

Pulikali

August 29, 2020

Pulikkali, or tiger dance, is a colourful **part of Onam celebrations in Thrissur**. The hallmark street pageant of the state's cultural capital usually brings the curtains down on the festival celebrations. Even amidst the lockdown and restrictions in the wake of COVID19, the tigers will reach residents' homes with their wild dance. But this time, it will be online, for an hour from 3.30 p.m. on the fourth Onam day.

Pulikali

The **Ayyanthole Desham Pulikali team is bringing the Pulikali online**. Around 20 painted tigers in costumes will enthral on screen. Each tiger participant will perform from home too. People can watch the performance on the Facebook page of the Ayyanthole Desham Pulikkali Samiti. **Shakthan Tampuran, the ruler of yore, introduced Pulikkali over two centuries ago as a street art form**. Sidelined initially as obscene, it won acceptance with the introduction of guidelines and rules.

Puli Means "leopard" and Kali means "Play". On the fourth day of Onam celebrations (Nalaam Onam), **performers painted like tigers and hunters in bright yellow, red, and black dance to the beats of instruments like Udukku and Thakil**. Literal meaning of Pulikali is the 'play of the tigers' hence the **performance revolves around the theme of tiger hunting**. The folk art is mainly practiced in Thrissur district of Kerala. Pulikali makes **use of forms and symbols of nature that find expression in its bright, bold body painting in yellow and orange and high-energy dance movements**. So by fusing man and beast in its artistic language, it flamboyantly celebrates the connection between humans and nature.

Pulikali performers enact scenes such as the tiger preying on an animal, and a tiger being hunted by a hunter .The

procession also includes floats from each village. The **different troupes vie with each other to make the best floats as well as the best dressed tigers.** A striking feature of this folk art is the colorful appearance of the performers. A particular combination of **tempera powder and varnish or enamel is used to make the paint.** Dancers will have to remove the hair from the body, and then, the base coat of paint is applied on them and it takes two to three hours for the paint to dry under the sunlight after which the second coating is applied again on the participants and the entire process takes five to six hours.