

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE ASPECTS OF THE DEVĪ DANCES IN SANKHU, NEPAL

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Introduction

Several places in the Valley of Kathmandu can boast masked dances in which the goddess (Devī) defeats her demon adversary Daitya. The yearly Devī pyākhaṃ (dance) in the capital Kathmandu is performed during Indra yātrā (Toffin 1992:77), the eight days festival of the king of the gods. A salient feature of the performances is that Daitya goes about unmasked, as if he stands somewhat closer to human beings than the masked goddess who slays him, or rather, who subdues him. For it is denied that Daitya is to be killed in the drama; at a more hidden level animosity goes together with affinity between the two opposed sides.

An invisible but all the more salient feature of the Devī pyākhaṃ in the small town of Sankhu (in the north-eastern corner of Kathmandu Valley) is that Daitya is not staged at all, in spite of the fact that his defeat is commemorated in the accompanying songs and enacted by the three protagonists brandishing their swords. The story goes that when the Devī pyākhaṃ of Sankhu was invited to the court of Kathmandu it was ridiculed because the protagonists Devī, Caṇḍī and Bhairava had no real antagonist. However, when Devī stroke her sword in a stone to mark the slaying of Daitya, her force was so strong that the Daitya performer of Kathmandu's Devī dance died at the instant, without even being touched. The Devī pyākhaṃ of Sankhu has not been invited to the capital ever since.

If invited by a benefactor, the Sankhu Devī Dances can be performed any time between Kāyāṣṭmī (four days before the start of Indra yātrā) and Vijayā Daśami, the last day of the Daśain festival. After that it can not be performed until Svanti (the festival of light known in Nepālī as Tihār). Furthermore, it is prohibited to perform the dance at the time of Sankhu Vajrayoginī yātrā, the town's main festival. The prohibition lasts from the very start, the invitation of the goddess (*nimantraṇā*), till the very end, the farewell worship (*bicā pūjā*). The prohibitions are mentioned in the

Contributions to Nepalese Studies, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January 1996), 255–269.
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instruction text of Vajrācārya, but no further explanation is given about the reason why. The dance association members do not know about the prohibition, so they said that the dance can be performed throughout the year. Vajrayoginī is the main goddess of Sankhu, and her shrine is situated on the hill above the town. Zanen has given a detailed description of the Vajrayoginī festival and Sankhu town (1986:125-166). At all other times of the year it is not forbidden to perform the Devī dance. In the absence of any patrons or sponsors, as it has now been for many years, the Devī Pyākhaṃ is yearly performed in the night of Kāyāṣṭmī in September. While the spectacle itself has thus been reduced to only one night in a year, the ritual and social organisation that surround the dances and constitute the foundation of their divine nature remain relatively untouched; the complexity of the invisible domain by far surpasses its highlight, the spectacular shows itself.

Ritual preparation and elaboration are features not confined to the Devī Pyākhaṃ of Sankhu. All divine dances of the valley start with the worship of Nāsadyo, the god of music, dance and drama. The Sankhu Devī dances derive their ritual complexity from their multi-caste participation, the elaborate ceremonies (in principle once every five years) at the time of the instruction and inauguration of a new dancing team, and the diversification of functions pertaining to different aspects of the performance. There are *nāyos* (elders, teachers) for all the different elements in the Pyākhaṃ: the movements and gestures of the dancers (Devī *nāyo*), the ritual observances required (*mū nāyo*), the rhythms of the drums (*khiṃ nāyo*), the accompanying songs (*me nāyo*) and the beatings of the cymbals (*tāḥ nāyo*).

A Buddhist (Vajrācārya) *guruju* officiates at the moments of transition: the worship and sacrifice to Nāsadyo preceding every dance, the acquirement of wings from the crown of the town's principle goddess Vajrayoginī—to be (temporarily) attached to the crowns of the dancers, and finally, putting as well as removing spells that give power to the divine dancers and protect them from the evil eye. A major transition is the sanctification of a new group of dancers which requires several *pūjās* to Vajrayoginī and Nāsadyo; the transfer (“drawing”) of the latter (the god of music and dance) to the house of instruction; (*ākhāḥ chem*); and, at the conclusion of the instruction period, three nights on end in which the dancers come out and circumambulate the town.

The mystery and power of the divine dances is contained in all those ritual aspects which overshadow the dramatic performance and at the same time represent a more hidden level of meaning in Sankhu's Devī Pyākhaṃ.

History and Myth

Nepal, as present day Kathmandu Valley was once called, is a centre of art and architecture, dance and drama, religion and culture. This was especially so in the time of Malla rule, from the 14th to 17th centuries. Several Malla kings themselves not only wrote songs, poetry and drama, but also staged dance and drama and played different roles (characters) themselves (see Malla 1982:66, 65-76; Vaidya and Kamsākār 1991:10, ix; Iltis 1990:146; Vajrācārya 1990:40-44). In the 14th century Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī, the oldest written chronicle of Nepal, the Newari word for dance and drama, *pyākhaṃ*, is mentioned in many places (Vajrācārya and Malla 1985: 148, 159, 162-164), which shows the rich tradition of dance and drama in those days. In Newari the word, *pyākhaṃ* is used for both dance and drama. But the tradition of *pyākhaṃ* which is based on the stories of gods and goddesses consists mostly of dance and ballads. The Devī *pyākhaṃ* of Kathmandu and the Devī *pyākhaṃ* of Sankhu were developed in that tradition. It is difficult to say when exactly the Devī *pyākhaṃ* in Sankhu started, because there is no written document available to trace the history, except two small manuscripts, one of which was copied in 1856 and the other in 1863. The first one contains ritual instructions for the Vajrācārya priest and the second contains hymns which are sung in the dance. The dance training is carried out by the assembly of organisers, the *guthi* of the Devī dance. It is done orally, no text of instruction is used. The tradition has been continued by the *guthi* members since their forefathers' times, as told by the dance teacher Mr. Hirakaji Shrestha.

Worshipping the mother goddess is an old tradition in Hindu society. Sankhu Devī *pyākhaṃ* is fully based on songs of praise to the goddess Devī in the powerful forms of Kālikā, Durgā, Bhavānī and Bhagavatī. For the people of Sankhu it is Vajrayoginī *hyāumkhvāḥmāju* (red-faced mother) or *mhāsukhvāḥmāju* (yellow-faced mother) who may have the forms of Kālikā, Durgā, Bhavānī, Bhagavatī or Devī. Red-faced mother is the main statue of Vajrayoginī, which never comes out of the temple, but the yellow-faced one is the *yātrā mūrti* of Vajrayoginī, which is carried down to Sankhu town every year in March/April in the Vajrayoginī festival. Both are called Vajrayoginī, but iconographically the two are quite different. Originally she was a goddess of the Buddhists, but now she is worshipped by Hindus as well. In his book *History of Nepal*, Daniel Wright has indicated the Hinduisation of the goddess Vajrayoginī (Wright 1877:35). For the people of Sankhu, Devī *Pyākhaṃ* is nothing else than the dance of Vajrayoginī herself in the form of three dancers: Devī, Caṇḍī and Bhairava.

The song teacher, called me *nāyo* (song leader) in the dance assembly, Mr. Krishna Shrestha, said that long, long ago a great tantrist found the

goddess Vajrayoginī dancing in a courtyard in Calākhu quarter of Sankhu, disguising herself as three children. As the tantrist was certain that the dancing children were none other than the goddess Vajrayoginī, he bound them with his magic spells (*tāṃ taye*) and swore to perform her dance every year in Sankhu. Since that time the Devī Dance of Sankhu is performed in Sankhu.

According to the *mū nāyo* (the chief or the main leader of the dance assembly), Devī Vajrayoginī is fierce as well as tender and merciful. If she is made angry she can bring great destruction, and if she is pleased she can bestow life and happiness. Masks, ornaments, dresses of Devī dancers, and musical instruments are kept in the *mū nāyo's* house. Every evening his wife has to light a wick in that room. Sometimes when she forgot to do so, she had to face fearful dreams or heard a frightening sound of jingling bracelets of Devī from the storeroom.

One of the *khim* (two-sided drum) players Mr. Kedar Narayan Ranjit said that many years ago, when he was very young, the Devī dance was not performed for a year. In that particular year a flock of monkeys from Vajrayoginī forest kept hanging around Sankhu town to alarm the dance assembly to perform the dance soon. Later, when the dance was performed, they suddenly disappeared. He told that just a few years back too, when it was becoming late to train the present team of dancers, his wife and his neighbours saw the three dancers dancing on the roof of the *mū nāyo's* house. He said that this also was to alarm the dance assembly not to delay the training of new dancers.

In relation to the divine power of Devī, almost all guthi members whom we interviewed also repeated the story of the instant death of a Daitya dancer of the Kathmandu Devī pyākhaṃ team when the Sankhu team visited the Kathmandu court.

When we go through the Hindu myth of Devī, we encounter numerous names for her such as Durgā, Kālī, Cāmuṇḍā, Maḥiṣāsura Mardini, "The slayer of the buffalo demon," and Umā or Pārvatī, as the wife of Siva (see Hopkins 1971:126; O'Flaherty 1975:238-269; Wilkins 1882:285-320). The accompanying songs in the Sankhu Devī pyākhaṃ are all descriptions of the various forms of the goddess Kālī, praising the slaying of various demon enemies.

Songs and Music

In the instruction text of the Vajrācārya priest, it is clearly stated that no other songs than *mālaśrī* (a kind of tune which is sung around Daśain festival in the praise of Kālī) can be used in the Devī pyākhaṃ. In his book *Songs of Nepāl*, Siegfried Lienhard has collected one such song

(1974:131). In Sankhu Devī pyākhaṃ eighteen such songs are sung to accompany the dances. In all songs, except the last one, Devī, Kālī, Bhagavatī is praised in her different names, forms, and actions of killing various demon opponents. Her beauty and wearing of different ornaments are also described in those songs. She is praised as the queen of the three worlds. In one of the songs the nature of Vajrayoginī in her fierce form is described ultimately as Kālī. Only in the last song, which is called *ārati* (the song which is sung at the end or at the beginning of singing), are many other Hindu deities mentioned.

The three dancers—Devī, Caṇḍī, and Bhairava—dance in the same songs and perform the same movements. There is no sequence in the dances and songs in Sankhu Devī pyākhaṃ, unlike in the Kathmandu Devī pyākhaṃ, where dances are presented one after another in their sequence.

Beside the three divine dancers, three more dancers—Khyāḥ (a furry creature), Kavaṃ (a skeleton) and Betā (a gentle kind of demon)—perform dances in Devī pyākhaṃ. Their dances are presented to entertain the public. In Kathmandu Devī pyākhaṃ their dances fit into the sequence in which the divine dancers Devī (who is also called Kumārī in Kathmandu), Caṇḍī and Bhairava are the main characters. Sometimes they dance together, but in Sankhu Khyāḥ, Kavaṃ and Betā are (somehow) separated from the divine dances. They (can) perform humorous dance sketches in between the divine dances without any sequence. Separately six songs are sung in performing Khyāḥ pyākhaṃ in Sankhu Devī Dance.

To accompany those songs, *khim*, *dhāḥ*, and *nāykhim* (different kinds of two headed drums), *tāḥ*, *chusyāḥ*, *babhū* (different kinds of cymbals), and *mvahāli* (a kind of pipe to blow music) are played. These instruments are played depending upon the songs.

In the Kathmandu Devī dance, all together ten episodes of dances are performed, including the *dyolhāyegu* (music or melody devoted to pay respect to the shrines of local gods/goddesses).

Masks, Dresses, and Ornaments

Devī, Caṇḍī, and Bhairava's masks in Sankhu are made of papier-mâché by local Citrakār, a painter caste in the Newar society. Once made, it is unnecessary to change the masks until they are broken. But every year a Citrakārā should repaint the masks, a tradition which also stopped a few years ago. The guthi no longer received money to remunerate to the Citrakār. The guthi's main leader said that the masks would now be given for painting only if their colour fades away. Devī's and Caṇḍī's masks are almost similar and red in colour, while Bhairava's mask is black. Only these masks are used in public performances. In addition to these, there are

three copper masks that are very secret and used only in the training period of new dances.

Devī and Caṇḍī wear a red blouse and red jāmā (a long skirt), and Bhairava wears a black blouse and black jāmā. The dancers wear various ornaments too. On their head they wear a matu (a divine crown), to which silver wings are attached (New.: kikiṃpā), and around their necks they wear various metal necklaces. They wear several decorated bracelets around their arms. They also wear anklets below their knees which give a jingling sound when they dance.

The Guthi Composition

The Newar society is strong associated with various *guthis* (associations). But unlike Sī guthi and Sanā guthi (funeral associations), other religious associations are not always caste-bound. Sankhu's Devī pyākhaṃ guthi falls into the second category. Previously this guthi consisted of only nine members, and others were not considered guthi members, but nowadays the pattern of the *guthi* has changed considerably. Many people of Calākhu quarter from different castes are considered to be members of the guthi. Yet, the organising responsibility is taken by the five nāyo's, the leaders of the guthi, who all belong to the Shrestha caste. But in singing songs and playing instruments, several other castes are included in the association. According to the present *khiṃ nāyo*, Mr. Shyam Krishna Shrestha, those who bring a plate with worshipping materials for Nāsadyo in the morning of Kāyāṣṭmī (the dance performing day) are considered the members of the association. The Jyāpu (farmer caste) who sing songs and play instruments, the Jogi who play *mvahālī* (a kind of pipe), the Nau (the barber) who cuts toe nails and shaves heads of the dancers, and the Puṃ or Citrakār who paints masks all bring *pūjā* (a plate with worshipping materials) in that morning. All are considered guthi members of the Devī pyākhaṃ. Generally impure castes like the Jogī are never considered guthi members in other cases. In Sankhu Devī pyākhaṃ it is a unique example.

The distribution of sī (parts of the head of the sacrificed animal) is one of the essential elements of Newar feasts in which an animal is sacrificed to any god or goddess, either inside a family or in an association. In the Devī dance association every year in the dance performing day a goat is sacrificed, and later in the evening its head is divided into eight parts as sī (parts of the head of the sacrifice). In the instructional text of the Vajrācārya priest it is said to give the main sī — the right eye — to the dance teacher (Devī nāyo), but in practice it is given to the *mū nāyo*, the main leader of the guthi. The left eye is given to the Bhairava dancer, the right ear to the Devī dancer, the left ear to the Caṇḍī dancer, the tongue to the Devī nāyo,

the right jaw to the me nāyo (song teacher), left jaw to the khiṃ nāyo and the nose to the Vajrācārya priest who officiates at all the ritual proceedings in the Devī pyākhaṃ.

Selection of New Dancers

In principle every five years new dancers must be introduced, but in practice it never happened, as far as the Devī dance teacher remembers. Only once in twelve or fifteen years new dancers are trained. This is due to financial problems. Training a new team of dancers is expensive, and there are no means to meet the costs except from among the guthi members themselves, who must share in the expenses. So in selecting new dancers mostly young boys are chosen, so they can continue to dance for many years. In addition the main leader of the dance says young boys are obedient and reliable and quick in learning to dance, and as dance characters youngsters look more beautiful and attractive. Surprisingly enough, in none of the divine dances of the Kathmandu valley including Sankhu's Devī dance girls are recruited as dance characters, even though the female deities are pre-eminent.

In case of the Khyāḥ, Kavaṃ and Betā there is no caste boundary, but for the Bhairava, Devī and Caṇḍī dancers, one must be of Shrestha caste. New dancers are preferably chosen from among those families in whom old dancers came. If the dancers are not found from those families, opportunity is given to boys of the other members of the Devī dance association. Only if eligible boys are not found among the association members, then boys from outside the association are invited, but still not from outside Sankhu town. The dancers in Sankhu's Devī dance are paid not a single penny, neither by government authorities nor by the dance association. However, there are not the risks and obligations faced as for example in the Kathmandu Daitya and Kumār dancers. In the latter case failure to fulfil the rules and regulations can make the dancers suffer badly (Van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992:196).

Training of new dances requires that an astrologer approve the boys. Horoscopes of the dancers to be trained are given to the astrologer for study. If he does not approve someone's horoscope, that person cannot be selected to dance. Five years ago, when the present batch of dancers was about to start training, one boy was disapproved by the astrologer. According to the mū nāyo, the main leader, this rule is very strict in case of Bhairava and Devī dancers, but less strict in case of the Caṇḍī dancer. As the main leader remembers, long ago when he was very young a boy was made Devī dancer ignoring the astrologer's disapproval, and the boy died after his

first year's performances. So he thinks it is difficult to be a dancer in Sankhu's Devī dance.

The present Devī dancer is the main leader's son. He was only ten when he was chosen for the dance. He said he never felt possessed by the deity during his dance, but he has to keep shivering as if possessed. He said he has to do so because he was taught so. When the dancers are dressed and masked local people worship them as divinities, but nowadays such respect is only due in the single night when they perform the dance.

The Sankhu Devī dancers are not very proud of their divine roles, as the former Devī dancer (who is presently *khim nāyo*) in the Sankhu Devī dance said. They had to perform the dance continuously for fifteen years, which was altogether tedious.

Training of the Dancers

During the training, the new dancers must pass four phases:

1. The transfer of Nāsadyo (the god of dance and music) to the house of instruction and the beginning of dance training
2. Bā pūjā: second sacrificial worship at the Nāsadyo Shrine when the dancers are about half-way in exercising the dance actions
3. Sila taye khākegu pūjā: another sacrificial worship in the Nāsadyo shrine, to begin the dancers shivering
4. Pidanigu: the first performances of the dancers for three days continuously

1. *The transfer of Nāsadyo.* This day is also fixed by an astrologer. In this day a secret night worship is done in a local Nāsadyo shrine located in Dhumlā tvāh (quarter). This time the worship of Nāsadyo is done with a goat sacrifice.

To start the worship each dancer has to offer ten betal nuts (*gvay*) and a coin (*dām*) to Nāsadyo. This process is called *gvay dām tayegu*. For the Newars (of Nepal) the *gvay dām tayegu* is a ritual announcement of a later larger ceremony (Tuladhar 1979/80:47). Then the Vajrācārya priest starts worshipping Nāsadyo and prepares *mohanī* (soot collected from oil lamp). This *mohanī* is of great importance for the trainees, because from this day on they must mark it on their foreheads everyday before practising their dance, until a day before their first public performance. They are prohibited from taking any *mohanī* from elsewhere till the day of their first performance (*pidanigu*), and they need not mourn if anybody dies in their family in that period.

After worship and sacrifice they go back to the house where the training of the dancers takes place (*ākhāh chem*). Nowadays it is in the *mū nāyo*'s

house where all the things relating to the Devī pyākhaṃ are kept. The priest has to purify the earth in the training room immediately after the dancers arrive there. He also has to bind 21 grains of husked rice (*ākhe*) four times in four small pieces of cloth to place those in the four directions of the room. Finally he has to put imaginary fences for protection against evil spirits in all four directions of the room. Then all dancer boys must present ten betal nuts and a coin (*dām*) to the Devī nāyo, the dance teacher, and they have to bow down before him and request him to teach them the dance well. Then they begin the dance practice holding a wooden sword in their hands but without any masks or special dresses.

There is no *nāsaḥ kṛpāḥ* (a cloth painted sign of Nāsadyo) used in Sankhu for transferring Nāsadyo. This is frequently used in Kathmandu, such as in case of the Daitya and Kumār dance and other divine dances. The Vajrācārya priest said that to transfer Nāsadyo he has to bind in a piece of cloth three kisli which are offered to Nāsadyo by the dancers and contain betal nuts and coins. Those are taken to the training room where they are put in a niche. The priest did not mention any *kalaśa* (earthen pot), but the house holder, the mūnayo, said that only one kisli is put on the mouth of a *kalaśa* which they call Nāsadyo. It is brought home after having received worship at the Nāsadyo shrine to be put in a wall niche in the training room. As the training finishes, the *kalaśa* remains in his home but without having any importance. When the training is completed, the kisli on top of the *kalaśa* is brought to the Vajrācārya priest.

According to the dance teacher, in the first period of training the dancers are taught to grasp the drum beatings. In this period the beatings are taught orally only. As soon as they have learned the beatings, the date for Bā pūjā is fixed.

2. *Bā pūjā*. This pūjā is also done secretly in the night-time in the local Nāsadyo shrine with a goat sacrifice. Then the dancers return to the *mūnayo*'s home, and after a feast, the training resumes. From now on the *khim* drum is introduced in dance training and the dancers have to practice on the beatings of the *khim*.

One common phenomenon among different castes of the Newar community is their belief that, to please Nāsadyo and to learn dance and music sooner, they need to steal animals. This belief is still found in the Sankhu Devī dance group. If a dancer is unable to steal any animal in the time of training, he becomes very slow in learning things; if a dancer is able to steal an animal, he will become a graceful dancer, singer or instrument player and be successful in whatever art he is learning. In the course of training the trainees can steal any animals for sacrifice, no matter

whether they are male or female animals; they can sacrifice to Nāsadyo in the *ākhāḥ* (training room) indiscriminately, even including pregnant animals. Only male animals are sacrificed in other cases. Sī are also distributed from those stolen animals, but no meat is allowed to be brought out from the training room. Even the women in the household are not supposed to eat any meat from those animals. However, the present *khim nāyo*, who once was a Devī dancer, said that he never did the stealing work. Yet his batch learned the dance in a month, which is a very short period to learn this dance. In the training time his other friends did steal animals from which he said he ate his share.

3. *Sila taye khākegu pūjā or shivering of the dancers.* In the ritual instruction text of the Vajrācārya priest, it is said that this *pūjā* should be done 21 days before the first performance of the new dancers. Again a goat is sacrificed in the Nāsadyo shrine. This time the copper masks, iron swords, *ghaṃghalā* (anklet with string of small bells) and *pātra* (bowls) of the dancers also receive worship together with Nāsadyo. The priest has to blow spells (of shivering) on all those attributes of the dancers, and he has to dry them in the smoke of *gumgū*, a kind of incense. Then he has to hand over the masks, ankle bracelets, swords and bowls to the dancers.

If possible the priest has to make the dancers shiver (*khākegu*) one by one, blowing spells 21 times to each of them. Whether they shiver or not they continue to practice every day. Within seven days, the dancers shiver automatically. In case they fail to shiver within seven days, they have to do a small worship to Nāsadyo with *samaybaji*, which contains beaten rice, black soyabeans, ginger, burned meat and liquor (Juju and Shrestha 1985:13) and a sacrifice of a duck's egg. Together with those worshipping items they must take 21 *dāphvah svām* (a kind of scentless white jasmine but in the ritual replaceable by a silver imitation) to the Nāsadyo shrine. First they are to offer those to Nāsadyo and bring back home nine of them. In the home (in the training room) the priest should attach three *dāphvah svām* to each one's head and try to make them shiver. If things still do not improve with similar rituals and *pūjā*, the instruction is to take twenty-one grains of husked rice (*ākhe*) to Nāsadyo and after *pūjā* bring back nine grains and then attach three grains on each dancer's head. It is said in the instruction text that this time the dancers shiver without doubt.

The process of making the dancers shiver is one of the most important features in the Sankhu Devī dance by which the audience recognizes them as possessed by the divinities. When the dancers come out they are distinct from human beings not only because of their masks and dresses but also because they keep shivering, which local people think is a sign of their divine power.

4. *Pidanigu or the first performances of the dancers.* After the dancers learn the dancing perfectly, pidanigu day is confirmed. This day the guthi must perform the *pañcabali pūjā* (worship with five animals' sacrifice: a buffalo, goat, ram, duck and cock) at the local Nāsadyo shrine. The assembly must also do pūjā at the local Gaṇeśa as well as at the Vajrayoginī shrine and at Mahākāla below the Vajrayoginī temple. In the text they are instructed to make a goat sacrifice at Mahākāla too. Mahākāla is also called Bhairava and well known by those names only, but in the *pitha pūjā* vidhi text the shrine is called Mahālakṣmī. Vajrayoginī does not accept blood in her temple, but animals to be sacrificed in Mahākāla are consecrated in her name, sometimes in front of the main gate of her temple (mostly by non-Newar people from outside Sankhu). But sacrifices are done only at the Mahākāla shrine. The *pañcabali pūjā* at Nāsadyo shrine is done sometime in the morning. Mohanī is to be made, and masks, ankle bracelets, swords and pātra need to be set up for worship. Furthermore all musical instruments are set up for receiving worship together with Nāsadyo. Three *thāpim* (items for worship, mostly a pot containing liquor) are also put there to be handed over to the three dancers later.

Concluding the worship flowers are taken from the god Nāsadyo, and the masks, ankle bracelets, swords and bowls are handed over to the dancers together with the flowers. They take them into the training house.

After the *sikābhvay* (a feast at which the parts of sacrificial animals' heads are distributed) in the evening the dancers are made ready to go out for their first public performance. Before they go out the priest has to blow the spells to make the dancers shiver, and he has to put a fence against evil spirits around them.

The Devī dancers in Sankhu have to perform their first dance at Dhumlā dabū (stage), because the stage is supposed to be the stage of Vajrayoginī and the dance itself is believed to be her dance. Then they return to Calākhu quarter and begin their dance, in front of Ajimādyo who is believed to be the mother of Vajrayoginī. After that they present dances at the Calākhu stage and take a round of the town presenting dances in all the quarters and stages. After presenting dances for three nights continuously, the pidanigu ceremony ends. After pidanigu (ceremony) there is rest for them until Kāyāṣṭmī.

Every year in the Kāyāṣṭmī night the dancers march around Sankhu town performing dances in all the eight quarters. In other years they start their dance from Calākhu quarter in front of Ajimādyo. In going around the town the dancers have to dance in *dyolhāyegu* gesture in front of all the divinities on the route. As the *khim nāyo* said, they have to perform *dyolhāyegu* dance more than a hundred times in making a round of the town. But it is a short act with each time a repetition of the same movements.

During the training period Vajrayoginī is worshipped simultaneously with Nāsadyo. On the day of the Kāyāṣṭmī dance performance, three pieces of Kikiṃpā, wings from the crown of Vajrayoginī, are brought to be attached on each dancer's crown. The bringing of the wings and attaching of the wings is done by a Vajrācārya priest. The attachment of wings is also considered to transfer the divine power of Vajrayoginī to the dancers.

Conclusion

The Devī dancers are praised in many ways for killing demon antagonists, but surprisingly none of the demon characters are staged in the dance performances in Sankhu. The dance association members said it is because her divine power can really kill the demon character if one is staged.

The reason why the fight with the demon is kept invisible remains mysterious. But when you take into account the fear and superstition among the local people, it is not difficult to imagine that the demon character is excluded to avoid the unfortunate death of the performer.

In Kathmandu's Devī dance the demon is slain by Devī, as Bhairava was unable to kill him. But Caṇḍī has nothing to do with the slaying of the demon. In case of the Sankhu Devī dance, all three dancers dance with the same songs, on the same musical beat and with the same movements. All of them strike their swords at the ground as a gesture of killing demons.

Unlike in mother goddesses (Mātrkā) temples in the valley, where fierce forms of Devī and Kālī are invoked and animals are sacrificed, blood is totally forbidden in the temple of Vajrayoginī. Only in the secret night worshippings Vajrayoginī accepts cooked meat and cooked duck eggs from the hands of Vajrācārya priests. The manifestation in the Devī dance of Sankhu of Vajrayoginī, who is none other than Kālī or Durgā as the accompanying songs describe, might also be seen as part of a process of Hinduisation of Vajrayoginī.

In contrast with other divine dances of the valley where sacrificing animals and drinking of the blood by the masked dancers is a common feature, it is not so in the case of the Devī dances in Sankhu. In the time of performing dances, the actors are not supposed to kill any animals or drink blood. Only in worshipping Nāsadyo they sacrifice animals. Doing several worships and sacrifices in Nāsadyo, the dancers get their divine power and are called Devī, Caṇḍī and Bhairava. But their power does not come from those deities but from Nāsadyo.

In the other dances of the valley, whether the Daitya and Kumār dances in Kathmandu or the Navadurgā dance of Bhaktapur and other divine dances, their sources of power and divinity are always drawn from Nāsadyo.

Nāsadyo, the god of music and dance, embodies the power to transmit divine power from the divinities into the human actors. The female characters may be considered the most powerful, slaying as they do the demon enemy. But in the practice of dance performances, the indigenous Newar god Nāsadyo transfers divine power into both male and female characters. The agency to bring this transfer about is, as we have seen, the bringing of sacrifice before the dance and during the training of the dancers.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to express my indebtedness to my long-time friend and research companion, Drs. Bert van den Hoek of Leiden University, The Netherlands, who not only inspired and instigated me to write this research article but also assisted me in this research. I want to thank my friends, Mr. Bishnu Bhakta Gorkhali and Mr. Roshan Gorkhali of Sankhu for their help during this research. I express my heartfelt thanks to the members of the Sankhu Devī dance association. Especially among them Mr. Dhirja Shrestha (*mū nāyo*), Mr. Hirakaji Shrestha (*Devī nāyo*), Mr. Krishna Shrestha (*me nāyo*), Mr. Shyam Krishna Shrestha (*khim nāyo*), Mr. Kedar Narayan Ranjit and present Devī dancer, Mr. Dharendra Shrestha. They supplied me with a wealth of information as well as a manuscript of songs. Furthermore, I want to express my gratitude to the Devī dance priest, Mr. Kriyānanda Vajrācārya for his valuable information and the ritual instruction text (manuscript). I am obliged to my institute, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, and Executive Director, Mr. Krishna P. Khanal for providing me with the opportunity to present this paper in the 13th European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies (August 31 to September 3, 1994) in Toulouse, France. I want to thank Mr. Ratnabhadur Shrestha for his valuable suggestions. Finally, I am grateful to Mr. Nirmal Man Tuladhar of CNAS who has always taken a lively interest in my research in the contemporary Newar culture.

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