

Folk Theatre of India: Koothu



Koothu which is also called Therukoothu is a Tamilian art form that incorporates dancing and music in the backdrop of narration and presentation of epics in the Tamil Language. The Dravidian society has been a harbour of cultural nourishment since time immemorial. It is believed that the Koothu had originated in the early days of the Dravidian Tamilakam.

The term Koothu refers to two performing arts viz. Terukuttu and Kattaikkuttu. In contemporary times, the two terms have an interchangeable usage. However, in medieval times, the two terms referred to two entirely different dramatics art forms. Kattaikkuttu consists of performances that take place overnight at a stationary fixed place. Terukuttu often refers to mobile and non-stationary performances that usually take place in a procession.

The prominence in its growth was achieved by Koothu during the medieval eras wherein during the Sangam era. This peak is clearly reflected in the Sangam literature which lay a preface to the nurturing of the natagam(drama), isai(music) and iyal(dance). The Sangam literature also etched out the fact

that the Koothu acted as a medium for the education of religion, tradition and history in the rural strata of society.

Koothu, in its inherent settings, does not include any spoken dialogues, it only consists of songs and music. The dance of Koothu has an informal structure and tone to it, with the backdrop of performances being the depiction of scenes from the Hindu mythologies like Ramayana and the Mahabharata along with some Tamil classics. Heavy, colourful and intricate costumes blended with elaborated and extravagant makeup are used by the performers in the drama. Sparkling shoulder plates, towering head gears and wide skirts. Since no amplification instruments are used, the performers are trained to sing in their voices at a high pitch so that they can amass the entire audience.



Koothu had been traditionally a male-centric theatre form, however with the change of times female participation has significantly increased. Over the years, there had been no institution for formal education of Koothu, however recently

the koothu pattari (workshops for koothu) and an array of dedicated schools have been set up to save the dying art.

Independent Project by Abhinav Sharma

Guide ⇒ Prof. Manohar Khushalani

References :

1. *Therukoothu*, The Street Theatre of Tamilnadu
2. Theru Koothu: A Tamil street theatre tradition in danger of fading into oblivion has found a new lease on life