

Pirkko Moisala, *Cultural Cognition in Music: Continuity and Change in the Gurung Music of Nepal*. Jyväskylä : Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy, 1991 (Suomen etnomusikologisen seuran julkaisuja 4). xii, 427 pp.*

Review by Mireille Helffer

Pirkko Moisala's book, dedicated to the music of an ethnic group in central Nepal, is a significant contribution to the knowledge of Himalayan music, as much for the novelty of the subject as for the methodology which combines anthropological, musicological and cognitive approaches.

The author, who has had several articles published in periodicals in Nepal and Finland, bases her work on solid fieldwork. She visited a village in the district of Lamjung with a majority Gurung population (in 1975-76, and more briefly in 1985); there, she collected music documentation to which 12 hours of videocassettes were added. She took advantage of the ten-year interval between her two visits to perfect her study of Nepali in London and ethnomusicology in the United States.

In the two introductory chapters, the author explains and justifies her choice of methodology by acknowledging her indebtedness to the late John Blacking, and other significant names in American ethnomusicology: Alan Merriam, Bruno Nettl and Norma McLeod. She also details the theoretical presuppositions which underlie her research and which aim at elucidating to what measure changes in musical order are concomitant with other observable changes in a given culture.

The following chapter places the Gurung ethnic group within the Nepalese context. There is a clear summary of data gathered by numerous English, Nepalese and French anthropologists during the last decades and a rigorous presentation of the conditions in which the study was carried out, at a time when the process of Nepalization was most intense.

The fourth chapter which deals with problems relative to the specificity of Gurung music takes up nearly half of the book: it is divided in six sub-chapters which successively examine the following points:

- village music, 1975-76
- Gurung and Nepalese musical concepts

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Translation: S. Keyes

- musical events, a description of sites where music is practised, especially the Gurung institution, *rodi ghar* where the youth of both sexes get together to sing and play the *madal* drum
- diverse "genres" representing varying degrees of Gurung culture
- changes in the village in 1985
- the emergence of urban music among the young Gurung living in the Kathmandu Valley

Two particularly significant musical manifestations are emphasised: 1) the *serga* dance, included in death rituals, which uses a dozen different rhythmic patterns; and 2) the *ghāntu* epic dance, considered by the Gurung as well as foreign observers as the most representative of Gurung culture which requires a male chorus, four *madal* drummers and two to three young female dancers. The performance lasts three days and nights. One part of this long epic is minutely analysed: text, carefully noted melodic and rhythmic patterns, vocal and dance styles leading to a trance, etc. Two other musical genres where Indo-Nepalese influence are clearly present are highlighted: 1) the *Krishna Caritra* or the life story of Krishna, with Nepali text; and 2) contemporary music and dance performed by village youth for amusement and integrated in presentations designated by the English term *Thetar* (for theatre); local songs are included as well as popular pan-Nepalese songs called *lokala git* and some songs adapted from Radio Nepal broadcasts.

In the conclusion, the author, who recognises the transitory state in which the ambient culture is conveyed by the education system and the media, attempts to analyse the changes she witnessed during her two fieldtrips. She always considers musical performances from three aspects: culture, musical genre and particular conditions where she observed each of these aspects.

In summary, it is an informative book based on the author's original documentation; contemporary ethnomusicology is confronted with the omnipresent problem of musical acculturation, and there is ample material for reflection. The reader will appreciate the abundance of iconographic documentation and musical examples, but unfortunately, there are no recordings illustrating the author's subject matter nor an index which would make the work more accessible.