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From Form to Flourish: Crafting Kamāli Compositions Through Structural Precision

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Abstract

Kathak as India's most renowned classical dance, exists in the phenomenon of rich variability of compositions in rhythm that are deeply refined and beautifully articulated. Such compositions are the soul of Kathak presentations. One such variety is Chakradār Composition. When a composition is repeated thrice identically is referred to as Chakradār Composition. Further Chakradārs comprise more subtle and refined varieties in which we have a distinctive one - Kamāli. Kamāli compositions are the unique form of Chakradār which has a distinctiveness in placements of 'Dhā' on certain matrā within the Taal, which raises the quality of the composition and adds dimension of subtle complexity to the performance. Designing this complex composition with multiple structures in different Tāla-s is a daunting task that has stayed unexplored, requiring a deep insight into Tāla and Laya. Through this study, I intend to analyse the mathematical and rhythmic structure for designing steps for this complex composition in multiple Tāla-s that will enrich the traditional Kathak repertoire ultimately leading to focus on innovation rather than rote memorization. For carrying out this research work explanatory research method, mathematical modelling, ethnographic method, and phenomenology method were employed. Information and data had been gathered and analysed through reading various texts, watching various video archives, witnessing discussions, and attending shows of eminent artists. This research aims to explore the underlying mathematical and structural principles of Kamāli Chakradārs to promote an approach that emphasizes analysis, innovation, and informed improvisation, thus enriching both pedagogy and performance in the field of Kathak.

Key words - kamāli, chakradār, kathak, tāla, dhā

Introduction

Kathak, that traditional style of dance rooted in the storytelling traditions of North India, is a well-balanced synthesis of rhythm, expression, and narration. The essence of Kathak lies in varying types of compositions that are organized sequences which blend intricate footwork, expressive gestures, and rhythmic patterns. Among these are Chakradār Compositions, a type

especially prominent in Kathak, where a specific phrase or sequence of bols (syllables) is repeated three times identically to conclude precisely on the sam (the first and most emphasized beat of a taal cycle). The name "Chakradār" derived from Hindi word "chakra," meaning as "circle" or "cycle," reflecting the cyclical composition. This concept of Chakradār when presented as Tihāi, tukda, paran, and parmelu defines it as Chakradār Tihāi, Chakradār Tukda, Chakradār Paran and Chakradār Pramelu respectively. Of all the kinds of Chakradārs, the Kamāli Chakradār is a masterpiece of compositional craftsmanship that features deliberate intricacy and beautiful structural engineering. The term Kamāli has been derived from the Urdu term "kamāl" that denotes an extraordinary or a miraculous thing, symbolizing a rare and elegant representation of this genre. The Kamāli Chakradār has an intricate and complex mathematical structure along with technical position of syllable 'Dhā '. It involves three identical repetitions, each containing a Tihāi (rhythmic phrases repeated thrice) with 3 ‘Dhā-s’ in each repetition of the Tihāi, making in a total of 9 'Dhā-s' in each identical repetition of the Kamāli Chakradār composition. These 9 ‘Dhā-s’ in each repetition of Kamāli Chakradār are set in such a manner that the first 'Dhā' of the first repetition , the 5th 'Dhā' of the second repetition and the 9th 'Dhā' of the third repetition, all align perfectly with the 'Sam' (the first beat of the rhythmic cycle all align perfectly with the 'Sam' (the first beat of the rhythmic cycle This deliberate placement of the 'Dhā' syllables: leading to an intricate structure sets this composition apart. This complex structure of a Kamāli Chakradār requires a profound structural understanding beyond mere memorization of limited compositions. The objective of this research is to understand the structural framework, through which we can construct a step-wise formula to create new varieties. Such a systematic treatment not only assists in deep understanding the structure of available compositions but also creates avenues for innovation, enabling musicians to explore this principle imaginatively and creatively, instead of simply presenting what has been instructed.

Literature Review

The word Kamāli is a derivation from Urdu word ***Kamāl*** which suggests something extraordinary. ***(DEFINITIONS | Tabla Legacy, n.d.)***. This concept which became prevalent and flourished during the mughal period, was crafted to make the presentation more interesting and entertaining to the spectators, especially kings to gain their patronage. Also, as the tabla emerged and evolved as the primary percussion instrument in Hindustani music, especially during the Mughal and post-Mughal periods, compositional forms like Theka, Peshkar, Kayda, Rela, Tukda, and Chakradār became stylistic markers of various gharanas. Among these,

Chakradār compositions, with their cyclic, mathematically intricate structure, came to be seen as tests of a tabla player's precision, creativity, and mastery of rhythm. The concept of Kamāli Chakradār, developed as an advanced subset of the Chakradār compositions. Such compositions were often the hallmarks of master percussionists, passed down orally and considered intellectual property within gharanas. These compositions, renowned for their rhythmic brilliance and structural complexity, were originally crafted and performed on various Percussion instrument. Over time, these extraordinary compositions found their way into the realm of Kathak dance, where artists began to embody their rhythmic patterns through graceful movements and expressive gestures. Due to its intricate and mathematically rich structure, the composition, while immensely entertaining and intellectually stimulating, gradually became rare in Kathak performances. Its complexity demands not only rhythmic precision but also a deep aesthetic understanding, making it a challenging choice for many dancers. Also the transmission of Kamāli Chakradārs occurred via the guru-shishya parampara, with an emphasis on rote memorization and oral tradition which limited the scope for innovation in this form of composition. However, with the increasing academic interest in rhythm and the growing need for documentation, several scholars and performers have begun analysing these structures. Yet, most approaches still focus on archiving our existing material, rather than offering a methodical way to construct new Kamāli compositions. This gap underscores the need for a systematic framework that preserves the intellectual richness of the tradition while promoting innovation.

Various texts have explained the intricate structure of Kamāli Compositions. ***(Dadhichi, 2004)*** and ***(Mishra, 2019)*** After analysing them the main characteristics of the Kamāli Chakradār are as follows

1. It is generally crafted in five avaratana-s of a Tāla. An exception is that it can also be crafted in 7 āvaratana-s ***(Mishra, 2019)***
2. Each repetition has 9 Dhā-s, culminating as 27 Dhā-s in the whole composition.
3. Each repetition of the composition will have a Tihāi which will further have 3 identical repetitions of 3 Dhā-s
4. First 'Dhā' of the first repetition, the 5th 'Dhā' of the second repetition and the 9th 'Dhā' of the third repetition, all align perfectly with the 'Sam' (the first beat of the rhythmic cycle all align perfectly with the 'Sam'
5. There can be gaps in between the repetition or it can be Bedumdaar also a better understanding of the intricate structure of Kamāli compositions can be understood from an example stated below ***(Mirchandani, 2020)*** :-

DhāSnadhi Kiṭanage Nadhikiṭa Dhekkatā |
x
SnaDheg Gadigana Dhakidatakadhi KitadhāS |
2
TunSnāS KatSkidaṭaka TāSnatā Snakiṭataka |
0
TinStinS TinSnānā tetedhāS nadhāSna |
3
DhāSDhāS DhāStinS Nānātete dhāSnadhā |
x
SnadhāS DhāSdhāS TinSnānā TetedhāS |
2
NadhāSna DhāSDhāS DhāSSS DhāSnadhi |
0
Kiṭanage Nadhikiṭa Dhekkatā SnaDheg |
3
Gadigana Dhakidatakadhi KitadhāS TunSnāS |
x
KatSkidaṭaka TāSnatā Snakiṭataka TinStinS |
2
TinSnānā tetedhāS nadhāSna DhāSdhāS |
0
DhāStinS Nānātete dhāSnadhā SnadhāS |
3
DhāSdhāS TinSnānā TetedhāS NadhāSna |
x
DhāSDhāS DhāSSS DhāSnadhi Kiṭanage |
2
Nadhikiṭa Dhekkatā SnaDheg Gadigana |
0
Dhakidatakadhi KitadhāS TunSnāS KatSkidaṭaka |
3
TāSnatā Snakiṭataka TinStinS TinSnānā |
x

tetedhāS	nadhāSna	DhāSdhāS	DhāStinS	|
2				
Nānātete	dhāSnadhā	SnadhāS	DhāSdhāS	|
0				
TinSnānā	tetedhāS	nadhāSna	DhāSdhāS	|
3				
Dhā				
x				

The illustration above demonstrates that a Kamāli Chakradār Paran has a specific rhythmic phrase repeated identically three times, is composed of only three distinct sections in each repetition:

The first part (highlighted in yellow) consists of the main bol phrase, the second part (highlighted in grey) features the Tihāi, and the third part (highlighted in green) features the pause in between the repetitions, which concludes the composition. Further the part highlighted in turquoise shows the core concept of this Chakradār i.e. first ‘Dha' in the first repetition, the fifth 'Dha' in the second repetition, and the ninth 'Dha' in the third repetition all precisely landing on the Sam. ***(DigiTabla.com | a Guide to the North Indian Tabla, n.d.)***

For the present study, a comprehensive review of the various texts have been conducted to evaluate the knowledge and collect the authentic content along with illustrations relating to this Chakradār pieces. ***(Mishra, 2020)*** and ***(Mishra, 2022)***. Although the documented sources are informative, they principally relate to the fundamental informations only. This shows that there is still a wide gap which directs towards lack of a systematic approach, restricting the innovative creations in this form of Chakradār. This study attempts to fill that gap by presenting a systematic formula guiding in creating varied versions of the Chakradār composition in across various Tāla-s. This research not only enriches theoretical knowledge but also presents a working model that can be applied, and hence, adds to the artistic and pedagogic richness of the Kathak repertoire.

Methodology

This research is based on both Quantitave and Qualitative methods. For aiming to derive a structured formula which will guide in creating numerous Kamāli Chakradār compositions qualitative-analytical approach combined with theoretical modelling have been used.

A quantitative research approach was employed to collect a wide range of Kamāli Chakradār

compositions. An in-depth review of classical texts and scholarly literature was undertaken to comprehend the traditional structures and aesthetic principles underlying these compositions. In addition, compositions available in notated form, transmitted orally through the guru-shishya parampara, and documented in video archives were systematically gathered. Further Qualitative research has also been utilized to find out the traditional aspects associated with these Chakradār compositions like how such compositions were made previously or transmitted from generation to generation. Also, Ethnographic research has been carried out in order to understand how artists create and present these compositions and conclude on Sam while performing. A mathematical analysis was also conducted to examine key factors influencing the structure of specific Chakradār compositions, including mātrā count, repetition cycles, methods of arriving on sam, and bol patterns. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the internal framework for recognising the recurring structural patterns. Based on this analysis, systematic steps were formulated for constructing such compositions. Additionally, various permutations and combinations of bol phrases were explored, creating a path for the creation of diverse and innovative Chakradār variations.

Drawing from the analytical findings, a generalized formula was formulated to facilitate the systematic creation of Kamāli Chakradār compositions. Further for assessing its accuracy and efficiency, empirical testing was performed to create new compositions in various tāla-s. Then the newly created pieces were critically analysed and compared with the available compositions collected from text books, oral knowledge, and archival sources which not only revealed the unique structural characteristics of historical Kamāli compositions but also authenticated the newly created pieces. Finally, the process provided useful contributions and broadened the possibilities in the context of both Kamāli Chakradār works.

Result

For understanding the framework, we need to understand the intricate structure of the composition comprising of three parts

1. First part consists of combination of Patākshara-s that are ***repeated thrice identically*** to make it
   Chakradār composition but excluding bol phrases of part 2
2. Second part comprises of ***Tihāi*** in each repetition, consisting of three identical repetitions having 3
   ‘Dhā-s’ culminating 9 ‘Dhā-s’ in each repetition of the entire composition
3. ***Gap or pause*** in between the repetitions of First Part (1)

For better understanding of these parts the above-mentioned illustration of Kamāli Chakradār played by Pandit Kumar Bose ji (an eminent artist of Banaras Gharana) is taken into consideration. The parts mentioned below are of each repetition of this Kamāli Chakradār Composition.

First Part –

DhāSnadhi Kiṭanage Nadhikiṭa Dhekkatā SnaDheg Gadigana Dhakidatakadhi Kitadhā S TunSnāS KatSkidaṭaka TāSnatā Snakiṭataka TinStinS

Second Part

TinSnānā tetedhāS nadhāSna DhāSDhāSDhāS

TinSnānā tetedhāS nadhāSna DhāSDhāSDhāS

TinSnānā tetedhāS nadhāSna DhāSDhāSDhāS

Third Part

SSS

Stepwise Framework for Kamāli Compositions

After understanding the structural framework of this composition, the following systematic steps have been outlined to guide the construction of various Kamāli Chakradār compositions within a specific Tāla structure. For illustrative clarity, the example presented here is based on Teentāl in Chatusra Jāti.

Step 1:

Multiply the total number of Akshara-s (as per the chosen Jāti) with the number of mātrās in five āvartans of the selected Tāla.

Example: ***For Teentaal - 16 mātrās × 5 āvartans × 4 Akshara-s = 320 Akshara-s***

Step 2:

Add 1 Akshara to the result obtained in Step 1, which accounts for the final Sam.

Result: ***320 + 1 = 321 Akshara-s***

Step 3:

Subtract 27 from the result obtained in Step 1 for ***27 Dhā (9 Dhā-s from each repetitions)*** from the total. The duration of 'Dhā' can be extended by adding Avagrahas (S) as pause indicators following it, resulting in variations such as ***DhāS, DhāSS, or DhāSSS.*** However, it is important to note that this extension alters the total number of Akshara-s used in the sequence of 27 Dhā-s. For instance, using DhāS results in **53 Akshara-s** ***(26 Dhā-s + 26S + 27th Dhā)***, DhāSS

yields **79 Akshara-s** ***(26 Dhā-s + 52S + 27th Dhā)***, and **DhāSSS** expands the count to **105 Akshara-s** ***(26 Dhā-s + 78 S + 27th Dhā).***

Example: ***321 – 27 = 294 Akshara-s (27 Dhā-s)***

Step 4:

Subtract the number of Akshara-s you wish to keep as a gap (pause) in between the repetitions. Then divide the remaining Akshara-s by 3 to determine the length of each identical segment in the Chakradār.

Example: ***If 6 Akshara-s are used as gaps — 294 – 6 = 288; then 288 ÷ 3 = 96 Akshara-s per repetition***

Step 5:

Since in a Kamāli composition, the first 'Dhā' falls on the first mātrā of the second āvartan (Sam), subtract the number of Akshara-s in one āvartan of the selected Tāla from the result obtained in Step 4. Then, divide the remaining value by 2 to determine the number of Akshara-s in each sections of the Tihāi under identical repetitions of the compositions (**excluding Dhā-s because it is already substracted in step 3)**.

Example: ***96 Akshara-s per repetition – 64 Akshara-s (16 mātrās × 1 āvartans × 4 Akshara-s) = 32; then 32÷2 = 16 Akshara-s per repetition are there in part b*** (***excluding Dhā because it is already substracted in step 3)***.

Step 6:

Subtract the result got in Step 5 from total number of Akshara-s present in 1 avartan of a Tāla to get number of aksharas in each repetition of part (a)

Example:-***(16 mātrās × 1 āvartans × 4 Akshara-s) 64 Akshara-s – 16 Akshara-s = 48 Akshara-s***

Step 7:

Therefore, the structure of we got from the above steps is:-

Part 1 (***48 Akshara-s)*** + Part 2 (***16-16-16 Akshara-s)*** + (***9 Dhā-s)*** + Part 3 (***3 Akshara-s)***

Part 1 (***48 Akshara-s)*** + Part 2 (***16-16-16 Akshara-s)*** + (***9 Dhā-s)*** + Part 3 (***3 Akshara-s)***

Part 1 (***48 Akshara-s)*** + Part 2 (***16-16-16 Akshara-s)*** + (***9 Dhā-s)***

Step 8:

The structure thus obtained forms the basis for writing a Kamāli Chakradār. Further the process also demands an in-depth knowledge of rhythmic combinations and permutations by accurately placing the bol phrases in this structure as needed, upholding the mathematical discipline and precision of the tāla.

For constructing Part 1 (***48 Akshara-s)***

These 48 Akshara-s can be divided into smaller segments which will assist in composing various combination of bol phrases to make these 48 aksharas-s more beautiful. Several possible combinations of Akshara-s can be explored, some of which are listed below :-

(7 Akshara-s × 4 repetitions) + (5 Akshara-s × 4 repetitions)

(6 Akshara-s × 6 repetitions) + (3Akshara-s × 4 repetitions)

(4 Akshara-s × 4 repetitions) + (3 Akshara-s × 6 repetitions) + (7 Akshara-s × 2 repetitions)

For constructing Part 2 (***16 Akshara-s)***

These 16 Akshara-s can be divided into smaller segments with the same process as mentioned above. Some of the possible combinations are:-

(***4 Akshara-s × 4 repetitions)***

(***5 Akshara-s × 2 repetitions) + (3 Akshara-s × 2 repetitions)***

(***3 Akshara-s ×4 repetitions) + (4 Akshara-s × 1 repetition)***

Part 3 (***3 Akshara-s)***

These 3 Akshara-s are the pauses or gaps depicted by ***(S)*** in between the repetition. So, for above mentioned framework 3 Akshara-s will be depicted as ***SSS.***

Step 9:

Once the structural framework for each part is established, the next step involves composing suitable syllables to align with these sections. Below is an example of a Kamāli Paran built upon this structure:-

Part 1 (***48 Akshara-s)***

{7 Akshara-s (Dhā Ge Na Dhā Ge Te Te) + 7 Akshara-s (Tā Ge Na Tā Ge Te Te)} × 2 repetitions

{5 Akshara-s (Dhā Ge Na Di Na) × 4 repetitions)

Part 2 (***16 Akshara-s + 3 Dha)***

4 Akshara-s (Dhā Ge Di Na) × 4 repetitions + 3 Dhā

4 Akshara-s (Dhā Ge Di Na) × 4 repetitions + 3 Dhā

4 Akshara-s (Dhā Ge Di Na) × 4 repetitions + 3 Dhā

Part 3 ***(3 Akshara-s) (SSS)***

Step 10:

Setting these patākshara-s into a form of Kamāli Chakradār composition :-

Dhāgenadhā geteṭetā genatāge teṭedhāge |

x

Nadhāgete ṭetāgena Tāgeteṭe Dhāgenadi |

2
Nadhāgena Dinadhāge Nadinadhā Genadina |
0
Dhāgedina Dhāgedina Dhāgedina Dhāgedina |
3
Dhādhādhādhā Gedinadhā gedinadhā gedinadhā |
x
Gedinadhā Dhādhādhāge Dinadhāge Dinadhāge |
2
Dinadhāge Dinadhādhā DhāSSS Dhāgenadhā |
0
Geteṭetā Genatāge Teṭedhāge Nadhāgete |
3
ṭetāgena Tāgeteṭe Dhāgenadi Nadhāgena |
x
Dinadhāge Nadinadhā Genadina Dhāgedina |
2
Dhāgedina Dhāgedina Dhāgedina Dhādhādhādhā |
0
Gedinadhā GedinaDhā GedinaDhā GedinaDhā |
3
Dhādhādhāge Dinadhāge Dinadhāge Dinadhāge |
x
Dinadhādhā DhāSSS Dhāgenadhā geteṭetā |
2
genatāge teṭedhāge Nadhāgete ṭeetāgena |
0

Tāgetete Dhāgenadi Nadhāgena Dinadhāge |
3
Nadinadhā Genadina Dhāgedina Dhāgedina |
x
Dhāgedina Dhāgedina Dhādhādhādhā Gedinadhā |
2

Gedinadhā Gedinadhā Gedinadhā Dhādhādhāge |

0

Dinadhāge Dinadhāge Dinadhāge dinadhādhā |

3

Dhā

x

Empirical testing of the formulated steps:-

These steps can be universally applied for constructing a Kamāli Chakradār composition in any Jāti and setting it within any Tāla, offering a systematic approach to rhythmic composition across varied structures. Here is an example of Kamāli Tukada in Tisra Jāti set to Taal Rupak.

Step 1 - ***7 mātrās* × *5 āvartans* × *3 Akshara-s* = *105 Akshara-s***

Step 2 - ***105 + 1 = 106 Akshara-s (1 Akshara accounts for the final Sam)***

Step 3 - ***106 – 27 = 79Akshara-s (27 Dhā-s)***

Step 4 - ***79 – 4 = 75; 75÷ 3 = 25 (2-2 Akshara-s as gap between the repetitions)***

Step 5 – ***25 Akshara-s per repetition – 21 Akshara-s (7 mātrās × 1 āvartans × 3 Akshara-s)= 4 Akshara-s; 4÷2 = 2 Akshara-s per repetition are there in part b* (*excluding Dhā because it is already substracted in step 3)***.

Step 6 - ***(7 mātrās × 1 āvartans × 3 Akshara-s) 21 Akshara-s – 2 Akshara-s = 19 Akshara-s***

Step 7 - The structure of three repetitions we got from the above steps is

Repetition 1 (***19 Akshara-s)*** + Part 2 (***2-2-2 Akshara-s)*** + (***9 Dhā-s)*** + Part 3 (***2 Akshara-s)***

Repetition 2 (***19 Akshara-s)*** + Part 2 (***2-2-2 Akshara-s)*** + (***9 Dhā-s)*** + Part 3 (***2 Akshara-s)***

Repetition 3 (***19 Akshara-s)*** + Part 2 (***2-2-2 Akshara-s)*** + (***9 Dhā-s)***

Step 8 & 9 - For constructing 3 parts:-

Part 1 - (***19 Akshara-s)*** patterns used are as follows:-

[***6 Akshara-s (Tā Ki Ṭa Dhi Ki Ṭa) × 2 repetitions***] + [***7 Akshara-s (Ta Ka Ta Ka Tā Ki Ṭa)× 1 Repetitions***]

Part 2 - (***2 Akshara-s + 3 Dhā)*** patterns used are as follows:-

[(*2 Akshara-s (Ta Ka)] + [(Dhā Dhā Dhā)*]

Part 3 - ***two Akshara-s*** (***SS)*** are used as pause or gap in between the repetitions of the Chakradār

Step 10 - Setting these patākshara-s into a form of Kamāli Chakradār composition

Tākiṭa Dhikiṭa Tākiṭa | Dhikiṭa Takata | KaTāki Ṭataka |

x				1			2				
Dhādhādhā	Takadhā	Dhādhāta	|	KaDhādhā	DhāSS	|	Tākiṭa	Dhikiṭa	|		
x				1			2				
Tākiṭa	Dhikiṭa	Takata	|	KaTāki	Ṭataka	|	Dhādhādhā	Takadhā	|		
x				1			2				
Dhādhāta	Kadhādhā	DhāSS	|	Tākiṭa	Dhikiṭa	|	Tākiṭa	Dhikiṭa	|		
x				1			2				
Takata	KaTāki	Ṭataka	|	Dhādhādhā	Takadhā	|	Dhādhāta	Kadhādhā	|		
x				1			2				
Dhā											
x											

Discussion

An in deep study of Kamāli Chakradār compositions helps in understanding their complex rhythmic structure which clears the reason that why they are infrequently performed in Kathak Dance presentations. This challenge of understanding the complex structure pushes towards rote memorization of compositions, ultimately leading to limit the innovation in this form of composition. This issue can only be resolved through the introduction of a methodical, formula-based method whereby students can comprehend, analyse, and even develop their own variations within different Tāla-s and Jāti-s.

The formulated steps mentioned above allows students to be active creators rather than passive memorizers. This will not only lead to rhythmic understanding but will improve the sense of gesticulation required over the created compositions, ultimately leading to aesthetical presentation. Further the sense of improvisation will also enhance which will in turn help in creating more such frameworks of intricate compositions. The research also posits that these organized templates can be applied to more intricate Kathak forms, enhancing the creativity while preserving the classical integrity of the form.

Conclusion

Kamāli Chakradār is an important but rare executed part of the Kathak repertoire, mainly due to its complex structure, which also requires a distinguished execution. The most important element which makes it a complex structure is the pattern of mātrā-s in every Tāla and the Jāti in which it is created. As every Tāla has different mātrā-s which changes the structure of the Kamāli Chakradār so to with the Jāti also. If a Kamāli Chakraadaar is created in same Tāla but

different in Jāti, the whole framework changes. This limits the scope for innovation and moves the focus towards memorisation and presentation of already created compositions. Since memorization of all the variants is challenging, this research aims at introducing an organized approach to divert the emphasis from memorization to discovery and aesthetic presentation. The methodology covers all Jāti-s, increasing the number of rhythmic possibilities and guiding the students to innovate various permutations and combinations of bol phrases more effectively. This research is highlighting a very important point that if intricate structure of compositions such as Kamāli can be understood so this way of thinking can also be applied to other set of intricate compositions which will shift the focus from set examples to process-oriented learning, enhancing the innovation and rhythmic awareness, which will make the Kathak repertoire richer in depth and imagination.

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