

# Narayana Bhattathiri: New Experiment and Styles in Contemporary Malayalam Calligraphy

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## Abstract:

Calligraphy is an important art form in artworld and it has long history. In India have diversity of languages, each languages have its own uniqueness in the scripts. Malayalam is a language spoken in Indian state of Kerala. Narayana Bhattathiri have done notable experiments in Malayalam calligraphy. He is an artist and calligrapher from Kerala. He has been constantly experimenting in the art of Malayalam calligraphy last four decades. He has a major role to raise Malayalam calligraphy into the national international level and also popularizing the art of calligraphy in Kerala. This paper highlights the different styles, patterns, new innovative experiments from his recent works in Malayalam calligraphy

## Keywords:

Calligraphy, Contemporary Art, Malayalam, Narayana Bhattathiri, Kerala,

## Introduction:

Calligraphy means beautiful handwriting it has long history and remarkable place in the history of art. In India have diversity of languages and each language have unique identity itself. In ancient India calligraphy tradition served multiple purpose in different periods mostly to duplicate religious texts and as a form of basic communication. Modern calligraphy evolved into more experimental bringing artists individual style into the works. Art of calligraphy is not so popular in Kerala but still art of letters have overwhelming presence in daily life in the form of typography, type design, hand lettering, sign boards, and many more. Each day we are surrounded by letters. Art of calligraphy is art form using with letters in an artistic manner. Narayana Bhattathiri is a Kerala based calligrapher have been working in last forty years in Malayalam calligraphy. He done his graduation from Trivandrum fine arts college in 1982. He had part of several calligraphy exhibitions national and international. Bhattathiri got two time Jikji excellence award in international calligraphy for 2017 and 2018. One of his works exhibited in calligraphy stone Park in Herbin, China. His first solo exhibition in Kerala in 2013 was the first calligraphy exhibition in Kerala. He conducted first national calligraphy fest in Kerala in 2019 and the second edition in 2022. He also started foundation and art gallery for calligraphy in the name of “KaChaTaThaPa”. he had been continuous effort to popularize the art of calligraphy in between the people of Kerala. Narayana Bhattathiri has a long experience in the calligraphy and he Choose to use regional language Malayalam as a medium for his practice. Early time he was work with popular weekly kalakaumudi as a title designer in Kerala. Part of his profession he done lots of titles in Malayalam

calligraphy mostly for literary works. He also done calligraphy works for Malayalam cinema. Looking into his contemporary calligraphy works shows how changes in his visual language from early works. His continuous journey in the field of calligraphy he had such deep understanding of art of calligraphy.



*Figure.1, calligrapher Narayana Bhattathiri, 2022*

### **portrays of new experiments and styles in Malayalam calligraphy**

Narayana Bhattathiri very dedicated to calligraphy practices. He daily does two Malayalam calligraphy works and posts them on his Facebook page with the title of Malayalam calligraphy now it's reached to more than four thousand art works. His works of art is an open gallery for all. it can see the understanding of artist about social media space how it's connected with people more quickly and also the importance of introduced this art form into to the public. looking into his Malayalam calligraphy series of works that he do every day, helps to narratively see the changes in the works and also understand about new experiments. each creations has a unique experience itself but looking into period of time works can see the general style or patterns involved.

Narayan Bhattathiri transforms Malayalam poetry works by different poets of Kerala into his art of calligraphy. the poets who arranged the letters according to their meanings, the expressions or ideas. through calligraphy he re arrange the words into his visual language its opening the door To see Malayalam language in a new way. He working very spontaneously without any pre-planning. Each two works of the day he do in Brahmamuhurta ( 48 minute period ( muhurta ) that begins one hour and 36 minutes before sunrise, and ends 48 minutes before sunrise ) its shows such a deep dedication and passion into to the art of calligraphy. He using such a process that read the words together when he create the calligraphy. The words of Malayalam in Bhattathiri calligraphy are mostly in padya form ( padya is a set of words in a mathematical order ). it create the rhythm in the arrangement of words in a loop form. Because different vrithas will have such a rhythm in the arrangement of the words that rhythm and

harmony could see in the works. In his work have lots of influence of popular calligraphy styles like Gothic, roman, italic, Arabian styles, and many more.

Bhattathiri had long experience in calligraphy mainly in the Malayalam language. Early time he worked lots of titles for literary works and also for film titles. That commercial works have lots of boundary. His practices turned into new way from when he connected with others national and international calligraphers and their experiments. In that famous Indian calligrapher Achut Palv inspired him lots.

### Visual aspect of Malayalam calligraphy in Narayana Bhattathiri works

Narayana Bhattathiri very experimental in his Malayalam calligraphy works. Each work has unique aesthetical quality. From his long experience in this field, he reached to his own visual language. In his works with using new tools, colours patterns, brush strokes and innovative compositions his works become special. Different kind of methods can see in the recent works use of loop of arrangement in a circle largely, mostly used in a direct attention to the circle pattern. Visual similarities in each day works are special, geometrical compositions are also visible in his recent works. Multiple styles of calligraphy into the creations with different colours. Using bold brush strokes in different colours in the background creates first impression into the works. Highlighting with few alphabets or one alphabets also special in recent works.

### Stylistic features in Narayana Bhattathiri's works



Figure 2, Malayalam calligraphy 4119 and 4118, mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023

Figure 2 is a two recent works from Malayalam calligraphy series. Both Done in the same time. method and process is used in the works that create visual similarly each other. It can be seen a conscious effort of the artist. Each work has its own uniqueness but still the visual similarities are there, because of his method of creating work of art. He creates very spontaneous composition without any pre-planning, but into to the second works the process is flowing by artist. application of colours, use of same tools in each

pattern in both works, use of same quality paper and the same size are creating the each works visual similarities. In both works the words are different but his exceptional skill of arranging Malayalam alphabets into calligraphy creating the workspecial.His works are combination of different calligraphy.



*Figure.3, Malayalam calligraphy 4117, mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023*

### **Multiple styles calligraphy in the works**

Through Malayalam calligraphy series Bhattathiri always trying to experiment in different styles of composition in each day. In the Recent works three styles of calligraphy in to the same works are visible, some days with two styles but mostly with three different calligraphy styles of combination. Each calligraphy carries different emotions though can see his works combination of different emotions and expressions. One of the styles usually using in the composition is thin line calligraphy and that using with more freely. Pen was using for this. It creating such a flow in work and feel of cursive writing. Malayalam language don't have cursive writing styles but

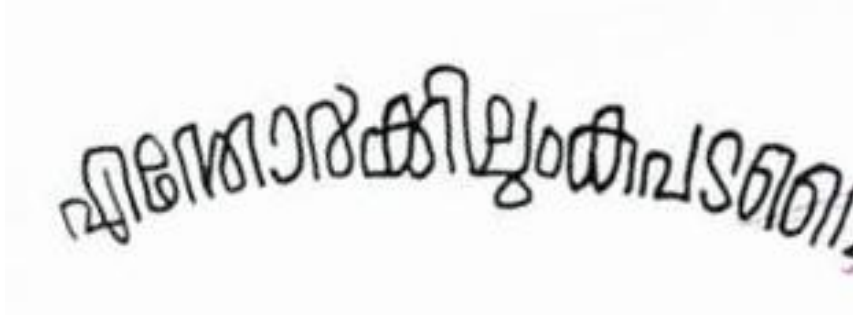


*Figure.4, malayalam calligraphy 4125, mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023*

Narayana Bhattathiri's some calligraphy with pens getting a feel of cursive writing. Looking into more closely can see few combinations of letters creating a cursive writing approach. Basic Anatomy of Malayalam letters are very curvy and rounded shape this anatomy of letters Exaggerating in his pen works, some works reach to more abstract way. Second style using flate edged calligraphy it's giving the feel of traditional calligraphy styles because use of traditional calligraphy tools for this lines. Third style is using very expressive and experimental way using with stokes, spontaneous approach, speeds of action and expressions with different tools.



*Figure.5, extract image from Malayalam calligraphy 4125, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023*



*Figure.6, extract image from Malayalam calligraphy figure 4125, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023*



*Figure.7, extract image from Malayalam calligraphy figure 4125, Narayana Bhattathiri, 202*

Figure 5,6,7 are extracted images from Malayalam calligraphy 4125 To show the three different styles of calligraphy he using into the recent works. Multiple calligraphy into the creations is special in Narayana Bhattathiri works.



*Figure.8, malayalam calligraphy 4075, mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023*

### Usage of tools and techniques

Tools have very important role in art of calligraphy. Different kind of traditional calligraphy tools can create beautiful calligraphy works. Bhattathiri have amazing collections of calligraphy tools and each calligraphy he using in his own ways. In his Malayalam calligraphy series can see each day's works he frequently change different tools to make variety of works. In the Recent works mostly using with three kind of tools that are Brush works, flate edged tool and pen works. Using flat edges tools he do layout for the writing path like parallel, horizontal, circles but in the case of pen works he working very freely and spontaneous developing the composition. Coming to brush works are more expressive qualities. Many popular calligraphy styles can be see in his works. In that Latin, Gothic, Italic, and many more. It's very fascinating to see Malayalam alphabets into this traditional style through Narayana Bhattathiri.

### Geometrical form in the works

Geometrical forms are arranged in a noticeable way in that Circle and square are largely can be seen in the recent works. Circles are mostly with calligraphic itself sometimes that with bold brush strokes. In the case of square brush strokes mostly using as a background for the calligraphy. That makes first noticeable before looking into calligraphy. Using letters into geometrical form Narayana Bhattathiri Using words in a loop way and he perfectly arranging repeated words.



Figure.9, malayalam calligraphy 4053,mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023

In figure 8 works cansee the how artist using the multiple geometrical forms circle and rectangle. Use of different calligraphy styles within the composition. Overlapping the colours making special effects.



Figure.10, malayalam calligraphy 4064, mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023



### Usage of colours

Historically, black colour has been used more in calligraphy, Multiple colours are not available largely as today that time. Today in the modern calligraphy is very experimental with colours, to bring different expressions colour had important role the art works. Narayana Bhattathiri Using multiple colours in the works creating works more appealing and beautiful. Use of colours is changing very frequently in each works. sometimes with warm colours and sometimes with cool colours. In the Recent works mostly with warm colours. Using bold colour forms in the background is common in his recent works. That is the first layer of the works mostly. It creating with different tools mostly with bold brushes. Alphabets are mostly with dark colours mostly with black.\



*Figure.11, malayalam calligraphy 408, mixed medium on paper, Narayana Bhattathiri, 2023*

### Conclusion

Art of calligraphy practices in the culture can connect people more with their own languages in a new perspective. Such a land Kerala where calligraphy didn't play important role as others culture. the art of calligraphy notable experiments in Malayalam language done by Narayana Bhattathiri and he always in the flow of experimenting in new patterns, styles. Composition etc. He had deep understanding of art of calligraphy and the anatomy Malayalam letters. His experiments with Malayalam alphabets in breaking the boundaries that the people who accustomed to reading language only horizontally and also that emphasize that the calligraphy not to read only, you can see as a painting. There is emotions, expressions, creativity, and many more. He didn't stick with any style or methods he always journeys with new experiments through his practices. His works are inspiring for future calligraphers and also related field like typography, type design, hand lettering etc. calligraphy is a very important art form in the art world. in the digital era where people not seriously looking in to their regional languages such an art calligraphy can do new way to connect people to their own languages and understand the scripts in a aesthetical way.

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