

History of Traditional Kolattam Performance in Malaysia

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Abstract: The research focuses on Indian folk dance Kolattam. Through analyzing this dance, the researcher looks at history of Kolattam and traditional Kolattam. This researcher will bring some research question in two detailed sections; to analysis the history of Kolattam; and how the Kolattam performed in traditional. This research is using qualitative research method with the technique of interview, observation, and documentation. Signification of this research is to improve information of this studies in dance field and gives knowledge about Indian folk dance to Indian, Malay and Chinese community. This research also can be a reference to the next research about Indian community. The contribution of this study is an additional document for the Indian community and to helps government in the Department of Arts and Culture JKKN to keep the arts alive.

Key words: *Kolattam, Indian Community, Indian Folk Dance, Traditional, Malaysian Indian*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a rich with diverse cultures because various types of people are living together. The three main races are Malays, Chinese and Indians. The Malays are the largest community among them. The second largest community is the Chinese. The Indians are the smaller group of community [1]. Each of community group has its own culture. Every each has their own dances that represent their culture. For Malay they have Zapin, Inang, Asli, and more. For Chinese they have Dragon Dance, Lion Dance, Fan Dance and more. Indians are dancing Bharathanatyam, Kuchipudi Oddisi, Khatak, Kolattam, Karagatham, Mialatham, and many more.

Indian dance in India can basically can divided in two: classical dance and folk dance. This dance takes several human figures as the basic instrument of the dance expression. It uses the way to observe and imitate the figure as the analyzing and synthesizing method. This method of analysis and synthesis can be seen in other Indian arts.

The classical dance tends to the fixed sequences and pattern to emphasize the use of the complicated gesture, foot works and movements. The classical dance started 2000 years ago. It has come down from the generation to the generation in various forms and

styles and it has been spreads all over the world. The typical examples of the Indian classical dance are Bharatanatyam, Oddisi, Kathak, Kathakali and Kuchipudi. Each form of those dances originated from each different state. Bharata Natyam from Tamil Nadu: Oddisi and Kuchipudi from Andhra Pradesh: and Kathakali from Kerala. Indian classical dances can be performed only by trained dancers for many years.

The Indian folk dance is generally quite spontaneous, and it regards to the creations of people's imagination towards their daily life. The whole depiction of the folk dance is dependent on song's lyrics. The examples of the folk dance are Kolattam, Pinnal Kolattam, Vasanta Atam and Kummi [2]. The folk dance is usually organized and performed by villagers in many events, such as a harvest festival, and wedding ceremony.

The Indian folk and classical dances began in Tanah Melayu (a previous name of Malaysia in the early fifteen century). Traders and missionaries from India brought Indian dance culture in Malaysia. These dances became popular among Tanah Melayu people at that time [5]. As in India, the classical dance was basically performed by trained dancers whereas the folk dance was performed by everyone, including non-professionals, in Malaysia [5]. The place to perform these dances in Malaysia was same with that of India.

For example, on village grounds in annual festival at Arulmigu Balathandayuthapani Temple, Penang.

Kolattam is one of the Indian folk dances. This is simple and unique dance performed by unmarried male and female dancers. While performing Kolattam, dancers wore colorful sarees and held little lacquered sticks. Young girls performed Kolattam in the birthday celebration of Rama, hero of Ramayana [2].

HISTORY OF KOLATTAM

Kolattam is a folk dance of the Indian community and it is from Andhra Pradesh, India and flourishing all over the world. Through performing this dance, young girls beautifully dressed up show colorful Indian community culture. Kolattam dance mainly consists of up to 30 to 40 dancers because it is a kind of folk dance performed in the village where participants are comprised of village people with unlimited number of dancers. The minimum number of dancers is 8 people. Dancers should be in even numbers. In early days, Kolattam was performed by women only, but some changes gradually occurred in this dance. In the present, it has been performed by both male and female [2]. Unlike this dance was only performed at the village in the past, Kolattam today had been performed on and off stages all over the world as an entertainment performance. Since the appearance of Kolattam, it has been changed according to time to time.

Kolattam started to perform in the seventh century. The name of the dance is not only one, Kolattam. Depending on where it is performed in, Kolattam has each different name. For example, people called Kolattam dance Dandiya in Gujarat, India. Kolattam was also known as Koladi, Kambadi or Kolkali in Tamil Nadu. It was called Kolannalu or Kolkolannalu in Andhra Pradesh. In Kancipuram, India, Kolattam was called Cheivaikiyar. The name of Kolattam comes from two words, "Kol" and "Attam." "Kol" means stick while "attam" means dancing or playing with wood in hand. Like the name originating from the mixture of words, rhythmic movements, songs, and music all are combined in Kolattam [2].

In historical and legendary stories Kolattam resulted from the victory of young girls from destroying the hatred evils, called Basavasura. Basavasura is the enemy who kills all human beings and destroys society. For the purpose of eliminating these evils, young girls danced by hitting wooded sticks in hand and producing harmonious sounds. The devil was aware of his mistake and promised not to destroy the community again. To celebrate the victory, people welcomed to perform Kolattam in all communities in Southern

India. In addition, Hallisaka and Dandarasaka are another names of Kolattam in Sanskrit. The dance was performed during the harvest season especially in a Ponggal festival that aimed to show God people's thankful mind about a good harvest [2]. Kolattam has a purpose to show a fight between two powerful gods, the God of water, Ganges, and the God of Parvati symbolizing courage. The fight was named Gowri Samvadham. It can tell that Kolattam's theme drew from the fighting moment of the Gowri Samvadham. Kolattam has been orally passed on to the next generation, and it strongly exhibits traditional beliefs of the village community and involves extant features of folk culture.

Indian language, religion, dance, music, architecture, food and customs vary from place to place in Malaysia. Indian culture in Malaysia regards as a merger between diverse sub-cultures and several millennium-old traditions, which is scattered throughout the Indian subcontinent. Considered by many of historians as the oldest civilization of the Earth. Indian tradition dates back to B.C. 8000. The record of history can be found after the time of the Vedas, 3,000 to over 5,500 years ago. Several elements of Indian culture, such as Indian religions, yoga and cuisine, become profound worldwide presence at the present. Malaysia is one of the countries where many Indians live in and still keep following Indian culture and customs.

Indians migrated to Malaysia 2,000 years ago. Groups such as the Chitty Melaka community and the Mamak community are descendants of the immigrants during the Sultanate of Melaka and later during the Melaka occupation by the Portuguese and the Dutch. The Straits Settlements - Penang, Malacca and south area (currently Singapore) - by the British between 1786 and 1824 began uninterrupted inflow of labor, traders, superiors, and prisoners. These people were led to involve in construction, trading agriculture, defense, and trade. The British colonizers also carried forward the migration of the massive Indians from the Indian subcontinent to Malaya follows in order to appropriate number of persons for the growth of rubber plantation economy. The expansion of the British colonialism into the Malay states got severe after the 1870s. Indians in Malaya and Singapore before independence mainly consisted of male adults who left their families in India and Sri Lanka. The Indian population in Malaysia frequently fluctuated with young men's incoming and outgoing. In 1901, the Indian population in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States was about 120,000. By 1931, this number increased to 640,000 in Malaya and Singapore, and in the state of Selangor, their numbers exceeded the number of Malays during that year. The Indian population was virtually

unchanged until 1947 as they traveled to Myanmar during the Japanese occupation as recruiters for the Indian National Armed Forces and as porters for the Death Line. In 2005, the Indian represented about 7% of the total population – about 1.8 million – in Malaysia [1,4].

The meaning of performing arts is related to the beauty and fineness of culture. As it is known, civilization of India is the rich civilization with unique features in the cultural aspects of creating variation in cultural and ethnic diversity in Malaysia. Among contributions of the Indian civilization in Malaysia, dance art becomes famous. Dance art contains cultural aspects of the Indian in Malaysia. The rich dance of exciting moves has created a colorful atmosphere in Malaysia. As a result, Malaysia has now become a nation that has not only a multi-racial society but also multi-cultures that have attracted attention all over the world.

Various dances have currently existed in Malaysia, such as Bharata Natyam, Oddisi, Kolattam, Kummi and others. Especially, Kolattam is not only popular in India but also in the world. The has been practiced until now. Indian immigrants brought Kolattam in Malaysia. The practice of dance has been maintained from the generation to the generation. Indian immigrants community plays an important role in causing Indian cultural and art development in Malaysia.

TRADITIONAL KOLATTAM

Kolattam is one of the traditional Indian folk dances. The dance was performed by women only in ancient times, whereas male and female dancers can participate in this dance in the present time. Time change factors, culture and society are among the main reasons for the change in dancers, from only female dancers to male and female dancers perform Kolattam which was in ancient times this dance as a dance that was only carried out in the village only but nowadays the dance is made as a show for entertainment purposes during festive seasons, weddings and so on, when the function of this of this dance had changed the male dancers started to perform this dance. The uniqueness of the Kolattam is that hold in the hands and make a sound of the wooden sticks them with background music while dancing by pairing with opposite and same sex. Traditional Kolattam usually involves certain floor patterns. Dancers should follow these patterns such as round, paired and diagonal patters.

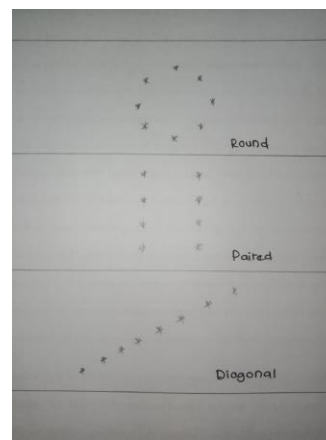


Figure 1 Examples of Floor Patterns

The floor patters in this dance is based on daily activities of female at village. In accordance with the exact patterns the tradition Kolattam has several structured movements. However based on in this thesis the researchers reading and findings could not identify the names of the movement. This is because there is no archival evidence that states about the name of the movement. The researchers in this thesis classify movement such as one, two, there, four and next, to identify the movement easily. This is because there is no study or writing of books that have been written about Kolattam, therefore the researcher wants to do this research so that this material can be used as reference material in the future. Another uniqueness of this dance is the dancers could not stop hitting the wood in their hands this is because the movement in Kolattam represent such as working in paddy fields and daily work in the village, when this work is done there is no stops until the work is complete. Working on paddy fields and other works done by woman's are gentle, therefore the movements in Kolattam are also gentle to symbolize the nature of a woman. This is because at first the dance was performed by women only but the movements were modified according to the time, place and community life. In the next paragraph the researcher will discuss about the costume and the function of that costume.

Furthermore, dancing costume for female dancers is tradition attire. The female dancers dresses paired with skirts and blouses, called "pavadai dhavani" meanwhile the male dancers dresses paired with shirt and white cloth named "vhetti jippa" . "Pavadai dhavani" only worn by girls who have had puberty and have not married. The reason is this dance majorly performed by female dancer who have not married. Furthermore, "vhetti jippa" is wore by married or unmarried mans. Man's costume can be in different colors but the white colors are the tradition. in tradition Kolattam the

simplest costume are very important to show the simplistic of India culture. Also the represent the villagers are mostly middle class and poor family, where they could not afford to buy and luxurious and expensive cloth. On comparison with the female costumes, male dancers costumes does not look luxurious but neat and beautiful. Moreover, the dancers should not wear any shoes or sandals on feet. This is because tradition Kolattam is mostly performed for thanks giving to the God and nature as the researcher mention earlier this tradition Kolattam are performed in festive seasons. In Hinduism the devotee's should not wear shoes or sandals. Next paragraph in this thesis the researcher will explain about the music.

Folk music are used in Kolattam. The name of the music is "urumi mellam". Urumi mellam usually played by dalits [7]. Dalits is used to describe communities that have been subjected to untouchability such people were excluded from the four-folded varna system of Hinduism and thought of themselves as forming a fifth varna, describing themselves as Panchama [8], but in this century Urumi are performed by everyone apart their caste. Urumi is a double-headed hourglass-shaped drum from state of Tamil Nadu, South India. Urumi melam ensembles usually consist of a melodic instrument, the double-reed Nadaswaram, a pair of double headed drums called pampai, and one to three urumi drums. Among the musical instruments is the "urumi" which is a tool made of goat leather that is shocked around the ring to be struck on two surfaces of the device. This type of ensemble is associated exclusively with funerals and other inauspicious occasions. This drum is widely believed to possess supernatural and sacred powers. When played in religious ceremonies and processions, the performance of specific beats on the urumi may induce spirit possessions [9,7]. It performs for a number of festive occasions including dance-dramas, menstruation ceremonies, weddings, harvest festivals, and staged folk dances such as Kolattam, Kavadi Attam, Poikal Kutturai, Puli Attam and Mayil Attam. The musician of this folk music should not less than 5 person. In order to produce a sound and steady sound for a good musical mix, the traditional musician should not be less than five to five. Further, the researcher will discuss more about the prop and the function.

As the researcher mention earlier the most important item of this dance that makes this performance unique is the two wooden stick. The researcher could not identify why the wooden stick was used in this dance, because in the reading material studied by the researcher there was no material that stated the wood function and that the reason wooden stick was used. In

this case, this topic will help to identify the important and function of the wooden stick. In researcher opinion, based on some readings the wooden stick in tradition Kolattam is very simply and don't have any decoration, it may because in past this dance is performed by villager. Wood beat beatings and music played need to be uniform. Often in the musical Kolattam tradition should follow the wood beats. Moreover, the stage to perform this dance also influence the usage of movement, prop, costume, and music.

The stage of performance is very important in every dance. The traditions Kolattam are often performed in place of worship like temples, village, and near paddy field during festive seasons from January to April every year, such as Thaipusam, the annual temple prayers and Ponggal celebrations. While in the events, dancers performed the dance at a side road of the temple or in front of the temple. There is no any theatrical stage for the performance so the dancer should performed at the ground or streets.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the heritage and cultural heritage of the Indian community inherited from generation to generation should be preserved to the younger generation to develop a society that is not only developed in many modern areas, but also in traditional arts. The development of a society requires a balance between modern and historical knowledge as well as the culture of the past society so as not to lose it. Besides being a valuable work, heritage and culture are also one of the unique aspects that distinguishes Malaysia from outside countries. Hence, it is important for such heritage to be preserved and introduced to the new generation for the culture to continue in future. To develop a traditional culture, the people must be exposed to the wealth of national cultural heritage. Kolattam is a folk dance practiced by the Indian community for a long time, this dance can also be practiced by a multiracial society for to be learned by other societies. This dance is less attracted by the present society, this is due to the influence of foreign cultures preserving the culture of the Indian community. If these dances are taught in schools as co-curricular activities can help many learn the dance and help students to recognize other cultures. This study explains about Kolattam and many Indian folk dance that have not been explored by many researchers and many have yet to recognize it. Suggestions to future researchers are that more Indian folk dance should be studied for reference to future generations as well as maintaining indigenous Indian culture.



Figure 2 Kolattam Stick

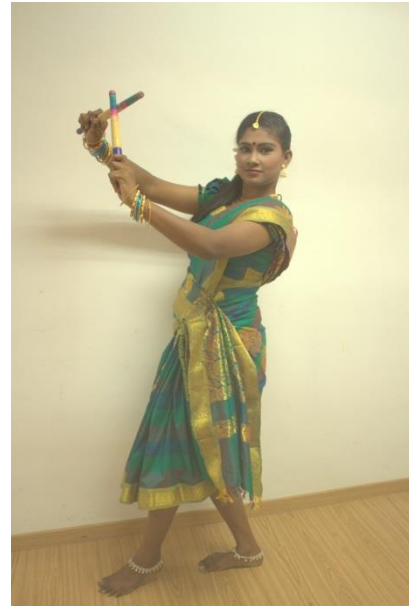


Figure 4 Female Dancer



Figure 3 Male Dancer

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