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PRESS RELEASE

Onam Tourism Week Festival revives the spirit of traditional art practitioners

- **Traditional art forms integral to cultural tourism: Tourism Minister**

Thiruvananthapuram, Aug 29: Kerala's rich tradition of folk and indigenous art forms is receiving a renewed spotlight at the Onam Tourism Week celebrations, with the Tourism Department putting up a splendid show of niche cultural expressions across venues in the state.

As part of the initiative, a traditional art form is performed in the main venue Nishagandhi every day during the week-long (August 24-30) festival as envisioned by Tourism Minister Shri PC Vishnunadh.

Tholpavakoothu, Padayani, Arjuna Nirtham, Poothanum Thirayum, Theyyam, Ottam Thullal, Sarppappattu, Duffmutt, Mudi yettu , Oppana are among the many traditional art forms being performed at this year's celebrations.

"We can find at least two or three different indigenous art forms from every district in the state," says Shri Vishnunadh. "These traditional art forms have different stories related to myth, history and culture. And all these art forms are a combination of traditional music, art, costume, and performance, attached with history and traditions."

Tourism and Cultural Department is keen to revitalize these artforms and their diverse artistic expressions to the world to promote the state's cultural tourism, he stressed.

Padma Shri awardee and Tholpavakoothu exponent Ramachandra Pulavar welcomed the decision to give traditional arts greater prominence during the festival. He said providing larger platforms was essential to taking these art forms beyond their traditional settings and reaching new audiences.

"Traditional art forms need stages that can reach more people," said Pulavar, who led the *Maveli Charitham* Tholpavakoothu performance at Nishagandhi. He said practitioners must also adapt their art to contemporary contexts and explore new themes and audiences.

Pulavar pointed out that language should no longer be a major barrier, with digital translation tools, such as Google Translate or ChatGPT, offering opportunities to explain traditional stories, techniques and mudras to audiences across languages.



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He also cited his experiments with diverse narratives, including stories of Mahabali, Jesus Christ and the origin of Kerala, as examples of how traditional art can be made relevant to wider audiences.

Pulavar also recalled acclaimed filmmaker G Aravindan's visit to his home and how the puppet of Goddess Gangalekshmi inspired the latter to make the iconic logo of International Film Festival of Kerala.

KM Unni Krishnan, a practitioner of Poothanu Thira, a native folk form originated in Palakkad-Malappuram region, says Kerala's indigenous art forms have deep cultural and social significance that need to be preserved.

The 72- year old Unni Krishnan, who began learning the art at the age of eight and now runs Raman Samaraka Thira Poothana Sangam, said platforms such as the Onam celebrations can help preserve these traditions and sustain the communities that practise them.

B Suresh Kumar, a veteran in Padayani, says around 20 members will benefit from a Padayani performance. "All our traditional artforms are result of artists who are skilled in a unique way. These artists can sustain now with the government giving us a stage like Onam festival," he adds.

He also suggests a separate festival to showcase traditional art forms, which will also benefit tourism in the state. "A meeting of all traditional art form practitioners under cultural ministry to find new ways and scope of these art forms will be useful to get new ideas," he added.

Kurichi Nadeshan, an exponent of Arjuna Nirtham, said the government should allocate more budget to Kerala Folklore Academy for preserving the state's traditional art forms.

Onam Tourism Week Celebrations will showcase the rhythm and elegance of Kerala's classical, folk, and ethnic art traditions before a larger audience, including tourists, till August 30.

Ends