5 Song Groups, Bards and Beggars

The South Asian song genre *bāraḥmāsa* depicts human emotions in relation to the changing moods and characteristics of nature during the twelve months of the year. The twelve months fall into six seasons *ṛtu*. The six seasons are called *vasanta*[1], *grīṣma*, *varṣa*, *śarad*, *hemanta* and *śiśira*. There are additional songs related to festivals and to stages of fieldwork. Newar song genres and their seasons:

Vasanta: *basanta me* and *rāg sāraṅg* were sung/played from Śrī *pañcamī* up to *hvali* fullmoon during the month of *phāgun. Hvali me* were sung from *aṣṭami* to fullmoon, *cīr sã̄skār* and *cīr dāhā* only during fullmoon night. After *hvali* fullmoon *ghātu* songs were sung.

Grīṣma: *ghātu* songs were sung up to the Bhaktapur New Year. After the *liṅga* fell on Baiśākh 1st (*biskāḥ*), *svarat songs* followed for one month.

Varṣa: The rainy season began with rice planting songs *pvāre me*, then transplanting songs *sināj-yā me,* then weeding songs *thukājyā me*. These were only sung in the fields. To ensure fertility[2], fertile women had to sing planting and transplanting songs. *Silu me* was sung during the month of Śrāvaṇ, as Śrāvaṇ fullmoon is the time for pilgrims to reach the sacred *tīrtha Silu* (Gosāiṅkuṇḍa). In the 1980s, during the evenings of the *sāpāru* week, a group of farmers living in Sujamādhi proceeded along the *pradakṣina* route, singing two of the most famous ballads, *silu me* and *sãdeś* whilst carrying a large hand-written songbook with the complete text. The ballads were presented with much emotion, gesturing, even weeping at the tragic climaxes. This is but one example of the vast repertoire of *me* that *bã̄suri bājā* draws their repertoire from. (Figs. 195, 196)

Śarad: The festival season was the time for *mārsi* songs in *rāg mālāśrī*.

Hemanta: *Burã̄jyā me* were sung when preparing rice grain to ferment for beer production. When carrying the major amount of harvested rice grain home for sun-drying and later storage, a big mound of rice was left in the field and covered with bundles of straw where it fermented for two weeks until the grain reached the desired brown colour[3] and moldy flavour for rice beer (*thvã̄*)

1 Spring starts on the day of Māgh *pañcamī* (middle of January).
2 the exception being Cvarcā *bã̄suri-dhimay-khalaḥ* who took all their instruments to play in the field in support of their women who did the sowing
3 called *hākuvā*, lit. black rice

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Fig. 195: Jyāpunī singers Surya Lakshmi Koju, Indra Lakshmi Duval, Buddha Lakshmi Kusi, Chandramaya Kusi, Subindra Layba and Puneshvari Kusi of Sujamādhi during a strictly private recording of rice transplanting songs *sināj̃yā me* at my home, 18/8/1987. Ladies were not supposed to be heard singing in the streets. So the recording had to proceed with subdued voices—and much giggling.

production. When there were no vehicles, this grain was carried home after a *pūjā* for Lord Gaṇeśa. These joyous grain-carrying processions were held with song and panache. All this joy vanished in the late 1980s when real estate business and brick factories uprooted agriculture. (Fig. 197)

Śiśira: During the cold season, praise songs for the gods were helpful for keeping warm. These could be sung during any season, for example Dasavatār me. During marriage processions, one heard *duḥ dhāṅkegu* me. This song refers to the earlier custom of the groom's party that carries the bride to the groom's home in a hammock. The song was sung as soon as they leant the bamboo pole *duḥ* with the hammock against the bride's house, to announce the time of her departure. All this has been replaced long ago with decorated vehicles and Hindi film songs. *Tvaphā me* and *mārā me* were sung during the month of Māgha. There were countless songs relating to gods—useful during any season. As some gods have their special day or days of the week, those songs were sung on the appropriate day.

During the 1980s, itinerant Gāine bards with their *sāraṅgī* fiddles sang their Nepali song repertoire in villages and at bus stops all over Nepal. Perceived as a typical aspect of Nepali folk culture, these professional musicians belong to the untouchable Gandharva caste. During the 19th century, five Gāĩcā—as they were called in Newari—and their families had been permitted to settle at the northern periphery of Bhaktapur in Bhvalāchẽ Ligãcā, arguably the filthiest lane in town. Before

Fig. 196: Farmers of Sujamādhi singing *silu me* during a recording session 19/8/1983.

Fig. 197: Farmers of Sujamādhi, each person carrying 80 kg of grain whilst dancing and singing *burãjyā me,* 1986

Fig. 198: Kṛṣṇa Gopāl Gāine (1934–1993) with *sāraṅgī* (bow with five tiny brass bells) and cigarette, 1988

the land reform in 1963 there was land that supported their musical duties during Newar festivals. During *mvahani* nights they had so sing *mārsi* songs in Newari in front of houses assigned to them. As this happened between midnight and 3 a.m., most people perceived these songs in their dreams. During an age without motorized traffic, this had a lovely, soothing effect—a surprise gift[4] to an audience that was only half awake and went back to slumber with a smile. What luxury!

4 This was much nicer than the aggressive stomping routine of night watchmen disturbing everybody's sleep in Indian suburbs, demonstrating that they are on duty and making sure that they do not encounter burglars.

The last active singer, Kṛṣṇa Gopāl Gāine sang *mvahani* songs in Newari, starting during the first night of *mvahani* at the Taleju temple. During the following festival nights he sang for twelve neighbourhoods in the upper and lower town. During Mahāṣṭhamī he sang in front of the Taleju temple in Kathmandu, during Mahānavamī in the Taleju courtyard in Bhaktapur. Two weeks later he sang during *dugupūjā*, and during Bhaktapur's New Year festival on 3rd of Vaiśākh for the Mahākālī-Mahālkṣmī *jātrā*, all this amounting to performances in sixty-six localities.[5] People living in the assigned houses used to give him grain and straw after the rice harvest. To feed his family, Kṛṣṇa Gopāl went fishing in ponds and rivers. Endowed with exceptional charisma, he also worked as a *vaidya* healer, a skill learned from his father. He also toured villages around Bhaktapur to play and sing in Nepali. In 1988 we recorded his complete repertoire, fifteen hours of songs. He had written down the song texts in five thick volumes. They were photocopied and bound and later kept in the library of Kathmandu University's Department of Music—along with his *sāraṅgī* that I was able to purchase from his family after he passed away. His nephew Bharat Nepali works at the department as *sāraṅgī* teacher and is much in demand as a studio musician in Kathmandu. (Fig. 198)

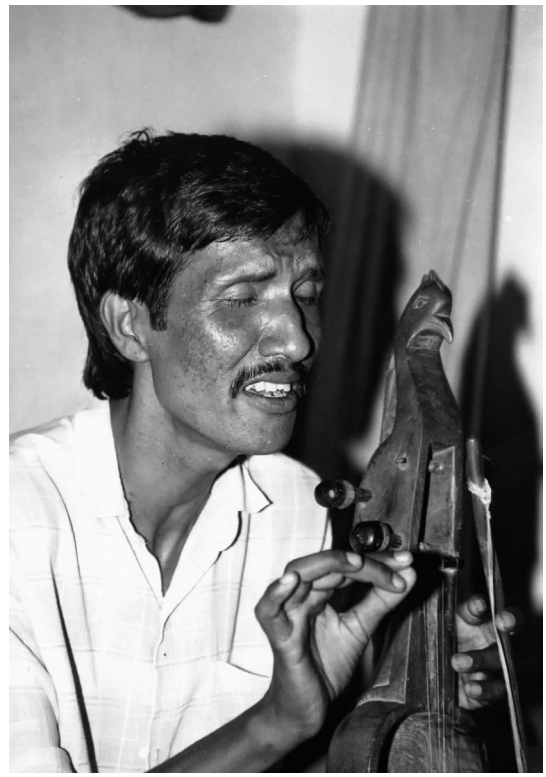


Fig. 199: Ram Saran Nepali singing a *dukha* (anguish) song at my home 18/8/1990

During the 1990s, many Gandharvas had left their traditional occupation in search of alternate ways of survival. One exceptionally talented Gandharva, Ram Saran Nepali achieved international fame during concert tours with the *tablā*-player Homnath Upadhyaya. They played mostly for expatriate Nepali audiences in the U.S. and other countries. In 1990, Ram Saran suddenly arrived at my home and poured out his troubled feelings. He suffered from the conflict between his artistic vision of beauty and peace that he found in nature and the depressing social reality in Nepal as an uneducated member of his despised caste. He sang for us a *dukha* song that exposed his intense suffering. It was presented with sublime artistic conviction. Ram Saran Nepali passed away in 1995. (Fig. 199)

In 1986 an itinerant bard arrived at the Dattātreya temple, to stay with his small family, a Baul from Bengal (Fig. 200). He and his wife sang ecstatic *bhakti* songs of longing of the human soul for union with Lord Viṣṇu, accepting occasional offerings from locals and tourists. They

5 In 1988 Niels Gutschow produced a map of these locations. Gutschow 2017, p. 426

Fig. 200: Baul Dās playing *ānanda laharī* and ankle bells during a recording session, 31/3/1986

accompanied themselves with the typical Baul instruments, plucked drum *ānanda laharī*, *dotār* lute and *ghuṅgrū* ankle bells. Poorly equipped to cope with the Himalayan winter, they left Bhaktapur after much shivering and coughing. (Fig. 201)

In 1983 two destitute Brahmacārī singers arrived from Far West Nepal to stay for two years. They came from one of the country's poorest regions where some families were forced to sell their children into prostitution or slavery in India, as they were unable to feed them. These undernourished boys had been told to leave their village for seven years and spend a pious life in purity on their path in search of divine help. Their only equipment was a small *ektāra* drone

Fig. 201: The *ānanda laharī* chordophone, a plucked drum

Fig. 202: Brahmacārī singers Hari Prasād and Kṛṣṇa Prasād with *ektāra* during a recording session, 17/8/1983

instrument (Fig. 202), to accompany two begging songs that they learnt before being sent away. The two songs were loosely based on episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa epic, one of them a gruesome ballad of a beheaded damsel. Neither the songs nor their rendition appeared effective in feeding the boys. When those seven years were over, they returned to their village—accompanied by Axel Michaels who wanted to know what would happen. They were treated as unwelcome visitors and left to continue their journey into nowhere.

5.1 *Dhalcā* and *Bhajan*

Dhalcā bhajan, *rās bhajan* and *gyānmala bhajan* are the Newar equivalent of Indian devotional group singing at temples and religious congregations. It is the standard musical and emotional expression of *bhakti*, loving surrender to God. *Dhalcā bhajan* uses the *dhalak* drum and cymbals as accompanying instruments, playing the *tālas calti* (4 + 4 *mātrā*), *dehrā* (4 + 4 *mātrā*), *partāl* (3 + 2 + 2) and *kharjati* (3 + 2 + 2). *Rās bhajan* and the Buddhist *gyānmala bhajan* use *tablā* and harmonium[6] as accompanying instruments. The more recently imported genre *rās bhajan* uses the Indian *tālas kaharvā, dādarā* and *dīpcandī* or local variants of these *tālas*. It has this in common with *gyānmala bhajan* that was introduced during the 1940s by Buddhist monks in Svayaṃbhū and initially banned by the ruler Juddha SJB Rana who perceived the new genre as a threat against Hinduism. Participation in *bhajan* singing transcends the limits of caste—nowadays also of gender. It is open to all. The map below testifies to the enormous popularity of these genres during the 1980s as the general evening occupation of Bhaktapur males. This changed abruptly with the introduction of television. Most groups stopped performing, with the exception of town rituals. (Map 33)

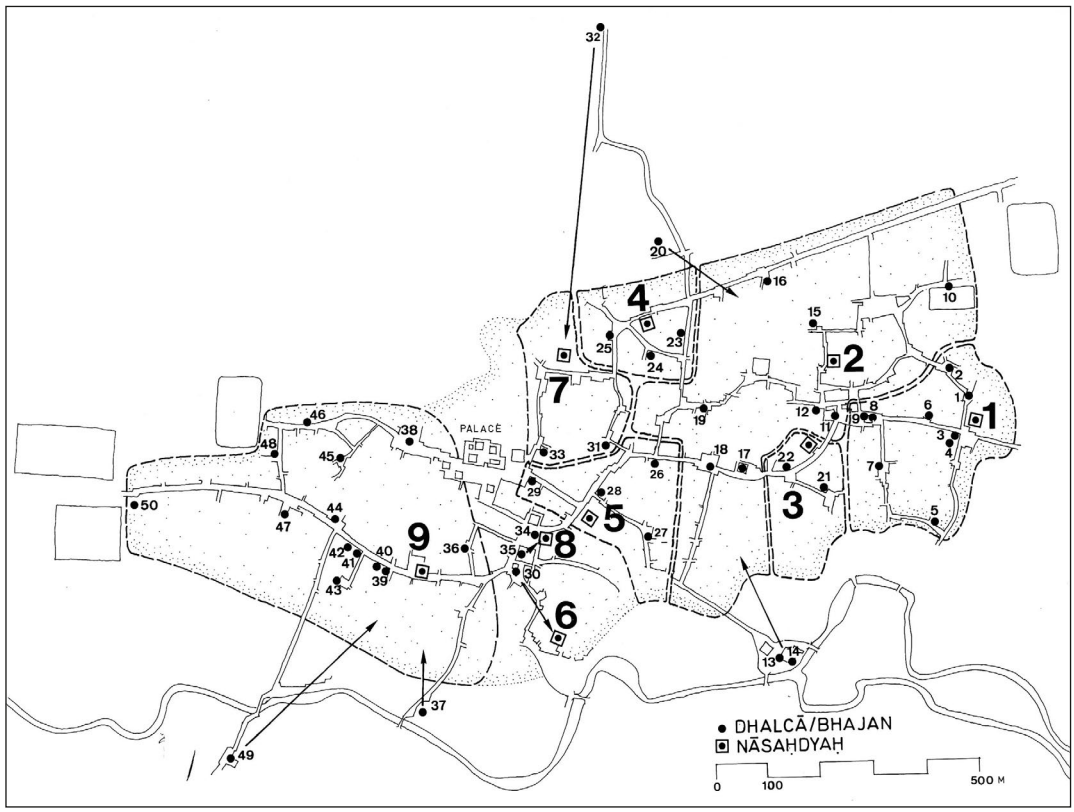
During processions *bhajan* groups turn mobile with the help of transport bicycles. In the case of *rās bhajan,* the accompanying instruments are placed on a cart that is pushed along the processional route in front of the palanquin carrying the god. The players walk directly behind or next to the tray where they can reach the *tablā* and the harmonium. This is a recent fashion. Before 1951, the use of the wheel was restricted to chariots carrying gods during town rituals. The only exceptions were luxury cars for the Rana rulers. Those vehicles and also grand pianos were status symbols that had to be carried to Kathmandu by manpower. (Figs. 203, 204)

The only *kvakhĩcā-dhalcā* group in Bhaktapur uses a *kvakhĩcā* instead of a *dhalak* drum, playing the same *tālas* as other *dhalcā* groups. These compositions are also played as part of the masked dance and *navabājā* repertoires. (Fig. 205, Map 34)

A typical *dhalcā bhajan* performance in the courtyard of Vākupati Nārāyaṇa included the following *dhalcā bhajan* songs and Newar *tāls*:

1. *Dyaḥlhāygu* (instrumental)
2. Sitakamalā *(rāg: maru, tāl: dehrā)*
3. *Mālāsama (tāl: dehrā)*
4. Devī Bhavāni *(tāl: calti, kharjati)*
5. *Jaya jaya* Machendranāth *(tāl: dehrā)*
6. *He* Mahādeva *(rāg vasanta)*
7. Badvachaba *(tāl: dehrā)*
8. Janāni *yā hune (tāl: calti)*
9. Taleju *bina nã (tāl: kharjati)*
10. *Āratī (tāl: calti)*
11. *Jaya jaya Nārāyaṇa*

6 in Newari: *tamal* and *arven*

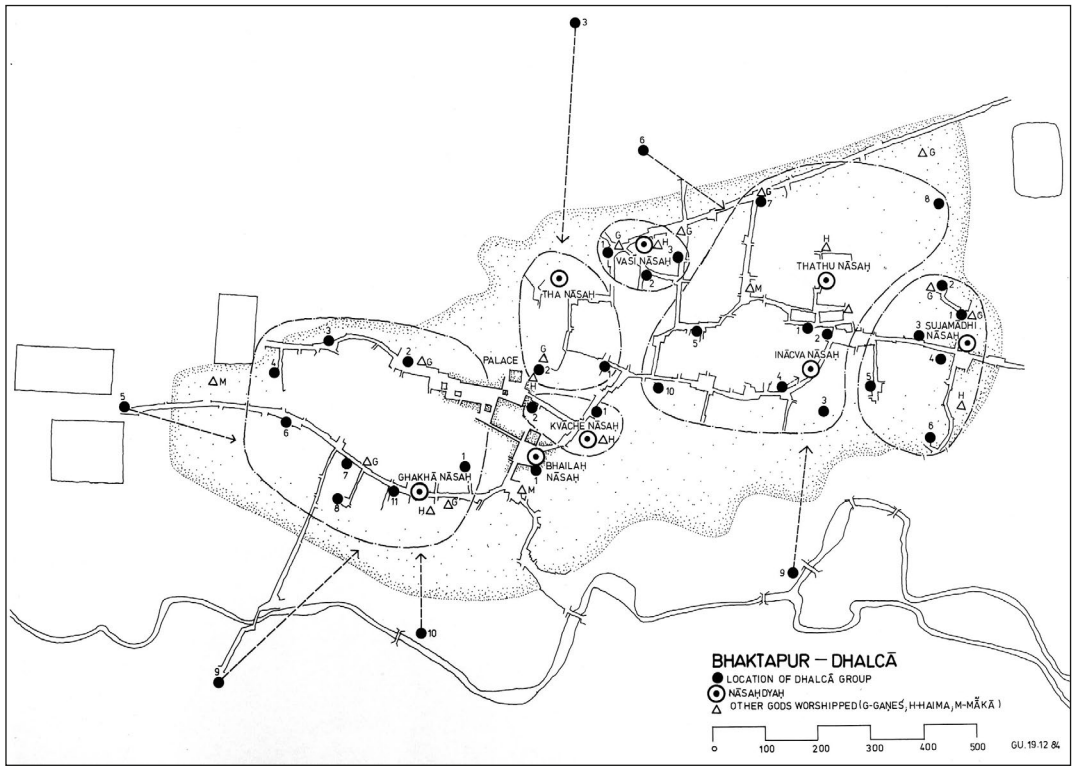


Map 33: Dhalcā and *bhajan* groups in relation to shrines of *Nāsaḥdyaḥ* worshipped during apprenticeship, 1984 (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

Fig. 203: Rās bhajan group of Yāchē Gaṇeś with *tablā* (Tīrtha Man Nāpit) and harmonium on wheels, *sāpāru* 1991

Fig. 204: Dhalcā-bhajan group singing on New Year's morning at Yaḥsīkyaḥ 1985

Fig. 205: Bhairavnāth *kvakhīcā dhalcā* performing on New Year's morning at Yaḥśīkhyaḥ 1985



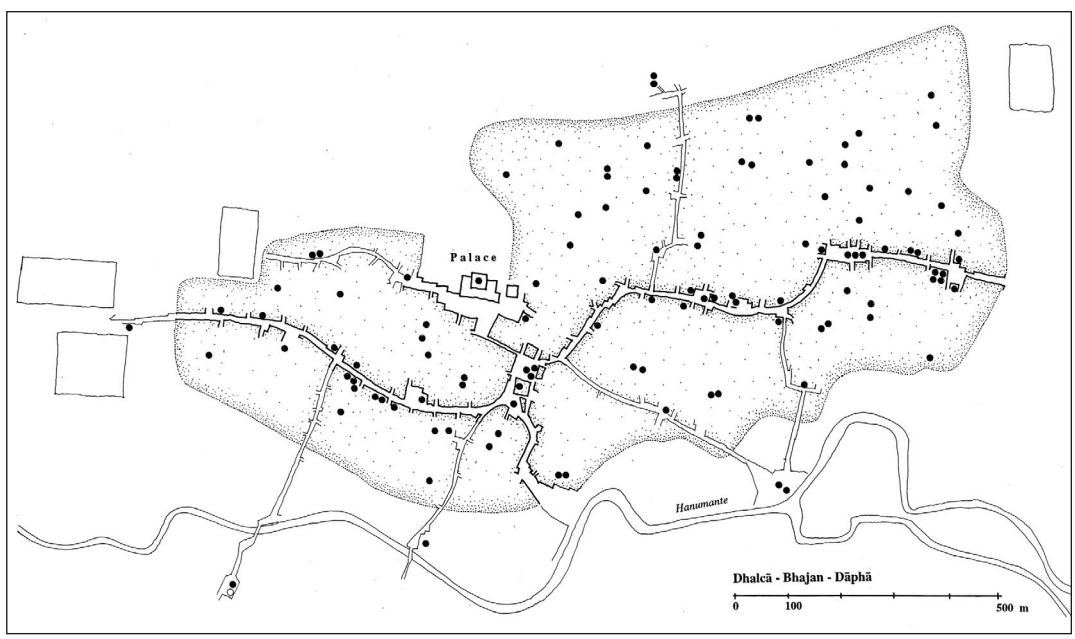
Map 34: Dhalcā groups in relation to shrines of Nāsaḥdyaḥ worshipped during apprenticeship, 1984 (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

During the 1990s, a few *bhajan* groups began to amplify their presentations with abominable technical equipment. It did not occur to them that neither the gods nor the neighbours needed a hearing aid. Drowning the neighbourhood with electronic noise is of no consequence in a culture where there is not even a word for 'disturb'. Someone must have seen this in India where amplified prayer and call to prayer have been common nuisance for decades as a means of dominance. Mercifully, power cuts are a daily occurrence in Bhaktapur. (Fig. 206)

Dominance and competition are and should remain alien to religious group singing. This applies to *bhajan*, *dhalcā* and *dāphā*[7] as well. The essential value is not perfection but participation, being part of the community. This was definitely consolidated during daily performances. The joy and peace of mind that members of a song group experience together were an invaluable factor in maintaining peace and happiness in the neighbourhood. This is even more important in a society where hierarchy can be a cruel obsession and where jealousy and hatred among siblings and neighbours can sever relations for generations. Music making keeps those destructive passions at bay—at least during the performance. Singing and drumming together gives new energy to socialization and is—was—valued for its cleansing, rejuvenating effect on Newar society. (Map 35)

7 Widdess 2013, chapter 4 offers a detailed and enlightening discussion about the relationship of *dāphā* and the social order.

Fig. 206: Bhajan group in Tilāchē having a fashionably amplified performance for the gods, 1990



Map 35: In 1983, 113 song groups of the three immensely popular genres *dhalcā, bhajan* and *dāphā* were singing daily for the gods, maintaining peace and happiness. With a few exceptions, all this has been lost. (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow).

5.2 *Dāphā* and *Lālākhī*

With over sixty active groups in 1983, *dāphā* was the most popular genre of devotional group singing at temples and shrines. Descending of the ancient South Asian *prabandha gīta*, *dāphā* songs are set to *rāga* and *tāla*. The most experienced singer starts with a short vocal solo introduction called *rāg kāyegu*[8] that proceeds without fixed rhythm for approximately three minutes.

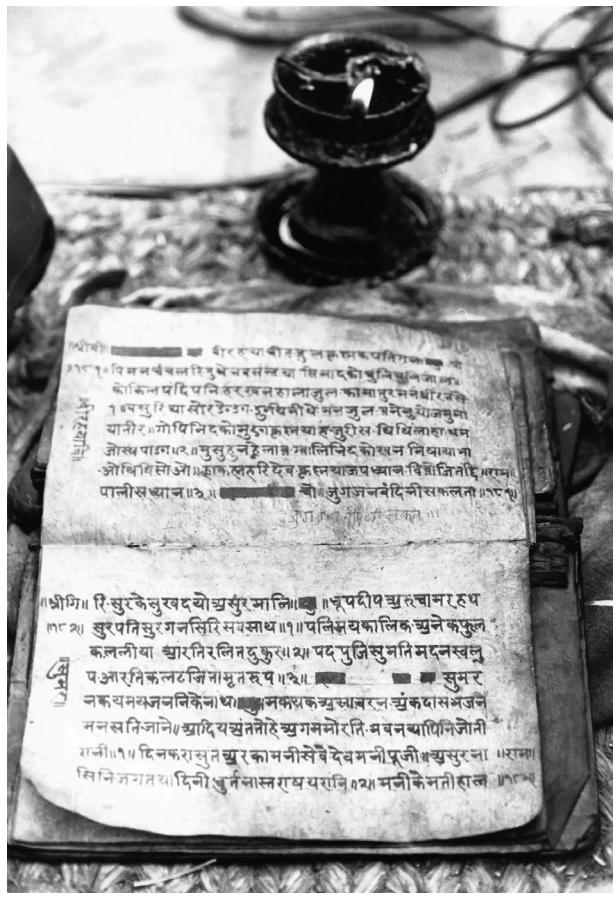
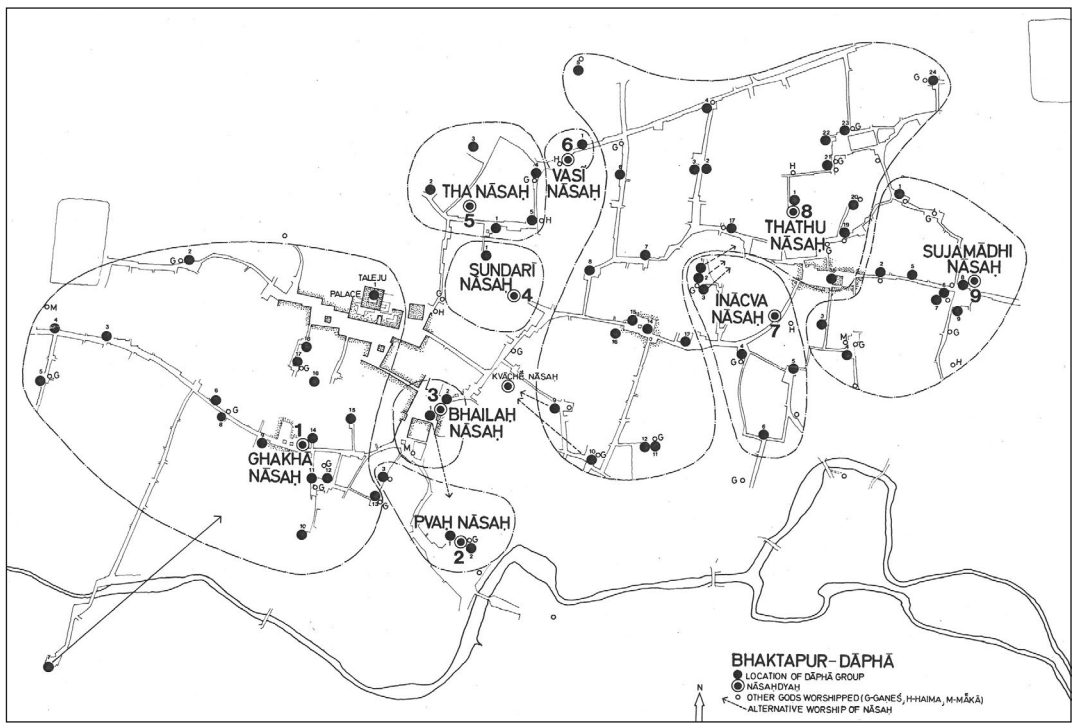


Fig. 207: Hand-written songbook of Yāchẽ *navadāphā* with song texts in black ink and names of *rāga* and *tāla* in red

The song begins in a set *tāla* with the accompaniment of one or two *lālākhī* drums, cymbals (*tāḷ* and *jyālicā*) and—at the climaxes—two or more natural trumpets *pvaṅga*. The *pvaṅga* players maintain one main pitch with continuous undulation within a narrow area around this pitch. There are two groups of singers who sit facing each other, each group having a hand-written songbook lying on the floor in front of the lead singer in the centre of each row. (Fig. 207)

8 lit. taking or exposing the *rāg*

Burning pairs of oil wicks resting in ornate brass lampstands help to illuminate the songbooks. Only song texts are written down and the names of *rāga* and *tāla* given. The rest is orally transmitted. One group sings the refrain *dhuvã* of the song, the other group responds by repeating this. This exchange continues several times until they join forces in a livelier tempo, *nhyāḥ*. The final stanza may include the composer's name, among them kings of Bhaktapur like Bhūpatīndra Malla or Raṇajit Malla—both passionate *dāphā* composer-singers. *Dāphā* sessions start with a long *dyaḥlhāygu* drum piece as an invocation of Nāsaḥdyaḥ. The session ends with *āratī* during which a special oil lamp with a statue of the donor is lit and briefly held in front of every musician who offers the *praṇām* gesture with folded hands, showing respect to Nārāyaṇa. (Map 36)



Map 36: Bhaktapur's 63 *dāphā* song groups, in relation to the various shrines of the music god *Nāsaḥdyaḥ* worshipped by group members during apprenticeship (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

Dāphā song texts are in Sanskrit, Maithili and Newari. Some groups sing the complete *padas* of Jayadeva's Gītagovinda (Fig. 208). The rarely literate older farmers of the early 1980s could not be expected to understand the subtleties and the dazzling beauty of the 12th century Sanskrit poem describing the love play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. They were aware of the outlines of the story and recognized the names of the divine couple. The poem's age and immense popularity sufficed to hold it sacred. For a fascinating and detailed study of *dāphā* in Bhaktapur I strongly recommend Richard Widdesses brilliant publication[9].

9 Widdess 2013

Fig. 208: Dāphā singers singing about the love play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, 1989

The barrel-shaped *lālākhĩ*[10] drum accompanies *dāphā* songs, processions and several masked dances, for example Rādhākṛṣṇa *pyākhã, kavācā pyākhã, khīcā pyākhã, kha pyākhã* and the identifying stick dance of the *sāpāru* festival, *ghētāgiśi*. *Lālākhĩ* accompaniment of *dāphā* songs includes numerous citations of dance patterns that singers instantly identify[11]. The drum has black tuning paste *khau* permanently stuck onto both drumheads. It contains powdered iron ore. This allows for an elaborate finger technique and a variety of sound productions. Each drumhead consists of two hides—the lower one carrying the *khau* paste and the circular one on top. Both hides are woven into the outer leather ring with holes for the drum straps with V-lacing. Three pieces of cow hides are used and female goat hide only for the lower hide of the Nāsaḥ drumhead.

The accompaniment varies a little between different *dāphā* groups. The compositions transcribed in this publication are the complete *lālākhĩ* repertoire of Yāchẽ *navadāphā*. Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhva taught them to me in 1983 and 1984. What he taught were—with the exception of the *dyaḥlhāygu* invocations and *thata*[12]—not entirely fixed compositions but models that need minor adjustments to the various *dāphā* songs during performance. Ideally, a *lālākhĩ* drummer learns both the songs and the drum repertoire. Before a new *tāl* is taught during drumming apprenticeship, a blood sacrifice must be performed at the respective Nāsaḥ shrine. (Fig. 209)

10 also called *dāphākhĩ* or just *khĩ*, which is also the generic term for 'drum'

11 Widdess 2013 mentions that *dāphā* singers sometimes perceive gods dancing in their midst, perhaps looking like masked dancers. Those associations and visualizations could have been triggered by respective dance patterns woven into the drum accompaniment. The names of such patterns are mentioned in chapter 11.12.

12 *Thata* can be played as an alternative to *dyaḥlhāygu* at the beginning of a *dāphā* performance, before the singing starts. It is ideal for the drummer to warm up.

Fig. 209: Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhva (with cap, next to the left stone lion) supervising his *lālākhī* students during their coming-out ritual *pirāne pūjā* of Yāchē *navadāphā* at the shrine of Thāthu Nāsaḥdyaḥ 1987. The young *dāphā* singers proudly wear Nepali caps presented to them as a token of successful completion of their apprenticeship. Despite the fact that the sun is shining, lamp stands with burning oil wicks are kept in front of the songbooks. The lamp stand with the donor's figure in the centre is lit only at the end of the performance.

As far as I could see, most *dāphā* groups of Bhaktapur have a similar set of compositions for *dāphā* accompaniment. Only one farmer of Inācva, the late Hari Bhakta Kasichvah (Fig. 210), knew six more pieces that he allowed me to record before he passed away.

During processions with *dāphā* singing, the drum is carried in a sling around the neck. The *ghētāgiśi* stick dance performed during *sāpāru* is based on a basic pattern and its variants, played by the two drums *dhã̄* and *lālākhī* alternating. (Fig. 211)

Before teaching compositions, Ganesh Bahadur gave me an exercise, *lāhā jukegu*, to create the habit of precise sound production. *Dyaḥlhāygu*, *cicāhāḥgu dyaḥlhāygu,* or *thata* are played as an offering before the *dāphā* singing starts. As indicated in the songbooks after the song text and the name of the *rāga*, the following compositions accompany the *dāphā* songs, *ghvasāḥ, astarā, ektā, cvakh, kharjati, partāl, lagasikha,* and *cāli*[13]. *Āratī* is played during the final light offering. The three examples of *rāg thvakegu* are not fixed compositions but flourishes that the drummer intersperses during the solo singer's *rāg* presentation before the *dāphā* song proceeds in a fixed *tāl*.

In the photo series below, Hari Govinda Ranjitkar demonstrates the *lālākhī* drumstrokes (Figs. 212–220). As a youth he learnt the *dāphā* compositions together with a group of farmer boys. When one of the Jyāpu farmers was honoured as the best drummer, Hari Govinda was

13 These pieces are not compatible with *navabājā* compositions of similar names. Similarity extends to meter, not to patterns.

Fig. 210: Hari Bhakta Kasichvaḥ playing my *lālākhĩ* during a recording session in 1984

Fig. 211: Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhva and his neighbours playing *lālākhĩ* and *dhã* during *sāpāru* 1990

convinced that—owing to his lower caste as a Chipā cloth-dyer—his obvious talent had been bypassed. Feeling piqued, he decided not to play *lālākhĩ* but to focus on the solo repertoire of the *navabājā* drums that he presented so admirably during *navadāphā* performances—unequalled by any other drummer in town. As his inherited cloth-dying craft went out of fashion, he worked as a stonemason for the German Bhaktapur Development Project. Although his hands must have suffered during manual work, his playing was that of an exceptionally talented musician.

Fig. 212

tā, tān, nã

Fig. 213

tin

Fig. 214

di

Fig. 215

ni, li

Fig. 216

ti

Fig. 217

drakha

Fig. 218

ghē

Fig. 219

kha

Fig. 220

Silent dampening for added brilliance of right hand stroke *tā*

Stroke combinations

dhã = tā + ghẽ
dhe = di + ghẽ
dhin = tin + ghẽ
dha = tin + kha (only in the combination *dha li tā ghẽ*)

5.3 *Navadāphā* and *Navabājā*

The term *navabājā*[14] refers to a set of nine different drums played in succession with varying accompaniment of different pairs of cymbals, *Gujarāti mvālĩ* shawms, *bāẽcā* fipple flutes and *pvaṅgā* natural trumpets. The town's four remaining *navabājā* groups[15] are all part of larger ensembles of singers and instrumentalists, performing *dāphā* songs at specific temples and shrines. These combined ensembles of *dāphā* plus *navabājā* are called *navadāphā*:

dāphā + navabājā = navadāphā

An ancient Newar form of responsorial group singing (*prabandha gīt*), *dāphā* songs[16] are accompanied with *tāḥ* and *jhyāli* cymbals, two natural trumpets *pvaṅgā* and the double-headed drum *lālākhĩ* which is not part of the set of nine *navabājā* drums. Approximately twenty times per year during certain auspicious lunar phases and important town rituals, the *navabājā* drums participate in the *navadāphā* performance as a special highlight sandwiched between pairs of *dāphā* songs. The nine drums are always played in a given succession, each drum playing a complete composition selected from a vast repertoire. The nine *navabājā* drums and their impressive repertoire are of central interest for this publication.

The chart below lists the nine drums starting with *dhã* and ending with *nagarā*, in the order of their appearance during performance (Tab. 1). In keeping with their dominant role, the name *navabājā* refers only to the drums, not to accompanying idiophones (cymbals and brass disc) and wind instruments (shawms, fipple flutes and natural trumpets). They are listed according to their prescribed combinations during performance. Only the inclusion of the brass disc *kāẽpā* may or may not be omitted, depending on the number of musicians.

14 Nepali: *naubājā*, lit. 'nine drums'
15 survey 2007
16 see Richard Widdess 2013

Tab. 1: Combination of nine navabājā drums with accompanying instruments.

	kāẽpā	tāḥ	jhyālicā	sichyāḥ	bhuchyāḥ	pvaṅgā	mvālī	bāẽcā
dhã̃				+	+	+		
kvatāḥ				+	+	+		
dhã̃cā	+	+		+			+	
dhimaycā				+	+	+	+	
nāykhĩ		+		+		+*	+	
pachimā	+	+		+			+	
dhalak	+	+		+			+	
kvakhĩcā		+	+					+
nagarā	+	+		+			+	

*only at the end of *calti* and *ektā*

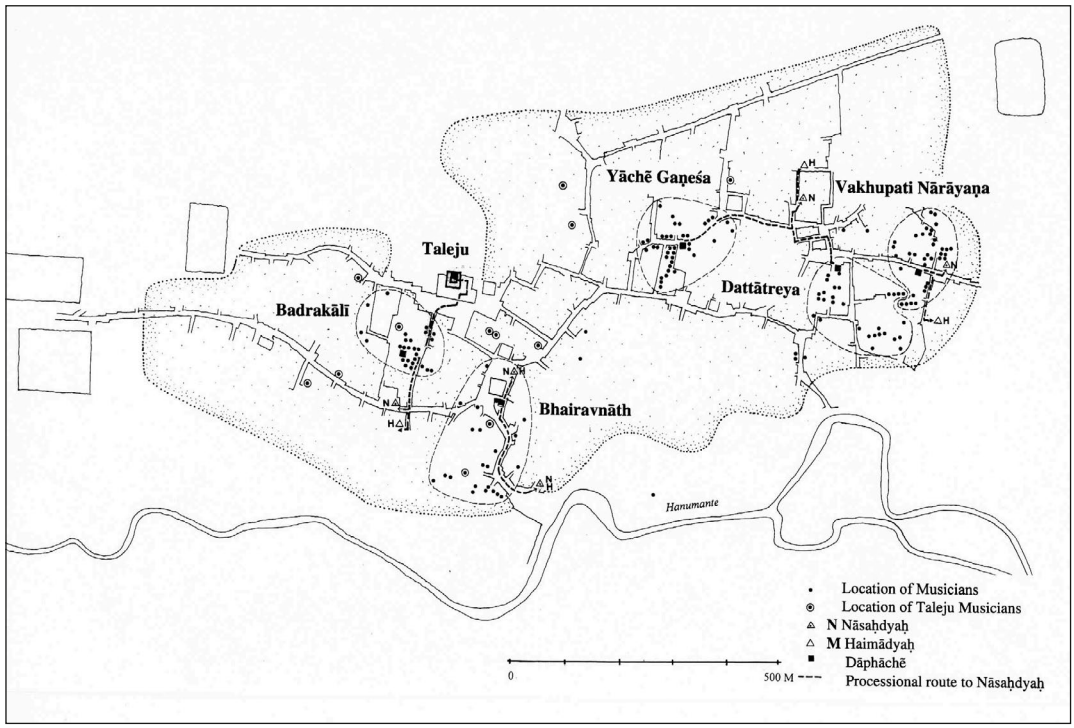
Until 1980, there were six *navadāphā* groups among the sixty-three *dāphā* song groups of Bhaktapur (Map 37):

name	location
Taleju *navadāphā*	Mūcuka of Lāykū (palace)
Bhairavnāth *navadāphā*	Lākulāchẽ
Bhadrakālī *navadāphā*	Icchu
Dattātreya *navadāphā*	Tacapāḥ
Vākupati Nārāyaṇa *navadāphā*	Sujamādhi
Yāchẽ Gaṇeś *navadāphā*	Yāchẽ

One more *navabājā* group had existed in Gvachẽ. It was disbanded in 1972. Previously it had played for the *Navadurgā* of Bhaktapur, during their annual gathering on the day of *bihi,*[17] in *Gvachẽ* square where the gods drink the blood and consume the decaying brain of the *khame* buffalo that is sacrificed eight days earlier at the shrine of Brahmayāṇī.

Each Bhaktapur *navadāphā* group has a *dāphāchẽ*, a building next to the shrine of the god for whom the group performs Here musical instruments, song books and lampstands are kept, meetings are held, quarrels are fought, students are taught, and feasts are eaten. The management of *navadāphā* affairs involves plenty of discussion over ritual feasts. Sometimes one gets the impression that these groups serve more as a platform for neighbourhood quarrels than for making music. Occasionally such quarrels led to a group splitting into two[18] or ceasing to play regularly. The function of the group leader (*nāyaḥ*) circulates annually. As every individual who passes the

17 cf. chapter 4.2
18 Dattātreya *navadāphā*

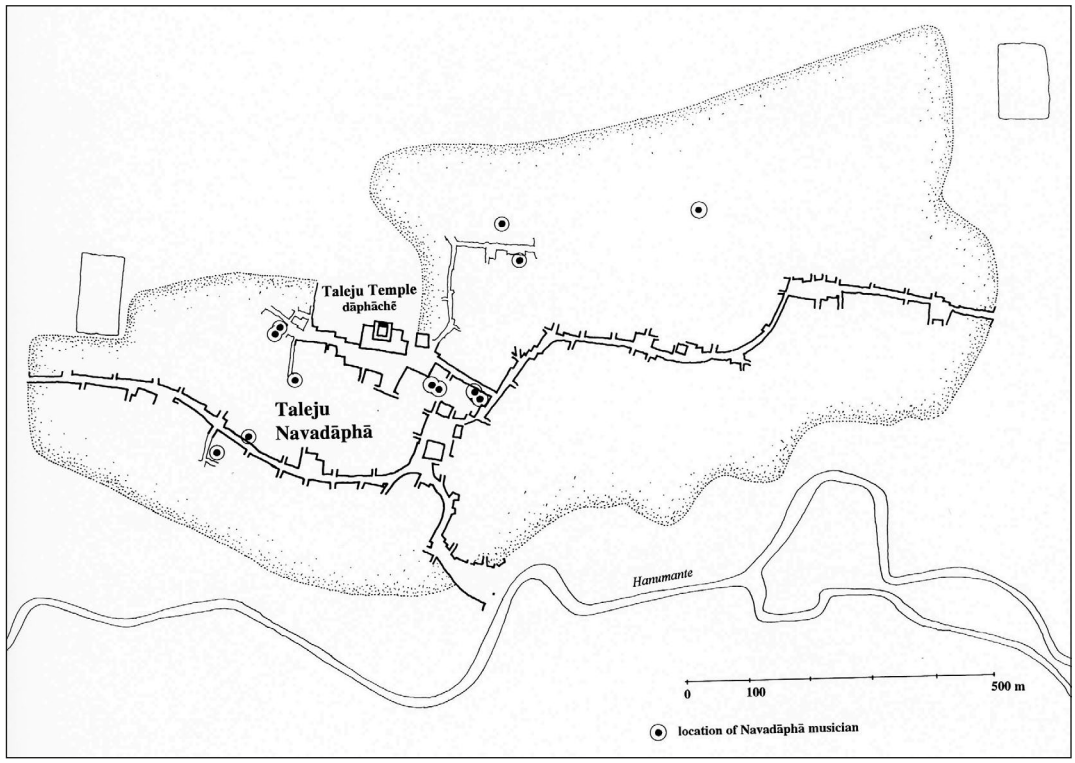


Map 37: Location of 5 remaining *navadāphā* groups and their members' homes (1983 survey), in relation to *Nāsaḥdyaḥ/Haimādyaḥ* and other gods worshipped during apprenticeship. (courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

singing apprenticeship or any of the instruments becomes a life member, some groups have the tendency to grow beyond capacity. In fact, many members do not participate in the performances, appearing only during annual feasts and the habitual drunken brawls that ensue with predictable regularity and regrettable results. Already in the 1980s, the younger generation's cultural ideals were dominated by the Bollywood film industry with their escapist dream productions and by other influences from abroad. For them, making traditional music in the local community as an expression of cultural identity was definitely not their chief interest.

Taleju *navadāphā* was the first *navadāphā* group to be afflicted by the generation gap (Map 38). The group managed to survive the land reforms, when each member had two to four *ropanis* of *guṭhī* land transferred to his name just in time. Farmers cultivated the land and received fifty per cent share of the annual yield as payment. All the group members were from the upper strata of the caste hierarchy. During the Malla period their ancestors served as courtiers at the royal palace and their homes were scattered in a wide circle around Bhaktapur's palace square. In 1983, the fifteen remaining members were all old men in their sixties[19]. None of them succeeded in stimulating their younger relatives' interest. This, the oldest among Bhaktapur's *navabājā* groups stopped performing in 1985. Among their active *dāphā* repertoire they had one praise song for

19 In those days, a person above forty was considered 'old'



Map 38: Performance site of Taleju *navadāphā* in front of their *dāphāchẽ* facing the Taleju temple. Residences of the high caste group members are spread in a wide circle around the palace (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

Jaya Prakāśa Malla of Kāntipur[20]. Earlier there were several songs for other Malla kings—in 1983 already forgotten.

Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* faces similar problems but they do remember their songs—among them praise songs for Jayaprakāś Malla, Bhūpatīndra Malla and Ranjīt Malla. Group members are mostly farmers and a few of higher castes. Only twenty-two musicians remained in 1983 (in 1975 there were thirty-two members). In 1999, 2006 and 2014, this *navadāphā* trained a group of young drummers and singers. The most successful students in 2014 were two of the girls who also learnt *lālākhĩ*. The group has an important performance during the New Year festival on 27th Baiśākh, just before Bhairava leaves his temple bordering Taumāḍhi square to enter his chariot that has been prepared for the annual tug of war between upper and lower town. Whilst members of the *Sāymi* oilpresser caste decorate the chariot, Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* starts playing on the large stone platform (*dabu*) at the southern end of Taumāḍhi square. As soon as the god's arrival is heralded by a group of Jugi shawm-players emerging from the gate house next to the Bhairavnāth temple, the performance is interrupted, and the *dhã̃*-drummer pushes through the

20 ruler of Kathmandu 1736–1746 and 1750–1768

Fig. 221: The *nāyaḥ* (leader) of Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* playing *dhā* in front of Bhailadyaḥ (Bhairava), leading the procession of the god on his way from the *sataḥ* gate house next to the temple to the chariot. The drummer has to drum his way through a massive crowd of devotees keen on touching the silver head of the god. Taumādhi, 10/4/1985 (photo courtesy of Ada Wilson)

excited crowd to precede the god on his way to the chariot. Enthusiasts compete in touching or at least having a glimpse of the Bhailadyaḥ's silver head. (Fig. 221)

According to legend, Kāśī Bhairava attended Bhaktapur's New Year festival incognito. When the god was recognized, he began to disappear by sinking into the earth. Just before he was gone, someone beheaded him with a sword. So Bhairava's head remained in Bhaktapur for people to worship him in the Bhairavnāth temple and during processions. When Bhairava takes his seat on the chariot, the spectacular chariot-pulling contest starts, which invariably erupts into serious brick-throwing causing a stampede. Upper town youths fight against lower town youths, always keeping an eye on non-Newar armed forces in battle gear looming in the background—lest they become the target of raining bricks.

Fig. 222: Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* performing during New Year's morning at Yaḥśīkhyaḥ. Bhairava left his chariot (background, left), receiving offerings in the eight-cornered pavilion.

Bhairava makes another appearance in town during his grand Bhairavnāth *jātrā* along the *pradakṣiṇa* on two successive days of the *sāpāru* week.[21] On this occasion, the god is accompanied by a smaller procession carrying a donor statue in the adoration pose of King Girvāṇ Yuddha Vikrām Śāha of Nepal (r. 1799–1816). Girvāṇ Śāha wanted to be remembered as a devotee of the most prominent god of the Kathmandu Valley and ordered the Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* to organise his annual Girvāṇ *jātrā* in such a way that it accompanied the god on his sacred route. To date, the *navadāphā* group keeps the original deed specifying details and conditions. It includes forty-one and three quarter ropanies and exempted the members of the group from different kinds of forced labour and different types of taxes. The group has to continue singing for Bhairavnāth every day, playing the *navabājā* instruments on special days and "...perform the *Pañcopacārapūjā* for Śrī Mahābhairava on the second day of the waning moon of the month of Bhādra, wishing the victory and prosperity of Ours". The deed ends with a warning, "...the evil eye of the same deity shall be cast on the person and persons misappropriating the income."—In 1822, another deed of twenty-five ropanies was allocated to the group on command of Chautariya Rana Udyota Śāha for observation of the Girvāṇ *jātrā* and "...to perform daily rituals and pray for Our everlasting prosperity." (Fig. 222)

Another occasion, of serene beauty, is *Sakimānā* fullmoon in November, at the end of the harvesting season. In front of the Bhairavnāth temple, the *navadāphā* group members prepare a huge mosaic with rice, popcorn, soya beans and other grains, depicting Bhairavnāth and Betāḍhyaḥ

21 see processional route in chapter 3.

Fig. 223: Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* performing during Sakimā punhī, looking at the completed grain mosaic (*nāsaḥ bvegu*) showing Bhairavnāth's chariot (*rath*) and the New Year pole.

on the chariot as well as the New Year *yaḥśī* pole at Yaḥśīkhyaḥ (Fig. 223). The mosaic is decorated with oil lamps and the group settles around it for their *navadāphā* performance. During this evening, all other song groups prepare similar mosaics depicting the local gods. People walk quietly from temple to temple to admire the pictures. Before the 1963 land reforms, Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* received 72 *murī* grain from their land and 24 *pāthi*[22] mustard oil delivered by Sāymi oilpressers of Gvaḥmādhi. In 1963 they lost twenty-two *ropanī* land[23], as there were no deed documents. Here is a list of their major annual expenses:

— Sakimā punhī (grain mosaic for Bhairavnāth): 12 *pāthi* wheat, 1 *pāthi* black soya, 4 *pāthi* corn, 4 *pāthi* popped rice, 2 *dhārni ghī*, 1 *pāthi* 4 *mānā* mustard oil, 1/2 *dhārni* sugar, 1 *pau* black pepper, fennel seed, 150 kg firewood
— Māgh Kṛṣṇa parevā (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 buffalo, 1 goat, 1 duck, 9 *pāthi* fried beaten rice, 16 *pāthi* beaten rice
— Māgh dutiya (next day, *pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Māgh tritiya: preparing and eating things sacrificed during previous days
— Māgh Kṛṣṇa cauthi (*pūjā* for Surya Vināyaka Gaṇeśa): 1 goat
— Puṣ Kṛṣṇa prati pradāḥ (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Phālgun śukla dvādaśī (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Cait 27 (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth and *guṭhī* feast): 1 goat
— Baiśākh 1 (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Baiśākh 2 (cleaning brass lamps and offering oil lamps, *pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat

22 1 *murī* equalled 91 litres (now less), 1 *pāthi* equals 1 imperial gallon = 4,55 l, 1 dhārni equals 2.400 g, 1 māna equals 0,56 l

23 1 ropanī equals 5476 square feet or 508,72 square metres

— Baiśākh 4 (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Baiśākh 5 (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Bhādra Kṛṣṇa tritiya and cauthī (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth, Girvāṇ *jātrā*): 2 goats
— Bhādra śukla punhi, Indra jātrā (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat
— Dīpāvalī, *dugu pūjā* (*pūjā* for Bhairavnāth): 1 goat

The fate of the Bhadrakālī *navadāphā* appears to be exemplary of the general decline. Since the Malla period, this group had been supported by a royal land endowment. After the Land Reform Act in 1963, the contractor Biśva Khardār agreed to entertain the group members with a ritual feast nine times a year. The thirty-two group members were supposed to contribute oil for burning the lamps during performances. So far, so good. The group retained one last plot of land which yielded just enough rice to pay the Jugi shawm players and the drum-maker for repairing the nine drums. Unfortunately this land was lost in 1980 when it became part of the Small Industrial Area (SIA) set up by the German Bhaktapur Development Project. Compensation never reached the group, as they were not able to produce written documents supporting their claim. Without payment, the shawm players boycotted all further performances. The drums were left to decay. The contractor died. His son became a highschool teacher, his grandson a finance clerk in a Kathmandu tourist hotel. They lost interest in the affairs of an ancient music group in Bhaktapur. Bhadrakālī *navadāphā* stopped playing their nine drums around 1980. Only the *dāphā* group remains. After this, the complete group is reported to have played only once, on New Year's morning 1986 (13th April) at Yaḥśīkhyaḥ. On this occasion, the entire population of Bhaktapur worships Bhailā, Betāḍhyaḥ and Bhadrakālī whilst the gods recover from their brutal chariot ramming during the previous night[24].

The three remaining *navadāphā* groups of the upper town are those of Dattātreya, Vākupati Nārāyaṇa, and Yāchẽ Gaṇeś. They were founded by private donors, and their members are almost exclusively farmers. Only Yāchẽ *navadāphā* included a barber (Nau) and a cloth-dyer (Chipā). The latter was Hari Govinda Ranjitkār, Bhaktapur's most outstanding *navabājā* drummer.

Founded by a Mahantā caretaker of the Pūjāri math, Dattātreya *navadāphā* still performs during festivals in front of the Dattātreya temple—thanks to the Lachimasyu family's four generations of talented drummers (now male and female), living as caretakers in the *dāphāchẽ* next to the Dattātreya temple. The first Rāṇā ruler, Jang Bahādur Rāṇā (1817–1877) donated twenty-eight *ropanī* land. In 1983, the group comprised of twenty-eight, in 1993 of thirty-six farmers. Jugis from Taumādhī came to provide shawm accompaniment against an annual remuneration of seventy-two *pāthi* rice grain. The Kulu drum-maker was supposed to tighten and repair the drums every month. In return, he received 1 *murī* of grain and participated in the annual *dāphā pūjā* feast of the group. Dattātreya *navadāphā* sings *dāphā* songs every day—with the exception of six early monsoon weeks when rice transplanting leaves no extra time for music. The nine drums were played every full moon, four days during the New Year festival, including the *jātrās* of Bhīmasena and Chumā Gaṇeśa, during the Dattātreya *jātrā* (*sāpāru* week), Mahāṣṭhamī, Mahānavamī and

24 This joyous fertility ritual happens immediately after the erection of the *yaḥśī* pole that signals the beginning of the New Year.

Fig. 224: Dattātreya *navadāphā* performing during *vijayā daśamī* 1998, with Panchalal Lachimasyu (left *lālākhī* player). Women returning from Brahmayāṇī leave offerings before a painted cloth depicting mothergoddesses under a helpful *PŪJĀ* soap advertisement. Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola had already extended their global competition with huge advertisement boards disfiguring the entire Kathmandu Valley.

Vijayā Daśamī (*mvahani*), and Śivarātri. On the day after Śivarātri, a group of ascetics used to camp around a log fire smouldering in front of the Dattātreya temple where they gave yogic advice to the general public for a few days. (Fig. 224)

Until 1995, there were only male drummers in Bhaktapur. When I taught *dhimay* drumming to Gopal Lachimasyu and his friends, his sister Indira surprised me by having picked up the initial lessons by listening from the kitchen. When her parents agreed, she joined the boys group, surprising the town during their coming-out procession. Instantly, all her female classmates wanted to learn from her. Nowadays it is not uncommon for girls to participate in many genres of processional music. Gopal, Indira and their younger sister Julum took part in several concert tours with the 'Masterdrummers of Nepal', presenting Newar drumming traditions and dances to European audiences. Indira was recruited as a judge during several drumming competitions organised by the Bhaktapur Municipality and fills a significant role as a teacher of *dhimay* and *navabājā*.

The shawm players of the impure but touchable Jugi tailor-musician caste are not members of the *navadāphā* groups. They were paid for their musical service with a fixed amount of grain per year and a share in the feast. Sadly, the tendency was to withhold their payment or at least to keep it as low as possible. No wonder that the Jugi musicians felt exploited and tended to stay at home. Over the past two decades it became increasingly difficult to find capable shawm players

Fig. 225: Vākupati Nārāyaṇa *navadāphā* performing during *pancadān carhe* 1986 at Sujamādhi. The group's transverse flutes *bãsuri* replace Jugi shawm players, owing to lack of funds.

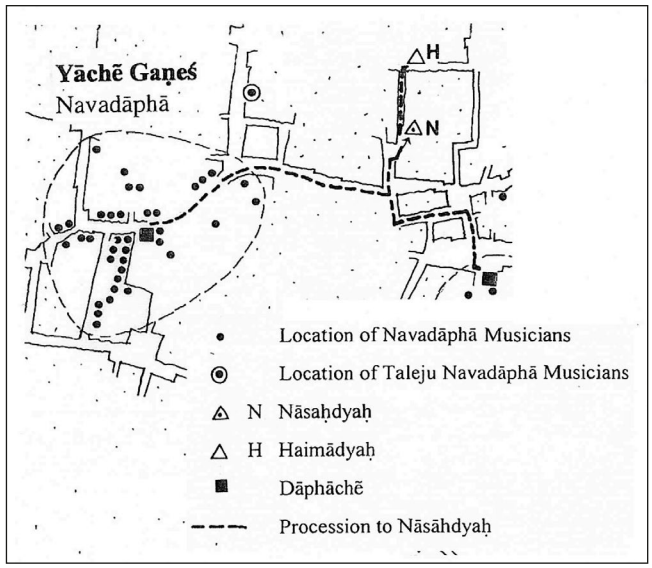
to support all scheduled performances, especially during major festivals. Groups had to manage without shawms. Vākupati Nārāyaṇa *navadāphā* solved the problem by replacing the missing shawm players with their own processional ensemble of transverse flutes. (Fig. 225)

This group comprised of thirty-five farmers singing *dāphā* songs every day and playing their set of *navabājā* drums every full moon, the lunar phase sacred to Nārāyaṇa. During The New Year festival (Vaiśākh 3) the group participates in the Brahmayānī *jātrā*, singing *dāphā* songs between a double row of impressive ancient torches. Their repertoire includes an interesting praise song for Bhūpatīndra Malla, telling the following story: The king and his colleagues from Kāntipur and Lālitpur undertook a pilgrimage to *Silu* (Gosainkunda), to offer three beautifully carved bulls to Lord Śiva. Those from Kāntipur and Lālitpur were of wood and metal and sank into the holy lake at once. Only Bhūpatīndra's carved stone bull kept drifting on the surface, indicating that his offering was not accepted. Bhūpatīndra was a good swimmer and jumped into the lake, pulling the bull under water. In that very moment the god spoke to him, revealing the reason for being displeased: "Bhūpatīndra, you composed so many praise songs but not a single one for me."—Presuming that Bhūpatīndra had drowned in the cold mountain lake, the other two kings returned to Nepal, discussing full of happy anticipation how to divide the kingdom of Bhaktapur among themselves. They worshipped at Paśupatināth and went to Bhaktapur. Having reached the fifty-five window palace, they perceived Bhūpatīndra sitting comfortably at a window, smoking a hookah and inviting them upstairs to listen to his latest song for Lord Śiva.

Like Vākupati Nārāyaṇa *navadāphā* with their nine drums and their additional flute ensemble *bã̃suri khalaḥ*, quite a few *dāphā* groups incorporate additional instruments. This allows the groups to put on impressive processions with additional *dhimaybājā*, transverse flutes, harmoniums, and violins. Vākupati Nārāyaṇa's *bã̃suri khalaḥ* used to accompany their charming Rādhākṛṣṇa *pyākhā* dance performed during the annual *sāpāru* week of stick dances, masked dances and singing of ballads. Vākupati Nārāyaṇa *navadāphā* have their most spectacular performance during a Buddhist town ritual on the day of *pañcadān carhe*, one day before the Buddhist processional month of *gũlā* ends. In the morning, decorated metal busts of the five Dīpaṅkāra Buddhas are carried to their meeting place at Sujamādhi where devotees gather to offer grain, fruit and flowers, before the Buddhas proceed to visit those families who vowed to give *pañcadān* offerings on an annual basis. Vākupati Nārāyaṇa *navadāphā* starts their performance before the Dīpaṅkāra Buddhas arrive one by one and are seated on the high stone platform at the eastern end of Sujamādhi square. Tragically, the entire neighbourhood of this ensemble and the local shrine of Nāsaḥdyaḥ were devastated during the 2015 earthquake.

Considering the importance of the gods in whose praise *navadāphā* groups were established, it is surprising that the local *Gaṇeś* of Yāchẽ was endowed with such an auspicious music ensemble. Unlike Taleju, Bhairavnāth, the Navadurgā, Dattātreya, or even Vākupati Nārāyaṇa, the realm of Yāchẽ Gaṇeśa extends only to the boundaries of his quarter and is of little importance to the rest of the town (Fig. 226). K. K. Nākhana, a group member of Yāchẽ *navadāphā*, told us the legend of the god's golden image arriving during the course of an infamous robbery, testifying that the

Fig. 226: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *pachimā* with Chandranath and two more Jugi shawm players playing *Gujarātī mvālī* during a performance of Yāchẽ *navadāphā*, February 1989



Map 39: Yāchẽ *navadāphā* (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

disappearance of religious artefacts from their original shrines has a long history. Previously, this Gaṇeśa statue resided in a temple in Basantapur, Kathmandu, which came to be known as *Maru* ('lost') Gaṇeśa. Miraculously, the statue emerged in Yāchẽ, where it was instantly installed in a temple built by Dil Bahādur Suba from Sukul Dvakā. His family worships Gaṇeśa as their clan god and sacrifices a goat whenever Yāchẽ Gaṇeśa visits his realm during the New Year festival. This happens every 2nd Baiśākh between 9 and 12 a.m. The group is scheduled to play every *cauthi*, the lunar phase significant for Gaṇeśa, whereas other *navadāphā* groups perform during fullmoon. (Map 39)

Before the land reforms in 1963, the group was supported with 35 ropani of land that were confiscated. Chandramān Tapol, descendant of the founder family of Yāchẽ *navadāphā*, did not participate in performances. Usually he came to check if a scheduled performance actually happened, distibuted 18 *muri* rice grain[25] per year and gave two feasts for all the members. After his death in 1986 his heir withdrew the donation, causing the *navadāphā* to stop performing for more than a year after a final, memorable quarrel. In this desperate situation, an unexpected patron of the Nepalese aristocracy, the late author Jagadish SJB Rana came to the rescue. He spontaneously decided to help with an annual cash donation that covered the requirements of the group. The initial year proved successful. The scheduled twenty-four annual performances happened, and group members derived encouragement from the new patron's regular visits and enquiries into their needs. The drumming gurus Hari Govinda Ranjitkār and Gaṇeś Bahādur Sijakhvāḥ administered the donation. Later I came to know that they were bullied by otherwise inactive group members—in 1983 already fifty-five individuals—who wanted the donation to be spent entirely on feasts. Intimidated by threats of physical violence, the gurus refused to accept the next instalment. After this, the neighbourhood of Yāchẽ had the feeling of a battlefield. *Navadāphā* performances

25 1 muri = approx. 160 lbs.

Fig. 227: Hari Govinda Ranjitkār playing *dhimaycā* during a performance of Yāchẽ *navadāphā* (28/2/1985)

happened irregularly and without enthusiasm. Hari Govinda trained some young *navabājā* drummers, including his talented daughter Manesa who is leading her married life in Pāṅgā. Several training sessions were held over the years for young men. Young girls also learnt to play *dhābājā* and *pvaṅgā* and did so for a few public *navadāphā* occasions[26] until they were married in other neighbourhoods. No adequate replacement was found for the ageing *pvaṅgā* players. The group seems doomed, a victim of greed and jealousy among neighbours. For the last fifteen years of his life, Hari Govinda turned his back to the *navadāphā* group, playing *tablā* (*tamal*) or harmonium (*arven*) with a *bhajan* group that performed in a shelter opposite to the performance site of the *navadāphā* group.

Hari Govinda Ranjitkar (1934–2019) was the solo drummer of Yāchẽ Gaṇeś *navadāphā* (Figs. 227, 228). Many consider him to be Bhaktapur's master drummer. He learnt the art from his paternal uncle who was a fine player and also from the leading drummer of Bhairavnāth *navadāphā*. Hari Govinda's humble ways and modest bearing, in combination with his achievement as a musician and stalwart of his tradition have been admired by European audiences during several concert tours. Unfortunately, due to the total disregard of this genre in present day Nepal, his fame did not even extend beyond his nearest locality. He had to adjust to problems of survival when his inherited block-printing craft ceased to be in demand. For a few years he found temporary employment as a stone-cutter in road construction work carried out by the German Bhaktapur

26 during *biskāḥ* and *mahānavami*

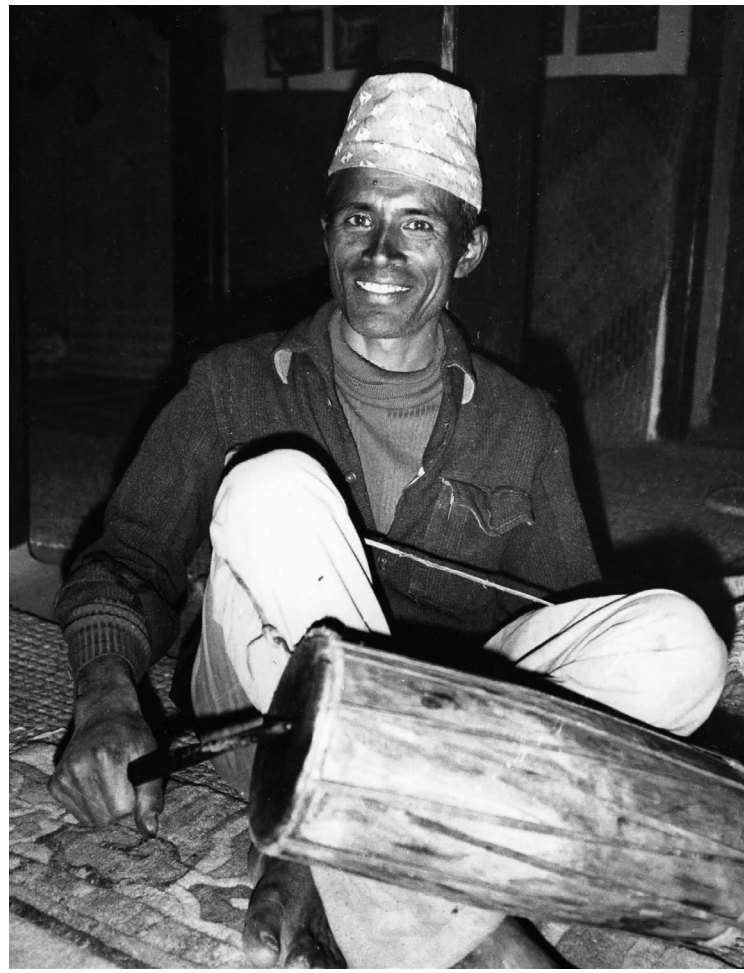


Fig. 228: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *nāykhīcā* at my home 1983

Development Project. From 1996 to 2019, he worked as a drumming teacher at Kathmandu University's Department of Music, training a large number of students. In 1983 and 1984, he taught me the complete *navabājā* repertoire, as it is transcribed in this publication.

Seven years Hari Govinda's junior, Gaṇeś Bahādur Sijakhvā of Yāchẽ (d. 2019) was a prominent guru of *dhimay* and *lālākhĩ*. He devoted more time than any other drummer in Bhaktapur to train a large number of *dhimay* players, including the author, and received huge applause for his brilliant *dhimay* drumming during the 1990 European tour with the 'Masterdrummers of Nepal'. After his father's fields and house were distributed among the three brothers, Gaṇeś Bahādur's earthquake-damaged part of the house was too tiny to allow him and his family to sleep there[27]. After the 1988 earthquake, he found refuge in the *dyaḥchẽ* of Yāchẽ Gaṇeś and—in exchange

27 When a Newar father dies, the house is often cut vertically into as many parts as there are sons, each of them insisting on building their separate entrance and staircase.

Fig. 229: Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhvā playing *dhimay* during a *navarāt* visit to Indrayāṇī 1988 (photo: Kevin Bubriski)

for free lodging—had to perform daily *pūjā* offerings and protect the golden statue from armed robbers, warding off several attempts at night. When he retired from this scary occupation, he lived with his sons near the Arniko Highway. He received no community recognition for his outstanding services as teacher and drummer. (Figs. 229, 230)

A *navadāphā* performance is an auspicious and elaborate musical offering to the god for whom the respective ensemble of musical instruments was bestowed. In the case of Yāchẽ Gaṅeś *navadāphā*, most performances in front of the shrine happened monthly during *cauthi*, the lunar

Fig. 230: Ganesh Bahadur's hands after a drumming procession

Fig. 231: Yāchē Gaṅeś *navadāphā*: The solo drummer faces the shawm players (l. to r.: Chandranath, Marsya Dai, Chandra Bahādur) and Yāchē Gaṅeś *pīth* (shrine in the left upper corner, with two young men occupying the entrance). A *dāphā* singer assists with broken *sichyāḥ* cymbals. 1989

phase relating to Lord *Gaṇeś*. The musicians sat cross-legged on straw mats, leaving in the centre an open square for the nine drums, a round brass box for keeping cymbals and song books, and the big sacred lamp stand *āratī* that is used exclusively by *navadāphā* groups just before the performance ends. Two small lampstands with pairs of burning cotton wicks illuminated the folded song books *thyāḥ sãphū* that were placed in front of the lead singer of each of the two rows of singers facing each other. Other indispensable paraphernalia were an oil container filled with mustard oil to replenish the lamps when needed and a small portable lampstand with a brass figure of a Malla king with folded hands in adoring posture. At the very end of the performance it was lit and shown to every participant, giving them an opportunity to visualize and greet Nārāyaṇa with folded hands. Owing to their low status, the three or four Jugi shawm players sat in a row on a torn straw mat and with their backs inauspiciously turned towards the Gaṇeś temple[28]. For the past twenty years, motorized traffic has pushed the group to perform in the *phalcā* porch next to the square. (Fig. 231)

The performance begins with three loud strokes of the thick-walled *tāḥ* cymbals. Musicians gesture *namaskār* towards the cymbals, addressing Nāsaḥdyaḥ. The god manifests through the ear-splitting sound of the cymbals. After this auspicious beginning, the musicians salute each other, using the ritual expression '*bhāgya*' to ask permission to sing or play, expressing mutual respect.

28 similar sitting arrangements are observed by the other groups

Fig. 232: Yāchẽ Gaṇeś *navadāphā* lead singer starting a *dāphā* song (1988)

The gesture is repeated after the light offering *āratī* that concludes the performance. Following this mental preparation, the drummer of the two-headed *dāphā* drum *lālākhĩ* plays a long *tāhā dyaḥlhāygu* invocation addressed to Nāsaḥdyaḥ and the main god of the respective *navadāphā*. The *lālākhĩ* drum is accompanied with cymbals and natural trumpets. The invocation addresses not only the gods but also calls missing musicians from their homes nearby. The ensemble is hardly ever complete when a performance begins. The *tāhā dyaḥlhāygu* allows musicians to finish their dinner, rinse their mouths, clear their throats and arrive at the performance site in time before it is their turn to sing. After the invocation, the musicians salute the gods again with *namaskār* gestures, before starting with the initial *dāphā* song. The invocation opens a portal to the blissful presence of the music god whose inspiring energies inspire the performance. Two *dāphā* songs with *lālākhĩ* and *pvaṅgā* accompaniment precede each set of nine *navabājā* drumming pieces. (Fig. 232)

The role of the solo drummer resembles that of a decathlon athlete. He has to play the nine drums in quick succession, each with different playing techniques and compositions, and remember the vast repertoire with the help of drumming syllables. These syllables imitate the sounds of the drum strokes, so each drum has a slightly different set of syllables. During a complete performance each drum plays two longer composition selected by the solo drummer, lasting for several minutes. During the third and final round each drum plays only a few typical strokes. These tailpieces are called *svachā*. This term is also used for a complete *navabājā* performance with three rounds of *navabājā* drumming. The nine *navabājā* drums are always played in the following

Fig. 233: Pvaṅgā trumpet players Khaḍga Bahādur Koṇḍā and Mukti Sijakhvā produce between them a continuous ululation that switches between the basic note and the fifth mimicking the *navabājā* drum compositions. During *dāphā* accompaniment only the lower pitch is maintained with undulations again mimicking the drum. 1985

succession: *dhã̄, kvatāḥ, dhãcā, dhimaycā, nāykhĩcā, pachimā, dhalak, kvakhĩcā,* and the pair of *nagarā*. Each of these drums is combined with characteristic instruments to achieve the desired timbre. These instruments are the optional brass disc *kāẽpā,* the cymbals *taḥ*, *jhyālicā, sichyāḥ, bhuchyāḥ,* the natural trumpets *pvaṅgā*, the straight shawms *Gujarāti mvālī* and the fipple flutes *bāẽcā.* With the exception of the first two *navabājā* drums, *dhã̄* and *kvatāḥ*, all other *navabājā* drums require accompaniment by specially hired Jugi tailor-musicians with their shawms and fipple flutes. (Fig. 233)

The two drums *dhã̄* and *kvatāḥ* share a similar repertoire and are played with the same accompanying instruments, *bhuchyāḥ, sichyāḥ* and *pvaṅgā*. *Dhã̄* and *kvatāḥ* are the only drums that play invocations during the initial round followed by other compositions. *Dhã̄* and *kvatāḥ* with their archaic repertoire and their significance as sacred tools, differ widely from those drums which were imported during the eighteenth century from India, namely *pachimā, dhalak,* and *nagarā*. *Pachimā, dhalak,* and *nagarā* form another group of drums with similar repertoire and accompanying instruments, in this case *kāẽpā, taḥ, sichyāḥ* and *mvālĩ*. If there are several *navabājā* drummers present, they may play two drums of this group with contrasting sound qualities, taking turns in dividing the same composition between them. (Fig. 234)

After the third set of short *navabājā* pieces the big *āratī* lampstand is prepared for the light offering ritual. Whilst the lamp holders of the *āratī* are filled with mustard oil and pairs of cotton wicks soaked with oil and lit, the musicians sing a final *dāphā* song. Then everybody gets up to circumambulate around the performance square with the big *āratī* lamp spectacularly illuminating the centre. Whilst proceeding with a slow gait they sing a *bhajan* song in praise of Nārāyaṇa. Towards the end of the song, the *dhã̄* and the *lālākhĩ* drums with *pvaṅgā, mvālĩ* and cymbals play their respective *āratī* pieces simultaneously before ending each with one *dyaḥlhāygu* invocation.

Fig. 234: Yāchē Gaṇeś *navadāphā* performing a duet of *dhalak* (l.: Tīrtha Man Nāpit) and *pachimā* (r.: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar), 28/2/1985

The *āratī* and *dyaḥlhāygu* pieces of both drums and of shawms differ in duration and structure, creating a musical chaos that appears fit to please the gods. Musical synchronization is clearly not intended. The music makes sense because of the function of the different invocations as musical offerings to the gods—whatever the specific drumming patterns happen to be.[29] Following this noisy finale, the musicians sit down for a moment of shared spiritual bliss and purification. The small lamp with the brass figure is lit and in turn presented to every participant who passes his right hand through the flame before gesturing *namaskār* first towards the flame in reverence of Nārāyaṇa, then to each group member, thus saluting the divine essence in every participant. (Fig. 235)

This underlines the meaning and the spiritual benefit of the *navadāphā* performance: realised communion with the divine presence that the group performance brings about. The music reveals its special qualities as a spiritual focusing tool that can open the portal.

Finally, instruments and utensils are collected and stored in the *dāphāchē* drum house and people go home to sleep. With the exception of a few performances during annual town rituals,

29 In this context it may be helpful to know that neither Newari nor the national language Nepali know a word for 'disturb'. Whatever happens, happens of its own right. 'Disturb' can be a problem that visitors from Western countries may encounter during their stay in Nepal. To explain this, the English word 'disturb' is linked with Nepali *garne* (= make). Foreigners are known to suffer for mysterious reasons.

Fig. 235: Āratī procession around the lampstand 1984

there is almost no visible audience. An exception is, for example, the evening of *navamī* during the *mvahani* festival, when the entire population of Bhaktapur mills through Yāchẽ to look at the new Navadurgā masks[30] displayed below the mask-maker's workshop in a courtyard behind the performance square. Only during such occasions, a crowd surrounds the *navadāphā* musicians to enjoy the music. Another important town ritual for all *navadāphā* groups is the morning of *dyaḥ svagā biyegu* on the fourth day of the Bhaktapur New Year when the entire population proceeds with a maximum number of music groups along the *pradakṣiṇā* processional route to visit all the gods that make their annual appearance in the form of golden statues arranged for general worship in front of the aniconic stone that represents the god in the open shrine throughout the year. This is a major occasion for every song group to perform next to the respective temple or shrine. On this day, Bhaktapur vibrates with joyous tremors of drumming and sacred singing.

In response to the need for an internationally presentable ensemble of Newar drummers, I founded the 'Masterdrummers of Nepal' in 1990. Initially, this ensemble included two senior drumming Gurujus, Hari Govinda Ranjitkar and Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhva, two senior *pvaṅgā* players of Yāchẽ *navadāphā,* two Jugi shawm players and four younger drummers including myself. During summer 1990, we toured Germany, France, The Netherlands and Switzerland for a month packed with concerts, presenting *navabājā* and *dhimaybājā* to European audiences.

30 Navadurgā masks are cremated at the end of the annual dance cycle.

Fig. 236: Members of 'Masterdrummers of Nepal'—among them four K.U. staff members Raju Hyaumikha, Buddhalal Manandhar, Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar, Ravi Kapali and Maṅgalāl Kapali (not playing)—rehearsing at Kathmandu University's Department of Music at Chupin Ghāt, 2014

With a little help, most of the musicians were able to adapt to the requirements of Western stage performances and a disciplined code of conduct as 'cultural ambassadors' of Nepal. (Fig. 236)

Following the foundation of Kathmandu University's Department of Music at Chupin Ghāt, Bhaktapur in 1996, this department became the base for the 'Masterdrummers of Nepal'. By then, the group had grown into a younger ensemble including several teachers and staff members of the Department of Music. In contrast with the traditional ensembles in town, the Masterdrummers had many practice sessions focusing on improving the technical standard and enlarging their repertoire. All group members had their say in criticizing and contributing to improvements. From the beginning I made it a condition that payment was accounted for openly and distributed on equal terms among all members. All this resulted in a lasting friendship and bonding as a group and helped to present model performances of *navabājā*, *dhimaybājā* and traditional dances during staged performances in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur and during a number of successful European tours to Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Czech Republic. Abroad, limitations of caste proved superfluous. Absence of suppression and exploitation is the key to joyful music making.