

# Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre

March 29, 2021

## About Kutiyattam

- The word “kuti” in Malayalam language means “combined” and “attam” means “acting”: therefore, the word “kutiyattam” means “combined acting”.
- Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre, which is practised in the province of Kerala, is one of India’s oldest living theatrical traditions.
- Originating more than 2,000 years ago, Kutiyattam represents a synthesis of Sanskrit classicism and reflects the local traditions of Kerala.
- In its stylized and codified theatrical language, netra abhinaya (eye expression) and hasta abhinaya (the language of gestures) are prominent. T
- They focus on the thoughts and feelings of the main character.
- The actor’s art lies in elaborating a situation or episode in all its detail. Therefore, a single act may take days to perform and a complete performance may last up to 40 days.
- Kutiyattam is traditionally performed in theatres called Kuttampalams, which are located in Hindu temples.
- Yet the actor’s role retains a sacred dimension, as attested by purification rituals and the placing of an oil lamp on stage during the performance symbolizing a divine presence.
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- Kutiyattam is performed by a community of male actors

called Chakras and female performers called Nangiars, assisted by drummers called Nambiars.

- Nangiar Koothu is the solo section of female performance in Kutiyattam.
- Kutiyattam includes the plays of almost all the major playwrights in Sanskrit, including Bhasa, Harsha, Saktibhadra, Kulasekhara, Neelakantha, Bodhayana and Mahendra Vikram Varman. However, notable exceptions are Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, whose plays are not traditionally part of its repertoire.
- Kutiyattam has been declared as among the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO

### **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)**

- ICH List is a UNESCO program initiated in 2001 to recognise and protect various cultures and practices.
- These cultural vehicles are called “Human Treasures” by the UN.
- UNESCO divides the list into three different categories:
  - The representative list comprises cultural “practices and expressions that help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance.”
  - The safeguarding list is composed of cultural elements that are threatened and in need of urgent measures to keep them alive.
  - The best practice list comprises the best examples by communities and governments of the protection and recognition of intangible cultural heritage.

### **Intangible Cultural Heritage Sites in India**

India houses a repository of unique Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) traditions, 13 of which have also been recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

1. Tradition of Vedic chanting
2. Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana
3. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre
4. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas.
5. Mudi yettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala
6. Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan
7. Chhau dance
8. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh, recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir.
9. Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur
10. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab
11. Yoga
12. Nowruz
13. Kumbh Mela