

Carol Tingey: *Auspicious Music in a Changing Society. The Damāi Musicians of Nepal*. London : School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, SOAS Musicology Series/vol. 2, 1994, 284 p.*

Review by Mireille Helffer

Seven years have passed since Carol Tingey completed her Ph.D., under the supervision of Richard Widdess, at the University of London. The above-mentioned book, which further explores her dissertation topic, is much more comprehensive and the author merits the highest praise. The book constitutes the culmination of extensive fieldwork in Nepal from 1987 to 1988 and concerns the caste of tailor/musicians, the Damāi, whose primary function is to ensure "auspicious music" for everyone.

The author's material has been organised according to a standard pattern. The two introductory chapters specify the methodology; the Damāi are placed within their geographical environment and the historical conditions of their settlements are examined. The reader will appreciate seeing how the Rajputs from northern India seemed to have favoured the development of small instrumental ensembles in Nepal; these ensembles were the heirs of *naqqāra khānāi* and *naubat shahnāi* in India and were characterised by the presence of *naqqāra* kettledrums and *shahnāi* oboes.

The study of the instruments composing these ensembles, often designated by the term "the five instruments" (*pañcai bājā*), comprises the contents of the third chapter. Each of the instruments—whether shawms (*shahnāi*), kettledrums of varying sizes (*naqqāra*, *damahā*, *tyāmko*), long natural horns (*narsinga*), trumpets (*karnāl*), or cymbals—is the object of a meticulous organological description accompanied by excellent photographs and drawings. There is particular attention to playing techniques, especially the shawm (oboe), of which Carol Tingey has become a skilled instrumentalist.

The fourth chapter examines the status of the Damāi in Nepalese society; despite their fairly low rank among the impure and untouchable castes, such as the Kami smiths or the Sarki tanners/shoemakers, the

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Damāi and their music are indispensable to numerous rituals and contribute to the prestige of those who employ them.

The following three chapters (pp. 103-227), illustrated with several musical examples, are devoted to the repertoire; it is examined within the context in which the various pieces are played: "popular" repertoire, repertoire within a specific context, ritual repertoire.

In the introduction to Chapter 5, Dr. Tingey analyses the respective roles of the instruments used in the two principal types of ensembles, *nagarābānā* and *pañcai bājā*). She shows how the *damahā* kettledrums (from which the Damāi caste takes their name) and *jhyāli* cymbals provide rhythm, how the *dholak* drum and the small *tyāmkō* kettledrum provide rhythmical interest, how the two *shahnāi* shawns, which are usually present, ensure respectively melody and tonic drone; and how the small, specific phrases characterising the *narsinga* and *kamāl* horns are articulated.

An inventory of the scales follows -associated with the *thāt* of classical north Indian music; this seems justifiable as the Damāi have some knowledge of the *rāg*, but in my opinion there is little point comparing them to Ionian, Dorian, Lydian, or Aeolian modes of traditional medieval western music; more especially as the author herself underscores the predominance of the pentatonic-anhemitonic scale.

Data related to popular repertoire as it existed at the time of the study (Ch. 5) are classified under different headings: 1) "popular songs", instrumental versions of locally well-known songs or those widely broadcast on local and national radio stations; 2) purely instrumental pieces which musicians call *khyāli* and *jhyaure* according to the binary or ternary character of the rhythmic structure; 3) dances.

Music associated within a particular context is discussed by the author in Chapter 6; such music belongs to a seasonal repertoire. It is essentially comprised of diverse versions of *asāre* performed during the transplanting of rice and of *Mālashri*, played at the time of Dasain. In addition, music performed on the occasion of various ritual activities -processions, life cycle rites, and especially marriage - are also included with numerous musical examples. The author also mentions the existence of a now obsolete repertoire, contingent like the Indian *rāg*, on different

hours of the day. In contrast to "popular" repertoire, these pieces hold a more important place in melodic improvisation.

Finally, under the heading, "ritual repertoire" (Ch. 7), the author refers to a corpus of works which are the obligatory accompaniments for certain ritual activities in specific shrines. Tingey then presents the calendar of ritual obligations for various ensembles at the palace in the town of Gorkha; she emphasises music associated with rituals in honour of Gorakhnāth or the goddess Kalika.

In the concluding chapter, the ongoing evolution of Nepalese society and its consequences for Damāi musicians with regard to the composition of their ensembles and repertoire are examined.

Several appendices furnish: 1) equivalencies between the Nepalese and western calendars; 2) a detailed table (hour by hour) of musical interventions which take place at Gorkha during Dasain; 3) the localisation of various groups of musicians, other than the Damāi, who take part in the festival of Dasain; and 4) an evaluation of the remuneration received by the Damāi from their "patrons" (*bista*).

In conclusion, Tingey's book is an exemplary contribution on a subject too long neglected by ethnologists studying Nepal, and it will serve for many years as an indispensable reference to all those interested in the field of Nepalese ethnomusicology. The wealth of information based on actual familiarity with the musicians, meticulous work methods, precise analyses, high-quality illustrations, a glossary of 285 Nepali words, a valuable index and a good bibliography -all of the aforementioned items contribute to the legibility and clarity of this book. One sole regret is that there is no CD accompanying the publication as this would permit access to the music so carefully described by Carol Tingey.