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The *Kalolsavam* Play's Competitive Turn in Kerala: A Practice in Transition

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Abstract

The Kerala theatre has many diversities, but contemporary theatre strives and survives in the competition drama as part of the Kerala School *Kalolsavam* that dates to 1957. Interestingly, the drama competition is held in multiple levels like sub-district, district, and state level. A total of twenty-five plays come in to the scenario for the final state-level competition. The school-level drama competition has given rise to the competition at local levels. Even the Kerala Government conducts professional drama competitions as an annual feature of the Government activity. This type of initiative was also undertaken during the fine arts society movement. These annual drama competitions catered to both full-length and shorter plays. The shorter plays became the strength of amateur theatre in Kerala. One-act plays or *Ekanga Natakam* became one of the major items in Kerala's dramatic literature field. It gave rise to many playwrights who started writing plays only for these kinds of competitions. The paper looks at the *Kalolsavam* plays from 2018 to 2023 focusing on their diversity and importance, and thereby also addressing questions on how contemporary theatre brings in its forms, content, and stamp through these plays and how contemporary is this practice.

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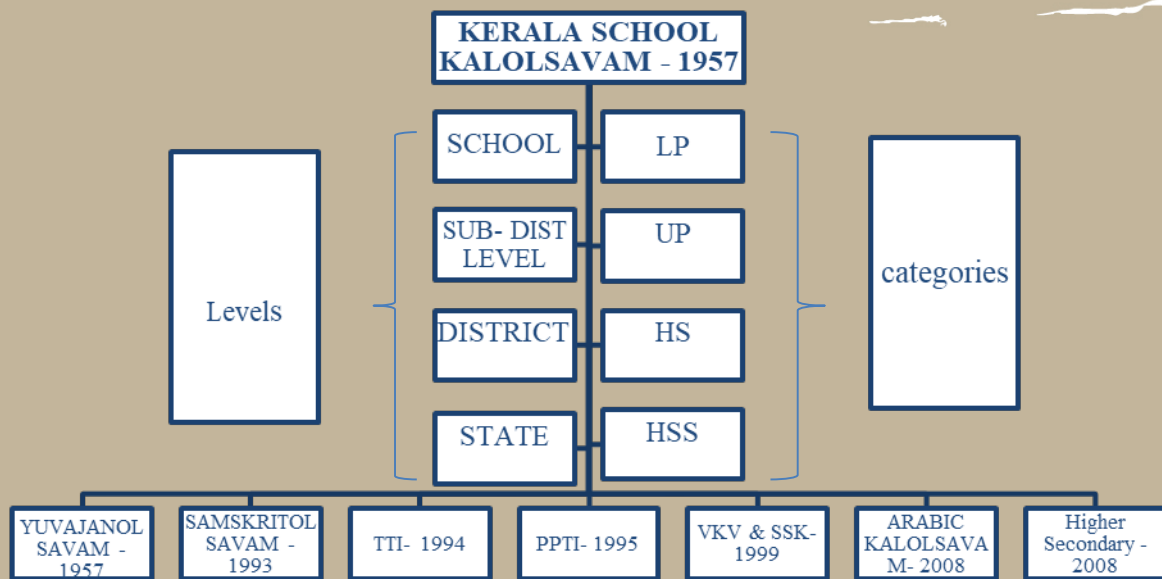
Introduction

Kerala school *Kalolsavam* is one of the major cultural events in Kerala. It is the competitions that are conducted in schools by the Government of Kerala. Now it is one of Asia's biggest cultural events. It was in 1953 when the first education minister Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad brought the idea of conducting Inter-University Youth Festival in Delhi. Dr. C.S Venkiteswaran, the DPI (Director of Public Instruction) also called Director of General Education of 'United Kerala,' was the man behind the Kerala *Kalolsavam*, because, he was influenced by the Inter-University Youth Festival and participated in it in 1954. He brought this idea to Kerala for school students. *Yuvajanolsavam* was the name for the *Kalolsavam* when it was conducted first in 1957 while the processes started from 1956 itself. The term *Yuvajanolsavam* means a festival in terms of competition for the youth. So, *Kalolsavam* is as old as the state of Kerala. These competitions have many levels and they cut across intra-inter schools, zone, regions and reach to the state level. The first *Kalolsavam* was conducted from 26th-27th January in Ernakulam SRV Girl's High School without having any rules and regulations (Anoop 52)¹. There were only eighteen items and hundred participants from around hundred high schools. It included literature, art & craft, music vocal and instrumental, dance solo & group, and theatre events. From the second *Kalolsavam* onwards, efforts were made to make rules and regulations by the organizers. They developed a formal structure and organized the event effectively by making manuals.

Later, in due course of time, these festivals gave raise to many other subsidiary festivals like *Samskritolsavam* (1993), Arabic *Sahityolsavam* (2000), TTI (1994), PPTTI (1995), Special School *Kalolsavam* (1999), *Vidyarangam Sahityolsavam* (1999), Higher



Secondary *Kalolsavam* (2008) etc. Interestingly, all these festivals happen in one venue with higher secondary festivals presides. For a better clarity the following diagram shows the structural division of this constellation of events.



- TTI- Teacher Training Institution
- PPTI- Per-Primary Teacher Training Institution
- VKV- Vidyarangam Kala Sahithya Vedi
- SSK- Special School *Kalolsavam*

Fig. 1: Structure of the *Kalolsavam* from 1957 onwards

As seen above it is an annual event conducted by Government of Kerala in different levels for high school and higher secondary school. These competitions progress through many levels they are school, sub-district, district, and state level.

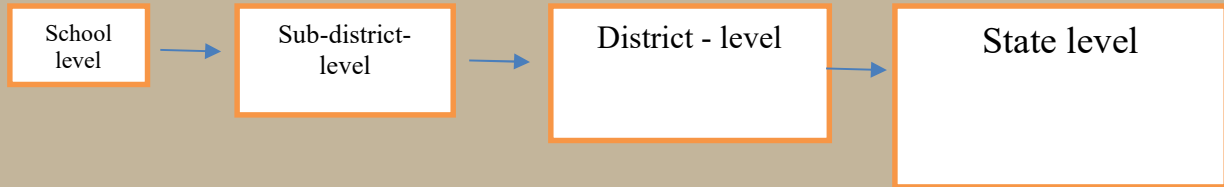


Fig. 2: Four levels of *Kalolsavam*

The selected students get opportunity to express their talent from school to state level competitions, if they win at each stage². Now it has been 62 years of festival and the participants and events proliferated. For the convenience the present paper divides the school *Kalolsavam* into different phases they are:

SL. No	Phases	Time period	Remarks
1	PHASE-1	1957 - 1979	Growth and formulations of rules.
2	PHASE-2	1966 - 1967	Due to Indo-Pak war <i>Kalolsavam</i> was cancelled.
3	PHASE-3	1972 - 1973	Due to Indo-China war <i>Kalolsavam</i> was cancelled.
4	PHASE-4	2006	<i>Yuvajanolsavam</i> shifted to ‘Kerala School <i>Kalolsavam</i> ’ and stopped “ <i>Kalathilakam</i> and <i>Kalapradibha</i> ” Positions.



5	PHASE-5	2008	Renewed the manual and added many events and eliminated PPTI, TTI, Special School <i>Kalolsavam</i> , <i>Vidyarangam Sahityolsavam</i> , Higher Secondary <i>Kalolsavam</i> with Kerala school <i>Kalolsavam</i> and now it conducting as an independent <i>Kalolsavam</i> . <i>Sanskritolsavam</i> and Arabic <i>Sahityolsavam</i> was added with the state <i>Kalolsavam</i> having separate rules.
6	PHASE-6	2012	Manual renewed and added new events.
7	PHASE-7	2019-2021	Due to Covid-19, <i>Kalolsavam</i> was cancelled.

Table 1: The table shows the main changes and breaks happened in the *Kalolsavam*.

From 1957 to 1965 it was a growing stage for *Kalolsavam* to make it systematic. The organizers studied a lot from each *Kalolsavam* and brought new inventions and revisions. In the years 1966, '67, '72, '73 the festival was cancelled due to the Indo-China and Indo-Pak wars respectively. From 1968 onwards, the festival received media attention as ministers



began to foster more of the festival and participate in the final meeting, and the '*Kalolsava Smaranika*' magazine was started. The official manual was published in 1979 regarding the rules and regulations on the competition and competition items by Ganesh Iyer by the order of education director C.K.K. Panikkar. When T.M Jacob was the education minister much progress could be made. He included many items and in 1985 during the celebration of 25th anniversary of competition the famous Malayalam poet Vaylopilly Sreedhara Menon gave the thought of giving golden cup or medal for overall champions, individual school, and individual champions. In 1986 *Kalathilakam* (meritorious performer female) and *Kalapradibha* (the meritorious performer male) positions and golden medals were introduced. Later, in 1987, the golden cup for the overall champions came to being. The selection of *Kalathilakam* and *Kalapradibha* was based on the total marks secured in the individual items and prize won in any three items from literature, theatre, dance, and music. In 1989, K. Chandrasekharan, the education minister, brought changes to make the festival short and K.K Vijayakumar (DPI) in 1992 made separate manuals for *Balakalolsavam* (*Kalolsavam* for kids) along with that he divided the competition according to the school categories and state level competitions were only for high school and higher secondary students participate.

In the upcoming years, along with *Yuvajanolsavam*, they added *Sanskritolsavam* (Sanskrit festival), TTI *Kalolsavam* (Teacher Training Institute), PPTTI *Kalolsavam* (Pre-Primary Teaching Learning Course), and Arabic *Kalolsavam*. CBSE schools were excluded from the festival in 1994 and the festival became only for the students from government and government-aided schools. The entire education system had changed from 1990s till the



beginning of 2020s and this had positively affected the competitions. The computerization came to being in competitions for registration purpose, publishing result, and a software was generated by an IT teacher T.J George who had previously worked in ISRO. They started to prepare certificates using this software and *Kalolsavam* became smoother with the use of software. Even after end of the festival, the details will remain stored in the software. Due to adding of many competitions with *Yuvajanolsavam* on 2006, the name has been changed to ‘Kerala School *Kalolsavam*’ which means Kerala school competition for arts and fine arts.

Now, *Kalolsavam* became an extravaganza because it gives a popularity that *Kalathilakam* and *Kalapradibha* are becoming stars in Mollywood, and grace marks are given for their public examinations. These kinds of practices had lead *Kalolsavam* to an unhealthy end, so, the organizers stopped the individual championships, stopped announcing the positions of winners, for that they brought the grade system. In 2008 renewed manual was published by adding more events and excluded the TTI and PPTTI *kalolsavams* from the event. Now a days, each *kalolsavams* (*Sanskritolsavam*, *Arabi Sahityolsavam*, *Yuvajanolsavam*) has separate rules and regulations and included a general instruction, idea, vision and aim of conducting *kalolsavams* in Kerala. As the influence of the media increased, a competition has been created for the news channels by the government itself for best report. Its Golden jubilee was celebrated in 2010 including the idea of student police from NSS and NCC. The manual was again renewed in 2012 by including new events, it was the last manual which published but later in 2017 and 2018 many circulars came in addition to the manual 2012. The renewal of manual and bringing of circular are the proliferation in the competition spirit, appeals, so on and so forth. Recently, due to Covid-19 from 2019-2021 for



two years the *Kalolsavam* couldn't been conducted. *Kalolsavam* took rebirth from 2022 onwards, after a complete break from every cultural event and other social gatherings other than the competitions. Every year the competition spirit is increasing among the participants, teachers, parents, audience, and media. After the 1980s, dance and drama events got much popularity than other events, because, many of the actors and actresses who came into Mollywood from *Kalolsavam*, especially participated in the dance and theatre events.

Drama and *Kalolsavam*

Theatre events in *Kalolsavam* started from the first *Kalolsavam* onwards which comes under the category of children theatre and named as '*Ekanga Natakam*' (one act play). These amateur dramas performed by the students into the competition, its main purpose is to develop the skills among the students. The drama competition developed, structured, and innovated along with the *Kalolsavam*. Drama competitions were conducted for a duration of thirty minutes with the suggestion that these dramas are edited versions of the established texts written or the selected portions of the established plays by the playwrights. Apart from that, during the fine arts society movement³ many of the fine arts society used to perform their own dramas as well as conduct their own annual drama competitions. The annual drama competitions were there for both full length and short length plays. The short length plays were the credos of amateur theatre in Kerala. Thus, one- act plays which has been called *Ekanga Natakam*, became one of the major items in Kerala's dramatic literature field. It has given rise to many playwrights, who started writing plays only for these kinds of competitions. This competition at present will have the same thirty minutes duration, with arrangement time of fifteen minutes. Each drama group use to spend more than five lakhs to



gain the prize and grace marks in the competition. Such a scenario brings in diversity in theme, contemporaneity in issues, depicting conflictual, political binaries, and various experimentation in works.

In the beginning, drama event was conducted as separate competition for boys and girls. Then, from 1959 to 1961 there was no drama competition in *Kalolsavam*. Later, in 1964, when it was reintroduced into the competition, there was a huge disappointment because of its performances. For example, boys were dressed up like girls and girls as boys because the society believed it was immoral for both boys and girls to act together in a drama. It reduced the acceptance of drama by the connoisseurs. During 1968 *Kalosavam* also, it could not reach up to the standard. The major reason behind it, was the irrelevant and unfit background music which made the dialogue delivery to fade because of lack of training. This led to a change in the drama competition from the next *Kalolsavam* onwards. In the beginning stage of *Kalolsavam*, it was a learning process for the organisers, partakers, contestants, and trainers for making the entire event successful and well structured. So, there were many variations occurring in the standard of each item. The same thing happened to the drama competition. The organisers had realised to make a structure and rules for conducting an event, performance, valuation, and registration. The most important among them was making rules for valuation of each event. Certain factors for the valuation of each event were introduced in 1971 and for drama the factors were story line, memorising the dialogues, costume, acting skill, and quality of using the stage. Because of these changes, Relevant social issues like child labour, life of people in ghetto, etc., and popular and translated novels like ‘*Jarasandande neethi peedam*’ – a Malayalam translation of Jarasandha’s Bengali novel



Nyayadanda, gained much popularity in the *Kalolsavam* conducted in 1974. Year after year, the competition got enhanced by the children's performance. The experimental dramas captured the attention of the audience only because of their performance. Still, they do innovations, experiments with new themes, new stage setting, and costumes for making the audience happy through stellar performances.

In the 2012 manual, they clearly state that valuation will be based on the plot, acting skill, performance, and sensation. Additionally, all backstage workers should also be students. The performer and trainers used to put a lot of efforts and hard work to reach the state level competition, but there was a catch. Each director who used to give training for school dramas, have their own group of people working with them for set designing, costume, makeup, sound, etc. They have a clear intention to build their own group with the school students, while coming to teach drama in the schools. Basically, they used to have a particular rendering pattern, melodramatic features, political perspectives and positioning. In totality, it was a collaboration of vision.

The dramas presented in 1987 *Kalosavam* used diversity of theatrical expressions like *Tanatu Nadakavedi* (theatre of roots), Absurd theatre and Tamil style of drama, influenced from *Terukoothu* and *Uchadanam Natakam*. As opined by the noted theatre personality Vipin Malabari, "People who lament about the demise of theatre in Kerala should come and watch these plays. Every year, there are at least the thousand new plays produced just for the school arts festivals in the State." (Raveendran, par. 4). According to Aabha Raveendran: *They go through rigorous scrutiny at the school, sub-district and district level before the select few reach the State level. Thousands of theatre personalities come up with novel themes every*



year for this event (par. 4).

It is very enthusiastic that every year, each school bring new trend in the drama competition. From 1957 to 2023 many changes have taken place in the drama event which specifies a great future for the theatre. *Kalolsavam* dramas also changed the concept of children theatre, and it broke down the walls that limit the children's play. It helped to generate passion among the budding talents from the schools. The students get an awareness that it is possible to fight against the social issues through art. In recent years, all dramas in the *Kalolsavam* were excellent in the content and performance. Among them Elipetty (2018), *Kithaab* (2018), *Sathyan* (2023), *Kla, Kli, Klu* (2024) and *Kumaru* (2024) are the most popular ones and selected few for analysing the perspectives and prospects of contemporary dramas through *Kalolsavam*.

Drama before the Covid-19 Break

The plays before the Covid-19 break had the basic idea of content creation in aiming at criticizing the social evils to expose what is good, bad, and ugly. So, in a way it is a moralizing act aimed at making people understand what is not to be done. Most of the times, the team thinks that it is the perspective of the students who participate in it but it is not real because of the dramas are written by adults with their own life experiences and feelings. They impose these perspectives upon the students trying to say that this is the perspective of the students. In actuality, it is not true. The main speciality of the plays before Covid-19 break is the idea centric plays with minimal set design, properties and more and more vernacular languages use to specify the locations. The plots were based on caste-colour



discrimination, oppression, and poverty, which the children could understand and act out. In a way, the space and the location were brought in through the plays by using the vernacularism.

Elipetty – The story of Mullanpanni (Hedgehog)



Fig. 3: Ragesh, G. “*Elipetty* in state *Kalolsavam*.” 8 Jan. 2018, *OnManorama*, <https://www.onmanorama.com/in-depth/kalolsavam-school-youth-fest/2018/01/09/kozhikode-kids-elipetty-traps-drama-lovers-kalolsavam-thrissur.html>

Sivadas Poyilkavu, who wrote ‘*Elipetty*’, is an English teacher and a notable playwright of children’s theatre with clear understanding of children’s theatre language and stage form. The speciality of his plays is without loud noises, colours or hyper- emotions he creates a child-like theatrical atmosphere. *Atho puratho* (2010), *Pachaplavila* (2011), and *Marupattu* (2014) are the other works of Sivadas which won prize in State *Kalolsavam*. His dramas brought a change in the language of school dramas in contemporary theatre. *Elipetty* is one of his major works done for *Kalolsavam* in 2018. This drama talks about breaking the barriers and demands stopping of compartmentalisation of human beings based on their caste and other factors. It deals with the dangerous aspects of fascism and communal attitudes. The main characters of the story are Hedgehog, mouse, snake and a hen which represents people of different communities. Each character has their own vulnerability and power. The thorn of hedgehog is for self-protection, but when it uses it otherwise against someone it becomes harmful. Snake is an amphibian, but human being not allow them to live in water and land



that creates problem for them. Mice lives between traps such as, human beings lives in a trap called home. The play begins with by showing all the creatures living in harmony. Later, it shows the house owner kills these animals for his desire, and comfort. At the end of the play the hedgehog falls in to a dream where he goes for school only made for hedgehogs.

The playwright is questioning the entire society that why parents are sending their children to their own community schools only. At the end, the whole creatures take a common decision that they will learn together and pledge that ‘all creatures are their brothers and sisters.’ Sivadas states that “People of every religion try to mostly send their kids to an institution run by that particular religion. This attitude will only divide future generations more and defeat the purpose of the ideals on which our nation was built” (qtd. in Gopika, par. 3). The students, who participated in the play, were very talented and the drama developed with the help of alumina’s of Thiruvangoor HSS Kozhikode. He added that despite facing financial hardship, they managed to deliver a fine performance. An important thing to be noted here is that the props used in the performance came from houses of the old students and therefore, it could be said that this was a joint effort of many people who were and are still associated with the school.

Kithaab

Rafeeq Mangalassery is a Malayalam language playwright who won Kerala Sahitya Academy award for drama and Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi award in 2013 for two plays named *Jinnu Krishnan* and *Iratta Jeevithangaliloode* (Through the Twin Lives). The dramas of Rafeeq are about secularism, unethical politics, gender justice, and other socio-



economic issues in the society. His perspective is that through children we can bring many changes in the society for building a secular society. *Kithaab* is a drama which portrays social discrimination against women on various issues in Muslim families. This drama won prize in District *Kalolsavam* for best drama and best actress but later stopped from performance in State *Kalolsavam* by court because of fundamentalist oppositions. The *Sunni Yuvajana Sangam* (SYS) and *Muslim Student Federation* (MSF) protested against staging *Kithaab* in State *Kalolsavam*. The MSF leader Anseer Panoli said that the drama “misrepresents Islam in gender issue giving a narrow perspective” which is “highly condemnable” (“Kozhikode”, par. 3).

The play *Kithaab* was performed by the students of Memunda Higher Secondary school, Kozhikode in 2018 Kerala school *Kalolsavam*. The theme was taken from the story *Vaanku* of R. Unni, in which a girl wishes to become a muezzin like her father and it is nipped at the bud. The play begins with a girl desiring to proclaim the Azaan, engages in singing and dancing with her friends. The culmination of *Kithaab* sees the girl vocalizing the Azaan while the others engage in prayer. This drama showcases the discrimination of women in matters of food, education, religious rights, and gender equality in the Muslim community. Rafeeq tried to fight against the fundamental oppositions through school children. The dramas of Rafeeq also portray the themes of humanity, people’s struggle to sustain in the society, especially in a Muslim community.

Drama after the Covid-19 Break

Covid-19 caused a break in Kerala School *Kalolsavam*, which was a regular event in



Kerala as it brought complete abolishment of social gatherings. But the 2018 Kerala flood was also a reason for the abolishment of *Kalolsavam*. Together, they brought a complete halt on *Kalosavam*, which was a difficult phase for the students as well as the partakers, connoisseurs, and *Kalolsavam* employees (makeup artists, costume designer, trainers, set designers etc.). But, it again stood over after sanctions got over on social gatherings.

Though, a sea of change is visible in selection of the theme of the play. Earlier, the themes that has been chosen for *Kalosavam* drama are commonly related to women empowerment, discrimination, corruption, secularism, equality etc. But a drastic change happened in the selection of themes because the Covid-19 & Flood crisis. These calamities become the main themes of the play after the break. Other than themes, styles, set, funding and number of participating drama groups also increased after the break. Commonly, the selection of the themes could be divided into three ways:

- Story line taken from novels, old written scripts, and other stories.
- Portraying the social issues happening in present world.
- New themes influenced from the real-life characters.

Sathyan



Fig. 4: Shafeekhan. “Kallanmarkidayiloru Sathyan.” 6 Jan, 2023. Asianetnews
https://youtu.be/1nQKZtgIrv4?si=iQKRujGTRU_ny_fK



Sathyan is the drama in 2023 *Kalolsavam* directed by Sujil Mangadu for the students of Peralaserry AKG Smaraka Government Higher secondary School, Kannur. This drama is a story of a thief whose name is *Sathyan*. It tells the story of a man who is forced to leave in a world full of injustice, corruption and violence. This kind of society is not letting a pure soul like *Sathyan* to live. Even in the midst of thieves, there might persist individuals of integrity. They may meet their end, or if fate spares them, societal norms may condemn them. The society exiles the innocent *Sathyan* for a mistake that he did not commit. From there he reaches a land where there are only thieves. So, compelled by circumstances, he turns to theft as a means of survival. In this new environment, *Sathyan* encounters *Taskareshu*, a headmaster of a school, who imparts the art of stealing to him. Following their alliance, *Sathyan* and *Taskareshu* embark on a mission to steal gold from the residence of a Namboothiri, who cohabits with a Muslim girl. After stealing they both tries to escape from the home though *Sathyan*, out of his innocence, gives back the gold he has stolen. But, he was caught by the society which punishes him. The verdict was pronounced by the judge, who has been sleeping since ages, to burn him alive. Here, the play has created an imaginary world and characters, which indirectly points out at the real world itself where injustice, violence happens against the innocents’.

Kla, Kli, Klu

Kla, Kli, Klu is the most recent drama happened in 2024 Kerala School *Kalolsavam*. The play was directed by Jinesh Amballoor and the students from Trivandrum Vazhutacadu Carmel GHSS has performed it and through their performance they have opened up the eyes of the audience. The drama’s theme is derived from the lesson titled “*kla kla, kli kli, klu klu*” found



in the 1980s Malayala Padavali textbook for second grade. *kla kla, kli kli, klu klu*, Suresh turned and looked, a Myna on the courtyard (*Suresh tirinju nokki, muttathoru myna*), this line in the chapter evolved into a playful pun targeted at individual named Suresh. The director has taken this idea and made a play that makes the audience look back to their roots, which give support and strength for growth, while also relating people to their life and nature.

The main character is Suresh, who dislikes going to school, and is often teased by his friends and neighbours, who call him “*Suresh tirinju nokki, muttathoru myna.*” He wonders why he turned and looked at the Myna, but receives no satisfactory answer. Later, the real Suresh, who looked at the Myna, arrives and answers the questions raised by the character in the play. The director vividly connects the short stories of *Kunjiyamma* and *Children, Pootham* and the kid, *Jaritha* and children to clear all the doubts that Suresh has. Here Suresh is looking back to the rational reasons which is already there in the lesson.

Kumar

Kumar, performed by Kokallor Government Higher Secondary School at the last Kerala school *Kalolsavam*, emerged as the most popular drama, written by Emil Madhavi and directed by P.S Nivedh, garnering significant attention from audience and other social media platforms. The narrative revolves around the nominal character, *Kumar*, who, despite being the son of a thief, resists the societal pressure to follow in his father’s footsteps.

The play commences with *Kumar*’s dream, where he wakes up and put on the attire of a Muslim groom due to his affection for a girl, the daughter of a wealthy man, whose scent compels him to dance and wear the costume. Despite his aspirations, societal pressures



persist, urging him to continue his father's profession of a thief. When *Kumaru's* love got discovered, her father forcibly removes her from the area. Nevertheless, her fragrance continues to haunt *Kumaru*, driving him to dream and dance as a groom. In the play's second act, overwhelmed by relentless societal expectations, *Kumaru* resolves to embrace thievery, only to be apprehended by the locals. He got caught for stealing things and society again implore him to lead an honest life. Succumbing to societal pressure once again, *Kumaru* renounces his criminal endeavours. However, when he attempts to speak the truth, the people again restricting him because he talked about the corruption and politics plaguing society, he is silenced and constrained by societal norms. In a bid to win his lover's hand in marriage, *Kumaru* masquerades as a wealthy individual, vowing to amass more wealth. Despite his efforts, societal barriers persist, ultimately driving him to contemplate suicide, an act akin to murder. Yet, despite facing defeat at the hands of society, *Kumaru* refuses to surrender to death because her smell gives him energy and power to come across and fight against the society. *Kumaru's* portrayal by Yadhu Krishnan earned him the Best Actor award at the state youth festival.

Conclusion

The plays showcased at the *Kalolsavam* exhibit numerous commonalities despite their varying themes, characters, and situations. One such commonality is that these plays serve as a reflection of the society. Many of them embody idealistic ideologies, aiming to showcase political beliefs and the collective dreams of the groups they depict. The characters often idealize certain moral values, attempting to convey the director's or playwright's moral stance to the audience or connoisseurs. As a result, most competition plays revolve around



portraying social realities and exploring the unfulfilled aspirations of their characters.

Indirectly, these plays seek to persuade the audience to adopt the performers or groups'

beliefs as the ideal way of understanding and behaving in society. The plays are characterized by the aspirations, ideological baggage, moralizing tendencies, and focus on individual characters, among other elements.

In terms of content, many contemporary plays often investigate into specific themes or narratives, frequently drawing inspiration from real-life stories or adopting distinctive traits of characters like *Kumaru* or *Sathyan*. These characters typically grapple with overcoming failings in their lives, determined to recover their stability. They are integral parts of society, yet their perceived insufficiencies haunt them, subjecting them to societal scrutiny and criticism aimed at rectifying their perceived flaws. Society's inclination towards moralizing dictates, societal norms, and worldviews often infringes upon individual freedoms. Characters advocating for their own autonomy, freedom of expression, and the pursuit of personal desires are often labelled as lacking and endeavour to address these perceived deficiencies within the limited time frame of a thirty-minute play. Their journey towards self-empowerment and fulfilment is frequently troubled with obstacles and hardships, as they aspire for heroism, contentment, a better existence, and societal change. Consequently, these plays typically revolve around the struggles and triumphs of such seeker heroes, tracing their paths and transformations.

To maximize the thirty-minute timeframe without wasting any precious moments on setup or transitions, directors often employ two key strategies. Firstly, they utilize repeated



chanting and chorus, creating a rhythmic flow that sustains momentum throughout the performance. Additionally, they make extensive use of sets and properties, ingeniously transforming them to suit various situations. By incorporating repetition, chanting, chorus dialogues, and extended monologues, they enhance the performance's structure. To further enrich the visual experience, they construct platforms, ramps, and other elevated levels, effectively scaling the vertical space of the stage. This not only amplifies the performers' visibility but also provides them with added height, particularly beneficial for school students who may lack height. Directors leverage these abstract levels and spaces to denote different settings and times seamlessly.

Another strategy involves creatively transforming single properties into versatile objects that serve multiple purposes, thus aiding the actors in expressing their characters effectively. Furthermore, directors are increasingly exploring vertical space, incorporating elements such as water, trees, changing colours, and costuming on the stage to enhance the performances impact. By utilizing negative and positive spaces and varying heights within the horizontal proscenium stage, they create a dynamic stage presence that captivates audiences and brings their vision to life.

The *Kalolsavam* dramas, as said earlier, have seen number of plays being produced from the school-level to state-level competitions. Each year the number of participants for the competition is increasing. The students participating in the competition though they did not have any theatrical background but it is all about passion and the competitive spirit. Historically, when we look at the drama competition, the development of drama is like a process from failure to success than other competitions like dance events. Here, success can



be sensed by the accessibility, appreciations, and popularity gained from the connoisseur, judges, organizers, and audiences. These plays are like the amateur dramas that portray relevant social issues through school children. These are also an opportunity for the upcoming drama practitioners to experiment and learn while working with children.



Endnotes

¹ Until 1979, the competition proceeded without a manual outlining the rules, regulations, and criteria. It was in 1979 that Ganesh Iyer authored the inaugural manual during the tenure of C.K.K. Panikkar as the education director.

² It commences at the school level, serving as a selection criterion for the sub-district level, where schools from the sub-district participate. The selected students then advance to the district level, and the final eligible participants showcase their talents in the state- level competition

³ Fine art society was established in 1956 in Ernakulam, Kerala. They conduct many festivals music consort, drama festivals, etc.



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