

cats of kochiStory

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Fugudo: dance tradition of Kerala's Konkani-speaking Kudumbi community

During a getaway to Mattancherry, Bandit the cat overhears a song and meets Maya of the Kudumbi community. She explains Fugudo, a folk dance with songs in Old Konkani, and its closing song, Marauli.

In this page

Meow, my dear readers of Cats of Kochi, it is me, Bandit! The tripod of this household. They depend on me for taking high-quality pictures. I also have three legs.

I was doing my weekly getaway from the house of Cats of Kochi. Instead of going to my usual Fort Kochi area, I went to the twin town of Mattancherry. I have some feline friends there, you know. I am quite popular on Catstagram. Hunting for some fish to eat, I was jumping from terrace to terrace when I heard:

“Chamba gada fuguda, ey chamba gada fuguda!”

Overcome by curiosity at hearing some hoomans sing this, I climbed a house to look for the source. Let me describe what I saw. A group of women stood in a circle, dancing and singing and clapping!

I was immediately enamoured. Some of the women came near me and started giving me my absolutely favorite chin massages. I chose the owner of the most comfortable hands for pets and made them my hooman of the day.

“Meow” I went and said to the lady. She smiled at me and gave me another chin scratch.

“Close enough, my name is Maya, not meow” she told me. The other women went back to their dancing, and Maya-hooman started singing in a melodious voice. From my feline friend Ginger, I had heard a lot about Kathakali, which is a dance-drama that originates from Kerala.

I am also curious about art in general. You can check my work on Chavittunadakam for proof. This dance, music, and performance was compelling and I wanted to know more.

Maya-hooman did not even hesitate to tell me about it! She is from the Kudumbi community of Kerala. They are a Konkani-speaking group of people whose ancestors fled from Goa during the forced conversion of Portuguese colonialism. I told her that I am from the Black Cat community of Kochi, currently staying with a hooman. The song she was singing is part of Fugudo, a traditional folk dance of the community they have been practising for ages.

It is not popular in mainstream dance cultures. With my interest sufficiently piqued at discovering a new community and culture in Fort Kochi, I immediately asked for an on-the-spot interview. I am quite known for my interviews. I did one on the Water Metro with an old friend of mine, Luna.

Me Meow, can you paint me a picture of this dance?

Maya I guess I need to change my name from Maya to Meow soon, haha! But to answer your question, the Fugudo dance starts with the lighting of a lamp. We, the women of the community, do a small ritual before we start the performance. Then, I sing on themes to which the dancers put up a lively performance.



Fugudo — the dance tradition of Kerala's Konkani-speaking Kudumbi community, in Mattancherry.

At the end of all performances, we have the Marauli. We call it the climax of the dance. If you come to watch our performance one day, then that is the

experience you will get to see. Dholak and chenda accompany the music. The attire is a saree draped in a unique way.

Me Oooh, this is all so new to me. I have heard of the dance from Goa called Fugdi. Are these two dances related?

Maya In a way, yes. Fugdi is the dance performed by the Konkani-speaking communities of Goa and Maharashtra. A dance, like any object, melds with the changes in its environment. In a similar way, the Fugdi dance has elements of Portuguese culture embedded in it because of its colonial history. Our Fugudo may have the same roots, but they are entirely different traditions and practices changed by geographic and linguistic differences.

Me So what language are the songs sung in? Is there perhaps a cat translation?

Maya With your help, I could surely work on a cat translation. The songs are in Konkani but not in the present-day modern language spoken in households today. They are in the style of Old Konkani spoken ages ago. Since it is an oral tradition of passing down folk songs and dances, it keeps the essence of the older language.

I personally feel like with translation, the soul of these songs will disappear. The rhythm and flow are untranslatable. Although I could still explain to you the meaning and interpretations.

Me I would love to meow the Fugudo songs and sing them to my feline friends! What are these songs about?

Maya The main theme is often farming or agricultural practices. The word Kudumbi also means the same. We also sing songs about women's domestic experiences, devotional hymns of our god Bhagavathy, everyday life and food habits. We call the last song Marauli. It is a climactic piece about the victory of good over evil.

In this dance, a leopard chases a peacock and the dancers try to protect the peacock from the leopard. The performance always ends with a Marauli.

Places in this story 2

Mattancherry Fort Kochi