

Preface

This publication is intended for English-language readers around the world, including the present generation of educated Newars. With its focus on the musical life of Bhaktapur during the decade starting from 1983, it could serve as a point of reference for comparison with the present situation. The transcriptions of almost every Newar drumming composition played in Bhaktapur and the use of special compositions for inducing divine inspiration may interest musicians even beyond South Asia.

It was my late Guruju of *navabājā*, Hari Govinda Ranjitkar who claimed that this publication was his last unfulfilled wish. Unfortunately he passed away in 2019 at the ripe age of eighty-four, having taught the repertoire of the nine drums to many students at Kathmandu University's Department of Music. Since its foundation in 1996, my transcriptions of the compositions served as teaching materials and are included in this publication together with other drum repertoires of Bhaktapur. I studied with Hari Govinda for almost two years, starting in March 1983 with daily lessons at my home at Yatāchē, Bhaktapur. Lessons were divided between the repertoire of the nine *navabājā* drums *dhā*, *kvatāḥ*, *dhācā*, *dhimaycā*, *nāykhīcā*, *pachimā*, *dhalak*, *kvakhīcā* and *nagarā*, and in addition *dhimay* and *lālākhī*. My late Guruju Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhva taught the latter two drums. Both Gurujus were the leading drummers of Yāchē Gaṇeś *navadāphā*. In the 1980s, this group was still performing regularly and within hearing distance of my roof terrace.¹ This and all my further drumming apprenticeships in Bhaktapur required the prescribed rituals and offerings to the local gods Gaṇeś, Kumār, Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and Haimāḍyaḥ, as described in chapter 2. During his remaining years following my *navabājā* apprenticeship, Hari Govinda added only a few minor variants² to the existing repertoire. The transcriptions published here are exactly what he taught me in 1983/84. To allow comparison with other genres and related repertoires, the drum compositions of *dāphā* (*lālākhī*), Bhaila *pyākhā*, *cacā pyākhā*, processional drumming genres Sāymi *gūlābājā* and Śākya *gūlābājā*, *dhimaybājā*, *ṇāykhībājā*, *ghētāḡīsi* and *tamva* are also included. The cult of the music god Nāsaḥḍyaḥ concerns every genre of Newar music and dance. To cover important aspects of this cult, the relationship with processional music is also examined in chapter 2.

My early publications in the series 'Newar Drumming'³ include summaries in Newari that complement the English text. As the knowledge of English among young Bhaktapurians has improved since then, this publication does not include a Newari summary. I am sure, with school education

1 In 1983 there was no motorized traffic in Bhaktapur.

2 Fabian Bakels allowed me to look at the notes of his much later lessons with Hari Govinda

3 Wegner 1986b and 1988

commonly available, every young person in Bhaktapur will be able to read the transcriptions after studying the instructions. This publication describes music in society as I encountered it in the early 1980s. Many Newars used the Nepali version of their Newari caste names, ‘Kapālī’ instead of ‘Jugi’, ‘Banmālā’ instead of ‘Gāthā’, ‘Prajāpati’ instead of ‘Kumāh’, ‘Manandhar’ instead of ‘Sāymi’, etc. Farmers wanted to be ‘Kisān’ instead of ‘Jyāpu’. In this publication the Newari caste name is applied in general to members of specific castes. Individuals appear with their preferred surnames. If not indicated otherwise, Newari terms are represented in the Bhaktapur dialect. With its abundant use of nasals, the pronunciation differs from Kathmandu Newari and there are many special words and phrases that identify the ‘*pakka* Bhaktapur Newar’⁴—as I have been called to my amusement.

In March 1983 I settled in Bhaktapur as a member of the ‘German Nepal Research Programme’, to document Newar drumming traditions. As an ethnomusicologist and a performing musician in a society where participation and contribution were essential values, my role did not agree with the concept of a scholarly observer keeping a safe distance from his or her research object, to produce a ‘theory’ as a visiting card for use in academic circles. For trying to understand another culture, I recommend humility.

As a resident of Bhaktapur for more than three decades, it was inevitable and natural that I interacted with local people and that my later role as a teacher of local drumming traditions affected those traditions. Obvious mistakes in some compositions were amended. I introduced written notation of compositions as a teaching aid and organised the first concert tours of Newar musicians to Europe. These were clearly out of context performances but they stimulated foreign interest in Newar culture and helped to raise the status of musicians involved, exposing them to unprecedented appreciation of their music. In 1995 I taught Indira Lachhimasyu of Dattātreya, the first female *dhimay* drummer, causing a fundamental change of the local concept of gender participation in music making⁵. My aim at creating jobs for local musicians as regularly paid music teachers led to the foundation of the Department of Music at Kathmandu University—a pilot project of applied ethnomusicology in South Asia⁶. This started operating in 1996 at Chupin ghāt, Bhaktapur and was inaugurated by the then German President, the late Dr. Roman Herzog during his state visit to Nepal. Devastation of the physical facilities during the big earthquake in April 2015 and the following flood wave in August 2015 caused the Department of Music to move to Kathmandu, along with the core staff from Bhaktapur and earlier graduates from various areas of Nepal, to resume their academic activities in a new setting that should accommodate the rising number of students.

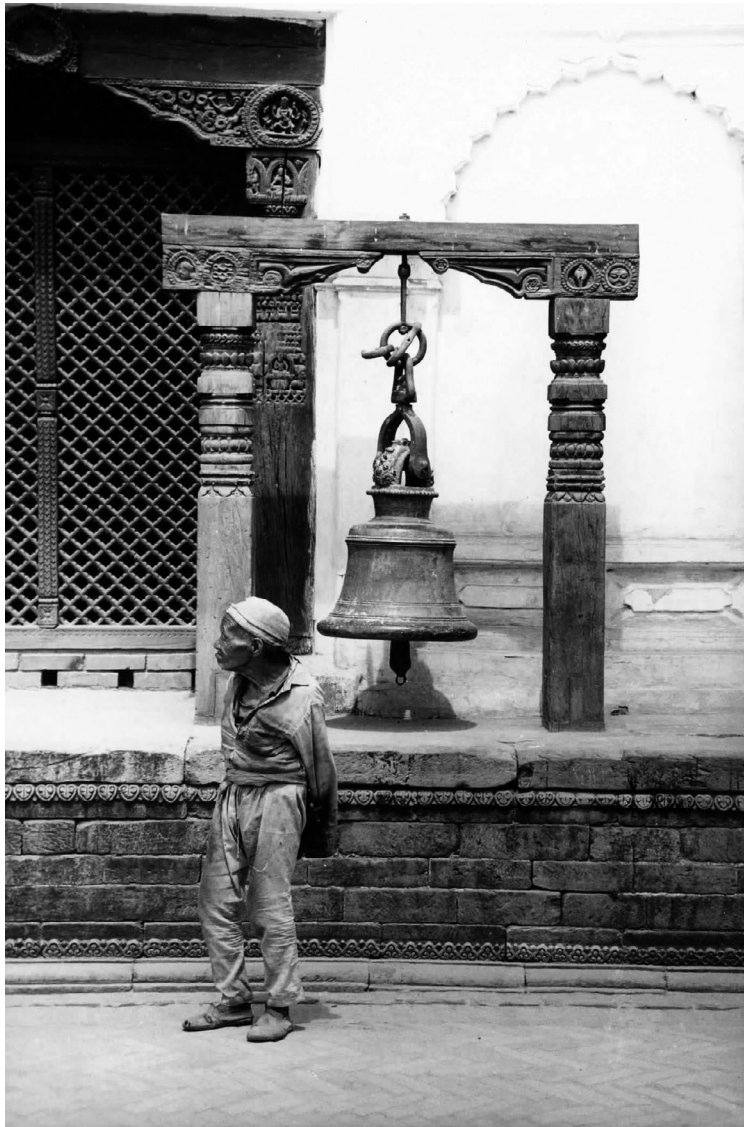
At my age personal participation as a drummer in the musical life of Bhaktapur is definitely over. But I hope that this publication will promote interest in this unique and fascinating repertoire and inspire future drummers to live with these compositions and behold the bliss of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ’s inspiring magic.⁷

4 ‘real/complete Bh. N.’

5 Until 1995 the local concept meant that men did all the fun things in life and women the rest.

6 cf. Fabian Bakels 2021. *Ethnomusicology and Preservation of Traditional Music in Nepal*. PhD thesis, Free University Berlin—to be published soon

7 Nāsaḥḍyaḥ is the local god of music and dance whose cult is examined in detail in chapter 2.



Gā bell and *pakka* Bhaktapur Newar in front of the palace, 1985

