Современные проблемы музыкознания /
Contemporary Musicology
2026/10(2)
eISSN 2587-9731

Ethnomusicology

Original article
UDC 781.72
https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2026-2-154-190
EDN RSSOZC

The past and the present chronotope of the *pāncai bājā* repertoire in Nepal

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Abstract. This study attempts to shed light on the changing dynamics of the *pancai bājā* from past to present, particularly with regard to performance occasions, performing communities, ritual functions, and professional practice. The study draws on Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope in literature and cultural performance, Alan P. Merriam's anthropological approach to music studies, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as analytical frameworks in examining the *pancai bājā* musical repertoire. Together, these approaches provide a systematic theoretical framework. In the past, when Nepali society was predominantly agrarian and traditional, Damain community performed the *pancai bājā* repertoire professionally on special occasions and rituals. However, today the Damain community has largely shifted to other occupations. Internal migration, access to education opportunities, modernization, foreign employment opportunities and declining social prestige are among the reasons behind their profession shift. These days, commercially motivated so-called upper caste people form *pancai bājā* bands in urban areas. As a result, the Damain community is gradually losing control over this musical heritage. In the course of studying the chronotope of *pancai bājā* tradition, we have employed a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with different respondents and key informants. Purposive sampling with observation and content analysis are other methods applied in this research. Moreover, the study is based on extensive library and archival research on the *pāncai bājā* tradition. The term *pancai bājā* refers to a traditional Nepali mixed ensemble consisting of shawms, kettledrums, cymbals, natural trumpets and drum traditionally played by the Damain community.

Keywords: chronotope, habitus, *pancai bājā*, repertoire, Damain community, ensemble

For citation: Niroula, D. R., Dahal, B. P., & Baral, C. R. (2026). The past and the present chronotope of the *pāncai bājā* repertoire in Nepal. *Contemporary Musicology*, *10*(2), 154–190. https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2026-2-154-190

Этномузыкология

Научная статья

Репертуар *панчай-баджа* в Непале: хронотоп прошлого и настоящего

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается развитие репертуара *панчай-баджа* (*pāncai bājā*) — непальского ансамбля из пяти музыкальных инструментов, состоящего из зурны, литавр, тарелок, натуральных труб и барабана. В прошлом, когда непальское общество было аграрным и традиционным по своим характеристикам, ансамбль составляли исключительно представители касты Дамаи, которые профессионально исполняли репертуар *панчай-баджа* по особым случаям — во время ритуалов и церемоний. Однако в современную эпоху эта каста изменила род занятий. Миграционные процессы, доступ к образованию, модернизация быта, возможности трудоустройства за границей и отсутствие самоуважения стали одними из причин смены профессии. В наши дни мотивированные коммерцией так называемые представители высших каст формируют группы *панчай-баджа* в городской местности. В результате община Дамаи постепенно теряет контроль над наследием *панчай-баджа*, что составляет национально-культурную проблему. Методология исследования музыкального репертуара *панчай-баджа* в статье опирается на теорию хронотопа Михаила Михайловича Бахтина, разработанную для анализа литературных произведений, на концепцию антропологической перспективы в изучении музыки Алана П. Мерриама и понятие габитуса Пьера Бурдьё. В ходе изучения хронотопа традиции *панчай-баджа* мы использовали смешанный метод, включавший взаимодействие с различными респондентами и ключевыми информантами, осуществили целевую выборку с использованием контент-анализа. Кроме того, проведено серьезное библиографическое исследование для сбора и обобщения научной литературы о традиции *панчай-баджа*.

Ключевые слова: хронотоп, габитус, *панчай-баджа*, репертуар, каста Дамаи, ансамбль, Непал, традиционная музыкальная культура

Для цитирования: Нирула Д. Р., Дахал Б. П., Барал Ч. Р. Репертуар *панчай-баджа* в Непале: хронотоп прошлого и настоящего // Современные проблемы музыкознания. 2026. Т. 10, № 2. С. 154–190. (На англ. яз.) https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2026-2-154-190

Introduction

The term *pancai bājā* literally means "five instruments." *Pancai bājā* is a collective term for a traditional Nepali mixed ensemble consisting of shawm, cymbals, kettledrums, natural trumpets and drum. The Nepali names for the *pancai bājā* are *sahanāi* (a conical-bore double-reed shawm), *dholaki* (a double-headed barrel drum), *damāhā* (a large unpitched copper kettledrum played with a thick stick), *tyāmko* (a small unpitched kettledrum made of either copper, iron or wood) and *narsingā* (a conical-bore natural horn with integral mouthpiece made of finely beaten copper). More broadly, the *pancai bājā* is a mixed ensemble of wind instruments (*sahanāi*, *narsingā*, *karnāl*), drums (*damāhā*, *dholaki*, *tyāmko*) and cymbals (*jhyāli* and *jhyāmtā*).

Traditionally, Damain community, a scheduled caste in Nepal, has carried on the legacy of performing the *pancai bājā* over the centuries. Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi discusses the contribution of the *Shudra* community, including Damain, in nurturing the folk music of Nepal. He claims, "...whether or not music is their principal source of income ... Sudras and the 'lower' castes within the caste hierarchy have nurtured Nepal's great musical tradition, even though music as profession has failed to provide them with a stable income, or bring lasting positive changes in the quality of their lives" (Regmi, 2023, p. 30). Even though there is no inherent relationship between caste status and occupation, the society allocated the duty of tailoring and the *pancai bājā* performance to the craftspeople of the Damain community. The depressed Damain community has a limited access to land and modern job opportunities. The majority of them rely on alternative sources of income such as foreign employment, portering and farming. Their traditional occupation does not sustain their economy.

This article addresses three main research questions. Firstly, it explores the cultural significance of *pancai bājā* in the Nepali social matrix. The second question is why the *pancai bājā* playing tradition has been transforming in recent decades. And the question concerns how temporal and spatial dimensions of the pancai bājā performance practices are being altered in relation to modernization process.

Bakhtin's essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics* introduces the concept of chronotope to refer to the intrinsic relationship between time and space. His theoretical formulation was

originally composed in the 1930s and was published in 1975 in the Russian language[1]; however, its English translation appeared only in 1981.[2] These days, scholars across a wide range of disciplines apply the concept to interpret issues in art, literature, anthropology, film, advertisement, culture and so on. Bemong and Borghart put forth, "Initially designed as an analytical instrument for establishing generic divisions in the history of the western novel, chronotopic analysis has recently been proposed as a conceptual tool for enriching … diverse fields…" (2010, p. 3). Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope is not formalist in its orientation. Instead of referring to the emotional and referential aspects of art, culture and literature, it points to the spatial and temporal embedding of human activities.

In Bakhtin's definition, chronotope is the intrinsic connectedness between the temporal and the spatial dimensions in a work of art. Although the term originated in the natural sciences, Bakhtin adapted it for literary criticism. Chronotope is a dynamic entity in which time and space mutually shape each other in a narrative. Extending its scope of application, we can analyze the transformation of the *pancai bājā*, a cultural entity, in its use and ownership, taking the dimensions of time and space into consideration. As a cultural phenomenon situated within the semiosphere, *Pancai bājā* can be examined through the lens of the chronotope, which brings together the time and space dynamics. In the initial phase, Bakhtin's theory was relatively undeveloped; however, it contained abundant impulses to function as an analytical tool to interpret cultural phenomena and components. The concept of the chronotope provides a productive framework for examining transformations in the *pancai bājā* tradition.

We have explored the social context and knowledge about the *pancai bājā* from an epistemological perspective. Another focus of the article is the ontology of both the instruments and the Damain community. The study also explores shifts in the axiology of the *pancai bājā* tradition over time. Therefore, the research is concerned with the knowledge, existence and socio-cultural value related to the repertoire

[1] Bakhtin, M. M. (1975). Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane. Ocherki po istoricheskoi poetike [Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics]. In Bakhtin M. M. *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* [Issues of Literature and Aesthetics] (pp. 234–407). Khudozhestvennaya literatura. (In Russ.).

[2] Bakhtin, M. (1981). Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (pp. 84–258). University of Texas Press.

of the *pancai bājā* instruments. The central concern of the study is to examine how the *pancai bājā* tradition has changed across time and space. The *pancai bājā* playing tradition extended from rituals to shrines, social occasions and the royal palace. In this context, Regmi states "... at the Gorkha Palace and Hanumandhoka Palace the tradition of playing *pancai bājā* and *naumati bājā*, which was started during the reign of Prithvi Narayan, continues to this day" (2023, p. 77). Documenting the Nepali *pancai bājā* tradition has become increasingly urgent in the context of globalization and the growing influence of Western culture. In this context, our cultural heritage, including ethno-musicological tradition, require preservation, documentation and promotion. We need to explore the spatial and temporal dimensions of the *pancai bājā* repertoire from the past to the present. The chronotopic analysis of the musical ensemble reflects the changes over the decades.

The key informants' response reveals the deplorable decline of this once rich and dynamic tradition within the Damain community. The Damain tailor-musician community traditionally supplies the *pancai bājā* ritual music at various shrines and on several occasions. About the expanding scope of chronotope in the analysis of literature and culture, Bemong and Borghart assert, "Lately, a number of scholars have hypothesized that some chronotopic configuration underlies every kind of narrative, however minimal, including jokes, strip cartoons, fairy tales, animal stories, narrative poetry and the like" (Bemong & Borghart, 2010, p. 9). Applying chronotopic analysis to the *pancai bājā* tradition expands the methodological tools available for the study of musical and acoustic culture.

Theoretical Framework

Before applying the theoretical approaches adopted in this study, it is important to understand local perspectives on society through an examination of the *pāncai bājā* tradition, which offers valuable insights into the practices and experiences of Nepali society, both past and present. It is also important to understand the complex and indeterminate relationship between the creation of cultural sound (*pancai bājā*) and the cultural sense-making processes in specific social contexts. Likewise, music should be understood with particular attention to its diverse forms and functions across different communities, including the Damain community in Nepal.

The anthropology of music explores music as a fundamental human cultural phenomenon, analyzing its creation, performance, and social functions within

various societies. Key aspects include understanding the connection of music to cultural values, identity, and beliefs, using both anthropological and musicological approaches to study the complex relationship between sound and meaning in cultural contexts. Pioneering scholars like Franz Boas emphasized the importance of studying music, and Alan Merriam's work *The Anthropology of Music* (1964) defined it as the "study of music in culture." It combines methods and theories from anthropology and musicology to provide a comprehensive understanding of music in its societal context. Influenced by figures like Boas, it emphasizes the importance of understanding cultures and their musical expressions from their own internal standards and values, rather than imposing external judgments.

The sounds of the *pancai bājā* music are not merely acoustic phenomena, but a product of the social behavior of Nepali people and their cultural processes. The theory investigates how *pancai bājā* reflects and shapes Nepali cultural aspects like social relations, community and society, Nepali belief system, socio-cultural values, and collective Nepali identity. Merriam touches on Hood's emphasis on bi-musicality. Hood fundamentally believes that only by being immersed can one accurately describe and understand another musical culture (Hood, 1960). Hood, along with Seeger (1987) and Herzog (1946), reacts quite strongly against the universalizing interpretations of early comparative musicologists and ethnologists (Hood, 1960). Therefore, this research paper aims to explore how the *pancai bājā* tradition musically expresses Nepali cultural values and belief system in the context of chronotopic changes and transformations in habitus as termed by Pierre Bourdieu.

In the course of studying ethnomusicology of the *pancai bājā*, "the problems of ethnomusicology are neither exclusively technical, nor exclusively behavioral" (Merriam, 1964, p. 15), and in technical aspect (sound structure), it is the "internal" study of the *pancai bājā* as a discipline, in which study focuses on what the *pancai bājā* is "at hand," how it is constructed, and what its structure is. In behavioral science, conceptual behavior, ideation, or cultural behavior is the entire process of determination of a system of "musts" and "should" associated with the *pancai bājā*, as well as the system of normative and existential concepts in which socio-cultural behavior, and learning behavior, i.e. interaction, communication and transmission are studied across Nepali society.

This study brings together the concepts of Bakhtin's chronotope, Seeger's ethnomusicology and Bourdieu's habitus. However, these three concepts converge

at one point. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope provides a framework for literary and narrative analysis of the *pancai bājā*; while Seeger's musicological work focuses on the nature and study of the *pancai bājā* itself, and Bourdieu's ideas explain changes in habitus and how *pancai bājā* works as the structure of the everyday life and cultural pattern of Nepali society. However, these concepts are about how meaning is embedded in different forms of human experience and communication. Bakhtin's idea of interconnectedness between time and space in narrative could be applied to the *pancai bājā*. Under the musicological purview, the study analyses the evolving temporal and spatial dimensions of the *pancai bājā*, relating it to musical structures or performances.

Through the concept of habitus, Bourdieu believes that people, in the course of their socialization within a specific social environment, acquire attitudes, habits, skills, tastes and perceptions deeply ingrained in their psyche. Habitus does structure structures and is structured by structure. In connection to the *pancai bājā* performance, on the one hand, the society structured the caste system and the notion of untouchability. On the other hand, the practice of *pancai bājā* music by the Damain community institutionalized the caste system and the practice of untouchability. Socially acquired habitus reflects an individual's cultural taste and social upbringing pattern as well. Webb, Schirato and Danaher believe that our knowledge "is always constructed through the habitus, rather than being passively recorded" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 38). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is an individual's series of dispositions. In this regard, Webb, Schirato and Danaher define habitus as "a concept that expresses, on the one hand, the way in which individuals ... develop attitudes and dispositions and, on the other hand, the ways in which those individuals engage in practices" (2002, p. xii). The influence of social and cultural context is internalized in human beings' habits, but such internalization is relatively unconscious.

The *pancai bājā* itself has a temporal and spatial dimension. A chronotopic approach could analyze how time and space are embedded in the *pancai bājā* compositions, performances, or even genres. Just as Bakhtin explored how chronotopes distinguish literary genres, the concept can be used to analyze how specific musical forms of *pancai bājā* (like other musical forms such as the fugue, the folk song, or the symphony) create distinct "time-space" frameworks. The *pancai bājā* is often a performance, which is inherently a temporal and spatial event.

The concept of chronotope could be used to understand the interaction between time and space within a live musical performance, and how this affects the meaning of the music.

Bakhtin introduced the neologism "chronotope" as a quasi-metaphor that already existed in the field of physics. The metaphor makes a transition from physical to narrative time-space. It is useful to trace the epistemological origins of the term. Bakhtin admits his borrowing of the idea of the chronotope from the relativity theory of Einstein, "The special meaning it [the chronotope] has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)" (1981, p. 84). As an inseparable whole, time and space intrinsically unite the spatial and the temporal phenomena.

In the Bakhtinian scholarship, the polysemic nature of the concept of chronotope is applicable not only in literary texts but in cultural texts as well. Bakhtin suggests that the chronotopicality of cultural phenomena is an elementary unit of literary imagination. Practical reason and imagination are blended in Bakhtin's concept of chronotope. His predilection for chronotopicality fascinates the multiplicity opposing the metaphysical essentialism. In this regard, Keunen enunciates, "Bakhtin's view of the temporal-spatial constellations in literature demonstrates a strong affinity to the ... perception of the spatial world is colored by the lived time experienced by the observer" (2010, p. 36). Bakhtin indicated the application of chronotope in the literary narrative, particularly the novel. However, the disciplines beyond literature have extended and applied the theory of the chronotope. The concept of chronotope has transcended scholarly approaches in cultural studies from the 1980s onwards. Chronotope as a critical tool can serve to navigate the historical dynamics of the *pancai bājā* across time and space, exposing lived experiences of Nepali society.

In the initial definition of the chronotope, Bakhtin unambiguously stated it as a formally constitutive category of literature. This definition precisely drew a limitation in the application of the term. However, recognizing the boundary, Bakhtin, later on, widened the scope, dissolving the borderline, "... we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal existence, but also into a semantic sphere" (1981, p. 258). Bakhtin's modality of chronotope opposes

the formalist and structuralist search for interpretive universals, neglecting the semantic dimensions inherent in the traditions. Scholars find a lack of precision in Bakhtin's explanation of chronotope. They state that Bakhtin "never provides a systematic definition ... nor does he present a clearly articulated protocol for identifying and analyzing chronotopes and the relations between them" (Ladin, 1999, p. 213). Consequently, Bakhtinian scholars have further interpreted and enlarged the scope of chronotopes. In this regard, Bemong and Borghart state that the "lack of analytical precision in Bakhtin's essays has led to a proliferation of heterogeneous chronotopic approaches to literature and, more generally, culture" (2010, p. 5). This statement hints at the possibility of applying the model of chronotopes in the field of culture. Accordingly, the present study applies the concept of the chronotope to the *pancai bājā*, an important element of Nepal's ethnomusical heritage.

In the Bakhtinian approach, the two categories of time and space constitute a fundamental unity. About the chronotope in art and literature, Bakhtin states, "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterize the artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Despite the fact that Bakhtin discusses the literary artistic chronotope, the successive scholars of the Bakhtinian School have extended the scope of chronotope to other disciplines of culture, too.

As *pancai bājā* is a cultural artefact, we apply the theory of chronotope to examine how this cultural artefact has been influenced by the dual factors of time and space in Nepali society. For this, we make a comparison between the past and the present as well as between the rural setting and the urban setting to demonstrate how time and space are closely intertwined in the historical development of the *pancai bājā* tradition.

Bemong and Borghart assess that Bakhtin took inspiration for his theoretical modality from the contemporary development in the field of mathematics and physics. They state that Bakhtin strongly believes that "the nature of spatio-temporal configuration in narrative worlds ... does share a common ground with the principles of relativity theory ... both in physical and fictional worlds there can be observed

an intrinsic connectedness of time and space, because in both realms chronology cannot be separated from events and vice versa" (2010, p. 4). The chronological history of the *pancai bājā* incorporates the spatio-temporal dimension of its evolution and transformation.

Bourdieu believes that mimetic practices are bound to rites and rituals, where by their performance contributes to the unconscious transmission of social rules without any need to make them explicit. Processes of modernization, globalization and technological development transmit understandings of the world on a corporeal level. Implicit understanding of the musical world is transmitted through the development of various physical activities in musical fields. They structure the musical world without explanation. This way, these various socio-cultural actions transmit systems of oppositions, of "right and wrong", of "dos and don'ts" from one generation to the next. As in mimetic processes "implicit", "practical", or "tacit" knowledge is transmitted, they provide people with unspoken "recipes" for how to "make sense of, and negotiate, the situations they are confronted with in the social world" (Webb et. al., 2002, p.139). In Bourdieu's words, "[t]here are heaps of things that we understand only with our bodies, outside conscious awareness, without being able to put our understandings into words" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 166). This way, the *pancai bājā* practices, as mimetic processes, contribute to the establishment of symbols that are usually not called into question, as they appear as common-sense logic. Bourdieu called this acceptance without questioning "*doxa*": "the ordinary acceptance of the usual order which goes without saying and therefore usually goes unsaid" (Bourdieu, 1979/1996, p. 424). However, such internalization without questioning is challenged if we analyze the chronotope of the past and the present.

In sum, the "bodily understanding" of things is inseparable from the historic genesis of the habitus and the "forgetting" of its historicity. Only through the "misrecognition" of the socio-cultural conditions under which an actor's habitus evolved, systems, rules, and structures that related to the *pancai bājā* may effectively function. The habitus concept enabled Bourdieu to explain why the power exertion of socio-cultural groups over others, or the exclusion of groups from certain resources, often works without resistance on either side.

Consequently, Bourdieu differentiated between social space (referring to "objective class") and the space of lifestyles (referring to "constructed class"): while social space refers to the conditions of existence, lifestyles are the visible

manifestations of the habitus (Rehbein et al., 2014, p. 112). This enabled him to distinguish between classes based on capital and classes based on habitus, which may differ from each other. In the *Finding and Analysis* section of this study, we have presented the case studies that help to differentiate and visualize the *pancai bājā* practiced and performed by the Damain community in Rawabesi as a constructed class and the *pancai bājā* now practiced in Biratnagar as an objective class or professional class for generating wages in terms of capital. Thus, differences in habitus are, in fact, determined by different social positions or capital possessions, but very importantly, cannot be reduced as such due to the "inventive" or "creative" potential of the habitus.

The pronouncement of these scholars reveals that the intrinsic connectedness between time and space is visible not only in the world of fiction and artistic creation but equally in the real physical world, too. Therefore, we argue that it is important to analyze the chronological development and transformation of the *pancai bājā* tradition, connecting them to the spatial and temporal phenomena. Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of habitus highlights the dispositions of individuals and that of the society as a changeable phenomenon in the spatio-temporal dimensions. Such an approach assists in understanding the trajectory of the musical repertoire of the *pancai bājā* performance tradition.

Methodology and Study Area

For this research, fieldworks were conducted in two different areas, namely Rawabesi Rural Municipality (Khotang) and Biratnagar Metropolitan (Morang). The first one is in the eastern hills, and the second one is in the eastern terai of Nepal. Thirty respondents and one key informant from each area were selected under the purposive sampling method. The first key informant provides information primarily about the past of the *pancai bājā* ensemble, and the second key informant spoke about the professionalism of the *pancai bājā* that is thriving in the modern urban setting. Our concern here is to show the chronotopic shift of the ensemble. Further, we analyze the changing habitus in Nepali society regarding the ownership and professionalism of the *pancai bājā*. The chronotopic approach is employed here to demonstrate the inseparable connection between the temporal and spatial dimensions of the *pāncai bājā* tradition. Ethnomusicological research on the *pancai bājā* is in its nascent form in Nepal. In the study, we asked twelve different questions

to the key informants (see Table 1). The principal objectives of the study are to explore the traditional dimensions of the *pancai bājā* performance practices in Nepali society and the present adaptation of its role in response to the social transformation.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents in Study Areas (Source: Field Survey, 2025)

S.N.	Community-based Distribution of Respondents in Rawabesi	Number	Community-based Distribution of Respondents in Biratnagar	Number
1	Brahmin	3	Tharu	3
2	Chhetri	3	Kami (Bishwokarma)	3
3	Newar	2	Chhetri	2
4	Kami (Bishwokarma)	2	Brahmin	2
5	Sarki (Charmakar)	2	Rai	2
6	Rai	3	Tamang	2
7	Gurung	3	Gurung	2
8	Magar	3	Magar	5
9	Damain	4	Damain	3
10	Majhi	1	Sarki (Charmakar)	2
11	Sanyasi	2	Madhesi	2
12	Tamang	2	Marbadi	2
	Total	30		30

This study focuses on two study areas: Rawabesi Rural Municipality and Biratnagar Metropolitan City. The first one is in the hills of eastern Nepal. In the past, the economy of the area was agrarian under the feudal system. The social structure perpetuated caste discrimination. Religious rituals and social ceremonies played an important role in community life. The means of entertainment were very limited. People deeply felt the vibrations of the *pancai bājā* melodies. The second one is in the eastern terai of Nepal. As a metropolitan city, the area has been commercially thriving with its multicultural and multiethnic population. The *pancai bājā* ensemble has undergone cultural transformation. These two areas respectively represent traditional and modern socio-cultural spaces.

Rawabesi Rural Municipality is an administrative division in Khotang District located in the Koshi Province of Nepal. It was formed through the merger of several former Village Development Committees (VDCs): Kubhinde, Kharpa, Haunchur, Lamidanda, Dubekol and Dumre Dharapani. It consists of six wards and its administrative headquarters is in Haramtar Kubhinde. The Rural Municipality is known for its topography, fertile land along the Rawa River, diversity based on culture and community, the nearby Dudhkoshi River and historical sites such as Pirmakot *gadhi* and Dumrekot *gadhi*.

Biratnagar is the capital city of Koshi Province, the headquarters of Morang district and one of the six metropolitan cities in Nepal. It is the biggest and the oldest city of Koshi Province, famous for being the hometown of the first large-scale industry of Nepal, the Biratnagar Jute Mill, established in 1936. The city holds significant religious importance and functions as a gateway to various destinations in the eastern part of Nepal. The city is densely populated by multicultural migrants, mostly from the mid-hills of Koshi Province (*Illustration 1*).

About Methods and Data

While undertaking this research, data were collected from multiple sources and at different levels to gain a comprehensive understanding of the *pancai bājā* tradition. Two sets of interview questions were prepared to gather information or perceptual dimensions of the *pancai bājā*—the first one was for musicians, and the second for listeners or audience.

Primary data were collected from selected Damai musicians who perform the *pancai bājā* repertoire. Interview, musical survey and group discussion proved to be useful methods for gathering information about the *pancai bājā*. Various types of data and information from multiple sources have been necessary for this study. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected using traditional methods, including ethnographic fieldwork, field observations, unstructured and structured interviews, and case studies. Before the field study, a brief encounter visit was conducted with musicians, audiences, and key informants. This is a qualitative research method, so the techniques for gathering information differ from those used in other quantitative methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with musicians and audiences to gain an in-depth understanding of the *pancai bājā*, the Damain community, the *bāli ghar bista* system, and its commercialization, including its spatio-temporal transformations.

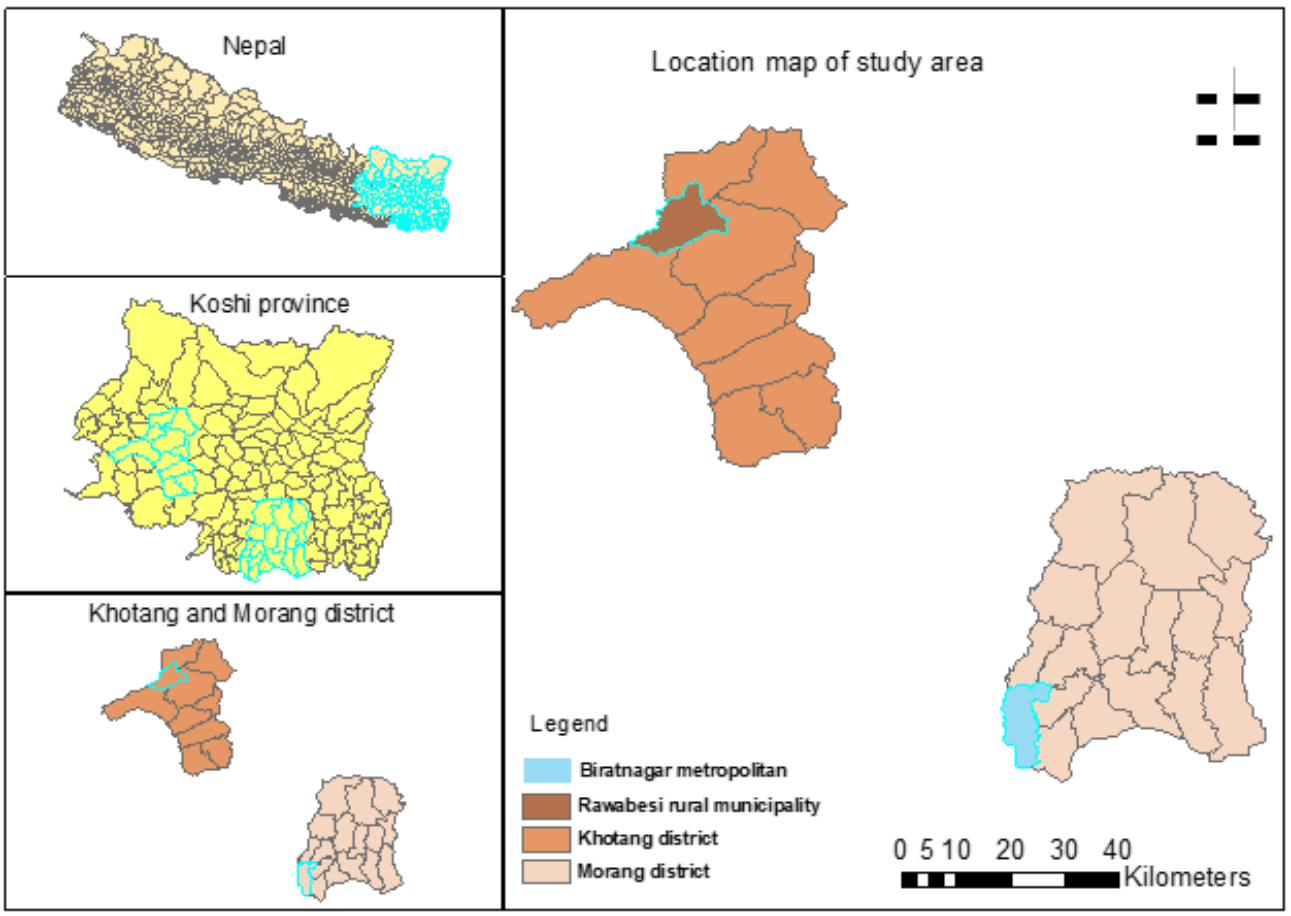

Illustration 1. Location Map of the Study Area

Key-informant interviews were carried out with scholars and elderly musicians who had performed *pancai bājā* repertoire for more than fifty years. The episodic interviews were conducted both in Rawabesi and in Biratnagar to capture the overall dimensions of the *pancai bājā* by participating in a marriage ceremony. The starting point for the episodic interview is the assumption that subjects' experiences of a certain domain are stored and remembered in the form of narrative knowledge—episodic and semantic. Episodic knowledge is organized closer to experiences; and linked to the concrete situations and circumstances whereas semantic knowledge is based on assumptions and relations, which are

abstracted from these and generalized. For the former, the course of the situation in its context is the main unit around which knowledge is organized. In the latter, concepts and their relation to each other are the central units (Flick, 2010, p. 185). Out of these methods, case studies were conducted to identify the changes and new adaptations of the *pancai bājā* repertoire.

Findings and Analysis

Bakhtin, in his essays, connects chronotopes with a temporal experience. Time is a key factor that marks the changes over the period. Keunen claims, "... the concept of the chronotope is a revolutionary category in the study of literature" (2010, p. 38). We can see the application of the theory of the chronotope in a variety of fields that lie at the intersection of language, society and culture. The *pancai bājā* is such a phenomenon situated at the intersection of musicology, rituals, culture, sociology and economy as well in the milieu of Nepali society. Elements from those sectors blend and interact in the analysis of the *pancai bājā* repertoire. About the significance of the temporal dimension, Keunen further states that the concept of time functions as the key in the study of human experience. Experience is a phenomenon that changes in both its spatial and temporal dimensions. He states, "Every observation ... occurs from a changing observational consciousness; every state of thing is colored by the observer's lived time. Together with the observation that our spatial environment implies a flux of changes, the attentive observer observes that he or she is subjected to change, too. The latter form of change could be called 'lived change'" (2010, p. 37). The spatial environment of Nepali society reflects the changes in perception and ownership of the *pancai bājā*.

Holquist differentiates the concepts of time and space between the Kantian school of thought and the Bakhtinian school of thought. He elucidates, "The Kantian categories of time and space are so transcendental that their application ... already compromises their status as pure categories" (2010, p. 31). However, the Bakhtinian position differs in connecting time and space with the immediate reality. Holquist further opines that Bakhtin "differs from Kant in taking time and space not as transcendental but as forms of the most immediate reality" (2010, p. 31). Experiments and innovations can be observed in the musicological tradition of the *pancai bājā* from the past to the present to reflect the immediate realities of the time and those of the geo-cultural space. Musical compositions, in whatever form exist or existed, are devised in their own historical and geographical context.

The history of Damain community in Nepal is connected with the unification campaign of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Regmi states, "Damais were also known for their unswerving loyalty to the royal courts. During the reign of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, one Bishe Nagarchi became famous for his wise counsel. The tradition of appointing Damais permanently in the Shah and Ranas court lasted until 1950 AD. This is evident from the names of the Damais in the financial expenditure lists who were appointed at the service of royal families and paid from the state exchequer" (Regmi, 2023, pp. 31–32). This extract demonstrates how royalty gave significant concerns and patronage to the Damain in the past. The palace always required Damain for two purposes: tailoring and the *pancai bājā* performances during rituals and ceremonies. Bakhtin establishes the decisive power of the time and space phenomena in human beings, "... every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (1981, p. 258). Chronotope provides ground for the representation of events and the concreteness of time.

Ram Sharan Darnal highlights the religio-cultural value of the *pancai bājā* ensemble in Nepali society, "The *pancai bājā* is purely an ensemble of serendipity in the traditional Nepali musicology. Its play is regarded as indispensable on every sacred occasion. The deeply rooted *mangal dhun* in Nepali culture is based on the *dasha awatār* (ten incarnations) of Lord Vishnu, a symbol of the creation and evolution process. In some context, the *pancai bājā* repertoire is interpreted as a symbol of the *panca tatwa* (five elements)" (Darnal, 2003, p. 219). The ensemble bears auspicious qualities in sacred contexts as ritual objects. The people of the Himalayan foothills in Nepal have nurtured traditional music for centuries (Morozova, 2024, pp. 179–184) and one of the examples is the *pancai bājā*, for a long period, bringing different communities together. Damain is a *pancai bājā* playing caste of professional musicians. Tailoring is their supplementary occupation. They are also employed as agricultural laborers. The word Damain is derived from the *damāhā* (a large kettledrum), one of the instruments in the *pancai bājā* ensemble.

Pancai Bājā and Noumati Bājā

The Damain community of tailor-musicians traditionally plays the *pancai bājā*. The term *noumati bājā* literally means "nine instruments", and it is occasionally substituted for the *pancai bājā* in reference to a larger ensemble. The nine instruments consist of two *sahanāi*, two *damāhā*, *tyāmko*, *dholaki*, *jhyāli*

and a minimum of two *narsingās* (natural horns). However, the ensemble exhibits regional variations across the country, from the terai to the hills and from the east to the west.

Pancai Bājā Ensemble

Conventionally, the *pancai bājā* is a festive and ritual music of the Damain community. A brief introduction of the *pancai bājā* ensemble is presented below:

Sahanāi

It is a curved wind instrument used for creating melodies in the eastern as well as the western hills of Nepal (*Illustration 2*). We can find variation in the organographical features of the *sahanai* instrument throughout the nation. In Tingey's general description, Nepali *sahanāi* comprises "a compound of double reed (comprising four leaves), seated on a pirouette (lip disc), and mounted on a conical brass staple which fits into the top of the curved conical wooden body. The instrument ends in a flared metal bell" (1990, p. 25). The *sahanāi* is approximately 45 centimeters in length. Moreover, it consists of a reed in the mouthpiece, seven finger holes, and another hole for releasing the air. Ram Saran Darnal clarifies the significance of the sahanāi, "In the wedding procession, sahanāi entertains people, creating a joyous melody while at the valediction of the bride from her maternal home; it makes people weep heightening their emotions. Even a naïve guy lifts their feet the moment *jhyāure*, *khyāli*, *bhote selo* and *cudkā* melodies are played on the *pancai bājā* or *naumati bājā*" (2003, p. 79). Nepali *sahanāi* bears the capacity of amusing the human heart as well as making it weep.

Illustration 2.
Sahanāi (Tingey, 1990, p. 26)

Dholaki

Dholaki is a double-headed barrel drum attached by lacing or occasionally Y-lacing over a rim (*Illustration 3*). It consists of two unpitched heads. The smaller one, locally named *pothi* (hen), is played with the hand while the bigger one, locally named *bhāle* (cock), is played with a *gajo* (a short wooden stick). The wood of *dār* and *chatiwan* is preferred in making *dholaki*. Animal skin is used for making and lacing the drumhead. The approximate length of an average-sized *dholaki* is 40 centimeters, including an 18-centimeter head and 19-centimeter diameter. Neither an excessively large nor an excessively small *dholaki* is preferred, since the large-sized one produces a low pitch and the small-sized one produces too high a pitch, almost resembling a shriek.

Illustration 3.
Dholaki (Tingey, 1990, p. 39)

Tyāmko

Tyāmko is made of wood, preferably the wood of *khamāri*, *cuwā*, *tuni*, *chatiwan* and so on (*Illustration 4*). However, the *tyāmko* used in the temple play for religious purposes is made of copper. Regarding the size, there is no standardization of *tyāmko*. Nevertheless, approximately the diameter of the head is 16 centimeters and the depth of the bowl is 20 centimeters. *Tyāmko* players strike the instrument with two thin sticks, putting the instrument on the player's chest or stomach. The strap from the neck supports the instrument.

Illustration 4.
Tyāmko (Tingey, 1990, p. 57)

Damāhā

Damāhā is a large unpitched copper kettledrum (*Illustration 5*), which lends its name to the *pancai bājā*-playing musician of Damain (it is claimed that from which the Damain community derives its name). Generally, *damāhā* is played with a short and thick stick locally called *gajo*. We do not find uniformity in the size of *damāhā* across the nation; however, the diameter of the head is approximately 30 centimeters, and the depth of the bowl is around 30 centimeters. Tingey has explained the making process of *damāhā* that needs around 4 kilograms of raw copper. The amount of copper is melted into a solid cake and forged into the desired shape. She further explains that it [the copper] "is heated periodically in the furnace, and the inside of the bowl is beaten with heavy hammers by two or three smiths until the required shape has been produced, when the outside is beaten smooth with a small hammer" (1990, p. 98). The shape of the bowl, the thickness of its walls and the quality of the copper affect the tone produced. The maker punctures a small hole in the base of *damāhā* to facilitate the soaking of the head with water.

Illustration 5.
Damāhā (Tingey, 1990, p. 48)

Narsingā

The instrument *narsingā* is sometimes included and other times excluded from the *pancai bājā* ensemble. However, a pair of *narsingā* is a part of *naumati bājā*. It is a conical bore natural horn with an integral mouthpiece. It is made of finely beaten copper. *Narsingā* is around 150 centimeters in length and made in five to seven parts. These parts facilitate transportation and storage. From the narrow mouthpiece, its width slowly increases and curves into a semi-circular shape. *Narsingā* players pause for breath rather than employing circular breathing. We can find variation in the shape and length of *narsingā* across the nation.

Jhyāli

Jhyāli is a pair of brass cymbals with a diameter of around 16 centimeters. In other words, *jhyālis* (alternatively known as *jhyāmtā*) are thin-walled plate-shaped cymbals (*Illustration 6*).

Illustration 6.
Jhyāli (Tingey, 1990, p. 59)

Caste System and Depressed Status of Damain

The Hindu caste system institutionalized the concept of untouchability, and it exploited the downtrodden communities of Kami, Damain and Sarki for centuries in Nepali society. The implication of untouchability remained grave and far-reaching in the Nepali society. Under the system, according to Tingey, those communities experienced "the non-acceptance of food and water and the taboos concerning sexual relations with higher castes. Pure castes avoid physical contact with the occupational castes, and purify (by sprinkling a few drops of water) things which have come into contact with them" (1990, p. 98). The inhuman practice

of untouchability unreasonably segregated a section of humanity. Tingey also reports that the so-called higher caste people neither ever entered the home of the outcaste castes, nor let the depressed castes enter their "pure" homes. Moreover, the Damain musicians would provide the *pancai bājā* music for a wedding from outside the home of their employer. In addition, they would enjoy a meal outside on disposable leaf plates. Their untouchable status sidelined them from the mainstream of socio-economic progress.

However, modern Nepali society does not act at the same level of apathy, discrimination and cruelty. A horde of social movements have not only introduced the fundamental rights of people in a democratic polity but also secured those rights of the depressed community. The chronotope of Nepali society in the past was marked by a severe lack of human sensibility.

Paradox between Untouchability and Auspiciousness

The traditional society would label the Damain community as untouchable along with Kami (blacksmiths or Bishwakarma) and Sarki (tanners and shoemakers). Although the caste-based traditional Hindu society considers the presence of Damain musicians and their ensemble auspicious as well as indispensable in the sacred rituals, they are placed at the lowest rung, and treated as the untouchable. The occupational caste of Damain exists within the paradox of a downtrodden social status combined with an auspicious ritual role. Tingey has pinpointed the paradox between the untouchability of the Damain community and the auspiciousness of the *pancai bājā* ensemble. She states the "dichotomy of auspiciousness versus disreputability or marginality" (1990, p. 99) of the Damain tailor-musician. She elaborates that the occupational caste of Damain belongs to an extremely low social status, as a social outcast from whom food and water may not be accepted, and with whom contact demands ritual purification. Despite their untouchable status, "the damāi are indispensable to Nepalese society as both tailors and musicians, and in their latter capacity they assume an auspicious quality" (Tingey, 1990, p. 2). The disparity is discernible between the auspicious function of the *pancai bājā* ensemble and the inauspicious status of the *pancai bājā*-playing Damain community.

Bāli Ghar Bista System

In the past, when cash transactions were very limited, the majority of the Damain musicians and tailors provided their services within a traditional patronage

system, locally known as *bāli ghar bista* system. This system was an economic framework under which cash payments normally did not exist. Instead of cash, the Damain would be provided with crops and grains as their remuneration after each harvest for rendering services over the year. Moreover, the patron would offer a traditional ritual gift to the Damain on specific ritual occasions. Under the *bāli ghar bista* system, the Damain would serve not only as a tailor and musician but as a farm laborer, too. Tingey captures the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Damain in the past, "... the damāi works in his capacities as tailor and musician, and he and his family may also supply labour for seasonal field work for his patrons. As a tailor, he usually works at the house of his patron, repairing or altering old clothes as required, and making new ones on the occasions of festivals and family events, such as the life-cycle rites. As a musician, the damai acts as *nāike* (leader, organizer) on behalf of his patron, calling together the band, usually from the ranks of his own family. The events for which the services of a *pancai bājā* may be required during the year include the life cycle rites of the first rice feeding of a baby (*pāsni*), sacred thread investiture ceremony (*bratabandha*), marriage ..." (1990, p. 103–105). The *bāli ghar bista* system was a popular practice in the past when monetary transactions were not flourishing in the agro-based traditional Nepali society. The remuneration system rarely practiced in the cash form would not suffice to sustain their livelihood.

Tingey expresses her worry and possibility about the decline of the *pancai bājā* ensemble because of the economic threat to the connoisseur of the ethnomusicological tradition. She asserts, "Unless the monetary returns are increased or their social status is enhanced, with the alleviation of the stigma associated with their caste profession, there will be a steady decline in the *pancai bājā* tradition. It is doubtful even whether the heartbeat of Nepal will continue to sound into the next century" (1990, p. 113). As Tingey predicted, the displacement of the Damain community from the *pancai bājā* playing occupation took place rapidly. Low income and social stigma discouraged the new generations of the Damain from seeking a career in the field of the musical performance of the *pancai bājā*.

Further, economic activities in the rural hills could not develop and expand since modern transport and communication facilities were hardly introduced. In the course of time, the young generation of the Damain expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional system of patronage because it was insufficient to sustain livelihoods and

had become outdated. Modern life requires cash to purchase modern accessories. The growing need and demand for cash necessitated the young generation to abandon the patronage system and leave their villages for the neighboring or distant towns seeking work or job opportunities that would reward them in the form of cash.

Role of Pancai Bājā: Social Integration and Value Preservation

Tingey is apprehensive about the decline of the *pancai bājā* that once functioned as the "social integrator, unifying the heterogeneous communities of the town through ritual music" (1990, p. 179). The sonorous sound and vibrating melody of the *pancai bājā* arouses a sense of unity among various communities in Nepal. Both in the past and at present, the ensemble as a processional band has involved the journey of people and deities "from one ritually significant area to another. In the case of humans, during *poojā* and *bratabandha*, the journey is between home and shrine, and for a wedding, between the homes of the groom and bride. In the case of deities, the journey may be between shrines ..." (1990, p. 178). From an axiological point of view, the *pancai bājā* is connected to the religious and spiritual values of the society.

In Tingey's reading, the ensemble, through its medium of propitious music, creates an auspicious ambience against the threat of negative forces. She claims, "The music provides an auspicious aura in which the ritual personnel and/or deities may move between hallowed areas, protected from the threat of malevolent forces. The journeys undertaken during *rites of passage* may be seen as the physical manifestations of the spiritual distance covered by an individual in crossing from one of the Hindu stages of life to the next. At these times, the individual is particularly vulnerable and needs the auspicious environment created by the *pancai bājā* as a safeguard from the forces of evil" (1990, p. 179). However, the *pancai bājā* is not merely a ritual music. Moreover, it is a medium of entertainment, a cultural heritage of Nepal and an integrator among ethnicities. Through the performance of the traditional auspicious *rāgas*, the *pancai bājā* has helped to preserve an original musical aesthetic practiced for centuries by multiple communities in Nepal.

The *pancai bājā* musicians are regarded not only as entertainers but also as harbingers of good luck. Despite the historical, cultural and social significance of the ensemble, some scholars point out the risk of collapse, too. The changing pattern of axiology and the introduction of the Western-style band instruments,

as Tingey pointed out, the *pancai bājā* might face tough competition. Around forty years back, she stated that the ensemble bore "the risk of becoming an anachronism and gradually fading from Nepalese village life" (1990, p. 179). Nevertheless, Tingey's prediction in today's context turned out to be false. The cultural renaissance in Nepali society has reiterated the value and significance of the ensemble, and various bands are formed to practically preserve the *pancai bājā-noumati bājā* repertoire. However, the profit-motivated capitalistic cultural market has dispossessed the Damain community of its *pancai bājā* legacy and transferred it to the so-called higher-class communities. The takeover of the *pancai bājā* repertoire by the profit-motivated commercial groups has erased its image as a "low-status" occupation and recast it as a "prestigious creative pursuit". The chronotopic analysis of the *pancai bājā* reflects the temporal (from the past to the present) and spatial (from the rural location to the urban location) shift in the usage of the repertoire.

Pancai Bājā Playing Occasions

The *pancai bājā* in Nepal is played for diverse purposes. The ensemble functions as a sacred or semi-sacred symbol associated with auspicious occasions. In Hindu *rites of passage*, such as *bratabandha* (holy thread investiture ceremony for young Hindu boys) and wedding, *pancai bājā* performances are fundamental requirements. Tingey mentions other occasions of the plays of the *pancai bājā* ensemble. She states, "It [*pancai bājā*] plays for the calendrical cycle of festivals, both agricultural (e.g. *hile jātrā, bajāune ropāin*), and sacred (i.e. *Caite Dashain* and *Thulo Dashain, Krishna Janmāshtami*) and leads civil processions and festivities of all sorts, e.g. the birthdays of the royal family, the triumphal procession of the successful candidate in a local ... election" (1990, p. 2). The performance contexts of *pancai bājā* extend from religious occasions and sacred ceremonies to social functions and secular entertainment music such as film music and folk-song tunes.

Case Study 1: Ritualistic Value of the Pancai Bājā under Local Patrons in the Past: An Experience from Rawabesi Rural Municipality

In the past, the agro-based traditional rural society of the hills in Nepal witnessed the *pancai bājā* ensemble as the major medium of entertainment for religious rituals and social ceremonies. Under the patronage of local feudals

and landlords, the Damain community would play the *pancai bājā* ensemble for low remuneration. The chronotopic study of the *pancai bājā* tradition reveals a tremendous shift in both the dimensions of time and space.

Merriam defines music as a form of social behavior worth studying from an anthropological perspective. The interconnectedness of time, space, and society in the study of music is highlighted in his proposition. Merriam explains, "Man moves in time: that is, he has a sense of the past, the present and the future, and he is intellectually aware of himself as existing in time. ... Man also moves in space ... Man moves, too, in society, he identifies himself with his fellows and cooperates with them in maintaining group and assuring its continuity" (1964, p. 21). He establishes connectivity among time, space and humanity, and focuses on the continuity of this connectivity. In the musicological study, spatial and temporal dimensions of the past and present vis-à-vis humanity are of prime concern.

Shyam Lal Pariyar (pseudonym), a resident of Rawabesi rural municipality in Khotang, in the capacity of a key respondent, sheds light on the local history of the *pancai bājā*. He is vocal about the occasions of the instruments' play, the cause of the ensemble's decline and experiences of socio-economic subjugation. The respondent draws a picture of the past (temporal dimension) in the eastern hills of Nepal (spatial dimension). The analysis of the interconnectedness between time and space reveals the social scenario and its cultural by-products.

In the past, Nepali rural society practiced caste discrimination, putting Damain, including Kami and Sarki, at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. Shyam Lal recalled, "During our adulthood, sonorous sound produced by Damain through the *pancai bājā* was regarded not only melodious but auspicious, too. However, their social status was attached to untouchability and inauspiciousness. Nepali society sustained such a paradox for centuries." Water and food items touched by Damain would be of the lowest standard, not to be consumed by the so-called upper caste people. The feudalistic mindset and the structure of the society alienated the creator (Damain) from its creation (*pancai bājā* melody).

Shyam Lal recalls the days when he used to play *narsingā*. In those days, *pancai bājā-noumati bājā* ensembles were played during weddings, *bratabandha* (sacred thread investiture ceremony), *ghar painco* (house warming ceremony), *laghu rudri*, *purāna* recital, *phulpāti* entry, *phul tārne* parva, *dewāli*, *kul poojā* (worship of the household deities), royal birthdays, *Saraswoti Poojā* and the like. The ensemble largely served ritual purposes and partially social occasions,

such as the birthdays of the royalty and victory rallies. In the rural hills, means of communication and entertainment media were minimal.

While analyzing the chronotope, or the spatio-temporal dimension, of the *pancai bājā* during the decade-long Maoist insurgency in Nepal, we find a significant shift. As the Nepali Maoists launched a violent attack against the polity, the *pancai bājā* playing tradition also declined. Many youths in the rural hills raised their arms against the status quo following the revolutionary Maoist doctrine. Resultantly, younger generations did not become enthusiastic about pursuing a career in the *pancai bājā* performance. Households in the Damain community began selling their musical instruments to coppersmiths at meagre prices. The hills of Nepal were badly affected by the violent conflict. Ordinary people were trapped between the forces of the state and those of the insurgent party. Wedding ceremonies until then would be organized at night. The trend reversed since the violent conflict began. Nighttime wedding practice was not appropriate from a security point of view. Even today, almost all wedding ceremonies are organized under the broad daylight, either in the rural hills or in the terai or in the metropolitan location.

In the geo-cultural space of Rawabesi, the Damain were sidelined from the mainstream of society in the past. They were economically exploited and socially marginalized. Despite the fact that they had to stand at the front of the wedding procession, they were humiliated as the untouchable *shudras*. During the nighttime wedding program, people would quarrel over different issues after taking alcoholic drinks. Very often, the musician Damain would be the victim of the quarrel. Shyam Lal states, “There would not be the police in the far-flung rural setting of the hills. At times, some cantankerous Damains would start a quarrel, other times, some vandals would badly beat and misbehave the Damain musicians.” Giving the credit for the daytime wedding ceremonies to the Maoists, Shyam Lal comments that the wedding ceremony under broad daylight is more disciplined, secure and time-saving.

Due to the unconscious incorporation of the habitus, social inequalities are not perceived as unjust, but as something natural, as deliberately chosen, or as an individual preference. The habitus of Nepali society in the past segregated the tailor musician community. The process of unconscious incorporation of dispositions is the heart of Bourdieu’s habitus concept because it explains how “arbitrary” social norms and rules are naturalized and hence legitimized. Since what is “ ‘learned by body’ is

not something that one has ... but something that one is" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 73). Despite the fact that there is no inherent relationship between the Damain community and the notion of untouchability, for centuries, the community and its profession of performing *pancai bājā* music and tailoring were regarded as an inferior occupation. However, if we analyze the chronotope and habitus, those professions are not only prestigious but they are sought by the so-called upper castes, too.

From the perspective of chronotope, the spatial environment itself witnesses the flux of changes across the temporal dimension. Respondent one, as a key informant in this *pancai bājā* research, shares his experiences of temporal changes in the rural space where he has been living for sixty-five years, i.e. since his birth. Shyam Lal Pariyar (pseudonym) explains the temporal dimension of the past and the spatial dimension of the countryside vis-à-vis the *pancai bājā*. By using their imaginative faculty of mind, the *pancai bājā* players have experimented with musical forms and melodic patterns within the tradition. As Keunen puts forth, "... human being is an imagining creature that unites the heterogeneity of his actions in a lived moment of time" (2010, p. 47). In the rustic setting of Rawabesi rural municipality, in the past, the *pancai bājā* functioned as a means of entertainment and music for rituals and ceremony. The ownership and the skill of playing the *pancai bājā*, then, were only with the Damain community. However, in today's socio-economic and cultural context, members of non-Damain communities have begun performing *pancai bājā* professionally.

Case Study 2: Ownership Transformation and Commercialization of the Pancai Bājā in an Urban Setting: An Experience from Biratnagar Metropolitan

The process of mass migration from the hills to the terai region of Nepal has influenced the legacy of the *pancai bājā* on a massive scale. In the rural location of the hills, Damain community would play the *pancai bājā* ensemble primarily to perpetuate the rituals rather than their professional growth. Their local landlord patrons offered only minimal cash payments for the accomplishment of the *pancai bājā* performances. However, the changing socio-economic pattern of the society has opened an avenue for professionalism in the ensemble play. Nevertheless, the Damain community has gradually lost its hold and ownership of the *pancai bājā* playing profession.

Lalit Magar (pseudonym) expresses his experiences related to the ownership shift, commercialization, government support and the role of women in the *pancai bājā* playing tradition. A certain group of the Magar community in the urban area of Biratnagar formed a *pancai bājā–naumati bājā* band that included players only from the Magar community. Traditionally, the Damain community carried on the legacy of the *pancai bājā* performance despite social stigma and the inhuman practice of untouchability. As the *pancai bājā* playing tradition did not belong to the Magar community, they hired five trainers from outside the Biratnagar metropolitan. The practitioner band of the Magar sought the Damain trainers from the neighboring districts such as Jhapa and Dhankuta. In this regard, Lalit states, "Among those five trainers, only one was from the Thakuri community and the remaining four were from the Damain community. The trainers coached them twice a day: in the morning from six to nine and during the day from one to four." After the formation of the Magar *pancai bājā* band in the metropolitan, the trend was soon imitated, and four additional bands were subsequently formed. Those bands comprise people from the communities such as Brahmin, Thakuri and Magar.

As our key informant, Lalit clarified mainly the three factors that inspired them to form the non-Damain *pancai bājā* band. First, they just wanted to preserve the originality through the continuation of the *pancai bājā* tradition since it is original and vibrant musical repertoire of Nepal. Second, the increasing invasion of the Western musical band has sidelined the original *pancai bājā* band of the land. The desire was to revive the neglected musical repertoire. Third, the Magar of the Biratnagar metropolitan sensed a great potential for professionalism in the adoption of the *pancai bājā* ensemble.

As interviewers, we asked Lalit whether they felt hesitation in the initial days to practice the *pancai bājā* performance since conventionally the socially outcast Damain community has played it. He responded, "In the beginning, we had some kind of awkward feeling, but later on, we found that our society was becoming much more liberal. The traditional prejudice has been effaced to a larger extent." The post-Maoist-insurgency society has largely deconstructed the social hierarchy sustained for centuries.

The economic factor has energized the professional practice of the musical ensemble, enlarging its scope. Inside the metropolitan territory, the Magar *pancai bājā* band charges Rs. 1500 to 2500 for a single instrument. Outside the

metropolitan territory, the charges are higher. In the *noumati bājā* band, the number of performers ranges from nine to eleven. Interestingly, the number of women players is approximately two-thirds. Women's participation in the *pancai bājā* band reflects certain facts about their involvement and intelligence. The spatio-temporal dimension of the *pancai bājā* has undergone massive change. Women's musical intelligence is much sharper than that of men. They learn the skill of playing the ensemble much more quickly. Being involved in such a creative pursuit, women feel fresh. In the past, even Damain women were not supposed to play the *pancai bājā*, but women from different communities now perform *pancai bājā* professionally.

The Magar community in Biratnagar metropolitan originated from internal migration from the hills. The hill-origin communities of Nepal have been sustaining the practice of the *pancai bājā* ensemble. Such a historical fact demonstrates that the communities originally from the terai region such as Madhesi, Rajbamsi and Tharu, and the migrated communities from India such as Marbadi do not use *pancai bājā* in their rituals and social ceremonies. The cultural expansion of the *pancai bājā* among the indigenous communities and the India-origin communities in the terai region is almost zero. The hill-origin communities, such as Brahmin, Chetri, Tamang, Magar, Majhi, Newar, Gurung, Rai, Kami, Sarki, and Damain hire the *pancai bājā* ensemble for wedding ceremonies.

About the future of the *pancai bja-noumati bājā* ensemble, Lalit is extremely optimistic. He claims, "The increasing trend of playing *noumati bājā* will minimize the widespread use of the Western musical band. People's inclination to employ the *pancai bājā* in rituals, weddings, and various social ceremonies is certain to grow." In the urban setting of Biratnagar, the players produce the melodies of *mangal dhoon*, *khyāli,* and *cutkā*. Moreover, they perform the melodies of popular songs from the immediate musical market to amuse the audience.

The Magar *pancai bājā* band in Biratnagar received financial assistance from the local municipal government not only for developing *pancai bājā* performance skills but also for purchasing the instruments. In this regard, the municipal government has provided patronage to the *pancai bājā* ensemble. The band of Lalit Magar expects a municipal grant for the repair of the instruments in subsequent years as well.

The clearly structured melody of the *pancai bājā* fascinates the audience. There are various occasions on which residents and government agencies hire the *pancai bājā* band for entertainment and social prestige. Those occasions include weddings, *bratabandha* (sacred thread investiture ceremony), *kul poojā, dewāli*, and rallies.

In the age of technological advancement, many people express their concern that the live performance of the *pancai bājā* might be threatened by digital playback. The recorded version of the *pancai bājā* melody might surpass the presence of the players in person in a real spatial location. However, our respondent Lalit confidently said that the recorded music would not much threaten the live performance. Prestige-conscious people prefer the in-person performance of the musical ensemble. The hill-origin communities are positive in the promotion and preservation of the instruments.

This is how the *pancai bājā* repertoire has undergone a massive transformation in the capitalistic market. Ironically, Damain community, the initiator, promoter, and preserver of the rich repertoire of the *pancai bājā* has been losing its hold and ownership over it. During hard times, they continued the tradition, facing the social malignancy. Social stigma attached to their profession discouraged the Damain and their posterity from seeking innovation and professionalism in the field. Gradually, the so-called upper caste communities adopted the profession of the *pancai bājā*, making it an alternative source of livelihood. The Damain community's displacement from the profession reflects the changing matrix of the spatio-temporal dimension in Nepali society. The chronotopic analysis of the *pancai bājā-noumati bājā* tradition suggests that the temporal and spatial dimensions of the ensemble have undergone various phases of crisis and commercial regeneration. Paradoxically, the real connoisseurs of the musical ensemble are pushed to the brink of sustaining the tradition that they nurtured for centuries amid social discrimination. However, the tradition continues to gain strength no matter who is commercially handling it in the technical marketplace.

Conclusion

As a traditional musical ensemble, the *pancai bājā* is performed in the rituals and social as well as religious ceremonies of the hill-origin Nepali communities. The ensemble consists of *sahanāi*, *narsingā*, *dholaki*, *tyāmko*, and *jhyāmtā*. We can see a chronotopic shift in the field of *pancai bājā* performance as we analyze

the spatial and temporal dimensions of the ensemble in both the past and the present. The social habitus (deeply ingrained dispositions) to perceive the *pancai bājā* ensemble has also changed considerably. In the study of the *pancai bājā*, Merriam's anthropological approach to music proves particularly relevant. In the past, only the tailor musician Damain would play the ensemble when the society contained an agro-based economy and rural setting. Their patrons would be so-called upper caste people. Mostly, the Damain musicians would not get their remuneration in cash but in the form of agricultural produce under *bāli ghar bista* system. The socially outcast and economically marginalized Damain community was treated as an untouchable section of humanity. For their service, they would annually collect the crops such as paddy, corn and millet from the households of their *bista* (patrons).

Along with the changes in socio-political and cultural contexts, these days, the so-called upper-caste people have been seeking professionalism in the *pancai bājā* performance. In the urban location, many *pancai bājā* bands are formed, and they perform the music that was traditionally regarded as belonging to the Damain occupational caste. However, in the modern capitalistic market, the so-called upper caste, not Damain communities, are seeking professional opportunities in the *pancai bājā* musical performance. The community that traditionally maintained the ensemble is losing its grip and ownership at the juncture of history when the society is growing more liberal and the concept of untouchability, connected to Damain, is thawing at a greater speed. In this regard, the new generation of Damain abandoned the *pancai bājā* playing occupation since it was associated with social stigma.

However, the Damain community has played a significant role in initiating and perpetuating the *pancai bājā* music in the past when there was neither adequate remuneration nor social prestige attached to the occupation. Despite the fear of the collapse of the *pancai bājā* repertoire, it is sustained in the commercial market, no matter how the ownership has changed. In the urban setting of Nepal, the *pancai bājā* is taking a commercial twist. The internal migration pattern of Nepal shows that a large proportion of the population from the hills has been migrating to the plains of the terai. This phenomenon contributes to the sustenance, development and professionalism of the *pancai bājā* repertoire. As the density of population increased in the terai, demand and consumers of the *pancai bājā* have escalated. In the modern urban cultural marketplace, the *pancai bājā* ensemble is played on occasions such as weddings, *bratabandha* (sacred thread investiture ceremony),

purāna recital, *phulpāti* entry, *dewāli* and *kul poojā* (worship of the household deities).

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The article was submitted 07.04.2026;
approved after reviewing 22.05.2026;
accepted for publication 10.06.2026.

Статья поступила в редакцию 07.04.2026;
одобрена после рецензирования 22.05.2026;
принята к публикации 10.06.2026.