

Fusion Of Hindu, Buddhist, And Folk Religious Culture of Dapha Khal Musical Performance of Newars of Kirtipur

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Abstract

Dapha Khal musical culture, the most traditional devotional musical performance, of the Newars of Kathmandu Valley, integrates multi-religiosity both in content and practice. The devotional hymns of Hindu, Buddha, and folk gods were orally transmitted from the Dapha Gurus (experts) to the students (committed followers) and continued a similar pattern till now. Despite the increase of single religious identity and modern musical domination, the community continued multi-religious practices, identity, and promotion of poly-religiosity. The fundamental aim of the article is to explore how and why Dapha Khal musical performance integrates Hindu, Buddhist, and folk religious practices in the influence of homoreligious identity. It tries to decolonize the Western perspective of religious evolutionism and one person, one religion at a time. Large numbers of Dapha Khal at Kirtipur enrolled young males and females in Dapha Musical school apprenticeship, though the females were traditionally restricted from participating in Dapha music. Educated youths engaged in such poly-religious traditional musical culture despite their socioeconomic and political background. It tries to interpret the practitioners' perspectives on multi-religiosity and traditional musical identity despite the influence of modern Nepali and Western musical traditions. Moreover, it tries to analyze the promotion and preservation strategies of such non-commercial musical and poly-religious culture of the Dapha khal of the Newars. To explore information on poly-religious culture in traditional music, we employed exploratory and descriptive research designs of qualitative approach. Observation, audio-visual recording, key informant interviews, and archival methods were employed to generate data. Despite homoreligious cultural domination, the Dapha Khal musical culture not only continued but also promoted poly-religious and gender-inclusive traditional musical culture among the Newars.

Keywords: poly-religiosity, music, apprenticeship, culture, Dapha Kh.

Introduction

Multi-religiosity of the Nepalese society is reflected in the census report 2021. The majority of people believed on Hindu (81.19%) followed by Buddhist (8.21%), Muslim (4.39%), Kirati (3.17%), Christian ((1.39%), and less than 1% of Sikh, Jain, Bon, Parkirti (Nature worshippers) and unidentified religions (NSO, 2023). This study tries to explore and analyze poly-religious cultural contents and practices of the traditional musical performance of the Newar community in Kirtipur, Nepal. Moreover, through trajectories of Dapha music, I try to debunk the colonial White European narratives of animism and polytheism as stages of pre-modern and pre-civilized religion of the societies. Plural religious contents, including animistic cultural practices are integrated both in their traditional devotional hymns and everyday culture of the Newars in Kathmandu. The Newars are a highly educated, socio-economically advanced, and politically active community of Nepal. There are various claims about the poly-ethnic and poly-religious genesis of the Newars. They practiced caste-based purity and hierarchy as well as Buddhist idea of equality within the community. The Newar is a complete society because various professional castes maintained their pattern of cultural, music, performance, festival besides their livelihood culture (Nepali, 1965). Various scholars including anthropologists have studied Newar musical culture, musical instruments and traditional performances (Bernède, 1997 & 2016; Wegner, 1988 & 1993; Toffin, 1998). They focused on the ethnomusical, musical instrument, and musical history of the community. The Newar vocal music singing tradition and genre have been analyzed (Kansakar, 1965; Widdess, 2013). Dhime and Dapha are considered the identity of traditional Newar music in Nepal. These musical cultures have been maintained by their traditional cultural institutions named Guthi and Dapha Khal. There are hundreds of such institutions in Kathmandu Valley. About 50 Dapha Khal in Kirtipur are actively engaged on musical performance and

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reproduction of integrative religious culture. Scholars have not explored and analyzed polyreligious (polytropy) integration of the Newars' Dapha Khal in the age of exclusive religious identity imposed by the Western modernity and culture of census recording. It explores how a community maintains animism, polytheism, and highly specialized professions one at a time.

The Dapha is a poly-religious series of devotional hymns with musical expression and the institution that maintained the schooling is called Dapha Khal in the Newar community. Special gatherings and performances are observed during special rituals, festivals (Jatras) and months. The Dapha is one of the oldest indigenous Newari musical traditions (Widdess, 2013). The Dapha music integrates North Indian music and folk musical traditions of various communities in Nepal. The Dapha Khal and Dapha Guru (expert) run Dapha music schooling as volunteers for the continuation of the culture. Recently, women and young girls have been included in Dapha musical apprenticeship. The Dapha schooling is considered as training to socialize traditional knowledge, social norms, religious cultural, musical orientation, and collective consciousness of the Newar people. It integrated the political-economic and religious diversity of the Newars.

Though the Newars have a professional musician caste named Kusule but Dapha musical culture is primarily centered and maintained by agricultural castes commonly named Jyapu. The Kusule community, as ritually connected professional musicians, initiated musical instruments during marriage, festivals (Jatra), and death rituals. Their caste status within the Newars was water unacceptable category in the old legal code of Nepal 1854 (Hofer, 1979; Nepali, 1965). The Dapha music ruptured the caste and professional hierarchy of so-called lower caste. There are few various Newar castes Dapha, but Jyapu Dapha khal are well maintained and functional. Women's participation in Dapha, and Dhime musics of the Newar were forbidden because they believed that female musician and dancer could not worship and observe the god of dance. There were diverse religious stories, gender taboos, and anti-women-friendly practices that discouraged the Newar girls' participation in Dapha musical schooling and practices.

Moreover, the study tries to articulate unity and social harmony of diversity of religion, music, language, religious pilgrimages and their profession through Dapha culture among the Newars. Social harmony and inclusion of women through engagement of the Dapha musical practices are observed increasing at Kirtipur. significant numbers of young girls and adult women were observed Dapha schooling and performance.

Theoretical Scope

Anthropologists and other scholars working in Nepal and the Himalayan region have observed that the Himalayan communities' practice of religion, rituals, and everyday worshipping does not exclusively belong to a single religion (Gellner, 2005; Zharkevich, 2016; Gaenszle, 2016; Nepali, 1965; Krauskopff, 2011; Fisher, 2001; Fisher, 1987). Some of them changed their religious identity or maintenance of multiple religious identities in terms of their political and economic relations with the government (Fisher, 2001; Campbell, 2016). After changes in the 1990s, most of the Himalayan communities started campaigns of a single religious identity which was articulated during a government census survey (Fisher, 2001; Gellner, 2005; Toffin, 2013). Modern context characterized by censuses, majority rule, election developed religion like ethnic groups or nations and their exclusive boundaries (Barth, 1969). Historically, religious boundaries in Nepal have been developed differently from the Western modern model of "one and only one religious identity per individual" (Gellner, 2005, p. 756). There were no clear and exclusive religious boundaries of different religions. Such poly-religious situations or the natural conditions of spiritual cosmopolitanism (Carrithers, 2000), where different holy people deserved respectful devotional hymns and worship from various devotees. Religious syncretism is a common phenomenon, whereas they call and write a single religion in government documents and public speech. The Newari Dapha Khal developed before the exclusive religious identity of people and people worshipped various spirits, as well as different ranked gods.

Evolutionist anthropologists argued that primitive people believed in animism in which they worshipped various nature of spirits (Tylor, 1970& 1871; Frazer, 1890). Polytheism is a slightly higher stage of religious

evolution in which great gods and spirits are worshipped as kings and chiefs among the men. They argued that ancestors, plants, animals, and unique appearance of nature were predominant in pre-modern societies (Tylor, 1870; Frazer, 1890). Ancestors, ranked gods, and nature worship are common practices across many religions in the world (Steadman, Palmer, & Tilley, 1996); it is also observed by many caste and ethnic groups in Nepal (Lecomte-Tilouine, 1993; Schneiderman, 2002; Adhikari & Gellner, 2016; Gurung, 2025). For Tylor (1870), people with animism and polytheism have simpler minds based on the doctrine of the psychic unity of mankind. The evolutionist scholars argued that monotheism is a stage and indicator of civilized and modern culture. This argument found problematic when a highly civilized Newar community in a capital city practiced animism and poly-religious musical performances in their everyday life. Tylor (1871) notes that advanced societies could retain their primitive items within culture as survivals. The cultural survivals are indicators of their primitive cultural proximity. The logic and categories of religions by evolutionist anthropologists are guided by the notions of essentialism, racism, and colonialism.

Most evolutionists argued that human mind and society progress in a straight line toward ever-increasing complexity, from animism to monotheism, and rationality (Tylor, 1870; Frazer, 1890). But Tylor's theory of religion, based on the idea of evolutionism that treated 'animism' as a feature of primitive religion, was later discarded in anthropology. In recent times, anthropologists have again revived the concept of animism without the evolutionary sense (Swancutt, 2023). The decolonized concept of animism is not the same as the old concept of belief in supernatural entity, but a dynamic one in which "person or social group with an 'animistic' sensibility attributes sentience or the quality of being 'animated' to a wide range of beings in the world, such as the environment, other persons, animals, plants, spirits, and forces of nature like the ocean, winds, sun, or moon" (Swancutt, 2023, p.1). Malinowski (1948) argues that religion originates and functions under conditions of emotional stress. He analyzed the positive function of the religion. Religious beliefs help not only social harmony, order, and control but also maintain certain levels of emotional stress and mental health of the people. In the same vein, Freud (1913:145) argues that both religion and magic are reducible to feelings of frustrations, tensions, emotions, and illusions. His interpretation of religion has influenced anthropological writing like Oedipus in the Trobriands (Spiro, 1993). Durkheim offers more comprehensive implications of religion in society. He believes that religion binds people together (cohesion), promotes cultural consistency (control), and offers strength for people during life's transitions and tragedies (Durkheim, 1995). Similar cohesion, control as well as promotion of poly-religious orientation of Dapha music helps to critique the colonial perspective of the religion.

Max Weber and Karl Marx analyze economic connections of religion. In Weber's writing *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([1905] 1992), he claimed that the Protestant work ethic cultivated the seed of capitalism by changing the traditional anti-capitalist Catholic Christian values of poverty. Weber highlighted that typical kinds of Protestantism promoted the pursuit of material advantage by appealing to followers to work hard (Weber, ([1905] 1992). Marx (1844) believes that religion reflects the socioeconomic stratification of society. He stressed that it maintains inequality, injustice, and perpetuates the status quo between the rich and poor. By comparing the nature of religion with opium, he argues that religion is just an extension of working-class material suffering and a tool of the ruling class (Marx, 1844). Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasized that religion is a symbolic system like culture that shapes individual understanding and experiences of the world. Religion, as a system of symbols, establishes powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations in followers by framing conceptions of general order of existence seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973). Dapha musical and poly-religious hymns offer powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations among the groups for religious and social harmony and integrity.

History of the Dapha Khal : Integration of Music and Religion

Several studies have been conducted in this field of Newar society and culture by different research institutions and scholars, but most of them concerned with general and focuses only musical activities as separate part of the community. They were not concerned with cultural, religious integration and social harmony, the value, status and change as well as an impact of socio-psychological contribution of the culture. G.S Nepali, (1965),

Dor B. Bista (1967), and Widdess,(1988) concerned with general study of Newar culture, musical instruments, tones and musicians. Actually, these studies did not portray the social-cultural integration and social harmony of Newars in particulars. The previous studies could not address the musical issues of cultural activities in order to continuity, identity, cultural tradition and socio-psychological issues of elderly and women, its value, status and impacts of other culture. Hence, the research tries to explore these issues in particular places.

It is argued that Newari Dapha is a genre of devotional singing and performed by male, non-professional musicians (Widdess, 2013). We observed a sufficient number of women participation and engagement of female in Dapha as well as collective musical schools of the Newari settlement in Kirtipur. He noted that Newari Dapha music combines religious rituals, social interaction and musical performance (Widdess, 2013). He did not pay attention to social harmony and cultural integration and community identity through Dapha and Newari Music. Existing literature does not address issues of women and multi-cultural participation in Dapha music.

The embedded relations of the religion and sacred sound or music observed in the practices of all religion and musical performance. Guy Beck's book named *Musicology of religion: Theories, methods and directions* (2023) argues that both religious and musical disciplines remain incomplete in the absence of other. Though both the music and religion are too broad disciplines, In his book, Beck argues that, " the study of religion is incomplete without music" and the study of music is incomplete without theology" (Beck, 2023, p. 298). Ringing bells in the temples, playing drums in the monastery, making a loud sound in the mosque, and shamanism's drumming and incantation are common phenomena in South Asian religious culture (Dahal, Rai, Ghimire,& Acharya, 2025). It also indicates the importance of music in religious culture. Similarly, religious cultural practices in many cultural groups incorporate musical instruments and musical performance. Hindu, Buddhist, Shamanism, and many other local traditions incorporate musical content in their practices. It provides a conceptual framework to understand the integral relations of religion and musical culture of the Dapha Khal of the Newars in Kathmandu.

An old stone inscription, about 1500 years old found in Lalitpur (Lele), articulates Bādītra gosṭhi⁴, a musical organization of the Newars (Joshi 1973:264). The name of the musical organization indicates a collective musical and religious culture of the people because religion was the fundamental organizing principle of the society and culture of those days (Regmi, 2005). A seventh-century Chinese document noted that people of Nepal valley played drums and trumpets (Snellgrove 1987:373). It also indicates a long historical legacy of musical inclination of the Newars. Similarly, the history of Newari music is associated with religious myths and culture. It was believed that lord Mahadev created six Ragas and drum first and started dancing with Tala of drum (Parjapati, 2018). Similarly, Lord Krishna also created the drum Mridanga and flutes. The Newars believe that the nāykhīñ funeral music invites the god Indra to observe the dead and open the door to heaven. The music facilitates liberation. This particular drum and trumpets were also played during the medieval and Shah-Rana periods (known as nāykhīñ choyekegu or Jhyali in Nepali) to announce royal news (Lie, 1999). *Dapha* and *Chacha* devotional and religious musical traditions, both originated in India from 11th to 13th centuries, started among the inhabitants of Kathmandu from 14th to 17th centuries (Parjapati, 2018). Both traditions include devotional hymns, tantric songs, and similar musical instruments.

The authentic establishment of the Dapha religious musical culture in Kathmandu is difficult to pinpoint. A painting in the *Taleju*⁵ temple dated Malla period (Pratap Malla in 1664 AD) is authentic evidence of the presence of Dapha musical performance in the royal palace (Widdess, 2013). Initially, it was centered at royal court and palace as devotional performance. The kings are also considered as incarnation of god. Royal and courtly elites observed the evening and leisure time devotional hymns. It was argued that the *Chacha* (Buddhist tantric songs, music and dance) and proto-Dapha culture had started long before the Malla period. Malla kings

⁴ Bādītra (Sanskrit word) means a particular musical instrument or musical group. Gosṭhi (Sanskrit word) means a social/religious institution formed for a particular function.

⁵ The royal goddess of Nepal

gradually systematized the Dapha around sacred and temple locations in the Valley. Widdess argued that despite earlier mixture of different religious traditions (Hindu-Buddhist, and animism) and musical culture (North Indian, folk, and Newari), Dapha music arranged as common Newari devotional singing in mid-17th century (Widdess, 2013). It was argued that the Dapha culture integrated not only various religious and musical traditions, but also royal and layman's cultural contents. Compared with other South Asian devotional singing, scholars argued that the religious phenomenon has encompassed devotional movements and culture spread across the region (Widdess, 2013; Parjapati, 2018).

Dapha Gurus and Newar historians of Kirtipur agreed that there was no such written historical document of Dapha history in the valley and Kirtipur. The knowledge and practices of Dapha music are handed down from generation to generation through practices and oral narratives. Few texts of hymns were documented recently. Ramesh Maharjan, Ex-Mayor of Kirtipur Municipality estimated that Siddhi Narsingh Malla was initiator of Dapha as a devotional/Bhakti song in Lalitpur. Since, Kirtipur and southern territory of the valley along Chitlang were territory of Lalitpur's Malla kings. Dapha was started as court-palace devotional musical culture during Malla period. The Newars elites were the practitioners of the Dapha. After the unification of Kathmandu Valley, historian believed that some of the contents and practices were gradually changed. One of the purpose of the Dapha during Malla and Shaha-Rana periods was to tribute and delight power of palace and court. When other techniques of devotion and amusement practiced with the arrival of new communities around the palace-court, the Dapha transformed as music of the layman and agricultural communities of the Newar society. Despite unfavorable situations of social and cultural gathering, the Dapha musical band continued because of its poly-religious, devotional and musical characteristics. After the end of Rana period and Panchayat, Dapha music and hymns continued antique cultural identity of the agricultural community of the Newar. Despite, arrival and penetration of modern musical band and musical culture, the community practiced and considered unique cultural identity of the Newar. Rather, Dapha music was practiced in Malla's court and palace in 17th century and gradually influenced folk style and livelihood culture after 18th century.

Statement of the Problems

The traditional Daphas integrated various religious traditions, local rituals, musical cultures, and social participations. The researchers are interested in exploring stories of poly-religious integration in the age of modernity and advanced people. Moreover, how Dapha cultivates social, cultural, and religious harmony in the age of clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1996) and domination of the Western notion of exclusively single religion at a time. Poly-religious practices of the same people is localized version of religious behaviours. Though Dapha is considered as ethnomusic but it integrates various traditions by a ethnic community. Community-specific music and local language songs, including localized versions of religious hymns are considered as ethno-music. What are logic of poly-religious culture of Dapha Khal? How does Dapha integrate poly-religious cultural practices? Why do the Dapha school continue poly-religious cultural practices despite their religious identity listed one religion. How do they recruit practitioners for the poly-religious culture? There is a deep relationship of music with religions, rituals, occupation, traditional skills, knowledge, and thoughts about life. The Dapha culture and practices are unique in terms of polyreligious cultural implications among the advanced urban community which challenges the western logic of religious development toward monotheism and naturalization animism and polytheism at the same time have not been discussed and analyzed.

Objectives of study

This research aims to explain poly-religiosity, the musical culture of Dapha Khal among the agricultural caste of newar community in Kirtipur. The specific objectives are:

1. To explore poly-religious cultural integration on Dapha musical performance

2. To interpret participants' perspectives and participation of poly-religiosity and musical culture of Dapha Khal
3. To analyze Dapha apprenticeship traditional schooling in the age of religious identity and mono-religious status at a time .

Research Methodology

We employed qualitative research design to explore and analyze poly-religious integration on Dapha music as well as poly-religious social integration through Dapha culture of the Newar community of Kirtipur. We observed certain individuals' everyday cultural and their inclination on multiple religious activities within the day. Dapha musical culture is typical and most frequently repeating (almost everyday performance) musical culture of the Newar. Despite its everyday operating phenomena, very few people realized the religious and musical integration trajectories of the Dapha. Any Newar people can talk about everyday features of the Dapha without claiming particular religious belongingness of the Dapha Music. Dapha Gurus (music and hymns experts) provided us historical and poly-religious integration or polyropy of Hindu-Buddhist and animism, musical integration, and social harmony among diverse people in the Dapha culture. Therefore, key informant interviews, observations, case study and archival study methods were used to generate data from the community. Both male and female knowledgeable people with references of the Dapha participants were selected. Both of the researchers resided in Newar community of Kirtipur for long time and one of us belongs to the local Newar community. We selected Kirtipur Daphas because of our familiarity with Dapha Gurus, historians, Dapha music school organizers and local polyticians who contributed Dapha music culture. Long familiarity and linguistic competency helped our access to in-depth information and specific data. We have observed the Dapha culture almost regularly, but we observed, for the purpose of this research, at Bahirigau Dapha, Layaku Darbar dapha and Chilancho Falcha Dapha in August-December in 2024. We interviewed 10 key informants including 2 females (Dapha Gurus, cultural historians, Dapha traditional school runners, polyticians, new trainee and everyday participants) . Collected data were translated, coded, and discussed and analyzed in different categories of themes and descriptions.

Findings

Poly-religiosity of Dapha

Both the archives and informants articulate the embeddedness of religiosity in the Dapha musical culture. Dapha Khal, as one of the oldest musical institutions of the Newar community, played a significant role in the protection, preservation, and integration of poly-religious contents to integrate various religious practices in the community. Despite governmental motivation to identify exclusive religion during the census and domination of Western schooling of single religious culture as a symbol of modernity, the community practiced a poly-religious culture in their everyday ritual practices. Polyticians and orthodox religious leaders, by showing certain weakness of opponent religions, occasionally motivated people to stand against their opponent religions, but the community habituated and naturalized to harmonize poly-religious cultural practices. Ramkrishna Duwal (75 years old cultural historian of the Newar) argued that multi-religious characteristics in Dapha were integrated during Mall kings and aftermath. Ramesh Maharjan (Dapha apprenticeship school runner and ex-mayor of kirtipur municipality) argued that Dapha integrated Hindu-Buddhist and folk religions including nature and spirits. The context of poly-religiosity was relations between kings and people. Maharjan and Duwal believed that large number of people of Patan- Kirtipur were Buddhist but kings were Hindu during Malla period. David Gellner (Gellner, 2005) argued that many Newar practiced Hindu and Buddhist culture and ritual simultaneously. The multi-religious practices called religious polytropy (Gellner, 2005) was common religious socialization among the Newars. Similar religious polytropy beyond Hindu-Buddhist religious practices are manifested in the contents and practices of the Dapha musical culture in different time. In the months of spring, Dapha experts sing devotional hymns related to nature-god, water-god and good spirits. They argued that

Dapha covers characteristics of Buddha, Ram and Krishna, Radha, Indra and Mahadev and their contributions to the society.

The term Dapha is written Newari language in 1672 with meaning of musical band (Malla, 2000:219). Dapha, as other devotional hymns connected with power of various gods, was devotion Gods, kings and courtly authority. Widdess noted that Dapha was mixture of Carya (Buddhist tantric ritual song), Gitagovinda (a sequence of 24 poems written by Indian Indian poet Jaydev about the celebration and performance, singing, and dancing of erotic relationship of lord Krishna and Radha in 12th century), Prabandhas (describe in 13th century Sangita Ratnakar), devotional Bhajan, and classical Dhrupad (Widdess,2013). Another genre of religious song called Gvara (Buddhist performance sung in the 9th month (Gula religion) of Newari calendar as part of procession, Chacha songs and Bhajan) in which the Dapha team sang devotional songs about the Buddha, his interaction with different living creature and his philosophy in the whole month.

The Dapha Gurus said that the Gitagovinda based Dapha Bhajan content in praise of lord Krishna's power, personality, love of Radha and skill to be sung in the spring season (Basant Ritu). It was believed that lord Krishna was symbol of love, affection, sexuality and protection people from natural disaster. Women sang songs of lord Krishna in Bihari and Bhojpuri repertoire in North India (Widdess, 2013). But there was no evidence of women's participation in the team of Dapha performance before 1990. Women were involved in tantric and noeth Indian devotional musical culture.

According to Ghamvir Mahajan (35 years old Dapha Guru) the mythical story of the Mahadev and Nasa:dha (God of dance and music) articulates Hindu religious connection in Dapha hymns in Kathmandu valley. Once Mahadev was overwhelmed with the beauty of Parbati (his wife), he said that she was the most beautiful lady in the world. He has not seen other beautiful lady so far. Then, Parbati informed that the most beautiful lady was in the Newar community in the Nepal Mandala. When Mahadev visited to Nepal Mandala, the most beautiful lady was planting paddy in the field. He diplomatically engaged with her and fell in love. After a month later, the girl became pregnant. When the girl informed Mahadev that she was pregnant, Mahadev scared because the baby will be like him. He ran away. The girl also left the society and started to live alone in new place. She gave birth a robust son without face. Mahadev cursed for faceless baby because of fear of public. He thought that if the baby will have face, he will have similar to Mahadev. When the baby grown up, he started musical instrument playing and dancing. By observing the immense ability of the boy, god Indra sent his own Gandharva (Musical caste) and Apsara (beautiful girl in heaven) to learn music and dance in the Nepal Mandala. When the learned group of Gandrava and Apsara returned, they started the musical dance culture in heaven. Then the faceless boy trained music and dance to the Newar community. This folk version of Mahadev with music, dance and songs are worshipped in various names like Guru Natraj, Natyasor and Nasa:dhay. This story is also included in the hymns of the Dapha. It shows the relations of various gods and humans interest on love, sex, music and dance.

Therefore, in Newar community, when learned musical instrument playing and music, they used to go Kaplas/Kabilas to worship Nasa:dhay. In each community centers or Nasals (squires) in Kitipur and including Kathmandu Nasa:dha god's statue was carved and installed in the temple of Nasa:dha.

Similarly, Dapha Gurus said that Gunla tradition has long historical as well as etymological foundation in Dapha culture. Gun means ninth and la means month as per Nepal Sambat of Lunar calander of the Newar community. They claimed that Gunla (the ninth month) is the holy month for Newar Buddhists. It starts from *Sbrawan Shuklapaksba Pratipada to Bhadra Shuklapaksba Pratipada*.

They tried to connect Gunla with religious mythology and old textual records. They said:

According to Swayambhu Mahapuran, Gunla festival was started by Manjushree by bearing witness of Swayambhu Mahachaitya. It is believed that Gunla festival was started nine months after established of Swayambhu Mahachaitya. According to religion, Lord Buddha took responsibility to feed human beings on

Shrawan and Bhadra months because of scarcity of food due to heavy rain. And Lord Buddha uprooted the yam leaf and feed to the human beings and saved from starvation (G. Maharjan, and K. Maharjan, personal communication, August 25, 2024) .

It is a holy month, people visit to worship Lord Buddha in Swayambhunath, Chaityas and the other holy places related to the philosophy and symbols of Buddha. Devotional music is sung, different types of musical instruments are played such as Dhaa Baja, Khin Baja, Dhime Baja, Trumpets etc. People pray to the god, there would be no calamities, floods, landslides, diseases etc. by lighting lamps and playing devotional songs with Dapha music. All type of devotional songs are sung especially Newari songs relating to Lord Buddha and Lord Narayan (Hindu God).

Jay Namō Shree Buddhā Bhagawan (because of “Gunla” relating to Lord Buddha).

Narayan Ju Gya Sisa Rasana (From Tulasi Yakadashi, it is believed that Narayan goes to the underworld (Paatal Lok) and sleeps for months)

Dapha songs are sung early in the morning to wake up people because it is the rainy season, old and mud houses would get devastated by floods and landslides. The hymns expressed reverence to the folk gods: gods of disease, gods of rain, gods of disaster and hunger. In the songs, participants of Dapha expressed readiness to offer help to the needy people. They try to console the natural disaster affected and suffering people. They asked kinds of services needed to the needy people. Dapha Gurus said that the performance followed both lunar and sun calendars. The temporal organization of the Dapha music is managed and performed 24 hours of each day, with different content and music of different days of the week, full moon time (Sukla Pakchya 15 days) and dark moon (krishna Pakchya, 15 days) time of each month, and annual cycle.

Therefore, Dapha Bhajan is not only concentrated on the characteristics and philosophy of Buddha, and Hindu but also aware of lay people about possible disasters and everyday business. Food was scarce in the rainy months because corn and paddy take time to harvest. People have finished winter stock of cereal production. There was no such market and availability of a cash economy among the lay people. Dapha hymns integrated folk cultural practices. The songs of Machhendranath included devotion of the agrarian community to the rain god. The detail story based hymns were sung and played during April-May months of every year. Therefore, Dapha integrated Hindu-Buddhist and animistic or folk religious characteristics. The Guru and other informants argued that admixture of the royal palace, temple, and folk cultures are included in the Dapha.

Musical Integration

Participants argued that musical language is better understood and remembered by the god. Common people also preferred to articulate their voices on musical patterns and melodies with the integration of musical instruments. The group of people make the music and songs audible, melodious, and social. Both Music and hymns are social construction. The group eventually form a social organization called *Khal*.

There was no unanimity about the historical trajectory of the origin and spread of Dapha (music and performance) culture among the Newars of Kathmandu valley. Ramesh Maharjan (whose grandfather and father run Dapha training center called Aakhche and he had completed course of Dapha training) believed that the kings managed sacred Bhakti and praise songs similar to other South Asian classical songs and music, in the palace, temples and community in the valley. Ramkrishna Duwal and Pragyaman Pradhan (75 years old cultural historian) argued that Bhakti music was brought by Tirhutiya Malla when they migrated in the valley from North India. Earlier settlers in the valley must have social and religious music and songs. They added that Dapha music appeared as a mixture of local social music, Hindu religious devotional music, and Buddhist tantric music. Prayagman Pradhan argued that Dapha was developed from Bhajan (Hymn), during Jaydev's period in 17th century. Both Bhajan and Kirtan (prayer for contribution) have religious connotations. The musical organization, Raga, metre (tal), temporal and rich contents reflect not only the socio-economic structure

but also articulate rich traditional indigenous knowledge, gender status and political culture of the period. All the informants agreed that Dapha music integrated Tals of Sanskrit –Hindi of South Asian tempo, and Newari and local versions of Nepali Tals. When observing the temporal order and musical rhythm of Dapha, both the contents and Tal followed the temporal order of solar and lunar calendars, daily routine, weekly schedule, month-based contents and Tal.

In terms of musical instruments, Khi (two side barrel-drum) and Tah cymbals the main instruments. When Dapha started, the drummer with jhyalica cymbals and trumpet was playing. Both scholars and informants agreed that when Dapha came into the folk culture and religious practices, regional languages, musical varieties, and local expert composition added variation and differentiation in Raga and Tal. When the trainers trained their successors, slight differences were overlooked. Because of the liberal folk culture owned by the particular community, the differences of Dapha music create problem of authenticity and unanimity and school of text of the Dapha. In the contents of Dapha, Hindi-Maithili, Newari and Sanskrit languages are used. The linguistic integration indicates the cultural and musical integration of Dapha music. The Gurus argued that most of molding in the Dapha Raga and Tal (classical indian to indigenous Newari) are features of the homeland musical culture, religion and livelihood practice of the people. They said that words and melody of the verse are common feature of classical and devotional singing in south Asian and all Dapha in Kirtipur and valley.

The Newars celebrate numerous feasts, festivals and Jatras throughout the year, where music play vital role of their cultural performance. Ghode Jatra , Lakhe Jatra , Bisket (Biska) Jatra , Mha Pooja , Yamaripunhi , Gai (Saparu) Jatra , Ropai Jatra , Machchhindra Nath Jatra , Kumari Jatra etc ,are few to name of Newari cultural performance where music is an important phenomena. Every Jatra and cultural ceremony has a special event and value. Newari music plays a great role for the identity of the Newars. Various Jatras and other cultural ceremonies cannot fulfill without musical activities in Newari community. Hence, music is a most important part of Newari people.

Prayagman claimed that the Dapha culture gradually owned by the Jyapu (agricultural community) of the Newar despite whole Newar communities engaging in the past. There are some separate Dapha Khala of different Newar communities, most of the Dapha and Dapha training centers managed by Jyapu (agricultural community). When we observed performance of Dapha Music at Chitu Bihar Falcha, and Layaku Darbar both males and females of different ages gathered at the public house and joined the Hymns. Initially, an oil lamp was lit. One of the male Gurus struck the Tal (three times) for the honor of Nasa:dhya god. The drummer followed the Tal with other instruments. Then, the Tah cymbals were used to deliver the blessing of the god. After oil lamp worshipping, the group greeted by saying 'Bhayati' (I bow to you). The group shared information about the community, cultural events, their participation, and general communication. Women also participated both hymn singing and the distribution of tea and snacks at the end of the hymns. The group has strong cooperation and solidarity for decision-making of visits to various religious places and other community activities.

Women's engagement in musical group was not new when observed North Indian classical and devotional hymn singing. We have observed a group of women singing hymns at Chitu Bihar and layaku Falcha at the morning. Ramesh and Dapha Guru argued that the women's inclusion in traditional Newari musical institutions is a recent phenomenon. There were various stories and belief systems for the seclusion of women in Dapha. Pragyaman Pradhan said that girls engagement in Dhimay band was earlier than Dapha. On the occasion of the New Dhaya Bhintuna procession, (Newari New year welcome really), many females played flute, Dhimay drum, and other musical instruments. Recently, a few number of women started engaging Dapha Khala at Kirtipur. Widdess (2013) argued that Newar girls started Dhyme but rarely observed Dapha. He noted that Dapha band is managed by a group of male singers of farmer castes of the Newars. On the basis of observations and information from informants, it can be argued that Dapha was exclusively male's devotional musical space till the 1990s. Women are recently trained and included in the Newari musical institutions.

Gambhirman Maharjan said that before talking about women's engagement in Dapha Khal, the relation between the Newar women and Nasadhya myth was important. Women were forbidden to worship and look face of Nasadhya in the Newar community. Buddhasaran Maharjan (about 40 years Dapha Guru from Panga) and Ramesh Maharjan argued that the Dapha Guru trainers denied women to train Dapha in the past. They believed that religion did not allow girl as Dapha team. Religion and religious values were powerful from till 1990s in Kathmandu valley. Though, they could participate to serve foods, drinks and snacks to the participant, they did not engage musical instrument and hymns before 1990s. Regime change in 1990 was not only political change, it set journey of Nepalese to the notion of gender inclusion, social inclusion, multi-culturalism, freedom of individual to choose skills and trainings. It opened the debate of social inclusion, and empowerment of marginalized and indigenous women. Girls started to play Dhyime first and all other musical instruments.



Women at Dapha Bhajan near Chithubihar

Source: fieldwork, 2024.

There were many logics of women exclusion in Dapha musical institutions in the past. Prayagman Pradhan argued that women have heavy workload during the agrarian community. Dapha was particularly organization of Jyapu community of the Newar. Jyapu women worked agricultural work. At morning and evening, they have to cook food and cleaning including household chores. They were restricted to enroll evening Dapha apprenticeship. Being agrarian community, they have to manage cooking materials and labour management. They could not stay late night. Though ethnic women were empowered and considered relatively free. Patriarchy influenced Newar culture and society. They were restricted to night stay out of home and hometown. Dapha training held at late evening. The Dapha Gurus and Prayagman Pradhan argued that girls were excluded because of their monthly cycle of menstruation. Menstruated women were considered pollution and Nasadhya god denied their engagement during the period. Pregnancy and postnatal periods were considered sensitive not only physically but also culturally. They argued that chastity and purity of women were controlled and cared not only among the Newars but also Parbatiya and around the world in general. Their

When we walked around the Kirtipur, we observed three Dapha Khals with male and female participants. Layaku Durbar Dapha, Chitu Bihar Dapha and Bahirigau Dapha numbers of women participants joined and followed hymns and played musical instruments. At Indrayani temple Dapha, female participants are occasionally observed. Interestingly, We observed young boy about 12 to 15 years old also joined the team in most of the Khal. When observed all these, questions of change particularly girls inclusion and influencing factors of inclusion are asked with informants.

Informant claimed that the decline of agriculture provided time and work freedom for the women. These days, most of the Newar girls enrolled schools and many of them are well educated. Political and civil society engagement promoted gender equality issues in all sectors and institutions of society. Government also implemented social inclusion policy in all sectors of development programs. Ramesh Maharjan told that a groups of girls (20 girls) have successfully completed Dapha music training recently. Girls are interested and more conscious about traditional culture and identity. Many of them are distracted because Dapha music is not commercial music. Most of them are oriented to economic profit oriented activities. Ramesh Maharjan added that he made provision of tea-snacks support for all Dapha Khal of Kirtipur municipality when he was Mayor in 2017. Political narratives of the Dapha music are also linked with Newar identity.

Discussions: Poly-religiosity

Dapha Khal as a poly-religious musical and social performance of the Newars contributes to the importance of religion in decolonizing perspectives in anthropology. Anthropological knowledge, particularly about the classification of religion and culture, was produced during the colonial period. In the context of the emergence of anthropology as a colonial child, the theoretical orientations of the classical anthropologists are criticized (Sinha, 2021). Their establishment of civilized culture (white European) and religion (monotheism) is also analyzed through the lens of racial and Eurocentric essentialism (Asad, 1993). Tylorian notion of the evolution of religion on fixed stages indicated stages of cultural evolution and those who believed in animism are categorized as savage society (Tylor, 1871). Polytheism was categorized as a barbarous society, and monotheism is the indicator of civilized culture. This is a colonial understanding of religion. In the case of Asian and typically South Asian society, many people, no matter whether they live in urban or rural settings, practice multiple religions simultaneously. The Newars mostly settled in the capital city of Nepal, believed and practiced Hindu-Buddhist and folk religious practices at the same time. The context of poly-religious practices and performance observed in multiple socio-cultural behaviors. The article focuses on the Dapha Khal musical performance. It tries to decolonize the monoreligious modernity and notion of western white civilized culture. Music and religion are observed as embedded phenomena while many religious culture performed with music. Hindu, Buddhist and all other devotional hymns are evidences of integration of religion and music. The Dapha Khal practice also integrates various religions (poly-religiosity) and diverse musical traditions (poly-musicology) of South Asian tradition.

On the basis of observations and findings presented above, it can be said that Dapha music was systematized by the devotional singers during the Malla period. Initially, it was practiced in the palace and courts. Gradually, a folk cultural version of Dapha appeared with a mixture of Hindu-Buddhist and animist religious characteristics. Because of Hindu-Buddhist, and animist integration of Dapha contents and practices, the Newars followed and maintained religious harmony among various religious people. It articulates agrarian culture and the importance of god-human-nature and cosmological relationships. The religious community believes that human society and culture are possible with the grace of the gods and nature. Similar contents are noted and expressed in the musical hymns. The clear articulation of hymns and music related to Machhendranath as rain god, the importance of rain for the agrarian society, love of gods indicate human procreation and the continuation of society. The culture and ecology model of Roy Rapport (1968 & 1999) helps to analyze the ramifications of the human-nature, human-nature-religion relations of the Dapha music and hymns. Being an agrarian community, people need adequate rainwater during the monsoon season. Similarly, they sang devotional hymns of Krishna, Buddha, kings, local gods, and various spirits around nature. Dapha music is the key window to understand poly-religiosity, and counter of classical evolutionists arguments of linear evolution of religion. A community multiple religious practices simultaneously though they were classified in one religion by the state record. The census question was designed in such a way that it did not allow for the recording of multiple religious belonging of a person. The enumerators also found in confusion when people said their multiple religious belonging. The evolutionist idea of mono-religious practice in civilized society is challenged by the practice of the Dapha culture. Similarly, the census enumerators of Newar community argued that they recorded one religion of a person because there was no provision to include multiple religious belonging of a person.

Archives articulate that the Dapha was devotional performance at palace and court during the Malla period. Slowly, it transformed into the folk culture of the agrarian community. It integrates Carya or Buddhist solo poetry and performance in the house of a religious family, Gitagovinda poetic song of the Radha-Krishna and folk culture of an agrarian community. Nepali (1965) and Toffin (2005) argued that Guthi was fundamental to maintain poly-religiosity, and musical integration and cultural activities of the Newars. Like Guthi, Dapha Music has also wider social, cultural, religious, agricultural, and psychological ramifications in the community. It integrates them socially and psychologically. In all seasons and months, different hymns and mythic stories of god, nature, and spirits are sung in order of Dapha song irrespective of their economic, religious, and caste status. During Gunla (ninth month of Newari calendar), Dapha team in many Falcha (public setting houses), and different temples continued a month-long Dapha hymn. It enriches the participant's poly-religious values and respect toward various religious groups. Tingey (1994) argued that traditional Nepali music culture has been rapidly changing among different communities of Nepal. In this context, participation of females in Dapha music is considered a cultural change over time. The inclusion of women and different castes, age group, strengthened social harmony, gender inclusion and girls' education became prominent development issues in Nepal after 1990. The Nepalese constitution 2015 and social inclusion policies ensured the participation of women in formal socio-political institutions. Similarly, right to the development of arts, literature, music, and cultural heritages are listed under the fundamental rights of the citizens (Constitution, 2015). All communities have rights to the institutional development of their musical property and skills. The Newar women are very rich in their culture, relatively educated, and politically empowered joined musical institutions of their community. Their musical institutions are closed interwoven with Guthi, Dapha, and Falchha where many of the Newar collectively grow.

Despite global domination of the Western and modern musical bands, Dapha musical culture maintained its own values, cultural orientation and social harmony in Kirtipur. It is very difficult to preserve traditional music in the age of globalization, commercialization and musical domination of the West (Tingey, 1994). Large numbers of local and ethno-musical values and musical culture have been lost. The community trained young male and female poly-religious musical culture to the younger generation.

Conclusion

Dapha Khal maintained poly-religiosity despite the hegemonization of the Western commercial music and mono-religious ideology of civilized society. The Dapha culture provides decononized perspective on religion and music. Tylor's theory of religion, based on the idea of evolutionism that treated 'animism' as a feature of primitive religion, was discarded by postcolonial theorists. In recent times, scholars have again revived the concept of animism in the course of decolonizing the evolutionary concept. Dapha integrates not only among people notwithstanding of their caste, class, gender, and age but also harmonize relations between different gods and human, nature and humans. Dapha music challenged evolutionists logic of linear evolution of religion from animism to monotheism. It provides evidence that a modern and civilized person could practice multiple religious values simultaneously. Animism and polytheism are also characteristics of modern people. The Dapha Khal cultivates collective orientation and social integration. It integrates religion, language, music, and different strata of society. When participants gathered every morning or evening, they shared language, food, decision and community work. They decide on collective pilgrimages, share pain and pleasure, including food and other materials. The gathering and hymns contents make them more liberal about religious and cultural differences. They argued that they are friendly with nature, plants, and other human beings. There are rare conflict cases among the participants of Dapha Khal. Interestingly, Dapha apprenticeships are excellent mediums of cultivation of poly-religious value, traditional knowledge transfer among the new generations.

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