

**AN ETHNIC FOLK DANCE FORM OF KAMBALATHU
NAYAKAR - SEVAIYATTAM**
Kala Velmurugan

ABSTRACT

This paper is stuffed with the information about Sevaiyattam which is an ethnic folk art of Kambalathu nayakar. The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the structure of the Sevaiyattam in detail. Our south India is very rich in culture and tradition. The folk dance is highly bonded with our culture and festival times virtually dances also. Folk dance is a part of life. The origin of folk dance is unknown. The people performed to express their happiness. In the village the folk dance are performed in every occasion from birth to death. This has a full energy. Folk dance is differing from place to place. In Tamil Nadu itself there are enormous folk dance are there. Which is customized in their own state topographical or ethnic region. A ethnic folk dance is a dance which characterizing of a particular culture group of people this paper is explain about the sevaiyattam which is an ethnic art form of Kambalathu Nayakar who migrated from Andhrapradesh and settled in Tamil Nadu in this paper I have explained about the history, origin, dance movements and instrument 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, Ramanadhapuram, Dharmapuri and Coimbatore districts of Tamil Nadu. Kambalathu Nayakars are one of the oldest ethnic groups still practising their traditional and ritual dance forms, which depict the myth of Ramayana and Lord Vishnu¹.

During the 11th century, these people migrated from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to Tamil Nadu² 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

¹Kanakasabai. T, Nattupura Attakalaigal Andrum Indrum, P - 45

² Thurston. E, Castes and Tribes Of Southern India, 1915 vol – 7, P - 148



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”³.

From another point of view that 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 Bellari⁴. In his book *Castes and Tribes of South India*, Edgar Thurston mentions that Kambalam is a family name of nine caste peoples: Anuppam, 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

In this world, there are tremendous and enormous dances. It can be any type of dance. Some of the dance has 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”⁵. There are large number of 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 tradition⁶.

- Devarattam
- Sevaiyattam
- Palaveda attam

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

In the performance, the Kambalathu nayakkar speciality is they will have the 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

³ Muthaiyah. O, Devarattam, 2003, P – 7-8

⁴ Kalidhas. S, Kattunayagan Varalaru, 2000, P - 21

⁵ Vatsayana Kapila, *Traditional Of Indian Folk Dance*, 1969, P - 25

⁶ Muttaiyah. O, Devarattam, 2003, P – 16 - 17



studying the arts in a particular ethnic cultural background, one can easily understand the origin, history, development, artistic expression techniques and individuality of the art⁷.

ETYMOLOGY

Sevaiyattam is an ethnic art form of kambalathu nayakkar. 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. 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 concepts⁸.

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 boon 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 of them had five heads goddess Parvathi was confused. She went to Lord Shiva said I could not find the difference between you and Brahma, so kindly remove his one head with your nails. Lord Shiva also fulfilled goddess's Parvathi's wishes, but unfortunately, Brahma's head was stuck with Lord Shiva's hand. He didn't know what to do⁹. Goddesses Parvathi called Maha Vishnu and asked him to help Lord Shiva from Brahma. Maha Vishnu accepted her request.

*"panai marathapola kaium kalum parunga, pacharisi pola pallaiparunga
Kuchi veedu pola thalaiyil kullaviyai parunga"¹⁰*

And then he wore ornament as four Vedas, on the head cap for colour she 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 comical dances in front of Lord Shiva with devathudumbi parai, jekandi tala and ganjira as an orchestra. Watching Lord Vishnu's buffoon dance, Brahma's head started to laugh, and it fell from Lord Shiva's hand. Shiva felt so happy that he bowed Maha Vishnu and went to Kailash¹¹. Because of these reasons, in spite of serving Maha Vishnu kambalathu Nanayakkara is performing sevaiyattam in a comical dance manner. In

⁷ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 13

⁸ Kanakasabai. T, Nattupura Attakkalaigal Andrum Indrum, P - 46

⁹ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 100

¹⁰ Kanakasabai. T, Nattupura Attakkalaigal Andrum Indrum, P - 435

¹¹ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 27



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 koothu¹². 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 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 sevaiyattam performers. A clown will also perform, wear multicolour costumes, and perform a comical dance with a stick¹³.

SONGS

Veerabhatraswamy songs are frequently performed in Kurumbhar sevaiyattam. 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, ten types of dances they perform. 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 sequence¹⁴.

DHARMAPURI SEVAIYATTAM

During the festival time in Dharmapuri district, the vanniya cast peoples perform sevaiyattam in Ethilamalaik kaattur, poonguruthisaanthamalai, beemandappalli, and kottaipatti villages. They perform in puratasi month third Saturday. Only men will perform this dance. There

¹² Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 20

¹³ Jeyapathi. S.S, Nattar Nigazhthukkalaigal Kalanjium, 2001, P - 250

¹⁴ Marudhadhurai. R, Tamilada Nattupura Vazhipattu Koothukal, 1993, p - 205



is noage limit to perform. Including the orchestra, a total of thirty members are performing this sevaiyattam¹⁵.

COSTUME

The costume of Dharmapuri sevaiyattam is unique. They wear eightyazh dhoti and the same colour shirt and trousers. They put shall 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 Dharmapurisevaiyattam¹⁶.

KAMBALATHAR SEVAIYATTAM

Kambalathar sevaiyattam is performed by komali whose name is "Thoppai koothadi". They have believed that clown is an incarnation of MahaVishnu because of these reason the clown is a leading dance in kambalatharsevaiyattam. Konangi, komali, and dhaseri are the names of "thoppaikoothadi¹⁷." Along with komali, seven or nine supportive dancers perform. komali will sing and perform in the centre point of the circle. The supportive dancers will perform around the komali. The audience also sings the sevai or service song along with the komali.

It is believed that this dance was very first performed in a town called Lakain fort. In those days if their any festival and cultural occasion sevaiyattam is performed and during the performance it is believed that an oldman from Lakain court come and does the ceremonies then he will start thesevaiyattam. Dattaiya Swamy temples are built in memory of this great man. Nowadays also sevaiyattam performers will worship him then they start to perform¹⁸.

COSTUMES FOR KOMALI

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 moustache and beard made on all over tribes they arrange cowrie shells as a truth, a short or long

¹⁵ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 20

¹⁶ Jeyapathi. S.S, Nattar Nigazhthukkalaigal Kalanjium, 2001, P - 247

¹⁷ Jeyapathi. S.S, Nattar Nigazhthukkalaigal Kalanjium, 2001, P - 47

¹⁸ Jeyapathi. S.S, Nattar Nigazhthukkalaigal Kalanjium, 2001, P - 49



sleeve loosen blue or black shirt with a big belly¹⁹. These are the aharya of “thoppai koothadi”. This appearance itself creates hasya. He also sings and dances comically.

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 awaist cloth and a long cloth in the front side—a bunch of ankle bells on both feet. The costumes of the upper part is masculine and the lower part is feminine. The “koothar” people will wear written clown skirt and shirt angavastra, waist belt, turban with tassels costumes. This costume is more similar to sevaiyattam²⁰.

SEVAIYATTA 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 as Perumal, Sandraya Perumal sevaipattu, Ramayan sevaipattu. These songs are 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 jamindarpattukomalipattu were also performed.

KOMALI PATTU

Thananey naanananey thanananaaney thaney

Naanaaney naanaaney thaananannaaney

Pacharisipola nalla pallapaarunga – anga

Paangaana komaliku vayaparunga (thannaaney)

Komalik kondapola koondhalapparunga – andha

Koondhappanach charampola thadiyaparunga²¹ (thannaaney).....

(Singer- sennama nayakkar, age 75, Kottaipatti kamatchipuram, Dindugal dist, 5.4.2000.)

ARANGANADHAR SEVAIPATTU (TELUGU)

Nannana naanaane naanaane naane

Naanaane naanaane naanane naane

¹⁹ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 26

²⁰ Gunasekaran. K. A. Malayin Makkal Attangal 1984 P - 36

²¹ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 102



Rangaiyaa rangu raavaiyya sami
Mammudhu leleti maaranga sami (nannaana)²²
Seeranga raayaalaa maraanga sami
Seethambulu aaderu maadhasiriyaiyaa (nannaana)
Pamulu sevvali raavaiyaa rangu
Puthulu maamindha kalakavaala sami²³ (nannana).....

Singer – chinnakalai, age 50 sevaiyatta komali, thambinayakambatti, Teni dist, 19.10.1995

Mening 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 performance 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

Singer-chinnakalai, age 50, sevaiyattakomali, thambinayakampatti, theni dist 19.10.95 see our

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 music²⁴.

CONCLUSION

Sevaiyattam is a 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 people are started to search a new thing day by day just to make them happy the artist needs to change the originality of the performance, but in some places especially when it comes for an ethnic group of dance the originality will never change for example this Sevaiyattam, during the festival time it is performed as an inseparable unit in Vishnava temples. Even today it is performing as a very important form of worship. As an audience or an art lover we should

²² Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 102

²³ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 102

²⁴ Muttaiyah. O, Sevaiyattam, 2002, P - 103



support them to bring back the originality of the dance form and we should encourage and support them through financially, because they dedicated their whole life for this art we should respect and help them to survive.

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