

KATHAKALI



793.31934
P 136 K

793.31934
P 136 K

K.P. Padmanabhan Tampy



—folklore—

devoted to folk-culture
english monthly journal.

**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
ADVANCED STUDY
SIMLA**

undoubtedly is a boon for students of Anthropology, ology, Iconography, History and many other branches of nt scholars and folklorists from different parts of the world / to make each issue of "FOLK-LORE" a varitable mine of owledge in the field of folk-art and culture. Edited by with a distinguished contributing editors.

This is what "Folk-lore" costs you

One year's subscription (12 issues)	Rs. 12'00 ; £ 1'4 sh. ; \$ 6
Two years' subscription (24 issues)	Rs. 22'50 ; £ 2'2 sh. ; \$ 11
Three years' subscription (36 issues)	Rs. 34'00 ; £ 3'4 sh. ; \$ 16

No other journal in India gives you exclusive and comprehensive coverage on folklore movements of this country and in other countries.

KALYANI

Bengali Monthly—a family favourite.

Appears 12 times a year.

Single Copy 50 nP.

Annual Subscription Rs. 6

Subscribers are entitled to get all Special Numbers
at no extra cost.

Eminent scholars and litterateurs contribute in
this journal regularly. Edited by Sankar Sen Gupta.

—3, BRITISH INDIAN STREET, CALCUTTA-1, INDIA.—

KATHAKALI

An indigenous Art-Form of Kerala.

K. P. Padmanabhan Tampy

*Art-critic, Art-collector, Author and member :
Faculty of Fine arts, Annamalai University.*

INDIAN PUBLICATIONS, CALCUTTA-1, INDIA.

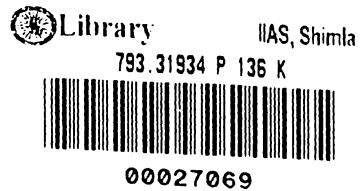
1 9 6 3

Published by
Indian Publications,
3, British Indian Street,
Calcutta-1, India.
© Copy rights reserved.

Price Rs. 3.00

793.31934
P136K

27069
7-11-68



Printed by
R. K. Dutta at Nabasakti Press,
123, Acharyya Jagadish Bose Road,
Calcutta-14.

KATHAKALI—AN INDIGENOUS ART FORM OF KERALA

AN astonishingly unique and dynamic combination of traditional dance, elaborate gesture, picturesque costume, grand make-up and vigorous music, KATHAKALI is a dance-drama form peculiar to Kerala. This pantomime came into existence in the first half of the 16th Century. It is popularly believed that KATHAKALI is an improvement upon KRISHNATTAM, a kind of dance-drama which was originated by Manavedan Raja, a scion of the Zamorin family of Calicut and a great devotee of Shri Krishna. KRISHNATTAM which came into being by about 1650 A.D. was based on ASHTAPADIYATTAM, a kind of folk dance in which the feeling of love was predominant. Modelled on Jayadeva's famous literary masterpiece GITA GOVINDAM, KRISHNATTAM was entirely in Sanskrit, confined to Court Circles, and performed as a votive offering lasting for eight consecutive nights.

Origin of Kathakali

Legend and tradition aver that Raja Veera Kerala Varma of Kottarakkara once requested the Zamorin of Calicut to send his troupe of KRISHNATTAM players for a performance in connection with a Royal wedding there. The Zamorin added insult to injury by not only declining the request of the Raja of Kottarakkara, but also by jeeringly remarking that there were no scholars in the South who were capable of appreciating such a highly artistic and literary performance as KRISHNATTAM. As a measure of retaliation arising out of righteous indignation, the Raja of Kottarakkara evolved a new type of dance called RAMANATTAM. He dispensed with the costly dress of the actors in the KRISHNATTAM and adopted simpler costumes which looked primitive. RAMANATTAM was first performed in front of the deity in the Ganapathi Temple of Kottarakkara. It is a convention which is followed by KATHAKALI actors that their first performance should invariably be performed as an act of adoration of God Ganapathi at this temple. RAMANATTAM is considered to be the "*foreus*

et origo" of KATHAKALI which in its form, substance, depth and dynamism is unique.

The Raja of the principality of Kottarakkara, a great scholar who lived between 1575 and 1650 A.D., was the first composer and originator of KATHAKALI. A revolutionary revival of the old folk dance-drama in a new, attractive garb, this new drama liberally borrowed both from the old and the new but sedulously preserved the trinity of harmonies as its most precious heirloom. It was originally called RAMANATTAM, for the earliest theme theatrically represented was the story of Sri Rama, one of the *avatars* (incarnations) of Lord Vishnu. The Raja of Kottarakkara took for all his eight plays the incidents in the RAMAYANA, from the birth of Sri Rama to his coronation after killing Ravana, and these episodes were graphically represented in his plays. The Raja of Kottayam who next developed this dance-drama based his themes on the BHARATHAM. He flourished between 1665 and 1743 A. D. The author of four KATHAKALI plays, he set the standard for the subsequent writers. An inspired dramatist and accomplished actor, he once took by surprise the Zamorin of Calicut who was a great connoisseur of the art of KATHAKALI. The Raja of Kottayam, during his visit to the Zamorin, without the knowledge of others, participated in a performance. The Zamorin was pleased with the new actor and was about to give him presents when he recognised to his great surprise, the person of the fifty-year old Kottayam Raja as the actor. The Raja of Vettathunad was the pioneer in improving upon the RAMANATTAM and making it brighter and more spectacular.

The art of KATHAKALI is older than its literature which is about four centuries old. Certain facts go to prove that KATHAKALI is at best a thousand years old. In KATHAKALI, literature is subordinate to art. A type of pantomime using a stylized gesture language, acted to the accompaniment of drums, and songs sung by special singers, and the whole set in a framework of dance, the KATHAKALI has no counterpart elsewhere, except in the shadow dance and dramas of Java.

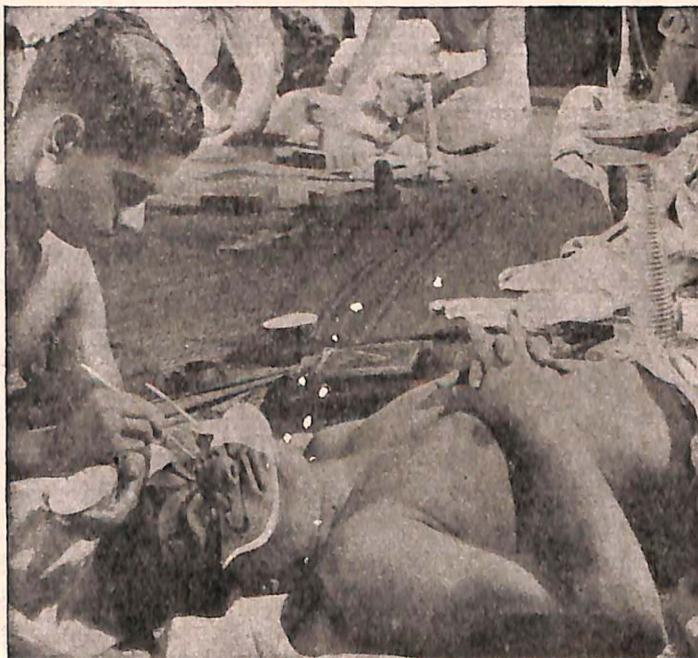
History says that Ammu Raja of Bali Islands, nearly a thousand years ago, took some people from Travancore and that they taught to the people of Bali a kind of dance in which predominance was given to gesture. This dance spread to Java.

Heritage of a Race

KATHAKALI, a perfect idealised art in which the acting, dancing and music exist in perfect union, has come to be recognised as the most wonderful histrionic art of the Orient and has caught worldwide attention. This Kerala art form which is both fascinating and spectacular has won the full-volumed admiration of art connoisseurs who are greatly



A Kathakali Actor in Green Room, in make-up.



The Actor is seen here lying flat on his back to get his face made up which is a long process.

impressed by its originality and elaborate technique. KATHAKALI has had a more intimate association with the social and secular life of the country than any other form of Kerala Art. Dr. C. A. Menon says that "it is a mistake to regard KATHAKALI as an isolated phenomenon divorced from its social and historical background" and that the art is "a cumulative growth expanding over several centuries". He strikes the right chord when he declares that "the Nayars and the Nambudiris, the two leading communities of Malabar and their special characteristics, have gone into the making of KATHAKALI as an art" and that "its features reflect their dominant qualities which they acquired in the course of their evolution". As another eminent art critic has put it, "KATHAKALI must be the heritage of a race, as old as itself".

Hasta-mudras (Hand Poses)

In the development of this scientific mimicry the whole gamut of literary expression of the flawless type has been reduced to elementary motions for which there are separate finger signs. The codified finger poses (*Mudras*) are full of definite symbolical significance and meaning and are effective substitutes for spoken language. Imitative, technical and suggestive, they are cent per cent symbolical and denote objects, action and even inflection. The system of finger poses is based on the *Bharatha Natya Sastra*. *Hasta Lakshana Deepika* and *Abhinaya Darpana* are two standard works on *Mudras*. The *Mudras* which constitute the alphabet of a language of more than seven hundred words, aim at indirect suggestion rather than direct exposition. Each pose has a separate name. Greater significance has been attached to indirect suggestion. There are 24 basic *Mudras* and about 300 main continuations. It is believed that the *Mudras* have their origin in the *Tantric* rites of old. This wonderful gesture language has in it all the potentialities of a universal medium of effectively expressing thoughts. The *Mudras* permit endless permutations and combinations, providing ample scope to the talented artists endowed with originality to express his rare and full volumed genius.

Hasta-mudras (Hand Poses) are shown with one hand and both hands, as befitting the occasion. Showing a basic *Mudra* with one hand is called *Asamyukta* (Single) pose, while showing the same root *Mudra* with both hands is called *Samyukta* (Combined) Pose. The display of one root *mudra* with one hand, and simultaneously another root *mudra* with the other hand, is known as *Misra* (Mixed). The twentyfour basic *mudras* are *Pataka* (Flag), *Mudrakhya* (Pose), *Kataka* (Bracelet), *Mushti* (Fist) *Kartarimukha* (Face of Arrow Shaft), *Sukatunda* (Parrot's Beak) *Kappitthaka* (Elephant Apple), *Hamsapaksha* (Wing of Swan), *Sikhara* (Peak), *Hamsasyam* (Face of Swan),

Anjali (Greeting), *Ardhachandra* (Half Moon), *Mukura*, *Bhramara* (Beetle), *Suchimukha* (Face of Needle), *Pallava* (Tender Foliage), *Tripataka* (Triple Flag), *Mrigasirsha* (Head of Deer), *Sarpasirsa* (Head of Serpent) *Vardhamanaka* (Causing Flourishment), *Arala* (Spider), *Urnanabha*, *Mukula* (Flower Bud) and *Katakamugha* (Opening in a Bracelet).

Kathakali Literature

Kathakali plays are of supreme dramatic and literary excellence. They are written in mixed verse and quasi-prose called *Manipravala*, a melodious, well balanced, admixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam. The dialogues are in songs and the intermediate incidents between scenes are in verses. The dialogues are invariably in Malayalam but the verses are in a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam. The verse, or *sloka* as it is called, introduces the actors to the scene. The verses, as a rule, close with the words, "And so they spoke", and immediately, behind the curtain appear the actors. The curtain (*Thirassila*) holders have to raise or lower the curtain according to the tempo of the dance of the actors. The silk curtain is five feet long, four feet broad and of a single colour and bears usually the emblem of a lotus or the representation of God Siva or Vishnu. The *Kathakali* literature has as its rich background an enormous amount of labour and research in the realms of art, literature and music. The religious devotion to the art, the impersonal participation in it, a lofty craftsmanship in the governance of the tools, the rhythm and emotion are the distinguishing features of this classical dance-drama which draws vital inspiration from the stories of the *Puranas*. The lyrical sublimity and epic grandeur of the *Kathakali* are unique. Rhythm, harmony and cadence, the primary requisites of dance, are in evidence in the *Kathakali*. *Kathakali* comprises a mixture of the various types of religious, folk, artistic, and martial dances prevalent in Malabar from very ancient times.

The eight plays composed by the Raja of Kottarakkara, some six hundred years ago, are not nowadays put to large use by *Kathakali* actors, as it is considered that the plays are out of date both in respect of their literary merit and adaptability to dance. Though the plays by the Raja of Kottayam, written about four hundred and fifty years back, are of considerable literary merit, they also do not find favour with the public at present.

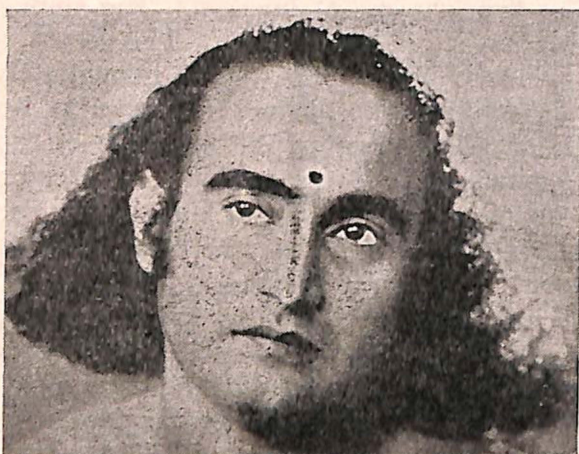
Towards the close of the 17th century there flourished Unnaayi Varier (1735-1785) who composed four plays on the story of Nala (*Nala Charitham*). Superb in literary excellence, dignified in diction, and difficult to act, his plays broke convention and became easily the most popular. The twelve compositions by H. H. Kartika Thirunal (1758-1798) and H. H. Aswati Thirunal (1756-1788) who flourished



Sringaram (Love)



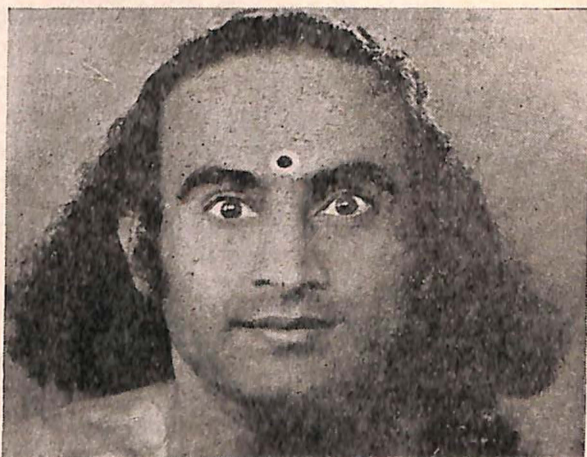
Veeram (Heroism)



Karunam (Pity)

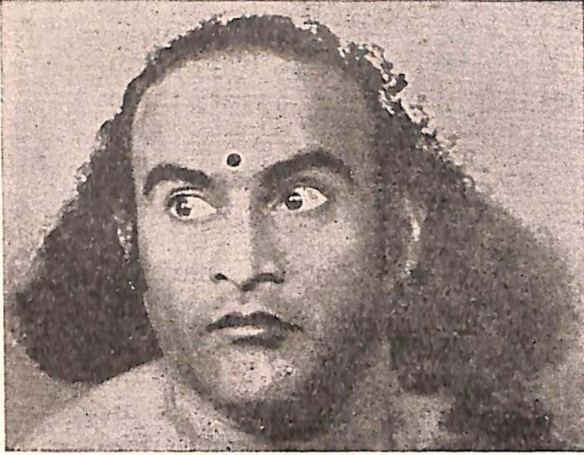


Hasyam (Contempt)

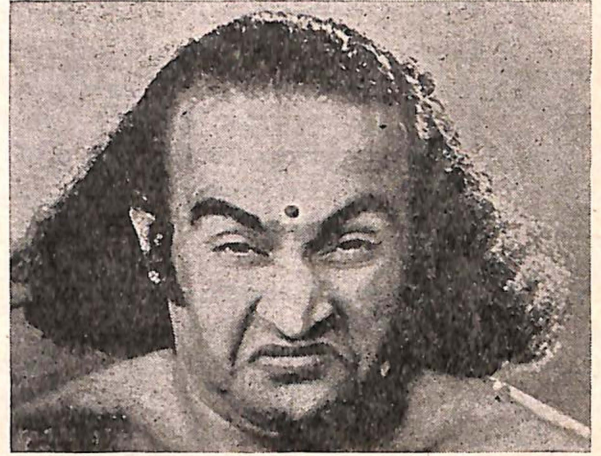


Atbudham (Wonder)

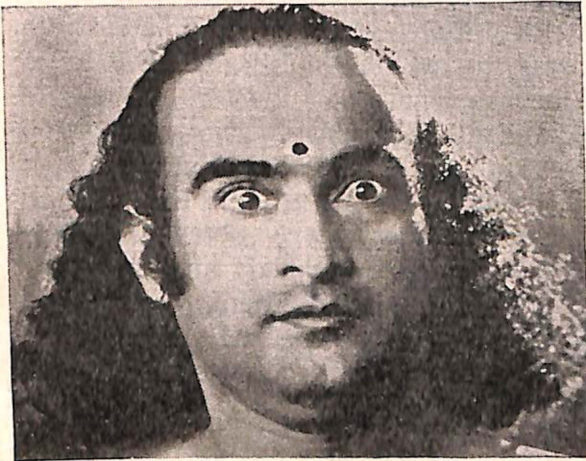
NABA
RASA
POSES
BY
GURU
GOPINATH



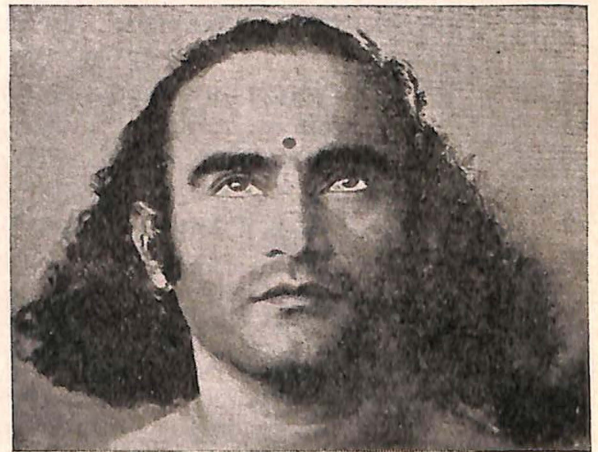
Bhayanakam (Terror)



Beebathsam (Disgust)



Rudram (Anger)



Santam (Tranquillity)

By Courtesy of Viswa Kala Kendra, Ernakulam.

towards the close of the 19th Century are also popular. Irayimman Tampi, (1783-1858), Court Poet of H. H. Swati Thirunal, wrote three plays which are first rate, and most often performed.

A Difficult Art

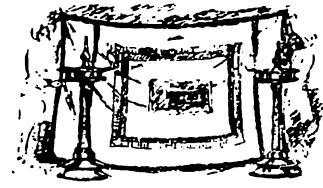
Kathakali is one of the most difficult of arts and the actors have to undergo a scientific course of severe and strenuous physical, spiritual and intellectual training for a period of twelve years under reputed masters to become proficient in the art. During the training, if the trainees have acquired enough skill, they are allotted minor roles in *Kathakali* performances. Ten to fifteen years of stage experience makes an actor competent to play major roles. *Kathakali* students join a *Kalari* or gymnasium between the ages of 10 and 12 and follow the old *Gurukula* system. Waking up at 3 a.m. they begin their training and continue it till the evening, with short breaks for food and rest. Physical exercises, language lessons, training in *Mudras* and rhythm, form the chief items of study. They gain complete control over the members and muscles of the body and are experts in the control of mental and emotional processes through meditation, contemplation and concentration. The actors have to master the art thoroughly and they need not aspire to achieve in twelve months what their masters only achieved in twelve years of hard work and great sacrifice. The training is severe and thorough, and only a visit to a *Kathakali* school will give an idea of it. With lightning speed the actors move their limbs, jump and dance. Their movements are acrobatic but never obtrusive. The face, heels, ankles, toes, waist and every part of the body and the face is used by the *Kathakali* actor. There are nine different movements or actions of the head, six movements each of the eyebrows, nose, cheeks and lips, seven movements of the chin, and nine movements of the neck, eleven glances of the eye, each varying in meaning.

The actors are tabooed from speaking while on the stage. The strides, dances, hand poses, and facial gestures are the effective substitutes for vocal expression. The actors are so clever in the art of pantomime that they with amazing ease, majestic grace and consummate ability, express emotion with telling effect. The hand poses are suggestive and recondite. The eyes of the *Kathakali* actors actually dance. The movements of the eyebrows and eyelids are sharp and full of meaning and charm. The *Kathakali* dancers are masters in movements of the eyes. There are nine different movements of the eyeballs, nine movements of the eye-lids, and seven movements of the eyebrows. The reddening of the eyes of the actors lends an ethereal charm and super human effect to this pantomime *par excellence*.

The *Kathakali* is a highly artistic manifestation entirely new to the



Kathakali Lamp. and Attendant



Kathakali Curtain and Lamp

*SKETCHES
BY
R. M. RAVAL*



Kathakali Actor in Female Role



Kathakali Masks (Head Dresses)

Westerner. The *Kathakali* actors "dissolve one into ecstasies or bring all heaven before one's eye." The histrionic art-form expressed in *Kathakali* is truly one of union—union of all aspects of the actor. The *Kathakali* actors transmute into dance both emotion and narration. The *Kathakali* has a rhythmic vitality, sweet cadence and rich beauty. Infinite melodies rise out of the steps of the *Kathakali* actors and exquisite rhythms flow from their souls. The *Kathakali* actor is a true aesthete whose aestheticism is at once divinely naive yet carefully cultivated. The renowned *Kathakali* Masters of the present day have to their credit uniformly dazzling records of thirty to forty years of intense work on the stage.

Wonderful Pantomime

Rishi Bharatha, the author of a treatise on Dance, while describing *Nritya*, ordains that "the dancer should with the throat sing ; with the feet express the *tala*, with the eyes express the *bhava* and with the hands express meaning." This terse definition does justice to *Kathakali* and demands a four-fold talent of the dancer. The *Kathakali* Dancer should have agile feet, expressive eyes and dexterous hands, for the hands, eyes and mind of the performer should work in unison. Gestures which constitute the soul of *Kathakali* dance are a four-fold entity, namely, *Anghikabhinaya* (expression through bodily movements) *Vachikabhinaya* (expression through musical speech), *Satvikabhinaya* (expression through emotions) and *Aharabhinaya* (expression through ornaments and costumes). In short, expression and emotion should flow from the various parts of the body of the dancer. "*Where the hands go, there the eyes should follow ; where the eyes go, there the mind ; where the mind, there the feeling ; and where the feeling, there the mind.*" The connoisseur of this unique art form must "comprehend the artiste's own values" and "perceive the beauty of which the artiste has exhibited the signs", if he wants to realise the greatness of the dance.

Costume And Make-Up

The costume and make-up of *Kathakali* actors, though old fashioned and queer, are impressive and contribute to the dignity of the actors. Strong Malayan and Tibetan influences are discerned in the embellishments of the actors. Some critics have observed that a pronounced Moslem influence is noted in the costume and make-up of the female characters. Legend avers that the Raja Kottarakkara who first conceived the characters had a vision of sea nymphs and monsters from whom he copied the form. A Raja of Vettathunad family introduced



In *Rukhmangada Mohini*. Kavungal Chathunni Panikker as *Rukhmangada* and
Mrinalini Sarabhai as *Mohini*.

certain far-reaching changes in the facial make-up and head-gear of actors. He insisted upon the actors painting their faces, wearing crowns and covering the body with skirts. He introduced the songster and the drummer. Vast improvements in the facial make-up of the actors were effected by the Kaplingat and Kallatikote Nambudiris who were great scholars. There are four different colourations of the face, each connoting a different mood. While exhibiting the different moods with the body and limbs, it is necessary that the colouration of the face is appropriate to create the required effect.

The elaborate make-up and the gorgeous costumes of the *Kathakali* actors were designed by scholars who wanted the characters to be considered not as puny human beings but as either Gods or demi-Gods, essentially super-human. It takes about three to four hours for this cumbersome and dazzling make-up. An actor has to tie at least eighty knots in the process of dressing. Red, green, yellow, black and white are the dominant vegetable and earth colours used for the make-up. The colour scheme of the make-up follows a distinct convention which is truly psycho-spiritual. There are different standardised make-ups for the various types of actors. The head dress is elaborate and it is heavy and a magnificent affair. The make-up of the female characters is simple. The actors use bangles, anklets, necklaces and armlets in profusion. All the characters except sages and rishis wear voluminous skirts which resemble the skirts worn by ballet dancers. The characters representing Kings, Gods and Demons put on fantastic dresses and paint their faces in the most hideous fashion. The characters which represent Gods wear carved wooden masks symbolically coloured and clothe themselves in gorgeous and oversize garments, which give a wonderful swagger to their movements. Shawls terminating in a lotus-shaped tassel hang round the neck. Inside the shawls are fixed tiny mirrors to enable the actor to see his facial make-up. The costume and make-up make them appear super-human. Mask-like designs are painted on the faces of the actors. Their eye-brows are accentuated and a white facial outline known in the language of the *Kathakali* as *Chutti* makes them look austere. Different types of white borders (*Chutties*) are made use of to denote the nature of characters. A paste of rice flour and lime is used for this white chin border. The *Chutti* is put on the face of the actors by a laborious process, bit by bit, allowing sufficient time for the mixture to harden. It forms an attractive frame for the face extending from the temples to the chin.

There is a wealth of colour, grace and jewellery in the costumes. The ornaments worn by the actors bear a definite resemblance to the archaic decorations found in the deific sculpture in ancient temples. Dance, gesture, costume and make-up of *Kathakali* are all highly stylised. The most beautiful of all the costumes is the towering head



A Kathakali Actor in
Female Role



A Kathakali Actor (Kari)

SKETCHES
BY
R. M. RAVAL



Kathakali Actors in Female Roles



A Kathakali Actor



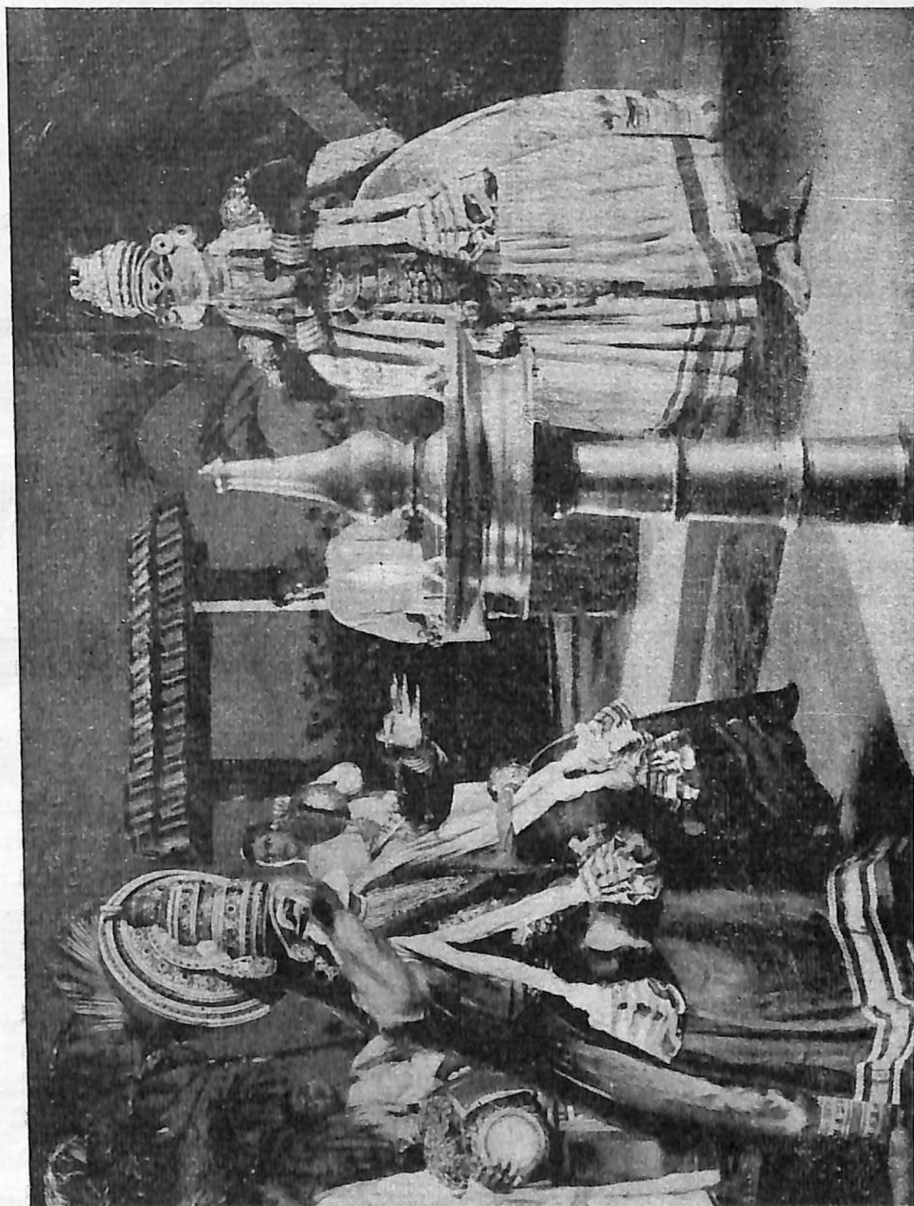
A Kathakali Actor

dress. The magnificent looking head dress is profusely embellished with multi-coloured beads, spangles, shells and glass pieces. The head dress triumphantly demonstrates quite a lot of intricate, elaborate and delightful carving, cunningly executed by master craftsmen. The head dress is after the pattern of a Crown, set with gleaming glass pieces. Its shape, colour and decoration varies to suit the attire of the actor. The dress and decoration worn by the actors signify the characters personified by them.

The *Kathakali* characters are classified under three principal types, *Satvik* (virtuous), *Rajasik* (having vices) and *Tamasik* (terrifying and destructive). The *Kathakali* Demon looks most formidable and fearful. He strikes terror into the minds of the youngsters. His make-up is terrifying. Some of the characters have long flowing tufts and thick black hair, long and pointed nails, looking like claws, round and bulging eyes and protruding molars. The use of powerful rhythmic movements and symbolic hand poses elevates the characters from actual life to the realm of celestial beings.

Types of Actors

Five distinct types of actors, namely *Pacha* (Green), *Kathi* (Knife), *Thadi* (Beard), *Minikku* (Polished) and *Kari* (Black) are identified in the *Kathakali*. The characters which belong to the general classification *Pacha* (Green) colour their faces deep green. The characters who impersonate Gods and mythological heroes are called *Pacha*. They paint their lips deep red. Their movements are dignified. The emotion which dominates them is love and they usually wear scarlet coloured dress, and ornaments in profusion. They enact their roles, with consummate refinement and in absolute silence. The characters classified under the group *Kathi* paint their faces red and green and they represent ferocious and evil beings such as Ravana, the demon-king. A knife shaped reddish marking on either side of the nose extending to the cheeks distinguish the *Kathi* type of actors. They wear artificial teeth, cork spikes and claws. Actors who appear with white, red and black beards are called *Thadi*. *Bali*, *Sugriva*, *Kalakeya* have red beards, while *Kali*, *Kattalan* (Hunter) have black beards. Hanuman, the Monkey God, is depicted as having a white beard. All these characters roar loudly. Those who impersonate Narada, the wandering minstrel, ladies, ambassadors etc., come under the group *Minikku*. They paint their faces in a mixture of yellow and light red, and put white dots on their cheeks. Also, they put on their fore-head caste marks. They put black dye on the eye-brows and redden the eyes and lips. Demons and evil characters symbolising primitiveness and savagery are called *Kari*. The elaborate facial make-up is a great art by itself



A Scene from Kathakali. The big brass lamp of exquisite workmanship is fed by Coconut Oil,

and has to be done by experts. Three to four years of training are essential to make one an expert make-up artist. The *Kathi*, *Thadi* and *Kari* characters give expression to some noise in moments of excitement whereas the other characters bear every storm of feeling in absolute and dignified silence. *Kathakali* actors redden their eyes by applying the flower of the *Chunda* (*Solanum Pubescence*).

Kathakali Music

The dance and mimicry are rendered rhythmic in complete harmony with the *rasa* (aesthetic delight) and *bhava* (aesthetic emotion) represented by the actors. The actor dances to the tune of the songster and the drummers and every moment of the dance is executed with well defined steps, attractive and harmonious movements and gyrations. The foot rhythm is intricate, powerful and capable of infinitive, expansive, modification, and the earth trembles under the feet of the actor. Close upon the songster finishing the verse, the actor takes up the song, and elaborates it, all in pantomime. There are two musicians, the chief and his deputy. The chief recites the stanza first in the appropriate *raga* and the deputy takes it up, thus giving time and scope to the actors to elaborate it through *Mudras*.

Kathakali music, which is of the "*margi*" type, follows the classical *Ragamala* code with its characteristic psychosis and time-elements and represents the purest form of South Indian (Carnatic) music now extant. The period of training of a *Kathakali* musician is moderately calculated to be five years.

A general and vigorous rhythm dominates the entire performance, and the sharp plastic movements of the body (*Anga Abhinaya*) and the different gestures (*Hasta Abhinaya*) enormously help the eloquent and perfect expression of the various emotions, the *Nava Rasas* (nine classical aesthetic sentiments,—*Sringara*, *Vira*, *Karuna*, *Adbhuta*, *Raudra*, *Hasya*, *Bhayanaka*, *Bibatsa*, *Santa* (Love, Heroism, Pity, Wonder, Mirth, Terror, Disgust, Fury and Tranquility) both in their elemental intensity and complex reactions to each other or the chemistry of feeling, as the expert psychologist would put it. The emotional effect of the *Kathakali* is superb. There are more than five thousand *Kathakali-padams* (songs), but the most popular songs are by the Titans of *Kathakali* music Kottayath Tampuran, Unnaayi Varier and Irayimman Tampi.

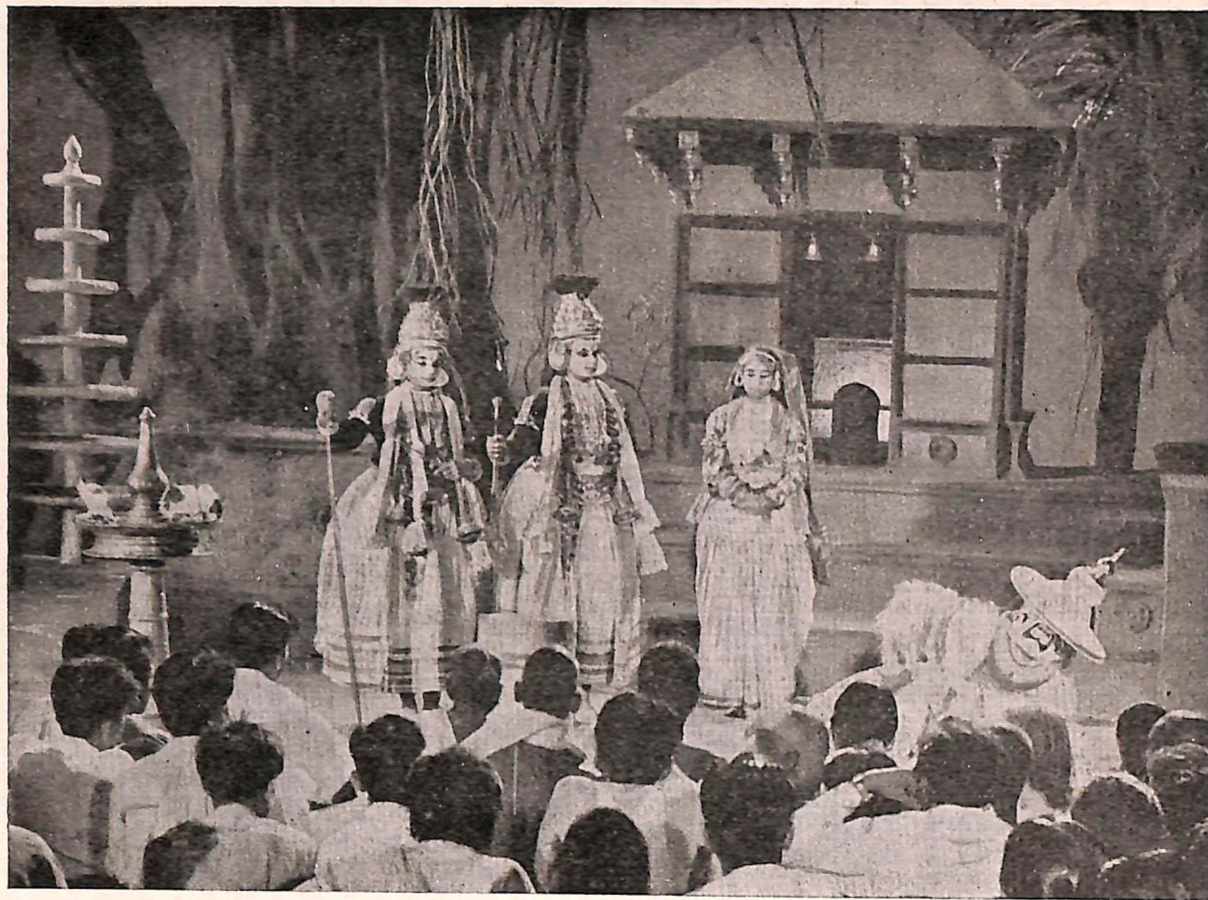
The music on the stage is comprised of the stentorian but melodious voice of a couple of singers accompanied by the clinking of the cymbals (called '*Kaimani*', being a pair of small circular bell metal pieces) and the jingling of the *Chengala* (gong) in harmony with the booming of the drums. The leading singer has a gong and the secondary singer a

pair of cymbals (*elathalam*) to mark time. Strokes made on the gong with a stick keep time for the actors. The drummers emphasise each gesture and keep rhythm for the singers. The measures, steps and poses of the actors are guided by the time beats on the drum. The conclusion or full stop to every conversation is marked by a *Kalasom*, i.e., measured steps and poses controlled by the time beats on the drum. Every rhythm is definitely correlated with a particular mood and produces its characteristic and thrilling effect with precise calculation. This rhythm is more than art; it is a powerful manifestation of the all-embracing rhythm of life, love, battle, romance, death, growth and decay. The variety of sounds which the drummers produce with the aid of their hands and the tiny stick is marvellous. Two drums called *Maddalam* (a long finger drum) and *Chenda* (cylindrical drum) are used. The *Maddalam* is fixed to the waist of the artiste with a cotton belt and remains in a horizontal position. The *Chenda* is fastened in a vertical position. The demonically clever and incessant drumming that shakes up the hearers assumes an entire gamut of rhythm. Of late, *Edakka*, a percussion instrument, is also used when female characters are on the stage, and then the *Chenda* is not used. The music of the *Kathakali* is a perfect combination of *Raga* (melody), *Tala* (rhythmic time measure) *Swara* (note) and *Bhava* (aesthetic emotion). *Kathakali* orchestral group stand facing the audience.

Kathakali music has attained a high level of perfection. The *Ragas* of the songs have been carefully selected to suggest the relevant emotional nuance and dramatic content. The synthesis of imagery and melody is a perfect achievement. Sixty different *Ragas* and six *Talas* are used with supreme evocative quality by the accomplished musicians. The movement of the actor is exquisite and never obtrudes itself beyond the meaning of the dance, delicately soft when necessary and extremely virile and tense at other times. The closest and most harmonious co-operation is necessary between the three artistes—the dancer, the singer and the drummer—to render a *Kathakali* performance a success. The colour effect of the triangular harmony between *Geetham* (singing), *Nritham* (dancing) and *Vadyam* (drumming) is supremely enchanting. The songs are long drawn. The esoteric significance of *Kathakali* songs has been extolled *ad libitum*. The voices of the songster resound and carry far into the night.

The Performance

The themes for the *Kathakali* are generally taken from the Puranic Lore. The stories of the *Kathakali* are many and varied, both tragedies and comedies, the former, however, being more realistic than the latter. The native and romantic background of this indigenous art-form is the



A typical Kathakali scene at a temple courtyard with the audience equatterly on the floor.



Arjuna, the most knightly of the Pandava brothers.
A Kathakali Actor impersonating Arjuna.

darkness of the charming Malabar night. No scenery is allowed. The *Kathakali* is always performed in the night and under the shadow of a giant bell metal lamp which stands four to five feet high with wicks all round. This lamp of exquisite workmanship is fed by coconut oil. The yellowish light adds to the grandeur and solemnity of the performance. The flicker from the lamps produces ripples of light. The tapering, tremulous, light throws into emphatic relief every subtle nuance or shade of feeling flitting across the faces of the actors. Only high class Hindus take part in the *Kathakali* performance. Some of the best *Kathakali* dances are to be seen during the *Ulsavom* (Temple festival) season in the Temples in Kerala. There are special *Kathakali* troupes attached to the leading temples in the State. The one characteristic feature of the traditional and typical *Kathakali* is that only men take part in the performance. On late, a few women have also trained themselves as *Kathakali* Actors, and they have appeared on the stage. Duel and death are essential items on the *Kathakali* Stage. The majority of plays end in a battle followed by the death of a demon or *Tamasik* hero. The martial tradition of the Nayars has contributed to this feature of *Kathakali*.

A standard *Kathakali* performance will take eight to ten hours. A good *Kathakali* Troupe consists of about thirty men including dancers, make-up artistes, musicians, green room assistants and servants. Towards dusk the drummers announce the performance with a special call known as *Keli kottu*. This vigorous sounding of drums, cymbals, and gongs effectively serves the purpose of the modern advertisements. At 8 p.m. the massive bell-metal lamp which can hold one gallon of oil at a time is brought to the stage and lighted. The audience usually gather after supper to witness this pantomime which continues till day-break. The drummers stand on one side. The singers stand behind the actors. A few minutes before the actual commencement of the *Kathakali*, the curtain, usually 12 ft—8 ft in size, held by a couple of green room assistants is taken to the stage. From behind the curtain the invocatory item called *Thodayam* (meaning beginning) follows. At the end of the Invocation two characters, one male belonging to the *Pacha* (Green) type, and one female, representing God and His consort, the *Paramatma* and *Jeevatma*, appear on the stage and perform the *Purappadu*, literally meaning the start. Elaborate technique is scrupulously followed when a character makes his first appearance on the stage. This is called *Purappadu* or the debut. It is all the more ceremonious, cumbersome and colourful if the character is a hero or heroine. The instruments are tuned to their proper pitch; the torch wicks are brightened and the royal ensigns are exhibited. The drummers indulge in rhythm and counter rhythm for some time and the singers improvise variations and elaborations of the single melody. The ensemble of the



In *Nalacharitham*. Kavungal Chathunni Panikker as *Nala* and Mrinalini Sarabhai as *Damayanti*.

27069
7-11-68

entry is really charming and has a powerful and thrilling effect upon the audience and they watch lost in rapturous admiration. The actors in the *Purappadu* stand with their knees bent sideways. The curtain holders have to be extra careful to raise or lower the curtain according to the tempo of the dance of the actors. The *Purappadu* is an exacting time both for the musicians and the curtain holders, and exciting to the spectators. Before the *Kathakali* proper commences, the drummers display their skill when the songsters sing the *Manjuthara* which is usually a few lines from Jayadeva's "*Gita Govinda*." The *Manjuthara*, an invocation to God, is followed by a dexterous display of drumming (*melappadam*) which thrills the audience with its technical competence. The performance rolls on to the grand finale with a hymn, *Bharatha Vakya*, and a devotional dance at the break of rosy dawn.

The *Kathakali* is one of the greatest contributions of Kerala to the cultural heritage of the world. Well may it be said of the *Kathakali* dancer ;

"In thy dance, Divine Dancer, Freedom finds its image, And dreams their forms ;

Its cadence weaves the threads of things. And unwinds them for ages ;

Charms the atom's rebellion into beauty, Gives rhythm to the symphony of stars ;

Thrills life with pain and Churns up existence into surging joys and sorrows."

Dance Par Excellence

Kathakali Actors are masters in both the *lasya* and *tandava* styles of classical dance. It is marvellous to watch these experts changing in the twinkling of an eye from *lasya* to *tandava* and vice versa in the course of a performance. Their acting is both subjective and objective realisation of what they feel and describe. The aesthetic spiritual self-identification of the actors is complete.

There are three distinct varieties of *Kathakali* Dance.

(1) *Ilakkiyattam*, the mild and gentle type usually adopted while depicting love and such other sweet and subtle emotions.

(2) *Idamattu*. The intermediate type which is half way between the too slow and the too quick varieties.

(3) *Murukiyattam*. The extremely vigorous variety used in duels and battle scenes.

The *Kathakali* Actor may engage you for a full hour with an elaborate description of a garden in full bloom and you will hardly realise that the clever artist has taken away an hour of your time. Fastidious critics of art consider that the actor is more accomplished if his acting



A close-up of the famous Kathakali Actor.
Kavungal Chathunni Pannikker as Nala in *Nalacharitham*.

is more elaborate. This type of acting which demands great experience, vivid imagination, and complete mastery over the art, is most difficult. The *Kathakali* dancer dances, eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, and transforms his body into an instrument which can be played upon by inner command or outer design. Joy, illumination, spiritual exaltation and self-abnegation are caused by the *Kathakali* which is born of religion and is symbolic of the salvation of the high class Hindus of Kerala. *Kathakali* stands at the very apex of all the arts of Kerala.

Our ancestors looked upon Dance with passionate religious adoration and found in it the essence of the four Vedas and *Purusharthams*. In the words of Nandikeswara's *Abhinaya Darpana*, Dance was valued even more than bliss which persons mediating upon *Brahman* experience. In *Kathakali* there is a harmonious combination of *Nrittam*, the essence of which is sweetness and grace of movement, *Nritya* which is



A Kathakali Actor in a Heroic Pose.

the expression of inner emotions by gestures, and *Natya* the paramount feature of which is *Rasa*, strictly speaking, *Kathakali* should be classified under *Nritya*, for paramount importance is given to the *Mudras* in this form of dance. Nandikeswara has, in his *Abhinaya Darpana*, defined *Natya*, *Nritta* and *Nritya*. Dr. Ananada Comaraswamy has, in his "*Mirror of Gesture*," rendered the relevant text of Nandikeswara thus :—"Nritya is dancing used in a drama (*Nataka*) combined with original plot, *Nritta* is that form of dance which is void of flavour (*rasa*) and mood (*bhava*), *Nritya* is that form of dance which possesses flavour, mood and suggestion (*rasa, bhava, vyayanga etc.*) and the like."



"The Hunter" in Kathakali repertoire, belongs to the 'Kari' group.

Summit of the Kerala Stage

It is no exaggeration to say that the summit of the Kerala stage has been attained in the *Kathakali*. The most brilliant expression of the national genius of Malabar in the realms of art literature, imagination and beauty, *Kathakali* is a *drisyyakavya* or visible poem interpreted through *Abinaya* (acting) and *Nritham* (dance). This indigenous art form has made as distinctive a local variant as the Wayang Orang of Java and Bali has done to the parent art of *Bharatha Natya* or the classical Indian Dance. It is believed that this Dance, full of antiquarian and ethnological interest, was ordained by Brahma to be performed at

the *Indra Sabha* (the durbar of the King of the Devas) before the celestial beings for the delectation of the Gods. *Kathakali* is regarded as a means to apprehend the Infinite through the bliss of rhythm. In some of famous temples in Kerala *Kathakali* performances are arranged by devotees as much priced offerings to the Deity. The *Kathakali* shows how artistically and scientifically a splendid system of Dance was evolved and enunciated by our ancestors as a source of imparting Joy, Wisdom and Mental Sublimation. *Kathakali* is the most important contribution of India to the dramatic art of the world. It is the only performance which combines music, acting, gesture, language and dance so as to make each element an integral part of the whole. Adolph Appia when attending the famous operas of Wagner developed his own theory of the word-tone drama wherein the guiding, though not the paramount, factor over acting and dancing, was the rhythm of music. Nearly two centuries before Appia wrote, the people of the West Coast of India delighted in spending the nights in aesthetic enjoyment of *Kathakali* performances the music of which is expressive of the different emotions. The word-tone drama reached a state of perfection and fullness in the absorbing *Kathakali* performances.

Royal Patronage

Kathakali has flourished long in Kerala under Royal patronage. His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore is a patron of the various troupes of *Kathakali* actors who carry on this remarkable art. His Highness maintains a Royal Troupe of talented *Kathakali* actors who perform on special occasions. His Highness is an enthusiastic admirer and competent critic of the *Kathakali* which, in His Highness's own words, has "given one new art-form to the world". His Highness Karthika Thirunal Maharaja (1758-98 A.D.) who was an authority on *Bharatha Natya*, and his gifted nephew Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma, were well known patrons of the art. They also distinguished themselves as great composers of first rate *Kathakali* plays. *Kathakali* reached its highest watermark during this period. Two of the greatest writers of *Kathakali* plays, Kilimanoor Vidwan Rajaraja Varma Koil Tampuran and Irayimman Tampi, flourished under the royal patronage of His Highness Swati Thirunal (1828-1847) who was a great composer of songs and an accomplished linguist and scholar. Maharaja Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma (1847-60 A.D.), a renowned patron of *Kathakali*, first organised a full-fledged Palace Troupe to serve as a pattern for the rest of Malabar. He had quite a passion for the theatre and he wrote a number of plays. It was under the command of this Royal Master that Easwara Pillai Vicharippu, the Chief Actor in the Palace *Kathakali* Troupe, for the first time, brought out a collection of



A scene from *Banayaddham*. Uma as *Chitrlekha* and Mrinalini as *Usha*.

fifty-four *Atta Kathas* (*Kathakali* plays) including the works of Maharaja Uthram Thirunal. It is said that H. H. Uthram Thirunal used to wear *Kathakali* costumes and perform before a mirror for his own delectation. He effected certain changes in the costumes of the actors. Like King Harsha Verdhana who used to take part in dramatic performances, the Kings of Kerala took delight in participating in *Kathakali*. About 111 *Kathakali* plays are now available in print.

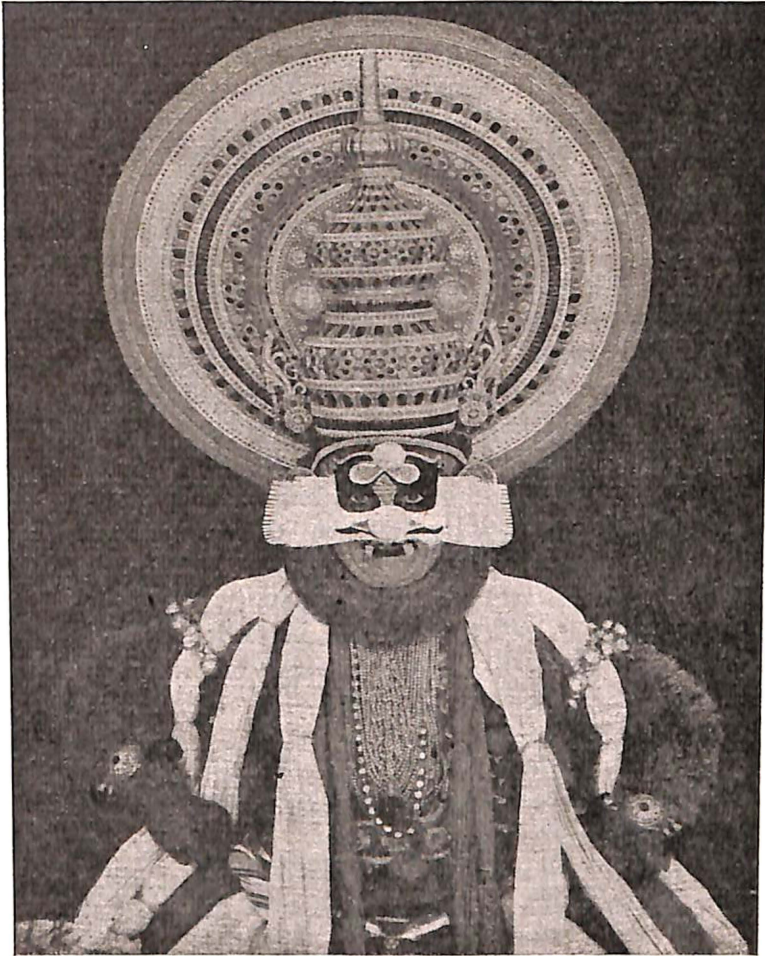
Made More Popular

Thanks to the great leadership of the foremost poet of Malabar—Mahakavi Vallathol—the *Kathakali* which was until yesterday a dying art has been revived and has come into its own. This glorious renaissance of *Kathakali* has flared a radiant path for this marvellous art and more and more of enthusiastic students from the East and West are making their cultural pilgrimage to the *Kerala Kala Mandalam*, the Academy where *Kathakali* is taught by a band of supreme artistes, to study this unique Dance-Drama. Poet Vallathol and his fine troupe of *Kathakali* Dancers have succeeded in rendering this histrionic art—from

more attractive and popular to the intelligentsia by modernising to a considerable extent the costume and make-up of the actors, by cutting down the duration of the plays and by fully exploiting the artistic and aesthetic phases of the art, but at the same time taking precious care to conserve the inherent and age-old greatness and individuality of this wonderful art-form which is the greatest contribution of Kerala to the cultural heritage of Asia. The healthy, modernising influence brought to bear on this great art and the growing recognition received at the hands of competent savants who have discovered in the *Kathakali* a treasure house, have triumphantly proclaimed that this art will never die as long as culture and civilisation continue to exist on earth. The *Kerala Kala Mandalam* and the *Viswa Kala Kendra* are the radiant centres of a dynamic dance movement which gives vivid impressions of the ancient Hindu civilization and its creative art. Accomplished *Kathakali* Actors like Guru Gopinath, Uday Sankar, Chathunni Panikkar, Ram Gopal, Mrinalini Sarabhai, and Ananda Sivaram have carried the great art to far off places all over the world, and won all-world fame.

It is interesting to recall to mind that nearly seventyfive years back, at a time when no one would have dared to suggest any curtailment of the duration of *Kathakali* plays, the late Oyyarath Chandu Menon, the first and foremost Novelist of Kerala, had the vision, courage and critical acumen to insist that those masters of *Kathakali* who wanted to perform in his house should commence the play at 7 p.m. and close it at 11 p.m. Next to performing *Kathakali* in palaces and temples, the actors were keen in performing before Chandu Menon, an aristocrat, a high Judicial Officer, leading literature and a great lover and critic of *Kathakali*. He wanted only select and superb items such as the meeting of the *Kattalan* (Hunter) and Damayanti in *Nala Charitam*, the contest between Bheema and Hanuman in *Kalyana Sougandhikam*, Lalitha in *Narakasuravadham*, Urvasi in *Kalakeyavadham*, to be performed straightaway, without indulging in the elaborate *Purappadu*. These striking episodes give full scope to the actors to display the genius of *Kathakali* and their mastery over the art.

Guru Gopinath was the pioneer among *Kathakali* trained Dancers to present solo items of *Kathakali* thereby making the highly complicated art enjoyable to those who were not initiated into the intricacies of the art form. With unerring discretion and consummate skill, he lifted certain select scenes from the entire *Kathakali* Epics and portrayed them as solo numbers with ease and grace as to appeal to the Indian and foreign audiences who had no thorough knowledge of the highly stylised dance form. The inspiration to attempt and achieve success in this came from Sri G. Venkatachalam, one of the front-rank critics of Art and Dance who opines that "*Kathakali* is certainly one of the most developed dance-arts, as it is the most perfect pantomime



A Villainous character.

Striking and artistic make-up and crowns give Kathakali characters a wholesome and overwhelming look.

play in the world". This welcome and effective departure from the age old method is now followed by the *Kathakali* masters who have taken by storm art centres in foreign lands. Hence *Kathakali* has become more appealing to a larger section of the public all over the world.

Art Perfected

The most brilliant exposition of the national genius of Kerala rising from the pit to the platform and expanding the vision to the highest altitudes of poetic imagination and into the deepest recesses of the heart, *Kathakali* is the loftiest manifestation of Dance and Art in which

is embedded creative energy, and aesthetic joy. Resonant with movement, and vitality, full of suggestion, symbolism, melody, colour, grace and the rich subtleties of dramatic expression, *Kathakali* is the Perfect Art, which has no parallel. Verily has it been pronounced by Havelock Ellis that "Dancing is the loftiest, the most moving, the most beautiful of the arts, because it is no more a translation or abstraction from life, it is life itself."

Uday Sankar, the foremost Indian Dancer who has earned an international reputation, says of *Kathakali*; "*It is art perfected, the most marvellous manifestation of the artistic impulses in man. There is nothing like it to interpret human sentiment, thoughts and emotions. The language of the limbs, hands, muscles and eyes is more powerful than spoken words. Graceful and telling, the effect is realistic. It is a vast mine, the plentiful resources of which remain yet to be tapped.*"

Our great poet Tagore, after witnessing a *Kathakali* performance, remarked: "Those of us belonging to Northern India who have lost the memory of the pure Indian classical dance have experienced a thrill of delight at the exhibition of this marvellous art of Kerala called *Kathakali*. I feel grateful at the assurance it has brought to us that the ancient art is still a living tradition in India with its varied grace and vigour and subtleties of dramatic expression."

●

*Join the dance, with step as light
As every heart should be tonight
Music, shake the lofty dome
In honour of our Harvest Home.*

*Join the dance, and banish care,
All are young, and gay, and fair;
Even the age has youthful grown,
In honour of our Harvest Home.*

*Join the dance, bright faces beam,
Sweet lips smile, and dark eyes gleam;
All these charms have hither come,
In honour of our Harvest Home.*

*Join the dance with step as light
As ev'ry heart should be tonight;
Music, shake the lofty dome,
In honour of our Harvest Home."*

—Charles Dickens.

27069
7-11-68

Books by the same Author

RAVI VARMA. A short biography of the great Indian artist with a critical appreciation of his art. (With an introduction by Principal K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar).

NICHOLAS ROERICH. (Monograph). A full account of the life and work of the master artist. (With a Foreword by Dr. James H. Cousins).

SRI CHITRALAYAM. An account of the collection of paintings in the art gallery at Trivandrum, with a special chapter on the state mural paintings.

GURUDEV NICHOLAS ROERICH. (Third Revised Edition). A biographical and critical volume on the life and work of the great modern artist-philosopher. (With an Introduction by Principal Devi Prosad Roy Chowdhury ; A Foreword by Principal Asit Kumar Halder ; and A Note of Appreciation by Sri Bireswar Sen).

BEAUTY SPOTS OF TRAVANCORE. A series of illustrated booklets.

Few more books by the same Publisher

1. **WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**, a compilation of 21 articles on the first Indian War of Independence—1857 edited by Sankar Sen Gupta. It is not a history but an attempt to present a true and a correct picture of so many events and incidents that occurred during 1857 war. Pages 186, Crown 8vo. Price Rs. 5, \$ 2.
2. **RAIN IN INDIAN LIFE AND LORE**, a pioneering work on different rain ceremonies in India. The book contains besides foreword and introductions 19 research articles and (1) The definition of rain (2) Popular beliefs on rain (3) Superstitions on rain (4) Khana on rain (5) Signs of rain : Pages 152, Size crown quarto, Price Rs. 12 ; \$ 5. Cloth Rs. 14 ; \$ 5/50.
3. **STUDIES IN INDIAN FOLK-CULTURE**, a compilation of the papers read at the All-India Folk Culture Conference at Bombay and at Ujjain.
4. **FOLKLORISTS OF BENGAL**, to be out in 3 volumes. Each volume will consist of 8 life sketches and bibliography, First Part is in the market.
5. **STORIES OF CHANDIDAS** by Prof. Priya Ranjan Sen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sri K. P. Padmanabhan Tampy. Born 1912 A.D. Educated at the S. M. V. High School and H. H. The Maharaja's College of Arts, Trivandrum. Has contributed to the leading periodicals all over the world and won reputation as a known writer, both in English and Malayalam. Has organised several art exhibitions and spoken at various art conferences. Member of the General Council and Executive Board of the Kerala Lalita Kala Akademi. Member, Faculty of Fine Arts, Annamalai University. One of the internationally reputed art critics. Contributing Editor of FOLKLORE and other periodicals of note. Has a rare and representative collection of about 400 original printing etc. by famous artists all over the world. Now a member of the staff of the Sri Chitralayam, State Art Gallery, Trivandrum.

KATHAKALI

An indispensable book of study to all who love the dance form of Kerala.

by K. P. PADMANABHAN TAMPY

Price Rupees Three only

A FEW OPINION

"Evoking the ancient symbols of Kathakali Dance. Mr. Tampy is doing a most useful work. He is an interpreter, and has a fine aesthetic understanding." NICHOLAS ROERICH.

"Shri Tampy presents interestingly in this book the results of his study. Such a book in such a pleasing style should fire enthusiasm". SOPHIA WADIA.

"Ananda Shivaram and I think the booklet contains a very faithful description of Kathakali. The booklet should be of much interest to dance students from India and abroad and visitors in search of Malabar Art." LOUISE LIGHTFOOT.

"I was very pleased to read your useful and interesting booklet on 'Kathakali.'" RUKMINI DEVI.

"Very useful and valuable to students and visitors. A book of such expositions would be of great service." JAMES H. COUSINS.

"Dada (Uday Shankar) was very much impressed by the book. It is very interesting and useful." RAJENDRA SHANKAR.

"An exceedingly well written and highly informative book which will be most useful to students and lovers of the great art form."

GURU GOPINATH.

"A work of rare charm and great value. Mr. Tampy is a true art lover and an able opener." K. S. RAMASWAMI SA

"Deals with the theoretical and practical aspects of Kathakali in a masterly manner." DECI

"A most interesting, informative and valuable work."



Library

IAS, Shimla

793.31934 P 136 K



00027069

KAM GOPAL.

INDIAN PUBLICATIONS

3, British Indian Street, Calcutta-1, India.