

Abhinaya in Kuṭiyāṭṭam

D. APPUKUTTAN NAIR

Here are some instances of the act of elaboration employed in Kuṭiyāṭṭam performances.

1. The first example is taken from *Tapatisamvarana*, where the elaborate *abhinaya* of a single *sloka* is given below:

ārādrṣṭam caladalaputeirdīrghikā padminīnā-
-mardhonmīlanmukulanayaneih praspurat bhṛngatāreih
tucchīkurvartuhinakanikājālakā me purastā-
-dāvirbhūtam kiraṇanikareirambarādārkabimbam

This *sloka* describes a dream that King Samvarana happened to see at night, when he meditated on Sun God with great devotion. "At that time the Sun God appeared. When the dew-drops studded on the lotuses were destroyed, the lotuses [*padmini*] bloomed [opening the eye-lids that are lotus petals] and gave freedom of movement to the dark bees imprisoned in them [metaphorically suggests meaningful glances from dark eyes]".

Now let us see how the elaborate acting is done (*mama purastāt ambarāt arkaabimbam āvirbhūtam*): In front of me, from the sky, the disc of the Sun appeared. Because I worshipped the Sun, he was pleased, and appeared before me. Everyone feels that the Sun is "in front of me" "in front of me". Is that really so? Not so (*mamapurastāt*). He did appear in front of me alone. Could it be the moon, since he appeared at night? No. Why? (*Dīrghikā padminīnām ardhonmīlita mukulanayaneih ārādrṣṭam*) The lotuses in that pond, on seeing their husband—the sun—nearby, give him loving glances with their half-open eyes that are buds. Are lotuses exactly similar to eyes? Yes.

(*Caladalaputeih*). They have lids that are petals, softly fluttering in the breeze. How else? (*Praspurat bhṛngatāreih*)—with fluttering pupils that are bees. They glance with such eyes. How is that? Showing that the lotuses, with the Sun's rays on them, bloom and sparkle, the actor adopts the characteristic stance of a heroine. While glancing up lovingly at the Sun, sees that the Sun is about to set. Alas! Our husband is going away from us; now the evil moon will come and trouble us. In sadness, prays: "O husband, please do not leave us and go away." Then as the Sun: "Dear lotuses, do not worry. I'll come back soon. Sleep well, in comfort" and disappears, when the lotuses are griefstricken. At that time, the moon rises and spreads his rays all over. Seeing his wives, the water-lilies, in grief, he says: "Who made them sad? The Sun; just watch. I am going to take away the splendour of his wives, the lotuses," and proceeds to rob them of their glow by raining dew-drops. The lotuses are pale and sad. Then seeing the sun rising, they become radiant

once again and glance at him lovingly, with half—open eyes that are buds. Now, does the Sun love lotuses? Yes. How? (Kiraṇanikareṇ tuhinakaṇikājalakam tucchīkurvat) with his rays, he destroys the dew-drops which made the lotuses lose their lustre, and thus make them happy. From all this, it is clear that it is the Sun's disc that appeared before me.

2. The next *sloka* is from *Nagananda* in which Prince Jimutavahana, in love with Malayavati, suggests his love-lorn state:

Nītaḥ kimna nīśaḥ śaśāṅkarucayo, nāghrātaminḍivaram
kim nonmilita mālātīsurabhayaḥ soḍhāḥ pradoṣānilāḥ
Jhamkāraḥ kamalākare madhulihām kim vāmayāna śruto
nirvyājam vidhureṣvadhīra iti mām kenābhidhatte bhavān

("Did I not brave moon-lit nights, unbearable for lovers in separation? Didn't I inhale the fragrance of water-lilies, which intensify desire? Didn't I suffer the fragrance-laden breeze coming from full-blown jasmines? Didn't I hear the humming of bees in the lotus ponds? Dear friend, even after suffering all this, which is unbearable to separated lovers, why do you call me a coward?")

Now the enactment (mayā nīśaḥ nītaḥ kimna): Didn't I suffer nights? For separated lovers, grief intensifies at night. Suffering that grief, I managed through the night. This is not an easy task at all. How are nights? (śaśāṅkarucayaḥ)—radiant, because of the presence of the moon. How is that? After sunset, the moon rises in the west, spreads its rays everywhere and shines brightly. It looks like this: the fisherman (that is the moon), in order to attract the vanity (that is fish) of women, climbs into a boat (that is the western mountain) and spreads his net (that are the rays) in the pond (that is the earth) all over. How is that? The moon-fisherman sees the women happily whiling away time in the company of their husbands. When a damsel looks at her husband, she sees that there is a tinge of collyrium on his cheek. She suddenly gets up, thinking: "Why is this? He must have kissed another one in her eye, and the collyrium must have spread into his cheek. I will not touch him now", and turns back on him. Seeing the anger, the husband says: "Lovely one, why did you now get angry, without any cause? I have done no wrong." Then saying "cruel one, I know all about your deceit. Go back to the same person with whom you had a nice time before", she gets more angry. The moon sees all the women in anger in different ways. Seeing the pride of these damsels (like fish), he wants to catch all these fish. Getting ready to do so, he takes up the rays (that are like nets), gets into the boat (that is the Rising Mountain), spreads the net on the pond (that is the earth) and catches the fish (the pride of women). Seeing the rising moon, the women become love-lorn; they discard their pride and embrace their husbands. Thus the moon and his rays are capable of intensifying the pangs of love in the hearts of everyone. Seeing these moon-rays is terrible to the eyes. Suffering all that, I somehow managed through the night. Don't you know? Is my courage capable of only this much? You may ask so; the answer is, "no".

(indīvaram āghrātam kim na)— Didn't I inhale the fragrance of the water-lily! The fragrance of a water-lily causes anguish in the heart of a separated lover. Didn't I suffer that? Then (pradoṣānilāḥ kim na soḍhāḥ): The soft touch of breeze, which starts from the southern region, travels everywhere and blows during the twilight hour, causes grief to people. I did not complain, but suffered it in silence. Thus the nights and dusk-time are oppressive; but are days happier? No. (kamalākare madhulihām jhamkāraḥ kim vāmayānaḥ Srutah): Didn't I hear the humming of the bees in the lotus pond? The lotuses bloom in the morning. At that time, the bees approach them, with a humming sound. That sound appears as though saying: "O lotuses, did you have a good sleep?" With these words, the bees enter the lotuses accompanied by their wives, suck in the nectar, get intoxicated and making a humming sound, fly about in different directions. This sound is similar to the stringing of Kama's bow, and the sound is unbearable to lovers in separation. I was not strong enough to brave it? Not really. I kept listening to it. Therefore I have acquired all the qualities characterising a brave man. (Nirvyājam vidhureṣvadhīra iti mām kenābhidhatte bhavān): Brave as I am, why do you call me a coward? There is no reason to do so. It is only your impudence.

As a reply, the Vidushaka says:

nītāḥ kim prthumodakena divasānāghrātamammāmpaḷam
kim nonmīlita cārujīrakarasāḥ soḍhāścapākānilāḥ
sīlkāraḥ kaṭukum varuttu kariyilkkūṭṭunna neram sṛuto
nirvyājam vidhureṣvadhīra iti mām kenābhidhatte bhavān

Then the Vidushaka recites the following verse in Malayalam:

Vāḷappaḷaṇṇal valiyo cila kāṇmanappam
vārkkunna sītkkaraṇanādamaṭuttu kelppan
pālkkanniyāruvatu pārttu purattirippan
ṇānallayo jagati dhīrarilagraganyan

Thus the Vidushaka also became a brave man.

The enactment of these two *slokas* have been cited here only to provide an instance. Many *slokas* have the same, method of elaborate acting.

From Margi Souvenir 1976, Trivandrum.
Translated from Malayalam by Sudha Gopalakrishnan.

Purvaranga in Kūṭiyāṭṭam vis-a-vis Natya Sastra

D. APPUKUTTAN NAIR

The Purvaranga in *Natya Sastra* has nineteen components. They are:

1. Pratyahara: The seating of the instrumentalists. This pleases the Yatudhanas and Nagas.
2. Avataram: The seating of the singers. This pleases the Apsaras.
3. Arambham: The beginning of Alap by singers. This pleases the Gandharvas.
4. Ashravana: The tuning of the drums. This pleases the Daityas.
5. Vaktrapani: The playing of the wind instruments. This pleases the Danavas.
6. Parighattana: The tuning of the Tanti Vadya. This pleases the Rakshasas.
7. Samghotana: The playing of the drum. The Guhyakas will be happy.
8. Margasaritam: The playing of the Tanti Vadya with Avanaddha Vadya. The Yakshas will be happy.
9. Asaritam: For separation of Kala and Apta. The Yakshas will be happy.
(The above are all Nirgita and behind the curtain. Remove the curtain and then:)
10. Any song: In praise of God. The Devas will be pleased.
11. Vardhamanaka: Tandava Dance. Rudra and his followers will be happy.
12. Utthapana: Singing the Nandi. Brahma will be pleased.
13. Parivartana: The worship of Dikpalas. Dikpalas will be happy.
14. Shushkavakrishta: Singing out with the Pitrus will be happy.
15. Ranga Dwara: First presentation of *Vacika* and *Angika* on the stage. Visnu will be happy.
16. Chari: Lasya to represent Sringara. Parvati will be happy.
17. Mahachari: Tandava to represent Raudra. The Bhuta-Ganas will be happy.
18. Trigata: The dialogue of Vidushaka, Sutradhara and Pariparsvika.
19. Prarotana: Praising the *kavya prayoga-siddhi* by reason and logic.

Let us now find out, how far the *kriyamsa* (Action) in Kūṭiyāṭṭam conforms to the above. In this context, we must bear in mind that Kūṭiyāṭṭam by and large is a temple art, performed within the walls of the temple. So the performance has its links with the temple and every *kriya* (action) has a bearing on ritual and has a symbolic significance. The style of presentation is thus more in the *natyadharmi* pattern, in all the four types of *abhinaya*, more than is envisaged in *Natya Sastra*. The performers of Kūṭiyāṭṭam learn the art from their Gurus more by *prayoga* than by *siddhanta*. They never bother to learn the names of numbers or classification of the various *bhavas*, *rasas* or *hastas* or *karanas*, but they learn the art with devotion and in that process acquire a *chaitanya* which pervades all their action.

In Kuttiyattam there are three parties to the performance: the Chakyar who takes the male roles in the drama and is the leader; the Nangiar who takes the female roles or accompanies the performance reciting certain specified stanzas and invocation songs and plays the cymbals, marking rhythm; and the very important Nambiar who is in overall charge of costumes, make-up, stage arrangements, i.e. *aharya* and is the main instrumentalist who plays on the *mizhavu* or copper pot covered with leather.

These persons, after their purifying bath, make obeisance to the temple deity; then arrange the stage in the Kuttampalam with decorations of plantain, tender coconut leaves, paddy, etc. and the traditional big bronze lamp; make obeisance to the Gurus and proceeds to the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, from where the flame is carried to light the lamp on the stage and the *Nepathya*.

In the *Nepathya*, *ashtamangalya*, and auspicious congregation of materials like paddy, rice, betel leaf etc., is placed in front of the lamp and the performer sits cross-legged facing eastwards and gets ready for the make-up after worshipping his preceptors, Ganapati, Sarasvati and the family deities. He takes a red cloth and ties it around the head. Next, he makes marks with *ghee* on his forehead, nose, chin, both cheeks, again on the forehead, nose and chin, thus marking eight times with *ghee*, silently reciting all the letters of the alphabet forward from beginning to end and backward from end to beginning and then the *Upasana mantras*. By touching the eight spots on the face with *ghee* by reciting the *mantras*, he invokes the *Ashta siddhis*, the Eight Divine Attributes: *anima*, *mahima*, *laghima*, *garima*, *eesitwam*, *vasitwam*, *prapti* and *prakasyam*. The recitation of the letters of the alphabet gives him clarity in pronunciation and intonation, in his oral delivery. He then spreads *ghee* all over his face and then applies the necessary make-up on the face and, after wearing the costumes, ornaments and headgear or crown, gets ready to go to the stage.

In the meanwhile, the Nambiar takes his seat behind the *mizhavu*, sounds it and plays it for a while. This is called *mizhavu ochihapeduttal* or sounding the drum, and is intended to announce the commencement of the play. After this, there is Ganapati Nivedyam consisting of offering oblations to Ganapati. This is done by the chief *pujari* of the temple. It is intended to ward off all obstacles.

The Nangiar now comes to the stage and takes her seat on a white cloth spread on the right-hand side with the cymbals placed thereon. The Nangiar recites *Akkitta*, a devotional song, to the accompaniment of the *mizhavu*, in which a special rhythmic pattern called *goshti* is played. The *Akkitta* praises Siva, Saraswati and Ganapati.

The drumming and singing stop and the Nambiar now comes forward to the lamp on the stage, and, sprinkling holy water for purification, recites a stanza referring to the play, making obeisance to the hero. This is not from the text of the play and is called 'Arangu tali' *sloka*. Probably this corresponds to the *Nandi* which does not find a place in the dramatic text of *Bhasa*.

The curtain is now held and the *mizhavu* starts playing a different rhythmic pattern. The *sutradhara* enters the stage (*Nandyante tatah pravisati Sutradhara*). Behind the curtain, he faces the *mizhavu* with his back to the curtain makes obeisance to it, and performs several *caris* ending in *panchapada-vinyasa*, during which he turns and faces the curtain. The curtain is now removed and we find *Sutradhara* with a smiling face, his

eyebrows and cheeks vibrating with happiness, his hands symbolically full of flowers. He offers flowers to the stage and prostrates.

He then performs *puja* of the deity. This is done without any flowers or flame or utensils, but purely symbolic gestures. It is as follows: "I see before me all things required for the *puja*. Let me now start the *puja*."

He takes his seat on the floor, takes the spouted vessel called *kindi*, worships it, takes the conch and its stand, worships them, takes sandal paste and flowers and then fills the *kindi* with water and worships it again. He then pours water into the conch, washes it, then invokes Deva Ganga into the water in the conch and worships it. This Tirtha or holy water is sprinkled on every object. He then propitiates the self and offers Naivedyam to Ganapati, invokes Goddess Saraswati from the face of Brahma to the Lotus Flower and worships with flowers and food.

He then sees his consort returning after her bath. He gives flowers and sandal-paste to her. Then he offers pushpanjali to the gods of heaven and prostrates. His face beaming with happiness, the Sutradhara then expresses his thoughts: "Ha! Ha! I feel so happy. Getting up early in the morning, I have finished my purification by bathing and cleansing, my *puja* and food. Let me now go the Rangasala."

He proceeds to the *ranga* or stage and sees several Brahmins. He depicts several Brahmins by their gait. How are these Brahmins? Possessing a pure, austere, prestigious culture and heritage, and engaged in *Shad-karmas* and well-versed in Vedas and Sastras, these venerable Brahmins have a brightness of their own. He plucks flowers and offers them with great respect and says: "O Great Brahmins! let the Lord of the three worlds Sri Narayana, bless you. How is this Narayana?" He signals the stoppage of the *mizhavu*-playing and recites a stanza like the following from *Balacharita* of Bhasa (In the case of other plays, he recites the Sutradhara stanza of the concerned work):

Śankha kṣīra vapuḥ purā kṛtayuge
namnā tu nārāyaṇa-
stretāyām tripadārpita tribhuvano
viṣṇuḥ suvarṇaprabhaḥ
Dūrvā śyāmanibhaḥ sa Rāvaṇa vaḍhe
Rāme yuge dwāpare
Nityam yonjanasannibhaḥ kaliyuge
vaḥ pātu damodaraḥ.

(Please note that the content of this stanza of Bhasa does not exactly correspond to the relevant passages in *Bhagavata*).

He recites the stanza and enacts it by means of gestures. He repeats "Damodarah nityam vaḥ patu".

Then starts the Nityakriya consisting of several *caris* of the types called *dhruvam*, *ceria pakkam*, and *valia pakkam*. There are special rhythmic combinations of footsteps set to the accompaniment on the *mizhavu*. After this, the Nangiar sings four stanzas which are

danced by the Sutradhara in a sequence called *bhramari*. The stanzas are: 1. Kshirasagara phena etc.; 2. Kunda Nirmala Mandahasa etc.; 3. Pankajaksa Saroraha etc.; 4. Nirmalaya Niramayaya etc. Following this, the Nangiar sings two verses in praise of Devi and Siva. 1. Ambike Girije etc.; 2. Adrima Vidruma Lalita Padam etc.

Then without any singing, the Sutradhara, by means of a dance sequence with gestures, describes Siva and then Parvati from head to feet. This is called 'Siva Parvati Kesadipada varnanam.' This is followed by another prayer, recited by the Nangiar and danced by the Sutradhara in praise of Siva: "Mara Sarira Vinasa Karame" etc. The Ashtadikpalaka vandanam is next performed, with the Nangiar singing the praise "Viswajanadhipa" and the Sutradhara offering obeisance to the eight directions by dance and gestures. The Sutradhara continues this with the gestural-dance worship of Brahma, Vishnu etc.

The last item is a dance where the Sutradhara, by means of gestures, worships all the beings in Heaven, Earth and the Netherworld. He dances, offering *pranams* by symbolically offering flowers to the Devas, Rishis, Siddhas, Charanas, Kinnaras, Vidyadharas of Heaven, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, Birds and Animals of the Earth, the Asuras, Serpents, Grass, etc. down to the ants of the Netherworld. The Sutradhara then retires.

From the above, we understand that with emphasis on rituals, and on symbolic representation by gestures, the Purvaranga of the temple-based Kūṭiyāṭṭam type of presentation of Sanskrit dramas do not follow many of the items specified in *Nāṭya Sastra*. Kūṭiyāṭṭam is dominated by rituals and *nāṭyadharmi*, much more than contemplated in *Nāṭya Sastra*, whether it be *vachika*, *angika*, or *aharya abhinaya*. Please note that even the application of *ghee* on the face before makeup, with the chanting of *mantras* is an attempt to imbibe the 'Ashta-siddhis'.

In Bhasa's *rupakas*, the dramatic text starts with "Nandyante tatah pravisati Sutradharah." The text does not contain any *Nandi sloka* or stanza as in the *rupakas* of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti or any of the others. So there is an argument that the Nandi, envisaged by Bhasa is the *atodya vadya*. But in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the Arangu tali *sloka* (the stanza recited for purifying the stage) is conceived as *Nandi sloka* and the Nangiar, who recites it, as the Nandi Sutradhara. The Sutradhara, here presented, is the Sthapaka Sutradhara.

We will conclude this with a short comparison of the items in the Purva Ranga of *Nāṭya Sastra* with those of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

1. Pratyahara of *Nāṭya Sastra* consists of seating the instrumentalists. The instrumentalists in Kūṭiyāṭṭam are the *mizhavu* and cymbal players. The *mizhavu* is fixed in a particular position in the *Kutapa Sthana* in the Kūṭampalam. The Nangyir who marks rhythm with the cymbals sits on a white cloth spread on the right hand side of the stage.

2. Avataram consists in seating the singers. The singer is the same Nangiar who plays the cymbals.

3. There is no Arambha in Kūṭiyāṭṭam as in *Nāṭya Sastra*, since the so-called singer does not elaborate the song.

4. The *mizhavu* is not tuned and hence *Ashravana* of *Nāṭya Sastra* is also absent in

Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The mouth of the *mizhavu* is covered with a particular type of leather which is soaked in water the previous day and put over the mouth. On drying, the leather gives the required sound. There used to be a *sushira vadya* called *kurumkuzhal* something of the shape of a *shehnai* to play rhythmic tunes rather than melodious tunes. This is not used now.

5. Vaktrapani is not relevant now in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.
6. There is no stringed instrument in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* and hence no Parighattana.
7. The Samghotana of *Natya Sastra* corresponds the *mizhavu ochchapeduttal* (the sounding of the drums) of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*
8. Margasaritam and
9. Asaritam are both absent in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.
10. The Vardhamanakam of *Natya Sastra* can be seen in *kriyas* like *ceria pakkam* in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*
11. *Utthapanam* may have its counterpart in the Vandana stanza, "Sankhakshiravapu" in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.
12. The Parivarttanam of *Natya Sastra* corresponds to the dance Dikpala Vandanam with the song "Visvajanadhipa."
13. *Shushkavakrishta* is absent in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.
14. The *Rangadwara* occurs as a part of the drama in the Vidushaka's Purappad for *vachika* and *Nayaka's* Purappadu.
15. *Chari* and
16. *Mahachari*, though they cannot be seen as such in the Siva-Parvati Kesadipadam description, may change in gestures. However, there is no *tandava-lasya* or *raudra-sringara* differentiation.
17. *Trigata* and
18. *Prarotana* are absent in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.