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Koothtthu Art and Socialization – A study

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Abstract

Koothtthu is a community-wide platform for celebrating creativity and enjoying life. This traditional Koothtthu is a community that shares its labor, plans and organizes together, celebrates and evaluates its community, and focuses on its community. It is not only about dance and song, but also about integrating society and their lives with the environment. Socialization is about living in harmony with the respective society, environment and culture. Koothtthu helps in many ways to create this situation. Koothtthu, which is being practiced in the Eelam environment, is contributing to interacting with the society, living in harmony with the environment in which they live, doing their livelihood, and living free from psychological effects. The activities of the koothtthu Theatre are a means of bringing the norms, values, customs and traditions that are the cultural elements of socialization. Culture and environment are interconnected. Rituals, family, education, friends, social institutions, communication tools, etc. support the integration and strengthening of cultural elements in accordance with the environment. The koothtthu Art is an important means of social change. It has ritual elements, is seen as a ritual symbol, and takes the lead in imparting learning to live according to the environment and exchanging human behaviors. This can be seen in the continuous activities of the koothtthu Theatre and the ritual beliefs and traditions in it. The research problem for this research focused on whether the koothtthu Theatre has a mechanism for socialization and living? And does it help a community to move to a new place and live harmoniously and to obtain a sustainable economy? The objective of the study is to reveal the way in which community gathering helps in socialization. The research methodology uses a descriptive approach in a qualitative research design. Historical methodology, descriptive methodology, participatory research methodology, critical methodology, etc. are also used. In this study, field visit, participant observation, interviews, discussions, etc. are used as primary tools and related writings are used as secondary tools.

Keywords: community gathering, socialization, grassroots forum, psychotherapy.

Introduction

Community gathering has cultural elements and is capable of making cultural changes. Therefore, it is evident that it is capable of controlling and bringing about behavioural change. In addition, it is a human need to get relief from pressures and live harmoniously with society. In this situation, the Koothtthu Theatre, which can help relieve mental stress, has the ability to satisfy the mind, give fearlessness, be happy, express creativity, celebrate, etc. It also shows that this is the only way to give permanent relief. This is why the theme of Koothtthu Theatre, a medium suitable for the 21st century, is resounding in the contemporary era. Its concept is conveyed

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to the outside world through Koothuthu Art activities and national and international conferences and research Journals.

It is necessary to show what Koothuthu Theatre, one of the cultural projects, has been used by the people to create a happy environment, establish a relationship with the environment, get rid of mental disorders, and live professionally.

Research Problem and Objective

The problem for this study is Does Koothuthu Art has a mechanism for socialization and living? and Does it help a community to move to a new place and live there harmoniously and achieve a sustainable economy? The purpose of this study is to reveal the way in which the koothuthu helps in socialization.

Research Methodology

In this study, the descriptive approach is used in the qualitative research design. Furthermore, historical methodology, descriptive methodology, participatory research methodology, critical methodology, etc. are also used. Field visit, participant observation, interviews, discussions, etc. are used as primary tools and related books are used as secondary tools.

To obtain more information, the researcher participated as an actor in the koothuthu performances conducted in the village of *Ampilanthurai* as a Bottom theatre. Through this, the conversations, acting methods, and psychological interventions among the koothuthu artists were observed. I went to *Ampilanthurai* to act in a *Pulikkoothuthu* performed among the *Vedar* community (indigenous), trained there, and played the role of *Vedarasa*. At that time, I learned that this play was performed to entertain the villagers in the refugee camps. The experience of such a field visit helped me to properly conduct this research.

It should be noted that in Eelam, the Koothuthu has been used from early times to the present day to make a living by doing their agriculture and protect profession, to rebuild what was lost due to war and natural disasters, and to console themselves. In this situation, it was possible to know and strengthen the mechanism of socialization and survival of the Koothuthu community through interviews.

Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted on Koothuthu according to their needs. S. Maunaguru's book *'Maddakkalappu Marapuvali Nadakankal'* contains many details related to the dance, song, and venue of Koothuthu (1998). Similarly, S. Suntharampillai's book *'Vada Elankai Naddar Aranku'* provides the Koothuthu forms performed in the northern region of Sri Lanka, its structure, and social status (2000). S. Jeyasankar's book *'Koothuthu Miluruvakkam'* discusses the social status of Koothuthu and the need for its regeneration (2006).

The above studies have been examined according to the needs and objectives of the researchers.

Research Gap

This study is being investigated under the title 'Koothuthu Art and Socialization'. The above studies reveal the nature of Koothuthu considering its object. Thus, there is a gap between the title and the subject of this study. It examines how Koothuthu is a medium for integrating society, sustaining people's lives, strengthening long-

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term relationships, and living widely in industrial settings. The system that has a mechanism for people to become a community and live is being examined.

Result and Discussion

The method of socializing Kooththu and bringing it back to normal

Kooththu performance greatly contributes to the community living together and receiving collective relief when it is affected. This is notable in the Tamil-oriented programs. When disasters strike, many programs introduced from the West provide only temporary relief to the individual. But they do not last long because those who provide that relief leave. But our ancestors have designed a platform for gathering and expressing themselves. That is the traditional kooththu. The series of activities in it, such as giving the law, entering the *Kalari Kudipukulhal*, the *Sathangaiyani* festival, the *Adukkupparthal,* the *Arangaratam* ceremony, going from house to house, and the conversations that follow, provide an environment for people to socialize and live in a very natural way. Therefore, kooththu, one of the programs found in the culture of the people, is a suitable medium for bringing communities together. This is what psychologist Daya Somasundaram has said as follows.

> "In a situation where people who have been exposed to severe social disasters identify themselves as a group, individual-based Western psychological counselling is not enough. In such a situation, the need for cultural therapies is greater" (Jeyasankar, 2010, p. 18).

The important points that are emphasized in socialization can be obtained through the forum. Humans do not live without culture. They are transformed according to the environment they live in by their parents, teachers, friends, social institutions and cultural events. When socialization occurs, there is a position to learn many things such as traditions, language, practices of the living environment, customs, norms, values. This is necessary to participate in the living environment in a good way and control behaviour. This learning process is also necessary to understand all the relationships in society and families. Apart from these, it can be said that the continuity of socialization is necessary for a society to gain a share in making a living and to exchange a way of life in accordance with cultural values. In addition, the socialization process is essential for achieving the behavioural patterns expected by everyone in the society, living in accordance with the common and specific culture, and achieving successful results in society. The continuous activities of the community are necessary to obtain this and the joy, celebration, and freedom from mental distress necessary for human life.

In the context of this, in socialization, individual and social behaviours change according to the environment. In particular, it is the exchange of oneself according to the environment. These exchanges should take place in cultural elements such as norms, values, traditions, and customs. Social institutions, friends, and the media help to bring about this exchange. Socialization states that through this, individual behaviour is controlled, individual personality is developed, etc., and there is an opportunity to live with the environment (Bharathi, 2018). Socialization, from a sociological perspective, refers to all the ways in which people learn to become members of a society and culture (Turner, 2006). Socialization is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values (Griffiths et al., 2017). The kooththu Theatre also helps to achieve this. The ritual events, continuous activities, discussions after it, and its content of the *koothan* harmonize human life with the environment.

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Based on this, the need for Koothuthu Theatre can be viewed from two perspectives.

1. Koothuthu Theatre helps people to celebrate and enjoy the environment and adapt to it while living in a new place professionally.
2. It is based on the use of Koothuthu Theatre as a means of community art activity for people in distress to strengthen themselves and gain psychological relief.

Our ancestors have used Koothuthu Theatre to make their livelihoods enjoyable from the main towns. Koothuthu Theatre is played when they move away from the main settlements to live and work in places far from the main settlements.

Koothuthu Theatre and their communities go to forest homelands permanently and temporarily to do agriculture, rice cultivation, livestock farming, freshwater fishing, hunting, etc. There, it is customary to cut down forests, cultivate agriculture, and raise livestock. They have used the Koothuthu, their artistic medium, to create themselves according to their environment and to celebrate and enjoy themselves while doing their jobs. What is the need for this? Why do they perform? The questions are important. What is the benefit to the community from dancing it? The answer to this is also necessary.

It is worth remembering what the Koothuthu community says about this. Initially, the Koothu dances performed in the main town were performed in places where professional activities were carried out as a secondary event. Then they tried to dance a Koothuthu and danced with everyone. It is noteworthy that people who lived in a shack or a small house for farming or other work came together to live together. The Koothuthu event is said to have provided interaction for many people to live together, such as respecting each other, strengthening relationships, training in self-management, getting used to living as an organization, and solving problems. It is said that the following benefits are obtained by dancing in this way.

1) To celebrate and enjoy and live happily
2) To get to know the nearby customers (neighbours)
3) To earn more income by growing the rice crop
4) To get rid of the evil spirits and dangerous animals that appear at night due to the sound of the drums and the sound of the song while dancing and to live happily.

Listening to the songs and rhythmic sounds, the villagers are using it as a suitable medium for sleeping peacefully and guarding the crops (Interview, *Thirunavukarasu, K,* 02.03.2013. *Pasupathipillai, M.* 01.08.2014. *Sithamparapillai,* S, 23.06.2014).

Therefore, the social movement in this paddy field area is further strengthened through the rice crop. This led to interaction between the people there (performers and spectators) and helped to develop new things as follows.

1) The occurrence of cultural preservation and cultural creation. This can be seen through the ceremonial events that take place from the time of the law-making of the Koothu to the performance.

2) The expansion (spread) of the Koothuthu Theatre. Koothuthu was used for socialization in the Batticaloa district in the 1970s. Especially since people went to the army to gather and live together, they started to settle permanently. As a result, new villages were formed. When examining this, Koothuthu has been

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played everywhere here. For example, it extends to *Thikilivettai, Kayanmadu, Paruththichenai, Kannagi Nagar, Pavakkodichenai, Palayadivettai, Erakkaththumunai, Kalkuda, Magizhavettuvan, Vathakalmadu, Ennampalap Pooval, Pansenai, Panichadimunmari, Uriyankaddu,* and *Sinnathaddumunai.*

3) *Annaviyar* and young kooththu artists are emerging. In particular, the *Annaviyar* and kooththu performers who provide the impetus for training and playing kooththu in contemporary times were formed in such Village industrial centres. The presence of kooththu has provided an environment for the community to live normally, as people who migrated for the sake of their profession have settled there. This has been possible only through community halls. In addition, they have celebrated and enjoyed themselves and have also been able to produce goods by doing their jobs properly.
Among the kooththu performers played here, along with *Vadamody kooththu* and *Thenmody kooththu, Vasanthan kooththu* and *Pulikkoothu* are also prominent.

Annaviyar V. Thevarasa (Annavi Palukudian) further mentioned this, "We had come to a place called Vathakalmadu when we were small. The main occupation was farming, raising cattle, and making hay. My father *Vellaiyan Annavi* called all the nearby *Vadikkarar* and we performed kooththu. I also participated the kooththu. *Kandiyarasan, Vaikuntham, Rama Nadakam, 17th and 18th wars, Valliyamman Nadakam, Suran poor, Valaviman Nadakam, Pavalakkodi, Sathyavan Savitri* etc. were performed here. Initially, the *Vairavar* temple, which was in a small pavilion, was now built in stone. As the Kooththu performed here, the Peoples came and settled there and expanded the village" (Interview, 06.08.2014). Initially, the houses where the people lived were huts and a small cottage. Now small houses are built with stones.

4) It also provided protection from dangerous animals, cows, etc. while performing in the paddy fields.

Therefore, the art of Kooththu gives people the motivation to do their jobs and live. In addition, it is evident that it has also paved the way for people to celebrate and express human feelings and unite.

The next most important thing in Kooththu is that it provides a way for people in distress to seek relief collectively and individually. In the continuous activities of Kooththu perform, the times of practice, and the cultural aspects revealed in it, a field for psychotherapy can be seen. The cruelty of the war in Eelam and the displacement caused by it, the impact of natural disasters such as tsunami and floods, and the displacement caused by it have affected people in many ways. As a result, they have lost their lives, belongings, property, their family relations, their village and their community. Therefore, it is necessary for those who have been affected to get psychological relief. This is not a relief for the individual alone. Nor is it temporary. It is necessary for the entire village and the community. This is also the expectation of that community.

People stayed in camps and lived in groups after the *Vanni* disaster. It is necessary to know that they have implemented the Kooththu Theatre that was in the process of being trained in their environment to rebuild themselves, celebrate and enjoy it. This has been carried forward as part of their cultural life. Kooththu Theatre art has been used in refugee camps as a program of solace that they had. Since people who were displaced by the war and lived in camps saw the lost village, family, social relations, etc. as a total loss, it is very necessary to console themselves and solace themselves by temporarily rebuilding what they have lost. The Kooththu Theatre, which is practiced in Eelam as a community theatre, has been used as a suitable tool to fulfil this

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purpose in disaster situations (Jeyasankar, 2010). Therefore, it is note that Koothuthu Theatre has been used to provide solace, mental peace and rebirth to the people living in refugee camps.

The Koothuthu Theatre tradition, which was practiced as a ritual and for beauty in the life of culture, has been organized and rebuilt for the purpose of mental comfort and joy and celebration.

> "It was also an aspect of cultural expression and a reaction to the genocide that had been carried out. It was also a cultural reaction that the traditional community art of Koothuthu, its artists, the Koothuthu theatre and its community, spontaneously expressed" (2010, p. 20)

It is clearly that S. Jeyasankar states that.

In modern periods, we can see how the traditional theatre has been used by the communities in which it is located to obtain relief. This shows how traditional theatre has been used to help rebuild those affected by disasters in modern periods.

The people living in the camps used the Koothuthu to protect themselves, their culture and social life, to free themselves from the grip of grief, to remove the losses from their hearts and forget them. It is also worth mentioning that the content of the Koothuthu they were in accordance with the sorrows that remained deep in their hearts. "The Koothuthu of the Kovalan expressed the voice against the unjust killing, and the Koothuthu of the Kaththavarayan expressed the achievement in the face of challenges" (Jeyasankar, 2010, p. 21). It is worth noting that this statement, beyond being comforting, has also expressed the opposition to the oppression of power through its traditional stage. Just as the characters in the story face problems, crises, and sorrows, etc., the viewers who watch it also get rid of their own problems. At that time, they will talk to themselves. Therefore, it is understandable that these people will be seen as having undergone psychological treatment here.

It is also noteworthy that young women participated and enjoyed performing in these welfare camps, a change from the traditional system in which men in the village played all the roles. It is noteworthy that this kooththu activity, which naturally brings together the community, has brought together all the people in the camps. It is noteworthy that during this gathering, they would have been talking to each other outside the kooththu Theatre, sharing feelings, laughing and having fun. It is clear that the kooththu *Kalay* would have been an open space where the kooththu community would express their skills, abilities and experiences. Therefore, the need for a kooththu Theatre is necessary for people to come together and live together, strengthen their lives and make the camp. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that people felt the need to perform kooththu even after they were displaced from *Paduvankarai* to *Eluvankarai* due to the tsunami disaster and the war in Batticaloa. When they returned to their native places, *Paduvankarai*, traditional kooththu performances were performed. They performed modern kooththu styles that reflected the tragedies that occurred during their displacement. It is noteworthy that *Navina kooththu* is called in the village as *Nagaisuvai kooththu*, *Angatha kooththu, Disco kooththu,* and *Samuka kooththu*. The poet K. *Thirunavukkarasu,* who lives in *Kannaki* Nagar, has written and performed three *kooththu,* covering the happy life in the village before the displacement, the oppression in the camp when the war was sent to welfare camps, and the tragedies that occurred during resettlement. It is worth remembering here that the poet who wrote this kooththu says,

> "This *kooththu* was used by the people of our village to regain what they had lost, to remember it, to talk about their feelings, to resolve their conflicts and to find solace"

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(*Thirunavukkarasu.* K, interview, 02.03.2013). The people of *Kaluwankeny,* who were affected by the tsunami, have been celebrating and dancing for the next month to strengthen themselves. What they say about this is worth mentioning. "We were affected by the tsunami. Everyone was worried. At that time, we all put aside our worries and danced for unity and the prosperity of the village" (Interview, 05.08.2014) said the writer S. Yokithan. V., who practiced this, *Thampimuththu Annaviyar* said about this, "The year after the tsunami (2005) I practiced the '18th War of Mahabharata' *Vadamody Kooththu*. That year, I trained and staged the '14th War' *Vadamodi Kooththu* in the next part of the village. Towards the end of that year, *Kaluwankeny* Senior *Annaviyar* also practiced and staged the *'Ashvamedha Yagam' Vadamodi Kooththu*" (Interview, 10.07.2013). Therefore, it is worth noting that after the tsunami, the community has enjoyed three Kooththu performances in one year with the aim of reviving its character. It is noteworthy that they have naturally utilized the artistic medium available to them.

Similarly, Kooththu and village art activities have taken place during the time when the tsunami-affected people were in camps in *Vakarai.* Kooththu was also performed while private institutions were carrying out psychological rehabilitation activities. In this, *'Pulikkooththu'* is used in particular. It is a community-based environment used to celebrate and enjoy during festive seasons. The story of this kooththu is centred on the honey-gathering work. It is full of ritual events and its symbols. It is noteworthy that *K. Ramalingam,* who conducted it, says about the Kooththu perform in the camps.

> "We were in the camp when the tsunami hit *Vakarai.* At that time, the companies were working. We planned to play *Pulikkooththu* by talking to the villagers and the people who were playing Kooththu. It was performed four or five times in the refugee camp. At that time, the people were very happy and comforted"

(*Ramalingam. K*, interview, 16.09.2014).

When the tsunami disaster struck Batticaloa, many programs were used to rebuild the people affected by it. Especially in *Navalady* of Batticaloa, many people lost their lives and lost their belongings, social structure and village and were resettled in different areas. Before the disaster, the *Navalady* community lived happily and happily in Kooththu performance. This village has its own Kooththu perform historical heritage. However, the people affected in the villages of *Navaladi, Mukuthuvaram* and *Dachbar*, which were affected in many ways by the tsunami, were resettled in a village called *'Thiraimadu'*. They belong to the traditional villages of Kooththu performance.

It is noteworthy that the people of *Thiraimadu* did not use the Kooththu program that was in training with them for psychological treatment. Because only individual psychotherapy has been used in some places to comfort the victims. This raises the question of whether these people are suitable for getting permanent relief from the psychological impact they have suffered. It is also necessary to get information from the community about how the community that has a cultural event to live considers it. Because it is not like the traditional means to come together and get rid of the impact.

Therefore, it is worth discussing that the people in *Thiraimadu* did not use the project they had in the *Vanni* camp and in different villages to live, celebrate, and enjoy together. Because it is understandable that it is not enough for the therapists to leave after their service is over to get rid of the suffering they have caused. The

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reasons for this are that the therapists often come from outside, they stay for a specific period of time, and the amount of financial support is limited.

It is clear that it is common for people to go out for work and use the Koothtthu to establish their lives and to expand their lives and be happy together. It is also necessary to find the answer to why those people did not use the Koothtthu art medium.

The people in the *Vanni* camp naturally used the Koothtthu they had to rebuild their lives. Although there was environment, resources, and personnel suitable for Koothtthu in *Thiraimadu*, they were isolated by saying that they were being consoled. New programs came from outside and left their activities alone. However, since various communities and cultures live in *Thiraimadu*, only common stories that are suitable for them should be performed. Stories like 'Nondi Nadakam' and *'Veerakumaran Nadakam'* are especially good examples.

But in the village of *Navaladi,* almost 10 years after the tsunami in 2014, when the community was scattered by the tsunami and lived in different villages and towns of Batticaloa, the Koothtthu community gathered their relatives and villagers to practice and perform the Koothtthu festival. It is noteworthy that they held a Koothtthu festival to celebrate and enjoy it. Another highlight here is that women also danced.

Therefore, it can be seen that the Koothtthu Art was in a state of learning in the Eelam context as a means of solace and socialization. Although there was a community with the capacity to carry out artistic activities in the villages, it could have been discussed and encouraged to do so. If this had been the case, psychotherapy would have been strongly implemented. It is best to use a suitable program to bridge such a gap so that the community can celebrate and enjoy. Among them, using the Art of Koothtthu, a community space that was used to enrich their lives, and rituals, would also be relevant in the present day. During times of disaster, foreign institutions came and used programs under the influence of their knowledge to collect funds and strengthen those who were victims of colonial thinking, but they did not help to strengthen them with the Koothtthu Theatre. In addition, although some of the researchers living in Batticaloa proposed their studies based on colonial mind, they did not help to strengthen the community hall and its inhabitants. However, a joyful social movement was also seen in *Navaladi*, where people gathered together to gain a living.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Human society lives with various types of traditional performances to come together in the environment they live in. This is a medium that they naturally use among themselves. The medium that operates in this way among the Eelam Tamils is the community theatre of the Koothtthu. It is for celebrating and enjoying life. People who go for work and live in huts as individuals have used this theatre to establish themselves permanently and have performed Koothtthu theatre. At the same time, in times of disaster, they have performed Koothtthu theatre in a group to receive psychological treatment and get relief. We also see places where this Koothtthu activity has failed to be implemented. However, after a long time, Koothtthu as a social activity has a trap for living. This shows that they have realized themselves and have made a camp. Through this, they have received collective psychological relief.

Against this backdrop, it is clear that the Koothtthu is a necessary part of the refugee camp, both in the places where people have been displaced and, in the places, where they have returned and settled. Therefore, Koothtthu is a suitable tool for people to celebrate and enjoy themselves in buildings, city life, and prisons. This is why we

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can understand that the need for traditional theatre is felt in this 21st century to make people buried in the jungle of buildings live peacefully. Koothtthu is a great tool for exchanging cultural elements and promoting learning according to the environment and for the individual and the community.

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