# Dances of Nepal

A compilation of research journals

## 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. Dances of Nepal
   (A Compilation of Research Journal )
b. The Nepalese Folk Culture
   (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**
Chairman
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# Sorathi Dance

**Surendra Bikram (Subi) Shah**

Sorathi is the most famous dance of Nepali folk tradition. Though this dance originated in the Midwestern Region, it spread throughout Nepal with time.

There is no written document to ascertain when this dance originated, but it is a historic dance. According to the practice of the dance in villages, Sorathi has developed from scholastic tradition. There is no record of the author, nor are written documents about the song available. This song was popular in Gandaki area till 1950, as a song transferred to the new generation by a dying old man. Experts believe, song moved from village to the *paltans* (armies).

There was a ritual to perform *Sorathi* dance in Hanumandhoka and other palaces by *Chaubish* armies (armies of the region divided into 24 principalities) during Indrajatra festival. From the same custom, the *Sorathi* is supposed to have continued as the dance of *paltans* (armies) and even today it is seen being performed at army camps. A short form of *Sorathi* can be found among the armies of eastern and western villages and even in Hong Kong, Malaya, and Indian Gurkha Regiments etc.

If we see from the perspectives of caste system in Nepal, this dance was initially performed by the Gurungs, Magars, Kumals, Duras, Barams, Tamang, Sarkis, Kamis etc. since early times.

If we see from linguistic perspectives, it resembles the Kumal language of today. But the ancient Nepali language too has a similar form. So, from linguistic perspective, it is difficult to find out the reality.

This dance is performed according to trend set by its teachers. Pangdure Nach (or Maruni Dance) has been assumed to be the mother source of the dance.

It is not compulsory that the dance instructor of Pangdure Nach should be a certain person from a particular caste. Whoever has got the talent can become an instructor. The singer has to sing the song about King Jay Singh and queen Hemaiti, and the dance should be based on complete classical forms. Hence, an ordinary instructor cannot teach the dance. Besides, the Sorathi dance has not been modernized.

Sorathi is a folkdance based on historical events. People say that the term 'Sorathi' came from 'Sorath', standing for a region in India, known as 'Saurashtra' today. Therefore, it is not an original Nepali folkdance. Some say that the story of Brizbhar is the story of Sorathi. It is also said that there are sixteen tunes and sixteen tricks; that's why it is called Sorathi – the word 'sorha' meaning 'sixteen'. Similarly, there are sixteen dancers for which they coined the name Sorathi.

If we minutely think about the formation and the way of dancing, we can say that it is a typically Nepali folk cultural dance. The reason is that Sorath is a meter. This meter is mentioned in the *Ramayana* written by Tulasi Das, which does not match with the historical narrative. There, mention has been made of Brizbilas in Krishna's life story, which doesn't match with Sorathi. There is no meter exclusively fixed for Sorathi. Brizbhar is based on the story of a boy and a king, which is famous in the Terai region. Our Sorathi is based on King Jay Singh and queen Hemaiti which matches with the Nepalese context. The Nepalese Sorathi has its own tune, style, story and way of singing. It can be an essential part of Nepalese folkdance as there is certainty of song, dance, tune, and the style of dancing.

King Jay Singh did not have children from his fourteen wives and thus he married Hemaiti accepting her as his fifteenth wife. (Some say that King Jay Singh had had sixteen wives whereas some say, he had had only seven.) A daughter was born to Queen Hemaiti, but she had to be thrown in a river on the pressure of other queens.

The incident shocked Queen Hemaiti and the king was also in irritation. The story says that Malare and Kumale, two village men, got a golden trunk in which they found the thrown-away girl, who had miraculously crept into the trunt. As Kumale got the child as his share, he named her Sunrupa — the golden-faced.

When the girl was sixteen years of age, the king happened to see the matured Sunrupa one day. He was completely carried away by her beauty. The queen, knowing of the reality, immediately sent for Kumale and asked for his daughter. Kumale also offered his daughter to the king.

On the day of their marriage, the king was surprised that when he was about to put vermillion, as a mark of matrimony, on the forehead of the girl, she instantly rejected telling that she could not put vermillion from her own father. To know the reality, the king called Kumale forth. Kumale explained everything about the child and the trunk, and told them how he and his friend Malare had found her.

To test whether it was true, the queen pressed some milk out of breast. The milk flew and entered the girl's mouth. Coming to know of the reality, everyone grew excited. The king and the queen too became very happy.

However, the marriage continued. The girl was married to Sujan, a minister. They celebrated the moment forgetting the tragedy that had taken place sixteen years ago.

The Sorathi is danced in response to the beat of madal (elongated Nepali drum) in two different ways. The first tune is very long, whereas the second is short. There are 14 beats in the long tune whereas in the shorter one, there are 7. There are short pauses after 3 and 4 beats. In the longer one, the first part is of 8 continuous beats, and the second consisting of two 4-beat divisions.

1. The long beat counted as per the play-tune

1 2 3 | 4 5 6 7 || 1 2 3 | 4 5 6 7||

2. The beat counted as per the movement of legs or hands.

1–2 | 1  2 | 3  4 || 1–2 |  1  2 | 3  4 ||

3. The clapping counted as the beat

X      |X    |X   || X     |X    |X    |

1–2  |1  2 | 3 4 ||  1 – 2 | 1  2  3  4  ||

1. The beat counted as per the play-tune

1 2 3 4 |  5 6 7 8 || 1 2 3 4 | 5 6 7 8 ||

2. The beat counted as per the movement of legs or hands

1 2| 3 4 | 1 2 | 3 4|| 1 2 | 3 4 | 1 2 | 3 4 ||

3. The clapping counted as the beat

X |X |X |X || X .X .X | X .|

1 2 | 3 4 | 1 2 | 3 4 || 1 2 | 3 4 | 1 2 | 3 4 ||

The 14 beats of Sorathi long tune

1    2  3  4      5  6  7 || 8     9 10 | 11   12   12  14

Jhya –dhin| jhya dhin ta fatt || fatt fatt ta | fann dhin   ta   dhin ||

The tune for clapping

1    2  3  4      5  6  7 || 8     9 10 | 11   12   12  14

Jhyan – dhin| jhya dhin ta fatt || fatt fatt ta | fann dhin   ta   dhina

Dhin ta dhin | jhya  dhin  ta –  || jhya – dhin|


The simple tune of Sorathi short beat (8 beats)

The link from short tune to the long tune

Jhya – dhin        |      jhya  dhin  ta     –      || dhin      ta     fatt    –

The simple tune of Sorathi short beat (8 beats)

Fatt   ta – | dhin   ta      fatt   –       ||

The tune is short beat

Fatt   ta dhin        –   |        dhin   ta      fatt   –       ||

Fatt   ta dhin      dhina |        dhin   ta      fatt   ta      ||

The last short tune linking to the long tune

Dhin   ta      fatt   –   |        fatt   ta      dhin   –       ||

Jhya   –      –      –   |        jhya   –      –      –       ||

Dhin   ta      fatt   |        ta      dhin   tau    –       ||

Jhya   –      dhin   |        jhya   dhin   ta      fatt   ||


The subject matter of the Sorathi song is the life of late King Jay        Singh. Therefore, without enough information about the King, it is impossible to sing the song. Similarly, the lyrics and the tune also should be known by the singer. There is no fixed meter; therefore, the song can be started any way, and the same song can be sung in two different tunes. Especially the at the end of the long song and the short song, the dance completes.

The main song has a narration. Therefore, the long songs must be made of two meters whereas the short one should be made of only one meter. In another steps also, the song has two meters in the long tune whereas in short tune there are four meters. The music is the base of rhyme and rhythm. There may be variations in the number of words per line.

1. The song with long beat

*Manai bhayo birakta*
*Kasai raj chalau*
*tinai kaal bitisakya*
*godai aaja khali bhayo*
*ekai nahi dubai nahi*
*choudha rani khali bhayo*
*charai disha andhakar*
*dhurudhuru aansu aayo.*

[The mind has gone sour. How should my rule continue when there is no progeny, not from one or two, but from fourteen wives? All the directions look dark and tears flow incessantly. ]

2. The song with short beat:

*Manai bujhai basideu*
*Punasko jaal kati*
*kasle bahira lanchhan ra?*
*Dhuruma dhuru narou rajai*
*mania bjuhai basideu*
*ekai naho buwai nahi*
*choudai rani khali bhayo.*
*Dhurudhuru narou rajai*
*Manai buhai basaideu.*

[Convince yourself, king! Who can deliver you out of this web of hardship? Do not let your tears flow. Hold your heart. Not one or two, but all fourteen queens went barren, though.]

There is still a trend of singing duet song in question-answer form in villages. The song is sung in both long and short beats.

1. The song with the long beat

*Naya jeevan pheriyo*
*bhawile lagan juyrayo*
*purwai dekshko Jay Singh Raja*
*paschimai deshko Haimaiti Rani*
*Chalisai barisko Jay Singh Raja*
*Sorha barisko Haimaiti Rani*
*Ghamai roopi Jay Singhe Raja*
*Junai roopi Haimaiti Rani]*

[Time has changed, and fate managed the union. King Jay Sing of the east found queen Hemaiti of the east. Jay Singh of forty married sixteen year old Haimaiti. Jay Singh was like the sun, and Hemaiti like the moon.]

2. The song with short beat

*Mani hamari santosh*
*kamalko phool jaiso*
*Haimaiti Raniko muhar*
*Rajaira Jyuko joli jurayo*
*mania hamari santosh*
*Gurdauali phool jaiso*
*Hemaiti Raniko muhar*

*Rajai ra jyuko joli jurayo*
*mania bhayo santosh*
*Injdrakamal phool jaiso*
*Hemaiti raaniko muhara*
*Rajai ra jyuko joli jurayo*
*mania hamari santosh.*

[Our minds are contented. Hemaiti, with a countencance of lotus became our king's mate. She has a face like the crysenthemum, and she is like the flower Indra Kamal. We are all happy by heart.]

1. The song with the long beat

*Sabai tirsana samjhi samjhi*
*Dilai kholi bola rani*
*guransako phool phulyo*
*nyauli chari jhuryayo*
*paiyooko phool phulyo*
*nyauli chari bhurrayo*
*kusumko phool phulyo*
*nyauli chai jhurrayo.*

[Recall all your desires, and open up your mind, queen! When the guras bloomed, the nyauli quivered. When the cherry bloomed, the bird flew, and when other flowers bloomed, the bird withered. ]

2. The song with short beat

*Manai hamari santosh*
*kusumko phool phulyo*
*leu omarai rajaijyu*
*rajai ra jyule diyeko phool*
*paiyoko phool phulyo*
*paiyoko phool phulyo*
*leu omerai rajaijyu*
*rajai ra jyule diyeko phool*
*mania hamari santosh.*
*Guranko phool phulyo*
*leu omorai rajai jyu*
*rajai ra jyule diyeko phool*
*mania hamari santosh.*

[My mind is happy. The Kusum has bloomed. Come King; take the flower, for it was your own giving. The cherry bloomed and the gurans bloomed. Come King; take the flowers, for they are all your own giving. The mind is happy.]

3. Long beat

*Kaun desh pugi gayou*
*kasko cheli magi aayou*
*paschimai deshko Baidangi raja*
*aaganai chhamchham parideu*
*kaunbar kaundin*
*Haimati baaliko junima*
*saderai baresko baalika*
*budhbara baisakh.*

[Which country did you reach, and whose daughter did you bring, O Baidang King of the west? Come all, dance on the yard. What was the day of your wedding? We bought Hemaiti as our bride, a girl of sixteen on Wednesday, in the month of Baisakh (April). ]

4. Short beat

*Sunma sun gharbeti*
*deshai duniyako janani*
*kothabhari sunchandi*
*Bedangai desh chhopima aayo*
*suna ma suna gharbeti.*
[O house owner, the mother of the universe, listen!
You have your rooms full of wealth.
The rulers of Baidang have surrounded all,
Listen o, the owner of the house.]

5. Short beat

*Leu o merai katuwale*
*Makawanpurai tori*
*Ratanepure kolaima*
*dhumaima dhumai lado tel......*

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