CHAPTER III

Women Characters in Sanskrit Dramas and Kutiyattam
Characteristics of women characters in Sanskrit Dramas

The role of women in theatre as in real life is as mother, wife, sister, daughter etc. We have instances for all these in Sanskrit dramas. The dominant sentiment in Nataka is erotic or heroic. Hence the major role of women in Nataka is that of the beloved. The source of most Sanskrit dramas is from the epics and Brhatkatha. Very few dramas are written from the author's own imagination. Since, Ramayana is the base of most of the Sanskrit dramas, and the heroine of these dramas is Sita, we start with the characteristics of Sita. Now we have look upon the women characters in Sanskrit dramas in detail.

Major Women characters in Sanskrit Dramas

SITA

Sita, the adopted daughter of Janaka and the wife of Rama, is the heroine in many of the Sanskrit dramas. All of these dramas reveal the one outstanding quality in her is an unparalleled devotion to her husband, and a unique identification
with him. Sita has become the ideal of a Hindu wife and that all Hindu women derive, from her memory, great strength in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and in adversity, for she drank to the full the drug of sorrow. Abducted by a cruel demon, kept in confinement in a far-off country guarded by demonesses, subjected to filthy proposals by Ravana, despairing of rescue and finally, when rescued, told by her husband that he did not want her and forced to jump into the fire to prove her purity. Mother Sita is the very embodiment of Indian womanhood in her trials and sorrows, pains and sufferings, ordeals and triumphs.

She is an example of supreme courage. She defies Ravana and holds him in contempt. She proves to Ravana that a chaste woman's curse is more powerful than the arrows of gods. When she thinks that Rama is killed, she asks him to kill her with the same sword with which Rama is killed.

Sita has very little desire for the things of the world. She is positively glad that her husband's coronation is broken off, and tells him that he is still her exclusive lord, instead of being
the lord also of numerous subjects. On being told by the maid that the coronation drums have stopped suddenly, she remarks “Perhaps the coronation is postponed. She moves on terms of easy familiarity with the ascetics and women hermits, devoid of all wealth, and endears herself so much to them that they call her’dughter’, ‘sita’, ‘Janaki’, ‘My dear’ etc. according to their different ages. She waters the plants herself. She is however, not devoid of worldly wisdom. She feels a sense of danger from Ravana the moment Rama goes after the golden deer. She tells the maid that acts of dishonesty begun in joke, end in tragedy. We have to see the innocent nature of Sita in Ascaryacudamani. Seeing Surpanakha as the guise of a beautiful damsel for approaching Rama and Lakshmana to marry her, Sita wonders how a delicate lady like Lalita travels in the forest infested with wild animals and demons. She finds it difficult to believe that the gentle lady could turn into a demoness. She is shown more as a human being than as a goddess.
Draupadi

Draupadi, is the daughter of Drupada, the king of Panjalas. In Subhadradhanayayashe is depicted as a noble wife and she excels her counterpart in the Mahabharata. Arjuna has great regard for hershe is not at all angry to learn about his marriage with Subhadra. She shows enthusiasm to welcome her fellow-wife, by sending her maid to see whether the attire of a cowherdess suits her. Later hearing the reported death of the damselshe decides to commit suicide. Seeing the lady unhurt by the side of her husband, Draupadi feels great satisfaction. Goddess Katyayani is pleased with her and blesses her with boons to have issues from each of her five husbands. She appears as a worthy lady who is not at all jealous. She is generous in her affection for all besides being kind to the servants.

Actually Draupadi is a very strong character in our epic, but her character was not given due importance in any of our Sanskrit dramas. Only in Venisamhara of Bhattanarayana gives another face of Draupadi. Here the character of Draupadi has been given the importance it deserves. Its first segment portrays the feelings of Draupadi, the insults that the Pandavas had to
put up with and Bhima's seething anger when he sees Draupadi's tresses. It highlights Draupadi's strong personality and not the lethargic attitude or response of passive women who have quietly borne the insults.

**Subhadra**

Subhadra, the sister of Sreekrsna, is the heroine of the drama *Subhadradhananjaya*. She may be classified under the Mugdha variety of heroines. She is a maiden of unearthly beauty to create whom the creator must have exhausted his resources. Seeing the beauty of Subhadra the Vidusaka exclaims she could not clearly see her for the blindness caused by her lustre. Every one of her limbs proclaims beauty. Her eyes stretch up to the ears, tresses are long and curley, and feet resembling the full-blown lotus attract the humming bees.

She is always obedient. At the suggestion of Dhananjaya she resorts to the form of a cowherd to please Draupadi. She worships the Brahmin sage and looks after his comfort at the instance of her brothers Balabhadra and Vasudeva.
Being a noble maiden, she finds peace only when she knows that she loves the same person in different roles. Her devotion to God is rewarded when the goddess saves her from the demon. Earlier she worships Indrani, as ordered by her mother. An adept in driving a chariot she is praised by her husband for her skill. Her love for the hero is deep-felt. She stitches the ten names of her husband on her bodys and keeps it as a treasure. All love her and her husband is enamored with her. Even her fellow-wife holds her in high esteem. Draupadi even prepares to commit suicide when she hears the reported death of the damsel. Above all she has friends who are eager to share her sorrow as well as joy.

Tapati

Daughter of the sun God and the younger sister of Savitri, Tapati belong to a worthy line. She is a celestial nymph capable of traversing the sky and becoming invisible as she likes. She is classed under the Mugdha variety of heroines. In beauty she has no rival in all the three worlds.
She is very timid and is abashed when her friends find out her love for the hero. She takes in their literal sense the hero’s words purported to deceive his friend and the queen concludes that he is not in love with her. When Menaka uses the word ‘Samvarana’ to denote a wall she mistakes it for the name of the hero and enquirer’s about him. When the hero swoons in the heat of his love pangs, she takes him for dead and herself tries to commit suicide.

She is easily carried away by emotions. Seeing that her worship of Vamana does not meet with immediate success, she decides to throw away her life. She swoons in excess of joy as well as sorrow. Her devotion to gods is evident from the fact that she worships Vamana. She also propitiates the goddess Rati with honey untouched by bees.

Her love for the hero is so deep that she is unable to tolerate the hero paying attention to any other woman. She cannot bear separation from the hero. When her father forbade her from meeting the hero, she resorts to disguise and appears before him. Believing the report of Mohanika, that her husband
is dead, she tries to commit suicide. The hero has great regard for her and her presence in Tapanavana makes the hero forget his own kingdom.

**Sakuntala**

Sakuntala, the daughter of Menaka - an apsaras and Visvamitra - a great Sage is the heroine of Abhinjanasakuntalam. She inherits from her mother beauty and light-heartedness, and from her father the famous ascetic, patience and forgiving love. Freedom of sense and austerity of life brought her into being. In her own life the two, freedom and restraint, earth and heaven should combine.

All the impulsiveness of youth is found in her in first Act. The daughter of the hermitage in the first outburst of passion gave herself away in simple innocence and complete trust to the king. She followed the unsuspecting path of nature, as she had not learned to control her feelings and regulate her life by norms. Many daughters of royal sages are heard to have been married by the Gandharva form of marriage and they have
received the approval of their father. Kanva when hears of the marriage blesses her. When Sakutala take departure from the hermitage to her husband’s place each one in the hermitage even the very trees bid farewell to Sakuntala filled with tender sorrow.

Sakuntala suffered the worst that could happen to a devoted wife. She is disowned by her husband and disgraced. Her mind becomes vacant and she stands there lonely, filled with terror, anguish and despair. The poet narrates her endurance of desertion, her fortitude in suffering, her later disciplined life until she is restored to her husband.

Urvasi

Urvasi, an apsara is the heroine of Virkramorvasiya. Her character is somewhat removed from normal life. She has power to watch her lover unseen and overhear his conversations. She is lacking in maternal affection, for she abandons her child rather than lose her husband. Her love is selfish and her transformation is the direct outcome of insane jealousy.
Dharini

In Malavikangimitra, the queen is called Dharini because she bears everything. She has dignity and forbearance incarnated. When Malavika fell in the eyes of the king in a dance scene which the clown has contrived, she rebukes the king in words of harsh satire that such efficiency would be of advantage if shown in affairs of the state. When her husband’s affection shifted to Iravati and then to Malavika, her devotion to him persists.

Iravati

She is passionate, impetuous, suspicious, demanding and dictatorial. When she was abandoned in favor of Malavika by the king, she bitterly complains and rebukes the king in harsh words. "How immodest of feeling is my lord?" "You wicked one, you are absolutely untrustworthy" "Oh! These men are untrustworthy by nature. We, like innocent deers snared by the music of the hunter, fall victims to their deceitful words and do not understand."
Vasavadatta

Vasavadatta, the beloved daughter of Mahasena and the dear wife of Udayana is a beautiful young woman endowed with many virtues of an ideal Hindu wife. She commands respect, even in her disguise as Avantika, of all people who meet her. Her supreme trait is her complete identification with her husband, and readiness to sacrifice her all for him. She is prepared to undergo any amount of suffering and humiliation for the good of her husband. She agrees to live in separation and work for the marriage of her husband with other women and even wreathes the wedding garland for Padmavati to marry her husband. This is really a very great sacrifice on the part of a woman. Her silent suffering draws our sympathy. She is a woman of gentle nature and pleasing manners, Padamavati and everyone in her palace love and admire Avantika. After all, she is an ever-memorable character.
Padmavati

Padmavati, is a born princess endowed with personal charm and high virtues. Hers is an unsuspecting generous mind, spacious in its scope, limped in its flow, and pure from top to bottom. She bears malice to none. She wants none to suffer for her sake. Even in the first scene she impresses as a generous woman with a strong will. She has great respect for ascetics and expresses her desire to acquire religious merit by giving gifts of whatever is required by the hermits. When the Kanchukin points out the difficulties in safeguarding a trust property, Padmavati says that she must keep her word at any cost. This shows her firm determination and her readiness to take responsibility.

She is young and does not make calculations about her future. There is an element of childishness in her as revealed in her play with a ball. The maid and Vasavadatta freely cut jokes with her. She is very friendly and kind even with her maids. Her simplicity and innocence were revealed by the unsuspecting way in which she accepts the explanations of Vasavadatta for
her inadvertent remarks and tears in the eyes. The complete absence of jealousy and a clear understanding of Udayana’s feelings is her one striking feature.

**Vasantasena**

Though a courtesan, she is depicted as generous, loving and unselfish. Bhasa’s Charudatta and Sudraka’s Mrccakatikaka depict her as the heroine. Here she is shown as being in love with Carudatta with her whole heart. She adorns Carudatta, and remarks that nobody can find fault with a courtesan who loves a poor man. Bhasa depicts her as a courageous woman.

In Bhagavadajjuka also the heroine is Vasantasena. Here also she is depicted as not like the usual types of ganikas whose love is for money. She is young, beautiful and is an ornament to the garden. Even the Yamapurusha appreciate her beauty. Here her lover is Ramilaka an elite citizen, who seeks pleasures in the urban life. They form a beautiful lovely pair attached to each other.
**Malayavati**

Malayavati is the heroine of the play *Nagananda*. But she does not strike an important part in the play. She is very beautiful and worships Gauri with sincerity. She falls in love with Jimutavahana at first sight and even attempts to hang herself when he rejects Mitravasu’s offer. She seems also to be somewhat proud. She blames herself for continuing to live when her lord is no more. She does not blame Gauri, like that her maid, but her own ill-luck when Jimutavahana expires. The Goddess Gauri ultimately revives her husband, pleased as she is with her devotion to herself and to Jimutavahana.

**Kurangi**

Kurangi, daughter of Kuntibhoja is the heroine of *Avimaraaka*. She is a delightful character, young and beautiful. She falls in love with Avimaraaka at the moment of his heroic rescue of her from the infuriated elephant. Thereafter, she pines for him and finally, gets him into her chamber in truly romantic fusion. When the secret intimacy was suspected and Avimaraaka
was forced to flee, she pines for him even more, as her love for him is not a passion, but is as deep as life itself. Her mother sends her ointments and medicines, not knowing the real nature of her melody. Her father fixed up her engagement with the prince of Benares, but on hearing this, she exclaims “I can dispose of myself”. She tries to commit suicide by hanging, at despair of being reunited to Avimaraka. When she hears a clap of thunder at the time of suicide, she cries out, ‘Oh save me, save me! Such is her delicate feminine nature.

**Mandodari**

Mandodari, daughter of Mayasura and the wife of Ravana is a character in many of the Sanskrit dramas. In these dramas, she acts as a queen, woman and wife and shows her anxiety in the future of the state, the condition of Sita and Ravana. When she hears the abandonment of Sita by Ravana she thinks as a queen and says ‘it will lead not only to the mortality of Lanka but also the whole Raksasavamsa’. When she saw in outright Ravana’s yeton Sita she thinks as a woman and ready to scobbled it even she prevents her husbands from the murder of Sita.
Whatever it may be, as a wife she does not like to hear the death of Ravana. When she hears the death of her husband she sighs and runs to the battlefield.

**Tara**

Tara is the monkey queen of Valin. She implores Valin not to go and fight Sugriva, shrewdly observing that Sugriva, who had run away, would not have returned unless he was relying on something for his victory. Valin shakes her off, and goes to meet Sugriva, and his death. He does not want Tara to see him in his dying condition, and asks Sugriva to keep her and the women folk away.

**The Goddess Kartyayani**

The Goddess Kartyayani, of Kali, is shown in two Sanskrit dramas, namely Balacarita of Bhasa and Subhadrnananjaya of Kulasekhara. In Balacarita she is shown as emerging out of the female babe of Devaki when dashed on rock-by the demon-king Kamsa. In Subhadrnananjaya she, is
the presiding deity of the temple and shown as the sister of the heroine Subhadra. She saves her sister from the hands of the demon and takes her to her husband. Her disguise as Draupadi causes embarrassment to the hero when the real one presents herself to him. To ease the situation she reveals her form and discloses that she saved the heroine from the demon who tried to kidnap her at the instigation of Duryodhana. She also blesses Arjuna and his wives.

**Surpanakha**

Surpanakha a demoness was the sister of Ravana and the wife of Vidyujjihva. Her role was comes in all the Ramayana based dramas. In the second act of *Ascaryacudamani* she has two roles one as *Lalita* in the guise of a beautiful woman and the other is in the form of a demoness.

These are the characteristics of some major characters in Sanskrit dramas. Now we may have look upon their position in Kutiyattam.
Women’s Role in Kutiyattam

Ancient Indian Society looked down upon even male actors. They were known as Sailusas. However, an impression had gathered in the minds of both the common man and intellectuals that women were not expected to take part in performing arts. So, in many regional forms men take the role of women. There are no women even for music in these art forms. However, in Kutiyattam women held an honorable position. It was women who took the roles of female characters. In addition to enacting the female roles, they used to be present on to keep the rhythm in the performance and speak dialogues wherever necessary. Thus, they have an active role both as actresses and as singers in Kutiyattam theatre.

There was a class of people set apart for performing these female roles in Kutiyattam, namely the women of the Nambiar community known as Nangiar. In addition to acting along with men in the drama, they also had the solo dance under the name Nangiaruttu. In some of the Bhasa-plays, an actress makes her entry along with the stage manager and it is
to be assumed that talented women enacted female roles. In the Sanskrit dramas of the great masters like Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka and others the heroines and some other female characters have very difficult roles to play. This requires great training and a good deal of scholarship. Female characters use Prakrit language, which is considered as the language of the common man.

The Cakyars enacted the male roles and the Nangiars enacted the female roles in Kutiyattam. All the members of the troupe belonged to the same family. The dance steps, the gestures, the ragas and talas and the format, method of training, etc. were the same as that of Kutiyattam. In the matter of abhinaya, also the nangiar keeps up the same high standards as the Cakyar.

In many cases, she surpassed her male counterparts. Yet the process of evolution of Kutiyattam eliminated her from the stage. Many female characters were not presented on the stage, some were represented only through oral renderings and yet others from behind the curtain. The Pancakanyakas were first
eliminated from the Kutiyattam stage. Even the roles of Sita, Mandodari etc were eliminated, though they have very good roles to portray. There are several reasons for this.

I. When Kutiyattam became a temple form, it became part of the rituals. Particular families were assigned for the performances in each temple. There are only few members in the community. It became impossible for other actors to move with a large retinue of the troupe from temple to temple. This prompted the actorsto minimize the members in their troupe. Naturally, the axe fell on the women artists.

II. Female artists too had their problem. Along with their artistic activities, they had to devote their time for maintaining the family. They had also days forbidden to enter the temple premises.

III. The technique of transformation of roles gave the actors a clever pretext to avoid the women. Male actors themselves can change over to the roles of women by way Pakarnnattam.
When Kutiyattam came out of the temple premises it was learned and performed by other castes. This leads Kutiyattam as well as women to their resurrection. Anyhow, by the efforts of many, recently women have a high place in Kutiyattam and they perform all the female roles in the Kutiyattam repertory including *Pancakanyakas*. A study of the female roles in Kutiyattam is given below:

**Important female characters in Kutiyattam**

In Kutiyattam all the characters of the Sanskrit dramas are not presented on the stage. There are two kinds of characters. One is imitated and the other is reflected. The imitated is that character whose entry the poet has permitted in the text. The reflected characters are those who live only in references. The poet has not described their entry. Those two may change their positions according to the context. A reflected character in one context, may be an imitated in another or vice-versa. In this way, the female characters are also represented in Kutiyattam. So the main imitated female characters in the plays are
1. Subhadra
2. Lalita
3. Mandodari
4. Sita
5. Malayavati
6. Vasantasena
7. Tara
8. Vasavadatta
9. Sakuntala
10. Urvasi
11. Vijaya
12. Gunamanjari
13. Devasoma
14. Surpanakha

Anusuya, Priyamvada, Caturika, Paribhritika, Atta, Nati, Ceti and some maids are also entering on the Kutiyattam stage.
Subhadra

Amongst the other female characters, Subhadra deserves to be placed in first place in the enactment of Kutiyattam as she enters on the stage Act one, Act two and Act five of Subhadradhananjaya. Among these the role in Act V gave more importance to Subhadra. There she has a Nirvahana after she makes her entry. The enactment of this Nirvahana takes five days, the first day for Purappadu and next four days for the performance of Nirvahana. For this Nirvahana the story of the first four acts was condensed in fifty-five verses and the text was elaborated wherever necessary.

In first the act Subhadra speaks only three or four sentences in the drama. But in Kutiyattam its enactment takes three or four hours. Subhadra’s fall from the sky is one of the spectacular scenes enacted in this act. The mode of presentation of this scene is given below:

Arjuna sees a demon carrying away a wailing maiden across the sky. She is crying out for help. Immediately Arjuna twangs his bow strings and threatens the demon. At this the demon
drop the maiden and flies away. The maiden is falling down crying for help.

“The Nangyar who playing the role of Subhadra gets attired in the usual make-up and dress for female roles. She sprinkles water on her face”, salutes the Mizhav stands. A stool is kept on a part of the stage, and two stage-hands hold a curtain in front of the stool. Dhananjaya and the Vidusaka are already on the stage. She touches the stool touches her head and stands on it (standing on the stool signifies aerial travel).

The curtain is removed revealing her being frightened and looking all around anxiously. She signals the drummer to stop playing. The drummer stops playing Mizhav and she speaks “save me, save me. She falls into the hands of the hero who is standing near the stool with outstretched arms. He helps her down and she stands on the floor.

Subhadra’s ‘fall from the sky’ is known to have been traditionally represented on the stage using spectacular stage settings and not just a stool as being performed now.
In Ascaryacudamani/Surpanakha, the prominent character takes the role, in the guise of beautiful damsel, Lalita. In Kutiyattam, the role of Lalita has done by a nangiar who has a good role to enact. She has Nirvahana and Kutiyattam in Pamsalankam- the first Act of Ascaryacudamani and Surpanakhankam in the second Act of the same drama. In the Nirvahana of Pamsalanka Lalita narrates her story from her birth, ends with description of her husband’s death and after this she searches for new husband, and saw Rama and Lakshmana etc. In this Act Lalita enacts with Lakshmana.

In Surpanakhanka verses for Lalita’s Nirvahana, are taken from Ramayana and here she depicts her story like this. Surpanakha’s husband, Vidhyajjihva was killed in a battle and she wanted to marry again. So she started looking for a suitable husband and saw Rama and Lakshmana in the forest. Seeing them she was love-struck and changed her demonic form to that of a beautiful girl and approaches Sri Rama, who is in the company of Sita, with a request to marry her. When Sitrama
refused her he approaches Laksmana. Laksmana also rejected her and sent back to Srirama. Here she portrays various emotions like deep, thought, helplessness, anger, jealousy, sadness, disgust, dullness etc. She yawns and lets out deep sighs, shows sorrow in separation and feels angry and speaks—“Let it be. If that Laksmana still does not accept me then I shall resume my demoniac form”. Then she does Pravesikam three times and walks about in the special gait of Rakṣasīs. With this the role of Lalita in the play is over.

The Pacangabhīnaya and the Bhavatrayabhīnaya are the shining scenes of Lalita. When Surpanakha sees Rama and Laksmana in the forest, she has overwhelmed by their beauty and became love-struck. Then she enacts the five main features of their in different occasions.

Lalita’s enactment of conglomeration of three emotions (Bhavatrayam) is very much interesting. She leaves different emotions pass through her face. Love when she looks to the face of Srirama; jealousy towards Sita and anger on her pitiable condition. These different emotions come in quick succession
on her face. The scene is so enchanting that Lalita will remain in our eyes for a long time after her departure.

According to acting manual the performance starts with the entry of Lalita. But in the performance in the various temples in these days, Rama enters first and enacts the first part of Lalita in his Nirvahana. In the final day Lalita’s Kutiyattm with Rama takes place and here Lalita comes from her real form as Raksasi. The attire of Lalita is that of a normal female character.

Mandodari

Mandodari, daughter of Mayasura and the wife of Ravana is a character in many of the Sanskrit dramas. Though Ramayanam Kramadipika mentions Mandodari’s purappad and Nirvahanam it had not been staged in many decades. Recently, it was Usha Nangiar who composed a Nirvahana of Mandodari based on Asokavanikankam the Vth Act of Ascaryacudamani and performed it in many stages. This Nirvahana describes the story of Mandodari from her birth. The enactment of this takes five
days i.e., First day Purappad, then three days Nirvahana and last day Kutiyattam.

**Sita**

Sita the heroine of many Sanskrit dramas has very good role to enact. But, in Kutiyattam she has nothing to do. Her role was eliminated from Kutiyattam repertory. But in recent days her role is revived in Kutiyattam. Sita has a fairly good role only in Surpanakanka, the second Act of Asçaryacudamani. In the performance other than the temples Sita is brought out on the stage. In temples she is supposed to be always with Rama and her role is acted by the ‘Hear and Act’ technique and her lines being rendered by the ‘Singing Nangiar’. Now-a-days Sita is appearing on the stage, but she has to enact nothing seriously.

**Malayavati**

Malayavati appears in the play Nagananda and after more than four decades, it was performed recently. The performance was limited to the first half of the play, which deals with the
story of love between Jimudavahana and Malayavati. The performance of the hanging scene is an important one in which the disappointed Malayavati decides to commit suicide by hanging. This scene is dramatically represented so as to give a real feeling of pity. The cakyar makes elaborate arrangements for enacting the scene. Sixtyfour yards of fresh cloth is used to devise the cord for the purpose of hanging. One end of the long cloth is tied to the beam supporting the roof of the theatre and the other end should be knotted at the height where the neck of the heroine could be when she is in a standing position. During the act two or three stools are arranged one upon the other. The heroine climbs over the stools thus arranged and remains suspended catching hold of the knot of the cloth by her hands. Now the stools are taken away from under her feet to create an effect of hanging. This scene is very much impressive and was presented recently by Smt. Usha Nangiar at Trissur.
**Vasantasena**

In *Bhagavadajjukam* the *Ajjuka* is Vasantasena. In this play, she and her maid *Paribhritika* are the two female characters entering on the stage. Here they have to do the description of the garden by gestures. The death of Vasantasena and the transference of the soul are also described here. Thus in this play the heroine and her maid have given considerable scope for acting.

**Tara**

In the popular Kutiyattam play *Balivadham – 1st act of Bhasa’s Abhisekenataka*, Tara vali’s wife is the only female character entering on the Kutiyattam stage. Her’s was a slight role, yet significant. According to the text Valin enters with his wife, who is clinging to his clothes. She has only a couple of lines to speak. Until some years back, she has not brought to the stage at all. Her part was either played by Valin or sung by the female singer. To show her presence, a stool was covered before the entry of Valin with white cloth of which one end has
kept hanging, and after the supposed exit of Tara it has stucked away. But now a days Tara is brought to the stage\(^9\), especially for performances outside the temples.

**Sakuntala**

Sakuntalam Kutiyattam, gives a prominent role to Sakuntala. In all the seven acts, the presence of Sakuntala is depicted throughout the play. She has to act variety things, but there is no Nirvahana for her. Bhramarabadha is an interesting scene in Sakuntalam Kutiyattam where the bee runs after Sakuntala. She runs away from the bee several times. But the bee consistently comes close to her eyes, lips and ears so as to kiss her. She calls for help in frustration.

**Urvasi**

The drama Vikramorvasiya is composed by giving importance to the actress Urvasi. In Kutiyattam, Urvasi has to do the story of *Lakshmisvayamvaram* in the form of Nirvahana.
Gunamanjari

She is the consort of Vidyadhara and her role is seen in the play Kalyanasaugandhika. She is introduced in the play just to serve a dramatic purpose. She is the one and only female coming on the Kutiyattam stage in the play. Ambarayana and Marutollolita are the two fascinating scenes she has to enact together with Kalyanaka i.e. the vidhyadhara. In Ambarayana they should stand upon a stool and restraining the movements of going through the ariel space and in Marutollolita they shows the violent movements of the airtoubles.

Vijaya

She is the female gatekeeper in the third act of Abhisekanataka. Hers is the only female role in Thoranayudha. She has to speak only a couple of lines. She is very calm and slightly insolent. In Kutiyattam ancient times this female part used to be enacted by Sankukarna himself and her lines were rendered by the singing Nangyar. Now-a-days an actresses do the role of Vijaya. Her function is decidedly minor in the scene,
though her initial calm contrasts nicely to Sankukama’s terror. She becomes excited when Sankukama enters with fear.

**Devasoma**

She is the consort of Satyasoma in the play *Mattavilasaprahasana*, and it is supposed that she is always with him. Actually, she is not presented on the stage, because of a tendency to avoid female roles.

**Surpanakha**

In the last part of the *Surpanakhang a* of *Ascarycudamani* Surpanakha comes in her real form as a demoness. In Kutiyattam Surpanakha’s is a major role and in acting importance is given to *Vacikabhinaya*. This role i.e. Surpanakha as a demoness is always played by a Cackyar, probably due to the very vigorous physical activity required and the make-up which is very repulsive and messy. The entry of her is a noisy and terrible one. From the green room Surpanakha shouts “Pooyi Pooyi Pooyi”. The curtain is held behind and she has to do a number
of vigorous dance steps. She has a Nirvahana in it. Unlike other Nirvahana’s which are done by gestures, and the verses on which the acting is based on the chanting or song of the Nangyar, here Surpankha does it in a speech, in a peculiar false voice. The language is supposed to be a crude dialect of Malayalam. For example the Malayalam words “Etryum sukhamundayi sukhamennu tane colliyalum pora sukham, sukham, sukham ennu palavattam colliyale mattiyaku…….” [I am very happy. It is not enough if I say merely happy. I must say, that many many times] is spoken by Surpanakha thus “Etryum Tukamundaye Tukamennu tane colliyalum poraye Tukam, Tukam, Tukam ennu palavattam colliyale mattiyave…….”

She uses the slang like that of low born people. Here the actor does not use his original voice. This is known as ‘hinasvara’ in Kutiyattam. She acts “feminine traits” and hoots now and then. She sits on the ground and rolls on one side and another like a mad person.

*Ninam Aniccal*, an important scene in Kutiyattam is presented here. When Surpanakha enters showing her terrifying form, running with her arms outstretched, stamping and shaking
up the whole place and with her mouth open as if to eat up Rama and Lakshmana. Then Lakshmana enters and dejected that he had to cut off the nose and ears of a woman. The Ninam Aniccal is acted thus:

In a secluded place Surpanakha’s artificial breast are cut and “entrails” are hung from her nose, ears and breasts. The body is covered with a big piece of cloth dripping with a red coloured liquid turmeric water and slaked line mixed and thickened if necessary with thin starch paste.

Surpanakha enters the auditorium through a door provided at the opposite end of the auditorium. She walks towards the stage through the audience howling, shouting and cursing. Burning torches are held in front of her by “stage hands”. Incense and charcoal powder are thrown on the torches and this makes the flames spurt up suddenly. The scene causes terror and her appearance with blood dripping causes a version.
The Description of Reflected Women Characters

The male actor represented women’s role through Pakarnattam is the other one where the females reference is coming. The male actor in the costume of a male character who takes on the roles of women in the scene also adds charm. A famous verse calakuvalayadhamnor in Subhadradhananjaya Act one will be taken as an example of this kind of acting. Here Arjuna is excited by the exquisite beauty of the girl who fell on his hands from above. He describes her charm thus:— “This women’s eyes beautiful as a pair of blue lotuses, adorned with black collyrium agitated from fear, the fragrance of her face attracting a flight of bees. Who is she to unfasten my heart from Subhadra?”

Gestures are shown for word meaning. When the adjective of eyes, painted with collyrium he narrates the process of dressing up of a heroine by her two maids. He assumes the role attitude of the heroine, and calls her maids, “Friends, come here, and decorate me”. Then he assumes the attitude of the maids one by one, looks at the heroine and begins to decorate
her. One unties her hair-knot, spreads the hair, makes it smooth with her hands, uses scented hair oil, and ties the hair into a knot, putting on a jasmine garland over it. The curls are kept in their proper place. Another places a tilaka mark on her forehead; yet another puts on her ear a beautiful ear-ornament. Another paints lips with red lace-dye, yet another comes to her and places the ornaments round her neck. Similarly she is decorated with bangles, rings, anklets, etc. She is also helped to put on her dress beautifully. Every now and then the maids make comments about the beauty of the heroine, and of the things used for decoration. When everything is over, one looks at her from head to foot, and shows that she is not fully satisfied. There is something wrong, some deficiency. She thinks about it for some time. Suddenly she understands it. She has forgotten to apply collyrium to her eyes. Immediately that is also done properly. They satisfy themselves that the dressing is perfect now.

The acting of this verse takes up two hours. In this passage the appearance of Subhadra is left to the imagination of the
This attractive episode of dressing scene is employed in Kutiyyattam in many occasions.

Another equally interesting context is the second act of Asçaryacudamani, where the gardener Sankukama informs Ravana of the destruction of Asoka garden by Hanuman. There he says that even Mandodari though she was fond of ornaments did not pluck a tender leaf from this garden. Here while explaining the part ‘Yasyam na priyamandarilapi’ actors add the dressing up scene.

Parvativiraha is another example for the enactment of reflected character in Kutiyyattam. In Asçaryacudamani Ravana sees Sita in the forest, pointed out by Surpanakha. Her beauty infatuated Ravana. He has not seen such beauty in any other women. While enacting the verse ‘Indranimahamapsaro-bhiranayam’ describes vividly the lifting of mount Kailasa. Parvativiraha is a part of this marvellous situation.

Parvati quarrelled with Siva seeing Ganga on his head. It was at this juncture that Ravana uprooted Kailasa. Parvati was
frightened. In a hurry she ran to Siva and embraced him. Ravana paid his homage to Siva for granting the boon by felicitating the embrace by Parvati when he lifted up the mountain. The quarrel of Parvati is enacted based on an anonymous verse.

Parvati: maulou kinnu Mahesa?
    Oh Lord, what is in your hair?

Siva: manini, Jalam
    Oh Dear, you know it is only water

Parvati: kim vaktram?
    But I see face?

Siva: ambhoruham
    It is only a lotus

Parvati: kim nilalakavenika/
    That are the blue-back curls of hair, then?

Siva: bhramarika
    They are bees
    (hovering around the lotus)

Parvati: kim bhrulate?
    What about eyelashes?
Siva : vicika
       They are only the waves in the water
Parvati : netre kim?
       I can see a pair of eyes?
Siva : saphari
       That is only fish
       (swimming in the water)
Parvati : kimustanayugam?
       What about the breasts I see?
Siva : prenkhadrathankadvayi
       They are only a pair of chakravaka birds.

The acting of this verse is very attractive. The actor sits on a stool and takes the role of Siva and Parvati alternately. Everything is communicated through facial expression and movement of eyes. Whenever Parvati looks at Siva it is with love, when she looks at Ganga it is with anger, and when she realises the truth she feels deceived.
Here Ravana in the role of Parvati stands on a pedestal, posing herself as on the mountain, feels being tossed, losing her balance, strains every nerve to stand erect, but fails in spite of all efforts, her braid loosens, the long curly hair gets untied, falls loose, she tries to hold them in her left arm with much difficulty, the unsteadiness of her posture goes on increasing and then her attire gets loosened, she fears whether she may become naked and rushes to Siva and embraces him. Being unexpectedly overjoyed by the embrace the Lord experiences horripilation.

In the same act the enactment of 'Panadrupa-rasayanasya' (drinking beauty with eyes) by Ravana is another example for reflected character. Here Ravana seated on his aerial plane notices Sita on the ground. He felt made in her beauty. His ten heads with varied emotions regale Sita’s bewitching beauty that too vying with each other. He drinks by eyes she beauty.

It begins by first identifying the particular head among the ten, five on one side, four on the other and one at centre, that notices the remote figure of Sita. Here, first the actor’s
eyes could reflect the appalling depth at which the object is as seen from the Vimana and there after as seen in the close up shot. The process of demonstrating the varied emotions exhibited by the head sisa really a challenging feat especially since only the actors' eyes are employed for the same.

These are some examples of reflected characters in those, which female part is enacted by male actors.

**The make-up and costume of female characters**

In Kutiyattam, the make-up and costume are the same for all the female characters whether she is a heroine or a maid. Different dress is given only to the Goddess Gauri and Supanakha in Kari. The role of Surpanakha as a demonesses (Karivesa) is always played by a cakyar due to its powerful nature. The enactment of this role requires very vigorous physical activity and the make-up (first black and later smeared with "blood") which is very very repulsive and messy. Their costumes are given separately in the staging manual. The make up and costume of a female character is given below:\[12\]
The aharya of female characters is simpler, but elegant. Formerly ‘Chayilyam’ (Mercury sulphide ore) alone or the same mixed with a small quantity of Manayola (Arsenic sulphide ore) Manassita in Sanskrit, was used to colour the face. This was called ‘puzhukka’, (ripe are canut colour). This is more or less completely replaced by modern make up colours like Rouge and cakmine. Black collyrium is used for applying on the eyes, eye brows, and to draw curls of hair on the forehead. The eyes are reddened with the application of chunda flowers (solanacca). A dot on the brow, having the shape of an ash-gourd seems is marked with rice paste.

In the early days the headgear used to be a conical cap made of Aretea Spathe or a piece of leather, fully covered decoratively with xora and other flowers. There will be a cobra’s hood made of silver on its top. Now, mostly a crown made of wood and well decorated with silver or golden trinkets and a cobra-hood, and red velvet-like material is used. A number of ornaments, garlands, bracelets, girdle etc. are worn. Earlier a white piece of cloth used to be worn tightly tucked between the legs, as an underwear, and on top of it white and red-coloured
cloth used to be tied to the waist. This is now replaced by wearing a sari with a lot of pleats. Formerly only a breast-cloth used to be tied on the chest, but now they use blones. A pleated long piece of cloth is tied crosswise on the torso. It is called an uttariya (Uppercloth). Its ends are tied in a suitable way to give the shape of a lotus flower. This will represent the lotus flower playfully carried about by heroines. False black hair is also hung from the headgear at the back.

The costume of Goddess Gauri

Goddess Gauri appears in the 5th act of Nagananda. The costume of her according to stage manuals this - the face is painted green. There will be a ‘Chutti’ a white frame or thick lining in the face from the ears down to the chin. This is made with line and rice paste. A golden crescent moon and golden prabhamandal have to be fixed and a third eye has to be drawn on the brow. From the waist down a cloth with flower-design (Poo-Podara) has to be tied and a yellow coloured uttariya is to be provided. By inference, this should be the costume for goddess Kartyayani when she circumambulates the temple on an elephant.
Katyayani however appears on the stage in the dress of other female characters as it is mentioned that she has disguised herself as Draupadi.

The role of Lalita-surpanakha in the form of a beautiful damsel—taken by a Nangyar and her make-up is same as that of a female character. The make-up of surpanakha as a demoness is thus described by L.S. Rajagopal.

"The main features of her make-up are that black colour (charcoal) is applied on the face, limbs and body. Artificial breasts made of Areca spathe or leather are tied at the chest. They thrust out like two cones. A piece of white cloth is twisted and tied on the chest and back to support the base of the breasts. The dress to cover her waist is similar to that of a normal female character. There is a white and yellow coloured design drawn round her waist. "Anklets" in the feet are in the form of a cloth tied round. She has palm leaf ear ornaments and on the head-gear, a special type of grass is tied on to represent her fuzzy red hair. Trident-marks are drawn in white on her brows, checks and chin."
References

1. Krsnamattam, Kathakali, Ottamthulla leact are the other classical artforms in Kerala. In Krsnaattam and Kathakali men take on the role of women. Ottamthulla artists were only men.

2. There is a famous salutation verse:

“अहल्या द्रैपती सीता तारा मण्डोदरी तथा।
पञ्चकन्याः स्मरेरित्यं पञ्चपातक नाशनम्।।”

Thus the Pancakanyakas are Ahalya, Draupati, Sita, Tara and Mandodari. Their elimination from the Kutiyattam stage is widely discussed in Natankusa, a critique on dramaturgy. According to Usha Nangiar The attaprakaras only saystheir roles are not enacted. It is not restricted by any law.


4. There isa general tendency is to reduce the number of actors on the stage to the very minimum. As far as possible one character will portray the role of all the others by the technique known as “Hearing and acting” and “Did you say so”.

5. Act V of Subhadradhananjayam has complied by the compained effort of Smt Usha Nangiar and Smt. Margi Sati. In this Act five female characters are entering on the stage.
6. L.S. Rajagopal, Women’s Role in Kutiyattam

7. The description of the ‘five limbs’ of a hero or heroine by gestures is Pancangam. Here the hair, eyes, face, breasts and feet of a lady or the headgear, eyes, face, chest and feet of a male are described. This is done when one falls in love or one is intensely devoted. Whether it is Subhadra or Surpanakha or a maid the description of the pancanga is the same. This is performed now and then during the course of a play as required by sitation. A more detailed description done similarly is kesadipadam head to foot.

8. Bhavatrayam: Normally actors concentrate to present a single bhava at a time. But there are interesting instances when more than one bhava is presented in succession with repetition. When three such bhavas are presented simultaneously it is called bhavatrayam.

9. After witnessing this performance of Tara in England Ruth Keshishian, a western reviewer, commented that her plaintive words - Pasidatu ———— Pasidatu ———— Mahrao ———— was hauntingly beautiful. He says it penetrated the whole
theatre and reverberated across the hall. The untutored audience remained receptive, enthralled and motionless.

10. L.S. Rajagopal, Women’s Role in Kutiyattam

11. Dr. K.G. Paulose, Kutiyattam theatre.

12. L.S. Rajagopal, Women’s role in Kutiyattam.