



1983

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

Phillip Zarrilli

Recommended Citation

Zarrilli, P. (1983). A Microanalysis of Performance Structure and Time in Kathakali Dance-Drama. 9 (3), 50-69. Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol9/iss3/5>

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*, *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, 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.

Phillip Zarrilli is Director of the Asian/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 Neff, 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 closet 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.

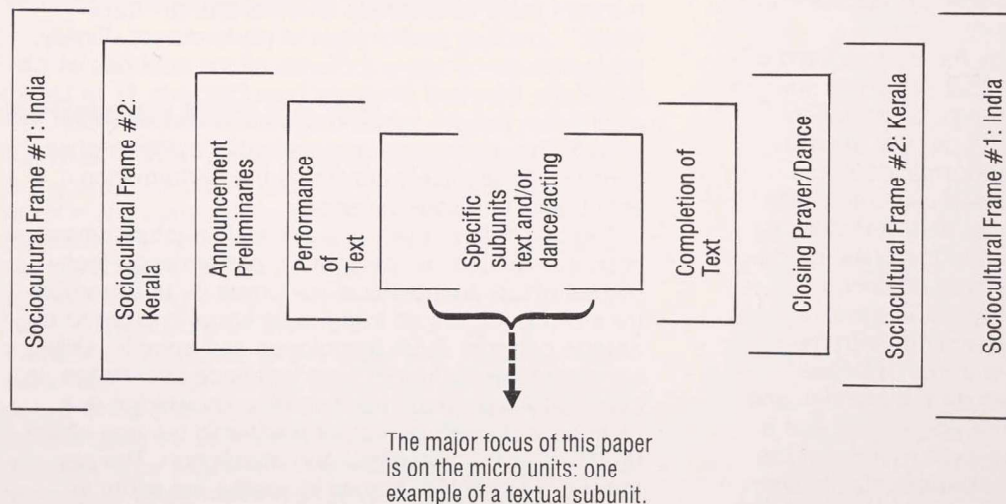
Kathakali's performance score is made up of a series of interlocking units, each of which is governed by its own set of specific performance conventions. At the most general level the largest units of a complete performance can be divided into four major groups: (1) announcement of performance (*kēlikottu*), (2) preliminaries, (3) performance of the text and (4) closing prayer/dance (*Dhanāśi*). (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.)



speak or sing the text; rather, the onstage vocalists sing the entire text. The actor/dancer presents his role in a threefold manner by (1) acting the character, (2) "speaking" the dialogue through the use of a highly codified system of hand gestures (*mudrās*), and (3) dancing both pure and interpretive choreography set for each role. The musicians who play the various percussion instruments provide the basic rhythmic framework accompanying each unit and subunit of performance. Taken together, then, the vocalists, percussionists, and actor/dancers create a truly collaborative art in which the skills and energies of all artists must be joined as one to create an outstanding performance.

Textual Subunits

The first subunit of the text is the *śloka*. *Ślokas* are metrical verses 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 (<i>kējikottu</i>). The cue to the village/environs that a <i>Kathakali</i> performance will take place that evening; a percussion announcement with two drums (<i>maddalam</i> and <i>ceṅṭa</i>).
8:00 p.m.	Preliminaries <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Lighting of bronze oil lamp (<i>kali vilakku</i>). 2 Percussion interludes (on lighting of the oil lamp the <i>maddalam</i>, accompanied by the cymbals, plays the <i>śuddha maddalam</i>, which in turn is followed by drumming on the <i>ceṅṭa</i> called the <i>aranu keli</i>). 3 Dancing of pure dance segment (<i>tōṭayam</i>) behind the hand-held curtain. 4 Singing of prayers (<i>vandana ślokas</i>). 5 Dancing of <i>purappaṭu</i> ("going forth"), or pure dance segment. 6 Vocalists and percussionists in a long composition (<i>Mēlappadam</i>). (Vocal portion lasts about 45 minutes to one hour with the singing of <i>aṣṭapadis</i> from Jayadeva's <i>Gita Govinda</i>. 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 (<i>Dhanāśi</i>). 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 *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 *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 rhythmical patterns with set formulas of timemarking 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 *campaṭa* (eight time units or *mātras*), *campa* (ten units), *aṭanta* (fourteen units), *pancāri* (six units), *tripuṭa* (seven units), and *muriya-tanta* (half *aṭanta* or seven). *Campaṭa tāla*, for exam-

ple, 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 *nunnam 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 (*sr̥ṅgāra*), 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

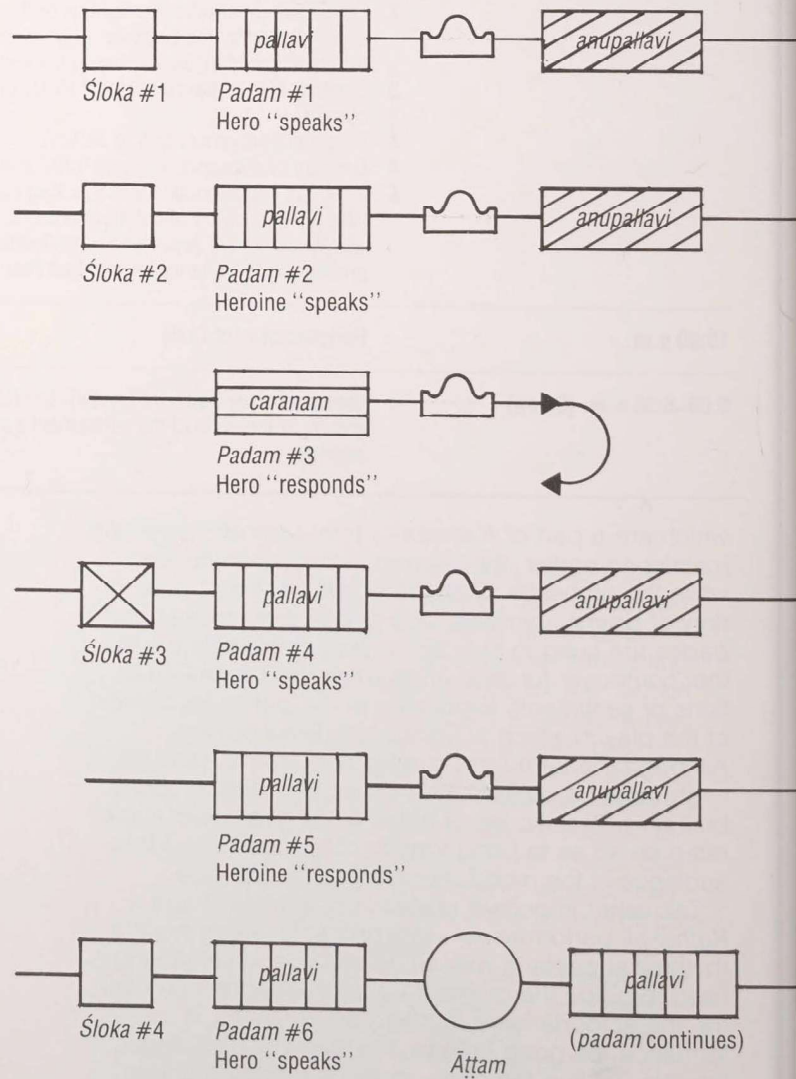
Diagram 3: Schematic Diagram of Typical Kathakali Structure

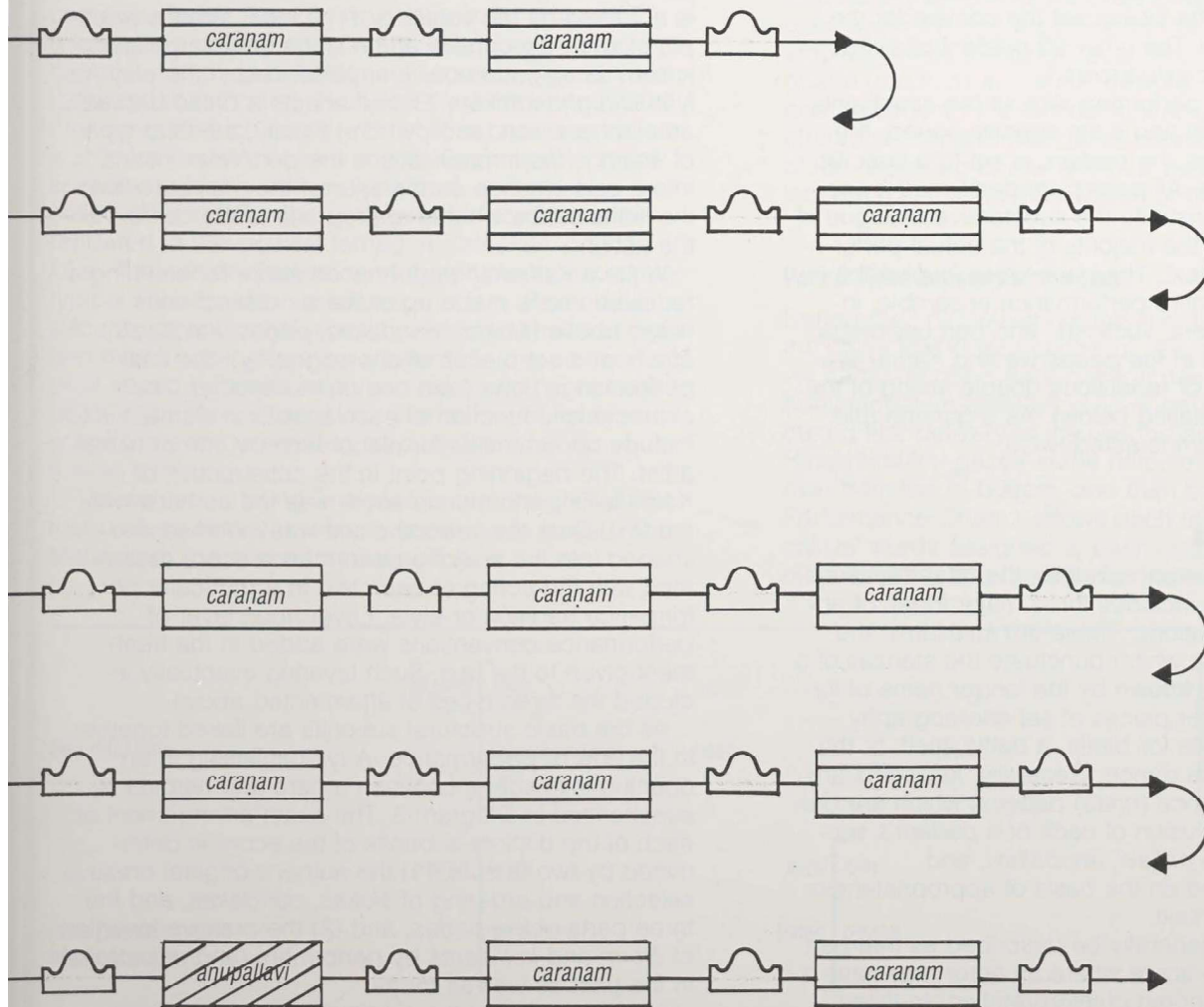
Note: This diagram merely illustrates the typical linkage among textual and acting/dance subunits which comprise the performance score. It does not attempt to illustrate the dynamic structure or interrelationship of the units. *Dandakas* are not included in the key and scene layout since they serve the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

Key:

-  regular unacted *śloka* (narrative)
-  acted *śloka* (narrative)
-  *padam* (dialogue)
-  *pallavi* (refrain)
-  *anupallavi* (subrefrain)
-  *caranam* (foot)
-  *kalāśam* (punctuating dance)
-  *āṭṭam* (interpolation)
-  set choreography (like a battle, sāri dance, etc.)

A Typical Two-Character Scene





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.⁴

While *ślokas* are performed without the constraints of rhythmical 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 punctuate the stanzas of a *padam*; *āṭṭam* (also known by the longer name of *ilakiyāṭṭam*); and longer pieces of set choreography such as preparations for battle, a battle itself, or the female *sāri* entrance dance. Generally, *kalāsams* are *Kathakali's* pure dance (*nṛtta*) 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 *āṭṭam* 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 (*mudrās*), 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 *āṭṭam*. One is a form of set soliloquy (*tantētāṭṭam*) acted by certain character types (*kattī* and *tāṭī*) after their entrance. These *āṭṭam* 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 *āṭṭam*, best called a descriptive *āṭṭam*, is a set interpolation which expands on a particular portion of the story of the received text. Descriptive *āṭṭam* 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 *āṭṭam* is the set interpolation known as *ajagarakalītam*, performed in the play *Kalyānaśaughandhikam*. Bhīma enacts a battle between an elephant, lion, and python.) Finally, the third type of *āṭṭam* 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*, *āṭṭam*, 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 *āṭṭam* 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 *āṭṭam* 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 *Bhāgavata Purāna*. 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 *katti*, or "knife" type of character (one who possesses both a streak of nobility and yet is arrogant and evil). In this case the main *katti* 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*: *patiṇa 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 *patiṇāṭṭam*, 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 *patiṇa campāṭa tāla*.⁵ 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

Beautiful lady	<i>Manini</i> [<i>mar</i> (plural ending) -ies]	<i>mauli</i> head	<i>ratna</i> [<i>me</i> vocative case ending showing direct address]
(one possessing implied) noble	<i>mania</i> [<i>seela</i> mannered]	<i>ketal</i> [<i>lum</i> listen] [<i>please</i>]	
<p>"Oh jewel among beautiful ladies; oh, noble mannered one, please listen."</p>			

Performance Chart 1: First Delivery of *Prahlāda Caritam* Line

Tāla
Vocalist sings
 (# = photograph placement)

Cycle #1

 1 2 3
 Manimar


Frame 1



Frame 2



Frame 3

Cycle #2

 4 5 6
 mauliratname


Frame 4



Frame 5



Frame 6

Cycle #3

 7 8
 maniaaseela


Frame 7



Frame 8

Cycle #4

 9 10 11
 ketallum


Frame 9



Frame 10



Frame 11

Elapsed time

Description of actor's performance

30–45
seconds

Looks at the face of the heroine through the use of facial gestures which elaborate on erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) *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.

30–45
seconds

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.

30–45
seconds

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 feet.

[12]
30–45
seconds

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 "neutral" position between the first and second delivery of the line.



Frame 12

the line. The accompanying photographs illustrate the approximate place in the vocalists' 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 mimes 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 "maninimar," 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 actor physically mimes/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 Kayati'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 sets 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 actors 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 *katti* 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 *purāṇas*, *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 *āṭṭam* 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*, *dandakas*, 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 lap 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 *bhāva* 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, closely 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 *kalāśams* are straightforward punctuating, decorative dance patterns, while the *āṭṭams*, 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 Caritam* Line

Tāla

Vocalist sings

Cycle #1

 13 14 15 16 17
 m a n i n i m a r


Frame 13



Frame 14



Frame 15



Frame 16

Cycle #2

 18 19 20
 m a n i n i m a r


Frame 18



Frame 19



Frame 20

Cycle #1

 21 22 23
 m a u l i r a t n a m e


Frame 21



Frame 22



Frame 23

Cycle #2

 24 (a,b) 25
 m a u l i


Frame 24a



Frame 24b



Frame 25



Frame 26

Elapsed
time

Description of actor's performance

30–45
seconds

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.



Frame 17

30–45
seconds

Now the actor shows the plural ending, i.e., ". . . ies" 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.

30–45
seconds

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 *mudrā* the actor performs is "ratna" (jewel). This *mudrā* 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).

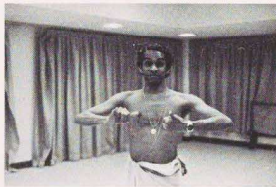
26
r a t n a m e

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 singers in the performance of all three *mudrās* for "mauli ratname."

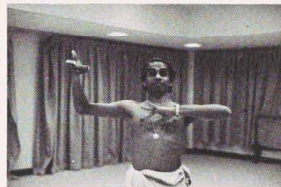
Performance Chart 2, continued

Cycle #1

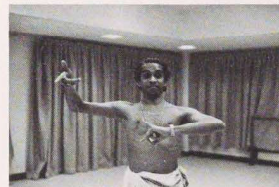
27 28 29
m a n i a s e e l a



Frame 27



Frame 28



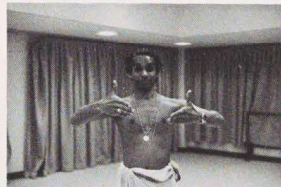
Frame 29

Cycle #2

30 31 32 33 34 35
m a n i a s e e l a



Frame 30



Frame 31



Frame 32



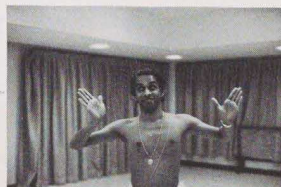
Frame 33

Cycle #1

36 37 38
k e t a l l u m



Frame 36



Frame 37



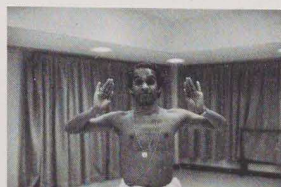
Frame 38

Cycle #2

39 40 41 42 43 44
k e t a l l u m



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*. “Seela” (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).



Frame 34



Frame 35

30–45
seconds

“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).

30–45
seconds

The last three quarters of this cycle are taken to perform “lum” (please listen) (frames 41–44).

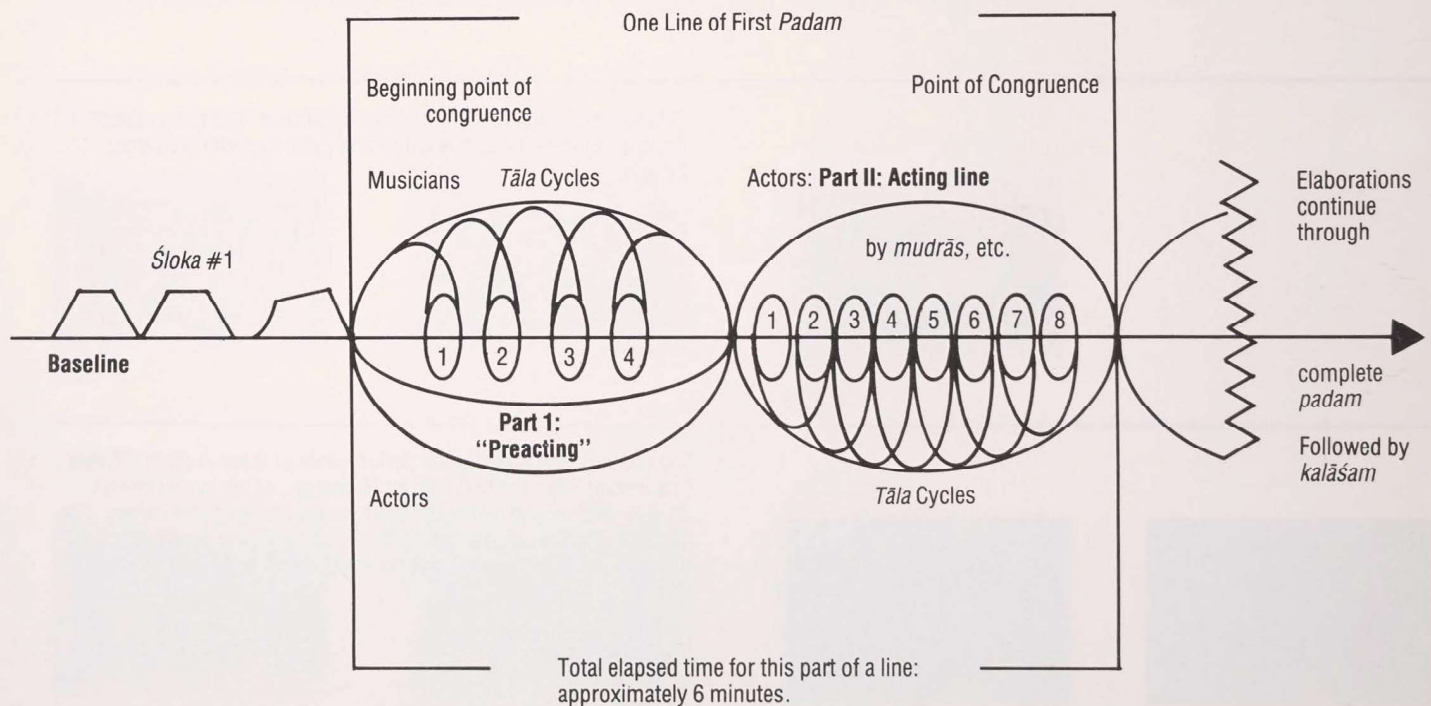


Frame 43



Frame 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*, *āṭṭam*, 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 *Prahlāda* 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 *āṭṭams* 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 *ślokas*, etc.), have all been designed and refined over the years as self-conscious challenges to the artist's skill. It is precisely these 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 *Prahāda 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 ages 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.

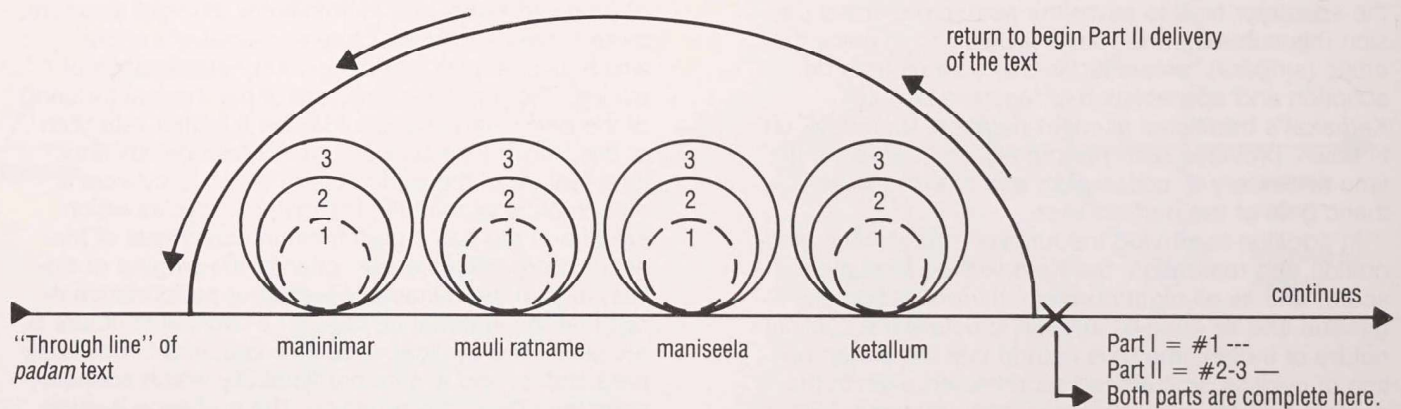
Lest these arguments seem tendentious, let us look more closely at the internal structure of the performance. Beyond the more general level of the content of *Kathakali* plays and its traditional all-night structure, there is the internal structure of *Kathakali's* score, which also reflects this deeply imbedded notion of cycles. 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 *ślokas*). 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 *padas*, 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, consummation, return, and then continuance as the performance score progresses to its next phase. The performance of *padas*, 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.

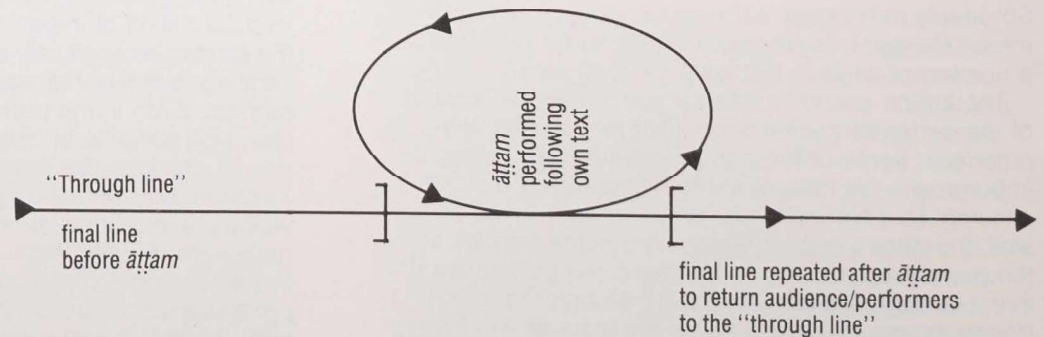
Although beyond the scope of this paper, there are other examples within the performance structure itself of how *Kathakali's* score reflects the Indian notion of cyclical time and movement. When interpolations such as long descriptive *āṭṭam* are added, they are often demarcated from the "through line" 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 score to the "through line" of the text. Using "maninimar mauli ratname maniaseela 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," "maniaseela," 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 *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.

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 Kathakali 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.

Notes

- 1 Some contemporary performances may intentionally attempt to blur such distinctions or to enact an event without indicating to unsuspecting audience/observers 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 *pallavi* (refrain), *anupallavi* (subrefrain), and *caraṇams* (literally "foot"). While the *anupallavi* may be omitted, there are usually multiple *caraṇams*. However, except for determining its total length, these compositional variations do not affect the performance of a *padam*.
- 3 The *Kathakali* vocal style is known as *sopana*. One of the few studies of the *sopana* style is by Leela Omchery, "The Music of Kerala—A Study," *Sangeet Natak* 14, (1969), pp. 12–24.
- 4 For a full explanation of "acted" *ślokas*, including specific examples from *Kathakali* repertory, see the author's forthcoming book, *The Kathakali Complex: Actor, Performance, Structure* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1983).
- 5 *Paṭiṇa campāṭa tāla* consists of thirty-two measured units (*mātras*), which is a joining of four sets of the eight-unit *campāṭa tāla*. The linking of four regular *campāṭa* 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.
- 7 "Time and Eternity in Indian Thought," *Papers from the Eranos Year Books*, Bollingen Series XXX (3) 1957, pp. 172–200, p. 185.