Introduction

The human voice is believed to be the first medium of musical communication, the most natural and the most expressive instrument of all time. The primitive musical instruments appeared as the human beings started imitating sounds of nature, using sounds to protect themselves, sometimes, just for the sake of the harmony. Musical instruments evolved over the years from hollow reed or rattling of stones, to add nuances to musical expressions. Through study of these instruments, we can seek to understand music - a highly regarded and ever expanding body of knowledge.

The Himalayan region is a composite of several cultural cosmoses rolled into one, each little valley or plateau with its distinctive cultural forms. Every mountain slope is, from the anthropo-geographical standpoint, a complex phenomenon displaying a whole range of cultural features/combinations. The Himalayan communities have a wealth of traditional art including the traditional music and dances. Music, an intangible art form is an integral component of the lives of the Himalayan way of life. The people possess a wealth of musical heritage comprising music and musical instruments, with a number of distinctive instruments and vocal styles. Folk music and musical instruments are intrinsic part of Himalayan culture. The music of the Himalayas reflects the unique cultural heritage of the region and the various ethnic groups across the Himalayan countries of India, Nepal and Bhutan.

However, organologic study of musical instruments from the Himalayas is limited. An effort here is made to discuss and classify a precious few of the Himalayan musical instruments and understand their importance in the day-to-day life or the religious ceremonies that are interwined with the traditional social practices of the region. Sometimes, they have religious connotations as well. In the western Himalayas, different sects of Tibetan Buddhism coexist - such as, Nyingma, Kargyud, Sakya, Gelukpa. Each sect follows its own traditions and has its own style of performing rituals, use of musical instruments, that are unique to each lineage. The study seeks to explore all these various musical instruments that add to the cultural distinctiveness of the Himalayan region.

Musical instruments: The Forgotten Heritage of the Himalayas

The Himalayan people use various types of musical instruments in their religious ceremonies, festivities, weddings and other celebrations. In the lean winter months when the snow brings all livelihood activities to a halt, festivities take over as a major activity. They form a very important part of the rich Himalayan culture. No festivity or celebration is complete without the traditional music and dance and a whole range of musical instruments bring to life the musical performances.

Most musical instruments are made locally utilising the local materials and also the traditional knowledge systems passed down from generations. Music is about expression, communication, release, celebration, worship, ritual and enjoyment, and the instruments support them all. Each region has its own distinct style of music and musical instruments. The Nepalese musical instruments for example, are a unique blend of Indian and Tibetan instruments. This Himalayan country rests in between the Tibet and India and hence its folk music is influenced by both regions. The musical instruments used in the Himalayas reflect the spiritual life the people lead, the connections between cultures, signs of great ingenuity and creativity, and physical emblems of the sounds they create.

Elementary organology categorizes musical instruments by their core element: earth (solid instruments), water (liquids/water instruments), air (gases/wind instruments), fire (plasma instruments), idea (informatics/quintphones - non-physical instruments). They can also be classified based on the principle of sound generation into: (a) aerophones/wind instruments (sound generated by an air-column), (b) percussion instruments - also known as idiophones (sound generated by material itself), membranophones (sound generated by a stretched membrane/skin), (c)
chordophones/string instruments (sound generated by stretched string) and (d) electrophones (sound generated by electronic means - the most recent development in the history of organology).

Musical instruments of the Himalayas discussed below are of wind, percussion and stringed varieties. This paper briefly describes the instruments used in the different Himalayan states of India and also in the Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan.

Wind Instruments of the Himalayas

Wind instruments use air as the primary vibrating medium for the production of sound and tone, and hence the name. The range of wind instruments display variety in terms of length, diameter, shape and construction of chamber in which air-mass is enclosed. Various kinds of wind instruments are used by ethnic groups across the Himalayan belt from West to East, made out of a wide range of materials and for varied purposes.

The Sunna used by the people of Lahaul & Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh is an ancient wind instrument, with a very straight body made of brass or copper which is capable of producing both high and low notes and is generally played by men. The Bansuri is widely popular across Himachal Pradesh and predominately perceived as an instrument of the shepherds. It has seven to eight holes and the idea is to help the player produce different kinds of notes as per his/her choice. The Karnal used by the people of Kullu Valley and the Kinners resembles a trumpet and is played during Kullu Nati, the popular Kullu folk dance that is performed on many fairs and festivals. It is also used by the Kinners while performing the Lossar Shona Chuksam, the famous folk dance of the Kinnaur region. Another wind instrument used for the kulu Nati dance is the Narsingha. The instrument is divided into two parts – Dhaturo (the larger part) and Dhopbana (the smaller part). The latter is put in the former, with the two being connected when the instrument is being played. The Kinners also play the Ransingha while celebrating Lossar Shona Chuksam. Usually shaped like the letter ‘S’ it is also at long and straight in structure.

The Surna is used by the Lahaulis of Himachal Pradesh in their traditional Lahauli dance and also the Dards of Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir when performing the Drugpa-Rches dance. The Dhonse is used by the people of Bhadarwah in Jammu and Kashmir during the Dheku or Kudd folk dance of the region.

Then in the Eastern Himalayan belt, the Lepchas of Sikkim use a double-barrel flute called the Nibryok Palit; a flute called the Pentong and another flute with four holes called the Palitkeng. The Tangue also used by the Lepchas is a small instrument made from bamboo and is played by the tongue. The Gurung community of Sikkim and Nepal plays the Madat Flute during the Dohori group dance. The Clarion and the Conch shells are used by the Monpas, Sherdukpons, Khambas, Mambas,
Wanchos - the ethnic tribes of Arunachal Pradesh during various traditional songs, and their pantomime and monastic dances.

**Percussion Instruments of the Himalayans**

Percussion instruments produce sound when hit with an implement or when it is shaken, rubbed, scraped or acted upon in any other manner. All instruments such as drums and bells fall into this category. Their usage is common in traditional music and dances and religious ceremonies of the Himalayan communities.

The Kinners of Himachal Pradesh use a percussion instrument called the Bugjal while performing the Lossar Shona Chuksam dance. The Chimta (tongs) is another key instrument used by the Himachali tribes in folk dramas (such as Bhagat, Kariyala and Jaragata). The tongs have bells attached on either side to produce the jingling sound when being played. The Gaddis of Himachal use the Dafale, a small round-shaped drum mostly played during wedding ceremonies. The Dammama is another instrument played by the Himachali tribes and is treated with reverence for its use in auspicious affairs like prayers and worship. Good attention is paid to the visual appeal of the instrument, through flower decoration and application of turmeric paste. There is also a custom of offering rice to the Dammama – accompanied by the chanting of prayers – before playing it in a religious ceremony. The Damman is used by the Lahaulis of Himachal Pradesh during various dance and the Dards of Ladakh while performing their dance called Drugpa-Rches. It comprises of two kettledrums called Fo (meaning male) and Mo (meaning female). Water is poured into Fo through a hole under it to produce a deep sound when being played. The two kettledrums are played by small sticks named Damshings.

The Dhaunsa is the largest and heaviest of the various forms of drums played in Himachal Pradesh. It is played by men using both hands and when played, it adds thrill and life to the festivals, fairs, carnivals and ceremonies. The Dhol is widely used in Himachal on diverse occasions, ranging from wrestling bouts to folk dances and festive occasions. The Gajju used by the Kinners and Lahaulis among other tribes of Himachal Pradesh, is played during religious festivals at temples and monasteries, and in various other auspicious occasions like birth and wedding ceremonies. These are also used to entertain the audience during various social functions, like fairs, carnivals and tribal dances. The Ghariyal is a common instrument used in folk dramas performed by the Himachalis. The Khadtal stands for wooden castanets and is played during the Ainchali songs or Jagarata folk dramas. The Manjira (also known as Jhanj or Tala) is also widely used in Himachal during folk dramas. It is played by hitting the two small discs against each other. The Nagara comprises of two kettledrums of unequal sizes made from different local materials aimed at bringing a contrast effect in the sound produced. The Tamaka used by the Bharai community of Himachal is a huge drum played to mark the beginning or end of a festival. The Kaans thali and Hudka are instruments used by the Kumaonis during the Kumaoni folk song of Ramaul and Hudkaibaul.
An earthen pot called Noot is played in Jammu and Kashmir. It is played keeping on one’s lap or the floor. The Tumbaknari (also called Matki) is played with Wachun, a Kashmiri folk song that is sung in wedding ceremonies.

The Tang Dar is a small round drum used by the Lepchas and the Chakpurjang is another elongated drum used by them. The Chyabrung is another drum used by the Limbus of Nepal and Sikkim played during the famous Limbu folk dance. Either sides of the drum are beaten by the drumstick and the hand alternately. The Damphu used by the Tamangs of Nepal and Sikkim is played during the Damphu dance on various occasions such as a wedding ceremony or child birth. A thick handle used to play the Damphu is attached to the main body through wooden pins. The Dhimey is another sort of drum used by the Jyapu Newar community of Nepal during their Dance.

A host of tribes including the Monpas, Nishings, Apatanis, Adis and Noctes of Arunachal Pradesh, use Cymbals in various folk dances like Buiya, Rekham Pada, Roppi (of the Nishings), Aji Lamu, Lion and Peacock dance (of the Monpas), Popir, Pasi Kongki, Ponung (of the Adis), Hurkani (of the Apatanis) and Chalo (of the Noctes). Cymbal is also played during the local folk songs. The Drums used by various Arunachal Pradesh tribes provide a key musical support for the many folk dances and songs. Another common instrument used by the Adi community of Arunachal is Yoksha. Resembling a sword, it is used during the Ponung dance.

### String Instruments of the Himalayas

String instruments are musical instruments that produce sound from vibrating strings when strummed, plucked or slapped. They include a wide variety of instruments, some originating thousands of years ago. The pitch of string instruments depends not only on the string length but also on its thickness, weight and tension. The vibration of strings against the soundboard produces sound. String instruments come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

The Damian (da – sound; mian – sweet) is a stringed instrument used by the nomads of Tibetan origin settled in Changtheng, Ladakh. Played during their Jabro dance, it is a six stringed instrument resembling a guitar. The Ektara played in Himachal Pradesh comprises only one string fixed with two adjacent bamboo sticks. That single string is to be deftly handled to produce the right tone. There was a time when Ektara was originally used by the bards and minstrels, with the bards travelling the villages while singing their own folksongs on the Ektara. Today it is played in all special festivals. The Ghurat used by the Nirmand people of Himachal comprises four strings, which are played with a bow made of hair from horse tail. The Jumang is assumed to have been in use by the Himachali tribes for several decades and is played on occasions, such as religious ceremonies and marriages. The Kokatha Murchang is played with a bow with bells on it and is widely used during Himachali folk dramas, such as Bhagat, Jaragata and Kariyala. The Ruman is used by the Sirnaur, Mahasu of Himachal Pradesh comprising many strings is played on various festive and religious occasions. The Kindari is another string instrument used by the Lahaulis and Spitians of Himachal Pradesh. The Kokpo is a traditional guitar played by the Spitian musicians during various performances.

The Tanbuk is a common string instrument used by the Lepchas of Sikkim. The Dramyin is used by the Drukpa monks of Bhutan and Sikkim while performing the Dramyin Cham dance. Also used in the religious festivals of Vajrayana Buddhism, and is played by plucking, strumming or fingerpicking. A double-waited, long-necked and fretless lute, the Dramyin with rosette-shaped sound holes is commonly hollowed out of just one piece of wood, sporting a length varying from 60 cm to 120 cm. Six of its seven strings or thags continue to the peg-box, with one remains in the neck itself.

### Multifaceted Instruments of the Himalayas

The Naumati or Naumati Baja is a multifaceted musical instrument used by the Nepali community of Sikkim. It is played during occasions such as prayers, weddings and also for a folk dance called Maruni. This is a unique combination of the following nine instruments – Tyamko, Bautaal, Dholaki,
Historic events, Madal, Ankle Bells, Tabla, Sitar, etc. are mostly used for entertaining purposes. Used mostly for marriage ceremony and other purposes, like singing bowls are used for healing the diseases, Damaru, Tingshaw and Vajra Ghanta are used for various rituals, including festive occasions, religious ceremonies, folk dramas and other occasions of celebration. Many different customs are associated with the musical instruments played across the Himalayan belt.

Materials that create the melody

Varied local materials ranging from metals and alloys to animal hair and skin are used in these musical instruments to create the enchanting melodies and sounds. Some of the most ancient instruments depict Tantric Buddhist rituals. Just as Buddhist tantric images feature necklaces of skulls on wrathful deities, some of the instruments are made out of human bones. Bone trumpets (Kamling) were used for various rituals, including sky burial ceremonies and cho practice - chants and meditation on non-attachment - which was often done in charnal grounds. The damaru was traditionally made from two human skulls and used in plethora of rituals.

Wind instruments: The bansuri or flute, a commonly used wind instrument in Himachal is made of varied objects like wood, steel, brass and copper. Sometimes one even comes across bansuris made of silver, and even gold. Another wind instrument, the kamal used by the Kullus and Kinners of Himachal is made from silver, copper or brass. Some other Himachali instruments, the Narsingha is made of copper and the Ransingha is made of brass or silver. The tangle, a flute-like instrument used by the Sikkimese is made out of bamboo, a widely available local material in the region. The Bugjal used by the Kinners is made of bronze.

Percussion instruments: The Dhol used by the Himachalis is made of either metal or wood. The two open ends of Dhol are covered with goatskin, with the latter being tightened with the strings that cover the body of the instrument. The Manjira used by the Himavhalis is made of bronze. The Nagara used by the Himachali people comprises of two kettle drums: larger one is made of copper, having a cover of buffalo skin that facilitates the generation of a deep sound and the smaller one is made of steel, sporting a cover of camel skin to produce a lighter sound effect. The Tamaka used in Himachal and the Damphu used in Sikkim and Nepal are also made from animal skin. The Hudka used by the Kumaonis has a body made of wood and its percussion surface is made from goatskin. The Tumbaknari played by the people of Jammu & Kashmir is made of clay and the open part is covered with tanned sheep skin.

String instruments: The Ektara used in Himachal is made of bamboo and the bow used to play the Gharotu is made from hair of a horsetail. The Dramyin played in Sikkim is hollowed out of a single piece of wood. Though the strings of dramyin were traditionally made of animal gut, nowadays synthetic material is used. Some dramyins contain a plectrum, which is connected with the base to facilitate plucking. Traditionally these plectrums were made of bone but now materials such as plastic or wood are used. The Naumati played by the Sikkimese is a combination of nine different instruments, all made with different local materials. Mujura comprises ‘Asta Dhatu’, an alloy of eight holy metals. Tyamko comprises a copper container covered by bull leather. The upper part of the instrument is attached to the base (Kumbhi) through the leather strings or taana. The base contains a small hole to be blocked by a piece of cloth called sutlo. It facilitates appropriate vibration. Narsingha is made from copper metal and the Jhyamta comprises two brass ball-like objects, with wide borders to facilitate combined beating.

Customs associated with music and musical instruments

Many different customs are associated with the musical instruments played across the Himalayan belt including festive occasions, religious ceremonies, folk dramas and other occasions of celebration such as weddings or child birth. Different Himalayan Musical Instruments are used in different purposes, like singing bowls are used for healing the diseases, Damaru, Tingshaw and Vajra Ghanta are used for spiritual ceremony, Pancha Baja, Nau Baja, Shehnai, Dholak, Damaha, Trumpets etc are used mostly for marriage ceremony and other social ceremonies, Sarangi is used to narrate the historic events, Madal, Ankle Bells, Tabla, Sitar, etc. are mostly used for entertaining purposes.
The nature of the Himalayan Musical Instruments can be understood from the people who use them and the purpose they are used for. In Nepal for example, some instruments are used in classical music which is influenced by the Indian culture; some for folk music; some for religious ceremonies, rituals and processions; and some for other activities common to the village life. In Nepal, a cacophony of wind and percussion instruments are still commonly used at monasteries to welcome guests, for the charm sacred dances, and to make offerings of sound to the deities on many occasions. At Losar, one monastery brings out two several meter-long tungchen trumpets to blast from the rooftop. The Gyalin, Tibetan flute, has a sound not like the Shehnai but Singchen (Cymbals) and large drums, very similar to the Dhyangro shamanic drums, which may have evolved from them. Probably the most familiar monastic instrument of all is the Thibu the hand bell used in combination with the Vajra. Like the Himalayan singing bowls, the Thibu Bell (Ghanta) creates a remarkable overtone of sound, which is associated with the different realms of existence by some.

The unique heritage under threat

Though Himalayan music and its development have undergone a great deal of transformation during the course of time, this vanishing heritage of the music and musical instruments of the region needs to be preserved for the coming generations to savour the essence of the uniquely distinct Himalayan music. Various professional music arrangers find it impractical to use folk-instruments while recording the Himalayan music, as many people find it difficult to match the pitch and scale of the traditional musical instruments with the modern / western acoustics. It is feared, in the long run, synthesisers would virtually replace these folk music instruments.

Preservation of the Himalayan Musical Heritage: The biggest impediment that the preservation of intangible cultural forms faces is the fact that the erosion of these forms is very difficult to determine. The need for preservation is often felt too late. Recognising this, most state policies and programmes aimed at the preservation of intangible cultures, such as music aim to provide avenues for continuing use of these intangible cultural forms. Competitions, festivals, awards, etc., are orchestrated events that enable the display/practice of the cultural forms. Various methods of documentation, publication and dissemination are also used, and serve to preserve as well as maintain the use of these cultural forms. Digital forms of documentation, e-dissemination and media broadcasts can be explored as the primary modes.

Pragya’s efforts: Pragya is lending a fresh lease of life to the ethnic music & dance forms of the area. New generations are being taught the traditional skills by local experts. Music & dance troupes have been constituted and troupe members have been given inputs on choreography and stage management. The troupes perform at local events and are being groomed to perform at the state & national levels as well, which would in turn generate wider awareness of and respect for the local culture. Heritage Interpretation Centres have been set up to preserve regional artefacts including the musical instruments. The Heritage Interpretation Centres are also meant for conducting periodic local cultural festivals for the benefit of both locals and tourists. Still at a nascent stage, this model could well establish a sustainable culture tourism cluster, which benefits the locals in the area.

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