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The concept of theatre in *Naatyashastra* and classical artforms of Kerala

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Theatre is an English term which is synonymous with *Arangu* in Malayalam. *Arangu* which is also known as stage where all art forms are systematically expressed or performed. The word *theatre* is derived from Greek word *theatron*. According to Christopher B. Balm the word theatre which means a space to see^[1]. Theatre is a very critical component which plays a crucial role in actor/actress artistic expression and a transit point between actor and audience.

The history of Indian dances traces its origin from Indus Valley civilization and Harappa Culture. With the work of *Bharata Naatyashastra* Indian art forms got a classical and scientific base. *Naatyamandapa* are the crucial component in all India Art forms. *Naatyamandapa* in Udayagiri is the classical example as per the standards compiled by *Bharata*. Most Traditional art forms like *Kathakali*, *Koottampalam*, *Kooth* all are performed in *Naatyamandapams*. How the structure of stage in Kerala art forms like *Koottampalam*, *Kathakali*, and *Krishnanaattam*, that here widely discussed in this paper.

Naatyamandapam in Naatyashastra

According to *Bharata*, *Naatyamandapas* are classified into three with reference to its style namely *Vikrishtam*^[2], *Caturashram*^[3] and *Tyashram*^[4] each of them are constructed in specific style of measurement i.e. *Jeshtam*^[5], *Madhyamam*^[6] and *Kanishtham*^[7]. Measurement style is divided into two *Hastaashrayam* and *Dandaashrayam*. Major measurement system are 108 *Dandu*, 64 *Kol*, 64 *Dandu* 32 *Kol* and 32 *Dandu* for each, six for *Vikrishtam*, *Caturashram* and *Trishryam*. So totally *Naatyamandapas* are 18^[8].

Structure of *Naatyamandapas* changes with the changes in characters, if *Devas* are the main characters then *Mandapas* will be *Jeshtam (Mandapam)*, Human people (*Kanishtham*) For Kings it is (*Madhyamam*). Dima is a *Roopaka* where *Devas* or *Asuras* plays the major role in which warfare is the main theme for that *Jyeshtham* is the preferred *Mandapas* because its size really fits.

Each *Naatyamandapam* is equally divided into three spaces *Rangapeetham*, *Prekshaagriham* and *Nepathyam*, all three are constructed in a strict scientific sense. *Kaliyarangu* is otherwise known as *Rangapeetham*. *Prekshaagriham* is the equal half of altogether of *Naatyamandapam*. Sculptured Pillars of *Naatyamandapas* are the imaginative boundary of inner space. Rest of the half is equally divided in to *Rangapeetham* and *Nepathyam*.

Naatyaranga is constructed in Square manner supported by four pillar in each edge and three in each sides all are decorated with sculptors and mural paintings. There is a common roof for *Naatyamandapam* and also a separate one for *Rangam*. It is known as *Vithaanamach*. As per *Bharata's Naatyalakshaa* the width of *Rangavedi* must start from one wall to another, must be divided into equal portions with pillars.

Koottampalam in Kerala

Koottampalam has got a golden status in Kerala's art history. Both *Koottampalam* and *Kooth* performed in it where as *Ottampalam* is space for learning *Vedas*, *Shastras* and *Mantras*.

Other popular name of *Koottampalam* are *Naatyagriha*, *Naatyamandapam* etc. In the words of *P. Unnikrishnan Nair*, *Koottampalam* is a *Naatyagriha* bestowed with the presence of divinities and deities^[9]. *Koottampalam* is an ideal platform for the arts like drama, skit etc. It is considered important as one among the *Panchaprasaadam*s. *Shreekovil*,

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Kalaashamandapam, *Agrashala*, *Balikkallu*, *Koottampalam* are the *Panchapraasadams*. *Koottampalam* is a popular art form in Kerala which is widely performed in *Koottampalams*, where the importance is given to movements and expressions of the artist. As per the structural configuration *Naatyamandapam* is constructed in three styles namely *Mukkon*, *Caturam* and *Deerghacaturam*. These types of models can be seen in so many parts of India but in Kerala only *Deerghacaturam* *Koottampalams* can be seen.

Naatyamandapam and Koottampalam

There is a notable difference/sameness in both *Koottampalam* and *Rangavedi* proposed by *Bharatamuni*. In *Naatyashastra*, *Bharata* defines the shape of *Naatyamandapam* as *Shylaguhaakaara-Kaaryashyalaaguhaakaarodvibhoomirnaatyamandapamandav aataayanopotonivaatoDheerashabdabhaak*^[10]. The constructions of Roof of *Naatyamandapam* are in the style of *Shylaguhaakaara*, a popular style which exists form BC 1st century^[11]. The major advantage of this is the voices of the actors are clearly expressed without any disturbance. Most of roofs in *Koottampalams* are constructed in *Guhaakriti*. To avoid echoing walls and roof are supported with wooden blocks.

In *Bharata's* concept of *Naatyamandapam* the walls are constructed with mud bricks. Small window are fixed in sides for proper air passage, so that further disturbance from environment can be avoided (*Kilivaatil*). Roofs are constructed in such a way to defend thunder, storm and rain.

Two pillars are constructed in parallel both inside and outside of *Rangavedi* outer side is bigger than inner side. There is space in the corridor where the audience can sit. The same can be seen in *Koottampalams* of Kerala.

According to *BaharataPrekshakasthaana* is in the middle part of *Naatyagriha*. The *sopanas* constructed in the middle part is space where audience sits. There are three types of *Prekshakas*, ie Gods, Kings, and humans each having separate *Naatyagriha*. If there are more *sopanas* it is meant for human, if it is less meant for *Rajas*. As per *Bharatas* notion *Naatyamandapas* should be medium in its size. Actors and Audience should be seated in a face to face manner as the same follows in Kerala too. *Prekshakas* are not allowed to sit in the floor and corridor.

The concept of Arangu (theatre) in Kerala Art forms

Stage is an indispensable part of any art forms it is unique space where actor forms, it is a unique space where actor/audience relationships exists in a cordial relationship of exchange^[12]. *Arangu* is used in a mutual cordial relationship of exchange. *Arangu* is used as a synonymous to *Rangavedi*, *Abahinayavedi*, *Natanavedi*. Three words are employed in same meaning.

Arangu being used for an artist forms, there are two types of *Arangu* (1) closed structure (2) open structured which is mainly used for local art forms. There are two types of open theatre in Kerala.

The stage of Krishnanaattam

Dance is the critical component in *Krishnanaattam* now widely plays in the location were once ruled by zamorins i.e. *Palakkad*, *Mankada*, *Nilambur*, *Neidyiruppukovlilakams*. Temples are like *Guruvayur*, *Trikkavu*, *Trikkandiyur*, *Hanumankavu*, *Tiruvambadi*, *Keraldeeshapuram*, *Nirakkaitakotta*^[13].

The audience of *Krishnanaattam* belongs to upper strata of the society i.e. Brahmins, Varmas etc... So they performed in those places like *Agraharams*, *illams* and *Kovilakams*. *Krishnanaattamis* widely performed in close space. But today it can be performed in any parts of the society.

Now a day's *Krishnanaattamis* widely performed in the stage of *Guruvayur* temple. The stage itself is an open space. *Nilavi/zakku* is the imaginative boundary of *Krishnanaattam* while performing in the stage. In the play time Singers are positioned in the middle backside of the *Arangu*, artist plays *Shudhamadda/zam* and *Toppimaddalam* are situated in both sides *Idakka* artist also positioned with them. Artists are performed in the middle space where the boundary is from *Ka/zivi/zakku* to the place where *Ponnaami* and *Shinkidi* stationed. This is the ideally measured space where *Krishnanaattamis* performed.

The stage of Kathakali

Kathakali is a unique blend of Art, Literature, Nritya, Music, Drama, Mela etc. So it is widely known as *Sundarakala*. It is based on the epic *Ramayana*, compiled by *KottaarakkaraTampuran*. *Kathakali* is the advanced version of *Ramanattam* compiled *KottarakkaraTampuran*. *Shriramavataram* to *Pattabhishekam* are the major eight *Khandas* in the play.

The *Arangu* for *Kathakali* is highly important as *Kooth*, *Koottampalam* and *Krishnanaattam*. This art can be performed in ideal space without any restrictions. The *Arangu* of the play is constructed in rectangular shape, where the floor is plastered with cow dung, each side is having pillars, sides and roof are covered with palm and coconut leaves. It is known as *Kalipanthal*.

Kalvilakku is located in the middle of the *Arangu*, curtain is in the backside of *Kalivilakku*. Singers are located in the back side. Musicians are placed in the right side of the stage.

The stage of Koottampalam

Koottampalam is a temple art form which is developed in Kerala temples, performed mainly in *Koottampalams*. This particular art form is protected and nurtured by the elite sections of the community and performed in a specifically constructed space. *Naatyasathaana* and *Prekshakasthaana* are two critical components in *Aranagu*.

Mizhaavu is placed in the middle of the (*Naatyasathaana*) back side. *Kurumkuzhal* is located and positioned in the right side. The singers are located in the right side; actors are located in left side.

Arangu plays a prominent role in all Keralaite art forms i.e. *Kathakali*, But plays like *Balisugreevayudham*, *Kucelapravesham*, *Narasimhapravesham* in all most of the times actor comes very close to audience and performs it well. Both *Koottampalam* and *Krishnanaattam* follow the same system.

Observations

- (1) Most of the Classical art forms of Kerala are performed in structured space. But in folk arts are performed in open theatres.
- (2) The concept of *Naatyamandapa* proposed by *Bharata* is widely seen but we can see changes with regional differences.
- (3) *Koottampalams* of Kerala are different in its construction-measurement style, not as the same proposed by *Bharata*.

- (4) During the play in some context in Kerala artist used to perform outside of the space. This may due to the influence of local folk arts.
 - (5) There is a widespread inequalities exists as *Bharata* comments, the forward caste is allowed to view these arts by sitting in front of the row and low caste must view the show by staying in outside of the *Naatyamandapa*.
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