

ARCHIVES

Nepalese Archives of the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme (Paris, 1960-1975).

Mireille Helffer and Anne de Sales

Early in the sixties, anthropologists and linguists within the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) started to collect oral and specifically musical traditions of various groups in Nepal. In 1966 the ethnomusicologist Mireille Helffer joined them and within a research programme directed by Prof. Millot, conducted several missions focusing on musical collections. Dr. Helffer then supervised the listing of all the collected documents - about 500 tapes that were presented to the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme. Each recorded tape was copied and classified in a file describing its contents (duration, place and conditions of recording, as well as the subject). A copy of the file was given to the collector. This is how Marc Gaboriau, Mireille Helffer, Corneille Jest, Alexander W. Macdonald, Philippe Sagant, and to a lesser extent Jean-François Mouel and Alain Fournier, presented their recordings between 1960 and 1975. A copy of Bernard Pignède's recordings (1958) was added to this very rich collection representing the Indo-Nepalese castes, including the Muslims, as well as most of the ethnic groups of Nepal.

It is regrettable that, since then, researchers who have carried out fieldwork, have ceased to present their recorded documents to the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme.

CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTIONS

1) The Indo-Nepalese castes

Two rich sets of recordings emerge. The first one concerns the *Gāine* repertoire,

popular songs of the *jhyāure* type, ritual songs such as *mālsiri git* and panegyric songs of the *karkha* type. Numerous missions were concerned with this caste of beggar-singers:

- 1961-62: A.W. Macdonald, assisted by Dor Bahadur Bista, recorded about a hundred pieces accompanied on the viol *sarangi*.

- 1966: survey by M. Helffer in the Kathmandu Valley and central Nepal (Pokhara area, Baglung etc.)

- 1966-70: recordings by M. Gaborieau in the Kathmandu valley and the Gorkha area.

- 1965-70: recordings by C. Jest.

The second important set of documents concerns the caste of tailors-musicians, the *Damāi*, recordings of whom were made in various areas of Nepal. In 1969, during a mission in Dadelhdhura (West Nepal), M. Gaborieau and M. Helffer collected an exceptionally rich body of musical material on the *dhohi-hudkiyā*. Besides these two specifically musical sets, various other recordings should be mentioned:

- tales and accounts related by Bahun and Chetri;

- recordings of linguistic interest;

- documents concerning the Muslims of the Kathmandu Valley and of Central Nepal (M. Gaborieau).

2) The ethnic groups

Musical samples were recorded among several ethnic groups such as the Chantel (C. Jest), the Gurung (B. Pignède and Champion), the Hayu (C. Jest), the Limbu P. Sagant), the Magar (C. Jest), the Newar (M. Helffer, C. Jest, G. Toffin), the Sherpa

(C. Jest, A.W. Macdonald), the Tamang (M. Gaborieau, M. Helffer, C. Jest, A.W. Macdonald) and among Tibetan populations of the high Himalayan Valleys.

These recordings illustrate various musical genres: seasonal songs accompanying work in the fields, planting out or harvesting rice, songs sung while gathering in the forest, sheep- or yak-herding songs and festival songs. The narrative songs are represented by the Indian epics of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa and by the Tibetan epic of Gesar, as well as by chantefables (*bār*), by heroic accounts (*bhārat*) from West Nepal (to be compared with repertoires from Kumaon) and by such foundation myth as the Tamang *hvāi* and the Limbu *mundhum*.

Other recordings include performances by various categories of religious intercessors (*jhākri*, *lha-pa*, *puimbo*) as well as ritual music of the Tibetan Buddhist and Bonpo traditions.

COLLECTIONS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

About a hundred musical instruments collected in Nepal by various researchers, especially by C. Jest, are kept in the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme. The whole instrumental range of the *Damāi* is represented (long trumpets, oboes, kettledrums of various sizes, and cymbals). Among the drums used by the religious intercessors there are single-sided drums such as the *rnga* of the Gurung, the *ring* of the Chantel, the *damphu* of the Tamang, as well as double-sided drums like the *dhyāgro*. Mention should also be made of lutes (*sgra-snyan*), small fiddles with sympathetic strings (the *sārangī* of the *Bādī*), hourglass drums (the *hudko* of the *dhohi*) and a few instruments used by the Newar.

USE MADE OF THE COLLECTIONS

The collected recordings have been used for the sound-tracks of films and for exhibi-

tions, and provided the basis for the following publications:

Helffer, M.

1969a: "Fanfares villageoises au Népal", *Objets et Mondes* IX/2: 51-58.

1969b: *Castes de Musiciens au Népal*, record 30cm/""t, Musée de l'Homme LD20, with a booklet in French and English, the Nepali text of the songs, photos, musical notations (no longer available).

Helffer, M. et Macdonald, A.W.

1966 "Sur un *sārangī* de *gāine*", *Objets et Mondes*, VI/2: 133-142.

1968 "Le vers népalé chanté", *L'Homme* VIII/3: 37-95 and VIII/4: 58-91.

English translations in A.W. Macdonald: *Essays on the Ethnology of Tibet and South Asia*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1975: 175-265.

Helffer, M. and Gaborieau, M.

1968 "Problèmes posés par un chant du Tihar", *Ethnographie*, 68-89.

1974a: "A propos d'un tambour du Kumaon et de l'ouest du Népal", *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis III*, Stockholm. Musik Historika Museet: 75-79.

1974b: Remarque sur l'utilisation des tambours-sablés dans le monde indien, le Népal et le Tibet", *ibid*, 268-272.

CONCLUSION

This collection is the legacy of an era when neither radios or cassette players were known in Nepal. It can therefore be used as a reference that enables one to evaluate the changes in repertoire and styles over a period of more than 30 years. A number of works in progress are using the collection in this way (J. Glodé, C. Tingey, Ph. Ramirez, H. Weisethaunet).

It is hoped that this summary will encourage young researchers to deposit their recorded documents with descriptive files in archives where they can be consulted. Only in this way can they be of value to future research.