

Nepal: Hindu-Tribal Interface

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Introduction

The Himalayas have long provided a contact zone for Hindus and diverse tribal² groups. The experience of such contact in Nepal exhibits certain unique features that are rarely seen in other regions of Hindu South Asia. Interaction between these groups in Nepali had been a much more intimate affair than probably anywhere in the Indian sub-continent. Further, this interaction has occurred over a long time in history so that certain forms of social relationship which developed between these groups even received formal recognition in the legal code of the Nepalese State. This legal recognition refers mainly to the customs of inter-marriage between high-caste Hindu males and the women of the tribal groups.

Thus, the Hindu-tribal dichotomy loses its sharpness in Nepal to a far greater extent than it does in India. The outlook in India regarding the relationship between these two groups is still highly coloured by expressions like savarna in opposition to avarna. The former describes a people encompassed within a social system following the varna division, whereas the latter describes those who remain quite outside it. The tribal groups in India are even now considered a world apart by the caste-Hindus there, and social intercourse with these groups into the "scheduled" categories in the constitution of India, and granting them rights to special social benefits has only helped to further heighten the notion of division between these groups.

The Hindu-tribal relationship in Nepal has never been characterized as one of total isolation, either in the past or in current times. Nevertheless, some of the early 19th-century European writers on Nepal, who were serving in the British-Indian government and were familiar with the Indian social order gave an "over isolated" picture of the Hindu and the tribal groups in Nepal. Contemporary western anthropologists working in Nepal have usually emphasized this division even further.

An attempt is made in the following paper to critically review and clarify the problem of Nepal's Hindu-tribal relationships. I will suggest that the emphasis on a sharp Hindu-tribal dichotomy in Nepal suffers from the lack of an historical perspective. By combining an historical with an anthropological approach, I will attempt to show that the ethnic groups in Nepal are more interrelated than divided and that the notions of "Hindu" and "tribal" here are perhaps better understood as a continuum than as a dichotomy. This idea will be further highlighted by contrasting the situation in Nepal with that of India.

One matter needs to be explained here before I discuss the theme of this paper further. The Hindus described in this paper refer to the Nepali-speaking parbatiya Hindus only, and the model within which I have attempted to examine the Hindu-tribal relationship follows their state-promulgated legal code. In this code even the Newars, who are a distinct community with their own traditions of caste and a separate internal ranking system, are lumped together with the other tribal groups such as the Gurung, Magar, Rai and Limbu in the social category of the matawali ("liquor drinkers"). Contact between the Newars and the parbatiya Hindus has been carried out over two thousand years in the Kathmandu Valley and this topic would require a separate paper to do it justice.

The Setting

It is well known that Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world today. According to its constitution, the sovereign ruler, who is a king, must be a Thakuri of the ruling Shah dynasty and a follower of the Aryan Hindu religion (Constitution of Nepal, articles 3 and 20). Of the 12 million people of Nepal reported in census of 1972, over 75% are classed as Hindus and the rest as tribals. For a country of Nepal's size, the ethnic diversity is not only extremely rich, but what has been called the tribal population is also quite large. It is certainly much larger than the estimated 7% tribal population in India.

In Nepal these diverse ethnic and cultural groups are settled all over the variegated landscape and have adapted themselves to their surrounding ecology. Some of the ethnic groups in the Tarai, whose population ranges from a few thousand among the smaller groups to several hundred thousand among the larger ones, are the Meche, Satar, Rajbansi, Dhimal and Bodo in the east and the Dhangar in the central Tarai. But the largest ethnic group of the Tarai is the Tharu, who have settled in Nepal everywhere from east to west. The middle hills, a densely populated region that alone carries two-thirds of Nepal's population, present an even richer spectacle of cultures and peoples. This area is often considered as the cultural heartland of the country. One finds the valley-bottoms and the low altitudes of these middle hills inhabited by the smaller ethnic groups such as the Raji, the Majhi, the Bote, the Kumal, the Danuwar, the Darai, etc. On slightly higher slopes but still along the southern edges of the middle-hills are the Raute (a semi-nomadic, vanishing tribe), the famous Magar, the Chepang, the Thami and the Hayu. Paralleling them along the middle and northern edges of the Nepalese middle hills are the more well-known and populous ethnic groups of Nepal such as the Gurung, Tamang, Sunuwar, Rai, Limbu and the Lepcha. The zone close to the high Himalayas, along the Himalayan south face and in the trans-Himalayan valleys, live the Bhote (Tibetan) populations of many regional and dialectical groups, the Sherpas and the Thakalis being the most well-known among them. The ubiquitous parbatiya Hindus are found settled throughout Nepal, interspersed among all these cultural pockets (Bista: 1972) except in the Tibetan cultural zone in the extreme north.

Hindu-tribal dichotomy

The totality of social order in Nepal today must be understood in terms of this cultural pluralism. This pluralism has been observed and interpreted from different perspectives over the last one hundred fifty to two hundred years. One angle of observation is provided in the writings of Westerners, beginning with Hamilton, who was serving the British-Indian government in the early 19th century. Hamilton's view strongly separates the tribal population from the Hindu population. The Hindus, with their caste-stratified society, are contrasted with the tribal groups that follow a more egalitarian social system, speak distinct languages, have their own traditional dress, customs, man-nerisms and beliefs (Hamilton: 1971: 24-25) and who, therefore, should be regarded as non-Hindus. Since Hamilton's time the Hindu-non-Hindu dichotomy has continued to be emphasized by Western scholars, especially anthropologists studying Nepal, and the force of this argument has sharply increased in its vehemence in recent times. These kinds of studies in Nepal, therefore, meet with an official disfavour, since the present government is interested in promoting "national integration". An ethnologist who studies one of these minority ethnic groups tends to cast it in an exclusive situation by isolating it from other extraneous elements, regarding it as a pure entity and posing it against the larger Hindu groups for all kinds of comparison. Points of similarity detected in this comparison are then explained away as happening through Hindu imposition or domination or are attributed to the more familiar concepts of Sanskritization, Hinduization or even Nepalization (cf. Caplan: 1970).

Another angle of observation for viewing the same Nepalese society is actually historical in origin and is provided by the Hindu Nepalese themselves. The perspective used by the Hindu Nepalese to judge their own society is an out growth of their formulation of an all-encompassing, all-embracing social model in which different participating social units are each given a caste name and definite rank within a hierarchy, no matter how divergent such groups may look or be in their beliefs and practices. Such a model was the officially recognised view in Nepal for centuries and is illustrated in the first legal codification promulgated in 1854 A.D., known as the Muluki Ain (henceforth to be called the legal code in this paper). This document embodied the highest sets of law in the times for which it was compiled and promulgated. It laid down legal procedures for punishing social and economic offences, categorised offences according to their severity and prescribed their punishment. Punishment meted out to separate castes differed both in nature and severity. This code became the most important instrument for regulating inter-caste behaviour and for applying social control in the kingdom as a whole. New editions of this code, with alteration, modification and corrections, appeared later; but its basic social tenets remained unchanged until 1963 A.D., when it was replaced by a new Muluki Ain, which is now in force.

The old code of 1854 presents a four-fold classification of society in which all castes and ethnic groups of Nepal were subsumed. This social universe is paraphrased as car varna chattis jat (four varnas and thirty-six castes). Their names and the order of the hierarchy were as follows:

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| 1. | <u>Tagadhari</u>

 | = Castes wearing sacred thread; all the Hindu high-caste consisting of the Brahmans, Thakuris and Chhetris. |
| 2. | <u>Matawali</u> ³

 | = Alcohol drinking castes; all the tribal groups are gathered in this class. |
| 3. | <u>Pani na calne</u>
<u>choi chito halnu na parne</u>

 | = Low service castes whose touch is not defiling, but from whom water cannot be accepted by higher castes. |
| 4. | <u>Pani na calne</u>
<u>choi chito halnu parne</u> | = Untouchable castes. |

It is evident that the framework of a single social order such as presented above involves an ancient Hindu concept. The rulers of Nepal throughout its recorded history have been high-caste Hindus. Therefore, this model can be considered as extended to the ethnic groups by the Hindus. Although this model was, in a sense, imposed on them, the ethnic groups of Nepal have lived under it for such a long time now that this model has extensively pervaded their own outlook.

Bearing this inclusive ranking of groups in mind, it now becomes important to consider what, in the Nepalese context, has been meant by "Hindu" and "non-Hindu". The connotation of the term Hindu to a Nepali has always carried a religious sense. The distinction between 'Hindu' and non-Hindu' as used in Nepal in the last hundred years or so is strictly understood in contexts where it distinguishes the bulk of the Nepalese people from the Muslims or aliens like the Europeans. In the legal code of 1854 A.D., the mention of the word 'Hindu' is limited to a couple of places where such a distinction needed to be made most clearly (code: 157: 4, 9). In the subsequent editions of the legal code, the use of the word 'Hindu' becomes more common, but it is continually used in the context of drawing distinctions between local beliefs and foreign religions such as the Muslim and the Christian religions, or between indigenous people and foreigners (Gaborieau: 1972: 85-91). Indigenous tribal religions, such as those of the Rai and the Limbu, were also considered to be a part of the Hindu religion in this legal Hindu-non-Hindu distinction (Gaborieau: 1972:86). The term Hindu has been used in this way in the legal code even as late as 1963 A.D., the code which is now in use.

For the first time in Nepal, this same legal code has ended caste discrimination as a legal basis for applying the law to Nepalese subjects. In other words, all people have been made theoretically equal before the law irrespective of their caste, creed, sex and tribe. But at the same time ethnic and caste identity has not even now been terminated in the code altogether. Traditional practices can be pursued and are being pursued within the family and within the ethnic groups. Even so, Nepalese society does not look upon these ethnic groups as being too much different from the predominant Hindu group, and the anthropologists' eagerness to use their own social classification system (i.e. Hindu-non-Hindu) in Nepal is not always favoured in official quarters.

Europeans studying Nepal have made social criteria the primary basis for distinguishing Hindu-non-Hindu social groups which is quite different from the religious sense of these terms, as discussed above. Hamilton made clear use of this kind of social criteria. He attributed tribal groups of Nepal with a relatively weak notion of purity and impurity, relaxed food taboos, relaxed marriage rules, and greater freedom of their women -- all characteristics wherein they most clearly differed from the Hindus. He also made a note of the beef-eating habit of these people, especially that of the Magars (Hamilton: 1971: 25-26).

Marriott (1959) has well demonstrated that even in north India, these kinds of social traits or 'attributes' like diet and occupation, do not really distinguish groups or account for the caste ranking⁴ between them. In Nepal, the relative unimportance of these "attributes" as a criteria for distinguishing and ranking groups is also clearly demonstrable. Many Nepalese tribal groups, until about two hundred years ago, appear to have been beef-eaters. The Shah kings apparently tried to put an end to this practice, which was completely antithetical to the Hindu values in Nepal, by issuing strong royal exhortations. One such exhortation was made in 1805 A.D., in the reign of King Girban Bir Bikram Shah (Stiller: 1976:82). Beef-eating was certainly considered an abhorrent practice by the Hindus. But continued adherence to beef-eating of some groups of people would probably not have made them any more inferior than the social status (of matawali) accorded to them already. The Bhotias, who never abandoned the practice of eating yak meat, and the Tamangs, who allegedly continued eating beef, had provided wives to the Ranas and other nobility of Nepal, and offspring born of such marriages have been accommodated into the folds of caste society without any problem.

More points of such divergence between the Hindu groups and the so-called non-Hindu are being emphasized by contemporary anthropologists studying Nepal nowadays. But I would suggest that there is as little justification in pressing this argument of cultural divergence too far as there would be in claiming that these ethnic groups are indivisible members of the Hindu caste order. Disregarding the nature of this dichotomy, a more striking phenomenon about Hindu-tribal contact in

Nepal is the process of synthesis and acculturation between peoples that has been going on for centuries.

Synthesis

The Hindu-tribal synthesis is a fact of Nepal's historicity. The historical process that ensued in the wake of contact between these groups in the Himalayas of Nepal -- which began around the beginning of the Christian era in the Kathmandu Valley; about the 12th century A.D. in the far western hills; and in the 16th and the 17th centuries in other hills further east -- has seen a lot of mutual give and take. As the anthropologists working on Nepal have affirmed, the extent of Sanskritization or Hinduization has been an inescapable feature of this contact (Sharma: 1975: 290-97). But this socialisation process has not been an entirely one-sided affair. Hindu orthodoxy in Nepal has itself been somewhat softened as a result of the Hindu people living in such a close juxtaposition with these other social groups. Relaxed rules of inter-caste marriage, widow re-marriage and easy divorce for women, even among high-caste Hindus are some examples of this.

Another fact is that Hinduization was not the result of force and coercion only. In fact, even the old legal code, which is of a much later date, seemed to have adopted a policy of minimal interference and actually allowed the retention 'for the most part of the traditional customs and usages of different local or ethnic communities' (Regmi: 1975: 110). Hindu primacy was asserted only in regard to upholding some basic Hindu values among all castes and ethnic groups, these being the high ritual status of the Brahmans, sacredness and protection to the cow, a ban against the levirate, a prohibition against copulation with women of untouchable caste and violation of commensal rules. The form of the Hindu-tribal contact was one of a balance between total absorption and total exclusion. It is true that Hindu rulers in Nepal meted out a less than equal treatment to members of the indigenous ethnic groups despite their displays of acculturation. Although the position of the tribals in the varna division was an indeterminate one in the earlier periods, in the later Rana times, they were considered as belonging to the low Sudra category.

Of course, this later (Rana) consideration of tribals as Sudra somewhat follows the Indian pattern of excluding tribals from the higher orders of Hindu society. Nevertheless, there is one fundamental difference in inter-caste or caste-tribal interaction as it occurred in different parts of India and in Nepal. The predominant regional Hindu societies in India did not have their social and cultural practices backed by any state authority. Social laws were preserved and respected only within their own group and through tradition. There was no such thing as state-promulgated laws regulating social life by establishing all kinds of social norms and laying down a consensual hierarchy of castes for all to follow on award of punishment for violation. The period of the British rule in India was a fluid social situation from which groups allegedly belonging to inferior positions took measures to socially promote themselves. Srivastava cites the

case of the Johari Bhotias of Kumaon who made a collective bid to change their Bhotia origin completely by abandoning their old life-style and modelling their new behaviour on the high-status, propertied Rajputs and claiming also a Rajput origin for themselves (Srivastava: 1966: 201-11). Cultural approximation with the regional Hindu societies was made and achieved through one's initiatives. But since Nepal's historical experience has been different, its Hindu society functioned under a much more controlled system in which the rulers, on behalf of the state, enunciated social laws and subjected all citizens to follow them. No arbitrary act of self-promotion could have proceeded without the intervention of these laws. Opportunity for social mobility and change in caste status was largely in keeping with the prescribed course of inter-marriage. The social privilege that the tribal people of Nepal enjoyed vis-a-vis Hindus in respect of marriage and the ensuing change in caste for their children puts them on a different standing in relation to the Indian tribals. Such a tribe-caste relationship born from the instance of Nepal may postulate an even stronger case for viewing tribes and castes as a kind of continuum rather than a dichotomy.

Before describing what the legal code actually says about this social mobility and change in a person's caste status, there is yet another interesting and historically significant feature of Nepalese Hinduism that Hamilton and later Hodgson alluded to. This concerns the widely prevailing ideas that the peoples in the plains of India have held about the Hindus of Nepal -- these ideas being so firm that contemporary Europeans like Hamilton and Hodgson were drawn to believe them. According to these ideas, Hindus of Nepal were held inferior in rank to the Hindus of the plains. This is particularly stressed with the Rajputs, who in Nepal are more commonly called the Thakuri, and regarded as a caste of the ruling class; and the Chhetris, who, in the Nepalese caste hierarchy, come one step below Thakuri. The most obvious reason behind this Indian judgement was the arbitrary custom of granting twice-born caste status to members of the tribal groups, a widely prevalent social practice throughout Nepal of which the plains Hindus did not approve. To quote Hamilton here, '... on account of this strictness, the Rajputs, of the western districts are as much courted by those of the plains as those from the east of Kali are scouted' (Hamilton: 1971: 24). Hamilton has claimed that many of the ruling clans of the Thakuri in the Chaubisi kingdoms are actually Magar in origin and that they were arbitrarily raised to Rajput status (Hamilton: 1971: 18). Hodgson has narrated a story in which kings of Gorkha sent emissaries to Mewar to explain their social position to the Rajput court there, and to get recognition of an equal rank from them (Hodgson: 1972: 38). Hamilton writes about the Gorkha's attempt to connect their house with Chitaur (Hamilton: 1971: 26). Hodgson further describes how the Chhetri clan name of Pandey, to which the emissary from Nepal had belonged, gave away the clue of his mixed heredity from his Brahman father and Chhetri mother. There is a saying which is widely current in Nepal and which Sikharnath, the first compiler of clan names of the Nepalese castes, has described in his

book, Thar-gotra pravaravali, in these words: 'Magar genealogies get lost over time, but they can be retraced in the Thakuri villages.' This is an obvious reference to the incidents of the Magars allegedly reappearing with Thakuri names in the villages of Nepal. Hamilton also alludes to some Chhetri who have attained their status through arbitrary and unilateral promotion. Such a doubtful method of caste promotion became the cause the Nepalis' degradation in the eyes of the plains Hindus, who disapproved their blood intermixture and the infiltration of high caste ranks by lower status groups.

There is yet one more factor which is responsible for adding to the ambiguity of the Chhetri caste of Nepal. There is a large group of people living in the districts of Jumla and Tibrikot in far-western Nepal who call themselves Matawali Chhetri. What is most curious about them is that, on the one hand, they join the high caste name 'Chhetri' with a matawali prefix which adds the meaning of 'an alcohol drinking person.' Alcohol consumption is acceptable in their society. In fact, they regard drinking alcohol as an age-old practice and see nothing odd about doing it while being a Chhetri. It is not only alcohol-drinking, but also the presence of some Mongoloid features which make them more akin to one of the Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic groups living further east of them in Central Nepal, and which distinguishes them sharply from other more highly ranked Hindus. As to their language, they speak a local variant of standard Nepali spoken by all other Hindu groups in that area. These Pabai, as they are also called (Campbell: 1978:II, 6), are suspected to be a relic of the old Indo-Aryan language speaking Khasa tribe that had once settled all over the Himalayan tract, beginning right from Kashmir (Grierson: 1968: 7-8). There is early reference to them in far-western Nepal during the 12th-15th century (Sharma: 1972: 17-19). These Khasas are believed to represent a stock which was only marginally Hinduized to begin with (Grierson: 1968: 4-5; Hodgson: 1972: 38-40). Hamilton remarks in one place how these Khasa, even though they are impure, are called 'Kshatris' in Nepal (Hamilton: 1971: 18). This is borne out also by a line inserted in the legal code of 1854 where it says: 'From hereon tagadhari Khas jat has been granted the ilkap (this word is most likely a corrupt form of the Persian khitab meaning 'title') of Chhetri Jat. In committing this to writing in documents one should first write the name of the person, then his thar(clan), after that the ilkap of Chhetri' (Code: 89: 50). A study of the society and religion of the Matawali Chhetri conducted by Campbell in Jumla has shown how their social model, although its general orientation is Hindu, differs in many forms and details from the more orthodox Brahmanical model of Hinduism (Campbell: 1978: VIII, 14-21). These facts seem to affirm the Khasa as a transitional group in Nepal, passing from one end of the tribal-Hindu continuum to the other.

Let us now turn to examine what the legal code has actually laid down concerning the rights of wearing the sacred thread by children born of mixed marriages. Four entries in the Code of 1854 A.D., under the section of 'granting of (rights to wear) the sacred thread (Code 91: pp. 413-14) are given below in translation:

1. 'If any one gave (the rights to wear) sacred thread to a caste which cannot ever wear it, except by commands of the sovereign ruler, by misrepresenting his caste, snatch away his sacred-thread and degrade him to his previous caste. Fine the person responsible for granting him the thread sixty rupees and the priest responsible for conducting the initiation rites and the preceptor for imparting him the Mantra (of initiation) five rupees each. In default of payment, imprison them in accordance with the law.'
2. 'If a person of the tagadhari caste has set free a female slave of his household and taken her as wife (later); if he has made her his wife even before setting her free in full knowledge of the other members of his household; if this woman had not had a previous husband; if sons and daughters born of this woman have been actually conceived with the semen of the husband (the present tagadhari husband), it is permissible to grant the sacred thread to such sons of this person and to marry off such daughters of his in a proper ritual wedding by the father, brothers (half-brothers from the isogamously wedded wife) and kinsmen. If the person had such children begotten from a slave-woman belonging to another owner, these children may be bought free from the owner in a deal and granted the sacred thread or (if daughters) given away in marriage amidst proper rites. Their mother need not be freed from slavery (in order to be able to do this). There shall be no punishment for a person doing this.'
3. 'A tagadhari person may grant his son, born of his matawali wife of the unenslaveable category, the sacred thread. Should he die (before he is able to do this) his agnates and kinsmen may grant it by conducting appropriate rites of the initiation ceremony. Persons conducting such rites and granting the sacred thread shall not be liable to punishment. If anyone prevents this from happening, fine such a person. If he has extracted a fine for this, recover this fine and return it to the payee and punish (the other person) the same number of times as he has committed (this) offence. In default of payment, imprison him in accordance with the law.'
4. 'A tagadhari person may grant his son, born of his matawali wife of the enslaveable category or of a bondswoman, the sacred thread. Should he die (before he is able to do this) his agnates and kinsmen may do this through a conduct of the proper initiation rites. The person himself is entitled to put on the sacred thread by conducting proper initiation rites. He shall never be enslaveable again.'

It is clear that the ranks of the Chhetri and to some extent the Thakuri have been the most infiltrated by peoples of lower castes and ethnic groups. Hypergamy seems to have swelled the numbers of the Chhetri caste most of all so that it is today Nepal's most numerous and widely settled group. The Chhetri is indeed a unique caste in

Nepal since it was the most open-ended social group in its inception and since it represents the greatest instance of the cultural-biological admixture in Nepal. The Chhetri clans today have preserved a diversity of names in which a large number are Brahman clan names. Chhetris have acquired these clan names through a Brahman father or other Brahman male ancestor. The Chhetri rank devolves on a person not only from a marriage between a Brahmin father and a Chhetri mother, but also from a Brahman father marrying a matawali wife, whether she is in the slaveable or the unslaveable category. Such diverse circumstances of their origin did raise some minor problems of rank difference among them, based on the degree and quality of blood mixture. This is conveyed through the use of the expression jharra (pure) and thima (mixed) as reported by Haimendorf from the Kathmandu Valley (Haimendorf: 1966: 47-56 and Bennett; 1977)⁵. But a way was also devised to move out of a thima designation. Over time one's status would ultimately be raised through one or two marriages in prestigious Chhetri families. It is widely asserted in rural Nepal that issues of hypergamous marriages of the Brahman or Chhetri fathers receive their full jharra Chhetri caste status in three generations. Indeed such processes among the Chhetri have not led to any case of fission nor to the birth of endogamous sub-castes among them. On the contrary, this caste has 'preserved an almost tribal feeling of homogeneity and solidarity' throughout Nepal (Haimendorf: 1966: 63-64). Evidence of what political fruits this caste group has enjoyed as a result of its high status is provided by the fact that all the prime ministers of Nepal in the pre-1951 period have been members of it. The Nepalese aristocracy based in the darbar (palace) of the Kathmandu Valley in the same period was also heavily dominated by Chhetris (Stiller: 1976: 184-215; 288-329).

Conclusion

Today Nepal has inherited a people of mixed race. Its Hindus carry a great deal of tribal blood in their ethnic make-up. This is but one form of syncretism that has taken place in Nepal, the other being the religious syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism. The significance of a socially accepted racial intermingling like this would probably not mean much for people in other regions of India, but it does bestow a distinct ethnic character to the Nepalese, giving them a further basis for asserting their independent national identity. A corollary of Nepal's Hindu-tribal interaction was the creation of much less rigid rules in social spheres, a relatively easy mechanism of social mobility and a relaxed inter-caste and inter-ethnic behaviour, in comparison to India. In both India and Nepal, Hindu culture has become a dominant force. But it appears that whereas the Hindu-tribal interface in India resulted in exclusion of the tribals from the orthodox Hindu fold, in Nepal the parallel confrontation between groups has tended more toward inclusion and interrelation.

The notion of blood purity and pure patrilineal descent among Hindus is strongly rooted in their belief system (Bennett: 1977: 227-33). This notion has been expressed in the great concern shown for the birth of the varnasankara in the ancient law books which was

regarded as a sign of social decay. Varnasankara are persons of hybrid births born of inter-caste marriages, and their existence created a problem of caste adjustment in India. The great numbers of sub-castes in India has in part been a result of inter-caste marriages. But these sub-castes have tended to develop into established endogamous groups and they spurn any idea of a mixed heredity in their caste. Nepal, however, never seems to have developed a multiplicity of sub-castes in spite of the fact that the incidence of inter-caste and caste-tribe marriages here has probably been the highest in Hindu South Asia. Compared to a maze of castes in India, Nepalese castes consist of fewer groups with a more clearly defined hierarchy. Many of the Chhetris, and even the Thakuris in Nepal, do not conceal the fact of their mixed descent, and their practice has not produced any fissions or endogamous sub-castes in their ranks. Just as Nepal's response to the question of varnasankara has been to ignore it altogether, its response to the question of bratya ksatriya -- i.e. the problem concerning the degraded ksatriya raised by Manu (Manusmrti: 10: 43-45) -- has been exactly similar. The book of Manu counted the Khasas in Nepal among a class of degraded Ksatriya. But they are today fully integrated within the high Chhetri caste of Nepal.

In the past, Hinduism had established its authority through the exercise of a social and ritual primacy in Nepal. This has changed in present times as Hinduism now establishes itself through a much stronger political assertion. The legal code now in force reflects a spirit compatible with modern values. But Hinduism has entered Nepal's polity as a fundamental element of its present constitution. It has acquired a new expediency in the Nepal of today; new symbols of it are constantly being invented and the older symbols are receiving a reinforced meaning. The present administration, in the process of national integration and modernisation, promotes this new Hinduism with a far greater force and rapidity than even before. This administration seems to balance its policies carefully between the recognition of a person's individual rights to practice his traditional culture and the rejection of any group action which might make a demand for greater cultural autonomy for the group.

The national mainstream in Nepal is constituted by the Hindus and their culture to which all smaller groups have, to greater or lesser extents, striven to conform in order to have access to the nations social and economic resources. The idea of preserving the cultural heritage of these groups by according them special protection may only place them in a disadvantaged position. In any event, the Hindu-tribal relationship in Nepal finds itself standing at this crucial juncture today.

Footnotes

1. I must express my deep thanks for helpful comments on the earlier draft of this paper to Drs. Linda Stone, Lynn Bennett and Gabriel Campbell and especially to Linda Stone for her generous editorial assistance.
2. The term "tribal" may sometimes carry connotations of primitiveness and social backwardness. However, it is not in this sense that I have sought to use the term here. It has been done purely for the purpose of brevity, to collectively refer to all the cultural and linguistic groups of Nepal that anthropologists and others commonly distinguish from the parbatiya Hindu groups. Sometimes, I have alternated this term with the expression 'ethnic group', which is also used by anthropologists in Nepal to refer these groups. I made no attempt to coin a new expression to replace these terms in this short paper since I fear that it might only cause further confusion.
3. The code recognises two categories of matawalis ranked one above the other and distinguished on the basis of maintaining or loosing an important social right -- their enlistment to slavery. The higher class of matawalis were called the namasine matawali i.e. the unenslaveable matawali and the lower class were called the masine matawali or the slaveable matawali. The more prominent of the tribal groups such as the Magar, Gurung, Rai and the Limbu, who lived as agriculturists and soldiers in the army, were accorded the superior rank of the namasine matawali. The numerically smaller tribal groups were classed in the slaveable category. Before slavery was completely outlawed in Nepal in 1924 A.D., slaves had been a strong prop in the Nepalese land-based agrarian economy and slaves were recruited from the members of these tribes. There is no basis on which to judge why certain groups of matawalis were ranked in the enslaveable category in the code. Those included in it certainly fell within the more economically deprived peoples than the others.
4. Rather he suggests caste ranking is determined by patterns of food transfer and service relationships.
5. Haimendorf does not actually use the term thima in his paper, although he does discuss the concept of an impure of mixed heredity among Chhetris through the use of the expression non-jharra. For discussion of the concept of thima or thimu, see Bennett, (1977).

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