a general identity as human beings. Race, color, nation, beliefs, education and culture group them with different identities; and as persons, each of them has their

individuality and identity. The theatre deals with each of them and sometimes they overlap each other. One realizes one's own identity through the realization of how one's actions, gestures, attitudes and thoughts were in the pasts. As one passes with more sophistication, he/she sheds or suppresses these elements of identity by being mechanical or modifying them. It is when one interlocks the fingers of hands, the right or left thumb will be up, but, it will be different in every one as it depends on the way how they are interlocking. One can never assume his/her orientation until he/she deliberately examines it. This is left unnoticed, though it happens with everyone. In the same manner in a particular phase, people begin to identify them in their past. Kerala society fits into the category of a performative society because of its caste based social and political performances. The media coverage of their performances affects depoliticalization in the people because those performances reactivate and they reinforce the caste composition of the Kerala society. This is evident in playing out scenes of heroics and this can confirm the idea of Keralite cult as an obsession with highly visible icons, and contradictorily enacted in a constant state of revolution. Kerala society remains to be contradictory in a way that it manifests a revolutionary facet, on one hand, and boasts of its traditional icons that stick on to its caste backgrounds on the other. The performances that mark themselves to be Keralite are based on such exhibitionist tendencies that are related to the caste-ism. The contemporary media intervention diffuses the political tinge the people may get from performances.

1.3.1. The Nostalgic and the Absorbed Identity

The socio-cultural aspects play a vital role in the formation of one's individuality. As Raymond Williams says:

A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to, the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary process of human societies and human minds, and we see

through them the nature of culture: that it is always both traditional and creative, that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings.

(Culture is Ordinary, 6)

The elements of one's identity like geography, caste, religion, nation, state, region, language, etc., are going through the socio-cultural history and transform into a new identity, which is absorbed unknowingly. This transformed identity is called absorbed identity. Absorbed identity cannot be natural as a baby having the first breast milk from its mother. It is the process that takes place through the experience of generations. Thus a person has an absorbed identity as naturally absorbed. This absorbed identity is closely related to the word *nostalgia*, as the Dutch doctor defined it in the 18th century. It is the depression one experiences when he/she misses his/her places or things. In a *performing area*, audiences try to find their absorbed identity. If they fail in this process, they consign the performances to oblivion. It is the missing feel of any absorbed spaces of this absorbed identity. On hearing the famous KPAC song, bali kudeerangale..., in accompaniment of its new orchestra, an audience is nostalgic for the voice of K S George (a famous singer, who sang most of the songs for the plays of KPAC during that time), the very play and the society it envisioned. This communication happens unawares in most people. It is because of this absorbed spaces creating nostalgia in one. In Wendy Jehnem's opinion, "A dream is a remixing process of conscious and unconscious minds" (67). She depended on neuroscience to argue it and explained it as the remixing of layers of experiences to create a new layer, i.e., dream. An artist also does the same thing as he/she dreams a new society by re-creating the experiences of audiences also. It is not necessary for the audience to walk from the seats towards a stage to participate in the recreating process. Occasionally, the audience undergoes the rhetoric of actors on stage with horripilation of excitement. Drama becomes the process of training the audience from this angle. An audience who is nostalgic about the songs of KPAC might be

the one who had found his/her absorbed identities once in the performing areas of those songs. One who has never absorbed KPAC songs in any experience can never be nostalgic about it. While absorbing their own areas on the stage, performance can keep the audience always nostalgic. Those areas can never be physical alone. Those spaces allowed the audience to determine the drama or performances and the audience themselves. It seems relevant here to quote, “The cultural process is as much, if not more, about creating audiences or public as it is about producing cultural artefacts and performances “(Garnham 58).

The audiences of Kerala were the real people the stages aimed to address. The cultural processes of molding the audience were so sharp in those days. Thikkodiyam, in his autobiography, remembers the formation of the first library by Kelappaji in their village, which had stood as the source of energy to all kinds of social and cultural activities for years. The educated, un- employed middle or upper middle-class youth engaged with those cultural activities. This also accounts for the reason behind the entry of working class into the *performing areas* of those years. And, those plays could determine the *nostalgia* of Kerala people. The audience of other castes tries to find their spaces within their social and caste identity in such drama. Though they tried to address the womanhood, it is evident in history the result was from the Namboothiri community only. A play, Thozhilkendrathilekku, emerged from a group of Namboothiri women. The question is why women from other communities did not produce plays inspired by Adukkala? It was because of these absorbed identical spaces. The play longed for those Namboothiri women audiences. . It was never concerned about others, even though there were some subaltern representations like Cherumi. Like VT Bhattathirippadu, KT Muhammed also staged plays for Muslim community. But they were multi-faceted. He made use of the dialectal form of the language and customs of the regional Kozhikkodan Muslim community. The slang

and style of the Kozhikkodan Malayalam and the open spaces of the lives of the common Muslim majority gave the absorbed identical spaces to the public also. So, those plays could address the people in general, though addressed a community specifically. G Sankarapillai wrote on the introduction of the book *The Theatre of the Earth is never dead*:

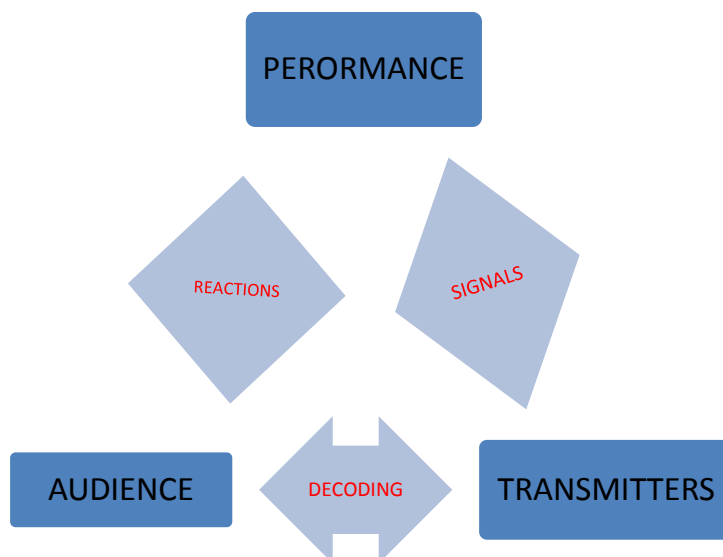
A Keralite, however far away he may be from his native- land, will, on the wings of fancy, fly back to his home country so as to enjoy himself in thought the newness and freshness of festivals like vishu, pooram, padayani, thiruvathira etc.with a nostalgic gusto, that is abiding and linked with the traditions of his inherent culture (Introduction).

In this quotation by G Sankarapillai, he tried to iconize the festivals like vishu, vemple festivals, padayani and thiuvathira as the nostalgic elements of a Keralite. Kerala has different styles of slangs, religious and caste-based customs and rituals, different concepts about costumes, hairstyles, social, educational and political perceptions. There are different festivals and rituals for specific regions. For a northern Keralite, padayani cannot be his nostalgia, as for a southern one theyyam cannot be. Different hues and colors of the social and cultural identity are synthesized into one Keralite. Middle class Hindu concepts and rituals express the nature of this identity just like the quotation mentioned above refers to it. In a closer analysis, it is clear that this quotation projects something more, while keeping silent about some other things. It never meant that the quotation rejects them. But as long it keeps silence about it, there are no hints about the other nostalgias. Naturally, they slipped to the dark spaces of memories and were thus forced to exit from our nostalgic spaces. There are enough reasons to think that the identity of Malayali was thus getting formed in the Kerala scenario.

This analysis deals with the nostalgic spaces of Kerala audience with 1) its origin from the folk and classical arts, 2) the historical evolution of the audience of modern drama and 3) the identity and audienceship and the state of audience in the present day of modern drama.

1.4. Performing Area

The audience, the spectacle and the identity shared by the audience and the spectacle form the three phases of a performing area. *The Performing Area* includes all the visual and the audible icons, texts, conventions, actors, costumes and make up, individual methods, the stage chosen and the performance atmosphere; and, it is the space, where audience shares their cultural identities with a fixed or flexible inner structured performance. Performance is a communicating tool for theatre. A number of pre-conditions have to be met by the performance and its audience. They need to be visible and audible to each other to communicate well. Visibility and audibility can determine themselves, but they need to communicate. The same language, same culture or the people sharing similar sets of assumptions about the gestures and meaning of words they use, can communicate more easily than others. The signals one performance creates must be transmitted to communicate a performance.



The signals are transmitted by means of the voice, movements, lights, music, properties and silence and make some expressions (bhavas) or meaning, which reach the audience. They decode the enjoyment (rasa), and, it results in some reactions as Natyasasthra says in siddhis (It will be detailed in chapter three). Performances seem to use devices such as suthradhara or vidusakas to make the communication more live and easy and to create deliberate interference in the audience as to what meaning or what message is intended by the performer. Then, audiences refresh their decoded signals through the new information of the device attributed. From the traditional and folk performances and musical drama, those refreshing factors reached commercial theatre today and remain inevitable. As AK Nambiar, theatre critic, comments:

If we analyze the cultural history of Kerala, we can see two specific streams. The first one is the art and culture of elites. The cultural taste of the people is regulated by the elites. The art form of this section caters to the entertainment of upper castes, mainly Brahmins and Kshathriyas. These art forms were nurtured at the palatial mansions and temples. Koothu, Koodiyattam and Kathakali were the products of this culture (62).

The performing areas of these art forms are occupied not only with the body of the castes but also of the beliefs, rituals and the myths of the elite castes and upper class people of the society. The story, character, actor, musicians, music, stage, the lamp, the torches and audiences create the *performing area* of kathakali. Apart from real life time, space and action determine the performance. The spaces of different identities like gender, culture, race and the performance determine the audience and all of them together form the performing area. All these elements are recreated after each performance, but performance can't re-produce as it was. Here, one may consider all the bareness with the limits of the performing area as Peter Brook imagines: a play as "one looks at another, one walking lonely through a corridor". The Kiss of Love, a movement Kerala witnessed in the year 2014 by the young against the moral

policing of the society also can be considered as a *performing area* as there is a performance, signals, decoding factors and audience.

1.4.1. Performing spaces which determine audiences

The audience and the playing space are not separable. As different stages have various aims, the duties of the performance also varied. The history of theatre is connecting with the hardships of the working class. It is natural to handle and reflect current society and its problems. J L Styan in his book *Dramatic Experience* states that, “the architecture of a play-house can tell a good deal about the play, the attitude and purpose of its audience, as well as the kind of acting and performance” (3).

In ancient Greek, it was impossible to think about making a roof for the huge audience, who came to see the performance. As the medieval drama lost much of the formal qualities of Greek drama, the theatre was largely religious, and plays were performed in play guilds of that time. Then, it had to be in open air theatres, and the stage is a series of platforms or mansions or actors travelled from point to point in decorated carts. In the Elizabethan era, the drama was relieved from the religious fence, and it demanded to draw the spectator’s attention to an important entrance. The Globe opened its doors to a great variety of dramatic techniques. There existed a firm relation between spectator and stage. At the earlier stage of the Restoration period, the modern-picture frame can be seen. It was a smaller indoor theatre. Modern stages can’t be generalized. The proscenium and the fourth wall theatre are conceptualized by play writers widely. In the contemporary theatre, the artist tries to break the traditional barriers of modern times.

In Kerala, days of the old theatre bear the nostalgia of the paddy fields also. From the ritual, theatre audience enters into the Tamil sangeetha nadakas. This made the path to the vellari drama. The open ground and temporary auditoriums show the nature of the audience,

too. Long before it, Kerala had a famous model for play-house. That is koothambalam. The theatre was an intimate one then. Only then the subtle acting style of Koodiyattam was made possible, and the audience could watch it. The facial movements are so important in koothambalam arts, and actually they are close-up arts. In Greek theatre, the subtlety of acting was out of imagination. There would have been above thirty five thousand people to watch a play. The choruses were of around three thousand people in a group. The spectacle might be so vague. So, masks and stilts were used.

1.4.2. Audiences' relationship with the performing spaces

The audiences' relation with a performing atmosphere is really a remarkable one. If a Theyyam or Mudi yettu performance takes place in a region other than its original region, it becomes a dead piece. Its life lies in historic, geographical, mythological and socio-political consciences of its land. Likewise, effective and live performance of temple-arts cannot be made outside of koothambalams, because they were so molded to that particular theatre and their audience. The words of Goverden Panchal and Kapila Vatsyayan are remarkable here:

Whenever I have watched a Kutiyattam performance in its natural habitat, the Koothambalam, its impact on me as on other sensitive minds, has been tremendous. ...I realized how wrong it was to stage kutiyattam in theatre conditions shorn of its proper environment (Panchal 10).

While it is not certain that these structures existed at the time of Kulasekhara, he certainly took the architectural style and floor pattern of the theatre into account while evolving the methodologies of presentation of kudiattom (Vatsyayan 22).

The relation between the written text, the means of play's presentation and the audience are connected with the how or why of a performance selected. All developments in the

traditional theatre, the Nangiar Koothu, Chakyar Koothu, Thullal, Ramanattam, Krishnattam and Kathakali, were associated with this temple - theatre. The performances became more ritualistic naturally. But as mere aesthetic forms, temple arts cannot connect their forms to the contemporary society. It may become grotesque when they try. They are only aesthetic experiences. Highly constructed and institutionalized spaces like nepathya and prekshaka griham, which were the integral components of temple arts, did not draw the public at large. The theatre emerged through temples were centered on actors. It was totally blind to all other aspects like lighting and scenery. The light source was the little flames of one lamp. The set is one or two stools sometimes. Properties are very limited to costume and accessories, and sometimes one sword (Lakshmana has a sword to cut Soorpanaha's nose). They have an elaborated costume and make-up. The scenographical possibilities are restricted to the abilities of the actor's body. The little space was like a fourth wall theatre. The koothambalam demands a limited audience of scholars and high castes. Koodiyattom, its stories, language and acting styles, addressed an audience of the elite class. In a way, an elite class malayali's all theatrical imagination was compressed to that little space. Any theatre depends significantly, in a great degree, upon the people for whom it was performed and their reason to go to the theatre. Performance space and its relation with the audience define the *performing area* of a performance, which deals with the identity of the audience.

1.5. The identity of audience in a Keralite performing area

The identity of audience in a Keralite *performing area* is complicated. It can be observed and analyzed only with the cultural, economical, political and social background. The *performing areas* in the contemporary world are found particularly at the meeting point where democracy encounters capitalism. In such societies, performance has gained a new kind of potency because multi-party democracy weaves ideological conflict visibly into the

very fabric of the society. This thesis addresses the audience who filled the *performing areas* of Kerala drama today.

SPECTATORS' FOLK THEATRE

The performance history of South India has three phases. There is no data available about the first phase. Tholkappiyam, the sangam texts like Chilappathikaram and Akananooru give some glimpses about the second and third phases. Limited knowledge is available about the ancient theatre of South India. Theatre might have evolved with the beginning of civilization. People sought something to mitigate their hardships of labor and daily chores. This history of theatre is the same everywhere. The relaxation might begin from the body movements. There might be no role for brilliance and talent; and, there might not be any audience. All might be the participants. So, the dance, music and acting could not be distinguished from one another. The performances might have developed from the improvisations of those moments. Gradually, people might have tried to search their mind through the body. This can be a short account of the formation of a theatre culture here. It is natural that the theatre of ancient times became dance-oriented. Kapila Vatsyayan says:

The use of a human body as a vehicle of expression and communication was not restricted to what is termed, normally, as 'dance' or movement: it was brought to the aid of the word, V`ak, whose primacy was unquestioned at all levels, particularly the village and urban levels. On the word was superimposed the melodic note: the two together provided the essential prerequisites for interpretation through movement. (9)

It is clear that the song and dance, though not in the systematic manner, were so natural and spontaneous. Dancing was a marked feature of most life situations. And, it is senseless to question the superiority of mind or body in a creative space, just like the question whether mango or its seed is the first born.

2.1 The ancient theatre of South India

In the third kantam of Tholkappiyam, porulathikaram, is connected with old Dravida theatre. According to Tholkappiyam, there are three elements such as muthalporul, kuruporul and uriporul. Muthal is with the time and space, kuruporul is about the productive elements and uriporul is about the emotion. Thinas are the geographical divisions mentioned in sangam literature. They are five, and, one thina has one uri each. For mullai iruthal (waiting) is its uri. kurinji's uri is punarthal (union). For palai uriporul is pirithal (separation). Marutham involves with oodal (quarrel) and naithal is with irankal (shed tears).

Geography in Performance

| Five <i>Thinas</i> are Five Geographical areas | Five <i>Uris</i> and each <i>Thina</i> has one |
|--|--|
| Mullai-Jungle | Iruthal-waiting |
| Kurinji- Hill | Punarthal- Union |
| Palai- Desert | Pirithal- Separation |
| Marutham- Field | Oodal- Quarrel |
| Naithal-Coastal | Irankal- Shed tears |

It can be understood from Tholkappiyam that dancing was very common with all classes of people. There were two kinds of dancing vallikoothu and kalanilaikoothu. Vallikoothu was in honor of Valli, the war God Muruga, while kalanilaikoothu was in honor of a youth, who fought with courage and got the victory. At the time he returned home, an anklet, known as virakkalal, was presented to him and he started to dance wearing it. The vallikoothu was popular among the lower classes. The kalanilaikoothu was of a higher order. There was another dance as atal in which velan veriyatal was very famous. Its chief feature was to offer bali to the God Muruga. During the worship

one man possessed by the spirit would start dancing; the crowd would join it. There was another kind of attam. It celebrated the heroic death of a king in the war. It was a custom when a king fell. The war will be stopped for some moments, and other kings would surround the dead body and would dance with swords. As evidenced by *Tholkkappiyam*, there were ritual dance and war dance in which ideas were expressed by different postures and gestures. *Tholkkappier* said about eight maipadukal (expressions), “Nakayye azhukai ilivaral marudkai / Acham perumitham vakali uvakaiyenru / Appal ettam maipadenpa (“nakai- hasyam, azhukai- karunam, elivaral- bheebatsam, marudai- atbhutham, acham- bhayanakam, perumitham- veeram, vekali- raudram, uvakai- sringaram”; my trans.; 295). They are very close to drama:

| 8 Maipadukal of <i>Tholkkappiyam</i> | 9 Rasas of <i>Natyasastra</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Nakai | Hasyam |
| Azhukai | Karunam |
| Elivaral | Bheebastam |
| Marudai | Atbutham |
| Acham | Bhayanakam |
| Perumitham | Veeram |
| Vekali | Roudram |
| | Santham |
| Uvakai | Sringaram |

As Ayyappa Panickar observes, “*Tholkkappiyam* emphasizes body language and attitude.” It speaks about bhavas, not rasas as in *Natyasastra*. But, these bhavas are not divine states of mind. There are some physical gestures. Ayyappa Panickar lists some examples from

Tholkkappiyam, “ Kuzhai viruthal, kathonrukalaithal / Oozhanithaivarar udaipayarthuduthalodu / Kezhi iya nake irandena mozhiva (“loosen the hair, take out ear rings from ears and drop them to the floor, groped the jewelry worn orderly, wear the cloth neatly”; my trans.; 297).

Chilappathikaram, a sangam text, gives some ideas about the theatre forms of the period. Chilappathikaram talks about various koothus. They can be broadly classified into vettiyaal and podiviyal. Other ones are santhikoothu and vinodhakoothu. Vettiyaal and podiviyal refer to the classical and popular. Santhikoothu again is classified into four kinds: sokkam, meyyakoothu, avinayam and natakam, while vinodhakoothu has been subdivided into six such as kuravai, kilinatam, kudakkuthu, karanan, nokku and torpavai. Santhikoothu has created a mood of responsible enjoyment as a means of aesthetic recreation. Vinodhakoothu has appealed to the masses, mostly because of the spectacular rather than intellectual. In the cantos six and eight, Kadaladu Kathai and Venir Kathai, Iankovadikal gives references of different types of koothus. Kottukotti is a dance by Siva and Bhairavi (Kali). Pantiranga is again a dance attributed to Siva. The alliyam, is dance performed by the dark hued Vishnu after disposing of the treacherous devices of Kamsa. Alliya’s dance is one among the ten dances Krisna is engaged in. The mallu dance was the victory of Krisna over Bana, when Bana imprisoned Anirudha, the grandson of Krisna for stealing his daughter Usa. The tudi dance is set amid the sea. This refers to the legend of the killing of asura, sura and Patma by Subramanya. The kudai dance is also by Subramanya lowering the umbrella before the asuras. The kutam dance is by Vishnu in his reincarnation as Gopala. The peti dance is by the Kama, the Cupid, who changed his male form to that of a hermaphrodite. The marakkaal dance is by Durga as Mahishasuramardhini. The pavai dance is by Lakshmi, and the kadayam dance is by lady Indrani standing in the field of the northern gate of Bana’s city. Besides

these eleven koothus mentioned in Kadaladum Kathai, Ilankovadikal talks about dances in Venir Kathai also.

The kankoothu vari (the dance of eyes) is performed by loving a maiden. It is a dance form appropriate to be called a gesture. The maiden would take varis from kuravai. The kankoothu vari tells about the first view of heroin by the hero. It is one of the eight varies. Vari is a term associated with music and of seven kinds; it may also refer to the seven strings of kural (two lines of four and three words in each). The kanvari is another dance performed at frequent and repeated intervals. Ulvari is a dance of disguise. Puravari is a dance, where the heroine coldly neglects the lover's company. In kilarvari dancer performs as the offended lover, when an intermediate tries to mediate. Another dance terccivari is a dramatic action, in which a person expresses in detail all his sufferings caused by separation. The katcivari is a dance exhibiting sorrow and distress. Ettuttu kolvari is the theatrical action of swooning in the extreme anguish to the point of being lifted. Chilappathikaram says regional dances also developed according to the topographical peculiarities of South India. In vancikantam kunrak kuravai (the dance of hill-maiden) is portrayed. There is another kuravai performed by the women of cow-herds in honor of Vishnu. Kontunilai is a kind of song, which accompanied the kuravai dance. Toriyamtantai is a dance by an aged dancer, who was accompanied by two more dancers. There are four characteristics of a dance: palai, kurinci, marutham and sevvai. Chilappathikara mentions a person, Sakkayyan, a dancing expert from Parayur. He performed the dance kotticceedam for the king's pleasure. Kotticceedam was a solo performance appeared as a classical type, while the group varieties, such as kuravai and tunangai might be of popular type. There are two schools of dance such as margi and desi.

When we consider Ayyappa Panickar's study of Tholkkappiyam, he found that the performances of that era didn't rely on rasa, i.e., the audience. So, they differed from Natyasastric audience. The performances were known in different names as attam, koothu

and kunippu. The Chilappathikaram phase mentions four kinds of koothu: santhikoothu, sakkayyankoothu, ariyankoothu and tamilkoothu. It is not clear whether these forms are different varieties or merely variations of the same type. Sakkayyankoothu might be the koothu performed by Sakkayyan. Santhikoothu, is said to be the dance of women before temples during festivals. It is a question yet to be answered if they bear any distant relation with the form nangiarkoothu. Aryankoothu might be a dance of Aryan people with poles on ropes; acrobatic feat existed there. And, the final tamilkoothu might be the performances of natives (Tamils), which might be the forerunners of the present therukoothu. It can be assumed that from the sangam description in ancient Kerala, there were different types of koothu and theatre performances. They were either king oriented or mass oriented. The king oriented performances attained great acceptability in the high order and the audience were the royal people. Though Chilappathikaram mentions some kinds of stages and screens, it is uncertain whether performances were performed in some theatre, in the temple complex, just in the open air or in the temple itself. As the majority of audiences were engaged with the desi type koothus and the margi type performances like Sakkayyan's kotticceedom, they might be performed to some intimate or private audience. Generally, the nature of theatre might be open air. It is interesting to notice that the performances, which were topographically oriented, gradually became caste oriented.

2.2 Rituals and theatre

All rituals are theatrical. Kerala has an abundant ritual history from which a theatre tradition emerged. The geographical and historical elements influenced it deeply; in other words, theatre itself evolves from this nostalgic past. The word *nostalgia* was derived from Greek (nosto- return, and alogos- pain). It was used for the first time by a Dutch doctor in the eighteenth century to define an affliction of people, who were forced to live away from their home land for a long period. *Nostalgia* is in this sense a passion for return. Nicola Savarese,

in the dictionary of theatre anthropology, talked about “Niccolo` Thommaseo, who introduced the word *nostalgia* in the Italian language as ‘the noble privilege of poor nations’” (165). It was natural that the mythical and legendary characters inspire *nostalgia* in people’s imaginations and it is very clear that the theatre has unique cultures specific to different regions. In all arts and rituals here, there are the symbols and glimpses of agriculture and fertility. Without paddy fields, there is almost no art. With the huge participation of a whole village, the art forms like mudiyettu, padeni and theyyam do a remarkable job to the society. With a flexible body language and mythological costumes and accessories, the artistes perform to the spectators, who are already involved in the performance.

Song, dance and rhythm with the musical instruments are the main attraction of ritual arts in Kerala. Ritual theatre reflects a mass audience-life and anthropological development. It creates a visual language, through which a region or a village speaks loudly to the world. Each village or region has its expressions and own theatre space, through which they start to communicate with the outer world. There are so many ritual plays in Kerala. Kothamuri, theyyam, chimmanakkali, thira, poothanum thirayum, kalikettu, paranettu, ramarkoothu, chaliyaporattu, tholpavakoothu, pavakali, sangakali, padeni, mudiyetu, kaliyutu, etc. are some of them. Padayani (Padeni), mudiyettu, theyyam are prominent among them.

2.2.1 Padayani

Padayani is performed in south-east Kerala, especially in Pathanamthitta district. Kadamanitta temple is famous for padayani. There is a proverbial saying that padayani has the elements of sixty four art forms. There is no clear evidence about padayani’s emergence. It is said that padayani was in practice when Perumal ruled the place in the AD 8th century. It is celebrated to please the deity, Kavilamma or Bhadra Kali. The myth behind the ritual is after the killing of Dhaarika, a demon, Kali danced violently. She returned to Kailasa in such a

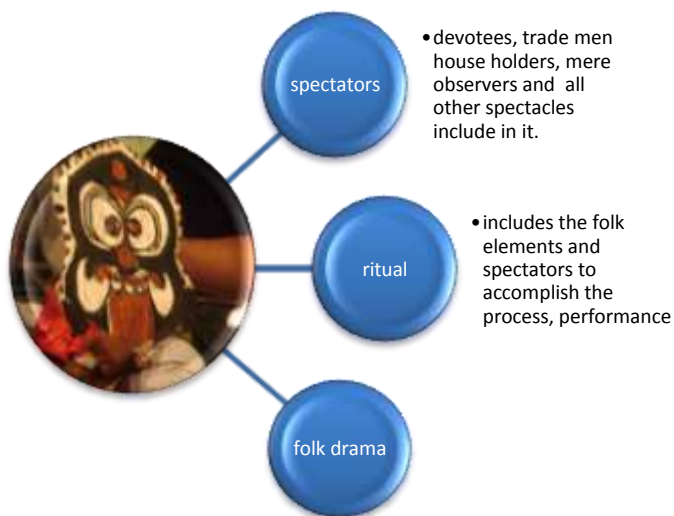
trans-violent journey. Lord Siva and his retinue of bhoothas wanted to cool the deity and performed different art forms such as musical concerts, dances, comic plays, etc. Still, they couldn't calm down her. At last, when the deity reaches the temple gate, she sees the kalam, an artistic depiction of serpents and other deities along with her figure using natural materials. And then she gives a roaring laugh. This shift of mood is made possible because she looks at herself and her turbulent mood being drawn sarcastically in different postures.

The padayani takes twenty eight days to perform. As in the other cases of rituals of Kerala, it is also in the Malayalam months Kumbham and Medam (March to April), the harvest is over. The uniqueness of padayani is that it is performed in a kara (village). The people of the whole region participate in it. Padayani begins with ooralipadeni. Oorali is a man from Kurava caste (a tribal caste). He comes from the hills with a bow on his right hand. Oorali has his costumes and accessories to perform. Purappad begins then. With a procession of Kavilamma, Oorali goes to each house of the village. This is purappadu. Each house receives the procession with great divinity and gives paddy in paras, a measurement pot used commonly in Kerala. It is known as parayeduppu. There are many minor rituals related to this parayeduppu. None of them are compulsory. Sometimes, they may be just offerings. While it comes back to the temple, the Oorali will make a huge sound with bow hitting on the ground and runs back to the hills. Another observance is chootuveppu. Chootu is a hand-made torch of coconut leaves. With lighting these torches, the padayani teacher makes rhythms in Thappu, a musical instrument. The real elements of the ritual begin from the third day of the celebration. Kappoli, sadippu, vinodham, adavi, kolamthullal, vallyepadeni, appinideemvilakkum are the important performances of padayani.

Kappoli is a rhythmic musical concert. Vallyamelam, thappumelam and chendamelam are the main items performed in it. The main musical instrument is thappu. Sadippu includes the thavadi and the pulayavritam. Thavadi is the steps with rhythm and flexibility with the

accompaniment of thappu. Different thappus and rhythms were in vogue. Pulaya vritham is a group performance. One man as pulaya comes to the circle, where performances are expected to stage and starts to perform as Pulaya with dialogues. Then men come and make the circle and begin to sing the songs. The body movements are different and ordered. They are related with the harvest and agriculture. Otta, iratti, mukkanni, vallye mukkanni, etc. are the steps. Kolkkali is another part of padayani. It is a type of movements of hands with sticks. It also has musical support. Ramayanam plot is generally sung by them especially seethanweshanam. Vinodham is also an important item of padayani in which the comic elements are prominent. There are different types of characters in vinodham. Paradesi, Anthoni, Ammummam Appuppanum, Masappadi, Kunhirikka maharshi, Asanum sishyanum, Nayarum Nambureem, Pattarum Pennum, Vairavi, Thangalum Padem, Kakkalan, etc. are the comic characters. Music-dance composition with dialogues with the audience is the main specialty of vinodham. Adavi is a main item of padayani. There will be a temporary auditorium with the roof of coconut palm leaves. Panayadi and azhiyazhikkal are important performances of adavi. After adavi the kolamthullal will be performed. The kolam masks are made of areca palm leaf. The kolam artistes must have a thorough training of different steps involving different types of eye movements. The body movements, attitude and steps create a terrific atmosphere, which is a divine one. Vallye padeni is considered as the most important day of padayani. The day between adavi and vallye padayani is edappadayani. Actually, it is a resting day. Only some rituals take place then. In the vallye padayani day, thavadi, pula vritham, paradesi, etc. are performed. In some places, kuthirakkolam also is performed on this day. After all, there begins nayaattum paddem (hunting). With masks of animals, people play nayattu. At the end of nayattu, mangalakolam will be performed. Mangalakolam is a ritual in which the village extends its apology to the goddess. It will continue till dawn.

It is the general nature of the ritual padeni. They are very real and important. Padayani has a very systematic form. The rituals, performance and the play are all derived from this system. Naturally, they maintained a distinction with each other. One derives from another and remains related to each other. The reactions evoked in the spectator by these inter woven factors are unpredictable. These experiences of the spectator are determined within the distinctions of those factors which are evolved through a continuous socio cultural process.



2.2.2 Mudi yettu

Mudi yettu is performed in the Central Kerala temples especially in Thsrissur, Kottayam, Eranamkulam and Idukky districts. Kavuvattam, an open air stage, is for the performance of mudi yettu. Mudi means hair in Malayalam. But it is crown in this context. The name mudi yettu indicates the coronation of Kali after the victory over the demon, Dhaarika. The myth behind this art form is the Kali- Dhaarika war and the main performance includes the challenging and killing of Dhaarika. The mudi yettu season starts from January to May (the Malayalam months Makaram, Kumbam, Meenam and Medam) and the artistes are from Kurup, and Marar castes. Lord Siva, Naradha, Kali, Kuli, Dhaarikan, Dhaanavendran and Koyimpada Nair are the seven characters of mudi yettu. Koyimpada Nair is the only human character in the mudi yettu play. He undertakes the duties of a narrator. Why and when of the

story are summarized by him. He makes dialogues with musicians also. The main characters, Kali, Dhaarika and Dhaanavendra, have elaborate costumes and accessories similar to kathakali. There are musicians and musical instruments on the stage. The music is like sopana sangeetham. The musicians and actors engage in dialogues often. The plot of the play is Kali. The goddess gets angry to the demon Dhaarika. On the plea of the gods, she determines to kill Dhaarika. When Dhaarika knows about this, he gets angry and starts to meet Kali. Their meeting, harangue and battle cry are the focus main performance. At last Kali kills Dhaarika.

Mudiyettu is being performed at midnights. It begins with the arangu keli, the announcement of the mudiyettu with the accompaniment of musical instruments. Arangu vazhthal follows. It is the appraisal of gods with music. Then spectators start to be seated on both sides of the stage, where musicians are performing. Mudiyettu begins. A thiraseela, curtain, is there but not fixed. In ancient days, it was a piece of white cloth. There is a stool on the stage. From behind the curtain, Siva and Naradha enter. They salute the musicians and Siva climbs on the stool. Naradha informs him about Dhaarika- Dhaanavendra and Siva. It has no dialogue. They exit. Then Dhaarika's introduction takes place. It is known as Dhaarikapurappad. Dhaarika enters the stage through the spectators. After dancing and acting Dhaarika exits. Then Kalipurappad. After thiranottam (behind the curtain), Kali also dances and acts. After her introduction, while Kali rests on the stool (peedam), the fifth character, Koyimbada Nair, enters. The spectators can have dialogues with him, and he narrates them how and why Kali is there, and he has dialogues with Kali also. After he exits, Kulipurappad begins. It is a comic character creating humor throughout the play. Pesal begins then. The dispute between Dhaarika and Dhaanavendra is the pesal. They fight each other. Kootiyattam begins after it. It is the climax sequence of mudiyettu. Kali meets Dhaarika and Dhaanavendra and they challenge each other. The battle cry takes place in this part. At the

end, Kali kills Dhaarika, and with his crown on him, Kali recites thottam. Here ends mudiyettu.

The temple premises are the *performing area*. The trees and their walls are meaningfully used by the actors. The earth, heaven and kailasa are all depicted with the given environment. As the play begins, the temple and its surroundings transform into a mythological space. Mudiyettu is the best example of environmental acting, where the environment participation is the prime preference. The improvisation method of acting is very fantastic also. The play and performance vary according to the participation of spectators. The spectators cannot be passive in this *performing area*. They have different responsibilities and participation possibilities as it is a ritual performance. Since they know the ritual, its myth and technical aspects from childhood itself, the participation is easy. The participation of spectators required development of their cognitive capacities to their full potential. This includes language and symbolic reasoning, which one must seek in interactions, thought processes, culture (it is very important as the plot and ritual are based on the Hindu mythology), and even ethical judgments. These are the significant elements of the performance because mudiyettu enhances its dramatic nature with fiction- like escape and pursuit, attack, defense, and social give-and-take. It is possible to make one conscious of life and death.

2.2.3 Theyyam

Theyyam is another ritual performance of Kerala, performed in northern districts. It is developed not in the environment of sophisticated temples but the small local groves (Kavus). A kavu in North Kerala is a place of worship that belongs to a particular family or village. Trees are common in kavus. The word theyyam has said to be originated from the Sanskrit word Daivam which means God. Theyyam is performed by certain castes like Malaya, Vannan, Velan, Anjuttan, Munnuttan and Pulaya. The theyyam season begins soon after the harvest in December and January, after the Malayalam month Thulam tenth. Theyyam is

performed in open fields and houses, where theyyam is a family deity. The villagers offer food and drink: rice, meat, toddy, coconut, fish, etc. to the theyyam, which are also the usual food of the villagers. This art form penetrates into the social, cultural and artistic life of the people on par with their varied approaches.

Theyyam performance is known as kaliyattam. Kali means to play and attam is dance. So, dance-play is kaliyattam. But theyyam is not just a play or danc. It is a very serious ritual performance, getting violent at times. Thiras are its sub divisions. Thiras represent the past heroes, who were outstanding members of the society. There are so many theyyams and so many myths behind them. Each theyyam has its myth. And, there are also a variety of theyyam rituals. Some of the significant theyyams are Bhairavan, Kuttichathan, Uccitta, Karival and Vishnumurthi. The face make up of the theyyam varies from theyyam to theyyam by its gender and emotional background. The commonly practiced ritual by all theyyams is the accompaniment of the percussion musical instruments during the ceremonial wearing of the crown and the draping of silk cloth around the waist of the performer. Then, the performer stands in front of the deity and chants thottams, which describe the particular theyyam he is going to conjure.

Vellattam is a kind of performance performed as the part of theyyam. It is for the theyyams of past heroes. The vellattam performer wears crown instead of mudi (Mudi is a particular head gear common in Kerala ritual arts. It means hair in Malayalam). Vellattam represents the young stage of theyyam. After thottam and vellattam, theyyam enters the green room and wears the full costume and make-up. It will take a long time. The mudi and some particular ornaments are added to the costume only after entering the *performing area*.

After wearing costumes, theyyam goes through a ritual. It is known as urayal. During the urayal the performer gets into the spirit and becomes possessed. The body rhythm will be

fast. It is the characteristic of urayal. This is for invoking the deity to enter the body of the performer. Thiranottam follows then. It is the acting behind a curtain, often a piece of cloth. Thiranottam is followed by attam (dance). Chenda, veekuchenda, kuzhal (horn) are the musical support for attam. After a long and tremendous performance, the ritual uriyattukelppikkal and kuri kodukkal follow. The devotees can talk with the theyyam then. It is the time for complaining or praying to God directly. People are assuaged by the oracular utterances of theyyam. With the removal of mudi, theyyam performance comes to an end.

Kothamuri: It is a type of theyyam performance in the far northern districts of Kerala. It also starts on the tenth day of Malayalam month Thulam. The farmers celebrate this for a prosperous year. The Malaya and Pana castes are the performers of this art. A small boy is the kothamuri with a cow's mask of arecanut palm leaf. The retinue is the group of Paniyans. They are comic actors and they are free to say anything to anyone. It has the characteristics of porattu plays. The kothamuri and paniyas wander from house to house and perform kothamuriyattam, the dance of kothamuri (steer). The play kothamuriyattam evolved from the bond of the agrarian society with the environment and the cattle they reared.

2.2.4 Tholpavakoothu

It is also a ritual and folk performance prominent in Kerala. Its specialty is that it is the only shadow theatre performance of Kerala. Puppetry is the theatre form that attracts the whole world. The developments of painting, cinema, drama are all associated with the puppet plays. In Kerala, tholpavakoothu is the prominent puppet play form. Tholpavas, the shadow puppets, are made with the skin of animals. It tells the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharatha epics. Though there is no exact proof about its age, it is believed that it was born in the temple premises of Palakkad district of Kerala. There is a myth behind the shadow play as it is performed as a ritual in the Kali temples of Kerala. The Dhaarika vadham (Killing of Dhaarika) in Kali story is related to this myth. While Kali was engaged with the

war against Dhaarika, the puranic (mythical) Rama- Ravana war was also going on. So, she was sad that she couldn't witness the event. Lord Siva found a solution for her grief. He asked his subordinates to perform Rama - Ravana story as a shadow play. The shadow plays of Kerala are thus conceived to be performed for Kali by the command of Lord Siva. And, they are the stories about Rama and Krishna. Since there isn't any restriction in worshipping Kali either in Saiva or Vaishnava temples, Tholpavakoothu is performed in all temples.

Earlier, the puppets were made from the palm leaves. So, they were called olappavakoothu as ola is the palm leaf. The Nair and Vellala chetty castes are the people responsible for performing tholpavakoothu. The artiste, who performs tholpavakoothu, is known as Pulava, meaning a scholar. He attains a respectable position in the society. He has a role in settling disputes. The stage, where tholpavakoothu is performed, is known as koothumaadam. It is a roofed and three walled rectangular stage.



Figure 1 Aryankavu Temple Koothumadam. Koonathara, Kavalappara, Shornur. Anil Ottappalam 16.March.2018

Thirty eight feet long and six feet high Aryankavu temple koothumaadam is considered as a model for koothumaadams. Usually, koothumaadams are called naalppapatheeradi kalari. It is a belief that koothumaadam might have forty two feet long. A white cotton cloth is used as

the screen. It is known as ayappudava. Below the white screen, there is a black piece of cloth also. The piece of white screen represents the earth and heaven, while the black one represents hell, the paathalam. The good characters come up with the ayappudava. Light for the screen is provided with a lighting facility from behind the curtain. For this, lit twisted thread lamps fixed on coconut pieces are kept on a vertically positioned piece of bamboo. This is kept behind the curtain exactly where black and white cloth- curtains join. These bamboo pieces are called as vilakkumaadams (lighthouses). There were hundreds of koothumaadams in Kerala in the past. Tholppavakooth is performed in about sixty koothumaadams that remain now. Generally, koothumaadams are situated on the opposite side of the Sreekovil so that the goddess also can watch the performance without any hindrance.

There are six artistes to perform the play. Three of them would be playing puppets, while others would be saying koothu, the story. The poems used for puppet plays are known as adal Paattu (dance song). In the introductory scene, there are two important characters; they are Brahmins, known as pattarpaavakal. The paavanatakam starts with these pattarpaavakal every day. The ritual starts with the bringing of lighted deepam from the sreekovil to koothumaadam. The thayambaka, ensemble of percussion instruments, i.e., rhythmic hitting on chenda (drums), starts then and it concludes with the tightening of ayappudava. This process is known as koothu koorayidal. The chanting of the gods like Ganapathi, Vishnu, and Saraswathi takes place then. It is kalarichinth. On the last day of the play, there is a ritual called ayappudayirakkal, in which the madappulavar, the performers, loosen the ayappudava and cut it to pieces and give to the artists.

Tholpavakooth is performed every year in certain temples. It is also related to the culture and socio-economic background of the place, where it is performed. Today, the people do not seem very much interested in tholpavakooth as it was in the past. So, it became only a temple

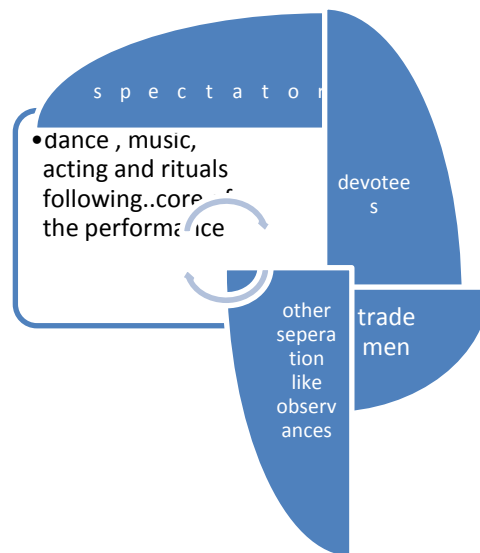
ritual. Various stages of it like koothu koorayidal are ritual symbols to start the temple festival of the year. The people around the temple are very much concerned about this ritual. They believe that it is not good for health and family to go beyond that locality after the koothu koorayidal. The Kali myth is a familiar one in Kerala. It is associated with the culture of Kerala as the mother God, Kali, has a deep link with the culture of Keralites. The text Eramavatharam, later known as Kamba Ramayanam written by the Tamil poet Kambar is the basic text of shadow plays.

2.2.5 Spectators' participation in rituals

The ritual plays are simple and have a direct impact, as they bloom from the utmost social consciousness of common people. The structure of a ritual performance undergoes an evolution through the involvement of the participation of the mass audience. This is an essential factor. The myth and tradition commingle here. Rituals connect people with an invisible world. The power of symbols in human communication is the main element of a ritual play. As the spectators make a crucial revision of performance, ritual spaces draw them from the passive viewers to co-creators. The rhythmic dance, the vigorous yet dexterous movements, the open air, smoke, flames, the smell of burning oil, the almost incomprehensible jargon mixed songs to the accompaniment of music, the sound of percussion instruments, pipes, cymbals, an elaborate face make-up, etc. form together to render an extra ordinary experience to the spectator. People engage themselves in it again and again, incrementally altering body tone and neural wiring, strengthening and gathering speed in synaptic pathways, improving their capacity to perform and participate in the performance because rituals have a compulsive place in their life.

The distance between the spectator and performance is of course, an important factor in experiencing a performance, especially a ritual. The observers, who are really motivated to participate in such situations of a ritual, can fare better at the moments of the high frequency

of the performance. Rituals extend repertoires and are capable of sharpening sensitivities. When the codes and signifying terms of performance are analyzed, the distance of the *performing area* and the spectator can be seen decreasing. Play within the ritual, therefore, has evolved to be highly self-rewarding. Each performance has a core and a peripheral part. The core part is related to the dance, music, playing on percussion and acting. The performance will be completed only when the peripheral parts are also filled. The spectators and their restoration behavior (like saluting, clapping, making sounds and rhythms), trade around the temple, etc. contribute to the festival mood. They are peripheral parts. The core part is pre-planned and pre-structured, as the latter is unpredictable. Each performance has three stages, Joining, Performing and Dispersing. It is clear from this that the rituals, Mudiyettu, Padayani and Theyyam cannot exist without their geographical and traditional backing. The atmosphere is the principal component in these performances.



2.3 Spectators in Folk Drama

Folk drama evolved from around the life of downtrodden people. Their beliefs, grief and happiness reflect in their arts. G Bhargavan Pillai considers folk drama as "lokadarmic

performance” (Nadodi natakngalude pinnale, 9). But in a close observation, it will be clear that all rituals and folk drama come under natyadharmi as Bharatha defines it. According to him the exaggerated words and deeds, unfamiliar occasions, melodramatic emotions, rhythmic and beautiful body language, etc. determine natyadharmi. Folk drama brings out socio-political situations through performances. They exaggerate the ordinary things to make communication easy. And, they demand a flexible body and good voice. If lokadharmi, a type of performance, merely imitates the everyday life on the stage, it is ridiculous to include folk drama under lokadharmi title. It may be simplifying its intent. Natyasastra says, “Natyadharmee pravrutha hi / Sadha natyam prayojayeth” (Bharatha, vol.1, 468). It means a performance always is in natyadharmi, i.e., a well structured pattern of performance. Then, folk plays are also natyadharmis, though it may have lokadharmic elements in action. Folk tradition is very strong in Kerala. The folk drama of Kerala, porattu natakam, kakkariissi, kurathiattam and chavittunadakam are different types of it. But all of them communicate to people directly. Folk drama generally uses the native language. It is the” jathibhasha” as per Natyasastra mentions it. Natyasastra talks about four languages preferred to be used in a performance. “Athibhasha” meant for gods, “aryabhasha” meant for kings, “jathibhasha”, they are two in types, the language of foreign countries and the language of India, and “yonyantharibhasha” meant for animals and birds. Sometimes, folk artists mimic vedic language and Sanskrit tradition to add beauty to their language and performance. But, they use their own language most of the time. It helps them to communicate directly and to criticize and interfere in day-today social life. It may be the reason for folk tradition to get such immense popularity among common people. Sundaran Kakkan of kakkariissi, Kattiyakkaran of chavittunadakam, Porattu of porattunadakam and Kurathi of kurathiattam, are some characters involved with the people through their direct dialogue. They function as effective devices of artistic appeal.

Folk drama always sees everything in a sarcastic way. It is sometimes comical. And this tone is never just accidental. When explaining Hasya rasa, Bharatha says that “hasyam, the comical action, is meant to be acted by female and down-trodden men characters”(Ns vol.1, 254). Chavittunadakam is an exception even though it has comical elements. It concentrates on war and it has the story of the foreign thread. The comedy works around Kattiyakkaran only. When examining Natyasastra as the edition of Indian performance history, it is interesting to notice that it explains so many features of and gives instructions to female actors. It points out the fact that there were no restrictions for females to act in drama. Here grew a male-oriented performance history. It focuses on one particular form of the emergence of the body onstage: the presentation of exceptionally masculine scenes. These are easily located because of the entertaining wave they create within various artistic elements, including song, dance, visual arts and performance. This thesis states that these scenes bring theatrical art out of its theatrical framework to create it by substituting a different possibility. That is, every theatrical event is accompanied by a sense of extreme presence of the real identical to that experienced when faced with a real event. The spectators are relieved of their excitement shared by the spectacle and the physical responses more at various phases of performance than its fictional frame.



Folk drama also has a core and a peripheral layer of performance. The audiences' nature differentiates it from the ritual performances. In ritual theatre the peripheral layer is always confused with the performers. In folk drama, though the layers are mutually related, they remain separated always.

2.3.1 Porattu Natakam

It is a form of folk drama in the Thrissur and Palakkad districts of Kerala. The men belonging to the Pana caste are the traditional performers of this art form. The Porattu is a performance highlighted by humorous songs, dialogues and vigorous dance to the tune of fast rhythm of percussionists. The buffoon, Vidusaka, with his antic humorous patter, provides much fun to the spectators. Chenda, maddalam, cymbals are the musical support. The petromax lamps were used as sources of light.

Dasi (a maidservant), Mannan, Mannathi, Kuravan and Kurathi, Cheruman and Cherumi, aged Mannathi are the characters. All these names indicate some low caste male and female counterparts of Kerala. Along with these characters, there must be a group of singers and

musicians on the stage. The director will join the team to perform the action. The way of the life of each of these castes is brought out with humorous dialogues and songs.

The performing area will be a vast and vacant field or ground with a temporary panthal (hall built by coconut palm leaves), which functions as the stage. A curtain is hung up at the centre of the stage. Audiences are provided with chairs and benches to sit. The play starts around ten at night and continues till the morning. Porattu is a play of laymen. It was very popular once. It has turned to be a museum piece performed rarely at some places in Kerala. In this play, the actors make conversations with audiences. The ritual arts like padayani and mudiyettu have some overlapping influences with the porattu natakam. The spectator not only experiences the sorry state of the poor life of the downtrodden but also remains with disgust and devoid of any empathy.

2.3.2 Sanghakkali

It is known in different names such as panem kali, yathrakali or chathirangam kali. The upper caste Hindu Nambudiris are proponents of this art. There are eighteen sanghams, groups, who used to perform this art from some time ago. Each group has its leader and deities. This is ritualistic, yet has some prominent elements of folk drama, too. This socially oriented drama is performed on the occasions like Namboodiri wedding, upanayana (the sacred thread wearing function) and in the first feeding of rice to a baby, etc.

The copper pot with its mouth down, wooden candle, chenda, maddalam, and cymbals are the musical instruments played in accompaniment of the performance. The performance space is in the middle of spectators. Red silk cloth and comical costumes are used. The character Kaimol will have long upper cloth, loincloth and a face mask. Apt costumes are there for the characters like Kuravan, Kurathi, Vannan and drunkard.

There are eight stages in the performance. The first one is chembu kottiyarkkal: shouting to the background by beating copper pots. The second stage is nalu padham chollal, which means four people recite verses or chollal songs. In the third stage, musicians play their talent well. It is the pattum kottum stage. Fourth is the entry of Edakkandappan, an important character, who gives the form of a folk drama. After that, his singing and acting follow. This is the fifth stage. At the sixth stage, characters are in disguise. The meeting of Prakajan and Oathikan is the seventh stage of the performance. Finally, taking up of arms and with this ayudhameduppu, taking weapons sequence ends the performance.

The Edakkandappan Kaimol is the vidusaka character who makes conversations with the spectators. A song from sanghakkali is to be mentioned here to emphasize its folk nature than a ritual play, “ORAL. Anaayaal naanam venam/ Mukhathanju meesa venam/Aanum pennum kettavane / Porinu vaada, thai thai... (“a man needs to have some shame and moustache. But you are neither a man nor woman; come on and fight!”; my trans.; Bhargavan, Naodi nadakangalude pinnale, 26).

2.3.3 Kakkarissi Natakam

This folk drama was well-known in southern Kerala in its early period. It mimics the lives of the downtrodden, especially the lower caste people. From Kakkala, a lower caste, the name kakkarissi is born. It has the influences of sanghakkali, mudiyettu and padyani. During the reign of Marthanda Varma (AD 1729- 1758), a group of Tamil people came to Kerala to help the King in the dispute with Ettuveetil Pillas, a well known Nair feudal family of Thiruvithamcore. Those Tamil people were known as Pandippada. G Bargavan Pillai says that they are the ancestors of the Kakkala caste (Kakkarissi Natakam, 24). Kakkalas are a certain gipsy caste, whose people used to be jugglers. Kakkarissi natakam is not a performance written or performed by Kakkalas. There is no relationship with the Kakkalas

and kakkarissi natakam, except the characters of the play resembling the people of this particular caste. This folk play is performed by some other castes like Nair, Ezhava, etc. Female characters are also played by males. Onam, Sivarathri and other temple festivals are some chosen occasions to stage them.

Though the singer-actor, Pattukaran, has a main role in the performance, he doesn't act or dance in the play but asks questions, which develop the plot. Sundaran Kakkan is the hero character of almost every kakkarissi play. Hero with his female counterparts and a hunter complete the character list. The play uses harmonium, mridanga, ganchira and kaimani as musical instruments. Music, dialogue and dancing are well merged in kakkarissi. Actors need excellent training as the play needs a very flexible body and good voice. The Kakkala caste and their surroundings form the plot. Their social life and family relationship are questioned in the play. The morality of their lifestyle is sarcastically examined here:

PATTUKARAN. Eda ninte kakkathimare vilichaatte... avalumaaru kereechu poyathalyo?

KAKKAN. Adiyanonnu vilikkan nokkate... (kandasudhi varuthi oru bhagathekku maarininnu ullilottu nokki vilikkunnu.)

KAKKATHIMAR. (akathuninnu)Poda Kakkane... ("singer asks the Kakkan to call his wives. Kakkan after clearing his throat calls them and their reply comes from within in a nay voice, get lost you Kakkan"; my trans.; Bhargavan, Kakkarissi Natakam, 56).

The dialogue pattern shows the nature of the play. From the dialogue, it is clear that it is the introduction of the female characters. In the Indian belief it is a wrong way to treat husbands in a dejected voice. It is not gentle and noble. So the dialogue is hauling a particular

group of people in the yellow light of insulting. The play has so many occasions like this. It may be the reason to avoid the telecasting of this art form in Doordarsan. G. Bhargavan Pillai indicates in his book “Doordarsan does not telecast kakaarissi nowadays because of the objection of Kakkala caste” (my trans.; Nadodi Nadakangalude Pinnale,33):

2.3.4 Kurathiattam

It was performed only in northern Kerala. Kurathiattam follows the story of a Kurathi, a low caste female, wandering to find out her Kuravan, her male counterpart. On the way, she meets the Thampuran, an aristocrat. Kurathi teaches the Thampuran about Gandhiji and his ideologies. Kurathiattam is well known in Payyannur region, the south Dandi, a historical place where Mahatma Gandhi made salt from sea water as part of non-cooperation movement against the British. And, it is very natural that a folk drama form at this place takes part in the freedom fight. In the play, Kurathi found her man at last and there takes place a dispute among them. The song and style resemble kakkarissi play in a way. Example:

KURAVAN. Entanedee ninte chundu randum nalla /Chenthondi pole thudichu
kanmoo/Enthellam maaranam undaayedee penne/Anthamillathaayi
kaaryamellaam.

KURATHI. Vendaathathenthinadaa kuravaa iniyum/ Undaakki vekkuvaan
naanamille ? (“Man. Why do your lips look as red as chenchondi fruit? /What all
damn did come to you woman, have all gone senseless? //Woman. Are you not
ashamed to weave all the obscene gossips man?”; my trans.; Bhargavan, Nadodi
nadakangalude pinnale, 63)

In kakkarissi play, the song is like:

KAKKAN. Kannil meyyum thottu nee poyath/ Viyartha kaaranamenthe
Kurathee?/Enthedee Kurathee?

KAKKATHI. Kaattuveyilathu odi nadannppam/ Kanda viyarppane Kurava (“Man.
What caused your kajol to smear in the sweat, woman? // Woman. By roaming in
the wind and sun and it is due to the sweat, man!”; my trans.; Bhargavan,
Kakkarissi, 100):

At last, Kakkathi and Kakkan joined happily together.

2.3.5 Chavittunatakam

Chavittunatakam gained immense popularity during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It was exclusively an art form of Latin Christians. Chavittunatakam, as the theatrical developments of opera of Italy in the seventeenth century and musical drama, welded the existing theatre and musical forms together to make a unified impression on the spectators. Karalmaan Charitham and Nepolean Charitham were the well-known chavittunataka texts. The asan, teacher of the chavittunatakam, is known as annavi. From the beginning to the end of the drama, he is the guiding spirit. Actors are trained in local gymnasiums and kalaripayattu, a martial art of Kerala. Music and sword play are essential factors of the play.

The stage is known as nataka thattu. It is an open stage of a width of thirty feet and a length of hundred feet. The planks of the stage are fixed to produce a drumming sound, if one happens to kick on it. Each of the opposite sides of the stage has a Metah, upper chamber, well decorated at the height of six to eight feet. Ladders are erected to connect the Metah with the stage. This special arrangement is for the kings to take rest with their retinue. As war is inevitable in Chavittunatakam, two kings were there with opposing armies. The Metahs are

built face to face. There will be a rectangular casement at the centre of the stage. A lightened lamp will be hung in front of it. The background singers are visible to the people through this door. A lighted big nilavilakku is placed on the floor of the open stage. The asan with cymbals in his hands takes his seat near it. The musicians sit beside him. Even today, the annavis stubbornly insist on keeping this honored seat at the centre of the stage. There are two doors on the two edges of the background screen. The one at the right side is the entry for actors from the green room and the other of the left side for the exit.

By the first Keli, a drumming sound to announce the performance there, the actors start to wear costumes in the green room. The annavi himself inaugurates the function and gives an introduction. Kottiyakkaran is a very special character of the chavittunatakams. As Chummar Choondal says though” he is like a property man of the Chinese stage, moving about to pick up a fallen sword or cap, etc.” (104), he must be well versed in the steps, music and all other techniques of the drama. His task is to amuse spectators in different ways. He has no restrictions to enter and do anything on stage. In the frightening scenes of war fight also, he can enter on the stage. It is considered as a tension relieving action. Anyway spectators like him. Tathaya and penkal are the actors playing as females. They are males.

Before the play starts, there is orchestral music for two hours. This rhythmic song of background chorus is virutham moolal. Two boys of twelve and fourteen years in soldiers’ costumes are the tutiyogas; they are called as balapastukkar. They enter from the two opposite directions and with strong steps move forward to salute the spectators. They bow to asan and pay offerings in rhythmic steps. Asan instructs them and they perform important steps and kavitham (poetry). Then, they say the story is going to be staged and ask people to be ready to watch the play.

2.3.6 Vellari Natakangal

Vellari plays were popular in the northern region of Kerala. They showed similarities to kakkariissi plays. The village people in the time of harvesting cucumber, known in Malayalam as vellari, would stay in fields at nights as to guard the cucumber against animals and robbers. They start rehearsal during the harvest season at nights and stage the show after the harvest. They are the vellari nadakangal. Men perform the male and female roles. Costumes and stage settings are simple. Buffoon is essential. The mythical, historical or sociological plots are selected to perform. Anyway, there isn't any perfect drama text for this. Most of them were improvised ones. The story or its development is not well planned. They cared only in the presentation and its comic elements. Vellari plays resemble folk plays in some aspects of characterization and story line. The spectators were the peasants and other village people. They might come sometimes in the excitement about the stage and appreciate the artists with garlands of money. The performing spaces were the secluded fields after the harvest. They were not sangeetha natakas, a type of musical theatre prevalent here once. But showed some distant similarities as both were for mere entertainments. Thalassery, Kannur and payyannur are famous for vellary plays. In the southern Kerala, kappakkara plays satisfied the function of vellari plays. Quilon and Kayamkulam are the places, where kappakkara plays were popular. Instead of cucumber, the vellari, there has been Kappa (Tapioca). And, the plays were known as kappakkara plays. When sangeetha natakas gained immense popularity, these plays gradually faded into oblivion.

2.3.7 The Pre Proscenia spectators

Now it is clear that there was a pre- proscenium era in the performance history of Kerala for the mass or common people. The modern fourth wall theatre entered only after that era. Spectators enjoyed every theatre performance in a given circumstance. Ritual tradition provided a mobile theatre, while folk tradition allowed the entry to the performing

spaces also. There was nothing to hide from the spectators. The performance was very transparent as the life of the people. Richard Schechner in his essay *Restoration of behavior* states that, “restored behaviour (a strip of behavior can be re-arranged or reconstructed) can be of long duration as in some drama and rituals or of short duration as in some gestures, dances and mantras” (205). As noticed in ritual arts of Kerala, the behavior of people of certain region are re-arranged for a particular time of performance. It is a belief in middle Kerala after the day *koothu koorayidal*, a ritual; the people of those regions do not go out of their locality and never stay away from their houses because they believe that their absence in their place is not good for them and their native place. The people of the region re-arrange their lives during the festival period with the beliefs to incorporate with the atmosphere of the ritual festival. The rituals play with the beliefs and myths, which connect the nostalgic social factors, while folk drama play with the social factors connected with myths and beliefs. Sajitha Matathil, the theatre person, remembers the Porattu play played in her quad during childhood days, as:

The courtyard near the stable would be cleaned and prepared by applying cow dung with water. This itself was a play for we children that we could cover our body with cow dung. The Porattu players would reach in groups at the courtyard (quad) by then (my trans.; *Natakaantham Sthreethwam*, 8).

The performing area of that Porattu play includes the process of preparing that performance space also. Theatres always performed the stories of common people to support the mythical characters. People remained as the co-actors. So, their mind and body enriched the drama. They are an essential part of the performance. It demands a deep cultural background to enjoy jokes and social criticism. Proscenium theatre was always considered in the hierarchy of theatres as inferior to koothambalam (Fourth wall performances). Even today, the notion about the downtrodden that they lack

moral values and they live recklessly as cultured animals, not as humans, etc. exist here. Their every act is disrespected as their art forms. In Natyasastra Bharatha mentions, “Gramya dharma pravruthe thu / Kama lobha vasangathe / Eershya krothadhi sanmmoode /Loke sukhitha dhu:khith” (“People who entered the village life indulged in the peripheral aspects of life and forgot the values to keep a cultured life. In simple words, they became the slaves of five senses”my trans.; 80-81)

However, the civilized world is always afraid of these uncivilized folk. They were looked down upon with hatred and they were the reason for jealousy at the same time. The society always wanted to keep them away from the core area. But, the folk tribes exist as an unavoidable and major part of the society. That is why Bharatha mentions Nirgeetha problem. The story of Nirgeetha, a type of music, that demons play to irritate gods as it has no musical quality, according to them. And, they made a plea to Brahma to avoid it from Natya, the performance, “Nirgeethenavadhathascha / Dhaitya danava rakshasa: / Na kshobham na vikhatham cha /Karishyanthee ha thoshitha: (“daithya dhanavas may not get angry and do any harm if by this, Nirgeetha honour them”; my trans.; vol.1,208)

It is believed that the music, song, dance and colors make these folk people happy. The performing spaces come from their life styles. As they live largely depending on harvest and hunting, they select their workspaces to perform, too. With the support of electronic equipment, the theatre naturally finds its comfort and possibilities in mobile theatre units. There must be different types of spectators. A category of people was not allowed to enter the temples and they never got a chance to see any traditional or classical play. But they knew something about them from hearsay. They were foremost among them. Others are the common folk, who knew nothing about classical plays but were interested in folk arts only. Some of the traditional theatre audiences show interest in folk arts also. However, it is a wide classification that will help to analyze the spectators. All these groups participate in rituals like theyyam, padayani, mudiyettu,

etc. as spectators. Castes play a major role there. Performing spaces determine the nature of the arts. The historical texts like Tholkkappiyam and Chilappathikaram called them as thinas. Victor Turner defines the term performance thus:

Performance, as we have seen, is derived from the Middle English parfournen, later parfournen, which is itself from the old French parfournir – par (thoroughly) plus fournir (to furnish) –hence performance does not necessarily have the structuralist implication of manifesting form, but rather the processual sense of “bringing to completion” or “accomplishing”. To perform is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act. (91)

Therefore rituals cannot be performed in an area other than its native place. They demand the myth, people and geography, where they come from. When we examine examples, padayani is a twenty eight days long performance beginning with Oorali’s entry. Oorali is not just an impersonator or an actor. He represents a particular community and its socio-political relevance. He comes with bow on right hand from the hills. He comes not just to act but pay his tributes to the goddess. If one who doesn’t belong to the particular caste acts like an Oorali, he can never find the biological and geographical factors of an Oorali’s body and mind. The soul’s transfiguration cannot take place there. The world of cultural beliefs is connected with sorceries and ancestors’ cult functions as an external soul. The spectators are a part of it. Spectators of folk drama are different here with the ritual spectators. In the folk plays, spectators are not the core part of the event. However, the ritual includes the spectators and folk drama itself as the core elements of its process. In the meantime, the open-air performances there remain as the fourth wall stages in temple premises.

Folk Drama

Differs from

Ritual



AUDIENCES IN KERALA CLASSICAL THEATRE

The Indian Sanskrit theatre envisions an audience for it. As it is related to Natyasastra, it seems relevant to examine Natyasatra here. In the first chapter natyolpathi, Bharatha says about the origin of drama. Hearing the devas, the fair skinned god people's plea Brahma created natya, the fifth veda, from the former four vedas. From Rigveda, he accepted the text. he took music from Samaveda, Yajurveda and contributed acting and Atharvaveda, rasa, the enjoyment. As the Sudra, socially, educationally and economically backward black skinned low caste people come under this category here, they were not allowed to study the four vedas, the fifth veda was for them, too. Brahma instructed saint Bharatha to study, teach and stage drama. In Indradwaja Mahotsava, the play Devasurasamgramam, was staged. This presents a scene, the victory of devas over asuras (the black skinned demons) was against demons. The demons felt insulted and got angry, and they wanted to stop the play. Then to stage plays safely, gods created play-houses here and the four directions of which they keep four gods to safeguard the play-houses. That is the mythical version of temple play houses of India. Anyway, the demons are the first audiences, who were stopped by the classical theatre. For many centuries this downtrodden people were compelled to keep outside the play-houses. To keep them in the distance, the god's people used the strong pillars of Natyasatra. Today their great theatre itself comes outside from those big play houses to the mass. How were the Sanskrit plays staged in ancient India? From Natyasastra one can assume some ideas and the very considerable visual evidence of statues and dancing figures found in Indian temples. The ultimate and most important source is Sanskrit plays themselves. There is only one Sanskrit theatre remnant here after many centuries. That is Koodiyattam of Kerala. It is very clear that it is not easy to enjoy the Sanskrit theatre. It needs some knowledge and training.

3.1 The Sanskrit Theatre and Its Audiences

Bhavas, the expressions, are emphasized as the reason of rasa, the enjoyment in the Sanskrit theatre. These expressions are types and stagnant. They communicate some states of a character not emotions. But Natyasastra says that, "Yasthushtau thushtimaayaathi /Soke sokamupaithi cha /Krudha: krothe bhaye bheetha: / Sa sreshta: prekshaka: smrutha ("who is that person who becomes happy on other's happiness, who becomes grief stricken on other's grief, who becomes angry on other's anger and who becomes frightened on other's fear, he/she is the best audience"; my trans.; Bharatha vol. 2. 211). Aristotle's catharsis also means that the audiences are going through the same inner emotions of a character. This process purifies their emotions. R I Singal says, "Etymologically the word catharsis is from the Greek root 'kathairo' which means to cleanse. It was used in Aristotle's time in a therapeutic sense of purgation as also in a religious sense of purification" (50). The theory of catharsis has been based on the emotions of pity and fear. Aristotle examines it as:

For feeling such as pity and fear or again enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence overall. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy whom we see a result of the sacred melodies-restored as though they had found healing and purgation.... (Politics and Poetics, 218)

While going through this experience, each member of the audience sees their own Rama, their own Seetha and their own Macbeth on the stage. The characters of the play get the emotions and the imaginations under the sub-conscious mind of the watching people. When seeing a scene, they think it is me like that man/ woman. Thus, he tries to find them on stage. That is why they are crying, laughing and enjoying the drama. The Rasa theory in a way deals with the same philosophy: "In Ayurveda Rasa means secretions from certain glands inside the human body. These in a normal healthy being maintain a certain balance. When

rasa balance is lost, one falls sick, whence the medicines, which are supposed to cure it also, called rasa” (Singal 51).

But Bharatha used the term rasa to refer to the unique aesthetic experience giving extraordinary pleasure. There are no emotions like catharsis told, but only expressions (bhavas). Bhatta Lolladan’s Ulppatthivada says that rasa is within the characters. As actor imitates the character, there is an illusion of this rasa, but it is with the character. The audience enjoys this rasa of character and experiences happiness (ananda). He gave an example for it. That is, when there is no silver in oyster, it seems as silver. Then, the people want to take it and may have an attraction for it.

By the Anumithi Vada, Sree Sankuka commented on rasa with his Chithrathuranga nyaya, which means the horse in the picture. There is no real horse, but horse is there in picture. So, horse is there. Likewise, the real character is not there on the stage but there is an actor. The true emotions (vibhava- anubhavas) of the character are not there in an actor. But he acts as if he has it. When watching drama, the audience reaches a deduction of emotions and experiences rasa.

Bhattanayakan commented on rasa as an experience of the moment, which has no existence before and after that moment. There are three things in sloga, Abhidayakathvam, Bhavakathvam and Bhojakathvam. Abhida is about meaning, Bhavakathva is about rasas, and the Bhojakathva is about audience. The first makes knowledge and the second universalizes emotions with commonness. The third is the role of Bhojakathva. It says the audience can taste the emotions in a state of devotion, contemplation and bliss.

Abhinava Gupta is the most prominent commentator of Bharatha’s Natyasastra. Abhinava Gupta made some remarks on the nature of the audience’s apprehension of the actors. The actor is the object of the deep contemplation of the spectators, just like an image of God in

the case of its contemplators. They apprehend the picture as God himself; God becomes the object of very clear conception through the means of the image. In other words, they do not make any virtual distinction between the picture and the God. Similarly, the dramatic content which is the object of a very clear apprehension arises from the actor's process of acting. This is not touched by the specific considerations like space, time, etc. It imparts instruction to the spectator in an emphatic manner. In the case of this instruction, there does not have a sublimating or counteracting factor regarding other dramatic conventions or the necessary mental state. The instruction that results is comprehensive and complete. Thus the spectators' apprehension is of the nature of Rama and not of this (actor) as Rama. In its 27th chapter, *sidhivyanjakam Natyasastra* suggests different audiences and different arts for each. It gives an insight into three types of audiences.

One: an audience who observes the actions on the stage with a quite interest.

Two: audience as a judge analyzing the work

Three: audience as critic who analyzes the play and describes it to others with good intention.

3.1.1 The audience who observes the things on the stage with a quiet interest

Bharatha suggests two siddhis, i.e., result, on the spectator: *manushi* and *daivi* (humanly and heavenly) evolving from *vachika* (oral), *angika* (physical) and *sathvika* (mental) acting. The *manushi* siddhis are ten and *daivis* are two, “*Smithardha hasathihasa/ Sadhvaho kashtamevacha/ Prabhadhanadha cha thadha / Njeya siddisthu vangmayi* (“smile, semi-smile, laughing, agreeing response, exclamatory response, feeling of pity and making huge sound are the oral responses or results and these are seven *manushi* siddhi” ; my trans.; Bharatha vol.2, 201)

They talk about the facial responses of the audience. These seven kinds of responses might be expected in suitable circumstances. Smithasiddi suggests a good smile when an actor acts hasya. If there is ambiguity in hasya acting, the audience can have a little smile that is ardhasmitha. The vidushaka (the comic narrator), his costumes and attitudes, may raise a good laughter in theatre. It is the athihasa. The sadhuvada is the response of appreciation when an actor talks about some great things. When an actor acts with an extra-ordinary, surprising skill, the audience must congratulate him with exclamatory expressions like Ho! That response is ahovada. If it is a sad situation and actor acts great sorrow, the audience must follow him. They may have even tears. Then, it is the result of kashtavada siddi. In excitement and thrilling sequence, the audience must have made huge sounds. It is the siddi of prabhadhanadha.

Pulakaischa sahochasai- / Rabhyuthanaisthathaiva cha / Chela dhanamgulee kshepai: /Sareere sidhi ri shyathe (Bharatha, vol.2, 201). The sloka says that the siddis (responses) related with the body of the spectators are sensory perceptions like blushing, giving gifts, making gestures of appreciation and heaving sighs. The last three manushis, pulaka, abhyudhana, uchasa are related to body expressions of the spectators. When going through a great performance, audience might go through sensory perceptions like a sigh, blushing, etc. In Indian belief giving new clothes as gift is a great thing. So, Bharatha suggested audience to give clothes to the actor in respect. The gestures of appreciation also include a style of congratulating something or someone, while involving deeply in a performance. It is common in Kerala, a classical art audience especially that of kathakali or koodiyattam, if they are interested greatly in performance, they will tap rhythms with fingers. It is very common in films and fictional works of Malayalam the figures of old feudal men with betel leaves in their mouth and rhythm in the fingers lying on his chair. It is common that a special chaaru kasera (push back chair) is set apart in the sit out of his house for this purpose. Natyasastra

suggested audience to run away, if the war or fights reach in its extreme on stage. These are the results Bharatha expected from an audience. By these conditions Bharatha proposed, it is clear that in drama the audience has a crucial role. The word *creeda* in Sanskrit means playing with. There is an old saying that *devas* asked *Brhma* a *creedaneeyakam* (toy) to play with. Thus drama is created. In Greek theatre the myth of *Thespi*, the first actor, says that when the law maker *Solon* warned him not to lie again, he had replied that what he did was only a game. All these indicate that drama means play with the audience.

Natyasastra talks about two *daivi siddhis* also. They are, “*Ya bhavathisayobhetha /Sathva yuktha thadhaiva cha/Sa prekshakaisthu karthavya / Daivee siddi: prayogatha:* (“enjoying drama with expressions and mental action is a *daivi siddhi*”). As *manushi siddhis* are the expected results in certain conditions, *daivis* happen quite naturally. It cannot be pre-planned by anyone and, it is not human. “*Na sabdo yathra na kshobho /Na chothpathanidharsanam /Sampoornatha cha rangasya / Daivee siddisthu sa smritha* (“There is no sound, no anger and no other bad omens. The stage is filled with audience. This is also a *daivi siddhi*”;my trans.; Bharatha, vol.2, 203, 204).

The process of enjoying one performance is different in every person. The audience cannot become stagnant or silent in a performance. He/ she must be alive in the process of drama going on there on the stage. Then only there is drama. Audience encourages, influences and even provokes one production.

3.1.2 Audience as the judge analyzing a performance

These groups of the audience come to a performance to judge the performance with their acquired knowledge, sensibility and social awareness. Only with a refined sensibility and warm-hearted attitude can one approach the judgment trustworthy. *Natyasastra* talks on judges as:

Charithrbhijanopetha

Santha vritha: sruthanvitha:

Yasodharmarathashchaiva

Madhysthavaśanvitha:

Shadanga natya kusala:

Prabudha: suchaya: sama:

Chathurathyodya kusala:

Nepathyanja: sudharmika:

Desha bhasha vidhenanja:

Kalasilpa vichakshna:

Chathurthabhinaya njashch

Sookshmanja rasabhavayo:

Saabda chando vidhananja

Nana sashtra vichakshana:

Eva vidhasthu karthyavya:

Prasnika natya darsane (Bharatha, vol.2, 209).

Those who are possessed of good character and high birth, serene temper and learning, are desirous of fame and virtue. They have thorough knowledge in all areas: four acting styles, music and musical instruments. And, youngsters are the best ones for judging performance. They must be in a good mental state and skilled in the four types of instruments such as thatham, anadham, sushiram and khanam. Scholars in different languages, arts, sculpture, geography, costumes, fashion, linguistics, rasa bhavas (acting theories), grammar and science are the acceptable judges deciding a performance good or bad.

Natyaśāstra suggests ten judges. Those who know holy sacrifice, poetic meter, about arrows and sounds, dancer, king, courtier, courtesan, musician and painter are the ten judges.

These ten men are skilled in different areas, and they can judge their area well. If there is confusion among them, the final decision must be neutral and credible. There must be a trophy for the victors. The seats of the judges must not be so far from the stage and so near it. Bharatha instructs twelve hands distance (dhvadhasa hasthasthitha:). The judges must concentrate on performance and note down the positive and negative elements (siddhis and khathas). The blows (khatha) are four types as, “Daivathma parasamutha- / Sthrividha khatha budhaisthu vinjeya:/Oulpathikaschathurtha: /Kadhachidhatha sambhavathyeva (“there are three blows as daivakhatham, athmakhatham, parakhatham. Sometimes, a fourth one oulpathikakhatham also can happen”). The storm, rain, fire, wrecked playhouse, presence of serpent, elephants and other cruel animals are considered as the heavenly blow (daivakhatham). The stage-fear, wrong costumes and make-up, weariness, forgotten dialogues, stage articles, etc. are self blows (athmakhathas). The blows from someone’s jealousy, partiality, personal grudge are parakhatham. They are considered as blows from outsiders. The noise, stones and other disturbances are also parakhathams. Earthquakes and lightening are oulpathikakhathas. In the chapter siddhivyanjana nineteen to forty one slogas deal with the different types of blows. Natyasastra considers the ignorance of language and dress-code of a region, where performance is staged, also as a blow. It says that, “Na kinchith gunaheenam / Doshai: parivarjjitham na va kinchith /Thasmanatyaprakruthau / Dosha natharthatho grahya: (“there is nothing without any goodness; and there is nothing without any badness. So it is not right to try to find out only faults”). The athmakhatha, self blows, can be treated as negatives. It is interesting in observing that Bharatha suggests one female as a judge, though she is a strumpet. It gives light to the ancient conception of female artiste also. The women are considered as the objects of sexual pleasures. Bharatha suggests hasya (comic) performance for women. Bharatha mentions, “Balanatya murkha: sthriyaschaiva / Hasya naipathyyo: sada” (“the children; fools and women are excited in comic and colorful

acting”; my trans. Bharatha vol.2, 204,208,210). One can approach the judgment trustworthy with a refined sensibility and warmhearted attitude.

3.1.3 Audience as a Critic

Yesham kayanuseelaenabhyasavasal/Visadhibhoothe mano mukure/Varnaneeya thanmayee bhavan yojyatha. / The sahrudaya samdabhaja:sahrudaya: (“the real spectator is one with a heart like that of poets because their continuous reading forms a clear mind”; my trans. Anandavarhanan, Appendix), says the poet. As he says, critics need more imagination than the audience. He/she is responsible for the healthy discussions and thus the development of theatre in an area. His/her imagination must be on the basis of some facts. By decreasing the level of their participation to understand and enjoy the creative side of a performance, the critics keep a distance from the performance, a kind of detachment, which may help them not to indulge in a performance emotionally. They need the five senses to enjoy the drama. The critic is more of an appreciator and less of a censor. They must keep themselves as possible as they can to be with the artiste. They are the ideal audience. They see a performance not just for themselves but for generations. The artistes create one work and the critics recreate it by their healthy involvements. There must be a positive spirit in all criticism. Criticism must not indulge in personal grudge and professional egos. The critic should be trained in drama and should be well-experienced. They must have thorough knowledge of different kinds of drama and acting styles. They must know history, development and contemporary state of theatre. They must observe the vision of playwright and director. They cannot enjoy art for its sake. Criticism demands thorough analyzing. All spectators are not critics. But a good critic must be a good spectator.

3.2 The Audience in Sanskrit Theatre

From these three divisions, we reach some assumptions about the audience of Sanskrit theatre. Natyasastra says about three kinds of stories to perform in Sanskrit theatre: Kalpitham (the complete fictional), Misram (real and fictional) and Prakhyaatham (a popular true story). It also says that rasa is within the audience like

Yadahi nana vyanjan

Samskrith mannam bhunjana

Rasana khadhyanthi sumanasa: purusha, harshadhichadhi

Gachani, thatha nana bhava bhinaya

Vyanjithan vaganga sathvopethan sthayee bhavana khadhyanthi

sumanasa:prekshaka, harshadeemshchadhijacha

nthm. (“How one enjoys the food with spicy curries and how the men with a refined heart enjoy happiness. Thus, the audience with a refined heart enjoys the substantial emotions (Styaibhavas) enlightened by different emotions and three prominent acting styles such as Vachika, Angika and Satvika they reach the ultimate happiness.”; my trans. Bharata vol.1, 245)

There are many audiences. In classical drama of Kerala, most of the stories are well-known to the people who watch them. They know the characters well. So, the role of anxiety and curiosity work little in them. Their interest lies on actors only. People come to enjoy the expressions and they search for the reason behind the expressions; they are vibhava-anubhava- sancharis. As most of the stories are from Hindu mythology, people who are unfamiliar with it, must try to understand the situations and involve in the search for the

stories first. So, the extent of enjoyment must differ in them. Usually, it is seen that this group of people, who has their early or first encounter with a classical art form, is the most interested group in it. Two reasons can be found for this.

1. A newly opened fictional world and theatre techniques may excite them.
2. The docility they have towards the upper class for ages.

They share their emotional responses with a heterogeneous group of people, who went on experiencing the performance. The assumption is that even today lower classes do not enjoy this art form, excepting some rare enthusiasts. The reference to several kind of audiences is in consideration of their individual traits as well. It is relevant here to notice the nanaloka audiences of the King Kulasekhara of Kerala. It is said that King Kulasekhara divided the audience as nanaloka, common people, and as prekshakas, the audience. Those common people might not be from the other classes as the social history says about the untouchability here. They were women, children and men, who did not have much brilliance to enjoy art like the real audience it envisions. It shows the individuality of the audience, who plays a major role in the enjoyment, rasa.

Sanskrit theatre and Kerala are connected through the koodiyattam of Kerala, which is well-known as the Sanskrit theatre of Keralites and it is a very ancient theatre form of Kerala. koodiyattam was initially developed with the patronage and direct involvement of King Kulasekhara Varma, around AD 900 King himself authored two plays Subhadradhananjaya and Thapathi Samvarana. King with the help of Tholan, a Brahmin scholar, introduced some innovations in koodiyattam. These innovations are the controversial hallmarks of this distinctive style of performance: 1. The use of regional language (Nambiar Tamil). Malayalam was then more under the influence of Tamil, the language used for translations of the original text. It was not just a translation, but an elaboration with an

introduction to each character and explanation to the puranic illusion. It is believed that it was Nambiar who used Malayalam for the first time on stage. 2. The development of inner meaning. There developed an acting style of inner meaning. To conceal characters' inner actions, actors developed a code language while speaking; the real meaning is expressed through the hand gestures, example," in the play, Manthranka, Vasanthaka speaks: on the rise of the moon all the stars appear. Its inner meaning is when yangantharayana, the chief, came all his ministers followed" (Paulose, Natankusa, Introduction 3). This added importance of vidushakas. The use of regional language gives more chances to vidusaka. He could interact with mass directly. These innovations made way for two types of aesthetic enjoyment. The newly introduced audiences of Kulasekhara, nanalokar as mentioned above, are not common people, or the public as per the casteist way. Then,untouchability and classism were common laws of the society. The nanalokar might be the elite themselves, who hadn't enough interest and tastes in arts. The prekshakas had a thorough mastery over all the eighteen sasthanas (science) as Indians say. They occupied the first positions, while nanaloka comprised of ordinary people. The presentation had to be in two ways then: one to satisfy the prekshka and the other to please the general audience. The development of theatre in the Kulasekhara period was from sthula to sukshma, physical to the soul. He has been known as the reviver or reformer of Kerala theatre. With the help of Tholan, he contributed a lot to the koodiyattam as a Sanskrit drama presentation of Kerala. They are summed up as follows

1. Recognition of two levels of aesthetic enjoyment as represented by nanaloka and prekshka and the corresponding acting.
2. Introducing every character with a brief narration of his antecedents-purvasambandha.
3. Delineation of two meanings: thematic and physic; the former is expressive and the latter is suggestive.

4. Deviation from the Script
5. The vidusaka speaks Malayalam.

No clarity about koodiyttam before Kulasekhara period is available. The high caste Nangiar, Nambiar and Chakyar families have the right to perform koodiyattam. Kapila Vatsyayan says that “the secret of the survival of the Kudiattam lies as much in the ability of the Cakyar community to safeguard and preserve traditions” (21). As to the history, P K Balakrishnan wrote about Kerala, that these castes were formed after the Brahminic entry in the sixth and seventh centuries. So, there is no way to connect the sakkayyan koothu indicated in the Chilappathiaram with these communities and their performances. It is assumed that it existed here even before. After Kulasekhara, the temple theatre emerged, and soon koodiyattam became a temple art. The actor came to acquire a status equal to that of the priest. The caste and religious restrictions block the mass audience, the real public, from koodiyattam. As it became a temple art form, rituals and beliefs became more important than art. They staged plays in koothambalams which were inside the temples. The caste based society of Kerala didn't allow the low caste Hindus and non- Hindus to watch or participate in the performance.

3.2.1 Koothus and Koothambalams

The period of Kulasekhara was considered as the AD 9th century. And, the formative period of koothambalams in Kerala, is calculated as between AD 9th century and AD 11th century. In the introduction of Natankusa, K. G Paulose mentions that “the temple theatres emerged here after Kulasekhara.” Kapila Vatsyayan also supports it. She says, “however, the surviving koothambalams and natya mandapas belong to a much later period than the reign of Kulasekhara” (22).

It is told that the famous koothambalams of Kerala were built not as the instructions in Natyasastra, though they resemble the Vikrista type of theatre described in Natyasastra. Natyasashtra says about three types of playhouses, vikrishta, which is rectangular, chathurasra in the square in shape and thrasya, the triangular one. They divide again as Jeshtam, Madhyam and Avaram, according to its magnitude. Jeshtam is for gods, madhyam for kings and avaram for common people. The koothambalams are situated in the temple; the stage is normally square and always faces the god or sreekovil. They are temple theatres. Thrissur, Iringalakkuda, Kidangoor, Harippadu, Guruvayur, Peruvanam, Moozhikkulam, Thirunakkara and Chengannur temples have koothambalams in Kerala. The architectural style of koothambalams shares the feature of the square and circular temples of Kerala. They are usually rectangular in structure. There is no evidence of any former playhouses other than koothambalams. So, these temple theatres might be the first play houses of Kerala. It is pointed out that the theatre existed here was of open air or any other kind. As the name indicates, koodiyattam is a group performance which took days to be completed. It might be a desi performance of open-air theatre as every group performance was in its former period. The parakkumkoothu of Naganandam play is the koothu outside of koothambalam, and the place where it is played is known as Koothuparambu. Kulasekhara's contribution might have developed the margi nature of the koodiyattam, and it went to the temple theatre. Then public audiences were kept outside as the temple, and its premises were restricted to high caste people. Kapila Vatsyayan says about Brahmin invasion of Kerala theatre: "It is necessary to point out that development of forms like Kutiyattam is directly related as much to the rigid caste structure of the society as to the inbuilt channels of mobility and change within the seemingly hierarchical and insulative groupings" (7).

When it became a temple art, the actors got the positions as priests. There allowed even the lady actors (Nangiars) to bell in the sree kovil. But, soon it lost its divinity with the lady

actors. The attitude of majority of male audience kept towards it pulled back its nobility in the society. koothu and koothachi, the woman who played a koothu, became the obscene word in certain dialects of Malayalam, especially koothachi. The half-naked Nangiar's bare breast might be the real enjoying factor for the libertines, who possessed the major part of the *performing area*. Nangiarkoothu, the female solo drama, and the Chakyarkoothu, the male solo performance also grew under this male gaze of Kerala. The satirical nature of Chakyarkoothu is generally considered as a healthy criticism of the society. It is obvious from its four components, purusharthangal, such as vinodham, vanchanam, asanam and rajaseva. Vinodham targets the immoral activities of men and women, while vanchanam attempts to convince people the mortality of life. asanam tells the story of a potentate and teaches him his duties towards people. Rajaseva assesses the capability of rulers comparing them with each other. Almost all the time it broke the line of courtliness for the enjoyment of the people, who were the high classes of society and patrons of the classical arts. Chakyar made comedies with linguistic diversity. The following verse and its parody called prathishloka in vidusakaKoothu is an excellent example. The play is Subhadra dhananjayam and Arjuna delineate Subhadra as

Saundayam sukumarathaa madhurathaa

Kanthirmmanohaarithaa

Sreematha mahimethi sarggaibhavaan

Nissesha naareegunaan

Ethasyaamupayujya dhurvidhathaya

Dheena:param pathmabhoo:

Srashtum vaanjathi chel karothu punara-

Pyathraiva bhikshhadanam (“If a creative artist misuses feminine virtues such as beauty, sweetness, grace, etc. in his artistic creation, it would be better for the artist to beg alms, instead of engaging in artistic works”;my trans.;Thampuran 161).

And, its parody vidusaka is about his love for Chakki, a lower caste in Kerala.

Vaanaattam kavarnnaatta meeramudiyum

Bhaavam kadum krooramaam

Vaaakkum nokkumithhadhi sarggavibhavaan

Nissesha chakkee gunaan

Icha kyamupayujya pathmajanaho

Chakkyana chakyantharam(“with a stinking mouth, damp and stench hair, a cruel face and words, you have blessed this Chakki, great God”; my trans.;Thampuran, 161).

While Subhadra, the elite lady is portrayed in a beautiful, sweet and sexy manner, Chakki is mentioned as grotesque with her stinking mouth, dirty hair and rough expressions. The castes always became the objects of satire and comedies. As it is the case of the whole world, the upper classes considered the downtrodden as the laughing stock of their ridicule.

The performance space, koothambalam of koothus, with its caste and classism determines the acting style, actors, plots and their audiences and a *performing area* for themselves. Though well trained, the audience was stagnant. They knew everything about the art form and knew the unchangeable performance structure. The lack of this flexibility is its limitation. A moving stage has plenty of possibilities rather than a stagnant one. The fixed acting place and fixed audience were the results of koothambalams. The art form generated for this performing space was compelled to concentrate on acting because of its audience’s intimacy. The acting style was so sukshma (subtle). The koothambalam arts could not address a wide audience. Koothambalams introduced a dull audience from the energetic past of the *performing area*. Goverdhen Panchal writes about koodiyattam audience as “no audience can

be expected to sit through the whole night performance without feeling restless sometimes...” (93). But kathakali fills its *performing area* outside the koothambalam and comparatively a little bit democratic than Koodiyattam.

3.3 Kathakali and Its Audiences

The *performing area* of kathakali extends from the past, where its patrons formed a system of interactions composed of determinants, conventions, sets of techniques and aesthetic principles. Kathakali’s structure is formed from the ramanattam, which was in Kerala in AD 17th century. There are confusions still about the influence and the period of krishnanattam or ramanattam and about the more influential one of them, paving the way for the birth of kathakali. The rulers of Kerala did not act sufficiently on the lives of the people or the prosperity of society in the seventeenth century. They engaged in the search of aesthetic beauties of language and arts. The forms, koodiyattam and kathakali, are very much connected with their texts. And, their aesthetic beauty shows that the patrons were very much interested in language also. The fantastic performance texts, attaprakaras and attackkathas, are examples. The first audience, the patron, is the king and the actors are high caste people of the performance area of kathakali. It has a structure with a masculine body orientation. Probably, the reason for this is that the tradition of the martial art, kalaripayattu which existed among Nair warrior men with flexible physical form would have passed to kathakali as well. It might be a reason to form a structure more body oriented. The involvement of the prime audience, the king, would have demanded a more concentrated and dedicated effort from the part of actor. Some kings of this period even authored performance texts for kathakali. And the humble obedience of patrons had limitations and never could make changes without the permission of patrons. As the majority of them were landlords, they could host the performances on their corridors or courts. The common people needed training to enjoy it, as it is linked to the mudras (hand gesture language) to communicate. The familiarity with this

sign language and performance conventions is a prerequisite to watch the performance. So the possibilities of having experience with the medium are very important in the case of kathakali and koodiyattam. The expressions like sringara, veera, romance and heroism were in focus only when Kottayam Thampuran gave structure to the form, kathakali. The elite and masculine society, which possessed a passion for these emotions, celebrated the rasa, enjoyment. The same story and the same actors would have reappeared on many occasions, but the audience kept following them to enjoy the rasa. Venu G remembers his first kathakali experience at the age of ten:

I saw kathakali for the first time when I was in the fifth standard. Someone brought me to the green room. In those days there was no green room prepared specially for kathakali in small temples. The green room was at a little distance from the stage. When the Kari, a character, got ready, someone lightened torches and guided him. We, children, noisy followed, watching the people around the actor walking in the style of character. The kathakali performance on that day was a turning point in my life (my trans.;G, Aranginte porulthedi 16).

From his surroundings and the occasions he got sri Venu engage himself with this art form, which made him passionate it. G Dileepan also remembers the days his father brought him to the kathakali performances (Personal Interview). The Nair and Namboothiri backgrounds of both of them also are considerable factors. In this context it is noteworthy that one of the popular Malyalam film actors, sri Mohanlal, hailing from a Nair family, was widely accepted when he performed kathakali for the film version of it. Since his caste identity and background were helpful in adapting the character of kathakali, sri Mohanlal was well viewed by the public. And, for the same reasons, he was widely accepted in the *performing area*. So, class and caste are two important factors reflecting in the *performing area*. The actors who perform possess their caste and class identity also. P Balachandran says

that an actor is a vessel which pours the character to the audience without commingling one's self with it. "Without commingling one's self with it, an actor pours the expressions of drama (and nature too) and the nature of actor (expressions too) with one's energy and the audience experiences the story through that vessel" (my trans.; Balachandran 115).

The Malayalam word, kathapathram, means the character can be divided as katha and pathram, in which katha is the story and pathram is the vessel. The argument connects the linguistic identity of the word to the process of enjoying drama. But in the case of Kerala classical plays, especially kathakali, it seems a little different, i.e., the actor pours himself to the audience. Keeping the actor and the audience at a distance, the actor projects himself through character. So, the actor is the character who comes to the *performing area*. Here, the audience decodes the expressions. The Nala of Gopi asaan or the Damayanthi of Kottakkal Sivaraman is more popular than the original characters of Nala and Damayanth in the myth. Audience selects the actor with some character, in which their concern will be how the character inhabits in the particular actor's body and manodharma. Manodharma is an improvising session, where the actor is free to express his psychological improvisation of the character.

From his expressions and gestures, a permanent kathakali audience can easily be identified in a group. The pronoun 'his' is used deliberately to point out that a woman audience is rare in these audience's exhibitionistic areas. It was common in ancient days, the older males of the elite family have the famous kathakali kambam, craze towards kathakali. Just like in the fashions in hairstyle, costume and attitude, the new generation boys imitated film stars. The men followed the kathakali kambam and kept its rhythm in their body movements and their attitude. Kathakali kambam is a very famous word in Malayalam. It meant one's obsession with kathakali. Many of the upper- class males had this kathakali kambam as a habit in olden days. The audiences did not come to see the performance like today; the actors go to the

houses or palace of the wealthy and upper-class people, when they are invited to perform. The freedom of the actor was up to the line the host has drawn. The improvisation, casting etc. depended on the host's interests. Kathakali and Koodiyattam have a fixed structure. In recent times, some artists like Venu G, try to make the form flexible to include and to update its contemporary performing area. The Shakespearian texts are also played as Koodiyattam and Kathakali today. But the classical structure those art forms earned through ages from the nostalgic past are not easy to contemporize as drama can. One of the best examples is the Poothana Festival of 2013 at Natyasasthra Kadampazhippuram. There were four performances plotted on the mythical character Poothana. Nangiar Koothu of Usha Nangiar, Mohiniyattam of Vineetha Nedungadi, Kathakali of Nellyyodu Vasudevan Namboothiri, and drama, Ghorarakshasam of Clay Playhouse, Ponnani were staged there. Drama was on the second day and was the last one. The four performances had tried to view Poothana in a contemporary context. But the drama made the most profound on the audience impact. After the drama, Nellyyodu Vasudevan Namboothiri, who staged Kathakali there, said that, "our classical art forms have some limitations. They cannot cross their structure. So, even if we tried hard to contemporize Poothana, it would be like a mythical character itself" (Personal interview). The brochure below has the pictures of character Poothana in Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Koodiyattam and drama. It speaks more about the matter discussed here.



Figure 2. Brouchure. Poothana Festival. Natyasasthra, Kadambazhippura 30-31. Aug 2013

The flexible structure of drama makes it more communicative and realistic. The classical art forms, especially koodiyattam and kathakali, retain a divinity in their costumes and make up, which keep them at a distance from audiences. As the characters have stylized acting and expressions, they are above the textual characters and always mythical rather than the dramatic ones. These exaggerated and expressive characters keep aloof from the daily lives of the audiences.

3.4 The Audiences of Classical Theatre of Kerala

Today, the base of the audience for the classical art forms is considerably bigger than it once was, because the *performing area* has been extended to foreign countries even. The remarkable development of the koodiyattam is its performance out of temple premises. Painkulam Rama Chakyar was the great one who performed it. It was in 1940s. It was given opportunity to perform in several nations and thus gained global recognition. There aren't any surprising gimmicks. The actor and his performance counted. Nedumudi Venu cites the

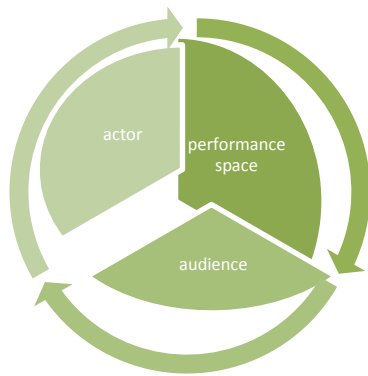
words of Ammannur Madhava Chakyar when he was asked about the outside performances of koothu and koodiyattam away from the koothambalam:

Oh, I am also doing something of the kind. I don't have the opinion that it is wrong. The first blame is that the dignity of an artist will lose if done so. But, if we bring an art form to the audience, there is the assumption that it is to entertain them and the artist. So, if an artist performs and people come there, both the art and artiste gain dignity (my trans. ; qtd.in Udalinte thara sancharangal, 131).

But the restrictions to enter the temple premises and to the koothambalam are still prevalent in Keralam for non-Hindus and the artiste is restricted to perform koothu or koodiyattam to other communities. So, even though one is passionate about this art form, he/she cannot enter the *performing area*. People from other castes, who wish to enter the performing area of these classical art forms, adopt a different identity and become part of the elite, even when they are from the lower caste. The smell of oil and lighting threads, incense sticks and the atmosphere make a temple atmosphere wherever these art forms are played. Those performances have a soft corner for authority. It won't question anything. Classical or traditional art forms never adopted the method of challenging the established system, whether in the case of art or the society at large. Even those Sanskrit plays questioning the social norms, when adapted to koodiyattam, seem to lose the fundamental issue or message of the original plays in the glitter of acting and performance. For example:

In the famous Balivadham, the near performance focuses slaying Bali. The actor's attention is fully concentrated on the manual presentation of the death scene. The audience, too, is fully immersed in the mesmerizing histrionics of the performer. It darkens the highly emotional area that Bali's reaction to the injustice Sree Rama did to him (my trans.; Njayath, 120).

Bali vehemently reacts against Sree Raman's violence to him. In fact, the very essence of Bhasa's play is to foreground the resistance to the injustice rather than the presentation of an elaborate death scene. Every art form is like a human child. It carries the gene with it. So, for an art form, it is difficult for it to sever its genetic connection with its origin. In Kerala, some of them are deeply embedded to the upper caste traditions. For the art forms like kathakali, koothu and koodiyattam, it is difficult to accommodate the contemporary society with a total disregard to caste and traditions and have a new structure for them. Thus rasa, the enjoyment, in classical arts circles their performing area itself, as the performance is a fixed one and the enjoyment circulates and moves only around the *performing area*.



EVOLUTION OF AUDIENCES OF MODERN DRAMA

Drama is visual poetry. This shows the significance of performance. Stage and language are complimentary to each other to produce a good performance. Therefore, the history of any performance depends on its language used to communicate and reveal the dramatic mystery. From other art forms, drama differentiates itself as the spontaneous performance. It cannot be re-staged. All performances are different and new while being performed. The *vachika* acting is very important in a dramatic performance. It is very unlucky that the modern Malayalam theatre doesn't have its roots in Kerala theatrical traditions. It was born and grew under the shades of Western dramatic culture. The modern Malayalam dramatic performances are indebted to Parsi musical drama. Imitating other linguistic and performance models, Malayalam theatre tried to find out its way. The Parsi musical drama came from the Western Victorian comedy theatre. It was rooted here. Musical plays were modeled on drama of the seventeenth century. Unlike tragedy, this is more profound because it explores the crisis of inner personality. Comedies did not move through sensation to awe at the human condition. They presented only types. The imported and distorted forms of the original, however, were popularized among North Indians soon. The working class was attracted to them madly, that the audience for musical drama was common people. Its results were the Marathi and Tamil musical theatres. Modern Malayalam theatre was influenced by them very much. In other words, Tamil musical drama was the reason for the reformation of Malayalam theatre. Even though, they were too contorted forms of the original Victorian text and performance, the people showed an excessive enthusiasm towards those shows.

The life experiences of much of those audiences were characterized by economic insecurity and political impotence. There might have been so many reasons like the social imbalance, hierarchy of classical and aristocratic arts, untouchability of artistic talents, color, etc. for their affinity towards them. Musical plays, came into being after oscillating between

the aesthetic conventions and strengths of classical, traditional and the Sanskrit emotionalism and moral polarization. The popularity of a particular form of cultural activity might, therefore, be related to those components of their experience. Musical drama can be seen as expressing the collective aspirations of a people; but the notion of people remained vague. There are various difficulties involved in trying to relate the history of musical plays to the history of a certain society. Most attempts to do so had begun from the art object and sought to connect its content or form to the conditions of its production. As the audience entered into a performance, they entered into relationships with others and with themselves. This cannot easily be mapped on to the relations of productions and receptions. Musical plays often stood in for the self- definition of a majority of struggling people to identify themselves and to dominate against an imposed and degrading definition by a ruling class and to constitute the specific economic and political identity. The mental slavery was the worst one. Like all the third world countries, India also keeps its curiosity and inferiority to western countries even today. Therefore, Indian people would have easily gone through a cultural shock. Like other areas, the cultural and sociological aspects would have needed to imitate the western ones, and would have thought it is better. Anyhow, those disfigured musical theatre forms had a great impact on the formation of Modern Keralite society also. The spectacle sensational scenes like crashing trains, burning houses, sinking ships, avalanches and explosions of Victorian melodrama were precursors of Malayala sangeetha natakas.

4.1 Tamil Musical Drama in Kerala

The musical plays created a dream space, where audiences were offered the fulfillment and satisfaction found only in dreams. It is an inner or invisible world, where an allegory of human experiences was dramatically ordered. During the British Raj in India, the European commercial theatre groups came to Kerala. It was only to entertain the officials of East India Company. The northern coastal cities of India thus became a stage for the inter-cultural

theatre traditions. Parsis were immigrants from Persia. Washing clothes and trade were their jobs. They accepted those western contorted forms of theatre performances and also started to perform their theatre experiments. It was the first step to having the musical theatre in India. In 1852 a theatre group Parsi Nadaka Mandali formed in Mumbai. For a king time, Parsi theatre continued. Parsis were well versed in English. So they could easily adapt to the Victorian dialogues and musical styles. But when Marati theatre turned to the Parsi musical drama, there were huge responses, and Marati musical drama became more popular soon. The world of reality was simplified and idealized there. As they selected the Persian way on stage, the stories were indigenous in Marati. They selected their own culture and history for the back ground of the plays. Some of the conditions of production and reception, which seem to underpin the response of audience, was a variety of forms of entertainments which made them popular. The Raja Gopy Chandh of Vishnu Das Buvae and Indrasabha of Amanath Kavi were evergreen among them. The superiority of such imaginations over the entirely unsatisfactory everyday life hardly needed any demonstration.

The audience always constitutes a collective. Any individual response is shaped within it. In Tamil Nadu, the Chettiar Community, who were merchants in northern India were responsible for the rise Tamil musical drama. They circulated the musical drama there. At the first time, the audience rejected the Parsi model of Tamil musical plays. The experience and the aspirations of the individuals and families, who comprise the audience for musical plays, were rooted in attending regional theatre performance. Then they thought about a kind of musical drama completely adopting Harikathas and Tamil classical music. It was a success. The musical drama companies were called sets instead of groups or troupes. They entered into Kerala with those colorful drama concepts. As Kainikkara M Kumarapillai wrote, “in Tamil musical drama literature was scapegoats of music and drama” (my trans.;24). The world of musical drama was the world of certainties, where confusion, doubt,

and perplexity were absent. That is the dream world its audience wished to get. In the musical plays, the audiences were given some reason to fear, to cry and to love characters. But the emotions aroused goes beyond the reason given. With their large gestures, grimaces and singing style, they raised an exclamation of their dreams. The climax was an expected one always.

4.1.1 Malayala Sangeetha Natakangal

In Malayalam, Sangeetha natakam appeared as a foreign art form especially as a Tamil one. Plays in this genre, were not mere imitations. They adapted to the style of Malayala dramatists who created their theatre here. They influenced the cultural history of Kerala itself. Those musical plays ruled the common minds here around half a century. Even though, they were foreign in origin, they made a great influence on the forthcoming theatre days. The commercial theatre formed and grew as professional theatre in Kerala on this ground. There was nothing to give to the people except the quilting scenario and rhythmic music. There is no clear evidence about the first musical drama and the first company to stage a musical drama in Kerala. Kattumadam Narayanan had written about this in his Malayala Nataka Prasthanam:

My effort to find out the whereabouts of the first Tamil theatre group which reached Kerala and the play they performed here was not fruitful. But, in all probability a Tamil play was staged at Thiruvananthapuram between 1040 and 1045 of Kollavrsham (Kerala traditional callender). And, Kalanilayam Krishnan Nair recalled once that a native of Augastheeswaram reported to him that his paternal uncle had played Mrudangam as a substitute in the said Tamil play. (my trans.; 95)

Though it was some vague information, it is clear that Tamil musical drama was popular, when the first Malayalam translation of a play came to modern light. Sadaram, a Tamil

musical drama staged in Valiya Kottaram in 1901 got acceptance among the high class of Kerala. This was the case with Musical drama. In 1903 KC Kesava Pillai wrote an adaptation of Sadaram as Sadarama and it is considered as the first Malayala musical drama. Malayala sangeetha natakas in a way popularized theatre in Kerala. The inscriptions like Nalacharitham, Syamanthakam, Parijathaharanam, Harischandracharitham and the stories like Sadaram and Saradadu Kumaram etc were performed and became popular as musical drama. The sangeetha natakas did not have any dramatic elements and were mere entertainments. They were inadequate artistic forms, crude in their emotions and simplistic in their morals. They might arouse sensations of terror, wonder or pathos in the viewers. But those feelings were aroused for their own sake, rather than emerging from a significant situation. In them, music was more essential element than drama itself. The relation of different kinds of music to dramatic gesture, how music directly reflected emotional states, which prefigured the stage directions of specific sequence important to the performance, were the keys to the popularity of musical plays. A great example for the romantic attitude to the music is that the hero enters by singing songs and starts a musical concert with the person who sits on the stage with a harmonium on his front left side (most of the time he might be in white silk Jubba, a long upper costume for males). The spectators were excited by this as the current generation fans of Malayalam films excited by the entry of their specific heroes. There were applauses of approval. Pakkalanilapadi is a Tyagaraja (a famous musician of India) keerthana as it was used as the entry song of hero and heroine in some plays. People called such entries of heroes as Pakkala Paduka. It was a usual calling “once more” to repeat scenes or sequences. When people demanded once more, actors used to repeat their actions. Artists do not let the gestures be too short even if it tires them. They wanted to please the spectator. There was no pretence. People went to the theatre voluntarily as it was a game, where certain expectations were set up and fulfilled. While the translated and adapted

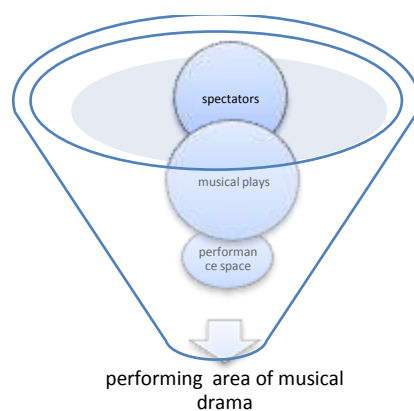
classical texts concentrated only on literature, musical drama concentrated on the performance.

In those days, drama reached the audience. They were the masters of the theatre. They demanded and the artistes preferred it. From the utter illogical Tamil musical plays, some dramatists like KC Kesavapillai, T C Achutha Menon, Eruvil Chakrapani Varrrior seem to lift the musical plays into a better logical Malayalam plays. Sangeethanaishadam, Sadarama, and Karuna of Swami Brahmavathan are some noted plays among them. Those plays were not for mere commercial purpose. They tried to keep some artistic qualities within the shell. The comedy was an essential element of musical plays. For creating comedy, a special character, baffoon was there in each play. It was from western stages, Malayalam musical plays opted two types of comic characters. Besides baffoon of Chavittunatkam, they brought in vidusakas of Sanskrit plays, too. Though the music was the speciality of musical plays, when Thikkurussi Sukumaran Nair entered with the non-singer hero, the audience accepted it also with excitement. The rendering of dialogues displaced the music. A piece of cloth held in front of the actors by men was the curtain and it is known as Thiraseela. There is a term *thiranottam* to the action behind this thiraseela in kathakali. The curtain entered with musical drama was different in nature. They were suspended in front of the stage. They can be considered as the theatre curtain today because they have been modeled on theater curtain.

After the formation of Thiruvattar's Manomohanam Drama Company there formed so many drama companies in Thiruvithamcore. They came to Cochin, and it had resulted in the formation of drama companies in Cochin also. Royal cinema and dramatic company' and Sanmarga Vilasam Natanasabha were led by Artiste P J Cheriyan. Those were different from Thiruvithamcore companies. They tried to make money with better artistic talents unlike the greedy business tricks of Thiruvithamcore musical play companies. VS Andrews was the playwright for both companies. In the northern region, Malabar kept its identity in the

Malayala sangeetha nataka history also. The dramatists like Kuttamath Kelu Nair, were never yielded to the greedy commercial attitude. Even the P S Varrior Paramavilasam Theatre Company also gave prime importance to the quality of the product not in the sense of business but in the sense of art.

The influence of Malayala sangeetha natakas never ended. Even today the commercial theatre has its elements. Thinking about the problems of musical drama may suggest a further facet, another angle of approach. The people were so passionate about the musical plays. It opened doors to all human beings who wished to enjoy dramatic pleasure beyond any social, regional, religious or caste barriers. The theatre was audience oriented, and they demanded the things to show off, like, a hero to marry the heroine at the end etc. The socio- communal plays of V T Bhattathirippad and his followers had the benefit of these audience psyches. They needed not to search for any kind of audience to see one performance. They are there ready to run any show. The addiction to the drama to such a degree made easy welcome to the all theatre movement to the Keralite society. One of the functions of musical drama may perhaps be located in the disharmony between the collective strength of the audience and the individual positions of them as members of the society. It was the most positive side of the Malayala sangeethe nataka movement.



The ultimate result was the birth of a society addicted to drama.

4.2 The first Drama in the Malayalam Language

Our theatre tradition was a performance or acting oriented. But with the rise of modern theatre, drama concentrated its attention seriously on its literature. In the year 1866 Kallloor Ommen Philipos's text *Almarattam Athava Oru Kelee Sallapam* was published. It was the translation of the *Comedy of Errors* of William Shakespeare. Unfortunately, it was never recorded in theatre history, nor has it recognized as drama even. Many scholars like Ulloor S Parameswarayyar considered it as a novel. Whatever it was, it is the first drama text in the Malayalam language. It has been said that in 1882, a translation of Sanskrit drama *Sankuthalam* to Malayalam had happened and Kerala historians consider it as the first drama in the language. Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran was the author. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai says that, "it was a fantastic experience to the Malayalees when the *Keraliya Sakunthalam* was published" (my trans.; 17). It was a different one from the familiar *koodiyattam* and *kathakali* texts. The development of the plot attracted the audience. Thus, literature came into the lime light. There were so many translations of *Sakunthalam*. The *Sakunthalam* translations had many opportunities for performance. The *Manomohanam* theatre group's performance was a famous one. They staged it in different places. In a colorful and splendid costume with inconsistent music, the drama could never go through the right meaning of the texts. The performances were always inferior to the literature. Thiruvattar Narayana Pillai, an actor, performed *Sakunthalam* in the style of *sangeetha natakam* and it made people remember the story and songs. That performance was one of the reasons for the popularity of *Sakunthalam*. One watching a performance or something different from his/her cultural frame makes the feeling of disabled or irrelevant to strategies of viewing.

A group of translations from different languages followed then. Among the Sanskrit translations *Janaki Parinayam* of Chathukkutty Mannadiyar (1889), *Uthara Ramacharitham* of

K Narayana Menon (1892), Malavikagnimithram (1892), Vikramorvaseeyam and Malathi Madhavam (1892) of Kottarathil Sankunni, Ascharyachoodamani of Kunhikkuttan Thampuran(1893), Veni Samharam (1916) of Panthalam Kerala Varma, Abhinjana Sakunthalam (1913), Malavikagni Mithram (1916), Swapna Vasavadhatham, Charudhatham (1917) of AR Raja Raja Varma were remarkable ones. There was an ocean of translations but only a few made goals. It was almost at the same time that different streams came to being in Malayalam theatre. The influence of English education had led to the translation of Shakespearian literature to Malayalam. Hamlet of Kodungallur Kunjikuttan Thampuran, Kalahinee Damanakam translation of Taming of Shrew were made by Kandathil Varghese Mappilai. A Govinda Pillai's Lear was one among them. Pershya Swayamvaram, the attakadha (kathakali text) form of Merchant of Venice, made an incredible possibility in Kerala theatre. In 1888 Chembaka Raman did that amazing work. King Lear was translated in 1897 by Govinda Pillai. It was performed very seriously for invited members as audience. The properties needed for the play were imported from abroad. The translated texts kept the European form in its dramaturgy. And, most of the plays were lost in excessive musicality in performance.

4.3 The Dramatic revolution in Malayalam stage

Chandra Mukhee Vilasam of CV Raman Pillai in 1887 was a difference to it. It was a starting of plays without verses as dialogues. The themes taken for plays by CV Raman Pillai were quite contemporary and much discussed. His play Kurippilla Kalari is considered as the first play of the farce stream, staged by Prahasana Prasthanam, of Malayalam theatre. Each farce dealt with the financial crisis of the middle class and youth. The inner subject revealed in each play was almost similar and performed in so many stages at Thiruvananthapuram. Those plays had the expression of chakyar koothu and were texted in Manipravalam, a language developed in Kerala by mixing Sanskrit with Malayalam. Manipravalam was

mostly used by the upper and educated class, and Chakyar Koothu also was for an elite class. So it is evident that the audience might be elite middle-class people. The subject of CV's plays' subjectivity extended to the middle of the 1940s.

The pioneer among the followers of CV was EV Krishna Pillai. Pennarasu Nadu, Kavitha case, B A Mayavi, Kurippinte Daily and Vismrithy, etc. were considered as farces. MG Kesava Pillai and NP Chellappan Nair also were parts of that evolution of amateur theatre stream there. The stages were the occasions of college or library anniversaries and birth day celebrations of high-class people. It was very common in Kerala, that plays were staged in connection with libraries. With the play Seethalakshmi in 1926, EV Krishna Pillai caused to begin a new stream in Malayalam theatre. For more than three decades it was the model for Malayalam stage. The serious and historical plot, hilarious acting, heroism, love and comedy created a formula for southern Malayalam stages. In those days, actors took extra care in an unnatural style of walking "perfectly" and using dialogues in vain. The subtlety in acting and its beauty were beyond thought in that era.

Thrissur and Palakkad districts of Kerala also had some drama groups. Since 1890, the groups Rasika Ranjini and Vidyavinodhini with a competitive spirit staged much drama. In Thrippunithara and Cherthala, drama companies like Benjalan - Kutteeswaran were active in work. Paramavilasam Theatre group formed by PS Varriar made the first organized theatre group in Malabar. A permanent hall for regular shows became real with the establishment of PSV halls at Kozhikode and Palakkad. In the North Malabar, the Kuttamath family and their theatre contributions cannot be neglected, when the theatre history of Kerala is considered. Pointed national movements in drama were well done by the Malabar theatre groups. Kuttamath, Kunniyur Kunji Krishna Kuruppu, Vidwan P Kelu Nair and Rasika Siromani Koman Nair were some among those theatre pioneers. The encouraging situations of Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram regarding the cultural and educational field were strange to the

Malabar zone. The national groups were stronger there in British Malabar. Only a minority engaged in arts compared to Thiruvananthapuram. Thus their theatre works were beyond the mere just curiosity and entertainment aspects. But they want for revolutionary social works. So the commercial aspects were comparatively lesser.

Modernity entered into Malayalam dramatic space through the translation done by Kesari Balakrishna Pillai of Henric Ibsen's most established play, Ghosts. It was so challenging to make a new move in the tastes of the audiences, who were deeply addicted to the melodramatic and hollow performances. N Krishna Pillai tried to lead the Malayali audience to a serious audienceship. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai characterized him as the "Perunthanchan" (60) of Malayalam Theatre. Perunthanchan is a mythical character who was the master on carpentry. The other famous Ibsenist followers were CJ Thomas, K Surendran, G Sankara Pillai and CN Sreekanandan Nair. Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, K Ramakrishna Pillai and TN Gopinathan Nair were most prominent people who wrote plays in the extreme melodramatic way using Ibsen's method. In 1944 Pulimana Parameswaran Pillai's Play Samathwavaadhi introduced expressionism here. All the modernism and revolutions of Malayalam theatre happened through texts. There were searches for fresh and effective performing areas.

4.3.1 KPAC

In the history of Kerala, KPAC is a milestone. The plays of Kerala Peoples Arts Club (KPAC) have a major role in the formation of the first government in Kerala. KPAC was formed as the Kerala wing of the IPTA, Indian People's Theatre Association. It was a period of the dramatic and political revolution taking place in India. Drama became political, and the theatre artists were considered as political figures. They had to organize strikes and to go underground as politics had a say in the plays of that time. In Kerala, Communist party had been accepted as the tongue of the oppressed and had deeply rooted in people. The ordinary

people gave their support to the party and its drama. So the KPAC's plays were not silly plays. They were the lives and wishes of a generation and considered as the voice of the common people. Party used those plays as their footsteps as it's not the party's concern to make a theatre culture here as they concerned only to build a Communist government. Francis T Mavelikkara, famous theatre person working with Kerala professional theatre says:

People used to throng the theatres and performance space in tens of thousands to watch plays. But the number has dwindled to ten to fifteen today. Who is responsible for this change? The authorities responsible for sustaining the theatre activities contributed little towards it. The communist parties in Kerala were much benefitted through the staging of the plays such as Paattabaakki, Koottukrishi and Ningalenne Communistaakki, etc. The play, Communistaakki, is historic and central in electing the government led by EMS in 1957. Even though the communist parties came in to power several times in Kerala, they did little for the development of theatre activities. They could have established a theatre each in fourteen districts of Kerala (my trans.; 68).

There were thousands of audiences to see a play. They came to see even at the risk of their life. The reason was Kerala Communist party was banned then. Was their love and emotion towards the party or plays? Did they love plays as they were the voice of the party? Or did they love party through the light spread those plays? These questions always arise in the present scenario of theatre here. E A Rajendran of Kalidasa Kalakendra, Kollam says:

The aim of Communist parties was to be in power by being elected, and, they never attempted to encourage the theatre activity. They made use of theatre as means of getting power. And, gradually they distanced it, except in the case of KPAC. Kerala

theatre never enjoy any special status or encouragement, when communist parties came in to power. On the other hand, film industry enjoyed subsidy (my trans.;70).

Drama did their best to make communist culture here. In India, Kerala is the best communist state. The Communist party has its control all the time even when they were not in power. The party could decide the lives here. KPAC Sulochana, a popular theatre artist, in her autobiography gives so many nostalgic and emotional memories about the relationship between audience and KPAC. One example is:

We were setting ready for the staging of a play in a theatre at Karunagapilly. Everything was complete, including make-up and stage-setting. We could hear the uproar of the people being seated to watch the play. In a short while, the theatre was over crowded. The noise was so much that nothing could be properly heard. In an attempt to start the play, we entered on to the stage. At this moment, the contractor who booked the play came to me panting and requested that we need to save him. On our enquiry, we understood the tickets sold for the show was several folds more than the seating capacity of the theatre. So, those people, who could not enter the theatre, threatened him to kill him if he did not make arrangements for them to view the play. Our secretary, whom we fondly addressed 'Kuruppu Chettan', appeared on the stage and announced to the audience in and around the theatre: 'the organizers, who booked the play for you, sold the tickets for it without even considering the seating capacity of this theatre. That is the present problem. So, we are willing to stage the play for a second time tonight itself. Therefore, I request you to keep quiet and co-operate with us in the performance'. It had an immediate effect. People became quiet and very helpful in staging the play. When we completed the second show, it was around 3 AM. Everybody kept supporting and encouraging us until then. And, in the end, they

went back to their homes shouting slogan such as ‘inquilab zindabad’ (my trans.; 33-34).

This incident depicts a picture about the influence of KPAC on the audiences. KPAC and their plays like, Aswametham, Ningalenne Communistakki, Sarvekkallu, Mudiyanaya Puthran, etc., excited them. There was a different experience Sulochana explained. It is when they went to stage at Manjery, a Muslim dominated area:

The location for the performance was totally empty to our dismay. We came to know the reason for the same from some of our sympathizers. According to their account, some people went about propagating that KPAC wanted to convert Muslims through their plays. It would badly affect the communal harmony of the place. So, they warned the people against watching the play or supporting the performance. If they did, they would face dire consequences. For the same reason, no organizer even showed up. If we did not stage the play, it would be hurting our pride and add to our financial liability. So, we decided to face the situation and went to meet some of our sympathizers at the locality. We convinced them that the theme of the play had nothing to do with religious conversion. If anything of it hurt their sentiments, we would end the play and accept the punishment for it. When we started the play, the number of the spectators was below hundred. But, by the time we completed two or three group songs, they thronged the place in great numbers. They kept supporting us. During the interval we announced to the audience, ‘We came to Manjery from Kayamkulam spending a lot of money for our travel and other expenses. We couldn’t meet anyone of the organizers, who booked the play with us. We require money for our return journey. Right now our hands are empty. So, when two of us approach you, kindly support us by giving them what you can spare for us, only if you like the

play'. The play ended very successfully. And, the donation was around Rs 300 (my trans.;34-35).

These events show how a theatre group got rooted in nostalgia of people in Kerala. The performance of that play was with such process, and, the people of Manjeri also took a part in that process. The people of Kerala were excited to participate in the process of watching KPAC' plays. Sulochana told another exciting experience about the Kovalam drama performance:

When we reached Kovalam for staging the play, the contractor, who booked the play with us, approached us and informed that the collector of the district banned the staging of the play due to the outbreak of smallpox in the area. But, the people of the locality did not know anything about it. They had reserved their tickets for the performance. So, the convenor of our troupe wanted to make a temporary stage using bamboo poles and palm fronds. We prepared the stage with the support of the people of the place. After sometime, two vans full of policemen were stationed at the place. At first did not understand the development around. However, I had political awareness imparted by Kuruppettan, Raja Gopalan Nair and Kambissery. And, this made me courageous. I, too, wanted to stage the play at any cost. The bell signaling the play rang. And, then, Kuruppettan announced, 'The Congress party supporters banned our play. But, we will stage the play, come what may.' People watched the full length of the play with utmost attention. Even after the play, they waited there to resist the policemen arresting us. Finally, we forced them to disperse. During the ban, main actors used to turn up and act out their roles in the play and go back to their hiding places. And, women used to return to certain other shelters as well. When I recall all these occasions, I am filled with high spirits. This is the first incident of

refusing the freedom of expression. I feel this must be one of the reasons that made KPAC popular all over India (my trans.; 30-31).

The drama artistes always complained that the Communist Party gave nothing to the theatre; instead used it to achieve their political goals. Party could have done so many things in return. But it didn't contribute much to its growth. It was not their agenda. So the party and theatre parted their ways and began to continue their journey themselves. From, the once more mass audience of Tamil musical drama and the political mass audience of KPAC plays, audience again shrank.

4.3.2 Kalasamithy plays

Nataka kalari (Play Workshop) and Kala Samithiy (Art Centre) were formed during the same age, where a small segment of theatre people had started to have familiarity this visual art theatre and started working for. A significant difference was seen during this period in commercial (called Professional) and amateur play styles. In 1960 and 70s, Kalasamithys had gained an active presence in this arena. During the time, most of the villages used to have at least one library and had a theatre group connected with it, which performed plays during anniversaries of these libraries. Apart from theatre aspirants, friends and social workers used to contribute to them, rather than participate in these productions. Thuppattan, a dramatist, remembers his theatre works with the native library anniversaries of his region in the nineteen sixties:

The drama texts were usually published at that time, with the names of crew and actors of the play. The presence of, popular and accepted identities of cultural area in those productions were an attractive element. So, in the enjoyment, the quality of one performance was only in second place. Naturally, each play depended up on their acceptance regarding this performing fact (my trans.; Nadezhuthicha natakangal, 26).

The scripts/texts selected to perform were normally simple and picked from those libraries themselves and portrayed them with a social and cultural focus. Though slight political influences were visible, these initiatives could successfully take the play to the common man by ensuring their active participation, resulting in the phenomenal unity of theatre aspirants and the general public. It was so normal that Kalasamithy's plays could always blend performances with an element of nostalgia. The birth of the play text with rigid and constructive structure is also an example of the dramatic influence of Kalasamithys in that era, which was undoubtedly considers the golden period of Malayalam theatre. During this period in Kerala, Kozhikode had witnessed the foundation of the historical Kendra Kalasamithy by theatre veterans like S K Pottekkad, PC Kuttikrishnan (Uroob), BC Varghese, M Abdul Rahman, K Padmanabhan, Nair, NV Krishna Varrier, Thikkodiyan, Theruvath Raman, KP Raman Nair, Balakrishnappilla. Kendra Kalasamithy, founded on the location of Kozhikode Bar Council, had taken its full shape through the gradual development of two libraries namely Deshposhini and Sengupta.

Kendra Kalasamithy thus formed had successfully conducted a Theatre Festival, which had turned to a real festival literally by great efforts taken by veterans instituted Vikraman Nair and CJ Thomas. It was a new experience for the aspirants, who included the awards for best play, director, actor, actress, etc. The renowned audio theatre personality, Shri.Thikkodiyan, had made his first stage plays in that festival. Kootukrishi, the play presented by Ponnani Krishna panicker Library Kalasamithy was also an influence of Kalasamithy movement. Uroob, KT Mohammed, Mohammed Yousuf (playwright of Kandam Becha Kottu) and Cherukad were other eminent theatre personalities, who made debut in that festival. Kozhikode Kendra Kalasamithy was a dream triggered to reality for an ensemble of real theatre aspirants having unique thoughts. Sincerity and dedication were witnessed in their efforts. This eventually led to a new theatre concept among common

people. Amateur theatre groups started gaining importance in continuation to the ripples created by Kendra Kalasamithy initiative. Kozhikode Deshaposhini Kalasamithy, Brothers Music Club, Kerala Kalavedi, Thrissur, Ponnani Krishna Panicker Library Kalasamithy, Cherpulassery Udaya Kalasamith and Kalasamithys at Nilambur were major the theatre groups which functioned as agents of change in stage presentations on the amateur floor. During this period, when theatre groups were looking for the presence of female actors on the stage, people started to let their female family members to participate in amateur groups. Even young men were willing to married to those young women ready to make them a presence on the stage. This is a revolution in the theatre history of Kerala.

Malabar witnessed the beginning and the steady development of Kalasamithy Prasthanam (Movement of art centre organizations). The efforts to accomodate art along with business were also initiated during this period. Semi-professional troupes were founded during this period in and around Kozhikode. Brothers Music Club drama troupe was formed by eminent persons like KT Mohammed, K P Ummar and Kunjava. Though the plays staged by them focused on social development, they had equally given attention to the importance of theatre techniques as well. Brothers Music Club had succeeded in conveying people that watching drama is both a serious and responsible process. Prathibha Arts Club of Kochi and KPAC of Kayamkulam had also witnessed the influence of KalasamithyPrasthanams in one way or other.

The plays of CV, CJ Gopinathan Nair and CL Jose, though enacted for leisure, also got space in amateur theatre segment. But, Kalasamithy Prasthanams influenced these plays as well with regard to professionalism brought in by Kalasamithies. Of late, this tendency is seen in the plays of different amateur theatre groups. However, amateur groups could stand away from vulgar imitations on presentation, which were very common in commercial plays during that time. Two kinds of play productions were formed. One is the kind of plays

formed around an existing social conscience on the contemporary issues and others are formed by a conscience influenced by issues deliberately brought in by some plays. The plays of CL Jose and SL Puram Sadanandan come under the first group. The semi-professional groups like Brothers Music Club, Prathibha Arts Club and KPAC had given much importance and efforts to sustain the element of art, which would otherwise drain out from the stage in an era of total commercialization of theatre. This magical synthesis of amateur and professional traits, which contributed a lot to the theatre sphere of Kerala, was the major reason for budding up of many new theatre groups like Kalidasa Kala Kendram, Geedha Arts Club, Kerala Theatre, Viswa Kerala Kalasamithy, etc. Play productions gained importance during this period along with play writing and stage presentations.

The literary texts of eminent persons like Krishna Pillai, Pulimana, CJ, which were hardly gained popularity as books, were staged as due to the tremendous influence of Kalasamithy Prasthanams. Good plays with professionally perfect presentation received very positive responses from the audience as evidenced in the case of a play Anuranjanam by Ponnani Kalasamithy. It should also be noted that the mental dispositions of the audience, who accepted this play, was already seasoned by plays like Koottukrishi, Ithu Bhoomiyanu and Kandam Becha Kottu, etc. due to the effort of Kalasamithy Prasthanam.

4.3.3 Nataka Kalari and Thanathu Nataka Vedi

Nataka kalari Prasthanam helped to impart awareness among the public that the theatre art is an art form to be learned or taught. The Nataka Kalaris are considered as milestones in the history of Kerala theatre. G Sankarapillai wrote, “Nataka kalari was neither an organization nor an institution; rather it was a process of probe, even more, a friendship” (my trans.; Natakadarsnam,97). The first Nataka kalari was conducted in 1967 at Sasthamkotta Devaswam College. It was led by G Sankara Pillai, M V Devan, C N Srikantan Nair, K

Ayyappapaniker and PK Venukuttan Nair. C N Srikandan Nair was the person behind fixing the tag name kalari in Nataka kalari. The major aim of this kalari was to provide awareness to the aspirants that the theatre was an art form, which needed serious learning. It was a rare experience for an aspirant in those days to get an environment, which gives awareness in various aspects of the theatre as a medium, such as stage actors, playwright, audience and other stakeholders, in which they are involved. It is rather illogical than contradictory to say that the stage presentation training or workshop was rare in Kerala, because kathakali and koodiyattam had complex and cumbersome training frameworks in Kerala. When the socio-cultural environment to initiate theatre in Kerala was considered, it understood that in the social climate theatre works were denied spaces. But kathakali and koodiyattam always enjoyed superior spaces in the society, though drama as a modern form was denied this space, moreover classical artistes, who were normally included in a superior class artistic society considered drama as an inferior form. The inferior social state of the drama artistes also contributed to reducing the scope to have stage presentation workshops during that period. Withstanding all these limitations, Nataka kalaris could present an initial solution in creating the notion that drama is a significant art form, which demanded systematic training and research. The background preparations had started years before the first Nataka kalari was founded in 1967 at Sasthamkotta. A theatre seminar held in 1961 led by M Govindan had introduced this training programme in theatrical mode. Another seminar held in Kottayam organized by CN Srikantan Nair in 1965 was also on this topic. Navarangam of CN had contributed much for further studies on the subject. The other initiative, which concentrated on the topic, was a six months theatre learning course held at Ram's Hindi Vidyalaya at Poojappura headed by N Krishnapillai and at Chirayinkeezhu Prasasheedhana Little Theatre of G Sankara Pillai. kalari targets the young people that playwriting is a creative process to be done purposefully and it was taught through models. External and internal factors, new and

ancient trends in world theatre, etc. started pouring into Malayalees' ears since then. The research and studies over Greek-Indian-European-Japanese-Chinese cultural, theatrical models led to a new outlook on theatre.

Nataka kalari began its work on the floor. The theatre sphere, which always used to gamble with play text, has paved a new path for experimental stage presentations through these kalaris. The first Nataka kalari was held for seven days at Sasthamkotta, and the play 1128 crime 27 by CJ Thomas was staged as part of kalari. The very next year, in May 1968, next kalari was conducted by C J Smaraka Samithy and Aa Manushyan Nee Thanne was staged. The third kalari was held in 1969 at Dhanuvachappuram. All kalaris were based on a common syllabus. Apart from physical fitness programmes, practical learning environment was provided on lighting, make up, costume, music, scenography, etc. Improvisational scripting was also involved in the syllabus. Presentation is as creative as play scripting process. The director, who depicts the external or internal movements of the script, was introduced in Nataka kalari. The autocracy of any actor was abolished, and the group performances were given more importance through this kalari. Training in theoretical and practical script writing, presentation and audiences' acceptance were also given in these kalaris. The fourth kalari was held at FACT in Kalamassery.

A performing arts department started in 1979 led by G Sankarapillai at Calicut University was the major turning point in the history of Malayalam theatre. This was well accepted by the young theatre aspirants, who had already gained energy from Nataka kalari. The mandate to have technical and structural knowledge in theatre has become part of the society through the school of drama. The school of drama witnessed the knowledge exchange of the Indian and European theatres through different workshops.

The search of an indigenous stage resulted in the rise of Thanathu nataka vedi. In the first nataka kalari at Thiruvananthapuram, M Govindan presented a seminar on the subject Thanathu. C N Sreekandan Nair, G Sankara Pillai and Kavalam Narayana Panicker were very influential in the case of Thanathu stages. They believed the theatre of Kerala should be evolved from the indigenous arts of Kerala. The search of the roots ended mostly in the upper class arts and attitude. The most democratic and flexible form of the drama tried to lock itself in the fixed structure of Kerala classical arts like kathakali and koodiyattam. The incapability of Thanathu plays to communicate with contemporary lives and the general rejection of elite past might be the reason for the less acceptability of Thanathu. In the opinion of KT Muhammed:

We haven't any national theatre here. Our art forms and culture were not formed in a gradual process. Our language too influenced by foreign invasion. Even, the name board of a petty pan shop also in English. As this is the situation, we went to the epics and ancestry in search of our root. I am not against it. But it must have the smell of life. Thanathu must have been born by itself, not to be made. (my trans.; 102)

The audience showed great hesitations towards the performance called Thanathu. While Kavalam Narayana Panikker made his way, others found no results anymore. C N Sreekandan Nair's play, Kali was first performed in December 1967. But it was lost in the noise of the people. And, this is often cited as an example for the response of the general public to a new concept of theatre.

4.3.4 The Role of School of Drama

The idea of learning drama was the result of Nataka kalaris. In 1979 School of Drama and Fine Arts was established under Calicut University as a study department. G Sankara Pillai was the initiator and the first director of School of Drama. The students, who came out from

School of Drama, deeply influenced Malayalam stages. The scientific and theoretical study about the stage conventions and dramaturgy was new and strange to Kerala people. G Sankara Pillai made ways to connect native theatre to an international one. In the early eighties, he invited Maya Tanberg Grischin from Switzerland to School of Drama several times. Her methods and style of presentation influenced and even was adopted by Malayalam theatre for many years. Simple but meaningful set, properties, body- oriented acting, and connecting words with actions and properties are her style of doing drama. S Ramanujam and Vayala Vasudevan Pillai were other remarkable theatre experts related with School of Drama.

Besides acting and direction as specialized areas, School of Drama promoted children's theatre. Children's Theatre itself has a different position from all those theatre concepts. It should seek special theories for drama. As a brilliant pedagogical tool, drama with children and for children means a lot. The children have their own way to understand things. Those communication languages are luckily more theatrical, too. Rabindranath Tagore's Post Office and Kainikkara Pathmanabhaa Pillai's Dharidra Narayanan were played for children. The short story, Kabooliwala written by Tagore was also performed as drama. Nagavally was made as the dramatic text and, Maya Tanberg did the play, the Little Chalk Circle, for children in School of Drama. Even though it may sometimes seem that human and animal fights constitute a kind of game. In which one has to pick one's fight's kind, a long tradition of admitting some relation between the two in fact exists. Such relations made the plot for most of the children's play. People, who do not consider animals as genuine bearers of right or subjects of ethical concerns even, agree the argument that the custom of tormenting and killing animals will harden children's mindset even towards men. While treatment of animal characters as means and ends and through which rights and obligations are conceptualized and articulated in terms of the human, from the perspective of child audience, there may start

a struggle against the concept that human being is the natural centre of all systems of morals. The picture below, is a class room production by the students of 2011-2013 academic year at School of Drama. Sunitha V, the student director, chose children's theatre as her option. The other people performed their play, Athava Arjentinayile Karakausalam for children.



Figure 3 Ariyittu Vazcha Adhava Arjentinayile Karakoushalam. School of Drama & Fine Arts Thrissur, Kannan 16.July.2013

The theatre persons passed out from School of Drama had to face a lot of questions. The first question the students out of School of Drama faced was always regarding the relevance of studying drama on an educational perspective. Theatre was not under the lime light of serious theoretical categories. People took it only a medium to entertain them in some manner. The first thing the theatre persons had to cross over was to train the general audience to go across the meaning of theatre conventions they have found from their previous studies. Two types of the audience were thus born;

- 1) The people who considered themselves an audience. This is theatre activism. They tried to analyze the inner meanings, symbols and images, that drama drew from a variety of things and loved to experiment with.

- 2) The second category believes that the drama provided by academic theatre persons made the drama from complicated and their appreciation and love for it diminished.

The next question faced by the School of Drama persons is about their livelihood. They had to survive. There wasn't any market for their productions. There were two options for them:

- 1) Do commercial drama for the mass audience and keep them in a financial safe zone.
- 2) Engage in search of new theatrical modes for a minority of audience.

Both options were selected according to their attitude. The people who selected amateur drama as their area went to villages and involved in the process of making a new audience. Jose Chirammel, Narippatta Raju and Deepan Sivaraman are best examples. The people, who selected commercial theatre like Kozhikkodu Gopinath, tried to make an order and thus refreshed commercial theatre. Even though they were quite different in their aptitude, the advent of the audience in a unique academic identity gradually happened. There is a third category that found their bread in screen, silver or mini. They made the institution popular among the common people. It is very important to notice the absence of talented playwrights among students passed out from the school of drama in recent years. The leading young generation playwrights are A SanthaKumar, Riyas, Jinoe Joseph, Satheesh K Satheesh, Jisha Abhinaya, EC DineshKumar, Gireesh Kalathil, E Rajarajeswari, Gireesh PC Palam, KV Sreeja, Vinod Kumar, Rafeeq Mangalassery, Sajitha Madthil, Pradeep Mandur, Sreejith Poyilkavu, Sivadasan Poyilkavu, Indran Machad, MK Babu, Hemanthkumar and KR Ramesh. Except for Sreejith Poyilkavu, Sajitha Madthil, and VinodKumar all other playwrights are not academically trained.

4.3.5 Caste and Community Theatre

The influence of social and religious customs in Malayalam theatre can be rightly spotted from the play, *Adukkalayil niinnu Arangathekku* of VT Bhattathiipadu, performed on the occasion of the twenty- second anniversary of Namboothiiri Yogakshema Sabha. Namboothiiri Yogakshema Sabha was a group formed for the reformation of the Namboothiiri caste in 1908. The play *Adukkala* was only a propagandistic play to achieve their goals, devoid of aesthetic and theatrical elements concentrated only on the power of the medium. The play *Adukkala* made a breakthrough in the up gradation of Namboothiiri women by bringing them out of the kitchen to the public space of the society. That was a time of musical plays. The play *Sadarama* written by KC Kesavapillai was staged widely, and it was running successfully. Meanwhile, in South Kerala, it was a time of Prahasanas, satirical plays, of C V Raman Pillai. To this colorful popular scenario, *Adukkala* put its first step to say the story of a society's darkness and shadows. Following VT's path, MRB and Premji wrote plays, *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and *Rithumathi* respectively. Both were propagandistic in nature intended to reform the Namboothiiri caste. The introductory song itself says the politics of *Rithumathi*:

Rithumathiyaayoru penkidaavennaki

Lathu mathi njaayam patippu nirthaan

Avalennum pinne adukkala thannulli

Lavashamirunnu narachidenam.

Kudayedutheedanam, kuppayamooranam

Kutila samudhaaya neethi nokkoo (my trans.; of a girl reaches menstruation, it might be enough reason to stop her studies. She should get grey and old in the kitchen from that day! She should get Kuda, an umbrella to cover hers from

others, and should remove her blouse as the Namboothiri women were not allowed to wear blouse. Look at the horrible injustice of a community!).

Those plays aimed mainly at the women audience of the society. Their stages were the long varandhas or sit out portions of the Namboothiiri homes. Devaki Nilayankode remembers:

Those plays said the sorrows of women. So, VT and MRB wanted them to be seen by women audience. At some places, they got the permission to stage in the sit outs of the Manas (Namboothiri homes). The ladies weren't allowed to come out and sit publically to see drama. They made some screens with two pieces of cloth and sat or stood behind those capuchins to watch the plays with great distress holding their breath and sometimes heaving long sighs. (my trans.;49)

And those attempts made great revolutions in Namboothiri community. Patta Bakki and Koottukrishi were the two plays noticeable in the reformatory social space of Malayalam theatre. Patta Baakki was written in 1937 to perform on the occasion of the farmers' congregation of Ponnani Taluk. The well-known playwright of the Malayalam theatre, C J Thomas called it the "first political play of Malayalam" (52). Economical in-equality and its torments were the central themes of the play. K Damodaran, the writer of the play, tried to portray Kerala life with a common issue related agriculture. "The main character Kittunni was considered as the representative of the oppressed ones by critics" (my trans.; Kattumadam, 135).

Koottukrishi put forward the ideology of Hindu-Muslim unity in the agricultural and geographical background. It was a real replica of the lives of the people in the Ponnani region. The play was staged in the 1940s and emphasized the age of its performance rather than its production and style. The agriculture field, farmers, etc were the performing area of

Koottukrishi. M Govindan is a remarkable personality of this era. His play, Nee Manushyane Kollaruth was not accepted widely but had a strong political message. In British Kerala, the theatre persons might have some doubts about the acceptance of their subject. But there is a remarkable uniqueness to all these plays, that all of them come from the same region Ponnani of old Malabar. The drama emerged from there were based on humanity and were genuine. Ponnani is a Muslim majority coastal area of Kerala, which is marked in the history by its musical and cultural heritage. Like musical debates, musaairas, the long corridors of the Muslim houses of Ponnani witnessed different plays in nineteen seventies and they were known as Varandha natakangal, corridor plays. If one staged the play, Ibileesundee Duniyaavil (in the world of the devil), the other group will reply with another play, Ibileesillaa Duniyaavil (there is no devil in the world). After Kalasamithy Prasthanam the theatre remained alive till the late nineteen eighties as part of the day-to- day lives of the people.

KT Muhammed is another name related to the caste and community theatre of Kerala. In 1953, he wrote and staged the play Ithu Bhoomiyaanu. The Muslim society and its inhuman customs were questioned in the play. It made uproar against the inhuman acts against the women of the society. Malabar was the landscape of KT's plays. KT influenced Malabar theatre and thereby its society in a broader aspect. The progressive changes occurred in the Malabar theatre are very strong due to the daring experimental changes brought by KT in his plays in terms of ideology, text and performance. As the theatre activities were centered at libraries, the youth made great impact on society with the plays of KT and it remained for several generations after KT. The commercial and the amateur elements are mixed up and developed in a semi-commercial style of presentation and it continued to establish a Kozhikkodan style in Malayalam theatre by eminent theatre persons P M Thaj, Satheesh K Sathesh, Ibrahim Vengara, A Santhakumar etc. A secularistic humanity remained in that

among the different religions, caste and community as the result of those past theatre works. The play Adukkala, that VT wrote and staged, worked not only for Namboothiri community but for other community as well. The plays KT wrote were for all human beings, never for Muslims alone. Similarly the plays of Edassery, M Govindan, Uroob and K Damodaran communicated to the world with the stories of one particular region. As all reformists envisioned all the reformation of the society begins only with justice for women.

4.3.6 Female in Malayalam Theatre

In Kerala, the history of women and women characters in theatre is as old as the theatre itself. It may not be a very big in number, but it a factual truth. In the ritual arts, the men performed by female roles. The performances like thumpi thullal, sarpam thullal, thiruvathira, oppana and margam kali, nangiar koothu and mohiniyattam gave space for women to exhibit their talents while classical arts like the kathakali rejected the presence of the female body and men created female expressions and emotions on stage. This tradition was extended to Modern drama also. When Tamil sangeeth natakam ruled Tamil Nadu, it is said that the people caught the trains to see the male actors, who acted female roles. Economical and pure commercial element of Tamil sangeetha natakam aimed only male audience. This might be the reason for the rejection of female bodies on stage. They wanted the exaggerated and distorted female figures, and they were the model for female ism. Ochira Velukkutty and Chatthukkutty Mannadiar were famous figures of those stages of Kerala. Sajtha Madathil describes the attitude of actresses of that age towards Ochira Velukkutty in her book. They also were the fans of the little more exaggerated female ism of those male actors.

Thottakkatt Ikkavamma is the first lady marked in the history of Malayalam theatre as the female presence in the drama. From the sangeeth nataka era, commercial theatre used women just as sex objects. The actresses were considered as sex workers in society. For most

people related to theatre, it was only a job and not an art form. The amateur theatre movements like Kalasmithi movements tried to change this conscience of society towards theatre by casting of sisters or life-partners of activists in drama. As the after effect of VT's Adukkala, the Namboothiiri women wrote and staged a play Thozhil Kendrathilekku. It was the first enterprise in the Malayalam drama. All were females in the play, in and out of the stage. The educated, elite class women's entry to the theatre made two different kinds of actresses generally, and they are the amateur female actors and the commercial female actors. Those are, the educated well-to-do elite class ladies and the ordinary ladies who took theatre as a job and for money alone. The amateur actresses never wanted to be recognized as commercial actresses.

NOW (National organization for women) is considered as the first feminist group of the world. It was formed by American women working in offices. They used drama as the main medium to communicate with. The first feminist groups of India were formed in 1975, one in Hyderabad under the name Progressive Organisation of Women and one in Aurangabad under the name of League of Women Soldiers for Equality. The educated and working women were leaders. They used art as their tool. The group Nirakaar from Mumbai and the group Vivadi from New Delhi were the groups concentrated only on theatre. During this period, feminist views came to Malayalam Theatre through the works of Manushi and Samatha in 1980s. The women wing of the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath also was very live on stages, then. Two theatre work-shops for women were held at Thrissur and Koothattukulam in 1990. Improvised texts and productions were more receptive than individual texts. A group called Abhinethri was formed at Thiruvananthapuram. The audiences of Kerala, who generally like the female figures on stage, turned their face from the stages of feminist labelled plays. KV Sreeja shares an experience:

The play *Labour Room* by Arangottukara Nataka Sangam was once staged at Shornur Railway Colony for the first death anniversary of a professional drama actor. The audience, who used to see only professional drama, got irritated in the feminist and experimental style of *Labour Room*. They started to make vulgar comments. It was the first experience to the group. We couldn't face them with the maturity of those (professional) actresses' and completed the drama somehow that day. It created so many problems within us after the staging. It was because the stages we used to play were different from this (my trans.; Sangasakthiyude Vilaveduppu, 5).

Nireeksha is presently the strongest presence of feminist theatre of Kerala actively working on theatre for the last fifteen years. The plays *Pravachaka* (2008) and *Aanungalillatha Pennungal* (2010) of Nireeksha competed in the state amateur drama competition. The distinctive nature of their plays is marked in the story and class and gender consciousness. They search for a gender space in theatre through their actresses' bodies and evoke gender violence in theatre. The female body on stage provoked the people in any period. The comedy scenes in most of the plays are almost all periods of theatre history made use of unparliamentarily comments about women. This is, to a certain extent, spread to films and other performances. The women audience also seemed to enjoy it. Nireeksha, through their drama, consciously tries to provoke such pseudo moral mindsets. *Pravachaka* was an adaptation of *Trojan Women*. The main character was Casandra, who was a *Pravachaka* (Prophetess). In this play the female actors, Athira, Kani and Nidhi rendered their best support to the group. The free and flexible female body on stage was the result of their effort. Their second play, *Anungalillatha Pennungal* (women without men), also was a challenge to the society. Malu, who acted the leading role, was fantastically bold on stage. The picture below shows five female bodies on stage trying to find meanings in the conscience of Kerala society about female behaviour in the public space. It is a sequence in which one lady gives

birth to a flower. Nireeksha gradually forms a gender space in Kerala theatre through their works.



Figure 4 Aanungalillaatha Pennungal. Vailoppilly Samskrithi Bhavan, Thiruvananthapuram, Manoj. 30.Dec.2010

4.4 The Drama Today

The capital of every theatre culture is its audiences. And, it is their need to sustain drama in the society. This realization makes one society a theatre friendly one. It depends on the values people keep with their lives. In the current scenario of Kerala theatre, theatre activities seem scattered and along with the audiences. The fast- growing, electronically and economically, audiences of today see drama just as shows for entertainment. Human being became more individualized than a social being. And, the people do not have enough time to think, share and even love each other. Society became more competitive. A burgoise concept of the performance came to exist, and the democratic praxis is someway vague at sight. Mass,

public or crowd and the spectators got newer meanings. An audience of burgoise nature evolved, and Mini, Mass and Intimate theatre productions happened as a result .N Sasidaran, a prominent playwright of Kerala of says, “the reason behind the changes Malayalies have undergonee is such a selfish and self centered decay of the communist party” (my trans.; Matsarathilillathe, 49). A strong political party based on communist ideology and its wide prevalence in Kerala gave rise to a society of powerful consumers with the freedom to choose. The malayalis became the most valid consumers. They are the consumers and not audiences of shows in the real sense. There are so many reality shows, comedy shows and different performances for the passive middle class. The distinction is very minimal as the lines between the classes in the case of enjoyment is a shadow past now with the entry of television and smart phone into a globalized Kerala society. The performances have nothing personal or public. And, everyone wants to be a star. The producers of television program are making reality shows even from Augusto Boal’s *Spectator* and are very contradictory to the concept of Augusto Boal’s Theatre of Oppressed. His concept became a big “prize” entertainment in the corporate hands. There grows a habit of consumerism. Television trains people to consume art. Unconsciously, it makes a habit or style of consumer shows. It is telecapitalism. The audiences are trained by their talk, and reality shows always expect things to be like that. Those shows limit their imagination and tastes. They train people to see art as just entertainments or as just art. As Shyamaprasad, an eminent film- theatre person says, “... in most of the houses, the television rooms have become the stage for cultural decay.... malayalis must be saved from this filthy atmosphere (my trans.; 16). A moral and cultural polarization has taken place in the tele-serial programs. Theatre has its politics and drama has the power to break any cultural freeze. N Sasidharan says:

Drama has better acceptance among people today. It maybe because of the TV serials and films that make people so desperate.... Now a days, there are so many theatre

festivals. People have a chance to see and participate in them. During the staging of my plays, Natile Pattu, based on the life of Kuttiaattoor and Jeevacharithram based on the life of Keralam, the number of the audiences surprised me. There were more than two thousand people as audience for each show. I wish if there is an effective system to support the interest of these people (my trans.; Matsarathilillathe, 48-49).

What that people want from theatre is evident. It is not dying. But most of the people are in front of the television. It does not matter. Art cannot be assessed by its number of the viewers but only by its impact on society. The audience of the play Adukkala might be smaller than the audience of Ningalenne Communistaakki. But, both of them reached their goal. The audience of a play is different from that of a television serial. While a serious audience of a play tries to capture a new vision about life, a television serial audience looks for new brands of ornaments and current fashions in saris. The contemporary amateur theatre works for this audience. As Shamshad Hussain, a cultural activist, wishes, “would there be drama theatres like cinema theatres!” (my trans.; 8).

There are so many streams in theatre productions, yet drama could not connect with the public is a real barrier to be overcome. The mainstream plays are the plays, produced by professional groups with the systematic production process and these professional groups stage them in different national and international festivals and secure the deposit money safe. They are considered as the mainstream drama here. Every amateur group wants to be a mainstream one. So they are trying hard to copy the structure of those productions. Deepan Sivaraman, an alumnus of Thrissur School of drama, went abroad for his further studies in theatre. He accomplished his doctoral thesis in theatrical scenography. In search of scenographical spaces in the theatre he directed three plays. Two of those are purely Kerala productions and the third one is the product of National School of Drama, Delhi. Spinal Chord, Peergynt and Uburoi are those plays. It was new to Kerala stage when Deepan

undertook the scenographical aspect of Siddartha, a play directed by MG Jyothish and produced by Abhinaya Research Centre Thiruvananthapuram. After its performance in 2009, Spinal Cord became the spine of the contemporary Kerala drama. The small tyre fixed stage sets became usual after Spinal Chord in which the moving sets determine the mood of the play. Deepan always tries to get new spaces in the acting and watching areas. His actors occupy spectators' chairs and communicate directly to the audience with the mobile scenographical improvisations, moving stage crafts and with the brilliant transformation of spaces, in which the director shifts the reality to surreal levels. His plays have behind the spaces for filling by the second reading. The play, Khasakinte Ithihaasam, an adaptation of the famous novel by the same name by O V Vijayan, the famous writer in Malayalam, made a wave in the theatre movement here. The play performed by the village theatre group of the Thrikkariippoor, a remote village of Kasarcode district, was first staged in 2015. There are about thirty people as actors only for this play, and it cost five lakh rupees for one performance. With the remote village people, it was a big experiment that Deepan Sivaraman tried to make real in Malayalam theatre. The youth considered him as the icon for them in the theatre activism. Figure 5 shows the drama version of the famous Malayalam novel, Khasakkinte Ithihasam. Deepan Sivaraman, the director, arranged seats of the audience as an integral part of its staging. The picture is an example for his scenographical experiment for the representation of the text.



Figure 5 Khasakkinte Ithhasam. Govt. Victoria College ground, Palakkadu. Anil. 01. May. 2017

By casting professionals from abroad Sankar Venkiteswaran, also alumnus of School of Drama, Thrissur, became the central attraction in the main-stream theatre. He did his further study in acting at Theatre Training Research Programme at Singapore. Sahyante Makan, Waterstation and Quick Death are his plays. And, they are derived from cultural spaces. Sahyante Makan, based on a Malayalam poem by Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon, a well-known poet of Malayalam, says the loneliness and nostalgia of a rutting elephant with a single Japanese actress. Thrissur is a place famous for its pooram festival of elephants and percussion ensemble. So the play becomes culturally rooted eventually. With the amazing acting of Micari, a foreign actress, Sahyante Makan won the attention of theatre goers and made different meanings in the inter-cultural communication of the audience with the actress in two ways, one as a lady and second as a foreign body. Another play performed here was Water Station. The text was Japanese. But, there was no dialogue. It is the story of humankind expecting nothing but thirst. Migration was the subject. The presentation was important to the play that play is without words. According to Sankar, “the play is slow as

the theme demands it. It is an experiment in a very slow pace, athivilampitha kaalam” (my trans.; 21). That slowness is living human time. In water station an actor walks two-meter distance taking five minutes. In the play no actors make sounds and moves. C Gopan’s opinion about a theatre without dialogue is, “today theatre does not celebrate words. It is the freedom of the body. Then a question arises, what is body? Body is a memory, memory of our culture, the body, which reminds us that we are alive. ...in those memories, how can we reject words? “(my trans.;14). He thinks the body oriented theatre works cannot neglect their voice as it is also a part of the body and sounding is an image of freedom. But, Water Station, is a kind of experiment. The still human body adds something to the audience experience. That is the play experimenting with.

When it was staged at Calicut, the audience got irritated by its slowness. Sankar says, ”the abroad audience has a little more patience to understand something and to involve in it; here, people seem less patient. This is obvious with regard to native audience in watching, discussing, agreeing or disagreeing with the plays” (my trans.; 21). Patience, on the other hand, is the quality of the classical audience. In the classical performances, audiences need patience and passion to enjoy. Through his drama, Sankar also addresses such audiences. Sankar Venkiteswaran’s audiences are in the way classical audiences. Through the plays, Water Station and Sahyante Makan, Sankar tries to explore the possibilities of upper caste cultural space in the Kerala theatre. His identity is also explored for that. With a kuduma (tied hair on the back) and his Brahmin name, Sankar tries to find the possibilities to get easy popularity in the Kerala cultural space through his theatre group Root.

The above mentioned approaches to theatre are the two successful and novel approaches in recent years. And, both of them provided the audience, diversity and for the producer, they were economical. They have some similarities. The main thing is that they are serious approaches to theatre. And, in the profession, and passion of the directors, they are unique.

The theatre is not a part-time work for these directors. Involving in theatre works for them is full-time. In amateur theatre, it is not easy to select drama as a career. There are many professional, full-time working, trained and experienced theatre persons. Deepan and Sankar differ from them in the economic reason, mainly. They have opportunities to find funds and develop theatre activities than others because of their foreign education. Finding those funds and its decisive distribution in theatre activities determine the positions of groups in Kerala Theatre, today. And, Sankar has the preveilage of his caste, Brahmin, also. The second similarity is passionate training. The rehearsal processes of each of these approaches are heavy, hardworking and priceless. Finally, they have a systematic production process. Besides these two directors, there are so many successful young drama practitioners in the name Samkutti Pattamkari, C V Sudhi, Manjulan K V, Jyothish M G, Sreejith Ramanan, P J Unnikrishnan, Vijeesh, S Sunil, Jisha Abhinaya, Vinod Kumar, Arunlal, Jino Joseph, Riyas, Nikhil Das, Aliyar, Rafeeq Mangalassery, Sajith Cheruman, Hazim Amaravila, Azeez Peringodu, Sarath Revathy, Shyju Anthikkadu, Sreejith Poyilkkavu, Jose koshy, Jinesh Amballur, Sivadasan Poyilkkavu, Gireesh P C Paalam, Prasanth, Ranjith P R, etc., Natyasathra Kadampzhippuram, Nireeksha Thiruvanthapuram, Rangachethana Thrissur, Nataka Souhridham Thrissur, Lokadharmi Eranamkulam, Abhinaya Thiruvanthapuram, Little Earth Theatre Malappuram, Clay Play House Ponnani, Patasaala Arangottukara, Kanal Samskarika Vedi Thiruvanthapuram, Malayala Kalanilayam Kannur, Prakash Kalakedram Neeravil, Sopanam Thiruvanthapuram, Rememberance Collective Theatre Group Thrissur, Kannur Central Arts Kannur, Njamanengadu Theatre Village, Ala Mulamthuruthi and Dravida are some examples of amateur theatre groups currently active in theatre of Kerala. Theatre lovers want to follow them. The minimized forms of mainstream amateur drama are very common. The improvised and instant plays of festivals and carnivals are changed their forms from the inspiration of the mainstream amateur drama.

The relation between society and theatre must emerge from themselves because in the case of theatre the capital is the audience and its demand determines the theatre in future. The audiences become the determining factors. So, they must be aware of the need for theatre activity here. In the case of performing arts, Kerala is a Mecca. But the theatre movements still search for their possibilities. The experience of the circus play, *Clouds and Clowns* by National School of Drama when staged at Calicut is remarkable here. Abhilash Pillai, the director of the play, said, “the audience including small traders, fisher men and some straight forward drama persons got fired” (my trans.; 48). The same play was performed at Delhi eight days continuously with its entire means. The performance style may select its audience. Communication will also be affected by the psychological and sociological patterning of the performance, including class, education, belief system, age, language and so on. The proper actions and dialogues in proper places are very important. Language in theatre is not merely a measure of class and ideology, if it is used to break the notions of society also. In the play *Peergynt* by Deepan Sivaraman, the actor plays the role of the mother using the Thrissur Malayalam slang. And in the play the actors intentionally use the word *myru* (which is considered as an abusive word in Malayalam) frequently. The words, which are restricted in public, the un-parliamentary words, using in a *performing area* make a cultural shock. But a new interpretation in audience signals is evolved. Performance might have affected by off-stage noises, coughs and mobile rings in the auditorium, camera flashes and children, etc. In the middle of one performance, Sobhana, a well-known dancer of India, stopped suddenly irritated by the camera flashes. In the PRD festival of Kerala, while the play *Peergynt* is running through its peak emotional sequence one mobile rang from the audience, and it distracted actor and he got violent (2011).

The village centred theatre groups try to connect Keralites with theatre. They produce different kinds of plays: amateur, serious, and experimental. Many theatre groups conduct

workshops and seminars. Natyasasthra Kadambazhippuram co-ordinated national theatre festivals twice. Audience training is also part of it. In the every corner of Kerala, there is a theatre club. And, a person working in theatre is the happiest twist of the period. The attendance of drama students in the School of Drama, Thrissur, and SSUS Kalady has been on the raise surprisingly. From the five or six students of 2000 batch School of Drama it has been raised to fifteen (the full seat) each year. The campus theatre and school theatre (Childrens' theatre) movements are also the waves of change.

The history of Kerala theatre is not linear. It has somany branches. Likewise, contemporary streams of theatre approach also vary. Different approaches cannot bring under one title. And, it is not practical to bring all notions on drama with one heading in the contemporary theatre situations of Kerala. There are amateur and commercial streams and both of them are professional.

4.4.1 Commercial Steps in Theatre Today

As the part of revaluation of modern drama, one has to consider the commercial streams of drama today. On the basis of cultural concern, it seems that there is a wide shift in the commercial theatre of Kerala. The Tamil musical drama had maintained prominence among the audiences both in financial terms and popularity for a long period. The commercial plays also continued this success. Most of the commercial plays were created for the audience, who was ready to see entertainment in theatre. It prejudiced its mass and the mass demanded what they wanted on the stage. The commercial drama was thus just created for the mass, which did not have any passion for the theatre. But they just wanted to get entertained. Santhosh Meenambalam says, "it is very right, when someone says about our drama as the animal tied to a stump. The public theatre is watching that stump. After the great NN Pillai, KT, SL Puram, Thoppil Bhasi and O Madhavan, etc., every one follow the same style"(my

trans.; 47). It indicates the need to give their own spaces to the current generation in the performing areas.

The commercial theatre was not brave enough to do experiments in theatrical aspects but only added things just to entertain people. The Great Koodiyaattam Guru, Ammannur, once shared with actor Nedumui venu. “if we bring an art form to an audience, that raises a thought in the audience and us that it must entertain them. People should feel respect for the artiste and art, when they come to watch a performance, where it is performed” (my trans.; qtd.in Udalinte thara Sanjarangal, 131). The popularity makes art forms so democratic and, in a way, unrespected. But generally, the basic nature of drama and theatre is democratic. The people are nostalgic about that democracy. Like the drama, its nostalgia also is in some way melodramatic. The commercial plays cannot be examined without examining the audience for whom they are designed. In Sharrat’ opinion, “melodrama, thereby coming in terms with the sense of oscillating between the aesthetic conventions and strength of the dramatic realism and sentimental emotionalism moral polarization” (The politics of the popular?, 276). The commercial plays idealized and simplified the world of reality. They go through the edges of melodramatic theatre. But they are more realistic than reality. In various ways, the art forms labeled as popular, seem to be adventurous. They make the audience anxious at different levels and this nature of commercial theatre makes it popular. The mass audience is surprised in such activities of the directors. But, surprisingly the commercial drama industry here, Kalanilayam, never tries to step into the adventure zone on the stage barring delivery of dialogues with big voice. It follows the same rhythm and style introduced years back. The text-oriented dialogue of pre-internet era continues without any change, except the changes in advertisements. The audience comprises the men rather than families, today. An audience thus grown up is not like a class, though it is collective. The audience or the mob for the commercial theatre is formed after so many theatre degradations. And, the responses cannot

be identified with their social or financial status. The shift of the audience is collective rather than individual because they are a group of people gathering without actually any pre-planning.

Two pictures of the audience watching a commercial drama (Nte Uppooppaakkoranandaarnnu of KPAC) in a temple premise is given below. Both are watching the same drama in the same performance place. One (figure8) concentrates the people who sit and are ready to watch a drama while other (figure9) says the real atmosphere of the performance space. The mood of the *performing area* of that performance derived from this performance space and the people shown in the picture. The festive mood of the *performing area* is the identity of this particular performance of this play, and, it will surely be different in other performance spaces, even though they also are part of any temple festival.



. Figure 6. Avenkotta Temple, Purangu. Viji George. 26-Jan-2016



Figure 7. Avenkotta Temple, Purangu. Viji George. 26-Jan-2016

4.4.2 Commercial Theatres of Kerala

Kerala has around two hundred commercial theatre groups. Five to fifteen lakhs is a normal budget for a commercial drama per year. Remuneration for authors and directors are 50,000 to 60,000. Music, lighting, and other technical support amount according to its demand. Actors' remuneration is 1000 to 2000 per stage. A play may get an average number of sixty to hundred stages in a season. The season spans from July to March. The troupes would be busy with their performances' rehearsals throughout the season and the vacation is during the monsoon, i.e., from May to July. It is the common schedule of a commercial theatre of Kerala. Drama is a product, by all means, in commercial theatre. The financial management in commercial drama must be a model for amateur groups. The aesthetic management of the main stream amateur drama must be the model for commercial theatre. Only in that case, theatre here will become professional.

Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam are the places, where the commercial drama groups work more. There are more than fifteen groups in Thiruvananthapuram itself and twenty

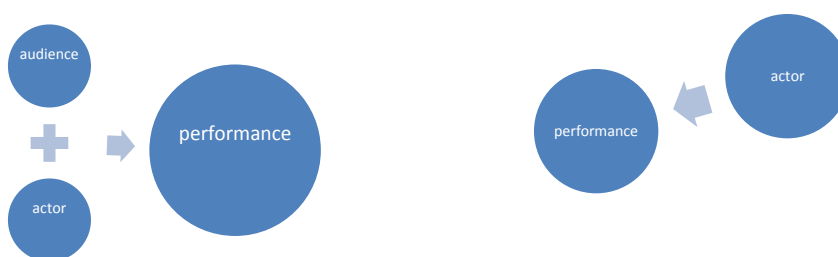
groups in Kollam. The temples and churches are the targets of the commercial theatre. The famous drama artist and playwright, Hemand Kumar, who works in commercial theatre for years, witnesses this reality. There is a strong competition not in creativity but to sustain. There are so many experiments, but all of them are textual not theatrical. Now, the technical experiment with projections and lighting has also been introduced. But the plays are far behind in the world of technical novelty. The style of acting and presentation remain outdated. Acting with throat is the identity of commercial theatre here. There is no intention to find any possibilities of acting through different styles of acting here in theatre. The myth and contemporary issues are the common plots. The plays, Kurooramma and Perarivaalan of Valluvanadu Nadham theatre is examples. KPAC attempts the remaking of old hit films to their drama version nowadays. The old hit film Neelakkuyil of KPAC was staged widely across Kerala. The play Ramanan of Kalidasa Kalakendra also comes under the same genre. Kalidasa Kalakendram staged the play Macbeth in 2014 by investing fifty lakhs. These groups are an exception from the majority of Kerala commercial theatre groups. Rajeevan Mammili says, that “the professional theatre pioneers lost their confidence. Here we turn our face from the experiment, while the whole world makes creative and challenging experiments crossing the limits of the stage” (my trans.; 74). And, Rajesh Irulam says, “there is a new generation, who comes to the drama by seeing trailers on facebook and other mass media” (my trans.; 74).

The proscenium is the permanent stage of commercial drama, here. They cannot think a *performing area* beyond this fourth wall theatre. In commercial theatre, there are a lot of academically trained artistes and directors from School of Drama. Sandhya Rajendran, E A Rajendran, Kozhikkodu Gopinath, Shibu.S Kottaram, Pramod Payyanur, and Prasanth Narayanan, are some examples. But they could not make a huge break in the notion of the commercial theatre of Kerala. Ibrahim Vengara, Meenambalam Santhosh, Hemanth Kumar,

Manoj Narayanan, Rajesh Irulam, etc. are some other energy filling presence of commercial Kerala theatre.

4.5 The Evolution of Audienceship from the Musical Drama to the Contemporary Malayalam Drama

The theoretical and practical innovations the Malayalam dramas went through, within a short period, is most important while consider the changes the Kerala audiences had. Different streams and stages were in vogue outdated within the one hundred and fifty years of the Malayalam drama history. The audiences actively, passively and as spectators, participated. From the middle class of the nineteenth century to the working class of the twentieth century took the central part of the performing areas. Commercial and amateur are the two prominent streams; working today in the Keralite's performing area. They are addressing the people who are culturally confused as the result of globalization and inter-cultural theatre practices. The modern theatre needs proscenium stage almost every time. The audience gained roofed theatre, darkness, loneliness and chairs instead of the naked sky over their heads, the lights of oiled cloth torches, mats to sit or to lie down if they needed, and, above all, their sharing and group action. In the olden days, a performance begins with the lighting of a candle. Today it begins only after switching off all lights. It is very familiar that the announcement before the curtain raises, asks to please switch off all the lights, which may disturb the stage actions. The stage becomes a mysterious one. It keeps a distance every time, when the spectators became outer-sides of action becomes,



In amateur theatre productions, Deepan Sivaraman's Spinal Chord (2009) and Peergynt (2011) and S Sunil's Anthatha (2012) and Birthday Party (2012) were good experiments with Trust stage. Audiences were a little more intimate than in proscenium in Trust productions. Narippatta Raju's play, Bali (2011), Thuppal Matsyam of K N Ramesh (2012), Aadupulyaattam of Riyas (2015), Chakka of Thrissur theatre group and Khasakinte Ithihasam of Deepan Sivaraman (2015) are excellent open-air experiments which recently happened. These plays derive meaning with the fresh air and moon light, which makes people close enough to the play as if they are participating in some rituals. The pictures of the play, Aadupulyaattam are below. As seen in the pictures, spectators are with the play in open-air performances as the performance text needs it. The performance hides nothing from the audience. It reveals the story before them. This performance picture is from Aarangottukara, a remote village in Thrissur, where plays take place and theatre events are regularly coordinated by Kalaapaatasala for more than fifteen years. The spectators are a mixture of villagers, cultural people and invited politicians..



Figure8 Aadupulyaattam. Kalaapaatasala, Thrissur. Aziz Sagar. 22. Jan.2016



Figure9 Aadupuliyaattam. Kalaapaatasala, Thrissur. Aziz Sagar. 22. Jan.2016

In the above picture (figure9) different gestures, postures and different facial expressions of each of the audiences show the reality that one performance is different for each. The pictures below are the pictures of the same play in different places and dates. The photo of the play at Vallathol College, Edapal (figure 10), was an in-house program and photo shows audiences wait for the performance. The performance at Calicut University Campus, Thenjippalam, also was an in- hous one. The picture (figure 11) shows the audiences dispersed after the play.



Figure 10 Aadupuliyaattam. Vallathol College, Edapal. Saheer Vakkat. 25. Oct.2015



Figure 11 Aadupuliyaattam. Calicut University. Saheer Vakkat. 12. Sep.2015



Figure 12. Mohana Sundara Paalam. Chamavattam Junction. Saheer Ramla. 27. March.2013



Figure 13. Mohana Sundara Paalam. Chamavattam Junction. Saheer Ramla. 27. March.2013



Figure 14. Mohana Sundara Paalam. Chamravattam Junction. Saheer Ramla. 27-March.2013



Figure 15 Mohana Sundara Paalam. Chamravattam Junction. Saheer Ramla. 27-March.2013

In the pictures above, three stages of one performance are revealed. The first picture (figure 12) shows the theatre persons occupying a performance space in a crowded area with vehicular traffic. In the second picture (figure 13), they are parading in the town. The third picture (figure14) shows the people are gathering to watch a performance and the fourth one

(figure 15) shows the drama going on. Mohana Sundara Paalam is a satirical play performed by Clay Play House and Performing Study Centre, Ponnani. The play is about the misery people are going through to get permission and fund from the authorities to build a bridge across a lake. The place, where the play performed, is particularly noticeable because of the bridge recently opened for the public across the river Bharathapuzha after their long strikes and wait. This performance was on world theatre day. It began from the early evening, from occupying space in a crowded town, to the night. The way the performers gained attention and the performance formed its audience are clear in these pictures, and, it is important to note that this play's other performances are different.



Figure 16. Mohana Sundara Paalam. AUPS Panampad. Saheer Ramla. 29-March.2013

The above picture (figure 16) shows the performance in a village school ground, where the audience is different. The *performing area* of the same play in different performances differs according to the place, audience, time of the performance etc., and it makes each performance totally different for each place. The fact that drama festivals and events mould a theatre aptitude is a welcome note in Kerala today. The international theatre festival of Kerala

opened several kinds of doors to intercultural theatre arena, and, it also works as a pushing factor for today's Kerala theatre. The pictures below show the interaction of audience and a *Performing area*. Figure 17 is of a play, Molahapodi, performed by Kattiyakkari, Tamilnadu. It was a moment of a procession heading proscenium stage through audience. Figure 18 talks about the audience waiting for drama Huo Mortal performed by E F S, Catalonia. Both the pictures are from ITFOK 2012.



Figure 17. Molahapodi. KSNA, Thrissur.Manoj.05.Feb. 2012



Figure 18. ITFOK. KSNA, Thrissur. Manoj. 10. Jan. 2014

CONCLUSION: THE IDENTITY OF AUDIENCES TODAY

Kerala is a southern state of India and the boundary of the state is formed by the Western Ghats. Many streams flow from the Ghats into the midlands and low lands of the state. In the north Kerala shares its boundary with Karnataka, in the east with Tamilnadu and it lands into the Arabian ocean in the west. Its landscape with hills, plains, rivers, lagoons, back waters and the long stretch of coastal belt, is a visual feast for anyone. Its fertile soil is ideal for agriculture and is well-known for its bio-diversity. Filled with coconut palms, it also provides a variety of trees such as teak, rosewood, ebony trees, mango trees, etc. cardamoms, etc. Its natural scenery, wildlife, art, craft, unique temple architecture and sculpture are indicators of its tradition and culture. The first chapter analyses the five thinas of Chilappathikaram. It depicts ancient southern India's geography, its cultural and economic diversity. Kerala became one of the states of the Republic of India in 1956. The first Communist government was elected in 1957. Change was seen in every phase of life. Villages were changed to small towns. Schools, hospitals, theatres, etc. saw the change. The mass media became prominent. Recently, T.V. reality shows and serials, computer, internet, smart phones, multiplex, musical albums, short films, ideography, etc. became common. Electronic media has been handy for all sections of the society. Economical, educational The malayali and cultural changes are faster than before. Similar changes take place in the case of religious believes, marriage customs, etc. Influential demigods (human-god) wield power in the society. Even governments worship them.

The cultural field has influenced and changed Keralites' life since 2010. The growth of the film industry during these years created a new familiarity with the people in the case of its grammar. And, it is now no more a curious media. People want to make films rather than watching them. Since the smart phone can be used as cameras, anyone can make films and upload on YouTube. The emergence of satellite channels and reality shows gave people the

chance to make them popular. Diverse programs are offered to satisfy different types of people (different age group, taste and talent). Many are ambitious of being stars. All of these changes influenced theatre activities, too. As a result, the audience of ten thousand dwindled to a mere ten or fifteen. The social, economic and educational changes might have influenced it. During the formative days of Keralite history, the educated and economically-settled middle class belonged to high castes. It has changed today. The Muslim, subaltern and women are also a part of the mainstream society today. They are conscious about their rights, i.e., people became courageous and aware of their rights and demands. They want to be addressed as what they are, rightly, truly and respectfully. This is the theatre scenario at present. Kerala theatre needs powerful involvements. The society demands it. In this light, it might be helpful to examine the amateur and commercial theatre audiences here in their socio-political identities as they are the cross-section of the society.

5.1 Nostalgia and Absorbed Identity

The first chapter discussed the nostalgic spaces, which create absorbed identities. The plays like Koottukrishi, Pattabaaki and the plays of KPAC filled the missing social and psychological spaces of Malayali's absorbed identity, even though they never tried to cross the line between stage and them. The thanathu plays' audience, Kozhikkodan audience, amateur drama and commercial drama audiences are groups of differently trained people. The play, Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku by V T Bhathirippadu, enlightens the communal spaces of Namboothiri community. It developed in and for the nostalgic and absorbed spaces of that caste. Such plays tried to determine a single faced audience.

This nostalgia has dealt with

- 1) The origin of drama audiences' recourse in Kerala
- 2) The performing areas as an embodiment of an audience's identity that conforms to an imagined Keralite community.

3) The performance of identity and audienceship

5.1.1 The origin of drama audiences' recourse in Kerala

The audiences of different *performing areas*, classical and folk drama today, can be observed in this background. Though the modern drama of Kerala has the past of a western influence, the origin of audience here could be found in the past of performance tradition. There is nothing to be surprised that the kathakali and koodiyattam, the upper-caste arts of Kerala, are recognized by the world as the great tradition of Kerala art forms and a mask of kathakali (kathakali thala) became the icon of Kerala culture, considering the social systems remained here for ages.

Kathakali never considers a mass audience. It is concerned only about the quality of the audience rather than numbers. The audiences were from royal and noble-men. The prime audiences were the patrons in the earlier days. The actors were the Nair warriors, whose bodies were flexible to do acting. Here the absorbed identity of the kathakali actor is really associated with the historical and physical lives of the Nair Padayalis. Nairs were the official soldiers of Kerala during the rulings of kings and naduvazhis here. They were well trained in the martial art, kalari. But Kerala never witnessed a big war like the wars usually happened in great kingdoms, but, had minor disputes and the warriors, usually Nairs, had to use their ability in martial art for a living. These Nairs were the first actors of kathakali. The actors and the acting style are important in kathakali. Character does not reflect in an actor; but he acts as he is it. When watching drama, the audience reaches a deduction of emotions and experiences, the *rasa*. While going through this experience, each of the audiences enjoys the actor rather than a character in kathakali. All stories might be well-known to the people, and, they know the characters as well. So, the role of anxiety and curiosity work little. People come to enjoy the expressions and through them, they try to search the acting spaces each actor acquired.

The most important transformation took place in the social structure of the Kerala society is that the determining centre of the society on the cultural, aesthetical and intellectual phenomena changed from elite and upper castes' hands to a democratic society. The economical structure changed a lot from the patronage system. The people, who were in the lower strata of the society, became the decision makers by owning power and being educated. The classical art forms faced a complicated situation and were forced to introduce the strange world of the classical arts to the subalterns. This is meant for their existence as well. koodiyattam, from its natural *performing area*, came out of it. The symposiums, demonstration classes and seminars, helped to mould an audience in the contemporary scenario. The classical audiences of today are analyzed and classified as

1. A) One who is born and brought up in the specific art form's atmosphere.

B) The other artistes, for example, a kathakali artiste enjoys koodiyattam. There was a habit among classical artistes not to see another art form, for example the koodiyattam artist tries to avoid watching kathakali and vice-versa in the fright of the influence of other art form may affect the styles of acting. In an interview the great koodiyattam master, Ammannur Madhava Chakyar says:

Only after the studies, I started to watch the Kathakali. It was at Iringalakkua.

The performance was Hanuman in Lavanasura vadham, actor was

Thekkinkattil Ravunni Nair and the song was Sughamo Devi (24).

These are the first B type of audience.

2. New audience: They are the other caste, religion and other nationals. By their passion and continuous effort, these groups try to absorb the identity and spaces of these *performing areas* with an adapted nostalgia.

3. The students of arts institutions: the people, who enjoy drama as part of some events or tourism programs, are forced audience. They may not be having the real

intuition. The audiences of school youth festivals and the audiences of virtual spaces also include in this category of audience group.

The classical audience can be widely divided like this. The first group comes from the sociological and historical background of these art forms. They can easily identify their spaces in these *performing areas*, while the second group tries to adapt the absorbed identities of the first group, as they are so enthusiastic about those forms. The first and second groups are active audiences. The others are passive audiences.

The spectators of folk and ritual art forms are widely classified on the basis on nature of spectators. Devotees, spectators and students are the main audiences of ritual plays. The kavus are changing into temples today; it may cause a need for some more coded attitudes and behavior of audiences. The permanent spectators are those who belong to specific geographical area and region. New ones are the researchers, and the enthusiasts, etc. The adaptations of absorbed identities take place here. The spectators of folk and ritual art forms today can be observed as follows:

1. The permanent spectators
2. New ones
3. Foreigners
4. The people crowded for some events & in tourist program sites (crowds).
5. Virtual audience

Most of the rituals are centered kavus. Their nature is considered as myth and performing areas are kavu-based. The kavus existed even before temples. Today, they face segregation from temples and their spaces. They create new meanings in the mixed levels of society and nature. Drama is constantly emerging from the even surfaces of social life. The absorbing identities are formed by closely relating

nostalgic spaces. The origin of today's drama audience relied on these nostalgic feelings.

5.1.2 The performing areas imagined Keralite community as an embodiment of audience identity

Drama is the only performing art to address the audience beyond gender, class and caste. There are no barriers to any customs, where the audiences celebrate the plays with once more calls. It has popularity very fast. There is a question. Who/what type of people was the audiences of the modern drama from the beginning? It was the golden age of classical art forms of Kerala, the middle of the nineteenth century. K Sreekumar says that, "the audiences were the lower and majority class distanced by the classical art forms" (my trans.;29).

Most of the dramatists from the first Malayalam Sangeetha natakam Sadarama were upper Hindu castes like Nairs and a small number of Christians. The casteism was very strong in the society. It is illogical to think that they engaged in theatre activities to entertain the low caste people, when the majority of low caste people were in poverty and half starving. They even couldn't afford to buy tickets to watch the plays. The audiences also might be middle or upper middle-class people. Attracted by the songs and dances of musical drama, the middle-class spread the form here. The enjoyment of musical drama was totally different from the classical and ritual art forms existed here. From the calm and quiet atmosphere of classical art forms and the erotic and excited fuss of ritual arts, the musical drama introduced a pure entertaining art form here. The *performing area* would begin with the circulation of the plays' notices. It was also a performance. A judka or bullock-cart roams around villages with musical accompaniment announcing the play and its story, while the notices are distributed among the children who follow them. It was quite common in those days. Around these years, there was another theatre activities taking place in the seminaries for the clergy in the leadership of father Chavara. It was known as Idaya plays. The first translation of the play of

Shakespeare was influenced by these Idaya plays. The dramatist Kallur Umman Philipose was engaged with the Idaya plays. It connects the nostalgia with the identity of the audience in the Kerala *performing areas*. It is evident that the absorbed identities are closely connected with the Western drama concepts. From the middle and upper middle-class audiences, the drama reached to the working class by the middle of the twentieth century. The political and social reformations reflect in the *performing areas*, too. Two prominent streams remained in Kerala in modern drama: amateur and commercial. Both are observed separately here.

5.1.3 Audiences of Amateur Drama

The amateur drama stream evolved from the process of experimenting with serious approaches rather than commercial attitudes to the drama. It is told that from the CV Raman Pillai's Prahasanas this stream blooms here. Nataka kalaris and Kalasamithis fertilized the growth of amateur stream. The women drama workshops and drama activities like the public prosecution of the corrupted doctor done by Kozhikode Samskarika Vedi, for the tribal realization KJ Baby's Nadugaddiga, PM Antony's Christhuvinte Aram Tirumurivu and Jose Chirammel's Kurisinte Vazhi connected drama to the society in a different manner. It tried to create an audience through innovations of the stages. The small projects of village groups and the gigantic productions under the patronage of funding agencies are in the amateur stream. The full-time amateur theatre persons seriously search the scope of theatre marketing today. The globalization and the technical revolution introduced a new phase to the drama activities. It differentiated the audience in a public space. The new media, projection and the search of the possibilities of the human body are handled today on stages. The stages and attitude of the productions of the amateur stream define audiences of drama. It defines the audience: who to be filled its *performing areas*. Example: the audiences of the play Water Station of Sankar Venkideswaran. When it was staged at Calicut in PRD festival in 2012, there had been an open fight among the audience after the play, in the open forum. It was not about the politics

of the drama but about the style it adopted. The audience who felt it was not addressing them, got irritated, while who felt it as theirs supported it. The twenty-first century is witnessing an orientation process on the audience through the different productions and festivals.

5.1.4 The audiences of Amateur plays today

- a) The co-coordinators, their relatives & friends: these audiences are mostly related to politics, social groups, the hosts of former performances and the relatives of the program coordinators.
- b) The other drama groups & their friends.
- c) The technical supporters: like drivers, electrical workers, auditorium staff and canteen staff.
- d) The audiences, who prefer drama texts/ actor/actress/ director/groups etc: I) Audience interested in certain text according to its content, political relevance, popularity and media coverage etc. II) The popularity of actor or actress participating in productions III) The style of direction and the acceptability of a director in the field influenced the selection of watching plays.
- e) Media: The media persons to watch or report
- f) Activists: The activists of different areas involved in the *performing area*
- g) The audience who come to watch plays through tickets: these are permanent audiences of the plays staged with tickets. Ex: the weekly performances of Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy and Rangachethana, etc.
- h) The virtual audiences: The audiences, who are not present at the production time, are the virtual audiences. This thesis does not consider them as the audiences of drama as drama is considered as a live process in its *performing area*.

Real audiences of a drama are also a virtual presence in the process of creation in a way. The director unifies the several views to one central point. In this process, he continually communicates with the audiences of his play from the very beginning of the thought of his play. They are the active audiences of his play. The one who can connect his / her absorbed identity with any space the director allowed to fill with them is his audience. The director works on his audience in two ways. 1) Identifies his absorbed identities in the *performing area*, for example: the plays of Kavalam. He does the plays within his cultural and social identity, in other words, absorbed identity 2) Adapting other absorbed identities to identify some specific *performing area*. Example: The play, *Otta Rathriyude kamukimar*, of A Santhakumar. He is adapting the lives of the female sex workers of Calicut and dramatized it. The different people, different attitudes and views gather to watch one drama. The audiences of the amateur stream are thus moulded intentionally by the productions.

5.1.5 Audiences of Commercial Drama

The commercial theatre of Kerala is known as Professional theatre in general. Its form, which is fully concentrated on business, is an extension of the past musical drama. A company or group, its owner, the contracted artists including writer, director and actors and the booking agents between the stages and drama are the outer structure of a commercial drama. It has an imagination about its audience generally. They are the mass audiences of drama in Kerala. The commercial theatre produces drama to satisfy pre conceptions of those multi-faceted audiences. It depends only on its consumers. The season, contemporary social events, the regions where it is going to be staged and the stages influence the production. For example, the play widely staged in Southern Kerala may not be accepted that much in Northern Kerala. The plays based on Hindu myths and puranas seem to have a wide acceptance, today. The churches and temples are the main markets of contemporary

commercial plays. Around two hundred plays are produced in a year. The famous theatre person, Pramod Payyannur, working as a drama director, comments, “the quality of plays has decreased as the dramatists write about twenty plays in a year” (my trans.; 74).

The eye only on money is the thing that happens in the professional groups of Kerala. The plays of Kalanilayam make people crazy by creating gigantic visuals. The star plays like Chayamukhi also try to play on the temporary fancies of audience interests on film stars. The spaces given for the audiences today are not theirs. They are trying to address the audiences of a past generation.

5.1.6 Audiences of Commercial Plays Today

- a) The audiences of temple festivals: most of the temples have a little number of audiences as the time of plays will be around midnight. The women audiences are very rare except in some temples where women await there in temples for the rituals of early morning. The temple authorities and the working class men are the audiences in general. Drunken and roaming in groups and commenting on dialogues, they celebrate drama with the festival. The audiences come specifically to watch drama are very few in number there.
- b) The audiences of church festivals: the devotees of the church may be the majority of audiences. Most of the plays selected will be Bible based. The drama has to begin only after sermons of the Priests. Comments and interruption will not be allowed there strictly.
- c) The audiences of Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy's stages: there are twenty stages in different parts of Kerala for the selected Professional drama given by Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy. Though most of the audience will be working class men, they are certainly different from the temple festival audience.

- d) The people gathered in political functions: most of the audience will be coordinators and political people. As they are involving in an event, the drama staging there becomes only a custom most of the time.
- e) The audience of drama: The real audiences, who enjoy, appear in drama festivals. They are seriously approaching drama and evaluating them.
- f) Virtual space audiences: telecasting the drama on live while staging it, through regional cable channels are the latest revolution of the audience ship here. In the drama festival ground, the cameras also watch the play from different angles as the eyes of the virtual audiences.

The audiences of commercial theatre are different. The commercial drama is prejudiced on the absorbed identities as a unique one. It addresses a passive mass audience. But never try to mark them in the productions. The audience of a commercial theatre is not silent and concentrated. They are connected to the drama through other elements like gestures, often imitated by mimicry artiste. So, the *performing area* they got in the drama is beyond the performing space. The majority of audiences of commercial drama are men, who are passive never enjoy drama. They celebrate the mood. The responsibility to keep them as the active audience by giving spaces on stage is not even considered by any commercial team.

5.1.7 The performance of Identity and audienceship

The identities of the audiences of Kerala in a *performing area* are multifaceted and can never be defined as a single faceted one. Drama can accept the society fully only by giving the people their own atmosphere through drama. This alone can function as their nostalgic spaces. With different people the enjoyment of drama differs and it communicates on different levels. There are lots of reactions to a single fact in theatre. The only factor threading these communications here is the particular social structure of Kerala. As said in the first chapter, the nostalgic social body works in the unconscious layer of the process

having the absorbed identity. One's enjoyment in a Kerala *performing area* is naturally connected to the region, where performance takes place and in audience with the social behaviour of that region. The experience shared by KV Sreeja (Ch.4,pp.114) and Abhilash Pillai(Ch.4,pp. 122), can be taken as very good examples for this.

In the Indian drama, there is Soothradharan or vidushaka, they control the play. In the traditional and folk performances also they enter to refresh the decoded signals of the audience. From the Tamil musical drama, the comedian came to the commercial theatre and existed as an inevitable part. All forms of interactions depend heavily on the ability of the receiver to decode information from the signals he/she is receiving. With their memories and experience, audience connects the information to the blank spaces of the performances, which are left to be filled intentionally.

If an actress says on stage what shall I do? It is not merely the actress, who has to make a decision. It is also up to the audience to decide. What they, what the character is to do? If it is not compensated with their decision, they may get desperate. Then the character fails, or the performance fails. There may be thousands of audience. A performance can never satisfy everyone. It may intend specifically to someone. All performances are not for everyone. Every performance has its audiences. So, no performance can ever fail. It may not satisfy you, but may satisfy someone else. The audience can resist the interpretations offered to them, if they do not believe in the performance and what it truly intends. All the factors like the head light of the buses, sounds of the train, the mobile ring etc., can affect the signals being transmitted. And, the audience is forced to compensate the gap in the information transmitted to them. The need for good auditorium and disciplined audience is demanded in some performances. The perfection of those performances lie in the atmosphere and the performance area determines the performance and audience.

The identity of an audience in a *Performing area* (including performance, auditorium, or open area and the audience) depends on the style and type of the atmosphere of the performance. The audiences and their audienceships, according to the performing spaces, determine the *performing area* of performance. Each *performing area* keeps a nostalgic space to each audience, which defines his/her audienceship. They are more complicated as seen in each of these areas. In the present day the virtual audiences also determine the performances. The virtual audiences are two types.

1) The audiences in the space of mass Media and technologies: the absorbed identities of these audiences cannot fill the nostalgic spaces of a *performing area*, as they are not part of a performance. The live presence only make one the part of a *performing area*. So, they are not an essential part of a performance because performance becomes true even without them. Though the performance never demands them, the other external factors like popularity and advertisement depend on them.

2) The audiences of the director who is communicating from the thought of the plot: these audiences are real audiences and the director wants to communicate with and for them. He designs a play at this point. If they are different in performance, the audiences and the performance go in vain as in the case of the performance of Labour Room at Shornur.(Ch.4,pp. 114) The expected audiences of Labour Room were absent or rare in that *performing area*. So, there happened an unexpected twist in the performance, as the artistes lost their presence of mind and somehow ended it.

The audienceship is deriving from absorbed identity and nostalgia of a *performing area*. The individuality, social, cultural and political means of identities are different, yet promiscuous in the audienceship. Some own the audienceship consciously, as most of the amateur drama audience does. But certain others accidently own it, as most of the

commercial drama audience does. But these passive audiences are the majority audiences of the *performing area* of drama of Kerala. An ideal audience cannot always be expected from this passive mass. When analyzing those *performing areas*, the majority spaces are filled by Christian or Hindu myths and stories. The stage may have temporary arrangements, and, the permanent hall is very rare. The seating arrangements of the audience never have been a matter of concern in temples except in some temples like Kalichukulangara temple of Alappuzha. But, most of the Churches have set audience seating. The uncomfortable seating might be a good reason to distance people from drama, while people prefer most comfortable and family friendly theatres. The so-called malayali notion is not to consider the price tag but to go for quality. Hence he/she prefers friendly theatre for them. In this *performing area*, the individuality of any audience can play nothing. The mass cannot bring a stage, but a stage determines its audience. The mass can try only to identify them on the allowed spaces of performance, which they are the moving factor behind. The stages demand and determine these audiences. The frame of these kinds of audienceships offers forceful implementation of prejudiced nostalgic factors, which are not real. And, the mounted *performing area*, rendered nothing but sarcasm to the viewers. It is interesting to think that how within this representation one audience would be able to pierce through an area that remains to be capable of issuing commands and communicate with them. An amateur play is tough to be staged in a temple festival, as a commercial play is not enough to satisfy the amateur audience's taste.

Though the drama and its stage derivations are indebted to the westernisms, the *performing area*, which makes them real, is Keralite. The audienceship relies on the performing history here. The trained audience of the classical arts and the spectators of folk arts are repositioned by the active audiences of the amateur stream. Here the audience's individuality fills the *performing area*. In the case of the passive audiences of the commercial

stream, the mass identity of audience works. It is more accurate to say that they are not representations. But they command and there are imperatives. In a performance, the no representation factors of an ideal audience come from classical arts and the spectator from the folk arts. Somehow this due nature of belongingness is the factor that differs drama a dynamic one. This is the illocutionary context in a *performing area*. Absorbed identities connect with each other and remain theatrical in the sense of determining themselves in the drama. However, there is efficiency in the commands that complicate this state of audience. Those commands and imperatives are the resources of our audienceships. At present, things are changing. Whatever its methodology or critical perspective, the invisible orientation is in progress. This takes place through theatre festivals in favour of a focus on definitions of audienceship pointing to something on *performing areas* and paying attention to the spaces themselves in the performance. The submersion of *performing area* into other cultural and historical identities has meant to a large extent that it has been an invisible field. This invisibility, due to a lack of close and unified attention, may have helped enrich our audienceship in some ways. But, it has in many cases held us back from understanding the intense and revelatory connections between our absorbed identities and performing area. So, it is possible to consider the *performing areas* as the continuing and connected dialogues about different identities in different cultures. This phenomenon makes a cultural shock in the audienceships here, as they have occurred in vastly different times and places.

The identity of the audience in a Keralite performing area fluctuates today because it cannot identify its exact relationship with the spaces. Such an identity is supposed to connect those spaces with their history. But it may not identify the spaces because everyone has their own specific history with audienceship.

APPENDIXTURE

Extracts of Interviews

With G Dileepan On 04- 03-2012 at Kadampazhippuram

S) when did you start to watch drama?

G) I began to watch drama during 1965 – 1970. I was studying at school then. My father, who was the president of the library of our village, brought me to the library every day. He is the person who brought me to the spectacle of drama, too.

S) What was the nature of Drama those days?

G) I started to watch from the plays of CL Jose. I can remember the plays like *Karutha velicham*. Women were rare on stages in that period. It was usual to bring professional actresses from distant places. I can remember the plays of NP Chellappan Nair too. Almost all plays were using parody of film songs. People liked them... *Thekkele Panki Muttamadikkumbol Theruthaye Nine Orma Varum* was one of the songs. A comedian, a song of melody or sad song and a parody song were compulsory in the drama. Some actors will create their own mannerisms, and, people loved to watch them in every performance of such actors.

S) When did you start to approach drama seriously?

G) When I was studying PDC at Thiruvananthapuram, I happened to watch *Kadamba*. It was the period between 75 and 77. After that I tried to watch almost every plays of Kavalam. Aravindan's *Cholkazcha* is a remarkable performance, we witnessed in those days. It was not fully a so-called play. I also remember the performances of Kunjuni Mash in it, standing

on a level, ie, an elevated position and saying, *enikku pokkam kuravanu*. By getting down from there he says; *enne pokkathirikkuka*.

S) The new genre drama creates a process of decoding visuals as in the case of paintings. How will such things affect drama approaches?

G) It is a positive one that the new genre drama is concentrated on visuals. The *play Sthree Pathru* of Neelam Man Sing played here in the Tagore Festival focused on visuals. Each segment is like a painting. They insisted on getting sand because they wished to create the visual impact. Likewise, they used some smells to create an atmosphere different from the normal.

S) Which will be the atmosphere that helps to form a real audience?

G) In the boy-hood days I was going to see Kathakali with my father. He was a school head master. The habit of seeing kathakli helped me a lot in the later period. It is true that one's living surroundings have a big role of moulding a aptitude in the people.

S) As a theatre person, which area gives you more satisfaction?

G) Of course it is coordination. It is also creative work.

Interview with Maya Taenberg Griffchin 15-3-2015 Thrissur

S) Why Maya is your name? Any Indian relation?

M) I am from Switzerland. My mother tongue is German. We use three languages including Latin. In all these, Maya is Mary. It is a Christian name.

S) How did you relate with Kerala Theatre?

M) The name Kerala was first noticed in the time, when Krishnan Namboothiri, a former teacher of School of Drama, came to perform Kathakali in Europe. For me, the performance created great interest in Kathakali. Later, in 1980, when I reached North India, I had met G Sankara Pillai. He was the head of the department of Thrissur School of drama then. He invited me to do an Acting Workshop for the students there.

S) How did you come to the theatre?

M) My Mother was an actress. Father also was a drama person. But for me and my sister, choosing drama as a career was something difficult for them. In any society women restricted from theatre activities and when reaching, there have to struggle a lot. There are some concepts about women and their body; we have to break them. We can survive here, only then.

S) You indicated the body of women on stage; could you explain it?

M) Yes. People love to watch beautiful faces on stage. I am against it. An actor or actress is not their faces. They have trained stage attitudes. How to sit, walk and speak on stage must be trained. I focus on the body. Women have some peculiarities; the training must be suitable to the persons. It should not limit them. Culturally also, women are different. When I was working with the Chinese women, it was clear, that they have unique body language different from the Europeans. We developed an acting technique for them. I have a plan to develop these types of acting techniques based on different culture and gender.

S) The base of training for acting in Kerala classical art is Kalari. Drama here also depends on Kalari for physical training, sometimes.

M) Kalari is very masculine. I do not intend that kind of training. We can find some feminine elements in Chinese martial art Kum-fu. By using fans, they try to bring some soft expressions. Kalari does not have possibilities. But I love the Kerala classical arts.

S) What do you think about their influence on drama?

M) They are stage arts, but not drama, and, are very Brahmanic too. The drama must have more contact with common people, which make the identity of drama. I think Theyyam is more influential on Malayalam stage than Kudiattom. It is very theatrical, violent and expressive.

S) You have seen the major plays of G Sankarapillai, Vayala Vasudevan Pillai and Narippatta Raju since 1980. Could you sketch any common factor or special thing in these plays, make them Keralite one?

M) I haven't watched that many Malayalam plays. I feel there is a very realistic stage habit, here; they insist on communicating the whole thing with the audience. The common factor, I feel about the Kerala drama productions, is the lack of imagination.

Interview with Nellyodu Vasudevan Namboothiri 30-08-2013 Kadampazhippuram

S) How do you see the concept of Poothana festival and how were the performances there?

N) It is a Great Thought. We have Performed Poothana for many years, and, every one wishes to perform in a new way.

S) New Way?

N) I mean within the structure, we try to find out new versions. But our classical art forms have some limitations. It cannot cross its structure. So, even if we tried hard to contemporize, the poothana will be like a mythical character itself. Here Usha Nangiar and Vineetha Nedungadi performed their poothanas wonderfully through Nangiar Koothu and Moihiniattom respectively. Yesterday, I performed my Poothna in Kathakali. But after your drama, I felt great limitations of those other poothanas. The structure of classical art forms is not a flexible one at all.

S) Yes. But within that, you can contemporize performances.

N) I am telling about that contemporized performances. It has big limitations compared to drama.

S) The drama performed here itself is formed from the inspiration of Poothana from classical art form.

N) Yes. You used the structure of classical art wonderfully in the flexible drama form. I am saying that, a classical art performer cannot find out that flexibility because its structure itself is a barrier, while it is the beauty of performance. We are very happy to see drama like this breaking our limitations in the structureless form.

S) Thank You. The structure of the art forms gives their identity; you say it is the limitation?

N) As artistes, we wish to perform characters in different ways within the structure. Take this Poothana, as a wonderful mythical character; we are searching her possibilities through each performance. When we do poothana, I try to do something new always like in the breast-feeding climax. I spread the darkness of eye lines yesterday to get the feeling. But the medium you have is wonderful, and, you can reach the extreme of a character through it. That is the experience today after your drama.

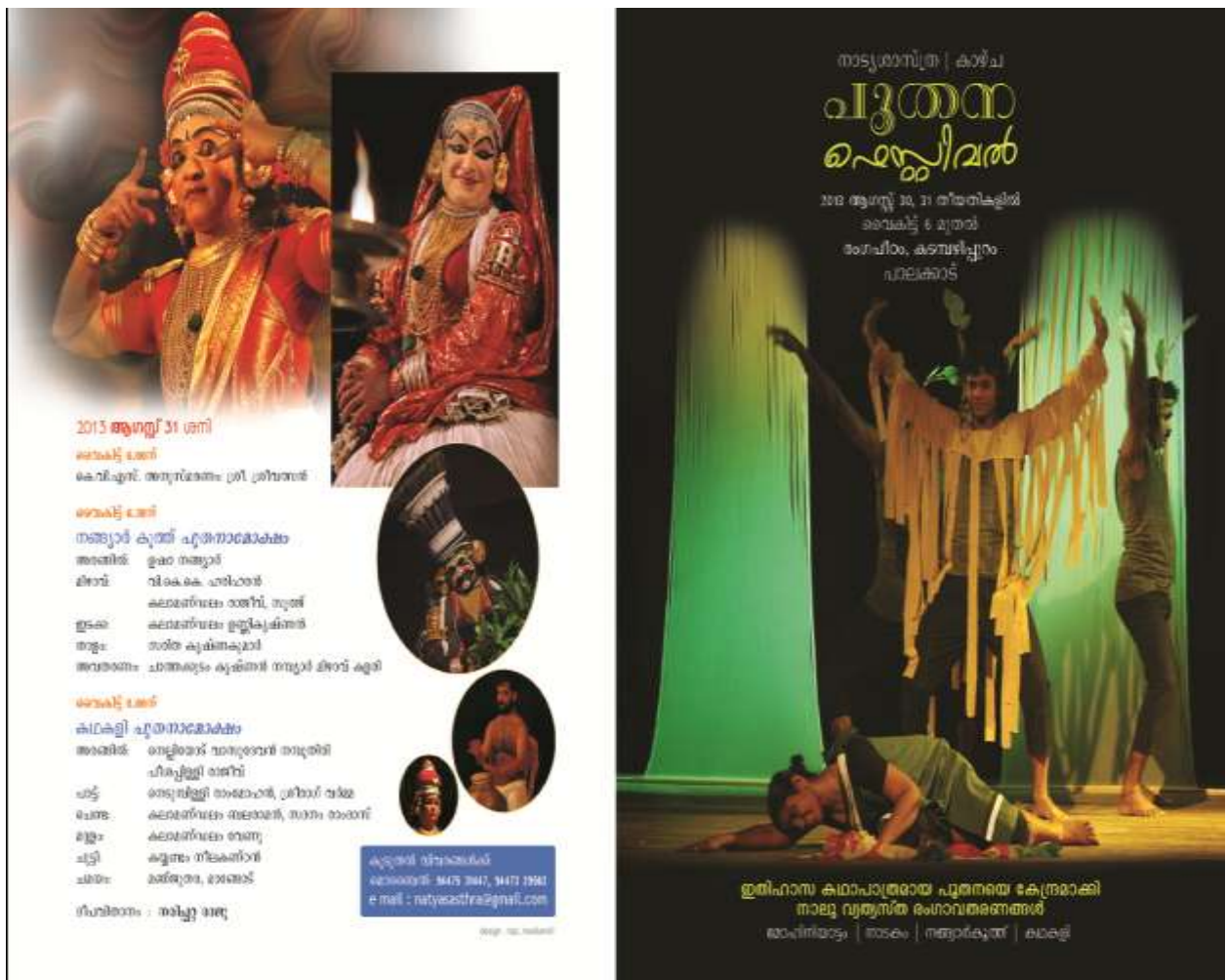


Figure 19. Brouchure. Poothana Festival. Natyasasthra, Kadambazhippura 30-31.Aug 2013

Interview with K V Sreeja 09-11 2014

S) Drama, life and agriculture: how do you relate them altogether?

K) Theatre is farming in a sense, group farming. I begin to engage in theatre seriously from the drama Koottukrishi of Ponnani Nataka Vedi. Even before, I was with drama or it was around me. In childhood drama was my last interest.

S) Could you share any drama experience from childhood?

K) In the temple festival day, we girls would reach at temple premises as a gang to reserve seats at late night around 12 or 1 o'clock. The night, moon and a trip without any elder finger; those were the attraction elements of those night journeys. It was the only day allowed to us, girls, to roam around without any calls in back. In the middle of the noisy folk, the curtain would arise. Then the noise would reach its extreme. Whistling and throwing paper rolls to stage, we would celebrate watching the drama.

S) As a common village childhood...

K) Yes. But as far as started to do drama, I realized the cruelty behind that noise. Now I am surprised about those actors, who did the acting without being distracted off the stage. They sang, danced and loved on stage for us. Most of the time, there will be filthy comments too.

S) Today also, I think, the commercial actors face these things on stage?

K) Of course. The commercial stages are different from amateur ones. The play *Labour Room* by Arangottukara Nataka Sangam once staged at Shornur Railway Colony in the first death anniversary of a professional drama actor. The audience, who used to see only professional plays, got irritated in the feminist and experimental style of *Labour Room*. They started to make vulgar comments. It was the first experience to the group. We completed the

drama somehow that day. It is because the stages and the audience are different from we aimed to meet.

S) What type of audience you want to meet?

K) It is not our own choice; the audience also selects and rejects drama. We want to select by all kinds of audiences, but of course, it is impossible.

Abbreviations

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| AD | - | Anna Domini |
| AUPS | - | Aided Upper Primary School |
| BC | - | Before Christ |
| C E | - | Common Era |
| C J | - | C J Thomas |
| CV | - | C V Raman Pillai |
| Dir. | - | Director |
| Edassery | - | Edassery Govindan Nair |
| EMS | - | Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran nambuiripad |
| Etc | - | Extra |
| EV | - | E V Krishna Pillai |
| FACT | - | Fertilisers And Chemicals Travancore LTD |
| GLPS | - | Government Lower Primary School |
| Ie; | - | That Is |
| IPTA | - | Indian People's Theatre Association |
| KPAC | - | Kerala people's Arts Club |
| KT | - | K T Muhammed |
| NS | - | Natya-sastra |

| | | |
|--------|---|--|
| Perf | - | Performance |
| Qtd.in | - | Quoted in |
| SSUS | - | Sree Sankaracharya Univesity of Sanskrit |
| Trans. | - | Translation |
| Vol | - | Volume |

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Poothanaa Moksham Kathakali. Perf. Nellyodu Vasudevan Nambudiri. Natyasasthra, Kadampazhippuram. 31. August.2013.

Prajaapathi. By Hemanth Kumar. Dir. Rajeevan Mammali. Perf. Valluvanaadu Naadham Communications, Edapal. Kolalampu. 28. August. 2015

Pranaysaagaram. By & Dir. Manoj Narayanan. Perf. K P A C, Aalappuzha. Avenkotta Temple, Purangu- Malappuram. 15- April- 2016

Pravachaka. By Rajarajeswari. Dir. C V Sudhi. Perf. Nireeksha, Thiruvananthapuram. Udinoor- Kasarkode. Sept. 2008

Sahyante Makan. By Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon. Adaptation & Dir. Sankar Venkiteswaran. Perf. Root, Thrissur. Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy, Thrissur, 2009.

Spinal Chord. By Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Adaptation. Dir. Deepan Sivaraman. Perf. Oxygen Theatre Company, Thrissur. Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy, Thrissur, 2009.

Water Station. By... Dir. Sankar Venkiteswaran. Perf. Root, Thrissur. Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy, Thrissur, 2012.