



Various Items of “Purvaranga – Preliminaries of a Play” in Nāṭyaśāstra and Kutiyattam: A Comparison

Name: Dr. Chavan Pramod R.

Designation: Assistant Professor (Temporary)

Institute: Department of Dramatics, Faculty of Performing Arts,
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

Mobile: +91-9898822624

Email: chavan.pramod-dramatics@msubaroda.ac.in

Abstract:

The Chapter No. – 5 of Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra describes “Purvaranga - Preliminaries of a Play” that are to be performed before the staging of a play. Here nineteen types of “Purvaranga – Preliminaries of a Play” are described out of which nine items are to be performed “Antar Yavanika: Behind the Curtain” while other eleven items are to be performed “Bahir Yavanika: After the Curtain is removed”.

“Kutiyattam – Kerala’s Traditional Sanskrit Theatre”, is a unique “Dramatic Form”, laid down on Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra and ritualistic temple art form. In the performance of Kutiyattam, its pundits emphasize the “Natya Dharmi” aspect rather than the “Loka Dharmi” aspect and also adopt new ways, new codes, new devices / techniques, new conventions and principles.

Here we will try to get an overview of the differences and similarities of the Purvaranga in the Kutiyattam and as mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra.

Keywords:

Purvaranga, Nāṭyaśāstra, Kutiyattam





Introduction:

Item No.	<i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i>	<i>Kuṭiyattam</i>
<u>Antar Yavanika:</u> <u>The Following Items Are Performed Behind The Curtain</u> (In <i>Kuṭiyattam</i> all the items are performed in full view of the spectator)		
1	<u>Pratyahara (To Please The Yatudhanas And Pannagas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeping the ‘Musical Instruments’ in the proper place – “<i>Kutapasya Vinyasa</i>¹” and seating the instrumentalists at the back of the stage. (Kumar, 2010, p. 227)⇒ <u>Mrdanga player –</u> <u>Mardangika:</u> → In the Centre, facing ‘East’.⇒ <u>Cymbals / Gong player –</u> <u>Panika:</u> → On the left side of ‘Mardangika’, sit two	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Main instruments of <i>Kuṭiyattam</i>: ⇒ Mizhavu² ⇒ Kuzhitalam³ ⇒ Idakka⁴ ⇒ Kurum Kuzhal⁵• The instrumentalists in <i>Kuṭiyattam</i> are – ⇒ <u>Mizhavu player - Nambiar</u>⁶: → ‘Mizhavu’ is fixed in a particular position in “<i>Kutapa Sthana</i>” in the ‘<i>Kuttambalam</i>⁷’.

¹ Kutapasya Vinyasa: The place, back-stage, between the two doors to the dressing room, where the musical instruments are kept.

² Mizhavu: The main percussion support for the actor on stage. A hollow copper drum with a leather seal around the narrow neck. Has remarkable acoustic properties.

³ Kuzhitalam: The small Cymbals used by the *Nangiars* to keep rhythm.

⁴ Idakka: It is a small hour – glass shaped drum.

⁵ Kurum Kuzhal: This is a small double reeded pipe similar to the Shehanai of the North India.

⁶ Nambiar: Particular cast who playing on the Mizhavu and help in doing the make-up.

⁷ Kuttambalam: *Kuttambalam* is part of the temple complex (Temple Theatre Architecture) in Kerala where *Kuṭiyattam* is performed.



	<p>‘Panikas’, who follow the musical rhythm.</p> <p>⇒ <u>Gayanaḥ:</u></p> <p>→ ‘Gayanaḥ’ is placed to the south of the back-stage and facing ‘North’.</p> <p>⇒ <u>Vainika and Vamsadharaka:</u></p> <p>→ By the side of ‘Gayanaḥ’, possibly a little back, sit ‘Vainika’ – Flute player and the two ‘Vamsadharaka’, those who accompany with flutes.</p> <p>⇒ <u>Gayikyah:</u></p> <p>→ Facing the chief singer, to the ‘North’.</p>	<p>→ It has permanent stands in front of the <i>Nepathya</i>, between the two doors.</p> <p>⇒ <u>Kuzhitalam player - Nangiar:</u></p> <p>→ The ‘Nangiar’ who marks the rhythm with ‘Kuzhitalam’ sits on a ‘White Cloth’ on the right side of ‘Mizhavu’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Idakka’ is placed not on the ground but is to be kept hanging near the ‘<i>Kutupa Sthana</i>’. (L. S., 2000, p. 38) • ‘Kurum Kuzhal’ is with the piper.
2	<u>Avatarana (To Please The Apsarases):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The musicians, especially the females, enter and take their seats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singer is the same <i>Nangiar</i> who plays ‘Kuzhitalam’ and takes her seat on the white cloth. • ‘Idakka’ and ‘Kurum Kuzhal’ are played by male artists and they do so in the standing posture near the ‘Mizhavu’.
3	<u>Arambha (To Pleases The Gandharvas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The commencement of singing (<i>Alap</i>), vocal exercises and trying out ‘<i>Svara</i>’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no <i>Arambha</i> in <i>Kutiyattam</i> as in <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i>, since the songs are not elaborated.
4	<u>Ashravana (To Pleases The Daityas):</u>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The adjustment of tuning of ‘Musical Instruments’ to the same drone (<i>Shruti</i>⁸).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Mizhavu is not tuned and hence <i>Ashravana</i> of <i>Nātyaśāstra</i> is also absent in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.There used to be a ‘<i>Sushira Vadya</i>’ called ‘<i>Kurumkuzhal</i>’ to play rhythmic tunes rather than melodious tunes.No. 3 and 4 items are performed later rather than being performed at this point of time. (L. S., 2000, p. 39)
5	<u>Vaktrapani (To Please The <i>Danavas</i>):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Trying out different styles of playing ‘Rhythm Patterns (<i>Tala</i>)’, particularly the ‘<i>Avanaddha Vadya</i> - Drums’.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The “<i>Mizhavu Occappetuttuka</i>” (The Sounding of the Mizhavu.) of <i>Kutiyattam</i>. At first the ‘<i>Nambiar</i>’ rubs the face (<i>Vaktra</i>) of the ‘Mizhavu’ with his right palm (<i>Pani</i>) and touches his head with his hands as a salutation and plays a set pattern of rhythms. (L. S., 2000, p. 39)During this he is not accompanied by the ‘<i>Kuzhitalam</i>’ or other instruments players.First time when a musical instrument is played, it is called the “<i>Mizhavu Occappetuttuka</i>”.

⁸ Shruti: The basic (Key) note – the Drone.

⁹ Mizhavu Occappetuttuka: The ritual start of the playing of the Mizhavu drum by the *Nambiar* on the stage before the start of the play.



6	<u>Parighattana (To Please The Rakshasas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The adjusting and tuning of the 'Tanti Vadya – Stringed Instruments'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is no 'Tanti Vadya' in <i>Kutiyattam</i> and hence no <i>Parighattana</i>.
7	<u>Samghotana (To Please The Guhyakas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In this item, preparation is made for rehearsing the different hand-poses to be used in marking time on the percussion instruments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The 'Nambiar' plays different rhythmic patterns.This is similar to the playing of "Gosthi-Kottuka¹⁰" in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.
8	<u>Margasarita (To Please The Yakshas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">At first there is combined playing of the 'Tanti Vadya – Stringed Instruments' with 'Avanaddha Vadya - Drums'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is no 'Tanti Vadya – Stringed' in <i>Kutiyattam</i> and hence <i>Margasarita</i> is absent in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.
9	<u>Asarita (To Please The Yakshas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Trying different rhythmic patterns in consonance with the songs in praise of Gods.For separation of 'Kala' and 'Apta'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Here we try different rhythmic patterns in the 'Gosthi-Kottuka', in which several 'Shlokas' are sung in praise of Ganapati, Lord Shiva and Sarasvati, which are called "Akkittas¹¹ Hymns". (L. S., 2000, p. 40)

¹⁰ Gosthi-Kottuka: The playing of the Mizhavu at the beginning of the performance to assemble the crowd. *Nangiar* will also be keeping the rhythm with the Cymbals and be singing some prayer songs.

¹¹ Akkitta: Invocatory verses on Ganapati, Sarasvati, Shiva etc. in Sanskrit, musically chanted by the *Nangiar* at the beginning of the performance along with drumming, and at the end of first act as the final invocation.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The drumming and singing now stop and then the ‘<i>Nambiar</i>’ comes forward towards the lamp on the stage and recites a ‘<i>Nandi</i>¹² <i>Shloka</i>’ referring to the play.• This ‘<i>Nandi Shloka</i>’ is not from the text of the play and is called “<i>Arangu Talikkuk</i>¹³ – Reciting the ‘<i>Nandi Shloka</i>’.”• The ‘<i>Chakyars</i>’ themselves have composed separately ‘<i>Arangu Tali</i>’ verses for most of the acts of various dramas they performed. (L. S., 2000, p. 45)• After the ‘<i>Arangu Tali</i>’, the curtain is held and the <i>Nambiar</i> plays ‘<i>Mizhavu</i>’ along with the orchestra, which is called “<i>Vayikku</i>”.
<p><u><i>Bahir Yavanika</i></u></p> <p><u>The Following Items Are Performed After The Curtain Is Removed:</u></p>	
10	<u><i>Vardhamanaka Gita-Vidhi (To Please The Rudra And His Followers):</i></u>

¹² Nandi: The invocation, the verse at the beginning of a drama.

¹³ Arangu Talikkuk: Literally ‘Sprinkling the Stage’ which is a form of purification, after the preliminaries and before the start of the performance on the first day.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The presentation of songs with ‘Svara’ and “Tala – Vadyas”.• Singing for the glory of the Gods. Such songs are called ‘Nirgitas’ and are to be performed along with the dance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The <i>Vardhamanaka</i> of <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> can be seen later when the ‘<i>Sutradhara</i>¹⁴’ does salutations to the guardian deities, these acts are called “<i>Nitya Kriyas</i>¹⁵” like “<i>Ceria Cokkam</i>¹⁶”, “<i>Valiya Cokkam</i>” etc.
11	<u>Utthapana (To Please The Brahma):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The technical preliminaries are now over and it is from this point that the presentation is raised to a performance level. (Kumar, 2010, p. 232)• This is the starting point of singing the <i>Nandi</i>.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Behind The Curtain: → The ‘<i>Sutradhara</i>’ enters behind the curtain and performs “<i>Marayil Kriya</i>¹⁷”.• This portion partly tallies with <i>Utthapana</i>.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Utthapana</i> may have its counterpart in the “<i>Vandana Shloka: Sankhashiravapu</i>” in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.
12	<u>Parivarttana (To Please The Dikpalas):</u>	

¹⁴ Sutradhara: The stage director of the play.

¹⁵ Nitya Kriya: Certain well – defined dance movements common to most performances in *Kutiyattam*. This is a set of dance movements towards the end of the first day’s performance.

¹⁶ Ceria Cokkam and Valiya Cokkam: *Cokkam* is a dance or *Chari* and *Valiya* is *Maha*, so it is suggested that *Cokkam* may be equivalent to *Chari* and *Mahachari*.

¹⁷ Marayil Kriya: This is the dance movement done by a character behind the curtain before entering the stage. The dance steps would be accompanied with the playing of the Mizhavu.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The ‘<i>Sutradhara</i>’ and his two assistants enter and start the worship of ‘<i>Dikpalas</i> – Deities in the Four’ quarters as well as the principal deities of the ‘<i>Natya</i>’ by walking round the stage with graceful dance-steps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The “<i>Sutradhara – Chakyars</i>¹⁸” enters –<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Enacts the performance of the “<i>Puja</i>¹⁹”.→ Gesticulates to the stage.→ Looks at the audience.→ Sees the <i>Brahmins</i> there.→ Bows to them.And recites a ‘<i>Shloka</i>’ invoking the blessings of the God.So, up to the point of his taking a look at the audience, his action would synchronize with the <i>Parivarttana</i>. But this recitation is better synchronized with the ‘<i>Sthapana</i>’ or ‘<i>Prastavana</i>’.
13	<u>Nandi (To Please The Chandra):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Invoking the blessings of Gods. It is the recitation of benedictory ‘<i>Shloka</i>’.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Chronology wise, ‘<i>Nandi</i>’ is not found here in ‘<i>Kutiyattam</i>’ according to <i>Natyashastra</i>.

¹⁸ Chakyars: The traditional male actor in *Kutiyattam*.

¹⁹ Puja: Worship of a deity and offering flowers and other things.

²⁰ Dikpala Vandanam: Prayers to the guardian deities Indra, Agni etc. with dance steps and gesture and offering salutations.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please refer item no. 9 'Asarita'.
14	<u>Shushkavakrishta (To Please The Pitrus):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The singing of the 'Nandi' is followed by a 'Dhruva' song. It is called 'Shushkavakrishta'. An 'Avakrsta Dhruva' is sung with meaningless syllables and 'Avakrsta' signifies a particular class of metrical composition. It indicates <i>Shlokas</i> for "Jarjara²¹" also. (L. S., 2000, p. 43) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After reciting the 'Shloka', 'Sutradhara' does the "Nitya Kriyas"; in this context "Akkitta" many songs are sung by the 'Nambiar'. Some of the songs have meaningless syllables. This portion partly tallies with 'Shushkavakrishta – Dhruvas²²'. "Jarjara Puja" is replaced by "Ganapati Puja". The <i>Shushkavakrishta</i> is absent in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.
15	<u>Rangadwara (To Please The Vishnu):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First presentation of <i>Vachika</i> and <i>Angika</i> on the stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Abhinaya' is introduced after the recitation of 'Shloka'. 'Sutradhara' recites it with mime and action. This would synchronize with the <i>Rangadwara</i>. The <i>Rangadwara</i> occurs as a part of the drama in the "Vidushaka's Purappad²³" for <i>Vachika</i> and "Nayaka's Purappadu".

²¹ Jarjara: A bamboo pole having five 'knots' as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Various deities are invoked on the pole for the protection of the drama.

²² Shushkavakrishta – Dhruvas: a song to be sung on the stage which has only meaningless syllables in place of words. This is to be sung before the rendering of the praise of the 'Jarjara'.

²³ Purappad: The first entry on the stage of the *Sutradhara* or important characters of the play.



16	<u>Chari (To Please The Parvati):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Lasya</i> (Dance Movement) to represent <i>Sringara</i>.• After addressing the verses of praise to the '<i>Jarjara</i>', the '<i>Sutradhara</i>' bends it low. At this time the two assistants move back to the west. This means that the '<i>Chari</i>' (also the '<i>Mahachari</i>') is to be presented by the '<i>Sutradhara</i>' alone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please refer below description.
17	<u>Mahachari (To Please The Bhuta Ganas):</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Tandava</i> to represent <i>Raudra</i>.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "<i>Nitya Kriyas</i>" start with some items of dance, would be the equivalent of <i>Chari</i> and <i>Mahachari</i>.• <i>Chari</i> and <i>Mahachari</i> are not similar to the "<i>Shiva-Parvati</i>:"



		<p><i>Kesadipadam</i>²⁴” description, there may be some changes in gestures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• However, there is no <i>Tandava - Lasya</i> or <i>Raudra – Sringara</i> differentiation.
18	<u>Trigata:</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It means ‘Three Men’s Talk’.• The conversation / dialogue among <i>Vidushak</i>, <i>Sutradhara</i> and <i>Pariparsvika</i>.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regarding <i>Trigata</i> in <i>Kutiyattam</i>, no conversation is conducted among ‘<i>Sutradhara</i>’, ‘<i>Vidushaka</i>’ and ‘<i>Pariparsvika</i>’.• In some of the plays ‘<i>Sutradhara</i>’ talks with a ‘<i>Nati</i>’ and in some others with ‘<i>Vidushaka</i>’.• So it can be called only a ‘<i>Dvigatam</i>’.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The <i>Trigata</i> is absent in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.
19	<u>Prarochana:</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Praising the ‘<i>Kavya Prayog – Siddhi</i>’ by reason and logic. It is an appeal to the spectator to make the performance a success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an item known as “<i>Nambiar Tamil</i>” means ‘<i>Malayalam</i> prose rendering of the play’, which is presented at this point and can be taken as part of <i>Prarochana</i>.

²⁴ Kesadipadam: A head to foot description, showing gestures for various parts of the body.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Prarochana</i> is absent in <i>Kutiyattam</i>.
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Conclusion:

In this manner, *Kutiyattam* has adopted several customs of “*Purvaranga* – Preliminaries of a Play” found in ‘Classical Sanskrit Theatre’, which strongly establishes its link with the ‘*Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata Muni’. In the overall analysis, we see that, between *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Kutiyattam*, there exist certain similarities and differences; these differences include the absence of certain practices in *Kutiyattam*, adaptation of certain practices in their own style and rearrangement of the order of certain items. *Kutiyattam* possesses its own distinct style and is the only surviving form today that presents the ‘Classical Sanskrit Theatre’.

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