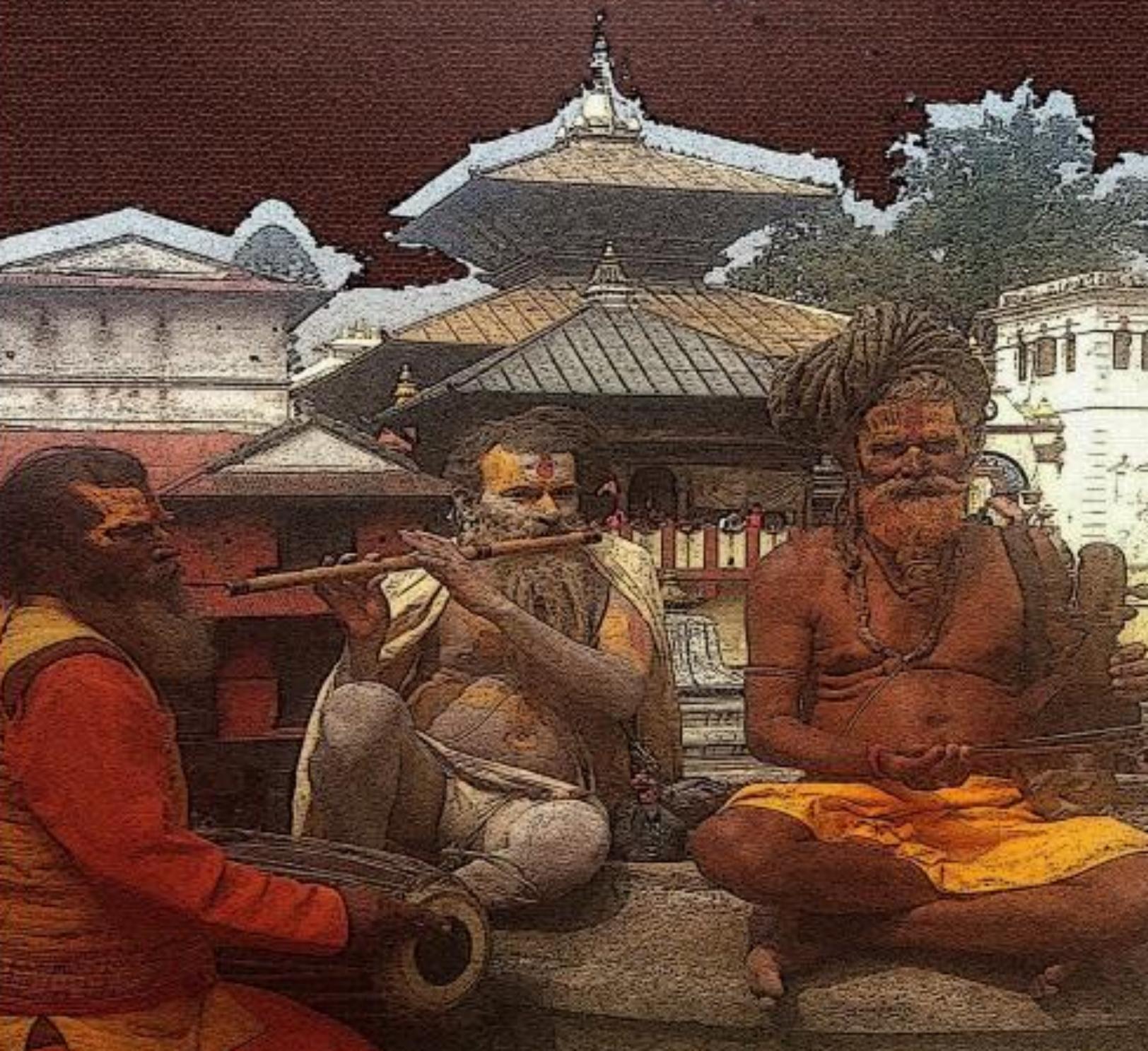


NEPALESE FOLK CULTURE

A compilation of research Journal



Nepalese Folk Culture

A Compilation of Research Journals

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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

Chairman

Nepal Music Centre Trust

Shrawan 30, 2071

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Dashain Folk Songs: An Introduction

Kusumakar Neupane

1. Background

Nepal is one of the many South Asian nations. A landlocked country, it has China to its north, while India lies to east, west and south. In its north are lofty mountains, while to its south lie long stretched extension of plains. It also has the glory of having world's highest mountain peak: Mount Everest. Its social life too is characterized by various folk literatures, folk music, folk art, folk skills, folk dresses, folk jewelries, folk rituals, folk festivals, folk beliefs, folk tradition, folk medications, folk maxims and the like. Of these, Dashain is one of the main festivals of Nepal, which is rich in both nature and culture.

The Hindus of Nepal observed Dashain with a great splendor and reverence. There are various rituals in which the communities observe the festival. During the performance of such rituals, certain categories of folk songs are added, to make the air more festive and blissful. This write-up aims to identify such rituals to introduce them. For this, the essay concentrates on the Dashain Folk Songs, and presents a brief introduction of them, limiting itself to the songs collected primarily from mid-western region of Nepal.

2. Dashain Festival

Dashain Festival, celebrated to uphold the victory of good over evil, has two types: big and small. The bigger one falls more or less in October everywhere, during the bright fortnight. Starting from the first day of the fortnight, it is celebrated until the fifteenth day, which is the full moon day. The smaller Dashain is celebrated in April, also during the bright fortnight. Since it falls in the Nepali month of Chait, people also called it 'Chaite Dashain'. This festival is celebrated from the first to the ninth day of the fortnight. But the bigger Dashain is celebrated with more pomp and enthusiasm.

All activities performed during the festival evoke purity of mind and happiness in life. Before the festival sets in, the Hindus clean and whitewash their homes and temples. When the festival begins, altars of Devi are established at shrines, temples and homes. Near the statue of Devi, jamara—maize of jawar seeds sown to germinate—is kept. The statues and photos are embellished with redwood paste, red flowers and votive grain dipped in red vermillion. In mornings and evenings, Devi is invoked and worshipped. Doing this will fill the homes and shrines with fresh, tantalizing fragrance. On the

tenth day of the ritual, people accept tika, as a mark of blessing, from their elders. The practice continues upto the full moon day, which is called Kojagrat Poornima. On the night of the Poornima Day, all jamaras, leaves and flowers from Devi's shrine are taken to the Ganga—represented by any river in the vicinity—and offered to the water there. This festival, that begins on the first day of the bright fortnight, and ends on the full moon day, is the 'Badha Dashain' or the larger Dashain.

3. Folk Songs Related with Dashain

During Dashain, the Nepalese sing two types of songs: Barhamase Songs, and Dashain Songs. Barhamase ('barha' meaning twelve and 'mas' meaning 'months') are those songs which can be sung all the year round. Among such songs are Salajo, Yanimaya, Sunimaya, Gallalagare, Kheli etc. Devotional songs and hymns too are sung round the year at or near the shrine of Devi. On the other hands, there are children's songs like 'Dahain aayo, khaula piyula' (Dashain is nearing; we get good food and cloth" sung at any time of the year for entertainment. So, since these are perennial songs, and do not exclusively represent songs of Dashain, they are not Dashain songs. Dashain songs are those, that are sung only during Dashain, and whose singing mode, content, feeling, melody and meter suggest the coming of Dashain, are Dashain songs. Such, exclusive Dashain songs are Malasiri, Sarayen, Biwas, Ping Kheldako Geet (song of the swing), Sewa Laune Geet, Turi Khelne Geet, Dashain Selaune Geet, etc.

3.1 Malasiri

Malasiri is a song sung during the Dashain festival, before the tenth day (Vijaya Dashami Day). This song is commonly referred to as Malasiri, Malsiri, Maarasiri, Marsiri, Malasi, Malashree or Malawashree. All these words have descended from Sanskrit word 'Malasi' that changed into Malashree, and to other words. (Pokharel, 1983, pp. 10). This song, that entered Nepal from India, was in vogue even during the Malla regime. (Thapa et.al. 1984, pp. 165; Parajuli, 2000, pp 108). Since then, old folks and youths of Brahmin, Kshetri, Magar and Gaine communities gather around temples and shrine of Devi, and sing this song, even without dancing. Though the Gandarvas sing it on their traditional lute called Sarangi, other communities perform it orally. While this song is sung, both the singer and the listener sway softly with the song. In this song, which has a slow tempo has the opening couplet, refrain and stanzas, also have discourse markers like aa, ho, e, ha, hau, ho etc. The song, whose content is the invocation of Devi the Goddess, has a mixture of Sanskrit, Nepali and Hindi vocabularies. And since the song is a dialogue between Devi and her devotees, it has descriptive and dialogic pattern. Though the song evokes the ethos of bravery at times, the fundamental ethos it evokes is one of devotion or bhakti. An instance is drawn from the following lines of Malsiri, sung by a Gandarva:

Jai de|bi bhairabi Gorakhna|tha
Darsan di|you bhuma|ni hou||| ho|||
Parthamm de|bi utpa|nna bha|you ni|
Janama| liya ni kai|las ni|

[Devi Bhairabi and Gorakhnath; great are your names! Since you came down to us, you are great. You the first of the Devis, who originated on Mount Kailash.]

3.2. Sarayen

Sarayen is one of many songs sung from the Vijay Dashami day, to Kojakrat Poornima day, i.e. from the tenth day of the bright fortnight, to the fifteenth day. People commonly call it Sarayen, Sarayai, Saraayan or Bakkhai. Since the dance it is associated with is like a game, it is also called 'Sarune Khel' or Sarune Game (Panta, 1986, pp 167). There is no official evidence as to where this song came from. Old singers maintain that the song originated when Nepal started winning wars. The dance and the performance associated with this song indicate the moods of winning and losing wars. (Pant, 1986, pp 167). Young men and older folks of various communities dance with daggers, swords, khukri and other weapons of war in hand, and the beats are provided by instruments like naumati baja (consisting of nine traditional instruments), conch, bell etc. Some singers carry a palanquin filled with flowers and leaves. Normally, this group song is sung, while walking, on the open space near the shrine of Devi. Sung in a shrill voice but slow tempo, the lead singer sings, and others add 'ho' or 'bakkhai' at the end of each line. In this song characterised by the multiplicity of stanzas and refrain, each single line makes a stanza. There is no need of the *sthai*—the opening couplet before the stanzas. The singers choose it; they may or may not have it.

The songs mostly invoke gods and goddesses, or sometimes make social harmony its content. In this song that makes extensive use of Nepali folk vocabulary, the narrator is a plural, first person narrator. The singers, consisting of people from various communities, regard one another as brothers and dance in cooperation. As they dance, they exhibit blood-smearing daggers and swords, and evoke ethos of bravery (Bandhu, 2001, pp. 167)

Though action and mood show ethos of bravery, there are different other moods and ethos the song exhibit. Fraternity, unity, faith in deities and entertainment are some of them. For instance, some lines from a song sung in Arghakhachi, Gulmi, Palpa and other districts of Nepal, are presented here:

e| nawai| Durga| ho|

e]] rachhe]] gare]] ho]]
e]] lahai]] bhaiho]] ho]]
e]] sarayen]] khelam ho]]
ho ho]] bhalo]] gare]] ho]]
ho ho]] bhalo]] gare]] ho]]
ho ho]] sarayen]] hamro]] ho]]

[Durga, protect us. Come brothers; let's play Sarayen. It will do us good.
It is our game.]

3.3 Biwas

Biwas is a devotional song sung by the Gandarvas, on their sarangis, from the first to the fifteenth day of Dashain. People commonly call it Bibhas too. The word has relation with the raga, the classical note-sequence in music. So, it is also identified as Biwas Raga. (Neupane, 2008 pp. 123). Though connected with classical music, it is not an imported category. It is Nepal's original that sprang with the origin of the Gandarvas. But sadly enough, the song is in an endangered state at present. Only a few old Gandarva folks have kept the song alive. The melody of this song, song during autumn and early winter by the Gandarvas on their saragis, on open spaces and lawns and in woods, always enraptures the listeners. This song sung alone or in a group of two or three, is not accompanied by dance. The song employs the opening verse, stanzas and a refrain. The opening verse of the header consists of four lines, and is repeated after every staza. The song is sung in a delayed tempo. A lot of Sankrit words are used in such songs, which have their bearings on Puranas and religious scriptures. The style is descriptive, and the listeners often get inspired to peace and sanctity. For evidence, a few lines for a Biwas sung around Palpa and its neighbouring district is presented here:

kati sutirah nan[dalal]]
jago bhai jau e]]
utha pati krishna timi aau
jam brinda]]banai e]] ho]]

[O, how much you keep sleeping, you child of Nanda (Krishna) ? Come on, wake up. My beloved Krishna, let's go to Vrindavan!]

3.4 Ping Kheldako Geet (The Swing Song)

Ping Kheldako Geet or the Swing Song is the song that is sung while playing on the swing right from the first, to the last day of Dashain festival. People commonly call the song Ping Kheldako Geet, Ping Khelne Geet, Pingo Geet etc ('ping' stands for 'swing'; khel for 'playing'). Though no history of its origin is available, history of swing might be considered for its history, as it is sung both by the one who is on the swing, and by the one who is swaying it, in a mood of pleasure. In fact, the song came into vogue at the time when the first swing was erected. The song shows various variants, according to variation in geography and community. The song is sung when one sits upon the swing, or sometimes stands on the swinging swing, or is also sung by the one who is swaying the swing. Anyone, from old to young, from older folks to children from any community sing this song, that requires no musical instrument or dance.

The opening verses and the stanzas appear to be similar. Refrains too are used in this song. Among various variants of the song, the one discussed here makes a typical Nepali bread, eaten during Dashain festival, its subject. Since from top to toe it describes the subject, the song is descriptive in nature. For evidence, we have some lines of such a song, sung around Parbat and neighboring districts.

sarararararararar chahahui

Dashaika rota chuye chuye

sararararararara chahahui

[Here goes the swing in air

See, breads of Dashain fall from nowhere

Here goes the swing in air]

3.5. Sewa Laune Geet

From the new moon day, fifteen days before the onset of Dashain upto the full moon day on the end of Dashain, the Gandarvas sing this folk song. 'Sewa', which stands for service, indicates the service the Gandarvas render to the people in the community where they live. They sing the song on their

sarangi. The history of the song dates back to the history of the Gandarvas in Nepal. Whatever be the case, the song is in practice since ancient times. In older days, while the song was sung, it used to be accompanied by classical notations that evoked 'mangal' or note of well-being, and 'rasa' or dance. But at present, songs of contemporary themes are sung. Therefore, its content is never a fixed category. Its fundamental aim is to sing any song in vogue, and prays for the well-being of the family. So, the Gandharvas, and the families where they sing, are found to have a very cordial relation (Neupane, 2005, pp. 356)

Front-yard is the place where Sewa Laune Geet is sung. The Gandarvas reach the years without any prior information. They greet the owner of the house, and then, depending upon the hour of the day, sing Rag, Mangal or Karkha. Besides, they also sing various modern songs as demanded by the listeners. Still, the older generation of singers loves to stick to devotional Rags and Mangals, which are in fact, the most characteristic types of Sewa Laune Geet. Though such songs do not have fixed opener and refrain, it can be safely said that like in other songs of the Gandarvas, these songs too have 'he' and 'ho' as repeating element after every line.

The songs employ rustic diction, and are descriptive in nature. And since such songs are many, the feelings they convey too are equally various. As for example, an excerpt from a Mangal sung by the Gandarvas themselves is quoted here:

Bihani asanan gangajal gomati]]]

Ganga issori]]

Chakra Bajritrai]]]

Bagijani Ganga Mai! Pap ni, dukha ni hara]]]ho]]]

[One should take bath every morning in the water of Holi Ganga or Gomati. Mother Ganga, who holds a holy wheel in hand; you keep flowing. As you flow, take away all our sins, and all our sorrows.]

3.6. Turi Khelne Geet

Turi Khelne Geet is a type of song the Gandarva youths and old folks sing, sitting at the shrine of Devi at Dhurkot, and at other shrines in Gulmi District. Some people call it 'Turi Geet' too. Sung like 'Doholi Khelni Geet' where two parties—males and females—take turns in question-answer pattern; scholars do not answer why this particular song is called 'Turi Khelne' instead of 'Dohori Khelne' Geet.

Most sung at Dhurkot in Gulmi, the song is first sung by the Gandarvas. Only after that, people of other communities sing the Sarayen, and enjoy. In this song that is in practice since a long time, we find a question-answer, conversational and debating pattern. Strewn with rustic diction as the Gandarvas normally use, the songs have static opening verses, the stanzas and the refrain. Both the singers and listeners enjoy, smiling at one another. Therefore, the song is classed among those that evoke the ethos of laughter. Some lines of songs prevalent in Gulmi district are presented below:

sundai chhu

timalai bhetna jaal pani bundai chhu

....

yo mann runchha

timalai malai bhetauuna dhou hunchha?

[I am hearing you; I am laying snares to trap you/ my heart cries;
is it difficult for you to meet me?]