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Sevaiyattam - A Konangi Dance

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ABSTRACT

This paper is stuffed with information about *Sevaiyattam* which is an ethnic folk art of Kamabalathu nayakar. The main purpose of this paper is to analyses the structure of the *Sevaiyattam* in detail.

Our south India is very rich in culture and tradition. Folk dance is highly bonded with our culture and festival times virtually dance also. Folk dance is a part of life. The origin of folk dance is unknown. The people performed to impress their happiness. In the village folk dances are performed on every occasion from birth to death. Which has a full energy? Folk dances differ from place to place. In Tamil Nadu itself there are enormous folk dances. This is customized in their own state topographical or ethnic region.

An ethnic folk dance is a dance which characterizes a particular cultural group of people. This paper explains about the *sevaiattam* which is an ethnic art form of *Kambalathu Nayakkar* who migrated from Andhra Pradesh and settled in Tamil Nadu. In this paper I have explained about the history, origin, dance movements and instruments of *Sevaiyattam*.

KEYWORD: Ethnic folk art *Sevaiyattam*, *Konangi*, *Komali*, *Kambalathu Nayakar*, *Devathuthumbi*.

INTRODUCTION

Sevaiyattam is a folk-dance form of *Kambalathu nayakargal*. Their residence was seen in Thirunelveli, Madurai, Salem, Trichy, Theni, Dhindukal, Ramanadhapuran, , Dharmapuri and Coimbatore districts of Tamil Nadu. *Kambalathu Nayakars* are one of the oldest ethnic groups still practicing their traditional and ritual dance forms, which depict the myth of Ramayana and Lord Vishnu.

During the 11th century, these peoples migrated from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to Tamil Nadu because the Telugu King ruled Tamil Nadu. In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the people struggled to survive when they migrated to Tamil Nadu, but they survived. In Sanskrit, the term Nayak means hero, and they used to call the soldier's captain. Later, Nayak became a Telugu's cast name as "*Kambalathu nayakar*". There are so many versions of this name. Some of them are saying that when they are giving judgment for any case, they use to sit on *Kambalam* (carpet) may be because of this reason they got this name. From another point of view, it is believed that they are born from "*Kan pazham*" (lemon), and they are called *Kanpazathar*. Then, day by day, the name has changed to "*Kambalathu nayakar*"¹.

From another point of view, in the northern district near the Tungabhadra River, there is a place called *Kambali*. It is believed that just because of their city name, *Kambali*, maybe that group of people received this name *Kambalathu nayakar*, and their ancestor was called *Bellari*. In his book Castes and Tribes of South India, Edgar Thurston mentions that *Kambalam* is a family name of nine caste peoples: *Anupam*, *Kaappiliyan*, *Thottiyam*, *Sakiliyan*, *kurumbar*, *kummarar*, *urumikkaran*, and *mangalavar*. Among all, *Thottiyam* can also be called *Kambalathar*. Although there are many reasons for the origin of the *Kambalathar* name, the word *Kambalathar* belongs to the Telugu Nayakas, and day by day, it became a title name for them.

ETHNIC ARTS OF KAMBALATHAR

Around the world, there are tremendous and enormous dances. It can be any type of dance. Some of the dances have their ethnicity, followed by a particular ritualistic tradition. Kapilavatsayana says that "When the group of people belongs to the same religion and caste peoples are living together are rich in folk arts"². There are many ethnic arts that can only be performed by certain ethnic groups. *Kambalathu nayakar* has their distinct culture and own ethnic dance forms with their style and tradition³.

- *Devarattam*
- *Sevaiyattam*
- *Palaveda attam*

Among these three, we are going to see the *Sevaiyattam* in detail.

¹ Muttaiyah .O, *Sevaiyattam*, nattupura nigazhkalai aiyvu, published by gandhigrama gramiya university, dhindukal, printed by S. P. Sinivasan, April - 2002

² Thurston. E, *Castes and Tribes Of Southern India* vol - 7, published by Cosmo publications -1915

³ O. Muthaiyah, *Devarattam*, published by Kavya publication, first publications is on December - 2003

In the performance, the *Kambalathu nayakkar* speciality is they will have their own creativity they perform freely without any hesitate it can be any character. They will live under the mountain region because they are living together. They all belong to a single group only of togetherness, *Kambalathu Nayakkar* can save these ritualistic and traditional dancers. When studying the arts in a particular ethnic cultural background, one can easily understand the origin, history, development, artistic expression techniques and individuality of the art⁴.

ETYMOLOGY

Sevaiyattam is an ethnic art form of *kambalathu nayakar*. This *Sevaiyattam* also known as *sevaattalu*, *servai attam*. The etymology root word of *Sevaiyattam* is *sevai* + *attam*; the word *sevai* means one who does service to God. *Attam* means dance. This dance form is mainly devoted to the Lord *Vishnu* or *Thirumal*. It is a *konangi* dance form. The village folk person who comes under the Nayak community will perform these dances. Although the same community performs *Sevaiyattam* and *devarattam*, there are more differences in the steps, songs and concepts.

MYTHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF SEVAIYATTAM

According to the mythological origin, the Trinities Lord *Shiva*, *Vishnu* and *Brahma* all of them were doing the duties, at the time one day Lord *Brahma* performed penance to receive fifth head as boom from Lord *Shiva* the end of the penance Lord *Brahma* received fifth head he was pleased with his new head, and he forgot his duty. Now Lord *Shiva* and *Brahma* had five heads and goddess *Parvathi* was confused. She went to Lord *Shiva* and said I could not find the difference between you and *Brahma*, so kindly remove his one head with your nails. Lord *Shiva* also fulfilled goddesses *paravathi*'s wishes, but unfortunately, *Bramah*'s head was stuck with Lord *shiva*'s hand. He didn't know what to do. Goddess *Parvathi* called *Maha Vishnu* and asked him to help Lord *Shiva* from *Brahma*. *Maha Vishnu* accepted her request.

*“panai marathapola kaiyum kalum parunga, pacharisi pola pillai parunga
Kuchi veedu pola thalaiyil kullaviyai parunga⁵”*

And then he wore ornament as four *Vedas*, on the head cap for colours he used six shastras, for *salangai* he used 64 arts and 96 philosophies as his disciples. Using all things, he dressed as a buffoon and performed

⁴ Muttaiyah .O, *Sevaiyattam* , nattupura nigazhkalai aiyvu, published by gandhigrama gramiya university, dhindukal, printed by S. P. Sinivasan, April - 2002

⁵ Kanagasabai . T, *Nattupura Attakalaigal Andrum Indrum*, published by Nigazhkalaithurai, Bharathidasan University, Trichy.

comical dances in front of Lord *Shiva* with *devathudumbi parai*, *jekandi tala* and *kanjira* as an orchestra. Watching Lord *Vishnu* 's *konangi* (buffoon) dance, *Brahma* 's head started to laugh, and it fell from Lord *shiva* 's hand. Shiv felt so happy that he bowed Maha *Vishnu* and went to *Kailash*. Because of these reasons, in spite of serving Maha, *Vishnu kambalathu Nayakkar* is performing *Sevaiyattam* in a comical dance manner.

In Tamilnadu, not only *Kambalathar* are performing *Sevaiyattam* apart from the other caste peoples also performing these dances. How are they performed? How is it structured? By knowing this only, we can compare *Sevaiyattam* and know about the speciality of *kambalathar Sevaiyattam* .

KURUMBHAR SEVAIYATTAM

Kurumbhar peoples are performing *Sevaiyattam* in the Trichy district. This team has different names. They are *Deiyvakoothu*, and *Thonmai koothu*. *Kurumbhar* peoples worship Lord *Veerabhadra* as their family deities; they believe that God *Veerabhadra* is an incarnation of Lord *Shiva*. While performing *Sevaiyattam* , they use *thappu*, *Jalra*, *Kilukilupu* and flute as their orchestra.

COSTUMES

They wear a turban on the head and fix white feathers on the turban. They apply ash and *kumkum* on the forehead. The colour of the shirt which they wear while performing are red, blue, green, from these they will wear any one colour at the bottom they wear trousers which match the shirt colour and on the waist they use to tie a long cloth among the cloth they tie a leather belt which was decorated by beads they wear anklet bells on the ankle, along with the *kurumbhar sevai attam* performers. A *konangi* (clown) will also perform, wear multi color costumes, and perform a comical dance with a stick.

SONGS

Veerabhadreshwara songs are frequently performed in *Kurumbhar sevai attam*. Along this, they sang *Pancha Pandava Vanavasam*, *Manmathan* story and songs on *Natrajan*. According to the song, the performers will perform in straight lines and circles and opposite lines like this. Moreover, they perform ten types of dances. The speciality of this dance is that they perform like a lamb fighting, and it is played in a way where two pretend to be lambs and take turns fighting. Totally six to seven members will perform this fighting sequence⁶.

⁶ Marudhadhurai. R, Tamilaga Nattupura Vazhipattu Koothukal, Aruna printers, Musiri -1993

DHARMAPURI SEVAIYATTAM

During the festival time in Dharmapuri district, the *vanniyar* caste peoples perform *seviyattam* in *Ethilamalaik kaattur*, *poonguruthi saanthamalai*, *beemandappalli*, and *kottaipatti* villages. They perform in *puratasi* month third Saturday. Only men will perform this dance. There is no age limit to perform. Including the orchestra, a total of thirty members are performing this *Sevaiyattam*.

COSTUME

The costume of Dharmapuri *Sevaiyattam* is unique. They wear eight yazh dhoti and the same colour shirt and trousers. They put shawl on the shoulders like multiple signs and wear white turbans. Forty brass bows are attached to the turban. Fifteen peacock feathers are tied on a stick, then to the turban, and some hang five hundred peacock feathers on the dhoti and wrist. They have a stick on their hands and anklets on their ankle. They apply *namam* on the forehead. Generally, there are twelve steps they will perform first in a circle; then they perform first in circles, then three lines again they will perform in the circle with Dandu sticks in their hands. They perform this dance as *Dandia*. But there is no reference regarding *komali* in the Dharmapuri *Sevaiyattam*.

KAMBALATHAR SEVAI ATTAM

Kambalathar Sevaiyattam is performed by *konangi* whose name is “*Thoppai koothadi*”. They have believed that *konangi* (clown) is an incarnation of Maha Vishnu because of these reasons the *konangi* is a leading dancer in *kambalathar sevai attam*. *Konangi*, *komali*, and *dhaseri* are the names of “*thoppai koothadi*.” Along with *komali*, seven or nine supportive dancers perform. *konangi* will sing and perform in the center point of the circle. The supportive dancers will perform around the *konangi*. The audience also sings the *sevai* or service song along with the *konangi*.

It is believed that this dance was first performed in a town called Lakain fort. In those days if there is any festival and cultural occasion *Sevaiyattam* is performed and during the performance it is believed that an old man from *Lakain* court comes and does the ceremonies then he will start the *Sevaiyattam*. *Dattaiya Swamy* temple is built in memory of this great man. Nowadays also *sevaiyattam* performers will worship him then they start to perform.

COSTUMES FOR KONANGI

They wear a long bent conical cap on the head. They knot their hair and decorate with flowers. They apply *namam* on the forehead and draw red and white swipes around the eyes. A mustache and beard made on all over tribes they arrange cowrie shells as a truth, a short or long sleeve loosen blue or black shirt with a big

belly. These are the *aharya* of “*thoppai koothadi*”. This appearance itself creates *hasya*. He also sings and dances comically⁷.

COSTUMES FOR CO DANCERS

Now see the costume of supportive dances. They wear silk with golden lace turban; they apply *namam* on the forehead, loose shirt with long *angavastra*, multicoloured long and wide skirt, on the skirt they will wear a waist cloth and a long cloth in the front side—a bunch of ankle bells on both feet. The costumes of the upper part in masculine, and the lower part is feminine. The “*koothar*” people will wear written down skirt and shirt *angavsatra*, waist belt, turban with tassels costumes. This costume is more similar to *Sevaiyattam* .

SEVAIYATTAM SONGS

In *Sevaiyattam* , the song plays a primary role because *Sevaiyattam* is mainly based on songs. The theme of the songs is all about the incarnation of Lord *Vishnu Ramayanam*. It is considered one of Lord *Vishnu*’s worship methods in any *Vaishnav* temple. During worship, *Sevaiyattam* dancers performed about the rising deity in the temple. In each temple they perform, they sing a particular song about the rising deity. The songs in the name of deities are also called *Perumal, Sandraya, Perumal sevaipattu, Ramayan sevaipattu*. These songs are at the end of the performance. The *Sevaiyattam* songs are sung in Tamil and Telugu languages, but most of the songs are sung in Telugu. Apart from the deity song, many other songs like *jamindarpattu komalipattu* were also performed.

KOMALI PATTU

Song -1

Thananey naanananey thanananaaney thaney

Naanaaney naanaaney thaananannaaney

Pacharisipola nalla pallapa arunga – anga

Paangaana komaliku vayaparunga (thannaaney)

Komalik kondapola koondhalapparunga – andha

Koondhappanach charampola thadiyaparunga (thannaaney⁸).....

⁷ Gunasekaran K.A , Nilagiri Malayin Makkal Attangal, Tamil University, Tanjavur - 1984

⁸ Singer- sennama nayakkar, age 75, Kottaipatti kamatchipuram, Dindugal dist, 5.4.2000

Song - 2

Aranganadhar sevaipattu (telugu)

Nannana naanaane naanaane naane

Naanaane naanaane naanane naane

Rangaiyaa rangu raavaiyya sami

Mammudhu leleti maaranga sami (nannaana)

Seeranga raayaalaa maraanga sami

Seethambulu aaderu maadhasiriyaiyaa (nannaana)

Pamulu sevvali raavaiyaa rangu

Puthulu maamindha kalakavaala sami (nannana)⁹

Meaning of the song

Oh, *Aranganadha*, the incarnation of Lord *Vishnu*, to his playing on the swing! Our family deity who's living in *Thiruvarangam* we should come and see in the earth, our bhakta's *Sevaiyattam*. It would help if you gave us wisdom. You should come and make us happy at the middling time. You should come and dance to the *devatudumbi* music. It would help if you came and performed how we are dancing with ankle bells. It would help if you gave more strength to our legs to perform. You should come and have fun listening to the music of *sevaipalagai* and *semakalam*. The meaning of the song is to invite *Aranganatha* to witness the *Sevaiyattam*

INSTRUMENTS

Since *Sevaiyattam* is performed based on the song, according to that song, the performers also play instruments like *devathunthubi*, *sevapalagai*, *semakalam* and *jaldra*. The performance begins with the *devathudumbi* instrument. Once the clown starts to sing, the *devathudumbi* musicians stop to perform the music¹⁰.

CONCLUSION

Sevaiyattam is a *konangi* dance which is considered as a service to Lord *Thirumal*. Nowadays the traditional dance and music are performing very less in the festivals and other occasions, because the peoples are started to searching a new things day by day just to make them happy the artist needs to change the originality

⁹ Singer – chinnakalai, age 50 sevaiyatta komali, thambinayakambatti, Theni dist, 19.10.1995

¹⁰ Kalidhas . S, Kattunayagan varalaru, Kalaidhas printers, Rajapalayam 2000

of the performance, but in some places especially when it coming for an ethnic group of dance the originality will never change for example this *Sevaiattam*, during the festival time it is performed as an inseparable unit in *Vaishnava* temples. Even today it is performing as a very important form of worship. As an audience or an art lover we should support them to bring back the originality of the dance form and the dancers should encourage and support them, because they dedicated their whole life for this art we should respect and help them to survive.

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