



## Ashtadasha Vadyam's and Temple Arts of Kerala

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### Abstract:

Kerala – The God's Own Country – is filled with the presence of music, dance, musical instruments, temple arts and temple rituals. The history of various traditional art forms rests in the soil of Kerala. About eighteen musical instruments are known as 'Kshetra Vadyam'. It includes 'Deva vadyam' and 'Asura Vadyam' from which the distinct place for 'Chenda' can be acknowledged by observing where it is present. It might be 'Chenda's resonance that make the seventeen 'Ashtadasha Vadyam's to below the 'Chenda'. Some of the musical instruments which are being used for Pooja rituals in temples are also being used for some classical dance forms in Kerala. The study of such musical instruments and the classical dance forms associated to it are the foundation of this journal. Some musical instruments are used only outside the temple and some are used inside the temple only. 'Sopana Sangeetham' is one of the popular among 'Kshetra Sangeetham'. Only one musical instrument is used in 'Sopana Sangeetham' ie Idakka. Idakka is a musical instrument which is inevitable in 'Mohiniyattam' concert. Idakka is only used in 'Kathakali' when female role is presented. The 'Chenda' is an inevitable musical instrument in 'Kathakali'. Altogether, five musical instruments in 'Pakkamaelam' are used when 'Kathakali' is staged from which four are 'Kshetra Vadyam's, 'Chenda', 'Idakka', 'Madhalam', 'Chengila' and the one which is excluded in Kshetra Vadyam's is 'Ilathalam'. In 'Krishnattam', which is staged only in the surroundings of the Temple.'Idakka', 'Thoppi Madhalam', 'Sudha Madhalam', and "Chengila' are borrowed from 'Kshetra Vadyam,'s. 'Mizhav' is a Kshetra Vadyam which is very important musical instrument for staging Kerals's unique and traditional art forms, 'Koodiyattam' and Nangyar Koothu'. Other than 'Mizhav', Idakka, Kuzhithalam, Conch, and Karumkuzhal are the musical instruments in Koodiyattam and Koothu.

## Introduction:

In Kerala, the art forms of music and dance are interlinked with its temples. The customs and rituals in temples are accompanied with dance and music. It might be because of this, that many instruments in Kshetra Vadyam's are seen being used in dance forms too. As the temple rituals are linked with mythology. The theme of classical dance forms is linked with myths and legends. It is because of my unrestrained passion for the Kshetra Vadyam's that I choose "Ashtadasa Vadyam's and Temple Arts of Kerala" as my first journal by being merely a classical dance student. I am sure that I will not be able to give a complete description about Kshetra Vadyam's through my journal. However, I hope that I will be able to draw and exhibit at least an outline of it.

## Ashtadasaha vadyam's:

I hereby state about Ashtadasa Vadyam's on the context of the knowledge obtained from Shri Thrikkampuram Krishnankutty Marar.

### Uruttu Chenda

It can be qualified as first or nineteenth in Ashtadasa Vadyam's. It is first because of its exceptional sound and feasibility. It is used in Thayambaka, Melam and especially in Kathakali. Earlier, different types of Uruttu chenda were there. It was based on the size and sound of the chenda.

### 1. Achan Chenda:

It is a musical instrument for the rituals in the temples of Central Travancore. It is used for Shivel and Shri Bhootha Bali. It's half the size of Veekan Chenda.

### 2. Idakka:

It comes under Thugal vadyams. It is being used in Sopana Sangeetham and dance forms like Kathakali and Mohiniyattam.

### 3. Udukku:

It comes under Thugal vadyams. It is being used in Ayyappan Pattu.

### 4. Thappu:

It is a musical instrument which has one side covered with thick leather. It has a similarity with Ganjira.

### 5. Thudi:

It is used in Valluvanad region for the traditional art forms like Poothan, Thira, Aandi and Nayadi.

### 6. Maram:

It is an important ritual instrument. It was the first of all musical instruments. Sound with the combination of Chenda, Chengila and Thimila. The above told instruments should sound at the same time when the hand is struck on the Maram. It means that Maram's sound is that much great. It is being used in vadyam traditions called 'Pani' in different types of kalashams that is an important ceremony in temples and on the days of 'Ulsava Bali' which is an important day in

festivals. The one who handles the Maram should follow all the fasting which the temple priest performs. Pani is of two kinds; Trithaala and Trichur. The pani should be struck always by facing the Deva.

#### 7. Chengila:

It is an instrument which is the most used among metal instruments. It is a rule that Chengila should get rhythm with Chenda.

#### 8. Thoppi Madhalam:

Shudha Madhalam was formed from Thoppi Madhalam. Thoppi Madhalam is not in use today.

#### 9. Padaham/Perumbara/Bheri:

It was being used before evening inside the fort in regions like Thrippunithura and Thiruvananthapuram. Bheri is an instrument of skin which is placed on the floor.

#### 10. Nakara:

Nakara is a percussion instrument. It is a festival instrument mostly used in South Indian Hindu temples.

#### 11. Timila:

It is an instrument which has only one part of Tabla.

#### 12. Damanam:

It is hanged on the shoulder and struck with both hands. In Guruvayoor, Damanam is being used in accompaniment with Thakil. It is also being used Thiruvilwamala.

#### 13. Damaru:

It is a circular instrument like Idakka which does not have a jeevakol. This instrument is not in use today.

#### 14. Karadika:

It is in the form of Achan Chenda and its exterior of the circle is tied with a thin wire. It is hung on the shoulder and struck with both hands. It is being used in regions like Thrikkodithanam and Changanassery.

#### 15. Mizhavu:

It is an important instrument in Koodiyattam. It comes from the North Malabar region known as Muzhakunnu. Earlier, the instrument was made of clay.

#### 16. Anakam:

The instrument is struck on both sides together by sitting on an elephant for the arrival of the King.

#### 17. Pullorkudam:

It is an instrument which is struck and sung by the pullor women for the pullor song.

#### 18. Onavillu:

Onavillu is a simple, short, bow-shaped musical instrument. Its name may come from Onam, a festival in Kerala where the instrument is used in dances, and villu, which means 'bow' in Malayalam.

## Idakka:

An Idakka is a musical instrument that is Malayalam's own or Malayalam could be proud of. Idakka is different from the musical instruments around the world because it is not kept on the floor. Usually, Idakka is hanged in the temple's when it's not in use; between<sup>1</sup> the sky and Earth, maybe because of that Idakka got its name. It is said that the musical instruments were born during the Siva Tandava. The myths also say that the name Idakka came into existence because it was formed from the Dakka or Damaru which was tied on the Trident of Paramashiva. It is also said that when Banasura, a devotee of Shiva asked for Kadumthudi for his pooja, Shiva responded by saying that he can't give but he would create a musical instrument which is equivalent to it and thus emerged the Idakka.

It is the main musical instrument of Kottipadi Seva, which is Sopana Sangeetham. Only Idakka is being used in Sopana Sangeetham. It is a temple music to impress the Devis and Devas by striking the Idakka and chanting hymns. Sopanam refers to the steps in front of the Sreekovil. As the hymns are chanted by standing in front of it, it is called Sopana Sangeetham. Ganapathy Kottu is a tradition which can be only seen in Kshetra vadyams. As the music in dance forms are linked with ragas, Sopana Sangeetham is also arranged in ragas. The ragas which are excluded in the 72 Melakarta ragas such as, Desakshi, Puranir, Shrikanthi, Nalatha, Malahari, Bhupali, Bauli, Antari, Antali, Malavi are being used in Sopana Sangeetham. There is no relation between the Malahari used in the Classical music with the Malahari used in the Sopana Sangeetham. The ragas which are chanted at the dawn are soft and the ragas which are chanted at the dusk are dense. Idakka is a musical instrument as well as a rhythmical instrument. It has a very close relation with the Kshetra poojas. The priest present the holy water and flowers in rhythm of the Idakka in the Kshetram.

The two circular sides of the Idakka represent Brahma and Vishnu and the wooden part represents Paramashiva. It is secured by passing the string through its six holes. The six holes are considered to be the six sciences (Vedangas). The hangings hung on the Idakka are called Poduppu. They are 64 in number. They represent 64 art forms. The Poduppu is tied with four 'jeevakol's. They represent the four Vedas. The strands which are tied on both sides of the rod denote the Living soul and the Supreme soul.

It can be understood from the ancient stories that Mohiniyattam was a dance with structural pulchritude of women which anyone desires. Mohiniyattam became an independent form from the Dasiyattam form along with the development of Malayalam language. The costume of Mohiniyattam has all the originality of the Kerala culture. Idakka is being used among the other musical instruments in Mohiyattam which is one of the indigenous art forms of Kerala.

Idakka's delicate sound increases the beauty of the Lasya dance, Mohiniyattam. Idakka was being used in the Mohiniyattam concerts till the end. Nowadays, the use of musical instruments changes in accordance with the nature of the characters. Since Idakka is a thala vadyam as well as a sruthi vadyam, it is played in consonance with the dancer's steps and the singers's chants. In accordance with some characters, only Idakka is being used without Mridangam in Mohiniyattam performance. Musical instruments like Mridangam, Madhalam, Flute, Veena, Kuzhithalam, is also being

<sup>1</sup> 'between' substitutes the Malayalam word 'idayil'

used apart from Idakka. In Kerala's another art form; Koodiyattam, Idakka is being used along with the other musical instruments. Idakka is also being used in a dance form, known as Nangiar koothu.

Even though Idakka doesn't have a great role in Kathakali which is Kerala's another ancient art form, it is mandatorily used when female roles are performed in the stage especially if the context of the storyline emphasizes on Rasas of both love and compassion. Chenda will be in complete silence during this period. Idakka is never used when the context of the storyline emphasizes on Rasa of anger. In some situations, Idakka should be played along with Madhalam according to the importance of the 'mudra'. In some places, Kathakali is being performed without Idakka. Idakka is also being used along with other musical instruments in the art form known as Krishnaattam which is completely subdued in Kerala's temples. Idakka is used with Mizhavu in Koodiyattam and Nangiar koothu.

### **Mizhavu:**

Mizhavu is one of the most ancient musical instrument; Mizhavu is also called as Mridangam (Mrith means soil and Angam means structure). Mizhavu is an important instrument in Koodiyattam, Nangiar koothu, Viruthi koothu, Brahmachari koothu, Parakkum koothu, Mathavilasam koothu, Anguriangam koothu, Chutala koothu and Mandrangam koothu. Mizhavu is used along with some methodized temple rituals. Since it is a musical instrument that is maintained on the basis of Shodasa Samskara, there is a rite when Mizhavu is unused, it is incinerated. The temple priest would invoke the Living Soul in the Mizhavu and enter it in the new Mizhavu: it is the reason why Mizhavu is considered to be prominent among other musical instruments. Mizhavu is placed in the Mizhavana (a specially made box to keep the Mizhavu) inside the Kuthavasthanam (specially arranged place to keep the musical instruments in the 'Koothambalam').

Mizhavu is an important musical instrument in Nangiar koothu and Koodiyattam. Nangiar koothu is an art form which has a great emphasis on enactment. The Mizhavu artist gives more support for the storyline. The only heroine Kalpalathika performs every character in Nangiar koothu. This custom of dance is called Pakarnnaattam. Nangiar koothu is also a dance form in which only one artist performs in the stage entirely. Its plot is mainly mythical stories like history of Sri Rama or Sri Krishna. Even though Triputa talam is used in episodes of the storyline, Mizhavu is often played in Eka talam.

"Hasathi hasa yethi ithi vidhooshaka" 'to laugh and to make laugh' is the character in Koodiyattam's duty. The aim of Koodiyattam is to guide from wrong path to the right path. Koodiyattam is the Chaturvidha Abhinaya traditions; that is, the combination of the four types of acting traditions such as expression of the limbs, expression of speech, costume and scene and true expression. Koodiyattam is one of the ancient art form in the whole world. Koodiyattam is the act and perform Sanskrit drama tradition written by great poets like Bhavabuthi, Sakthibhadran, Kalidasa, and Sri Krishna by using Navarasas, 24 mudras like Pataka, Mudrakhyam, Katakam etc, 20 ragas such as Shreekanthi, Paurali, Kaishiki, Veladhuli, Dukkagandharam etc, and 7 talams like Eka talam, Dhruva talam, Triputa talam etc. Kooth and Koodiyattam are the art forms which were employed by Chakyar, Nangiar and Nambiar community and which only Brahmins enjoyed. Padmasree Mani Madhava Chakyar, Padmasree Narayanan Nambiar, Painkulam Raman Chakyar Ashan etc played a major role in bringing Koodiyattam within the temple boundaries to the outside world. Koodiyattam is being

taught as a subject since 1965. Along with Mizhavu, musical instruments like Kuzhithalam, Idakka, Kurumkuzhal, Conch etc. are used in Koodiyattam. In Nangiar koothu, musical instruments like Kuzhithalam and Idakka are used along with Mizhavu.

### **Chenda:**

The Chenda is an instrument which is used widely in Kerala, Tulu Nadu in Karnataka states of India. Chenda is a cylindrical percussion instrument which has a length of two feet and a diameter of one foot. Both the ends of the Chenda are covered with the 'Chenda Vattam' (usually made with animal's skin i.e. cow's skin). The sling of the Chenda is put around the neck of the percussionist so that it hangs vertically. Even though both sides of the Chenda can be used, only one side is consistently struck. The percussionist strikes the upper parchment using two sticks. Chenda can be classified into different categories namely, Veekku Chenda, Uruttu Chenda, Muri Chenda etc.

Chenda is indeed the life of the art form, Kathakali. Kathakali is the only visual art form in which the Asura vadyam, Chenda is used. The mudras came into life only with the support of Chenda. Chenda should be struck by giving importance to the movement of the mudra over bhava. Chenda will be played in accordance with the same rhythm of Kalasam i.e. if the Kalasam is in Chembada talam, Chenda too will be in Chempada talam. If no significant mudra is shown, Chenda should be struck in accordance with Kathakali movement. Hence the percussionist of Chenda should know every aspect of the Kathakali. Chengila, Elathalam, Madhalam, Idakka are also being used in Kathakali other than Chenda.

### **Madhalam (Shudha Madhalam and Toppi Madhalam):**

Madhalam is a heavy percussion instrument made out of the wood of a jackfruit tree. Its two circular ends are made out of leather which is struck to play. Madhalam produces different sounds on its each side. It is hung around the waist of the percussionist and it is performed by standing. There are two kinds of Madhalam such as Shudha Madhalam and Toppi Madhalam. It is also said that after the arrival of Shudha Madhalam, Toppi Madhalam disappeared. In earlier days, Shudha Madhalam was being used for Mohiniyattam. Nowadays, Mridangam is used instead of Shudha Madhalam. Shudha Madhalam is a musical instrument which deserves the same significance as Chenda, in Kathakali. After the Purappadu in Kathakali, there is a custom called Melapadam. There won't be any vesham in 'Arangu', only Melam will be present. Melapadam is also a chance for the percussionist of Chenda and Madhalam to show off their talent. Chenda will not be used when female role is performed at Arangu. Madhalam is struck along with Idakka at the Kalasam of female roles. Hence the percussionist of the Madhalam should also know every aspect of Kathakali. Shudha Madhalam and Toppi Madhalam are important musical instruments in Krishnanattam which is entirely a temple art form. Only Shudha Madhalam is in Kathakali.



## Chengila:

The lead singer (known as Ponnani bhagavathar or Ponnani singer) in Kathakali will sing in accordance with the rhythm of Chengila. The singer which holds the Elathalam (known as Singidi or Singidi singer) will sing while keeping up the rhythm. Managing the Arangu according to the rhythm is also the task of the lead singer. Chengila and Elathalam are being used in Krishnanattam just as in Kathakali. Earlier, it was sung in a same way without understanding the Raga in Krishnanattam but the masters (acharya) of music like Kottakkal Vasudevan Nedungadi, Kala Mandalam Nilakandan Nambisan trained them to sing in tune. (The Acharya's are now no more alive)

## Conclusion:

We have a decent civilization which is accepted anywhere. Variety in languages, caste, religion, rituals, practices, and art forms... When all these things keep the Indian civilization on the lead, the little state of Kerala has a major share in it. Maybe because all the art forms were linked with the temple rituals and were only performed inside the premises of the temple, many of the art forms are not existent today. As a result of hard efforts of many prominent personalities many art forms were brought out the temple boundaries. It is because of it that many ancient art forms still exist today with some changes. Some among the Ashtadasa vadyams are not in use today maybe because their chance of usage has declined or there are no prominent experts to maintain them as needed. If not, it maybe because the current generation's disinterest in ancient art forms. If there is no one to practice, any art form may disappear completely.

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## Glossary:

- Kshetra Vadyam – Temple musical instruments
- Deva vadyam – Musical Instruments constructed by Gods
- Asura Vadyam - Musical Instruments constructed by demons
- Ashtadasha Vadyam's – Eighteen musical instruments
- Pakkamaelam – Group of musicians in a dance concert
- Thayambaka - Solo "Chenda" performance
- Melam - It is a group performance using 'Chenda' as main instrument, supported by 'Veekkan chenda', 'Ilathalam', 'Kombu' & 'Kurumkuzhal'.
- Shiveli - Shiveli is also known as Sri Bootha Bali. It is daily ritual, is nothing but a temple procession of deity held on the temple premises in the morning and in the late evening
- Thugal vadyams - Musical instrument covered with leather
- Sopana Sangeetham - One of the traditional music that is being performed near the "sopanam"(steps to Srikovil).
- Ayyappan Pattu - It is also known as 'Shasthampattu / Udukku pattu'. Most of the songs are related to Lord Ayyappa, but there are other songs too. Performed by group of artist, using 'Udukku' as the supporting instrument.
- Valluvanad - A place in Kerala.
- Kalashams - A metal / Mud pot with a large base and small mouth, large enough to hold a coconut used in Pooja
- Pani - Percussion in Temple as part of the ritual.
- Ulsava Bali - Utsava bali', one of the most important rituals of the annual festival being held at the Temple
- Jeevakol - 4 Nos. of Carved Wooden pieces on 'Idakka' on which the woolen balls are hanged. Pullor - People belongs a particular community in Hinduism.
- Tandava - Tandava, also known as Tāṇḍava natyam, is a divine dance performed by the Hindu gods.
- Kadumthudi - A rhythm instrument used in Art forms like 'Thottam pattu', 'Kalampattu'...etc.
- Pooja - A ritual in honor of the gods, performed either at home or in the Temple
- Poojari - Priest who is responsible to conduct the rituals in Temple.
- Thala vadyam - Rhythm Instrument
- Sruthi vadyam - An instrument that supports & sustains the melody of another instrument or singer by providing a continuous harmonic bourdon in a particular octave.



- Shodasa Samskara - 16 Rites of Passage : Garbhadana, Pumsavana, Simantonoyana, Jatakarma, Namakarana, Nishkramana, Annaprashana, Karnavedha, Chudakarana, Vidyarambha, Upanayana, Samavartana, Vivaha, Panchamahayagna, Vanaprastha & Antyeshti
- Vesham – Character
- Arangu – Stage

