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**‘Where Nothing is Everything’ – A Comparison of Japan’s Noh
Theatre with its Indian Counterpart**

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“Life is a lying dream; he only wakes who casts the world aside.” — Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443)

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Origins, Evolution and the Principal Features of Noh	4
1.2 Performance Aspects of Noh Performance and the Noh Repertory	5
1.3 The Noh Performance Stage	7
2. Techniques of Performance	8
3. Genres and Schools of Noh	9
4. The Socio-Logic of Noh Education	10
5. The Well Springs of Creative Capital in Noh	11
6. The Philosophy of Noh	12
6.1 Symbolism	13
6.2 Minimalism	13
7. The Temporal Dimension of Noh	15
8. Deconstructing ‘Yugen’	16
9. Comparing Apples to Oranges: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Noh and Kutiyattam	17
10. Co-creation as the new Frontier: Factoring a new dimension to India -Japan Cultural Cooperation	22
References	24
List of Figures	28
List of Tables	28

Abstract

The Japanese theatre form Noh has striking resemblances with its Indian counterpart, Kutiyattam. Both theatres are frugal, austere and minimal in their own ways. Coincidentally both were proclaimed by the UNESCO as the intangible heritage of humankind in the year 2001. Despite these similarities there exist differences in the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of the two art forms. Comparisons of two cultural manifestations are odious but inevitable in a globalized world where inter-nations relations are presaged on cross cultural comparisons. In this paper, the Noh Theatre is the axis of analysis and comparison. The paper attempts a major foray into the world of Noh as understood by an Indian academic. It attempts to delve into the origins, philosophy, performative dimensions and the institutional and economic foundations of Noh and its similarities and contrasts with Kutiyattam. Based on its analysis and findings, the concluding section proposes a co-creation mode of collaboration that involves artistes from the two streams to provide a vibrant depth to India-Japan cultural ties.

Keywords: nothingness, repertoire, essence, minimalism, symbolism, creative capital, India-Japan Cultural Cooperation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Origins, Evolution and the Principal Features of Noh

The origins of Noh go back to two ancient art forms of Japan, viz Sarugaku (a folk art that is traced to China) and Dengaku (or rice field music) that forms part of Japan's peasant art forms (Mikiko Ishii, 1994)¹. The acting dimension of Noh owes its roots to Sarugaku while the Noh traditions of music and dancing came from Dengaku (Ishii, 1994). The 14th century founding fathers of Noh, were Kanami AKA Kan'ami / Kanze Kiyotsugu and his son Zeami Kanze AKA Zeami Motokiyo. Both were playwright-artistes. The father son duo started off as Sarugaku artistes in a theatre group that the former had set up in Obata. After a while both of them moved to Yamato where Kanami set up his second theatre group, named Yūzaki. It is here that their constant experimentations yielded the new art form 'Noh'².

The Yuzaki was to later morph into the first school of Noh, viz the Kanze school, which was once again founded by Kanami. The Kanze school developed an impressive repertoire of Noh plays largely aided, in its earlier years, by the patronage received from the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (Anonymous (ud2) ibid). Over years, other schools of Noh came into the scene, viz Komparu, Hosho, Kongo and Kita. The Kita which was the last of the five illustrious Noh schools, came into being in early 17th century.

Today the repertory of Noh comprises of nearly 240 plays, a large number of which has been created by Zeami (O' Neill 1953, p8).

Noh is variously described as 'dance drama' and 'musical drama' since it combines song, dance and drama. The relative contribution of the three elements in a Noh play is not easy to determine. In this sense, as is the case with India's Kutiyattam, Noh can be best described as a theatre form.

As a theatre form, Noh differs from Western drama theatre in the sense that it is not based on a 'play with a story'³. Rather Noh focuses on presenting the mood of a moment and representing it in an aesthetic way by blending words, music and dance. The story is narrated by a single actor / character. This obviates the need to have multiple characters on stage as is typical of Western drama (O'Neill.1953)⁴.

The minimalist streak of a Noh performance arises from the absence of standard dramatic effects. The emphasis is on rendering an 'incident' through restrained, physical movements and at a very slow pace⁵. Noh acting is stylised and is based on seemingly simplistic expressions (Sekine 1985, p 43). However these manifestations in movements and acting conceal rich emotions and profound moods. Subtle tilts in the masks worn by the main characters was enough to convey change in moods. An upward tilt of the mask (teru) indicates joy and mirthfulness while a downward tilt is associated with despair and grief (kumoru) (Udaka, 2015, p 187)⁶.

¹ Anonymous(ud1). The term 'Noh' is derived from the Sino- Japanese word 'No' which means 'skill' or 'talent'. <https://www.definitions.net/definition/NOH>, accessed on Sep 5, 2020.

² Anonymous (ud2) [https:// www .britannica.com/biography/Kanami](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kanami), accessed on Sep 4, 2020.

³ O'Neill.1953

⁴ This is a characteristic that is true of India's Kutiyattam Theatre as well.

⁵ As Sekine(1985, p44) observes, Noh plays were more pronouncedly slow during the Edo period. The canonisation of Noh also took place largely during the Edo period. This assumed the forms of metred performance yardsticks and universalised depictions of emotions.

⁶ The impact that Noh masks had on Yeats' concept of drama has been tremendous. See Yeats 1961 and Youngmin Kim.2019 for a detailed discussion on the influence of Noh theatre on Yeats' plays.

Conventional Noh performances commenced with a ceremonial dance called 'Okina'. Traditionally, five plays were performed in a sequence on a given day. These five categories of plays are referred to as shin, nan, nyo, kyo and ki (god, man, woman, madness and demon respectively). Shin or wakinoh-mono plays are celebratory in content. Nan or shura mono play centres on armed conflicts and typically involves the story of a deceased warrior who descends into Shura-do, which is the asura realm of Buddhism, Nyo or Kazura – mono is about graceful dancing. The Kyo plays (included in the fourth category of plays) are called Kurui-mono. These plays are about tormented souls. The 'Ki' play concludes a full day of Noh program on a celebratory note (Udaka ,2010 p147-48). The final act is most vivacious one in Noh, as characters break into brisk movements on stage, which is way different from the slow, gliding moving that is characteristic of main body of Noh plays⁷.

These days only two plays are performed in a given day (Udaka ,2010 p147-48).

What Zeami is to Noh is what Bharata is to India's Sanskrit Theatre. Traditional Kutiyattam plays of India also commence with ritualistic oblations before the lamp. This is consistent with the precept laid down by Bharata in his work *Natyasastra* that highlighted the importance of conducting rituals prior to a performance in order to purify the body and controlling the senses of the performer (Vatsyayan. 1993, p47).

Between each Noh play, it is common to have a comedy or farce piece performed, referred to as Kyogen (or mad words). In some ways Kyogen resembles 'Cakyar Koothu' associated with Kutiyattam. Both are satirical in nature. 'Cakyar Koothu' which is an adjunct art form of Kutiyattam is however enacted as independent performance on days / times when Kutiyattam is not performed.

1.2 Performance Aspects of Noh Performance and the Noh Repertory

The main characters of a Noh performance (without which a Noh performance is incomplete) are the Shite (the main actor) and the Waki (who is the next most important actor after the Shite). The Waki sets the stage for the Shite to enact and perform. Indeed some plays like Minobu comprise of only the Shite and Waki (O' Neill 1953, p7)⁸.

The supporting actors associated with the Shite, are referred to as Tsure. In addition, there are other minor actors (referred to as Tomo) and child characters (referred to as Ko-kata) (O' Neill 1953, p6). The Noh stage is enriched by music. The musicians present on stage include those who play flute, a small drum (or kotsuzumi) which is held on the right shoulder and struck with the hand, a slightly larger drum (o-tszumi) held on the left hip and struck with the hand and a big drum (taiko) (for some plays) which is set up on a low stand and played with drumsticks⁹.

Despite its focus on the departed souls, Noh plays remains rooted in the present tense. To quote Takahashi et al (2010, p17), 'At the door of the Noh theatre we invite you to experience a stirring account with elemental life'.

⁷ Noh movements are of three types viz, realistic, symbolic and abstract. The Noh actor rarely moves quickly when charged with emotion as is the case with Western Plays. Movement is slow but majestic. Actors strive to glide across the stage instead of walk.

⁸ The Shite wears a mask, while the Waki does not (O' Neill 1953, p7).

⁹ O' Neill (1953, p8) and Anonymous 2020, a.

In terms of the nature of characters focused upon, Noh plays can be classified into Mugen Noh and Genzai Noh. The former comprises of plays where the main character of the Shite is not a flesh and blood living being but the spirit of people who died long ago. Genzai Noh plays, on the other hand, focus on real life characters. According to Yamanaka (2015,43-44), Genzai Noh plays tend to be like Western theatre, since they deal with incidents and their resolution, while Mugen Noh is the quintessential Noh play since it stresses on dreams and illusions and controlled but intense emotions.

Noh plays are also classified into five (Kami,Shura,Kazura, Zatsu and Kiri) depending on the characters played, their gender, the typology of characters presented and the dominant moods of these characters. Kami is a play where the Shite assumes the role of God, Shura Noh is where the Shite assumes the role of the ghost of a warrior, while in Kazura type of plays, the Shite dons the role of women. Zatsu presents plays that are characterised by moods and temperamental traits of the characters presented, which range from madness to vengefulness. Kiri plays are characterised by the presence of demons and supernatural powers¹⁰.

The principal source of the Noh mystique is the metaphorical value of the masks (omote) worn by the main characters. The process of mask making is called utsu (Udaka ,2015, p 188). Noh masks are made of seasoned cypress wood. The wood is seasoned by immersing them in water for long periods of time. This is followed by special chiselling, painting and colouring. As Udaka (2015, p 185) states, there are 60 basic models of Noh masks which get extended in number to over 200, if subtle variations and the class of special masks are included. Older actors (hitamen) do not wear masks. The masks used in professional Noh performance by the leading schools go back to the period between the 14th and 17th centuries (Udaka op, cit). Masks used in Noh can be categorized into six viz, onna for female characters, otoko for male characters, jo for elderly characters, okina for aged dieties, kishin for demons and gods and onryo for wandering spirits of the living or dead¹¹. It is the masks that transform an actor into the character that he assumes on stage (Udaka (2015, p 186). The masks are by design smaller than the human face that it seeks to cover. An actor wearing the mask is under great pressure to ensure that his performance meets the highest standard (Udaka,2015, p186).

Finally, comes the music associated with a Noh performance. The words of a chant are called kotoba and the music is fushi. The typology of chanting is referred to as Utai. Some lines are performed to the accompaniment of drums and flute, while certain others are not¹².

The dynamics of repertory management by performing arts theatres rest on the dual approaches of repertory deepening and repertory widening (Damodaran,2013). By repertory deepening is meant reworking and the enrichment of classical plays included in the conventional repertoire in order to impart new stylistic features by way of variations. By ‘repertory widening’ is meant the tendency to introduce plays with exotic genres from other theatres. Re-adaptations of classical Noh plays to include modern drama features also involves repertoire widening.

Over the years the Noh theatre too has undergone the processes of repertory widening and deepening. Examples of repertory widening undertaken by Noh artistes / schools include the works of Kita Minoru (a famous artiste belonging to the Kita School / lineage). His works carried new content, while adhering to the traditional canons of Noh production (Anonymous. ud3). Minoru’s modern Noh plays works which were not part of the classical repertoire include Yumedono and Kenny – o. These works were created by him in cooperation with the famous Japanese poet Zenmaro Toki.

¹⁰ See <https://www.the-noh.com/en/world/forms.html> accessed on 25 Aug 2020.

¹¹ Udaka op, cit.

¹² http://ryokoaoki.net/study_e/about.html, accessed on 4th August 2020.

Examples of repertoire widening carried out by non-traditional Noh artistes, include modern Shakespearian plays enacted in the Noh format by the Ryutopia Noh Theatre Shakespeare Series' under the stewardship of Yoshihiro Kurita, an artiste who moved from Kabuki to contemporary Theatre¹³. Another outstanding case of repertoire widening carried out by non Noh artistes involves the readapted choreographic work, 'Lady Aoi' of 1954, essayed by the famous novelist Yukio Mishima, which incorporates elements from Western Opera with the 'damask drum' being the only element drawn from classical Noh performance¹⁴. A more contemporary figure who has experimented new Noh (Kyogen) scripts is Mansai Nomura, the charismatic Kyogen artiste who has tried innovative methods to draw new audience to Noh plays (Birmingham, 2008). Mansai has appeared in Shakespeare's Macbeth performance which tried to combine Noh and Kyogen strands in the work. However the problem with new or re-adapted Noh plays is that they run the risk of not being acceptable to the audience (Masayuki ONUKI 2019, Personal communication, 30th August).

The instances of repertoire deepening are more complex in the case of Noh as it involves mapping the changes that have occurred in performance styles of plays over a period of time. This is something that can be done only by traditional performers associated with the five Noh schools. Since the strength of the canons is strong amongst these families, changes and innovations on existing works are hard to come by. Despite this both the utai as well as performative aspects of Noh have evolved in interesting ways¹⁵.

1.3 The Noh Performance Stage

The Noh performance space is built with cypress wood. It is 'L' shaped, open on three sides, with a backboard carrying a painted image of a pine tree. This main performance space or Hombutai comprises of three rectangles. The outer rectangle is the 'performance space proper'. The smaller rectangle on the posterior has as its backdrop a painted image of a pine tree. It is here that drummers and other musicians (hayashikata) sit. The third rectangle is a smaller one to the right where the chorus (Jitai) sits. The stairs in front of the stage is called 'Kizhashi'. The main performance space (the outer rectangle) is supported by four pillars or Hashira, each of which is allotted to different classes of characters. The rear pillar on the left of the stage is earmarked for the Shite (Shite hashira), while the rear pillar on the right is earmarked as the musicians' pillar (fue hashira). The anterior pillar to the right is earmarked for the Waki (waki hashira) while the anterior left pillar to the left is earmarked as the sighting pillar (metsuke hashira) to help masked characters adjust their masks. To the left of the main performance area is a passage or walkway called hashigakari that leads to a doorway from which the characters emerge and exit, which is covered by a curtain (or Agemaku). Three pine trees are placed in front of the hashigakari. The audience sit facing the stairs as well as the hashigakari¹⁶. The pine tree and the painted bamboos on the sides of the stage signify grandeur. (Cavaye et al 2004).

¹³ https://performingarts.jp/E/art_interview/0503/art_interview0503e.pdf, accessed on 6th August 2020.

¹⁴ Analysing Mishima's 'The Lady Aoi', Neblett (2011, p136-137) mentions how Mishima while carefully navigating the major literary and performative traditions of classical Nōh imparts Rokujō Lady's demonic "living ghost," with a modern touch by innovatively repositioning her supernatural aspects based on Freudian psychology. As Neblett says, in this manner Mishima seeks to reinterpret the classical aesthetic of yūgen associated with Noh.

¹⁵ This aspect of repertoire deepening in Noh is suggested in the following narrative on the Komapru School of Noh, 'The basic methods of the school which were established by Bishao Gon no Kami and his son Gon no Kami Konparu, underwent dramatic deepening at the time of Gon no Kami's grandson, Zenchike Konparu (<https://japanese-wiki-corpus.github.io/culture/The%20Konparu%20school.html>, accessed on Sep20, 2020.). In the case of Kutiyattam, repertoire deepening is reflected in the changes brought about in the stage manuals for different plays from time to time (Margi Madhu (personal communication, September 22, 2020).

¹⁶ See Ichida Hiromi. (2017, p 88-94) and O'Neill(1953, p 12).

2. Techniques of Performance

The basic technique by which an actor fulfils his commitment to the role in hand and imparts life to a character, is by moving slowly and smoothly with occasional stamping on the floor to project his annoyance or anger. The only exception to this rule of staid movements is when violent, negative characters are to be portrayed, where loud and rhythmic stamping of the floor is involved (Cavaye et al 2004).

The essential movement in Noh is that of gliding like movement referred to as 'Hakobi' whereby the heels are not lifted from the floor. The centre of gravity for hakobi is provided by the basic posture that a Noh actor has to adopt viz, Kamae, whereby the axis of gravity of the actor is the lower part of the body, which is enabled by the slightly bent knees. The upper part of the body has the arms slightly bent with elbows pushed out. The right hand holds the fan and wafts it in a circular fashion. The fan is opened and closed as necessitated by the script¹⁷.

The changes in moods are conveyed through shiori that symbolises crying, Sashi in which the hand holding the fan is brought back closer to the body and then swung in an arc like fashion to point to a distance to point to a mountain or a sea afar¹⁸.

Kata is the detailed choreographed pattern of movement in Noh, which adds to the emotional touch of Noh plays. Kata can mean different things at different stages of a given play¹⁹.

In addition to regular performances, the Noh performance list includes smaller, elemental, but aesthetically rich versions of performance viz, Shimai and Maibayashi. These versions are extracted from the main plays and performed by the Shite. However these smaller versions look like rundown versions of regular plays. For one thing, the Shite does not wear his regular costumes in Shimai plays. Similarly instead of his regular fan (chukei), the Shite of Shimai plays, uses the less officious shizume fan²⁰.

¹⁷ See Anonymous (2020a) and Lamarque (1989) for the symbolic nature of the movements essayed by a Shite with his fan. Thus the single sweep of a fan with the left hand indicates shooting an arrow, if repeated twice it denotes fluttering wings or the wind.

¹⁸ <https://www.the-noh.com/en/world/danceform.html>, accessed on 24th Aug 2020.

¹⁹ <https://www.the-noh.com/en/world/danceform.html>, accessed on 24th Aug 2020.

²⁰ <https://www.the-noh.com/en/world/danceform.html>, accessed on 24th Aug 2020.

3. Genres and Schools of Noh

Following Yamanaka and Pellachia (ud), we can distinguish Noh schools in terms of the types of plays performed by them as well as in terms of their differing performance styles. The schools of Kongo and Kita do not focus on Waki based plays. Similarly the Komparu, Kongo and Kita schools do not perform Kyogen. The hayashi musicians are also affiliated to various schools depending on the instruments handled by them. Thus there are three schools of fue (also nōkan, the transverse flute), four schools of kotsuzumi (the small hand drum), four schools of ōtsuzumi (the large hand drum) and two schools of taiko (the stick drum) (Yamanaka and Pellachia (ud)).

Each school of Noh includes learners who are not relations of the head of the school. These schools also enrol amateur students some of whom eventually turn into semi or full professionals (Yamanaka and Pellachia.ud). As Pellachia (2017) notes, nonfamily, nonprofessional individuals perform Noh as amateur members of university clubs of Noh etc. They affiliate themselves to different schools of Noh with a few of them turn into professional artistes. Indeed as Pellachia (2017) notes, there are female actors in the amateur streams although in the traditional scheme of things, female members are overlooked when it comes to hereditary transmission of professional titles.

In Noh, the fans held by the characters are not just instruments that aid acting but also serve as totems for the school the performance is associated with. In fact each Noh School distinguishes itself from the other by the distinctive design of the fan used by them.

Noh schools are not educational institutions or academies or conservatories although they have a band of teachers who teach pupils in highly formalised environments. According to Yamanaka and Pellachia (ud), the traditional schools of Noh, being closely held and driven by patriarchs, assume the character of 'Ryugis'. A Ryugi is a Japanese term used to refer to a 'flow' of a tradition shared by a group of practitioners. Ryugis are headed by iemoto (lit. 'origin of the house'). The iemoto lineage, from which each Ryūgi takes its name, is the highest ranking within the stylistic school. They partake of a hierarchical social order (Yamanaka and Pellachia (ud)).

As Yamanaka and Pellachia (ud) further state, Noh performers do not undertake extensive group rehearsals prior to a performance. They rehearse separately and have at best one rehearsal before the actual performance. According to the authors, the fixity of the canons of acting, music, choreography and staging conventions obviate the need for extensive.

It is possible for different schools to come together to enact complementary roles. Thus the authors mention how the Kanze-ryū Shite could perform with Fukuō waki or Hōshō waki, with kō-ryū or okura-ryū kotsuzumi, etc. However two Shites from different Ryūgis very rarely perform together in the same play due to differences in parameters of acting, music and performance.

Each school is known for its unique competencies when it comes to performances. The Kita Noh school prides itself in the distinct character and quality of its utai. Likewise the Kanzai, Kongo Komparu and Hosho schools have their distinctive styles of dance, music, costumes and choreographic works.

4. The Socio-Logic of Noh Education

There are a few tenets of Noh that define the socio-logic of education and training in Noh. The first tenet is that the learning process in Noh is based on the principle of imitation ('maneru') which in turn, is based on observation and repetition of what the teacher demonstrates (Pellachia 2017). In terms of this approach, there is little potential for the pupil (and more so for an amateur pupil) to be creative or original (Pellachia 2017). The teacher will display a higher level of enthusiasm than the learner to induce students to be converted to cause of rigorous learning. Another manifestation of this facet is that the teacher projects himself as super-energetic by taking up himself, physically demanding movements and actions despite his age, to instil energy and a sense of commitment amongst his pupils to learn the craft of Noh (Oshima Teruhisa.2016).

Being traditionally family / kinship-based organisations, Noh schools followed the path of exclusive training and pedagogy that is exclusive and secretive. Pound and Fenollosa (1959, p31) mention the story of how an outsider, young actor had to struggle to learn the acting secrets of a difficult play Sekidera Komachi since the instruction on the same was only provided by an iemoto to his elder son²¹. Movement of artistes or artiste families across different schools of Noh has also been a rarity²².

The advent of amateur performers since post World War 2 and their dual role as performers and financiers sharpened the distinction between amateurs and professionals in the world of Noh (Pellachia .2017). There were 1250 Noh professionals in Japan during the 2016 (Sato 2017, p12). As Pellachia (2017) brings out the amateurs were an unqualified blessing to the school and its master, due to their unswerving compliance to the former's authority as well as their role in financially sustaining his master and his school through financial contributions which included purchase of tickets for performances conducted by the master and his core disciples.

However, Noh Amateurs did not have any right to improvise on Noh plays as the rights over repertoire (which included removing or including a new work as well as recognising performers and professionals) rested with the iemoto (Sato.2017, p12)²³. Efforts to create new types of Noh plays that went beyond classical repertoire was rare and was taken up only by celebrity literary figures like Yukio Mishima. Nevertheless, in recent times the desperation to attract new audiences has impelled Noh performances to go far beyond conventional canons. These moves parallel efforts to introduce female actors in Noh performances (Salz.2019).

²¹ A contrasting case in point from Kutiyattam is the account about venerable Kochu Kutta Chakyar , who was the Kutiyattom Guru at the performing arts school 'Margi' in Trivandrum from 1970s to 1990s, who had amongst his pupils, his two sons Sajeewan and Madhu and his nephew Raman apart from others . However the Guru lived with all his pupils in a common facility attached to the school instead of staying separately with his sons and nephew. It is noteworthy that many of his pupils, including his sons and nephew turned out to be successful professional artistes.

²² In the Edo period, there have been instances of actors changing camps at the beckoning of their patron or domain lords. There have also been equal number of instances where artistes on their volition, crossed over from one school to the other. See for such instances ('Question 135 Is it possible for Noh actors to change to different schools? <https://www.the-noh.com/en/trivia/135.html>, accessed on 5th Aug 2020.

²³ The attraction of amateurs to the Noh Theatre was fuelled by the State's policy of promoting heritage and traditions among the younger generation of Japanese citizens in post-World War 2 Japan (Pellachia 2017). This policy initiative was also impelled by the emergence of Noh as a symbol of social superiority and a valuable slice of Japanese heritage (Pound and Fenollosa.1959, p8). However, the gap between the professionals and amateurs is less pronounced for Kutiyattam as amateurs practising this art form are open to receive even 'play production grants' by para stal bodies like the Sangeet Natak Academies of the Central government and the State Governments (Source Margi Madhu, personal communication, Sep 15, 2020).

5. The Well Springs of Creative Capital in Noh

Being canonical in nature, Noh is tightly metred when it comes to performances. Indeed Zeami's basic works like *Fushi – Kaden*, *Shikado* and *Sando* lay down tall and tough standards of performance (Sekine, 1985, p14-17)²⁴. On the face of it, this rigid canonical structure associated with Noh, leaves very little scope for individual artistes to experiment or be innovative. Yet in practice, Noh provides scope for an actor to improvise and innovate.

The creative moment of a Noh play arises from its emotional content which is expressed in a restrained manner by the actors. As Wells (1965, p175-192) puts it, Noh is more lyrical 'than dramatic. It is about spiritual conflict and psychical unrest, issues which lie at the core of Zen Buddhism. Similarly Zeami was of the view that the aesthete of the audience was a major factor that guided the performance of a Noh Actor (Samsom, 1975). Thus Zeami emphasized on the centrality of the performance moment and not on the grip of the play on the actor (Megumi Sata. 1989).

For Zeami, a Noh actor experienced a mysterious sense of beauty (or *Yugen*) each time he repeated his role in given drama. This artiste's *Yugen* is also discerned by the audience who derive immense pleasure and joy from a Noh performance. In many ways Zeami's stress on the audience, resonates with the canons of Bharata's *Natya Sastra* where the role of audience in savouring *Rasa* is highlighted. The creative capital of Noh therefore lies not in its canonised texts and manuals but in the performance moment, which in essence, conveys the creative twists and turns that is brought out at the spur of the moment by the actor.

An identical 'moment of creation is suggested for Western Classical Ballet in Damodaran (2013). However the big difference between the creative moment in Western Ballet (a dance form) and Noh is the more intimate touch that a Noh artiste keeps with his audience as compared to the Western / Russian Classical Ballet. This is facilitated in the Noh Theatre by the smallness of the stage, the relative proximity of the audience with the stage and the ability to feel the pulse of the audience due to the stillness and slow-moving enactment process. The corollary of this feature is that Noh and Kutiyattam, unlike Russian Ballet do not require large, ornate performance infrastructure on account of their minimalist character.

As with Noh, in Kutiyattam, despite the dominance of 'Natya Dharmi' (the laid down canons of performance), actors go by 'Loka Dharmi' (or the practice of assessing the state of mind of the audience) and bring suitable variations to their performance to suit the moods of the audience.

Given that plays and performance manuals are written by artistes in Noh (as in the case of Kutiyattam), the scope for incorporating innovations in acting is immense²⁵.

However as mentioned earlier, the privilege of innovating on Noh plays always rests with professional actors.

²⁴ Indeed some Noh plays call for special skills on the part of the actors. An interesting phenomenon which gives grist to this statement is the well-known discourses on Noh theatre that emphasizes on the special skills required of an actor to successfully enact difficult plays like *Dō-ji*, which calls for extraordinary physical and mental strength on the part of the actors. See Oshima Masanobu (2016).

²⁵ The concept of *Manodharma* in *Natyasastra*, in some ways, is the fountain of innovation and creative capital in Kutiyattam.

6. The Philosophy of Noh

The broad premise of the Noh theatre is the ideal of wholesomeness and the unity of opposition between, 'the worldly and the non-worldly', 'the sacred and the profane' and 'the good and bad' etc (Wells 1965). However wholesomeness requires the expurgation of partial truths or partial facets. This entails, as per Noh philosophy, of first attaining a state of 'Nothingness' and 'naturalism' before moving to capture the spirit of wholesomeness. The concept of nothingness and naturalism in Noh can be traced to the philosophical foundations of Zen Buddhism which is typically expressed in Japanese language through the metaphor of 'empty space'. Japanese language treasures 'ma' or 'empty space' and seeks to find hidden meaning in them (Davies and Ikeno (2002, p38). The concomitants of the concept of empty space are the deep reflection, intense gaze, symbolism, minimalism and circularity of time. These virtues lead to the realisation of 'yugen', the supreme aesthetic feeling that a Noh actor realises while performing.

Indeed, the idea of 'Nothingness' is the philosophical principle of Zen Buddhism as well²⁶.

The idea of nothingness is empowering and has a powerful positive connotation (Sekine, p95). 'Nothingness' is not just about renouncing the idea of self. It is also about being one with the universe. It is in this sense that Zeami explains why it is important for a Noh actor to seek unity with the universe and achieve spiritual enlightenment (Sekine op. cit, p95)²⁷. The idea of nothingness in Noh is associated with a Noh actor shedding his own personality in favour of the role that he assumes in a play. The mask that a Shite dons to cover his face, is what enables the artiste wearing the mask to transform himself into that of the assumed character. 'Nothingness', in turn can be associated with the ideals of asymmetry, sublime austerity (introspective eyes), freedom from attachment and tranquility (Shinchi Hisamatsu (1982. p62).

The second philosophical principle of Noh is the idea of 'naturalism'. The roots of Noh stories are drawn from nature as well as from festival songs, rituals and dance (Udaka (2010, p177). The best manifestation of naturalism in Japanese ethos is the respect that it confers on resources that other civilizations consider as valueless²⁸.

The other closely related point about Noh is that it emphasises the primacy and purity of human energy (the artiste's body and voice) in comparison to the artificiality of electricity and human created sources of energy (Sato.2017, p12). In this way Noh is associated with the credo of sustainability.

²⁶ As Suzuki (1970, p 419) says, Noh plays like Yama -Uba (the old woman of the mountains) was put in by a Buddhist priest to propagate the teaching of Zen. Indeed 'nothingness' in Zen Buddhism is not a hopeless void. The importance that Zen accords to nothingness can be gleaned from the following tale involving a Zen master of the Meiji era, the Rinzai Master Nan-In. The master once received a University Professor who came to inquire about Zen. The master welcomed the Professor by serving him tea. He poured his visitor's cup full and still kept pouring. The Professor watched the overflow until he could not stop. "It is overfull. No more will go in", he said. "Like this cup, said Nan-In " you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you empty your cup. See Bryan McDaniel, Richard. 2013, p 292.

²⁷ It is noteworthy that Henry W Wells (1965, p175-192) considers the Noh experience to be about spiritual conflict and psychical ferment, issues which form the core concerns of Zen Buddhism. Wells (1965) however describes the Sanskrit theatre forms (like Kutiyattam for instance) as 'theatres of poise'.

²⁸ Davies and Ikeno (2002,p71) mention how the approach to beauty in Japanese culture pays equal attention to all the different states in which an object may exist. Thus in Japanese culture flowers in full bloom hold the same significance as their withered versions. While conventionally other cultures are used to thinking the former to be beautiful and ipso facto valuable and the latter valueless, in terms of the Japanese ethos the withered flowers are deemed to be of value for the pathos they generate. In a deeper sense this credo of assigning value to the valueless conveys naturalism and ipso facto the attachment to the notion of diversity.

A concomitant of the concepts of nothingness and naturalism is the principle of intense gaze and reflection on the part of the actor or artiste. As Pound and Fenollosa (1959, p32) state, the more you look at a Noh mask, the more you see it charged with life and the more you feel like getting to be one with the mask. The gaze into nothingness in a calm manner leads the actor to cast away his body and mind and enter the realm of a liberated state that portrays distance from everyday life and transition to a world of metaphors and symbolism. These were the added qualities that attracted the famous Irish poet / playwright W. B. Yeats to the Noh Theatre (Jeff Janisheshki.2014)²⁹.

6.1 Symbolism

The Noh mask is the symbol of serenity, transformation and ‘other-worldliness’. The pine tree which forms the backdrop of the rectangular performance space and the bamboo plants planted in front of the walkway (hashigakari) through which characters enter and exit, symbolise radiant green and positive spirits or kadomatsu (Ichida Hiromi.2017, p92). These aspects strengthen the naturalistic dimension of Noh (Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa .1959, p36). Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the fans used by the main characters and the costumes also convey the identity of the character and the theatre. Similarly, the bridge that links the mirror room to the stage represent the transition between the material world and the spiritual realm (Mikiko Ishii .1994). Udaka (2010, p181-183) describes how Noh plays have their allegorical tones and change men into trees and sometimes into Gods.

6.2 Minimalism

The austere nature of Noh is reflected in its minimalist approach to acting which is best expressed in the stately but slow movements of the characters (Udaka,2010, p177 and Lamarque 1989). Even in Noh plays that are lyrical, the process of build up towards music and dance is gradual (Udaka 2010, p175)³⁰. This is achieved through bodily restraint. As Zeami avers, when you feel ten in your heart, express seven in your movements”. Likewise the actor should restrain a gesture (extending or withdrawing the hand) "to a lesser extent than his own emotions suggest" (Roland Barthes.2005). Likewise gentle tilts to the mask indicates fundamental change in emotions on the part of the characters (Udaka, p178).

The Noh stage has no dazzling curtains unlike the stages of dance forms like Western Classical Ballet. The sets are bare and simple. The music is by way of chants and does not bear the opulence associated with the orchestra of a Ballet or an opera.

The other reason why Noh is minimal is that a Noh play, unlike an opera or a ballet does not require the presence of too many characters/ actors. The Shite of a Noh play by enacting multiple roles obviates the need for a Noh performance to have a corps of artistes as is the case with Ballets and Operas or classical western drama³¹.

²⁹ Hisamatsu (1982, p100-101) refers to the Shite in Matsukaze undergoing the metamorphosis of the kind described from his own self to that of the character of the play.

³⁰ As Udaka says, the most lyrical of Noh plays do not necessarily connote the musical. The lyrical element imparts the greatest concentration of expression and the evocation of emotion.

³¹ The minimalist rigour of the classical Noh theatre of the Edo period got weakened in the post-World War 2 period when efforts were made to attract commoners as spectators by introducing the shimai where the Noh drama which was until then sombre and stately, transitions to its more mirthful dance phase (Bowers, Fabion.1960).

Thus in the Mugen play 'Atsumori', where the main character is the slain warrior Atsumori, the widened scope for acting comes from the Shite performing first as a mirthful youth and later on as the mature Atsumori who is killed in battle. The Waki of the play also is required to perform more than one role, first as a repentant warrior and later as the monk Rensei who is in desperate search of the Atsumori's ghost to atone for his sin of killing him. Both the Shite and the Waki in Atsumori have ample scope for venting their emotions in a quintessential Noh manner. The finale of the play occurs when the Rensei whom the ghost of Atsumori wanted to destroy, is embraced by him as his friend.

The practice of the main actor / character assuming or enacting different roles is an accepted performance mode in Kutiyattam as well.

7. The Temporal Dimension of Noh

The circularity of time underlying Noh aesthetics is best expressed in the paradigm that what goes out comes back. The Japanese concept of four seasons accords with this approach to time. The characters in Mugen Noh plays alternate between departed souls and their 'in life' versions.

The second dimension of a Noh's circularity is the enormous temporal dimension covered by a Noh play within a narrow stage (space). In certain plays the change in time is conveyed through small changes in spatial movements across place³².

³² As Heita (2004) says, in terms of traditional Japanese thinking, a change in place (and character) brings in a temporal dimension. Thus it is conventional for Japanese history to be divided into time periods that are associated with places. Thus the seat of authority during Heian and Edo periods was Kyoto which was different for other periods.

8. Deconstructing 'Yugen'

When compared to the concepts of monomane (mimicry) and Hana (a flower) that defined the aesthetics of Noh theatre, Yugen was a relatively new concept which received in depth consideration at the hands of Zeami (Tsubaki,1971). The concept of creation from a state of nothingness casts the yugen in a distinct mould. Yugen is the mysterious beauty that guides an artiste from the state of abnegation of self and 'nothingness' to a state of enrichment that is centrally stimulated by the audience before him³³. Lamarque (1989) says, that Zeami saw an intimate connection between the defining qualities of a character and the inner mental state of the actor portraying the character. The enlightened pool of Noh audience that are passionate or addicted to Noh (Rasikas in Sanskrit parlance or 'connoisseurs' in French and English) vary in their mental makeup depending upon their expectations from a performance. These expectations vary from day to day. The same play performed on different days creates differing expectations amongst its spectators. The skill of a Noh artiste lies in his ability to sense the changing moods of the spectators. Another source of inspiration for a Noh actors was the enlightened approach of patrons in the pre Meiji era (the Tokugawa shoguns) and their cultural sensitivity which inspired an actor to realise the 'hana' (or flower) and the yugen effects every time he performed (Sekine,1985, p52-53).

The spur of the moment creations also explains the infinite capacity of a Noh performer and a Noh play to generate creative capital. The artiste is not trammelled by the grip of the drama's plot or the rigidities of the stage manuals in realising his creative potential. In some ways, the idea of yugen resonates with the aesthetic concept of Rasa in India's aesthetics which highlights the role of the audience or the spectator in kindling creativity of the artiste as per her / his manodharma (state of mind driven or self-generated creativity) that is set to Lokadharmi (the audience's aesthete).

As discussed, earlier Noh is minimalistic and deeply symbolic. This explains why the yugen in Noh is realised without recourse to the fantastic and spectacular. According to Ikegami (2005, p109-111), this has been due to actors attached to Japanese performing arts wrenching themselves free from madness (kurue) and marginality, two traits characteristic of the medieval period in Japanese history. This also explains why Noh actors transform themselves in the direction of restraint and control when it comes to performances. What accounts for minimalism in acting has been 'the aesthetics of suggestion combined with the principle of monomane (the imitation of essence) which pares down gesture and movement in favour of high symbolism by way of the realisation of yugen (Lamarque (1989)³⁴.

³³ Tsubaki (1971) explains how the idea of yugen was to evolve in the hands of Zeami from that of mysterious beauty to a state of sabi (the serene simplicity of the aged). The impact of sabi on the Noh aesthete is not assessed in this paper as it needs a detailed and separate consideration and more profound scholarship.

³⁴ Lamarque (1989) explains the essence of minimalism and symbolism as expressed through restrained actions such as single sweep of a fan with the left hand to symbolise shooting of an arrow. Likewise, by a slight lowering of mask the actor conveys grief.

9. Comparing Apples to Oranges: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Noh and Kutiyattam

Franz Boas (1940) was a well-known critic of the comparative method in cultural anthropology that sought to relate one 'whole culture' from the other. Boas' refrain was that such an approach tended to gloss over the evolutionary particularities of compared cultures. Thus two art forms like Noh and Kutiyattam that have distinct origins, milieu and aesthetic properties cannot be compared as 'distinct whole systems' even when they have a few striking similarities. Yet, if one were to eschew comparisons altogether, the discipline of anthropology would lose its sheen. As Borofsky (2019) says, comparison free anthropology can at best create a flood of specialized studies that are of uncertain significance³⁵. When an outsider seeks to understand an exotic culture, the predominant tendency is to relate traits of her / his culture that are morphologically similar to the observed exotic culture. In these days of globalisation where cultural exchanges assume complex cross cutting forms, an anthropological approach that shies away from the 'comparisons of the incomparable' would stand in the way of human beings belonging to one part of the world making sense of themselves vis-a-viz myriad communities or expressions found in other parts of the globe. In this paper, we thus resort to the methodology of comparing apples with oranges by giving an account of the phenological and ontological distinctions between Noh and Kutiyattam. In some ways, this approach accords well with the neo Boasian traditions in cultural anthropology pioneered by Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict that sought to compare specific traits of two cultural phenomena without comparing them holistically.

The minimalist streak of Noh and Kutiyattam is manifested in the profound simplicity of Noh performances. Unlike a classical Western Ballet Theatre where the performance venue is linear and large with extensive stage props (including opulent curtains and backdrops), the Noh theatre is considerably light in terms of its décor. Also, as observed earlier, the movement of the characters is limited in the range covered. As Yamanaka (2015, p57-58) observes, the kata (or movement patterns) of a Noh character is wavy and slow. The trajectory of movement follows a hexagonal shape that moves onwards and reverses (see Yamanaka, 2015, p 53 and p56). The recursiveness of movement is suggested in Kutiyattam too, given the small size of the performance space. Thus both art forms are different from that of Western Ballet that requires long, horizontally linear movements across the stage (which in turn calls for a larger and longer performance space). The L shaped performance space of the Noh theatre is spartan so is the Koothambalam, which is the performance space for Kutiyattam. The Koothambalam is a roofed, square platform that is supported by four pillars (See Nair.1976 & Lal, p174).

Similarly both Noh and Kutiyattam are theatre forms that go back to antiquity. While the former traces its roots to the folk traditions and evolved in its present form during the 14 to 15th century, the latter emerged from the Great Sanskrit traditions of India and trace its formalised origin between the 10th and 12th centuries (Moser 2011, cited in Damodaran and Chavis, 2017). As mentioned earlier, Noh practitioners were drawn from groups of families that occupied a high position in social hierarchy. Even today despite becoming more inclusive, Noh continues to be controlled in its performance traditions by these families. In the case of Kutiyattam too, the traditional families practising the art form were situated high in the social order. However in the wake of social reforms that swept Kerala in the 1950s, the art form became more socially inclusive with members of non-traditional castes also making their entry as performers (Lowthorp 2013a; Moser 2013).

Both theatre forms were proclaimed by UNESCO as Intangible heritage of Humankind in 2001 and both were inscribed in the UNESCO representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008³⁶.

³⁵ <https://hrf.yale.edu/the-return-of-the-comparative-method-in-anthropology/>, accessed on Sep 21, 2020.

³⁶ Damodaran and Chavis, 2017 and <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/nogaku-theatre-00012>, accessed on Sep 21, 2020.

As mentioned earlier, the philosophy of Noh has centred on the Zen philosophy of ‘nothingness’ associated with minimalism and profound symbolism. Kutiyattam is also based on the idea of minimalism and deep symbolism with the exception that it is based on the idea of illumination from a previous state of darkness-illumination which leads to the unfolding of Rasa (particularly Srngara) from a state of Sthayi bhava (state of feeling / mood) (Venu,2013, p 6-7). The dimension of illumination in Kutiyattam is suggested by the focus of an actor’s performance on the lighted lamp placed at the centre of the performance stage, that is ritualistically lit, prior to the launch of actual performance (Venu,2013, p5)³⁷.

Noh differs from Kutiyattam in that it has conventionally speaking, not accepted the presence of female actors even when women characters are to be depicted. In Kutiyattam, the role of female characters is played by female artistes (Nangiars) and there are dedicated solo performances by female actors, referred to as Nangiarkoothu (Venu,2013, p2). In reality, the aesthetic foundations of Kutiyattam eulogise the role of mother Goddess and conceptualise the female character of Kutiyattam as Goddess and this is reflected in the distinct costumes worn by female characters (Venu,2013, p 4-5).

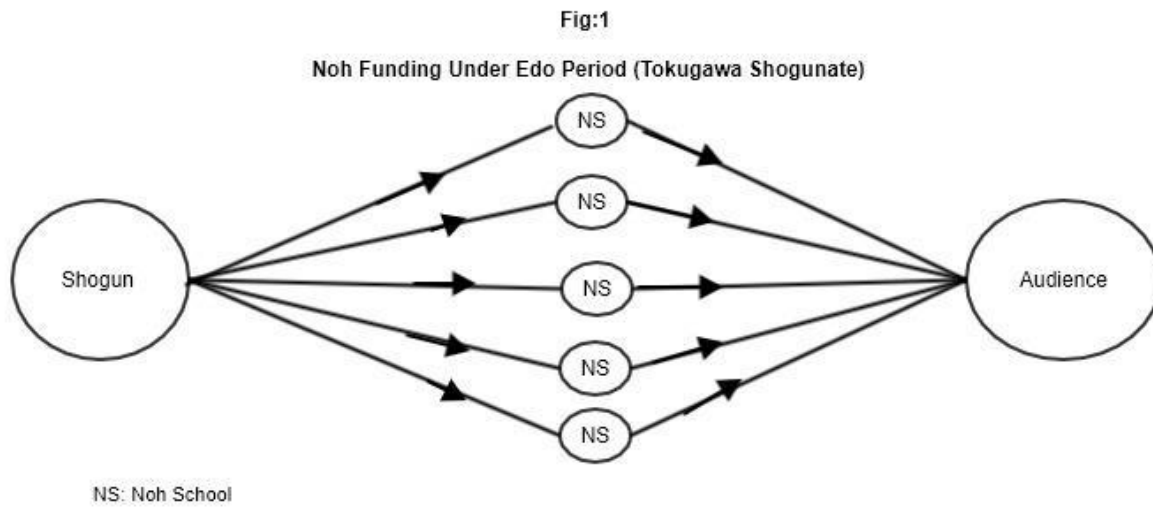
The two striking performative similarities between Noh and Kutiyattam lies in the chanting nature of their music and the manner in which a single actor / character presents the story involving multiple characters (O’Neill.1953). There are a couple of other features that are similar between Noh and Kutiyattam. One is their ritualistic roots and the other is the presence of comic adjunct performances. Both Noh and Kutiyattam have, as has been noted earlier, a strong ritualistic element associated with them. Kutiyattam plays, as has been noted, commence with ritualistic oblations before the lamp. Indeed portions of Mattavilasam and the Anguliyankam plays in Kutiyattam are densely ritualistic when performed in temples (Venu,2013, p 2). Likewise, as has been noted earlier, there are strong resemblances between Kyogen and Cakyar Koothu in terms of their satirical and comedic orientation.

The significant dissimilarity between the two theatres, is the divide between amateurs and professionals when it comes to rights to perform and innovate in the case of Noh as compared to Kutiyattam.

Both theatres have as noted in the preceding discussions on repertoire management indulged in both repertoire ‘deepening’ and ‘widening’. Repertoire deepening in Kutiyattam has involved excavations of old choreographic pieces and their deepening by way of greater elaboration. In the case of Noh it has involved reworking of old choreographies. The point of divergence between the two theatre forms is that in the case of Noh repertoire deepening could have also been driven by the desire on the part of different schools to establish their stylistic distinctiveness, while in the case of Kutiyattam, there are no proclaimed differences between existing performing schools or theatres as far as stylistic differences are concerned (Damodaran and Chavis, 2017). When it comes to the conversion of modern novels and plays from their respective languages into the theatre format, Noh takes a lead over Kutiyattam as modern Noh plays have been created by modern literary figures of Japan. Kutiyattam, by contrast are still occupied with converting old Sanskrit plays which were not choreographed into the Kutiyattam acting format. This included like Kalidasa’s Abhijnana Sakuntalam and Vikramaorvasiyam. Very few Indian contemporary literary works have been added to the Kutiyattam repertoire.

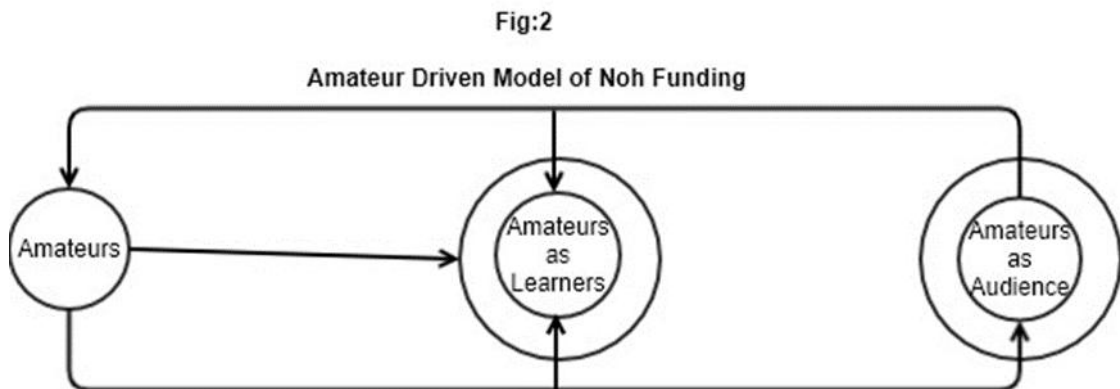
The financing models of Noh and Kutiyattom performance organisations differ in major ways. As far as Noh is concerned during the Edo period the art form was patronized and economically supported (or funded) by the Shoguns (Fig 1).

³⁷ A lamp has pride in place in Sanatan Vaidik Hindu Dharma (<http://themodernvedic.com/science-vedas/light-lamp-deepam-science/#:~:text=A%20lamp%20has%20its%20own,of%20Durga%2C%20Lakshmi%20and%20Saraswathi>, accessed on Sep 20,2020).

Figure 1 – Noh Funding Under Edo Period

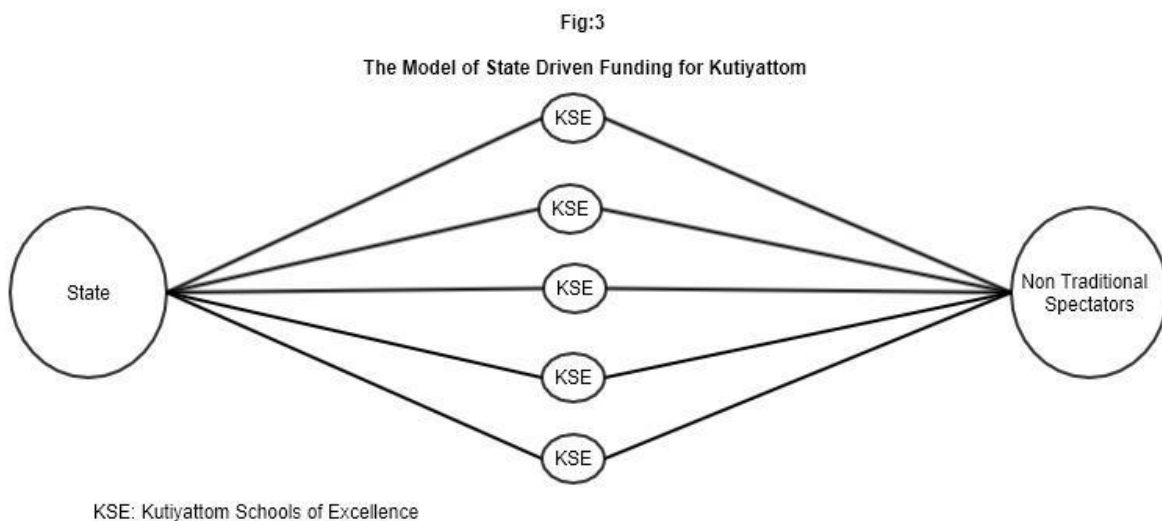
However as noted earlier, in the post-World War II period, faced with the decline in direct or indirect financial support from patrons, Noh performance organisations shifted to the ingenious alternative of admitting ‘well to do’ and ‘keen’ amateurs as students in return for their monetary contributions. These amateurs also doubled up as spectators of performances by the performance organisations (Peellachia,2017). Fig 2 illustrates the changed of funding.

Figure 2 – Amateur Driven Model of Noh Funding



In the case of Kutiyattam, the traditional support for the theatre form came from temples and local patrons (Damodaran and Chavis,2017). However, during the 1950s as these sources of financial support drained up, Kutiyattam performing organisations got into serious difficulties. Commencing with the 1970s the Provincial and Federal Governments stepped in to fund five Kutiyattam Schools of Excellence through the Central and State Sangeet Natak Academies. Fig 3 illustrates the model of State driven funding of Kutiyattam Schools in India.

Figure 3 – The Model of State Driven Funding for Kutiyattom



This process of Central and State Government funding gained renewed vigour after the proclamation of the theatre as intangible heritage of humankind by the UNESCO in 2001 (Damodaran and Chavis,2017).

The revenue models of the two theatre forms vary radically. While the Noh schools have a box office approach to revenue collection based on a hybrid of third order and second order price discrimination models, the Kutiyattam performance organisations do not practice of charging for their performances on account of State regulations requiring them to treat public performances as public goods³⁸.

Both theatre forms were recognised by the UNESCO as the intangible heritage of humankind in 2001. However, as Lowthorp (2015, 157) states, Kutiyattam underwent ‘mediatization’, ‘institutionalization’ and ‘liberalization’, in the period following UNESCO recognition of the art form. By comparison Noh did not undergo major changes in the post UNESCO recognition phase.

Table A provides a matrix that summarises the points of convergences and divergence between Noh and Kutiyattam in terms of their broad morphological and phenological features.

Table A: Systemic Comparison between Noh and Kutiyattam

Parameters	NOH	KUTIYATTAM
Origin	Folk (Little Traditions)	Sanskritic (Great Traditions)
Philosophy	Creation and Enrichment from a state of Nothingness	Illumination from Darkness
Performative Systems	Subtle Motions and Controlled Expressions (through use of Masks)	Pronounced Motions and Acting
Present Social Context	Exclusive Affinal and Lineage based Performance Organizations	Traditionally performed by designated upper castes
Repertoire Management	Both Repertoire Deepening and Widening	Both Repertoire Deepening and Widening
Stylistic Identity of Performing Schools	Strong	Weak
Financing Source	Amateur Learners who double up as Spectators as well	State Funded
Revenue Model	Ticket / Box Office Sales	Free Public Good

³⁸ However the onset of virtual performances in the COVID 19 era have altered the situation as the different Kutiyattam schools have taken to ticketing their virtual streaming performances taken up through the social media platforms afforded by Facebook and Instagram.

10. Co-creation as the new Frontier: Factoring a new dimension to India - Japan Cultural Cooperation

The modern history of India Japan relations goes back to the year 1903 when the India-Japan Association was formed³⁹. After India's independence, both countries entered into an agreement for cultural cooperation on 29 October 1956. This agreement came into effect on 24 May 1957 (ibid).

More recently a yearlong 'Festival of India in Japan' was held from October 2014 to September 2015. This year-long festival has fostered closer ties between the two countries. The 'Act East' policy of the Government of India initiated in 2014, which is focused on South East and East Asian Countries, envisages close cultural cooperation of these countries with India. Japan is a key country of focus in India's 'Act East Policy' (Anonymous 2020 b).

The Embassy of India in Tokyo and the Consulate General of India in Japan, organised the celebrations connected to the 3rd International Day of Yoga on 18 June 2017 (ibid). The Yoga Organisation of Japan and the Quality Council of India launched a scheme of Voluntary Certification of Yoga and conducted the first QCI examination outside India in Japan at the Vivekananda Cultural Centre on 23 April 2016 (ibid). These steps have without doubt, opened up the cultural heritage of both countries to their respective citizens and created conditions for both Japanese and Indian citizens to pick up skills in critical areas like yoga and dance forms.

Another interesting facet of India-Japan cultural cooperation has been the Jenesys (or "Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths") and its programme of selecting Indian youth (along with youth from the Asia-Pacific region) to be Young Cultural Ambassadors to Japan (Anonymous.2018). Although cultural exchanges are envisaged under this programme, the same does not extend to fine or performing arts. Similarly Japan's cultural assistance programmes undertaken in India include cultural exchanges programmes. Thus in India's North Eastern States like Manipur, with a history of ties with Japan⁴⁰ programs have been taken up to promote tourism involving Japanese citizens. Japanese tourists in Manipur pay visits to the tombs of Japanese soldiers who were cremated in Manipur during Japan's brief military occupation of Imphal during World War 2. In addition Japan has provided assistance to natural heritage projects in Manipur which includes projects taken up for improving the sustainability of the Lok Tak Lake (Anonymous, 2016). Likewise, Japan has promised investment to help the rebuilding of the Nalanda University in Bihar. In addition, Japan Government has come forward to assist infrastructure development in the Nalanda District (Vibhanshu Shekhar. 2007).

The discussions in the preceding sections of this paper underscore the close affinity that potentially exists between Noh and Kutiyattam. Noh performers from Japan have visited India on sporadic missions and have interacted with Kutiyattam artistes. However these exchanges have not been as part of India-Japan Cultural Exchange Programs. One method by which India- Japan cultural co-operation can be taken to an advanced level, is by exploring possibilities for Noh and Kutiyattam artistes to come together to co-create new works involving the two art/ theatre forms. However for co-creation to be a reality, it is essential that artistes from both streams grasp the aesthetic essence of the art forms that they seek to learn about, through a process of active, two-way interactions. In this scheme of things Noh artistes would attempt to grasp the philosophical essence of Kutiyattam from their Kutiyattam counterparts, in the same manner that Kutiyattam artistes will attempt to grasp the philosophical essence of Noh from the former.

³⁹ Anonymous (2017) accessed on Sep 20, 2020.

⁴⁰ Japanese soldiers, who during World War 2 were stationed In Imphal, to fight the British and allied troops had a history of close interactions with the local population.

The concept of Mono has been a key principle guiding Japan's cultural interchange with the outside world and can be a critical tool in promoting understanding of the philosophical essence of arts forms. As Yamaguchi (1991, p 61) explains, the Japanese term mono (by which is meant the 'roots an object'), lies at the base of the Japanese 'technique' of exhibiting the invisible mono of its cultural objects through a material mono which is artistically fabricated. Put in a different way, the Japanese believe that their 'Gods' do not want to see things as they truly exist. In terms of the Japanese ethos, Gods would prefer to get astonished by fabricated things that look like the original⁴¹. However to create a product that resembles its original, it is essential that the artist who fabricates a material mono understands the essence of the original. In many ways Yamaguchi's point, though related to the idea of Baudrillard's simulacrum, resonates with the remarks of the celebrated Japanese novelist Junichiro Tanizaki (1977) on essence. As Tanizaki says, "I would push back into the shadows the things that come forward too clearly, I would strip away the useless decoration...Perhaps we may be allowed at least one mansion where we can turn off the electric lights and see what it is like without them". In many ways Tanizaki's approach accords with the idea of *kuden*, or acquiring the feel of a phenomena by grasping the inner spirit (Pound and Fellonsa.1959, p 30).The penchant of getting astonished by artistically fabricated mono has a close resemblance to the Husserlian phenomenological quest that privileges the essence of a phenomenon in preference to its outward manifestations (Husserl 1983, p7-8).

What are the implications of the phenomenological quest of essence (or the material mono) on the proposed idea of co-creation involving Noh and Kutiyattam artistes? The simple answer to this question is that a quest for deriving the essence of a phenomenon will help artistes on both sides to decipher the essence of aesthetics implicit in Noh and Kutiyattam. A practical consequence of the approach is that it will foster a deeper level of engagement and involved discussions amongst the practitioners and scholars of Noh and Kutiyattam that centre on the key aesthetic concepts of *Yugen*, *Bhava* and *Rasa*. Thus these interactions will help scholars and artistes from both sides to arrive at the invariant core of both art forms and create conditions for co – created plays involving both Noh and Kutiyattam artistes. Co-created plays could involve adaptation of Kutiyattam plays to the format of Noh and vice versa. While it may be true that a large number of *Srngara Rasa* based plays of Kutiyattam may not fit into the metre of Noh plays, it is quite likely that Kutiyattam plays that highlight *Santa bhava* may fit into the Noh format. Likewise the *Mugen* plays of Noh with its focus on other worldly beings may go well with the focus of Kutiyattam plays on super natural characters. However as Baumer and Brandon (1993.p73) observe, by ensuring that the play that is being adapted to an exotic art form captures the essence of the art form to which it is transposed, it is possible to ensure its acceptability amongst its new audiences. This is where cultural exchange programmes involving India and Japan can play a positive role.

⁴¹ A case in point is the *ikebana* (or the Japanese technique of flower arrangement which seeks to bring out inner qualities of flowers that evoke emotions amongst its beholders (Yamaguchi,1991, p 61).

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List of Figures

Figure 1 – Noh Funding Under Edo Period19
Figure 2 – Amateur Driven Model of Noh Funding20
Figure 3 – The Model of State Driven Funding for Kutiyattom20

List of Tables

Table A: Systemic Comparison between Noh and Kutiyattam.....21