

Conceptualizing a Performance Documentation Framework for Kirtan: An Inductive Methodological Approach through Comparative Performance Analysis

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Abstract

Maharashtra Kirtan represents one of India's significant living performance traditions, integrating devotional literature, music, philosophy, oral narration, rhythm, dramatic communication, embodied expression and collective participation into a unified performative experience. Although Kirtan has received considerable scholarly attention from literary, philosophical, musicological, religious and historical perspectives, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the systematic documentation of Kirtan as a live and multidimensional performance event. Existing documentation frequently preserves textual, musical or theological content, while the performative processes through which knowledge is communicated, interpreted, embodied and collectively experienced remain inconsistently recorded.

This methodological gap creates challenges for comparative research, archival preservation and interdisciplinary analysis. Observations made by different researchers are often shaped by their respective disciplinary orientations, resulting in fragmented documentation and limited comparability across performances. Addressing this concern, the present study proposes a conceptual Kirtan Performance Documentation Framework (KPDF) developed through a qualitative and inductive methodological approach. The framework emerged from comparative analysis of four devotional performance case studies: Naradiya Kirtan presentations by H.B.P. Muralidharbuva Nijampurkar and H.B.P. Milindbuva Badve; a Warkari Kirtan presentation by H.B.P. Balkrishna Maharaj Vasantgadkar; and a practice-based Kathak-Kirtan performance experiment titled Shabari. The performances were not compared to determining stylistic superiority or artistic merit. Instead, they were analyzed to identify recurring performative dimensions requiring systematic documentation.

The comparative process generated seven interrelated domains: performance metadata, performance architecture, performance, performative communication, musical and rhythmic organization, audience participation and collective experience, embodied performance and interpretative research notes. The proposed KPDF is conceptualized as a flexible, non-evaluative research methodology rather than a fixed checklist or performance-assessment instrument. The study makes an original methodological contribution by proposing a documentation framework specifically designed for Maharashtra Kirtan as a living performance tradition. It also establishes a foundation for future empirical validation, interdisciplinary application and heritage documentation.

Keywords: Kirtan, performance documentation, Performance Studies, Indian performing arts, intangible cultural heritage, comparative performance analysis, oral traditions, KPDF.

1. Introduction:

India's cultural heritage has been sustained not only through written texts and material artefacts but also through living traditions that transmit knowledge, philosophy, values, collective memory and aesthetic experience across generations. Oral and performative traditions preserve knowledge through voice, rhythm, movement, repetition, participation and embodied practice. Their continuity therefore depends upon both transmission and performance.

A live performance differs fundamentally from a written or permanently fixed cultural object. It is produced within a particular relationship between performers, audience, place, time, social context and performance conventions. Performance Studies accordingly approaches performance not merely as an artistic product but as an event, process and form of cultural behavior (Schechner 87). Ritual and performance also organize social and symbolic meanings through enacted relationships rather than through verbal content alone (Turner 75-78). Meaning in live performance emerges through interaction between performers and spectators, creating what Fischer-Lichte describes as an autopoietic or self-generating feedback relationship (Fischer-Lichte 38-39).

These theoretical positions have important implications for documentation. A written transcription, song list or audio recording may preserve certain components of a performance but cannot independently explain how those components interacted during the event. Performance documentation must therefore record not only what was presented but also how meaning was produced through sequencing, rhythm, vocality, bodily expression, spatial organisation and audience participation.

This concern is particularly significant in relation to intangible cultural heritage. The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage identifies performing arts, oral traditions, rituals and festive events as important domains of living heritage. It defines safeguarding as including identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion, transmission and revitalization ("Text of the Convention"). UNESCO nevertheless does not prescribe a single universal documentation template, recognizing that documentation methods must remain sensitive to the nature of individual traditions and their communities ("Guidance Note").

Within the Indian context, Maharashtra Kirtan is a major example of such an integrated living tradition. It brings together devotional singing, scriptural exposition, storytelling, philosophical interpretation, rhythm, humour, dramatic narration, gesture, collective chanting and ritual participation. The Kirtankar may function simultaneously as vocalist, narrator, philosopher, interpreter, educator, actor, communicator and devotional leader. Maharashtra Kirtan therefore cannot be adequately understood through any single disciplinary perspective.

Existing scholarship has contributed significantly to the study of Kirtan's literary foundations, Bhakti philosophy, saint traditions, musical forms, social role and historical development. The devotional literature of the Bhagavata Purana, Jnaneshwari, Eknathi Bhagavata, Tukaram's Abhangs and other saint-poet traditions provides an important textual and philosophical foundation for Kirtan. Research into Maharashtra's religious traditions has similarly demonstrated the complex relationship among deity traditions, pilgrimage, regional identity, saint literature and collective devotional practice (Dhere). Nevertheless, much existing documentation records what is performed rather than how the performance constructs meaning. Texts, verses, ragas, talas, philosophical interpretations and biographical histories may be recorded, while transitions between speech and song, changes in bodily orientation, humour, performer-audience dialogue, collective energy, rhythmic intensification and performative silence remain under-documented.

The methodological difficulty becomes particularly evident when researchers from different disciplines observe the same performance. A literary scholar may record scriptural interpretation; a musicologist may document raga and tala; a historian may emphasise the development of the tradition; and a scholar of religion may foreground philosophical or ritual content. Each perspective is valid, but the absence of a common documentation structure makes their observations difficult to compare, integrate or archive systematically.

The present paper argues that this limitation results not from the complexity of Maharashtra Kirtan but from the absence of a documentation methodology designed specifically for Maharashtra Kirtan as a multidimensional live performance. It therefore proposes the Kirtan Performance Documentation Framework, hereafter KPDF. The KPDF does not evaluate artistic excellence, devotional authenticity or the relative superiority of performers and traditions. Its purpose is to guide systematic observation and documentation while preserving stylistic, regional and individual diversity. The framework was generated inductively through comparative analysis of four performance case studies. The study consequently progresses from primary performance observation to comparative analysis and from recurring observations to conceptual framework development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Kirtan as a Literary, Philosophical and Devotional Tradition

Kirtan has been studied extensively in relation to Bhakti literature, saint traditions, devotional philosophy, religious communication and cultural history. Such studies establish that Kirtan is more than devotional singing. It functions as a medium through which philosophical concepts, scriptural narratives, ethical values and collective memory are made accessible to diverse communities.

The textual foundations of Maharashtrian Kirtan include the works of Jnaneshwar, Namdev, Eknath, Tukaram, Ramdas and other saint-poets. These compositions do not function only as literary sources. Through oral exposition, repetition, singing and interpretation, they become active elements of performed devotional communication.

Studies of Maharashtra's religious and cultural traditions have demonstrated that devotional literature must be understood in relation to pilgrimage, regional practices, popular belief and community participation (Dhere). Nevertheless, the central concern of much such scholarship remains historical, theological or literary. It explains the content and significance of devotional traditions but does not necessarily provide a methodology for documenting their live performative realization.

2.2. Kirtan as a Musical Tradition

Musicological approaches have examined raga, tala, melodic organization, rhythmic structures, compositional forms, accompanying instruments and regional styles of devotional singing. These studies demonstrate that musical organization contributes significantly to devotional experience and collective engagement.

However, music in Kirtan does not operate independently. A change in laya may intensify narrative action; a pause may prepare an interpretative statement; rhythmic recitation may shift into dramatic communication; and a familiar Abhang may transform listeners into active participants. Musical description alone cannot therefore document the complete performative event.

2.3. Kirtan as Performance

A smaller body of scholarship recognizes Maharashtra Kirtan as a form of performance combining storytelling, vocal interpretation, humour, gesture, enactment, dialogue and audience interaction. Such

approaches are important because they move beyond understanding Kirtan exclusively as literature or music.

However, performance-oriented descriptions are often shaped by the observer's disciplinary interests. One researcher may foreground acting, another narration, another musical expression and another devotional communication. In the absence of shared observational parameters, similar performances may be documented in substantially different ways. This prevents the cumulative development of comparable performance records.

2.4. Performance Documentation and Performance Studies

Performance Studies provides a broader methodological basis for treating performance as event, behavior and cultural process (Schechner). Turner's work on ritual demonstrates that enacted forms may communicate collective and symbolic meanings that cannot be reduced to written scripts (Turner 16). Fischer-Lichte similarly emphasizes the dynamic interaction between performer and spectator, suggesting that the meaning of live performance is generated during the event rather than contained entirely within a pre-existing text (Fischer-Lichte 38-40).

Movement analysis offers another important methodological precedent. Laban's work demonstrates that movement, effort, direction, energy and spatial organization can be recorded through systematic observation instead of remaining within impressionistic description (Laban 52-55). The present research does not directly apply Labanotation to Kirtan; rather, it draws from the broader methodological principle that embodied performance requires identifiable observational categories.

2.5. Intangible Cultural Heritage Documentation

UNESCO's 2003 Convention recognizes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices and ritual events as domains of intangible cultural heritage. It treats documentation, research and transmission as important aspects of safeguarding ("Text of the Convention").

At the same time, UNESCO acknowledges that no single inventorying model can be applied uncritically to every tradition ("Guidance Note").

This flexibility is necessary because living traditions are culturally specific and continue to evolve. However, broad heritage principles alone do not identify the detailed parameters needed to document a Maharashtra Kirtan performance. They do not specify how researchers should record narrative progression, rhythmic transitions, performer-audience relationships, embodied communication or the interaction between devotional and performative processes.

The literature review therefore establishes two conclusions. First, performance documentation is internationally recognized as a legitimate scholarly and heritage concern. Second, a performance-documentation methodology specifically designed for Maharashtra Kirtan remains insufficiently developed.

3. Research Gap

Existing Maharashtra Kirtan scholarship has made substantial contributions to literature, philosophy, history, musicology, saint traditions and Bhakti studies. The present study does not treat these contributions as inadequate. It identifies a different and more specific methodological gap.

Most existing studies document individual dimensions of Maharashtra Kirtan rather than Maharashtra Kirtan as an integrated live event. Literary studies concentrate upon textual meaning; musicological studies examine melodic and rhythmic organization; historical studies trace traditions and institutions; and philosophical studies foreground doctrinal interpretation. Even studies recognizing Kirtan's performative

character frequently employ descriptive categories selected according to the researcher's disciplinary orientation.

A second limitation is the absence of common observational parameters. Existing research does not consistently specify what should be documented during a Kirtan performance; how observations should be organized; how descriptive observation should be distinguished from interpretation; how interaction among speech, music, rhythm, gesture and participation should be recorded; or how documentation from different performances and researchers can be compared.

Consequently, important dimensions—including performative transitions, audience participation, rhythmic intensification, embodied communication, spatial orientation, emotional progression and performer–audience feedback—remain inconsistently documented.

The central research problem is therefore:

How can Maharashtra Kirtan be documented systematically as a multidimensional live performance without imposing evaluative or prescriptive standards upon its diverse traditions?

The proposed KPDF addresses this methodological question. Its originality lies not merely in identifying the components of Maharashtra Kirtan, many of which have already been discussed independently, but in organizing recurrent performative dimensions into a coherent documentation methodology specifically designed for Kirtan.

4. Research Objectives

4.1. To examine four selected devotional performances as multidimensional performance events.

4.2. To identify recurring observational requirements across performances representing different traditions and performative approaches.

4.3. To distinguish performer-specific features from parameters relevant to systematic performance documentation.

4.4. To develop a conceptual Kirtan Performance Documentation Framework through inductive comparative analysis.

4.5. To establish a non-evaluative and flexible methodology capable of supporting comparative research, archival documentation and interdisciplinary study.

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative, inductive and conceptual research design. Rather than constructing the framework solely from established theory, it derives documentation domains from repeated observations across selected performances.

The analysis does not employ comparison to rank performers, traditions or artistic outcomes. It uses comparison as a methodological instrument for identifying dimensions that repeatedly require documentation.

5.2. Selection of Cases

Four cases were selected through purposive sampling. The sample includes two Naradiya Kirtan presentations, one Warkari Kirtan presentation and one practice-based Kathak–Kirtan experiment. The cases were selected to introduce variation in tradition, performance organization, rhythmic orientation, audience participation and embodied expression.

The inclusion of diverse cases corresponds with the inductive purpose of the research. If similar

documentation requirements emerge across performances that differ significantly in style and structure, those recurring requirements may provide a stronger conceptual basis for framework development.

5.3. Stages of Analysis

5.3.1. Stage One: Primary performance observation. Each performance was observed in relation to context, sequence, music, rhythm, narration, movement, communication, participation and transitions.

5.3.2. Stage Two: Individual case description. A concise profile of each case was prepared to establish its tradition, occasion, setting, duration, content and significant performative characteristics.

5.3.3. Stage Three: Cross-case comparison. The cases were compared through recurring categories rather than artistic judgement. Similarities, differences and repeated observational requirements were identified.

5.3.4. Stage Four: Conceptual synthesis. The recurring requirements were grouped into seven interrelated documentation domains, forming the preliminary KPDF.

5.4. Researcher Position and Practice-Based Observation

The Shabari presentation was developed as part of practice-based research. The researcher therefore occupied the combined position of practitioner, choreographer and observer in relation to this case.

Such involvement provides access to creative decisions, structural planning and embodied processes that may not be visible to an external observer. At the same time, it creates the possibility of researcher subjectivity. To address this concern, the Shabari case was not used to validate the artistic success of Kathak–Kirtan integration. It was analyzed through the same observational dimensions applied to the other cases.

5.5. Scope of the Methodology

The present study develops a conceptual framework. It does not undertake statistical generalization, inter-observer reliability testing or quantitative measurement. The proposed domains remain open to refinement through subsequent empirical application.

6. Profiles of the Four Performance Cases

The following profiles provide the minimum contextual information necessary for understanding the comparative analysis. They are intentionally concise because the objective of the paper is methodological development rather than complete documentation of each performer's repertoire.

6.1. Case One: H.B.P. Muralidharbuva Nijampurkar

Tradition	Naradiya Kirtan
Programme or principal subject	1. Nirupan Kirtan on Samarth Ramdas Swami 2. Rare kirtans of Muralidharbuva Nijampurkar (Upasani)
Date	1. 1965 , date unknown 2. Date unknown
Venue	1. Tulshibag, Pune 2. Venue unknown
Occasion	1. Kirtan saptaha 2. As this is compilation of their rare kirtans in audio format , occasions are not mentioned
Approximate duration	1. 00:11:30 2. All recordings around 45 to 50 mins

Source of observation	Audio recordings 1. https://youtu.be/F8OoOiKJjMs?si=paS3I3Yb06gjYl-P 2. https://youtu.be/9tbX0fCwKyc?si=MX0sTSybEgoaSira 3. https://youtu.be/6gzC4FoC0uI?si=qdiaavWJJYPrrCsL 4. https://youtu.be/GprieX4EpRY?si=oO-Xa2OfhPp5-mzM 5. https://youtu.be/ztmPpta7EIU?si=JBISznGmgTYokx_A 6. https://youtu.be/IKSnt9R595w?si=IifboVFGkOPLwQ45 7. https://youtu.be/iIk3VtMmnQs?si=bUxjDbygjNazegg3
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The performance demonstrated a Naradiya structure in which musical exposition, verbal interpretation, dramatic narration and embodied communication operated in close relationship. The performer moved between singing, spoken explanation, character representation, humour and expressive gesture. Voice modulation and bodily orientation contributed to changes in character, narrative emphasis and emotional tone.

Classical performative elements were visible, but they did not function as isolated demonstrations. They were integrated into narration and interpretative communication. This case was therefore particularly relevant for observing performance architecture, transitions between Vachika and Angika expression, character differentiation and dramatic communication.

6.2. Case Two: H.B.P. Milindbuva Badve:

Tradition	Naradiya Kirtan
Programme or principal subject	1. Bhakti Jagar kirtan Mahotsav 2. Datta maza bhaav, Datta maza dev kirtan Mahotsav 3. Krushna katha ras re kirtan Mahotsav
Date	1. 4 to 9 June 2022 2. 12 to 18 Dec. 2021 3. 1 to 8 Sept. 2021
Venue	1. Pune 2. Pune 3. Pune
Occasion	1. Ganga Dashahara Pavan Parva 2. Datta jayanti 3. Bhagvan Gopal Krishna Mahotsav
Approximate duration	1. 01:32:21 2. 02:01:55 3. 02:01:42
Source of observation	video recordings 1. https://youtu.be/Qjt8bof_B64?si=rE9RCQrSa4Yw5F_S 2. https://youtu.be/4ANoO-R_Sw0?si=N-nZ20Ia-DAi-Jj 3. https://youtu.be/jYfcVlmFbfs?si=-734KoknAapmoLR4

This performance displayed a pronounced rhythmic orientation. Tala, laya, rhythmic recitation, percussion

interaction and carefully controlled tempo changes contributed to both musical organization and communication. Rhythmic material did not remain confined to accompaniment; it punctuated interpretation, intensified selected passages and organized transitions between spoken and musical segments.

The case was particularly important for distinguishing rhythm as a structural and communicative device from rhythm treated merely as a technical musical component. It also demonstrated the need to document the relationship among recitation, percussion response, Sam, tempo and narrative progression.

6.3. Case Three: H.B.P. Balkrishna Maharaj Vasantgadkar:

Tradition	Warkari Kirtan
Programme or principal Abhang	1. Gyanoba Mauli Tukaram gajar 2. Vithoba Rakhumaicha gajar 3. Sant Muktabai kirtan 4. Trishulapuri Kashipuri: Sant Eknath Maharaj Abhang
Date	1. 5 years before, date unknown 2. 29 Sept. 2017 3. 5 years before, date unknown 4. Date unknown
Venue	1. Vasantgad Santhan 2. Karad 3. Karad 4. Karad
Occasion	1. Varkari kirtan Mahotsav 2. Varkari kirtan Mahotsav 3. Varkari kirtan Mahotsav 4. Varkari kirtan Mahotsav
Approximate duration	1. 00:05:25 2. 00:05:44 3. 02:31:10 4. 00:04:32
Source of observation	video recording 1. https://youtu.be/Wr4pAgyF7w0?si=pShARQoWoOG05CRt 2. https://youtu.be/kObGOaJbwr0?si=91JUKet9GFRZ0RW9 3. https://youtu.be/rUXLnbSXyQ4?si=WI5zVaonPPLjxwWw 4. https://youtu.be/cKl8TtWce9U?si=eXmTwsS3NLw0K8GH

The Warkari presentation placed collective devotional participation at the center of the performance. Abhang singing, Gajar, Namasankirtan, clapping and congregational responses created a participatory structure in which the distinction between performer and audience became fluid.

The performer acted not only as narrator and singer but also as leader of collective devotional energy. Changes in tempo, repetition, verbal prompts and familiar musical material regulated participation. The case consequently provided important observations concerning performer–audience relationships, collective rhythm, participatory leadership and the progressive construction of devotional intensity.

6.4. Case Four: Shabari

Performance type	Practice-based Kathak–Kirtan experiment
Principal narrative	The devotional narrative of Shabari
Date	5 Feb. 2023
Venue	Savitribai Phule Auditorium, Dombivli
Occasion or research context	Project based on phd thesis and annual function of Shree Mudra kalaniketan organisation
Approximate duration	30 mins approx
Principal performers and accompanists	[IDr. Vrushali Dabke, Atul Godse, Mandar Dixit, Tanvi Gore, Rushiraj Salvi, Vatsharsha Kolhatkar

Shabari was developed as a practice-based experiment investigating the structural integration of Maharashtra Kirtan narration and Kathak performance within a unified devotional presentation. Its organization included [insert exact opening], narrative exposition, musical passages, choreographed movement, rhythmic compositions, character representation and an emotional culmination centered upon Shabari's devotion.

The presentation allowed conscious examination of how Kathak vocabulary could support Kirtan narration without becoming an unrelated dance insertion. It also made the creative process itself available for documentation, including decisions concerning sequence, transition, spatial design, movement symbolism, rhythmic placement and emotional progression.

This case was not included as a standard against which traditional Kirtans were assessed. Its methodological function was to test whether documentation parameters emerging from established Maharashtra Kirtan presentations remained applicable to a consciously structured interdisciplinary devotional performance.

7. Comparative Analysis

7.1. Performance Architecture

All four cases possessed identifiable internal organization. Their structures were not identical, but each performance progressed through an opening, development, transitions, intensification and conclusion.

In the Naradiya cases, the relationship between Purvaranga, musical exposition, verbal interpretation, narrative development and conclusion established the performance architecture. In the Warkari case, repeated cycles of Abhang, Gajar, exposition and collective participation produced a different but equally identifiable structural progression. In Shabari, the architecture was consciously created through ritual opening, narration, choreographic development, rhythmic expansion and emotional culmination.

The comparison demonstrates that performance documentation must extend beyond preparing a list of presented items. It should identify the order of segments, their duration, their relationship to one another and the mechanisms through which one section moves into another.

The recurrence of internal organization across all four cases justified the inclusion of performance architecture as an independent KPDP domain.

7.2. Performative Communication

Meaning was communicated in every case through multiple expressive modes. Verbal narration was supported by vocal modulation, song, pause, gesture, facial expression, bodily orientation, humour,

rhythmic recitation and audience response.

Nijampurkar's presentation revealed fluid transitions between spoken exposition and dramatic embodiment. Badve's presentation used rhythmic articulation and vocal precision as communicative strategies. Vasantgadkar's performance integrated narration with collective chanting and devotional leadership. Shabari combined spoken narration, movement, music and symbolic visual expression. The comparison indicates that speech, music and bodily communication should not be documented as unrelated categories. Researchers must record when the modes change, overlap or reinforce one another. The repeated interaction of expressive modes generated the KPDF domain of performative communication.

7.3. Musical and Rhythmic Organization

Rhythm functioned in all four cases as more than accompaniment. It influenced pacing, emotional intensity, audience participation, narrative emphasis and structural transition.

The two Naradiya presentations used rhythmic devices to articulate dramatic or interpretative moments, although the degree and technique differed. In the Warkari case, rhythm regulated collective participation and the growth of congregational energy. In Shabari, rhythm organized choreographic passages while contributing to devotional and narrative development.

Elements such as Tala, Laya, Sam, Tihai, percussion dialogue, rhythmic syllables, acceleration and repetition therefore require documentation in relation to their performative function.

This recurring observation justified the KPDF domain of musical and rhythmic organization.

7.4. Performer–Audience Relationship

Audience members did not function merely as spectators. Participation appeared through singing, chanting, clapping, verbal response, emotional reaction, ritual involvement and shared devotional attention.

Participation was most visibly foregrounded in the Warkari case, but performer–audience communication was present in all four performances. Humour, rhetorical questions, familiar verses, changes in tempo and direct address were used to regulate attention and response.

The comparison also revealed that audience participation should not be recorded only through audience size or general statements such as 'the audience responded positively.' Documentation must record what form participation took, when it occurred, what initiated it and how it influenced subsequent performance. This finding generated the KPDF domain of audience participation and collective experience.

7.5. Embodied Performance

All four performances communicated through the body, even when formal dance vocabulary was absent. Facial expression, posture, gesture, directional change, stillness, movement quality and spatial positioning contributed to interpretation.

The Naradiya presentations used bodily differentiation to support dramatic communication. The Warkari presentation employed embodied leadership and rhythmic physicality in guiding collective participation. Shabari used consciously designed choreographic and symbolic movement.

The comparison therefore demonstrates that embodiment in Kirtan cannot be reduced to the question of whether dance is present. Researchers must document the range of bodily actions through which meaning is communicated.

This recurring requirement formed the KPDF domain of embodied performance.

7.6. Performative Transitions

One of the most significant comparative findings concerned transitions. None of the performances

remained within a single expressive mode. Each moved repeatedly among narration, singing, rhythm, interpretation, humour, dramatic representation, silence and participation.

These transitions maintained continuity and controlled changes in attention and emotion. A transition could be created through a verbal bridge, musical cue, percussion pattern, pause, change of posture, repeated phrase or audience response.

Conventional documentation often records the components but overlooks the processes connecting them. The comparative cases demonstrated that these connections are central to the experience and organization of Kirtan.

Transitions were therefore incorporated across the domains of performance architecture, communication, rhythm and embodied performance rather than being treated as an isolated checklist item.

7.7. Interpretative and Descriptive Observation

The comparison revealed a further methodological requirement: the need to separate what was directly observed from what the researcher inferred.

For example, ‘the performer increased the tempo and invited collective clapping’ is a descriptive observation. ‘The acceleration generated devotional intensity’ is an interpretative statement. Both may be academically valuable, but they represent different levels of analysis.

This distinction generated the seventh KPDF domain, interpretative research notes, which allows researchers to preserve analytical reflection without presenting interpretation as directly observable fact.

8. Comparative Synthesis

Table 1. Relationship between Case Observations and KPDF Domains

Documentation dimension	Nijampurkar	Badve	Vasantgadkar	Shabari
Performance architecture	Naradiya progression and dramatic sequencing	Rhythmically organised Naradiya progression	Cyclical participatory progression	Consciously designed interdisciplinary structure
Performative communication	Voice, narration, gesture and enactment	Vocal-rhythmic articulation	Narration and collective devotional leadership	Narration, movement and visual symbolism
Music and rhythm	Supports dramatic and narrative emphasis	Central communicative and structural device	Regulates collective participation	Supports choreography and narrative development
Audience relationship	Direct address and responsive engagement	Attention regulated through music and rhythm	Congregational singing, chanting and clapping	Guided reception within a staged presentation
Embodied expression	Characterisation and expressive gesture	Rhythmic physicality and presentational control	Embodied leadership of collective energy	Formal Kathak vocabulary and symbolic movement

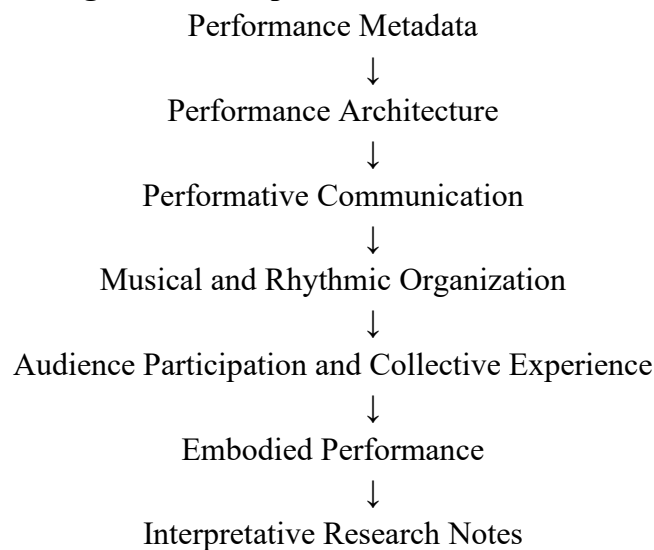
Transitions	Speech–song– enactment	Recitation– rhythm– interpretation	Exposition– Abhang–Gajar	Narration–dance– music–dramatic action
Interpretative potential	Dramatic communication	Rhythm as meaning	Collective devotional experience	Interdisciplinary integration

The table does not evaluate the strength or quality of the performers. It demonstrates that the same broad documentation needs were encountered across stylistically different performances. These repeated needs provided the inductive basis for the proposed framework.

9. Emergence of the Kirtan Performance Documentation Framework

The comparative analysis revealed seven recurring categories of information. These categories were subsequently organized as the KPDF.

Figure 1. Conceptual Structure of KPDF



The sequence should not be understood as a rigid chronological order. The domains interact throughout a performance. The figure represents the organization of documentation rather than the mandatory order of performance.

9.1.Domain I: Performance Metadata

This domain establishes the context in which the performance takes place.

- name of performer
- Kirtan tradition
- title or principal subject
- date and venue
- occasion
- duration
- temple, auditorium, public, institutional or digital setting
- accompanying artists
- instruments
- language

- intended audience
- mode of observation
- recording availability
- relevant permissions

9.2.Domain II: Performance Architecture

This domain records the internal organization of the presentation.

- opening sequence
- invocation
- Purvaranga
- Principal verse, Abhang or scriptural basis
- narrative organization
- philosophical exposition
- musical segments
- Bhajan, Gajar and Namasankirtan
- dramatic episodes
- climax
- Conclusion
- duration of segments
- transitions connecting successive sections

9.3.Domain III: Performative Communication

This domain records how meaning is communicated through different expressive modes.

- vocal modulation
- narrative style
- direct address
- dialogue
- question–answer interaction
- humour
- repetition
- gesture
- facial expression
- bodily orientation
- symbolic action
- silence
- character differentiation
- transitions between speech, song and enactment

9.4.Domain IV: Musical and Rhythmic Organization

This domain examines music and rhythm in relation to the construction of performance.

- Raga or melodic framework
- Tala
- Laya
- tempo progression

- Sam
- Tihai
- Paran
- Tatkar, where applicable
- rhythmic syllables
- percussion dialogue
- collective rhythm
- musical cues
- relationship between rhythm and narration
- relationship between tempo and audience participation

9.5.Domain V: Audience Participation and Collective Experience

This domain documents the relational character of Kirtan.

- collective singing
- chanting
- clapping
- verbal response
- ritual participation
- humour-induced interaction
- performer–audience dialogue
- invitations to participate
- spontaneous participation
- changes in audience energy
- emotional response
- effect of audience response upon subsequent performance

9.6.Domain VI: Embodied Performance

- This domain records how the body contributes to meaning.
- posture
- gesture
- facial expression
- movement
- stillness
- spatial orientation
- directional change
- character differentiation
- symbolic movement
- performer positioning
- ritual action
- relationship with accompanists
- use of formal dance vocabulary, where present
- relationship between movement and narration

9.7.Domain VII: Interpretative Research Notes

The first six domains primarily document observable phenomena. The seventh preserves informed interpretation.

- emotional progression
- Rasa construction
- narrative strategy
- philosophical emphasis
- knowledge communication
- symbolism
- distinctive artistic characteristics
- cross-case observations
- researcher reflexivity
- alternative interpretations
- questions for further investigation

The separation of descriptive and interpretative observations improves transparency and allows later researchers to revisit the primary record.

10. Principles Guiding KPDF

10.1. Comprehensiveness

Documentation should acknowledge the multidimensional character of Kirtan rather than privileging one disciplinary perspective.

10.2. Non-Evaluative Observation

KPDF records performance phenomena. It does not rank performers or measure artistic, spiritual or aesthetic superiority.

10.3. Comparability

Use of common domains allows meaningful comparison across performances while preserving stylistic diversity.

10.4. Flexibility

The framework may be adapted according to the tradition, research question, field conditions and availability of audio-visual records.

10.5. Distinction between Observation and Interpretation

Researchers should differentiate directly observable phenomena from analytical conclusions and personal interpretations.

11. Discussion

The study began with a methodological concern: researchers examining Maharashtra Kirtan frequently document different aspects of the performance according to their disciplinary training. The resulting accounts may be individually insightful but collectively difficult to compare.

The comparative cases demonstrate that Maharashtra Kirtan functions as an integrated system. Voice, narration, rhythm, music, movement, humour, philosophy, ritual and participation acquire performative significance through their relationships with one another. Documentation confined to a single dimension therefore produces only a partial record.

The KPDF responds to this limitation by shifting attention from discipline-specific description to

structured performance observation. It does not prevent literary, philosophical, musicological or theatrical interpretation. Instead, it provides a shared primary documentation base upon which such interpretations may subsequently be developed.

The framework's non-evaluative character is essential. A Warkari Kirtan centred upon collective Namasankirtan should not be judged through the same artistic expectations as a Naradiya presentation foregrounding dramatic narration. Similarly, a practice-based Kathak–Kirtan experiment should not be treated as evidence of the inadequacy of traditional Kirtan or as a superior contemporary model. KPDF records what each performance does within its own structure.

The study also demonstrates that certain elements have remained particularly vulnerable to omission: transitions, embodied communication, audience participation, spatial organisation and rhythm as a narrative or communicative device. Their recurrence across all four cases indicates that they are not peripheral details. They are central components of Maharashtra Kirtan's performative identity.

The framework therefore constitutes an original methodological contribution. It does not claim to discover that Kirtan contains music, narration, rhythm or participation. Its originality lies in translating these interconnected dimensions into a systematic documentation methodology specifically intended for comparative and archival study.

12. Potential Applications of KPDF

KPDF may assist field researchers by providing structured observational categories before, during and after a performance.

It may facilitate comparative studies because multiple performances can be documented through shared domains without requiring artistic uniformity.

It may complement audio-visual archives. A recording preserves the visible and audible event, while the KPDF record identifies structure, transitions, participation, contextual information and interpretative observations.

The framework may also encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars of literature, music, dance, theatre, folklore, anthropology, religious studies and heritage studies.

Finally, the framework may be adapted into digital documentation forms, searchable archival metadata and researcher training instruments.

13. Limitations

The study is conceptual and exploratory. The framework was derived from four purposely selected cases and should not be treated as a universally validated instrument.

The sample does not represent every regional, sectarian or contemporary form of Kirtan. Ramdasi, Haridasi and other regional or institutional traditions may reveal additional documentation needs.

The study does not test inter-observer reliability. Different researchers may interpret parameters differently unless definitions, examples and training procedures are developed.

The inclusion of Shabari introduces the methodological complexity of practitioner-researcher involvement. Although reflexive separation between artistic creation and comparative observation has been maintained, complete elimination of researcher subjectivity is neither possible nor claimed.

Finally, the current framework identifies domains but does not assign quantitative scores. This is deliberate because the purpose is documentation rather than evaluation.

14. Future Research

The next stage should apply KPDF to a larger and more diverse corpus of performances.

Future research may test inter-observer reliability; refine definitions and coding instructions; examine applicability across Kirtan traditions; develop digital field-documentation templates; connect KPDF records with audio-visual archives; develop multilingual terminology; investigate performer and community responses to the framework; explore ethical protocols for documenting sacred and community-based performances; and examine adaptation to related traditions such as Harikatha, Pravachan and other narrative-devotional performance practices.

Artificial-intelligence-assisted indexing may eventually support the identification of temporal segments, speakers, musical transitions and participation patterns. However, such tools should complement—not replace—culturally informed human observation.

15. Conclusion

Existing scholarship on Kirtan offers substantial literary, philosophical, historical, religious and musicological knowledge. However, it provides comparatively limited methodological guidance for documenting Maharashtra Kirtan as a multidimensional live performance.

Through inductive comparison of four devotional performance cases, the present study identified recurring documentation requirements concerning context, architecture, communication, music and rhythm, audience participation, embodiment and interpretation. These recurring dimensions formed the conceptual basis of the Kirtan Performance Documentation Framework.

KPDF is neither an evaluation instrument nor a prescriptive model for performance practice. It is a structured and flexible methodology intended to improve the comprehensiveness, transparency and comparability of Maharashtra Kirtan documentation.

The framework's contribution lies in establishing a common methodological foundation while preserving the individuality of traditions, performers and performance contexts. It may support field research, comparative analysis, archival documentation and interdisciplinary scholarship.

The proposed framework represents the first conceptual stage of a continuing methodological enquiry. Its wider value will depend upon empirical application, practitioner consultation, inter-observer testing and adaptation across diverse traditions. Nevertheless, by directing attention from isolated performance components towards their interaction within a live event, KPDF offers a necessary step towards documenting Maharashtra Kirtan as an integrated living performance tradition.

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