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## Gallery

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# Gallery | Popular Music Across the Himalayas

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This selection of images references sonic practices in ways that imagine musicians in diverse venues of performance. These venues include not only the stages and studios behind their products and performances, but also the emotional and geographical backdrops that permeate their albums, posters, and concerts. Thus, the pictures provide a small selection of images from the world of Himalayan sounds. Included are instruments, musicians, and singers, often set to text and/or visual imagery invoking mountains, sunsets, echoes, and valleys. In addition, of course, album covers reference the longing, love, and nostalgia of the song texts within them. Frequently, album covers are enlivened with grand splashes of color and dreamlike impressions of mountain homes—homes that are understood to be “up there” somewhere in the high country.

The contributors to this Special Issue have listened intimately to the sounds they write about. In so doing, many have focused on the processes of music commodification in ways that have explored recording, distribution, and advertising. Albums, songs, and concerts are the places where the construction of musical identities and traditions can be “seen”. By contrast, sound is ephemeral—it ends as soon as it happens. Significantly, however, recording allows for a repetition of what might otherwise disappear. Images like those shown here give us some further indication for what the meaning behind the sounds may have been.

The digital revolution has dramatically altered music industries around the world. Popular music industries in the Himalayas are not immune from these disruptive forces. Survival in the new



## *Chhuñyāḷ*

A plethora of singers appear in front of a backdrop of mountains on Narender Singh Negi’s VCD version of this more comically oriented album *Chhuñyāḷ* [Garhwali. Gossiper].

digital environment requires adaptation to new modes of production and distribution. In many ways, therefore, these covers and posters tell us stories of technology, loss, and negotiation. Changing traditions are mirrored in changing formats as new forms of promotion emerge. Loss of tradition invokes a nostalgia for home and inspires a revitalisation of endangered practices and instruments. Analogue cassettes get recycled in digital MP3 format while new “picturizations” revitalize songs in VCD format. Even so, widespread free access to digital files makes the production of new albums almost unviable.

Quite appropriately, Rama Cassette, a company that has been a key player in the Indian popular music industry throughout the past forty years, provides a thematic thread across these images through the inclusion of six of their Uttarakhandi albums. The changing role of institutional patronage as well as the influence of a commercial imperative impinges on cultural expression in different ways. These images provide a glimpse into the processes and encounters of musicians and producers as they negotiate commercial and political realities.

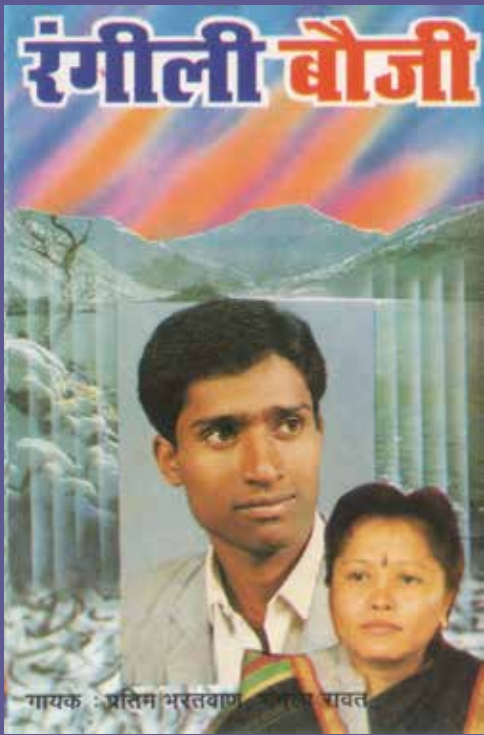
The poster *Jamarko* invokes group effort in revitalizing Nepal’s musical traditions, while backdrops of mountains permeate the images of early Uttarakhandi cassettes. Digital reproduction provides an expanded opportunity for hyper repetition within both the sounds and images of albums and festivals. Negi’s portrait from his politically inspired *Nauchhamī Nareṇā* reappears on his more playful *Chhuṅyā!* at the same time that the MP3 format of the former creates an extended compilation playlist in contrast to the VCD format of the latter. A selection of these album images as well as pictures of traditional musicians from the Echoes in the Valley Festival poster feature on the cover of this issue and in this Gallery Selection.

We hope the images here will amplify the articles of this Special Issue. They remind us that, even though music is sonic, it exists in a world of practitioners, producers, and musicians. The musical product must be promoted, and this activity of promotion is itself a site for cultural construction.



#### *Bablī Ghasyārī*

Suneel Thapliyal and Meena Rana receive top billing on this MP3 compilation album under the title *Bablī Ghasyārī* [Garhwali. Babli the Grasscutter]. Verdant mountain slopes in the background make reference to the kinds of forest venues where one might hear grass cutters singing their songs.

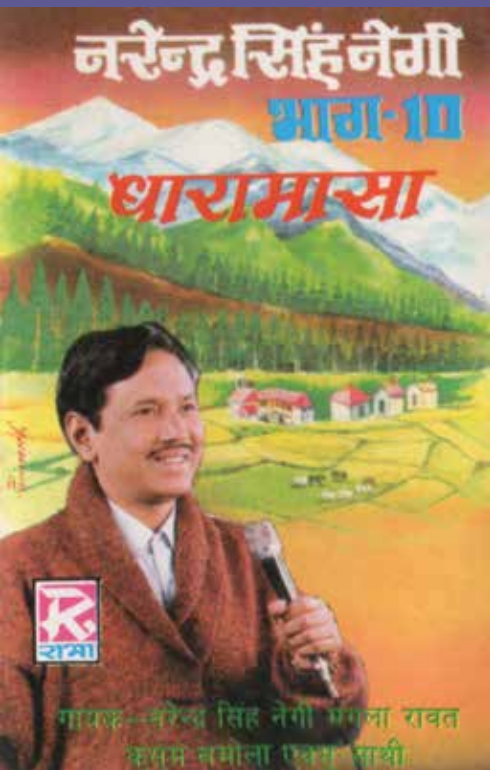


### *Raṅgīlī Baujī*

This is one of Pritam Bharatwan's early cassettes, *Raṅgīlī Baujī* [Garhwali. My Beautiful Sister-in-Law], on which he is joined by Mangala Rawat. A *Bau* is one's elder brother's wife—someone for whom a younger brother should have great respect. Simmering beneath any such relationship are her nostalgic memories of her own home.

### *Jamarko*

This poster is for the *Jamarko* [Nepali. Group Effort] workshop held in Kathmandu in 2016 in collaboration with Project Sarangi. The workshop aimed to promote indigenous/folk Nepali music and instruments by providing a forum for sharing and learning about the construction and performance of instruments like the *sarangi*, flute and *madal*.



### *Bārāmāsā*

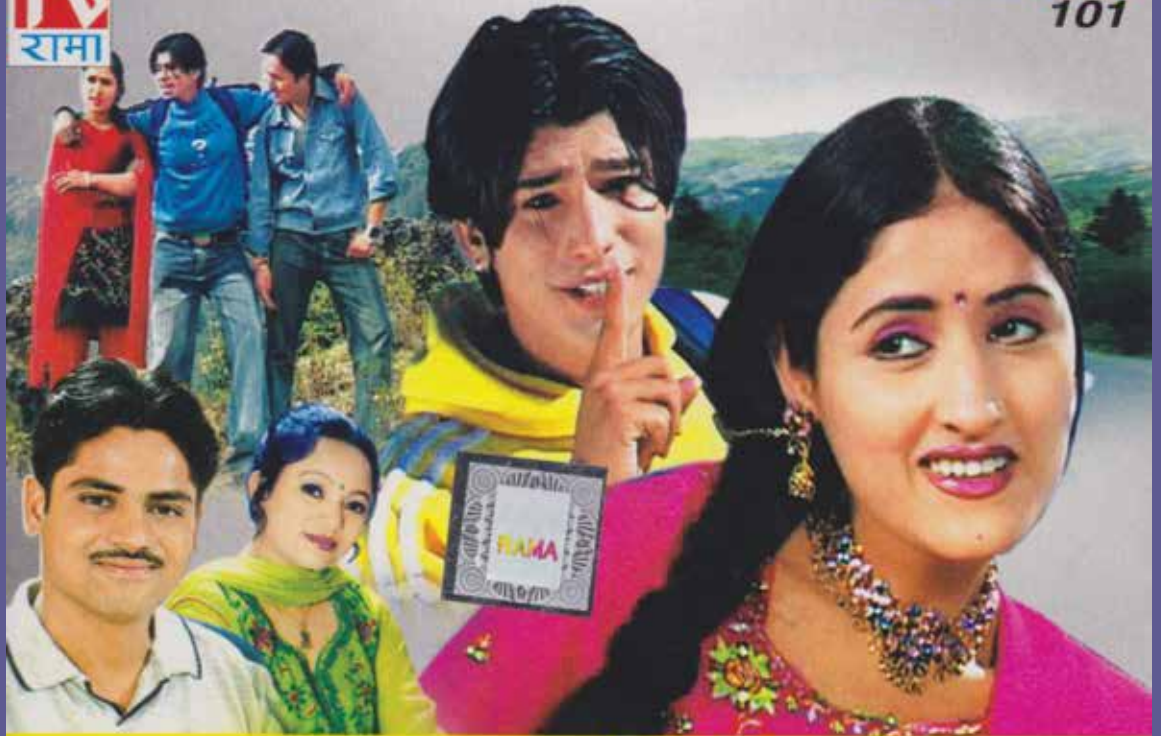
This is Narendra Singh Negi's classic cassette album *Bārāmāsā* [Garhwali. All Seasons]. Artistically rendered mountains, forests, villages and fields provide an agrarian background for the singer with his microphone.





Rama Cassettes Presents

VIDEO CD  
101



गढ़वाळी चित्रगीत  
**नौनी भावना**

स्वर : वीरेन्द्र राजपूत व मीना राणा



*Naini Bhāvanā*

Scenes from numerous filmic renditions of girls' emotions are scattered across the front of Virendra Rajput's and Meena Rana's *Naini Bhāvanā*. Graphic technologies allow the producers to reference the digital production within the playlist.

रामा कॅसेट की प्रस्तुति

गढ़वाली

MP3 Vol.1

नौछमी नारेणा

स्वर : नरेन्द्र सिंह नेगी, सुषमा श्रेष्ठ  
मंगला रावत, मीना राणा

### Nauchhami Nareṇā

Another of Narendra Singh Negi's well-known cassettes was his *Nauchhami Nareṇā* [Garhwali. The Nine Rhythms of Narayana]. An earlier release of the album was politically motivated receiving considerable notoriety.<sup>1</sup> This compilation MP3 album cashes in on the album's earlier publicity while adding songs from four other albums.

1. Fiol, Stefan. 2012. Articulating Regionalism through Popular Music: The Case of Nauchhami Narayana in the Uttarakhand Himalayas. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 71(2): 447-473.