

BACKGROUND OF KATHAKALI

Kathakali is ancient and classical in nature and holds centuries of tradition and culture. It is not simply a dance- drama but an act of devotion featuring the universal struggle between good and evil.

Kathakali takes place in a variety of places from a beautifully constructed Kootambalam – story temple – or in a simple temporary canopy made from coconut leaves covering a platform made of earth in a village temple or a garden. The dressing room would be close to the stage and also made from coconut leaves.



The actual Kathakali performance starts between 9 and 10 pm with Arrangu Keli - a drumming piece played on the Madalam drum to ask the Gods for their blessings and to invite them to watch the performance. To perform Kathakali is a great honour and performed to the Gods as an act of devotion.

A large brass oil lamp called a Valaka, is placed at the front of the stage. Lighting the lamp is highly symbolic as when lit, it illustrates that there is divine presence.

Thodayam – is a dance ritual that is performed behind a large brightly coloured satin curtain held up by two men at the front of the stage and called a Tereshiela. Two junior actors perform a composition of pure dance accompanied by the SUDDHA MADALAM drum- solo Madalam.

The Vandana slokam is a prayer and follows Thodayam to bless the stage and to receive the Gods. The first actors make their way to the stage but before leaving the dressing room they will go to all the senior artists, touch their feet and ask for their blessings, pray to the Valaka – lamp – situated in the green room and

finally go onto the stage that is now a holy place. The actors make their journey from this world into the world of the Gods with dignity and humility.

Purappad - means starting point and represents the beginning of the Kathakali performance, traditionally performed by students to develop their skills. The actors represent the main characters of the story - Krishna or Balarama and perform a piece of pure dance, sometimes accompanied by the relevant female partners.

Melappadam - is a musical master piece where senior singers and drummers are given an opportunity to perform their outstanding skills.

The singers express dedication and appreciation to Jaya Deva who wrote the great poems of the Geetha Govindam in the 11th century. Singing his poems creates a melody of exquisite beauty. People travel many miles to see the top artists perform Mela Padaam as a piece of vibrant music in its own right.

The Kathakali play - the actual Kathakali story starts when Melepadam finishes. The audience have been bathed in powerful drumming, superb singing, rituals and ceremonies. This is in preparation for the full impact of Kathakali to descend onto the stage and depict stories from the great Hindu epics.

Normally two or three plays are performed throughout the night starting with a love story or one featuring every day life, saving the last story for an almighty battle when good conquers evil, just before the sun rises in the cool early morning sky to celebrate a new beginning as light blesses the earth.

The temples hold annual festivals where the community is encouraged to evolve with more compassion and care for each other. Throughout the night the audience and artists have engaged in a universal journey where goodness prevails over evil to illustrate the path to a better life.

Danasi is a dance ritual performed by one of the good characters in the story, usually Lord Krishna or Lord Siva as the sun rises. He asks for blessings on the audience and gives appreciation to the Gods for the night that they came to earth.

For the artists it is a social time where everyone winds down, take a bath in the temple tank or river, eat breakfast and move onto the next temple performance. It is extremely hard work to perform throughout the night for all the artists involved and results in family atmosphere within the group.

Many years of quality training and experience is required to create a Kathakali artist. Each one is respected for the specialised skills that they bring to the stage to present one of the most moving and unforgettable experiences of all.

DRAMA

Kathakali is very different from other classical Indian – drama styles and performed as a group with a variety of characters. A Kathakali performer is known as an actor and not a dancer and a performance is called a play.

Kathakali plays are about complex human relationships with each character representing a different symbolic level of consciousness from the Gods to the most evil.

The actor translates the story through stylised body language, gesture and deep emotion.

THE CHARACTERS:

The characters are categorised into symbolic "personalities" ranging from the most sanctified [Gods] to the most evil.

The characters represent the evolution of humanity and the sensitive relationship between the individual, spirituality and society.

Situations are acted out where desperation and cruelty give way to truth and compassion. The plays communicate on a deep and personal level intended to offer an example of how to survive when enormous hardship is faced.

KATHAKALI CHARACTER TYPES are easily identified by specific make up, costumes and body language.

Two different characters belonging to the same category may "appear" visually the same, even though performing in two separate plays. However, the story, slight changes in the make up or costume will indicate the exact character on stage.

CHARACTERS



Pacha



Katti

(Pure- Green face) Represents good, divinity, The gods and heroic Characters.
E.g: Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, Arjuna, Bhima and King Nala.

Katti

(Knife) - They are heroic but have lust, arrogance, a desire for power and cruelty
. Eg: Kichaka, Ravana, Duryodhana .

CHARACTERS



Red Beard :

Cruel, evil, destructive, arrogant and a killer. E.g: Baka, Jarasandan, Veerabhadra.



Kali

Kali: - symbolises anger, cruelty and evil. Similar to Red Beard but a different combination of colours.



Black Beard:



Kari: An evil Demoness

Black Berad - Represents Humour, violence. Primitive life E.g A forest dweller.

CHARACTERS



White Beard:

Hannuman - the devoted Monkey God.



Female(Minikku)

Minikku: Soft and natural make up for the female character, Humans, Brahmins, Sages, Messengers, Narada Radiant and Priests.

CHARACTERS



Hamsam:

Lord Krishna or Lord Rama

Hamsam: The Golden Swan and Garuda both have special make up

THE TRAINING:

The training of a Kathakali actor begins at an early age when young boys leave their homes to dedicate the entire lives to Kathakali.

The rigorous training necessary for a Kathakali actor begins at 4.00am with eye and facial exercises followed with body exercises and the learning of the Kathakali plays.

In the monsoon season the actors undergo a daily painful session, which involves body exercises followed by a special oil massage, called Urachil. This makes the actor supple and physically prepared for the characters that he will eventually have to portray on stage.

There is a saying that summarises the Kathakali acting technique....

"Where the hands move, there the eyes follow,

Where the eyes move the mind follows.

Where the mind goes, the mood follows

where the mood goes, there the Rasa [flavour] arises.

DRUMMERS, SINGERS, MAKE UP ARTISTS AND COSTUMERS all undergo years of specialised training guided by a Guru – Ashan. Eventually they will perform as a complex team of experts each bringing their own specialist contribution to the performance.

THE HANDS - SIGN LANGUAGE:



The sign Language used in Kathakali is very important and is called MUDRAS – an ancient sacred sign language that originated in the Hindu temple rituals thousands of years ago and later adapted into the dramatic language of Kathakali.

The Mudras are representative actions; emotional gestures and an actual sign language complete with an alphabet and sentence structure.

There are 24 basic Mudras used in Kathakali to tell the story – **Asamyutha** Mudras – using one hand and **Samyutha** Mudras – using both hands.

Just as letters of the alphabet become words when put together, these primary hand shapes only develop into an actual language when put into context, with the appropriate facial expression and a series of hand, arm and body movements.

With various combinations of the basic Mudras over 700 "words" are available to the actor to tell a story.

MUDRAS – SIGN LANGUAGE – basic alphabet



1-Pathakam



2- Mudraakhyam



3- Katakam



4- Musti



5- Kartharremukham



6- Sukathunddam



7- Kapidhakam



8- Hamsapaksham



9- Sikaram



10-Hamsassyam



11-Anjaly



12-Ardhachandram



13-Mukuram



14-Bhramara



15-Soochikamukam



16-Pallavam



17-Thripathaakam



18-Mrigaseersham



19-Sarpasirassu



20-Vardamanakam



21-Araalam



22-Oornanabham



23-Mukulam



24-Katakaamukham

HOW THE MUDRAS ARE USED:

These are some examples of how the specific hand shapes of made up from the basic alphabet, illustrated above, are utilized to represent specific words contained within the Kathakali dramatic sign language complete with sentence structure and grammar. The hand shape of each word remains within the basic alphabet structure to convey a story through visual dialogue.

KALAMANDALAM VIJAYAKUMAR - Kathakali actor is planning to create new words based on this sign language with additional vocabulary and structure. Kathakali sign language was established for a drama, however, this exploration Kalamandalam Vijayakumar aims to investigate the Mudras as a practical language.



Lord Brahma - The Creator



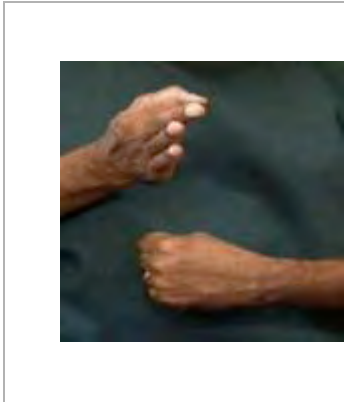
Lord Vishnu – The Protector



Lord Siva - The Destroyer and Lord of Dance



Lord Indra (King of Heaven)



Father or Guru



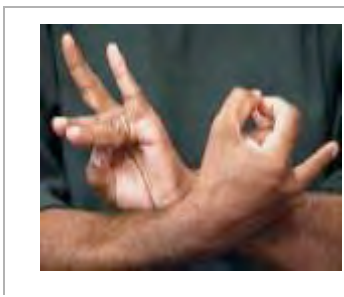
Certainty



Lord Krishna



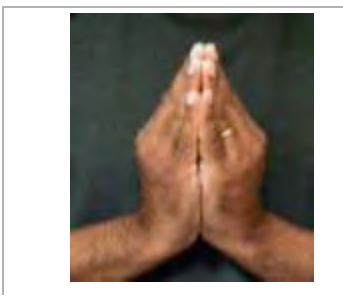
Goddess Lakshmi



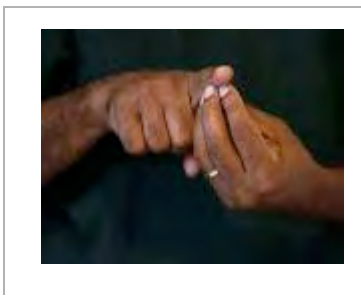
Goddess Parvati



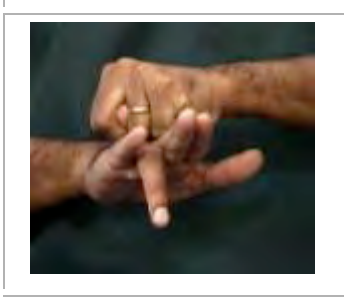
Lord Rama



Greeting - Namaskaram



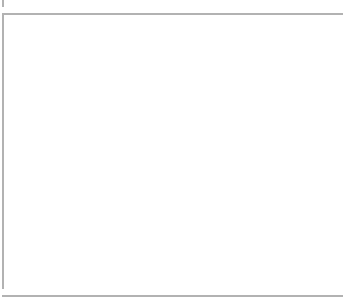
The Five Pandava brothers



Kill



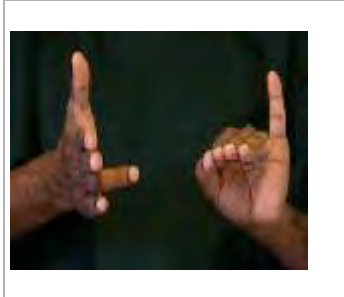
Reason or because



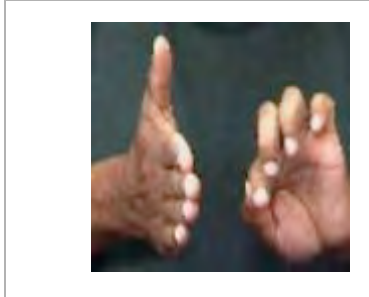
Beautiful



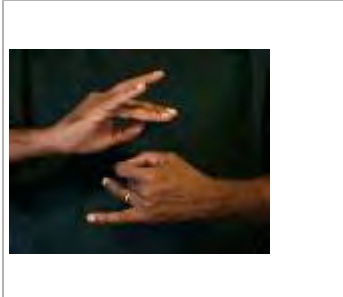
King Duryodhana



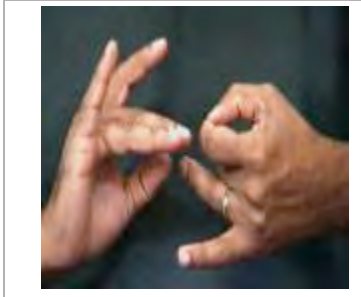
Dussassana








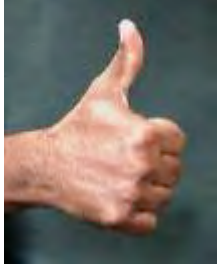

Beautiful woman



Sister



Sister

			
Lotus flower	Deer	Look	Bird
			
Fish	NUMBER Four	Eight	



The facial expressions are essential to Kathakali and take years of intense training. In the first instance, the gateway into Kathakali is through the actors eyes and face to experience the intimate emotion divulged by the actor.

THE FACIAL EXPRESSIONS - SATVIKA ABHINAYA - is a highly sophisticated performing technique that requires intensive training of the facial muscles, called Rasabhinaya.

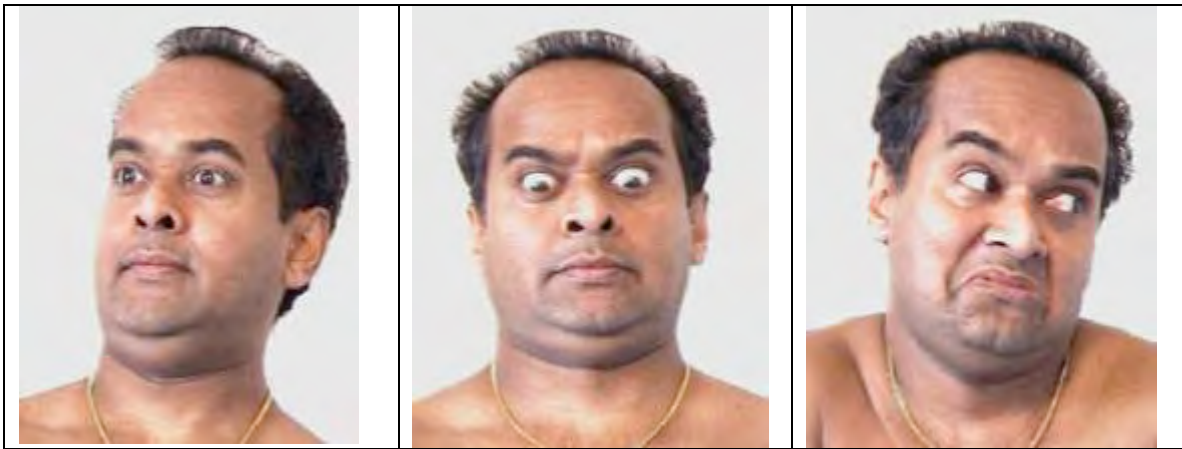
NAVARASAS – are the nine emotions – called Bhava, or mood, used by Kathakali actors to entice the audience into the enchanting dramatic world of Kathakali.



1-Sringaram- Love

2-Hasyam-Big head

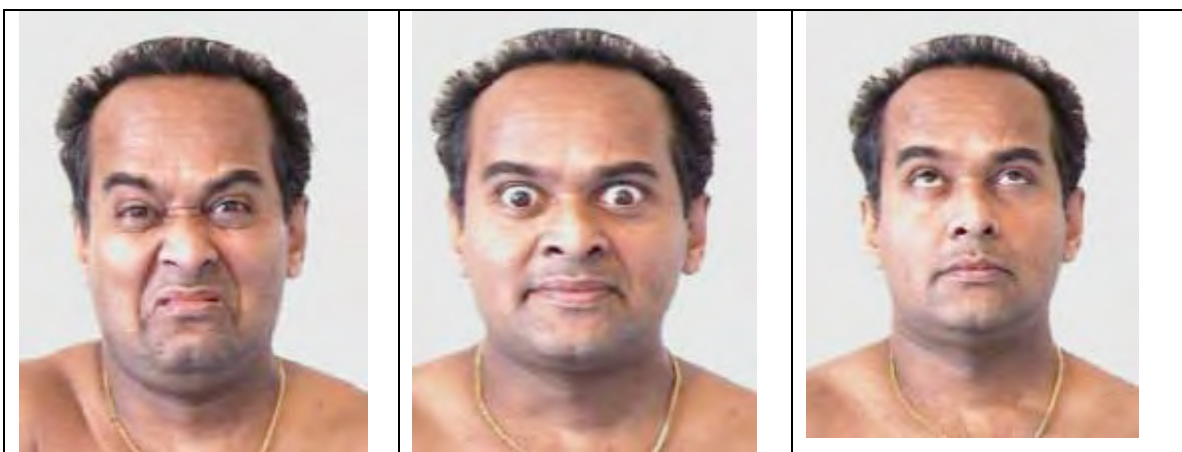
3-Karunam - Sad



4- Veeram – Proud

5-Rowdram – Anger

6 - Bhayanakam - Fear



7-Beeblsam-Disgust 8 Albootham – Wounder 9- Santham – peace

Facial expressions by Kalamandalam Vijayakumar

COSTUMES AND MAKE UP



The enormous impact of Kathakali transports the audience into a totally different world. This unforgettable visual experience is mainly due to the extraordinary make up – unique to Kathakali – and the brilliantly coloured costumes.

The make up has the same power as a mask, however, because it is applied directly onto the skin, the actor has full use of his facial expressions.

THE MAKE UP – FACE PAINTING AND CHUTTI

The make up is executed with great skill by the actor, who paints his own face, followed by a highly trained specialist known as a Chutti artist who applies a beautifully proportioned three-dimensional “structure” directly onto the face.

It is impossible to write about the Kathakali make up without acknowledging the great master of Kathakali make up – **Kalamandalam Govinda Variyar Ashan**. He played a vital role in the evolution of the Chutti, especially the technique to attach the “structure” to the face. To ascertain how the Chutti could be constructed onto the skin in three-dimension, he used a combination of existing and revolutionary techniques.

The proportions of the paper shapes are very important in Kathakali make-up as the audience must be able to see the eyes and facial expressions. The design and proportions laid down by Govinda Variyar Ashan are exquisite and unsurpassed.



Kalamandalam Govinda Variyar Ashan

“The Chutti is there for the actor - not the actor for the Chutti”.

The Chutti artists require years of specialist training to apply this intricate make up passed by word of mouth from Ashan [guru] to student.



The great Chutti Master [Guru] Kalamandalam Govinda Variyar teaching the first known female Chutti artist in the world - Kalamandalam Barbara Vijayakumar in 1974.

The make up is applied in two stages:

- 1] Painting the face
- 2] Applying the Chutti.

1] PAINTING THE FACE:

The Actor paints a specific design in brilliant colours made from natural materials onto his skin using his finger and a stick taken from the centre of the coconut palm and called an Erkulla.



Kathakali actor Kalamandalam Ramachandran Unnithan is painting his face with the basic design ensuring that each side is exactly the same. Character – Narasimham – The Lion.

Each character has a different design painted by the actor using natural materials to produce the vivid colours for the Kathakali make up

THE COLOURS are mostly made with ground rocks and coconut oil as follows:

YELLOW – grind a yellow stone - Manyola with coconut oil – male characters

YELLOW – the yellow stone is mixed with water not oil - female characters.

GREEN - add a blue stone called China Blue to the Manyola

RED - add a powder called Chayalliyam to the Manyola

BLACK - made from the soot of burnt gingerly oil collected on the bottom of an earth pot then mixed again with coconut oil.

Each character takes up to four hours to prepare, the actor paints the traditional design onto his face with ground rocks and coconut oil then lies down on a mat on the floor to have the intricate Chutti constructed onto his face.

2] THE CHUTTI

The Chutti can only be applied by a highly trained Chutti artist and requires patience, a steady hand, a good eye and accurate paper cutting. The Chutti artist is responsible for the visual representation of the character on stage and is applied with great care and respect.

The work of a Chutti artist must be exquisite as a mistake will remain on the face throughout the whole performance and cause distress to the actor.

A line of rice paste is applied to the actors face and then carefully spread into the correct shape. The paste is built up in layers until the exact height is achieved.

The specifically cut paper shapes are skilfully embedded into the moist rice paste as it dries.

Other techniques are used to ensure that the paper shapes do not come off during the performance, even when the actor is utilising every muscle in his face.

Once the Chutti is complete the Chutti artists checks that it is perfect and hands a mirror to the actor who checks again that he is happy with the Chutti. This is a tense moment as the Chutti is scrutinised and an important step in the transformation of the actor is concluded.

Certain characters require additional face painting by the actor before the make up is finished.



Chutti artist – Kalamandalam Barbara Vijayakumar

Actor – Kalamandalam Unnithan

Character – Narasimham – The Lion

The Chutti artist is applying the three-dimensional make up using rice paste and paper. Precision and concentration is essential to create a Chutti that is beautiful, symmetrical and remains secure throughout the performance. Each of these elements requires skill, patience and devotion.



This is the face of the Lion God – Narasimham - in the style of Govinda Variyar Ashan.

The Chutti artist is a vital member of a Kathakali Troupe who after several years of specialised training is able to prepare all the characters for a Kathakali play.

The highly trained Chutti artist is totally responsible for creating the visual images of the magnificent characters for the Kathakali stage. When the Chutti is finished it signifies an important part of the transformation process of the actor.

It is the Chutti that makes Kathakali visually unique in the world of theatre.

THE EYES – CHUNDA POO

IMPORTANT NOTICE – DO NOT PUT ANYTHING IN THE EYE.

The Kathakali actor uses a small seed from the Chundapoo flower to dye the eye red and to make the character appear to come from a different world.

The eye returns to normal about one hour after the seed is removed at the end of the performance.

THE COSTUME:



Actor- Kalamandalam Gopi

The Kathakali costumes are sacred, colourful and work in perfect harmony with the make up. They were probably inspired the costumes of Koodiattam and Krishnattam, are made by crafts people and require an experienced actor to wear them due to their abnormal weight and bulk.

It is a great honour to wear a Kathakali costume and completes the psychological journey from human being into a divine character.

This lengthy process is essential for the actor to absorb the personality of the character that he is to perform.

The costume of the male character consists of an enormous skirt draped over starched cloth; a large woollen jacket, wooden ornaments and a beautiful carved wooden headdress called a Kirikidam covered in gold foil.

Before the Kirikidam is placed on the actors head, padded with black cotton head scarves, he will sprinkle the head dress and his feet with water to purify them and pray that he will do a good performance.

Other characters have specific costumes to denote their characters.

The **AHRAYA** - is the name given to the costumes, make up and stage props, used to transform the actors into some of the most powerful images, ever seen in the world of theatre.

The Aniyara – dressing room - is the place where the artists prepare and is considered to have divine presence therefore the preparation is done in silence as a sign of respect. The brass lamp – VALAKA is lit and prayed to before the artists begin their make up, before they go on stage and again at the end of the performance when they have removed their make up.

Kathakali is an act of devotion and performed as an offering to the Gods not entertainment requiring great sincerity and focus from the actor before going on stage.



Hannuman (The monkey god)

Actor - Kalamandalam Ramankutti Nair Ashan - world famous for his portrayal of Hannuman

MUSIC:

Music has been nurtured in the temples of Kerala for centuries to evoke a feeling of well-being, celebration and devotion. As the dance drama tradition of Kerala developed, the existing temple music was incorporated into the classical storytelling techniques of Kathakali.

Standing at the back of the stage one singer hits a brass Changila [gong] with a wooden stick to keep the Tala [rhythm] and the other singer uses a set of Elatalam [Cymbals].

The three drums used in Kathakali are:

The **MADALAM** – played with both hands - one hand with a chuttu - rice paste and cloth wrapped round the tip of the drummer's fingers and one without.

The **CHENDA** – played with sticks turned up at the ends and the hands.

The **EDDEKA** – played with a stick and moving the inner section of the drum to create a softer sound.



Kalamandalam Krishnan Kutty Poduval and Kalamandalam Appukutty Poduval the most celebrated of all Kathakali musicians.

The music is vital to Kathakali as it is the singers who actually instigate the emotion of the play through their voices, to inspire the actor to tell the story and drummers who keep the movement, emotion and the music together.

Through the music the actor and the audience can experience the full essence of a Kathakali play.

When one element of Kathakali is removed it becomes incomplete.

KATHAKALI is a magnificent combination of dance, drama, music, make up costumes and most of all devotion. Kathakali relies on a team of skilled artists contributing equally to the extraordinary manifestation of what we call Kathakali.



Kathakali is one of the most remarkable and challenging forms of theatre in the world. It is not simply a performance but a complete way of life that has existed for generations. In this rapidly changing world there is a need for art forms such

as Kathakali to remind us of who we are, how we relate to each other and contemplate our spirituality.

PLEASE CONTACT –

The Kala Chethena Kathakali Company

Kalamandalam Barbara Vijayakumar

1 Holland Rd,

Woolston,

SOUTHAMPTON

SO19 9FW. UK

Tel: +44 (0)23 8042 0114

Fax: +44 (0)23 8044 4468