

THE ART OF KATHAKALI

An artform based on Hinduism

A powerful artform that combines devotion, drama, dance, music and costume to produce one of the world's most impressive forms of sacred theatre

WORDS; JANET MYERS

IMAGES: JONATHAN MYERS



A POWERFUL ARTFORM THAT COMBINES DEVOTION, DRAMA, DANCE, MUSIC AND COSTUME TO PRODUCE ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPRESSIVE FORMS OF SACRED THEATRE

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A MAGICAL PERFORMANCE

The room was dimly lit and on stage sat a drummer beating out a steady rhythm on a drum clenched between his ample thighs. Suddenly from the side enters a colourful figure gesticulating with their hands and with eyes flashing. Despite the dress and the semblance of womanhood I sense a male persona! The face is heavily painted to almost resemble a mask and it seems impossible that even from the sixth row I can see those bright white bulging eyes with their pupils darting from side to side. This is Kathakali - a traditional Hindu based art form. It is a mixture of music, dance, drama and mime and takes many years to perfect. There are no words and there are no props or backdrops but incredibly the story it tells is easy to follow.

At its core are facial expressions. With a tilt of the head and a come hither glare from those eyes the Kathakali performer can single out a watcher in the audience and draw them to the stage. Having grasped this fact I sank low on my seat not wishing it to be me! Fortunately those eyes rested else where!

DRUMMER AND PERFORMERS IN TREVANDRIUM





As the tempo increased another character jumped onto the stage. This time the face was painted emerald green and on their head they wore a tall richly embellished headdress.

The performance we witnessed was in Trevandrium but this is a folk tradition prevalent throughout Kerala. In the folk museum in Cochin, an architectural wonder in its own right, the second floor contains some amazing old costumes but I am glad to say that Kathakali itself is far from dead. It exudes the same characteristics as the Hindu faith. A way of life that is broad ranged and tolerant towards others and their beliefs. A way of life that is one with nature. Perhaps that is why we experienced such harmony amongst the Kerala people and saw conservation and due care for its flora and fauna. It is a culture we could do well to learn from.

Kerala wins hands down on scenery but its people also excite and leave a lasting impression. People of all faiths live in harmony and everyone offers a smile and a helping hand.

The folklore museum in Cochin is a good place to get an insight into its rich history. It is arranged on three floors and packed with exhibits. The building itself is an impressive architectural masterpiece. Inside it resembles Tutenkamuns tomb but with a knowledgeable guide its secrets are soon unlocked.

On the second floor are the costumes of Kathakali- a fascinating traditional art-form of music, dance, drama and mime. Examples of its costumes are preserved in giant showcases but this is a folklore tradition which is still practised throughout Kerala



MUSEUM IN COCHIN

ONE OF THE MANY EXHIBITS ON KATHAKALI

WORDS:

JANET MYERS

PHOTOGRAPY:

JON ATHAN MYERS