

Tradition to Stage:

The Institutionalisation Narrative of Kathakali

📍 **Kerala Kalamandalam**

Group 37
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KATHAKALI AT THE KALAMANDALAM



- With its roots in Kerala, Kathakali is an Indian classical dance form that began in ode to Lord Krishna.
- The performances usually portray stories derived from the Ramayana or Mahabharata.
- As an art form that was considered to be dying, but has now received international recognition, we were interested in studying the reason behind this change.
- The Kerala Kalamandalam is credited with bringing about this change and making Kathakali a globally taught and performed art.

LITERATURE REVIEW & GAPS

Topics covered:

- About Kathakali as a dance form
- About Kathakali training
- About institutionalisation of classical dance

Gap 1:

Lack of modern day research in Kathakali. Most research is focused upon its origin and its teaching in the original Gurukul system.

Gap 2:

Lack of research into the effects of the residential system that the Kalamandalam, has on the learning of the art form.

Gap 3:

Lack of research in the area of (if and) how the institutionalisation of Kathakali has standardised the dance form.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



What is the significance of Kerala Kalamandalam in the institutionalisation of Kathakali?

To what extent has institutionalisation of Kathakali contributed to the progression of the dance form to what it is today?

How has the institutionalisation of Kathakali at the Kerala Kalamandalam evolved over the years?

PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Where?

- Kerala Kalamandalam
- Olappamannamana
- Old Kalamandalam

What?

- Netnography (Pre-field)
- Semi-structured interviews (On-field)
- Ethnography (On-field)

Who?

- Students
- Professors
- Management

INTERVIEWS :

- Semi-structured interviews.
- Before each interview, we took consent from the interviewee only after which we recorded the interaction.
- Conversational interview enabled follow-up questions to enrich the data collected.



41
INTERVIEWS

28
STUDENTS

11
PROFESSORS

2
MANAGEMENT



The event performance gave us insights into the various elements of Kathakali and how they complement each other to tell a story.



The demonstration allowed us to observe the fine nitty-grittys of the dance form including the facial expressions, eye movements, and hand gestures.

RESEARCH CHALLENGES

01

Challenge - Language barrier since we had only 3 Malayalam-speakers in the group.

Solution - We asked the questions in English and recorded the Malayalam responses which were then translated by the native speakers.



02

Challenge - Bias amongst the management.

Solution - We ensured that we did not rely on the data collected from these interviews greatly so as to not bias our research.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

PEDAGOGY

STANDARDISATION

SPREAD



FINDINGS: PEDAGOGY

Evolution of the curriculum: less rigorous and more structured.

Introduction of language courses such as English, Sanskrit and Malayalam in order to increase job prospects for the students.

Equal emphasis placed on theory and training.

Evolution of teaching style and teacher-student relations.



ANALYSIS: PEDAGOGY



The change of the diploma programme into the official Bachelor of Fine Arts degree programmes have resulted in an increased focus on theory and introduction of other subjects.

This change has also led to increased job prospects in areas such as research.

The increased focus on theory helps the artists contextualise their performances better.

The teaching methodology has changed in order to keep up with the needs of the 21st century.

FINDINGS: STANDARDISATION

The mudras and facial expressions were different when taught by different Gurus during the Guru Shishya teaching methods, as they were passed down.

Costumes and jewellery are based on the materials available, and Kalamandalam has not played a significant role in its standardisation.

The makeup is already quite standardised. However, the increase in social media activity has resulted in it being given more importance.

Kalamandalam has contributed to the uniformization of differences in ornaments that arose as a result of the many sources of origin.



ANALYSIS: STANDARDISATION



Majority of the professors and even external teachers are Kalamandalam graduates. This has resulted in standardisation of the teaching methods.

This institutionalised revival has helped create a point of contact and helped Kathakali gain global appreciation and has also resulted in cultural exchanges.

Standardisation helps build a stronger base since it’s more structured.

Standardisation does not allow for a personalised method of teaching.

FINDINGS: SPREAD

The Kalamandalam has achieved its goal to bring more attention to the artform not just in Kerala but all around.

Kalamandalam alumni became teachers at other places, thereby enabling more people in other places to learn Kathakali, as earlier there were only a few Kaliyogams.

The International Centre of Kathakali, established in Delhi in 1960, is home to numerous Kalamandalam alumni who have become legends in their fields.

The students at Kalamandalam aspire to go abroad and work in research fields, as they said that Kerala art forms are appreciated there.

There are Kathakali adaptations of famous Shakespearean plays, such as “King Lear.”



ANALYSIS: SPREAD



Kathakali became one of India's major cultural exports.

Adaptations of foreign stories in Kathakali have given international students a chance to replicate the dance form in their home countries.

Admitting female students to Kalamandalam marks a significant step towards gender equality in Kathakali.

Professors add Kalamandalam to their names out of admiration and respect; this demonstrates how much the art form is affected by Kalamandalam.



CONCLUSIONS

We set out to find out the role of the Kalamandalam in keeping the artform alive.

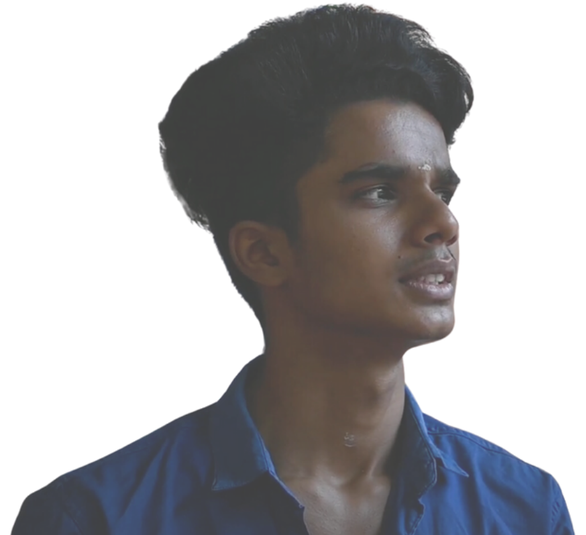
Our visit to the Kalamandalam can be highlighted by a keyword - Opportunity.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

Studying the life of the alumni.

Gender and caste restrictions in Kathakali.

Economics of the Kalamandalam.





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