

The Historical Context and Present Scenario of *Mādal*

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Abstract: Madal is a two-faced hand drum used in Nepali music. It is also well-known throughout the world as a percussion instrument commonly employed in Nepali traditional music. In terms of its structure and playing style, limited works of literature and treatise have mentioned some rhythmic instruments akin to the m dal. The origins of the m dal have been linked to ancient instruments such as the mridanga, mardal, and muraj. The evolving trend of this musical instrument has been thoroughly examined in this study. The sources of information for this study were textual reviews and field trip notes. Furthermore, the researcher has also reviewed some research studies focusing on the caste and communities associated with m dal. As a result, the current study is intended to be a valuable resource for people interested in learning more about m dal. Similarly, this study has underlined the importance of m dal in the current global context.

Keywords: Folk-song, mādal, mardal, musical instrument, nātyashāstra, tri-pushkar.

Introduction

Among the varieties of musical instruments, the *madal* is one of the popular in mostly Nepali music field. It has been a representative and ideal musical instrument for each Nepali since ancient days. Most musical events, feasts, and festivals would be in the dark without it. Its indispensability has been almost on the top, ever in Nepali society, which is most famous folk musical instruments associated with our culture and lifestyle. “*Mādal* is a symbol not only of Nepali folk music but also of the whole Nepali music” (Regmi, 2058, p-3). So, it has been able to take a special place in the existing folk music in Nepali society since time immemorial. There is no doubt that *mādal* has always been present at every moment of sadness and joy in Nepali society. The current research is primarily concerned with the historical facts and charismatic significance of madal both within and outside of Nepal.

Methodology

The present article is prepared in a descriptive manner. The secondary types of data were utilized, reviewing the texts, books, research articles, news, theses, unpublished papers, and others. Library visits and web surfing were carried out to review the kinds of literature frequently as per necessity. A few field visits to *Chāngunārayaṇ*, *Gokarṇeshwara*, *Mahālxmi* temples, Kathmandu, Bhakatapur and Patan Durbar Square were made to collect some photos.

Historic aspects of *Mādal*

The very first musical instrument in this world, according to *Hindu* epic, is assumed to be the *Damaru*. It was believed to be created by Lord *Mahādev*, which is an *Avanadda Vādya*, a kind of percussion instrument. According to the story, while Lord *Mahādev* started dancing cosmic *Tāndava* dance, he felt the lack of rhythm. So, he created the *Damaru* to accompany *Tāndava* (Mishra, 1992, p -70). In the *Hindu* religion, most of the Gods and Goddesses have been associated with music subjects, i.e. singing, instrument, and dance (Poudel, 2021a). Lord *Ganesh* and *Indra* are associated with *mridanga* (Regmi, 2058), which is similar to *mādal* of today. *Mridanga* is one of the *Tri-Pushkar Vādya*, which was created by *Sage Swāti*, as stated in eastern ancient text: *Nātyashāstra* (Mishra, 2006, p -3). Likewise, *Āwaj* is another synonym word for *Mridanga*, which is known as *Pakhāwaj*, today (Mishra, 1992, p -64).

As stated in *Nātyashāstra* :

Mridanga Bheri Patahair Bhānda Dimdima Gomukhai:

Paṇawai Durdura chaiwa Sarwātodyai Prawāditai:।

(Malaviya, 1997, p -76)

Mridanga was one of the musical instrument of ancient time and has been popular at present too. Another eminent text *Sangūt Ratnākara* has stated (Chaudhari, 2006, p -509) that,

...*Nigadanti Mridangaṃ taṃ Mardalaṃ Murajaṃ tatha...*

which denotes *mādal* with *mardal* or *mridanga* or *muraj* in the same sense. Veteran *mādal* player Subi Shah in his book '*Mādal*' mentions as *mādal* in a modified form of *Mridanga* (Shah, 2039, p -1). There is a ritual belief in *Hindu* religion that Goddess *Pārbati* and God *Shiva* stay on left and right face of *Mardal*, respectively, according to a lines stated in a text, composed in between 7th to 11th century by *Nārada* in *Sangūtmakaranda* (Telang, 1920, p -21).

Dakṣiṇāṅge sthito Rudra Umā bāme pratishthitā;

Shivashaktimayo nādo mardale parikirtita:

The structure of *mardal* stated in *Sangūt Ratnākara* by *Shārangadev* (Chaudhari, 2006, pp 508-509) is exactly the same as the structure of *mādal* today. So, the existence of *mādal* starts from the ancient period and continues to the modern days. Some photos of sculptural works taken by the researcher relating to *mādal*-like instruments in some Nepali temples are given below, which evidence the existence of musical works, especially the existence of *mādal* in Nepal since ancient times.



Figure 1 Nandi playing *Tri-Pushkara* (Gokarṇeshwara Temple)



Figure 2 *Bhringi* playing *Mardal* or *Mridanga* (Gokarṇeshwara Temple)



Figure 3 *Yakshya* playing *Muraj* (Chāngunārāyaṇ Temple)



Figure 4 An angel playing *Pakhāwaj* (Bhaktapur Durbar Square)



Figure 5 A group performance by Dancer, *Mardal* and *Jhyāli* player
(*Chāngunārayaṇ* Temple)



Figure 6 Lord playing instrument
at *Chāngunārayaṇ* Temple

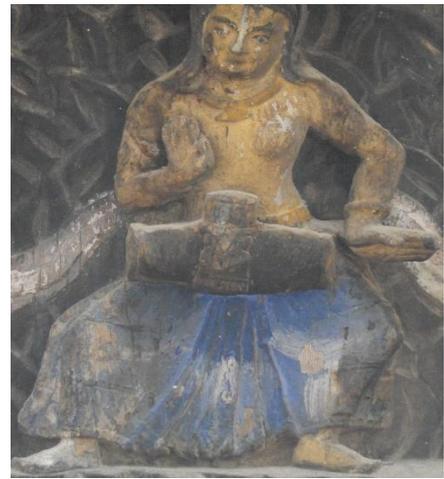


Figure 7 playing three faced drum
Kathmandu Durbar square



Figure 8 *Mādal* player in dancing pose
at Kathmandu Durbar Square



Figure 9 stone carving of a *Mādal* player
(downward, second last) *Umāmaheshwara* at
Kumbheshwor Temple water spout, *Patan*.



Figure 10 *Newār* people in Lhasa parading with mādal-like drum during 1903 AD (source: Frederick Marshman Bailey)



Figure 11 Group dance with *mādal* (source: youtube)

Likewise, the *mādal* is associated with the *magar* people in the hilly region of Nepal. Traditionally, *Magar* people use to play *mādal* during their *Sorathi*, *Kaudā*, *Ghātu*, *Sālaijiu* dance and songs (Tiwari, 2060, p -104). Other communities i. e. *Brāhmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Durā*, *Kumāl*, *Gurung* also play *mādal* in the local ceremonies, like farming, cultivation, feast, and festivals. *Newāri* people of Nepal also use to play *mādal* with their folk tunes. The leather instrument is called ‘*Khin*’ in *Newāri* language. So, these people have named *mādal* as ‘*Maga-Khin*’ in their mother language, which means the instruments belonging to *Magar* caste (Thomas et al., 1960, p -411). “Nepali scholars agree that the drum (*mādal*) is typical to the *Magar* caste in the central Nepali hills west of Kathmandu” (Maharajan & Moore, 2010, p -5).

In the past, Nepali people used to visit Indian places for employment, trade, pilgrimage, and educational purpose and Indian people also used to visit Nepal for the same causes. So, it can be easily assumed that, during those days, due to the movement of people across those two countries, either the *mādal*, probably, would have been arrived from the places of India, where, *mridanga* or *pakhāwaj* was popular or *mādal* would have been reached to the territories of India. Likewise, the Nepali *Gurung* and *Magar* people in the Indian army, in the past, also can be assumed as the carrier of the *mādal* from Nepal to ancient India, and probably, Indian scholars reformatted *mādal* into *mridanga* as per their convenience or vice-versa.

Folk music scholar, Kandel has opined that, before the unification of Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan, the *magar* ruler had occupied most of the territory of Nepal and they popularized the *mādal* throughout the country in between the 8th to 12th centuries (Maharajan & Moore, 2010, p -6). On the other hand, since primordial days, there have been many other musical instruments in practice, which seemed similar in the name, as well as, the physical structure of *mādal*, inside Nepal and in India too.

As discussed before, *mādal* is the alternate name of *mardal* (Mishra, 1992, p-88). The *mādal* in Bengal, Chhattisgarh (Sen, 2005, p -78), Rajasthan, South India (Sen, 2005, p -148) seem similar in name, and the structure of *mādal*, which are bigger than Nepali *mādal* in reality. Likewise, *Maddale* (Sindhusri, 2020) is an inevitable rhythmic instrument alike *mādal* at Karnataka, while performing *Yakshagāna* - a theater form that combines, dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up and stage techniques, which was developed with the *Bhakti* movement during 11th century (Dey, n.d.). Late Hiriyadka Gopala Rao (1919-2019AD) was an eminent *maddale maestro* from Kannada (Reporter, 2019). Similarly, the *Sudha Madhalam* is another percussion instrument similar to *mādal* accompanied with *Keli*, *Panchavādyam*, *Kathakali* and *Krishnanattam* in Kerala (Cultural dept of Kerala, n.d.). The playing style of *maddale* (Upadhyya, 2018) seem similar to the *Khīn* (Kutumba, 2016), a kind of rhythmic instrument which is very popular in the Newāri community in Nepal. Some examples of *mādal* and alike drums found in internet are presented below:



Figure 12 North Indian
Pakhāwaj



Figure 13 Newāri *Khīn Baja*



Figure 14 Nepali *Rāni Mādal*



Figure 15 *Sudha Madhalam* Kerala



Figure 16 Copper *Yaba Mridanga* Nepal



Figure 17 *Gilāse Mādal*



Figure 18 *Maddale* at Karnataka



Figure 19 *Mādal* players in *Sakhīyā* dance Surkhet, Nepal

Manufacture and structure of *mādal*

The major material for manufacturing the *mādal* are hollow log, goatskin, straw-ash, metal powder, glue, and other hand tools (Shah, 2039). As it is a leather instrument, animal skin, especially, goatskin is widely used to make good quality *mādal*. The log (*Ghār*) is specially made from the trees like *Chhatiwan* (*Alstonia scholaris*), *Shirish* (*Mimosa Lebeck*), *Chāp* (*Michelia champaca*), *Simal* (*Bombax ceiba*), *Utis* (*Alnus nepalensis*), *Kadam* (*Anthocephalus chinesis*), *Khirro* (*Apocynaceae*), Bamboo, and *Siudi* (*Cactus*) (Shah, 2039 p-3). *Shārangadev* has mentioned the *Bijpur* (*Bimiro*) tree-log for making the *mardal* (Chaudhari, 2006, p -509). The log is carefully hollowed from both sides, 1 foot to 2 feet in length. While hollowing, one side of the log is made smaller in circumference in comparison with the other. The smaller face is known as male (*Bhāle*) and larger is known as female (*Pothi*) (Shah, 2039, p-3). For the tightening purpose, a long leather strap (rope) is weaved in a zigzag pattern, on the edges (*Mathurā*) of both sides of goatskin, which covers both hollow ends. After tightening the processed goatskin at both ends of *ghār*; a mixture of straw-ash, metal powder, and glue is pasted carefully for the purpose of producing resonating sound if a stroke is made. *Mādal* is played either by hanging on the waist or sitting. Traditionally, specific castes of Nepal, like *Chanāra*, *Sārki* (shoe-maker), *Kulu*, and *Bādi* are engaged in the manufacturing of *mādal* (Shah, 2039, p-2). But today, this skill has been converted into a money-earning professional business. So, there is no boundary of castes in the production of *mādal*. Basically, the hilly regions of Nepal are popular places for producing the *mādal* in a wide range.

Kinds of *Mādal*

Due to the different aspects of *mādal*, like pattern, size, type, usage, and, various kinds of *mādal* are found according to location, and caste specific. The names of the *mādal* are also different from the place by place and caste by caste. In the hilly region, small-sized *mādal* is used, because it is easy to carry and dance on up and down landscapes. *Purbeli mādal* is small in size and popular in eastern hilly part of Nepal, and *Pashchimeli mādal* is comparatively big in size and accompanied with local tunes which are popular in the western hill and *terāi* region of Nepal. *Rāni Mādal* is much popular in *Pālpā* district (Karki, 2022). *Sorathi mādal* is another type of *mādal* which accompanied with *sorathi* tune and dance since the 16th century. Basically, *Gurung*, *Magar*, *Brāhmin*, *Kshetri*, *Kumāl* communities in *Dhaulāgiri*, *Gandaki*, *Rāpti*, *Bheri*, and *Lumbini* districts of Nepal are engaged with *Sorathi* (Tiwari, 2060, p-104). Likewise, *Sakhiyā Mādal* and *Jhumri Mādal* are accompanied with folk tunes and dances of *Thāru* community of *Terāi* region of Nepal (Karki, 2022).

Syllables played in *Mādal* then and now:

There have been some mnemonic syllables of *mādal* since ancient times. Those syllables (*Varna*- basic alphabets) are played with certain methods. Basically, special parts of the hand: palm and fingers are used to produce the appropriate sound from both faces of *mādal*. As stated in 1033 and 1034 shloka of "*Sangūt Ratnākar*", by *Shārangadev*, he had pointed 32 syllables altogether could be produced from *mardal*. 7 syllables *Tat*, *Diñ*, *Tho*, *Te*, *He*, *Nan*, *De* are produced from the right face, and 6 syllables, *Tha*, *Ta*, *Lha*, *Da*, *Dha*, *La* from the left face. In addition, 16 other syllables of *Pataha* (Today's *Dholak*) and 3 syllables by another opinion *Bha*, *Jha*, *Ma*- 3 syllables.

Today, many of those alphabets have disappeared and some are changed or mixed with other syllables. As far as *mādal* is concerned, the experts of *mādal* have summarized 5 basic syllables: 1. *Taṭ/Tā/Na/Nā*, 2. *Tā/Tin/Ti/Tuñ*, 3. *Dhiñ/Dhi/Di/Da* 4. *Faṭ/Fa/Khaṭ/Kha* 5. *Jhyām/Dhing/Dhāng*. Those syllables practiced today are somehow similar to the syllables from ancient times.

Present Scenario of *mādal*

Mādal has gone through various epochs, since its origin. In ancient times, *Mardal* was accompanied with both, religious and folk music, which is mentioned in various ancient music texts. *Mādal* was accompanied with those types of songs, which were about historical ballads, historical tales of ancestors, religious hymns, romantic, and sad songs. Even today, *Mādal* is still played with equal importance. This musical instrument has been playing an important role in special occasions, festivals, farming, and other local ceremonies as inevitable. The role and importance of this popular instrument in the present context can be analyzed with the following aspects.

***Mādal* as the heartbeat of folk music**

According to experts, folk music is the basis of our culture. Without music, culture becomes dull and crippled. The arts and artists in society are the bearers of tradition, generation to generation (Bohlman, 1988). Musical performances of singing, instrument playing, and dancing at different times and contexts are a beautiful way to express the feelings of human beings and to mirror the actual society (Mukarung, 2078). So, the music is glue for social integration. Alike, the *mādal* also has been playing a coordinating role in the musical heritage of Nepal, which is celebrated since the traditional era. People from different communities including *magar*, *gurung* and other castes living in Nepal have been embracing *mādal* as their ancestral musical instrument. Therefore, *Mādal*, which has been played in folk music since the past, has been the heartbeat of Nepali folk music heritage.

***Mādal* as the identity of Nepal**

Nepal is famous as a country, rich in folk culture in the international arena. “Nepal has been second to none in its musical tradition” according to an eminent musicologist (Darnal, 1993). Most of the 126 castes, here, have had their own way of living, festivals, and traditions since the past. So, from birth to death many musical patterns have been found in the society that exists as a tradition or practice. Most of the existing musical instruments in Nepali society are found to be fixed for certain purposes by tradition, i.e. from permission to proscription (Regmi, 2015). But *mādal* is such type of musical instrument that can be played and performed in all seasons, all months, and all days except in the hour of mourning. In most of the performances of Nepal in the representative programs held in the country and abroad, the presentation of Nepali folk music has been found to be indispensable, where the *mādal* is found played, sometimes as the main instrument and sometimes as an accompanying instrument. In this context, *mādal* has always been an important musical instrument in each national and international level music conference representing Nepal (Shah, 2039, p-2). Thus, it has been known as the identity of all Nepali. This has been termed “*the national rhythm instrument of Nepal*” (Tiwari, 2060, p -41).

***Mādal* as a professional subject**

In modern times, music is studied as a rich profession, whereas, in the past, music was practiced as a subject of entertainment and self-expression. On the one hand, music used to be performed in the worship of gods and goddesses, on the other hand, music was developed as a powerful medium to express the events prevailing in the country and society and the feelings within an individual. At present, the importance of music for human life is increasing along with all these aspects. Compared to the eastern world, the professional attitude towards music in the western world is found to be more organized and stronger. In the case of *mādal*, it has been popular most in Nepal, and gathering fame in the international market gradually for some decades. It is reported that Nepali musician *Ranjit Gajmer* firstly used *mādal* during 1971 AD, in the Mumbai film music industry (Gaekwad, 2018) (Sasad, 2018). That made *mādal* a more popular musical instrument in the SAARC region through the Indian film “Hare Rām Hare Krishna”. Before the entry of *mādal* in Mumbai, many Nepali cultural trips were already had

made to international forums along with *mādal*. From this point of view, the performance of *mādal* has become as popular as any other subject of music.

Nepal's veteran maestro *Nhuchche Bahadur Dangol* (Kantipur, 2018) (Karki, 2022) is an exemplary personality who has been making a name and fame for himself and his country by presenting the *mādal* music on stage at home and abroad, which he learned from his ancestors and *guru*. He has visited 19 countries with *mādal* music (Karki, 2022). Recently, another eminent Nepali *mādal* maestro from West Bengal, Kalimpong, *Kaajee Singh* has been honored with the *Padma Shri* award -2022 by the Indian government for his great contribution for preserving and promoting *Gorkha* folk culture (*Ministry of home affairs press note*, 2022). This award has made all Nepali as well as all *mādal* players proud of the music profession. Thus, undoubtedly, in the current context, *mādal* seems to be established itself as a professional subject.

***Mādal* as a subject of higher study**

After the establishment of Tribhuvan University in Nepal, Padma Kanya College in 2017 BS, Ratna Rajya Campus in 2030 BS, Lalit Kala Campus in 2033 BS, and Kathmandu University in 2053 BS, started teaching music as an academic subject (Pokhrel, 2021). Many Nepali scholars have been awarded higher degrees in separate subject of music from different universities (Dhakal, 2021). With the flow of time, theoretical and practical classes on *mādal* under folk music have been taking place in the courses of Tribhuvan University (Lalitkala campus, 2015), Kathmandu University, and in other private colleges too. At present, separate classes of *mādal* from school level to university level have been arranged as other subjects. After the establishment of the National Theatre and Royal Nepal Academy during 2014 BS in Nepal, many periodical pieces of training and instructional programs related to *mādal* have been organized time by time, which has been accelerating the popularity of *mādal*. Thus, it cannot be denied that *mādal* has been established as a separate subject of study. Many private and community-based organizations have been conducting training on *mādal* for decades.

***Mādal* as a multidimensional musical instrument**

Among the 5 types of instruments prevalent in music (Poudel, 2021b), *mādal* is studied under *Avanadda Bājā* (Percussion instrument). Apart from accompanying folk music, there has been a new trend to play *mādal* with other songs and music too. *Mādal* is now widely used in folk songs, hymns, pop, movie music and other local and foreign music. There are many ample examples of Nepali artists and bands performing music at home and abroad (Yerina & Ivan, 2010), presenting the use of *mādal* from various dimensions. It seems that *mādal* has been presented not only for rhythmic purposes but also in melodic purposes for creating tunes as *mādal-tarang* (Tintala, 2007). Similarly, *e-mādal* is another example of *mādal*'s variety of experimentalism, through which *mādal* can be used for other phonetic uses including rhythm and melody. Likewise, *mādal* has been played not only placing horizontally, placed vertically too, which is called '*Gilāse-mādal*', placed like a drinking water-glass (Fig: 17).

Apart from these views, sometimes *mādal* was the only one popular musical instrument accompanied by cadre to fight against Ranacracy and autocracy through conscious songs which supported for the emergence of democracy in Nepal. Many of the writers, novelists, cinema – makers, lyricists also have been expressed about *mādal* in their creations, i.e. singer late Dharmaraj Thapa and others.

Conclusion

There are synonymous names of *mridang* like *muraj*, *mardal*, *pakhāwaj*, which have been playing an important role in the music field from *Vedic* times to modern times. This study has further strengthened the fact that the ancestral instrument of Nepali percussion instrument *mādal* is *mardal* or *mridang*, which has been played with religious and social significance, since the old days. The process of manufacturing, the syllables, the playing styles of *mādal*

today are found similar to *mardal* during the ancient era. Many similar instruments like *mādal* are found in use with various names in multiple places. The important aspect is that, the playing style of *mādal* in Nepal is an unique. Likewise, the present study has stated six major aspects concerning to the popularity of *mādal* at present situation in Nepal. As far as works of literature relating to *mādal*, there the researcher noticed a few other research articles mentioning caste and communities associated with *mādal* in internet, *mādal* related some books and general articles in Nepal. The study would be more effective if community visits were arranged. This study will be definitely a strong reference for future authors and researchers who seek for the historical facts of this musical instrument. Similarly, the present article will be very much relevant for teaching purposes also to clarify about the historical and current situation of the *mādal* from different perspectives.

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