Folk Dances of India: Kolkali



Kolkali Dance is a folk dance practised by the inhabitants of the region of the North Malabar belt and the Lakshwadeep Islands. This group dance form has a history that goes back around two millenniums in time. It is widely regarded that this dance form has drawn elements from Kalaripayattu(this is a martial art practised in Kerala and Tamil Nadu). The body postures, choreography and the footwork displayed in Kolkali derive their roots in the training schedules of Kalaripayattu.

Kolkali is performed to magnify the occasions of joy and happiness. During the paddy harvest season in the Malabar Belt, Kolkali is performed by groups with all the pomp and show. The dance form is all-inclusive with participants being from all the castes, creeds and religions. The tribal festivals and the weddings in these areas have Kolkali as an integral part. At times a wooden stage called ‘Thattinmelkali’ is constructed for the performance of Kolkali.



Breaking the word Kolkali, it is comprised of two words i.e. ‘kol’ meaning sticks and ‘kali’ meaning dance, hence Kolkali being the dance-with-sticks. This dance form has rhythmic, eye-catching moves with participants moving in about a circle, striking small sticks in the same rhythm complemented by elegant footsteps. The climax of the dance performance is amalgamated with certain high-frequency musical notes, with 12-24 dancers moving unbrokenly moving in and out of a circle with the traditional ceremonial lamp, called ‘Nilavilakku’ at the centre. This movement encompasses tapping with the feet and the handheld wooden sticks.

The songs in the Kolkali dance are a concoction of devotional stories which are an auditory imagery of the regional Gods. The clinking and the striking sticks in a rhythmic way augment the music and create a holistic atmosphere. Musical instruments like Chengala, Mathalam, Elathalam and Chenda are used in this dance form.

The very scene of Kolkali artists – performing dynamic and radiant steps against a surreal backdrop of pulsating and enriching music is a sight to cherish and delight. Kolkali is a vibrant art form that makes the culture and the heritage of

the Malabar Belt and the Lakshwadeep Islands opulent and sumptuous.

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References :

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2. Types of Kolkali