



Kalamezuthu: A Ritualistic Art of Kerala- An Artistic Analysis

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Abstract

Kerala has various ritualistic traditions that are still practiced today. Kalamezhuthu is an important ritualistic tradition in Kerala. It involves creating pictures of deities on the floor using colored powders with hands. This entire practice includes the myths, beliefs, philosophical and cultural significance. Use of colors and line the kalamezuthu artist are creating magical effects in the floor. There are various elements to enhance the effects of kalamezuthu in the form of decorations, music, and performance. There are different communities practicing klamezhuthu as a family tradition. in India have various floor art like kolam, alpana, mandana, rangoli, likhnu and many more, in that kalamezhuthu has unique characteristics and beauty, that evolved from ancient. This paper aims to artistically analyze kalamezhuthu to elevate the aesthetic richness in the picture making of kalamezhuthu.

Key words: kalamezuthu, Floor art, Ritualistic art, Kerala, Aesthetics

Introduction

India, as a culturally diverse country has various ritualistic traditions in various way of practices in different part of the country. In the ritualistic tradition, floor art is important in the culture, including included various worship and sacred meanings. Different kind of floor art has been practicing in different part of India in example, Kolam from Tamil Nadu, Alpan from West Bengal, rangoli from north India, Mandana from Madhya Pradesh, Likhnu art from Himachal Pradesh etc. these art forms, which have been passed through generations, are full of aesthetic and timeless artistic knowledge.



Figure 1: kalamezuth artist creating kalamezhuth

Kalamezuthu is a floor art considered the oldest ritualistic art form of Kerala, also called kalamezhuthu pattu. Etymologically the word kalamezuthu composed of two words: kalam denotes the sacred space where ritual drawing is done, and ezhuthu means writings, which implies drawing (M, 2024).

Kalamezuthu is distinguished from other Indian floor arts by its visuality and ritualistic practices. Mostly actively practicing in a festival season yearly and it is highly associated with temple culture. Natural color powder is used to create pictures of deities, and going through various ritualistic performance and then finally wipe out the picture at the end. In the entire process includes with various visual elements that elevate the aesthetic quality and richness of kalamezuthu tradition.

In human history, where people started to stay together in one place, they started to do various picture makings in the wall and floor part of their communication, expression, and other activities. Later when humans stated to adapted more myth into life this picture making also became part of ritualistic. The continuity of ancient worship and rituals can be seen in kalamezuthu tradition, because the cocept of Mother God can be seen in kalamezuthu in the form of various expression of Bhagavathi kalam. The figures of deity, which contain elements of compassion and wildness at the same time, are transformed into kalamezuthu format in which devotees can see the divine in them, rather than just an image.



Figure 2: completed bhadrakali kalam

The entire process of kalamezuthu begins and ends on the same day, which is completely different from other commercial art forms. As a clan occupation, only a specific group of people practice and maintain kalamezuthu tradition. Artisans Kurup family is one of important in the kalamezuthu tradition. Artists depict different deities according to beliefs and rituals, important deities are Bhadra Kali, Ayyapan and Vettaykorumakan in addition, tantric spheres without figures are also creating in the kalamezuthu. The entire kalamezuthu program goes through three major steps. first is create kalam that means creating deities' picture on the floor and second is singing kalam paatu. paatu means song in Malayalam language. Different types of songs are sung as part of various form of worships. and finally erasing the floor picture. The entire process includes various visual elements to elevate the created floor image, such as decorations, natural lightings, performance part of rituals, singers, and their visual appearance. Kalamezuthu itself has unique richness in aesthetics, using only five colours create magical effects and the visibility of lines and their linearity of aesthetics creating divine effects in the floor. How must be a perfect picture should be are described in Vishnu dramothara purana popularly known as the shadanga theory, that all positive traits can be seen in kalamezuthu art. This research paper artistically analyses the kalamezuthu and closely understanding the various visual elements how it works aesthetically in the kalamezuthu art.

Literature review

- **Kalamezuthile chitra dharshanam by Dr. Radhakrishnan Chembra, Kerala Lalithkala Academi, 2011**

This book covers various aspects of study on kalamezhuthu, its social and aesthetic understanding in the context of Kerala, and discusses the floor art tradition of India. discussing the use of colors and their connection to the panchbhootha concepts and other inner meanings from kalamezhuthu.

- **A hereditary art of Kerala- Kalamezuthu by Dr. Vishnu Namboodiri, DC books publication, 2020**

This book is a detailed study of kalamezuthu by Dr. Vishnu Namboodiri, a scholar who has immensely contributed to Kerala folklore studies. This book that touches almost every aspect of this ritualistic art form, such as its social, religious, environmental, artistic and philosophical aspects. This survey encapsulates the concept and practices of kalamezuthu as a hereditary art. Through this ritualistic tradition this book has discussing the social relationship and ethnic values of the present generations. Also included picture plates of kalamezuthu that helps to closely Analyse the visual, aesthetical aspects.

- **Kalamezuth: festival of visual by Ragendra Kartha, Chitravartha, Kerala Lalithkala Academi publication, February 2020**

In this article, the author, an artist Ragendra Kartha, reading kalamezuthu in its aesthetical quality and discusses about the picture quality in the context of shadanga theory also going through various kalams and its differences.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research method to explore the richness of kalamezuthu and its unique aesthetics. The methodology is as follows.

A comprehensively reviewed academic journals, articles, books are closely related this research area. That includes different studies on kalamezuthu helps to find the research gap. mostly secondary data collected for this study. Various online sources used to get art talks and discussions and documentaries about concerned research topic. Data collected on the basis of identified areas such as visual aesthetics, process of making, materials and its visual effects, other visual elements in the kalamezuthu art. Qualitative analysis use to the collected literature to identify the findings in the concerned area in a way how kalamezuthu art become a richest artistic tradition specially the context of its visual aesthetics. The findings emerged from this study are interpreted in artistic analysis offering new insights.

Results and discussion

Kerala has diverse in art and culture, different traditional and folk-art practices have rich cultural history, Kalamezuthu art has significant role in that, considered as very ancient ritualistic art practices. What we see today is a fine version of kalamezhuthu that carries various knowledge accumulated from the past. In particular, the context of visual aesthetics, it has reached into a unique style of visual imagery. The picture created in the floor is beyond just image; it has a divine effect. More than just focusing on the floor image, the entire kalamezuthu program is a work of art because it starts step by step, including music, rhythms, performance, and many other artistic aspects. Kerala's other traditional arts like kathakali, koodiyattam, and kooth are all familiar to people by their artistic sensibilities but its roots come from kalamezuthu (Kantha, 2020). Its aesthetics can be seen in the paintings of KCS Paniker, who is one of the important Indian modern artists.

The entire kalamezuthu program is complete in a day, and can be classified into three steps: create image on the floor and keep it for a few hours for worship and then wipe out the image. These three steps are associated with the concept of Srishti (creation), sthiti (maintains), and samhara (destruction) from Hindu philosophy. This art form is not familiar globally because it has a strong ritualistic structure and only occurs in a day program within the temple culture. It is considered that deities are summoned to the stage using tantric methods after creating a picture on the floor. The artisans believe that by drawing the deity's eyes at the end of the picture, the deity's life is coming in the picture. Lines play an important role in kalamezuthu; the visibility of lines creates its quality in the picture. The artisans use their hands as brushes to create a picture, they skillfully create unbroken flowing lines. Various running patterns and designs are visible in the figures of deities. These are improvising areas for artists, but the basic structure of the figure has proper measurements. Square and rectangle shapes are used to compose the deities' image and tantric kalam designs can be seen in circles also. There are no direct visual references or layouts at the time of creating the deities' image, the skillful artists are aware of the images according to the space and size. They take images from memories that they accumulated from the Guru Parampara (religious teaching method). Most of the kalamezuthu pictures are in a symmetrical composition. This symmetrical, when it comes to non-figurative tantric kalam designs, are more complex mathematical compositions. This symmetrical visual knowledge is taken from nature.



Figure 3: Non-figurative kalamezhuthu designs with complex mathematical composition

Kalamezuhu tradition has many environmental aspects. The philosophy that the influences of eco/environment system mold the life and culture of a community is proved through art forms like kalamezhuthu (Namboothiri, 2020). The material used to prepare the kalam art are natural. There are only five colors used for kalamezhuthu, and this unique combination of colors when blended with natural lighting (traditional lamp in the four corners) creates a divine effect. Colors known as Panchavarnam Sanskrit meaning five colors, pancha means five varnam means colors. This panchabhootha concept from Hindu philosophy is used to describe the five colors. Yellow for Earth, white for water, red for fire, green for air, black for sky/space. Kalamezhuthu evolved into this way of seeing through the ages, through the refinement of artistic knowledge through artists. In the early time there are three colors: white, black, and red. With advent of green and yellow, this art form took on a new dimension (Chembra, 2011). In the visual aesthetics of kalamezuthu red color is so important its intensive presence can be seen in the almost every kalam. This aesthetic consciousness can be seen even in other Kerala art forms like kerala traditional murals, theyyam, and mugazthezhuth (face drawing art). Looking Kerala as a green natural landscape use of vibrant red color (opposite color of green) shows how intensive aesthetic sense of beauty Kerala has. Each of deities in kalam art use with their different weapons and their vehicle together in the picturizations. Different part of Kerala and different communities have little variations in the picturizations of kalamezhuth Although in the aesthetical qualities are the same. When multiple artists draw together in kalamezuthu according to the size, each artist keeping the same visual understanding of output of the picturization.



Figure 4:: Large kalamezuth art in vaikom temple, Kerala

Creating commonly in the 8-10 feet size, larger kalamezhuthu art also seen rarely according to different purpose of believes and worships. Largest kalamezhuthu art conducting in 12 years circle in vaikom Mahadeva temple part of vadakkupurathu a grand spiritual celebration. Before stating kalamezhuthu art the stage preparations are first process, some temple has specific place for kalamezhuthu. The stage decoations with the flowers and leaves and white black red cloths, light green new coconut tree leaves and Tulasi (Holi basil) of dark green leaves. it is a perfect blend with the aesthetics of picturization in the floor and great effects in totality. The ritualistic chair called pedam, mirror, the sword, rice, and other elements to offering deities also part of kalmezhuthu art in an aesthetical context. After the stage preparation there is a small ritual then starting to create picture of deities in the floor part of the ritual singers will perform together with instrument nanthunui. The entire kalamezhuthu is also considering as a same process of temple making but for temporary time period. It is a great artistic tradition that creates a temporary temple through the use of floor art and process, worship there, finally wipe out. Although it is created with five colours, it looks there are several colours because of its closed juxtaposed use of colours and paters especially in the ornaments and cloth designs. in Vishnu dharmotrara purana mentioning how to be a good picture, this theory known as shadanga also known as six limbs of Indian painting. All of the aforementioned elements in the shadanga theory can be found in in kalamezhuthu. The different use of forms and its measurements, different expressions according to various deities and their specific moment, infusion of artistic quality, quality of forms, combinations of colours and its skill are included in kalamezhuthu. the ancient roots of artistic knowlede embodied in this ritualistic art. in the artistic perspective looking the kalamezhuthu art and its unique visual aesthetics that evolved from generations to generations has a significant role, creating rich heritage of Kerala.

Conclusion

In this ritualistic art form kalamezuthu has a uniqueness in the aesthetics the evolved from the hereditary of artistry. Various visual elements are involved in the entire art practice to enhancing the way of seeing the floor picture, in that specially the use of colors and the lines have important role in the picture making of kalamezuthu. The linear quality of lines and its use of various pattern, the unique color combinations use with only five colures are creating its rich aesthetics in this art form. Can be consider the Visual aesthetics of this ritual art form that evolved over time have reach its maximums beauty

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