

Performing Arts in Tamil Nadu

Folk Music

&

Folk Dance

Folk Music

- ▶ Ancient Origin
- ▶ Reflects activities of Village people
- ▶ Intricate taalas (rhythm)
- ▶ Ancient Panns or ragas
- ▶ Different types musical instruments
- ▶ Classical Music of Tamil Nadu - Carnatic Music owes its origin to Folk Music

Folk Music

- ▶ Folk songs sung by wandering minstrels
- ▶ Festival Singers
- ▶ Songs are topical
- ▶ describe the life, hopes and beliefs of people
- ▶ Occupies unique part of rural culture

Folk Music

- ▶ Villu paattu
- ▶ Kathaakalakshepam
- ▶ Occupational Songs
- ▶ Lullabies

Villu paattu



Villu paattu or Bow Song

- ▶ Invented by a court poet in 15th century
- ▶ Very popular in Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram and Kanyakumari districts
- ▶ Themes: Ramayana, Mahabharata, Madurai Veeran, Kaathavaraayan, Kattabomman, Vellaikkaaran

Villupaattu

- ▶ also known as **Villadichampaatu**
- ▶ Ancient form of musical story-telling in India where narration is interspersed with music
- ▶ The *villu* (bow), the age-old weapon of warriors - used as a primary musical instrument for the *Villu Paatu* artists
- ▶ performers narrate stories ranging from mythological to social.
- ▶ The main storyteller narrates the story striking the bow
- ▶ The bow rests on a mud pot kept facing downwards
- ▶ A co-performer beats the pot while singing.
- ▶ There is usually another co-singer who acts as active listener to the narration, uttering appropriate oral responses.
- ▶ The local government sometime utilise this as a vehicle for social messages and propaganda.

Villu pattu

- ▶ *Udukku, Kudam, Thala Kattai* used as supplementary instruments in performances
- ▶ *Udukku* is a small drum with a slender middle portion which is held in the left hand and played by the fingers of the right hand.
- ▶ Occasionally, the *Villu Pattu* team divides itself into two groups, each trying to prove opposite points-of-view of a subject. This is called *Lavani Pattu*.
- ▶ The songs used by the *Villu Pattu* artists are mostly traditional folk-songs.
- ▶ They are played during occasions of temple festivals in villages.
- ▶ The songs sung mostly in *Villu Paatu* praise a god or tell a story.

Kathaa kaalakshepam



Harikatha or Kathaa Kaalakshepam

- ▶ An art of extempore discourse
- ▶ Rendered for three to four hours
- ▶ Introduced by the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur towards the end of 19th century
- ▶ *Harikatha* involves the narration of a story, intermingled with various songs relating to the story.
- ▶ narration involves numerous sub-plots and anecdotes, which are used to emphasize various aspects of the main story
- ▶ The main storyteller is usually assisted by one or more co-signers, who elaborate the songs and a Mridangam accompanist. The storyteller uses a pair of cymbals to keep the beat.

Harikatha

- ▶ Harikatha is a composite art form composed of storytelling, poetry, music, drama, dance, and philosophy
- ▶ popular medium of entertainment, which helped transmit cultural, educational and religious values to the masses
- ▶ main aim of Hari Katha is to imbue truth and righteousness in the minds of people and sow the seeds of devotion in them.
- ▶ Another of the aims is to educate them about knowledge of self (*atman*) through stories and show them the path of liberation.

Harikatha

- ▶ In Hindu mythology, the first Harikatha singer was sage Narada who sang for Vishnu,
- ▶ other prominent singers were Lava and Kusa twin sons of Rama, who sang the *Ramayana* in his court at Ayodhya.
- ▶ the storyteller explores a traditional theme, usually the life of a saint or a story from an Indian epic.
- ▶ The person telling the story through songs, music and narration is called a Haridasa.
- ▶ This is an ancient form that took current form during the Bhakti movement in around 12th century. Many famous Haridasa are Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa.

Occupational Songs



Occupational Songs

- ▶ Important aspect of rural life
- ▶ There is hardly any occupation without song and music
- ▶ Relevant to the various activities which involve hard work and toil
- ▶ Most songs centre around good rains, fertility of land and a bountiful harvest
- ▶ Do not use any percussion aids
- ▶ The prosody, beats and metres of the songs are determined by the nature of work which needs a systematic movement of limbs and the activities of the limbs

Lullabies



Lullabies

- ▶ Universal ancient custom to sing lullabies while swinging the baby in the cradle
- ▶ Village women gather and swing the cradle to the accompaniment of songs, followed by lullabies sung by the mother
- ▶ Contains descriptions of her experiences while delivering the child
- ▶ vows and care taken by her to groom the child
- ▶ Full of meaning and emotions which enrich the song
- ▶ Songs exemplify the child as a king, a God or an illustrious man
- ▶ Passed down through generations by oral tradition

Folk dance

Folk dance

- ▶ Kummi Attam
- ▶ Kolaattam
- ▶ Karagaattam
- ▶ Kaavadi attam
- ▶ Impersonation Dances

Kummi



Kummi

- ▶ derived from the word *kummai* which means to dance while clapping hands to a rhythm, accompanied by songs in popular tunes.
- ▶ Women form a circle and dance during the Maariamman and *Kaanum Pongal* festivals for ten consecutive days, and also at homes where a girl has attained puberty.
- ▶ It has originally a part of the Pongal or harvest festival and is derived from the different activities performed in the fields, such as reaping, husking, harvesting, etc.

Kummi attam

- ▶ Hands are clapped variously - by *viral thattu* (striking with fingers), *ullangai thattu* (striking with palms), *anjali thattu* (striking with joined palms) and *muzhankai thattu* (striking with elbows).
- ▶ Literature: *Valliamman kummi*, *Siruthonda Naayanaar kummi*, *Pancha Paandvar kummi*, *Harishchandra kummi*, *Ganapadhesa Perimba kummi*, *Villaimathar kummi*, *Nabialla karana kummi*
- ▶ **Paaligai kummi**
- ▶ During marriages, women of different age groups dance the kummi circumventing eighteen varieties of grains known as *Paaligai*. The leader sings folk songs and the members repeat the same while dancing and clapping hands.
- ▶ **Chandi kummi**
- ▶ This is based on household activities such as cooking, drawing water from the well, cleaning vessels, pounding flour, etc.

Oyilaattam or Oyil Kummi

- ▶ *Oyil* means grace or aesthetic gestures, and *aattam* means dance, so *oyilaattam* is the dance of graceful gestures.
- ▶ performed exclusively by young men of village in an open auditorium in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, in Madurai, Kovai, Trichy and Tirunelveli.
- ▶ dancers dress uniformly, either in coloured costumes or in white shirts or *kurta* and *kachcham*.
- ▶ Their costumes or include a dark- coloured sash (cloth belt) around their hips, a coloured turban on their heads, a coloured piece of cloth in their right hands and bells tied on their feet.
- ▶ This is a linear type of dance, in which twelve to twenty persons stand in a row and perform the dance to rhythmic music with forward movements, swinging their hands forward and backward coupled with intricate foot work.

Oyil Kummi or Oyilattam



The songs are based on legends and mythologies of great heroes such as Kattabomman, Madurai Veeran, Vallithirumanam, Kattavarayan and so on.

Kolaattam



Pinnal kolaattam

Kolaattam

- ▶ derived from kol meaning a small stick and *aattam* meaning play.
- ▶ name of a charming dance practised by a group of young girls, with two wooden sticks artistically painted in red and green striking against each other.
- ▶ This dance is associated with a festival having cultural and religious significance.
- ▶ According to tradition, an omnipotent asura called Basava was controlled by a few graceful girls who danced *kolattam* to charming music. This has since been celebrated as *kolatta jaathirai*, in Tamilnadu.
- ▶ Goddess Parvati underwent severe penance for nine days to enable the Devas to win over an *asura* named Bhandu. Unable to withstand her vigorous penance, her maidens danced the *kolattam* before Shiva's vehicle Nandi, the Bull, to obtain His grace and to reduce the severity of Parvati's penance.

Pinnal Kolattam

- ▶ The players tie their sticks to coloured ropes and weave them into a braid as they dance by changing their positions. They end up with different designs of braids, as they inter-weave the ropes in tune with the music. This dance calls for great dexterity, as one wrong move can undo or mess up the entire braid.

karagam



Karagam

- ▶ a folk dance which developed with the Maariamman cult in Tamil Nadu.
- ▶ denotes a pot or *kumbham* filled with sacred water for purificatory purposes, since water is identified with *maari* (rain). *Kamandalam*, *alangati*, *neerthuli*, *gangai* and *poonkumbam* are some of the meanings attributed to the term *karagam*.
- ▶ a divine offering of the dancer, balancing a decorated brass pot on the head. The dancer then executes complicated and frenzied movements, without upsetting the *karagam*.
- ▶ *Shakti karagam* (religious) a ritualistic dance performed in the worship of the Goddess.
- ▶ *Aatta karagam* (professional) - purely for entertainment purpose

Sakti Karagam

- ▶ The Pot is filled with sacred water and decorated with margosa leaves, flowers, sandal paste and lime and is balanced on the dancer's head. It is believed that during rituals and ceremonies, all the seas of Varuna, (the Lord of rain), and seven sacred rivers were attracted and confined in the *karagam* and were released only when the final ablution was performed, after which the water was poured or sprinkled over the heads of worshippers. For water and agricultural/ pastoral prosperity, Maariamman, Gangaiamman or Kaveriamman, (the perennial rivers are worshipped and the *karagam* ritual dance performed in their honour.

Aatta Karagam

- ▶ Glittering dressed men and women balance the pots on their heads, unaided by their hands, and dance to the rhythm of the musical accompaniments such as the *nayyandi melam*, *paampadi*, *urumi*, *thavil*, *naadaswaram* and *thamukku*. They start from an Amman temple and walk through the streets and lanes of the villages in a procession in front of the image of the Goddess.
- ▶ When the tempo increases and raises to a frenzy, the male dancer brandishes a sword or a staff and becomes oblivious of himself, and though he tumbles and leaps, he somehow retains the pot on his head.
- ▶ The female *karagam* dancer balances herself on two ladders and climbs up and down. These movements are executed with great dexterity by the artists to establish their ability and, at the same time, to hold the attention of the audience.

Kavadi



Kaavadi aattam

- ▶ a medium of divine worship *kaavadiaattam*, exclusive to Tamil Nadu.
- ▶ performed by the devotees of Lord Muruga or Subramaniya (kartikeya) after undergoing many vows and austerities.
- ▶ a combination of the two words *kaavi* and *padi*, which denotes the vow made to walk the distance to a particular place of pilgrimage on foot during such festive occasions as *Skanda sashti*, *Thaipoosam*, *Karthigai deepam*, *Vaikaasi vishaakham*, etc.
- ▶ The moment the melody of the *nayyandi melam* reaches a high pitch, the quickness and vigour of the dancer's movements also automatically increase. The *salangai* is tied around his legs, producing a lilting sound and adding vigour to the music. *Kaavadi aattam* is the *taandava* form of dance, as opposed to the *laasya* type, which is subtle and docile. When the emotion-choked dancers go into raptures and yell *Muruganukku Arohara* and *vel vel vetri vel*, *bhakti* (devotion) and mysticism electrify the air.

Impersonation dances

- ▶ Mayilaattam
- ▶ Poykaal Kudirai aattam
- ▶ Pagati vesham

Mayilattam



Mayilaattam

- ▶ The *mayilaattam* is performed together with dummy horse shows during temple festivals and on other important occasions.
- ▶ Men dress up as peacocks, in costumes made of cardboard, paper, bamboo and sticks, all decorated with colourful glass, beads and artificial jewellery.
- ▶ The dancer impersonates Lord Muruga: with a lance in his hand and bells on his feet, he dances to the music produced by folk instruments, exhibiting movements similar to those of a real peacock, Muruga's vehicle, whose character is taken on by the Lord.

Poykaal kudirai



Puravi Aatam or Poykaal Kudirai Aatam

- ▶ This dance became popular during the Maratha rule of Tanjore, which became the citadel of dummy horse dance artists.
- ▶ Stories based on the Puranas, Ithihasas and historical events, particularly the chivalrous feats of Chatrapati Shivaji, his worship of Goddess Bhavani and his victory over the Mughals, are depicted through this dance form.
- ▶ The image of the (dummy) horse is made of cardboard, jute, paper, glass, bamboo strips and decorated with colour garments. The dancer gets into the horse through an opening on top and looks as if he/ she is on horseback. Wooden stilts and *sallangai* (bells) are tied to the feet. The stilts are used to prevent the dancer from being harmed by snakes or scorpions and to produce the sound of horses' hooves.
- ▶ The dance is performed by a pair of dancers impersonating a king and queen seated on horseback. They dance to rhythmic folk music produced by the *kunthalam nayyandi melam* and can perform acrobatics for hours of entertainment. The making of a *poykaal kudirai* dancer involves months of hard work and training

Pagati vesham



Pagati vesham

- ▶ The term indicates disguises worn by the dancers as they visit homes to dance and earn money. Men impersonating bulls, tigers, bears and monkeys dance to popular folk tunes. Men dressed as gods and goddesses go from house to house and dance rhythmically to the music.
- ▶ Among the disguises, *pulivesham* is the most popular. The artist wears a tiger's mask, paints his body with stripes, fixes pointed teeth in his mouth together with a long tail at his back and impersonates a tiger. He then dances to the sound of the *thappu melam*, jumping and growling like a tiger to instil terror and fear among the spectators. This is a favourite among children and the audience throws money to the tiger in excitement.

Symbol of Tamil Tradition and Culture

- ▶ Tamilnadu has rich tradition of folk arts displaying traditions skill and dexterity handed down from generations.
- ▶ The folk Music and Dances represent the rustic ethos, aesthetic values and melody.
- ▶ The conduct of folk dances and music on occasions of temple festivals and community functions gives entertainment, mirth and merry to the villagers.