

Chavittunatakam : A synthesis of Cultures and Artforms

JANAL Team

Summary - *Cultures of Christianity and the form of Kathakali bring together a unique form of Indian Christian Dance Drama.*

JANAL Archive is the Kerala Museum's digital canvas for exhibitions on the history of Kerala. Produced in Kochi, Kerala in partnership with the Geojit Foundation.

Licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



Figure 1: A scene from *Jayakkodi*, a *chavittunatakam* performed at the Kerala Museum in April 2023

The emergence of Chavittunatakam, believed to have taken shape between the 17th and 18th centuries, has piqued the curiosity of scholars due to its intriguing blend of Western and Eastern artistic elements. Many researchers have pondered its origins, with consensus pointing towards the role of Latin Christians as pivotal in its development. Chavittunatakam serves as a tangible reflection of the significant changes that swept through Kerala under Portuguese influence. This art form also stands as a clear illustration of the transformative impact Christianity underwent in Kerala, spurred by the Portuguese presence. As one delves into the historical account of Chavittunatakam, one finds it tightly interwoven with the fabric of the region and its society. With its diverse cultural influences and strong ties to the evolution and indigenisation of Christianity in Kerala, Chavittunatakam presents a rich history that warrants attention from both scholars and those interested in understanding the evolution of both society and religion during that era.

“In one sense, we are returning to the past, where chavittunatakam was celebrated as an art form. I am happy to see that people are more aware of chavittunatakam now, so in another sense, it can also be seen as its rebirth.”
- Josy, a chavittunatakam writer, director, and performer.

This article delves deeper into Chavittunatakam, understanding it as a remarkable synthesis of artistic expressions. In addition, it is a fine sample of the power of indigenisation—the power to subsume several elements and give birth to a novel mode of expression that is at once foreign and native. The artform acted as a creative melting pot, deftly incorporating elements and styles from a myriad of cultures and artforms. From its inception, Chavittunatakam showcased an inherent adaptability, seamlessly weaving together Western theatrical techniques, Eastern rhythmic patterns, and indigenous storytelling traditions. This artistic amalgamation, a testament to the openness of Kerala to cross-cultural exchanges, not only provides a fascinating window into the socio-cultural tapestry

of the time but also underscores the universal appeal and enduring relevance of Chavittunatakam as a unique and captivating form of artistic expression.

Christianity in Kerala

Christianity in Kerala, India, has a unique and intricate history deeply embedded in the region's cultural and religious fabric. It traces its roots to the arrival of St. Thomas¹, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, in 52 AD. St. Thomas is believed to have established seven churches in Kerala and Tamilnadu, laying the foundation for what would become the St. Thomas Christian community, or *Nasranis*. Over the centuries, Kerala's Christian community has evolved through a series of encounters with various influences. Bishop David of Basra's arrival around 300 AD and the mission led by Thomas of Cana in 345 AD brought Persian and Mesopotamian Christian influences to the region. Thomas of Cana's arrival with 400 Christians from Baghdad in Kodungallur is considered a significant event and possibly marks the establishment of the first documented Christian community in South India.

From the 2nd millennium BC onwards, trade routes facilitating the exchange of spices between the Far East and Europe underwent transformations, often coinciding with shifts in imperial powers. Notably, the Arabs played a substantial role in the Indian Ocean, bolstering trade connections with Kerala while establishing a robust Islamic commercial network. This interaction eventually prompted King Manuel I of Portugal to charter voyages aimed at military campaigns against Muslims and expanding participation in the Indian Ocean trade.

¹ Joseph, Stephen. "Evaluation of the Basic Theological Education Course and Its Impact on the Preaching Skills of Lay Pastors." 2008, <https://core.ac.uk/download/155818327.pdf>.

The early St. Thomas Christians enjoyed rights and privileges, and their community was further strengthened by Persian immigrants. However, the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century marked a crucial turning point. The Portuguese, led by figures like Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, introduced changes that deeply impacted the local Christian population. The Goa Inquisition, Latinisations, and the imposition of a Latin bishop disrupted the indigenous Christian traditions, leading to resistance and division within the community.



Figure 2: Portuguese Kodungallur. Image: *History of Kerala*

St. Francis Xavier's visits to Kerala in 1544 and 1549 yielded conversions among various fisher castes, including the *Mukkuvans* and *Arayans*, who adhered to Roman papal authority and Latin rites. Importantly, these castes were deeply entrenched in the caste system, and newly converted members were initially prohibited from worshipping alongside Syrian Catholics until as late as 1914. This segregation prompted the construction of separate churches for Latin Catholics in Kerala and their subsequent formal recognition by the Roman papacy.

Latin Catholics were mainly converted from lower caste Hindu communities. These people shed their old religion to free themselves from caste discrimination. In their new religion, however, they continued to be categorised depending on their caste or

occupation. Thereby forming several subsections among the Latin Catholics. These were the *Arawatnalukar* (the community of the sixty-four), *Ezhunoottikars* (the 700), the *Anjoottikars* (the 500), and *Munnoottikars* (the 300). The *Arawatnalukar* were from the Brahmans and Nayars, the *Ezhunoottikar* the descendants of the soil slaves, *Munnottikar* the Anglo-Indians and the *Anjoottikar* converted fishermen.² The fishermen formed the majority of the Latin Catholics in Cochin due to the region's topography. This, along with the fact that most of them were low caste made them despised by the higher caste converts. Their white clothing also distinguished them from the rest.³

The complex religious landscape of Kerala today reflects the legacy of this historical journey of the religion. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church represent branches of the St. Thomas Christian tradition, each following distinct liturgical practices. Additionally, the Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church and the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church, both adhering to the West Syrian Rite, are integral to the religious mosaic of Kerala.

Missionaries and their influence on Indian Music

From the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, a notable and substantial Western influence was discernible in the Christian music of India. It is noteworthy that this era coincided with Europe's expansion, marked by the Age of Colonialism and Imperialism.

² Anantha, Krishna. 1926. *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 259.

³ Day, Francis. 1863. *The Land of the Permauls*, 398.

Goa, a Portuguese overseas territory in India, was annexed by India in 1961. The Portuguese first reached India in 1498 and conquered it in 1510, leading to significant conversions to Christianity. The Portuguese missionaries, including Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, and Augustinians, supported the missionaries, offering rice donations, good positions, and military support. The Portuguese imposed colonial policies, such as Portugalisation in customs and Latinisation in the Christian Rite, leading to a highly Westernised Goan culture. Goan music, including Latin hymns translated into *Konkani* and newly composed Konkani hymns, has evolved over the centuries, representing both Indian and Western musical traditions. *Mando*, a dance music that evolved during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, represents both Indian and Western musical traditions. *Deknni*, a semi-classical dance form, may have originated in Hindu tradition but is popular among Goan Catholics. The *ghumot*, an earthen pot-made instrument, is used for weddings and other religious performances.



Figure 3: Mass held in *Malayalam* during a wedding ceremony in St. George Forane Church, Edappally. The church is under the Syro Malabar Sect of the Catholic Church. Image: Maria Thaliath 2023

Roberto de Nobili, an Italian Jesuit missionary in south India, adopted an indigenisation strategy to preach Christianity. He arrived in Goa in 1605 and settled in Madurai in 1606. He studied

Sanskrit and Tamil literature, became a '*Tattuva Bhodini*' and became an ascetic. He adopted Hindu customs, such as shaving his head and wearing a white dhoti, wooden sandals, and a three-stringed thread representing the Holy Trinity. This strategy raised controversy among Jesuits and the Archbishop of Goa but was settled by Pope Gregory XV in 1623. De Nobili's approach was similar to that of Matteo Rich, who adopted an "indigenisation" strategy in China. The controversy over the strategy was initially raised against St. Thomas Christians and Jesuit missionaries but later grew into the Chinese Rites Controversy between the Dominicans and the Jesuits. As de Nobili was based in Madurai under tolerant native rule, it may have been necessary for the Catholic Rite in Madurai to be more indigenised than in Goa.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, allowed the use of native languages and customs in the Liturgy of Churches (customary public rituals for worship). The Church approved all art suitable for the Liturgy, allowing the use of the vernacular in Mass and Sacraments. Missionaries were encouraged to learn indigenous musical traditions. This decision led to a significant change in Christian music in Catholic churches. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) was established in 1944, and then they established the National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre in Bangalore in 1966. Bishops did not enforce a specific style of music on communities but allowed the use of indigenous music and instruments to help local communities. After the Second Vatican Council, some bishops began learning Hindustani or Carnatic music and composing devotional songs, such as *bhajan* and *kirtan*, which are now widely sold. Christian music in India today is diverse in form and language, with

masses held in various languages, especially on festival days.

Origin of Chavittunatakam

The origin of Chavittunatakam remains a subject of debate among scholars, with various narratives attributing its inception to different influences. One school of thought suggests that the local Christians in Kerala were exposed to the Portuguese theatrical style due to their close proximity to the colonial power. It is argued that these Kerala Christians, intrigued by the novel techniques and dramatic elements employed by the Portuguese, integrated certain aspects of their theatrical practices into their own traditional theatre. This adaptation involved incorporating daring stunts and emphasising the individuality of characters, marking a departure from the more conventional and restrained expressions in local performances.

An alternative perspective points out that it was the Portuguese themselves who took the initiative to shape Chavittunatakam. Displeased with the deep-rooted interest of the Kerala Christians in traditional drama, replete with its Hindu storylines and characters, the Portuguese sought to create a distinct form of Christian theatre that would align more closely with their religious beliefs and cultural values. Consequently, Chavittunatakam emerged as a deliberate effort to provide a platform for Christian-themed storytelling, effectively breaking away from the predominant Hindu-centric narratives of the time.



Figure 4: A chavittunatakam performance at St. Antony's Church, Vaduthalai in 1996. Image: *Chavittunatakam: Music-Drama in Kerala* by Joly Puthusseray

Regardless of its precise origins, Chavittunatakam undeniably represents a fusion of cultural influences, emerging primarily from the interactions between the local Christians and the Portuguese. The regions in Kerala, where Portuguese presence was most pronounced, played a pivotal role in fostering the flourishing of this theatrical tradition, thereby strengthening the connection between the two. The artistic influence of other indigenous performance arts, such as *Kathakali* and *Kalaripayattu*, can be distinctly discerned in Chavittunatakam. This amalgamation of artistic elements from different cultural sources contributed to the distinctiveness of the art form, setting it apart from conventional theatre styles. This interplay of ideas and practices, fuelled by religious and colonial dynamics, has also bestowed upon Chavittunatakam a unique historical significance that extends beyond mere artistic expression.

Making a Legend

During the 17th century, an intriguing cultural convergence occurred in Mattancherry, where individuals congregated around the *Kunankurishu* (or St. George Orthodox *Koonan Kurish* Old Syrian Church) to engage in religious activities on Sundays. These gatherings involved singing hymns, dancing, and prayer, which displayed distinct influences of Kathakali *padams* (dialogues in the dramatic text). The involvement of Chinnathambi Pilla, a Tamil Catholic scholar from Thenkashi who resided in Kochi, was particularly significant. Pilla observed these practices and subsequently crafted a play titled *Brasia*, which he taught to local performers. The populace enthusiastically embraced the reception of this new art form.

Various myths surround Chinnathambi Pilla, including his origins in Tamilnadu, his time in Kochi and Kodungallur, and his connection to a Portuguese missionary. The lore also suggests that when he sang, a cross in the Mattancherry Church bent towards him, forming the first *Chuvadi*, the recital of the text of Chavittunatakam. This cross, known as the *Koonan Kurishu* or slanted cross, is one that played a significant role in the history of Christianity in India. It is



Figure 5: Painting of the *Koonan Kurishu Cross Oath*. Image - *Chronicles of Malabar*

believed to be the cross used by Mar Thoma Christians to denounce the Portuguese kingdom in 1653, where thousands of people held a rope tied to the cross and took the oath. The most famous Chavittunatakams, *Kaaralsmaan* and *Brijeena Charitham*, were written by Chinnathampi Annave.

From the perspective of the Portuguese, who held reservations about the close association of Kerala's Christians with Hindu cultural elements like Kathakali and bhajans, Pilla's endeavours raise pertinent questions regarding his underlying motivation towards indigenisation. The emergence of a Christian theatre tradition might suggest that there was an attempt to propagate Christianity and assert its cultural tenets in a predominantly Hindu society. Pilla's efforts to nurture this performance tradition may have been driven by a desire to promote Christianity and introduce art forms more aligned with

Christian beliefs near places of Christian worship.

Chavittunatakam's thematic focus on depicting stories centred around European warriors and other heroic figures is a testament to its origins and intended audience. The art form predominantly served to narrate tales that resonated with the Christian community in Kerala, reinforcing their religious and cultural identity. "Initially, it was used to spread religion," said Josy during an interview with the researcher. It served as a powerful medium through which Christian stories and values were communicated, effectively spreading the faith among the local populace. In this sense, Chavittunatakam was not merely an artistic expression but also a tool for religious dissemination, mirroring the broader aims of the Portuguese in promoting Christianity in the region.

The Steps and Chuvadi

The *ashan*, the master and director of the performance, is also respectfully referred to as *annave*, in homage to the art's creator, Chinnathampi Annave. The *ashan* plays a pivotal role, being the custodian of the Chuvadi book, which contains the script of the *natakam*. Typically, the tradition of passing down Chuvadis from generation to generation sees the master bestowing this responsibility upon their favourite student or offspring. Interestingly, although women do participate in Chavittunatakam, female *ashans* are exceedingly rare. Chuvadis are rarely passed on to female performers or their offspring. Some contend that the first instance of women portraying women's roles in Chavittunatakam occurred in the 1956 production of *Geevarghese Charitham Natakam*.

Additionally, there was an all-female troupe in Gothuruth during the 1960s. Treasa, a female performer working with the *Kreupasanam* troupe, says, "I started performing when I was eight. That was in 1976. My very first performance was two days long. In those days, Chavittunatakam used to be like that. It is only now that it has been reduced to the duration of a few hours."



Figure 6: Josy, who is the director or the *ashan*, blesses a new performer who joined the troupe. The image was taken on the day the JANAL team observed a practice session at Josy's house. Image: JANAL Archives 2023

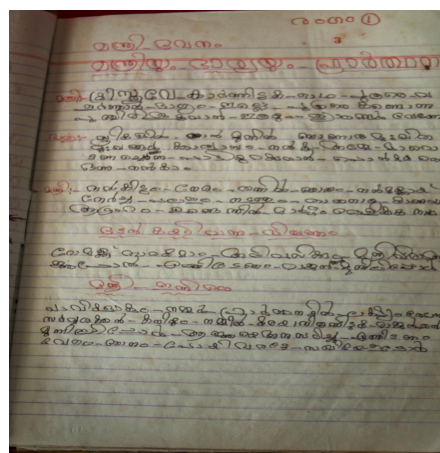


Figure 7: The first page of a Chuvadi, in the handwriting of Josy. Image: JANAL Archives 2023

Earlier, selecting actors for chavittunatakam involved a year-long rigorous training process at the *kalari* (school), often situated in the front yards of houses, with teaching hours scheduled around the *ashan's* availability, typically in the evening after their work. "Everyone in my family was a chavittunatakam performer. My parents and elder sisters all performed Chavittunatakam. In our native place, an *ashan* used to come and give training to children from a young age," said Treasa. Aspiring performers, spanning various age groups, underwent comprehensive training encompassing Kalaripayattu steps, intricate dance *mudras*, and memorising the entire drama. A defining aspect of this art form is the rhythmic stamping by the performers on the wooden stage, often accompanied by various musical instruments. Instruments like the *chenda* and *elathaalam* are employed for male roles requiring robust stamping.

In contrast, female roles incorporate *mrudangam*, *tabla*, *fiddle*, *flute*, and *bulbul*, accompanied by softer, rhythmic steps performed by the artists. The play uses meticulously tailored costumes that suit the narrative. The final casting decisions rested with the *ashan* at the end of the year. Although this traditional

method has dwindled over time, the troupe now makes casting decisions following shorter practice sessions spanning a few months.

Music, Style, and Make-up

Chavittunatakam emphasises the importance of the actors' singing and the background music. Josy says, "Chavittunatakam is the only art form where the performers sing without other artists singing as backup." Music is composed in extreme harmony with the time measure and movement of the characters. The songs are composed in the vast and varied Tamil musical literature tunes, which Kerala inherited from the Sangha Poems. The composers of chavittunatakam plays use various *rasas*, which mainly suit the sentiment of valour and parade deeds of bravery and thrilling fights.

When asked about the *ragas* he uses in compositions, Josy said, "chavittunatakam songs are usually in certain ragas from classical music. I make sure that the lines of the songs, even if they are contemporary plays, match or fit into the traditional ragas. Only then will it sound authentic. If I were to write a song like any other, or if the situation I choose does not match the artform itself, it will not look complete or genuine."

Chavittunatakam follows the *tandava* style, primarily for men, symbolising strength and vitality. The steps are set to *talas* of time measures, with different footwork for noble characters like kings, commandants, angels, priests, and physicians. Low personages, like thieves or executioners, have different sets of steps. The dance has 12 essential steps, including *Kavitham*, *Kalasam*, *Edakkalasam*, and *Atantha*. The hero performs *Kavitham* at the beginning of a Durbar scene. Mastery in *Kavitham* is achieved through years of experience, and the correct display is considered the

hallmark of a well-trained, experienced actor. *Kalasams* are vigorous steps at the end of a song, while *Edakkalasams* are in the middle of a song. Although Chavittunatakam resembles Kathakali, *Atantha* combines flowing steps for women, resembling *Mohiniyattam*.⁴ Footwork is crucial in Chavittunatakam, as actors enter the stage, move around, and go out, keeping strict time to the drum beats. Thomas, who has decades of experience performing chavittunatakam, said, "There are various *mudras* in Chavittunatakam, and they are similar to what one sees in Kathakali. These *mudras* are very important for storytelling. I have been on stage for so long that the *mudras* come naturally to me when I hear a song."



Figure 8: Uma Devi, demonstrating mudras for the JANAL team. Image: JANAL Archives 2023

Chavittunatakam expresses the mood of the plot and its characters through costumes, ornaments, and make-up. The costumes are renowned for their artistic excellence, featuring elaborate designs of great emperors, mediaeval kings, and knights from Europe. The soldiers wear Greco-Roman uniforms, with the helmet and breastplate being first modelled in clay. The costumes and make-up are realistic to an extent, without masks or symbolic representation. Emperors and kings dress as emperors, soldiers as

⁴ Raphy, Sabeena. "Chavittu-Natakam dramatic opera of Kerala, 59-60." 1969.

soldiers, and sages as such, ensuring an unforgettable sight. Uma Devi, who is 64 years old and still an active member of chavittunatakam performances, began performing when she was 14. When asked about costumes and make-up, she said, "When I started performing in 1969, when I was 14 years old, we didn't have gowns like those we see now. Back then, we used to wear sarees wrapped around ourselves in a particular style. Only men had costumes specially made for them. We made do with sarees. It has only been a few years since female performers have used modern gowns on stage."

In the past, before the advent of entertainment broadcasts like Doordarshan, Chavittunatakam provided believers with a cultural extravaganza that was deeply rooted in their heritage. *Kaaralsmaan* Chavittunatakam, among the most renowned, once ran for a remarkable 15 consecutive nights. With the advent of alternative entertainment media such as radio and television, the duration of these performances has considerably shortened. Fortnight-long spectacles have been condensed into week-long productions, which have been further truncated into performances lasting mere hours. Presently, the average Chavittunatakam production spans approximately three to four hours, showcasing the art's most dynamic and acrobatic elements. Treasa said, "Earlier chavittunatakam performances used to last 2-5 days. Each performance takes a lot out of each performer, as it is physically straining. However, still, performers never got tired. even if the programme lasted a few days, because we are used to it."

Different places brought their styles to the dance drama, creating the *Thekkan* (southern) style and *Vadakkan* (northern) style. Regions closer to Kodungallur, such as Gothuruth, Thuruthipurath, and Kurumbathuruth, follow the Vadakkan style, while artists from Kochi and other

southern regions follow the *Thekkan* style.

Themes

It is imperative to acknowledge that a substantial portion of Chavittunatakam literature comprises fictitious narratives that are woven around both actual and fictional individuals. These narratives were meticulously crafted to instil the Christian way of life as envisioned by the Roman papacy. Over time, Chavittunatakam underwent a significant transformation, relinquishing its ecclesiastical associations. This evolution allowed individuals from diverse religious backgrounds and societal strata in the coastal regions to embrace and contribute to this art form. Remarkably, within the Catholic Church, various sects regarded Chavittunatakam as an inferior artistic expression. Performers adorned themselves with makeup, wigs, and gloves, delivering dialogues in an unfamiliar language, alienating themselves from conventional practices within the Church. However, it is imperative to underscore that the rationale behind these peculiarities is deeply rooted in the rigid caste hierarchy of society.



Figure 9: *Jayakkodi*, a Chavittunatakam about the hardships faced by the people of Chellanam, being performed at Kerala Museum in April 2023.

Given the mixed origin of the costumes and storylines, Chavittunatakam failed to gain recognition within the realm of

'Classical Indian' dance forms for an extended period. This art form persisted despite minimal financial support, preserving the cultural heritage of the fishermen's communities for centuries. Recently, there has been a resurgence of Chavittunatakam on the global art stage as a cosmopolitan art form that synthesises elements from both Eastern and Western cultures. Notably, it has been promoted as the only existing maritime dance drama in the world. This newfound exposure prompted the creation of contemporary Chavittunatakam performances featuring a diverse array of themes, including adaptations of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," Sophocles' "Oedipus," and the highly acclaimed "Swamy Ayyappan," which intriguingly brought Chavittunatakam back to temple precincts. This development has been met with irony by some observers, as the art form, originally designed to disengage converts from traditional temples, now finds a place within these sacred grounds.

Girija, one of the audience members of the Chavittunatakam performance *Jayakkodi* organised by the Kerala Museum, commented, "I have seen a Chavittunatakam long ago during a *palliperunal* (church festival). I have not seen Chavittunatakams that adapt contemporary stories like we saw today. I didn't know that was done these days. Usually, such artforms stick to their original stories, right? This was refreshing and such a change to witness."

The broader audience appeal and exploration of bold new themes in Chavittunatakam performances are gradually gaining acceptance within the cultural psyche of Kerala. This newfound recognition can be partially attributed to the sudden global attention garnered by Chavittunatakam. Furthermore, the future of this art form appears promising, as it has been integrated into the ambit of the

School Youth Festival under the auspices of the Kerala State Government. Josy is a regular judge at school youth festivals and commented, "I am invited regularly to judge school youth festivals. Because it is a competition event now, a lot more people are taking an interest in it and are trying to learn more about the art form." This institutional support signifies a resurgence and revitalisation of Chavittunatakam, ensuring its preservation and continued contribution to the rich tapestry of Kerala's cultural heritage.

Influences

This critical examination shows the intricate and complex origin of Chavittunatakam, influenced by a combination of artistic, religious, and cultural factors.

The incorporation of European heroic narratives from Portuguese theatre into Chavittunatakam, for the dissemination of Christianity in Kerala raises questions about the underlying motivations driving the genesis of this artistic tradition. This strategic utilisation reveals the intricate interplay between artistic representation and religious propagation, implying a calculated approach to advancing colonial agendas through artistic means.

The resemblance between Chavittunatakam's preliminary prayer, *venpa*, and the initiation of Sanskrit plays emphasises the ritualistic elements shared in Indian theatrical customs. Although the purposes of these prayers may differ, their presence is proof of the cultural foundations of Chavittunatakam within broader theatrical traditions. The resemblance of *Kattiyakkaran* in Chavittunatakam to comedic figures in Tamil and Telugu theatrical traditions suggests a reciprocal cultural interaction between Kerala and neighbouring regions, enriching the dramatic configuration of Chavittunatakam. Furthermore, the

discernible elements of the Koothu tradition in Kattiyakkaran highlight the potential cross-cultural inspirations and influences on the genesis of this art form, shedding light on its multifaceted origins.



Figure 10: Performers and some of their family members praying before the beginning of rehearsal. Image: JANAL Archives 2023

The selection of principal performers proficient in Kalarippayattu reflects an amalgamation of performing arts and physical training in Kerala. While this practice adds a dimension of visual extravagance and physical agility to the performances, it also raises concerns about the potential exclusivity and accessibility of principal roles within Chavittunatakam, possibly limiting the participation of artists not versed in Kalarippayattu.

Conclusion

Chavithunatakam has consistently adapted to meet the evolving needs of its audience, making it a dynamic and

responsive art form. Since its inception, Chavithunatakam has demonstrated a commitment to engaging with its audience through themes, language, and performance duration changes. The transition from traditional heroic tales to addressing contemporary issues such as climate change and socio-economic problems indicates the art form's proactive nature in addressing pertinent concerns. The reduction in performance duration, from days to a few hours, and the alterations made to older plays to resonate with modern sensibilities further underscore

Chavithunatakam's indigenisation quality, i.e., flexibility and willingness to absorb and evolve while remaining rooted in tradition. Including women in Chavittunatakam performances from the 1950s is a positive step towards inclusivity and gender equality, enhancing the art's relevance in a changing society. Additionally, simplifying the language to make it more accessible to a broader Malayalee audience is a commendable effort to ensure that Chavittunatakam remains a vibrant and living art form that can engage and resonate with contemporary viewers. These adaptations have made Chavittunatakam more relevant and enriches its cultural and artistic significance.

References

- George, Dewmol, and Celine E. (Sr. Vinitha). "Indigenised European Theatre: The Transfusional Narrative of Chavittu Natakam." *Teresian Journal of English Studies*, vol. 12 (2), Apr. 2020: 44–52.
- Gladstone, John Wilson. *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement in Kerala: A Study of Christian Mass Movements in Relation to Neo-Hindu Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850-1936*. Kerala United Theological Seminary, 1984.
- Puthussery, Joly. "Chavittunatakam: Music-drama in Kerala." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 37 (3–4), 2003: 321–341, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2003.0031>.
- Racheal E.V., Annie. "Probing History of Chavittunatakam." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, vol. 10 (11), Nov. 2021, <https://doi.org/http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.11.12>.
- Raphy, Sabeena. "Chavittu-Natakam Dramatic Opera of Kerala." Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1969.
- Ross, Israel J. "Ritual and Music in South India: Syrian Christian Liturgical Music in Kerala." *Asian Music*, vol. 11 (1), 1979: 80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/833968>.