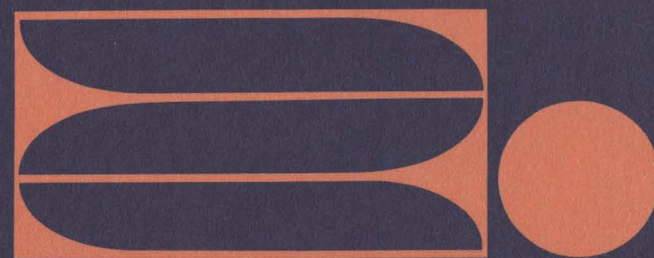


# SONGS AND DANCES OF NEPAL

RECORDED by CASPAR CRONK

NOTES by CASPAR CRONK AND GEORGE LIST

ETHNIC Folkways Library FE 4101



INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
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Ethnomusicological Series

George List, editor





Nepali love song  
Prayer chant  
Song by Tsering  
Ancient Takali prayer chant  
Song of rejoicing  
Dance to foreigners  
Danyan music  
Dance song, danyan  
Song by Ang Dawa  
Song by Phurkepa  
Tibetan song by Me La

Tibetan begging song  
Song by Tile Tolma  
Song by Rema Gealchen  
Song by Soltu Ma  
Flame shrine: conch and drum  
Flame shrine: prayer chant  
Nepali love song  
Tibetan folk tune  
Nepali song  
Danyan music  
Newari song

# SONGS AND DANCES of NEPAL

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE



## Songs and Dances of Nepal

Nepal, an independent state lying on the northern frontier of India, is one of the most rugged geographic areas in the world and one of the most inaccessible. The world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas, stretches across Nepal from east to west. In the east the crest of the range is on the Tibetan border. In central and western Nepal the high peaks lie further south of the border. The highland region to the north of the Himalayas is extremely uneven, broken with deep ravines and studded with high hills. Access to the south through the Himalayas is by means of the gorges made by the four major river systems which flow from north to south.

To the south of the Himalayas in the eastern central part of Nepal is the basin or valley in which the capital, Katmandu (Kathmandu), is located. This is the most fertile region of the country and has the most moderate climate. South of the central basin is a comparatively low mountain range, the Siwalik, whose southern flanks drop precipitously into the steaming, malarial jungle region known as the Tarai (Terai), which lies on the southern border of the country.

For centuries Nepal has been under the influence of two competing cultures: the Indian, carrying the Hindu religion and an Indo-Aryan language rooted in Sanskrit; and the Tibetan, with its strong lamaistic Buddhist institutions and its Tibeto-Burman language. The highland north of the Himalayas has been greatly influenced by the Tibetan culture, the Tarai by the Indian. Only in the protected central valley did there exist for many centuries an indigenous and relatively independent culture. Prior to 1770 the valley was ruled by the Newars, a people whose ancestors may have come originally from Tibet or even from China. They still bear some marks of Mongolian origin, both physically and in their customs, and the Newar language seems to be related to Tibetan. However, through invasion and migration from the south they have acquired many of the physical characteristics, religious beliefs, and habits of the Indians. Though originally farmers, they have become skilled craftsmen, and more recently merchants. There is a written history of the early period in the Nepal valley. Although this history is in part legendary, some events can be verified by records in China and India.

In the decade beginning in 1760, the Nepal valley was conquered by the Gurkhas, a group native to the area west of the valley which included several war-like mountain tribes. The Gurkha leaders, however, were largely of Indian descent, their forefathers

having fled to Nepal after the Moslem conquest of India. The Gurkhas had accepted not only Indian leaders but the Hindu religion and caste system, although the caste distinctions have never been so rigid as in India itself. Since 1770 the Gurkhas have ruled the Nepal valley and have increased their domain to include all of present-day Nepal. Their language, Parbatian or Nepali, has now become the *lingua franca* of all Nepal. Nepali is rooted in Sanskrit but contains many words of Tibetan origin.

The recorded history of Nepal is primarily that of the central valley. Throughout most of the remaining area of the country the people have had very little contact with the central valley. The inhabitants of these other areas feel little allegiance to the central government and the central government in turn has little knowledge of the conditions which exist or the events which occur in most of the country outside of the central valley. The cause of this situation is the extreme ruggedness of the topography which prohibits the employment of modern means of transportation. The use of wheeled vehicles is impractical in much of the interior of Nepal. Movement is by foot and all goods involved in commerce are carried by porters. Yaks, mules, and horses are in general use only in the area of Tibetan culture found along the northern edge of the country. There are only a few airfields in Nepal and all except those at Katmandu and Pokhara are located near the southern border. The necessity of continuing to rely upon such primitive means of transportation has been a primary factor in the maintenance of the cultural differences exhibited by neighboring groups of people in Nepal.

The recordings and photographs presented in this album were made during the 1959 American Himalayan Expedition, whose purpose was the exploration of the little known territory north of the Dhaulagiri massif in western central Nepal. The Expedition made its way north in mid-September from Nautanwa in India to Tansen in Nepal and then up the Kali Gandaki River valley to Tukucha. North of Dangarjong the Expedition turned westwards and spent a little more than a month in the area north of the Dhaulagiri massif. After returning to the Kali Gandaki valley, a side trip was made to Muktinath. The Expedition then turned south, stopping at Tukucha and Ghasa en route to Pokhara. From Pokhara the journey was made to Katmandu by air at the end of November. The map shows the route of the Expedition and the points at which the recordings and photographs were made.



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In the region traversed south of the main Himalayas, i. e., south of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna, the people largely follow the Hindu religion. From this region, which includes Pokhara and Tansen, came some of the tribes of the Gurkhas. North of the Himalayas the people are closely related to the Tibetans and are largely Buddhist. To the north and west of Tukucha many inhabitants are followers of the Pon'po religion. Those who profess this religion claim that it is the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. However, it appears to be largely a borrowing of Buddhist beliefs and of Buddhist deities but with different names.

Of the many tribal and other cultural groups found in Nepal, only the Botea (Bhotea), Sherpa, Takali (Thakali), and Newari are represented in the album. In addition, there are recordings of refugees who had recently fled Tibet to escape from the Chinese. The Botea are a tribal group who inhabit southern Tibet and who are found in the highlands north of the Himalayas in both central and eastern Nepal. In language and culture they are indistinguishable from the Tibetans. The principal concentration of Sherpas is found in the eastern highlands and they are very close to the Botea in culture. Both tribes are, in general, adherents to lamaistic Buddhism. The Sherpas are known outside Nepal for their excellence as high altitude porters to mountaineering expeditions.

The Takali are a group approximately ten thousand strong who live beside the Kali Gandaki north and south trade route. They are primarily merchants, are relatively prosperous, and show greater homogeneity than many of the other tribal groups. Ninety per cent of the inhabitants in the valley between Ghasa and Tukucha are Takalis. At Jomosom to the north they constitute nearly half of the inhabitants. The Takali language is also of Tibetan stock. Until some 400 years ago the Takalis had apparently been adherents to an offshoot of Hinduism known locally as Jangrism. Then lamaistic Buddhism was imposed from the north and Jangrist books and manuscripts were burned. However, Jangrism is still practiced by some Takalis.\*

Over the years the Newars in the Katmandu valley have abandoned all concepts of monistic Buddhism and have adopted some elements of Hinduism. This development is fairly characteristic. Except in those areas of Nepal where the people are of Tibetan stock, the religion is primarily Hindu and only vestiges of Buddhism survive within the Hindu practice. The Buddhist temples in the central valley are maintained mostly by Tibetan lamas. There is also an increasing breakdown of tribal identity through intermarriage. Many individuals work as itinerant laborers. Thus the members of any one tribe are often widely scattered, several tribes being represented in one village. Dialect differences are also tending to disappear. The Sherpa dialect, for example, no longer contains many words distinguishable from Tibetan.

\* See H. Kihara, Editor, Scientific Results of the Japanese Expeditions to Nepal Himalaya 1952-1953, Vol. III, Peoples of Nepal Himalaya, Kyoto, 1957, p. 90 ff. No mention of Jangrism is found in the other sources.

Nepalese, almost without exception, are bi-lingual, speaking Nepali as well as their own dialect. Unfortunately, there has been no thorough study of the dialects of languages of Nepal. Since all data were secured from informants through interpreters, indications given in the notes concerning the dialect used are often and necessarily conjectural. The translations or, rather, synopses of the song texts were made either by Manik Tuladhar, an eighteen-year-old Newari youth assigned as liaison officer to the Expedition, or, in a few cases, by one or other of the Sherpas. The Sherpas had a limited command of English. Manik had good command of English and Nepali but not of Tibetan languages. The texts of songs in Botean were translated into Nepali by the informant or a friend and then into English by the interpreter. Takali texts had first to be translated into Botean before being translated into Nepali and then into English. Many of the translations were recorded and have been transcribed directly from the tape.

Exactness in rendition of song, chant, or instrumental music does not seem to be a cultural value in the area. Nor do there seem to be clear distinctions between songs which are sung by individuals and those which are sung by groups. In the performance of many songs one individual starts the singing and a second or several individuals join at apparently arbitrarily chosen moments. When a second voice joins a solo singer, this often seems to be an attempt to help along with the words.

The recordings were made on one or one and one-half mil Mylar magnetic tape, using a Nagra III B tape recorder and an MD 21 mi-



crophone. Without exception, the original recordings reproduced here were recorded at 7 1/2 i.p.s., full track. The full collection from which the items heard on the disc were selected is on deposit in the Indiana University Archives of Folk and Primitive Music, Archives Tape Library Nos. 1375-1392.

A fade-out heard in a recorded strip indicates the omission of a following section; a fade-in, the omission of a previous section.

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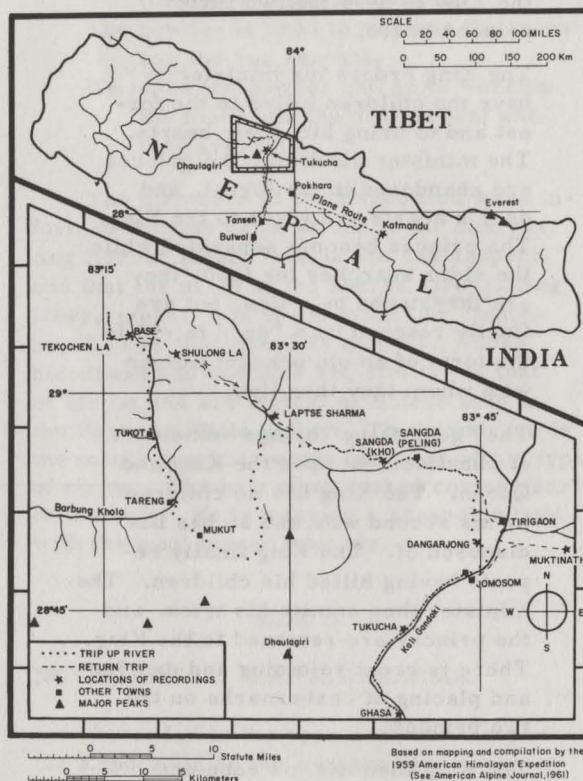
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MAP SHOWING ROUTE OF EXPEDITION AND LOCATIONS WHERE RECORDINGS WERE MADE



#### NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

##### SIDE A

##### OCTOBER 4. TUKUCHA.

Recorded at night in the house of Shan-kerman Serchan (Serchand), a well-to-do Takali trader, at a specially arranged gathering. Approximately thirty persons were present.

##### Band 1. Nepali love song of recent origin.

Sung by Purna Prasad Serchan, a Takali in his thirties, from Ghasa. Another man joins him.

The boy wishes to go everywhere with the girl. He says to her:  
"We will eat from the same plate, sit in the same place, and go in the same places."

Band 2. Prayer chant. Chanted as a protection against sickness while traveling. Performed by Darjung, a Botean, from Chimi Garza, Purungaon.

Band 3. Sung by Tsering, a Botean, from Chimi Garza, Purungaon.

Though a father has been a drunkard on raksi (the local distilled drink), it won't hurt his children.

##### Band 4. Ancient Takali prayer chant.

Chanted by Tan Prasad Serchan, an elderly Takali, from Kopang Davitag. According to the informant, this chant is about four hundred years old and it may therefore be related to the practice of Jangrism. The singer has some difficulty with his throat. The entire prayer lasts four minutes.

##### OCTOBER 5. TUKUCHA.

In the evening a play was presented by the townspeople on the occasion of the dedication of a new school in Tukucho. A synopsis of the play follows:

A King had two sons by his first wife. She died, and he has re-married. The play opens on the elder prince's birthday, during which there is a ceremony in which he receives his caste mark. The two little princes play ball. The ball goes through a window into the stepmother's room where she is



dressing. They go to ask for the ball. She is very angry and asks the King to have the two little princes killed.

The King orders his minister to have the children killed in the forest and to bring him their hearts. The minister disobeys, the princes are abandoned in the forest, and deer's hearts are given to the King. The princes become separated while the elder searches for food, they are threatened by a lion, but are finally rescued by a "good fairy" in the form of an old peasant woman with whom they then live.

The "good fairy" brings some sort of chastisement upon the King and Queen. The King has no children by his second wife and so has her disposed of. The King finally repents having killed his children. The minister then admits his trick, and the princes are returned to the King. There is great rejoicing and dancing and placing of caste marks on the two princes.

The King then has his robe and crown removed and placed upon his elder son.

The plot of this play exhibits a close relationship to a number of Indo-European tales in which motifs such as the demanded banishment of stepchildren, the compassionate executioner, and the separation of brothers appear.\*

Band 5. Excerpt from the song of rejoicing at the close of the play. All parts were played by women. The harmonium and drums were played by men. The man's voice heard is that of the director and harmonium player. The dancers wore ankle bells called couteau (ring) citari (bells). The music performed was popular, rather than traditional, some

\*See Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folktale, A Classification and Bibliography, FFC, 184, Helsinki, 1961, Types 592, 681, 709, and, in particular, 567A.

Nepali and some Indian. The stage was lit by the town's three gasoline pressure lanterns.

OCTOBER 8. DANGARJONG.

Recorded at night at the house of Nawang Tsering. There was an enclosure connected with the house which has a floor of hard-packed earth. This area was used as a threshing floor (as in the photograph on the

cover of the album), as a stable yard when mules or yaks were loaded, and for dancing.

The arrival of the expedition provided a good excuse for a dance. A large part of the village, perhaps fifty people, was present. The dancers formed a large circle and danced around a single kerosene lamp in the center. This type of dance seems to be common to all the Tibetan people as both the Botea and the Sherpas were familiar with it. It seems to be done at any time and to be purely a social dance. The dances observed were divided into two parts, a slow section followed by a more rapid section. During the transition from the slow to fast section or at the beginning of the rapid section the participants often emitted a hissing sound.

The dress of the Botean women is shown in the photograph on the cover of the album. The skirt is of many colors and the rope-soled moccasins are also very brightly colored.

Band 6. Dance to foreigners. Danced and sung by young Botean women. According to the informants, this dance song and the one below (Band 8) were very old. It seems that the texts were often altered to fit the particular occasion. The song was sung while dancing.

We are very glad to see you.

Where do you come from?

The excerpt given here contains the transition from the slow to the fast section of the dance.

Band 7. Instrumental selection on the damyan. The damyan is an instrument used primarily by the Tibetan peoples for dance accompaniment. The instrument has a long neck and a small resonating chamber hollowed out of the same piece of wood. Over this a skin is stretched. There are no frets. A plectrum is used. The instrument seen in the photograph has two double strings and one single. It is apparently tuned in fourths. In the photograph, Chotre, a Sherpa, is holding Nawang Tsering's damyan. The photograph was made purely for purposes of demonstration; Chotre did not play the instrument. Nawang Tsering plays the instrument in the recording. The sound of heavy breathing by some individual close to the microphone can be heard.

Band 8. Dance song with damyan accompaniment. Sung by the same group of women as before. Nawang Tsering played the damyan and danced as he played. The excerpt includes the last part of the slow section of the dance



and the beginning of the fast section. Some hissing can be heard.

We are very glad to see you.  
We regard you as gods.

The reference to members of the Expedition as gods is probably due to their possession of several marvelous instruments, tape recorder, polaroid camera, etc. Upon their departure, the villagers placed white scarves around the necks of the members of the Expedition as a sign of respect.

#### NOVEMBER 6. TEKOCHE LA BASE CAMP

"La" means "pass." By this date the Expedition had spent almost a month exploring the rugged and mountainous area north of the Dhaulagiri massif. They were camped as far west as they could go since the early advent of severe winter weather was expected. After negotiating the little used Tekochen La and scaling several peaks near the pass, they returned to the Kali Gandaki River valley.

Band 9. Composed and sung by Ang Dawa, a Sherpa 30 to 36 years of age. Ang Dawa was the sirdar or head man of the group of Sherpa porters accompanying the Expedition.

The good sahibs have come and seen  
the mountain.  
All see the top and then will go back.

The translation of this song and the one below was provided by the Sherpas.

Band 10. Composed and sung by Phurkeepa, a Sherpa about 45 years of age.

Everything is going well.  
Everyone is in good health and hopes  
to return home in good health.

Another Sherpa joins in.

The Sherpas worked together and often sang during the day. They learned each other's songs.

#### NOVEMBER 9. SHULONG LA CAMP

Recorded in the tent of the yak herder from the assistant yak driver, Me La. Me La, a Botean, was from Zomba in the upper Barbung Khola valley. He had learned many songs from the Tibetan refugees who were in the area at this time.

The yak drivers were with the Expedition for ten days. The yaks were used for transport from the final westward position near Tekochen La eastward to the Kali Gandaki River valley.

Band 11. Tibetan song sung by Me La.

There is a tree called shuckpa pom

from which we make a powder  
(incense) to put in the fire.

The powder is used to worship the moon  
and the sea serpent.

We make the powder and go to worship  
the moon and the sea serpent and  
they are happy.

The members of the Expedition were informed that the name of one of the Sherpas, Ang Norbu, meant "son of the sea serpent," and that the name of the Sherpa sirdar, Ang Dawa, meant "son of the moon" or "moon-boy." The photograph is of a man whose hairdress and costume are similar to that of Me La and are typical of Botean men in the Barbung Khola valley. The headdress is the man's own hair which is bound with a type of string. The hair when loosed comes nearly to the hips. He is wearing a sheepskin coat with the wool turned inwards.

#### SIDE B

#### NOVEMBER 12. LAPTSE SHARMA.

Recorded in the open near the camp of the Expedition on the western side of this high valley which forms a watershed divide between the Kali Gandaki and the Barbung Khola River valleys. The altitude was around 16,000 feet, the temperature a little above 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

Band 1. Tibetan begging song. Sung by Nakpa, a Khampa (Kam-pa) refugee lama of a non-celibate sect from Domba in western Tibet. This type of song is used for begging food. The drum, damaru (Sherpa dialect) or dalü, and the bell, tiboo, are also used in the daily prayer ceremony.

#### NOVEMBER 13. SANGDA KHO.

Recorded from a party of non-celibate lamas with their families who were refugees from Tibet. The recordings were made in a yurt or tent about six by ten feet. The top of the yurt is split to allow egress of smoke from the fire. There were approximately twelve Tibetans present.

Band 2. Sung by Tile Tolma, a woman 24 years of age, from Domba, a Khampa village near Lhasa. The song is said to be very old. Ghi is the term used for cooking oil or fat.

The yaks graze in a large mountain  
meadow.

We get ghi from yaks which give us  
fire for the Buddha.

Therefore we are glad to have this.

The reference in the second line is to the use of an oil lamp.



Band 3. Sung by Rema Gealchen, a man 33 years of age, from Gilashi in Tibet.

There is a great Lama in our village.  
He is very good and we must obey his  
orders and regard him as our  
parents.

Band 4. Sung by Soltu Ma, fifteen-year-old girl from Domba.

There is a special tree named  
Chingin.

We always use a piece of that tree  
in wine as well as medicine  
for all diseases.

That is all that God has granted us.

The third line above probably should  
read: "God has granted us all this."

NOVEMBER 19. MUKTINATH.

At Muktinath there is a copious spring and a thick woods, forming an oasis in the arid highlands. Muktinath is known even in India as a holy place to which pilgrimages are made. The spring is one of the sources of the holy Ganges. The water flows from 108 separate spouts made of copper and fashioned in the form of animal heads. Hindus bathe in the water and carry it away in flasks.

In addition to the Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu, there are three temples or gom-pas which are primarily Buddhist. On one of these a famous sacred fire, a flaming natural gas jet, is worshipped. The flame and a small spring are in a small grotto below the altar and can be seen by worshippers. The altar supports a large image of a seated Buddha, flanked by images of two other manifestations of Buddha.

The flame shrine was kept by two local women, Sumduch and Unabsong, the first 42 years of age, the second 37. These two chanted the daily prayers and simultaneously played drum and cymbals. On occasion a large sea shell, a conch, was blown as part of the service.

Band 5. Conch and drum.

Band 6. Prayer chanted when food or fruit is brought to the gods. Chanted by Sumduch and Unabsong with accompaniment of cymbals and drum. This prayer is approximately eight minutes in length. The body of the prayer consists of five sections chanted to the same melodic motif, punctuated by very short instrumental interludes. Beginning with the second section the rapidity with which the prayer is chanted constantly increases. It closes with a short section on a different melodic motif which is followed by spoken recitation to the ac-

companiment of rapid clashing of the cymbals.

Two excerpts from the prayer are heard in the band, separated by fade-out and fade-in. The first presents the instrumental prelude and part of the first chanted section. The second fades in towards the end of the fourth section of the chant and continues to the end of the prayer. At the point of entrance there has already been considerable acceleration in the tempo of the performance. Manik Tuladhar, the Newari liaison officer, took upon himself the responsibility of saving as much tape as possible for the Expedition. He often informed Cronk that the performance was completed and that he could stop the tape recorder. In this number he was over zealous. He can be heard saying, "All right," before the reverberation of the last cymbal crash has died, and "Finished," at the end of the recording.

NOVEMBER 21. TUKUCHA.

Recorded at the house of Govindman Serchan. Govindman, who was educated in India, played the European violin rather than the local equivalent, the sarangi, the Indian or Nepali violin. The drum was constructed like the Indian tabla. The head of the drum was of hide, at least an eighth of an inch thick. The drum was about 16 inches high and the head about 12 inches in diameter. The heel of the hand was pressed against the head near the edge of the drum and the fingers of both hands used in striking. The pitch of the drum was varied somewhat by the pressure put upon the drum head.

Band 7. Nepali love song with violin and drum accompaniment. Sung by Sunimayan, a villager, and Indraman Serchan. Violin played by Govindman Serchan. Govindman refused to have the name of the drummer recorded as he did not believe the quality of the latter's performance warranted this. The Serchans were in their early thirties, Sunimayan perhaps a little younger. The song is in praise of a girl who wanders in the forest. She is described as having the eyes of a deer. The interpreter again exclaims, "Finished," before the piece is completed.

Band 8. Tibetan folk tune. Played on the violin by Govindman Serchan.

NOVEMBER 23. GHASA.

Band 9. Nepali song accompanied by drum and bells. Sung by Tiki Devi, a woman 30 years of age from Ghasa. The drum was a tabla. The ankle bells were the couteau citari previously heard on Side A, Band 5. Each formed a three-quarter circle or arc. Here they were held in the hand and shaken. The occasional voices in the background were



those of other people present who sang along or discussed the performance of the selection.

One anna, two anna, three anna.  
I give you, you like me, I like you.

An anna is a monetary unit equal to one-sixteenth of a rupee.

Band 10. a) Selection on damyan.

b) Damyan accompanying solo dance. Damyan played by Prasad Tulachen (Tulachand), 22 years of age, who lived in Lete. He claimed he had been playing the instrument for twenty-one and a half years. The instrument was used not only to accompany the usual Tibetan type of group circle dance but to accompany individual dances as well. In the second excerpt the damyan provided an accompaniment to a solo dance by a girl who wore couteau citari. This solo dance also has two sections, slow and fast.

DECEMBER 6. KATMANDU.

Recorded at the house of Manik Tuladhar, the Newari liaison officer assigned to the Expedition.

Band 11. Newari song. Sung by Susila

Kansakar, thirteen-year-old girl, a cousin of Manik. The song describes the ancient marriage customs of the Newars. The informants considered it an important Newari traditional song. The text may indeed be old. However, the melody and the style of singing are typical of that heard in North Indian films, a fact which offers some evidence of modern Indian influence in the city.



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