

The painted performer—Artistry and Identity in Performative Arts

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Abstract- *The visual aesthetics that define the cultural performative arts of India, through the traditional dance forms like 'kathak-kali,' emphasize the overt yet often overlooked artistic qualities of Indian history. The folk tradition unearths ancient epics and Indian performative arts that use makeup to serve a special visual language. These aspects are deeply rooted in both religious and cultural customs. Indian dance forms and celebrated traditions provide an amalgamation of traditional narrative. Makeup plays the key role in enhancing the art of expressions and also serves as a vehicle for the preservation and advancement of cultural narratives. This paper examines the extravagant makeup looks that strengthen the genre's immersive experience.*

Keywords—*Folk Tradition, Cultural Makeup, Visual Aesthetics, Performative Arts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement

This paper uses the critical and theoretical, digital storytelling, visual elicitation, and descriptive analytical approach to tell the evaluation of makeup, the theoretical analysis of performative arts in association with gender, and to convey and unravel the importance of makeup in cultural performative arts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about the history and evaluation of makeup, including the media's portrayal of cosmetic product advertisements, which has contributed to the perception of makeup as having feminine qualities and being primarily used by women in contemporary western times. Despite the fact that well-known feminine makeup brands have produced makeup lines aimed at men, the perception of makeup as a gendered practice has always swayed in the West. Later it was found that both men and women in ancient Egypt, one of the

oldest civilizations that subsequently impacted the earliest Western civilizations (Duiker and Spielvogel, 2016), used makeup on a daily basis. They used henna to stain their hands, feet, and nails, and kohl to darken their brows and line their eyes (H. Butler, 2000; Corson, 2010). This indicates that women began to become the main makeup consumers, and the main idea of makeup as gendered began to take shape (Corson, 2010). But when makeup was viewed as inappropriate by both men and women in the seventeenth century, this practice changed.

The majority of makeup users by the eighteenth century were middle-class men, who shaped and darkened their eyebrows in addition to applying rouge and perfume (Carter, 1998; H. Butler, 2000; 2010). However, by the nineteenth century, women once again became the main makeup consumers. This persisted until the 20th century, when men's use of makeup declined (H. Butler, 2000). Therefore, this demonstrates that, when considering the entirety of Western human history, the idea that makeup is gendered is not only a relatively new idea. But it also has been contested.

Moreover, a distinction between everyday makeup and theatrical makeup has been drawn, but an exact distinction between artistic makeup is still anonymous, with the reference to the subverted, non-normative theatrical makeup and the punishment of subverted everyday makeup an argument that is consistent with Judith Butler's (1998) critique of gender performativity, which holds that while everyday, non-normative gendered actions are scrutinized and punished, non-normative theatrical performances on stage are revered and celebrated. As previously mentioned, everyday makeup is typically worn in a feminized manner, while artistic makeup is worn in a way that is necessarily influenced by gender notions, even though the appearance of the

artistic makeup used by individuals may resemble everyday makeup that conforms to traditional definitions of femininity and/or masculinity.

In other words, since artistic makeup is a form of artistic expression that originates from one's feelings, bodily agency, and self-autonomy—all of which are not necessarily derived from binary ideas of gender—it can be worn in any way.

Therefore, with my paper, keeping in mind the perspectives of west regarding the makeup and the perspectives of makeup in India, vis-à-vis India has seen makeup through the lens of defining art on a performer's face. I am exploring the artistic makeup in Indian performative arts, which uses makeup to bring the folklore to life. It incorporates a creative interpretation while honouring traditional description, drawing inspiration from the performing arts. This work serves a greater purpose than just being a creative endeavor: it aims to preserve and revitalize traditional folklore, which is frequently forgotten in the contemporary world. Furthermore, exploring more with makeup in performative arts, using strong facial expressions to portray the character's strength and identity, they serve as a medium for communicating cultural identity and character traits while also emphasizing visual elements that represent local knowledge and cultural identity. Makeup has deep symbolic meaning, illustrating cultural values and elevating the performance's overall aesthetics. In the performative arts, makeup is a crucial component that serves to visually represent the message or narrative that the performance is trying to convey. Makeup reflects character morality, not gender identity. The makeup's purpose is to distinguish between good and evil, human and heavenly, calm and angry, and heroic and demonic. Thus, Kathakali develops an alternate visual system in which appearance is defined by morality and myth rather than gender.

This paper will also give a brief about Shashtriya kalas and Lok kalas, how they are distinguished from each other, their roots in Indian culture in respect to Indian performative arts, their spiritual themes, and how they are driven by different communities. In these Kalas, despite the performance and costumes,

heavy makeup plays a pivotal role in showcasing the expression of beauty and a sight of creativity.

The study tackles the fundamental questions that direct the process of creativity.

What are Shashtriya Kalas and Loke Kalas in Indian culture?

How does makeup work as the performing symbol in performative arts?

How is makeup reflected in specific dance form kathakali?

III. BRIEF ON SHASTRIYA AND LOK KALAS

Given the complexity of performance traditions and sources that are Kathakali's direct ancestors, it is not at all unexpected that it is challenging to accurately trace the history and development of a sophisticated dance-drama form like Kathakali.

The concepts and methods found in Bharat's *Natyashastra*, an encyclopedia of Indian dramaturgy and theatrical practices that dates from between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., are the foundation of the Shashtriya Kalas heritage of India (Karnad; Nandan 2015). Of these three performing domains, the Shastriya Kala tradition is the most visually sophisticated. The *Natyashastra* covers a wide range of topics, such as the theater's mythical beginnings, detailed descriptions of the movements of the body's main and minor limbs, the development of a comprehensive philosophy of aesthetics, dramatic communication between audience and actor, stage construction, etc (Castenda 2015; Daughterty and Pitkow 2015). In the past, the higher castes supported these Shashtriya kalas. The ancient Sanskrit tragedies were performed for the courts and never relied on the support of the general public to survive. The Shashtriya Kala tradition often favors exclusivity and technical perfection (Gopalkrishnan).

The Lok Kalas performance tradition is far more accessible to the general public than the Shashtriya Kala lineage's exclusivity. While Lok Kala theaters are typically written wholly in the regional language, the dramatic substance is instantly accessible and understood to everyone, but Sanskrit tragedies did

employ regional everyday languages for lesser characters. If Shashtriya Kala Theater is known for its expansive, costly gestures and statements, then anybody may simply access them. While Lok kala forms are more immediately appealing, Shashtriya kala performance styles typically need an audience knowledgeable with the prescribed aesthetics of the discipline.

Ritual performance is a third general kind of performance. Shashtriya and Lok Kalas performances can be given whenever a patron or community is interested in ritual performances, or when the occasion calls for them. An effective goal or purpose is directly related to ritual performance. The propitiation of a diety or dieties is the ultimate purpose of ritual performances, which include a wide range of theatrical or dramatic approaches. Both Lok and Shashtriya styles of performance have been influenced by many of the spectacular theatrical components of ritual performance, such as the use of fire, highly symbolic and colorful costumes, and headdresses. Even certain ritual performances' "dramatic" aspects, particularly when they depict the slaying of spirits, demons, and other evil figures, are quite similar to comparable dramatic circumstances in forms of the Lok Kalas or Shashtriya kind.

IV. MAKEUP AND COSTUMES: TRANSFORMING THE ACTOR

Kathakali belongs to the genre of Shashtriya Kala. The performer is transformed into a broad range of idealized and iconic character types via the use of vibrant costumes and makeup. On the stage of the Kathakali, the gods and heroes of the epics and Puranas are larger-than-life representations of their legendary counterparts (Zarrilli 1989). Over time, a wide range of sources—including the Sanskrit temple play Kuttiyattam, ceremonial performances like Theyyam, everyday attire, and even the martial tradition—have contributed to the highly stylized costumes and makeup that have developed into their current forms. Although it is very hard to accurately trace much of the precise history of Kathakali makeup and costumes, it is crucial to note that the result of this process is the development of sophisticated and standardized costume systems and

makeup, which, when paired with Kathakali's powerful dance and movement style, creates an outstanding aesthetic impact that makes the legendary gods and heroes instantly visible to the audience.

Onstage, a wide range of both good and evil epic figures are created by the bulbous shape of the layered skirts of the majority of male Kathakali characters, the relative enlargement and exaggeration of features through the elaborate headdresses and facial makeup, and Kathakali's basic played stance (Meaden 2013).

V. MAKEUP TYPES AND BASIC COSTUMING

In Kathakali, makeup is more than just a cosmetic; it is a codified visual language that categorizes characters based on their moral nature, social standing, temperament, and part in the story. As a result, Kathakali makeup differs significantly from the gendered understanding of cosmetics in mainstream society. In popular culture, cosmetics is frequently connected with femininity, beauty enhancement, and personal grooming. However, Kathakali uses cosmetics (vesham) to portray archetypes rather than gender expression. For example: Pacca (green) signifies noble, good masculine heroes such as Rama and Krishna. Kathi (Knife) portrays haughty and antiheroic male characters. Kari (black) represents demons or woodland spirits. Minukku is a soft, radiant cosmetic used on gentle characters, including male sages and female roles. The many different Kathakali personas that appear on stage may be explained by six fundamental forms of makeup. Subgroups that further define and clarify specific characteristics within the overall class are frequently found within each of the fundamental categories. Green, crimson, black, warm yellow/orange, orange/gold, white, and the sporadic use of yellow as an accent are just a few of the vivid and striking variations in makeup. Rice paste is typically used to apply design motifs to a portion of the face or to frame the entire face in white makeup. The cutti is the broad white border that surrounds the full face, from ear to ear, for numerous characters' makeup. The Cutti frame has altered over time, just

as other elements of Kathakali. Rice paste and thread were used to create the cut earlier in this century (to prevent the layers of paste from splitting). The foundation was built up layer by layer. According to photos of Kathakali taken earlier in this century, the width of such rice paste Cuttis was possibly one to one and a half inches for both Pacca and Katti makeup types. Some female characters (part of the Minukku type) even appear with a very thin, small Cutti of rice paste framing their faces. The usage of thick white paper pieces that have been trimmed to fit has been a recent trend, at least for the last thirty years. These "modern" Cutti frames are far broader than their predecessors, giving the actor's face a rounder, more round aspect even if it is still layered. The female frame has been completely abandoned, however the male kinds employing the Cutti have seen an increase in frame size.

Pacca ("Green") makeup type

This group of characters comprises rulers (Nala), epic heroes (Rama), and celestial beings (Krsna). Characters in this class are the most sophisticated of all character types; they are moral, upright, and collected. The underlying inner fineness of the type is reflected in the white Cutti cosmetics frame that contrasts with the green foundation. Visnu's stylized mark is painted on the forehead with black and red patterns on a yellow background. The eyes are framed by the soft, curved black underlining of the lower lids that continues to the side of the face. The vivid coral color highlights the lips. The Pacca figures' top red and lower white outer clothes, which begin with orange stripes, are their most distinctive colors. Two side panels of red carry the red motifs onto the lower body. The entire picture of the Pacca is dignified, with elaborate use of upper body accessories. Below the skirt the actor wears a set of bells strapped to each leg just below the knee (Zarrilli).



Katti ("Knife") makeup

These individuals have some redeeming traits, usually a trace of nobility in their blood, while being conceited and evil. This class includes characters such as Hiranyakasipu, Narakshsura, and Ravana. They have the same size and type of crown and wear the same Cutti, or face frame, as the Pacca figures. The upturned crimson moustache bordered by white rice paste depicts their conceit and depravity, but the green cosmetic base suggests that they are also highborn. The red pattern above the eyes and eyebrows, which is once more strongly drawn and contrasted with the white rice paste frame and white bulbs adhering to the nose and forehead, all follow the same motif (Meaden).



Vella Tati ("white beard") makeup

A higher, divine kind of being is symbolized by white beards. Hanuman, the monkey king is the major character in this category. The delicate makeup design's red pattern suggests a monkey face. Hanuman's religious and moral character is demonstrated by the tiny spot of green on his nose. His shaggy white coat and white beard, along with his wide-brimmed headpiece, are what make him most recognizable (Castenda).

Characters with red beards are typically wicked, cruel, and disgusting. Sisupala and Virabhadra are two examples of such characters. The base makeup is a beautiful red that matches the red beard, which frames the neck. The white moustache, which reaches the ears, frames the black-encased eyes. The nose and forehead knobs are much bigger than the lips, which set off the fierce mouth. The most distinct thing about this character is their huge crowns. (Castenda).



Karutta Tati ("Black beard") Makeup

In addition to being just as malevolent as red beards, black beards are typically cunning individuals like Kattalan. In this, the bottom portion of the face is black, framed by a black beard, and contrasted with a blue lower skirt and black upper shirt. The usual bucket shaped is headdress is another identifying feature, as is the "flower" on the nose of such characters. These are aboriginal beings, often related with the forest. (Nandan).



Cuvanna Tati ("Red Beard") Makeup



Minukku ("Radiant") makeup

This category includes kind and spiritual characters. The makeup and costumes are rather straightforward and realistic. includes Lalita, a female heroine. and brahmins and sages are examples of male characters. Warm yellow makes up the base. (Daugherty and Pitkow).



Process of Makeup

For any character, the four unique preparation items are among the most crucial. The actor puts a little seed in each of his eyes after crushing it in a dab of

water. His eyes will stick out on stage as he rotates them and the seed turns them a vivid red. The positioning of the evil characters' concealed artificial teeth is the second last preparation step. These are concealed within the mouth, and Katti (bearded) or Kari Characters may display them when needed. The crown installation is the most crucial of all the preparations. At last, the actor will apply his long silver fingernails to his left hand.

The usage of hands in mudra creation is emphasized by these finger extensions. (Meaden; Zarrilli).

VI. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

These are the fundamental makeup techniques, costumes, and methods used by Kathakali actors to assume the roles of the numerous heroes, demons, and malevolent plotters found in the epic tales of the Kathakali theater. All of the actor's extensions are intended to highlight the aesthetic form, with an emphasis on larger-than-life iconic characters and subtle gestures and techniques that highlight the face, hand, and eyes. To sum up, this paper aims to contribute to the fields of beauty and cultural storytelling by examining the artistic and theoretical work involved in bringing folklore traditions and performative arts.

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