

6 Royal Kettledrums and *Navabājā*

A combined ensemble of *dāphā* plus nine additional *navabājā* drums is called *navadāphā*, distinguishing it from the sixty-three *dāphā* groups of Bhaktapur¹. Bhaktapur *navabājā* includes a medium-sized pair of kettledrums (*nagarā*) played in combination with shawms and cymbals as the climax of a *navabājā* performance.

A historical link suggests itself with the *naubat*, an ensemble of shawms, natural trumpets and kettledrums that entered North India with Muslim invaders and became established there during the 14th century. Miniature paintings and historical accounts give evidence of Mughal emperors adorning their courts with such impressive ensembles. As a result of this imperial Mughal example, the playing of large *naqqārā* became a daily affair at many South Asian local courts, important Hindu temples and Sufi shrines, a fashion that reached the Kathmandu Valley during the 15th century (Fig. 237).

In her study of *pañcai bājā*, Carol Tingey² examines Rajput migration to Nepal and *nagarā* playing in temples and as part of military bands. According to her, the earliest evidence of kettledrums is provided by the *dam nagarā* of Gorkha palace installed in 1609. In the Dattātreyā temple³ of Tacapāḥ, Bhaktapur, an ancient *nagarā* (diameter 46 cm) is played twice a day during *nitya pūjā* along with the big bell suspended in front of the temple. Anybody is welcome to play the drum as an act of worship. This is rewarded with *prasād*, a plate of yoghurt and beaten rice. Local people say that this *nagarā* was donated by the first Mahanta caretaker of the original Pūjārīmath built in 1471 by the Sannyāsin Gosain Gurubaska Giri during the reign of King Jayayakṣa Malla (r. 1428–1482). If this information can be trusted, this would be the earliest evidence of a *nagarā* in Nepal, antedating Tingey's assumed 'earliest evidence of kettledrums' by one hundred thirty-eight years.

Visiting Benares in 1989, I found a large pair of decaying *naqqarā* kept in a porch in the lane bordering the Kāśī Viśvanāth temple (Fig. 238).

Above, on a balcony overlooking the temple courtyard, musicians observed their hereditary duty that started after the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707). They played *śahnai* shawms and a pair of small kettledrums *khurdak*⁴ during daily rituals in the Hindu temple. The shawm player, Dulare Hussain Khan astonished me by reciting the names of twelve generations of his

1 survey period: 1983–1985

2 cf. Tingey 1994 pp. 23–37

3 built in 1471 by King Jayayakṣa Malla

4 The *khurdak* pair of drums combines the individual drums *zil* and *bāyām*, both played with finger technique similar to *tablā*.

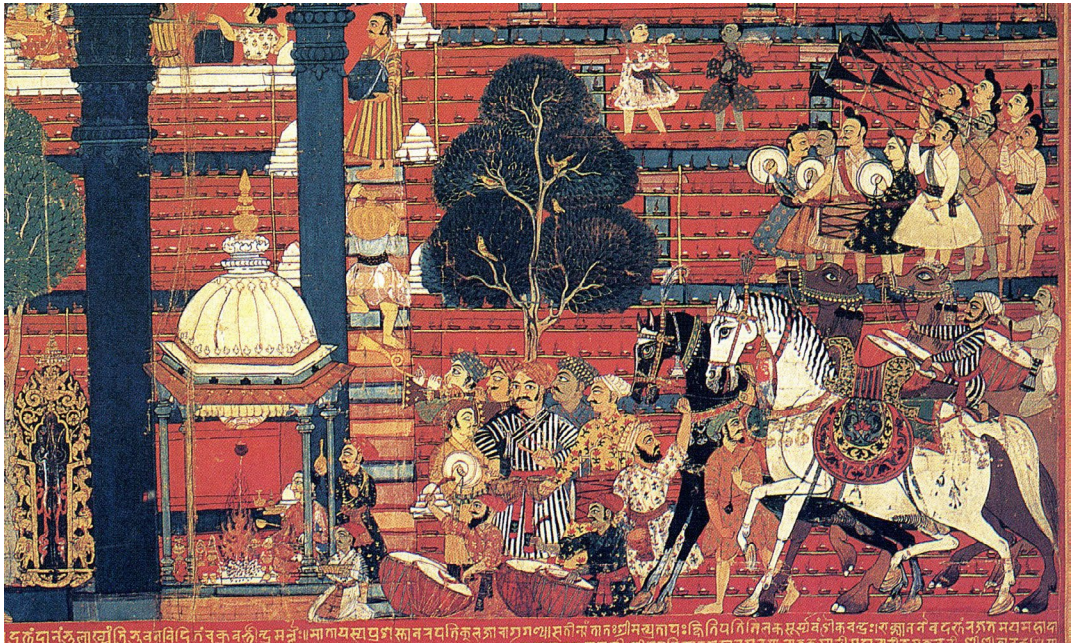


Fig. 237: *Nagarā* drumming (also on camel back) during a grand royal *tuladana* ritual in 1664 on the steps of Kathmandu's Taleju temple. As part of a Mughal-style *naubat* ensemble on the ground floor, two pairs of *nagarā* face the fire ritual in the pavilion. A man wearing a striped coat plays a pair of small kettledrums tied to his belt, with two shawm players and another one with a natural trumpet standing behind him. Next to him a pair of *bhusyāh* cymbals accompany a cylindrical drum of the *dhhol* category. Two camels carry drummers and kettledrums. (detail of painting publ. by Anne Vergati in *Marg* 56/2 p. 47)



Fig. 238: Benares *nagarā* shells opposite the temple of Kāśī Viśvanāth in 1989



Fig. 239: *Śahnāi* (Dulare Hussain Khan), *khurdak* (Shankar Lal) and harmonium (Sajit Raza) playing daily at 4 a.m. and 11 a.m. for *pūjā* at the temple of Kāśī Viśvanāth, Benares 1989

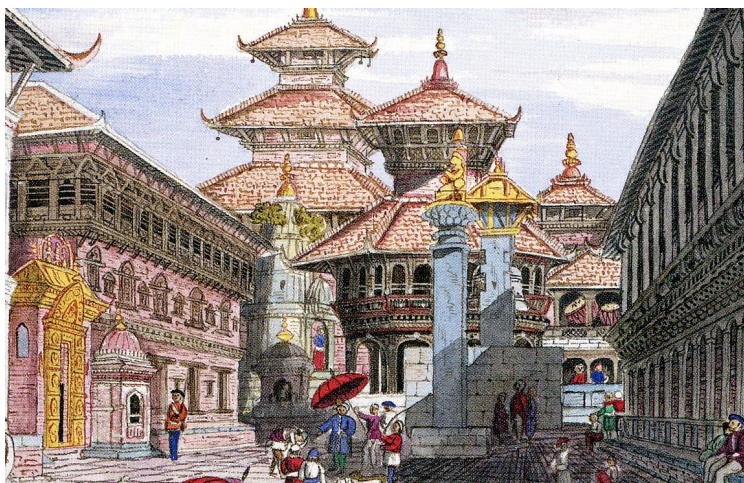


Fig. 240: Detail of a watercolour by H. A. Oldfield (1858), showing Jitāmitra Malla's pair of *nagarā* in their original location on the first floor of the *lāykuphalcā*. (in: Bajracharya, Gutschow, Michaels 2016. *History of Kings of Nepal, Maps and Historical Illustrations*, p. 80)

male ancestors in charge of this musical duty at the Hindu temple. The family tree extended to a Hindu named Singh who was forced to convert during Aurangzeb's rule. Some aspects of music practice in the holy city could have inspired royal pilgrims from Nepal, keen on upgrading their residences with a majestic boom for every citizen to hear.

In 1690 King Jitāmitra Malla of Bhaktapur donated two large copper *nagarā* kettledrums to his tutelary deity, the goddess *Taleju* whose temple is located on the south side of the *mūcukva* courtyard in the Bhaktapur palace compound. The drums were installed on the first floor of the *lāykuphalcā* arcade in the room facing the grand *Taleju* bell *tagva gā* erected in 1737, reflecting



Fig. 241: *Nagarā* shells held in position by friendly woodcarvers, *bekvacukva*, Bhaktapur 1989

similar arrangements in the vicinity of the magnificent Taleju temples at the Malla residences in Kathmandu and Patan with their giant bells and kettledrum pavilions.

Jitāmitra Malla's donation included farmland. The annual yield of rice from this land was utilized in part as payment to a Damāi family from Nala. These Nepali-speaking tailor-musicians had been assigned the duty to play the big kettledrums during *nitya pūjā*, the daily ritual for Taleju. Since the 1960s this duty had been neglected and the uncovered *nagarā* shells were lying upside down in the *bekvacukva* courtyard. (Figs. 239–243)

In 1992 the late Italian filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci decided to use the royal kettledrums for his film 'Little Buddha'. The scene shot in Bhaktapur's Dattatreya Square shows Prince Siddhartha Gautama (Keanu Reeves) leaving the enclosures of his father's palace in regal style, ready to encounter the facts of life. Outside the gate he was cheered by a crowd of six hundred extras and a band of frantic *dhimay* drummers—in real life my students. Through the combined effort of ten Kulu drum makers from Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu, the drums were restored with new water-buffalo hides. A local woodcarver made sixteen extra large drumsticks. Eight members of the Royal Nepal Army were ordered to play not only Jitāmitra Malla's *nagarā* drums from Bhaktapur but also another six slightly smaller kettledrums flown in from South India. I arranged a pattern based on the *nāykhī* piece *pūjākhī* to be played by the *nagarā* ensemble during shooting. After the film crew left, the refurbished local pair of *nagarā* was exposed to the weather and to visiting crowds of tourists in the *bekvacukva* palace courtyard.

In an attempt to preserve the drums and revive their performance during the daily temple rituals, I trained two young farmers to play the *nagarās*, using the *pūjākhī* pattern. With the help



Fig. 242: Jitāmitra Malla's *nagarās* (diameter of drum head: 147 cm) before restoration

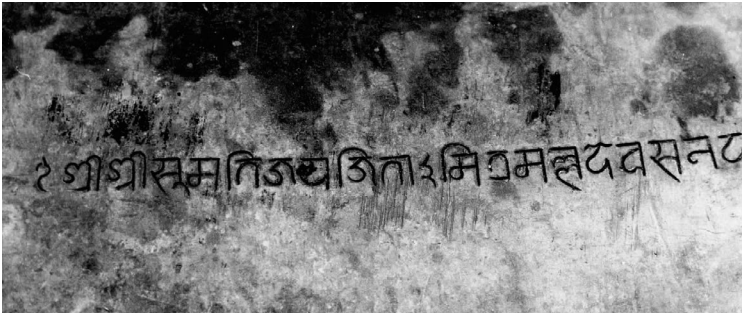


Fig. 243: Carved inscription on *nagarā* shell mentioning the donor, Jitāmitra Malla

of foreign friends and the Nepal Heritage Society, we raised money to pay the drummers for their daily service. The Bhaktapur municipality agreed to supervise the playing and administer the payment. There was the need to find a shelter for the drums. During earlier centuries the drums had resided in a room facing the *tagva gā* bell. Recently, this room had been occupied by a branch office⁵ of the Department of Archeology and they were not willing to vacate it. The only temporary alternative was *janḡī paharā*, an empty room on the ground floor of the *lal baiṭhak* palace wing housing the National Gallery. There the drums were installed during a televised public gathering on 24th December 1992. They were played during *nitya pūjā* for the following three years. When the funding was exhausted, the Bhaktapur Municipality decided to put the royal kettledrums at



Fig. 244: Inauguration of the daily drumming service with the restored royal *nagarā*-s in front of the palace (24/12/1992). I taught two young farmers the patterns that they played for several years during *nitya pūjā*. (photo courtesy of Bikas Rauniyar)

rest in two guard niches between the *yamadvāracukva* and *bekvacukva* courtyards. Hidden behind wooden screens, they were left to decay. (Fig. 244)

For over a decade, the invaluable drums donated by King Jitāmitra Malla remained in these dank holes infested by rats, silent witnesses to local ignorance until April 2019, when I was able to convince the President of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, Narayan Man Bijukchen to exercise his influence. On 31st December 2019, the drums were given a public resurrection celebration in Bhaktapur's Durbar Square. The Mayor played the royal *nagarās* to public acclaim, before having them installed in their original room opposite the big bell with the assistance of thirty sturdy soldiers of the Nepal Army.

Another, even bigger *nagarā* donated by Jitāmitra Malla's grandson Raṇajīt Malla in 1727 was played until the 1950s in a niche in the Taleju *mūcukva* courtyard. Although none of the gates were wide enough to let the drum pass, it mysteriously managed to vanish overnight in the late 1980s—despite the courtyard being under twenty-four hour surveillance by the Royal Nepal Army. Even in those days, the price of copper was high.

Owing to their outlandish size and volume, the musical scope of the royal kettledrums with their thick buffalo hides is limited. To play fast, the drummer himself would have to be of superhuman proportions and strength. The fact that the *nagarā* pair donated by Jitāmitra Malla includes two drums of almost the same size (diameter: 147 cm and 146 cm) causes them to be of the same pitch. The next step in the evolution of kettledrums would be, to have two drums of different size and pitch, allowing for more varied patterns. When the drums and the drumsticks are smaller, they

allow for faster playing. These advantages were applied in the pair of *nagarā* that is part of the *navabājā* ensemble, to create an impressive repertoire of musically satisfying compositions. The South Asian evolution of kettledrums would go much further, resulting in the pair of the Indian concert drums *tablā* and *bāyāṃ* (in Bhaktapur Newari: *tamal* and *bām*), two drums of different material and size, with complex drum heads made of goat skin, carrying a tuning paste with powdered iron ore in the centre and a refined finger technique that takes advantage of contrasting pitches and a vast variety of sound production. This opened the road towards the impressive virtuosity of contemporary *tablā* playing with its limitless repertoire of beautiful compositions⁶ and application in various musical genres.

Pañcai bājā, the auspicious instrumental ensemble of Nepali-speaking Damāi musicians living in the hills of central and east Nepal, includes the kettledrum *damāhā* that gave the caste its name.⁷ In the 1980s, *Damāi* musicians were still playing kettledrums for temple rituals at important Hindu shrines, for example at Gorkha (Kālikā Darbār and Gorakhnāth cave), Cāngu Nārāyaṇa, Manakāmanā, Nuvākoṭ (Bhairavī temple) and Tripureshwar (Rānī Lalitā Tripurasundarī Śivalaya). Owing to the almost nonexistent remuneration of low-caste temple musicians, most of these traditions disappeared during the 1990s. As far as I was able to document since 1982 in various parts of central Nepal, larger temple kettledrums were mostly played without rhythmic variety, continuous strokes at a medium tempo.

In front of the Nārāyaṇa temple at Cāngu Nārāyaṇa a large *nagarā* was played by a member of the Nepali speaking Damāi caste of tailor-musicians. This temple courtyard had another ensemble of Newar Jugis playing shawms together with a small kettledrum called *tamva* or *tukumuku*⁸. These Jugi musicians lived in a small isolated settlement just outside the western gate of the courtyard whereas the village of Cāngu Nārāyaṇa lies below the opposite side of the temple complex. This arrangement underlines the low status of shawm players in the Newar caste hierarchy. Members of higher castes lived at a safe distance outside the eastern gate. (Fig. 245)

The *nagarā* pair of kettledrums used in the large instrumental ensembles of Bhaktapur *navabājā* are much smaller than most temple *nagarās*, allowing for faster playing and a technically demanding repertoire of drumming compositions. The drumheads of the three hundred years old pair of *nagarā* used by Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* measure 34,5 cm and 28,5 cm in diameter, a perfect size for this purpose. *Nagarā* drumming is only one aspect of Bhaktapur's *navabājā* that includes eight more drums. The *nagarā* pair is played as a spectacular highlight at the end of a *navabājā* performance. It is accompanied with *sichyāḥ* cymbals and by Jugi tailor-musicians playing *Gujarāti mvālī* shawms. (Fig. 246)

The idea of combining all available sources of musical sound to create a new auspicious musical ensemble is likely to have sprung from the mind of a king and his impulse to adorn his tutelary goddess, Taleju—possibly following the example set by Pratapa Malla in Kathmandu during that grand *tuladana* ritual in 1664. It appears that nine drums of different origins and functions were combined in the Bhaktapur *navabājā* ensemble to fulfil a new purpose. Seven of

6 cf. Wegner 2004

7 for a detailed study of this ensemble see Tingey 1994

8 diameter of drum head: 17 cm

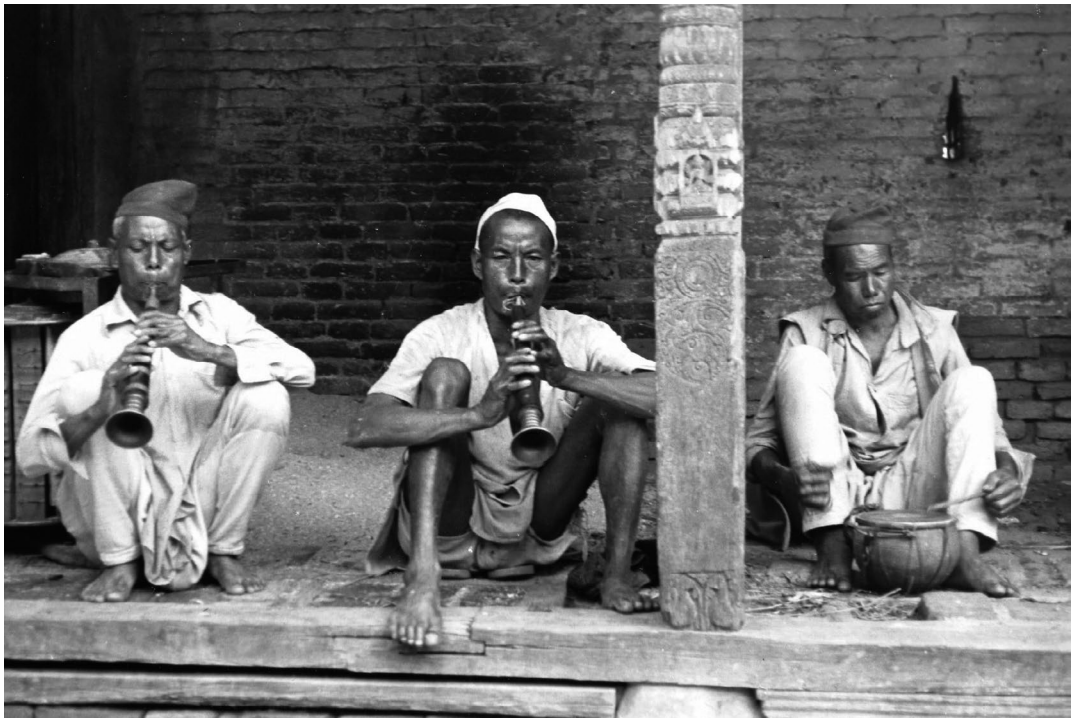


Fig. 245: *Jugi* shawm players with *tamva* kettledrum (also called *tukumuku*) at Cāngu Nārāyaṇa (1987)

these drums were already played in the context of other local ensembles. The unlucky number seven would not do. Nine being an auspicious number, there had to be a total of nine drums. This was—I imagine—how two more drums, *dhācā* and *dhimaycā* could have been created for the sake of the perfect number. Already, the larger drums *dhā* and *dhimay* existed in various sizes. Making smaller versions was an easy task for a skilled drum-maker. Even in the 1980s, there was no standard size and pitch for Newar drums. Several times my drum-maker, the late Dil Bahādur Kulu pointed at a half-decayed *lālākhī* drum in his workshop, suggesting that this could become a good *dhā* or *dhimaycā* after sawing off the worm-eaten parts. With his practical sense of economy he always succeeded admirably in producing drum reincarnations with the seasoned wood that I preferred—never minding the slightly odd size or the occasional wormhole⁹.

Owing to the lack of precise historical data we can only speculate who was the originator of the first *navadāphā* groups. The two oldest *navabājā* ensembles were those that played until 1983 for Taleju in the *mūcuka* courtyard, and the group performing for Bhairavnāth, sitting on a *dabu* stone platform in front of the entrance gate (*satah*) to the inner sanctuary of the Bhairavnāth temple bordering Taumādhi Square to the east. In 1717 Bhūpatīndra Malla (ruled 1696–1722) commissioned construction of the *Bhairavnāth* temple in *Taumādhi*, Bhaktapur. Significantly, all the plots of land bestowed on the *navadāphā* ensembles of Taleju and Bhairavanāth are situated

9 Deforestation around the Kathmandu Valley made it increasingly difficult to find suitable wood for making local drums. Nowadays all *dhimay* drums are made of tin or brass



Fig. 246: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing a V-laced pair of *nagarās* during a *navadāphā* recording in Byāśi, April 1983

next to each other and are of equal size. Performance schedules of these two groups never overlap. The reason could be that both bestowments were initiated at the same time, probably between 1717 and 1722 to the first *navadāphā* group that had to perform in both places and later was divided into two separate groups for practical reasons.¹⁰ Another—unlikely—possibility could be that Girvāṅ Śāha founded the Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* when he created the Girvāṅ *jātrā* in 1822 with a special land deed mentioning the playing of the nine drums. But then, the land that Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* lost to Mahendra Shah's administration in 1963 was of an older deed. So Girvāṅ Śāha's contribution of 1822 must have been an additional deed to the already existing group.¹¹ A singer and composer of *dāphā* songs, Bhūpatīndra Malla took a keen interest in the musical life of his capital. Some of his songs are still sung today by local *dāphā* groups.¹² He modified the Bhairavnāth temple into a triple roofed temple at around N.S. 837–838 (1718 AD) with seven golden pinnacles. He added major dynamic aspects to the New Year festival created by Jagajjyotir Malla (1613 to 1637). The festival starts after the performance of Bhairavnāth *navadāphā* with the spectacular tug of war in front of the Bhairavnāth temple. All this leaves little doubt that Bhūpatīndra Malla was the source of inspiration and financing of the initial Taleju *navadāphā* group, probably also the Bhairavnāth *navadāphā*. Unfortunately it is not known who conceived of the fascinating drum compositions and who played the initial sets of *navabājā*.

Navabājā drums and some of their repertoire were also included in the huge processional music groups of the Sāymi oil pressers of Bhaktapur, who during the Buddhist processional month of *gūlā* used to proceed through the town with their raucous horn and drumming signals. Similar groups existed in the two neighbouring towns, Thimi and Banepa that were part of the earlier Malla kingdom of Bhaktapur.

In 1963 King Mahendra Shaha ordered the land reform *bhūmi sudhār*¹³ that deprived all Newar music groups and temple trusts of their land endowments. The state of Nepal confiscated the so-called *gūthi* land without refund. With their financial basis gone, most music and dance groups found it very hard to continue. Without money to repair musical instruments and *dāphāchē* drum houses, rewrite decaying song books, buy lamp oil, pay participating Jugī shawm players, organise new apprenticeships, etc., many groups were forced to give up and collapsed—usually after nerve-wrecking internal quarrels. Others had to minimize their performance schedule. Unless an alternative way of sponsoring can be found, the end of the most impressive among Bhaktapur's ensembles appears imminent.

Another kind of *navabājā* survives in Patan. It performs during the Buddhist processional month in July/August and includes more than nine drums, among them a single *nagarā* and the pair of *jvaḥ nagarā*¹⁴ (Fig. 247). Comparison with the *nagarā* and the *jvaḥ nagarā* of Patan *navabājā* makes it clear that the pair of *nagarā* used by Bhaktapur *navabājā* groups has an important musical advantage. Contrary to *jvaḥ nagarā*, the pair of kettledrums used in Bhaktapur produces

10 This is what Daibagya Raj Joshi—earlier a member of both groups—remembered

11 cf. chapter 5.3 for details of the deed

12 cf. Widdess 2013

13 also known as *gūthi samsthān* act

14 for a detailed description of the instruments used in this ensemble, cf. Wiehler and Wiehler-Schneider 1980



Fig. 247: Different kettledrums used by Patan *navabājā* for separate compositions: Y-laced *nagarā* and the pair of V-laced *jvah nagarā* (1984). The painting of the royal *tuladana* ritual in 1664 on the steps of Kathmandu's Taleju temple shows a musician playing a pair of small kettledrums tied to his belt. That could have been an ancestor of the pair used in Patan.

different pitches. This advantage allows for much more varied compositions calling for a virtuoso playing technique that Hari Govinda Ranjitkar had clearly cultivated.

6.1 *Dhā/Kvakhī*

The double-conical or barrel-shaped *dhā* is made of wood. Shape, size and weight vary. The drum in the photo below is 46 cm long. The height in the centre of the body is 36 cm. The drum heads measure 24 cm and 25 cm. The right hand plays the lower sounding Haimā head made of cow hide with a carved *dhā kathī* drum stick. The higher sounding Nāsaḥ head made of mountain goat hide is played with the left hand.¹⁵ Among all *dhā* drums of Bhaktapur, only those played in the context of *navabājā* carry an impressive pair of ram's horns (Figs. 248, 249). Therefore these drums are also

15 Buddhist processional groups hold the stick in the left hand, playing the Nāsaḥ head with the right hand, as they apply a special finger technique for the *drakha* ornament.



Fig. 248: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing a big *dhā* decorated with ram horns, Yatāchē 1987



Fig. 249: Decorated *kvakhī* (*dhā* with ram's horns, collection of the then Royal Nepal Academy)

called *kvakhī*, ‘horn drum’. There is a story remembered in Yāchē about the ram horns decorating the *dhā* of Yāchē Gaṇeś *navadāphā*. During the final years of the Rana period a Mr. Joshi of Yāchē owned a valiant mountain ram that defeated the Rana ruler’s animal in a staged ram fight. The ruler decided that he must own that victorious ram and bought it. Soon it came to his notice that the new animal refused to eat. It rejected even the juiciest leaves from the kitchen garden. Clearly, that ram was homesick. The ruler respected its suffering and returned the animal to its former owner in Yāchē where it instantly developed a healthy appetite. When it finally died, the horns that defeated the Rana’s animal were mounted on the drum. Animal horns decorate many shrines of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ who is believed to reside in drums. The only other drum in Bhaktapur carrying ram horns is the unique *ḍyaḥkhī* drum that accompanies the Navadurgā during their annual dance cycle—an instrument of singular ritual significance. *Dhā* and *kvatāḥ* are said to be the oldest Newar drums still in use. During *navadāphā* performances they are invariably played as the first and second drum. *Dhā* is played again during the concluding *āratī* ritual. Their ritual significance is underlined by the fact that they are the only *navabājā* drums that start with an invocation to Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, before playing other pieces.



Fig. 250: As a guest appearance on *pañcadān carhe*, a *gūlābājā* group led by Gopal Prajapati from Thimi plays *dhā* for the Dīpaṅkara Buddha at Yāchē 1999

Dhā is often used as a processional drum in an ensemble called *dhābājā*, where the drum is combined with *bhuchyāḥ* and *sichyāḥ* cymbals and with *pvaṅgā* natural trumpets, if available (Fig. 250).¹⁶

16 cf. chapter 3.2



Fig. 251: Kumāḥ potters playing *dhābājā* during August 1988 in Taulāchē, Sujamādhi

Two different Buddhist processional *gūlābājā* ensembles play *dhā* in the reverse way, holding the drumstick with the left hand. Sāymi oilpressers play animal horns capable of producing the mantra *Ārya Tārā Tārā Buddha Dharma Saṅgha* with the accompaniment of *dhā* drums.¹⁷

A complete *dhābājā* ensemble including several *pvaṅgā* trumpets accompanies the masked dance *Bhaila pyākhā* of the Kumāḥ potters during *sāpāru* week.¹⁸ (Fig. 251)

Among many dances and processions involving *dhābājā* is the popular *ghētāgiśi* stick dance preceding cow effigies that are said to lead the souls of the dead safely to heaven.¹⁹

The photo documentation of drum strokes in this and the following chapters was carried out with Hari Govinda Ranjitkar, a right-handed person. A left-handed person holds the drums and the drum stick the other way. Exact measurements of drums are not always mentioned, as there are no standard sizes in Newar drum-making. The following details of playing-technique concern the use of *dhā* as part of *navabājā*. With all Newar drums, the variety of drumming syllables is larger than the number of strokes. (Figs. 252–256)

17 cf. Wegner 2009

18 cf. chapters 4.4 and 11.16

19 cf. chapters 4.3 and 11.17



Fig. 252

Resonant sound *ghē*, *dhū* or *kā*



Fig. 253

Dampened sound *ga* or *du*



Fig. 254

Fingers 3, 4, 5 stop the hide from resonating



Fig. 255

Resonant sound *tā* or *nā*



Fig. 256

Dampened sound *ti*, *tu* or *ri*

Stroke combinations and fixed patterns/formulas

jhī or *dhā* = *tā* + *ghē*

drakha = *ghēghēti* (usually a rapid flourish/ornament)

kāghē = *ghēghē* (usually in fast repetition)

tāghemītā = *tāghēdutā*

garajaka = *tākāghētā*

6.2 *Kvatāḥ*

The compound drum *kvatāḥ* consists of two drums tied together, a small *lālākhī* and a small *nāykhicā* tied vertically in front of the horizontally played *lālākhī* (Fig. 257). Only three drum-heads are played in combination with natural trumpets *pvaṅgā* and *bhuchyāḥ* and *sichyāḥ* cymbals.



Fig. 257: Hari Govinda playing *kvatāḥ* during a *navabājā* recording in Byāsi 1983

The drum has different names and repertoires, depending on context and genre. In Bhaktapur the name *kvatāḥ* is used only for the *navabājā* drum. The oldest name and use must be the *pañcatāla* drum that accompanies tantric Buddhist *cacā* dances traditionally performed in secrecy in the *āgaṃchē* clan god house of Buddhist priests and goldsmiths. A rare occasion²⁰ for observing *cacā* dance in public occurs on the morning of Buddha *jayantī*²¹ at Svayaṃbhūnāth.²² On the same day around noon, young Śākya and Vajrācārya men of Kathmandu play *pañcatāla* in combination with pairs of *pāyṭaḥ* natural trumpets and *tāḥ* cymbals, leading a procession of devotees bearing Buddha's relic through the heart of the old city.

20 Leaving aside recent attempts at popularising a few *cacā* dances for insufferable tourist presentations

21 Jyeṣṭh fullmoon, Buddha's birth, enlightenment and *nirvāṇa* fall on this day—at least in Nepal. In Tibet it is celebrated one month later.

22 cf. chapter 4.1

Probably commissioned by King Jagajjyotir Malla of Bhaktapur (1614–1637), a Newar *rāgamālā* consisting of fifty-four miniature paintings was produced by a local artist of the Pūṃ caste of ritual painters. Painting no. 4 shows a *kvatāḥ* drummer and a cymbal player in the then fashionable Rajput style court dress (Fig. 258).



Fig. 258: Painting no. 4 of a Newar *rāgamālā* commissioned in the early 17th century by Jagajjotir Malla shows a *kvatāḥ* drummer and a cymbal player (courtesy of Jagadish SJB Rana)



Fig. 259: *Gā pyākhā pañcatāla* playing *dyaḥllhāygu* for *Nāsaḥdyah*

Another *pañcatāla* ensemble accompanies the masked dance *gā pyākhā* that is performed every twelve years in Patan—in this genre also in combination with *pāyiaḥ* trumpets and *tāḥ* cymbals (Fig. 259).²³



Fig. 260: *Sākvalā Sāyṁi gūlābājā* with *pastāḥ* and *pvaṅgā* 1985

During *gūlā Sāyṁi* oil pressers living in *Sākvalā*, *Gvaḥmādhi*, *Bāsagvapāl* and *Banepa* use this drum under the name *pastāḥ* in combination with natural trumpets *pvaṅgā* and *taḥ* cymbals to play *dyaḥllhāygu* invocations when they pass or circumambulate a Buddhist monument with their processional *gūlābājā* ensemble.²⁴ (Figs. 260–264)

²³ cf. chapter 4
²⁴ cf. chapter 3.4



Fig. 261: Bāsagvapāl Sāymi *gūlābājā* with *pastāh* and *pvaṅgā* 1985



Fig. 262: Banepa Sāymi *gūlābājā* with *pastāh* and *pvaṅgā* during their visit to Sākvalā 1985



Fig. 263: Painting no. 5 of a Newar *rāgamālā* commissioned in the early 17th century by Jagajjotir Malla shows a *bhuchyāḥ* player and a *pvaṅgā* player with painted palms and elongated nails of their little fingers—the *Kāmasūtra* instructs us in the use of this fingernail as an erotic device. (courtesy of Jagadish SJB Rana)

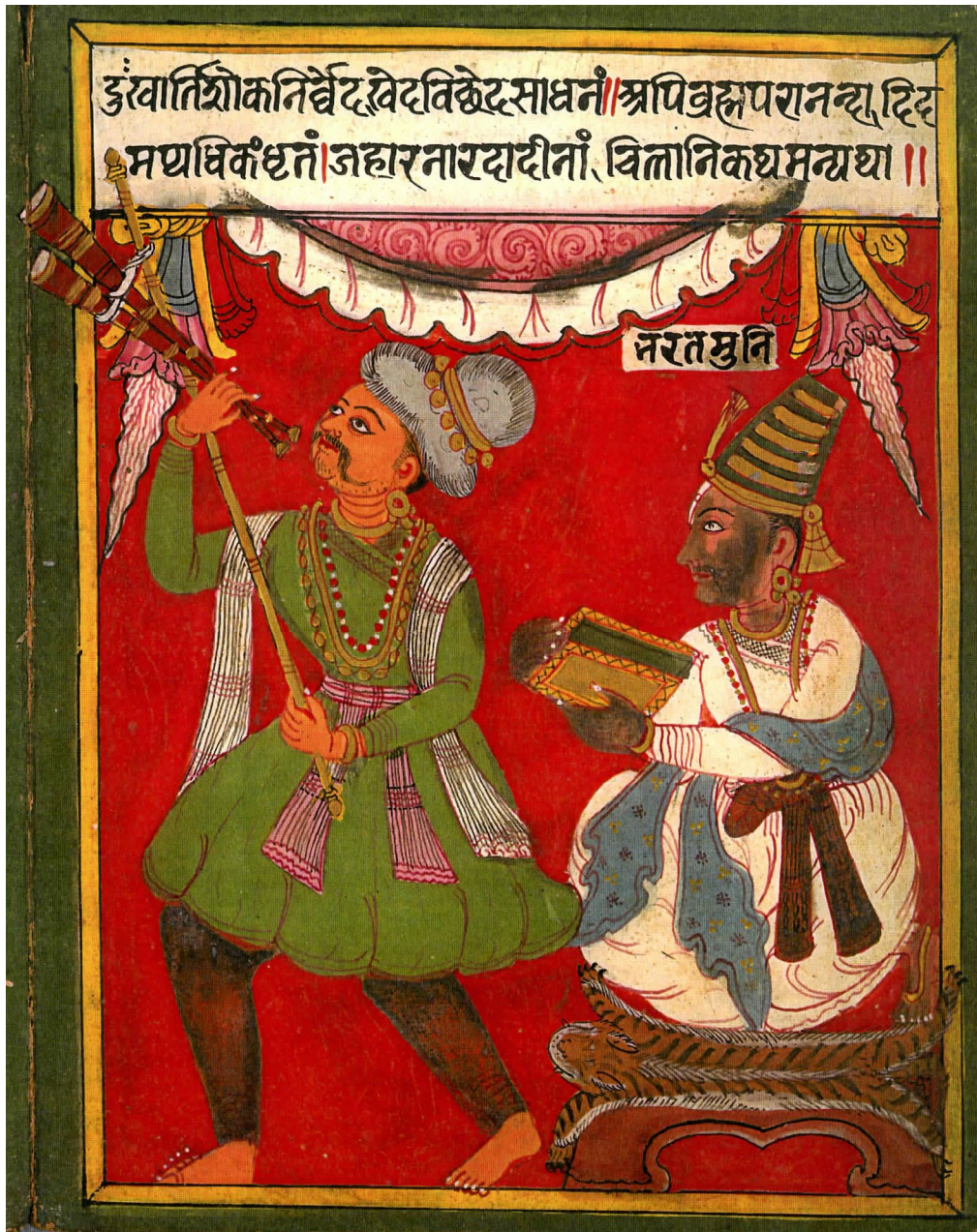


Fig. 264: Painting no. 6 of a Newar *rāgamālā* commissioned in the early 17th century by Jagajjotir Malla shows a *pvaṅgā/pāyṭāḥ* player and the imagined author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bhāratamuni—here spelled incorrectly as Bharatamuni—holding what must be the manuscript of his famous treatise. The legendary author is fashionably seated on a tiger skin—as befitting an accomplished and enlightened ṛṣi or sage. (courtesy of Jagadish SJB Rana)

Hari Gavinda Ranjitkar demonstrates the playing techniques used for *kvatāḥ* in the *navabājā* context. (Figs. 265–272)



Fig. 265

tā



Fig. 266

tuganuga



Fig. 267

jhē



Fig. 268

tā



Fig. 269

dhū (with left hand *ghē*)



Fig. 270

dī, tī



Fig. 271

tu, nu (in *tuganuga*)



Fig. 272

ga (in *tuganuga*)

Stroke combinations and fixed patterns/formulas/alternatives

tuganuga can be played

- a) with alternating hands on the *nāykhī* head or
- b) with alternating fingers 2 4 2 4 producing four undampened sounds on the Nāsaḥ head of the *lālākhī*

The syllable *tā* is used for two different strokes

- a) on the *nāykhī* or
- b) on the Nāsaḥ head of the *lālākhī*

6.3 *Dhācā*

As the name *dhācā*²⁵ suggests, this drum looks like a miniature *dhā*. Its repertoire has nothing in common with what farmers play on the big *dhā* drum during processions or what Kumāḥ potters play when they accompany their masked dance Bhaila *pyākhā*. There is no evidence for any other use of this drum but in *navabājā*. Perhaps the first *dhācā* was created by a drum-maker on royal command. Or it was used for some undocumented purpose at the time when the first two *navadāphā* groups were introduced. The drum is smaller than *dhā* and played with a lighter



Fig. 273: *Dhācā* with drumstick and *dhimaycā* (right, 45 cm high) photo: Bernd Karl Rennhak

drumstick. The Nāsaḥ drumhead is made of female goat hide, the Haimā drumhead of mountain goat hide. Playing technique has much in common with *nāykhīcā*. In fact, *dhācā* looks and sounds like a slightly older brother of the *nāykhīcā*. *Dhācā*, *dhimaycā*, *nāykhīcā* and *dhalak* have a tuning paste permanently stuck against the Haimā drum hide. It is made of crushed castor seeds, resin and mustard oil.²⁶ (Figs. 273–278)

25 lit. small *dhā*

26 cf. chapter 6.12 for documentation of drum-making



Fig. 274

Fingers 3, 4, 5 stop the hide from resonating



Fig. 275

Dampened sound *kha*



Fig. 276

Resonant sound *ghē*



Fig. 277

Resonant sounds *tā, nā*



Fig. 278

Dampened sounds *tī, nī, mī*

Stroke combinations and fixed patterns/formulas

dhā = *tā* + *ghē*

drakha = *ghēghēti* (usually a rapid flourish/ornament)

kāghē = *ghēghē* (usually in fast repetition)

tāghemitā = *tāghēnitā*

6.4 *Dhimaycā*

Contrary to what the name *dhimaycā*²⁷ suggests, this drum has almost nothing in common with the big *dhimay* drum played by farmers during processions. There is no evidence for any other use of this drum but in *navabājā* and—with one tiny *dyaḥlhāygu* as the only piece—in *gūlābājā* of the Sāymi oil pressers. Perhaps it was used for some undocumented purpose at the time when Bhūpatīndra Malla founded the first two *navadāphā* groups. The oilpressers seem to have incorporated several *navabājā* drums and Jugī shawm-players at a later stage as a fashionable addition to their much older processional ensemble of horns, *dhā*, *pastā* and natural trumpets. The Haimā drumhead is made of cowhide, the higher sounding Nāsaḥ is made of softer calf hide. Unlike



Fig. 279: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *dhimaycā* during a film shooting at Yāchē 28/2/1985

the processional drum *dhimay*, the *dhimaycā* is played with hands and finger technique similar to *dhalak* playing (Fig. 279, Figs. 280–284). *Dhimaycā* sounds like a bass *dhalak*. The *dhimaycā* compositions *dhamāk* and *kharjati* are somewhat similar to the *nāykhīcā* pieces under the same names. Only two patterns of the *dhimaycā* piece *cvakh* can be seen as derived from the *dhimay* compositions *mā* and *nhyāḥ*.

27 lit. small *dhimay*

6 Royal Kettledrums and *Navabājā*

For example, the popular *dimay* pattern

/tā dhā/nā dhā/nā dhā/nā dhā/
/tā dhā/nā dhā/nā dhā/tāy ghū/
/dhā khutā/tā khutā/tā khutā/tā khutā/
/tā khutā/nākhutātā/khutātākhu/tākhutā/

appears in the *dhimaycā cvakh* as

/tā di / ni di / ni di / ni di /
/tā di / ni di / ni di / tā o /
/dhē khati/tā khati/tā khati/tā khati/
/tā khati/tākhata /khatitākha/ tā o /

and the *dhimay nhyāḥ* variant

tāy khutā/tākaghunā/tātākhutā/tākaghunā/

appears in the *dhimaycā cvakh* as

/tā khati/tāgadhē/tātākhati/tāgadhē/



Fig. 280

nā, tā



Fig. 281

nī, tī



Fig. 282

drakha roll with 45, 3, 2, 45, 2



Fig. 283

ghē, ga



Fig. 284

kha

Stroke combinations:

dhā = *tā* + *ghē*

dhe, *dhē* = *ti* + *ghē*

6.5 *Nāykhīcā*

The name of the drum derives from *nāykhī*, literally ‘butcher’s drum’. The last syllable *-cā* denotes something small, a small *nāykhī*. In fact, the *nāykhīcā* played in *navabājā* ensembles is of smaller circumference than a *dhācā* but it is not a particularly small *nāykhī*. In the *navabājā* context the *nāykhī* is also called *nāykhīcā*. As with *dhā* and *dhācā*, the drummer’s right hand holds a drumstick to play the lower sounding Haimā head that is made of cow hide. Chapter 4 mentions Hari Govinda’s special technique for producing a clearer *tā* sound played with the left hand on the Nāsaḥ head made of goat hide. An instant before playing *tā*, either the tip of the drumstick or fingers 3 to 5 of the right hand press against the centre of the Haimā head, preventing it from vibrating, as that would cause a rather dull *tā*. In this way, brilliance and clarity of *tā* sounds are achieved. This advanced technique is not known or at least not applied in the *nāykhībājā* repertoire of the Nāy. On the other hand, butcher drummers use a unique technique for producing a wailing sound that they call *kvī*. Before playing, they rub bee’s wax called *men* on the Haimā head of the *nāykhī*. Just before producing the sound *kvī*, the drummer licks the tip of his right middle finger and lightly pushes the moist fingertip forward across the Haimā head that responds with a haunting wail, *kvī*. The *nāykhīcā* used in *navabājā* does not play even a single pattern from the butcher repertoire. There is no bee’s wax applied and no *kvī* wail. Compositions are similar to those played by other *navabājā* drums under the same name. The *nāykhī* is also played in the Buddhist processional context of both varieties of *gūlābājā*. Oilpressers do not use the *kvī* rub, only goldsmiths and Buddhist priests. (Figs. 285–287)



Fig. 285: Nāy butchers Kajilal Shahi (left) and Kalu Shahi playing nāykhī and sichyāḥ at the shrine of Thāthu Nāsaḥ April 1985. Note how Kajilal's feet support the drum.



Fig. 286: Nucheraj Buddhacharya ('Gole Guruju') of Inācva gūlābājā playing nāykhī accompanied by Jugi with clarinet (Chandranath Kapali) and trumpets (Kedar Kapali, 3rd from right and colleague) August 1986



Fig. 287: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *nāykhīcā* with Yāchē *navadāphā* during a film shooting 28/2/1985

Drumming syllables used by Śākya/Vajrācārya and *navabājā* drummers for remembering and transmitting their *nāykhī* and *nāykhīcā* repertoires differ from all other inventories of drumming syllables. They exploit the articulation contrast between labial and dental sound production whereas all other drums focus on the contrast between dental and velar sounds. There are other differences, too. When I studied *nāykhībājā* of the butchers with the exceptionally accomplished drummer Kajilal Shahi, I was astonished to see that he did not use any drumming syllables but remembered the compositions as a chain of muscular reflexes. The slightly unnerving disadvantage of this method for me was, that he could not isolate sections of a composition. He had to repeat the complete piece at full speed—again and again. When I published his repertoire²⁸, I applied the drumming syllables used in *navabājā*, to make things easier for future students.

28 cf. Wegner 1988



Fig. 288

dā, da, na

The right hand stroke *thu* is produced by striking the Haimā head lightly in the centre with the stick and maintaining the pressure against it, producing a dampened and slightly high-pitched sound.



Three fingers of the right hand stopping the Haimā head whilst playing *pā* or *ma* with the left hand

Fig. 289



Fig. 290

pā, ma

6.6 *Pachimā*

The name of this majestic double conical drum indicates that it came from the west²⁹. It is similar to the North Indian concert drum *pakhāvaj*, a little more bulging in the middle and not at all as perfectly tuned—although this may have been accomplished with more care during earlier centuries. In the Kathmandu Valley, the *pakhāvaj* used to accompany *dhrupad* singers and Rudra *vīṇā* players at the royal courts and, until the middle of the 20th century, in some stately homes of the Rāṇā aristocracy.



Fig. 291: A painted and a carved *pachimā* from Bhaktapur (photo: Bernd Karl Rennhak)

As with the *pakhāvaj*, the local drum *pachimā* (Figs. 291–293) has tuning paste on both heads, each with different components, adding weight and resonance to both drum hides. The Nāsaḥ head has in its centre a permanent black tuning paste *khau* containing crushed iron ore. It is attached to the lower goat hide. A ring-shaped hide of mountain goat rests on top (Figs. 294–298). Both hides are woven into a leather ring with holes for the V-laced drum straps. In theory, this head could be tuned to a precise pitch but in common practice the pitch is neglected for a year, until the drum is taken to the Kulu's workshop for an annual overhaul. Just before playing the *pachimā*, the drummer kneads a sticky *chucū* dough of wheat flower and water and sticks it in the centre of the Haimā head that is made of cow hide. This must be removed after the performance lest ants and rats nibble it off and damage the leather parts as well. In between strokes, the drummer presses loose bits and pieces of sticky dough back into position with his left hand.

During *dhrupad* performances with *pakhāvaj* both heads were tuned precisely at an octave's distance and to the basic note of the *rāga*, depending on the singer's disposition. Not so with *pachimā*. Before big festivals, the Kulu drum-maker is asked to tighten the loose drum straps to achieve more resonance. But the pitch is left to chance. An equally lax treatment is given to the

29 Delhi lies exactly to the west of Kathmandu



Fig. 292: Carved decoration (skulls and intertwined snakes) along the waistline of two different *pachimā* drums

lālākhi, the drum that accompanies *dāphā* songs. Some singers of *dāphā* songs happily croon away at their personal pitch, apparently unconcerned about the drum's or the lead singer's pitch. Could it be that the ideal is not technical precision but inclusion of all available forces—whatever their musical merits? I often suspected that things must have been done to a higher standard during the Malla time when Newar culture was in its bloom.



Fig. 293: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *pachimā* during film shooting in Yāchē on 28/2/1985



Fig. 294

tā, nā



Fig. 295

tī



Fig. 296

ta



Fig. 297

drakha



Fig. 298

tin

Stroke combinations:

dhā = *tā* + *ghē*

dhe = *ti* + *ghē*

dhī = *tin* + *ghē*

Pachimā is also played in processional flute ensembles, with shawm accompaniment in Sāymi *gūlābājā* and for accompanying some masked dances like Mahākālī *pyākhā*.

6.7 *Dhalak*

Dhalak is the Newari name for the local version of the X-laced Indian *ḍholak*. Unlike most contemporary North Indian *ḍholak* drums, the V-laced *dhalak* does not use cotton straps but traditional ones made of leather. The Nāsaḥ drumhead is made of goat hide, the Haimā head of com hide. The sound quality is clear and pleasing, not at all like the aggressive and hellish noise that huge *ḍholak*-dominated percussion ensembles have produced in Bollywood film studios since the 1970s, to project archaic values of male dominance over female submission. The refined left hand playing techniques including rubbing and single fingers playing that are common in *qavvālī* accompaniment, are not applied in playing the *dhalak*. As a contrast to the majestic ring of the *pachimā*, the *dhalak* plays similar compositions but in a dry and pleasant matter-of-fact manner. This contrasting range of sound production makes the two drums ideal partners in sharing compositions by taking turns in playing different sections. (Figs. 299–301)

In Bhaktapur, the *dhalak* is also used as a processional drum by transverse flute ensembles and Buddhist *Sāymi gūlābājā*. It plays a prominent role as the only accompanying drum in the devotional song genre *dhalcā-bhajan*. (Figs. 302–308)



Fig. 299: Indian *ḍholak* with tuning rings and leather straps (photo: Bernd Karl Rennhak)



Fig. 300: Tirthaman Napit playing *dhalak* during film shooting in Yāchē 28/2/1985



Fig. 301: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar and Tirthaman Napit playing a duet for *dhalak* and *pachimā* 28/2/1985



Fig. 302: Buddhalal Manandhar playing *dhalak* in Gvaḥmādhi 1986 with his Sāymi *gūlābājā* ensemble based in Vāṃśa Gopāl



Fig. 303

tā, nā



Fig. 304

tin



Fig. 305

drakha (4-3-2-4-2)



Fig. 306

ti



Fig. 307

kha



Fig. 308

ghē

Stroke combinations

dhā = *tā* + *ghē*

dhē = *tin* + *ghē*

6.8 *Kvakhīcā*

Kvakhīcā is known as *kvacākhī* or *bhagaḥkhī* in Kathmandu and Patan. It is a vase-shaped clay drum with a hole at the bottom that is opened and closed with the left hand during playing, to alter the sound. The lower layer of the drumhead is made of goat hide, the upper one of mountain goat hide. The drumhead looks like that of the *tablā* but the application of the *khau* tuning paste is very rough in comparison with professional *tablā*-making in India. Lack of tuning is another factor resulting in a soft sound quality lacking brilliance. When it is the *kvakhīcā*'s turn during *navabājā* performance, Jugi shawm-players exchange their loud *Gujarāti mvālī* for soft and lovely sounding bamboo fipple flutes called *baēcā* (Fig. 309). Unfortunately all the old *baēcā* flutes disappeared.



Fig. 309: Chandranath Kapali playing one of the two last old *baēcā* fipple flutes of Bhaktapur 1991

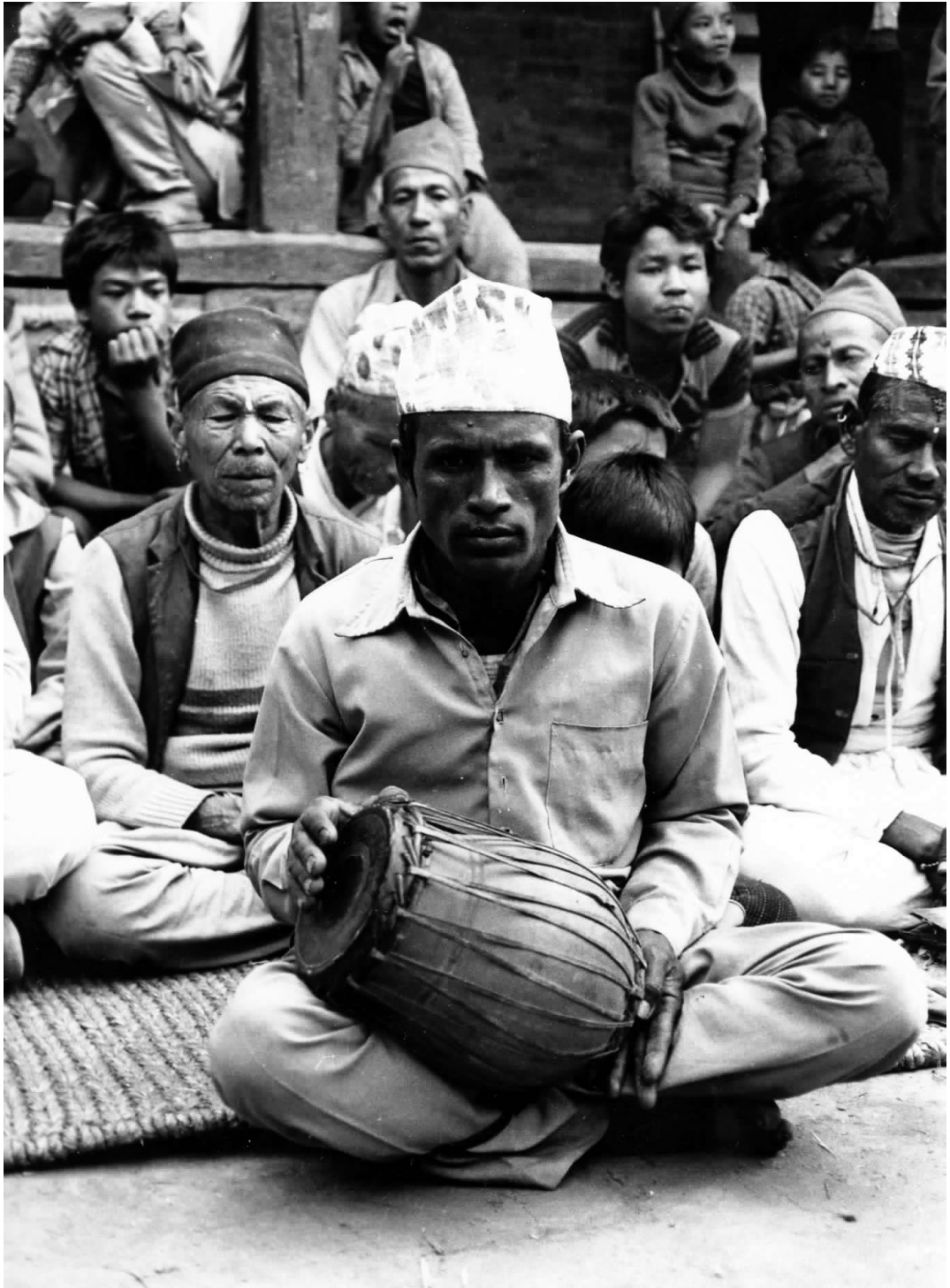


Fig. 310: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing kvakhicā with Yāchē navadāphā, 28/2/1985

There were two left in the collection of Kathmandu University's Department of Music but one of them broke during the earthquake in 2015. In the 1980s, farmers in Kathmandu and Patan had large transverse flute ensembles *bāsuri khalaḥ* that included accompaniment with several *kvacākhī* drums. They played processional music during *gūlā* and marriage music during the dry season.

In Bhaktapur *kvakhīcā* is played as part of *navabājā* (Fig. 310), *Sāyami gūlābājā* and in a single *kvakhīcā dhalcā* song group based in Taumādhi where it replaces the *dhalak* drum that is usually part of *dhalcā bhajan* groups.



Fig. 311

nā, tā

Fig. 312

tīn



Fig. 313

di



Fig. 314

drakha (4-3-2-4-2)



Fig. 315

kha



Fig. 316

tin (after *drakha*)



Fig. 317

open



Fig. 318

closed

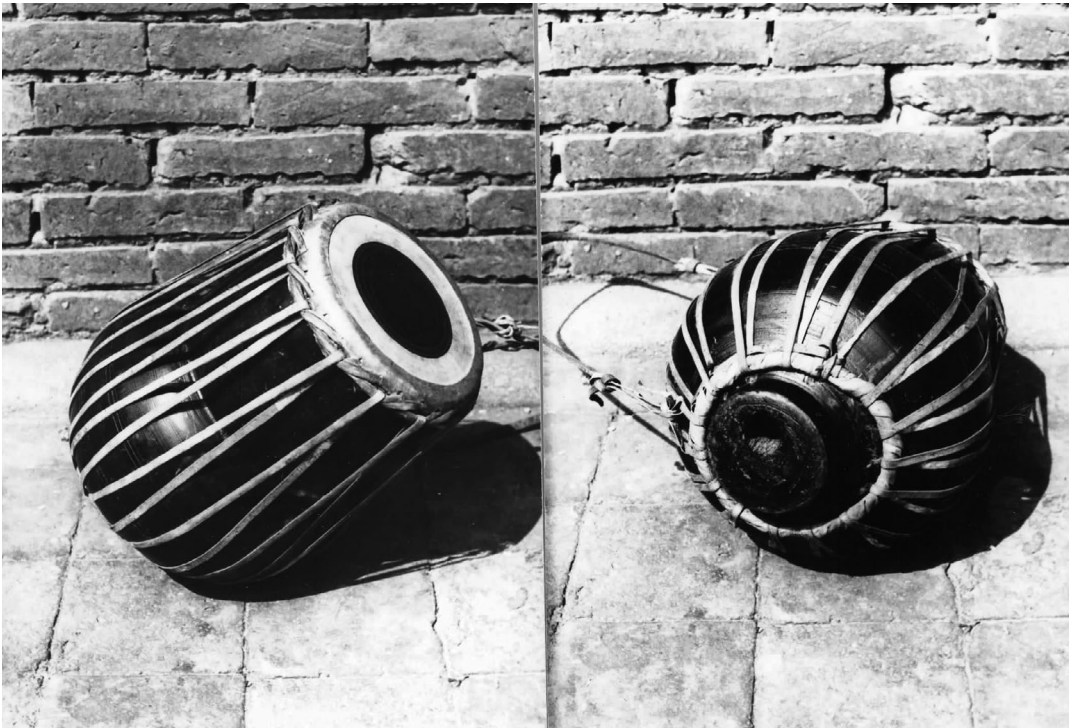


Fig. 319: A rare kvakhīcā made of wood (photos: Bernd Karl Rennhak)



Fig. 320: Bhagāḥkī made of clay, played as part of Patan navabājā in 1986

6.9 *Nagarā*

Nagarā comprises of two V-laced kettledrums made of clay or copper (expensive but more lasting), differing in size and in the construction of the drum heads (Figs. 321, 322). The smaller *Nāsaḥ* drum has two layers of cow hide on top of each other, the upper one shaped as a one inch wide ring encircling the lower hide. Contrary to the larger drum with only one thicker cow hide, the construction of the *Nāsaḥ* head allows for more variety of sound production and protects the rim of the drum from damage. The addition of the ring-shaped hide appears to be a relatively recent feature. In the 1980s there were still a few older *nagarā* drums with single-layered *Nāsaḥ* heads. The chief reason for untimely disintegration of a clay *nagarā* are frequent hard strokes against the rim that are carried out at the wrong angle and with a tight wrist. The drumstick should approach the rim in a horizontal position, lightly hitting the edge of the drum as well as the entire two inches of the circular hide. The bigger *Mākaḥ* drum has a sturdier hide, sometimes with a *masalā* paste stuck against the centre from inside. This is evident as some of the mustard oil used as *masalā* component seeps through the hide. The *Mākaḥ* is played only in the central area, never on the rim. With sudden spectacular involvement of the drummer's raised right arm, *nagarā* playing conveys joyous rhythmic power, a perfect climax to the *navabājā* performance and a very good reason for kings to be so fond of kettledrums.



Fig. 321: Pair of *nagarā* kept in position by straw rings (photo: Bernd Karl Rennhak)

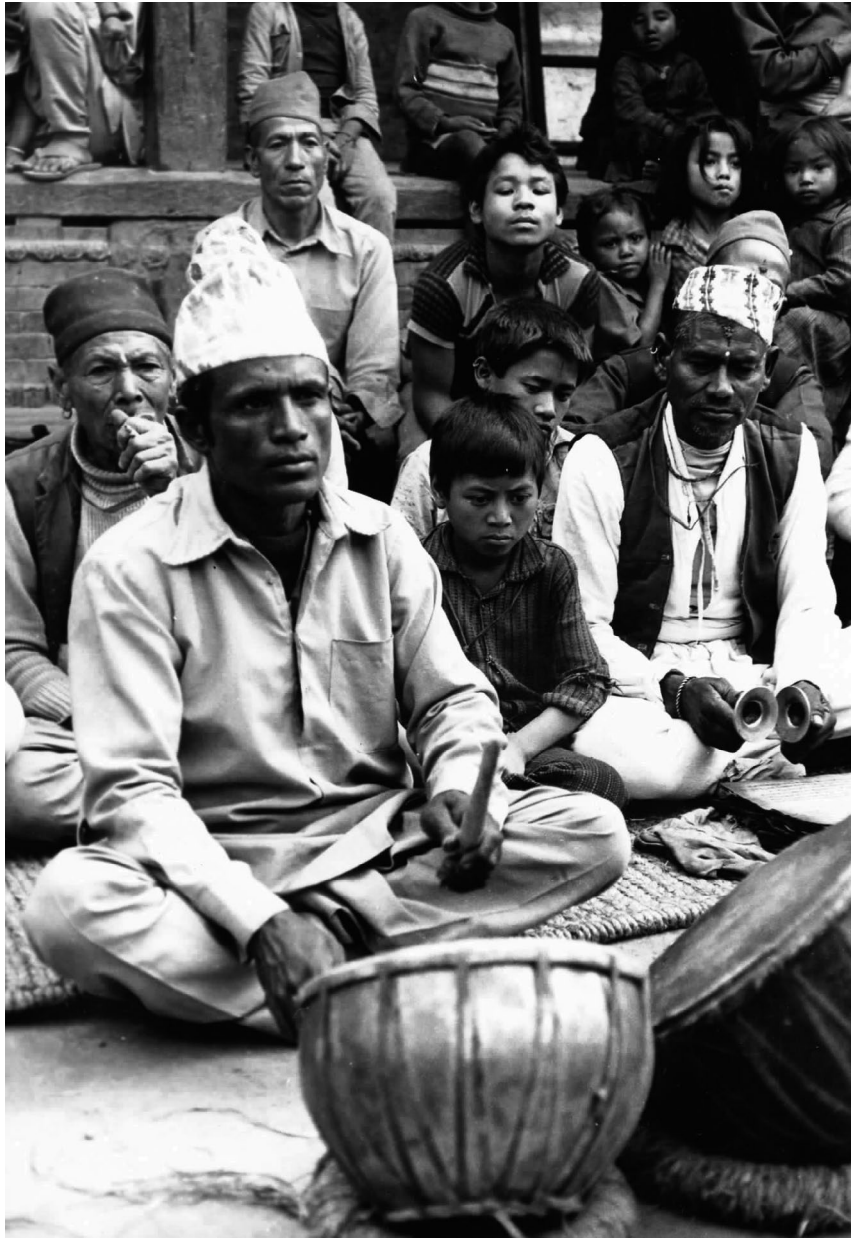


Fig. 322: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *nagarā* during a film shooting at Yāchē, 28/2/1985

In Bhaktapur, the pair of *nagarā* is used as part of *navabājā* ensembles, in Sāymi *gūlābājā* and in Mahākālī *pyākhā* where it accompanies the battle of three *daitya* demons against the mother goddesses. Invariably, the demon is subdued and the goddess triumphs to the majestic sound of the *pachimā* drum. (Figs. 183, 188)



Fig. 323

tā, nā



Fig. 324

di



Fig. 325

digadiga, tugunugu

6 Royal Kettledrums and *Navabājā*



Fig. 326

ghē, dhē



Fig. 327

dhē



Fig. 328

dhē diga tā (right hand moving from left to right to play *tā*)



Fig. 329

dhē diga tā (diga)



Fig. 330: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar playing *nagarā* during a film shooting at Yāchē, 28/2/1985

6.10 *Dabadaba* and *Kāntādabadaba*

Lord Śiva is frequently depicted as the cosmic dancer Naṭarājā playing the *ḍamaru*, an hour-glass-shaped clapper drum made of the upper layers of two human skulls. Śiva as absolute, eternal time is Mahākāla. This is transcendental timelessness before creation begins. In this state, the god absorbs all time. Once creation starts, Śiva manifests as movement in time, playing the drum as Naṭarājā.³⁰ The drum is used in tantric cults all over South Asia and also in Tibetan Buddhism. Paintings of many Ādivāsi ethnic groups of South Asia use a symbol of this drum, consisting of two triangles meeting with their points. In the Vārli Ādivāsi context in rural Mahārashtra, male shamans (*bhagat*) play similar drums (*ḍāk and audh*) during marriage and death rituals. In the tantric Śrī *yantra*, the overlapping of two triangles stands for the union of male and female energies. The House of Gorkha adapted this symbol as the so-called ‘star of Gorkha’. A detailed study of the *ḍamaru*, its use and its symbolism could fill volumes.

Tamer versions of the drum used in Newar culture are made of wood (*dabadaba*) or clay (*kāntādabadaba*). (Fig. 331)



Fig. 331: *Dabadaba* (height: 8 cm) and *kāntādabadaba* (right)

The *dabadaba* was played as part of Sāymi *gūlābājā* of Bhaktapur, before the repertoire was lost with the death of the last player in the mid 1980s. A pair of *dabadabas* played simultaneously by a single person is used in Sāymi *gūlābājā* of Banepa and in Patan’s *navabājā* during *gūlā*. The Navadurgā of Bhaktapur play a big skull *dabadaba* during processions. Occasionally street hawkers and begging mendicants announce their arrival with the characteristic rattling sounds of similar drums.

The *kāntādabadaba* is used in every Hindu household during the Mahānavamī home ritual. During the following days children play with the delicate clay drums until they are broken.

30 cf. Kramrisch 1981, p. 272

6.11 The *Navabājā* Repertoire

When the first *navadāphā* groups were founded in the early 18th century, a huge repertoire of suitable *navabājā* compositions had to be found, adapted or created by musicians whose identity remains unknown. They could have been members of the inner court circle, probably founding members of Taleju *navadāphā*, as this requires independent and discerning artistic minds that a Malla king would have valued to have at his service. These musicians would have had exposure to *śāstriya saṅgīt* practised at the Malla courts—a perfect position from which to organise musical material. A major part of the Bhaila *pyākhā* dance repertoire and other masked dances was integrated into the repertoire, also some patterns of *dhābājā*. Comparison of the repertoires of the existing *navadāphā* ensembles suggests that Yāchē *navadāphā* could be the youngest among Bhaktapur’s *navadāphā* groups. This group’s repertoire does not include three Bhaila *pyākhā dhā* compositions that are part of the Bhairavnāth and Dattātreya *navadāphā* repertoires. Despite occasional friendly chats between the leading drummers of Yāchē and Dattātreya and young Hari Govinda Ranjitkar listening to many performances of Bhairavnāth *navadāphā*, these few pieces never made it into the Yāchē repertoire. With more than twenty performances spread over the year, the *navadāphā* groups were in much better practice than dance groups that performed only for a week per year³¹ and had to put on annual training sessions before coming out. As a result, the dance compositions are played faster during *navabājā* performances. Another reason for the relatively slow tempo of Bhaila *pyākhā* could be that there is a natural tempo limit for dance movements that is easily surpassed by a good solo drummer. The drumming syllables vary between both genres but the compositions are easily identified in the other context. Borrowing patterns from other repertoires is not uncommon. However, there are certain limits to this, depending on the respective genre and caste. To allow comparison with related drum repertoires, this publication includes, among others, the drum repertoires of *lālākhī* (Yāchē *navadāphā*), of Bhaila *pyākhā* (Kumāḥ of Sujamādhī) and of Sāymi *gūlābājā* (Sākvalā).

During a *navabājā* performance, the initial composition is a *dyaḥllhāygu* invocation for Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, played by the first of the nine drums, *dhā*, to be followed by two short compositions called *cva* and *gu*. Another *dyaḥllhāygu* precedes other *cva* and *gu* played by the second drum, *kvatāḥ*. Two different *āratī* compositions and *dyaḥllhāygu* are played simultaneously by *dhā* and *lālākhī*³² during the final *āratī* procession around the lit *āratī* lamp stand.

There is a short pattern that imitates the sawing movement of a blunt blade at the throat of a sacrificial goat. It is played during the gory stage of blood sacrifice at the Nāsaḥḍyaḥ shrine and is called *dugucā śyāygu*, ‘cutting the goat’. Before the sacrifice with *dugucā śyāygu* drowning out the goat’s death rattle, the blade is purified with water and decorated with red and yellow powder. Apparently, it is never sharpened. Chicken sacrifices are carried out with a similar blade but without musical encouragement.

31 Bhaila *pyākhā* and Rādhākṛṣṇa *pyākhā* during *saparu* and Mahākālī *pyākhā* during Indra *jātrā*

32 drum accompanying *dāphā* songs

Dhā is not only played during *navadāphā* performances but also during processions to the shrine of Nāsaḥdyah on the occasion of music apprenticeship rituals³³ and during life-cycle rituals including processions. For example in *saparu pyākhā* the drums *dhā* and *lālākhī* take turns in accompanying the *ghētāgiśi* stick dance in front of a cow effigy. These and other short processional patterns are included in the transcriptions, as they were taught during my *navabājā* apprenticeship. Most of them are never played as part of a *navabājā* performance but during ritual processions. *Nhyāḥ* is an irresistible basic processional pattern suggesting physical movement. It is played in between *cva* compositions that are usually repeated once or twice. *Cva* 5 and 7 to 11 are also part of *dhimaybājā* processional patterns. *Lā* *cva* was adapted into the *dhimay* repertoire during the 1990s as an instantly popular addition.

As the combination of accompanying cymbals and natural trumpets and a stock of similar compositions underline, *dhā* and *kvatāḥ* were probably played in the Kathmandu Valley long before *pachimā*, *dhalak* and *nagarā* arrived from India. In many paintings and sculptures depicting Nāsaḥdyah as Nṛṭyanāth, his vehicles Nandī and Bhṛṅgi appear next to the god as smaller human figures playing *dhā* and *kvatāḥ*³⁴. The three of them dance, the god in the centre, gracefully lifting his right leg. There are many depictions of Nṛṭyanāth dancing with his Śaktī either as half male, half female Ardhanareśvara³⁵ or in sexual union as an unmistakable image of divine creative energy³⁶. It is exactly this inspiring energy that musicians need to tap and communicate through music like a charm. In fact, *nāsaḥ* can be translated as ‘charm’. During a *navabājā* performance, *dhā* and *kvatāḥ* play first *dyahlhyāgu*, then pairs of short compositions called *cva* and *gu*. I was repeatedly told that they are conceived as pairs of male (*gu*) and female (*cva*) energies. *Gu* is never played during procession, only *cva*. The only other *dyahlhyāgu* in the *navabājā* repertoire (for drums number three to nine) is a short piece for *pachimā*. This is played only during procession, at the beginning (invoking Nāsaḥdyah), in front of the *tvah* Gaṇedyah (in this case Yāchē Gaṇeśa), on reaching Surya Vināyaka Gaṇeśa, and at the end of the procession (Nāsaḥdyah).

Navabājā drums number three (*dhācā*) to nine (*nagarā*) are accompanied by shawms and—in the case of drum number eight (*kvakhīcā*)—fipple flutes. Compositions for these drums include longer developments of changing rhythmic patterns with a brilliant climax. In the *navabājā* context ‘*tāl*’ does not stand for a rhythmic cycle but a fixed composition that may develop stepwise in different meters. The typical development starts with a basic pattern, the so-called *duvā* serving as the identifying refrain to the respective *tāl*. This basic pattern is repeated several times and can be replaced with minor *buttā* pattern variants, before another pattern emerges which also could be varied in a stepwise progression. Typical variants are generated by dividing the patterns into two halves, playing one section once and the other one three times. Another common procedure is the replacement of one short embellishment played on the last beat. The number of pattern repetitions is meant to coincide with the melodic development of the shawm accompaniment that also has a *duvā* refrain and a related melody to be played in between. There can be further increase of tempo, before a chain of lively drumming patterns leads to the climax. Another possible development

33 cf. chapter 11.16

34 in rare cases also *dhā* and *lālākhī*

35 cf. chapter 3.2. p. 65

36 cf. chapter 2., p. 27



Fig. 332: Jugis playing *Gujarāti mvālī* during a *navabājā* recording at Yātāchē 1989

includes repetition of the entire set of variants, before the piece reaches a final climax. There are also patterns succeeding each other with contrasting accents.

Most of the procedures described above resemble elementary variation techniques in North Indian classical *tablā* and *pakhāvaj* playing³⁷. Unknown in *navabājā* drumming is the important *tablā* compositional procedure of *khālī-barī* where a *tablā* pattern is repeated with contrasting *bāyāṃ* strokes highlighting the rules of the respective *tāl*—for example in the *qāyḍā* form. As the classical *tablā* repertoire began to evolve in the late eighteenth century in Delhi, it is obvious that this advancement could not have influenced the *navabājā* repertoire of Bhaktapur. When Indian court musicians were employed by Malla and Rana courts, there must have been little or no exposure of Newar farmers and lower castes to this exclusive court entertainment.

The Jugi tailor-musicians accompany the *navabājā* drummer continuously from the third drum *dhācā* to the ninth drum *nagarā* with shawm melodies³⁸ selected in accordance with the season and festivals (Fig. 332). For example, during autumn (*mvahani* festival), they play five variants of *rāg mālāśrī*, during the spring month of Māgh variants of *rāg basanta*, during the month of Phālgun *hvali me*, during the New Year festival *ghātu*. Two pieces³⁹ start with *rāg kāygu*, a short melodic introduction in free rhythm, whereas all other pieces have a simple melody in two parts⁴⁰. It begins just after the drummer introduces his initial pattern of the respective composition. He

37 cf. Wegner 2004

38 Simonne Bailey was able to identify altogether forty-nine shawm melodies played with *navabājā*.

39 *thatā* and *tatalī*, played by the *dhācā* drum

40 identical with the North Indian concept of melodic development in two steps, *sthāyī* (fixed refrain) and *antarā*

rarely tells what composition he is going to play but expects the shawm players to identify the piece after the initial drumming strokes and respond with the suitable melody. Other shawm players wait until their leader has identified the drumming pattern, before they join in. Different degrees of confidence become obvious, as some shawm players avoid playing in the more difficult upper range, allowing themselves a nonchalant puff from their cigarettes or simply stopping for breath.

There seems to be limited compulsion to play shawm as precisely as possible. This is enhanced by the fact that quite a few Jugi musicians are habitually drunk. Their accompaniment is not the unison playing of a well-defined melodic line. It is the sum total of four—ideally there were four shawm players—different versions that produce a lively continuum around a remembered melody. Astonishingly this works, if the drummer is confident about his patterns and the tempo. Then the tipsy shawm players manage to proceed without letting the music fall apart. So shawm accompaniment is not necessarily a dependable point of reference for the drummer. It represents an element of impending chaos that needs to be lived with.

Reasons for the absence of technical perfection in many performances of Newar music could be general intoxication during festivals or simply the advanced age and bad health that also led to the present state of decline of this tradition. Shawm accompaniment was definitely more precise during the early 1980s when there were still enough proficient players and regular performances. In Bhaktapur, Jugi shawm players are always, sometimes drastically shown their place at the very bottom of the socio-economic order. After the *guthi* land bestowments were confiscated by the state of Nepal in 1963, the music groups still needed to pay shawm-players. Payment was mostly in kind, rice and wheat, and it became less and less. Owing to the Jugis' reluctance to play for free, performances became increasingly rare. If professional musicians are to work, they need to be respected and paid, not abused but supported. The people of Bhaktapur missed that chance.

All *navabājā* drums are played in cross-legged sitting position, some supported by a drum belt around the drummer's knees. In the following descriptions of playing techniques, the fingers are numbered 1 to 5, starting with the thumb as 1. The Nāsaḥ hide of a two-headed drum produces much clearer undampened, open *tā* sounds when the Haimā hide is blocked just before the stroke. Blocking is done either with the drumstick or with fingers 3, 4, 5 silently holding against the centre of the Haimā hide with their tips whilst fingers 1 and 2 hold the stick. Both techniques help to produce a clear and ringing *tā* sound and are applied whenever the tempo allows for this. Fingers 3 to 5 of the right hand also regulate the range of the drumstick's movements by holding it either tight or loose, allowing more freedom to bounce back from the drum head.

Movements are restricted to the barely necessary and carried out with maximum relaxation and quiet, regular breathing. Facial expression should be focused but serene. In exceptional cases, an experienced drummer may use an extra movement to highlight special strokes. Among all *navabājā* drummers, only Hari Govinda did this to impressive effect whilst playing some special *nagarā* patterns. He had learnt this technique from his uncle. (Fig. 333)

The popular *tatali* piece for *dhācā*, *dhalak* and *nagarā* includes a section where the shawms synchronize with the drumming patterns (Fig. 334). Here, the shawms respond after the fashion of natural trumpets *pvaṅgā*. They use only the basic note and the upper fifth, the basic note coinciding with *ghē* strokes of the lower sounding drum hide and the fifth with *tā* strokes of the higher sounding drum hide.

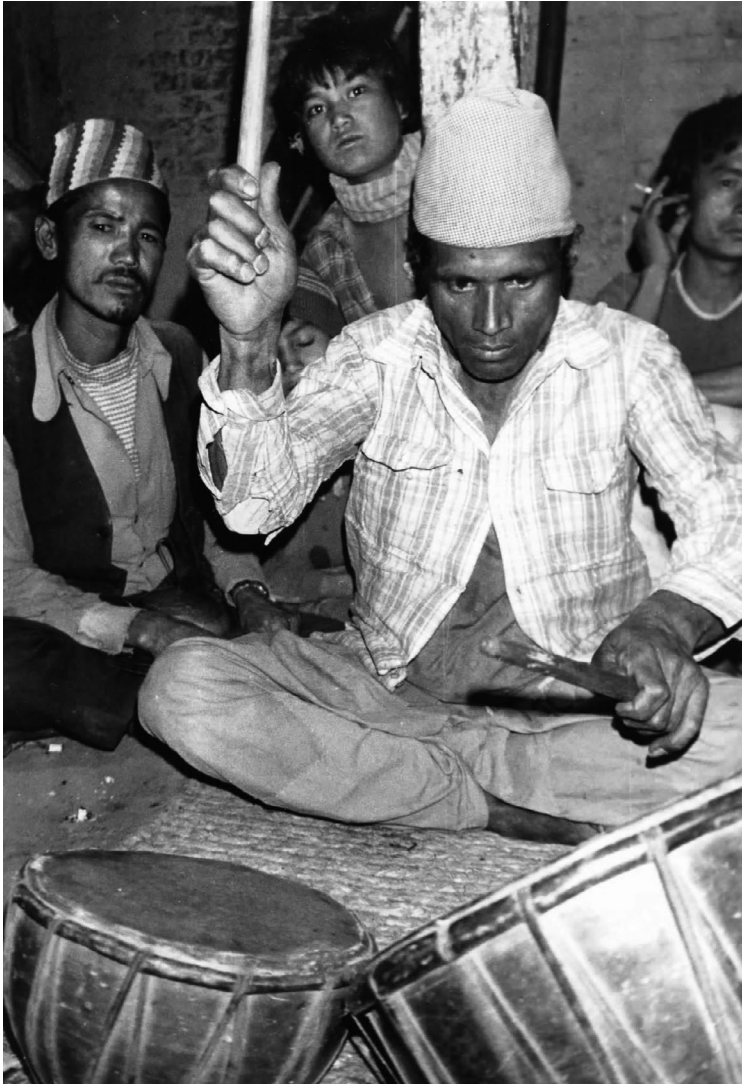


Fig. 333: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar throwing his arm up to highlight a stroke (1983)



Fig. 334: Hari Govinda Ranjītkar playing *tatali* with the *dhācā* during a recording session in Yātāchē 1989

In this way, the drum pattern /ghē tā tā ghē / tā tā ghē o /

synchronizes with the shawms playing⁴¹ / S P P S / P P S o /

etc.

In the entire *navabājā* repertoire, this is the only piece, where shawms divert from their role of having to support the drummer with repetitive melodies. The union of melody and rhythm becomes intimate. The piece includes also patterns of Rādhākṛṣṇa *pyākhā* and *khīcā pyākhā*⁴².

Other *navabājā* compositions may include certain patterns that cite those of masked dances: *Cva* no. 10 for *dhā* is the main pattern of Bhaila *pyākhā*. It is played when Bhailadyaḥ dances with his entourage.

The composition *dhamāk* for *dhimaycā*, *nāykhīcā*, *dhalak*, *pachimā* and *nagarā* uses the typical patterns of *khyāḥ pyākhā*, a dance in a rapid seven beat meter showing naughty ghosts that lurk on rooftops at night and paralyze people in their sleep (Fig. 335).

41 in Indian letter notation

42 lit. dog dance



Fig. 335: Khyāh pyākhā performed by potters of Taulāchē, August 1988.

Citations of dance patterns appear also in *dāphā* drum accompaniment⁴³. Musicians and listeners in Bhaktapur are instantly able to pick up the lead given by the drumming patterns and associate the respective gods and other characters from various masked dances.

As much of the *navabājā* repertoire is also part of drum compositions played by Bhaila *pyākhā* and Sāymi *gūlābājā*, the complete transcriptions of those repertoires are included in this publication. Bhaila *pyākhā* uses only two drums, *dhā* and *lālākhī*. Many among *these dhā* pieces are also part of what the *kvakhī* drum plays during the initial section of a *navabājā* performance, but at a faster tempo. The drumming syllables differ a little in both genres, as these are oral traditions.

In this chapter I tried to establish that the *navabājā* repertoire of compositions was to some extent compiled from compositions of existing dance repertoires. Their performance in the *navadāphā* context causes performers and listeners to associate and perhaps experience a vision of the respective characters from those masked dances. It appears that the masters who selected the compositions did apply a final touch resulting in the convincing format of this treasure of Newar drumming compositions. They must have included several original compositions in addition, for example most of those for *dhācā*, *dhimaycā* and *nāykhīcā* and those for *kvakhīcā*. Obviously, they were highly skilled musicians with the necessary intellectual and creative potential. They lived two hundred years before our era when Newar culture was at its full bloom—thanks to an almost unlimited support by the Malla kings. Those rulers embraced the responsibility towards their astonishing culture, encouraging the Newar genius by participating in the unique spiritual and artistic potential of their subjects.

Many drumming patterns are shared among different Newar settlements. For example, some of the *dhimay* patterns of Bhaktapur are also used in Thimi or Kathmandu. The last section of Bhaktapur's *dhimay dyaḥlhāygu* is also played in far away Baḍikhel (near Lele)—proof of the extreme age and ritual importance most this important invocation of Nāsaḥdyaḥ. Much more comparative research into the repertoires of different Newar towns needs to be carried out to identify links between the various local styles. This may enable us to understand the flow of information among local styles and allow conclusions to their origin.

Comparison of Bhaktapur's drumming genres reveals that some genres share nothing, not even a single pattern with other genres, pointing to the restrictions of use by a single caste and/or use in esoteric tantric practices. This applies to the *cacā pyākhā* and *pañcatāla* repertoire of the Buddhist Vajrācārya priests that could be among the oldest surviving drumming traditions—their exclusiveness ensured by secret performances. The other high caste Buddhist drumming tradition, Śākya and Vajrācārya *gūlābājā* is processional music for everybody to hear, but not a single drumming pattern of this can be found in other genres. The other end of the social ladder is represented by *nāykhībājā*, the processional music of the Nāy butchers. Their repertoire includes the funeral procession music *sībājā*, believed to emanate black magic and death. Nobody else wanted to have anything to do even with the rest of the *nāykhībājā* repertoire. Not a single pattern is shared with other genres. This is also the case with the unique music of the Navadurgā that dates from the early 16th century. The mothergoddesses are the most powerful protectors of Bhaktapur. Their music stands apart and cannot be taught to outsiders.

43 cf. chapter 11.12

The *lālākhī* accompaniment of religious *dāphā* songs includes patterns from popular *sāpāru* dances. When the singers are singing the *dāphā* song text, these drum patterns work like an under-current of meaning. Naturally, when they sound, the musicians may visualise the dance characters.

Other genres frequently contributed to each other, especially those genres practiced by the middle strata of the society, the musically very active farmers and related castes of craftsmen. Several processional patterns occurring in *dhimaybājā*, *dhābājā*, *Baila pyākhā* and *navabājā dhā* are similar, for example the following one that accompanies the ensemble dance of *Bhaila pyākhā*. In *navabājā* and *dhābājā* it is called *cva*, in *dhimaybājā gu*, whereas *Bhaila pyākhā* uses the drumming syllables as the title of the piece, *dhānyedhānā*. It comes in a straight metre. The syllables differ but the structure and playing technique are similar.

navabājā and *dhābājā*: /ghē o o tā/ o o ghē o /tā o o o /tāghemitā/
/ghē o o tā/ o o ghē o /tā o o o /tāghemitā/
/tākha o tā/ o o kha o /tākha o tā/ o o kha o /tā o etc.

dhimaybājā: /dhā o o syāy/ o o thēy o /syāy o o o /khutātāka/
/dhā o o syāy/ o o thēy o /syāy o o o /khutātāka/
/cakhū o ba / o o khū o /syāy o o o /khutātāka/ etc.

Bhaila pyākhā: /dhā o o nye/ o o dhā o /nā o o o /garajaka/
/dhā o o nye/ o o dhā o /nā o o o /garajaka/
/dalī o ce/ o o kū o /cakū o nye/ o o kū o /cā etc.

There are numerous examples of drumming syllables evoking poetry—inevitably of erotic connotation. When male drummers start inventing these naughty rhymes based on their drumming patterns, there is no end to it. For example, the popular *tatali* drumming piece played during performances of *navabājā* and *kha pyākhā* has this pattern:

/ghē ti tā /kha ti tā/ ghē ghē tāghē/tā etc.

If replaced by meaningful words, it becomes:

/dho-ti tva/kāy-ta tva/prā-si nāpā/tva etc.
Take off the dhoti. Take off the loincloth.
Take off the sari, too.

Another example:

/kāy-ta tva/prā-si tva/jvāḥ jvāḥ majhvāḥ/tya etc.
Take off the loincloth. Take off the sari. Interlock!

6.12 Drum-Making

During the 1980s, the only drum-makers in town were two Kulu brothers, Dil Bahādur and Śāṅkha Bahādur, living on the northern periphery of Bhaktapur, in Mulāchē. Owing to their professional occupation with cow and other animal hides, their Kulu caste comes between Nāy butchers and untouchable Pvaḥ sweepers, basket-makers and fishermen. With the recent disappearance of many music groups and decreasing demand for their traditional work as drum-makers, the next generation of Kulus with school education is trying to find additional avenues for generating



Fig. 336: Kulu women repairing a pair of *tablā* (*tamal* and *bām*) for use in *bhajan* accompaniment, 1985

income. Some specialise in the tourist business, selling small *māḍal* drums, singing bowls and toy *sāraṅgīs* as souvenirs. In the mid 1980s Dil Bahādur Kulu organised instructive video shows of American blue films (entrance fee: 1 Rupee). This became a temporary racket for the needy and brought him some extra income. Newar drums are tuned only to an approximate pitch. If the groups can afford it, they take the instruments to the Kulu drum-maker for tightening—usually before the big town rituals *biskaḥ* and *mvahani*. (Figs. 336–338)

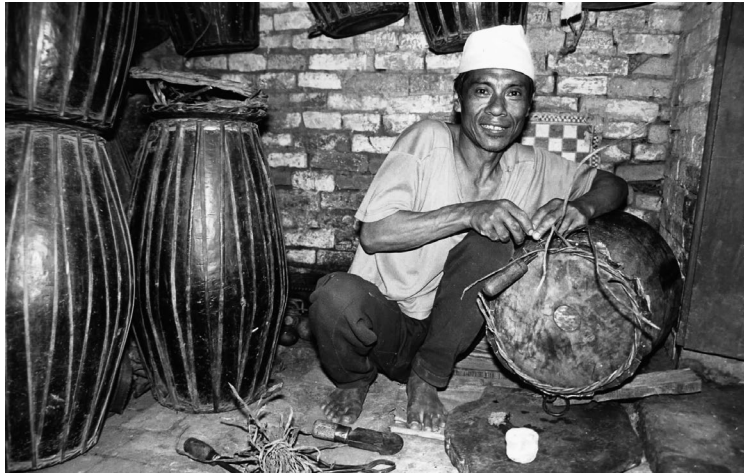


Fig. 337: Śaṅkha Bahādur Kulu repairing *lālākhi* drums in his workshop, 1989



Fig. 338: Drum-maker's tools and raw material for making a *nāykhī* drum,

front row from left to right: Haimā hide (*chēgū*) of cow with bamboo ring (*pvatā*), Nāsaḥ hide of female goat with bamboo ring, and flat *lvahā* stone for tool sharpening,

second row: *lvahā* stone hammer, flat bamboo slice *benā*, hole piercing awl (*pvāḥ khanegu ācā*), *lapi* blade, flat awl (*gvaḥgu ācā*), *chālicā* pliers,

third row: leather strip (*tā bālā*), cotton rope (*kā khipaḥ*), water jug (*karuvā*)

Animal hides used in drum-making

Name of drum	Nāsaḥ drumhead	Haimā/Mākā drumhead
<i>dyahkhī</i>	<i>nāk</i> (female <i>yāk</i> , <i>Bos grunniens</i>)	<i>nāk</i>
royal <i>nagarā</i>		male buffalo
<i>dhimay</i>	calf skin	female cow
<i>lālākhī</i>	cow (upper layer), female goat (lower l.)	cow (male for upper layer, female for lower layer)
<i>dhā</i>	<i>cyāgrā</i> (mountain goat)	cow
<i>kvatāḥ</i>	see <i>lālākhī</i> and <i>nāykhī</i>	see <i>lālākhī</i> and <i>nāykhī</i>
<i>dhācā</i>	female goat	mountain goat
<i>dhimaycā</i>	calf skin	female cow
<i>nāykhī/nāykhīcā</i>	female goat	cow
<i>pachimā</i>	mountain goat (upper layer) goat (lower layer)	cow
<i>dhalak</i>	goat	cow
<i>kvakhīcā</i>	female mountain goat (upper layer) female goat (lower layer)	
<i>nagarā</i>	cow (thin)	cow (thicker)
<i>tamva/tukumuku</i>	mountain goat	
<i>mādal/magaḥkhī</i>	female goat	mountain goat
<i>tablā/tamalā</i>	female goat	
<i>bāyām/bām</i>		mountain goat
<i>dabadaba</i>	goat (thin)	goat (thin)
<i>kāntādabadaba</i>	bladder of male buffalo	bladder of male buffalo

All animal hides are soaked in a chalk solution overnight before scraping off the hair with a *lapi* blade.

Some drums require tuning paste. This increases resonance and allows additional sound quality and playing techniques. These pastes are of three varieties:

1. *chucū*, a dough made of wheat flour and water. This is applied to the Haimā of the *pachimā* drum before performance and must be scraped off immediately after performance.
2. *khau*, a mixture of powdered iron ore, little water and various sticky components. It is applied on the outer side of the drum head and rubbed against the tightened hide with the help of a smooth, round stone. Rubbing and pressure cause heat which makes the paste stick to the drum hide for years. Application needs to be done in many layers and with utmost precision to allow for the fine-tuning of a concert *tablā*, for example. The finest *tablā*-makers in India own rare skills as secret craft traditions that are highly valued by professional *tablā-vādaks*. The *khau* applied by local *Kulus* in the Kathmandu Valley is a very rough version of the perfection that some Indian specialists are capable of. Newar drums with *khau* are *tamal* and *bām* (*tablā* and *bāyām*), *lālākhī* (Nāsaḥ and Haimā), *kvakhīcā* and *pachimā* (Nāsaḥ).
3. *masalā*, a mixture of crushed castor seeds (*Ricinus communis*), dried tree resin and mustard oil. It is applied on the inside of the drum hide and needs to be replaced every year. The *masalā* paste lends weight and a deep resonance to the Haimā drum hides of *dhimay*, *dhimaycā*, *dhācā*, *nāykhī*, *dhalak* and to the Mākaḥ of the *nagarā* pair of kettledrums.

Dil Bahādur Kulu taught me how to make a *nāykhī* drum. The following series of illustrations (Figs. 339–373) documents the process:



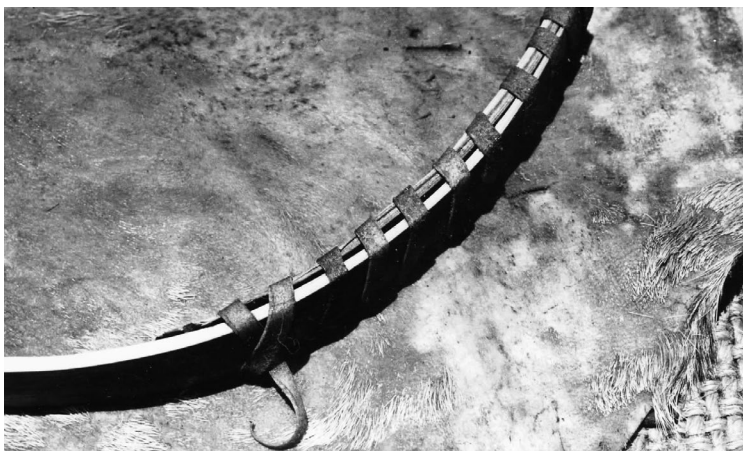
Gvaḥ body of the drum of black *casī* wood⁴⁴
(diameter at both ends: 19 cm, height: 33 cm)

44 Magnolia



Cutting the wetted Nāsaḥ hide into a circular shape (*cāḥ lakaygu* or *cāḥ utigenkegu*)

Figs. 340, 341



Binding the bamboo ring with a leather string (*pvata cigu*)

Fig. 342



Cleaning the Nāsaḥ hide with the blade (*chēgū pigu* or *chēgū svigu*)

Fig. 343



Jacketing the bamboo ring (*pvata tulegu*) with the help of the *benā*

Figs. 344, 345



Fitting the Nāsaḥ hide on to the drum (Nāsaḥ jukegu)

Fig. 346



Cutting the wetted Haimā hide into shape (cāḥ lakaygu/cāḥ utigenkegu)

Fig. 347



Cleaning the Haimā hide (chēgu pīgu/chēgu svigu)

Fig. 348



Sharpening the *lapi* blade

Fig. 349



Cleaning the Haimā hide
(*chēgū pigu/chēgū svigu*)

Fig. 350



Checking the shape of the
cleaned Haimā hide

Fig. 351



Wetting the Haimā hide
(*chēgū phvayegu*) before
jacketing

Fig. 352



Jacketing (*pvata tulegu*)

Fig. 353



Components of the *masalā*
paste: mustard oil (*tū
cikā*), *sāl* resin (*sāl dhūp*)
and castor seeds (*ālaypu*)

Fig. 354



Castor seeds (*ālaypu*)

Fig. 355



Crushing and grinding the resin with a round stone (*lvahā*) into a fine powder

Figs. 356, 357



Crushing and grinding
castor seeds with a stone

Fig. 358



Adding mustard oil
(*tū cikā*)

Fig. 359



Three *masalā* components
mixed into a rough paste

Fig. 360



Mixing the components thoroughly, until the *masalā* becomes sticky and glutinous

Figs. 361, 362



Applying the *masalā* paste on the Haimā hide (*masalā tāyegu/masalā ilegu*)

Fig. 363



Fitting the Haimā hide on to the drum (Haimā jukegu), *masalā* inside

Fig. 364



Securing both the drum hides with string (*nikhē kākegu*)

Fig. 365



Tying both the drum hides

Fig. 366



Tightening the string with the big toe (*tuī kākah tāyegu*)

Fig. 367



Piercing twelve holes (*pvah khānegu*)

Fig. 368



Putting the leather strap (*tā bālā*) through them one by one

Fig. 369



Connecting the two drum heads with the leather strap and balancing the tension

Fig. 370



Piercing the remaining holes and putting the strap through (*pvaḥ khāṇa tā tāyaḥ cvāgu*)

Fig. 371



Levelling the drum hides
(*cāḥ māthā vākugu*)

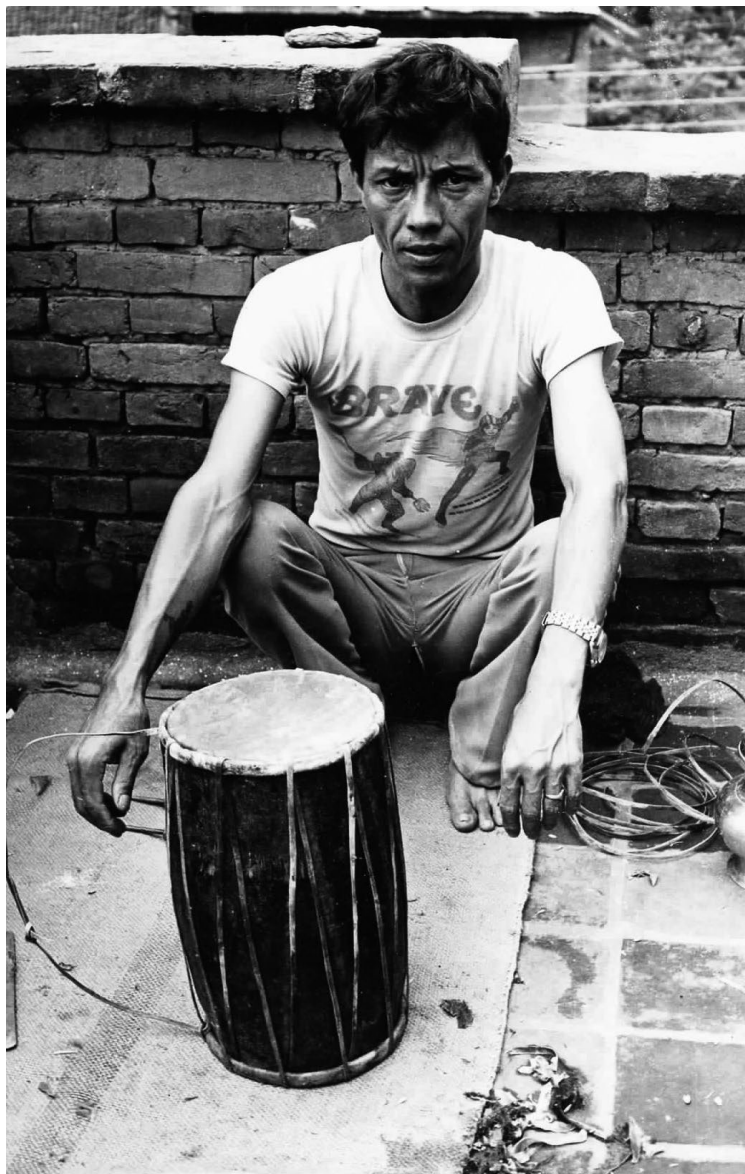
Fig. 372



Tightening the straps
(*tā salegu*)

Fig. 373

Already suffering from tuberculosis, Dil Bahādur Kulu (Fig. 374) passed away five years later. At the time, TB was a chief cause of premature death in Nepal. He left two sons, Bikram and Bikas, who are skilled drum-makers.



*Fig. 374: Watching the drying nāykhī in the sun (nibhāhḷe pāḡu).
Dil Bahādur is relaxing.*