

## MUSIC AND IDENTITY AMONG MAHARJAN FARMERS

### THE DHIMAY SENEGU OF KATHMANDU<sup>1</sup>

Franck Bernède

In many ways, Newar music appears to apply metaphysical concepts to urban order. The 32 wards (*toḷ*) of Kathmandu reflect a cosmological ideal, asserting themselves as so many musical microcosms. Processional music plays an important part in urban organisation and its role is considered to be essentially a ritual one. While concentrating on the ways musical knowledge is acquired among the Maharjan peasants of Kathmandu, this study emphasizes the importance of the role held by the "language" of the drums in the representation of these territorial identities. This study is organised according to three axes of research: the mythical substratum, ritual structure and the orientation of musical education.

To begin with, it should be noted that musical performance among the Newar cannot really be qualified as professional; nevertheless, they occur as a parallel activity harmoniously integrated into daily life. Most castes take part in a number of instrumental and vocal groups. Among these, the Maharjan (*Jyāpu*) have a prominent role, whether in religious or memorial festivals. Considered by the Nepalese as the first inhabitants of the valley, they are often presented as the spokesmen for Newar culture. Their music comes under the banner of a lineage divinity explicitly associated with music. It is through a presentation of this divinity, that we hope to introduce a study of the *dhimay* drum, which as a tangible and musical form of the god of music, invests its deep resonance into the royal Nepalese cities.

<sup>1</sup> Translation: Susan Keyes. This article is among the first results of an investigation undertaken within the context of a research programme directed by G. Toffin (Pir-villes project of the CNRS). Material was collected during three missions (July-August 1995, February-March and July-August 1996), with the support of UPR 299 of the CNRS, the Société Française d'Ethnomusicologie and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. We are most grateful to K.P. Rimal, our collaborator, as well as Dev Narayan Maharjan, our *dhimay* teacher. Our thanks to our musicologist and musician colleagues—R.K. Duwal, I. Grandin and G.M. Wegner.

## Nāsaḥdyāḥ

Nāsaḥdyāḥ is the Newar god of music, dance and the arts. He appears as an aspect of Śiva Mahādeva with whom he shares the names Nāṭeśvar and Nṛṭyanāth. These two terms refer to his initial function as the lord of cosmic dance, Naṭarāja. It is common to derive the Newar name Nāsaḥdyāḥ from *nāsaḥ*, "charm, delight, inspiration", and *dyāḥ*, "god" and to link this conventional etymology to the Nepali expression *nacne devatā*, "dancing god"<sup>2</sup>.

Representations of Nāsaḥdyāḥ are diverse and can be divided into three principal categories: cavities (New. *Nāsaḥpvāḥ*), anthropomorphic forms and finally musical instruments. The cavities (New. *pvāḥ*) can be simple or consist of three or five cavities with different geometric configurations (cf. Wegner, 1992: 126). Most of Nāsaḥdyāḥ's shrines only have three symbolising the god and his principal musician assistants, the bull, Nandī, and the dwarf, Bhṛṅgi, (Fig. 1). The two supplementary cavities are generally associated with Śiva's two sons, Gaṇeśa and Kumār.

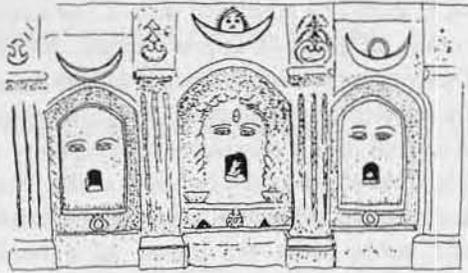


Fig. 1 Nāsaḥpvāḥ (Indra cok, Kathmandu)

In his anthropomorphic form, Nāsaḥdyāḥ is principally represented on the stone or metal tympanums (*torāṇa*) of temples. Generally, like Mahādeva, he is represented draped in a tiger skin, covered with ashes

<sup>2</sup> *nasah* = 1. charm, delight, inspiration; 2. god of music, dance and drama": *Newar Music Dictionary* (Wegner, 1992: 125). According to Mahes Raj Pant (personal communication), the syllables *nā* and *saḥ* are contractions respectively of the Sanskrit root *NRT-* "to dance" and the word *īśvara* "lord"; the contraction of Sanskrit syllables is common in monosyllabic Newari.

from pyres, adorned with snake necklaces and endowed with a varying number of arms. He holds a number of attributes in his hands, among which, the hour glass drum (*ḍamaru*) and a necklace of skulls are the most significant for our purpose. The *ḍamaru*, the archetype of all membranophones, bears some resemblance to the *ḍhakkā* drum of Śiva Naṭarāja. The most ancient text referring to this god<sup>3</sup> mentions that at the end of his dance, striking his drum 14 times, the lord of the dancers utters all the constituent sounds of articulated language, from which, among others things, music is born<sup>4</sup>. As for the garland of freshly cut human heads (Skt. *muṇḍamālā*), it indicates, as for all Tantric divinities, the acceptance of blood sacrifices. Moreover, the garland symbolises "the science of letters", *mantra vidyā*. Other iconic representations of Nāsaḥdyāḥ are drawn on pieces of cotton (New.: *dhaki*) intended to veil the cavities where he resides during rituals. The god and his assistants are represented here in a semi-abstract manner (cf. Duwal and Maharjan in this issue)<sup>5</sup>. Finally, as a tutelary divinity of music, Nāsaḥdyāḥ also manifests himself in the form of musical instruments. Among them, the *dhimay* drum has a special place. It is considered as a tangible aspect of the god, and is therefore the object of particular veneration.

Nāsaḥdyāḥ is associated with a mountain called Kabilas or Kapilasa, located north-west of Kathmandu in Nuwakot District. The first name of this mountain, which may come from the local pronunciation of Kailas (?), is an explicit reference to the archetypal residence of the god Śiva, while the second refers to the sage Kapila, who according to oral tradition practised austerities long ago on the summit of this hill. There,

<sup>3</sup> The *kārikā* of Nandikeśvara on the *Pratyāhāra-sūtra* of Pāṇini, also called *Śivasūtra* (cf. Rao, 1990: 173).

<sup>4</sup> The hymns to Naṭarāja are characterised by their propensity to imitate drum beating and comprise numerous alliterations of consonants and onomatopoeia evoking percussion. Hence, there are numerous devotional hymns attributed to distinguished personages like Patañjali, in which the text suggests dancing and the tinkling of jewellery. One of the most important hymns, the *Tatvārya-stava*, is recited after the *pūjā* at Cidambaram: it evokes the identification of Śiva with *ākāśa* as well as his association with grammar and medicine, describing him as the dancer and he who sings the purest hymns of *Sāmaveda*. Another hymn, the *Nāṭeśa Cintāmani*, structured around five phonemes of his mantra, explicitly describes him as musical notes personified, residing in the Śri Cakra.

<sup>5</sup> Although Nāsaḥdyāḥ is rarely depicted, the *thankā* in the National Art Gallery of Bhaktapur in a form with "16 arms", *ṣoḍaśi mudra*, dancing with his consort and dated 1659 AD, is a remarkable example.

Mahādeva and Nāsaḥdyāḥ are distinct entities and reside in different shrines. A small temple built on the hill's summit shelters Mahādeva in the form of a *caturmukha liṅga*, while Nāsaḥdyāḥ is represented by a natural niche in the wall of the mountain side, about 50 meters below. Still further down, two raised stones are dedicated to Sarasvatī and Gaṇeśa. Curiously, Hanumān, the inseparable companion of the god of music in urban temples appears to be absent here.

These shrines are mostly frequented by Maharjan peasants who perform rituals including blood sacrifices every spring. It is said that everyone must go to Mount Kabilas at least once in their lifetime. Women cannot participate in the worship of Nāsaḥdyāḥ, nor even approach the shrine of the god. However, their presence is required for the worship of Sarasvatī. At this site, it is customary for the women to offer a small hemp sack to her thereby recalling the direct links that they maintain with the Goddess in their daily worship.

Two contrasting accounts illustrate the relationship of Nāsaḥdyāḥ with this mountain. The first recounts in essence that the god, who originally resided in Bhaktapur, fled to Kabilas riding a white cock, as he found the town too dirty. For the farmers of Kathmandu, the journey is reversed: it is said that Nāsaḥdyāḥ, coming from Kabilas one night, stopped at the northern entrance of the capital (*Thamel tol*) before settling early in the morning in each ward. Another version, from Rājopādhyāya priests in Patan, leads one to understand that Nāsaḥdyāḥ could have been the name of a realised being (*siddha*), deified following his numerous feats.

Principally associated with skill, talent, perfection, eloquence and right action, Nāsaḥdyāḥ is above all venerated for the powers (*siddhi*) which he confers on his devotees and without which no creation is possible. If his favours are principally sought by artists (musicians, singers and dancers), they are equally solicited by all Newar for other reasons. Thus, it is common to present the new-born to the god in order, it is said, to avoid malformations, especially mental. Various legends associated with the god should allow us to better define the nature of the ties uniting him with music and dance.

## Legend 1

"The demon Bāsmāsur, eager for power, accomplished difficult acts of austerities. One day he was gratified by a visit from Mahādev, who to recompense him for his asceticism, asked him what he would like. Bāsmāsur asked for the power to reduce to ashes all that he touched. The great god agreed to his request, and Bāsmāsur wishing to verify his new powers, rushed headlong at Mahādev, who was frightened and fled. The demon followed him without respite and Mahādev had no other choice but to take refuge in the semi-obscurity of a rocky cavity. Risking great misfortune, the gods united and put together a plan to stop the rampaging demon. Making him think that Śiva's powers were not so great, he convinced him to test them on himself. Credulous and naive, Bāsmāsur agreed and in an instant destroyed himself".<sup>6</sup>

## Legend 2

"One day, Nasa Dya gave Bhim Dya [Bhimsen] a singing lesson, but the latter did not have much in the way of talent. When Bhim Dya was later practicing on his own, a washerman came by who happened to be searching for his lost donkey. Hearing the sound, the washerman thought it was his lost animal's braying and coming upon Bhim Dya asked where the donkey was. Bhim Dya thus realized that his singing sounded like a donkey's cry. Just as a bad craftsman quarrels with his tools, Bhim Dya grew angry with Nasa Dya, thinking that he had been badly taught. And so he went off to hit Nasa Dya with his club. Seeing him coming, Nasa Dya was frightened and ran away but Bhim Dya chased after him. Fearing for his life, Nasa Dya hid himself in a dark place among garbage and filth. This is the reason that his shrines are located in or near such places."<sup>7</sup> (Lewis, 1984 : 111).

<sup>6</sup> Legend recounted by a Brahman from the temple of Kabilas.

<sup>7</sup> The same spelling and underlining rather than italics is used here, as in Lewis' translation of Prem Bahadur Kasa, *Nasa Dyaya Mye*, 1963.

### Legend 3

"A long time ago, Nāsaḥdyāḥ in his human form, was walking towards Mount Kabilas. On the way he saw a young woman who was cutting grass. Deeply moved by her beauty, he courted her and made love to her. Later, a child was born. The baby was beautiful and a source of pride for the young mother; she took all the credit for the birth of her son. However, Nāsaḥdyāḥ was proud of his virility and claimed the same rights. The situation created a quarrel between husband and wife and degenerated to such a point that the god and his consort decided to separate the fruit of their union into two parts. Nāsaḥdyāḥ took all the bones and created a skeleton named Kavā, and the young woman took the flesh and made a being called Khyā. Nāsaḥdyāḥ, saddened by the hideous creatures, sat down on a felled tree trunk and began to beat it furiously. Suddenly, the two creatures came to life and began to dance to the rhythm of their father. According to oral tradition, this legend is the origin of Nepalese music and dance." (after R. Praddhan (1111 NS, p. 1).<sup>8</sup>

### Legend 4

"In the beginning was the great goddess Mahāmāyā. Alone in her glory and wishing to be multiple, she wanted to join forces with someone; hence she created Brāhma. Frightened by the ill-omened character of this incestuous relationship, the latter refused. The furious Mahāmāyā instantly destroyed him. She then created Viṣṇu who in turn refused and so met the same fate. Beside herself with rage, the Goddess engendered Maheśvara who agreed to her request on the one condition that the goddess change her form. Both took turns at all aspects of the creation. At the end of this divine game, Mahāmāyā and Śiva both assumed human forms and finally united. Following this divine union, Mahāmāyā disappeared. Insatiable and filled with despair, Maheśvara went to the ends of the universe to look for her. He then assumed the form of Rudra and abandoned himself to a terrible dance, *tāṇḍava pyākkhā*<sup>9</sup>. Since then this wild, destructive dance associated with carnal desire, is called *Nāsaḥdyāḥ pyākkhā*<sup>10</sup>."

<sup>8</sup> Translation from Newari by S. Manandhar.

<sup>9</sup> *pyākkhā*, "dance" in Newari.

<sup>10</sup> Legends 4 and 5 were recounted to me by a Vajracārya dance master in Patan.

### Legend 5

"One day Pārvatī in her angry form (*krodha mūrti*), was performing her wild dance when Mahādev appeared and began to dance with her, taking on, one after the other, all the different angry *rasa*. The last dance, which finally pacified and satisfied the goddess was called *Nāsaḥdyāḥ pyākkhā*. It is also called *lāśya nrtya*. Surprised and completely won over by this dance, Pārvatī adopted it and made it her own. According to the local tradition, it is the origin of the *rasa adbhuta* ("the wonderful mood").

### Legend 6

"Arrogant *ṛṣi* lived in a forest. One day Mahādyāḥ (Mahādeva's Newar name) decided to shatter their pride which was destroying them and he paid them a visit. Seeing the god, the *ṛṣi* became extremely angry. To test his power, they prepared an offering on the sacrificial hearth. A wild boar sprang forth from the fire. With a demented granting, he rushed towards Mahādyāḥ to devour him. In an instant, the latter dismembered him with his finger and covered his shoulders with the animal's skin. The *ṛṣi* were unrelenting and started on a new sacrifice from which a venomous serpent sprang forth. Upon seeing Mahādyāḥ, the reptile was instantaneously pacified and delicately coiled around his neck, offering him body as an ornament. Confused, but determinate, the *ṛṣi* used the force of their mantras to engender a demon dwarf. The dwarf rushed at Mahādyāḥ to devour him. The great god knocked him out and began to dance wildly over the inanimate body. According to the Newar, this dance attributed to Nāsaḥdyāḥ is called *tāṇḍava pyākkhā*<sup>11</sup>."

Certain characteristics which emerge from these legends allow the predominate features of the god's personality to be established. Obviously this divine figure presents a great number of similarities with the dancing Śiva of classical Indian tradition. Legends 4 and 5 illustrate the bipolarity of the *tāṇḍava* and *lāśya* dances, traditionally associated with the lord of

<sup>11</sup> Legend recounted by a Rājopādhyāya of Patan.

dancers, and myth 6 is a variation of Naṭarāja's story related in the *Mahātmya* of *Chidambaram*, the *Koyil purāṇa* (cf. Rao, 1990: 174). These elements would therefore lead *a priori* to the assimilation of this god with Śiva Naṭarāja. Nevertheless, as T. Ellingson (1990: 227) rightly remarked, this Himalayan emanation shows considerable differences with its Indian counterpart<sup>12</sup>. Not wishing to enter into the details of a synoptic study of these myths for the time being, only the most recurrent aspects will be discussed, which are in some respects, the most important for our purpose.

In most accounts, Nāsaḥdyāḥ appears as a fearful god. This sentiment, although affirmed in Vedic and Puranic mythology, is nevertheless paradoxical for a god. It is obviously not a trait of character. The divinity's fear is generally linked to the need to escape from hostility caused by ignorance. The classic story of Indra and Vṛtra in the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (XV.11.9) is an explicit illustration of this:

"Indra, having slain Vṛtra and imagining that he had not killed him, went to the remotest distance. He pushed apart the *anuṣṭubh* and crept into its middle portion. This indeed is Indra's dwelling. In safety does he offer sacrifices, in safety does he finish the sacrificial session, who, knowing this, chants on these verses."

Within the context of Newar myths, the god, called either Nāsaḥdyāḥ or Mahādev, cannot escape from the demon Bāsmāsur's powerful asceticism and is forced to grant him what he wants. He is then compelled to flee from Bāsmāsur, who intoxicated with his new power, only dreams of destroying the one who has bestowed these powers on him<sup>13</sup>. In legend 2, it is the absence of Bhimsen's talent for music which

is at the origin of his blind hostility and leads Nāsaḥdyāḥ to hide in the cavities<sup>14</sup>. Nāsaḥdyāḥ's characteristic of invisibility is in keeping with the two meanings of the Sanskrit root *NAŚ-* which can perhaps link the name of Nāsaḥdyāḥ: "to bend", on one hand, and "to become invisible", on the other<sup>15</sup>.

The account of the birth of Nāsaḥdyāḥ's child (Legend 3) appears as another noteworthy difference between Nāsaḥdyāḥ and Naṭarāja. The division of this child into two entities, Khyā and Kavā<sup>16</sup>, resulting from matrimonial discord, is of the greatest interest. It should be pointed out in advance that for the Newar, these two beings are intimately associated with nocturnal terrors, in particular, those of children. They are sometimes considered as inveterate mischief-makers, sometimes feared. It is said that one of their "favourite games" consists in pressing down on sleeping people. Although it is not specified in the myth, their representations in the form of a skeleton and a pile of flesh recalls the heterogeneity of the constituent of the organism, divided into "hard" and "soft" parts associated respectively with the male and female.



Fig. 2 Kavā and Khyā

the scornful, nor the unstraightforward, nor the one who has no self-control; thus I shall grow powerful!" [Nir. 2.4].

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that Bhīmasena is the name of one of the five Pāṇḍava brothers in the *Mahābhārata* and of Deva Gandharva (Renou, 1987: 533). It is also the name of the Newar god of commerce.

<sup>15</sup> NAŚA I. 658, *kautilya* and NAŚA *adarśane* IV.85 in the *Dhātu-pāṭha* (appended list of grammatical characteristics of Pāṇini including approximately 2000 roots which are used to form all Sanskrit words).

<sup>16</sup> "[...] A spirit who accompanies the goddess Kālī, often represented in painting as a skeleton. Skt. *kaṅkāla*" (Manandhar, 1986: 26).

<sup>12</sup> A master of dance, Vajracārya, explained the difference between Mahādeva and Nāsaḥdyāḥ, "Nāsaḥdyāḥ concedes the *siddhi* "powers", and Mahādev, completely intoxicated with cannabis and drunk with the perfume of the *dhatura* flower, grants all that one asks . . ."

<sup>13</sup> In the *Nirukta* of *Yāska*, one of the six auxiliaries (*vedāṅga*) of the Veda, it is said that Knowledge personified seeks refuge in a being whose function is precisely to be the trustee, the receptacle of Knowledge *par excellence* which is the Vedic Word, "Verily, knowledge approached Brāhmaṇa, 'Protect me, I am thy treasure. Do not expound me to

Turning towards India, one sees that this theme has been dealt with in detail in the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, the fundamental treatise on Ayurvedic medicine. In his work, Caraka indeed enumerates with precision the parts of the embryo which come respectively from the mother and the father: skin, blood, flesh, fat, umbilicus, heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, etc. are from the mother; while hair, moustache, nails, teeth, bones, channels, ligaments, vessels and sperm are from the father (*Śārīrasthānam III: 6-7*)<sup>17</sup>. This division between female and male organs according to female *mṛdu* (soft) and male *sthira* "hard" characteristics is not the exclusive prerogative of the Indian world, but it exists throughout Asia. It should also be recalled that for Tibetans, *sha* "flesh" designates the maternal family, and *rus* "bones", the paternal side and what remains of the corpse after cremation. This opposition of bones and flesh is intensified by other oppositions: hard and soft, cold and hot and white and red. With the latter, the colour white is associated with sperm and red with *śoṇita* or blood, the fertilizing element associated with the mother.

Within the musical aspect being examined here, the creation of Kavā and Khyā associated with the separation of gender is in keeping with the founding constituents of musical production as expressed in the traditional stanza of unknown origin, *śruti mātā layaḥ pitā*, translated as "the pitch is the mother and time is the father" (cf. Rao, n.d.: 2). The soft parts are therefore associated with Speech (represented by the syllables, *bol*), and the firm or hard parts, by rhythm. As we will see, this game of oppositions which is found in symbolism associated with musical instruments, is decisive for the understanding of different phases of musical apprenticeships.

### *Laya, Tāla Smṛti*

In his explicit relationship with music, Nāsaḥdyāḥ is associated with *laya*, a polysemous term which for the Indo-Nepalese as well as for the Newar, means a tune or melody (Manandhar, 1986: 224). Among the Newar, the technical meaning of *laya* is also the generic name of three musical *tempo* (slow, moderate and fast) used to accompany some rituals, in accordance with the meaning of the term in classical Indian musical tradition. As a major concept, embracing cosmology, yoga and the arts,

<sup>17</sup> Edited and translated by M. Angot, in press.

the term *laya* as a wide meaning as conventional translations demonstrate with the words: "dissolution", "absorption", "merging" or even, "rest". P.L. Sharma (1992: 387), in his detailed study on this theme, presents four of the most synthetic definitions:

"The important meanings of *laya* are 1) dissolution or destruction (*saṃhāra*) at the cosmic level, implying the dissolution of one element into another in the reverse order, with reference to the order of creation; 2) deep sleep or slumber (*susupti*) in living organisms where the merging of the faculties of sensation and perception into consciousness is implied; 3) in *hatha yoga*, the state comparable to *samādhi* (deep meditation) spoken of by Patañjali, 4) in music, the *viśranti* or rest immediately following each *kriyā* or action, spoken of in the treatment of *tāla*; taking a cyclic view of this action, rest not only succeeds, but also precedes each action."

With the omnipresence of Nāsaḥdyāḥ within Newar society as a whole, this association with *laya* must be considered in a broader perspective than its musical meaning. The existence of abundant literature relating to worship of this divinity in the milieu of the priesthood and the metaphysical speculation associated with it are evidence of a broader meaning<sup>18</sup>.

Within the framework of musical apprenticeships, Nāsaḥdyāḥ, Hanumān, the monkey-god, and Sarasvatī, Goddess of Knowledge and of Speech, form an indissociable triad. In this context, each of these divinities is endowed with a "special quality" which benefits students. It is said that Nāsaḥdyāḥ grants *laya*; Hanumān presides over the *tāla*<sup>19</sup> "rhythm"; and Sarasvatī confers the power of *smṛti* "memory" permitting musicians to acquire competence.

Nāsaḥdyāḥ, the principal divinity of music, is present in all instruments, nevertheless, tradition particularly associates him with membranophones and aerophones. Hanumān, as rhythm master, is represented by different categories of idiophones (metal discs and cymbals). Lastly, Sarasvatī is traditionally associated with stringed

<sup>18</sup> Bernède, forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> Literally, "hand-clapping", derived from the root *TĀḌ* "to clap" or "to beat".

instruments, in particular the *vīṇā*. However, among the Newar she is also associated with the *pivāmcā* fiddle, an instrument which no longer exists today<sup>20</sup>.

### The Ritual Context

Among the caste of Maharjan peasants, Nāsaḥdyāḥ is the object of an annual cult, called *Nāsaḥdyāḥ guṭhī pūjā*, *tvāḥ pūjā*, *Nāsaḥdyāḥ pūjā* or *dhimay guṭhī pūjā*. This ceremony, during which the *dhimay* drum is consecrated, is divided into two major parts: the first consists of various offerings; the second is an animal sacrifice called *si kāgu* "taking the head". The description which follows, based on the observation of several ceremonies in Kathmandu, enumerates the different stages. A diagram of good omen (*svastika*) is first of all drawn on the ground with white and yellow powders. The divinities Gaṇeśa, Nandi, Nāsaḥdyāḥ, Bhṛṅgi and Kumār are set in place one after the other from left to right. The *sukunda* lamp is lit before Gaṇeśa; the *svastikā* is drawn in front of Nāsaḥdyāḥ and the ingredients of the *pūjā* (flowers, incense, etc.) are set before Kumār. After these preliminaries, the cotton veil (*dhaki*) is stretched out across the cavities (*pvāḥ*). The ceremony begins with the *abhiśeka*, "sprinkling" of the shrine. In the rituals we observed, the officiant was the clan elder, *kaji* and music master (*dhimay guru*); he installs three sacrificial cakes representing respectively the god and his two musician assistants, Nandi and Bhṛṅgi. Yellow and red *ṭikā* are then placed on the drums, as well as on the ritual utensils. This procedure is followed by diverse offerings, consisting of cotton thread (*jajāka*) representing the gift of precious clothing, flowers and *samay*<sup>21</sup>. After having thrown the rice in eight directions, the incense and lights are presented to the god and his

<sup>20</sup> According to oral tradition, the appearance of the *pivāmcā* fiddle in Nepal coincides with the appearance of Mañjuśrī, the divinity associated with the creation of the Kathmandu Valley. From ancient descriptions, the playing technique seems to resemble both the Chinese fiddle (fixed bow) and the Indian *sarāṅgi* (fingers resting on the strings). It was chiefly used to accompany a repertoire of love songs, entitled *kāli*, "black" which were performed during marriages. This fiddle is described as one of the best means of seduction (R.K. Duwal, personal communication).

<sup>21</sup> The *samay* is a mixture of rice, beaten rice, black soy seeds, puffed rice, ginger, roast meat, black seed cake, boiled seeds and alcohol.

assistants, then the *ṭikā* mark of Nāsaḥdyāḥ (New. *mvaḥani sinḥa*)<sup>22</sup> is placed on the forehead of each participant. Recitations of the mantras follow; after which, the master of ceremony is empowered to give instructions or to make remarks to his students. An offering called *baupā*, dedicated to the *bhut-pret* and *picāsa* concludes the first part of the ceremony. The *baupā* offering is composed of beaten rice, ginger, black soy seeds, black seeds, pieces of raw meat and salt. Intended to pacify the spirits of the dead, it is an indispensable preliminary to the sacrifice which follows.

The second part, the animal sacrifice, begins with the consecration of the sacrificial knife (New. *nāy cupi*, "the butcher's knife") and the victim, which may be a cock, a young goat or as in the ritual we observed, a buffalo. If the animal is a cock or a young goat, the officiant sprinkles it with water. It is said that if it shakes itself, this signifies that it accepts the sacrifice (*mūaligu*). If not, the animal is unfit (Pradhan, 1986:234). This sprinkling is not judged necessary for the buffalo. The throat of the animal is then cut open from top to bottom and a small piece of flesh is extracted from it. It is stuck to the temple's tympanum; a second piece of flesh is then presented to the *sukunda* lamp's flame, and placed in a saucer. Finally, the head is cut off, removed from the body and placed on the altar of Nāsaḥdyāḥ. The cotton wick of the *sukunda* lamp is lit and placed there. It is interpreted as the sign of the re-absorption of the buffalo's constituents into the five elements (Skt. *mahābhūta*). A blood *ṭikā* is then placed on the drum skins. The head is now placed in a pot and presented to the participants who each in turn apply the *ṭikā* mark to their foreheads. Egg whites are offered to all the divinities as well as to Khyā and Kavā, the children of Nāsaḥdyāḥ. The students return to the house of the elder (*Kāji chē*) where he blesses them. Immediately following this, the animal is dismembered. Its head is divided into eight parts and offered to the elders as music masters according to a strict hierarchy:

<sup>22</sup> *mvaḥani* from the Sanskrit word, *mohan*, "illusion", and one of the names of Kṛṣṇa. The black *ṭikā* mark is placed on the forehead of all participants during the ritual. It is made with the soot from burning fabric mixed with mustard oil. It strongly suggests the powers of attraction attributed to Nāsaḥdyāḥ and is surrounded with immense prestige.

muzzle	<i>Kaji</i> (clan elder)
right eye	first song master
left eye	first instrumentalist
right ear	second singer
left ear	second instrumentalist
tongue	third singer
right cheek	fourth singer
left cheek	third instrumentalist

Thus, as shown above, all left parts are reserved for the instrumentalists (*khī* or *dhimay guru*) and the right parts, for the singers. The horns (called "the remains of the animal", Nep. *śeṣa*) are an indivisible part, offered to Nāsaḥdyāḥ and hung on the top of his temple. We note that the ritual follows the order of ceremony of buffalo sacrifices as practiced by religious associations (*guthī*) and is conceived as part of the category of rituals in honour of the group of tutelary divinities (New. *digudhyāḥ*) to which Nāsaḥdyāḥ belongs<sup>23</sup>.

The sacralization of musical instruments is not an isolated phenomenon and is found throughout the Indian world. Bharata Muni (second century ?), in his famous treatise, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, described in detail the diverse types of drums and their divinities. Even today in India, some drums are the subject of codified ritualization. As an example, the *bherī* of southern India, within the context of the cult of Naṭarāja, is the object of particularly elaborate procedures. The obvious link between the dancing god of Cidambaram (Tamil Nadu) and Nāsaḥdyāḥ, leads us to quote the translation of a text from the *Bherī-tādanavidhi* part of the *Cidambaraṣeṭra Sarvasva* (1982, vol. 1 : 90). In some respects, this text is a meridional counterpart of the sequencing of Nāsaḥdyāḥ's *pūjā*<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the description of the buffalo sacrifice in Pyangaon, described by G. Toffin (1976).

<sup>24</sup> We warmly thank Pandit Śivarāja Dikṣitar from the Institut Français d'Indologie in Pondichery, who told me of the existence of this passage and kindly agreed to translate it.

"[...] drawing two *śthaṇḍila maṇḍala* with rice, one in the East and the other in the North of the *dhvajadaṇḍa* "flag post". Drawing a lotus figure with eight petals in one of the said *śthaṇḍila* and placing the *bherī* in it. Placing the *astrarāja* "Śiva's holy trident" in the other. Both of these things are honoured with *dhupa* "incense", *dīpa* "holy oil lamp", *naividya* (cooked food, with fruit, etc.). Then the *bherī* is honoured by offering flowers, etc. [then] Worshipping 'Rudra' at the centre [of the *bherī*], *sapta ṛṣi*, "the seven sages" at the root [bottom of the *bherī*], *nava graha* "nine planets" at the holes (?), Vasuki "abyssal serpent" at the black [centre of the *bherī*], Śaṅṅukhe (the god Śubramaṇya ?) on the beating stick (or sides of the stick, on the top ?) [then] adorning the *bherī* with a piece of silken cloth, flowers, etc. [then] elevating the wind on the *ākāśa* (sky) with *hakāra* meditating on Mahādeva as having (in) 'bindu' form and *vyonākāra* (permeating the whole *ākāśa*), [then] either the priest (of the festival) or his assistant beats *bherī* (thrice by reciting the following mantras):

1. *Brahmajajñānam + asataśca vivaḥ* - first beating.
2. *Idam viṣṇurvicakrame + paṇṇ sure* - second beating.
3. *Tryonbekam yajāmahe + mā mṛtāt* - third beating.

After beating the *bherī* by the *ācārya* priest or assistant, the ritual is over, the regular *bherī* player is called to the place and is sprinkled with sanctified water. He is also adorned with garlands of flowers. He too beats the *bherī* with *Nandi tāla*. Other instrumentalists, at that time, play on the important instruments like *maddala*, *muruja*, *paṭaka* (kettledrum), *viṇā*, flute, *dundhubi* (large kettledrum) and *jhāllari* (cymbals). By that meditation, all the deities and all the worlds become pleased and bestow boons upon the devotees."

With regard to the polarity of the *miśra* type (Vedic and Tantric) of the cult of Naṭarāja in southern India, we note that it is the Brahmans who are responsible for the sacralization of the *bherī* drum and this procedure does not include blood sacrifice. One of the officiants of the temple of Cidambaram whom we met described the different steps in the *pūjā* of the Newar god: "The cult of Śiva Naṭarāja is that of Beauty, nothing hideous in it." This remark takes into account the respective typologies of the two poles of tradition. It should also be recalled that in

the case of the ritual to Nāsaḥdyāḥ, the ritualization of the *dhimay* drum, which is not codified in writing, is performed by *Jyāpu* peasants, who consider the god of music as a secret divinity (*āgādyāḥ*) especially bound to them.

### The Instruments

Two kinds of *dhimay* drums are found in Kathmandu: a large one, most often called *mū dhimay* or *mā dhimay* and a smaller one called *yelepvāḥ dhimay* or *dhāñchā dhimay*. The Newar describe the first as an indigenous creation whose origin goes back to "the time of the gods" (Toffin, 1994: 438). According to I. Grandin (1989: 68), its existence goes back to the Licchavi period (fifth-seventh centuries). Let us briefly recall the characteristics of these two instruments, organologically linked to the great family of *dhol* drums scattered throughout northern India (Kölver and Wegner, 1992).



Fig. 3 *mū dhimay*

They are cylindrical drums, with two skins, in wood or in hammered brass. Their non-standard sizes, vary respectively from 35 to 42 cm in height and 23 to 27 cm in diameter for the *yelepvāḥ dhimay*, and from 45 to 50 cm in height and 38 to 50 cm in diameter for the *mū dhimay*. Their manufacture is collective uniting several craftsmen — Chunara carpenters for the wooden bodies (New. *gvāḥ*) and Tamrākār/Kansākār smiths for those in brass. The preparation — tanning, stretching the goat or buffalo skins and the final assemblage are the responsibility of the Kulu caste of tanners<sup>25</sup>.

Each of the drum skins is charged with different symbolism in the three ancient royal cities. Hence, in Kathmandu the skin on the right is associated with Nāsaḥdyāḥ, while that on the left represents *māñkaḥ* (from *mā*, "mother", and *kaḥ*, "place" ?)<sup>26</sup>. In Patan this play of oppositions is respectively represented by the two types of dances of Śiva Naṭarāja, *tāṇḍava* and *lāsya*<sup>27</sup>, and finally, in Bhaktapur the skin on the right is, as in Kathmandu, associated with the Newar god of music, while that on the left is identified with Haimādyāḥ, the divinity linked to Mahākāla who seems unknown outside the walls of "the city of the devotees"<sup>28</sup>.

The *yelepvāḥ dhimay* is presented as a relatively recent creation, attributed to the caste of *kumā* potters (Nep. *Prajapati*). This group of inferior status to the Maharjan, without access to ritualized apprenticeships of the *mū dhimay*, would created the drum in order to improve its condition. The *yelepvāḥ dhimay* has been known in the Nepalese capital for approximately 60 to 70 years. Its name, *yele*, the former name of the town of Patan, and *pvāḥ*, "from" evoke this locality where it is in fact unknown. According to some, the *yelepvāḥ dhimay* more precisely originated in two wards, *Tyauḍa* and *Jyāthā tvāḥ* (high part of the town, *thahne*). It is above all the instrument of public

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed description of the different steps in the manufacture of the *dhimay* drum, see G.M. Wegner (1986).

<sup>26</sup> The term *māñkaḥ* generally seems to represent a contraction of *mahākāla*. However, according to informants in the southern part of Kathmandu, the translation of *māñkaḥ* is "mother's place".

<sup>27</sup> This evokes the popular etymology of the word *tāla* associating the syllables *tā* with *tāṇḍava* and *la* with *lāsya*.

<sup>28</sup> For more on Haimādyāḥ, cf. Wegner, 1992: 125.

festivities and festivals as shown by its inclusion in ritual events (marriages, democracy day, the king's birthday, etc.). As opposed to the *mū dhimay*, which is exclusively reserved for the Maharjan, this instrument is played by the two communities.



Fig. 4 *yelepvāḥ dhimay*

To be complete, the *dhimay bājā* requires the presence of idiophones, which have the function of regulating the tempo (*tāla*). According to the locality, the ward or the circumstances of the performance, two kinds can be distinguished: large *bhusyāḥ* cymbals with protuberances and small metal discs called *kepuī* or *ghau*.

Traditionally made by members of the Vajrācārya and Śākya high castes from a combination of different metals whose proportions are kept secret, the two elements form pairs of *bhusyāḥ* cymbals (30 cm in diameter) which like the Tibetan *sbug-cha*<sup>29</sup> are not the same as each other. The left one is heavier and is placed flat in the hand; it is held by a small thong in a V-form across the fingers and associated with the female. The right one, male, is held by a piece of bamboo thought of as a *liṅga* and twisted into the the strap. Their evident association with the *yelepvāḥ*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the detailed description of M. Helffer in her work on Tibetan musical instruments, *Mchod-Rol*, CNRS Editions, 1994: 162.

*dhimay* of Kathmandu is here theoretically outlawed with the *mū dhimay*, at least in the lower part of the town (*Kone*).

Organologically similar, the *ghau* and *kepuī* can be distinguished by their respective pitches. The higher pitched *ghau* is used in the lower part of Kathmandu; it is also played in Bhaktapur and Patan. The *kepuī* (from Newari *ke*, "disc" and *puī*, "strap for holding the instrument") is played in the upper areas of the town (*Thahne*)<sup>30</sup>. Today, the *kepuī* have nearly disappeared and are mostly replaced by the *ghau*. An honorific practice because of their normative function of regulating the *tāla*, playing metal discs often falls to clan elders (*kaji*).

### The Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship of *mū dhimay* (New. *dhimay senegu*) is a major event in the lives of the Maharjan peasants. All young people in the community must learn the instrument. Although generally taken up between the ages of 10 to 15 years, it is not uncommon that adults, who did not learn to play in their youth, join the training. Always preceded by a preliminary initiation called *vahlāḥ cvanegu*<sup>31</sup>, it is organised every 12 years in each ward and last about three months. Under the seal of secrecy, its transmission is above all oral<sup>32</sup>. This session takes place in almost seclusion in special houses called *ākhāḥchē*. The name, formed from *ākhāḥ* "letter" and *chē* "house", designating the site of musical training, is most interesting.<sup>33</sup> Probably from Sanskrit, the first meaning of *akṣara* is "imperishable"<sup>34</sup>; the Newari term *ākhāḥ* corresponds with the meaning "phoneme", defined as the "plus petit élément, insécable a-tome (*a-kṣara*)

<sup>30</sup> According to R.K. Duwal (personal communication), the *kepuī* metal disc was also used in Panauti, Banepa and Thimi.

<sup>31</sup> See Toffin, 1994: 439, for a description of this ceremony.

<sup>32</sup> The transmission of musical knowledge is not hereditary, but based on individual abilities. Thus, as a general rule, the best student is destined to become a guru upon his master's death.

<sup>33</sup> The term *akharā*, according to S. Isvarananda (1995: 1) designates "a place for exercise, meeting hall".

<sup>34</sup> "Akṣara, according to the traditional etymology - *na kṣarati* or *na kṣiyāte* - is what does not flow out or perish, hence the imperishable, the indestructible, the eternal", in Padoux, 1992: 13.

de la langue" (Padoux, 1980: 75). It should be remembered that within a musical context and since the *Viṣṇu-dharmottara* (second century BC ?), *akṣara* is also the technical term for syllables corresponding to diverse drum beating<sup>35</sup>. Within the context of Newar civilisation, where every part refers to a totality and where analogous principles prevail in all sectors of society, it is not surprising to see a place for acquiring knowledge, based above all on the Speech, designated as "house of letters".

This apprenticeship is formally divided in two major, distinct periods, marked by four ceremonies respectively called: *Nasāḥ salegu*, *chema/chuma pūjā*<sup>36</sup>, *bā pūjā* and *piranegu pūjā* (Toffin, *ibid.*: 441). Each of them is accompanied by blood sacrifices and followed by a communal banquet (New. *bcay*).

### Musical Language

Teaching invariably begins on a Thursday or Sunday after the festival of *Gathāmugaḥ* and terminates a few days before *nalasanigu*, the first day of *Dasā* (cf. Toffin, *ibid.*: 439)<sup>37</sup>. Preference is generally given to Thursday, an auspicious day devoted to *Nāsaḥdyāḥ* and *Bṛhaspati*, the master of teaching in the Hindu tradition. It is preceded by a propitiatory rite called *Nasāḥ salegu*, "conveying", or *dyāḥ salegu pūjā*. This ceremony, an indispensable preliminary to teaching, is intended to transfer the god's energy from the temple of the ward to the *ākḥāḥchē*. The music master and his students meet to make the *kislī*, a substitute for the god in the form of a terra cotta saucer containing uncooked rice on which a coin with a betel nut on top is placed (cf. Wegner, 1984: 12 and Toffin, *ibid.*: 441). Each student keeps one in the *ākḥāḥchē* and dedicates a twice-daily worship throughout the apprenticeship. This ceremony is also intended to receive the black mark of *Nāsaḥdyāḥ* (*mvahanī sinḥa*).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. A. Daniélou and N.R. Bhatt, 1959: 157.

<sup>36</sup> Obligatory in Kathmandu, the *chema pūjā* is rarely practised in other localities (it does not exist in Kirtipur and is optional in Patan).

<sup>37</sup> This schedule can, however, vary according to localities. Thus, in Kirtipur, according to student abilities, it can be prolonged by nine months, during which the festival of *Caṭ Dasā* concludes a short time before.

For approximately six weeks, the first part is devoted to the theoretical acquisition of the repertoire, which in Kathmandu, includes about 15 pieces. Like most percussion instruments on the Indian sub-continent, playing Newar drums is based on a corpus of syllables (*bol*) and on stereotyped rhythmic structures (*tāl*) (cf. Kölver and Wegner, 1992). In Kathmandu, this language is based on five phonemes: two gutturals, *kho* and *ghū* (left hand), two dentals *tā* and *nā* (right hand) and a compound syllable, *dhyā* (*nā + ghū*), corresponding to simultaneously playing with two hands. The first guttural *kho* and the first dental *tā* relate to the edge of the skin and *ghū* and *nā* to the middle. The left is struck with a bare hand, the right is struck with a bamboo stick (New. *tāhkutsa*) whose extremity is rolled up in a spiral<sup>38</sup>. If the timbres corresponding to the dentals *tā* and *nā* are well contrasted in playing the *mū dhimay*, striking the edge of the drum causes a naturally duller sound than in the centre of the skin. However, the same dentals tend to merge in playing the *yelepvāḥ dhimay*, whose resonant surface is less<sup>39</sup>. As for the gutturals, *kho* made by the hand's pressure on the edge of the frame produces a dull sound, while *ghū* consists of a bounce of the palm of the hand, favouring resonance. Finally, the *dhyā* syllable, associating *nā* and *ghū*, is made by simultaneously striking the centre of the two membranes. These syllables, respectively mute and resonant, are supposed to be analogous with the type of sound produced by the drum.

These five phonemes are arranged in a limited number of combinations, each constituting a unit of measure (Skt. *mātrā*). Hence, from the matrical phonemes, 50 or so are combined, comprising two, three or four syllables (cf. Ex. 1 in appendix). Each musical sequence is repeated at the place, in reverse, inverted or by alternating sequences. These mnemotechnical procedures consist in first isolating each element of the musical phrase and then in reconstructing the totality from its parts. This technique aims as much at establishing a metric regularity as at developing the independence of the student's two hands. As an example, a list of stereotyped formulas used during the apprenticeship of the *yelepvāḥ dhimay* is given (cf. Ex. 2 in appendix).

<sup>38</sup> According to L. Aubert (1988: 50) the name for this stick is derived from the Newari *āhā*, signifying serpent.

<sup>39</sup> Generally, the *yelepvāḥ dhimay*, whose reduced diameter of the skins restricts the possibilities of varying the timbres using different ways of striking the drum, has a great virtuosity in playing techniques which have contributed to its popularity.

Far from being the exclusive prerogative of the musical world, these techniques resemble other apprenticeships which may have inspired them. For example, one is reminded of the study of the Vedic corpus in which different types of recitation appear<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, corporal participation, attitudes linked to striking the drums, which are also found in the dance repertoire, *dhimay pyākkhā*, favour this memorization.

The memorization of the corpus is regularly controlled on two levels: through daily recitation before the music master, and each week, generally on Sunday evening during the collective *pūjā*, in the Nāsaḥdyāḥ temple. The first part of the apprenticeship ends with a ritual called *chema pūjā*. According to G. Toffin (ibid.: 441), it is a ceremony of pacification intended to appropriate an equivalent relationship between the devotees and the divinity. From the musical point of view, this rite is above all intended to solicit Nāsaḥdyāḥ's forgiveness for students' mispronunciation<sup>41</sup>.

### Musical Gesture

The third ceremony, *bā pūjā* (*bā*, "half" in Newari) marks the division between the two steps in the apprenticeship. A chicken is sacrificed for the occasion and the music master offers the right wing to the best student. This *pūjā* precedes the phase of instrumental practice which is in fact the application of the syllabic corpus to the instrument. In northern wards of the town, this stage also includes the practice of acrobatics (*māḥ tāhneḡu*)<sup>42</sup>. The students form human pyramids and learn to handle a long bamboo pole called *dhunyā* or *dhunyā munyā*<sup>43</sup>. According to S. and H. Wiehler (1980: 92), "These poles were originally a military sign and are relics of the time of the Malla Kings, when the Jyāpu whose caste alone play the *dhimay* were taken into military service together with the Nay or Kasaim". Even today, these poles, decorated

with ten pennants associated with the ancient Malla dynasties, are perceived as a symbol of kingship, not however without some humour. One Maharjan questioned on the significance of these poles, said, "[...] the king must not fall, this would be the source of great unhappiness but [...] here at least, we make him dance as we like".

The handling of the bamboo pole is elsewhere associated with the god Hanumān, the master of the *tāla*, represented at the top by the tail of a white yak. With the *dhimay* drum, it forms an inseparable couple, the apprenticeship of the pole (*dhunyā scneḡu*) is accomplished on the basis of rhythms emitted by the instrument. This spatialization of musical language, whose importance in pedagogy should be underscored, is generally based on binary rhythms. In some wards, however, it is made up of combined rhythms (binary/ternary). The example cited below, called *dhunyā bol*, illustrates a conventional schema of word/gesture articulation. Each element of the choreography of the binary rhythm (*cho tāl*) coincides with two *mātrā*: / *ghū ghū* / *nara* / (going up) / *ghū* / *nārā* / (descending) / *kho* / *tātā* : (turning around the waist from left to right) and *ghū* / *nārā* / (turning around the waist from right to left).

// kho / tātā / ghū / nārā / ghū ghū / nārā / ghū / nārā /

kho / tātā / ghū ghū / nārā / ghū / nārā / ghū ghū / nārā //

The apprenticeship of the *mū dhimay* ends after a first public performance. This festivity is accompanied by a ritual called *pidanḡu* / *piranḡu pūjā* during which the students must lead the god's energy (in the form of the *kislī*) saucer from the apprenticeship house to the neighbourhood temple. For them it is an occasion to receive once again the black *tikā* of Nāsaḥdyāḥ. In some localities, for example, Panga, *pirane pūjā* is followed by a fifth ceremony called *litanḡu* / *litatayankigu pūjā* "giving back". This *pūjā* plays a similar role to that of *chema* in Kathmandu. These solemn ceremonies are invariably followed by a banquet. One can easily imagine the nature of the ties created through this apprenticeship. They once again reflect the basic parameters of Newar unity, as can be observed in all activities of this group — the principle of seniority and ritual cohesion on the basis of ward.

<sup>40</sup> Traditionally 11 forms of the recitation of the Veda exist; they are intended to fix in the memory of the Brahman student the phonic sequence independently from the meaning of the words.

<sup>41</sup> In some localities this rite, under the jurisdiction of the master, is optional.

<sup>42</sup> According to G. Toffin (ibid.: 443), "*māḥ tāhneḡu* (short form: *māhtāḥ*) seems to be derived from Skt. *mahā* and New. *tāhneḡu* "to join things together."

<sup>43</sup> The origin of the word *dhunyā* is unknown to us. It may be derived from the Sanskrit root *DHŪ-* "secouer, s'agiter, faire trembler" (cf. Renou, 1880: 343).

## Analytical parameters

We have seen that the repertoire of *dhimay* drums has a relatively restricted corpus of pieces in which the circumstances of performance are most often linked to processions. Improvisation plays practically no part and the creation of new works is a rare phenomenon. These compositions generally follow a similar pattern in all sectors of the capital. They include three or four distinct parts called *nhyāh*, *gau*, *kolā* and *tvālhāygu*<sup>44</sup>. This technical vocabulary can be defined as follows:

1. *nhyāh* "to move forward in space" (Manandhar, 1986: 139). This first term which may be related to the Sanskrit root *Nī-* "to drive, to direct", express the idea of a prelude or if one prefers, an "overture". It is generally repeated eight or ten times.
2. The word *gau* "to change, to meet, to follow" may be derived from the Sanskrit root *GAM-* "to go", designates what may be called "development". It is subdivided in two sub-sections of unequal length. The first *gau*, is very short (three *mātrā*) and acts as the "transition" between the overture (*nhyāh*) and the second *gau*, which constitutes the real "development". The latter is repeated twice.
3. *kolā* "to conclude". This fragment is a kind of coda introducing the final part. Contrary to the three other sections, it seems that this short composition, optional and rarely played, is the exclusive prerogative of the *mū dhimay*.
4. *tvālhāygu* "to finish, to cover, to close". The final part is fixed and invariable. It is played at the end of all compositions and acts as a kind of sound emblem of the ward (New. *tvāh*).

With regard to rhythmic organisation, one first of all notes that binary structures are common in two forms (*mū* and *yelepvāh dhimay*), while combined rhythms (associating binary and ternary) are principally reserved for the ritual drum. Nevertheless, even in the case of binary structures, the repertoire of *mū dhimay* proves to be more extensive than that of the *yelepvāh dhimay*. Two contrasting *tāla*, respectively called *cho* and *lānta*, can be distinguished. The first comprises four *mātrā* approximately corresponding to a beat of 112, while the second, played

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ex. 4 in appendix and CD, tracks 6 and 7.

twice as slowly, comprises eight (= approximately 55) [cf. CD tracks 7 and 8]. Apart from this elementary binary structure, the ritual drum's repertoire uses two other *tāl* called *partāl* and *jati*. *Partāl* is made up of seven *mātrā* (3 + 4) and *jati* of 14 *mātrā* [(3 + 4) x 2]. With the exception of the latter which seems more to be the prerogative of the northern wards<sup>45</sup>, the first three *tāl* are played in all wards of the capital. They are not specifically reserved for the *dhimay bājā* and are used in other ensembles (especially *dāphā* and *dāh khalah*).

The rhythmic structure governing this repertoire seems relatively homogeneous throughout the urban area. In return, the sequencing of five matrilineal phonemes used in Kathmandu vary considerably from ward to ward. It should be remembered that each syllable corresponds to a different strike and that each strike produces a timbre of its own. The syllabic variations are thus concomitant with variations of timbre which within the same rhythmic frame are discrete markers of the identity of each group.

## Repertoire

Although playing the *yelepvāh dhimay* is not restricted and can be employed in all circumstances, this is not the case for the *mū dhimay* which is required in nine specific circumstances in Kathmandu:

- worship of the god of music, *Nāsaḥdyāh pūjā*
- passing of power from the clan elder, *thakālī lui*
- initiation of aged people, *burajankvā*
- procession signalling the conclusion of the apprenticeship of the *mū dhimay*, *Swayambunāth wone*
- setting up the *stupa* and removal of the statues (*murti*), *bhagwan bijāyakigu*

<sup>45</sup> Hence, Dev Narayan Maharjan (in *Ombaha tvāh*) never mentioned the existence of *jati* during our brief apprenticeship of the *dhimay* drum, and when questioned on this subject, he responded, "Yes, *jati* certainly exists, but not among us."

- festival of the cow, *Sā pārū* (Nep. *Gāi jātrā*)<sup>46</sup>
- king's birthday, *jujuya janmadi*<sup>47</sup>
- full moon of *baisakh*, *baisakh purnima*
- concluding festivals, *shiba goyagu*

The repertoire of these different ceremonies is made up of a corpus classified in two distinct categories, as shown by the table below: the first, under the title *dhyāḥḥhaygu*, (*dyāḥ* "god" and *ḥhaygu*, "to speak, to express") includes five pieces, whereas in the second category there are eight, with no particular denomination.

#### *Mū dhimay dhyāḥḥhaygu*

Title	<i>tāl</i>	Performance circumstances
<i>mūdhyāḥ dhyāḥḥhaygu</i> <sup>48</sup>	<i>cho</i> <i>lānta</i> <i>partāl</i>	in the <i>ākḥāḥchē</i> and in the temple of Nāsaḥdyāḥ, before as well as after any displacement
<i>lānta dhyāḥḥhaygu</i>	<i>lānta</i>	in the <i>ākḥāḥchē</i> during the <i>pūjā</i> to Nāsaḥdyāḥ
<i>tvāchā dhyāḥḥhaygu</i>	<i>cho</i>	in front of temples as well as while moving to a chosen destination
<i>tañtakho dhyāḥḥhaygu</i>	<i>cho</i> <i>partāl</i>	arriving and leaving chosen destinations
<i>tabhunañtata dhyāḥḥhaygu</i>	<i>cho</i>	walking to the temple towards which a procession is making its way, as well as on arrival

<sup>46</sup> This piece includes the use of natural trumpets. On account of the limits of this article, Newar aerophones will be presented in a later publication.

<sup>47</sup> On this occasion, the *dhimay* is associated with the *nāykhī* drum, recalling the Majārjan peasants' and the Nāy butchers' service in the army during the Malla dynasties.

<sup>48</sup> cf example 5 in appendix.

Essentially representing musical offerings addressed to the gods, the five *dhyāḥḥhaygu* must be differentiated. The first which is the masterpiece of the repertoire, is a salutation soliciting Nāsaḥdyāḥ's protection, and is the only composition in the repertoire using the three *tāl* of reference (*cho*, *lānta*, *partāl*). There are 32 in Kathmandu, this number refers to the 32 wards of the city, as well as the canonical number of ritual drums<sup>49</sup>. This piece, devoted exclusively to Nāsaḥdyāḥ, represents in some respects the voice of the god in each *tol* of the town. The second *dhyāḥḥhaygu*, dedicated in priority to Nāsaḥdyāḥ and Ganedhyāḥ, can, nevertheless, be played for other divinities; there are 24 in Kathmandu. As for the other three pieces, they are used especially during the displacement of the instruments outside the ward's borders. Among them, the last is specifically used during the festival of the cow (*Sā Pārū*)<sup>50</sup>.

Some occasions require the combined use of the first three *dhyāḥḥhaygu*. Bearing in mind the sacralization of the instrument, one is reminded that in some wards (especially in the lower part of the town), the *mū dhimay* is only played by the music master and in principle only leaves the apprenticeship homes (*ākḥāḥchē*) to be taken to Nāsaḥdyāḥ's temple. The denomination of *mū dhimay* (from the Sanskrit *mūla* "root"), generally understood as a generic term referring to the category of ritual drums, here designates a particular drum in each of the "32" wards. Its displacement from the house of apprenticeship to the temple of Nāsaḥdyāḥ is the object of great precaution. On this occasion, the first three *dhyāḥḥhaygu* must be successively interpreted: the first is played facing the altar of the god of music, the second on leaving the room and the third in crossing the house's threshold.

In contrast to the first five pieces, which in addressing divinities, can be understood as "bridges" between the worlds of men and that of the gods, the second series of compositions is intended to illustrate the different stages in procession itineraries. Each of these pieces is hence associated with the necessity of displacement: ascending, descending, circumambulating, overcoming obstacles, etc. Furthermore, this musical production becomes a means of sacralizing the ritual space which is the

<sup>49</sup> For further information on the number 32, see G. Toffin's article (ibid.: 435).

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that specific *dhyāḥḥhaygu* do not exist for the other two divinities, Sarasvatī and Hanumān, presiding over the apprenticeship.

entire town. As the table shows, with the exception of the second *lampvāḥ*, based on the combined rhythm *partāla*, all displacements are carried out on a binary structure (*cho tāla*); the combined rhythms are generally only played during pauses.

Title	<i>tāla</i>	Performance circumstances
<i>lampvāḥ</i> <sup>51</sup>	<i>cho</i>	between the <i>ākhāḥchē</i> and the first river
<i>dhuniyāpvāḥ</i>	<i>cho</i>	crossing a river <sup>52</sup>
<i>swantipupvāḥ</i>	<i>partāl</i>	at the shrine of Swantipvāḥ <sup>53</sup>
<i>tampvaḥ</i>	<i>cho</i>	during climbing
<i>devalipvāḥ</i>	<i>cho</i>	circumambulating the <i>stupa</i>
<i>pūjāpvāḥ</i>	(?)	during rituals
<i>lampvāḥ</i>	<i>partāl</i>	going back down to the <i>ākhāḥchē</i>
<i>mahpvāḥ</i>	<i>cho</i>	accompanying acrobatics ( <i>māḥ tāḥncgu</i> )
	<i>partāl</i>	

Lastly, the repertoire of the *mū dhimay* comprises a final piece which is not taught during the apprenticeship and which the students must discover themselves. Called *sā yāgu* (*sā* "cow" and *yāgu* "to make"), it is played during the festival of *Sā Pāru* (Nep. *Gāi jātrā*). Its existence illustrates an elementary principle which one could qualify as pedagogic; to become a musician one must be capable of integrating in an autonomous manner, through simple imitation, an unknown or new composition. Here, the *bol* must be appropriately reconstituted from direct observation, which significantly contrasts with the general scheme of musical instruction.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Ex. 3 in appendix.

<sup>52</sup>This composition, as its name indicates, is also associated with the bamboo pole *dhunyā*. Moreover, it is played in the following circumstances: the displacement of the *murti*, *Shiba goyagu*, *Burajankvū*, *thakāli lui*, *Bhagwan bijāyakigu*, *Nāsaḥdyāḥ pūjā*, as well as during the festivals of *Seto Matsyendranāth* and *Indra jātrā*.

<sup>53</sup>The famous cave at the base of the shrine of Swayambhunāth.

## Conclusion

This general presentation of the apprenticeship of the *dhimay* drum in Kathmandu does not aim so much at elaborating the details of musicological analysis as at emphasizing the underlying interrelations among myths, rites and music in this society. As we have seen, Indian sources have proved extremely valuable references for understanding certain aspects of the complex personality of the Newar god of Music. They seem to be able to elucidate in depth an aspect of instruction to which we hope to return, this is the important role of Sarasvatī, one of the cardinal divinities presiding over learning. The direct association between Sarasvatī and *smṛti* in this context is particularly interesting. This Goddess of the Arts and Knowledge is equally personified by Speech and the association between Knowledge and memory is omnipresent in Hindu tradition. This Knowledge is never conceived as extrinsic to the individual, but as something that has been forgotten. Within the Newar context, memorization of the *bol* syllables really constitutes the root of the acquisition of musical knowledge. The direct association between this goddess and *smṛti* within the framework of an apprenticeship resolutely centred on Speech is thus not surprising, even if in its practical application, it is destined to become silent and to be used to support the sound of the drum. Once these syllables are integrated, it could be said that instrumental application is immediate. As P. Sagant (1988) understood so remarkably well with regard to Limbu children, "Savoir dire, c'est savoir faire."

The second part of the apprenticeship of the *dhimay* finally appears as an exteriorization of Speech in the form of rhythm and musical "colours". It has been shown that from a relatively homogeneous rhythmic effect, identity expresses itself in each ward through the sequencing of specific syllables associated with strikes. Hence, the *tāla* rhythm appears as a fixed point, immovable, from which the various syllables/strikes radiate. Finally, transcending these two aspects of which he is the genitor, *Nāsaḥdyāḥ* is the master of silence, *laya*, silence before and after all musical creation.

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*Appendix*

*Ex. 1. List of compound syllables used in playing the dhimay drum in Kathmandu*

1	2	3	4
tā	tātā tākho tādhyā	tātātā tākhotā tātākho tātāghū tākhoghū tāghūghū	tātākhotā tākhotātā tākxonākho tākxonārā tāghunātā tāghunārā tāghūtāghū
nā	nādhyā nārā	nātākho nānākho nākodhyā nākoghū	nātākhotā nānākhotā nākoghū
kho	khotā	khotātā khotāko khotāghū	khotākhotā khotātakho khotākodhyā
ghū	ghūnā	ghūtāghū ghūnārā	ghūnāghūnā ghūnākhotā ghūnātāghū ghūnānākho ghūnānātā ghūnātākho
dhyā	dhyādhyā dhyānā dhyātā dhyāghū	dhyānātā dhyātādhyā dhyākhōtā dhyāghūnā	

Ex. 2 Formulas for the apprenticeship of the yelepvaḥ dhimay

1. tā / kho / dhyā / kho /
2. dhyā / kho / tā / tā /
3. tāā / kho / dhyā / dhyā /
4. kho / tākho / dhyā / dhyā /
5. dhyā / khotā / tā / kho /
6. tāākhotā / dhyā / khotā /
7. dhyā / khotā / tāākhotā /
8. tāghunāā / kho / tāā /
9. tāākhotā / tākho / dhyā /
10. dhyā / khotā / tākho / dhyā /
11. kho / tākho / tā / tā /
12. tāākhotā / tā / tā /
13. tāghunāā / tā / tā /
14. ghūnāāghū / tā / tā /
15. tāghunāā / ghūna / dhyā /

Ex.3. Lampvāḥ for the mū dhimay (tāl cho)

tā	tāā	kho	tāā	tā	kho	tā	tāā
ghū	nārā	khotā	tākho	tā	ghū	ghū	nā
khotā	tākho	tā	tāā	kho	tāā	kho	tāā
ghū	nārā	ghū	nārā	ghūnā	nākho	tā	ghū
tākho	nārā	ghū	nārā	ghū	nārā	khotā	tākho
tā	ghū	ghūnā					

[x 10]

Yelepvaḥ dhimay

Ex. 4. Cholti

Cholti (cho tal) is constructed with a cycle of eight connected sequences. Each of them is subdivided in two unequal sections: *nhyūh* and *gau*. The piece concludes with a stereotyped *tvālhāygu* formula. The eight different *nhyāh* and *gau* are interchangeable. Each *nhyāh* is repeated eight to ten times. The *gau* part is in turn subdivided in two unequal sections. The first, made of three *mātrā*, acts as a transition between the introductory formula (*nhyāh*) and the development. This transition formula introduces the second *gau* which is repeated two times. The general structure can thus be summarized as: A [x 8-10] / B / C [x2] / D // The *bol* notation of the first sequence and *tvālhāygu* follows (cf. CD tracks 6 & 7):

A Nhyāh

tā khotā	dhyādhyā	tāākhotā	dhyādhyā
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[x 8-10]

B Gau

tā dhyā	nādhyā	kho
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C Gau

tā tākho	tā dhyā	tā dhyā	tā dhyā
tā dhyā	nā dhyā	nā dhyā	tāākhotā
tākhoghūnā	nākhoghūnā	tākho tā	tākho tā
tā dhyā	nā dhyā	nā dhyā	tāākhotā
tākhoghūnā	nākhoghūnā	tākho tā	tākho tā
kho tāā	khotākhotā	tākhotātā	khotākhonā
tākho tā	tākho tā	tākho tā	ghūnākhotā
dhyā ghū			

[x 2]

D Tvālhāygu

ghū tāghū	nārākhotā	ghū tāghū	nārākhotā
tā ghū	tāghunārā	khotā ghū	tāghunārā
ghū nārā	kho tā	tāākhotā	tākhotātā
ghū nā			

Mū dhimay

ex. 5. Mūdhyaḥ dhyāḥlaygu (tāl lāntā)

ghū	tātā	khotā	tākho	tā		tā	tākho
tā	khotā	tākho	tātā	khotā	tākho	tā	tā
tātā	khotā	tākho	tātā	khotā	tākho	tā	tā
ghū	nā	khotā	tākho	ghū	nā	khotā	tākho
ghū	ghūnā	takho	ghūnā	ghū	ghūnā	ghū	
ghū	ghū	ghū	kho	tā	ghū	kho	tā
ghū	ghūnā	nā					

[x 2]

ex. 6. Gau (tāl cho)

ghū	ghū	nā	tātā	kho		tā	tākho
ghū	ghū	nā	tātā	kho	kho	tā	tākho
ghū	ghū	nā	tātā	kho	kho	tā	tākho

[x 2]

tā	khotā	tākho	tātā	tā	kho	tā	tā
tātā	khotā	tākho	tātā	khotā	ghūghū	nānā	khotā

[x 10]

ex. 7. Kolā

tā	tātā	khotā	tākho	ghūnā	nakho	ghū	ghū
nā	tātā	khota	tā	ghūna	nākho	tāghū	nārā

[x 10]

ex. 8. Tvalñāygu

ghū	nārā	ghūna	tā	tākho	nārā	ghū	nārā
ghūna	tā	tākho	nārā	tāghū	tāghū	tātā	ghū