

Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rārag Performance by

Martin Clayton

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Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance, by Martin Clayton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. xx, 230 pp., musical examples, notes, bibliography, discography, index, compact disk with 39 selections. ISBN 0-19-816686-9.

This remarkable book delves deeply, systematically, and with extraordinary clarity into temporal theory and practice in North Indian classical music (especially khyal, dhrupad, and instrumental forms), arriving at insights relevant not only to the study of Indian music, but also to the cross-cultural study of rhythm and meter. Clayton engages with music theoretical debates on the nature of "meter" and "rhythm," using Kolinski's representation of meter as a "background for rhythm," Lerdahl and Jackendoff's idea of meter as "interacting pulse streams", and Justin London's provision for unequal pulse durations. Clayton's broad goal is to show that it is "possible to develop a theory of musical metre with crosscultural applicability" (202). While sensitive to the subtleties with which both the Western and Indian terms are actually used, he justifies his separation of "meter" from "rhythm" on the basis of the Hindustani distinction between tāl and laykārī. The work maintains a tension throughout between the idea that meter is abstract and inferred by the listener, and the idea that tāl—which is concrete and unambiguous—is a kind of meter. This is resolved at the conclusion, however, where tāl is cast both as something that exhibits metric qualities, and as something broader, including features not found in other "metric" systems.

Chapter one introduces the work with a charmingly impressionistic description of a rag performance, meant to direct the reader's focus towards the importance of analyzing Indian music as a process in time. Chapter two considers the cultural implications of musical time. Clayton focuses on the historical importance in religious ritual of time measurement and argues (citing Rowell 1988a) that this is the basis for "the perceived necessity for accurate and unambiguous time measurement in music" (Clayton, 11). He also examines the frequently cited "cyclicity" of Indian music and the rather facile way it is represented in connection with Hindu cosmology (again, citing Rowell 1988b; 1992), noting that the Indian tāl system was not originally cyclical. Historically, Indian tāl evolved into a cyclical system, rather than existing as one from time immemorial. He cites Rowell's Bourdieu-esque "mutual feedback" theory of cosmology and music and speculates that Sufi philosophy influenced the later Indian idea that performance should represent cyclic time. Finally, he argues that differences between Western and Indian meter do not depend on cyclicity; rather, the differences lie in the preoccupations of theorists describing these principles and the metaphors they employ.

Chapter three considers general theories of rhythm and meter. In addition to the theories mentioned above, Clayton reconsiders Sachs's famous distinction between additive and divisive rhythms and questions the common association of the former with Indian music and the latter with Western music. He argues here and returns later to the idea that Indian music should be viewed rather as a set of transformations or variations of patterns. He also draws on Bamberger's idea of rhythm as figurative, from which elements of stress and duration may both be perceived to create a sense of whole patterns. Finally, Clayton draws on psychological research to make statements about how humans perceive music on macro levels, or Gestalts, and in small units. Using the idea of the "perceptual present," estimated to be 2-3 seconds, he argues that short tāl cycles can be perceived metrically, while longer ones cannot (although periods within the tāl can be perceived locally as metric).

Chapter four outlines Indian $t\bar{a}l$ theory and provides insight into some of the more fascinating and challenging aspects of Hindustānii practice, both with respect to $t\bar{a}l$ theory and with respect to theories of meter in the West. He points out two tendencies in Hindustāni rhythmic practice. The first conforms to theoretical norms to an extent: this "syllabic model" of $t\bar{a}l$ calls for systematic subdivision of the $t\bar{a}l$ by the singer or instrumentalist, each articulation falling in a precise mathematical relation to the primary divisions of the $t\bar{a}l$ structure. In this model, the $t\bar{a}l$ itself never changes speed; the effect of acceleration and deceleration is accomplished through mathematical increase or decrease in surface density. In actuality, Hindustāni music does change tempo;

Clayton hastens to point out that Indian theory does not account for this. The second model is "melismatic." This is a historically recent style. fostered by the slowing down of the tāl considerably and superimposing seemingly free-rhythmic explorations of the rāg atop the tāl structure. The means for orientation in this style is through seizing upon moments in time that Clayton calls "articulation points," where a syllable or stroke must fall in a particular position within the tāl. This phenomenon has been described by authors such as Wade (1979, 173) and Powers (1986, 701-702) but never theorized as such. South Indian classical practice provides for a similar distinction: I have heard the "melismatic" style referred to as pada style (drawing on the free-rhythmic style of padams), and the 'syllabic" as varna style (drawing on the articulation of tala subdivisions characteristic of concert varnams). Even some non-classical music, such as that of Nilgiri Hill tribals, evidence a style similar to the "melismatic" one Clayton describes, at least in its broad outlines (Wolf 2000/2001, 24). I have described Clayton's "articulation points" elsewhere as "anchor points," with regard to Kota music (Wolf 2000).

Clayton considers $t\bar{a}l$ as both a form of time measurement (marked by hand gestures) and as a qualitative structure (articulated through the $thek\bar{a}$). Ultimately he adopts a hybrid model of $t\bar{a}l$ that accounts for both, viewing them as historically independent systems that have mutually interacted. This interaction has led to a lack of uniformity in the way $thek\bar{a}$ patterns correspond to cheironomic (i.e. hand gestural) ones with respect to the placement of the $th\bar{a}l\bar{t}$ (empty) $t\bar{a}l$ position. Ultimately, Clayton arrives at a single model of $t\bar{a}l$ with adjustable variables, which "encompasses a metric hierarchy with both quantitative and qualitative (durational and accentual) characteristics, and an explicitly dual structure in which surface rhythm overlays that metric pattern" (55).

Chapter five continues to explore these issues, examining types of *thekā* accentual patterns, the history of clap patterns and the relationship between clap patterns and the *thekā*, and the musical features that lend the listener a sense of cyclicity.

Chapter six explains the concept of *lay* in Indian music and its variable application to tempo and rhythmic density. He points out the disjunction between perceived pulsation and the current concept of *mātra* as a primary subdivision of *tāl* in theory. Using studies of perception combined with what appears to be the original meaning of *mātra*, Clayton establishes the idea of "effective pulse rate" in order to discuss tempo systematically. This allows Clayton to measure, graph, and compare *lay* in different Hindustāni performances. The scientific application of measurement here, and throughout the work, is not gratuitous: here Clayton is able to graphically illustrate just where and how changes in tempo occur in performance.

Chapter seven examines different parts of a Hindustani musical performance. The introductory exploration of the rag, called alap is generally described as free in rhythm. Clayton suggests, in accord with Widdess (1994), that even so-called free rhythm may conceal a pulse. Similarly, he notes that the jor section that follows, usually described as pulsed but unmetered, is in fact metered (though it is sometimes inconsistent, and therefore also concealed), even though it is not situated within the framework of a particular tāl. Drums accompany jor in some styles (the same is the case, incidentally, for tānam in south India). The evasive quality of meter in these examples leads Clayton to be "less satisfied with the question 'what is the metre of this piece of music?', and more prepared to ask 'how (and why) does this piece of music manipulate listeners' dispositions to recognize certain kinds of metrical patterns in music?" He suggests that pulse is disguised in alap to draw the listener's attention to the melodic dimension. His reasoning in regards to why meter is obscured in jor is less clear.

Chapter eight explores vocal and instrumental compositions (bandis), their histories, and relationships to one another. He points out relationships of the composition's structure to the tāl structure, styles in which compositional structure is "contrametric," verse and musical meter relationships, and the differences between melismatic and syllabic style bandis-es. He interestingly accounts for some anomalous tāl-to-verse relationships by suggesting that in some cases a typical verse meter may have influenced musical meter, but that musical meter may later have been used to accompany verses in yet a different meter.

Chapter nine continues discussion of performance structure in time by considering development techniques applied in the "post-bandis' phase." He again draws upon the syllabic-melismatic distinction here, showing also that these categories sometimes overlap and influence one another. In the syllabic mode, musicians must calculate relationships between surface rhythm and $t\bar{a}l$ In the melismatic mode, musicians must maintain a sense of free-rhythm in spite of the $t\bar{a}l$, and then smoothly transition into and away from the $mukhr\bar{a}$ (anacrusis).

Chapter ten considers techniques of rhythmic variation, and how vocal and instrumental models for such variation differ; many such techniques have been borrowed from South Indian practice.

Chapter eleven is a case study of the instrumentalist Deepak Choudhury's repertoire. Here Clayton's goal is not only "to characterize a specific repertoire . . . in terms of its rhythmic parameters" but also to illuminate central issues such as "the development of Hindustāni music and the relationships between the various genres and styles" (179). He

examines the oft-asserted claim that an instrumental style is of the gāyakī ang, that is, closely adhering to a vocal model. This assertion is an ideological one, driven by the high status accorded vocal music in India. Clayton is masterfully able to analyze Choudhury's performances with respect to specific rhythmic techniques and conclude that although very rough analogies can be drawn between the instrumental and vocal styles (influence is clear in large scale organization), the notion that Choudhury's style is "vocal" on any deep level is misguided. In the course of analysis, Clayton turns up a number of interesting issues of mutual influence from several sources and shows just how complex and crossfertilized a Hindustāni musical performance can be.

Clayton concludes in chapter twelve with six statements on musical meter that he introduced at the beginning of the book and discusses them in relation to Indian music, pointing towards a crosscultural perspective on rhythm and meter.

The writing in this book is refined, distilled, and extremely clear. The many figures, notations, and graphs are meticulously arranged and accurate (except the alignment of ex. 10.11). The editing and diacritics are superb. If I were to find any fault with the work, I would admit to a quibble with the implication (and not only by Clayton) that it is possible and desirable to establish a lexicon of analytic terms (such as meter) that can be used to describe or ask questions about all the world's musics. The idea that "meter" is something "out there" (even if subjectively so) ultimately produces a reification which I, as an ethnomusicologist, am uncomfortable with. As I mentioned at the outset, a tension pervades this book: namely, does Clayton think that tāl is meter? I have always emphasized the difference between meter and tāl to my students because it is simply too tempting for those who have not taken the trouble to learn a musical system in its own terms to naively apply their intuitions to a new music. If "meter" is inferred by the listener it is in this way intuitive. Where do we register cultural difference in our theories of perception? That is to say, whose intuitions do we rely upon to construct "meter" in our analyses and how do we access such intuitions? In the end (and this is why I call my response a quibble), I agree with Clayton's subtle treatment of tāl in relation to metric theory, although I see no reason why his view could not have been made clear from the outset.

A second, somewhat problematic matter concerns what Clayton refers to as "representation" of the $t\bar{a}l$ —the idea that $t\bar{a}l$, like meter, is not heard directly. But in a sense it is. Again, this issue is revisited towards the end when Clayton writes "a $thek\bar{a}$ is a rhythmic pattern used to represent or signify a $t\bar{a}l$ (and hence a metre)—since it performs this function, it comes to be identified with the $t\bar{a}l$. Thus what signifies $t\bar{a}l$ comes to embody $t\bar{a}l$. . ." (p. 202). Important here is that a $thek\bar{a}$ is a qualitative

embodiment of the $t\bar{a}l$ (with differently sounding drum strokes). Although Clayton deals with "quality" as a representation of $t\bar{a}l$, he doesn't until this final chapter consider what it means to embody a $t\bar{a}l$. A whole branch of phenomenological time theory, deriving from Henri Bergson and developed further by Hubert (Munn 1992, 95), focuses on how time is not only quantitative, but also qualitative, in which duration is given content through the nature of activities which compose it. It seems to me that 1) the "melismatic style" Clayton describes and 2) thekā (and for that matter, $lahr\bar{a}$) as a qualitative embodiment of $t\bar{a}l$ (the $thek\bar{a}$'s historicity notwithstanding) are phenomena of general significance that present missed opportunities for time-theoretical consideration. These qualities, as qualities, cannot "represent" meter, they rather give presence, life, and definition to a $t\bar{a}l$ in performance. Quality is one of the components of $t\bar{a}l$ that make it a broader concept than meter.

Neither of my reservations affects the overall quality, accuracy, or usefulness of what Clayton does accomplish in this brilliant book. Time in Indian Music is destined to be a classic in ethnomusicology, Indian studies, and music theory. I recommend it to anyone interested in Indian music or rhythmic theory.

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