THE BAJA GUTHI OF BADIKHEL

NUTAN DHAR SHARMA AND GERT-MATTHIAS WEGNER
Kathmandu

In search of ancient sources of Newar Music our attention was drawn to the Lele stone inscription of Sivadeva and Amsuvarna, dated samvat 526 (Licchavi period, c. 604 A.D.). The stone tablet stands in a little garden south of the main road of Lele’s Majha tol. The Sanskrit inscription has been published in Abhilekh Samgraha, vol. 1, p. 29-31 (1961), and translated and commented upon by Jośi (1973), Vajmācārya (1973), and Regmi (1983).

The stone inscription of Lele. Today most of its has been scratched off by helpful villagers trying to remove the lichens with blades, in order to enable visiting scholars to read the text.
The inscription mentions a vāditra gausthikā (in Nepali: bājā guthi = a group of musicians), endowed with a land donation of ten mānīkā. According to Vajācārya (1973: 284-289) the Licchavi gausthikās are similar communal institutions as the guthis of the Malla period, and those of today.

The ancient name of the Lele was Lembati drangā (= Lembati town), indicating the existence of several smaller settlements in the vicinity (ibid. 218-221). Badikhel is a village situated behind a small ridge north of Lele, inhabited by a mixed population of Paharī and Bāhun-Chetṛī. According (Kīrāta) settling in the Kathmandu Valley before the Licchavi conquered it.

During his survey of Badikhel, Sharma (unpubl.: 10) discovered the existence of three unusual guthis with names similar to those mentioned in the Lele inscription, e.g. bājā guthi, Indra guthi, and patākā (= flag) guthi. According to our knowledge, guthis of these names are not found in other places of the Kathmandu Valley. Newar music guthis are never called bājā guthi or bājā guthi, but are named after the type of music they support, e.g. dāphā khalah, dhimay khalah, bhajan khalah, etc. This coincidence strongly supports that these Badikhel guthis are indeed descended from those mentioned in the Lele inscription.

We visited Badikhel and interviewed the members of the bājā guthi. The leader (thakāli) of this music group is Purna Bahādur Paharī. He plays the sacred drum (in Paharī: guru dhemā) representing Nāsahdyah, the Newar god of music and dance. As there is no Nāsah shrine in Badikhel, this drum is worshipped during a Nāsah pūjā which includes sacrificing a cock to the music god.

The ensemble consists of five drums (dhemā), two pairs of cymbal (bhuśyāh), and one bronze disc (tāitāi) which broke recently.

The drums are repaired by a drum maker (Kulu) from Sundhara, Patan, who receives thirteen pāthi of rice per year and participates in a ritual feast (bhve) during Caitra full moon. During the Rānā period the group had in their possession four ropani of land at a place called Harramūla, from which they got two muri rice per year to cover their expenses. This land was lost during the 1963 land reform.

During the Buddhist processional month (gūlā) the group takes a daily round of the ritual village circuit (pradaksīna). This happens in the early morning around 6 a.m. On the day after new moon the group proceeds to Bungamati to play at the shrines of Bungadhyah and Bhailadyah. On their return to Badikhel the group plays invocations for their village gods before proceeding to the houses of the four spokesmen (mukhiyā) who receive musical
offerings. During Māsir and Āśādḥ there are two ritual offerings (chemā pūjā) at the shrines of Gaṇeś and Devī, where the whole village gathers, and the dhemā group plays.

Purna Bahadur Pahari with the guru dhemā (right) and the other instruments of his bājā guthi

During Cāitra full moon these two gods are carried around the village on the pradaksina route and the musicians precede the gods.

The Bājā Guthi of Baḍikhel/25

The Baḍikhel dhemā group circulating around the shrine of Bungadyaṭ at Bungamati
The drumming repertoire consists of the following pieces:

1. *Dyahľhāygu*, the invocation of the music god, must be played at the beginning and at the end of every music performance. This piece is also used to invoke other gods, for example when an offering has been completed.

2. *Lā dhemā thāyagu* is played while walking from one locality to another.

3. *Cálni* is played while staying at a locality for some time, for example when waiting for the completion of an offering.

4. *Dyah čāhuligu* is played while circulating around a god.

5. *Yāh ņyāgiyu* is played exclusively while accompanying the gods Devī and Ganeś during their jātrā.

6. *Khukāygu dhemā thāyagu* is played for special entertainment amidst large gatherings of people.

The following transcription shows

A. the Badikhel *pucāhāhgu dyahľhāygu*, and
B. the *cicāhāhgu dyahľhāygu* of the Bhaktapur *dhimaybājā* (see Wegner 1986).
With the exception of the encircled section the two pieces are almost of an identical structure. The tempo, however, differs considerably. The Bādikhel group plays at about half the speed of most of the Bhaktapur groups. Though only the tailpieces of the two invocations have been transcribed here, the similarities are so striking that one can say that both the versions must have evolved from the same source. The Bhaktapur version of the complete invocation certainly is more elegant and convincing from the structural point of view. It would be too early to decide which is the older and which is the corrupt one. Only a comparative study of the dhimay repertoire of various Newar settlements could answer this question. At the first glance, the Bādikhel repertoire appears to be far more archaic than the Bhaktapur pieces which reveal a richer variety of patterns and the more advanced structural forms.

However, if we accept the above conclusions about the origin of the bījā guthi of Bādikhel, we can state that as early as in the 7th century A.D. dhimaybījā had already acquired its function as a ritual drumming ensemble among the Newar. No doubt, in those
days Lembaṭi draṅga must have had a variety of musical traditions, of which the Badikhel dhimaybajā is the sole survivor.
References

Ačārya, Bāburām
1978  *Nepāh, nevāh ya nevāh bhāy.* Transl. into Newari by Svayambhūkāl Shrestha, Patan: Sāhityayā Mālukha

Jōṣi, Hariyām
1973  *Nepāl ko prācin abhilekh.* Kathmandu: Nepāl Rājakiyā Prajñā Pratisthān

Māli, Indra
undated  *Paharī bhāṣikā chagu adhyayan.* Lalitpur: Māri Saphu Kuthi

Regmi, D.R.

Sharma, Nutran Dhar
unpubl.  *Badikhel gāā ko vistrīt adhyayan.* Ms. submitted as part of M.A. degree, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, 1989

Tewari, Ramji, ed.
1961  *Abhilekh Samgraha 1.* Kathmandu: Samsodhan Mandal

Vajrācārya, Dhanavajra
1973  *Licchavikālākā abhilekh.* Kathmandu: C.N.A.S.

Wegner, Gert-Matthias
1986  *The Dhimaybājā of Bhaktapur.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH