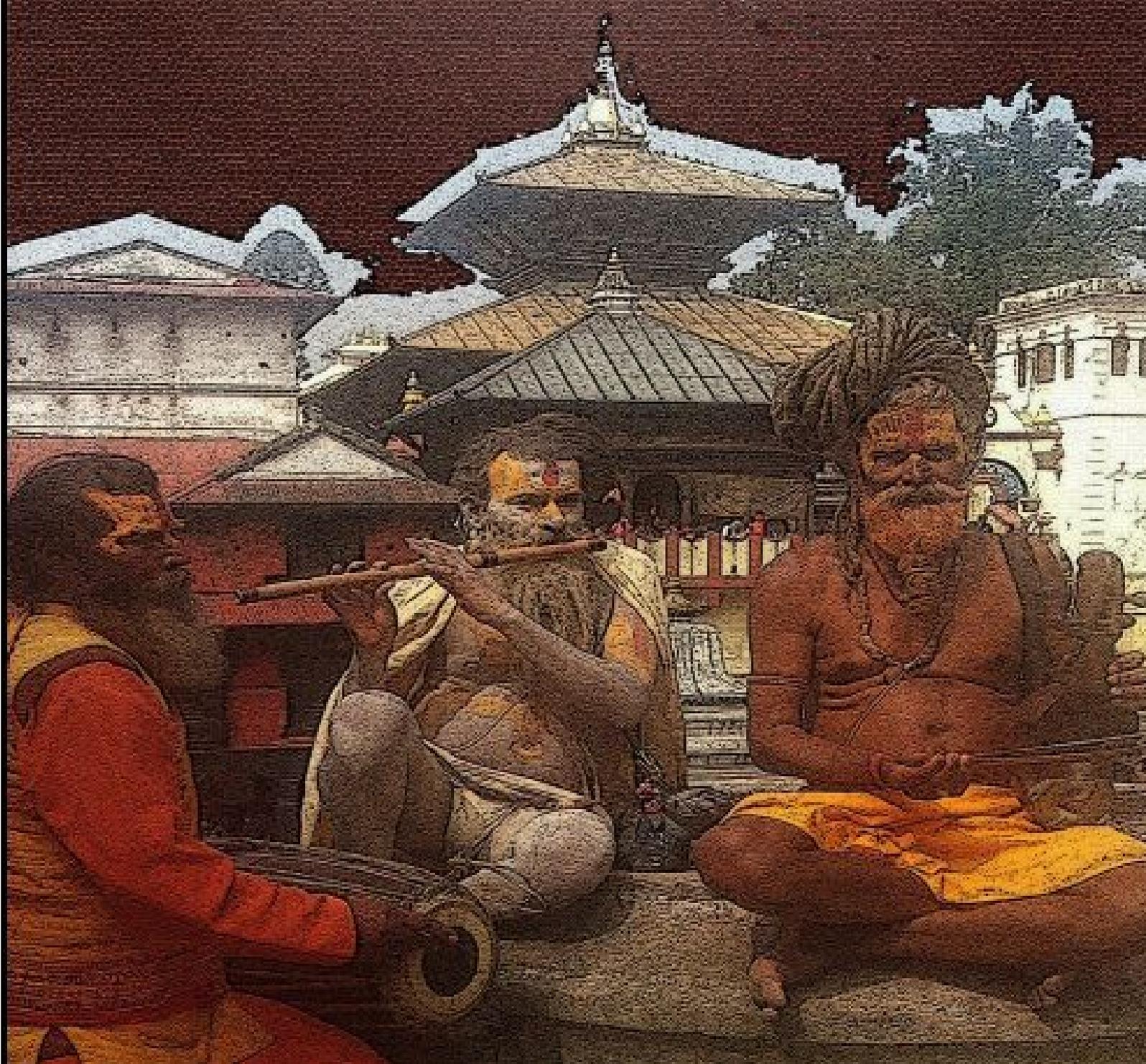


NEPALESE FOLK CULTURE

A compilation of research Journal



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Foreword

Nepal Music Centre (NMC) Trust was formally established five years back in the year 2009. Established with limited resources and with the initiation from people's level, this trust, in order to start a new initiative in the support of folk culture, aims to develop Nepali music enterprise, especially musical instruments, singing and dance.

NMC trust, with its own building at Pingalasthan, Battisputali, Kathmandu provides basic as well as advance music education and training to around 500 to 600 students from the age group of 6 to 50 years. It teaches students with the help of textbooks prescribed by the government of Nepal. As per the objectives mentioned above, the trust is running in its full-strength based on formal curriculum and standardized teaching methodology. In addition, this trust gives special preference to traditional Nepali folk music and classical music along with facility of modern/western musical education.

In this rapidly changing world, rigorous work can only bring a sense of authentic change in the field of music which requires practical planning, clear vision and imagination. In doing so, preservation of our musical heritage based on oral tradition along with its unique and original attributes is a must. Otherwise, our valuable musical cultural heritage may suffer from untimely extinction. Hence, it is important to publish journal papers on Nepali music even in English medium. Such research-oriented publications can help develop and introduce rich Nepali music to the international community.

Nepal Music Centre Trust is proud to share the fact that there is a regular publication of a research-based journal called LOK SANSKRITI. The Trust believes that this publication may become a meaningful contribution and thereby it would help preserve and disseminate valuable musical heritages of Nepal. In order to meet the demand of national as well as international music world, the Trust has published two useful journals written by experienced music practitioners, trainers, and researchers:

- a. The Nepalese Folk Culture
(A Compilation of Research Journal)
- b. Dances of Nepal
(A Compilation of Research Journal)

The publication of these journals is a matter of great pleasure for us. We would like to thank all the authors for their valuable contribution in the journals. Nepal Music Centre Trust congratulates authors for their success in producing insightful findings on the rich diversity of Nepali music enterprise. It is hoped that these research journals will become an important marker of the heart-beat of intangible culture of Nepal.

Satya Mohan Joshi

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Nepal Music Centre Trust

Shrawan 30, 2071

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The Use of Female Voice in Folk Literature and Folk Music

BeniJangamRawal

Out of various songs available, there are many that are by and large available as the contribution and promotion of women. Such songs include morality songs like Fag, Mangal, and Sagun from Far Western Development Region of Nepal; Sangini, Samhala and Birhini from eastern region including Bahramase, Chhaumase, Tinmase and Chautabar from the Tarai, Maithili folksongs and song of Teej, Ratyauli, Bhailo etc. In some societies, songs that sing the misery of widows are also in practice (Shrestha, 1982). In all these kinds of songs, women express their feelings openly. Some songs can be taken as examples. Songs like "Tije Song" giving voice to the intrigue and a clash for existence among the family members. Panchami Song and Sangini Song are especially written to express female problems, while Birhini song is for an orphan child. Songs like Ratyouli Song, Khyali Song, Maini Song, Chachawari song, Chait Song are sung on the occasion of marriage as romantic song (Bandhu, 2001:218).

If we want to know anything about the folksongs, we have to go to their depth. Teej songs refer to the songs sung by Nepalese women during a fasting, commemorating Parvati, a mythological character, who stayed on fast to invoke Lord Shiva and have him as her husband. Teej is the greatest fasting of Nepalese women.

There is similarity between the singing of marriage songs and religious hymns. From early age, there is a trend of using female voice in singing religious hymns. Purna Prakash Nepal has clearly written about the female voices in folk literature with examples from marriage songs, Maini, Bhuo, Lallori and Chachawaro.

The folksongs of Nepalese women are historical archives of Nepalese society. The tradition is based on listening and memorizing and passing from one generation to another. Different communities living in Nepal have their own religions, cultures, trends, customs and rituals. All these are found expressed in female voices in the form of folksongs and they express social, cultural, natural and economic aspects. Those female folksongs can be analyzed with its different forms.

1.1. The Sociological Analysis of Nepalese Women's Folksongs

Folksongs originated in the village and both males and females have equal participation in the society. By corollary, therefore, folksongs are not away from the society with both males' and females' participation. Still, there are some folksongs and folk literatures that have flourished with the help of women alone. Therefore, some of the folk literary exponents opine that such songs exclusively form women's literature (Panta, 1975, 18).

Anyway, there are a lot of folk literatures conserved and promoted by the females. We can take example as Teej, Sangini, and Bhailo etc. These folksongs express the common perspective of the female world regarding their festivals, ways of life, cultural dresses, rituals etc. The women clearly voice their joys and sorrows, internal feelings, and experiences in front of the society. They try to eradicate the perversions prevailing in the society with the help of such songs. In these songs, the women express their emotional attachment towards their parents, suppression and aggression at the hands of their mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, polygamy prevailing in the society, non-matching marriages, discrimination between sons and daughters, contemporary events, political conditions, educational conditions, voice against girls trafficking and so on. These folksongs, originated from female voices in the then social contexts, express different events going on in the society. For instance in rural areas, the wrong belief of not educating daughters and sending them to collect firewood and fodder has been expressed and criticized. For example:

Gharmathi high school aaundarunchha man padnalainapauda

chhorai IA ra BA pas

ma chhorilairaatdinadauraghas

[A high school is established just above my house,

But I am pained on being barred from attending it

They make their sons pass IA and BA

For me, the daughter, they assign wood and hay]

As Kalidas made the cloud his messenger in his Meghadoot, the women make crows or pigeons their listeners and express their feelings: 'Hey birds, do

not tell anyone about my sorrows; convey my good news to others and do share it to those who cannot solve our problems.” It’s like Bhartrihari’s *Subhashita* (holy invocations): “Yam yampasyasitasyatasyapurato ma bruhivacha.” (Carry my words as I say; Thapa, Subedi, 1983:104)

1.2. Analysis of Cultural and Religious Rituals

The social, moral and spiritual values of life come under ‘culture’ as internal and external expression of common people. In another sense, culture is the mirror of a nation and a society. Neither a caste nor a class can be away from culture.

So far as the folksongs sung by women are concerned, various aspects of Nepalese women appear under the expression such as sacraments, festive activities, excitements, worshipping as well as opting to fast and so on. Various sacraments from conception to rituals like name-giving ceremony, first feeding ceremony to the child, belbibaha (symbolic marriage of maturing Newari girls with a bel fruit, as a mark of initiation), thread-giving ceremony, gufa (rituals associated with first menstruation of a girl), death rituals etc. are the major events and in all these events women singers play a vital role to make the situation or event exciting, beneficial and compassionate. Here we get a compassionate song of a bride who is married and sent to her husband’s house.

Bhitrabataaamaimeri, chhamchhamaauna

Bhokopetaphuko kasha kanyadandeuna

Saanithiyemera baba, palyouhallaihallai

Thulibhayemera baba, diyokallaikallai.

[Come mother, come dancing from inside

And give me away to someone, with empty belly and unmade hair

Father, as long as I was small, you raised me rocking

And as young I grew, you gave away to unknown.]

The women's folksongs in Doti-Karnali area are full of sacramental contents. As mentioned in "Aupurusheya Mag," a sacramental section in Doteli folk literature, 'sagun' is the holy invocation by the women. Similarly *fag* is considered a propitious song for women. While singing *fag*, the women produce soft sound and thus, it is called 'laya' or melody. The 'laya' has its own significance and identity. The songs can have their own tune but as it has been compared with a beehive, and the sound like the humming of the bees, it doesn't seem appropriate. Here is an example of the women's invocation song:

Sagun

Sagundiyasarainika bola

nayomanagalgaunti

subhalachhinbolanti

eisasubhamangalgaunti

subhalachhinbolanti

[Let's sing Sagun, as Saraini—an instrument—is being played. Let it bring forth a propitious time, and good luck to everyone. (Panta, 1980, page 18)]

The *fags*, popular in female voices in Doti, are sung in the form of marriage songs or songs sung in religious ceremonies. In Karnali Zone as well, such *fags* are popular. In hilly region of central Nepal, there are popular terms such as *Maagal*, *Mahaal*, *Maaletc* given to such songs. But these days such women singers are decreasing in number. (Bandhu, 2001, 160)

The *Maagals*, popular in Nepalese society, are sung during marriage ceremonies. In central and eastern Nepal, a song sung by females after the groom goes to collect his bride is called *Ratyauli*. Here is a sample of *Ratyauli*.

Ukhumeethobainikyameetagyamara

Lognemachhepanihamrai hun kamara

[Sugarcane, is sweet, Gyamara species sweeter;

These menfolks are after all, servants to us.]

(Parajuli, 2000, 265)

Experts of folk literature claim that the lyricist of this song is a female (Panta, 198, 14). Anyway the song sung in female voice in the form of culture falls under sacramental songs.

1.3 Specific Internal and Functional Analysis of Women's Songs

Culture is observed in two aspects—internal and external. The internal aspect is its soul which is constant, and the external one is practical which changes with time. The civilizations and cultural practices constitute internal features of human life. To some extent, we can find the reality of and from within the country and some other contemporary activities in literature by females. Therefore, cultural artists are taken as spokespersons of a culture in any country. Whatever be the fact, folk culture is the base to evaluate the caste, culture and civilization of a particular country.

Folksongs are parts of a folk culture. The cultural values are preserved through them. In our community there are such cultures and cultural practices where females are dominant and they have been ruling the society on its behalf. In such folksongs, the life styles of women are clearly stated. In the songs of sacrament at some places, the social system, religion, eating and drinking, dresses, musical tunes, art etc. are clearly manifested. Several activities like making *kasaar* (an eatable, made of fried rice flour, made into dry balls) for marriage and other activities of marriage are done in accompaniment of songs. Here is a religious song sung during the time of making *kasaar*.

Hamrabhaibibahabhayo

Kasaraibataram

O ho kasaraibataram

Akashaibatapatalaibata

aayekadidirabaini

kasaraibataum

(Sharma, 2006, 158)

[It's our brother's wedding

come, let's make kasaar;

We the sisters have come from

the sky and from under the earth

come, let's make kassar]

The song sung in central Nepal, especially in Palpa area during the time of making kasaar is exemplified here:

Bhalayesagunaye

Aakashakodidaimeripatalakobainimeri

Banaideunadidaibainimerora Ganesh

Sunekai re taulimarupaaike re jhyagaima

Bhutaideunadidaibainimerora Ganesh

Gha ta tamrodidaikarim ta hamro

Barabarahunechhaina, harmokarim

(Thapa, 1973, 85)

[Holy Invocation

My elder sister from sky, younger from under the earth!

Come; make for me Ganesh (kasaar)

In a golden pan, with a bunch of coins
Fry and bake for me, my Ganesh
Home is yours, sisters, but the fate is ours
Our fates are never the same, sisters!]

1.4. The Explanation of Geographical and Regional State

In common sense, the folk music that falls under folk literature has been taken as folk culture by some of the experts, and the fact should be taken under consideration. In the given context, the expressed issue on the behalf of women is female folksong or female folk literature. It has come from the classification of gender differences, according to the different classifications of folksongs and classified female folksongs. Generally the area of such folksong refers to the community and people living there where there are female talents. Stories, charades, jokes etc. are the prose forms of folk literature. In all these genres, the adults, aged people, grandmothers and children enjoy in every aspect of life. Females are found much more forward in this kind of genres expressing openly. Wherever the females are, they sing the songs with rhymes, sentiments and expressions in their own tune. Therefore, Krishna Dev Upadhyaya believes that women are the real originator of folk songs.

The women are found to be cooperative not only in household activities but also in working together with friends, enjoying and helping at the time joy and sorrows. Out of these friends, some have to leave the country under obligatory conditions and the girls have to go to their husbands' homes after marriage. The way they miss their friends is expressed in songs sung during the festivals. One example:

Khusiyalimanaudaimaitigharateknechhu

Pranbandapyarasaathibhetnechhu

[In jubilation, I shall reach my parents' home

And meet friends, dearer than the soul.]

We also come across the mentioning of a trend, wherein songs like 'bidhawakobilap' or wailing of the widows, in some regions. (Shrestha, *Sambhav*, 1981)

Rune-Dhune (Songs of wailing in Karnali Zone)

When girls come to their parents' home from their husbands' houses for the first time, and again depart, the mother and daughter as well as other gathered women sing, crying. It is called 'Rune-dhune.' After putting *tika*—grainssmearing in curd—the females sing songs with full sentiments and send the daughters back to their husband's house.

Chhori: meribabakochanchalashir hos

Roopkosancharsunkoduwara

Aama: mera baba pheribhoudoulya!

[Daughter: Let my father have a lot of wealth

And doors made of gold.

Mother: My child, we will invite you again!]

The song of *Bhagal-bhagalsung* as a pure 'malhar' without any musical instruments by *mugleri* on the birth of a son in Karnali Zone is called *bhagal*. A sample song:

Hera herasahadeubarama

Aajakheri din kaisasunan

Aajakheridinaaaisa hun

Udhyouliherabarmadhuloradhulyouto

Ubhoherabarmakagadmasi

(Rimal, 1967, 2)

[Come, Shahdev and see
What kind of a day is this going to be?
The day today is such–
Up there is the slate and chalk
And down there, paper and ink]

Similarly, there is a trend of singing *Jhoda and Ratyauli* at the groom's house and *Bhagall* at bride's house.

Meri odnedabatiyabhaikorumal
Babujyukadiyagharparyojanjal
Saataimaikieutibahininamrakhechaitala
Babajiyka sangria lagyaaaugayemaitala

[My only blanket is my brother's handkerchief
Home, father gave me away to, is all a mess now
A single sister to seven of my brothers
Missing father a lot, I have come back to meet.]

In this way, there are various folksongs created and sung by women to indicate geographical condition and local customs. There are various popular songs found in the region. In the eastern region, *Sangini*, *Samhala*, *Birahini* are sung, while in the far western region, *Magaland Fag* are sung. *Sanginün* in the mid hilly region, *Bahramase* in the Terai area, or *Ghatu* in the valley are popular women's folksongs. They sketch the existing society. Therefore, in

Nepali folksongs, females have not only significant position but also supreme standard.

1.5 Meter, Melody and Instruments

A folk song is considered a primitive form of lyrical epics. The melody and lyricism are qualities added the words and meaning later. (Jain, 2002, 7). The women's songs too are significant from epical, musical and prosodic points of view. As it is a natural composition, it is obvious that it abounds in joys, sorrows, pains, sufferings and traditional rituals and customs related to the women coming aplenty. The epical elements like rahani, badhan and thego (refrain) make the songs both musical and contextual. Almost all the songs are metrically constructed. In the context of folk songs, tukka (aphorisms), antyanupras (rhyme), rahani and thego (refrain) too can be considered a part of the meter. (Rawal, 2006, 32)

According to the melody and tone patterns, women's songs are of different categories. 'Melody' refers to the musical coordination—slow, average or fast tempo—and 'bhaka' is the tune of the folksong. Its meter consists of the lines organized in ten, twelve, fourteen, fifteen or sixteen syllables. For example, a seven-seven syllable line runs as follows: "Kharbarimakharachhaina, Aajajhilkedarachhaina," a piece taken from Lallori, a folk music tune. (Shrestha, 2004, 115). As far as 'bhaka' or the tune is concerned, we get songs like Teeje, Resam (drutjhayure), Sorathi, Lallori, Nirmaya, Laibari, Sunkogajur, Sunimaya, and Nainaresam, categorized on the basis of refrain. Some other, classified on the basis of 'rahani' are Maya HudaiSalala, ChhiMachhiJaalaima, SaudaiGare Maya Namare, Byroad koBaatomaTyaksiGudaudai etc. (Rawal, 2006, 59).

Tune and musical flow are special qualities of women's songs. Since such songs are more in use in the village as compared to the urban areas, they abound in easy diction commonly used in day to day rural life. The tendency of ending works with 'i' or 'u' make it more lucid, attractive and pleasing. For example, a 'gagro' (pitcher) is often written 'gagri' or 'gagaru', and 'pittal' often spoken as 'pitalu', making the words pragmatically experimental. (Shrestha 2004, 115). For example:

Aagophuknegagaru ta panibharnesote

Kanmalaunebulaki ta Nakmalaunepote

[Pitcher to blow fire, pipe to fetch water

Blulaki on the earlobes, necklace on the nose.]

(This is a parody, for the opposite is true. Pitcher is for fetching water, pipe for blowing the fire. Bulaki is a nose ring, pote a necklace.)

Such folk songs of the women, sung with precision in tone, lyrics and tempo are found not only Nepal but also abroad. Ankhikhole and Karputare tunes according to region, Dura and Pokhareli tunes according to communities and Dhado and Tesro tunes according to tonality are some classifying parameters brought into practice to categorize such songs. (Bandhu, 2001, 117).

In songs, the contexts are unveiled not directly as done in day-to-day speaking; rather, it is artistically incorporated into the musical context. If a song has two parts, the latter contains its main message, while the former is a contextual preparation only. These parts are also called 'tuppa' or the top and 'phed' or the bottom. The toppo and phed, in folk songs, bear an intimate tonal consonance as well. For example:

BaranikoTaparogodanegai

Hera aayeRamleSitaaghilai

[The nuptial leaf-plate, and the cow gifted on marriage

See, Ram comes comes home with Sita in the lead.]

*BaranikoTaparo is a leaf plate, usually larger than ordinary leaf plates, prepared for the occasion called Barani, where, the girl formally concedes to become the boy's wife. 'Godanegai' is the cow gifted to the priest by the girl's father to absolved from all sins during the birth and brining up of his daughter up to marriageable age.]

1.6 Form (Solo, dual, and chorus)

'Banot' or form in a folksong actually refers to the way it is sung. In solo, we include all songs sung singly by a woman singer, while in dohori or duel, we have two singers on two sides, or two groups crisscrossing one another in songs. Rune-dhune, Ratyauli and Dohori come under such duel songs. Some are sung alone, while some by a single group. Occasionally as village folk pass along hills and plains, or work in home-yards and farms, they sing singly or in group. The 'mahal' songs of the far west too fall under this category. Mahal is usually sung by two or three women in a slow tempo (Thapa, Subedi, 1984, 111). No musical instrument is played with the song. Example is the 'magal' of Karnali, sung at the birth of a son, or at the time of offering something to the needy:

Nya taliBijaipurBaidebiko than

Kun Jyulenachainkhelain

Kun Jyulediyebalankodan

BajyaiJyulenachaiankhelain

Babujyulediyebalakkodan. (Thapa, Subedi, 1984, 111)

[Down there at Bijaypur is the shrine or Goddess Ba Devi

Who made the baby play and dance?

Who made offerings in his name?

Mother made the baby play and dance.

Father made offerings in his name.]

2. Musical experimentation and musical instrument in women's folksong

In folksongs, three basic things come into use:

- a) Song
- b) Tune
- c) Instruments

Since music more than literature becomes more dominant in folksongs, its natural attractiveness does not become explicit unless carefully unveiled. Language has its limits, but music knows no boundaries. Experts of music are one in the idea that from a savage to a civilized man, music holds its influence. Literary critic ShyamSundar Das has said, the analysis is music is nothing but its influence and the deep impact it plants on the soul.

Two trends are seen in the folk songs by women. The first include those songs sung by women without the accompaniment of musical instruments. In the second are those that are done with instruments. But both the trends have intimate relation with one another. At times, the two can move independently as well. In women's folksong, instruments are often played to increase the degree of pleasure. At times, they perform to the beat of a madal (a homemade Nepali drum) while at times, in the absence of any instrument, they manage with claps. But what is special about women's song is that they are sweet even without instruments. As mentioned about, the element of dance that organically moves with these songs create the necessity of musical instrument, often. The soul of a song and dance lies in the beat of the instruments. (Ganguli, 2001, 148).

In Nepali women's folk music, madal (mridangum—an elongated drum beaten on two side walls made of animal hide) is considered main. Examples of songs sung to the tune of madal are given below:

madalghanghanhankauki?

sorathibhakamanachouki

[Should I play madal: ghan-ghan

And sing 'sorathi' the folk tune?]

Ancient 'kyali':

Akashaimaherou ta kalomailobadal

Dharatimapaniparyojhamjham

Madalaiko tang-ghing-tang haimarunikochham-chham

[Up there in the sky is dark, dirty cloud

And rain falls on the earth, drizzling

Maruni dances on the tune of the madal – ding-dong!]

This way, the accompaniment of a song by instruments adds to the agility of a song. The instruments therefore have a close connection with women's songs too. More than in singing, instruments are deemed necessary for dancing. In fact, instrumental beat is the soul of a dance.

Like in other folk songs, women's folksongs too make use of all types of instruments. Among the instruments for beat and rhythm, we have those sewn with dry animal hide, and beaten with hands or with wooden or bronze sticks. The number of such instruments in Nepali folk music is quite high. According to their make, such instruments are divided into four categories, but in accordance with their use, they are two:

a) Anabaddha (with sides sewn with skin): madal, dhol, dhime, dha:, nagara etc.

b) Ghanabadhya (played by striking against one another): bhusya, ghanti, chaanp, kartal, tinumuni, chimta etc.

The major task of both the categories is to provide a tune. The tune determines syllables, and syllables the melody, thereby making the entire music pleasing to the ear. Every instrument has its own manifest sound, beat and rhythm. Like in ordinary folk music, the music exclusively sung by women to make use of such instruments to a great extent.

Normally, women do not make much use of instruments in their singing. Without any prior preparation they spontaneously sing on relevant occasions. But at modern times, even folk singers are assuming professional roles to earn their living. As a result, the folk music and dance prevalent in our rural areas are facing the threat of devaluation. If not carefully conserved, they might move to extinction. Still we have time, if adequate research and conservatory initiatives are taken, our traditional folksongs, dances, tunes,

beats and their notations can be preserved. This write-up is a small attempt in this direction.

Example of a popular folk song (Sangini) and its beat associated with it is given below:

Koshikokinarmakephulaphulyo

Saypatriphulairaphulyo, kinaraiujyalo.

[Which flower bloomed on Koshi bank?

It's marigold, brightening the whole bank.]

The beat of sangini has 6 syllables, the six beats run as dhin, dhin, teen, taak, dhin tin!

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