



KAIKOTTIKALIPATTUKAL AS A SYNTHESIS OF DEVOTION, LITERATURE AND MUSIC

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Abstract

Kaikottikalipattukal are devotional and narrative song tradition of Kerala rooted in Puranic themes and oral transmission. Characterized by lyrical simplicity, graceful rhythm, and the expression of *lasyabhava*, it holds a significant place alongside other Malayalam song genres. Eminent poets such as *Kunjan Nambiyar* and *Irayimman Thampi* enriched its repertoire with devotional, romantic, and narrative compositions. The tradition includes diverse categories such as *Sthuthis*, *Vrittapattukal*, *Kathakali Padangal*, folk songs, and *Mangalam*, reflecting a blend of classical and folk elements. This study highlights Kaikottikalipattu as a vibrant cultural expression preserving Kerala's spiritual heritage and women-centered performance tradition.

Index terms: Kaikottikalipattu, Thiruvathirakali, Attakathas, Mangaladhira, Dashapushpam, Ettangadi, Kuravan, Kurathi, Unjal.

I.INTRODUCTION

Kaikottikalipattu is the literary form of Kaikottikali (a dance form). Independent language songs based on Puranic stories, which were orally passed down and popularized, were the ancient method for Kaikottikalipattu. In North Kerala, there are differences in the songs and play styles compared to the rules in South Kerala. The Puranic narratives praising the gods and goddess are retold in the songs. Padas (verses) from *Attakkathas* (Kathakali literature) are also used for Kaikottiakali.

The literary quality of Kaikottikalipattu can be placed alongside other Malayalam song genres like *Kilippattu*, *Thullalppattu*, and *Vanchippattu*. Simple embellishments, heartfelt imaginations, a pleasant tune, and a graceful rhythm make kaikottikalipattu excellent song literature along with the corresponding foot movements and *Kummi*

(a particular segment in kaikottikkali) bring out the '*lasyabhava*' (feminine grace) in the dance. The narration, which is short and straightforward, also gives the song a lyrical quality.

Many songs on the stories of Sreekrishna and his wives can be read in this work. The section that re-enacts 'Rukmini Swayamvaram' (Rukmini's wedding) in the style of a kaikottikalipattu is noteworthy. The Krishna story songs, which have '*shringara*' (romance) and '*hasya*' (humour) as their '*rasas*' (sentiments), also celebrate the love, desire, and married life within the concept of Thiruvathira. The verses presenting the story of Sree Rama and Seetha in the form of a song have also gained much popularity.

II.THE FAMOUS AUTHORS AND THEIR LITERARY WORKS

Kunjan Nambiyar, Machattu Ilayath, Venmani Namboodiri, Kottur Nambiyar, Ambadi Kunju Krishna Poduval, Irayman Thambi, his Daughter Kutty Kunju Tangachi, Pattathu Kunjuni Nambiyar, Aripattu Kochu Govinda Warriar, Naduvathu Mahan Namboodiri, Kodungaloor Kochunni Thamburan, Kottarathil Shankunni are the eminent poets who had composed Thiruvathira songs. *Machattu ilayath – shanthampilli Narayana ilayath* had composed kaikottikkali pattu at the instigation of *Karimbatta Chinnammukutti Netyaramma*, the second wife of *Shakthan Thamburan*. Some of his famous writings are mentioned below-

1. *Parvarthy paanigrahanam – pathuvrittam(10 vrittam)*
2. *Ajaamilamoksham – naaluvrittam (four vrittam)*
3. *Gopikageetha – naalu vrittam (four vrittam)*

In 1954, the first part of shri ilayath's works was printed and published by vidhwan Ilayath smaaraka vayanashaala of vadakaancheri near Trissur. The expression of romantic feelings and tender feelings full of simplicity and sweetness is a contribution of youth.

Rasakreeda – four vrittam & Rukmini swayamvaram – ten vrittam are believed to belong to *Kunjan Nambiyar*:

1. *Kuchelakatha – kottur Nambiyar*
2. *Paatracharitham – ambadi kunju krishna podhuval*
3. *Subadraharanam – aroor Madhavanadithiri*
4. *Subadraharanam, pandrandu vrittam – Irayman thambi*
5. *Ashtapadhi – pattathu kunjuni nambiyar*
6. *Shakunthalam – aripattukochugovinda warriar*

Besides, *Venmani namboodiris* poems like "*omanakuttan Govindan*" are also very popular compositions. *Shangunni*'s compositions at the palace also enriched this genre of music. Some of his famous works are mentioned below:

1. *Nivaathakavachakaalakeyavadam – iruvathinaalu vrittam*
2. *Srimoolarajavilaasam – pathu vrittam*

III. MUSICAL REPERTOIRE IN KAIKOTTIKKALI

Earlier, the artform was practiced in the households of brahmin families. The content of the songs was usually in praise of shiva Parvathy, Rama, Krishna, Maha Vishnu, devi, Subramanian, dashavatharam. The performance begins with a ganapthy stuti and Saraswathi sthuti all the time. The songs based on mythology or *mahakavya*, *kathakali* padam(songs), *vanjipattu*(boat song), *kurathi*(gypsy songs), *kummi* songs, *hasyaganangal* (comedy songs), *saamuhyavimarshanaganangal*(social criticism) were part of the kaikottikkali. Thiruvathira songs are melodious with literary music such as songs with Tamil influence, delicate once for little groups, songs for drumming, songs about *dashapushpam* and its glory, *unjal*(swing) songs, *mangaladhira*, songs about *ettangadi*. We can hear the heartbeat of kerala life in songs. Folk tunes and classical tunes have been used in these. All the keerthanams are arranged in classical ragas. *Kurathi*, *vanjipattu*, *kummi pattu* are sung in folk style. Some of the songs are composed in classical tunes and some in folk tunes while describing mythological stories etc.

3.1 STHUTIS

Many devotional songs exist that describe the exploits and praises of gods and goddesses, as well as the greatness of temples. These are known as sthuthis or prayers. They are traditionally used as hymns in the ritualistic kaikottikkali dance. Every art form, ceremony, and ritual begin by praising Gods or Goddesses. Sthuthis are sung at the beginning, during intervals, and at the end of kaikottikkali.

3.1.1 GANESHA STHUTI

Kaikottikkali begins by praising Ganesha for the smooth and successful completion of the event. Some famous Ganesha prayers that start as follows:

- *"Thuduthude nalla kadalippazham..."*
- *"Thumbappoomalayum Ganganeerum..."*

3.1.2 SARASWATHI STHUTI

The Saraswati Stuthis are hymns that praise Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and wisdom.

- *"Ponmayamaayoru..."*
- *"Thamarappoovil vasikkum devi'..... "*

The sthuthis in praise of Parvathi, Shiva and Krishna are also sung in the repertoire of kaikottikkali.

3.2 DESHAPATTUKAL

Desham means region or place. In the context of devotional traditions, *Deshapaatukal* are songs that are deeply rooted in local beliefs, legends, and traditions, and they highlight the unique aspects, stories, and divine qualities of the deity worshipped in that region. They serve not only as musical offerings but also to pass down spiritual heritage and cultural identity through generations. Each region has its own unique style and variety of *deshapattukal*, making them a distinctive and meaningful part of the performance tradition.

Some of the examples are as follows:

- *thiruvallaalayamaasane sreevallabhane.....'*
- *"ambalappuzhayil mevitu gopaal Krishnaa....."*

3.3 VRITTHAPATTUKAL

In ancient times, Kaikottikkali performances were conducted over extended durations, often lasting several hours or even days. Due to the length and narrative depth of these traditional performances, the use of *Vritthapattukal* was more prominent during that period. *Vritthapattu* refers to a form of song that narrates an entire Puranic story or epic theme, systematically divided into multiple segments. Each segment corresponds to a different episode or phase of the story, and is rendered in various tune, rhythm, and musical structure.

- *'Shukapuri'* (Rasakreeda Naluvritham - Kunjan Nambiar)
- *'Thaamarakkannan...'* (Rukmini Swayamvaram Pathuvritham - Kunjan Nambiar)

3.4 KATHAKALI PADANGAL

Kathakalipadangal, the lyrical compositions of Kathakali, are traditionally rendered in the *Sopana* musical style. A considerable number of the songs employed in *kaikottikali* are adapted from these *Kathakalipadangal*. Although originally composed in Sanskrit and *Manipravalam*. The main themes of Kathakali padams are indeed drawn from Puranic texts and epic stories like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Shiva Purana.

3.5 NAADANPATTUKAL

Folk songs represent the very heartbeat of rural cultural expression and constitute an integral component of Kaikottikkali. The repertoire of these folk songs encompasses a diverse range of themes, including agricultural and harvest songs, expressions of daily human emotions, dialogues between mother and child or father and child, humorous songs, exaggerated narratives, occasional compositions, *sadya* (feast-related) songs, and songs inspired by weather and seasonal changes. Some types of *naadanpattukal* includes *Vinodapattukal*, *Thamashapattukal* and *Onapattukal* etc. These songs are composed for entertainment purposes using simple language and humour and are traditionally performed during the festival celebrations in Kerala.

3.6 KUMMI

Kummi songs are among the most popular in the repertoire of kaikottikalipattu. The practice of Kummi holds cultural importance in both Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Many poets have contributed compositions specifically for **Kummi**. Unlike **kaikottikali**, which typically unfolds at a graceful, moderate pace, **Kummi** is characterized by its brisk tempo, rhythmic hand claps, and energetic movements. **Kaikottikali Kummi** songs blend folk lyricism, devotional storytelling, and community participation, preserving oral traditions through generations of women performers. A particularly notable example is the celebrated Kummi segment from Irayimman Thampi's **Uttaraswamyamvaram**, featured in the play beginning with the line "Veera! Viraada! Kumaravibho..."—a composition where the word Kummi itself stands out as emblematic and widely recognized.

3.7 KURATHIPATTUKAL

Kurathi songs typically revolve around the theme of fortune-telling by the Kuravan and Kurathi (male and female fortune-tellers). The fortuneteller examines the palm of a person, praises its features, and predicts their future. The narration is usually presented in a colloquial style, adding to its charm and relatability. Significant emphasis is placed on the melodic structure, making the tune a vital element of the performance. The background of these songs can be rooted in both everyday life and mythological contexts. One of the famous kurathippattu composed by *Machattilayathu* is '*Divyanakum Parasaramamunindran Pandu...*' from *Vyasotpatthi Kurathippattu*.

3.8 VANJIPATTUKAL

Boat songs (*Vanchippattukal*) are occasionally incorporated into *kaikottikali* performances. Traditionally composed in the *Nathonnatha* meter (characterized by a distinct metrical pattern, a unique rhythmic structure, and a flowing musicality that sets it apart within traditional compositions.), these songs align with the rhythmic movement of oars during rowing. An example of *vanjipattu* from *kuchelavruttam* is “*Aazhimakalum orumichoru...*”

3.9 MANGALAM

Mangalam is usually performed in praise of the presiding deity of the temple, household where the performance takes place, or in reference to the sanctity of that place. Devotees seek forgiveness to the lord for their sins knowing and unknowingly. The harmonious tunes and meaningful lyrics of Mangalam continues to inspire and bring joy to those who take part in festivals, making it a cherished tradition in the hearts of many. Example, “*paaril prasidhamaam shri guruvayur vaanarulum*”.

IV.CONCLUSION

Kaikottikalippattukal stands as a rich literary and musical tradition that complements the graceful dance form of *Kaikottikali*. Rooted in Puranic narratives and devotional expression, it harmoniously blends classical sophistication with folk vitality. Through its diverse repertoire—ranging from *Sthuthis*, *Vrittappattukal*, and *Kathakali Padangal* to *Naadanpattukal*, *Kummi*, *Kurathi*, and *Vanchippattukal*—the tradition reflects the spiritual depth, regional identity, and everyday life of Kerala.

The contributions of eminent poets such as *Kunjan Nambiyar*, *Irayimman Thampi*, and *Venmani Namboodiri* have enriched its literary and aesthetic value. Preserving feminine grace, devotional fervor, and community participation, *Kaikottikalippattukal* continues to remain a vibrant cultural heritage that sustains Kerala’s artistic and spiritual legacy across generations.

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