

## A Group Assignment on Kathakali

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### **Introduction:** -

Kathakali, the world-renowned Classical Dance-Drama of Kerala, originated in Kottarakkara during the first quarter of the 15th Century. It was then known as RAMANATTAM. This art form slowly made its impact throughout Kerala, with the introduction of four classical stories with human heroes by Kottayath Thampuran (North) in the second half of the 17th Century, Ramanattam started known as KATHAKALI. The literal meaning of the word Kathakali is “story-play”. The term Kathakali is a combination of two Malayalam words “katha” (meaning story) and “kali” (meaning play). This art form left its divine nature and transformed into an absolute theatre status by the 18th century. The unique style of depiction of the Bhavas (Emotional states), physical movements, the interfilming dance-element and colorful costumes were widely acclaimed.

Like other Indian classical dance arts, the story in ‘Kathakali’ is also communicated to audience through excellent footwork and impressive gestures of face and hands complimented with music and vocal performance. However, it can be distinguished from the others through the intricate and vivid make-up, unique face masks and costumes worn by dancers as also from their style and movements that reflect the age-old martial arts and athletic conventions prevalent in Kerala and surrounding regions. Traditionally performed by male dancers, it developed in courts and theatres of Hindu regions contrary to other Indian classical dances which predominantly developed in Hindu temples and monastic schools. Although not clearly traceable, this classical dance form is considered to have originated from temple and folk arts that trace back to 1st millennium CE or before.

By 1950s this classical art form attracted connoisseurs from all over the world. Kathakali is the total theatre of Kerala. The term Kathakali is derived from two words Katha means the story and Kali means play, in which actors delineate the stories to conceal their identity in magnificent colours. The characters of this theater are grouped based on three gunas (quality). Satwa, Rajas and Thamas. Righteous gentle and soft characters are known as Minukku, royal righteous ones are Pacha, more dignified warriors with little aggressive nature are Kathi more aggressive ones are Thadi primitive characters are kari. Taxonomy of characters is based on the colors of the face, costumes, and patterns drawn on the face and the crowns and the cloths. A character in a play is assigned to one of these roles depending upon the Sthayibhava (a predominant emotional status) and mood attributed on the particular occasion of the play. Kathakali is pantomime super. The characters never speak. The transfer of emotional state and dialogues to audiences is

achieved by processes like Kinesics, Oculistics, Grunts, Gait, Postures and Gestures, Haptics and Costumes.

All realms of Non-Verbal communication is best explored in the process of enacting of Kathakali. In Kathakali, performers bring action for all spoken words by the singers, and no words are wasted. This study aims to understand how non-verbal communication is effectively used in Kathakali, non – verbal forms include Kinesics, Gait, Haptics, Postures and Gestures, Grunts and Oculistics. The researchers chose observation study for their research. Some of the the prominent plays were observed for the same. The plays are Seethaswayamvaram, Baalivadhham, Bakavadham, Kalyana Saugandhikam, Kaalakeyavadham, Kiratham, Baalivijayam, Keechakavadham, Dakhayagam, Rajasooyam, Narakasuravadham and Baanayudham.

- **Kathakali and Natyashastra -**

The theory of enacting process of Kathakali is based on Sage Bharatha's Natyashastra. According to Natyashastra, Abhinaya (the process of enacting) has four components, viz. Sathvik, Angik, Vachik and Aharya, which are otherwise different stages of evolution of emotion in living beings. Abhinaya is the process of carrying one's mind (Naya) by another in direct presence (Abhi). Chadurvidhabhinaya the Four stages of enacting- or the Process of Emotion originating in Subtle Sub-conscious Mind and getting expressed as Oculistics, Kinesics, Gait, Postures and Gestures.

Author Phillip Zarrilli mentions that the basic components and distinct features of this form of classical dance can be traced back to ancient Sanskrit Hindu text called 'Natyashastra', a text on the performing arts written by the sage Bharata Muni, an Indian theatrologist and musicologist. Although the full version of the text is conjectured to be completed between 200 BCE to 200 CE, such time span also hover around 500 BCE to 500 CE. Various chapters of this text consist of thousands of verses. Dance is categorised in two specific forms in 'Natyashastra' - 'nritya' and nritya'. While the former is pure dance that concentrates on hand movements and gestures, the latter is solo expressive dance that showcases brilliance of expressions. Natalia Lidova, a Russian scholar mentions that the text throws light upon different theories of Indian classical dances that includes theories of Tandava dance, standing postures, basic steps, bhava, rasa, methods of acting and gestures.

- **Unique features of Non-Verbal Communication in Kathakali**

In Kathakali the actors do not speak. Two playback singers render verses of Attakatha (Lines of Kathakali Text). The main content of the text are dialogues of characters. It also includes lines stating the situation, emotional state of character and other aspects. The whole sequence of enacting of characters falls into two parts, viz. the

acting of the verses sung – **Cholliyattam**, and acting in accordance with drums without background rendering of verses, the **Elakiyattam**.

1] **Oculesics** in Sathika Abhinaya- It is said that where there is Mudra, the Mind is there, and the eyes are naturally there. The eyes focus where the mind does. As mentioned, the prime media of expression of Bhava in Sathvik Abhinaya are eyes

2] **Kinesics, Gait, Postures and Gestures Cholliyattam**: Cholliyattam is based on enacting Verbatim. The whole text sung by the singer is enacted word by word. Such a process, in addition to acting verbatim, should also have the embedded Sthayi Bhava of the character, Sancharibhava –the overlapping alternating mood, and the message of the situation. This sophisticated blending can only be achieved by a powerful expressive body language with effective Kinesics, Gait, Postures, and Gestures and by a delicate depiction of emotional state with appropriate Oculesics complimented by Grunts.

The Body Language of the actor has 24 basic Alphabets viz. the basic **MUDRAS**. These are a sequence of movements of the limbs of the body with a starting posture, sequence of movements ending in a defined posture with emphasis on position of palm and fingers. The word or noun is conveyed mainly by the hands or fingers and so these are also called HASTHA MUDRAS (Signs of Hands). The Kathakali Mudras are based on Hasthalakshanadeepika (author unknown). The position of hands with Mudras, variation of Mudras in hands etc. has different attributed meanings. An actor can depict word, sentences, and a full situation by combination of Mudras. There are 'Asamyutha Mudras' (that is shown using single hand) and 'Samyutha Mudras' (mudras shown in double hands) in each Basic Mudras, to show different symbols. Considering all these Mudras and their separations there are totally 470 symbols used in Kathakali.

The details of each Mudra are given below:

### **1. Pathaaka (Flag):**

There are 36 double hand symbols and 10 single hand symbols using this Mudra.

#### **Double Hand Symbols:**

1.Sun, 2.King, 3.Elephant, 4.Lion, 5.Ox, 6.Crocodile, 7.Arch, 8.Climbing Plant, 9.Flag, 10.Series of waves, 11.Path, 12.Hell, 13.Earth, 14.Hip, 15.Pot, 16.Multi-storied building, 17.Evening, 18.Noon, 19.Cloud, 20.Anthil, 21.Thigh, 22.Servant, 23.Travel, 24.Wheel, 25.Stool, 26.Lord Indra's weapon, 27.Gate Tower, 28.Rampart, 29.Vehicle, 30.Peaceful, 31.Crooked, 32.Door, 33.Pillow, 34.Trench (ditch), 35.Leg, 36.Bolt

#### **Single hand symbols:**

1.Day, 2.Movement, 3.Tongue, 4.Forehead, 5.Body, 6.That thing, 7.Noise, 8.Messenger, 9.Sandbank, 10.Sprout

### **2. Mudraakhyam:**

There are 13 double hand symbols and 12 single hand symbols using this Mudra.

Double hand symbols:

1.Growth, 2. Movement, 3. Heaven, 4.Ocean, 5.Thick, 6.Forgetting, 7.Everything, 8.Announcement, 9.Thing, 10.Death, 11.Meditation, 12.Sacred Thread, 13.Straight

Single hand symbols:

1.Mind, 2. Thought, 3.Desire, 4.By oneself, 5.Remaining, 6.Wisdom, 7.Creation, 8.Life, 9.Defame, 10.Future, 11.No, 12.Fourth

**3. Katakam (Golden Bangle):**

There are 20 double hand symbols and 9 single hand symbols using this Mudra.

Single hand symbols:

1.Flower, 2.Mirror, 3.Female, 4.Offering holy materials to the sacrificial fire while chanting 'manthras', 5.Sweating, 6.A little, 7.Quiver, 8.Smell, 9.Which one

Double hand symbols:

1. Vishnu (God), 2.Krishna (God), 3.Balaraman  
4.Arrow, 5.Gold, 6.Silver, 7.A female demon, 8.Sleep, 9.Main woman, 10.Godess of wealth, 11.Veena, 12.Stars, 13.Chain, 14.Lotus/ water, 15.Demon, 16.Crown, 17.Weapon, 18.Peculiarity / special news, 19.Chariot, 20.With

**4. Mushti:**

There are 25 double hand symbols and 15 single hand symbols using this Mudra.

Double hand symbols:

1.Driver of chariot, 2.Prefix, 3.Beauty, 4.Purity, 5.pirit of Ghost, 6.Binding, 7.Qualification, 8.Condition, 9.Ankle, 10.Pulling, 11.Tail of the animal (a whisk), 12.Destroyer/ Yama, the god of death, 13.Mud, 14.Medicine, 15.Curse, 16.Swing, 17.Gift/ donation, 18.Circumambulation, 19.Digging, 20.Giving up, 21.Lance, 22.Heroism, 23.Hot (Sunor fire)/ grieve, 24.Vomiting, 25.Delivery/ child birth,

Single hand symbols:

1.In vain, 2. Extremely, 3.Fill upon, 4.King's advisor, 5.Crossing, 6.Bearing, 7.Donation, 8.Consent, 9.Victory, 10.Bow, 11.we, 12.Single sentence, 13.agedness, 14.Robbing, 15.Food

**5. Kartharee Mukham (Scissor's sharp point):**

There are 16 double hand symbols and 10 single hand symbols using this Mudra.Totally 26.

Double hand symbols:

1.Sin, 2.Tireness, 3.Male member of Brahmin caste, 4.Fame, 5.Skull, 6.House, 7.A religious vow, 8.Purity, 9.Bank, 10.Dynasty, Bamboo, 11.Hunger, 12.Hearing, 13.Telling, 14.Gathering, 15.End, 16.Hunting

Single hand symbols:

1.You, 2.Word, 3.Change of mood/ time, 4.Gradation, 5.We, 6.Human being, 7.Face, 8.Enmity, 9.Child, 10.Mongoose

**6. Sukathundam (Parrot's peek):**

Double hand symbols:

1.Goad, 2.Bird, 3.Engagement

**7. Kapidhakam (The fruit of a tree):**

There are 10 double hand symbols:

1.Net, 2.Doubt, 3.Tail feather of a peacock, 4.Drinking, 5.Touching, 6.Prevent, 7.In the open expanse of land, 8.The outer side, 9.Descend, 10.To step

**8. HamsaPaksham (Swan's wing):**

42 single hand symbols and 11 double hand symbols can be shown using this Mudra.

1.Moon, 2.Air, 3.Kamadeva, 4.Gods, 5.Mountain, 6.Valley, 7.Everyday, 8.Relatives, 9.Bedding, 10.Rock, 11.Happiness and comfort, 12.Chest, 13.Female breast, 14.Cloth, 15.Vehicle, 16.Lie, 17.Lying down, 18.Falling, 19.Croud, 20.Beating, 21.Covering, 22.Spreading, 23.Found, 24.Coming, 25.Salutation, 26.Game, 27.Sandal, 28.Embrace, 29.Follow, 30.Escaping, 31.Reach, 32.Mace, 33.The cheek region, 34.Shoulder, 35.Hair, 36.Humility, 37.Blessing, 38.Sint, 39.Thus, 40.Fish, 41.Worship, 42.Tortoise

Double hand symbols:

1.You, 2.Sword, 3.Anger, 4.Now, 5.I, 6.In front of, 7.Axe, 8.Light, 9.Calling, 10. Getting nearness 11.Prevent

**9. Sikharam (Peak):**

8 single hand symbols:

1.Walking, 2.Legs, 3.Eyes, 4.Sight, 5.Path, 6.Search/ detection, 7.Ears, 8.Drinking  
Duble hand symbols using this Mudra are Garudan (a hawk in Purana), Swan and Jatayu.

**10. Hamsaasyam (Swan's peek):**

This Mudra can show 8 double hand symbols:

1.Iris, 2.Smoothness, 3.Dust, 4.Whiteness, 5.Blue colour, 6.Red, 7.Mercy, 8.Hairs of the body

4 single hand symbols:

1.Beginning of the rainy season, 2.Hair of the head, 3.The line of hair on the abdomen, 4.The three folds of skin above the naval of a woman

**11.Anjaly (Folded hands in Salutation):**

15 Double hand symbols:

1.Excessive rain, 2.Vomiting, 3.Fire, 3.Horse, 4.Loud noise, 6.Light, 7.Hair, 8.Ear-ring, 9.Heat or sorrow, 10.Anxiety, 11.Always, 12.Blood, 14.River, 15.Flowing

2 single hand symbols:

1.Twigs of the tree, 2.Anger

Totally 17 symbols using this Mudra.

**12.Ardhachandram (Half moon):**

There are 9 double hand symbols and 4 single hand symbols using this Mudra.

Double hand symbols:

1.If, 2.For what, 3.Helplessness, 4.Sky, 5.Blessed man, 6.God, 7.Memory, 8.Grass, 9.Hair of a man

Single hand symbols:

1.Starting, 2.Smiling, 3.What (This can be done with single and double hands), 4.Contempt

### **13. Mukuram (Mirror):**

There are 11 double hand symbols and 9 single hand symbols using this Mudra.Totally 20.

Double hand symbols:

1.Tusk, 2. Seperation, 3. Forlimb, 4.Waist, 5.Vedam, 6.Brother, 7.Pillar, 8.Mortar, 9.Speedy, 10.Devil, 11.Growth

9 single hand symbols:

1.Dissenting person, 2. Beetle, 3.Ray, 4.Anger, 5.Excellent, 6.Bangle, 7.Neck, 8.Armllet, 9.Negative

### **14. Bhramaram (Beetle):**

5 Double hand symbols:

1.Wing of a bird, 2. Song, 3.Water, 4.Umberlla, 5.Ear of the elephant

4 Single hand symbols:

1.Demi-god (Gandharva), 2. Birth, 3.Fear, 4.Weeping

### **15. Soochimukham (Needle's sharp point):**

10 Double hand symbols:

1.Broken, 2. Jumping up, 3.Universe, 4.Lakshmana, 5.Fall, 6.The other thing, 7.Month, 8.Eyebrow, 9.Loose, 10.Tail

16 Single hand symbols:

1.One person, 2. What a pity!, 3.Dull, 4.Another, 5.Plural, 6.Ear, 7.A digi of the moon, 8.In olden times, 9.This man, 10.These people, 11.Kingdom, 12.A little, 13.Witness, 14.Give up

### **16. Pallavam (Sprout):**

9 Double hand symbols:

1.The weapon of Lord Indra, 2. Mountain peak, 3. Ears of cow, 4. Length of the eye, 5. Male buffalo, 6. Pestle made of iron, 7. Spear, 8. Horn, 9. Circling

6 Single hand symbols:

1.Distance, 2. Pledge, 3. Fume, 4. Tail, 5. Cane, 6. Grain

### **17. Thripathaaka (Flag with three colours):**

6 Double hand symbols:

1.Sunset, 2. Commencement, 3.'Hey', 4. Drinking, 5. Body, 6. Begging

### **18. Mrigaseersham (Deer's head):**

2 Double hand symbols:

1.Animals, 2. The supreme being

### **19. Sarpasirassu (Serpant's head):**

9 Double hand symbols:

1.Sandal, 2. Snake, 3. Slowness, 4. Worship of god using 8 substances, 5. Vomiting, 6. Saint, 7.Swinging of elephant's ears, 8.Escaping, 9.Massage

Apart from these symbols, this Mudra is used to show the symbols, Sprinkle, clapping hands, breaking skull of the elephant, chertishing, giving water to God and message of wrestlers.

**20. Vardhamanakam (Seedling):**

6 Double hand symbols:

1.Ear-ring of a female, 2. Diamond neklace, 3. Knee, 4.One who practices Yoga, meditation, 5.Drawn, 6.Man look aftering the elephant

3 Single hand symbols:

1.Whirlpool, 2.Navel, 3.Well

**21. Araalam (Curved):**

5 double hand symbols:

1.Fool, 2.Tree, 3.Wedge, 4.Bud, 5.Sprout

**22. Oornanabham (Spider):**

7 Double hand symbols:

1.Horse, 2.Fruit, 3.Tiger, 4.Butter, 5.Snow, 6.Plenty, 7.Lotus flower

**23. Mukulam (Bud):**

1.Fox, 2.Monkey, 3.Fading, 4.Forgetting

**24. Katakaamukham:**

6 double hand symbols:

1.Blouse, 2. Servant, 3. Hero, 4. Wrestler, 5. To shoot arrows, 6. Arrest

The symbol of 'addressing' anybody is showed using the Mudra Hamsapaksham.

In "Mushti" when the small finger is straightened gets "Baana" Mudra.Using this can show the symbols like oppose, Stop!!, coming, future etc.

There are two types of Mudras:

1. Samaana Mudras (Same Mudras):- That is, the same Mudra is used to show two different symbols. For example the Mudra "Karthareemukham" is used to show both the symbols 'Time' and 'Near'.

2. Misra Mudras (Mixed Mudras): That is, some symbols are shown using two different Mudras in both hands. There are 68 Mixed Mudras. For example to show the symbol 'Indra', the Mudra "Sikharam" in one hand and the Mudra "Mushti" in the other hand; for 'Sivan' the Mudras used are "Mrigaseersham" and "Hamsapaksham"; etc.





This image is reminiscent of Vardhamanakam mudra and Elakiyattam.

3] **Elakiyattam** - Elakiyattam is the pinnacle situation of Non-Verbal Communication in Kathakali. During Elakiyattam there is no singing. The actor presents the whole situation by his silent language by effective and apt usage of Kinesics, Gait, Postures, Gestures and Oculistics complimented by Grunts. The enacting sequence may run to a time span hours. Here the actor has freedom to deviate from the main stream and can enact Flashbacks, History, Self-Achievements, Wars, Scenes of Natural Beauty etc. This is the occasion when the actor brings his innovative talents to stage. An educated connoisseur yearns for such performances. A predefined Elakiyattam sequence is considered as the uniqueness or CHITTA of a story and is judged as the grade of classism.

- **Kalaasam or Foot movements in Kathakali**

Kathakali, the classical dance drama of Kerala, uses complex and intricate schemes of rhythm and foot movements. Kalaasam is one of them. Kalaasam's threw light on the supreme combinations of inborn talent and rigorous training requisite for any actor to perform the classical art forms of Kerala. They fall in between the verse lines and dance crescendos at the end of the songs. Ashtakalasam, one among the Kalaasam, comprises of eight dance types in Kathakali performed to express the enormous joy of a character. The steps are composed in the 'Champa' rhythm and require great mastery for an artiste to perform. Each performance ends in Astakalaasam of huge movements, rhythm, orchestra, dance, music and moods.

The muscles play an important part in Kathakali and the movements of the facial muscles are a most significant part of a dancer's training. The geometrical pattern which the dancer follows may be described as either a square or a rectangle, with the dancer standing with book feet apart, knees turned out and the outer soles of the feet touching the ground. This position may be identified as the mandala sthana. The dancer covers space also in patterns of square and rectangles. The right foot meets the left and one side of the square. The dancer moves forward to the third corner of the rectangle and then back to the second corner and finally comes back to the first corner but only touching all four points. With his arms and hands, the dancer covers space usually in figures of squares and rectangles or clearly drawn diagonals along these squares and rectangles. Occasionally the hands execute figures of eight and the eyes follow, but the movement sequence always limits imaginary geometric pattern. The knees are always turned out and there is invariably space of two to three feet between the feet. The torso is used as one unit or occasionally, two i.e. the upper and lower torso. Jumps, spirals, sweeps and leaps are characteristic. Leg extensions are clear and the weight must be shifted from one foot to the other in these extensions with ease. It is an essential part of the dancers training to learn how to use each facial muscle

separately. The movement of the eyebrows, the eyeballs and the lower eyelids described in Natyasastra are not used to such an extent in any other dance style of India.

The Kalasams is the twist fundamental units of a cadence of movement in Kathakali. There are the double Kalasams which normally are longer than the smaller units, sometimes these culminate in multiples of three. There are even bigger Kalasams known as the Baliya Kalasams. These are extended passages of dance but always used in dramatic structure. There are then the Vattam Vachchu Kalasam which represent covering space in circles. There is the largest of the longest type of Kalasams called the asthakalam. This kinetic phrase is a stringing together of eight different units normally set to a 10 beat metrical cycle called the champala. It is important to note that each of these nritta passages are always used as part and parcel of the dramatic spectacle. These Kalasams also have an emotional mood or bhava. Always these are conditioned by the mood of the play and the particular situation of the dramatic scene.

- **Conclusion**

This indigenous theatre of Kerala has many intricate methodologies of in-built non-verbal communication. This art form has its own built-in intricacies techniques to handle communication. The depicted Bhava when communicated via three aspects of Chadurvidhabhinaya gets transformed as Rasa in the minds of connoisseurs. The major transfer is via non-verbal means. Thus, Kathakali's methods of non-verbal communication are both unique and effective. In Kathakali all major forms of non-verbal communication viz. Kinesics, Gait, Postures & Gestures, Grunts, Oculistics work in unison. Each one compliments the others.

Also, unlike our Epics, the Protagonists in Kathakali may not be righteous or divine. Protagonists resemble heroes of Shakespearean Tragedies and are men of self-achievement. The Protagonists of stories of earlier origin are righteous Pacha type. Very generally speaking, Pacha or Kathi types are Protagonists and dynamic, quick-acting, vigorous Chuvanna Thaadi who protests are mostly Antagonists. In addition to the appearance, these character roles differ in the tempo of non-verbal communication. The bit-rate transfer of Antagonists is very high as they are in furious excited state. But surely, there exist many similarities between Protagonists and Antagonists.

An in-depth study of the classical elements of this theatre will surely throw light upon these otherwise obscure elements and might help to explore new realms for modern means of non-verbal communication.

