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Ingemar Grandin

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One song, five continents, and a thousand years of musical migration by Ingemar Grandin, Linköping University, Sweden

In 1986, the senior Nepali composer Amber Gurung invited some musical friends to his home to record a few of his songs. There were Tarabirsingh Tuladhar, the sitarist; Prakash Gurung played the tabla, and Madanji the guitar. From Amber Gurung's own family of gifted musicians, Kishor Gurung played the keyboard while Amber Gurung himself sang and played the harmonium. I was there to do the tape recordings. Among the songs we recorded at that time was *Aankhaale malaai* (which later was re-recorded in the *Saanga* studio and issued on the cassette *Kaile lahar, kaile tarang*). This is a typical Nepalese modern song. But the song itself, the arrangement, and the instruments with which it was performed altogether show traces of musical processes, flows and movements that encompass five continents. And to unravel all this will take us through more than a thousand years of musical migration.

THE SONG

Like in many others of Amber Gurung's songs, this is not only his own music but also his own lyric. Since my article is on music, not on literature, we will only note one basic fact on the text as such: It is written in the *sthai-antara* (refrain-verse) form. This is underscored in the musical setting, where the *sthai* and the *antara* have been given each its distinct melody. Of course, this is just standard modern song practice. But it is a practice shared with numerous other song genres, all over the South Asian subcontinent, and which can be traced back to the 12th century A.D., to Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* hymns.

The musical shape given to the text in *Aankhaale malaai* well represents its genre, the Nepalese modern song. After 1951, when Nepal arrived in earnest upon the modern scene, the modern South Asian genres had already gone a long way. Nepalese composers hence had a ready-made eclectic tradition to work upon, in addition to the light classical and folk music genres that continue to be a source of musical ideas in the modern genres. Modern song no doubt has its own peculiarly Nepali colour, but in its musical basics, it is one branch of modern South Asian music. (I hesitate to say "Indian music", unless we take "India" to mean not only the country within its present-day borders but the whole South Asian cultural area). Music historians (including Indian and Western scholars such as Sukumar Ray, Wolfgang Laade and Peter Manuel) have shown how these modern genres have been devised. One person figures

prominently in their genesis: Rabindranath Tagore. Very consciously, he attempted to create a modern Indian song which should neither have the elaboration and feudal associations of the classical ragas, nor respect the ethnic boundaries of the folk songs. So he tried integrate the essential elements of the ragas into formal frameworks borrowed from Western music as well as from the folk songs of his native Bengal. The symmetric and periodic shape Amber Gurung has given *Aankhaale*... – each line of text is given a four-bar melodic phrase – may well be a repercussion of Tagore's work. The genealogy of the modern genres includes not only Tagore's songs, but also regional folk songs and theatre songs as well as light classical songs (ghazal, thumri).

In both film songs and in the less commercially targeted songs composed for the radio and disc records, composers moreover borrowed from Western – especially popular – music. Western popular music, in its turn, has been created as a result of the musical interchange between Europe and Africa, mostly on American ground. This includes both North America, where many of the most well-known popular genres have originated, and Latin America whose rhythms – such as mambo, rhumba, samba, bossa etc. – have been taken up in Indian modern genres.

RAGAS AND CLASSICAL MUSIC

Throughout the evolution of the modern genres, the classical ragas have remained a constant source of musical ideas. Partly via the light classical genres, but partly also as direct infusion. Contemporary Nepali composers, among them Amber Gurung himself, point out raga as one of three ways of basing a melodic composition (the other two being folk song and “free” composition). Indeed, *Aankhaale*... is based on a raga: raga Bihag. In his composition, Amber Gurung – who is well studied in shastriya sangit – has shaped his melody according to the melodic turns of this raga (note, for instance, the treatment of ma tivra/ma suddha).

But raga music has its own history. Shastriya sangit is not just the indigenous creation of the Indian soil. Already at the time of the Delhi sultanate (1192–1526), the Turks and Persians who invaded from the west brought their own music and musical instruments along. This was the start of many centuries of Islamic musical impact in South Asia. With the shifting fortunes of various rajas and nawabs, musicians migrated back and forth between Hindu and Muslim courts. A comparatively recent case of this was when the khyal singers Inayat Hussein Khan and Haider Khan left the Rampur court of the Muslim Nawab Kalve Ali Khan for the court of the Hindu Maharaja Bir Shamsheer in Kathmandu.

Already at the beginning of this period, the legendary Amir Khusrav is credited with introducing Sufi (Islamic mysticism) *qawwali* hymns and the Arabic/Persian *ghazal*. The ghazal is basically a poetic form, marked by two-line verses that are independent in content but linked together by a double rhyme. (With its typical topics of intoxication and love – to a man or

woman or to God – the ghazal is closely linked to Sufism. With its Arabic and Persian origin, it was much favoured by the Persian and, later, Urdu-speaking elite in North India – to the extent that it was entertained also by Hindus, often under Muslim pen-names. In the late 19th century it went on into the Nepali language with Motiram Bhatta, who had studied Persian and who today is regarded as one founding father of Nepali literature.) The ghazal type of poetry was (and is still) used in qawwali, but later became a prominent light classical genre and today, in the popularized form sung by Mehdi Hassan, Jagjit Singh *et. al.*, it is heard everywhere, not only in India but also in Nepal.

The musical infusions from the Islamic west continued under the Mughals. At the great emperor Akbar's court, the singers were from India – Hindus and a few Muslims – whereas the instrumentalists were Muslims from the north-west (Khorasan and Central Asia). It was from this brew of Indian and Islamic music that Tan Sen created his dhrupad compositions and founded his fame as Akbar's master musician – a legendary artist to whom musical artists are proud to trace their legacy still today.

Into recent times, shastriya sangit has kept on looking to the west for musical resources. For instance, the *sarod* derives from the Afghan *rubab*, and its modern form is credited to one Ghulam Ali Khan, a 19th century musician of Afghan descent who worked in India. And the Islamic impact on shastriya sangit was naturally transferred also to Nepal. The artists imported by Bir Shamsheer were not only Muslims themselves, they also came directly from Rampur, a Muslim court with Afghan Nawabs.

In fact, shastriya sangit has a lot in common with the classical music of the Arab and Persian world. The idea of melodic modes or melody-models is found in different names and permutations – Arabic *maqam*, Turkish *makam*, Persian *dastgah*, South Asian *raga* – in a large geographic area. Still today, the practice of unfolding the basic melodic ideas of a mode in extended improvisations – as well as compositions – is strikingly similar in Tunisia, Turkey, Iran, India.

These similarities may suggest musical interchange between the concepts of raga and maqam/dastgah. At least they have been used alongside each other. A chronicle reports that the favourite music of the 16th century Sultan Sikandar Lodi in Delhi (himself an Afghan) included ragas such as Kanada and Kalyan, but also the maqam Husaini. And in more recent times, as John Baily tells us, the Afghanistani town of Herat seems to have been a meeting-place for South Asian and Persian modes.

In spite of this continuous replenishment of new musical ideas from the Islamic west – seen also in the many Persian terms used in North Indian shastriya sangit – the concept of raga still has certain basic features that are *not* found in maqam or dastgah music. These features – which stem from pre-Islamic times as can be inferred from the 13th century musical treatise *Sangita Ratnakara* – include the emphasis on anchoring all musical processes on the tonic, *Sa*, and musical modes organized in full octaves rather than in tetrachords (groups of four notes).

Paradoxically, these features bring Indian and European music closer to each other than to the music of the Arabs and Persians, from whom both Europeans and Indians have taken so much...

THE ARRANGEMENT

As we have seen, Amber Gurung was content with a small ensemble of five instruments for the recording. Even this small ensemble is enough for the basic arrangement practice of modern songs: emphasis on melody, but also the use of a harmonic framework. This is an amalgamation of South Asian and European musical practices. The melody line is highlighted by the harmonium shadowing the vocal melody, but also by the emphasis on variation of timbre in the main melody line: the sitar and the keyboard take turns in instrumental interludes and give brief musical “comments” upon the vocal line. The “shadowing”, where a melody instrument – a harmonium or a *sarangi* – follows with slight deviations (heterophony is the musicological term for this) the vocalist is common practice in South Asian classical and light classical genres.

The keyboard – which adopts the role of the strings in a larger orchestra – moreover gives countermelodies. The guitar’s responsibility is to give the chords. Both these features – chordal harmony and countermelodies – are taken from Western music.

COUNTERPOINT AND CHORDS

These musical features take us back to the 12th century. These were the days when among others the choir-masters associated with Notre Dame in Paris, Leoninus and Perotinus, made the early experiments with polyphony, with letting two distinct melodies sound at the same time. In subsequent centuries, at the court of Burgundy, in Italy, in England, everywhere composers tried various ways of relating three, four or even more distinct and independent melodies to each other. Composers such as Machaut, Ockeghem, Josquin, Palestrina, Monteverdi, Bach elevated the art of polyphonic composition to ever higher levels.

But within this evolution was the seed to fundamental change in how multi-melodic music should be perceived and understood. And in 1722, with the French composer Rameau’s *Treatise on Harmony*, the shift was expressed in a clear and comprehensive theory. The chord was born. For not even in the West are chords a fundamental part of music since time immemorial. For centuries, the Western composers and musical theorists had emphasised the melodies, the “vertical” aspect of the web of lines (the chords and harmonies) was seen as secondary and incidental. No doubt, what we today would perceive as chords were played on instruments such as the lute, but they were regarded only as the product of counterpoint, not as independent entities. But with Rameau, chords were considered as primary, indivisible musical

units rather than as the product of the polyphonic web. And no matter how the three notes of C, E and G are sounded – CEG, EGC, GCE – they are only inversions of the *same* musical unit. This is a C major triadic chord however the chord is voiced and even if G or E is the actual base note, C is the fundamental root that gives the chords its particular harmonic function.

Rameau's *Treatise* anticipates a great transformation in European art music, from the fast harmonical rhythm and the polyphonic intricacies of Bach to the functional tonality with its dominant→tonic progressions of Mozart and Beethoven just a few decades later. But the shift had even more thorough consequences. With the conceptions of Rameau and others, composers were able to think directly in harmonic progressions. Once let loose from their polyphonic context, chords took a life of their own. As a kind of ready-made musical building-blocks – that can be used in, say, the sequence Am, Dm7, G7, C which may signify the guitar accompaniment for a folk song or the basic idea for a jazz chorus – chords have been diffused and adapted to various musics all over the world.

THE INSTRUMENTS

The musical ensemble Amber Gurung used for the recording of his song is a basic modern song orchestra – expanded beyond the minimum of harmonium and tabla, but naturally still not so far as the studio orchestra with its ubiquitous strings. (As we have seen, the keyboard took on the musical role of the strings.) Let us now consider the five instruments of this small ensemble. They have all their own histories, which contribute to the complexity of the pattern of musical migration.

To start with the *harmonium*, this instrument, which is so common in Nepal today, is the fusion of an East Asian principle of sound production, European instrument technology and design, and South Asian musical requirements. The harmonium employs the free reed principle for sound production (distinct from the way the reed is used in a clarinet or oboe) which is recent in Europe but age-old in East Asia. There is evidence that the Chinese free reed mouth-organ, known as *sheng*, originated well before 1000 BC, and at the time of Confucius it was known as both a court and folk instrument. In the period when both the V.S. and A.D. eras start, when the Han dynasty ruled China, the sheng was used for banquet music, which in its turn was a mixture of Confucian ritual music and popular music. (The mouth-organs found in Japan, Korea, Laos and Thailand are related to a still later development of the sheng.)

In 1777, the sheng was taken to Europe. This inspired European instrument-makers to experiment widely with free reed instruments (this principle was new in Europe by then). In fact, the sheng figures prominently in the pedigree of three very successful instruments: the *accordion*, the *harmonica*, and the *free reed organ*. “Harmonium” was initially the brand name for one such organ. The harmonium reflects contemporary European technology and culture. For in these instruments (like in the accordion and the harmonica), the bamboo reeds of the sheng were substituted with metal ones, well suited to the mass manufacture of industrializing

Europe. And moreover, they were given a keyboard. In these times keyboard instruments were much in fashion – instrument makers tried to fit all kinds of instrument with a keyboard. The keyboard – maybe Europe’s most distinct contribution to musical instrument technology – is the result of several centuries of development. The early keyboards – in the 13th century – had wide distances between the keys and had seven or maybe eight or nine tones to the octave. As a result of musical requirements, this was expanded into the full 12-note octave, and when the necessary mechanisms had been invented, keyboards were made with the keys close together and the whole octave conveniently within the span of the human hand.

The harmoniums, which were massproduced from about 1850, were manufactured in different shapes and sizes, including small, portable instruments. In these colonial times, it was not long until missionaries had brought harmoniums to India. (From India, the harmonium went on to Nepal, presumably at about 1885 along with the Rampur ustads invited at that time by Bir Shamsheer.) With its 12 notes to the octave the harmonium fitted well into Indian music (though of course on the expense of any shruti practices) and was produced locally in a shape adapted to Indian musical requirements: three octaves and one-hand playing – unlike in the harmonized hymns sung by the missionaries, the left hand was not needed in the single-line melodies of Indian music. The instrument made inroads into hymns and light classical genres, and was formative in the development of modern genres. Today, the harmonium is favoured by composers, on stage, in the ubiquitous git-ghazal performances in the restaurants, as well as by local hymn-singers and in schools.

THE TABLA AND THE SITAR

Most often in all these settings, like in the Amber Gurung song we discuss here, the harmonium goes hand-in-hand with the *tabla*. This instrument is a product of the impact of West Asian/ North African Islamic music on Indian music. The very word betrays the instrument’s Islamic connections: “tabla” is a diminutive form of “tabl”, which is the generic term for drums in Arabic-Islamic North Africa and West Asia. The tabla as a drum-pair is not older than late 18th century. The left-hand drum can be traced to the *duggi*, a smaller version of the *naqqara* (nagara) kettle-drum. The naqqara is known in the Islamic world – present-day Turkey, Syria, Egypt – since the middle ages. The right hand drum, in its turn, is probably related to the goblet-shaped drums of Iran and adjoining areas. And the very combination of a bass kettle drum and a goblet treble drum is familiar from the middle east. However, the way of actually *playing* the tabla emanates from not only the performance practice of the naqqara, but – significantly – that of the *dholak* and the *pakhawaj*. So when playing technique is considered, the tabla can be seen as the Indian dholak or pakhawaj cut in two; but these two “halves” both derive from the Islamic instruments of the west.

The *sitar* has much the same type of mixed Indian–Islamic descent as has the tabla. The word is of Persian origin, and also the prototypical sitar was imported from the Islamic west during the

time of the Delhi sultanate. The Uzbek *dutar* as well as the Persian *setar* has been proposed as the sitar's ancestor. When the sitar in the late Mughal period had become a prominent instrument in the classical music of the courts, it had already a long history of revisions on Indian ground, and this process – additions of frets, strings, sympathetic strings etc – have continued into recent times.

THE GUITAR AND THE ELECTRONIC KEYBOARD

The present-day *guitar*, of course, is a European instrument but one whose roots – again! – can be traced to the Arabic/Islamic world. During many centuries – 711–1492 A.D., to be specific – this world extended well into Europe, since what today is Spain was the seat of an Islamic califate with wide reputation for its achievements in the arts. Of course, the conquering Arabs brought with them what they considered the Sultan or King of musical instruments, the lute or *al'ud* as it is known in Arabic. This instrument originated in the Arab world well before the 10th century. The guitar was developed from the lute – whether by the Arabs or in Europe is a point historians still have to decide. Anyway, many centuries of transformations on European ground preceded the six-string guitar as it appeared in Spain at about 1780. This evolution has continued until present times – in fact, the six-string guitar and its performance practice as we know them today have been shaped during the last hundred years. This instrument, in its turn, has been further revised – notably into the electric guitar – to be heard among saxes and trumpets in a band, or in outdoor settings. The guitar was never that much of an art music instrument (a position the lute occupied). But it has conquered the world as an accompaniment instrument in popular and folk musics, and where its chief function is to give the chords. And this is an outcome of the shift (discussed above) into functional tonality and the view of the chord as an independent and primary musical unit. Give a chord sequence to your guitarist, and he will give you the accompaniment you want (provided, of course, he knows your genre).

Then, finally, the *electronic keyboard* which – as the name implies – combines the time-honoured European keyboard with modern electronic technology for the actual production of sound. The instrument used in our recording was from Japan, who nowadays dominates the market for household electronic keyboards. In its range of forefathers, however, the instrument has synthesizers such as the ones developed by pioneer Robert Moog in the USA, electronic organs, and also the early European experiments with electronic instruments (such as the *ondes martinot* and the *theremin*). In Nepal, the harmonium has paved the way for the electronic keyboard. Any harmonium player (and the harmonium is probably the instrument that most people can play) can adapt to the keyboard – as seen by most Nepali musicians, this is just an electronic harmonium and will be played accordingly, with the right hand only. And moreover, the harmonium has well-tempered whatever shruti practice there was before.

MUSICAL MIGRATION

Now, take a world map, and note all the areas and migrations we have mentioned above on it. You will see that most of the world's continents – Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, and South America – have become connected to Naxal, Kathmandu. (This network of cultural flows converging in Kathmandu becomes even more impressive if we consider major cultural areas instead of continents: East Asia, South Asia, Islamic West Asia and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and so on.) Then, consider time instead of space, and you will see that what preoccupied musical artists in, for instance the 10th, 15th, or 18th centuries A.D. is highly alive in a contemporary Nepalese song.

In sum, if we listen carefully, we would hear Amber Gurung's music room resonate with musical sounds performed at a banquet of the Chinese Han emperors at about 0 A.D., the Califate court in the 10th century Spain, for the Delhi Sultan in the 13th century, the Dukes of Burgundy in the 14th century, the Mughal emperors in the 16th century, in Tagore's Bengali mansion, by Persian court musicians, by the 18th century European composers, by African Americans, white Americans, Latin Americans, by pious Hindus, by English church-men... And, to be sure, it is not only this song of Amber Gurung's that has these reverberations. Every time you turn on Radio Nepal, watch a Nepali movie or put a modern song cassette in your player, these echoes are there. The musical histories of Europe, of the Arab middle east, of the Americas have all been transferred to South Asia.

But how come? Music does not travel alone. At least, this was not so in the pre-medialized world. Before media, music had to be transmitted in face-to-face encounters between living persons. But this was no obstacle to musical migration. Man is a very mobile animal. The Arabs and, later, other Muslims brought along their own music when they went to conquer, explore and trade in various nooks and corners of the world. By this means, a large part of the world has taken up Islam and adapted to Islamic culture. Being politically successful and culturally high-standing, it was natural that Islamic culture had an impact even larger than its ability to convert: Christian Europe and Hindu India both have incorporated Islamic cultural features. Later, the Europeans followed suit, and went on to put the world under their spell. The means were the same: trade, military and political conquest, cultural conversion. And as traders' merchantmen and caravans connected different areas with each other, as new rulers set up their courts, open-eared musicians faced new sources of inspiration.

MOBILE MAN IN THE HIMALAYA

In spite of the apparent barrier of the Himalaya, Nepal has in no way remained outside these cultural flows and political currents. Kathmandu itself is a testimony to mobile man, built as it is on the trans-Himalayan trade track connecting Tibet–China with the Indian plains. The Malla Kings ruling the Kathmandu Valley from the 13th until the 18th centuries entertained lively contacts – warfare as well as cultural exchange – with the realm of Tirhut in present Bihar and

brought even their own patron deity, Taleju, from the south. At their courts, as inscriptions and manuscripts testify, Maithili and Bengali was used along with the vernacular, Newari, and the ritual language, Sanskrit. The Newari language itself reflects the perpetual mobility and continuous cultural contacts: Tibeto-Burman by stock, it has been overlaid with a great many loans from Sanskrit and modern Indian languages. The literature in Newari is well connected to Indian models and includes translations of and comments upon the shastras. And throughout the centuries, imports from the south have supplied musical resources – ragas, instruments, genres – to the Newar music traditions of the Valley.

The Islamic expansion was experienced both directly and indirectly in Nepal. Directly, when Shams ud-Din Ilyas assaulted and ransacked the Kathmandu Valley in 1349. Indirectly, when numerous Hindu scholars and artists sought refuge in the Kathmandu Valley as a consequence of the Turkish Tughluqs invading the plains. Many of the Rajas in the many petty chiefdoms in the Nepalese Hills were Rajputs who had become displaced in the south by the Muslims. These Rajput dynasties include the Rajas of Gorkha who eventually were to become the Kings of Nepal. Within a few decades, their realm expanded from their small Hill territory to span everything from Kumaon and Garhwal (present-day Uttar Pradesh) in the west to Darjiling in the east – and then in 1814–16 the armed forces of the British East India Company helped it contract to the borders of Nepal as we know it today.

The people of Nepal have contributed themselves to human mobility. In search of trade and business opportunities, salaried work, or new land to till, Nepalis have moved largely over the area: Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjiling, the big cities of India, even Burma. Not to mention the Nepali soldiers who under Jang Bahadur helped the British suppress the sepoy mutiny and returned home with 4300 carts loaded with the loot of Lucknow, or all the young Nepali men who have served in places the world over in the British army, or the fact that the various ethnic groups of the country more or less recently have immigrated either from Tibet or from the south..

Amber Gurung's own history is an instance of this. He was born and grew up in Darjiling where army work had taken his father, a man from west Nepal. During Nepal's pre-democratic period, Darjiling – precisely because of being outside the country – was Nepal's pre-eminent cultural and intellectual centre, a refuge for writers and intellectuals, and where good educational opportunities were found. In Darjiling, Amber Gurung got his education, studied western as well as Indian music, and formed the first part of his musical career – among other things as a member of the Art Academy – before King Mahendra in 1969 invited him to join the Royal Nepal Academy.

Also the musical artists of our recording have, in their own way, themselves contributed to musical migration. Tarabir Tuladhar has given recitals not only in Nepal and India, but also in Europe where he moreover recorded a LP disc for the international market. Kishor Gurung has spent long periods abroad, studying at universities in America.

MEDIA, MIGRATION AND MODERNITY

With media, music has seemingly become independent of face-to-face meetings between performer and listener. The first of these media, of course, was musical notation, music on paper. However, to understand notated music presupposes that you know the style and genre. Music in notated form hardly migrates beyond its home territory. In the contemporary world, the electronic media have made possible to freeze an entire performance and transmit it. This does imply increased possibilities of musical migration. A western listener can develop a taste for South Asian shastriya sangit, or a Nepalese listener for Western rock music, without ever meeting the artists face to face in a situation of here-and-now music-making.

As conventional wisdom has it, flows, migrations, cultural contacts, cultural syncretism and hybrids are features of the modern world, a world seen to be “contracting” as a result of air-travel and media. If we can learn from our investigation here, this is no more than prejudice. Most of the musical migration traced in this article in fact pre-dates the modern world. Most of it is a result of political expansion and moving traders rather than of air-travel and media. The modern world has only given further momentum to processes that were always there.

FOREIGN MUSIC, OUR MUSIC

However we consider *Aankhaale malaai* – in terms of its composition, its genre, the way it is performed – it is saturated with the traces of things foreign. So, how then could this be a *Nepali* song? Is the genre of modern songs no more than a mixture of various foreign influences? But this is also the case with older Nepalese musical traditions. As Mireille Helffer and Carol Tingey both point out, the Damai wedding orchestra is just a local version of the *naqqarakhana* or *naubat* orchestra which originated in Persia or Central Asia and was used as a symbol of feudal power in the days of the Delhi sultanate and the Mughals; the Newar musical traditions have imported much from the south; and as Kishor Gurung recently has noted, even the lauded symbols of Nepal’s indigenous traditions – the four-string *sarangi* fiddle and the *madal* drum – are found over a large area outside Nepal.

But maybe the question is misleading. Though people may claim it as their own, music does not belong to a place. Nothing can be more “Indian” than a raga performance with a sitar or sarod and a tabla. But as we know, the sitar derives from the Persian setar or the Uzbek dutar, the sarod from the Afghanistani rubab, the tabla from the Arabic naqqara, and shastriya sangit performance practice if not the raga concept itself is influenced by Arabic/Persian art music. Music is not pure. But still, inspite of all these foreign loans and influences, it would not be possible to mistake this sitar or sarod raga performance for any other kind of music. Persian and Arabic classical music sounds very different.

Because of man’s mobility, migrating musicians and, later, media, music is always in a flux. It

is always on the move and is never the property of any particular place. This is true in two ways. First, any major culture will have a lot of imported musical goods in “its own music”. But moreover, whatever is developed in one place will be diffused to other places, and in this way, the place of origin loses its “ownership” of its musical creations. Once they have migrated to new places, they will be re-interpreted and utilized in new ways in new places. Chinese sheng music, a blues harmonica solo, Scandinavian folk tunes on the accordion, South Asian harmonium-accompanied hymn-singing are all connected in the historical process of musical migration, but the local adaptations are so different that the connection hardly suggests itself to the listener.

And it is these re-interpretations and local adaptations that matters when it comes to what is Nepali in Nepalese music. No music can be deemed “foreign” just because it contains foreign musical elements (tones, scales, forms, genres, instruments and so on). These elements have always migrated. And as we have seen, musical syncretism is in no way inherently modern. In fact, if Nepalese modern song is based upon musical borrowings from abroad, well so are Nepalese folk traditions, so is European art music, so is shastriya sangit.

NOTE

This article is based on a presentation given at the workshop on cultural flows in Sigtuna, Sweden, in October 1992. The article is based upon my own research on Nepalese music (supported by SAREC, the HSFR, and the Swedish Institute, whose financial help is gratefully acknowledged). But even more it draws upon memory fragments accumulated from various readings over the years. Since the human memory is not to be trusted (at least not mine), I have checked the factual details on ghazal poetry with Russell (see under works consulted below), Nepali literature with Hutt, Newari literature with Malla, Kathmandu Valley history with Levy, Nepalese history with Stiller, and on various aspects of music and musical instruments by means of extensive use (thanks to *Gert Wegner*) of the *New Grove dictionary of music and musicians*, and the *Grove dictionary of musical instruments* – in addition to the literature mentioned in the text. To *Amber Gurung*, the composer and singer of the “one song” of this article, I owe a great many thanks not only for the invitation to participate in the recording sessions, but even more for the help and the many clarifying discussions on the subject of Nepalese music (especially modern songs) he has given me since 1981.

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