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Kathakali, the dance-drama of Kerala, a state on the southwest coast of India, in its natural setting goes on for many hours, traditionally lasting from dusk until dawn the following day. This article attempts to define the specific elements that constitute the performance score which guides the complete performance, to isolate the individual performance units that make up the complete score, to subject a single example of a performance unit to microanalysis, and to suggest reasons for the duration of such performances.

Performance Score and Text

Kathakali, like all forms of performance, has a score. A performance score consists of all the created and/or received conventions which collectively constitute the complete composition performed. Various theatrical forms range widely in the degree to which the specific score guiding a particular performance is "set." Classical Asian theatrical forms such as Kathakali, Kiyati or Noh have relatively set scores; that is, the performance conventions change only slightly from performance to performance through elaboration, refinement, and a relatively slow process of innovation in nuance of technique. While much contemporary Western theater is built by constructing a new and unique performance score for each new production of a play, Western ballet often attempts to re-create as precisely as possible the previously choreographed performance score of a "Swan Lake." Any performance, then, possesses its own score. The specific internal construction of scores differs from genre to genre. Within a genre the score may also vary from performance to performance.

Phillip Zarrilli is Director of the Asia/Experimental Theatre Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The present essay is part of his forthcoming book, The Kathakali Complex: Actor, Performance, Structure to be published by Abhinav Publishers, New Delhi. At present he is continuing research in two areas—the martial arts of India and folk performance in New Glarus, Wisconsin—with Deborah Nett, Associate Director.

One part of many performance scores is a received text. In classical Asian theater forms, the text is usually a highly regarded literary composition guided by specific poetic and literary conventions governing the particular genre of dramatic literature. The performance score, however, should not be confused with such conventionalized, received texts. Not all forms of performance have such received texts. Some improvised performance forms, such as commedia dell'arte, or improvised sections of a performance literally create their own texts through the operative conventions which are a part of the performance score. Contemporary art performances may have no text or create a text in performance; nevertheless, each art performance follows a specific set of acts/actions that constitute its score.

Even in some classical Asian forms such as Kathakali dance-drama, the received text does not coincide on a one-to-one basis with the performance score. The text is only one of the major constraints governing the performance. Simply reading the received literary version of a Kathakali dramatic text (or that of a Peking Opera, Kabuki, or Noh) gives the reader little idea of what a performance of that dramatic text is actually like.

In Kathakali, the written, received literary text is sacrosanct; that is, nothing should be added to or taken away from the originally authored text-as-text. The text is perceived as discrete, individually authored, and capable of being judged as a literary work according to the criteria applied to other works of the same literary class/genre. However, in terms of the performance of the text, the received text is only the beginning point in the construction of the performance score by the performers. The received literary text in Kathakali historically has served as the initial inspiration for further developments in the performance score.

Over the years, originally authored Kathakali plays have spawned the development of a performance score for a particular play which may diverge radically from the received literary text. Different scores may even exist for a single play owing to subtle variation in treatment given that text by different Kathakali schools.

The development of divergent performance scores is not at all surprising. There has always existed a dynamic tension between an original text and the performance of that text through time. With the exception of a few historical periods where dramatic dramas were written and never intended for performance, the dramatic text has always been authored for performance. By their very nature theatrical performances are concrete, one-time events. A performance score must be constructed for any text—that is the immediate concern of the performers. In the original production of a text, the playwright is often directly involved in the
production so that alterations in the text can be made to suit the performers. The result is often a close initial congruence of text and performance score. Such was the case with Shakespeare at the Globe, Aeschylus in Athens with his chorus, and at least some Kathakali authors working with troupes in the first staging of their dramatic texts. Alterations of the text made in an original production are most often based on the immediate needs of the production being staged by this particular group of actors for the specific occasion of this particular production.

When the original text serves as the basis for more than the one original production, that same text will always be subject to possible change or alteration. Indeed, historically we find that the original congruence of playwright, script, and performance score often lapses or alters as time passes. Naturally, with time there are changes in historical and personal circumstances: authors/performers die; the distance between the originally authored text and aesthetic principles guiding the original production grows wider; new generations of performers come to the stage; performance techniques change. The likelihood is that there will be changes and alterations and that the conventions governing the performance of a received text and constituting the performance score will change. Examples from world theater history are many and varied. In the Hellenistic theater the emphasis of performance shifted from a total unified festival context and meaning to an emphasis upon individual star performers for whose benefit the earlier Greek tragedies were modified. A similar phenomenon occurred when Shakespeare's plays became vehicles for star performers during the Restoration and eighteenth-century theaters of England. The result was that Shakespeare's plays were not played in their entirety again until the nineteenth century.

Just as there is a received, originally authored text in Kathakali, so is there a received performance score associated with a text. The received performance score may be defined as the specific set of conventions which collectively constitute the complete composition performed, established by tradition, and handed on from teacher to student and/or performer to performer. In performance genres like Kathakali which base their scores on received texts, there have grown up over the years traditions for enacting that specific text, or portions of that text. As noted earlier, different schools may have slightly different traditional scores for the enactment of a particular part of a text.

Internal Construction of a Kathakali Score

The internal construction of a performance consists of all the discrete items and/or markers that may be utilized to set the performance apart, or frame it, from daily life.1

Such usually public frames or markers delimit and define the theatrical genre or styles of performance, setting the outside boundaries for what is considered a part of the performance event. Inside these outer markers there often exists an inherited, or "traditional," structure and/or style of performance. Finally, the performance score includes all the subunits which fill out the inherited structure (see Diagram 1). In classical Asian theater forms, these subunits may often be isolated as discrete and definable systems of actions which ultimately constitute the performance event, and therefore the score.

The total score, then, is a skeletal structure whose flesh is provided by the specific performance techniques which an individual performer in an ensemble (or individual if a solo form) must know in order to be able to perform. Such techniques and specific skills constitute the performer's performance knowledge. In classical Asian forms performance knowledge is a highly specialized branch of traditional training which takes years for transmittal and absorption. The performer uses his techniques to realize the score in performance.

Kathakali's performance score is made up of a series of interlocking units, each of which is governed by its own set of specific performance conventions. At the most general level the largest units of a complete performance can be divided into four major groups: (1) announcement of performance (kūlikottu), (2) preliminaries, (3) performance of the text and (4) closing prayer/dance (Dhanāsì). (Diagram 2 outlines this traditional structure of a full Kathakali performance including a description of each unit and the subunits which make up the lengthy preliminaries.) While an exhaustive study of the Kathakali performance structure would necessitate analysis of all four of these large units, this analysis will concentrate on performance of the text.

To focus more tightly on the performance of the text, there are two sets of subunits that constitute the major constraints of the text's performance score: (1) subunits based on the text itself and (2) subunits based on dance-acting interpolations added over time to the original text. To understand all the basic subunits of the text's performance score, first the textual subunits and then the dance-acting subunits will be briefly outlined below.

While the following structural analysis is being read, it should be kept in mind that the entire performance is shaped by the general conventions that govern Kathakali performance. The actor-dancers do not
Diagram 1: The Frames of a Kathakali Performance

Any performance consists of a series of frames. In this study one of the smallest frames is subjected to a microanalysis. (In performance analysis simply noting and describing the frames is the first step. The juxtaposition of the frames, the interspaces between the frames, and the relationship of the smallest textual subunits on the micro level to the largest sociocultural context on the macro level must all be studied.)

Textual Subunits

The first subunit of the text is the śloka. Ślokas are metrical verse composed in stanzas, are usually written in the third person, and narrate or tell what is going to happen in the dialogue portions of the play. The ślokas usually provide the context for the “action” of the dialogue scenes. Occasionally a dandaka replaces a śloka. Dandakas are also narrative passages usually written in the third person, and they serve the same function as ślokas. However, ślokas are set in certain specific metrical patterns while dandakas have a different metrical structure. (Since dandakas serve a similar function to that of ślokas, they will not enter into the body of this more limited discussion of performance structure.)

The second major subunit of the text is the padam. Padas are songs composed specifically as dance music for interpretation in performance. In general, the padas are the dialogue or soliloquy portions of the texts and therefore are usually written in the first person. Even though the vocalists sing the entire text (including both ślokas and padas), the padas are written as if the actor/dancer were actually speaking the lines.²

Both of these major types of text units are sung according to accepted musical conventions and style.³
Diagram 2: Outline Structure of Kathakali Performance (Traditional Pattern)

Clock Time (Approximate Times) | Description
---|---
6:30–7:00 p.m. (Dusk) | Announcement of Performance (*keli koottu*). The cue to the village/environ that a Kathakali performance will take place that evening; a percussion announcement with two drums (*maddalam* and *centa*).

8:00 p.m. | Preliminaries
1. Lighting of bronze oil lamp (*kali vilakku*).
2. Percussion interludes (on lighting of the oil lamp the *maddalam*, accompanied by the cymbals, plays the *svadha maddalam*, which in turn is followed by drumming on the *centa* called the *araṇu keli*).
3. Dancing of pure dance segment (*tōrayam*) behind the hand-held curtain.
4. Singing of prayers (*varṇaṇa sīkhas*).
5. Dancing of *purappatu* ("going forth"), or pure dance segment.
6. Vocalists and percussionists in a long composition (*Mēlappadam*) (Vocal portion lasts about 45 minutes to one hour with the singing of *āṭṭappadis* from Jayadeva’s *Gītā Govinda*. The last part of this preliminary is a chance for the drummers to display their skills.)

10:00 p.m. | Performance (of Text)

5:00–6:30 a.m. (Dawn) | Closing Prayer Dance (*Dhanāśi*). Short solo dance offering thanks to god for completion of the performance and seeking blessings for the audience.

which are a part of Kathakali’s total aesthetic style. As mentioned earlier, the vocalists sing the entire text while the orchestra provides accompaniment on a variety of drums, cymbals, and gongs. Both *slokas* and *padas* are sung in specific *ragas* selected by the author/composer for their appropriateness to the emotions or sentiments expressed in the particular context of the play in which a *slok* or *padam* appears. Although the term *raga* is difficult to briefly translate, it might best be defined as a series of melodic modes built on a specific set of notes in the scale and elaborated on so as to bring together the musician(s) and audience in the mood represented by the *raga*.

Two other important musical constraints shape a Kathakali performance—*tāla* and *kāla*. *Tālas* are the rhythmic patterns with set formulas of timemarking used to guide the orchestra and, through the orchestra, the actor/dancers in their performances. In performance the song held by the lead vocalist “keeps the *tāla*,” hitting the gong on each accented unit of time. All *tālas* are cyclical arrangements of the specific number of accented and unaccented time units (*mātras*) which constitute a specific *tāla*. There are six Kathakali *tālas*, including *campala* (eight time units or *mātras*), *campa* (ten units), *aṭanta* (fourteen units), *pancāra* (six units), *tripuṭa* (seven units), and *muriya-ṭanta* (halt *aṭanta* or seven). *Campaṭa tāla*, for example, has three accented and five unaccented time units (*mātras*) arranged 12345678 (x = accented).

Variation in the tempo of each of the six basic *tālas* is governed by the speed (*kāla*) in which the *tāla* is performed. There are three basic *kālas*: slow (*vilamba* or *onnam kāla*), medium (*madhyamā* or *randam kāla*), and fast (*druta* or *unnan kāla*). Medium speed is a doubling of slow speed, and fast, a doubling of medium. Like a *raga*, the specific rhythmic pattern (*tāla*) and its speed (*kāla*) are selected for their appropriateness to the context of the action. Generally speaking, a sudden change in the basic speed of a rhythmic pattern or a change from one pattern to another signals to both onstage characters and audience a change in mood or sentiment (*raṣa*). For example, the slow speed is generally associated with the erotic mood (*śringara*), medium speed with the heroic sentiment (*vīra*), and fast speed with the furious (*raudra*).

Returning to the two basic textual subunits, *slokas* and *padas*, I have noted that both are set in specific *ragas* according to the dramatic context. However, there is an extremely important difference in the way that these basic text units are performed musically. *Slokas* are sung by the vocalists without percussion background and therefore with no strict adherence to
Diagram 3: Schematic Diagram of Typical Kathakali Structure

Note: This diagram merely illustrates the typical linkage among textual and acting/dance subunits which comprise the performance score. It does not attempt to illustrate the dynamic structure or interrelationship of the units. Dandakas are not included in the key and scene layout since they serve the same structural function as slokas.

Key:
- Regular unacted sloka (narrative)
- Acted sloka (narrative)
- padam (dialogue)
- pallavi (refrain)
- anupallavi (subrefrain)
- caranam (foot)

kaśčam (punctuating dance)
aññam (interpolation)

set choreography (like a battle, sari dance, etc.)

A Typical Two-Character Scene

Sloka #1
Padam #1
Horo "speaks"

Sloka #2
Padam #2
Hernine "speaks"

Padam #3
Horo "responds"

Sloka #3
Padam #4
Horo "speaks"

Padam #5
Heroine "responds"

Sloka #4
Padam #6
Horo "speaks"

Atam
(padam continues)
a particular rhythmic time structure. Ślokas, then, allow the vocalists great freedom of interpretation outside the constraints of rhythmic pattern (tāla) and speed (kāla). For the vocalists the singing of ślokas is an opportunity for displaying their vocal capabilities. Unfettered by restrictions of rhythmic patterns, they have freedom to interpret by elaborating on the long syllables of any word in the śloka. But this freedom is always within the bounds of the mood they are attempting to capture in their singing.

As a rough approximation, nearly 80 percent of the time ślokas are sung without actors onstage. In the majority of cases, the ślokas set the context for the padas which follow. The other 20 percent of ślokas are acted by the actor/dancers.6

While ślokas are performed without the constraints of rhythmic pattern and a set specific speed, the other textual subunit, the padam, is set to a specific raga, tāla, and kāla. All padas are performed by actor/dancers and constitute the substantive dialogue of the play, providing the majority of the actual performance time of the text. The padas also involve the integration of the entire performance ensemble, including actor/dancers, vocalists, and percussionists. In the performance of the padas we find Kathakali's characteristic form of repetitious double acting of the lines of the text (detailed below). As a general rule, each line of a padam is acted twice.

Dance-Acting Subunits

In addition to the textual subunits, the total Kathakali performance score includes three major forms of actor/dancer’s elaborations. These are kalaśams, the dance compositions which punctuate the stanzas of a padam, āttam (also known by the longer name of ilaṅkīyāttam); and longer pieces of set choreography such as preparations for battle, a battle itself, or the female sāri entrance dance. Generally, kalaśams are Kathakali’s pure rāga (nṛtta) patterns which are performed at the conclusion of each of a padam’s sections (including the pallavi, anupallavi, and caraṃs), selected on the basis of appropriateness to the dramatic context.

The āttam may generally be described as that part of the performance score where an actor may have a great degree of freedom of interpretation. In these passages the actor speaks in hand gestures (muḍrās), either to himself or to another character, but without the support of the vocalists. These passages are outside of the main written text, although they are elaborations on the specific text.

There are three distinct types of āttam. One is a form of set soliloquy (tanjētāttam) acted by certain character types (kattī and tāḷī) after their entrance. These āttams allow the actor to elaborate on his basic nature, for example, illustrating self-confidence, arrogance, or an assessment of the situation facing him. A second type of āttam, best called a descriptive āttam, is a set interpolation which expands on a particular portion of the story of the received text. Descriptive āttams have their own texts handed down from generation to generation of actors: however, it serves as a guide to the actor in his performance and is not sung by the vocalists. (The most famous example of such descriptive āttam is the set interpolation known as ajagarakabaličtam, performed in the play Kalyarasughanondičam. Bhima enacts a battle between an elephant, linn, and python.) Finally, the third type of āttam is the improvisations the performer inserts into a performance on the spur of the moment within the limits set by what is appropriate to the context of the action.

While a Kathakali performance score for enacting a received text is made up of the six distinct units noted above (ślokas, dandakas, padas, kalaśams, āttam, and set pieces of choreography), the total performance flows from one unit to another. The characteristic function of each structural element is to include opportunities for elaboration by one or more artist. The beginning point in the construction of Kathakali’s performance score was the author’s written text. Over the years the text was modified and shaped into the specific performance score associated with the acting of each text in a particular performance tradition or style. Layer upon layer of performance conventions were added in the treatment given to the text. Such layering eventually included the three types of āttam noted above.

All the basic structural subunits are linked together in the flow of performance. A typical linking in an opening love scene between a hero and heroine is summarized in Diagram 3. The exact arrangement of each of the distinct subunits of the score is determined by two factors: (1) the author’s original creative selection and ordering of ślokas, dandakas, and the three parts of the padas; and (2) the creative insertion of āttam and kalaśams by performers (and/or patrons) in the past as well as today.

Now that each of the smallest subunits of the score has been isolated, it will be important to expose them to microanalysis. In microanalysis, the infrastructure of the subunit is examined in detail by isolating the techniques used to produce the subunit of the score. Since the padas of the text constitute the major portion of the Kathakali text-in-performance, and therefore one of the substantive portions of the total score (and total clock duration), the following microanalysis focuses specifically on the performance of one line of dialogue.
Microanalysis of One Line of Dialogue

The line of dialogue selected for analysis is taken from the play Prahlāda Caritam, based on the Bhagavata Purāṇa. I have purposely selected a line from the opening scene because it takes a relatively long time to perform. Prahlāda Caritam’s opening scene is a typical one, involving a kattī, or “knife” type of character (one who possesses both a streak of nobility and yet is arrogant and evil). In this case, the main kattī character is Hiranyakasipu, who first appears with his wife, Kayati (a minukku, or “radiant” character type). Plays in which the main character is a knife type usually open with a love scene in which the major emotion or sentiment (rasa) being unfolded is the erotic (śṛṅgāra). Prahlāda Caritam is but one of many plays which begin with what is popularly called a śṛṅgāra padam, or love scene. Such opening love scenes are highly conventionalized, and are also called slow sets by the performers, since they are rendered in the slowest tempo in Kathakali: patina kāla. The earlier discussion of speed mentioned three typical speeds: slow, medium, and fast. Patina kāla is a fourth, or additional, speed in which a rhythmic pattern may be set. It is even slower than the normal slow speed (vilamba or onnam kāla) and might best be thought of as super slow. The acting of such scenes is even referred to as patināttam, or acting in a slow tempo.

The sentence being analyzed is the first line of the first padam. Hiranyakasipu is speaking to Kayati. The Malayalam line and a translation follow:

In order to unpack the performance of this one line of dialogue, we can assume that, in the case of the padam, the text itself is the baseline for interpretation and elaboration by the performers: the vocalists, who sing the text as well as keep the basic tāla on the gong and cymbals, and the actor/dancers.

The performance of this one line of text, like all regular padam lines, may be divided into two major sequences: (I) first delivery of the line by the vocalists, during which the actor enacts the traditionally set subtext of the line; and (II) the second delivery of the line, during which the vocalists sing the line over and over again through a set number of tāla cycles (in example 2) while the actor “acts” the line in gesture language (mudrās) and facial gesture, thus projecting and embodying the emotional state (bhāva) of the character. In performance, of course, these two parts of the rendering of one line of a padam flow from one into the other without a division or break.

Part I: First Delivery of the Line

During the first delivery of the line, the vocalists sing the entire line in four cycles of tāla, as in the slow patina campa tāla. As a general rule in the Kerala Kalamandalam (central) style of performance, during first delivery of the line the actor playing Hiranyakasipu gazes at the heroine, looking her over from top to bottom, and then back up again. Performance Chart 1 shows each tāla cycle, the vocalists’ words assigned to each cycle, approximate elapsed time, and the actor’s movements interpreting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manini</th>
<th>mar</th>
<th>mauli</th>
<th>rathna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful lady</td>
<td>(plural ending)</td>
<td>heart</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(in)</td>
<td></td>
<td>vocative case ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>jewel</td>
<td>showing direct address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mania</td>
<td>seela</td>
<td>ketal</td>
<td>turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(one possessing</td>
<td>mannered</td>
<td>listen</td>
<td>please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(implied)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Oh, jewel among beautiful ladies; oh, noble mannered one, please listen."
# Performance Chart 1: First Delivery of Prahlada Caritam Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tāla</th>
<th>Vocalist singing (# = photograph placement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cycle #1 | 1 2 3  
|         | Manīnīmar                                 |
|         | Frame 1  
|         | Frame 2  
|         | Frame 3  |
| Cycle #2 | 4 5 6  
|         | mauliratname                              |
|         | Frame 4  
|         | Frame 5  
|         | Frame 6  |
| Cycle #3 | 7 8  
|         | maniascola                                 |
|         | Frame 7  
|         | Frame 8  |
| Cycle #4 | 9 10 11  
|         | kulalum                                    |
|         | Frame 9  
|         | Frame 10  
<p>|         | Frame 11  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elapsed time</th>
<th>Description of actor's performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>Looks at the face of the heroine through the use of facial gestures which elaborate on erotic (ardhgāra) rasa. Here the actor can free-associate in terms of what he imagines, mainly through the movement of the neck and eyes. Although technically looking at the heroine, the actor is actually seeing an imaginary Kayati since the actor playing Kayati is within his peripheral vision only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>He now sees his wife’s breasts and shows how this arouses his passion. He sees her breasts with his eyes, and then shows his appreciation of the wealth of her beautiful breasts by flickering his eyelids and moving the eyes in a figure eight pattern. Her breasts are so full that there is no visible cleavage between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>Up to the middle of this cycle the actor keeps the same basic bhāva of passion, but then in the second half (last 16 mātras), his eyes begin to move down toward his wife’s foot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[12] 30–45 seconds</td>
<td>At the end of this cycle his eyes reach her feet, and he does a take with his head and eyes. Having looked her fully down, his eyes, during the first half of this cycle (first 16 mātras), slowly come up along her body. Then, in the second half of the cycle, the actor moves his face/head as he attempts to draw his wife’s attention to the fact that he is about to speak. [12] This frame illustrates the transition stage or a &quot;neutral&quot; position between the first and second delivery of the line.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the line. The accompanying photographs illustrate the approximate place in the vocalist’s delivery of the sung words where the action described occurs. The exact coordination of a particular eye movement, for example, will vary slightly from performance to performance.

The first delivery and performance of a padam line might best be thought of as a “pre-acting” of the line which follows. It establishes an emotional context. Normally, in this first delivery, the actor shows the bhāva which lies behind the meaning of the line, that is, what we would often call the subtext in Western acting terms. In the case of this particular line from Prahlāda Caritam we have a somewhat interesting variation on the straight subtext of the line sung. The line itself is rather straightforward: “Oh jewel among beautiful ladies: oh, noble mannered one, please listen.” However, in the line’s first delivery the actor projects and embodies the bhāva of passion. Obviously the literal line does not explicitly or implicitly imply passion, rather, the actor embodies Hiranyakasipu’s passion on seeing his wife’s breasts. The acting is governed by the general convention of presenting Hiranyakasipu’s passion since, at the Kerala Kalamandalam, this bhāva has become associated with the acting of this particular scene. This is part of the received performance score connected with the acting of this particular padam in the text. The generally set subtext of the line is Hiranyakasipu’s passion on seeing his wife.

While the first delivery of this line of Prahlāda Caritam is not a straightforward acting of the meaning of the line, it illustrates vividly how important the subtext is to the delivery. Usually such pre-acting is more directly connected and associated with the obvious meaning of the line delivered.

**Part II: Second Delivery of the Line**

A general performance principle of Kathakali is that the vocalists repeat as often as necessary each tāla cycle, and the accompanying segment of a line set to each tāla cycle, to allow the actor/dancer sufficient time to complete his performance of each segment of the line. The vocalists’ repetition of the line segment gives the actor/dancer sufficient time to complete his performance of the entire set of hand gestures (mudrās) required to interpret and convey the meaning of this portion of the line. In this second delivery of the line, the actor literally mimics each individual word of the text, “speaking with his hands,” while the vocalists “speak” the dialogue through song. The performance of any particular mudrā varies in the amount of time required to perform the complete system of gestures. Some mudrās can be, and usually are, performed in a relatively limited amount of space and time; other larger, more complex mudrās take longer to perform because of the larger use of space covered in performing the gestures and/or because of the speed at which the mudrā is performed. The same mudrā, in a different dramatic context, can take longer or shorter to perform, depending on the mood of the action. In the case of the lines from Prahlāda Caritam, set in a very slow tempo, the actor takes the maximum amount of time to perform each mudrā. The slow action accentuates the mood of the erotic, the absorption of the images, and the creation of an erotic ambiance for the amorous exchange between husband and wife.

We have seen that in the first delivery of the line it takes only one complete tāla cycle to perform “manirnāmar,“ another for “mauli ratnāmar,” and so forth. In second delivery of the line the text temporarily does not move forward but is simply repeated while the actor physically mimics expresses the mudrās which directly duplicate the words being sung. In this example, a second repetition of each tāla cycle, and the accompanying word/phrase, provides enough time to allow the actor’s mime to catch up to the singing. In performance there is a constant, dynamic, creative tension between the musicians and actor/dancers as they move toward each moment of final congruence marked by the completion of each segment of the line being performed.

In Performance Chart 2, the tāla cycle, vocalists’ words, approximate elapsed time, and a description of the actor’s performance of the lines are listed, along with notation of the accompanying photographs, which show the actor’s physicalization of the gesture language “telling” the line of the text.

The bhāva of performance of the above line is the erotic, not passion, as shown in the first delivery of the line. Here the actor playing Hiranyakasipu should embody an appreciation of Kayatt’s character and beauty. This part of the acting of the line is a description and appreciation of her character. In the second delivery of the line, the actor speaks through gesture language every word of the dialogue. While the first delivery acts the context and allows for the pre-acting, the second delivery provides the actor with the opportunity to directly deliver his lines in gesture language with the appropriate bhāva.

The total time for performance of this one line is approximately six minutes. In this six minutes, the musicians, vocalists, and actor have collectively created a series of elaborations on the baseline score, in this case the padam. The score itself, if we were to look at the larger events in the story of Prahlāda, follows a linear chronology, as one event unfolds into another, then another, and so on. The conventionalized opening kattī love scene is certainly peripheral to the main events in Prahlāda’s story, but it serves the purpose
of allowing time for the opening elaboration of the erotic sentiment. The other scenes of the play are more directly related to the story proper. The text, although filled with poetic conceits and written in highly Sanskritized Malayalam language, nevertheless follows a linear chronology. As adaptations of segments of the major epics and purānas, Kathakali plays, as the very name Kathakali (story-play) implies, tell these stories.

The baseline of the performance score consists of the string of performance subunits as outlined in Diagram 3. Performance of the subunit padas demonstrates the most complex of the many forms of elaboration which create Kathakali’s highly convoluted score and internal structure. Other forms of elaboration noted earlier include the vocalist’s vocal elaboration in singing slokas and the insertion of āttam as elaborations on the original received text. But it is in the infrastructure of the padas of the text that the most complex form of technical elaboration occurs. It may be described as a triple helix of cyclical, repetitive elaborations on the baseline of the padam being performed (Diagram 4). (Note: the baseline of the total score changes with each subunit on the string. The baseline is the received text for slokas, danakas, and padas.)

As we have seen, the padas provide an opportunity for musicians, vocalists, and actor/dancers to collectively create a series of elaborations around the baseline padam. During these elaborations the story moves haltingly, idling, as it were, for stretches of time when the text is repeated. Ultimately, of course, the full story is unfolded but the process of the unfolding in the elaborations is as important as, or even more important than, the content of what is unfolded.

Specifically, the padam elaborations follow the lead of the ponnani, or lead singer, who keeps the basic tāta controlling the rhythm and pace of the padam performance. Within the basic tāta set by the ponnani on the gong, drummers may elaborate within that rhythmic structure. We have seen how the dialogue of the padam is set to corresponding tātas cycles according to the duration of vocalization. The elaboration here consists of a double form of repetition around the baseline ponnani. (1) the tāta cycles themselves are repetitions of set patterns; and (2) the repetitions of the specific tāta cycles with the accompanying text in Part II of the delivery. The third spiral forming the triple helix around the text consists of the actor/dancer’s mode of delivery and elaboration on the baseline padam.

The quality of the padam in performance emphasized the repetitive/cyclical structure. This is especially true of the quality of vocalization found in today’s modified sopana style, where the voices of the lead singer and his assistant constantly overlap; the effect of these overlapping waves of repetition, connecting the lead singer’s first cycle to his assistant’s second cycle, produces something like a series of sound waves, similar to filmic lap dissolves.

While the musicians and singers are circumambulating around the baseline of this padam guided by the cycles of tāta, the actor provides his own form of elaboration for this line of text. (1) his pre-acting of the subtext of the line during its first performance; (2) the signing, or literal speaking with the hands, through mudras of the text while the vocalists are performing repetitions in Part II of the line’s performance; and (3) the actor’s acting of the text through facial and other gestures by projecting the correct bhava for the context. In the case of the actor, his acting and speaking of the text are linear and chronological in that he follows usual Malayalam grammar. The actor, then, loosely follows the padam in its linear unfolding but interprets each line of a padam in several ways.

While each padam is acted twice, and may be sung as many as sixteen times through a number of cycles by the vocalists, this repetitive cyclical pattern is characteristic only of the padas of a Kathakali performance. When the other main text subunit, the sūka, is acted, it follows a one-to-one relationship between the text and the way that the actor performs or interprets these metrical verses. There is no “double acting” of sūkas as of padas; therefore there is not the same inherent cyclical repetitive pattern. The words of a sūka are only repeated once by the vocalists. The dance/acting units are direct interpretations and elaborations of the text. The kālasams are straightforward punctuating, decorative dance patterns, while the āttams, though extremely complex interpolations in the received text, are direct interpretations of either dramatic context and/or their own texts without the repetitive cycles found in acting padas.

In summary, the padam performance structure is the most complex and densely packed form of elaboration in Kathakali. In the performance of a padam each segment of dialogue is presented to the audience in a series of cyclical waves of sound/vocal and acted/emoted impressions which are repeated at least twice. The threads of the performance of phrases of a padam are woven around and around one another; the audience experiences the combined efforts of the percussionists keeping tāta and drumming, the vocalists singing cycles of the text, and the actor/dancers conveying the text literally, while simultaneously embodying the meaning of the text as a character. As we have seen, the tāta cycles are matched with phrases of the vocal text and are delivered at the same time. On the other hand, the duration of the visual images of the actor/dancer and the “through line” of the character overlap and continue from one tāta cycle to another. The moments of final
Performance Chart 2: Second Delivery of Prahlāda Caritam Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tāta</th>
<th>Vocalist sīnas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle #1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>14 15 16 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m a n i n i m a r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 13</td>
<td>Frame 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 15</td>
<td>Frame 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle #2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>19 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m a n i n i m a r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 18</td>
<td>Frame 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle #1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>22 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m a u l i r a t n a m e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 21</td>
<td>Frame 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle #2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 (a.b)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m a u l i</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 24a</td>
<td>Frame 24b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame 25</td>
<td>Frame 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elapsed time</td>
<td>Description of actor's performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>The actor shows the mudrá for beautiful lady. The single mudrá, &quot;beautiful lady,&quot; actually consists of a series of gestures. It takes one full cycle of tāla for the actor to perform this mudrá sequence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frame 17

| 30–45 seconds | Now the actor shows the plural ending, i.e., "... ico" and thus catches up with his gestural telling of the full meaning of the word, "maniminim." This plural ending also takes the full cycle to perform. |

| 30–45 seconds | In the course of the performance of "mauli ratname," the actor takes three mudrás to perform the text. The three mudrás are spread over the two cycles allotted to the singing of "mauli ratname," as noted in the accompanying photographic plates. The first mudrá performed is "head," which the actor shows literally (frames 21–22). The mudrá for head takes a relatively short time to perform. The actor performs the mudrá for head during only the first half of the first cycle, or 16 mātras. The second mudrá the actor performs is "ratana" (jewel). This mudra takes a relatively long time to perform so the performance of jewel begins (frame 23) during the second half of the first cycle of the singing of "mauli ratname" and continues through the first half of the second cycle (another 16 mātras) (frames 24 a and b). |

| 26 ratname | The last half of this second cycle is given over to the performance of the third mudrá required to say, "mauli ratname" (frames 25–26). The vocative ending is shown in these last 16 mātras, or second half of this cycle. Once again the actor catches up by the end of this second cycle with the singers in the performance of all three mudrás for "mauli ratname." |

continued
Performance Chart 2, continued

Cycle #1

Frame 27

Frame 28

Frame 29

Cycle #2

Frame 30

Frame 31

Frame 32

Frame 33

Cycle #1

Frame 36

Frame 37

Frame 38

Cycle #2

Frame 39

Frame 40

Frame 41

Frame 42
"Maniaseela" requires four mudrās to perform. The first mudrā, "mania" (noble), takes this entire first cycle to perform (frames 27–29).

The second cycle includes the performance of three mudrās. "Ecota" (manière) takes the first half, or 16 mātrās, of the cycle (frames 30–32). The second half of the cycle is again divided into halves. The first 8 mātrās are given to performance of "one who possesses" (frame 33), while the last 8 mātrās are taken to perform, "Oh, you" (frames 34–39).

"Ketallum" has two mudrās. The first mudrā, "keta" (listen), takes this entire first cycle of 32 mātrās plus the first quarter or 8 mātrās, of the second cycle below. This is the longest of any of the mudrās for this line, running through a total of 40 mātrās, or 1¼ cycles (frames 36–40).

The last three quarters of this cycle are taken to perform "sum" (ploac listen) (frames 41–44).
congruence of the actor's elaborate embodiment and visual telling of each phrase of a padam occur on completion of both the pre-acting of Part I and the acting in Part II. Other forms of elaboration or embellishment may then occur through kalāšams, āttams, set dances, and so on.

The complex, repetitive performance structure of Kathakali padas to a large degree accounts for the long time required for performance of a Kathakali text. (The six-minute length of the Prahāda line should be ample evidence). The other most important factors, but beyond the scope of this paper, are the additions to the text which form the baseline of the performance score, especially the often lengthy descriptive āttams which may last longer than one hour.

Conclusions

Kathakali's complex performance score is a series of elaborations, elaborations on and within elaborations, and embellishments. The elaborations characteristic of performance of the padas, as well as of Kathakali's other forms of elaboration and embellishment (poetic conceits giving scope to the actor for mimetic display; the vocalist's vocal elaboration in singing slokas, etc.), have all been designed and refined over the years as self-conscious challenges to the artist's skill. It is precisely those elaborations that are savored by the cultural elite and that offer the connoisseur and traditional patron the opportunity to fully relish the simultaneous, varied manifestations of the rich performance offered through the technical and emotive skills of the team of artists.
Kathakali’s performance score, and in particular the
cyclical, elaborative performance structure of the pa-
das, is first and foremost a direct reflection of the
classical aesthetic tradition of India. The savoring of
each moment of performance is the classical audi-
cence goal. There are no sudden and unexpected
flashes of emotion but rather the slow unfolding of
each moment in the dramatic enactment, which al-

tows the spectator to attain the treading of the various
sentiments (rasas). In our example from Prahāda
Caritam, Part I of the performance of the line allows
the spectator time to savor the actor’s projected pas-
sion (his subtext), and Part II allows him to enjoy the
erotic (sphāgāra), presented in this context as a de-
scription and appreciation of feminine beauty.
Kathakali’s traditional all-night duration, from dusk un-
til dawn, provides both performers and audience the
time necessary to accomplish and realize the aes-
thetic goal of the performance.

In addition to serving the function of aesthetic elab-
oration and realization, the Kathakali performance
score, and its all-night duration, mirrors in both its
general and its specific internal structure the cyclical
nature of Indian time. It is natural that the Indian no-
tion of cyclical time should be reflected even in the
content and structure of Indian performances. Mircea
Eliade writes of Indian time:

Time is cyclic, the world is periodically created and de-
stroyed, and the lunar symbolism of “birth—death—rebirth”
is manifested in a great number of myths and rites. It was
on the basis of such an immemorial heritage that the pan-
Indian doctrine of the agoo of the world and of the coo-
nic cycles developed.7

So deeply imbedded is the notion of cyclical time in
Indian life that it is not surprising to find it reflected in
a number of ways in Kathakali performance.

The Indian notion of time can be located in several of
the performance frames in Diagram 1. First, the
outermost frame of the pan-Indian cultural context is
imbued with the idea of cyclical time. It is a cultural
assumption which extends to the second frame as
well, the Kerala cultural frame. The outer markers of
the performance itself, demarcating the performance
event through the announcement and closing prayer/
dance, house the traditional all-night structure of Ka-
thakali (Diagram 2). The dusk-dawn duration is the
most obvious direct reflection of the cyclical move-
ment of time and cosmos. But other than this surface
similarity, there is a qualitative aspect of traditional
Kathakali all-night performances which is difficult to
convey in an article. There does seem to exist—at
all-night performances under the stars, especially in
more isolated villages—a special atmosphere and
feeling when the performance reaches its culmination
at dawn, when the vicissitudes that face Kathakali’s
epic, heroic figures have been resolved. As archetypal
figures on one of many levels of significance
embedded in the form, Kathakali characters are re-
presentative of broad categories of good and evil. The
coming of dawn, the winning of the typical early
morning battle by the forces of good over evil, returns
the cosmic world of the stage to its rightful condition
in this replaying of cosmic, mythic events.

I test these arguments seem tendentious, let us look
more closely at the internal structure of the perform-
ance. Beyond the more general level of the content
of Kathakali plays and its traditional all-night structure,
there is the internal structure of Kathakali’s score,
which also reflects this deeply imbedded notion of
cyclical. The repetitiveness of the internal ordering
of the performance score may be a further reflection
of this Indian time concept. The most obvious struc-
tural feature of the performance which is cyclical is
the structure of the tāla, the rhythmic cycles which
are one of the basic performance constraints of the
entire score (with the exception of the singing of ślo-
kās). It is in the dynamic situation of performance it-
self that the importance of such a cyclical structure is
revealed. The cyclical, repetitive structure is obviously
predictable, and it is its predictability which connois-
seurs and music lovers enjoy. The audience is musi-
cally drawn into the performance by this predictability
of cyclical patterns. It is the moment of return to
the beginning of the pattern at which there is the closest
congruence and joining of performer and audience.
While a qualitative observation, it appears that these
moments of congruence serve as high points of audi-
ence-performer interaction.

The performance score of the actor/dancers is, as
we have seen, also highly repetitive, reflecting this
cyclical notion of Indian time. The internal structure of
the padam momentarily suspends the forward, ad-

cancing action of the story/text while cycles are
marked. Even in the performance of sections of pa-
das, the moments of close congruence between audi-
ence, actor/dancers, and musicians are those at the
junctures between tāla cycles. There is an artistic as
well as an experiential sense of completion, consum-

mation, return, and then continuance as the per-
formance score progresses to its next phase. The
performance of padas, then, is simultaneously repeti-
tive/elaborative and cyclical—they are a part of one
another at the deep structural level at the core of the
performance.

Although beyond the scope of this paper, there are
other examples within the performance structure itself
of how Kathakali’s score reflects the Indian notion of
cyclical time and movement. When interpolations
such as long descriptive āṭṭam are added, they are
often demarcated from the “through line” of the story
by the repetition of the final text line before the āṭ-
thāli—a repetition which marks a return to the
Diagram 5: Cycles of Repetition and Elaboration in Kathakali

Example #1: The first example below is a segment of a padam. This diagram is simply another way of illustrating the relationship of the performance cycle to the “through line” of the text. Using “maninimar mauli ratname maniasela ketallum” as our example again, and keeping in mind the two-part performance of the line, it may be seen that in terms of the “through line” of the story, Part I is a delivery of the entire line in four cycles; Part II returns us (arrow) to the beginning of this phrase of the padam for a second and third cyclical repetition of each word/phrase in the line: “maninimar,” “mauli ratname,” “maniasela,” and finally “ketallum.”

Example #2: The second example is the simpler cyclical return to the “through line” when a loop is formed for the performance of a descriptive attam. The attam is an elaboration on the text, but there is a return to the same place in the text from which the elaboration began.

"Through line" of padam text
- maninimar
- mauli ratname
- maniasela
- ketallum

Part I = #1 ---
Part II = #2-3 ---
Both parts are complete here.

"Through line" performed following text
final line before attam

final line repeated after attam to return audience/performers to the “through line”
“through line” of the story. Such descriptive āṭṭam always bring us back to where we began. Diagram 5 graphically illustrates the cyclical nature of the elaborations of the padam performance structure and of the āṭṭam interpolations on the “through line” of the story.

The leisurely unfolding, the savoring, the long process of elaboration, and the cyclical, repetitive score are all characteristic of Kathakali performance. At the heart of a Kathakali performance is the padam, which at a deep structural level reveals as clearly as the more obvious level of actual performance time (dusk-dawn) its culturally assumed notion of time. The playing out of that time through artistic and aesthetic elaborations is the characteristic mode of appreciating performance. As forms like Kathakali undergo various transformations, adjustments, and changes to accommodate nontraditional, and often urban or Western audiences, changes in the performance structure subtly alter the received traditional structure of a performance. Elaborations, embellishments, and opportunities for artistic display may be, and often are, edited out of performance scores. A more linear concept of story and “through line” of action has already drastically altered many Kathakali performances which cater to nontraditional audiences. The significance of such changes will be the object of future studies.

Notes

1 Some contemporary performances may intentionally attempt to blur such distinctions or to enact an event without indicating to unsuspecting audiences how aware that this is a performance operating as a specially framed and marked-off event. In such cases the internal construction of the score is still as specific as it is in those performances in which the expected frames or markers do occur. The only difference is that the markers and frames are not consciously shown or are consciously hidden.

2 A padam usually has three parts: the pailavi (refrain), anupalavi (subrefrain), and caranams (literally “foot”). While the anupalavi may be omitted, there are usually multiple caranams. However, except for determining its total length, these compositional variations do not affect the performance of a padam.


5 Patina campañā tāla consists of thirty-two measured units (mātras), which is a joining of four sets of the eight-unit campañā tāla. The linking of four regular campañā to the long, slow thirty-two unit tāla changes the specific accented units.

6 The number of times the vocalists repeat a line of a padam varies from a minimum of two to as many as sixteen repetitions. When sixteen repetitions are being sung in a slow speed, the elapsed time for enacting a single line of a padam may be as long as twenty minutes.


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