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# Music under development: children's songs, artists, and the (pancayat) state

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# Music under development: children's songs, artists, and the (pancayat) state

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In September 1993, Gopal Yonjan (an important personality in the field of Nepali music) released a book-plus-cassette set with songs for children. The cover of the book shows children in dresses typical of different Nepali regions, and these children hold up musical symbols from both East and West: the note-syllables of *sa*, *re*, *ga*, *ma*, and *pa* together with a treble clef and an eighth note. On top of this, the name of the book, *Git Manjari*, is inscribed into the five lines of Western staff notation. In the book – beside the lyrics and *saragam* notation of the songs – there are instructive comments. These comments are obviously there to educate the music teacher as much as the students. It is suggested how each song can be performed (group, solo singers, with dance, from stage, etc.), illustrations show where the various notes are on the keyboard, and there are comparisons into Western ways of putting music on paper (D major scale, tone-names, etc.). As to the lyrics, we meet in one of these songs a greedy cat, and in another song we are treated with one didactic proverb for each of the ten fingers of the two hands. All the songs – which are targeted at children between four and ten years old – are also found on the accompanying cassette.

Of course, it was not his songs for children that elevated the late Gopal Yonjan (1943-1997) to be seen as one of Nepal's (and Darjeeling's) absolute top musical artists. He is remembered as a composer, as a songwriter, as a part of the legendary *Mitjyu* constellation with Narayan Gopal, as a flutist, and maybe as a studio-owner and college teacher (of music, at the Padmakanya Campus). Among his works, one might mention songs such as *Birsera pheri malai nahera* (sung by Narayan Gopal, lyrics Nagendra Thapa), *Makhamali colo cahidaina* (the radio hit sung by Mira Rana), or *Kalakala salasala* (the hit from the film *Kanchi* where Aruna Lama sang Chetan Karki's lyrics). In the context of Gopal Yonjan's oeuvre, the songs for children in *Git Manjari* appear marginal.

In a similar way children have been assessed as marginal in Nepali studies (Gellner 2004). One of the most striking developments during Nepal's last half century is certainly the explosive growth in schools (see, for instance, Liechty 2003: 57–8, 212–14, 264). The implications of this explosion for youth culture are thoroughly investigated in

for instance Mark Liechty's (2003) study of the rising middle class, and in the studies on various new forms of Nepali music by Paul Greene (2001, 2002/03; Greene & Henderson 2000; Greene & Rajkarnikar 2000). Children's songs, on the other hand, remain unmentioned here as well as in the research at large – as the overviews of Nepal's musical scenes in the leading music encyclopedias (Moisala 2000; Wegner *et. al.* 2005) testify.

Indeed, marginality seems to be characteristic of children's songs, whatever the context in which we consider them. They are – as the Gopal Yonjan case illustrates – on the fringe of the modern musical developments in Nepal, where the central genres have been those of modern songs and (folklorized) folk songs. And in the educational context, children's songs appear as similarly marginal. Compared to the compulsory, comprehensive teaching – with centrally approved textbooks – in Nepali and social studies, singing was an activity on the periphery of school practice and music was not even an explicit part of the curriculum (Ragsdale 1989: 118; see further below).

Yet this marginality may well be deceptive. As I hope will be clear in course of this article, studying children's songs, as cultural artifacts and as artistic and educational practices, lands one on important, contested and central ground.

### **Children's songs, artists, and contexts**

This is an introductory study of one particular musical “genre” or corpus within the modernized Nepali musical territory: children's songs. While songs *for* children, produced by adult artists, are easily discerned as a sub-category within modern Nepali music, they are not referred to with one, consistent term. The term *ketaketika githaru* (“children's songs”) is sometimes employed, and so is the English translation. Moreover the audience can be targeted explicitly with various other appellations for children (*bal*, *balak*, *balika*, *baccha*) or school classes (*kaksha*) as well as only implicitly, by means of the style of music and text or of the textual contents.<sup>1</sup>

The study covers these songs as music and as texts, but also the people – teachers and artists like Gopal Yonjan and many others – who have produced them. Cultural artifacts such as these songs are of course not produced in a vacuum but in a contextual matrix of conditions and processes – or from the actor's perspective, a matrix of resources and opportunities. I assume the text–context relation to be dialectical: while the contextual

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these designations for children's songs appear under Sources, below.

topography in important ways conditions what ways the cultural practice can take and what shapes the cultural artifacts can assume, a cultural practice such as music in its turn helps shape the topography of the contextual terrain.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, I will invoke the contexts we need in order to make sense of children's songs as artistic/educational practice. It so happens that the pancayat state, its cultural and educational policies, and its rhetoric and ideology feature importantly in these contexts. Both the communications sector (including various cultural institutions) and education were important enough in pancayat Nepal to be the subject of systematic planning – the Communication Service Plan and the Education Systems Plan were both launched in 1971 – and the state was (and is) assumed to control these areas in significant ways. This will lead us to examine both the nature of this control and the state as an actor; and opposition to the state and to pancayat ideology will, therefore, be invoked as another context necessary to make sense of children's songs.

This being said – and though children's songs are an excellent empirical case for the study of, say, pancayat ideology – it is still children's songs as uncharted cultural ground and not the analysis of pancayat ideology as such that motivates the study. Another thing that might need to be pointed out is that the study looks at the production, not reception, of culture; whatever "effects" these songs may have on the children (and other people) who sing and listen to them is beyond the scope of the investigation.<sup>3</sup>

### **A case of music under development**

Much of the contextual matrix can be subsumed under one word: development. This, of course, is a complex and contested notion. However, the notion will be employed here not as a tool for the analysis, but to indicate promising areas for analysis.

For the present purposes, the notion can be summarized like this.<sup>4</sup> Development is both process and intention. As a process, development can denote economic growth,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Grandin (1994) on the role of music in the urbanism of the Kathmandu Valley.

<sup>3</sup> "Culture", as the concept is employed in this study, is taken to indicate ways of life as well as "meaningful forms" (Hannerz 1992) but in my understanding, culture includes "meanings" only inasmuch as these are *public* (Geertz 1973: 12) and *not* the private properties of subjective consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> The summary draws upon the discussions of "development" as a notion in Schech & Haggis (2000, esp. pp. 2, 15, 74) and Nederveen Pieterse (2001, esp. pp. 5–7, 101, 105).

modernization, Westernization but also something that brings about victims as much as beneficiaries. As an intention, it is assumed that one can intervene in and manage development. Moreover, development can denote the international development “industry”. In Nepal, of course, development aid has been “a trickle turning into a torrent” (Mishra & Sharma 1983; quoted in Pigg 1992: 497 fn.12). And within Nepali studies, the discussion of development as aid, of donors and NGOs, and of the ideology of *bikas* has become a rather fertile subfield<sup>5</sup>.

In this study, children's songs as a musical genre and practice will be related to development in three different ways, each with its analytical strategy:

1. The development of music. Music – children's songs – itself can be “developed”: new musical genres, new instruments and ensembles, new techniques for composition and arrangement. So my first analytical strategy is to start out from children's songs as *music*, and to see the principal context as the *cultural* apparatus (see below) where the state's aims can be seen in communication and media policies.
2. Music for development. Music – children's songs – can be a tool for development, like for instance in “consciousness-raising” songs. So the second analytical strategy is to start out from children's songs as *texts*, and to see the principal context as the *educational* apparatus where the state's aims can be seen in educational policies.
3. Artists and opportunities. Development – in both of the two senses given above – creates new arenas for music and demand for (new forms of) music and with this, it provides new opportunities for musical artists. Consequently, the third analytical strategy starts out from how musical artists navigate in and against the partly state-controlled cultural and educational apparatus.

### **The development of music: the modern musical conglomerate**

During the three decades of partyless pancayat democracy, in 1962–1990, nation-building with its “double agenda” of development as well as integration (Onta 1996a: 220) came to the forefront (see, among many others, Burghart 1994 or Pfaff-Czarnecka

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the influential study by Pigg (1992) or the recent contributions to SINHAS by Prasain (1998) and Fujikura (2001).

1997). The infrastructure for national integration was greatly expanded. When there were very little roads outside the Kathmandu Valley before the mid 1950s, a network of roads connecting major towns inside the country and Nepal with both India and China had been completed already by 1972 (Seddon, Blakie & Cameron 1981:ch 7). The large growth in education (see i.a. Ragsdale 1989: 14, Liechty 2003: 57–8, 212–14) and the infrastructure of communication and culture followed the same pattern.<sup>6</sup>

Along with its cultural and physical infrastructure Nepal had expanded what Ulf Hannerz (1992: 81–84) – following C. Wright Mills (1963) – theorizes as a “cultural apparatus”.<sup>7</sup> In the Nepali case, the cultural apparatus was to a large degree founded upon patronage and sponsorship from the state. From a musical point of view, the most significant parts of the cultural apparatus (devised partly according to the Communication Service Plan of 1971) were Radio Nepal, the Shri Ratna Recording Corporation bringing out discs and cassettes, the National Theater staging performances of modern “operas”, the Royal Nepal Film Corporation producing films, and of course the Royal Nepal Academy with such musical notabilities as Amber Gurung on board. Add to this the infrastructure of schools and the educational apparatus<sup>8</sup>, and we have a rather powerful machinery for the production of new forms of music – children’s songs among them.

In a way, modern Nepali musical practice is a result of the state’s cultural engineering for nation-building purposes and of the cultural infrastructure. Modern Nepali music comprises the genres that in contrast to various local “ethnic” or “folk” traditions are typically described as belonging to “national culture” – alternatively, using Slobin’s (1993) notion, we can say that they belong to the Nepali superculture.<sup>9</sup> The development of this modern musical conglomerate was roughly coeval with the pancayat era and

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<sup>6</sup> This and the following has been presented more elaborately in Grandin (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Following Hannerz (1992: 82) I see the cultural apparatus as made up by organizations and *milieus* for artistic work and the like, and of the means which make such work available to the public. In contrast to Hannerz, however, I do not include scientific and general intellectual work in what this apparatus deals with; consequently, mine is a more restricted understanding.

<sup>8</sup> The educational apparatus can be understood in analogy with the cultural apparatus, though of course centered upon educational, rather than artistic, work. (In Hannerz’s 1992 theorization both these apparati would be included in the cultural apparatus.)

<sup>9</sup> For an adaptation of this notion to the context of Nepali music, see Grandin (2005).

centered upon two genres: *adhunik git* (“modern song”) and *lok git* (“folk song”).<sup>10</sup> As the cover of Gopal Yonjan’s *Git Manjari* – where traditionally dressed Nepali children and *sa-re-ga* note-syllables mix with a Western treble clef, an eighth note, and five-line staff notation – illustrates so well, the modern conglomerate has always been deliberately hybridizing. In a wide area, from Morocco to India, large orchestras mixing local and Western instruments (notably string sections) were devised to play film and radio music (Laade 1971: 228–31), and the development of the Nepali modern conglomerate was a part of this pattern. Also in Nepal, the modern conglomerate has important ties to the media – especially the radio – and the music is potentially distributed widely, to a mass audience. Still this music is not just a media product. When performed live the characteristic core modern ensemble is that of harmonium and tabla (for *adhunik git*), a *madal* (for *lok git*), and maybe a guitar though the accompaniment might well be augmented with such instruments as the *bansuri* (bamboo flute) and assorted drums (*nal*, *dholak*, *congas*).

To Nepali critics, the dependence of much of the modern conglomerate upon the state-sponsored cultural apparatus suggested that the artists of Radio Nepal etc. “were like birds in a cage” (see Grandin 1989: 24, 126–7), and there are somewhat similar assessments also in the scholarly literature (see, e.g., Moisala 1991: 81, 348, 370). True, after the 1990 *jana andolan* Radio Nepal locked away some 500 patriotic songs and maybe a few hundred folk songs; these songs were banned from broadcasting because they were too explicitly pancayati.<sup>11</sup> On the whole however, as I have argued elsewhere, it would be wrong to write off the whole of modern Nepali music as just pancayat propaganda, assigning to the artists the role of mere mouthpieces for the government (Grandin 2005: 236-38). Musically, the conglomerate of modern Nepali genres came into being by both drawing upon and breaking away from Indian models. In the 1930s, as the veteran artist Ratna Das Prakash told me, there was no such thing as Nepali music. Light classical genres and Hindi or Urdu songs were respected in those days. Nepali songs were worth nothing but ridicule: “That’s what the beggars sing!” In the development of the modern conglomerate, the pancayat state and its cultural apparatus

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<sup>10</sup> A comprehensive presentation of the Nepali modern musical conglomerate is found in Grandin (1989); additional information and/or perspectives are presented by Moisala (1991, 2000), Gurung (1992, 1993), Tingey (1994), and Weisethaunet (1998). For later (typically post-pancayat) developments – pop etc – partially rooted in this conglomerate, see Greene & Henderson (2000), Greene & Rajkarnikar (2000), Greene (2001, 2002/03), and Henderson (2002/03, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Information from Purushwattam Sapkota, Radio Nepal, on 7 February 1992.

was enrolled in the efforts to create music that was *Nepali* – just like there was a Nepali history, language, and literature.<sup>12</sup>

Beside the *adhunik git* and *lok git* already mentioned, the supercultural conglomerate includes a variety of new musical genres: songs for Nepali films, *gitinatak* (“opera”), and *rashtriya git* (“patriotic songs”). But moreover, also the songs known as – among other terms – *pragatishil* (“progressive”) belong to this conglomerate, though they were largely produced outside the state-sponsored musical institutions. This is an issue that we will have reason to discuss further below. Beside the distinction between (allegedly?) collected folk songs and the acknowledged authorship of text and music in other genres, the most obvious distinctions between the various modern genres pertain – as genre labels indicate – to the lyrics. But there are additional characteristics and contrasts among the different genres. The soft, studio-adapted singing of romantic, contemplative and individual-oriented lyrics by the solo singer in *adhunik git* is quite distinct from the motoric appeal of the madal-driven meters of many folk songs as well as patriotic and progressive songs, and the loud, group singing of political texts typical of the latter.

## Materials

So this is the musical conglomerate to which children's songs belong. To return briefly to *Git Manjari*, the back cover claims that this “is the first ever music book written specially for Nepalese children”.<sup>13</sup> But it was certainly not the first effort of a Nepali musical artist to write for children and schools. Nepali artists have produced a rather sizable corpus of children's songs part of which has been made public on cassettes, on the radio, in booklets, and even on disc records. The *primary* material under analysis here is listed (under Sources and references: Songs) at the end of this article and includes songs from the following sources:

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<sup>12</sup> See further Grandin (2005); on history, language and literature see Onta (1996b, 1997, 1999). In literature, Hindi, Urdu and English were respected; Nepali was “useless” and “unsuitable” (Onta 1997:80) and indeed Nepali was seen as a “language spoken by coolies and *kawadis*” (Onta 1996b: 42). Both in Nepal and from “exile” in India, people worked purposefully to reverse these values.

<sup>13</sup> My copy of the *Git Manjari* set disappeared long ago into the educational world of the Kathmandu Valley, but I have this quote – along with other observations on the set – in my file of field-notes.

- The two vinyl discs in the 4-song EP-format with “children’s songs” brought out on the Ratna Records label (1970s–80s)
- One EP-disc with two songs labeled as patriotic songs, also from Ratna Records (1970s)
- Booklets of song lyrics and recorded cassettes brought out independently by various artists and other actors (schools and the like) (1980s–90s)
- Informal recordings of children’s songs in Kirtipur and elsewhere (1980s–90s)
- Lyrics and recordings for proposed new school songs brought out by the Ministry for Education in 1997.

This sample of children’s songs covers the genre as it was formed in the pancayat era and as it has lived on into the post-pancayat period. The sample includes officially endorsed as well as more independently produced songs, and songs from the national as well as the local scene.

Throughout this article, the comments upon children’s songs as well as the translated quotes and paraphrases of song texts all refer to this selection. The analyses of the primary material are grounded in observations, discussions, recordings, and collection of music in the greater Kathmandu area 1985–2004.

### **Children’s songs as developed music**

Children’s songs as discussed in this article are songs *for* children, who typically sing them as part of activities regulated by the adult world. In school, the instrument that will lead and accompany the children’s singing is most probably the harmonium. But when such songs are recorded or presented on stage, there will be an arrangement for a number of different instruments. Like the composition of the melodies, the way of making the arrangement belongs to modern Nepali musical practice.

Let us start with the compositions, and with Ram Krishna Duwal’s melody for *Bansuriko dhunsanga* as given below on p. 19. Without going far into the technicalities of music analysis, we can note that this song is well adapted to be sung by actual children. The melodical phrases all begin on the first beat, are of equal length and metrically similar, and they are repeated and proceed in simple, small-step melodical movement with the sole exception of the final phrase of the verse. This composition, along with the other music presented in this article, is typical of songs for children. Melodies that move in

small steps within a restricted range and simple meters, phrases that are symmetric and few altogether, much repetition of both notes and phrases – this, I would say, is the general rule.<sup>14</sup> Of course it is not mandatory law. Guje Malakar, the Kirtipur music teacher, employs a seven-beat meter (*rupak tala*) in melodies such as *Sunko darbar bhanda* (“My country is better than a golden palace”). The range in *Bansuriko dhunsanga* is stretched quite a bit outside the usual frame of the octave. But on the whole, the composers of melodies for children create diversity within a narrow format. *Hamro git sunira’ne* (see below p. 25) starts out with eleven syllables sung to the same note. *Ka kha ga gha* (see below p. 17) at one place repeats the same note six times, and the whole melodic content does not need more than four bars of four-beat music to notate. This is expanded by a factor of 14, on the average, to the 56 bars the full song contains – in fact the rising four-note motif that opens the song is sung 34 times and makes up 30 per cent of the entire song. Similarly, the phrase, *nacchau gaunchau* (“we dance, we sing”) in *Bansuriko dhunsanga* is sung 20 times in course of the song.

As recorded at Radio Nepal and brought out by Ratna Records, children’s songs are close to the *adhunik git* “recipe” for arrangement (see further Grandin 1989, 2005), with heterophony, counter-melodies, chords and harmonic progressions. With texts mostly in the *sthai* – *antara* (refrain–verse) form, there is one melody for the refrain, another for the verse(s), and then – as part of the arrangement – melodies for the “music”, the instrumental interludes marking off the sung sections. The exact composition of the orchestra varies from song to song but strings, guitar, base guitar, vibraphone, accordion, mandolin, *bansuri*, and congas pretty much sums up the instrumentarium on the recorded songs. Like in other Nepali modern genres, the recording gives priority to the voice. The singer remains foregrounded. Beside the lyrics, also the choice of singers sets these songs off from their siblings in the modern conglomerate. When a “star” vocalist (Prem Dhoj, Mira Rana, Tara Devi) is featured, she or he interacts responsorially with a choir of children, while other songs are sung by child vocalists, solo or in a small group.

Shiva Shankar’s melody for one of these radio-recorded songs – *Dui ekan dui*<sup>15</sup> – served as signature music for the *bal karyakram* that was broadcast daily by Radio Nepal (in

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<sup>14</sup> This claim is tentative only: it is based on transcription and formal analysis of a few children’s songs along with more numerous listening impressions from other songs. To really establish the claim, of course, formal analysis of a larger sample would be required.

<sup>15</sup> See under Sources below.

1986 for instance, this program opened the evening broadcasts at 5.30 P.M.) well into the post-pancayat era and hence will probably be instantly recognized by many Nepalis.

The songs on the cassette issued by the Ministry for Education in 1997 – some 15–20 years after the Ratna Records discs – display much the same arrangement as the radio songs on the discs though with many acoustic instruments substituted by electronic ones. Groups of children sing in all these songs – but all songs are also given instrumentally, in karaoke versions. In contrast, the Swarnim School recordings (from the 1980s) on *Ketaketika githaru* work with a much more basic instrumentarium, and rely heavily on the sonorities and pre-programmed rhythms of an electronic keyboard and some harmonium as accompaniment for groups of child singers.

I was able to further confirm my observations on arrangement and performance practice in children's songs when in the 1990s, Kirtipur musicians asked me to help make informal recordings of such songs. These musicians have recorded also in the multi-track recording studios in Kathmandu or Lalitpur (for which money is needed), and also for broadcasting at Radio Nepal (for which friends inside are needed). But for playback music for the dances at Parents' Day and similar cultural performances at a school, they considered a simple "live" recording in the rehearsal room sufficient. Some of these songs were authored by well-known Kathmandu artists – notably Rayan – but most were of local manufacture. The child vocalists had been selected in the music classes where they had also learnt the songs, so they were well prepared for the recordings. The electronic keyboard would take the role of the harmonium and guide the children through the melody. In these recordings, the songs were arranged for an ensemble where adult musicians played the electronic keyboard, guitars, mandolin, flute, tabla, *madal*, congas and still other drums. This, of course, is the core modern ensemble, slightly revised and expanded.

### **Artists and opportunities**

As the careers of such musical artists as Nati Kazi and Shiva Shankar testify, the state's sponsorship of the cultural apparatus certainly opened up new opportunities and thus helped the modern musical conglomerate (to which children's songs belong) into being.<sup>16</sup> Even so, most of the people active in the field of modern music – one can think of such

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<sup>16</sup> See Darnal (2038 v.s.), Grandin (1989, 2005), Karthak (2003).

artists as Narayan Gopal, Prem Dhoj Pradhan, Raamesh or Kumar Basnet – have sought most of their opportunities elsewhere.

A principal actor in the recordings we did in Kirtipur was one local music teacher and musician. In the late 1980s, when we were almost neighbors, he was a carpenter and an able and enthusiastic musician in many genres. Much of these efforts were channeled into local cultural organizations (see Grandin 1989) which subsequently were assimilated within ISAS (*Indreni samskritik samaj*). Consequently, this musician has performed with ISAS's premier artists, including Rayan, on cassette recordings as well as numerous cultural programs live from the stage. But at about the same time, local schools started to use his obvious musical capabilities for Parents' Day programs and the like. Gradually he was able to get more regular assignments until he could earn about as much from his three or four schools as he would earn from being a carpenter.

Indeed, child-oriented musical work can provide important resources and opportunities to musical artists in a number of ways: as outcomes; as arenas for expression and creative work; and as arenas for building a reputation. Many artists have entertained links with the world of education, with everything from local schools to prestige schools and campuses. As we have seen, children's songs are tied into the modern music conglomerate by means of shared composition, arrangement, performance and recording practices, but also by means of artists – including such people as Nati Kazi, Shiva Shankar, Tara Devi, Gopal Yonjan, Rayan, and Raamesh<sup>17</sup> – who migrate between genres. Sometimes it has seemed to me that every second musical artist I know, from local talent to renowned performers and composers, has survived by teaching music. Schools and education draw people from various regions to the capital, and out again. And educational activities – from cassettes sponsored by NGOs to teaching – are natural elements in artistic careers and pathways (cf. Grandin 1994: 162–67).

With the following, second example of the artist as a teacher (and the teacher as an artist) we will also ground the discussion of children's songs in the practices where such songs were actually performed. The artist in question, Ram Krishna Duwal, can look back upon decades of teaching and recite a long list of schools where he has contributed in various ways: as a co-founder, as director of Parents' Day programs, as a teacher. We

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<sup>17</sup> Like throughout in this article, these are the names under which they are known as artists. Artists often shorten their given names, assume pen-names, leave out the "family name" that indicates caste and ethnic affiliation, and so on. For instance, according to [yomerosite.com/literature/ title%20of%20Nepali%20writer.htm](http://yomerosite.com/literature/title%20of%20Nepali%20writer.htm) Ganesh Rasik is the artist name of Ganesh Bahadur Thulung (Rai).

will meet him as the director of a Parents' Day program in a Kirtipur school during pancayat times, in 1985.

With this, we will now move on from the context of the cultural apparatus to that of the educational apparatus, and from the music-oriented analytic focus of *the development of music* to the more text-oriented focus of *music for development* (cf. above). To put it differently, we are about to witness the pancayat state's educational apparatus, in its ground-level incarnation, at work. With different analytic angles, we can see in this rehearsal the state implementing its policies in the fields of education and communication; nation-building on the ground; the construction of cultural heritage and the invention of tradition; musical modernization; and cultural activism and various forms of "resistance". There are good reasons to consider this rehearsal in some detail.

### **Music for development: a school rehearsal in the pancayat era**

Parents' Day in a private school should be an event that confirms to the parents that they have chosen a school well worth its fees. So for his 1985 Parents' Day program, Mingmar, the young headmaster of the private Kirti Madhyamik Vidyalaya school in Kirtipur, had wanted someone with a proven record to teach his primary school children songs and dances. He had commissioned a musical artist – an experienced director of music and dance living in the neighboring town of Panga – to come up with suitable pieces and spend a month rehearsing them with the students.

I went with Mingmar to take a look at these rehearsals. In the classroom the artist–director was busy supervising a line of young children who were singing and dancing.<sup>18</sup> The artist–director rose from his harmonium, stopped the children's performance and went on to demonstrate how he wanted the dance, singing along with his dancing: "Which alley is this? Which alley is that? This is the butter-seller's alley. Here comes the girl Panavati...".

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<sup>18</sup> Beside fieldnotes and tape-recording from the 1985 rehearsal, this account is based on discussions of that recording again in 1997 with both the artist–director in question, Ram Krishna Duwal, and the Kirtipur musician and music-teacher Guje Malakar. My thanks to these two eminent musicians for their help and support from 1985 and into the present, and for all their good music!

This is the song known as *Va chu galli*, a traditional song from the Kathmandu Valley and in the Newari language.<sup>19</sup>

The rehearsals had made good progress. The children were already able to perform quite a few songs and dances. Only occasionally, the artist–director filled in some words of the song text or interrupted to correct the melody or the steps of the dance (he had learnt to dance himself in his young days). The contents were mixed. After *Va chu galli* – where the children had still some problems with both text and melody of the verses but sang with enthusiasm in the refrain – came the English song “This old man”.<sup>20</sup> Then Nepali poetry set to music. “One morning (so it is said) a golden day will dawn”, or in Nepali, *Sunko din ek udauncha re*.<sup>21</sup> The colorful clouds, the singing waters, the ringing temple bells, the fragrant air – all will contribute to make this day one when hearts and flowers alike will bloom. One experienced music teacher later told me that he would dare to try this song from the sixth grade only. Laxmi Prasad Devkota’s text is not easy to understand for young people – especially not when Nepali is their second language – and the music is not really that of a school song tailored to the abilities of small children. Raamesh, the composer, has given each of the four lines of a stanza its own, and partly melismatic, melody. But the young students of Mingmar’s school mastered these difficulties.

The rehearsal went on to a piece of folk culture. The artist–director left his harmonium to pick up a *madal*, and with this drum, the *jhyau* meter (6/8 in the right hand, 3/4 in the left), the melody, and the Nepali language there was no doubt that we were now in the hills of western Nepal. Next we turned south, to the Tarai flatland, with a song in the Maithili language – the classical literary medium that has been so important to the civilization of the Kathmandu Valley. Today, though Maithili is one of Nepal’s major languages, it is not prominent in the Kathmandu Valley, and presumably none of these Kirtipur kids knew it. Still, the artist–director had taught them to sing in this language without hesitation. Moving from England to modern Nepali superculture, to the folk culture of the hills, to the Tarai, the rehearsal came back home to the Kathmandu Valley and its distinctive language, Newari:

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<sup>19</sup> Transliterated and translated as song no. 34 in Lienhard (1974).

<sup>20</sup> The role and significance of English songs in Nepali schools would merit further enquiries. This song, as recorded with children from Swarnim English School (Burungkhel, Kathmandu), and along with several other English songs (“Row, row, row your boat” and the like), is featured on the cassette *Ketaketika githaru*. See under sources below.

<sup>21</sup> See under Sources below.

*Jila chamha misa ca / Nepa maya mhyaya macca nha* – “I am one daughter of mother Nepal’s”.

And therefore, the song went on, I am not afraid of anything and I will do whatever my country may ask me. But the children sang this recent and patriotic text to a well-known traditional Kathmandu Valley melody, the one known as *Ghintangmaye*.

The children returned to Nepali with the next song. “Look around! In all directions, wherever you look, it is beautiful...”, they sang, referring to the evening in the festival of Tihar when everybody lights a lot of small oil-lamps. This autumn festival was just a few days away from the Parents’ Day. The song was based on folk song, but partly in unmistakably modern musical style – it had been written recently for such singing groups that many schools organize for fund-raising during Tihar.<sup>22</sup> At that time it is customary that children assemble to go round their village singing and asking for alms. But (as the artist–director later explained) this custom was only recently – and in fact by the agency of various schools – brought to the Kathmandu Valley.

Finally there was a music-accompanied piece of drama. It was taken from the Ramayana and the dialogue was in a mix of Nepali and English. But it started in a third language. The opening song, which the artist–director sang himself, was in Newari. Mingmar joined to help the children with their stage-acting while the artist–director was at the harmonium providing the musical accompaniment. In this music he had again taken a melody from the Kathmandu Valley (that of the song *Pashupati guheshwari*), but he also included a piece of tune from an Indian film song, the classic *Cal cal cal meri sathi* from the Hindi movie *Hathi meri sathi* (“Elephant my friend”).

Four different languages; classical epic, folk culture, modern poetry; English nursery rhyme, Indian popular culture and Nepali patriotism; songs and dances from different parts of Nepal – this was what the spectators were to be treated with a few weeks later. The audience of parents, relatives, friends of the school’s pupils – and a few specially invited notabilities taking their seats on the chairs on-stage – could hardly expect more multi-cultural variety from these children than what the artist–director had devised here. Since I was unable to attend I cannot say exactly what happened at the actual Parents’ Day event. But deeming from the usual procedure (and from photos from the occasion), it can be assumed that Mingmar the headmaster gave a speech early in the program, that bright students were called up to the stage to receive their prizes, and that further speeches were given by invited notabilities. Together with the songs and

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<sup>22</sup> *Gawai ramailo*. (See under Sources below.)

dances directed by the artist–director, all this would have amounted to several hours of didactic entertainment.

### **Nation-building and children's songs**

With this Parents' Day rehearsal we have now witnessed children's songs, schools and education as settings for modern Nepali music; for musical acculturation or creolization, for modernization or even Westernization; for cultural activism; for the efforts of the pancayat state at cultural and social engineering; for the promotion of national culture; for the promotion of ethnic culture; for resistance; for musical artists seeking opportunities; and probably more<sup>23</sup>. Last but not least, we have seen that what children sing and children's songs are not necessarily one and the same. In sum, this Parents' Day rehearsal offers good potentials as a case – an essay could easily be written on any of these issues with the rehearsal as a point of departure. Out of these issues, hybridism in children's songs, and in the modern musical conglomerate generally, has been discussed above under The development of music.<sup>24</sup> The issue of artists and opportunities has been taken up only introductorily above. The rest remain to be considered. Later in this article, children's songs as oppositional rhetoric, as well as the agency of musical artists will come to the analytical forefront. I will start out, however, from pancayat policies.

The Parents' Day program that was directed for Mingmar's school included songs and dances from different regions, communities, languages: a Maithili song from the southern flatland, Nepali songs from the rural hills, songs in Newari from the Kathmandu Valley. Beside these "folk" items there was one song written by Devkota, Nepal's most celebrated modern poet. And one of the folk melodies was sung with a patriotic text. If one is to create one nation out of Nepal's many distinct peoples, this must be how a cultural program at a school should be shaped. Irrespectively of where she lives, irrespectively of which language she learned during her first years, the student must get some acquaintance with what kind of peoples live in her country, and what kinds of customs, songs, dances they maintain. She should be helped to develop

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<sup>23</sup> The way children's songs, as texts, music and practice, take part in the construction of childhood is one further issue that comes to mind. This is an issue that cannot be treated within this article but which seems important enough to merit further research.

<sup>24</sup> See also Grandin (1989, 1995a, 2005).

patriotism towards her country. And she should be given some knowledge of the pan-Nepali superculture of which literature is such an important part.

All this was precisely what the Education Plan of 1971 prescribed. It saw schools as agents for developing, preserving, and propagating the national language, literature, culture, and arts. Practical performance was one way of acquainting the school children with all this. Training in performing arts was made compulsory in primary education. In lower secondary and secondary schools, this was included in physical education, but was also to be conducted as extra-curricular activities. To give a cultural manifestation such as the Parents' Day program at Mingmar's school should be done by each school at least once a year. And it should also take part in inter-school competitions in the performing arts. (See Amatya 1983: 22–24.)

The school textbooks that were devised in accordance with the Plan have been rather widely seen – and analyzed – as another means of policy implementation (Ragsdale 1989; Pigg 1992; Onta 1996a; Skinner & Holland 1996; de Sales 2003a). Already in the third grade – that is, in primary school – the students were taught about the various districts of their country, what people lived there, and their dress, food, and religion. They read stories set in different cultural environments. They read patriotic poems. They learned about national heroes. In this way, all Nepalis would know about Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814–1861), the father of Nepali literature; Arniko, the Kathmandu Valley craftsman and architect who went to Beijing in 1260 invited by Qublai Khan, the Emperor of China; Tenzing Sherpa, the 1953 pioneer on Mount Everest; Amsuvarman, the illustrious 7th-century ruler; Jayasthiti Malla, the reformer who was crowned in 1382 and brought peace and law to the Kathmandu Valley. Such knowledge of Nepali civilization, culture and history was given even greater emphasis in lower secondary and secondary school. (See Amatya 1983: 22–3; Ragsdale 1989: 152–3.) As Pigg (1992: 500) argues, schoolbooks “offer us a window” on state ideology: “the unity of Nepalese society (‘we are all Nepalis’), the Nepali character (peaceloving and brave), the common Nepalese heritage (from Mt. Everest to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha)” and they give “patriotic exhortations on national character and national unity”. Or in the words of another pair of analysts, these texts “worked to forge a national identity and feeling of unity” and “evoked the beauty of ‘our Nepal’, glorifying its magnificent rivers and mountains” (Skinner & Holland 1996: 279). The standardized textbooks, moreover, were “yet another way in which a homogenized notion of children and a ‘national’ childhood have been constructed” (Onta Bhatta 2001:266).

So what about children's songs? Were they, like the school textbooks, vehicles for the expression of state ideology? Let's see what happens if we consider these songs as pure

text and – without any consideration of authors, intentions, or contexts – assemble a montage of paraphrased passages and translated quotes from different children's songs.

### Children's songs: didactic, patriotic, romantic

The children's songs turned out by Nepali artists come in different varieties. As we are about to see, some songs are written as if coming from the mouth of a child, while other songs sound more like the teacher telling him how to behave. There are songs about children from an adult perspective (and in adult language) and there are songs in a simple language and addressed to children. There are songs where children are taught to love "our own country" or where they are encouraged to develop good habits and stay away from bad ones. Such moral points are often taught in a tone of sober instruction:<sup>25</sup>

ka kha ga gha, e bi si di lekh-ne ba-ni ra - mro  
*Ka kha ga gha, A B C D to write is a good habit*

*Second time, D.C. al fine*

ri - sa - u - ne, ka - ra - u - ne ru - ne ba - ni na-ram-ro  
*But to get angry, to shout, to cry is not a good habit*

kha - ja kha - ne ba - ni ram-ro bho - kai bas - ne na - ram - ro  
*To eat the snack is a good habit, to stay hungry is not good*

ko - ci ko - ci dhe - rai kha - ne ba - ni pa - ni na - ram - ro  
*But to eat too much is also not a good habit\**

Again and again – four times in the refrain only – children who sing this song tell us (and themselves) that it is good to learn how to write. Four times they sing that it is not good to get angry, to shout and to cry. Other points repeated over and over in this song is that it is good to go to school, it is good to play (but not too much), it is good to keep clean and tidy, and it is good to work. It is a bad thing to be lazy! Other songs are similarly

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<sup>25</sup> The following is from *Ka kha ga gha (Ramro naramro)*. For further details, see the list of songs under Sources below.

didactic. Be nice towards your friends. Don't lie, speak the truth. Your worst enemy is your own anger. Two times one is two, two times two is four, study carefully little children!<sup>26</sup> Learn your alphabet and your multiplication and open the door to knowledge and wisdom. Work sincerely, be industrious, this is how progress will come.<sup>27</sup> Like in Gopal Yonjan's *Git Manjari* song about a greedy cat, a fable can be employed as a way of extolling virtues and denouncing vices. *Euta kamila batoma* (*Kamila ra roti*, "The ant and the piece of bread") elaborates the virtue of cooperation. The ant cannot manage the piece of bread alone, so she calls for her friends and together they carry it home and share the meal in communion. The same message can be given in another, also indirect, way: Together small stones and earth make up a mountain, together small streams make up a big river.<sup>28</sup>

But instead of adult instruction, the words can be put as if from the children themselves. Sometimes, this is just "childish" meditations. Myau, myau little cat, come to me. Kill the mouse that destroys my clothes but don't drink my milk.<sup>29</sup> Koho, koho, the cuckoo cries, calling its friend. The friend is lost, the cuckoo weeps; the cuckoo cries: koho, koho.<sup>30</sup> Where are you going, butterflies? You are so beautiful, please don't go away. We'll plant flowers for you.<sup>31</sup> I am the beautiful daughter, but how am I to fetch the water? I'm too small to sit, but if I fill the pot while standing up my waist aches.<sup>32</sup> More typically, however, also these songs are didactic, though in a low-key way. Please buy me a pen and a book; mother and father, teach me how to talk, play, laugh, read and write.<sup>33</sup> When children tell us about how they go on a picnic with their teacher<sup>34</sup>, the lesson is still there: you should enjoy life at school and be happy that nice, adult people guide you through your learning and help you to build your character. When the clock strikes ten, it tells us to go to school, when the clock strikes one, it tells us to wash and have lunch, when the clock strikes three, it tells us to take a break from studying and to sing and dance.<sup>35</sup> To quote more extensively from another example of low-key

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<sup>26</sup> From *Dui ekan dui* (Basudev Munal; Shiva Shankar).

<sup>27</sup> From *Ka kha ga gha nga* (Bekh Bahadur Thapa).

<sup>28</sup> From *Sana sana dhunga mato*.

<sup>29</sup> From *Myau myau biralo*.

<sup>30</sup> From *Koho koho koili karayo*.

<sup>31</sup> From *Kaha jane kaha jane putaliko hul*.

<sup>32</sup> From *Mai chori sundari*.

<sup>33</sup> From *Ama malai bolna khelna*.

<sup>34</sup> In *Nepalka hami sana balbalika*.

<sup>35</sup> From *Das baje ghanti lagcha* (*Ghantile ke bhancha?*).

didacticism that tries to make the children familiar and comfortable with school as a physical setting, with its personnel and its activities:<sup>36</sup>

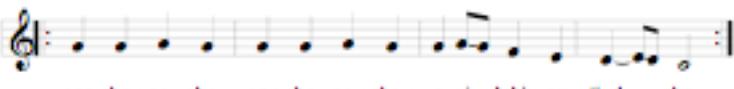
**Refrain**



ba-su-ri-ko dhu-na-san-gai nac-na ha-mi thal-chau  
 ma-da-lu-ko ta-la-san-gai gau-na ha-mi thal-chau

*To the melody of the flute we start to dance  
 To the rhythm of the madal we start to sing*

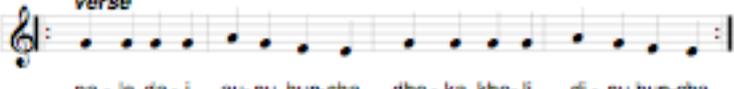
**Verse 1**



nao-chaugau-chau nao-chaugau-chau a-ni lekh-na thal - chau  
 nao-chaugau-chau nao-chaugau-chau a-ni padh-na thal - chau

*We dance and sing, dance and sing, and we start to write  
 We dance and sing, dance and sing, and we start to read*

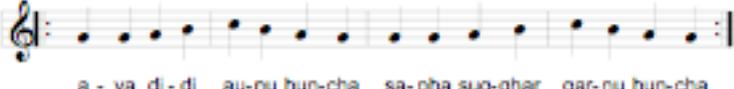
**Verse 2**



pa - le da - i au-nu hun-cha, dho - ka kho - li di - nu hun-cha  
 ghan-ti ba-jai sa-bai - la - i padh-na ja - u bhan-nu hun-cha

*Brother peon comes and opens the door  
 He rings the bell and tells us to go to read*

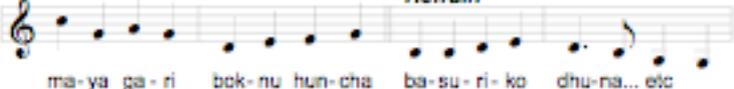
**Verse 3**



a - ya di - di au-nu hun-cha sa-pha sug-ghar gar-nu hun-cha  
 ham-ro sa-thi ro-yo bha-ne ma-ya ga - ri bok-nu hun-cha

*Sister aya comes and cleans the school  
 If our friend weeps, she lovingly takes her up*

**Refrain**



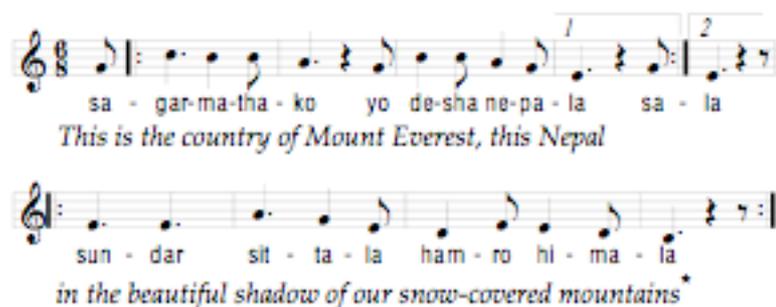
ma-ya ga - ri bok-nu hun-cha ba-su-ri-ko dhu-na... etc

*She lovingly takes her up To the melody of the flute*

In the second verse, we learn that our Miss is lovely like our mother, that our teacher lovingly teaches us, that to read is just like playing, and that school is a nice place. Here, again, the simple words are put as if coming spontaneously from the mouths of small children, but the text is not without its didactic implications. Again we meet the nice adult staff, eager to help, console and give comfort. Again school is painted as a merry place with singing and dancing. Again we are assured that to read and write is fun.

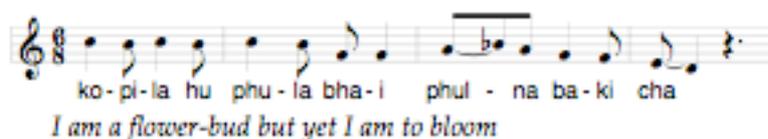
<sup>36</sup> The following is from *Basuriko dhunsanga (Ramailo skul)*.

Other songs will have children pronounce sentiments of national pride:<sup>37</sup>



Or, as other songs say: My country is dearer to me than a golden palace.<sup>38</sup> In school today, I will ask my teacher about Nepal, and then I will tell my little brothers and sisters.<sup>39</sup> When my little eyes will know the letters of the alphabet, when my little fingers will know how to write, when my little voice will know how to sing, the first word will be “Nepal – my dear Nepal.”<sup>40</sup> I will make my mother happy and serve my country.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, children are the leading lights of this country, they are the future of Nepal.<sup>42</sup>

A third orientation in children’s songs, beside didacticism and patriotism, is romanticism. One common metaphor, for instance, is that of children as flower-buds:<sup>43</sup>



The romantic images in this song are matched by a poetic form where a double rhyme – *dulna baki cha, khulna baki cha* etc. – ties verses and the refrain together and makes this song something like an expanded ghazal. Other songs display similar romanticism.

<sup>37</sup> The following is from *Sagarmathako yo desh Nepal*.

<sup>38</sup> From *Sunko darbar bhanda*.

<sup>39</sup> From *Ama malai bolna khelna*.

<sup>40</sup> From *Mero sano akhale*.

<sup>41</sup> From *Sano sano balak ma*.

<sup>42</sup> From *Sana sana bhailai maya gara*.

<sup>43</sup> The following is from *Kopila hu phul bhai*. The metaphor is found also in *Kopila hau hami* and *Aja hami sana-sana*.

Children are the buds of light<sup>44</sup>, the morning sun<sup>45</sup>, the flowers of our fate, and the future of Nepal. In their smile heaven opens. If they cry there is a landslide in our chest. They have God's own face and are the pearls of our eyes.<sup>46</sup> They wear a red rhododendron flower in their hair.<sup>47</sup> They are the twinkling stars of the earth.<sup>48</sup> These romantic descriptions are often written in the first person, as if uttered by children themselves, though no longer in simple, "childish", words: I will water the country with the nectar of immortality and make the land fertile.<sup>49</sup>

### **Children's songs and pancayat ideology**

With such songs (like with the Parents' Day program as discussed above<sup>50</sup>), the pancayat state and its Education Plan seem to have found perfect vehicles for their ideas and values. To help forging national unity and inculcating love of the motherland, patriotism is a recurrent theme in children's songs. That songwriters from a variety of ethnic backgrounds put their respective mothertongues aside and help build a body of children's songs in Nepali – the linguistic medium for national integration – further underlines this nation-building capacity of children's songs.

The didacticism in children's songs helps support the other pillar (beside national integration) of what Pratyoush Onta (1996a: 220) calls the "double agenda of nation-building", development. According to pancayat policies, education was also to bring out the manpower needed for the development of the nation. To produce the motivated, labor-loving, skillful manpower needed to develop the integrated nation, character building was important in primary school. The children should come out of school with love and respect for labor and for rural and national life, with a sense of discipline, with motivation and skills, and with the habits of self-reliance, honesty, co-operation fully formed (Ragsdale 1989: 88–91, 116–19, 205–11). Seen in this light, the didacticism in children's songs encourage the children first, to appreciate school and studying, and

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<sup>44</sup> From *Sana sana bhailai maya gara*.

<sup>45</sup> From *Sana sana bhailai maya gara*; this metaphor is also found in *Sano sano balak ma*.

<sup>46</sup> From *Sana sana bhailai maya gara*.

<sup>47</sup> From *Amalai bolna khelna*.

<sup>48</sup> From *Dui ekan dui* (Basudev Munal; Shiva Shankar).

<sup>49</sup> From *Sano sano balak ma*.

<sup>50</sup> See under Nation-building and children's songs above.

second, to develop the good habits needed in their future work – in short, these songs help with character building.

The romanticism in children's songs seems less directly pragmatic, less geared toward practical aims. Maybe what resounds in these romantic songs is the theme that Lazima Onta Bhatta (2001: 236) finds in laws as well as popular writings (long before the pancayat era) of children as "sacred beings" who "embody purity", of the child as *agyan balak* who is "ignorant, unaware, and uninformed".<sup>51</sup>

But while this romanticism may or may not sit somewhat uncomfortably with pancayat ideology, there are other things that more directly should caution us not to accept children's songs as straight-forward vehicles for the pancayat state's policies. To return again to the Parents' Day program, the repertoire here included not only songs explicitly tailored to children, but also jewels from "ethnic" (*Va chu galli*) as well as "modern" and "national" (Devkota's *Sunko din*) culture. The exact items thus included merit some further consideration. To select and promote a cultural heritage was certainly part of the pancayati nation-building agenda, but the consensual assessment of the pancayat state is that it was decidedly hostile to overt ethnic claims.<sup>52</sup> I would argue that the inclusion of a Newar folk song in the Parents' Day program was precisely an overt ethnic claim. To consolidate this interpretation, we can consider that in between the rehearsals, the director of the Parents' Day program went on stage in programs publicly celebrating Nepal samvat (see further Grandin 1995b) – one important manifestation of Newar ethnicity in the pancayat era.

And even more, though Devkota was celebrated as a national poet also in pancayat days, the idea of a golden day dawning might go further than pancayat ideology would accept. To the implications of this we will now turn.

### **People-oriented songs and progressive cultural activism**

At first sight, the Parents' Day program – like children's songs in general – might certainly look like a case of the educational apparatus carrying out its tasks in the way the pancayat state supposed it to do so. But as we have noted above, in various ways the

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<sup>51</sup> An instance of this is the song *Sana sana bhailai maya gara*, where it is said that children have god-like face (*devatako anuhar yastai*) and are the creation of god (*ishvarka srijana*).

<sup>52</sup> For instance, Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997: 434): "Any claim to ethnic identity was reduced to political subversion."

content of the program is at odds with pancayat policies. Instead it is very similar to the cultural programs staged by progressive political activists, both as anti-pancayat opposition (Grandin 1989: 42–49, 58–61, 144–59; see also Skinner & Holland 1996: 289), and into the post-pancayat era (Grandin 1993; Onta 1996c). The Parents' Day program starts to look very much like a piece of cultural activism on the school's ground.

To relate the historical background of such cultural activism, one can with Shramik khabar (2060a) choose a convenient point of departure in *Ralpa* as a performing group of artists, or as a "movement" (*andolan*; cf. Shramik khabar 2060c), in the late 1960s. The *Ralphas* had important precursors (Gokul Joshi is often cited in this role; the ex-*Ralphas* later published, composed new music for, and performed his songs in public<sup>53</sup>) and they were not primarily an ideological movement from the beginning. But with the various activist "families" (*parivar*) or "societies" (*Sankalpa parivar*, *Vedana parivar*, *Aasthaa parivar*, *Indreni samskritik samaj*) they have later gone on to found, the key artists of *Ralpa* have had an important role in what is sometimes referred to as the "cultural front" of the anti-pancayat opposition in pancayat days. (See further Grandin 1989: 125–29; 1994: 166; Rai 2060b; Shramik khabar 2060b.)

Of course, the ex-*Ralphas* were not alone here<sup>54</sup>, and moreover, songs of social commentary and protest were not exclusively something written and sung by educated, Kathmandu-based activists and artists but also a local practice. Songs referred to as *dukhako git* (song of hardship) and the like were part of local practice in various parts of Nepal in the pancayat era (Grandin 1989, 1996b on Kirtipur in the Kathmandu Valley; Holland & Skinner 1995, 1997 on "Naudada" close to Pokhara; Enslin 1998 on Chitwan). Even in contexts that are overtly ritual, such songs, with texts describing specific instances of hardships in real life and often with a critical orientation, have been a standard part of the proceedings (Grandin 1989: 1–7, 35–39; Grandin 1996b; Holland & Skinner 1995: 288). Such local practices have interlinked with the more institutionalized forms of cultural and political organizations which have contributed to local cultural activism in various ways – for instance, by publishing books with songs suitable for use in local events such as women's Tij singing groups (Holland & Skinner 1995: 289; Enslin 1998: 282) and of course by giving stage performances. Though it is sometimes said that

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<sup>53</sup> For instance, Joshi's *Garibiko suskerama*, with the refrain *Na mara gariblai. Najau angreji paltanma* ("Don't kill poor people. Don't join the British Army!") which was performed, with music by Raamesh, in Sankalpa programs and published in JG 1:53.

<sup>54</sup> See further, for instance, the list of songwriters and composers in Grandin (1996a: 176) – and these are only the authors of the 69 songs under study in that article.

the *X parivar* is the “cultural wing” of the Y Party, the actual ways in which these cultural families or organizations have been linked to one another, and to different left-leaning political parties (and factions) are rather complex (cf. Onta 1996c, de Sales 2003b: 7).

In the pancayat era these cultural activists typically 1) made a point of staying out of the state-controlled cultural apparatus (most significantly Radio Nepal), 2) explicitly took an anti-pancayat and left-leaning political stance, 3) wrote and performed songs that were socially and more or less propagandistically oriented<sup>55</sup> (and therefore would not fit with state policies for the cultural apparatus), and 4) formally or informally labeled their artistic output with such words as progressive, people-oriented, and the like. Rai (2060a: 6), in response to his own question *ke ho “janataka git”?* (what is “people’s songs?”), comes up with a number of terms which are more or less equivalent, among them *pragatishil git* (progressive songs), *janavadi git* (people-oriented songs) and *birodh git* (opposition songs). In this article, I use “people-oriented” and “progressive” interchangeably to point to the artists as well as their songs.<sup>56</sup> It should be noted, then, that “progressive” is *not* an analytic concept that I use in order to characterize songs, rhetoric or ideology, but a term picked up from the activist artists’ own usage.

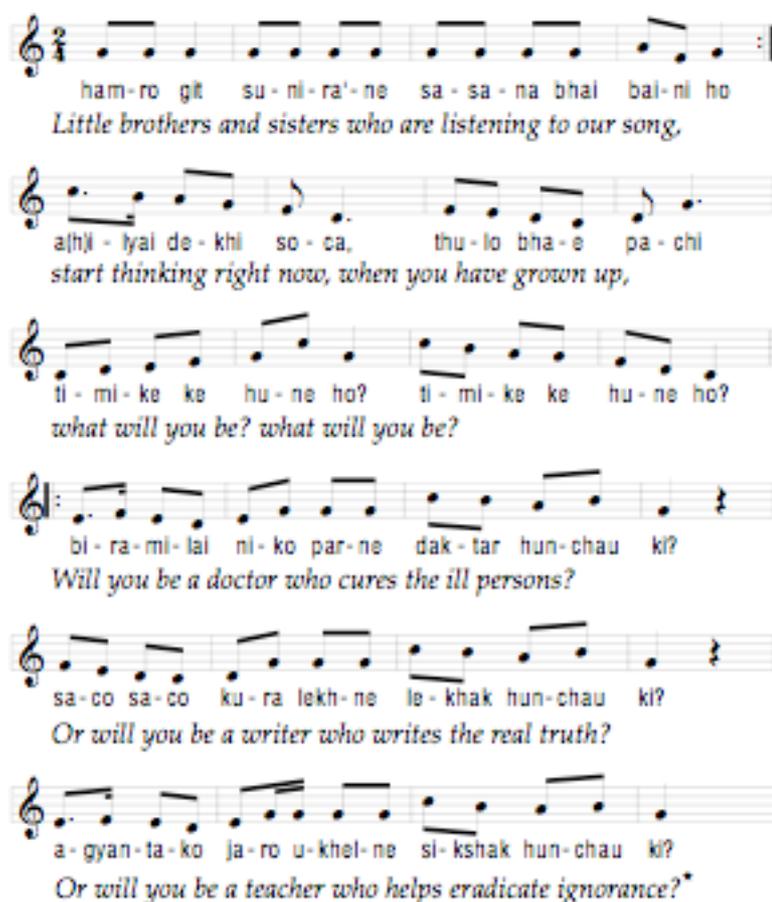
One of these cultural activists – a poet and songwriter – once explained to me how the role of the teacher might be played out in a people-oriented/progressive song. Think of a Nepali village somewhere in the hinterland. There is a lot of trouble and hardship in such a place. People are illiterate and exploited by the landlord. Then the teacher comes to the village, the villagers become enlightened and conscious, and everything can change. As Skinner & Holland (1996: 275) observe, “to become educated was associated with becoming ‘conscious’ (cetana) or politically aware”. (See also Grandin 1989: 191–224; Fujikura 2001.) In the context of progressive, people-oriented cultural activism, education is seen to produce “conscious” actors who in their turn will become agents of enlightenment. This is clearly illustrated by the song *Hamro git sunira’ne* (*Timi ke ke hune ho*, “What will you be”). This song is written as a message for children to hear rather than to sing themselves, and lists a number of occupations that children should consider for their own future, and in order to “do something to build the nation” (*desh banauna*):<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> On textual topics and rhetoric of progressive songs, see below and Grandin (1989, 1996a).

<sup>56</sup> On the issue of terminology, see also Grandin (1989: 127, *passim*) where I settled for “societal songs” (a word I made up) as a cover term.

<sup>57</sup> The following is from *Hamro git suni ra’ne*.



ham-ro git su-ni-ra'-ne sa-sa-na bhai bai-ni ho  
*Little brothers and sisters who are listening to our song,*

a(h)i - lyai de-khi so-ca, thu-lo bha-e pa-chi  
*start thinking right now, when you have grown up,*

ti-mi-ke ke hu-ne ho? ti-mi-ke ke hu-ne ho?  
*what will you be? what will you be?*

bi-ra-mi-lai ni-ko par-ne dak-tar hun-chau ki?  
*Will you be a doctor who cures the ill persons?*

sa-co sa-co ku-ra lek-h-ne le-khak hun-chau ki?  
*Or will you be a writer who writes the real truth?*

a-gyan-ta-ko ja-ro u-khel-ne si-kshak hun-chau ki?  
*Or will you be a teacher who helps eradicate ignorance?\**

True, the song recognizes also the need for workers in the factories and farmers in the fields. But the first occupations suggested to the children are the doctor who cures the sick, the writer who tells the truth, the singer who blows the trumpet of consciousness (*cetana*), and the teacher who helps eradicate ignorance.

The song collection *Janataka githaru* (“People’s songs”) – from which the above text is quoted – includes quite a few songs for children (some of which have been included in the primary material for this study; see under sources below). Just like the Education Plan strategists, the people-oriented artists behind this collection saw schools as where to sow the seeds of change. But the change they had in mind was much more comprehensive than that favored by pancayat policy. Here the picture of comprehensive, overnight change painted by Devkota in *Sunko din* captures well one central aspect of people-oriented rhetoric: the day of change. (For a fuller account of the rhetoric of progressive songs in the pancayat era, see Grandin 1996a.) The means to achieve this end are, as people-oriented songs suggest, consciousness, work, unity, uprising, and struggle. To reinforce that change is indeed necessary, people-oriented songs gave specific and elaborate descriptions of the oppression, injustice, and exploitation that prevailed, and

the songs presented their argument in such a way that fundamental and radical change appears to be the logical conclusion. And change is also the point at which the people-oriented rhetoric comes to a full stop.

### **Radicalism and patriotism**

After analyzing pancayat rhetoric Bengt-Erik Borgström (1980: 44) asked the obvious question: “Why a radical phraseology?” Just like the people-oriented songs, and the anti-pancayat movement that those songs were a part of, pancayat ideology explicitly talked about “an ‘exploitation-free ... tomorrow” (Pigg 1992: 500), included such notions as development for the welfare of the people and development that should wipe out inequalities and, as Gellner (2003: 11) puts it, aspired to “institutionalize equality”.

When the radicalism of pancayat rhetoric trespasses on progressive/people-oriented territory, many people-oriented songs voice a patriotism that seems to fit well with pancayat policies and (on all this, see further Grandin 1996a).<sup>58</sup> Two school songs provide an instructive comparison. The first of these, Rayan’s *Mero sano akhale* – albeit with new music by Gopal Yonjan – was suggested as the song for the first grade by the Ministry for Education in 1997. The school children would sing things like: When my little eyes will know the letters of the alphabet, when my little fingers will know how to write, when my little voice will know how to sing, the first word will be “Nepal – my dear Nepal.”<sup>59</sup>

The second song is Ganesh Rasik’s *Hatne hoina, dati ladne, Nepaliko bani huncha* (“To fight bravely, never to run away, this is the habit of the Nepalis). Though labeled by Ratna Records as a “patriotic song” rather than as a “children’s song”, this was (as I have been told) a compulsory school song in pancayat times.<sup>60</sup> Still well into the post-pancayat era *Hatne hoina* was referred to as “the national song that students from the

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<sup>58</sup> Both pancayat and people-oriented rhetoric gives a Hills/Mountains-centered image of the motherland. Interestingly, the new school-songs suggested by the Ministry for Education in 1997 remain within the boundaries of the didactic, the romantic, and the patriotic but seem to reinterpret the essence of the Nepali nation. Buddha is invoked side by side with Janak and the southern flatland (the Tarai) is mentioned side by side with the mountains.

<sup>59</sup> From *Mero sano akhale*. See under Sources below.

<sup>60</sup> However, the song is *not* mentioned by Onta (1996a) in his observations on patriotic school songs.

first grade till the tenth grade have to sing” (*kaksha ek dekhi das sammaka bidyarthiharule gaunu parne kakshagat rashstriya git*).<sup>61</sup> The text is loaded with national symbols: the *daphe* (the colorful bird that is known in English as the impeyan pheasant), the *sarangi* fiddle, the *khukuri* knife, the red rhododendron flower (*laliguras*), the majestic snow-covered mountains, the *madal* drum, the red and blue national flag. In all this, Ganesh Rasik tells the schoolchildren, there is the whole of Nepal, the King and the Queen. No wonder that this song was included on the same Ratna Records EP disc as the national anthem!

So what, then, was the difference between state-controlled and progressive practice, between pancayat and people-oriented rhetoric? Firstly, a look at the respective careers of the artists behind these two songs, Ganesh Rasik and Rayan, is instructive. After both being members of *Ralpa* in the late 1960s their respective careers took on very different trajectories during the following decades. Alone among the *ex-Ralphas* Rasik went on into the state-controlled cultural apparatus: he was a successful Radio artist and for a period General Manager for the Shri Ratna Recording Corporation. Rayan, on the other hand, consistently stayed out of anything related to the pancayat state. Typically, the people who sang in Radio Nepal during the pancayat era presented themselves as artists, not as ideologists or propagandists. The compromises necessary to remain in access to the resources of the cultural apparatus did not necessarily mean producing such glowing rhetoric that we find in Rasik’s song – more often it was just a retreat into non-offensive subjects such as love. This, at least, was the way people-oriented artists saw – and criticized – their colleagues in Radio Nepal.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, in the context of “People’s songs” agitation, the low-key didacticism of songs such as *Bansuriko dhunsanga* (see above p. 19) takes on another significance. When children are encouraged to enjoy education and requested to build their character, they are put on the road to political awareness and to their future work for progress. Moreover, the typical song heard from the state-controlled media in the pancayat era was a love song (as we noted above). Because of their opening towards other, maybe more “serious” subjects<sup>63</sup>, and because of their overtly propagandistic nature, even those children’s songs produced by the state-controlled apparatus are in a way already on people-oriented territory.

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<sup>61</sup> Nadisha intarpriaj, *Shivali sharirik shiksha prashnottar*, p. 46, where the text also is given.

<sup>62</sup> On people-oriented artists’ critical view of love songs, see Grandin (1989: 126–27).

<sup>63</sup> Their “serious” (*gambhir*) subjects were precisely one reason for the popularity of people-oriented songs (Grandin 1989: 170–71).

And thirdly, there are instances of more explicit wordings also in children's songs.

You must throw away these worn-out traditions ...

What is broken has to be torn down, then it can be built again

This statement, from *Padhnu baneko ke ho?*<sup>64</sup>, suggests that before anything can be built and developed what is useless – pancayat democracy, among other things – must be demolished and thrown away. This metaphor is spelled out in more detail in the people-oriented song *Hida mera dai ho*<sup>65</sup> where the tearing down of the old house and the building of a new house – for all of us – is described as a collaborative project.

With the old house torn down we have again reached what Anne de Sales (2003b: 17), in a study of the post-pancayat rhetoric of *Raktim parivar*, describes as *tabula rasa*.<sup>66</sup> Like in Devkota's *Sunko din*, the day of change has arrived, the tables are cleared and we are ready for a fresh start.

### Artists, opportunities and the state

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997: 434) claims that in, among other things, the education system, the pancayat state had “forceful tools” which could promote “cultural unity as a means of political control”. Similarly, Pigg's (1992) study of development ideology argues that schoolbooks “offer us a window” (1992: 500) on state ideology, and that this rhetoric

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<sup>64</sup> See under Sources below.

<sup>65</sup> *Hida mera dai ho* (Shyam Tamot). NL 71–76. This song was involved in a telling incident of post-pancayat realignments which could be witnessed in the Academy Hall at a December, 1994 cultural program honoring the new Minister for Education and Culture, Modhnath Prashrit (UML). Here this song was performed instrumentally by an ensemble where musicians from people-oriented cultural groups and Academy staff musicians played together – such an event would have been almost unthinkable only a few years earlier.

<sup>66</sup> As de Sales's (2003b) study makes clear, most of the rhetoric of pancayat-era progressive songs have lived on into the post-pancayat era. Much of what she finds in the recent songs by *Raktim parivar* can be recognized from the earlier era: the realistic and elaborate images of how people live; the use of metaphors related to nature; the patriotism; the call to the *lahure* to return home; and of course the day of change. However, though one certainly finds both blood and martyrdom in certain of the pancayat-era progressive songs, the “overwhelming presence of blood in the songs” (p. 20) by *Raktim parivar* seems to be a new development.

was “highly influential” (1992: 502). And Moisola’s (1991, 2000) accounts of “nation-building politics and modern music” attributes much to the “successful cultural policies” of the pancayat state (2000: 705). All these three arguments seem to rely upon the same presumption<sup>67</sup>: that the vehicles (the tools, the schoolbooks, the apparatus) adequately mirror the state’s policies. In other words, they assume a state with complete control over its apparatus.

This is not what we find in children’s songs. We have here a case of people (artists) exploiting the state (the educational apparatus) for their own purposes. Rather than a state in control of its apparatus, this looks like rather successful resistance in several of the forms outlined by Gellner (2003: 3–4) – most notably the second kind of resistance in Gellner’s typology, ordinary people exploiting the state’s mechanisms to personal advantage. This is much in line with Skinner’s & Holland’s (1996) observations. Schools, Skinner & Holland note, were fashioned by “the panchayat government to be the instruments for promoting loyalty to the nation-state” (1996: 288) but “remain a paradoxical tool of control at best” (1996: 273). Schools are “contested and heterogeneous sites” (1996: 288), “sites of multiple agendas and multiple voices” (1996: 274). Schools “did not provide the harmonious and homogeneous march toward nation-building and unity that those in power envisioned” (1996: 288).

Indeed, Onta has cautioned against granting “totalizing power to the Pancayat state and its educational apparatus” (1996a: 232) and pointed out the need to “pay attention to the social agents, institutions and practices that made a particular imagining ... possible” (1999: 5). In the case of children’s songs and the imaginings they present, artists and teachers as social agents were at the center of the practices. Again, as agents these people much resemble the teachers whom Skinner & Holland met in Naudada. These teachers had been members of various student organizations and “often continued their political activism ... advocating at school and elsewhere for political and social change. They went beyond the idea of simple unity expressed in the school texts to promote more ‘progressive ideas’ (pragati sil) about equal rights...” (1996: 280).

Of course, people-oriented artists and teachers were not alone to work from a position inside a state apparatus and to use its resources for their own ends. While today the term *panca* seems to denote people who supported and upheld the “pancayat system”, it should be remembered that the actual *pancas* – the people elected to various positions within the pancayat system – included also such high-profile opponents to the system as

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<sup>67</sup> Moreover, all three seem to agree that the policies thus executed powerfully affected the state’s subjects.

Padmaratna Tuladhar (elected to the *Rastriya pancayat* in 1986) and Haribol Bhattarai (elected the *Pradhan panca* of Kathmandu in 1987) as well as a large number of less renowned, but similarly oppositional, local elected representatives.<sup>68</sup>

So by means of its development-oriented efforts in education and communication, the pancayat state opened up new opportunities that artists could draw upon for their own purposes. The very apparatus designed by the state to serve as its instrument was utilized, from the inside, for different purposes. While the cultural apparatus included sponsorship of music, the educational apparatus was presumably not established in order to support musical artists. And moreover, artists used these opportunities not only to personal advantage, for artistic aims, but in order change the face of the country in ways not at all compatible with pancayat ideas.

### **Children's songs and development: final questions**

What have been under discussion in this article are songs for children to sing, songs addressing themselves to children, and songs about children. Whatever all this is, it is not children's own music culture in the sense discussed by Minks (2002) or children's culture from their own perspective as proposed by Gellner (2004; cf also Lewis 1998). So my interest here is not in children's own expressive practices, but in the way children are drawn into the musical world defined by adults (principally, musical artist and educators). But of course, the more child-centered approach suggested by Minks and Gellner would clarify several problem areas that haven't been considered here. One might think of the reception perspective: what did children's songs mean to the children themselves?<sup>69</sup> What part did they have in children's culture?

And of course, there are a lot of further questions. What did the school song repertoire actually look like, what was the actual practice in different types of school? What changes in songs and repertoire can be seen from a more fundamentally historical perspective? What is the history of children's songs? And what about schools and songs in Maoist-controlled areas? To mention one final issue that has been left out of this

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<sup>68</sup> See Grandin (1989: 39–41) on Padmaratna as a political hero, (1989: 55–58) on one local political scene.

<sup>69</sup> Onta (1996a: 219, 236 n. 12–13) has given a few reminiscences of school songs. And similarly, a Google search on the Internet for, say, "hatne hoina dati ladne" can tap one into various interesting conversations.

article, development aid and its agencies are clearly relevant from the American involvement in pancayat-era educational planning and till the present day, when such players as Danish Association for International Cooperation<sup>70</sup>, Read (with its “proven, sustainable development model”)<sup>71</sup>, British Council<sup>72</sup>, and Cambridge Education (complete with a “participatory gender awareness workshop at the grassroots level”)<sup>73</sup> have been active on Nepal’s educational scene.

A large number of questions on children’s songs thus remain unanswered, a large number of analytical strategies remain untried. But this only further testifies to the culturally and politically central position of this seemingly marginal musical genre and of the many practices that sustain the body of cultural artifacts analyzed here as “children’s songs”.

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<sup>70</sup> See [http://msnepal.org/reports\\_pubs/theatre\\_june03/education\\_for\\_all.htm](http://msnepal.org/reports_pubs/theatre_june03/education_for_all.htm)

<sup>71</sup> Quoted from <http://readnepal.org>

<sup>72</sup> See <http://britishcouncil.org/nepal-partnerships-education.htm>

<sup>73</sup> Quoted from <http://www.camb-ed.com/pro15.htm>

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### Songs

*First words (Song title, if any) Songwriter; Composer. Source(s).*

*aja hami sana-sana (kaksha 2 ko kakshagat git)* Santa Gautam & Khadga Bohara;  
Deepak Jangam. KG

*ama malai bolna khelna* Biswa Ballabh; Hut Raj. ESR 80 1:2

*basuriko dhun sanga (ramailo skul)* Ram Krishna Duwal. JG 4:59, KKG 3

*das baje ghanti lagcha (ghantile ke bhancha?)* Mohan Shrestha. JG 4:63, 2KKG

*deshko maya* Syam Prakash Tamot; Raamesh. KKG 16

*dherai padhchau, dherai lekhchau (kaksha 3 ko kakshagat git)* Ratna Langpang Rai;  
Natikazi Shrestha. KG

*dui ekan dui* Basudev Munal; Shiva Shankar. ESR 161 2:2

*dui ekan dui (badhau aphno at)* Syam Tamot. JG 1:63

*e gitkar, tapai ke gitkar* Manjul, Raamesh. JG 1:64-65

*euta kamila batoma (kamila ra roti)* Durga Lal Shrestha; Ram Krishna Duwal. JG 1: 45

*gawai ramailo (deusi bhailo)* Saru Subba; Shambhu Rai. JG 2:38

*hami ta balak sana chau* Ram Krishna Maharjan; Guje Malakar. Coll

*hamro git suni ra'ne* Manjul; Raamesh. JG 1:66. Coll

*hatne hoina* Ganesh Rasik. ESR 126 b2, SSS: 46; Coll

*ka kha ga gha (ramro naramro)* Agyat; Raamesh. JG 4:62. KKG 5

*ka kha ga gha nga* Bekh Bahadur Thapa. ESR 80 2:2

*kaha jane kaha jane putalika hul* Hari Bhakta Katuwal; Nati Kazi. ERS 161 1:2

*kaphal pakyo* NN; Guje Malakar. BGM, Coll

*kitabka pana hera (kaksha 4 ko kakshagat git)* Bhupal Rai; Pradip Bamajan. KG

*koho koho koili karayo* N.N. 2KKG

*kopila hau hami* Rajendra Maharjan; Guje Malakar. BGM, Coll

*kopila hu phul bhai* Durga Lal Shrestha; Raamesh. JG 4:60, KKG 1

*mai chori sundari* Kumari Pradhan; Bharati Upadhyaya. ESR 80 1:1.

*mero gau jyamire (jamuniko chori)* Rajib; Raamesh. LL 84–88, JG 4:61, KKG 7

*mero sano akhale (kaksha 1 ko kakshagat git)* Rayan; Gopal Yonjan. KG

*mero sano akhale* Rayan. Coll.

*muna hau hami kalila (kaksha 5 ko kakshagat git)* Khangsen Oli; Gopal Yonjan. KG  
*myau myau biralo* Dipak Soto; Bekh Bahadur Thapa. ESR 80 2:1

*nepalka hami sana balbalika (banbhat)* Rajib; Bijaya Subba / Ram Krishna Duwal. JG  
4:58, KKG 9

*padhnu bhaneko ke ho* Durga Lal Shrestha; Ram Krishna Duwal. JG 4:54; Coll  
*sagarmatha ko yo desh nepal* Rajendra Kumar "Putra"; Guje Malakar. Coll

*sana sana bhailai maya gara* Kali Prasad Rijal; Shiva Shankar. ERS 161 2:1

*sana sana dhunga mato mili aglo pahad bancha* Syam Tamot; J B Tuhure. JG 1:49;  
2KKG

*sano sano balak ma* Basudev Munal. ERS 161 1:1

*sunko darbar* NN; Guje Malakar. BGM, Coll

*sunko din ek udaucha re (sunko bihana)* Lakshmi Prasad Devkota; Raamesh. JG 2: 1;  
NL 39–42; Coll

### **Discs and cassettes**

(BGM) Swaccha bal giti mala. (Copy made for the author by ISAS/Kipu)

Git manjari, see below.

(1KKG) Ketaketika githaru Children Songs bhag 1 (see also KKG below)

(2KKG) Ketaketika githaru bhag 2 (pre-copy given to the author)

(KG) Shri 5 ko sarkar, siksha mantralaya: *Kakshagat git prathamik taha*. 2053 VS.

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Ratna Records ESR 126. ca 2035 VS

Ratna Records ESR 161. 1982.

### **Print**

*Git manjari*. Kathmandu: Prakasika: Rinchen Yoñjan. asoj 2050/september 1993. With  
cassette.

(JG1) *Janataka githaru, bhag – 1*. Kathmadau: Lalima prakashan, second print 2039  
V.S. (=A.D. 1982–83).

(JG2) *Janataka githaru, bhag – 2*. Kathmadau: Lalima prakashan, no date.

(JG3) *Janataka githaru, bhag – 3*. Kathmadau: Lalima prakashan, 2042 V.S. (=A.D.  
1985–86) (second print).

(JG4) *Janataka githaru, bhag – 4*. Kathmadau: Lalima prakashan, 2040 V.S. (=A.D.  
1983–84).

(KKG) Ketaketika githaru Children Songs bhag 1. 2042. Prakashak: Swarnim english skul Burungkhel. [Same songs as 1KKG]

(LL) *Light of Life. Ujyaalo jivana lyaaunuchha. A musical journey with Aasthaa Pariwaar.* Kathmandu (?), Bangkok (?): Wayang, Aasthaa Pariwaar, 1991.

(NL) *Name of Life. Jivanko nam. A collection of songs. Giti samkalan.* A presentation of Aasthaa and French Cultural Centre. Kathmandu, 1993.

(SSS) Nadisha intarpraijej. 2053 (?) *Shivali sharirik shiksha prashnottar. Naya model anusar 2053 salko es el si parikhsako lagi tayar garieko.* Kathmadau.

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