

Cost-cutting, Caste and Community: A Look at Thakali Social Reform in Pokhara

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Although their population is relatively small, the Thakalis' entrepreneurship and rapid rise to wealth and power has prompted attention in a great many recent articles (Bista 1967, 1971; Fürer-Haimendorf 1966, 1967; Iijima 1960, 1963; Jest 1966, 1974; Messerschmidt 1973; Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974). Most of these articles have been concerned mainly with the history of the Thakalis and their traditional life in their Thak Khola homeland. With the exception of Messerschmidt's article, nothing has been published about the Thakalis who have migrated to other parts of Nepal. This article is an attempt at remedying that lack. It should be understood, however, that this article is the product of on-going field research and as such should be taken as tentative.

One of the most remarkable features of Thakali culture is its great adaptability. There seems to be not only a willingness to accept social reform, but a desire to embrace it as a community, rather than as individuals. This communal acceptance of social reform has been present from the first in Thak Khola and has continued to be a feature of Thakali society after the large-scale migration out of Thak Khola. In this article, we shall look at one of the main institutions responsible for this on-going social reform; the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh (Thakali Social Reform Organization) of Pokhara.

Historically, the Thakalis appear as a marginal people living just outside the ethnic and economic sphere of the Kingdom of Mustang. Their population was quite small and remains small to this day. The 1961 Census lists only 4,134 Thakali speakers in all of Nepal (Malla 1973: 118). This figure is undoubtedly a low estimate, but it is clearly indicative. It is hard to imagine that there are presently more than 7,000 Thakalis all together.¹

The Thakali homeland lies in the shadow of the Himalayas. As a result of this there is little rainfall, making this one of the driest sections of Nepal. Jomosom (immediately to the north of Thak Khola in a region called Panchgaon) has a mean annual rainfall of only 270 mm, only 19% of which falls during the monsoon period of June to November (Okada 1970:64)². These arid conditions made it impossible for the Thakalis to produce sufficient food for their needs. The food deficit had to be made up through means other than agriculture. Although the land was difficult, nature provide the Thakalis with one major advantage. Thak Khola lies in what Jest calls "le seul point de passage facile entre le Tibet, le Népal, et l'Inde" (1966:30). In addition, Thak Khola itself was a natural location for an entrepot. Okada points out that "because

Thak Khola and the northern areas are dry and pleasant in summer in contrast to the rest of the sector (comprised of Lumbini, Gandaki and Daulagiri Anchals) which is hot and, above all, wet, trade patterns are oriented northward in the summer so that goods may be stockpiled for trade with the south in the winter when Thak Khola is too cold" (1970:63)³.

The natural trade route which followed the Kali-Gandaki valley through Thak Khola and over the pass to Tibet became the object of warfare between Nepal and Tibet from 1854 to 1856. Among the objectives of this war was the desire, on the part of Kathmandu, to gain control of the trade in this area. The Treaty of 1856 ended the war, but the agreement reached then soon broke down leaving Nepal entangled in "an interminable series of petty disputes" (Rose 1971:123). In order to tighten their control over this region, the Ranas needed a trustworthy local representative. There was the problem of whom to appoint. The local Bhotiyas were felt to be untrustworthy since they still had split loyalties. In 1869 the decision was made: Bal Bir Serchan, a Thakali who had acted as a translator in the 1854-56 war, was appointed Subba, "with jurisdiction over trade, customs and local administration (as a Magistrate) in Thak Khola" (Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974:201 also see Fürer-Haimendorf 1974b)⁴.

The Subba system flourished during the first half of the twentieth century when the Tibetan salt trade was at its height in Nepal. 'Subba' was a hereditary title given to the chief administrator of a region appointed by the central government in Kathmandu. The system initially had a dual purpose: to regulate and control customs on northern trade, and to secure the allegiance of the northern border peoples. By this system, customs contracts (thekka Nep.) which allowed a monopoly over trade in the region, and the title of Subba were jointly awarded to the highest bidder, or to a favored entrepreneur politician (Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974:197).

The situation where the Subba "wielded political authority in addition to the enormous economic influence derived from his monopoly of the salt trade," led to a period where, "for more than half a century the customs contractors were the dominating force in Thak Khola" (Fürer-Haimendorf 1974b, quoted by Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974:198)⁵.

In order to maintain this favored status, the Thakalis and especially the Serchan clan who passed down the Subba's powers along the male line to the descendants of the first Subba, Bal Bir Serchan, felt that certain social reforms would greatly improve relations with their Orthodox Hindu patrons. The Thakalis felt that they were looked down upon because of their Tibetan ways. Among other things, the Thakalis ate yak-meat and yak is classified as beef by the Hindus.

The traditional government of Thak Khola was separated into thirteen individual villages. Each village selected its richest and most capable man to be Mukhiya of the village. The title of Mukhiya (headman) then became hereditary, unless for some reason the son was considered unable to follow in his footsteps, usually because of a change in the family fortunes. Twice a year, in August and October, the thirteen Mukhiyas met in the village of Kobang to settle wider disputes and to prepare educational programs and arrange local festivals. At all times, the decisions taken by these thirteen Mukhiyas were binding on all Thakalis.

When the Serchans became Subbas, their power and influence spread. They made themselves paramount chiefs (chikep, Thk.) over a loose confederation consisting of Baragaon and part of Dolpo as well as of Thak Khola (Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974:208)⁶. Jest reports that as of 1961, the Subba's influence still extended from Baragaon north-west into Dolpo as well as to part of the Kingdom of Mustang. They collected the taxes, settled quarrels and imposed justice. They were the spokesmen for the Nepalese Government in this whole region (Jest: Personal Communication).

The Serchan's desire to see an end put to the Thakalis taste for yak-meat created a conflict. Yak was not only a source of protein for the Thakalis, it was their major ceremonial food. All rituals required that yak be distributed and consumed. The Serchans and their close allies in other clans had given it up; now the Subba insisted that the thirteen Mukhiyas impose a taboo on all Thakalis forbidding the consumption of yak. The Mukhiyas saw the advantages to be gained by this reform and voted to impose the taboo, replacing the traditional yak with the use of mutton in all social events.

Cultural homogeneity was fairly easy to maintain at that time, even in the face of rapid social change. The Thakalis were a small population living in a limited geographic area. One informant told us that when Thakalis who are now in their sixties were young, all Thakalis knew each other face-to-face. This face-to-face contact resulted in a tight social network where change, however radical, could be quickly decided on and rapidly adopted. This situation was to change as the Thakalis began to migrate into other areas.

In 1920, the customs contract system was abolished in Thak Khola, yet "as early as the mid-1800's Thakalis were moving out of Thak Khola into neighboring regions to take advantage of economic opportunities" (Messerschmidt, 1973:25). The gradual migration did not become an exodus until the motor roads were built in the south bringing an influx of cheap salt from India into the middle hills. The eradication of malaria in the Terai also created new opportunities for investment. "The replacement of the conservative regime of the Dalai Lama by that of Communist China led to the rigid control of all traffic across the Himalayan passes and to a ban on many imports into Tibet" (Fürer-Haimendorf 1974a). Unconfirmed

stories of harassment of Thakali traders by the Khampas led to the abandoning of trade with the north⁷. The collapse of this traditional trade re-introduced the problem of making a living with an inadequate agricultural base. Thakalis who had established winter houses in Baglung and Pokhara moved there permanently.

The Thakalis long control of the salt trade and their many other enterprises gave them a great deal of cash, which was now available for investment in the rapidly expanding economies of the south. Trucking, construction, hotels, large farms and the cloth business provided good opportunities for investment. Migration seemed the best answer.

In 1954, there were about twenty Thakali households (roughly 80 Thakalis) in Pokhara. From 1951 to 1971 the Thakalis became the fourth largest group of immigrants coming to Pokhara, even though they are only the 11th largest group in Pokhara's total population (all in terms of absolute numbers). The largest period of growth was between 1956 and 1960, the period coinciding with the closing of the northern trade (figures derived from Shrestha and Gurung 1973:37 and passim)⁸.

The Structure of the Thakali Social Reform Organization

The rapid growth of the Thakali population in Pokhara created communications problems for the Thakalis. Once a small group living within a limited geographic area, the Thakalis now found themselves cut off from their traditional networks. Faced with the necessity of having to make many adjustments, they were reluctant to do so as individuals and searched for a way to continue making decisions as a group. The Thakalis of Pokhara suddenly found themselves a minority in a community where many social lines were already drawn. They perceived that if they were to make their mark here, they would stand a better chance functioning as a group. Prior to 1954, there were so few Thakalis in Pokhara, that all could meet together as a group and settle their differences. As the population began to grow, the Thakalis felt that some kind of formal organization would be necessary.

The first such organization was the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh founded in 2011 V.S. (1954). This organization was headed by a four-member executive body made up of a Mukhiya, a Sachib (secretary) and two Ghumdals.

The Mukhiya of Pokhara was in many ways simply a continuation of the traditional role of the Thak Khola Mukhiyas. He continued to have great influence and was for all intents and purposes the titular head of the Thakali Community in Pokhara and surrounding areas. The bulk of the organizational work was handled by the Sachib, however. He handled virtually all records and accounts and was a corresponding secretary, an executive secretary and a treasurer, all in one. The Ghumdals, who held the other two seats

on the executive body, had the role of travelling from house-to-house, informing the members of the Thakali community of executive decisions; and the implications of those decisions were discussed with the heads of the households. All four members were elected by the heads of the Pokhara Thakali households. At yearly intervals, the Sachib and the two Ghumdals would change office in rotation. At this point, one of the Ghumdals would take over the responsibilities of the Sachib. The Sachib would in turn become a Ghumdal. The following year, the remaining Ghumdal would take over as Sachib. The Mukhiya, however, did not take part in this yearly rotation. Even though each officer served a different organizational function, each was a member of the executive board and each had an equal vote when it came to making decisions.

The Pokhara Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh was the only such formal Thakali organization outside of Thak Khola until a similar organization was formed among the Thakalis of Bhairawa using the Pokhara organization as a model. This latter organization was not formed until 1973. The Pokhara organization was seen by the Thakalis as a direct continuation of Thak Khola's thirteen Mukhiya system. No attempt was made by the Thakalis to select board members according to clan affiliation. The Thakalis have a four-clan system, made up of the Serchans (Thim-čan Thk: this group included the original Subbas of Thak Khola; we might add that all Subbas were Serchans, but not all Serchans were Subbas), Tulachans (Sal-ghiu, Thk.), Gauchans (Chos-ghiu, Thk.) and Bhattachans (Phur-ghiu, Thk., the first Thakali settler in Pokhara belonged to this clan). All Thakalis use their clan name as a last name, with the exception of a few people who call themselves "Thakali"⁹. The first executive body was made up of two Serchans (the Mukhiya was a Serchan), a Gauchan and a Bhattachan. Since board members were selected on the basis of capability proved by business success, it is not surprising that the Serchans with their head-start in Thak Khola continued to have considerable influence in the post-migration period. The decisions of this board continued to be binding on all Thakalis. Those who refused to comply with the board's orders could be faced with complete social and economic boycott on the part of the other Thakalis. This weapon has never been needed.

The Thakali population continued to increase. By 1972 there were about 300 Thakalis living in Pokhara or about 1.5% of the total population of the Town Panchayat area (Shrestha and Gurung 1973:37). This burgeoning population began to place a great strain on the time of the four-member board, who after all were volunteers and had to devote time to their own businesses. A four member board also seemed to represent too limited a set of interests. The problems consequent on the arrival of so many new-comers caused the original board to re-evaluate the structure of the organization and the whole system was revised.

The objectives of the organization (discussed below) remained the same, but in 1971 (2028 V.S.) the four-man executive body was expanded. A Managing Committee made up of from 15 to 21 members was created. This Managing Committee (Sanchālak Samiti, Nep.) included all the officers of the organization, namely: the Sabhapati (chairman, Nep.), Chautarya (vice-chairman, Nep.), Saha-sachib (joint secretary, Nep.), Upa-sachib (under-secretary, Nep.) and the Kosadekchha (treasurer, Nep.).

The Sabhapati, like the Mukhiya retained his great prestige and like the Mukhiya retained the function of titular headman of the Pokhara Thakalis. In addition, he supervised all work undertaken by the Committee. Unlike the traditional Mukhiyas, his title and office was not hereditary and he had to stand for election once each year. Elections in the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh are by acclamation, with all the politics taken care of ahead of time. Because of this and because of the prestige of high office and the great skill of the present Sabhapati, he has held this office for a long time. The Sabhapati holds the tie-breaking vote in Managing Committee Meetings, but his prestige and persuasiveness make such close votes uncommon. The Chautariya's role is limited in the presence of the Sabhapati, but he too must possess great political skills since he takes over when the Sabhapati is unable to be present.

Again, the bulk of the day-to-day organizational work falls on the other officers. The Saha-sachib and the Upa-sachib are responsible for supervising work in progress and for seeing to it that everything proceeds on schedule. They handle most of the organizational paperwork and take charge of the records. The Saha-sachib calls all meetings and presents all cases involving current or potential social problems or internal misunderstandings to the Managing Committee. The Kosadekchha runs the organizational financing and is in charge of the organization's many investments.

As in Thak Khola, the Managing Committee organizes the yearly round of Thakali festivals: Desh Puja, the community festival (Nep.) and Tor-ang-la, the archery festival (Thk.). Each year, four households whose heads are members of the Managing Committee are joined together to take care of all arrangements. The responsibility for these festivals is rotated among the members of the committee. Since Desh-Puja is also the occasion for yearly reports and elections, an auditing committee is also raised from members of the Managing Committee to go over all accounts fifteen days before Desh Puja and then present a report. Members of the Managing Committee are elected for four-year terms and can be re-elected indefinitely. Meetings are held irregularly as the need arises.

At present, membership to the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh is open only to members of the four original Thakali clans residing in the Pokhara area¹⁰. Membership is limited to "that individual or family who can assure the Managing Committee of being Thakali on the basis of language, culture and morals: (such people) can acquire membership and achieve security" (Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh 2028 V.S. (1971 :3). All Thakali households in Pokhara are members of this organization; indeed membership is automatic upon arrival at Pokhara. If a Pokhara member moves to Bhairawa, he is dropped from the Pokhara organization and automatically picked-up by the Bhairawa one. The member will then follow the practices of the new organization if they differ in any way from the old. There are however Thakalis living at present far outside of Pokhara for one reason or another, who are retained on the Pokhara rolls. This is because their distant residences are in fact considered as temporary and they continue to maintain some sort of household in Pokhara.

General meetings are held twice a year, but if a problem comes up which is felt to be too far-reaching for the Managing Committee to decide alone, a General Meeting can be called and the entire membership polled. The Managing Committee calls all meetings, but meetings can be forced by the members outside the committee, if for some reason the Managing Committee is unwilling to call a meeting¹¹.

Funds are collected through entrance fees, yearly dues, a birth tax (different for boys and girls), a death tax (which varies according to the will of the deceased). In addition, 1% of the principle of every dhikur in the Pokhara area is retained as a tax by the organization. A yearly fund drive is also held at the To-rang-la festival. All income is invested in local business enterprises.

Functions of the Thakali Social Reform Organization

The Thakali's ability to make effective changes as a community and to seize new opportunities as they arise is by no means a new one. Prior to the Rana period, the Thakalis transformed their traditional culture based on pön-nag (a shamanistic cult, Thk.) to one based on the tenets of nying-ma-pa Buddhism, "in order, as Bista says, to civilize themselves" (1971:54). Although elements of the original pön-nag cult remain in Thakali culture, along with fragments of the Bon religion and Magar and Gurung beliefs (especially the thoms, Thk., or Thakali jhankris who still practice even in Pokharā today) much of the old religion fell when, with the expected zeal of converts, the Thakalis began to spend great amounts of cash earned in trade on constructing gompas and other elements of Tibetan Buddhism (Snellgrove 1961). The jhumā system was followed whereby the second son (mahila, Nep.) or second daughter (mahili, Nep.) would automatically become a Buddhist lama or nun. These transformations were accepted by the entire Thakali community.

With the coming of relations with the Ranas of Kathmandu, the Thakalis became interested in entering Hindu caste society or at least in adapting the outward trappings of Hindu respectability. Yak was dropped from their diet¹² and a good many myths began to appear about the so-called "Thakuri origins" of the Thakalis¹³. The basic theme of rapid communal social change in order to enhance status appears repeatedly throughout Thakali history. The work of the Thakali Social Reform Organization involves a continuation of this pattern, yet in addition, the organization has become involved in cultural streamlining to avoid "lavishing their money in religious rituals, thus avoiding a certain chronic impoverishment" (Okada 1970:74).

One of the first moves toward cultural cost-cutting by the Thakali Social Reform Organization of Pokhara involved the funeral practices of the Thakalis. Since the services used to combine rituals performed by both lamas and jhankris, they ended up being quite complicated and costly affairs. Added to this, was the cost of food served to relatives and friends at all of the many required rituals. In the days before the organization's reforms, the family of the deceased had to provide food on the day of the burning. Custom required that a goat be killed and meat provided for all those that had attended the burning. On the third day, the son-in-law brought the bones of the deceased into the house where they were decorated with all the things that he or she had loved in life. From this time until the end of the twelfth day, the services of a jhankri were required. In addition, anywhere from one to twelve lamas might be present in the families' house. These lamas were fed by the family and were paid a variable fee depending on the families' ability to pay. The ceremonies of the third day (called sak-sum, Thk.) required that all clan mates be fed by the family.

The sixth day (chun-da, Thk.) also required that food be given to all close relatives. The thirteenth day (malami-pauni, Thk.) which signalled the liberation of the soul from earthly concerns, necessitated the celebration of an arghun. This too meant that food had to be served to all Thakalis that attended (in Thak Kholā this literally meant all Thakalis). On the 49th day (called sipsiserku, Thk.) if it was a woman who had died, all Thakali women were called together to participate in a feast. If a man had died, the feast was given to all the men. Another feast was held after one year had passed. This signalled an end to the mourning period and all clanmates attended. At this point women could once again wear tikka and affected members could again do ancestor puja (pitri chadaune, Nep. see Jest 1969). As one informant put it, "If we'd have continued these practices, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere by now".

About ten years ago, the Thakali Social Reform Organization changed all this. Their revisions cut-out about 50% of the expenses involved. Now after the burning, only tea is served to guests. It is now thought adequate to use an apprentice jhankri up until the twelfth day when a practised jhankri is needed. We were told that all rituals until the thirteenth day had been eliminated, but at a recent funeral, all rites were performed in a somewhat abbreviated form (suggesting that the older forms are still allowed, but are no longer required). On the thirteenth day (malami pauni), the traditional arghun has been replaced with an informal purification rite. It is at this rite, that the first meat is served. Sipsi Sirku has been transformed into an informal purification rite as well.

Some changes in Thakali traditions were tried and abandoned. The constitution of the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh names Chaitra Asthami as the date for desh puja (the community festival which combines organizational business and elections with a large maila or picnic). This was a change from the original date of desh puja which used to fall on Jestha Asthami. The argument for this change was that Jestha fell in the planting period at the beginning of the rains. Chaitra was felt to be a more convenient date, but the constitution was amended before anybody realized that Chaitra was a very hot month and not conducive to outdoor enjoyment and it was a month when Thakalis were not allowed to sacrifice. Desh puja was returned to its original date in Jestha. Nobody has gotten around to amending the constitution.

Along with the taboo on yak meat, the Thakalis accepted the celebration of the Hindu high holidays as well. Although the Thakalis are not fond of Dassain (and much prefer other holidays like Holi) the Thakalis do celebrate it. Recently, however, it was decided that Thakalis should only visit the households of their fathers and uncles on Dassain and eliminate the exchanges of food, tikka and gifts with the rest. Again this was a cost-cutting move.

Presently marriage reforms too are under study. Under present customs, when a young Thakali man wishes to get married, he must present the girl with anywhere from ten to twelve tolas (1 tola = $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce) of gold. At the present price of gold (about Rs. 800-850 per tola) this represents an outlay of about Rs. 8,000-10,200 for gold alone. In addition, the girl should be given saris, according to the means of the family, the more, the better; and meat and raksi given to all Thakalis able to attend the marriage. The saris and the feast might cost from Rs. 6,000 and up. Although wedding gifts and contributions might cover some or all of these expenses, Thakalis feel that a wasteful amount is being spent for a single event. They feel that if present inflation continues and the customs remain unchanged, soon nobody will be able to afford to get married, or even worse, so

far as our informants are concerned: some form of dowry system will have to be instituted to help the son's family pay for the cost of the wedding. The son's family is now responsible for the entire cost of the wedding, which has been known to run up to Rs. 50,000 as in one recently reported Thakali marriage in Kathmandu.

One rule has already been established setting the minimum number of saris required. Although only five are now required, no stipulation has been made as to the quality and price of those saris. This means that a man could spend as much for five saris now as he would have spent for ten in the old days and as with the funerals, the required minimums do not necessarily prevent one from continued conspicuous consumption. If the minimum is met, however, nobody will complain these days. The difficulties in trying to cut costs in the marriage requirements on the one hand and the temptation to display one's wealth and generosity on the other makes this a problem whose resolution will not come easily.

The problem of reformation and cost-cutting in general is difficult for other reasons as well. Many Thakalis, both young and old, deplore the loss of old traditions. They feel that the traditions of the Thakalis should be maintained at any cost, as one young lady told us, if life is to have any meaning. The second problem is the younger Thakalis themselves. The Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh is effectively run by the heads of the Thakali households. This means that the head of the household is the only one that can vote and these votes are binding on the young. Thakali youth is on the whole well educated, with a large percentage getting their SLC's and even going on to college (one of the authors is presently doing an education survey of the Thakalis as a group the results so far are indicative). These young people are dissatisfied with the present arrangement, especially since they have to live for a long time with the decisions of their parents. A particularly sore point involves the on-going discussion of marriage reform, since an unfavorable decision might involve a long marriage postponement. The institution of voting by acclamation also bothers the young, since they feel it makes it difficult for them to get sympathetic members on the board. In recent years however, younger men have begun to take over posts on the Managing Committee. The young have also begun to take an interest in more traditional Thakali roles as well. One informant was surprised to find that the jhankri who arrived from Thak Khola to perform funerary rites was only 28 years old.

The reformation of old traditions which have become dysfunctional, either because they no longer fit in with the requirements of the Thakali's present needs or because of their great expense is a difficult problem for the Thakalis, particularly since they insist on making these changes as a group. The maintenance of

group cohesion is the major function of the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh, but this cohesion is not as simple to maintain as it was when the Thakalis were a small and compact population in Thak Khola. Today, the Thakalis are spread out over a large geographic area. There are Thakali settlements in Pokhara, Bhairawa, Kathmandu, Butwal, Galkot, Tansein, Palpa, Riri Bazar, Bhot Khola, along the Mayangdi Khola and other places as well as along the entire road from Pokhara to Jomosom. This presents an entirely different problem. The advantage of geographic proximity is lost. Communities of Thakalis lose contact with one another and become subject to the process of acculturation.

A good example of this involves group of Thakalis that moved quite early into the Galkot-Dhorpatan area. This was one of the earliest migrations out of Thak Khola. These Thakalis became involved in the running of copper mines which closed in 1930 (Jest: Personal Communication). We are told by Thakalis from that area, that the Galkot-Dhorpatan Thakalis from that migration no longer speak the Thakali language.

In order to prevent this sort of local isolation and the resulting cultural "drop-out", the Thakalis see the need of promoting communication between the various Thakali groups. The problem is that the Thakali Social Reform Organizations in Pokhara and Bhairawa and the informal group in Galkot each have only a limited jurisdiction. In order to maintain the desired cohesiveness, each group must rely on word of mouth transmission and the acceptance of new reform as it appears functional to these outside groups. The Thakali's present machinery is limited, but they are currently discussing the creation of some kind of umbrella organization to try to achieve unity for the group as a whole.

In addition to the reform functions of the organization, they also act "to try to eradicate misunderstanding and internal conflict among Thakalis" (Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh 1971 (2028 V.S.):1). This is primarily the prerogative of the Managing Committee. Any conflict between members of the Thakali community is required first to have a hearing before this body prior to any subsequent action. The committee tries first to effect a compromise between the injured parties but, failing that, takes steps to decide the case. Minor cases are handled by the Managing Committee on its own, but a major case can have a hearing before the general membership of the organization.

The hearing of disputes by the Thakali Social Reform Organization serves two major functions. First, it enables the Thakalis to maintain a united front in its dealings with outsiders by preventing the growth of factions and long-term enmities which might otherwise occur. Secondly, it saves considerable time and a good deal of the cost of litigations. In order to keep the membership from circumventing its authority, the Managing Committee is empowered to levy a stiff fine on offenders. Again, the Thakalis

have produced a method of cutting costs and at the same time promoting unity. An indication of how well this system has worked is the fact that the Managing Committee has never imposed a fine on anyone for circumventing this function.

An example of how this system might work involves, let's say, a fictitious divorce. If two people find themselves constantly fighting, they can go to the Managing Committee and ask for a divorce. The Committee will try first to effect a compromise, in other words they would try to act much like a marriage counselor in the West. They will try to get at the roots of the trouble and get each to see the other's side of the quarrel. If this cannot be done effectively or if the couple repeatedly comes before the Committee, they will determine which partner is at fault, he or she will pay a fine and the marriage will be considered dissolved. The fact that either partner can be made to pay the fine is a tribute to the financial independence of many Thakali women, since many run their own businesses (mainly bhattis or roadside inns, Ne.)¹⁴. The ramifications of this financial independence on education patterns, marital relations and economic life in general is now under study and, hopefully, will be the subject of future works.

In any quarrel, whether business or marital, the settlement worked out by the Managing Committee is binding, only if both parties agree. If one party feels a decision is somehow unfair, he can still resort to the National Courts of Nepal.

Finally, the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh, was set up to help poor and needy Thakalis. This aid seldom, if ever, comes in the form of direct financial contributions, but takes the form of introducing a needy member to one of the many locally operating Thakali Dhikurs. Dhikur and specifically the dhikurs of Pokhara have already been discussed in a fine paper by Messerschmidt (1973). Rather than covering what Messerschmidt has already said, we will limit ourselves to saying that dhikurs (what Messerschmidt has called rotating credit associations) are best organized by the Thakalis, with high interest rates (roughly 10% per annum) and many members. The main advantage of the dhikur is that it provides each of the members of the dhikur with large amounts of working capital in rotation. In addition, the dhikur provides an inexperienced member with access to the other members, who are often experienced businessmen all interested in the new member succeeding. This benevolence comes first out of the avowed solidarity of all Thakalis, stated in the organizations constitution and constantly reaffirmed by their desire to act as a community. Secondly, there is the desire to keep the new member from defaulting on his loan. The recent expansion of the economy of central Nepal provides a high success rate for new business provided that the enterprise is adequately financed and follows sound business principles. The interaction of the Social Reform Organization and the various dhikurs provides access to both.

In return for this, the Thakali Social Reform Organization oversees the dhikurs and provides a means for settling disputes. Take for example this "troublemaker clause" in one dhikur agreement:

If any member is found having any intentions of causing the association trouble or of dissolving it or anything of the like, then the chairman (of the dhikur) shall call together the entire membership and they, being of one mind, shall make formal complaint for legal action to the head (Sabhapati) of the Thakali Social Reform Organization (Honorable Benevolent Daulagiri Dhikur, 2029 V.S. (1972) quoted in Messerschmidt 1973:41).

This regulation of the legal functioning of dhikurs is particularly important since dhikur is not mentioned in the Nepal Civil Code (muluki ain). Dhikur is considered to be an ethnic group organization not requiring registration under the Code (Messerschmidt 1973:10). If it were not for the Social Reform Organization's ability to settle disputes in the Thakali community, these extra-legal organizations would be difficult to regulate and investors would be harder to find. It should be pointed out as well, that the Thakali Social Reform Organization is also considered to be an ethnic group organization of a specifically non-political nature as far as party politics is concerned as such is not registered.

In return for the regulation of Thakali dhikurs, the organization receives a fee:

This dhikur association, like all dhikurs which are functioning within the confines of Gandaki Zone, is required to submit Rs. 1 per 100 on the initial fund to the Thakali Social Reform Organization. In this way the Social Reform Organization is supported (Messerschmidt 1973:42).

Messerschmidt points out that this clause is designed to tax all Thakali dhikurs outside of Thak Khola. It remains to be seen whether a similar clause in the dhikurs of Lumbini Zone leads to the taxation of their dhikurs by the Bhairawa organization. A problem for future study is the amount of influence these urban organizations have on Thakalis living in rural areas.

Concluding Remarks

The Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh seems to be the natural outgrowth of several recurring themes in Thakali history. It has as a main function, the continuation of the reformation and re-evaluation which seems to have always been present in Thakali life since their earliest known origins. These reformations involved first the adoption of Buddhist institutions in order that the

Thakalis might better fit in with their then powerful northern neighbours in Mustang. This was followed up by a series of reforms inspired by the desire of the Serchan Subbas to improve their relations with the Hindu Ranas and thus improve their own economic position. The most noticeable feature of these cultural changes was the communal solidarity of the Thakalis in accepting these changes in their way of life. Much of the old culture was maintained and is maintained to this day, but the changes decided on by the thirteen Mukhiyas were binding on all and followed by all even if that meant a total break with the values of the past. It has been pointed out that the strong leadership of the Mukhiyas and the strong influence of the Serchan Subbas on their decisions, as well as the small population and limited geographic spread made this remarkable solidarity possible.

With the end of the northern trade and increased possibilities in the south, a large-scale migration took place, making the traditional leadership ineffective and a limited geographic spread no longer a fact. In order to prevent this from resulting in a loss of cultural homogeneity, yet at the same time desiring to maximize cultural flexibility, the Thakalis in Pokhara formed the Thakali Social Reform Organization. This organization provided Thakalis with a way to eliminate dysfunctional social traits in an orderly way, both cutting costs of ritual events and external litigations, and maintaining at the same time some sense of cultural homogeneity and common purpose at least within the jurisdiction of the organization.

The lead of the Pokhara Thakalis was followed formally in Bhairawa and informally by the Thakalis in Galkot. The weakness of these organizations as far as maintaining a caste-wide homogeneity is the limited jurisdiction of each of these groups and the reliance on verbal transmission of these reforms and their implications. This weakness is likely to be corrected through meetings of representatives of all Thakali groups.

As a regulating agency, the Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh has been quite successful. Its regulation of dhikur, as well as its ability to settle disputes in business and homes is attested by the fact that it has never had to institute fines or boycotts against its members. The close interrelationship between the organization and dhikur is both complex (since each funds the other and provides the other with the means for proper functioning) and successful. Both the reform and regulatory functions of the Thakali Social Reform Organization spring dually from the desire to create both financial betterment and solidarity.

The problem of reform is, however, a delicate one. On the one hand, there are Thakalis in Kathmandu who are at the vanguard of reform. These Thakalis use Brahmans for ritual purposes rather than the traditional jhanakris or the more recent lamas. They

discourage the use of the Thakali language in all situations where non-Thakalis are present. There are, on the other hand, those who regret the loss of any of the Thakali's social customs and this is by no means limited to the older members of the society. There are problems between the young and the old, as the younger Thakalis fight to gain power in the organization created by the old, while the old, who grew up in a world where all Thakalis knew each other personally, fail sometimes to understand and accept the perceptions of the young. There is the conflict between wanting to show oneself as successful and generous at the events surrounding birth, death and marriage, and the worry that the customs of the old days have become prohibitively expensive in these times of inflation.

The success of the Thakalis is attributable in large part to the cash that became available to them as a result of the salt trade. When the south of Nepal opened up, it was the Thakalis who had the cash to invest. They have never forgotten that this cash became available to them in large part because of their flexibility in being able to deal with the other disparate cultures around them. The Ranas saw their talent and made them their representatives. The Thakalis were also fortunate that they lived on one of the best trade routes between Tibet and India. This geographic advantage is now gone. The Thakalis now live alongside many other groups, but they know their advantage lies in ethnic solidarity and the flexibility that brings. The Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh is, for them, the best guarantee of the continuation of both.

Footnotes

1. It is not clear to us how the figures in this linguistic survey were obtained. If all those who are bi-lingual in Nepali and Thakali, yet were ethnically Thakali were counted as Thakali speakers, then the number is still an underestimate since the Thakalis living in the Galkot-Dhorpatan region are no longer Thakali speakers even though they are ethnically Thakalis. The point is still accepted. The Thakalis do have a very small population, especially compared with other groups from the same source: Tamangs, 518,882; Newars, 377,727; Magars, 254,675 Gurungs, 157,778 (Malla 1973,117).
2. This rainfall should be compared with the rainfall recorded in Pokhara and Butwal for the same periods. In Pokhara, the annual rainfall is 3587 mm per year with about 87% falling between June and November, while at Butwal the annual rainfall is 2,630 mm of which 97% falls in the monsoon period (Okada 1970:64).
3. Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974, discuss the relationship between this natural trade route and the success of the Thakalis while at the same time comparing it to the somewhat more difficult time the Lamichane Gurungs experienced when

trying to organize similar trade in the Bhot Khola region of Nepal, northeast of Pokhara.

4. Good accounts of this salt trade can be found in Fürer-Haimendorf 1974b. and Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974. A look at the salt trade in Humla is also informative, see Fürer-Haimendorf 1974a.
5. Messerschmidt and Gurung have an interesting account of the short period where Lamichane Gurungs wrested control of the Kali-Gandaki trade route from the Serchan Subbas. Okada mentions that a Rs. 12,000 per year fee was paid to the government for the privilege of maintaining the monopoly. The monopoly lasted for 60-70 years (1970:73).
6. Bista (1971) describes the mit relation (fictitious kinship relation, Nep.) between the son of the Subba and the Raja of Mustang which drained the Raja of much of his wealth and led to the decline of his power. In his place, the Subba arose to take over much of the administration of the principality.
7. The Khampas or Tibetans from the Eastern Province of Khams fought pitched battles with the Chinese along the entire length of Tibet. When it became evident that they could no longer win, they migrated among other places into the northern mountain regions of Nepal. Most relevant to our discussion are the settlements in Dolpo, Manang, Mustang, Baragaon (the area just north of Jomosom) and Panchgaon (the area north of Tukuche, from Marpha to Jomosom). Since the Khampas were hostile to the Communist government in Tibet, they tried to prevent trade from going into this region. The event which my informants say precipitated the closing of the Thakalis involvement with the northern trade took place around 1960 when a Nepali national (of Tibetan origin) from Jomosom was killed under mysterious circumstances. This story has yet to be verified.
8. Gurungs, Brahmans and Newars represent the largest groups of immigrants into the Pokhara area during the period 1951-1971. The Thakalis come next representing about 10% of the immigrants into Pokhara. Shrestha and Gurung found that in 1972 there were about 80 Thakali households in the Town Panchayat of Pokhara or about 1.5% of Pokhara's total population. The Thakali Social Reform Organization figures show there are now 83 households living here. The large percentage of the Thakalis migrating compared to the smallness of the population is an indication of the rapid influx of a large number of Thakalis in a short time.

9. The use of the name 'Thakali' as a surname is similar to the use of the name 'Gurung', but for Thakalis is unusual. It is used by either Panchgaonlis (see below) trying to 'pass' as Thakalis or as a function of distance. If a Thakali works among people where it is to his advantage to be known as a Thakali (because of business reputation etc.), but where the Thakali names 'Serchan', 'Bhattachan' etc. are not known, he will adopt the name 'Thakali' as a social label. In both cases the name 'Thakali' is used to overcome the ignorance of others as to the intricacies of Thakali clan structure. Thakalis who have entered the British or Indian Army often change their name to 'Gurung' to overcome the 'martial race' prejudice of those groups. These men changed back on their return.
10. The original four Thakali clans of Thak-Sat-Sae (The Seven Hundred Thakali Households, Nep.) lived in Thak Khola, a region of Mustang District from Tukuiche southwards. The people in this region are in the strictest sense what he have here called Thakalis. In the region immediately north of Thak-Sat-Sae, bounded by Jomosom on the north live a people called here Panchgaonli (sometimes they are called 'Marphali', but this is inaccurate since Panchgaonlis live in Syang, Thini, Jomosom and Tsim as well as in Marpha). These people are imitating many of the Thakalis successful patterns and will seldom correct you if you call them Thakali. Some also use the surname 'Thakali' as well (see above), but the Sat-Sae Thakalis, the four original clans, always differentiate. They do not marry the Panchgaonlis and separate themselves because the Panchgaonlis still "eat yak". At present Panchgaonlis are not allowed in the Thakali Social Reform Organization (though one claimed membership-his name was not on the membership list), but the present Sabhapati told me that this rule may be changed in the future. At present only Sat-Sae Thakalis may join.

11. Extract from the constitution:

Section 11. General Meetings

- a) Normally a General Meeting will be held twice a year, but when the Managing Committee does not call a meeting as laid down in the regulations, 1/3 of the members can call for this meeting upon written application.
- b) This meeting has the right to re-elect the Managing Committee.
- c) The Managing Committee can be dissolved or any member removed when 2/3 of the General Meeting passes a vote of "no-confidence" in the Managing Committee or on any member on genuine grounds.

- d) In the event of section (c) above, the General Meeting can elect and fill a vacant position. (Thakali Samaj Sudhār Sangh 1971 (2028 V.S.):3).
12. Although the Thakalis no longer eat yak, it is interesting to note that the practice of sucking blood from an artery in the neck of the beast for medicinal purposes still remains. When the yak forages in the high pastures, he supposedly eats a good many herbs of medicinal value. The medicinal properties of the herbs can be therefore found in the blood of the animal. By sucking the blood through a tube directly from the artery, these medicinal components are ingested by the human sufferer, thus relieving him of his ailments and avoiding the cost of a doctor, as an informant said quite seriously.
13. The most famous of these involves the four sons of the Jumla Raja, who migrated to four different places. One became the Gorkha Raja, an ancestor of the present King of Nepal, while another became the Hansa (Swan, Nep.) Raja and moved to Thak Khola. The Hansa Raja married to daughter of the Thini Raha (in present Panchgaon) and had four sons. Each son founded one of the four Thakali clans. Since the Swan Raja and the Gorkha Raja were brothers and since the Gorkha Raja was a Thakuri, the inference is obvious.
14. Okada points out that "because of any (sic.) relative egalitarianism and absence of social strictures, their women (Thakali's) engaged in business, principally the running of small wayside inns during the winter months for travellers in the hills and such temporary inns are still plentiful in the Gandaki sector (Okada 1970:74)". I might add that since the tremendous rise in the popularity of trekking, a good many of these temporary inns have become permanent in addition to the large inns which were part of the old trade route as well as the great many inns in Pokhara and along the new motor roads (though many of these bhattis are run by Panchgaonli and not Thakali proprietors).

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