

DDD Music Analysis, Group Dances, *Takai--Kondaliya*

Overview

Alhaji explains that Kondaliya is "walking music" of female leaders in the community, such as women who hold positions of authority in the royal families. As indicated in the drum language of Kondaliya, drummers join the entourage of the female royals as they move with pomp on ceremonial occasions. Kondaliya has been adapted into the set of pieces played for Takai.

Compared to other pieces of the Takai medley, Kondaliya bears close resemblance to Takai itself. Like Takai, it is arranged for four instruments--leading luṅa, answer luṅa, leading guṅ-gṳṅ, and answer guṅ-gṳṅ. The time span between dancers' rod knocks is eight beats, put into notation here as four duple measures. The lead luṅa part of Kondaliya is permanently offset from the onbeats of the other drums and the dance. The dance movements of Kondaliya share many features with Takai but, unlike Takai, musical time in Kondaliya moves in binary not ternary beats.

Place in the Medley

At Tufts, we play Kondaliya as the fifth and final section of the Takai medley. Not only does Kondaliya work well as an "offstage" piece, its resemblance to Takai also creates symmetry among the five sections

Dance and Musical Material

As is true for all sections of Takai, dancers strike their rods alternatively with the partner to the front and their neighbor to the rear. The basic dance step taught to me by Alhaji and Fusena Wombie has the following pattern (see Figure 1). Unique to Kondaliya, dancers use flexion in their legs to emphasize up-and-down torso motion that helps their smocks flair out gorgeously. The downward motion of the center-of-gravity occurs on beat one and the upward motion is on beat two, a coincidence with the terms "downbeat" and "upbeat" in Western music.

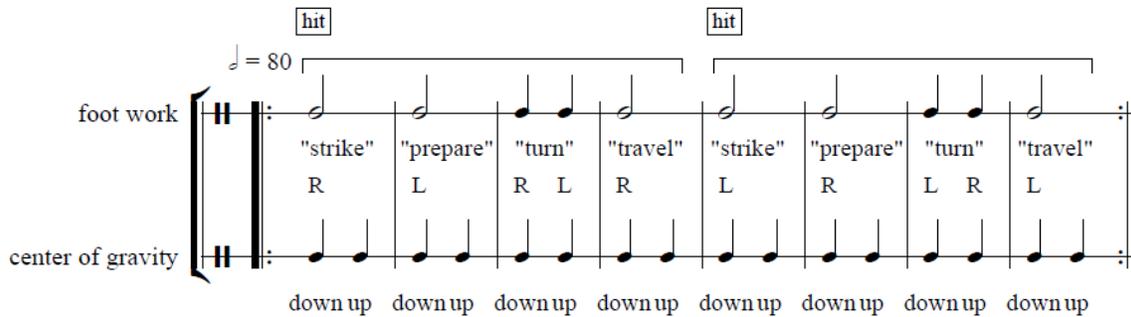


Figure 1 Kondaliya dance step sequence

In terms of underlying steady pulsation, the dancers' counts move at half the speed of the drummers' beats--as notated, there is one dance count per measure. There are four dance counts between each hit. The only difference between the stepping of Kondaliya and Takai is the timing of the two "turning steps"--the steps in Kondaliya feel slower and are more even in comparison to the quicker uneven rhythm of Takai.

The dancers' steps impart a slow, cut-time feeling to the drum phrases (see Rhythm Notation). In its most essential format the leading guṇ-gṛṇ aligns closely with the dance--it begins on the two "turning steps" in the dance and moves towards cadence on the hit. As revealed in Alhaji's demonstrations, however, most lead guṇ-gṛṇ phrases cover a longer 16-beat time span (eight duple measures) that encompass two strikes in the dance. Answer guṇ-gṛṇ has two of its phrases per hit--its first end-point cadence marks the mid-point of the dance and its second joins the lead guṇ-gṛṇ in accentuating the moment of strike.

Compared to the two guṇ-gṛṇ parts, whose accents easily support the dance, accentuation in the two luṇa parts puts a lot of offbeat pressure on the dancers' ability to maintain steady time. The four strokes in each answer luṇa phrase fall *in between* the dancers' steps. In Takai, by contrast, strokes with the same time values are placed *on* the dancers' counts. Although non-Dagomba dancers usually are challenged by the offset between their steps and the accents of the luṇa drums, Dagombas find it stimulating. As discussed below, the leading luṇa creates a parallel metric field whose onbeats are displaced from the dance and the other drums by one eighth note.

Interplay among Parts

In terms of their basic themes, in Kondaliya the luṅa drums are offset from the guṅ-gōṅ drums. This is observed most vividly in the phrases of the answer drums (see Rhythm Notation). For experienced players, the offbeat-to-onbeat connection between the two answer drums is a comfortable and familiar dimension of Dagomba dance drumming. Precisely the same relationship is found in the very popular drumming of Damba Maṅgli.

Lead guṅ-gōṅ has a rich set of traditional themes and is a site for improvisation. Its strokes dart back-and-forth between unison and offset relationships with the answer parts. When lead guṅ-gōṅ plays offbeat strokes, they line up with answer luṅa but become offset from answer guṅ-gōṅ. The music always generates polyrhythmic interplay.

Lead luṅa phrases are oriented to a cadence point not shared by the other drums or the dance. From the dancers' point of view, the downbeat of leading luṅa occurs on the upbeat of the dancers' second count. From the perspective of leading luṅa, the dancers' strike comes on the upbeat of beat one.

Note on Theory and Notation

As is true in Takai itself, the permanently offset temporal condition among the parts in Kondaliya proves extremely hard for unenculturated musicians to hear. It suggests that trying to understand Dagomba dance drumming with metric concepts like downbeat, onbeat and upbeat may not always be the best approach. Although I do endorse their validity in most cases, hearing *relationships* between strokes and phrases is vitally important. Staff notation with bar lines, beams, and flags sometimes is not the best tool for visualizing this music. Graph paper notation that calls attention to fast-moving steady temporal units can provide a more elegant method.

Groove

Kondaliya grooves like fast Damba. The interlock between answer luṅa and answer guṅ-gōṅ is the engine that drives the overall texture. Leading guṅ-gōṅ shapes its phrases to culminate on the moment when dancers strike their rods. With its insistent suggestion of an alternate rhythmic reality, leading luṅa agitates the flow of the other parts.

Guṅ-gṅṅ

Answer Guṅ-gṅṅ

Amidst the powerful offbeating of the luṅa drums and the shifting accentuation of the phrases from lead guṅ-gṅṅ, the answer guṅ-gṅṅ is a rock of stability. It steadily puts loud, resonant bounce tones right on the beat. Typical of the motion of Dagomba drum rhythm, its phrase begins on the upbeat and moves to end-point cadence on the downbeats--"two one, two one." Clearly, answer guṅ-gṅṅ shapes the time span between strikes into two symmetrical halves.

Leading Guṅ-gṅṅ

All the material that Alhaji demonstrated for leading guṅ-gṅṅ stems from the same drum language: "Chem sa, ka ti cheṅ," which means "Walk there, then we will go." In this sense, Alhaji's demonstrations are variations on this theme (see *Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation*). If we factor in musical considerations, however, we might prefer to classify the phrases into several different themes that Alhaji varies with multi-stroke ornaments or added figures.

As mentioned above, the lead guṅ-gṅṅ phrases cover two dancers' strikes. The phrases are in two parts, each cadencing on a strike. The two halves may be identical, connected by some sort of pickup between them (see "Chem sa, ka ti cheṅ," *Vocables and Drumming Notation*), or the two halves may use similar figures that give the phrase its distinctive musical identify (see "Ka ti cheṅ, kati ti cheṅ, cheṅ). Alternatively, a phrase may have a strikingly unique opening gesture, followed by short figures common to other themes (see "Chem sa, ka ti cheṅ, ka ti chem sa, ka ti cheṅ"). The pattern we observe is that drummers build variations from a combination of new and familiar short figures that are linked together in a stylistically appropriate manner, all the while making sure to conform to the structure of the dance.

Rhythmically, phrases whose opening gestures sets the underlying language "Chem sa, ka ti cheṅ" align perfectly with the first three strokes of answer luṅa. As is the rule in Dagomba music, the very first stroke on time point 1.4 is crucial to the rhythmic force of these phrases.

Luḡa

Answer Luḡa

The answer luḡa phrase in Kondaliya may be regarded as the offbeat twin of the onbeat answer luḡa phrase of Takai (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). In Takai and Kondaliya the time values of the four notes are identical, as is their melody--M M H L, or in vocables, den den diyan dahan. In Kondaliya, however, the whole phrase is shifted so that all the strokes are offbeat. Kondaliya and fast Damba share an identical answer luḡa rhythm but the melody made by the pitches of the four strokes is different.

The answer luḡa part may be conceived as two pairs of strokes, an interpretation strengthened by the rate of motion in the dance. Unlike Takai, the temporal structure of Kondaliya is not multideterminant. The beats in Kondaliya consistently are treated as quaternary (four fast units per beat). Stroke one lands on time point 1.3, right before the backbeat. This "dotted" position, so to speak, gives the music its lift. The other three strokes land on the upbeats of the next three beats. In comparison, these three strokes all are onbeat in Takai. If the answer luḡa is perceived from the perspective of Kondaliya's leading luḡa, however, it appears exactly like Takai.

In order for the drum to sound like spoken Dagbani, Alhaji urged his students to properly use the pressure cords that connect the drum's two heads (see Vocables Notation).

Leading Luḡa

Note

I have included note-for-note transcriptions of Alhaji's demonstrations on vocables and the drum itself because of the leading luḡa's displaced relationship to the other parts (see Transcription Scores). The bar lines are set according to the pattern of accentuation in the leading luḡa phrases themselves, not according to the temporal structure of the other drums and the dance. Above the staff, the boxed text marks the time point on which the dancers' strike occurs--time point 1.2 of every fourth measure.

Alhaji teaches that the first phrase of leading luḡa is "Wɔyi m-bɔ m-binya bayaka zuḡɔ, ka zuḡɔ yaa ni." This four measure phrase features extremely fast sticking and complex rhythm, including dotted figures and a rare quarter note triplet. The other drummers are expected to jump into action on the last two strokes of the phrase--"diyan dat." When

heard by itself, these two strokes are extremely syncopated, which makes the entrance cue very challenging for students not born and bred as Dagomba drummers. Happily, the answer guŋ-gɔŋ player can time its two bounce strokes to the lead luŋa's final two strokes. The strokes of both drums are in exact unison.

The other two talks for lead luŋa draw upon the final motive of the opening call. Like the longer phrase that starts the music, the last two strokes in these phrases line up with answer guŋ-gɔŋ. The "basic" lead luŋa phrase is "To zuŋɔ yaa ni." Using the method of isolating a figure and then repeating it, the other talk doubles the duration of this basic phrase.

END