THE BAJA GUTHI OF BADIKHEL

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In search of ancient sources of Newar Music our attention was drawn to the Lele stone inscription of Sivadeva and Amsuvarma, dated samvat 526 (Licchavi period, c. 604 A.D.). The stone tablet stands in a little garden south of the main road of Lele’s Majha tol. The Sanskrit inscription has been published in Abhilekh Samgraha, vol. 1, p. 29-31 (1961), and translated and commented upon by Joši (1973), Vajmacarya (1973), and Regmi (1983).

The stone inscription of Lele. Today most of its has been scratched off by helpful villagers trying to remove the lichens with blades, in order to enable visiting scholars to read the text.
The inscription mentions a vāditra gausthikā (in Nepali: bājā guthi = a group of musicians), endowed with a land donation of ten mānikā. According to Vajācārya (1973: 284-289) the Licchavi gausthikās are similar communal institutions as the guthis of the Malla period, and those of today.

The ancient name of the Lele was Lembati drāṅga (= Lembati town), indicating the existence of several smaller settlements in the vicinity (ibid. 218-221). Bādikhel is a village situated behind a small ridge north of Lele, inhabited by a mixed population of Paharī and Bāhun-Chetrt. According (Kirāta) settling in the Kathmandu Valley before the Licchavi conquered it.

During his survey of Bādikhel, Sharma (unpubl.: 10) discovered the existence of three unusual guthis with names similar to those mentioned in the Lele inscription, e.g. bājā guthi, Indra guthi, and patākā (= flag) guthi. According to our knowledge, guthis of these names are not found in other places of the Kathmandu Valley. Newar music guthis are never called bājā guthi or bājā guthi, but are named after the type of music they support, e.g. dāphā khalaḥ, dhiṃay khalaḥ, bhajan khalaḥ, etc. This coincidence strongly supports that these Bādikhel guthis are indeed descended from those mentioned in the Lele inscription.

We visited Bādikhel and interviewed the members of the bājā guthi. The leader (thakāli) of this music group is Purna Bahūdur Paharī. He plays the sacred drum (in Paharī: guru dhemā) representing Nāsahdyāḥ, the Newar god of music and dance. As there is no Nāsah shrine in Bādikhel, this drum is worshipped during a Nāsah pūjā which includes sacrificing a cock to the music god.

The ensemble consists of five drums (dhemā), two pairs of cymbal (bhuśyāḥ), and one bronze disc (tāṛtāṛ) which broke recently.

The drums are repaired by a drum maker (Kulu) from Sundhāra, Patan, who receives thirteen pāṭhi of rice per year and participates in a ritual feast (bhve) during Caitra full moon. During the Rānā period the group had in their possession four ropani of land at a place called Harramūla, from which they got two muri rice per year to cover their expenses. This land was lost during the 1963 land reform.

During the Buddhist processional month (gūlā) the group takes a daily round of the ritual village circuit (pradaksinā). This happens in the early morning around 6 a.m. On the day after new moon the group proceeds to Bungamati to play at the shrines of Bungadyāḥ and Bhailadyāḥ. On their return to Bādikhel the group plays invocations for their village gods before proceeding to the houses of the four spokesmen (mukhiyā) who receive musical
offerings. During Masir and Asadh there are two ritual offerings (chema paja) at the shrines of Ganes and Devi, where the whole village gathers, and the dhem group plays.

Purna Bahadur Pahari with the guru dhem (right) and the other instruments of his bajar guthi

During Caitra full moon these two gods are carried around the village on the pradaksina route and the musicians precede the gods.

The Bajikhel dhem group circulating around the shrine of Bungadya at Bungamati
The drumming repertoire consists of the following pieces:

1. *Dyaḥlavgyu*, the invocation of the music god, must be played at the beginning and at the end of every music performance. This piece is also used to invoke other gods, for example when an offering has been completed.

2. *Lā dhemā thāyagu* is played while walking from one locality to another.

3. *Calni* is played while staying at a locality for some time, for example when waiting for the completion of an offering.

4. *Dyaḥ căhuligu* is played while circulating around a god.

5. *Yāh nyāgiyu* is played exclusively while accompanying the gods Devī and Ganeś during their jātrā.

6. *Khukāygu dhemā thāyagu* is played for special entertainment amidst large gatherings of people.

The following transcription shows

A. the Badikhel pucāhāgu dyahlāygu, and

B. the cicāhāgu dyahlāygu of the Bhaktapur dhimaybājā (see Wegner 1986).
With the exception of the encircled section the two pieces are almost of an identical structure. The tempo, however, differs considerably. The Baḍikhel group plays at about half the speed of most of the Bhaktapur groups. Though only the tailpieces of the two invocations have been transcribed here, the similarities are so striking that one can say that both the versions must have evolved from the same source. The Bhaktapur version of the complete invocation certainly is more elegant and convincing from the structural point of view. It would be too early to decide which is the older and which is the corrupt one. Only a comparative study of the dhimay repertoire of various Newar settlements could answer this question. At the first glance, the Baḍikhel repertoire appears to be far more archaic than the Bhaktapur pieces which reveal a richer variety of patterns and the more advanced structural forms.

However, if we accept the above conclusions about the origin of the biṣā guthi of Baḍikhel, we can state that as early as in the 7th century A.D. dhimaybija had already acquired its function as a ritual drumming ensemble among the Newar. No doubt, in those
days Lembaṭi draṇga must have had a variety of musical traditions, of which the Badikhel dhimaybâjâ is the sole survivor.
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