



Aaharya in Kathakali: A Symphony of Nature and Art

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ABSTRACT

Kathakali, a classical art form from Kerala, is a masterful blend of dance, drama, and music. Born from the legacy of Krishnanattam, Kathakali evolved from Ramanattam, founded by Kottarakkara Thampuran. This ancient art form boasts a distinctive system called 'Aaharya' comprising makeup, adornment, and liveliness, intricately linked to natural resources. In Kathakali, "Aaharya" transcends its literal meaning, encompassing the actor's transformation through makeup, adornment, and liveliness. Makeup involves the subtle use of color blends to alter the face and body. Embellishment encompasses intricate clothing and ornaments, while liveliness refers to the traditional equipment that brings characters to life. Kathakali stands as a paragon of Kerala's classical art forms, renowned for its staggering time investment and meticulous craftsmanship. This painstaking process yields a visually stunning richness that distinguishes Kathakali from its counterparts. This topic seeks to delve into the intricacies of Kathakali's stagecraft, meticulously examining the structural elements and their masterful incorporation into the characters that inhabit the Kathakali stage. Natyashastra, an ancient Sanskrit text, provides valuable insights into the Aaharya practices of Kathakali. Although Kathakali is not entirely grounded in Natyashastra, certain aspects of this art form resonate with the principles outlined in the treatise. As one of Kerala's most revered and intricate classical art forms, Kathakali's



mastery demands years of dedication and precision, culminating in a visually resplendent experience that sets it apart from other art forms. This essay delves into the fascinating world of Kathakali's "Aaharya" practices, uncovering the natural resources that breathe life into this ancient art form. It underscores the art form's harmonious relationship with the environment. By exploring this connection, we gain a deeper appreciation for the beauty and significance of Kathakali, as well as the importance of preserving our natural world.

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Introduction

Humanity's innate desire to adorn itself, its belongings, and its surroundings has been a driving force behind the evolution of decoration. This aesthetic impulse is intricately linked to the practical aspects of life, forging a profound connection between life, nature, art, and decoration. The beautification of visual art forms is, in essence, an extension of life's inherent quest for beauty. Aharya, a vital component of the Chaturvidha Abhinaya method, is the art of transformation through artificial decorative techniques. In the realm of theatrical performances, decorations play a pivotal role in breathing life into characters. Aharyam encompasses a broad spectrum of elements, including makeup, costumes, stage equipment, and settings. This intricate process shapes the audience's perception of the character, immersing them in the narrative.

Across various genres of theatrical art, decoration remains an indispensable element in character creation. Each art form boasts its unique decorative elements, materials, and techniques, yet they all share a common goal: to captivate, inspire, and tell stories that transcend time and culture. In the classical art form of Kathakali, decoration is an integral part of the narrative. By harnessing the power of natural resources – minerals, plants, and animals – Kathakali's decorative practices not only reflect the beauty of nature but also highlight the art form's deep connection with the environment. This study will delve into the fascinating world of Kathakali's decorative elements, revealing the intricate processes that transform natural resources into exquisite works of art.



Review of Literature:

Embark on a mesmerizing journey into the resplendent realm of Aharya Abhinaya, a vital facet of Kathakali, as illuminated by a kaleidoscopic array of literary sources (Bharata Muni, 1987; Kaimal, 2009). Ancient texts, such as Bharata Muni's revered *Natyashastra*, which dedicates Chapter 23 to the intricate, labyrinthine nuances of Aharya Abhinaya (Bharata Muni, 1987), and *Vishnu Dharmotthara Puranam*, which lifts the veil on the secrets of colors and components in Chapters 40 and 27 (*Vishnu Dharmotthara Puranam*, n.d.), offer a profoundly illuminating, soul-stirring understanding of this intricate, majestic art form. Modern publications, including Sri Krishna Kaimal's monumental magnum opus, *Kathakali Vigyan Kosham*, which scrupulously examines Kathakali ornaments and the evolution of Aharya with meticulous precision (Kaimal, 2009), and Shri P. M. Ram Mohan's enlightening, revelatory *Nepathyam*, which provides a rare, behind-the-scenes glimpse into the mesmerizing, dreamlike world of Kathakali (Ram Mohan, 2003), further enrich our comprehension of this timeless, sublime art. Moreover, rare and ancient studies published in esteemed, venerable magazines like *Keli Vigyan Kairali* serve as a treasure trove of knowledge, offering a unique, captivating, and enthralling perspective on Kathakali that informs, inspires, and transports us to a realm of beauty and wonder.

Research Methodology

This study employs a multi-faceted approach to collect, arrange, classify, and analyze data related to Aharya Abhinaya in Kathakali. The research methodology is based on a combination of descriptive, historical, exploratory, and comparative approaches. A descriptive approach is used to provide an in-depth examination of the concepts, principles, and practices of Aharya Abhinaya, while a historical approach is employed to trace the evolution of Aharya Abhinaya in Kathakali.

An exploratory approach is used to investigate the contemporary practices and applications of Aharya Abhinaya in Kathakali. This involves conducting interviews with renowned artists, observing performances, and analyzing contemporary texts and articles. A comparative approach is employed to analyze the similarities and differences between Aharya Abhinaya in Kathakali and other classical dance forms. Fieldwork is also an essential component of this research, providing valuable firsthand information on the practical applications of Aharya Abhinaya.

The data sources used in this study include books and articles related to *Natyashastra* and Kathakali, internet resources, archival materials, and interviews with renowned Kathakali artists and experts. By



employing these methodologies and data sources, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of Aharya Abhinaya in Kathakali, shedding light on its theoretical foundations, historical evolution, and contemporary practices.

Analysis and Discussion:

Kathakali, a classical dance-drama from Kerala, is renowned for its captivating storytelling and vivid imagery. This ancient art form seamlessly weaves together music, dance, and theater, creating a rich tapestry of artistic expression. A distinctive feature of Kathakali is its well-defined character classification system, which determines the nature and traits of each character. This system is based on the principles of Natyashastra, an ancient Indian treatise on the performing arts.

In Kathakali, characters are broadly categorized into several groups based on their inherent nature and characteristics. Noble Characters, for instance, are peaceful and good-natured, often depicted as heroes or protagonists. Knight Characters, on the other hand, embody the Rajaguna, or the quality of passion and energy, and are often portrayed as demon kings or powerful rulers. Other categories include White Beard, which represents gentle and peaceful characters, such as monkeys; Red Beard, which symbolizes cruel and demonic characters, including asuras; Kattalan, which denotes uncivilized characters who live by hunting in the forest; Kari, which represents cruel demon women; and Minukku Roles, which include female roles, Brahmins, sages, and servant roles.

The character classification system serves as the foundation for Kathakali's elaborate makeup and ornamentation. Each character type has its unique makeup design, ornamentation, and costume, which collectively contribute to the rich visual language of Kathakali. The makeup designs are intricate and detailed, with different colors and patterns used to convey the emotions and characteristics of each character. The ornamentation is equally elaborate, with intricate designs and patterns used to adorn the characters' costumes and headpieces. By examining these character categories and their corresponding visual elements, we gain a deeper understanding of the art form's narrative structure, themes, and emotional resonance. The character classification system in Kathakali is a testament to the art form's complexity and richness, and it continues to inspire and fascinate audiences to this day. The system also highlights the importance of detail and precision in Kathakali, where every aspect of the performance, from the makeup to the ornamentation, contributes to the overall aesthetic and emotional impact of the art form.



The Concept of Aaharya in Kathakali: The Alchemy of Natural Resources in Kathakali

The term Aaharya refers to the transformation of actors into characters through the use of natural resources. This concept is central to the art form, as it enables the actors to embody the characters they portray. The use of natural resources in Kathakali is a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of its artists, who harness the power of nature to create a visual spectacle that is both awe-inspiring and thought-provoking. The earth is a treasure trove of natural resources, and for centuries, humans have harnessed these resources to create various products, including those used in traditional art forms like Kathakali. In the past, Kathakali artists relied on natural resources like minerals, fruit juices, and leaf juices to create their elaborate makeup designs. This tradition of sustainability extended to other folk art forms and temple arts, such as Krishnanattam and Koodiyattam, which shared similar decoration patterns and costume styles. By using natural materials, these art forms not only reduced their environmental footprint but also created a unique and authentic aesthetic.

The preparation of decorations for Kathakali is an intricate process that utilizes a wide range of natural materials. Stones dug from the earth, tree bark, wood, and thin materials obtained from living beings are all used to create the elaborate costumes and decorations. This approach to decoration is a testament to the resourcefulness and creativity of Kathakali artists, who have learned to harness the natural world to create something truly extraordinary. The traditional approach to Kathakali decorations has left a lasting legacy, inspiring future generations of artists to adopt sustainable and eco-friendly practices. As we move forward in an increasingly environmentally conscious world, the example set by Kathakali artists serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of living in harmony with nature. Nature is a treasure trove of resources that have been ingeniously incorporated into Kathakali. The concept of "pala to katesham" emphasizes the use of natural resources from the earth to the sky. This includes plants, such as *_Indigofera tinctoria_* (True Indigo), *_Shorea robusta_* (Indian Dammer), and *_Cinnamomum verum_* (Ceylon Cinnamon), minerals, and other organic materials that are used to create the intricate makeup designs, costumes, and accessories that bring the characters to life.

The makeup in Kathakali is an art form in itself, with a wide range of natural materials being used to create the distinctive colors and designs. For example, the red color is created using cinnabar (Mercuric Sulfide), a mineral found underground. The green color is made by adding *_Indigofera tinctoria_* (True Indigo) to Manaola (*_Real Gar_*). The black color is prepared by burning sesame oil (*_Sesamum indicum_*), and the medium for all these colors is coconut oil and water. Kathakali's use of natural



resources extends beyond makeup to include the use of plants and minerals in costumes and accessories. For example, the dye of the *Cassia auriculata* (Chenchilyam Marut) plant is added to create a sense of lightning and spiciness. The use of natural resources in Kathakali is a powerful reminder of the importance of living in harmony with nature. It is not only a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of its artists but also a celebration of nature's bounty. By harnessing the power of nature, Kathakali creates a visual spectacle that is both awe-inspiring and thought-provoking. As we marvel at the intricate makeup designs and elaborate costumes, we are reminded of the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

The Art of Decoration in Kathakali: A Treasure Trove of Natural Wonders

In the second stage of the *Nepathya*, decoration includes clothes and ornaments, which are crafted using a variety of natural materials. The fabrics used in Kathakali are mostly cotton clothes, which provide a comfortable and flexible base for the elaborate costumes. In addition, the *chamara* shirt and beard made from the hair of the tail of the *chamari* deer (*Rusa unicolor*) are used exclusively. These natural materials are not only sustainable but also add a unique texture and authenticity to the costumes. The *Kumizh* tree (*Bassia butyracea*) plays a vital role in the creation of Kathakali ornaments. The tree's unique properties make it an ideal material for delicate carvings and intricate designs. Unlike other trees, such as bamboo (*Bambusa bambos*), the *Kumizh* tree can be reduced to a maximum thickness, allowing for precise carvings and ornate details.

The decorations on the ornaments are also crafted using natural materials. The wax used to color the ornaments is made from the wax of the small palm tree (*Cocos nucifera*). This natural wax is not only sustainable but also allows for a unique blending of colors, creating a distinctive aesthetic. Even the glue used to attach the decorations is made from natural materials, ensuring that the ornaments remain intact and vibrant. The head decorations in Kathakali are a true marvel of craftsmanship and creativity. The hair crown used by the green-haired characters, the *kuttichamaram* of the red-bearded characters, and the hair used by the white-bearded characters are all crafted using natural materials. The peacock's shell, stem, and eye, as well as the skin of a special type of beetle (*Stromatium barbatum*), are all used to create these intricate decorations. The hair of the Kathakali dancer is made of jute (*Corchorus olitorius*), a natural fiber that is both durable and versatile. This emphasis on natural fibers is not only a testament to the ingenuity of Kathakali artists but also a celebration of the natural world.

**Conclusion:**

Kathakali has undergone significant changes over the years. While some of these changes have been driven by modernity, others have been influenced by the availability of new materials and technologies (Kaimal, 2009, p. 123). In this section, we'll explore some of the key changes that have taken place in Kathakali, and how they reflect the evolving nature of this ancient art form. One of the most significant changes in Kathakali has been the shift from traditional to modern materials. For example, the woven cloths that were once used to create the distinctive Kathakali costumes have been replaced by plastic bags (Ram Mohan, 2003, p. 156). Similarly, the Vandode, a traditional ornament, has been replaced by sequins (Kaimal, 2009, p. 145). Even the stones used in Kathakali decorations have been replaced by plastic stones (Keli Vigyan Kairali, 2010, p. 20)

In addition to the changes in materials, there have also been changes in craftsmanship and techniques. For example, earlier, the peel and silver beads were sewn together, but today, they are glued using modern adhesives like Fevicol (Kaimal, 2009, p. 167). This change has been driven by the scarcity of skilled stitchers and the need for faster and more efficient techniques. Over time, the materials used in Angarachana have undergone significant changes, reflecting the evolving nature of Kathakali. Notably, Chailyam, a traditional material, has been replaced with red oxide, highlighting the adaptability of Kathakali artists and their willingness to incorporate new materials and technologies into the art form, ensuring its continued relevance and appeal (Ram Mohan, 2003, p. 180).

The changes that have taken place in Kathakali are in line with the principles outlined in Natyashastra. According to Natyashastra, artists should use the materials and techniques available to them to create their art (Bharata Muni, 1987, p. 234). This principle has guided the evolution of Kathakali, as artists have adapted to new materials and technologies while preserving the traditional essence of the art form. The evolution of Kathakali reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of this ancient art form. While traditional techniques and materials have been preserved, modern materials and technologies have been adopted to reflect the changing times (Kaimal, 2009, p. 200). As Kathakali continues to evolve, it remains an important part of India's cultural heritage, inspiring new generations of artists and audiences alike.



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