

Preserving a rich cultural tradition

[The Hindu](#)

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Workshop A workshop was held in Irinjalakuda to highlight the importance of rhythmic syllables or phrases in indigenous music and performances.

The Indian education system boasts of a past where knowledge was imparted to the next generation by word of mouth. To pass on the teachings of various art forms, the masters devised various techniques.

One among them is rhythmic syllables or phrases called *Vaaythaari*. These rhythmic phrases, in the case of percussion arts, are construed in such a way that their recitation resembles the sound generated by the instrument, be it the chenda, maddalam, mizhavu, mridangam or edakka.

Professor Immanuel Wuthrich, a musicologist at the Bern University of Arts (Switzerland), and Ludwig Pesch, a musicologist and Indologist, have documented this system. Under the joint auspices of the Bern University of Arts and Natanakairali, Irinjalakuda, a workshop was conducted two years ago at Irinjalakuda on the intangible aspects of oral traditions. The intention of the workshop was to highlight and compile the rhythmic phrases that breathe life into indigenous dance and music performance. The workshop also focussed on ways and means to preserve the art of playing the percussion instruments.

'Vaaythaari'

Based on the discussions at the workshop and the ideas evolved from that, a book 'Vaaythaari' and an audio CD was released recently at Natanakairali.

The programme started with a Thukilunarthu paattu by members of Vayali, a folk troupe based at Thrissur, which strives for the promotion of

folk art culture, indigenous handicrafts and nature conservation.

Inaugurating the function Naagamangalam Raghavan, director Doordarshan Kendra, Thrissur, who is himself an accomplished flautist, highlighted the benefits of the Indian system of teaching and stressed the importance of absorbing knowledge in 'masthanam' (brain) rather than through 'pusthakanam' (book).

This was followed by a flute recital by Raghavan, accompanied by P. Nandakumar on the edakka and Hariharan on the mizhavu. 'Vathapi' (Hamsadwani), 'Rajarajarajithe' (Niroshtha), 'Raghuvamsasudha' (Kathanakuthoohalam) and Ashtapadi (Darbari Kanada) were some of the kritis played.

In the workshop that followed, a lecture-demonstration by Nirmala Panicker on the incorporation of rhythmic syllables in Mohiniyattam, an oral exercise by Vayali, a class by P. Nandakumar on the rhythmic phrases and patterns used in playing the edakka and the mridangam, a demonstration by Kalanilayam Prakasan on the phrases used in maddalam and a painting class by V. C. Arun were included.

As a finale, folk songs and dance forms were presented by the members of Vayali, showcasing the variety in the folk culture of Kerala practised by different sects and tribes.

The organisers hope that the workshop will help create awareness about Kerala's rich folk art culture.