

THE BAJA GUTHI OF BADIKHEL

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In search of ancient sources of Newar Music our attention was drawn to the Lele stone inscription of Sivadeva and Amsuvarma, 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 Joši (1973), Vajrācārya (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 *mānikā*. According to Vajracārya (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 draṅga* (= Lembati town), indicating the existence of several smaller settlements in the vicinity (ibid. 218-221). Baḍikhel is a village situated behind a small ridge north of Lele, inhabited by a mixed population of *Paharī* and *Bāhun-Cheṭrī*. According to (*Kirāta*) settling in the Kathmandu Valley before the Licchavi conquered it.

During his survey of Baḍikhel, 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 khalaḥ*, *dhimay khalaḥ*, *bhajan khalaḥ*, etc. This coincidence strongly supports that these Baḍikhel guthis are indeed descended from those mentioned in the Lele inscription.

We visited Baḍikhel 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 Baḍikhel, 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 (*bhuśyāḥ*), and one bronze disc (*tāitāi*) which broke recently.

The drums are repaired by a drum maker (*Kulu*) from Sundhāra, 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 (*pradakṣinā*). 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 *Buṅadyah* and *Bhailadyah*. On their return to Baḍikhel the group plays invocations for their village gods before proceeding to the houses of the four spokesmen (*mukhiyā*) who receive musical

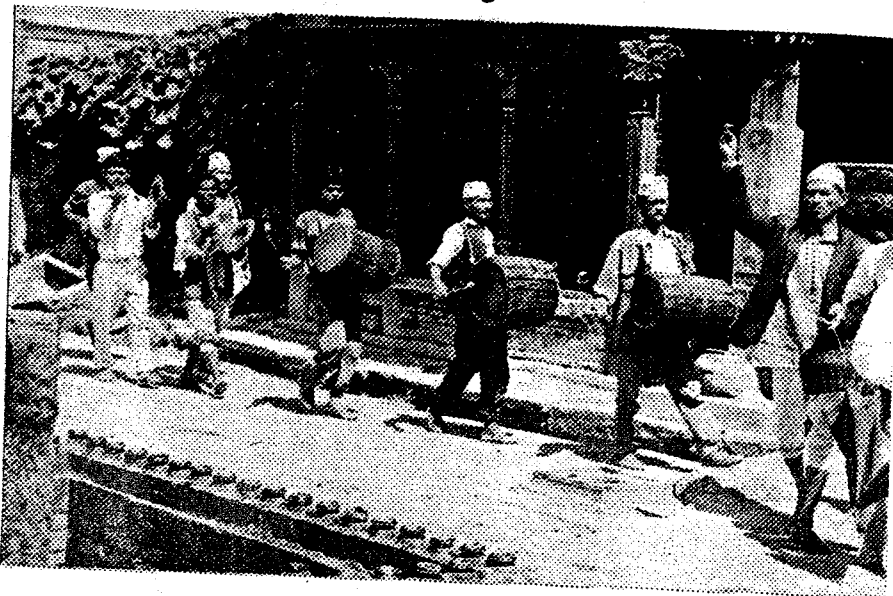
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offerings. During *Māsir* and *Āsāḍh* there are two ritual offerings (*chemā pūjā*) at the shrines of *Gaṇeś* and *Devī*, where the whole village gathers, and the *dhemā* group plays.



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

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



The Baḍikhel dhemā group circulating around the shrine of Bungadyaḥ at Bungamati

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ghū	tā	tā	ghū	ghū	tā	tā	o	tā	khū	nā	tā	khū	tā	tā	ghū
								tā	tā	ku	tā	tā	ku		
ghū	tā	tā	ghū	ghū	tā	tā	o	tā	khū	nā	tā	khū	tā	tā	tā
								tā	tā	ku	tā	tā	ku		
tā	ghū	nā	ta	di	ghū	nā	ta								
			li				li								
				ghū	nā	kha	tā	tā	khū	nā	tā	tā	o	o	o
								tā	tā	kha		jhī			

With the exception of the encircled section the two pieces are almost of an identical structure. The tempo, however, differs considerably. The Baḍikhel 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 Baḍikhel 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 bājā guthi of Baḍikhel, we can state that as early as in the 7th century A.D. dhimaybājā had already acquired its function as a ritual drumming ensemble among the Newar. No doubt, in those

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days Lembati dranga must have had a variety of musical traditions, of which the Badikhel dhimaybājā is the sole survivor.

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