

MEMORIES OF THE GÄINE

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More than thirty years have passed ... in 1966 one did not arrive directly in Kathmandu ... there was no French embassy there and it was necessary to stop in New Delhi and engage in a few formalities before securing a seat on the plane which would land in a field in Gaucar. Then it was only necessary to await the arrival of the luggage, which in my case could take more than ten days! Directed by Professor Millot, the French research group, RCP Népal, was making its first investigations, but already a certain Corneille Jest had revealed his qualities as a leader and expert, which seemed normal given his long experience in Dolpo. French ethnologists interested in the Himalayan world were still few : since 1961 Macdonald had regularly visited the Gäine, Gabo-

autumn - and the choice of the Pokhara region, discussed with my colleagues, seemed logical. It had been envisaged that Kesab Bista who already was accustomed to working with the Gäine would accompany me, but he was bedridden with hepatitis! It was thus a young Nepalese student, Drona Prasad Rajaure, one of Gaborieau's pupils in French, who agreed to become my assistant and in this way discovered the joys of fieldwork.

Installation in the village of Batulecaur was accomplished rapidly, and after a month of acclimatisation to the Gäine, to their demands and to the material for recording (*tapricot* according to local pronunciation of the word 'tape-recorder'), a prospective itinerary was defined with Gaborieau's assistance, as his knowledge of Muslim villages in the area proved to be valuable.

Where then were they living—these despised Gäine who were only capable of begging ? How would they greet my presence and my approach to them? Some, satisfied with the opportunity to earn money without having to move about, recorded willingly and proved



rieau was the first to teach French in Kathmandu and had already defined his project concerning Muslims in Nepal; Sagant, who had just begun to work on the Limbu, and I - the only woman - whose competence was limited to ethnomusicology, stood out against the horizon.

It was my first real fieldwork; my four children were grown up; and because of my work already carried out on the acoustic material collected by Macdonald, it had become possible to suggest an investigation on the settlement of singer-beggars, the Gäine, in central Nepal. The season was favourable - around the beginning of

bent on gain, the money collected facilitating their carousing in the *batti* [the local pub] more than the usual search for grain; some had already taken the route to Kathmandu where the poet Dharma Raj Thāpa, himself a native of Batulecaur, introduced them to Radio Nepal. A few were really shabby and sang badly. Others showed distrust, or even hostility. This was particularly the case of those in the photo above.

Better provided for than their counterparts in Batulecaur or Hyāngja, they had some land and would not agree to be recorded, but after being shaved and

dressed, they were pleased to pose for a family photo reuniting three generations. Their differences in head-gear are obvious and seem a tell-tale sign of status attempting to take form with the new term *gandharva* used to designate the Gāine :

- the father, wearing a turban and carrying the *saran-gi* fiddle, a sign of his caste;
- the older son, in the usual *topi*;
- the younger son, in a felt hat, like those worn in town.

Significantly, the three men are wearing locally-made shoes, while the younger son wears shoes made by the Bata Company; the little boys also have shoes, but the woman and the little girls are barefoot, which was still very common at the time.

For me this photograph marks the beginning of a difficult journey which would lead me in an unforeseen manner to the Tharu of Dang, close to the heart of my assistant.

The evaluation of my efforts was positive, and in the years to come up to the dissolution in 1970 of RCP Népal 65, "Etude des régions népalaises", which was replaced by RCP 253, "Ecologie and géologie de l'Himalaya central", I fulfilled the function of staff ethnomusicologist, responsible for cataloguing recordings made by the researchers.