

PRITHVI NARAYAN SHAH'S MUSIC POLICY

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Abstract

Most writers describe Prithvi Narayan Shah as someone who didn't really appreciate music. However, his grooming in the palace with different rituals accompanied by musical chants of mantras and his attachment with his fellow friends in his childhood shows that he had adopted musical in a very cultural manner.

In his 'Divya Upadesh', he has shown views of preserving and protecting Nepali culture by promoting Nepali music and Nepali artists. Bise Nagarchi, a musician helped Prithvi Narayan Shah in his unifying campaign by encouraging and refreshing the people at war through his music.

This article will enlist points that showcase facts that show he was not against music and also review some of his 'Dibya Upadesh' through a more musical perspective. Both primary and secondary data have been used as the source of content in the making of this article.

Background

Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom where Lord Buddha was born, is a culturally rich and profound country. From ancient times people with diverse culture, religion, caste, ethnicity, ideology and identity live together. Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of the Nepal kingdom addressed this diversity in his 'Divya Upadesh' by describing Nepal as a common garden of four castes and thirty six creeds.

Music is one of the most integral parts of our culture. It is the identity of our nationality and culture. The Kings of the past have always played an important role in preserving and protecting our rich traditional music.

They had great love and affection towards music. Some of the Malla kings even composed music which still exists today. So it only natural that Prithvi Narayan was no different than the other kings and he must have been touched by the sweet melodies of traditional Nepali music. Besides that, during that particular era the entire Indian subcontinent was engulfed within a musical environment. There was even a trend of patronizing musicians and composers, and without doubt many of these musicians have visited the Gorkha Durbar while King Prithvi was still young and hence he must've had been exposed to many musical elements from a tender and malleable age.



K. K. Karmacharya, *Prithvi Narayan Shah looking at the Kathmandu valley from the hill of Chandragiri*, 2004. Oil on canvas, 101.6 cm x 152.4 cm. Gorkha Durbar Museum, Gorkha.

Music is something that is important to every human. From birth to funeral, music plays an important role in Nepalese life. Every festival and ritual are accompanied by music in our culture. From the past all the Kings have had a very active role in following and preserving our musically rooted traditional rituals. Certainly King Prithvi Narayan Shah was aware of and appreciated the musical tradition of our festival and rituals. His *Divya Upadesh* shows that he had great concern to traditional roots within music.

Prithvi Narayan Shah, the father of modern Nepal and the leader of

the Gorkhali conquest, was born on 27 December 1722AD as the first child to King Narabhupal Shah and the second queen Kaushalyawati (Acharaya Baburam 2024 BS). He ascended the throne to Gorkha after the death of his father in 1799 BS at the age of 20. He conquered most of the neighboring kingdoms and had developed friendship with the Kings of the three main cities that are Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur. He liked the beautiful valley of Kathmandu so much that he desired to conquer it. He targeted Kathmandu and successfully attacked it in 1825 on the occasion of Indraajatra, soon after came Patan and then

Bhaktapur. He was also responsible for developing the feeling of unity amongst the people of Nepal as he considered Nepal as a garden of four castes and 36 sub-castes.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's Childhood

From a very early age Prithivi Narayan Shah was taught the vedic mantras and Durga kawach alongside other activities such as education and athletics. A place was made where he could interact with children of his age. (Acharaya, 2024 BS) According to historic data, our music is very much associated with the vedas. Vedas were musically recited (Singh, 1995)) and because of that intentionally or unintentionally he may have had inherited some music culture. We can also guess that during the course of his playing with his friends, he might have come across cultural music from different friends.

At the age of 11 during his bratabanda, Sabitra mantra was chanted by Shreeharsha Mishra. And at the age of 12 Mokchheshwar Joshi taught him the Saptrastris stotras and the stutis for mediation. (Acharaya, 2024 BS) Because of all these stotras and mantras he must have adopted a rich musical culture.

According to historian Acharaya Baburam, Queen Chandra Prabha kept him away from the dance and music unlike other princes of neighboring state thinking that he will

indulge in lust and entertainment. However this doesn't mean that he was restricted in attending festivals and rituals which were musical. Hence, although unwilling, he was groomed musically.

After the coronation King Prithvi Narayan Shah headed to Varanasi for taking a bath in Ganga according to the tradition (Acharaya, 2024 BS) Varanasi during that time and even today is a very musically rich city. So in Varanasi too he might have observed different musical events although his purpose was different. Given all the exposure he received towards music it is unlikely that he was indifferent to our profound musical culture.

Studying all these events we can assume that he never hated music instead, he followed all the musical cultures of our festivals, and rituals.

Unification

The unification of more than four score of petty kingdoms in Greater Nepal stands as one of the greatest challenges of eighteenth century Asia. There are five types of unification-military, political, legal, administrative and cultural. For the cultural unification there needs to be the religious and cultural assimilation. Had there not been the cultural unification the unification wouldn't have been permanent. (Ludwig F. Stiller, 2017) As mentioned beforehand, music is one of the most

integral parts of culture and hence, we can assume that music must have played important role in the cultural unification of Nepal. His respect towards Nepali culture can be seen in his 'Dibya Upadesh'. His Dibya Upadesh "*Nepal chaar barna chhatish jaatko saja fulbari ho*" clarifies his opinion of cultural unification of which music is an integral part.

King Prithvi Narayan Shah attacked Kathmandu on 1768 when Jaya Prakas Malla the king of Kathmandu and the people were celebrating the Indra Jatra Festival, rejoicing in dance and music (Ludwig F. Stiller p121). Prithvi Narayan Shah was aware of the effect of dance, music, so he planned to attack on that day when all were submerged in entertainment but this doesn't prove that he was against music. This shows that he had musical knowledge, otherwise he wouldn't have known about the effect that music could produce.

Bise Nagarchi, a musician also played a very important role in his unification campaign by encouraging and boosting the morale of the warrior by singing the war songs. Also Raghunath Bhatt and Maniram Gaine contributed in unifying Nepal through their music. (Acharaya, 2024 BS)

Court Environment

Pratap Shah, the elder son of Prithvi Narayan Shah was not enamored of the military life. His tutors turned his attention to the study of poetry and music. (Ludwig F. Stiller, 2017)

Had there not been the musical environment and the music tutors at the royal palace, Pratap Shah wouldn't have been interested in music. So we can assume that there was a musical environment at the palace then. Along with this Pratap Shah might have been influenced by the traditional music of the valley.

According to Triratna Manandher, Prithvi Narayan Shah was presented two dances by Ranjit Malla of Bhaktapur as a gift while he was still in Gorkha. This might have been done because of his love for the music. This all shows the very rich musical tradition of the Gorkha palace.

A great singer, composer, and Binkar Sadarang visited the Gorkha palace during the time of Prithvipati. (Singh, 1995) Many other great musicians visited Nepal and some even served as a court musician which shows the rich musical environment of palace during that time and shows that the Kings were a patronage of music.

It is said that Prithvi Narayan Shah also composed a couple of spiritual songs (Bhajans) of Gorakhnath. He was spiritual and had faith in religion. Having faith in religion definitely means being attached with the devotional songs too.

The Divya Upadesh of Prithvi Narayan Shah

The Divya Upadesh explains Prithvi Narayan Shah's accomplishment of the unification campaign and

his counsel to the successors of his seats of power. These counsels dealt with the geo-political vulnerability of his newly unified country, and provided directions to the governing elite on how to pursue governance, nationalism, and foreign policy in order to sustain the country.

The Divya Upadesh shows how a conqueror eventually changed himself into a unifier. The Kingdom that he unified not only remains unified till today, but also continuously maintains independent existence and expresses the collective consciousness of its people. The rest has certainly become history. He tried to unify the country in all aspects..

The Divya Upadesh encompasses most of the important issues for the newly unified country. *Mera sana dukhale aarjyako muluk hoina, sabai jatako fulbari ho, sabailai chetasna bhaya. Yo fulbariko chota bada charai jat chhatis varnale yeslai samvar garnu (Commision):* I have suffered a lot to build this Nation. This is a garden of all Castes, everybody should acknowledge it. Everybody from all the four Jat (Castes) and Thirty Six Barna (creeds) should protect and promote this garden.

If we observe this 'divya upadesh' we can see his vision of culturally uniting the nation. Whenever we talk about culture, music comes along with it. The traditional music of every nation is closely associated with its culture. Therefore when he described

it as the garden of different castes, he definitely also meant that the culture and the different cultural music were a very important part of our society.

Yo aasin Hindustan ho, aafno kul dharma nachod nu (Commission)

In this divya upadesh related to religion he advised the citizens of Nepal to never leave the traditional dharma of the ancestors. He emphasized that his country, which he finds to be a real Hindustana, is a commonwealth of all castes and tribes, and he believed in a government by the consent of the governed. He says his is the real Hindusthan (place of Hindus). "Do not give up your Kul-dharma (religions inherited by the dynasty). Abide by the order of the Khwamit (King)."

So when he quotes to stick to our own religion, he also means to stick to our own culture associated with music. Following our own religion for him meant following our own music associated with it. If we look back at history, we find that every music has evolved through religion. There are spiritual songs throughout the world in every religion.

Malai euta kurako sandeha lagirahanchha, ke kura bhane Muglan najikai chha, tyes jagama chokadas patriya rahanchhan, chitrakar bhanyako kothabhar dholak, sitar raag taanama bhullan, Raag taana ma thulo moha hunchha ra daksaya pani pesinchha, deshko bheda oani tinle laijanchhan ra hariple daga garchha,

raagko abhyas pani kasaile nagarnu
(Commission)

Whereas, I have a serious doubt in my mind. My doubt is that Muglana (India/British Rule) is not far away from Nepal; there are different Chookada (youths involved in antisocial/delinquent behavior) and Patria (shameless person) within Muglana. My worry is that our youths may visit those colorful and artistic rooms (places) and engage themselves in Dholak, Sitar, Raga and Tan (musical environment and essence of music). People may have a lot of Moha (attachment) in Raga and Tana (music) and they may spend a lot of money on it. They (people engaged in such entertaining activities) may reveal our state-secrets and our enemy may attack us (with the help of that information). Do not try Raga. Prohibit the movement of those three kinds of people (Chhokada, Patria and Gayak (singer)) in the mountainous region. If you have to open their movements, allow them to move in small numbers (one or two together with at a time) for Fagoo (a festival) and then send them back as soon as possible. If we could do so they will not give away the secrets of our country. (Commission)

He even advises people not to drain out money on Hindustani singers and dancers. Whilst he acknowledged that there was great pleasure in their melodies, he sought to highlight the possible misuse of local wealth drainage and espionage: "they also

take away the secrets of your country and deceive the poor."

Many writers have tried to interpret it differently and tried to show that he was against the music. It is true that he was against the cultural and musical invasion of other countries. He was against the policy of foreign artists coming to Nepal because he suspected they might be spies sent to steal the wealth of the nation. But if we study this Divya Upadesh we can see his acknowledgement to the effect of music. He explains its power to lure. On the other hand he didn't want his army and courtier to indulge in foreign raga and taana, which means he was already acquainted with the effect of melodies of ragas. This was actually for the army for not diverting their mind except war

*Aafna sokh sayallai ta shastra
bamojim ko tinai shahar newa haruko
naach jhikai herya pani hunchha,
yinma ta diyako pani aafnai desma
rahanchha* (Commission)

Here in this 'dibya upadesh' he shows his great concern for the traditional music. Moreover, he sought to turn the attention instead towards the Newar dancers of the three cities of Nepal as a suitable alternative: "This is quite all right. If anything is given to these, it remains inside your own country: If this is done, your country will be well protected." (Adhikari, 2015) He quotes that instead of listening to foreign music for pleasure one can listen his own traditional

music of Newars which are very rich and are based on strong theory. He also quotes that this music is based on shastra, which means he was familiar with this music based on profound theory. He was always of the opinion that the Nepali culture and the Nepali artist should be preserved and protected.

Musicians who played important role in Unification

According to available evidences, Bise Nagarchi a musician helped King PN Shah in his unification campaign with two unique ways. First, when 'Gorkha kingdom' faced financial problem to manage military and war acts, Bise suggested King PN Shah to collect one rupee from each household of Gorkha kingdom to cover the unification expenses Secondly, Bise took part in the war of unification as a singer. He used to sing war-songs that were full of emotion, devotion and commitment in front of the battlefield. He used his songs to make the Gorkha soldiers vigorous and motivated in the war course. (Wagle, 2017) From this evidence it is clear that Prithvi Narayan Shah was acquainted with the power of music and he used this power of Bise Nagarchi to encourage as well as refresh the people at war. The historians even claim that Bise's father too was a musician in the Gorkha Durbar.

Beside Bise other musicians like Raghunath Bhatt and Maniram Gaine also participated in the unifying

campaign. (Acharaya, 2024 BS) They acted as a catalyst and accelerated the unification campaign. They united the people and encourage them. Along with the war songs they also refreshed the tired warriors through their enchanting melodies.

Taking the suggestion of musicians and participating them in the war goe to show that he had great love and respect for music and musicians.

Conclusion

Though historians and writers have tried to portray King Prithvi Narayan Shah as someone who was against music, if we study his history we find that he was never against the music and the musician. It is said that he was kept away from music and dance but studying his childhood, we find that from the childhood he was taught vedas which are considered as the source of our music. After the coronation he had been to spiritual journey to Banaras, the city of music, where he might have observed the musical events.

Taking the help of Bise Nagarchi, Maniram Gaine, Raghunath Bhatta in the unification shows that he was familiar with the power of music.

In his 'dibya upadesh' he has always expressed his concerns regarding the Nepali culture, caste, religion and music. Nepali music is associated with its rich culture and religion, and the people of different castes have their own traditional music. So he always

held the opinion that Nepali music and musicians should be preserved and protected.

He always held the opinion that we should stick to our values and culture, which proves that he was not against the Nepali music but rather respected its place in our culture.

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