

1 Introduction

The Newar people of the Kathmandu Valley and beyond are an ethnic group of Nepal that absorbed many cultural influences from South Asia over the past two thousand years. Their Newari language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese language group. Their admirable musical culture saw its heyday during the rule of the later Malla kings of Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu (13th to 18th centuries) and continued to thrive initially even under later Nepali-speaking rulers of other ethnic background. During the 1980s, the decline of Newar culture had become a matter of concern to many Newars who engaged in appeals to preserve their language.¹ As there are now several ground-breaking publications about the social, spatial and ritual orders of Bhaktapur, I will not duplicate this but recommend the reader to consult these essential books for detailed and fascinating background information.² Owing to the lack of data, it is not possible to reconstruct a continuous early history of music in the Kathmandu Valley. This was not made easier by the unhelpful habit of invading armies destroying and eradicating whatever they encountered. Frequent massive earthquakes had a similar effect. The earliest written document dates from 464 A.D. when the Licchavi ruler Mānadeva (464 to 505) had a stone pillar with a carved inscription installed at Cāṅgu Nārāyaṇa. Originally the pillar carried the glorious statue of Garuda that now stands on the pavement, facing the sanctum and is said to be a portrait of King Mānadeva. The stone plinth of the temple shows coarse carvings that could be the earliest depictions of musical instruments in the Kathmandu Valley. Although the temple was destroyed and rebuilt several times after earthquakes and fire, the plinth carvings—now in part concealed by later structures—could refer to the music practice of the Licchavi period that coincided with the North Indian Gupta period. We perceive musicians playing various drums, cymbals, transverse flutes, lutes and harps.

The first stone inscription mentioning a music group dates from 604 A.D. It stands at the roadside in Lele³. Line eleven of the Sanskrit inscription goes “...yāḥ mā 12 vādītra gauṣṭhikā nāmmā 10 ... rasya mā 40 pradīpagauṣṭhikā nāmmā 8 arccā gauṣṭhikānām...”, mentioning a group of musicians endowed with a land donation of ten *mānikā*. *Vādītra gauṣṭhikā* translates into Nepali as *bājā guṭhi*. So the practice of supporting music groups with land donations goes back to the Licchavi rulers. It reached a monumental scale during the later Malla period (15th to 18th centuries), the Golden Age of Newar culture.

1 Whelpton 2005 offers an insightful discussion of changes in lifestyles, values and identities (chapter 6).

2 Gutschow 1982, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2017, Gutschow and Kölver 1975, Levy 1990

3 cf. Wegner and Sharma, 1994 and 1995

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The first written version of the *Bṛhad-Svayaṃbhū purāna* in Sanskrit dates from the third quarter of the fourteenth century⁴. It mentions⁵ sweet sounding *ghaṇṭa* bronze bells, the performance of dance (*nṛtya*), hymns (*stotra*, *dharāṇi*), song (*gīta*), singing (*gāna*) in local language (Newari). Musical instruments (*vādyā*) played for Svayaṃbhū include⁶ *mṛdaṅga*, *duṇḍubhi*, *paṭaha*, *vīṇā*, *muruja*, *dhvār ghaṇṭa*, *ḍiṇḍimā*, *jharjhara*, *bherī*, *kāhāla*, *tūrya*, *śṛṅga*, *śaṅkha*, further⁷ *maṇḍala*, *mukunda*, *kāmsya tāla*, *kāhāra*, *vāṃśa*, *ghoṣa vādyā* and⁸ *kāmsaya*, *dhakkā*, *mṛduḍiṇḍima* and *jantu śṛṅga*. The manuscript⁹ mentions *tirtha* processions¹⁰ where the following instruments were played, *maṇḍala*, *mṛdaṅga*, *paṭaha*, *dhakkā*, *dhvana*, *duṇḍubhi*, *maddu*, *ḍiṇḍima*, *tāḍana*, *vīṇā*, *kiṅkinī*, *kāmsaja*, *turya*, *kāhāla*, *jantu śṛṅga*, *śaṅkha*, *bherī*, and *ghoṣavādyā*. It also tells us that Svayaṃbhū is adorned with the *pañcatāla* instruments (compound drum, cymbals, natural trumpets) and other instruments.¹¹ We learn about three different kinds of utterance and their use¹², *japa* (murmur, for *mantra* and *yajurveda*), *paṭh* (recite, for *stotra* and *ṛgveda*), *gāi* (sing or recite in a singing manner, for *sāmaveda*). Important advice for monks (*bhikṣu*) is added: If they indulge in *doṣa* (sins) like alcohol inspired dance, song, playing of instruments, garlands, perfume and—heaven forbid—*maithuna* (sexual intercourse), this will lead them to hell (*durgati*).¹³ So, if a reader of this publication happens to be a monk, he should stop reading here. As the following chapters prove, the Newar people of Bhaktapur tend to enjoy all these things tremendously.

The cult of the music god Nāsaḥḍyaḥ with its unique concept of the linear progression of divine energy along flight lanes indicated by specific openings in brick walls must have been in practice when ancient settlements emerged. The town of Bhaktapur grew from a cluster of villages, each having at its centre a shrine of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ (Fig. 1). This becomes clear when we examine the gods worshipped during music apprenticeship and the processional routes to the respective shrines. The following chapters include several maps providing evidence.¹⁴

Following the Licchavi period, the time between 740 and 1150 was a dark age of anarchy that coincided with a similar situation in Tibet. Vajrayāna Buddhism became a prominent religious influence with its centre in Lalitpur (Patan). It introduced Tantric Buddhist *caryā* songs (*cacā* in Newari) and dances (*cacā pyākhā*). According to legend, Bhaktapur was founded during the 9th century. During the 12th century Anandadeva of Banepa moved his residence to Bhaktapur. The early Malla period began with Ari Malla (1200–1216). In 1342 the queen and prince of Simraungarh (Terai) settled in Bhaktapur, installing their tutelary deity Taleju. Bhaktapur was in control of the trade route to Tibet and became the leading town in the Kathmandu Valley until its division into the three Malla kingdoms in 1482. (Map 1)

4 I owe this information to the late Prof. Horst Brinkhaus who was preparing his translation of the text.

5 p. 66

6 p. 104

7 p. 122

8 p. 138

9 pp. 296, 297

10 pilgrimage to sacred water sources for ritual purification

11 p. 153

12 p. 200

13 p. 221

14 cf. chapters 2., 3.1, 3.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3



Fig. 1: Bhaktapur in 1985 seen from south, with the temple roofs of Nyatapola and Bhairavnāth in the central Taumādhi square, the division between upper (right) and lower town (left). The temple roof of Cāṅgu Nārāyaṇa is just about visible between two tall trees on top of the forested ridge north of Bhaktapur. The central part of this ridge is veiled by polluting exhaust of brick kilns that kept multiplying around Bhaktapur during the following decades, putting every citizen's health at risk and destroying the basis for agriculture. In the foreground we perceive a Jyāpu farmer in a wheat field, carrying two baskets suspended from a bamboo pole.

With all those invading armies devastating North India, the remote Kathmandu Valley appeared as a peaceful refuge to those arriving in search of physical security. They brought with them their cults, their skills and in some cases, their musical instruments. All this contributed to the unique Newar musical culture that blossomed between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the Malla kings of Bhaktapur who left an important legacy as patrons of music, art and architecture were Jagajjotir Malla (1614–1637), Jagatprakāśa Malla (1644–1673), Jitāmitra Malla (1673–1696), Bhūpatīndra Malla (1696–1722) and Raṇajīt Malla (1722–1769). The former is remembered as a composer-king. He devised the most spectacular details of Bhaktapur's New Year festival, founded the initial *navadāphā* groups and composed *dāphā* songs that were still sung in the 1980s. His statue crowns a pillar in front of the Golden Gate in the palace square. Bhaktapur remained a Malla kingdom until 1769 when it was the final Malla kingdom to fall into the hands of a conquering warlord, Pṛthvī Nārāyaṇ Shah of Gorkha, founder of the state of Nepal. When he made Kathmandu the capital of his kingdom and resided in the Hanuman Dhoka palace, he encountered Indian court musicians whose performance irritated the ruler. They were deported to India, to be invited back to stay by the conqueror's grandson, Raṇa Bahādur Shah (ruled 1777–1799). Pṛthvī Nārāyaṇa Shah found the musical culture of the Newars tolerable enough to recommend his subjects to proceed with their ritual masked dances and singing and drumming at

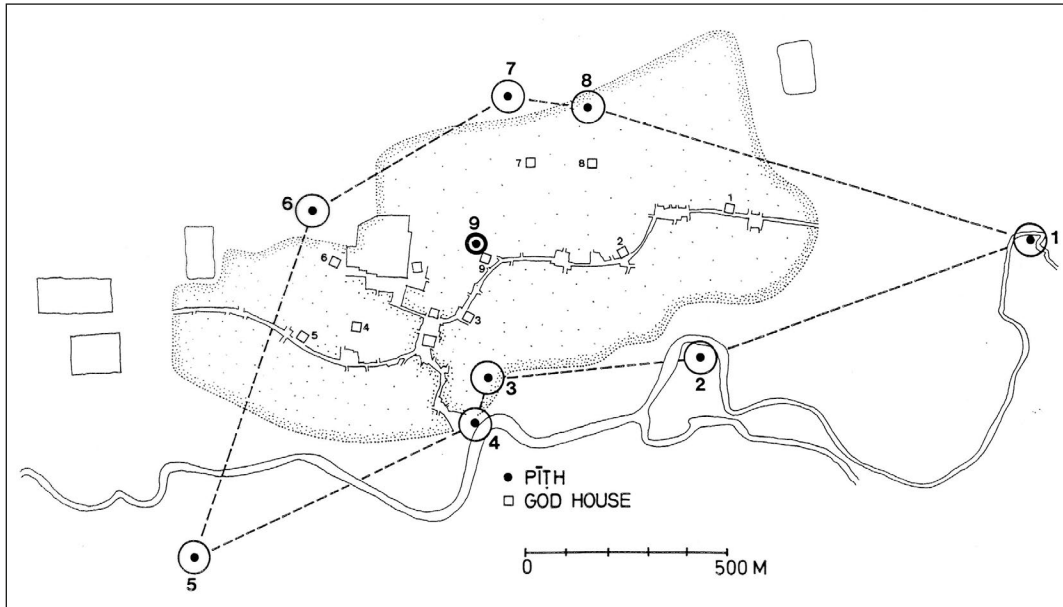


Map 1: Bhaktapur 1987 with the old main road to Tibet meandering through the town and the Hanumante river flowing from east to west (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

temples and during processions. Even after the conquest, new forms developed and the creative spirit remained unbroken for a while. The new ruler did not interfere with the land endowments that financed Newar culture. Nepalese school textbooks describe King Pṛthvī Nārāyaṇa Shah as ‘father of the nation’, whereas some Bhaktapurians used expressions for the Shah kings that cannot be repeated in polite society. More than two centuries after the conquest, people in Bhaktapur lived with a marked sense of subjugation, perceiving Newar culture as superior but threatened by decline. Two Royal Nepal Army camps outside Bhaktapur and continuous army presence in the Malla palace compound did not contribute to relax the situation. In Bhaktapur, the old spatial and social orders persisted. Robert Levy called it a ‘unicultural town’.¹⁵

When I arrived in Bhaktapur in March 1983, it was a town for pedestrians. There were no vehicles. People walked. The air was clean and so were the Hanumante and Kasan Khusi rivers. Set on an elevation stretching from east to west, the old town with its Newar population of seventy thousand was overlooking the paddy fields where over seventy per cent of the citizens worked as farmers. Chilies, ginger, cucumber, cauliflower and yoghurt were of outstanding quality. Clouds of butterflies and golden dragonflies hovered over the fields and everywhere lingered a smell of the most prominent weed, *Cannabis indica*. There was a feeling of profound peace, of being out of this world. Nobody lived outside the old town. Farmers spending the night out in a field hut to water potatoes or cauliflower, had alarming stories to tell of ghosts making their appearance, rattling at the door, etc.

¹⁵ Levy 1990



Map 2: Open shrines (*pīth*) with aniconic stone representation and god houses (*dyahchē*) with golden statues of Aṣṭamātrkā mothergoddesses Brahmāyaṇī (1), Maheśvarī (2), Kumārī (3), Bhadrakālī (4), Vārāhī (5), Indrāyaṇī (6), Mahākālī (7), Mahālakṣmī (8) and Tripurasundarī (9) (map: Niels Gutschow, in Levy 1990, p. 155)

Inside Bhaktapur it felt very safe, as if living in a womb. The town was protected by numerous gods and goddesses residing in temples and shrines that constitute a *maṇḍala*, with the shrines of the eight mother goddesses Aṣṭamātrkā at the periphery and Tripurasundarī in the centre and shrines of other gods spreading all over the town (Map 2). The Bhaktapur *maṇḍala* painting below includes only some of the main gods and goddesses. The outer rhombic realm shows the Aṣṭamātrkā starting with Brahmāyaṇī and Maheśvarī (top left), in the next realm eight Bhairava-s and Mahāsiddhas, then eight Gaṇeśas and Tripurasundarī in the centre. In reality, the total number of Gaṇeśa shrines is forty. There are more Gaṇeśas outside the town. One of the four guardian Gaṇeśas of the Kathmandu Valley, Surya Vināyaka Gaṇeśa is located two kilometres south of Bhaktapur and receives blood sacrifices after completion of musical apprenticeships. The shrine of the tutelary goddess of the Malla kings, Taleju is located inside the palace complex and does not appear in the *maṇḍala* painting.¹⁶ (Fig. 2)

As my language skills in Nepali and Newari improved, my teacher of the nine *navabājā* drums, Hari Govinda Ranjītkar revealed his mythic world view by telling us the story of a tornado that he witnessed during his young days. In the Kathmandu Valley, the occurrence of a tornado is much rarer than earthquakes, perhaps once in a century. This one devastated a rectangular water reservoir on the southern slope of Cāngu Nārāyaṇa, breaking one of the walls

¹⁶ The Buddhist *maṇḍala* of Bhaktapur includes Buddhist shrines, monasteries and *cībhāh* monuments but also the mother goddesses Aṣṭamātrkā and Surya Vināyak Gaṇeśa. It is actualised by Buddhist processional music groups during the month of *gūlā*, as explained in chapters 3.3 and 3.4.



Fig. 2: Bhaktapur *maṇḍala* showing in the outer rhomboid area the Aṣṭamātrkā among trees, in the second area eight Bhairavas and Mahāsiddhas, in the third area eight Gaṇeśa-s with other gods, and in the triangular centre three Gaṇeśa-s and Tripurasundarī dancing with two goddesses. Next to the rivers lie cremation grounds with jackals looking for bones. The borders show the distant surroundings, left the Himalayan peaks north of Bhaktapur with Langtang (7234 m) and Shishapangma (8027 m), right the south view with Phulchowki hill (2791 m). (painted by Madhu Krishna Chitrakar in 1987 after an older prototype)

and spilling the contents. In the early 1980s, this slope was reforested with pine trees that have grown into a fine plantation. The reservoir has been left untouched since the event that Hari Govinda related. One of the famous Licchavi period stone images in the temple courtyard of Cāṅgu Nārāyaṇa depicts Lord Viṣṇu sitting on his mount, the snake-devouring eagle Garuḍa. In the Kathmandu Valley, traditional water sources are protected by Nāga snake gods, said to promote fertility and continuous flow of water. As everyone can see, a *Nāga*'s care does not extend to modern urban water systems. However, what Hari Govinda saw during that cataclysmic event was this: Not a black cloud covering the sky with the sun shining above but *Garuḍa* spreading his mighty wings, carrying on his back Lord Viṣṇu in all his glory. Having spotted the *Nāga*, *Garuḍa* pulled the angry snake (the tornado's roaring funnel) up into the sky for his

afternoon snack. Now without the Nāga's protection, the water basin was devastated and ran dry. For the past eighty years, nobody has dared to repair it after divine interference with this frail human structure.

Thus it became clear to me that the old generation of Bhaktapur Newars perceived the world in a way dramatically different from my own. I probably would have seen something uncommonly dull, as the national weather report.¹⁷ Soon I realised that Hari Govinda's magical view of the world was no exception. In fact, the entire local mythology had been superimposed over the landscape (urban and otherwise), and people were living happily in daily communion with their gods.¹⁸ As I was taught during drumming apprenticeships, the divine presence needs to be actualised during processions and town rituals with the help of musical invocations called *dyahlhāygu*. These compositions work like telephone numbers connecting the drummers' minds with the divine energies residing in shrines, temples and other religious artefacts. Played in the proper context, *dyahlhāygu* invocations can open a portal to the realm of the gods.¹⁹ By tapping those divine energies, musicians are rewarded with inspiration. In fact, everybody is. During festivals, Newars tend to consume gallons of home made *thvā* (rice beer) and *aylāḥ* (spirit), ensuring a most generous flow of inspiration.

Caste prescribed not only the locality of your house but also what kind of daily work to pursue, whom to marry (ideally within the same caste), and exactly where to be cremated at the respective *ghāt* at the river banks. Crossing the social divide was unacceptable. Untouchable sweepers had to live outside the old town walls in small huts made of dried mud bricks and thatched with straw, whereas houses of other castes included three to four floors and burnt *pvalā apā* tiles as roofing. Almost every family owned a house—with the exception of most Jugi tailor-musicians who were allowed to occupy the upper floor of some public *sataḥ* gate houses. In 1983 people lived at a caste-related distance to the Malla palace and their tutelary deity Taleju. High-caste ritual specialists and families of earlier courtiers lived close to the palace and Nāy butchers and other low castes at the periphery of the town. The Jyāpu farmers' quarters occupied most of the space in between. They range in the middle of the caste hierarchy. (Map 3)

Besides spectacular temple squares, traditional architecture included hundreds of multi-purpose *phalcā* shelter buildings with a row of carved pillars on the front side, donated by local people for public use. Such multi-purpose shelters were dotted all over the town, frequently next to temples, most of them used by song groups singing for the gods during evening hours. Temple squares had *dabū* stone platforms used by music groups and also for the performance of masked dances. All musicians and dancers were males.

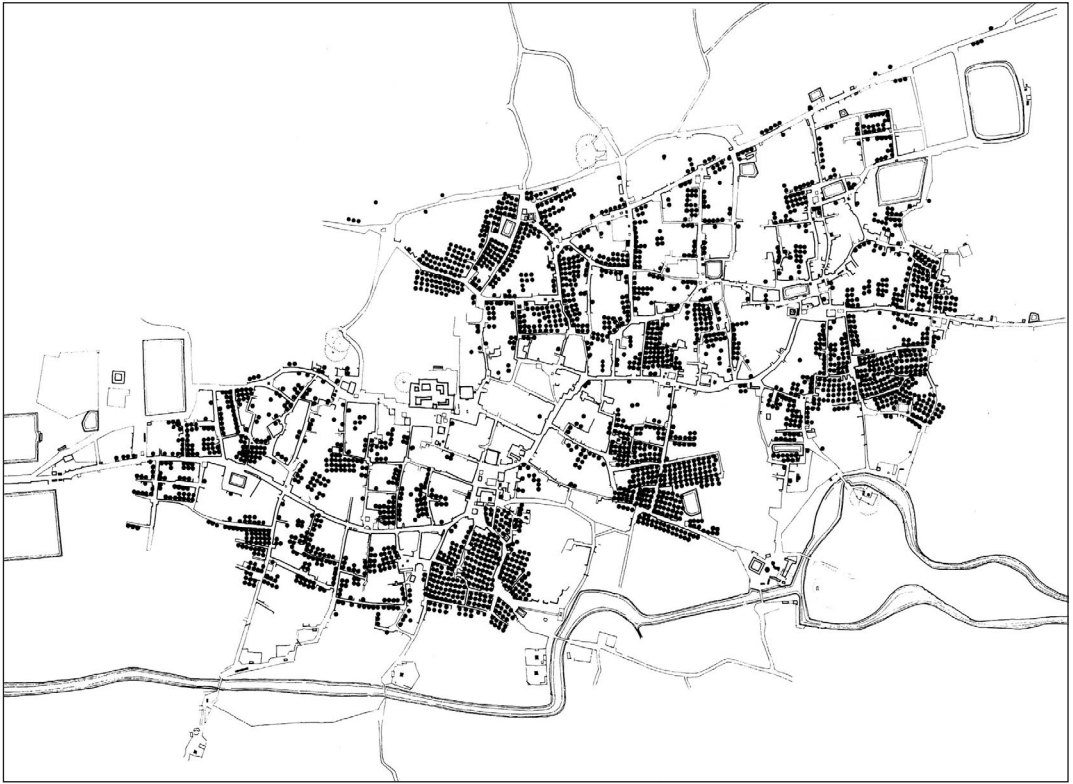
In 1983 there were one hundred and thirteen song groups performing on a daily basis in *phalcā* shelters. The three genres of devotional group singing included—starting with the oldest—sixty-three *dāphā*, one *kvakhīcā dhalcā*, thirty-six *dhalcā*, and thirteen *rās bhajan* and *gyānmālā bhajan* groups. The imported genres *dhalcā bhajan* and *rās bhajan* are similar to popular North Indian genres of devotional group singing. A Buddhist version of *rās bhajan*,

17 In the 1980s, the national weather report informed precisely about yesterday's weather. The rest of the news was equally stale.

18 cf. Gutschow 1982, Levy 1984 and Wegner 2009

19 cf. chapter 2. and Wegner 1986a, 1992c, 2006e, 2009, 2012

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Map 3: Bhaktapur: location of Jyāpu farmers' houses, excluding the area around the royal palace. Most music groups of Bhaktapur comprised of farmers. (map in: Gutschow 1982, p. 49)

gyānmālā bhajan was created in the 1940s at Svayaṃbhū and initially banned by the Hindu ruler of Nepal, Juddha SJB Rana. *Dhalcā* groups play *dhalak* (*ḍholak*) as accompanying drum. *Bhajan* groups use *tamal*, *bām* (*tablā*, *bāyāṃ*) and *arven* (harmonium). The much older genre *dāphā* is responsorial group singing with the accompaniment of *lālākhī* drums, cymbals and natural trumpets. At an age before television and with long gaps between radio broadcasts, music was a common evening occupation for the male Bhaktapurian and had an important function in promoting participation and socialization. Today (2021) this dense musical landscape is a matter of the past. With very few exceptions, most surviving groups perform only during festivals. As these are oral traditions, there is increasing danger that part of the repertoire will be forgotten or survive as impaired versions. In offering a notated version of almost all drumming repertoires of Bhaktapur as teaching and learning aid, this publication will hopefully help to prevent the loss of these musical traditions.

A survey carried out by my first field assistant Ganesh Man Basukala in 1983/84 identified over two hundred music and dance groups:

- 1 Navadurgā *pyākhā* (important cult and annual masked dance cycle performed by Gāthā gardeners)
- 30 dance groups (exact number and genres changing every year) performing during *sāparu* and *Indra jātra* festivals, including Bhaila *pyākhā* performed by potters, Mahākālī *pyākhā*, Rādhākṛṣṇa *pyākhā* and many other dance genres. The numerous *ghētāgiśi* stick dances preceding the cow effigies during *sāparu* are not included. Their number varies every year.
- 23 *dhimaybājā* (processional drumming of farmers)
- 3 *dhābājā* (processional drumming of farmers)
- 9 *nāykhībājā* (processional drumming of butchers)
- 2 *kābājā* (processional playing of large natural trumpets)
- 3 Sāymi *gūlābājā* (Buddhist processional music of oilpressers)
- 3 Śākya and Vajrācārya *gūlābājā* (Buddhist processional music of gold- and silversmiths)
- 4 *bāsurikhalah* (transverse flute ensembles as part of *dāphā* and *navadāphā* groups)
- 9 Jugī groups (playing shawms, fipple flutes, *tamva* kettledrum and marriage band music)
- 5 Gāine bards (singing songs with *sāraṅgī* fiddle accompaniment)
- 1 group of farmers singing ballads during *sāparu*
- 36 *dhalcā bhajan*
- 1 *kvakhī dhalcā*
- 13 *bhajan* (Hindu *rās bhajan* and Buddhist *gyānmālā bhajan*)
- 63 *dāphā* (song group with *lālākhī* drums, cymbals, natural trumpets)
- 6 *navadāphā* (*dāphā* plus additional ensemble of nine *navabājā* drums accompanied by Jugī shawm players)

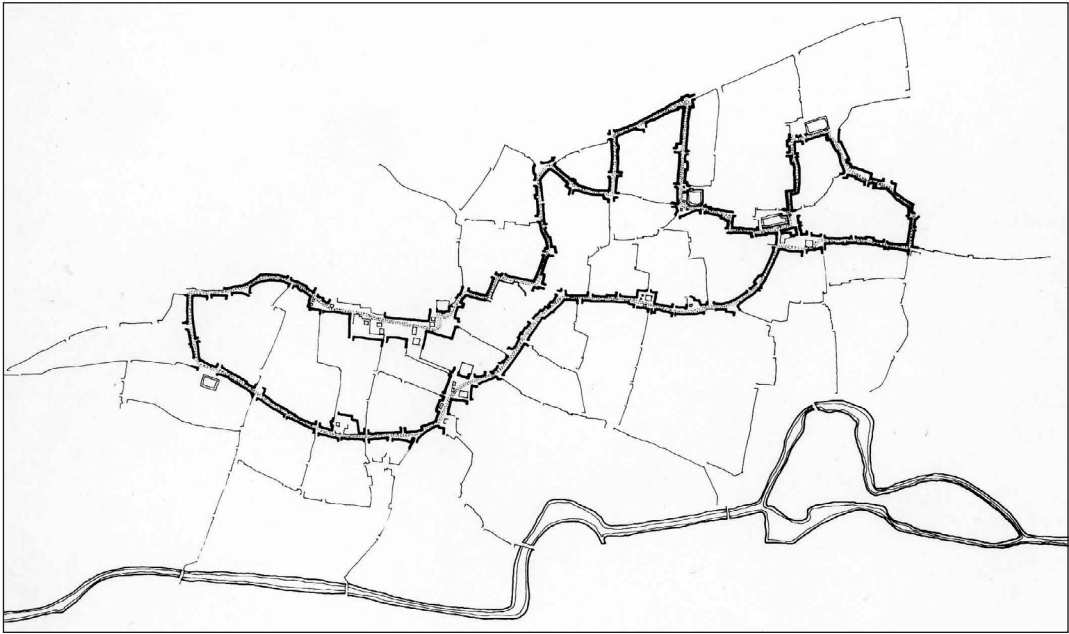
In addition, there were three Buddhist vocal genres, *tutaḥ* hymns, *gvarā/gvārā* songs with instrumental accompaniment, tantric *cacā/caryā* songs and—probably already extinct in Bhaktapur during the 1980s—tantric Buddhist dances, *cacā pyākhā*.²⁰

With the exception of Jugī tailor-musicians, all other genres of Newar music took place without payment. In 1963, King Mahendra Shah issued the *bhūmi sudhār* act, a land reform with dramatic consequences for the entire Newar culture. The *guṭhi* land endowments donated to music groups by earlier sponsors were confiscated by the state—in exchange for the installation of ill-equipped *guṭhi saṁsthān* offices that were to look after temple maintenance and town rituals. Since then, musicians had to finance their own performances. This is one of the chief reasons for the rapid decline of the entire Newar musical culture.

Like every ancient Hindu city, Bhaktapur has a processional route, the *pradakṣina*. It meanders through Bhaktapur in a big loop, touching most of the important temples and shrines—with the exception of most of the Aṣṭamātrkā goddesses at the periphery of the town. It is along this route that most processions and dynamic aspects of town rituals proceed, invariably clockwise, sometimes in two to four hours, sometimes in the course of several days. As will be shown in the following chapters, this is where music and dance play a decisive role in consolidating Newar

20 cf. chapters 3.4, 3.5, 4.1, 11.14, 11.18, 11.19

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Map 4: Bhaktapur's *pradaksina*, the processional route covering the main squares, temples and shrines (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

society and its values of participation and contribution. Circumambulation of a religious object in the proper manner is a way of showing respectful adoration, of leaving offerings and receiving blessings, a chance for accumulating merit and for seeing and being seen. (Map 4)

Niels Gutschow's maps with local place names of Bhaktapur can be found in the appendix. Two detailed charts of the local calendar in relation to lunar phases, festivals and agricultural cycles can be found in Gutschow's *Stadtraum und Ritual der newarischen Städte im Kathmandu-Tal*.²¹ Newari and Sanskrit terms are translated in the Glossary. Newari musical terms with translations are listed in the Dictionary.

²¹ Gutschow 1982, pp. 10–11