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Lokapañca

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Lokapañca

Analysing structure, performance and meanings of a temple song in Nepal

Richard Widdess`

Songs as artefacts and performances

Every evening at about six o'clock, a group of men assemble at the temple of Dattātreyā in the town of Bhaktapur, Nepal, to sing sacred songs. They are farmers, who live in the nearby streets of the town and go out to work in their fields by day. It is their pleasure, and they also regard it as their duty, to sing for around two hours every evening, throughout the year without exception, accompanying themselves on cymbals, drum and natural trumpet. They sing a minimum of five or seven songs, and by singing every line repeatedly, each song is extended to many times its intrinsic length. Preliminary and concluding rituals, and breaks for conversation between songs, mark the event as both a sacred and a social interaction. The type of singing that the group perform is called *dāphā bhajan*, or *dāphā* for short, a style of devotional music that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Bhajan* is a ubiquitous South Asian term for a devotional song; the origins of the term *dāphā* are obscure, but it seems to refer to group performance.

The repertoire of the group, and of other similar groups at other temples in Bhaktapur, is a repertoire of religious poems set to music. Such songs can be considered both as historical artefacts having at least a degree of permanent existence, and as evanescent events in time – that is, performances. The poems are contained in manuscript songbooks, which the singers read from as they sing. Punctuation marks delineate their division into verses and lines, and

the appropriate melodic and rhythmic modes (*rāg*, *tāl*) are indicated; the author's name is often inscribed in the last verse. The melodies are not notated in writing, but they are orally transmitted and must be committed to memory in the learning process; there is little scope for deliberate variation, embellishment or improvisation by individual singers. Melodies tend to follow a formal schema, based on registral contrasts, that permeates not only this repertoire, but religious and classical music throughout South Asia. As a historical text, each song affords meanings relating to the syncretic Hindu-Buddhist religious culture of the Kathmandu Valley, the historical context of its composition, and in some cases, the specific locality in which it is performed.

The version of a song that is learned by beginners follows the written text with little or no repetition. But in performance by the group it is expanded through multiple repetitions of successive lines and verses, according to a standard pattern involving antiphonal alternation, changes of rhythm, tempo and instrumental accompaniment. In the rare event of this expansion being omitted, the performance is described as 'folded up' (Widdess 2013a: 75); only an expanded performance, usually lasting 10–15 minutes, is really complete. Performance therefore transforms the song, but performance also has its permanent, predictable, schematic structure. Like the song, performance also affords meanings, but of different kinds, accessible through ethnographic analysis of social behaviours and cultural norms, and through consideration of the cognitive processes involved.

In a larger publication, I attempted to analyse the repertoire and performance of *dāphā* from the various vantage-points that seem to be demanded – history, structure, performance, social and cultural context, cognition, meaning – and to show the interrelationships of these overlapping perspectives (Widdess 2013a). In this chapter, I summarise some of my findings by analysing a single song, *Lokapañca*. I have selected this example because it is both an unusually short song, and a song that is rich in historical and other meanings. To convey

something of these meanings it is necessary to set out the historical background of the society in which *dāphā* is performed.

Historical background of *dāphā*

Nepal lies between India to the South and Tibet to the North, the latter separated from Nepal by the great Himalaya range of mountains. The Kingdom of Nepal was formed in the 1760s after an area of territory in the Himalayan foothills was conquered by the king of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah, who deposed local rulers and established his capital at Kathmandu. The Gorkhali dynasty retained the throne of Nepal until 2008, when Nepal became a republic.

Prior to the Gorkhali conquest, the name *Nepal* referred to the Kathmandu Valley, a highly fertile area of the Himalaya foothills, some 15 by 20 miles across. This small area was divided between three independent city-states, ruled by local kings: Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur. The population of the valley belonged mainly to the ethnic group known as the Newars, who still constitute the majority of inhabitants of Bhaktapur, and speak a language of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Newars became rich on trans-Himalayan trade with India and China, and the three cities became centres for religious and artistic culture, including music; contact with India, especially, led to the naturalisation of Hinduism and Buddhism as the twin religions of the Valley. Impressive temples and palaces built by rival Newar kings adorn the three major towns. The Bhaktapur palace includes the royal temple where the local tradition of *dāphā* singing probably originated, under the influence of classical and religious music from India, in the early seventeenth century. Later, the tradition spread to the major temples outside the palace, and in the course of the nineteenth century it was taken over by the farmers, many of its former, high-caste patrons having migrated to the new national capital, Kathmandu.

The origins of *dāphā* in the Newar palace context is still evident in the manuscript songbooks that every *dāphā* group possesses. These preserve the texts of songs written in a

mixture of old Newari, Sanskrit and Hindi – the court languages of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Bhaktapur; in most cases the song-texts include the signatures of the Newar kings, some of whom were prolific authors of poetry and drama. The earliest locally composed songs in the songbooks of Bhaktapur *dāphā* groups are attributed to Jagajjyoti Malla, king of Bhaktapur from 1614 to 1637; the most prolific Bhaktapur author, still highly popular with *dāphā* groups today, was the last Newar king, Ranjit Malla (r. 1722–1769). Following the Gorkhali conquest, from 1846 to 1951, autocratic rule by the Rāna clan isolated Nepal from events elsewhere in South Asia; the Newar farmers were oppressed – *dāphā* singing became their sole source of education – and music groups became impoverished as their lands were dissipated. But the restoration of monarchy in 1951 was followed by reforms some of which benefitted the farmers, and in the 1980s there were around 70 *dāphā* groups in Bhaktapur, of which the majority remain at least occasionally active today. At the same time, however, land reforms deprived many groups of their source of income, and changing economic and social pressures have depleted the ranks of singers, so that the demise of this tradition is widely predicted by its remaining practitioners.

***Lokapañca* as historical artefact**

The song *Lokapañca* is sung by the group of singers attached to the fifteenth-century temple of Dattātreya, a large, three-storey pagoda-style temple overlooking one of the main squares of the town. The singers, playing large and small cymbals (*jhyālicā*, *tāḥ*), and their instrumental accompanists playing barrel drum (*lālākhī*) and natural trumpet (*pvaṇa*), are all farmers by trade, and belong to the farmer caste – an endogamous group midway between the extremes of high and low in the complex Newar social hierarchy.

The lyrics of *Lokapañca* are unusually short, consisting of two couplets only. For this reason the song is not difficult to sing, and it is one of the first songs to be learned by a beginner in this group. But the text is also unusual in that it addresses three different

dedicatees. The first line addresses an unspecified community, using an old, respectful form of address: *Lokapañca*, literally ‘fivefold people’, hence ‘gentlemen’ or ‘respected sirs’. The second line turns to a divine saviour, called Nātheśvarī, who is also invoked in the last line. The third line addresses a human patron, ‘Śrī Rājendra’. This combination of addressees encapsulates important aspects of the religious, social and political history of the Dattātreya dāphā group. In the songbooks of the group the text¹ is given as follows:

|| [Rāg:] Pā ṅ e [Tāl:] Cā[li] ||

lokapañca dako sena • nitya bhajana yāva ||

nāthesvarī chalapola udhāranī yāva || śrīnāthesvarī || 1 ||

narapati śrī rājendra prajāpatī pāla[na] yāva ||

śrī guru nāthesvarī su[di]ṣṭina svava || su[di]ṣṭina svava || 2 ||

1 (A) Respected sirs all, sing sacred songs regularly. (B) Thou, Nātheśvarī, please save us.

2 (A) The Lord of Men, Śrī Rājendra, Lord of Progeny, please nourish us. (B) Venerable teacher, Nātheśvarī, please look on us with good fortune.

The first addressees – the *lokapañca* – appear to be the singers themselves, or perhaps the wider community to which they belong. The archaically polite form of address evokes an elite social world: underlying it lies a complex social history in which the farmers, as landless peasants, were tied to high-caste landowning patrons, whom they served in various capacities, and whose cultural practices they emulated. Dāphā was the preserve of the elite until, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, farmers gradually took over membership of the Dattātreya and other dāphā groups. Today there are still tensions between a high-caste family who regard themselves as patrons of the Dattātreya dāphā group, but rarely participate, and the farmers who daily carry out the injunction of this song to ‘sing sacred songs regularly’; but even the patrons acknowledge that the knowledge and skills required for dāphā performance now rest with the farmers.

The singers say that this is a song for the god Nāsaḥḍyaḥ: the Hindu god Śiva in his role of patron of music and dance, called Nṛṭyanātha in Sanskrit (Ellingson 1990; Wegner 1992; Bernède 1997). In Hinduism, this aspect of Śiva is credited with the creation and dissolution

of the universe through his dance, and in the Kathmandu Valley he is worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists as the source of musical knowledge and skill; secret training and ritual initiation into his worship are required before a person can take part in *dāphā* singing or any other form of Newar religious music or dance (Wegner 1986; Widdess 2013a: 207–217).

‘Nātheśvara’ could be construed as a name or title for this deity. However, the Sanskrit name *Nātheśvarī* in the song is morphologically feminine in gender, as is shown by the final vowel *-ī*. In Hinduism, male deities regularly have female consorts, who are regarded as the esoteric source of the male god’s power (*śakti*), and hence are themselves powerful, potentially protective, but also potentially dangerous. The worship of such esoteric female divinities, with what are known as *tantric* rituals, was particularly favoured by the Newar kings and their Gorkhali successors, and still permeates Newar religion. So it would seem that *Lokapañca* is addressed to the female consort of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, as the source of his spiritual and musical power.

The third dedicatee of the song, King Rajendra Bikram Shah, was the fifth ruler of the Gorkhali dynasty of Kathmandu, who ruled from 1816 to 1847. Most *dāphā* songs bear the names of Newar kings from before the Gorkhali conquest, but some bear those of early Gorkhali kings; the latter seem to have realised that, by supporting *dāphā* groups at the major temples in their realm, and creating songs in their own names, they could legitimise themselves as successors of the deposed Newar rulers.

It appears that Rajendra played an important role in the development of the Dattātreyā *dāphā* group. Two decrees issued by this monarch, dated 1841 and 1846, survive in the national archives (and photocopies are in possession of members of the group). Both decrees charge the group with singing ‘uninterruptedly’, that is, daily; in return, the group are granted exemption from a highly unpopular system of compulsory labour (*jhārā*). Revealingly, the first decree stipulates that the singers should serve God *and praise the king*. The second

decree grants a plot of land for the support of the music group, and appoints a musician to be their leader.

In the light of this history, we can understand that the song *Lokapañca* reveals not only the divine source of the group's power and protection – the goddess Nātheśvarī – but also the human source – the “Lord of Men, Śrī Rājendra”, who had been generous in his patronage. The song reminds the community of their duty to ‘sing sacred songs regularly’, as decreed by Rajendra, and of their responsibility to kings and gods. Hence *Lokapañca* is one of the first songs to be learned by new members of the group. It is also sung by the whole group once a year at the start of their annual feast, which all members must attend. The group sing every day and will not interrupt their daily duty unless instructed to do so by the central government in Kathmandu. The song thus encapsulates key aspects of the history and purposes of the group.

***Lokapañca* as musical artefact**

Lokapañca is an unusually short song, with only two verses. The same melody is used for both verses: the melody is divided into two sections, called *pad* and *nhyāḥ*, corresponding to lines A and B, respectively, of each verse (Example 14.1). The *pad* melody emphasises the upper tonic, which is represented here as the pitch c", but in practice is located anywhere in the upper register of the adult male voice, depending on the vocal pitch and energy levels of the singers present. The *nhyāḥ* melody begins from around this same pitch, but then descends stepwise to the octave below. The opening melodic motif of both *pad* and *nhyāḥ* (6 2' 1' 7 1') is transposed down a fourth at the end of the *nhyāḥ* (3 6 5 4 5), serving both as a transition back to the beginning of either section, and a conclusion to the whole song. The notation in Example 14.1 shows the melody as it is learned by a beginner, and the time-keeping pattern played by the singers themselves on heavy, high-pitched cymbals (*tāḥ*).

Most dāphā songs of the type to which *Lokapañca* belongs have three, four or more verses, and a refrain, *dhuā̃*, which is absent in *Lokapañca*. But the high register of the *pad* and the octave descent in the *nhyāḥ* in *Lokapañca* are conventional in these songs; where there is a *dhuā̃*, it is normally in the middle of the vocal range. A similar registral contrast is common in songs from the classical traditions of North and South India, and in related traditions of South Asian devotional song; registral contrast between song sections was noted as early as the thirteenth century by the Indian music theorist Śārṅgadeva (Widdess 1981). So the modified appearance of this schema in *Lokapañca* indicates the song's membership of a pan-South Asian, historically rooted tradition of religious and courtly song.

Pad (Sanskrit *pada*) denotes a short verse for singing, and hence conveys no particular clue as to the musical character of the A line to which it applies. But the term *nhyāḥ* means 'flow', evoking the smooth continuous movement of a river, or a ritual chariot in lumbering motion as it is pulled through the streets by long lines of pullers. We will return to the musical implications of this term later.

The song *Lokapañca* thus has to be considered a musical as well as a poetic artefact: based on a conventional contour schema, it nevertheless has a distinctive melody that so far as I know is used only for this song. Melody, rhythm and text combine into a single entity. Performance transforms this entity, but again according to a conventional schema.

Performing *Lokapañca*

A distinguishing characteristic of dāphā singing is the spatial disposition of the singers in two lines or sides facing each other across a small empty area (Figure 14.1). The two sides sing alternately, never simultaneously, and they mark the metrical structure of the music with small cymbals of loud tone. Instrumentalists, playing drum and natural trumpet, may occupy the remaining sides of the rectangular space thus created. The empty area in the centre of the group is reserved as a dancing area where, the musicians believe, the deity praised in the song

dances invisibly while the performance is in progress. Singers say that they perform partly for the gods, and partly for themselves, but not for any other human audience; they sit facing inwards, backs turned to the world outside the group.

Whether because they are accompanying an invisible dance, or to heighten their own emotional experience, or both, *dāphā* singers extend the performance of a song by multiple repetitions of each line and verse. Figure 14.2 is a diagrammatic representation of a normal performance of *Lokapañca*. The first line of the first verse – line A, *pad* – is sung four times, by the right and left sides of the singing group alternately, in slow tempo. Between each repetition and the next, the drum and cymbal players play a rhythmic pattern that overrides the metrical schema of the *tāl*: such interjections are called *khī tvālhāyegu*, ‘segmentation by the drum’, using a verb that means to cut something long into shorter pieces.

After four repetitions of A, the tempo accelerates to double speed as the right side of singers embark on line B of the song, the *nhyāḥ*. This line is again sung alternately by the two sides, four times in all. But this time there are no instrumental interruptions until the end of the fourth repetition: as one side ends the line, the other takes over smoothly without a break – in some songs, there is a short overlap at these points.

After the fourth repetition of B, an instrumental interjection heralds a return to the original, slow tempo. One might expect to move on to the second verse at this point, but instead, there is a further stage of elaboration of the first verse, called *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ*, ‘mixing up’. Here the text lines A and B are sung in the order ABBABB, to the same *pad* and *nhyāḥ* melodies as before. But after A has been sung by the right side at slow tempo, the left side burst in with B at fast tempo, and this tempo then prevails until the end of the *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ*. The left side of the group no longer repeats what the right side has just sung, but each side sings the same number of times as the other, and so they each make an equivalent contribution to the performance.

In songs of this type, most of which have several verses, the singing of subsequent verses follows the same pattern as for verse 1, until the last verse is reached. Then a short cut is taken, by singing only the *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ* for this verse, and maintaining the fast tempo throughout. This constitutes a compression of the performance of the final verse, and since *Lokapañca* has only two verses, the compression is applied to verse 2. A short instrumental closing pattern is then played to round off the performance.

Performance of cultural meaning

Can we account for this pattern of performance, or at least infer some purposes and meanings?

Similar patterns of repetition are typical of devotional song in South Asia, and part of their purpose is usually to enhance emotional response to the sacred words by performers and/or listeners. The peculiar complexity of the pattern of repetition, antiphonal alternation and tempo changes in *dāphā* calls for some further consideration; and yet the singers themselves have little to say on the matter. Here I suggest two areas of cultural signification that can be inferred from the performance practices of *dāphā*.

Complementarity and reciprocity

The structure of the song melody, and the practice of performance, reveal two binary oppositions: *pad* versus *nhyāḥ*, and right versus left groups of singers. Similar oppositions, where something whole is considered to comprise two complementary parts, occur frequently in Newar culture. We have already noted the male-female complementarity of Nāsaḥdyah and his consort, a relationship replicated by many god-goddess pairs in both Hindu and Buddhist pantheons. The town of Bhaktapur itself is divided into Upper Town and Lower Town; this division comes to the fore in the festival of Biskāḥ, when Upper and Lower Town residents compete in a tug-of-war to pull the chariot of Bhairav out of the central square into their half of the town. Biskāḥ, the culmination of one half of the religious calendar, is complemented half a year later by Mohanī, the festival of the Goddess, who in her various guises is the *śakti*

of the male god Bhairav; this division of the year into two halves also corresponds to the agricultural calendar with its two crops, wheat and rice, respectively. Among other examples of binary complementarity, Nāsaḥdyah, the god of music and dance who alone enables successful performance, also has a negative counterpart or alter ego called Haimādyah or Mankāḥ: while Nāsaḥdyah helps musicians to play well, Haimādyah will cause them to make mistakes if he is not propitiated (Wegner 1986). The pair are resident in drums, in the right and left heads respectively, and are also associated with the right and left sides of a dāphā group.

The alternation between the two sides of the dāphā group thus articulates a binary complementarity that runs through Newar society and culture. Antiphonal performance in which each group sings an equal number of times evokes a related ideal of Newar society, especially among farmers: that everyone should make an equal, equivalent, reciprocal contribution. Thus farming families help each other at busy times in the fields, keeping an unwritten tally of hours worked to be reciprocated the following year. All Newar males belong to a ‘death society’ (*sī guthi*) that takes charge of funeral arrangements immediately a person dies, so that communal assistance is assured for all members and their families. In societies that run music groups and other social or religious functions, expensive or onerous tasks, such as organising feasts and providing the food and drink for them, are assigned to members by turns (*paḥ*), usually according to a written list; in *dāphā* groups, attendance at singing sessions or at feasts is often recorded in a ledger, and fines periodically levied for absences. The objective in all such cases is to ensure that everyone makes an equal contribution to society. This egalitarian reciprocity contrasts with the strongly hierarchical structure of Newar society as a whole. Interactions between different hierarchical levels (castes) involve asymmetrical relationships of power and status, but within the residential

neighbourhoods in which dāphā groups operate, communities tend to be of similar or equal social status.

Thus the performance practice of dāphā groups helps to articulate social reciprocity and embed it in consciousness. Until recently, learning to sing dāphā was considered an essential part of the social education of boys of the farmer caste, whereby they became integrated with the local adult male community (Bernède 1997; Widdess 2013a: 118–20 and 203–5).

Traditional Newar society associates the ability to perform music (or dance) with the ability to interact socially. Both are considered the gift of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, so that someone who behaves awkwardly, unreliably or without social graces – one who is insensitive to social relations – can be described as a person who is ‘out of time’, or ‘out of tune’, or ‘not blessed by Nāsaḥḍyaḥ’. The performance of a song like *Lokapañca*, then, articulates and teaches important concepts of complementary relationships and reciprocal behaviour, and in the past would ideally have been learned by most of the male inhabitants of each neighbourhood, as part of their social enculturation.

Intensification, auditory attention and flow

Many genres of sacred singing in South Asia feature similar processes of repetition, from simple reiteration of a single line or name as in the north Indian *nām kīrtan*, to complex patterns of segmentation and responsorial repetition in the *samāj* singing in temples of Vrindāban (Tanaka 2008). Such extensive and/or elaborate repetition is often associated with heightened states of attention or emotion. Henry argues that ‘an important goal in many different music genres, from participatory “folk” music to that of the “classical” full-time specialist, is the generation of intense feeling in [their] listeners or participants’ (Henry 2002). He identifies various musical features and processes that can lead to this goal. Rhythmic processes include increase of tempo, rhythmic density, rhythmic complexity and shortening of the metrical unit. Melodic processes include melodic ascent, holding a single high pitch and

melodic phrases covering a wide range. Other important factors include increasing loudness of singing and/or of accompanying instruments, and the introduction of particularly meaningful and arousing lyrics. Individually or in combination, these processes of intensification lead to mental states variously described as absorption, heightened feeling, ecstasy or trance.

In the performance of *Lokapañca*, musical intensification occurs mainly in the *nhyāḥ* section of the performance, and continues into the *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ*. The opening *pad* is sung in a slow tempo, accompanied by a seemingly disjointed, hesitant drum pattern. Each repetition of the *pad* is followed by an instrumental interjection that disrupts the binary meter, as if to deny any metrical continuity that might have been established so far. The melody of the *pad* centres around the upper tonic, which is emphasised, and to which the melody returns after excursions to the third above and fourth below. It is normal for a *pad* melody to emphasise this pitch register, and in *Lokapañca* it projects the opening appeal of verse 1 to the human addressees – the gentlemen of the community, the *lokapañca*.

In the *nhyāḥ*, the melodic octave descent discharges the melodic tensions of the *pad*. The tempo accelerates to double speed, and the instrumental interjections of the *pad* are discarded as the two sides of singers alternate without interruption. The drum player replaces the hesitant patterns of the *pad* with continuous rapid playing, repeating progressively shorter patterns that are out of phase with the melodic repetitions until the very end (Widdess 2013a: 64–70); the trumpet player, hitherto silent, imitates on one pitch the rhythms of the drum. Players of the penetrating, high-pitched thick-walled cymbals (*tāḥ*) continue to articulate the binary metrical schema (with alternate undamped and damped strokes), but the players of the thin-walled cymbals (*jhyālicā*) break into rapid rhythmic patterns. In these ways the performance generates intensification, matching the appeal of the second text line to the divine power of Nātheśvarī.

As we have seen in [Figure 14.2](#), following the *nhyāḥ* section of verse 1, the fast tempo and rhythmic intensification abruptly revert to the slow tempo of the *pad* at the beginning of the *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ*. A similar sudden deceleration would also happen at the start of each subsequent verse, except the last, in songs with more than two verses. This exemplifies what David Huron has called the ‘stimulus ramp archetype’, in which ‘musical passages tend to build in a gradual way, but tend to subside relatively quickly’ (Huron 1992); such abrupt changes stimulate auditory attention, and since indefinitely continuing increases in volume, tempo, pitch and so on are impractical, a large decrease to earlier levels permits a further series of increases. Thus intensification, as defined by Henry, becomes an infinitely extendable process.

In addition to stimulating auditory attention among listeners, who as we have seen are not an important consideration in *dāphā* performance, an abrupt drop in tempo (like the corresponding return to fast tempo that follows it) demands the attention of performers, who must anticipate it at specific points in the performance. Similar smaller effects are generated by the frequent instrumental interruptions of the *pad* section, which temporarily disrupt metrical continuity. [Figure 14.2](#) interprets the performance structure of *Lokapañca* as a schema in which periods of ‘effort’, repeatedly interrupted and resumed, eventually give way to longer periods of ‘flow’. Here ‘effort’ refers to repeated rising melodic phrases at slow tempo that characterise the *pad* section and the beginning of the *nhyāḥ*. By ‘flow’, I mean the greater speed, metrical continuity and descending melodic contour of the *nhyāḥ* section. The first two of these are further applied to the *pad* in the *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ* of verses 1 and 2. As we have seen, *nhyāḥ* literally means ‘flow’. By ‘flow’, I also mean to suggest a psychological ‘flow state’ induced by the collaborative performance of the song according to a strict and elaborate pattern of repetitions and tempo changes. Flow in the latter sense is described by ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino as

a state of heightened concentration, when one is so intent on the activity at hand that all other thoughts, concerns and distractions disappear and the actor is fully in the present. The experience actually leads to a feeling of timelessness, or being out of normal time, and to feelings of transcending one's normal self. Regardless of how intense the activity is ... people find flow experience restful and liberating.

(Turino 2008: 4)

Evidence that singers experience such a state includes their expressions of intense concentration while singing – with little physical movement other than those required for playing instruments – and their statements that singing is not tiring, but makes them feel relaxed. According to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002: 72 ff.), music, along with rituals, sports and games, is *designed* to induce flow states in its participants, provided the level of difficulty in the activity and that of knowledge or competence in the participants are commensurate. While *dāphā* singing is not technically demanding in terms of melody and rhythm, changes in tempo, the timing of antiphonal responses, the more complex repetition-pattern of the *thalāḥ-kvalāḥ*, and the short-cut compression of the final verse, are all performance 'obstacles' that require anticipation and attention if mistakes are to be avoided. While *nhyāḥ* refers to the musical continuity established in that section, it is the interruptions and changes punctuating that continuity, requiring alertness and concentration on the part of performers, that make the achievement of cognitive 'flow' all the more likely.

Structure, performance and meanings

Contemplating a song like *Lokapañca*, from historical, ethnographic, music-analytical and cognitive perspectives, leads one to the conclusion that it partakes of the qualities of both artefact and performance. True, the song in its fullness can only be realised through performance – collaborative performance by a group of singers; its structure should be conceived 'first and foremost as a process' (Rink 2015). But the lyrics have an independent existence on paper in the manuscript songbooks, and their structure determines the pattern of

musical processes to which they give rise. They are a unique historical artefact with not only literal meaning,² but also wider historical and cultural resonances.

Similarly, the melody and rhythm of the song as learned by a beginner in ‘folded up’ form (to use the performers’ metaphor) constitute a unique sonic artefact (shown in Example 14.1), the schematic structure of which is related to that of other *dāphā* songs and to other genres of South Asian song. This ‘structure’ is indeed a process, involving registral shifts and melodic contours. But the process is embedded in the song, as the song is embedded in the collective memory of the *dāphā* group. The orally transmitted song may not appear to be as precisely defined as a notated composition – there is no *Urtext*, and performance variants can be observed such as those noted in Example 14.1 – but regular group performances can result in a high degree of stability.³ In view of this stability across performances, and its common features with other items of the same repertoire, the song does more than ‘afford the inference of structural relationships’ by performer or listener (Rink 2015): it affords the observation that such relationships are an inherent part of the artefact.

The song as artefact, on the other hand, is transformed by performance. Its relatively compact structure is ‘unfolded’ through antiphonal repetition, instrumental embellishment and changes of tempo. This unfolding is itself a process: a process of intensification achieved through repeated efforts and interruptions that lead to a musical and perhaps cognitive ‘flow’. It is also a process of balanced, co-operative interaction between members of the group that musically re-enacts reciprocal social relations and a deep-rooted cultural trope of binary complementarity. These processes could be said to constitute the structure of performance, as opposed to the structure of the song; the performers must know how to apply the former to the latter, adapting the performance schema to take into account the inherent structure of the particular song being performed (e.g. the number of verses, the presence or absence of a refrain etc.).

To resolve apparent oppositions between artefact and performance, structure and process, in *dāphā* or other music, it may be helpful to enlist the concept of cognitive *schemas* (or *schemata*). A schema, in music or in any other cognitive domain, is an array or network of categories in a certain relationship (e.g., spatial or temporal), which is acquired in memory through repeated experience, and generates expectation, recognition and physical and/or emotional responses (Snyder 2000: 95–105). Schemas are inherently flexible, allowing the omission, addition or substitution of elements. Those that unfold through time can be regarded as processes, but because they constitute a predictable sequence of related events, they can also be conceived as structures. Both artefacts and performances can be organised schematically: we have seen how, in *dāphā*, the song as artefact articulates a contour schema, shared with many other songs, while a different schema drives the unfolding of the song in performance. Schemas of different dimensions, or pertaining to different domains such as melody and rhythm, can be combined, hierarchically or in parallel, in ways that are predictable, as in *dāphā*, or unpredictable, as in improvised music (Widdess 2013b). And because schemas permeate many different domains, they can be expressions of cultural meaning (Shore 1996; Strauss and Quinn 1997).

Thus *Lokapañca* combines a literary schema (a verse form), a metrical schema (*tāl*), a modal schema (*rāg*) and a contour schema, to which combination a performance schema is applied including antiphonal repetitions, tempo changes and accompaniment patterns; its performance engages the spatial schema of the seating arrangement of its performers, special states of mind and temporal experience, and cultural patterns extending far beyond the activity of *dāphā* singing.

Singers say that participating in group performance of *dāphā* relieves their minds of the anxieties of daily life. Many songs overtly appeal for relief from illness, guilt, or other pain, and protection from threats to health, wealth and happiness – of which, in a period of political

instability and far-reaching social and economic changes, there are many. *Lokapañca* is no exception, appealing to both the goddess and the king for protection, nourishment and good fortune. But it is not only the words sung, but the whole activity of singing, including the ritual actions and social interactions occurring in any singing session, that brings peace of mind. We may speculate that the performance of music, in which multiple schemas are integrated in a dynamic whole, serves as a metaphor for harmonious interactions between humans and gods, and creates the sense of equilibrium that is often lacking in normal life. Thus *dāphā* performance reflects, re-enacts and reconciles important dynamics of human behaviour and experience.

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Figure 14.1 Dattātreya dāphā group (photo: Richard Widdess).

Figure 14.2 Performance schema for *Lokapañca*.

Example 14.1 *Lokapañca*, first verse. T = undamped cymbal stroke (*tin*); C = damped stroke (*chu*).

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² It does not necessarily follow, however, that this literal meaning is fully understood, or understood at all, by singers: usually they have a sense of the subject-matter (Widdess 2015).

³ How far this stability has been maintained over a period of almost two centuries since the time of Rajendra Shah (when the song was presumably composed) is unknown, but recordings made in 1996 and 2012 indicate no significant change, either in the song itself or in its performance, in that shorter period.