1983

A Microanalysis of Performance Structure and Time in Kathakali Dance-Drama

Phillip Zarrilli

Recommended Citation

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol9/iss3/5
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.
A Microanalysis of Performance Structure and Time in Kathakali Dance-Drama
A Microanalysis of Performance Structure and Time in Kathakali Dance-Drama

Phillip Zarrilli

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, Kiyatam, or the Japanese Kabuki 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.

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 sacrosant; 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 classic 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 a 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 performance, established by tradition, and handed on from teacher to student and/or performer to performer. In performance genres like Kathakali which base their score 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 performer) 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 (kōlikottu), (2) preliminaries, (3) performance of the text and (4) closing prayer/dance (Dhanās). (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 interstices 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.)

The major focus of this paper is on the micro units: one example of a textual subunit.

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 vocalist sings the entire text (including both ślokas and padas), the padas are written as if the actor/dancer were actually speaking the lines.

Both of these major types of text units are sung according to accepted musical conventions and style.
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 ślokas 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 śloka or pada 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 rhythmical patterns with set formulas of time marking used to guide the orchestra and, through the orchestra, the actor/dancers in their performances. In performance the gong 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 campa (eight time units or mātras), campa (ten units), atānta (fourteen units), pāncā (six units), tripuṭa (seven units), and muniya-tanta (halt atanta or seven). Campa-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 (madhya or randam kāla), and fast (druta or nūnnam 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 (rasa). For example, the slow speed is generally associated with the erotic mood (śringāra), medium speed with the heroic sentiment (vīra), and fast speed with the furious (raudra).

Returning to the two basic textual subunits, ślokas 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. Ślokas 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)
- kaisam (punctuating dance)
- attam (interpolation)

A Typical Two-Character Scene

- Sloka #1
  - Pallavi
  - Padam #1
    - Hero "speaks"

- Sloka #2
  - Pallavi
  - Padam #2
    - Heroine "speaks"

- Padam #3
  - Caranam
  - Padam #3
    - Hero "responds"

- Sloka #3
  - Pallavi
  - Padam #4
    - Hero "speaks"

- Padam #5
  - Heroine "responds"

- Sloka #4
  - Pallavi
  - Padam #6
    - Attam
    - (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. While ślokas are performed without the constraints of rhetorical 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 kalāsams, the dance compositions which punctuated the stanzas of a padam, āttam (also known by the longer name of ilakiyattam); and longer pieces of set choreography such as preparations for battle, a battle itself, or the female sari entrance dance. Generally, kalāsams are Kathakali’s pure dance (nritta) patterns which are performed at the conclusion of each of a padam’s sections (including the pallavi, anupallavi, and caranams), 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 (taniṭṭāttam) acted by certain character types (katti and tali) after their entrance. These āttam allow the character 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 āttam 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 ajagarakabolattam, performed in the play Kalyanasugamhodhikam. 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, kalāsams, 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 kalāsams 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 kāṭṭi, or “knife” type of character (one who possesses both a streak of nobility and yet is arrogant and evil). In this case the main kāṭṭi 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 kāṭlä. The earlier discussion of speed mentioned three typical speeds: slow, medium, and fast. Patina kāṭlä 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 ornām kāṭlä) and might best be thought of as super slow. The acting of such scene is even referred to as patinaṭṭām, 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.

<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>hear</td>
<td>jewel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mania</th>
<th>seeala</th>
<th>ketal</th>
<th>lurn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(one possessing implant) noble</td>
<td>mannered</td>
<td>listen</td>
<td>please</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tāla</th>
<th>Vocalist singe</th>
<th>(# = photograph placement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle #1</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>Maninimar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle #2</td>
<td>4 5 6</td>
<td>mauli ratnane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle #3</td>
<td>7 8</td>
<td>maniascola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle #4</td>
<td>9 10 11</td>
<td>ketallum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elapsed time</td>
<td>Description of actor's performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>Looks at the face of the heroine through the use of facial gestures which elaborate on erotic (śrṅgāra) 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>
<td></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>
<td></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>
<td></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 tāko 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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the line. The accompanying photographs illustrate the
approximate place in the vocalist’s delivery of the
tongue 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
Prahładā 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 implicit-
ly 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 asso-
ciated 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 the line of Prahładā
Caritam is not a straightforward acting of the meaning
of the line, it illustrates vividly how important the sub-
text 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 (mu-
ḍrās) required to interpret and convey the meaning
of this portion of the line. In this second delivery of the
line, the actor literally mimes each individual word of
the text, “speaking with his hands,” while the vocal-
ists “speak” the dialogue through song. The per-
formance of any particular muḍrā varies in the
amount of time required to perform the complete sys-
tem of gestures. Some muḍrās can be, and usually
are, performed in a relatively limited amount of space
and time; other larger, more complex muḍrās 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 muḍrā is performed. The
same muḍrā, 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 Prahładā
Caritam, set in a very slow tempo, the actor takes
the maximum amount of time to perform each muḍrā.
The slow action accentuates the mood of the erotic, the
absorption of the imagery, and the creation of an erot-
ic ambiance for the amorous exchange between hus-
band and wife.

We have seen that in the first delivery of the line it
takes only one complete tāla cycle to perform “mani-
nimar,” another for “mauli ratname,” and so forth. In
second delivery of the line the text temporarily does
not move forward but is simply repeated while the ac-
tor physically mimes/expresses the muḍrās which di-
rectly 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 sing-
ing. 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 seg-
ment 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 photo-
graphs, which show the actor’s physicalization of the
gesture language “talking” 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 Kayali’s character and
beauty. This part of the acting of the line is a descrip-
tion 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 ap-
proximately six minutes. In this six minutes, the musi-
cians, vocalists, and actors have collectively cre-
ated 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 Prahładā, follows a
linear chronology, as one event unfolds into another,
then another, and so on. The conventionalized open-
ing katti love scene is certainly peripheral to the main
events in Prahładā’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 ślokas 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 ślokas, 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 tāla controlling the rhythm and pace of the padam performance. Within the basic tāla 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 tāla cycles according to the duration of vocalization. The elaboration here consists of a double form of repetition around the baseline padam. (1) The tāla cycles themselves are repetitions of set patterns; and (2) the repetitions of the specific tāla 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 lip dissolves.6

While the musicians and singers are circumambulating around the baseline of this padam guided by the cycles of tāla, 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 mudrās 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 śloka, 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 ślokas as of padas; therefore there is not the same inherent cyclical repetitive pattern. The words of a śloka are only repeated once by the vocalists. The dance/acting units are direct interpretations and elaborations of the text. The kalaśams 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 tāla 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 tāla 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 tāla cycle to another. The moments of final
### Performance Chart 2: Second Delivery of Prahlāda Garitam Line

#### Tāta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle #1</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>manimāra</td>
<td>Frame 13</td>
<td>Frame 14</td>
<td>Frame 15</td>
<td>Frame 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle #2</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>manimāra</td>
<td>Frame 18</td>
<td>Frame 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle #1</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mauli</td>
<td>Frame 21</td>
<td>Frame 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle #2</th>
<th>24 (a,b)</th>
<th>25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mauli</td>
<td>Frame 24a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>|               | Frame 26 |       |</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>The actor shows the mudrā for beautiful lady. The single mudrā, “beautiful lady,” actually consists of a series of gestures. It takes one full cycle of tāla for the actor to perform this mudrā sequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>Now the actor shows the plural ending, i.e., “... icon” and thus catches up with his gestural telling of the full meaning of the word, “maninimar.” This plural ending also takes the full cycle to perform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–45 seconds</td>
<td>In the course of the performance of “mauli ratname,” the actor takes three mudrās to perform the text. The three mudrās are spread over the two cycles allotted to the singing of “mauli ratname,” as noted in the accompanying photographic plates. The first mudrā performed is “head,” which the actor shows literally (frames 21–22). The mudrā for head takes a relatively short time to perform. The actor performs the mudrā for head during only the first half of the first cycle, or 16 mātras. The second mudra the actor performs is “ratna” (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).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 ratname</td>
<td>The last half of this second cycle is given over to the performance of the third mudrā 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 singer in the performance of all three mudrās for “mauli ratname.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Chart 2, continued

Cycle #1

27  28  29

Frame 27
Frame 28
Frame 29

m a n i a s e e l a

Cycle #2

30  31  32  33  34  35

Frame 30
Frame 31
Frame 32
Frame 33

m a n i a s e e l a

Cycle #1

36  37  38

Frame 36
Frame 37
Frame 38

k e t a l l u m

Cycle #2

39  40  41  42  43  44

Frame 39
Frame 40
Frame 41
Frame 42

k e t a l l u m
“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. “Eclee” (mannered) takes the first half, or 16 mātras, of the cycle (frames 30–32). The second half of the cycle is again divided into halves. The first 8 mātras are given to performance of “one who possesses” (frame 33), while the last 8 mātras are taken to perform, “Oh, you” (frames 34–35).

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

The last three quarters of this cycle are taken to perform “Lum” (plCAC listen) (frames 41–44).
Diagram 4: Performance of One Line of a Kathakali Padam
Example: First line from Prahlada Caritam

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 kalāśams, 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 Prahlada 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 padas, is first and foremost a direct reflection of the classical aesthetic tradition of India. The savoring of each moment of performance is the classical audience goal. There are no sudden and unexpected flashes of emotion but rather the slow unfolding of each moment in the dramatic enactment, which allows the spectator to attain the tasting of the various sentiments (rasas). In our example from Prabhāda Caritam, Part I of the performance of the line allows the spectator time to savor the actor's projected passion (his subtext), and Part II allows him to enjoy the erotic (śṛṅgāra), presented in this context as a description and appreciation of feminine beauty.

Kathakali's traditional all-night duration, from dusk until dawn, provides both performers and audience the time necessary to accomplish and realize the aesthetic goal of the performance.

In addition to serving the function of aesthetic elaboration 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 notion 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 destroyed, 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 agoos of the world and of the cosmic 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 Kathakali (Diagram 2). The dusk-dawn duration is the most obvious direct reflection of the cyclical movement 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 representative 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 tautological, let us look more closely at the internal structure of the performance. 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 repetitive structure of the internal ordering of the performance score may be a further reflection of this Indian time concept. The most obvious structural 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 slokas). It is in the dynamic situation of performance itself that the importance of such a cyclical structure is revealed. The cyclical, repetitive structure is obviously predictable, and it is its predictability which connoisseurs and music lovers enjoy. The audience is musically 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 audience-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, advancing action of the story/text while cycles are marked. Even in the performance of sections of pdas, the moments of close congruence between audience, actor/dancers, and musicians are those at the junctures between tāla cycles. There is an artistic as well as an experiential sense of completion, consumption, return, and then continuance as the performance score progresses to its next phase. The performance of pdas, then, is simultaneously repetitive/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 āṭṭam—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 core to the "through line" of the text. Using "maninimar mauiri ratname maniaiseela 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," "mauiri ratname," "maniaiseela," 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 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 Kathākali performance. At the heart of a Kathākali 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 Kathākali 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 Kathākali 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 audience members 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 pailavī (refrain), anupālavi (subrefrain), and caṇğamis (literally "foot"). While the anupālavi may be omitted, there are usually multiple caṇğamis. However, except for determining its total length, these compositional variations do not affect the performance of a padam.


4. For a full explanation of "acted" slokas, including specific examples from Kathākali repertoire, see the author's forthcoming book The Kathākali Complex: Actor, Performance, Structure (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1983).

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


Acknowledgments

A first version of this article was presented as a paper at the Ninth Annual Wisconsin Conference on South Asia, 1980. Its present form is a condensation of one section of the forthcoming book The Kathākali Complex: Actor, Performance, Structure (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1983). M. P. Sankaran Namboodiri offered invaluable assistance with translation and performance in preparation of this article. Thanks are also due Joan Erdman, Farley Richmond, and especially James Brandon for comments which improved it.