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Autumn 2002

**EBHR**

**EUROPEAN BULLETIN  
OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH**

# European Bulletin of Himalayan Research

The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research (EBHR) was founded by the late Richard Burghart in 1991 and has appeared twice yearly ever since. It is a product of collaboration and edited on a rotating basis between France (CNRS), Germany (South Asia Institute) and the UK (SOAS). From October 2002 onwards, the German editorship will be run as a collective, presently including William S. Sax (managing editor), Martin Gaenszle, Elvira Graner, András Höfer, Axel Michaels, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Claus Peter Zoller.

We take the Himalayas to mean: Karakorum, Hindukush, Ladakh, southern Tibet, Kashmir, north-west India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and north-east India. The subjects we cover range from geography and economics to anthropology, sociology, philology, history, art history, and history of religions. In addition to scholarly articles, we publish book reviews, reports on research projects, information on Himalayan archives, news of forthcoming conferences, and funding opportunities. Manuscripts submitted are subject to a process of peer-review.

Address for correspondence and submissions:

European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, c/o Dept. of Anthropology  
South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University  
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330 D-69120 Heidelberg / Germany  
e-mail: o50@ix.urz.uni-heidelberg.de; fax: (+49) 6221 54 8898

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schuhman@sai.uni-heidelberg.de

Contributing editors:

**France:**

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, Pascale Dollfus, Anne de Sales  
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, UPR 299  
7, rue Guy Môquet 94801 Villejuif cedex France  
e-mail: mlecomte@pop.vjf.cnrs.fr

**Great Britain:**

Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Ben Campbell  
School of Oriental and African Studies  
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square London WC1H 0XG U.K.  
e-mail: mh8@soas.ac.uk

**Netherlands:**

Mark Turin  
Himalayan Languages Project, Silodam 355  
1013 AW Amsterdam Netherlands  
e-mail: markturin@compuserve.com

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## Editorial

The first issue of the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* was published in Spring 1991 at the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg, in the Federal Republic of Germany. It ran to twenty-nine pages, and in their introductory editorial Richard Burghart, András Höfer and Martin Gaenszle wrote that they had offered to produce the *Bulletin* "over a trial period of two years on the understanding that we would retire with dignity at the end of that period, should the interest and commitment of a sufficient number of scholars prove illusory."

Twelve years – one *yuga* – later, the EBHR has returned to the South Asia Institute at Heidelberg, and it has clearly come of age. It is truly international, being published from Heidelberg, Paris and London on a rotating basis. The quality of its articles and reviews has steadily improved, and it has earned an international reputation. In short, the interest and commitment of scholars around the world has been more than sufficient to maintain its dignity, and that of its editors.

Nevertheless, at least one of its original goals remains but partially fulfilled. The first editorial expressed the hope that the *Bulletin* would be a forum for scholarship from throughout the Himalayas and not just Nepal, and indeed over the years it has published material from the entire Himalayan region. Still, Himalayan areas outside of Nepal remain under-represented in its pages, and so we encourage our readers to submit scholarly articles, reports, and book reviews from all parts of the Himalayas for publication.

The quality and usefulness of the *Bulletin* will keep improving so long as the pool of contributors continues to expand, and for this we need more subscribers. So please, renew your own subscription, and encourage your colleagues and students (and your institutional libraries) to subscribe as well. With your help, the *Bulletin's Tretayuga* can be every bit as positive as its *Satyayuga*.

William Sax  
Managing Editor

## Notes on Contributors

**Eberhard Berg** is an anthropologist (PhD from Zürich University), presently affiliated with the Lumbini International Research Institute (Nepal). He is carrying out field research for a project titled "A living Buddhist tradition and its encounter with modernity - On the local performance of the Dumji festival, its key text, and the institution of patronage in the contemporary era of profound change."

**Lok Bhattarai** holds degrees in anthropology and archaeology from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He was a researcher on the project "Livelihoods and Environmental Change in the hills of Nepal". He has written two books in Nepali on the Gorkha Durbar and Manakamana temple complexes.

**Tone Bleie** (PhD) is an anthropologist and Research Director at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway. She has worked for several years on stratified social formations in Bangladesh, India and Nepal and co-headed the research project "Livelihoods and Environmental Change in the Hills of Nepal" between 1998-2001.

**Morgan Edwards** is finishing her Master of Arts in Anthropology at George Washington University. Her thesis is titled "Sustainability and Cultural Tourism in Rural Nepal". She will return to the field in summer 2003 to continue her research on development issues in the ACAP region of Nepal.

**Steven Folmar** is Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Wake Forest University. He began field research in Nepal in 1979 on demographic processes among the castes of Nepal. He is currently interested in how development programs affect the lives of Dalits and he will continue that line of research in the summer of 2003.

**Sharon Hepburn** is currently in Nepal researching how people represent, perceive, and experience fear and risk during the People's War. Her previous work in Nepal concerns tourism, vision, and identity. She teaches cultural anthropology (of vision, religion, and death) at Trent University in Canada.

**Marianna Kropf** is a PhD student in Classical Indology and Anthropology at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, Germany. She has been in Nepal since 2000 as the manager of the South Asia Institute's Kathmandu office. She also conducted research on various topics related to local ritual traditions. Currently she is concentrating on her PhD thesis focussing on a group of planetary deities (Navagraha – 'nine seizing ones') and their rituals in the local traditions of the Kathmandu Valley.

## **Cultural Change and Remembering: Recording the life of Au Leshey**

Eberhard Berg

Gomchen Au Leshey (1900-ca.1978), a fully ordained monk, was a most exceptional Sherpa *thangka* painter. Tibetan Buddhist clerics as well as Sherpa lay people praised him highly for his artistic skills, but even more so for a lifestyle that was wholly committed to the Dharma. For more than a decade he led the secluded life of a hermit, in the style of Milarepa (1040-1123), Tibet's most famous yogin.

Among Western scholars Au Leshey enjoyed a special reputation due to his collaboration with Khenpo Sangye Tenzin, lama of Serlo Gompa in Solu, in the creation of *The Nyingma Icons*, first published in 1975 in the journal *Kailash*.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the latter had collected the songs of homage from various sources, Au Leshey had done the redrawing of the divinities which were originally included in the *History of the Nyingma Dharma* written by H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche. Moreover, Hugh Downs has devoted a considerable section of his famous book *Rhythms of a Himalayan Village* (1980) to the memory of Au Leshey.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately this text presents only the period which Au Leshey spent as a hermit and *thangka* painter, while the rest of his life remains unmentioned.

It is a sad fact, however, that since Downs's work neither the artists nor the painting traditions of the Sherpa region of the Nepal Himalaya have been studied again.<sup>3</sup> Today, more than two decades after his death, Au Leshey, his biography, his studies and achievements, and his services to Buddhism seem to be almost forgotten even within his own locality in Solu. In this context it is of particular interest that Au Leshey's individual life history reflects crucial aspects of the last century of Sherpa history. He lived in an era during which traditional Sherpa religion and culture, economy and society were confronted with fundamental changes.

For several months in the fall and winter of 1999 and again in the early spring of 2000 I worked with seven informants, all of them male clerics, to elicit and record Au Leshey's life story. This entailed travelling in the Junbesi Khola Valley from the monastery where I stayed to the diverse informants' houses, to visit and talk with them. All informants answered my queries with great interest and intensity. They had been familiar with me both as an ethnographer and as a person for almost ten years, and so we enjoyed a casual and friendly relationship. Owing to these favourable

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. III (1975). The booklet was subsequently republished by Ratna Pustak Bhandar in Kathmandu.

<sup>2</sup> Downs 1980: 106ff; 116ff.

<sup>3</sup> This observation contradicts D. Jackson's optimistic view concerning contemporary interest in the artists and the recent painting traditions of the Sherpas, see Jackson 1996: 350.

conditions our interviews usually turned into animated discussions of Au Leshey's achievements with special regard to Sherpa Buddhism, culture and society. Conversations were held in Nepali, Sherpa, and English. I asked them a range of questions on Au Leshey's rather unconventional life. It should be noted that to answer my questions they used both the past and present states of Sherpa culture as frames of reference. Thus, through a mixture of languages and the deliberate act of remembering by these informants, traces of Au Leshey's life history eventually assumed shape.

This article consists of two parts. In the first I attempt to give a realistic account of Au Leshey's life history, putting it in the context of Sherpa Buddhism, culture and society at his time. An important point I am trying to make concerns the reason for the Sherpas' encouragement of my endeavour and the particular meaning of his life history for my informants themselves. In the second part I will explore the rather complicated conditions of this anthropological life history research.

### **I. Recent religious, cultural, and social changes among the Sherpas**

The Sherpas are an ethnically Tibetan, Buddhist people who for more than four and a half centuries have lived in hamlets and villages along the upper ridges in Solu-Khumbu, north-eastern Nepal. Owing to their successful engagement in Nepal's booming trekking and mountaineering industry, Sherpa religion and culture, economy and society have changed substantially over the past three decades.<sup>4</sup> In search of a more comfortable life in the city, many Sherpas moved away from high-altitude Solu-Khumbu to the Kathmandu Valley. There, the majority of them settled in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods on the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu, especially in the area around the Tibetan neighbourhood of Baudha.

In the 1990s, young Sherpas and whole families continued to migrate from Solu-Khumbu to the city: young Sherpas were in search of employment while usually the wealthier families were interested in better education for their children and more comfort than could be found in a remote, high-altitude Sherpa village. Hence, Sherpa religion, culture, and society in Solu-Khumbu seem to be threatened. In the majority of villages many houses have been vacant for a long time and, as a consequence, are suffering from decay. The remaining local population consists mainly of elderly people, wives and children of absentee Sherpa men working in the flourishing trekking and mountaineering business, and impoverished Sherpas. In many cases ethnic Rai men take care of a Sherpa farm, dairy, or tourist lodge. Often the menial work is done by low-caste *Kami* people. In their school education, children studying in state schools both in Solu-Khumbu and in Kathmandu have been learning Nepali

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<sup>4</sup> On the dramatic change of Sherpa religion, culture, and society and its consequences see Fürer-Haimendorf (1984), Fisher (1991), Ortner (1995), and Adams (1996).

instead of Sherpa as their first language.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly, today many young Sherpas are leaving even Kathmandu to look for better jobs in the West, ideally in places like New York City, California, and Oregon.

### **Sherpa encouragement and the ethnographer's responsibility**

Now I shall explain why I was so strongly encouraged to reconstruct and write Au Leshey's life history. In recent years, many Sherpas have become aware of the threat to the future of traditional Sherpa culture posed by these increasing dispersals. Since the beginning of my field research in Solu-Khumbu in 1992, many Sherpas have expressed their deep concern that Sherpa religion, culture and society have been eroding for decades. Indeed, many took the fact that Au Leshey, the once famous Sherpa monk, hermit and *thangka* painter had almost been forgotten in his and their own community as a clear indication that with his passing away the lifestyles and histories of 'the old days' would soon be lost as well.

Owing to these circumstances, several organizations in both Solu and Khumbu were founded in recent years with the explicit aim of preserving traditional Sherpa culture and revitalizing Sherpa Buddhism. As a consequence I did not face any problems in explaining what I hoped to accomplish. My project to record the life history of Au Leshey was well received by virtually all of the Sherpas I talked with. My main informant summarized the Sherpas' wholly positive attitude towards my endeavour: "We highly appreciate your engagement with our culture. You are trying to collect our stories so that our histories and lifeways, which are illustrative of our traditional Sherpa religion and culture, will not be forgotten. If our children don't know about our own history - and this actually seems to be true of a great many Sherpa children - all will be lost."<sup>6</sup> In these words a respected old *thangka* painter articulated a problem many Sherpas seem to be aware of today: the urgent need to preserve the Sherpas' rich cultural heritage.

Moreover, in the context of the apparent decline of Sherpa culture, the textual inscription of Au Leshey's life history came to be regarded as an important device to counter the threatened loss of their cultural memory at a time when Sherpa culture is being integrated into a globalised economy. The more I learned of what is actually at stake for the Sherpas today, the more I felt that the act of inscribing Au Leshey's life

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<sup>5</sup> Sherpa religion, history and language is presently taught only in the context of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan language in the monastery schools in Solu-Khumbu and in the Tibetan Buddhist boarding schools in the Kathmandu valley. The Hillary schools in Khumjung, Kharikhola and Junbesi introduced Sherpa religion, history and language as distinct subject only about six years ago.

<sup>6</sup> In a recent article Desjarlais has noted a similar attitude towards his life history project among the Yolmo people of Helambu who are facing comparable problems (2000: 261-275).



on paper implied a certain responsibility on the part of the biographer/anthropologist.<sup>7</sup>

### **Traditional Sherpa *thangka* painting and Au Leshey, monk, hermit, and painter**

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Solu Valley, the southern part of Solu-Khumbu, has been the home of several accomplished painters of religious art. These artists painted the monastery walls and furnishings and, most important, created *thangkas*, the famous scroll-paintings of Tibetan Buddhism. Like Tibetan *thangka* painters in general, most of them were pious laymen and therefore just ordinary artisans. Like other villagers they usually cultivated some land, and in the case of the Sherpas, they grew wheat, potatoes, and some vegetables to sustain their family. Like most of their Tibetan colleagues who depicted the deities of the four Tantras they had, at least formally, to be tantric initiates.<sup>8</sup>

In many respects, the Sherpa monk and *thangka* painter Ngawang Lekshey,<sup>9</sup> more commonly called Au or Uncle Leshey, represents an interesting exception from that rule. His life of renunciation and solitary practice, and the gathering of disciples at his retreat, are reminiscent of some crucial events in the life of Milarepa. Since his early childhood he had led a life wholly dedicated to the Buddhist Dharma. In the year 1900 he was born in the village of Gompa Zhung in Central Solu.<sup>10</sup> He spent a long period studying at different monasteries before spending the last decade of his life as a hermit and *thangka* painter. After having suffered from various diseases for some years he died in far away Kharsang in Sikkim in 1977 or 1978. To my informants the story of Au Leshey's life is significant because of the extreme hardship he went through. But most important to them was the fact that by having practiced the Dharma with complete dedication he demonstrated in his religious biography the exemplary path of a perfect practitioner, both to clerics and to lay people.

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Desjarlais reflects on what his 'responsibilities might be, in the writing of that (i.e. Meme's) life' and he worries about the 'potential effects' of his writings (2000: 263, 287).

<sup>8</sup> On the typical features of Tibetan painters see Jackson & Jackson (1994: 12-13). These authors, however, have respected the common misconception that the traditional Buddhist *thangka* artist is not necessarily a yogin who ritually evoked the deities and then painted them.

<sup>9</sup> Ngawang, < Tib. *sngags* 'mantra', *dbang* 'initiation', is the term indicating a fully ordained monk – or nun – which is bestowed by the lamas of the Dza Rong Phu Monastery; formerly this was done by Ngawang Tenzin Norbu such as in the case of Au Leshey, today by Trulzhig Rinpoche as his successor (see below). Lekshey derives from Tib. *dge-chung Ngag-dbang legs-bshad*, 'good speech'.

<sup>10</sup> According to my informants Au Leshey was born in 1900 whereas according to D. Jackson (1996 : 366, fn. 800) Au Leshey was born ca. 1915-1920.

### Early studies and religious education

Au Leshey was the youngest of three sons of poor parents. As a child he had been named Sangye. Lama Lhakpa, his father, was a respected village tantric priest (*sngags-pa*) of the influential Serwa clan in Gshongs-lung or Gompa Zhung (Nep. Junbesi).<sup>11</sup> Like all Sherpas in Solu-Khumbu up to that time, Lama Lhakpa received religious instructions from a famous lama who had played a key role in shaping Sherpa Buddhism in its modern form. The then-influential lama Trakar Taso Tulku Choki Wangchuk (1775-1837) lived in Kyirong in the Mangyul region. Since shortly before 1850 some Sherpa village priests had moved to Mangyul to study with this great lama. Choki Wangchuk had instructed Sherpas in a series of ritual and meditational cycles which still are popular throughout Solu-Khumbu.<sup>12</sup> This was prior to the recent rise of celibate monasticism among the Sherpas, which dates from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and started with the construction of Tengboche Gompa in Khumbu in the years 1916-1919. Chiwong Gompa, the second oldest Sherpa monastery situated in the southern Solu region, was built in 1923.

In a small side valley of the Junbesi Khola Valley situated high above Gompa Zhung, Lama Lhakpa had built a simple place of retreat where he used to meditate in solitude. It was here at his 'upper retreat place'<sup>13</sup> that Lama Lhakpa also instructed his young son Sangye in the Dharma for about eight years. This period came to a sudden end with Lama Lhakpa's death. Sangye, determined to devote his life to the Dharma, moved to Chiwong Monastery, which was not yet completed. There he joined a group of young Sherpa laymen who were determined to renounce worldly concerns, receive full monastic ordination, and join the future *sangha*, i.e. the monk community, of Chiwong.

Before the growth of monasticism in Solu-Khumbu the Sherpas had to leave their 'homeland' in order to receive religious education and to become monks at one of their traditional monastic centres of learning in Tibet. To achieve this the Sherpas, being adherents of the Nyingmapa tradition, had to travel to Tibet. They went either to Mindroling Monastery in the vicinity of Lhasa, the most important monastery-university of the Nyingmapa tradition, founded in 1670 by Terdak Lingpa and the

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<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that members of the Sherpa Serwa clan claim descent from one of the most illustrious lineages of hereditary lamas in the Tibetan Nyingmapa tradition, the Nyang clan. Its most famous member was the treasure-finder (*gter-ston*) Nyangral Nyima Ozer (1136-1204) who is regarded as one of the leading figures in the history of the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism (see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 755-759). On the genealogical link between the Sherpa Serwa lineage and the Nyang clan of Tibet see Childs (1997: 23-25).

<sup>12</sup> He was one of three lamas who played an important role in the codification and transmission of Nyingmapa teachings in the 18th and 19th centuries from Southern Tibet to Nepal (see Ehrhard 1993: 81; Kapstein 1983: 42).

<sup>13</sup> Tib. *mtshams khang teng*, 'upper retreat place' for meditational practice in solitude, is opposed to *poroshe cham khang*, another retreat place which is situated at lower altitude and within eye-sight of Gompa Zhung or Junbesi.

seat of the chief Nyingma patriarch; to Nyingmapa centres of learning such as the monasteries of Shechen and Dzogchen in Kham (where the Sherpas had originally come from); or to Dza Rong Phu Monastery in the Dingri region, situated just north of Mt. Everest. The journey was usually combined with trading activities and a pilgrimage to the holy places. The main religious activities follow traditional religious patterns: Lama Sangwa Dorje, the mythical hero of the Sherpas, had visited many places of pilgrimage in Tibet, and he had gone on many religious retreats in caves where he had practised meditation.<sup>14</sup>

After the construction of Chiwong Gompa had finally been completed the group of young men went on pilgrimage to Dza Rong Phu Monastery, situated on the northern side of Chomolungma (Mt. Everest) across the Nangpa La. They went there to meet the Dza Rong Phui Sangye ('The Buddha of Dza Rong Phuk'), Ngawang Tenzin Norbu, the founder (1902) and abbot of Dza Rong Phu Monastery.<sup>15</sup> Their goal was to obtain religious instruction, to receive initiation, and to become fully ordained monks. Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (1866-1940) had been a monk of Mindroling Monastery. This famous Tibetan lama, the fifth reincarnation of Lama Sangwa Dorje, had a strong interest in expanding monastic Buddhism. This inspired him to encourage the establishment of Tengboche Gompa and some other monasteries among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu such as Thame, Takshindo and Chiwong.<sup>16</sup> Actually, the construction of Dza Rong Phu Monastery mirroring the introduction and spread of 'high religion' (Ortner) marks the beginning of the modern era in the development of Sherpa Buddhism.<sup>17</sup>

From Ngawang Tenzin Norbu, Sangye received the monk name Ngawang Lekshey. However, this name is not reflective of the artistic skills for which he was held in high esteem among clerics and lay people alike in later years. Whereas most of the other Sherpa monks from Chiwong Monastery left Dza Rong Phu sooner or later after their full ordination, Ngawang Lekshey is said to have remained there for about thirty years in order to continue his studies and improve his religious learning. Finally he moved back to Chiwong Gompa in Solu. It is from this time onwards that he devoted his life wholly to the religious art of *thangka* painting. He spent his

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<sup>14</sup> On Sangwa Dorje see Zangbu & Klatzel (1988: 12).

<sup>15</sup> Ngawang Tenzin Norbu was the guru of Trulzhig Rinpoche - who is his successor as abbot of Dza Rong Phu Monastery - and of Au Leshey.

<sup>16</sup> On the biography of Ngawang Tenzin Norbu and the history of Dza Rong Phu Monastery see Aziz (1978: 209-211); Macdonald (1987a: 1-10); on the rise of monasticism within the realm of Sherpa Buddhism see Fürer-Haimendorf (1964, chapter 5); Ortner (1989a: 99 - 149, 178-192); Ortner (1989b, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> According to Aziz (1978: 209) it represents "... the finest example of institutional growth and the force of independent enterprise. It is also a reflection of the general economic expansion the area has been experiencing."

apprenticeship as a *thangka* painter in Surkyema, a small hamlet far below the massive rock on which Chiwong Gompa is situated.<sup>18</sup>

### Hermit and *thangka* painter

It was during this time that Au Leshey, in association with the monk community of Dza Rong Phu, practised a meditation which is related especially with the religious biography (Tib. *rnam-thar*) of Milarepa. In the course of the *ras rkyang*, the practitioners are dressed in only one simple cloth made from cotton, following the example of the cotton-clad Milarepa.<sup>19</sup> This meditational practice generates inner warmth while at the same time protecting the practitioner from unfavourable weather conditions outside.<sup>20</sup>

The meditation was practised in a retreat just above Phungmoche, a small monastery which is situated in the upper part of the Junbesi valley in Solu. It was presided over by Trulzhig Rinpoche (born in 1915 in Dupthay near Taklung Monastery in central Tibet), Ngawang Tenzin Norbu's chief disciple, who had succeeded him as abbot after his death in 1940.<sup>21</sup> In 1959, the year in which China consolidated its occupation of Tibet, causing the exodus of more than 100,000 Tibetans, Trulzhig Rinpoche escaped with most of the monks and nuns of the Dza Rong Phu monastic community across the Nangpa La into Solu-Khumbu. In Solu-Khumbu he sought a suitable remote place in which to rebuild his monastery, which had been devastated by the Chinese. Later, after stopovers at Thame and Chiwong Gompa, the Dza Rong Phu community stayed for some time at Sengye Phuk, a place situated high above the small temple of Phungmoche which had special mythological importance for the Solu Sherpas. This was their last stay before they settled down at a nearby site which was finally chosen for the construction of their new monastery called Thubten Chöling.

After this meditational practice in the company of the monk community of Dza Rong Phu, Au Leshey lived for a short time at Trulzhig Rinpoche's newly built monastery. It was at this time that Trulzhig Rinpoche came to appreciate the artistic skills of this Sherpa monk-painter of simple and poor origin. Au Leshey was already known and respected as a *thangka* painter, but he had developed a strong dislike of

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<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately it was neither possible to find out the name nor to learn about the biography of the Sherpa artist who taught Au Leshey the art of *thangka* painting.

<sup>19</sup> See Das (1989: 78): *ras rkhyang*, 'dressed only in cotton cloth'.

<sup>20</sup> On the various kinds of meditations Milarepa practiced in his life see his religious biography translated by Lhalungpa (1977: chapters 4 – 7); on the practice of *tummo* (Tib. *gTum-mo*) see p. 117.

<sup>21</sup> Trulzhig Rinpoche is one of the leading hierarchs of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. He is known to have incarnated in numerous identities. The earliest of these incarnation lines goes back to ānanda, the favourite disciple of Buddha *oḅākya*muni. On Trulzhig Rinpoche's biography see Aziz (1978: 212-214).

the normal monastic way of life.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the deeply religious monk-painter strove to adopt the kind of life for which Milarepa had become highly revered by Tibetan Buddhist clerics and lay people alike. Thus, when leaving the monastic community of Thubten Chöling in 1963 or 1964 Au Leshey took a vow never to cross anyone's threshold again. At the beginning of his sixties he removed himself from the monastery to spend the end of his life in the forest practising the Dharma in the solitude of the mountains in accordance with the yogin way of life exemplified by Buddhist saints such as Milarepa. Au Leshey retired to the small, remote meditation retreat (*mtshams khang*) where Lama Lhakpa had once practised and given his young son his first religious instruction. There he spent about ten years, a period which turned out to be the most creative part of his life as a *thangka* painter.

As the structure built by Lama Lhakpa had almost disappeared, Au Leshey initially lived in a tent. His small tent provided space for one person only; in fact, it offered just enough shelter for him to sit upright for meditation. His simple diet consisted of various plants, mainly stinging nettles (following the example of Milarepa) which he used to collect in the surrounding forest. As to his valuables he possessed only one cooking pot, and there was not even a store of grain. He led this sort of life for some months, just as his father had done before him, and as many other pious Sherpa men and women had done at certain points in their individual biographies.<sup>23</sup> By chance, he was discovered by a woodcutter. The Sherpas respect those who renounce worldly concerns and practise meditation in solitary retreat. The news of the hermit's presence on the side of a steep cliff under a large overhanging boulder, high above but not so far away from the village of Gompa Zhung, attracted many visitors: clerics, laypeople, and eventually also some foreigners. Although Au Leshey never asked for anything, the pious visitors brought him many offerings.

### **The hermit becomes a teacher of a gathering of disciples**

Gradually, Au Leshey's retreat evolved into a widely known centre of learning for *thangka* painting. Among the diverse visitors were two young monks who were studying at nearby Serlo monastery.<sup>24</sup> They asked him if he would teach them the art of *thangka* painting, and Au Leshey gave his consent. As they needed some

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<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately it was not possible to clarify the reason for his strong dislike as well as for his consequent decision.

<sup>23</sup> According to the information I have collected over a decade it seems that it was common at certain periods, in particular at certain periods of 'crisis', when Sherpas were more prone to donate part of their wealth to support a lama or a monastic community, to devote one's life to the practice of the Dharma or even to undergo the hardships of a hermit's life. The recent period of revitalization of Tibetan Buddhist tradition see Aziz (1984) that can also be witnessed among the Sherpas - as well as in the Tibetan diasporic community in Nepal - is reflective of a crisis that has emerged in the context of the ongoing encounter with modernity and certain forces of globalisation.

<sup>24</sup> Serlo Gompa was founded in 1959 by the highly learned and widely respected Sherpa Khempo Sangye Tenzin. On his biography see Macdonald (1987b: 87-99).

accommodation, the two disciples offered to build a small and very simple house as a more permanent structure. That house was built onto the face of the cliff. As more people came to ask him for instruction and guidance some small houses were constructed at a nearby site. Even some Westerners showed up and joined the group of disciples of both laypeople and monks which had gathered around Au Leshey as their guru. On the same spot on the side of a cliff under a large boulder an American disciple finally built a tiny three-room house for Au Leshey. Its ruins are still visible today.

Although Au Leshey spent these years teaching various disciples he also managed to lead a hermit's life, practising meditation in retreat and painting *thangkas*. In the narrations of my informants special importance was attributed to the fact that there was no bed in the house: Au Leshey was said to have slept cross-legged and erect in the same place where he used to read, eat, and paint. He usually got up at three in the morning, read scriptures until around daybreak, and then performed a service for all sentient beings before he started to paint. He used traditional mineral colours, ground from stones brought from Tibet, whenever they were available, but he was also known for his very pragmatic use of modern synthetic poster colours, contrary to the conventional norms of *thangka* painting. All my informants showed their greatest admiration, however, when they elaborated on the simplicity of his needs: during certain extended phases of meditation he lived on only one pill of Tibetan medicine per day.<sup>25</sup>

According to them, Trulzhig Rinpoche had always actively encouraged Au Leshey to follow his chosen way of life as a forest hermit and *thangka* painter. After the death of Ngawang Tenzin Norbu, Trulzhig Rinpoche became Au Leshey's guru; he also supported him in various other ways. Most importantly, however, Trulzhig Rinpoche acted according to an influential Tibetan cultural pattern as his main *zhindak*, i.e. patron/donor/sponsor (Tib. *sbyin-bdag*).<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, Trulzhig Rinpoche commissioned Au Leshey mainly to paint *thangkas* for his new monastery and also for his personal use. Moreover, it was Trulzhig Rinpoche who gave "to the hermitage of the Bhiksu and Yogin Leshi" the name *Pinnacle of Supreme Paradise*.<sup>27</sup> In a poem which sums up the most characteristic features of the monk, hermit and *thangka* painter Au Leshey, the Tibetan hierarch of the 'Old School' expressed his deep respect for him. There he wrote:

... In this natural rock-nest  
lives a sage, austere yogin:  
he is an object of worship,  
a bhiksu in manner,  
with hair in long locks,

<sup>25</sup> This practice is called *rden bcud len*. See Das (1989: 394).

<sup>26</sup> On the history of the important relationship (Tib. *mchod yon*) of a lama acting as spiritual adviser (*mchod gnas*) of his royal or princely lay donor (*yon bdag*) in Tibetan Buddhism see the recent work by Ruegg (1995). On the meaning and the importance of the *zhindak* in Sherpa culture see Berg (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> See Downs (1980: 170).

a descendant of the clan of Nyang.  
 His small size is not disagreeable,  
 and though he acts as an artist,  
 these icons are not for sale,  
 but for spiritual accumulation.<sup>28</sup>

In their book on Tibetan *thangka* painting, D. and J. Jackson have emphasized that painting and sculpture "... was crucial to the religious life of Tibet because it was a medium through which the highest ideals of Buddhism were evoked and brought alive. A sacred painting was for the Tibetan a 'physical support' - in other words an embodiment - of enlightenment."<sup>29</sup> In the case of ordinary lay people who came to visit Au Leshey, the commissioning of *thangkas* depended on sad and unavoidable events in their lives. Sickness or trouble, death in the family, and the need for an image in connection with a particular necessary religious practice were the three main reasons for Sherpas to request the painting of a *thangka*.<sup>30</sup> Every Sherpa home has an altar, for which a family orders images according to its financial capacity. It is believed that the commissioning of religious art, like any other virtuous act, brings merit (Tib. *bsod nams*), and only this can give rise to future benefits. Apart from asking for the painting of a *thangka*, people visited Au Leshey in order to request blessings, memorial service, or simply for advice. It was painting, however, which occupied most of Au Leshey's time. Although he asked for nothing in return, people who had money gave him a little, whereas those who did not have money gave him some butter or milk, potatoes, wheat or barley.

The life of the flourishing community finally reached its peak when still more students arrived and there was no place for them to stay. As a consequence, some disciples built another cave complex not so far away from Au Leshey's hermitage. For some years, however, Au Leshey's health had been in a bad state. In 1975, when he could barely move his arms and knees, he finally accepted a doctor for a medical checkup. The latter provided him with some medicine and a crutch, and he even convinced the monk-hermit to leave his retreat, which meant nothing less than committing the sin of breaking his vow.

After a short stay of one or two months at Thubten Chöling Monastery, Ngawang Tengye, the older of his two nephews, who represented the last surviving members of his family, carried the sick Au Leshey on his back all the way to the Solu air strip at Phaplu. Via Kathmandu, Ngawang Tengye took his uncle to Kharsang in Sikkim. There he had a job at All India Radio as the announcer of the Tibetan programme. Au Leshey never recovered in this unfamiliar new place in faraway Sikkim; he died there in 1977 or 1978. The community of disciples had dissolved, and Trulzhig Rinpoche ordered the valuables of his retreat to be taken to Thubten Chöling. Since that time only few ruins and a small *chorten* (Tib. *mchod-*

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<sup>28</sup> In Downs (1980: 169); translation of the poem by Kapstein (1983 or 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Jackson & Jackson (1994: 9)

<sup>30</sup> Jackson & Jackson (ibid.)

*rten*) nearby containing his ashes testify to those who know that once there had been a Sherpa monk-hermit's retreat and a centre of learning for *thangka* painting.

## II. Dealing with the 'death of memory'

Over the last fifteen years much research and debate within the social sciences has focused on the constitution of knowledge. Since the debate on 'writing culture', which has resulted from a 'crisis of representation', anthropologists have been seriously rethinking anthropological theorising and reworking ethnographic practice.<sup>31</sup> In this context I am concerned with an important issue of the ongoing debate. In the following I want to elaborate on the 'micro-politics' (Behar 1993: 149) of the situation in which Au Leshey's life history was obtained. This includes information on both the particular conditions of fieldwork and on the ways in which the anthropologist/biographer was personally involved as an 'active, situated, participant' (Turner 2000: 51) in the conversations as well as in the construction of the resulting representation.<sup>32</sup>

When trying to elicit the life history of Au Leshey among the Sherpas of Solu I did not face any difficulties from the side of my informants. Neither did I meet with polite reservation nor direct resistance as were experienced by J. Gyatso, for instance, when she tried to collect information from a high-ranking lama on the practice of diary writing in the context of her research on Tibetan autobiography.<sup>33</sup> This resistance is due to the conflicting attitudes towards diary writing that persist amongst Tibetan Buddhists. On the one hand one should be humble regarding one's own achievements and virtues, whereas on the other there is the Buddhist insistence that "... only 'nirvanic', as opposed to samsaric, activities are valuable ..."<sup>34</sup> - However, the obstacles I had to face were of another sort.

Life history research in anthropology usually deals with living personalities such as in Crapanzano's *Tuhami* (1980), Shostak's *Nisa* (1981), Behar's *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993) or Desjarlais' *Echoes of a Yolmo Buddhist's Life, in Death* (2000). In anthropological research the life history is understood as the result of a narrative process leading toward the construction of a self.<sup>35</sup> In this realm it is the privilege of the narrator to act as both the storyteller and the main character at the same time.<sup>36</sup> However, when I started

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<sup>31</sup> See e.g. the recent anthologies by Gupta & Ferguson (1997), Appadurai (1997) and by Marcus (1998).

<sup>32</sup> Abu-Lughood has emphasized "that we must constantly attend to the positionality of the anthropological self and its representations of others" (1991: 141-2).

<sup>33</sup> Gyatso (1997: 162ff).

<sup>34</sup> Gyatso (1997: 176). For a more detailed discussion of this aspect see the next chapter.

<sup>35</sup> For a recent review of life history research in anthropology see Peacock & Holland (1993).

<sup>36</sup> Crapanzano (1994: 873) describes the two different characters in one as "the controlling internal narrator and that narrator's subject."



collecting data on his life in 1999 Au Leshey had been dead for more than twenty years. In the course of my research I had to realize that his death involved what Behar has called 'the death of memory' (1996: 42). My aim in this context is to convey a sense of the complexity of the situation with which I had to come to terms.

In contrast to the usual subjects of life history research, my main character, Au Leshey, did not have the chance to construct a particular image of himself by narrating his own life history. Although he is the main character he is not his own storyteller. In other words, Au Leshey's life history as I have presented it above is not a self-portrayal, but one constructed by others who had actually had some personal contact with him in historical retrospect.<sup>37</sup> Gradually, the life history of Au Leshey emerged in a series of conversations with my different informants. And it was the biographer/anthropologist who combined the bits and pieces he obtained and inscribed the life history on paper.

Indeed, I never met Au Leshey personally. Instead, I had a substantial previous knowledge dating from the time when I began my ethnographic research among the Sherpas in 1992. This knowledge was mediated mainly by a few Westerners. Some of them had been living in Kathmandu for many years and had known Au Leshey personally, while others had just heard of him by way of Downs' book *Rhythms of a Himalayan Village* and/or the drawings of Nyingma icons published in *Kailash* in 1975. Such informants mentioned a community of Sherpa and Western disciples who had gathered around Au Leshey as their *guru*, centred on his hermitage, high up in the mountains of remote Solu-Khumbu. In this context it is of interest that their accounts depicted the community in a way that was strongly reminiscent of the Western counter-culture of the late sixties.

Such was the situation I was confronted with when I undertook my research on Au Leshey's life history. The only living members of Au Leshey's family, his two nephews (his elder brother's sons), had emigrated 'a long time ago': the older to Sikkim, the younger to an unknown place. His simple house in Junbesi was in ruins; about one fifth of Junbesi's 84 households was deserted; and many of his generation had either died or moved away from Solu-Khumbu to places in the Kathmandu Valley such as Baudha.

Some of the few surviving members of his generation in western Solu had heard his name, at least. However, most of them did not know much more about him, because none had known him personally. But things were even more complicated. Sherpa society is characterized by a deep cleavage between the religious élite and the laity. Accordingly, there is a marked disjunction between spiritual and secular knowledge. It is due to this cleavage that lay people generally feel uncomfortable

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<sup>37</sup> As to the act of 'construction' in this context Bruner's statement still holds true that "... a life history is still a story, a representation of life, not life as lived or experienced." (1988: 8). Peacock & Holland (1993: 368) prefer the term 'life story' because it does not connote that the narration is true.

when asked to serve as informants on religious matters, including their religious specialists. In this context Sherpa lay people are usually quick to emphasize without hesitation that they themselves don't know. Thus, instead of engaging in the art of social remembering themselves, they politely send the ethnographer to their experts in religious matters.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, my group of informants amounted to a very small number of persons. All of them were educated male religious specialists who had studied for a short time at the same monastery as Au Leshey: one *thangka* painter, two monks, one lama (an abbot), and one *sngags-pa* (village Tantric priest). And there were two who had once been members of the gathering of Au Leshey's disciples at his hermitage. Whereas the informants of the first group remembered only very vaguely, simply because so many decades had passed, the two other informants were the only ones who had lived with Au Leshey and studied under him for more than a year each.

Unfortunately, two personalities who were of crucial importance in Au Leshey's life were out of reach at the time of my investigation. The Sherpa artist who had introduced Au Leshey to the religious art of *thangka* painting had died in the 1950s; today not even his name is remembered. Also, Kapa Par Gyalzen, one of the most prominent Solu Sherpa *thangka* painters of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, had passed away in 1994. In close cooperation with Kapa Par Gyalzen, Au Leshey had painted the *thangkas* and murals of the newly built Thubten Chöling monastery in 1962/63. Unfortunately Kapa Par Gyalzen's two sons, who would have been a valuable source of information, had been living in Japan as *thangka* painters for more than a decade and were therefore out of reach.

### **Generating a religious life history in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition: *namthar*, the literary genre of religious biography**

What does it mean to elicit a life history in the context of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition? There is an apparent contradiction between life histories and the Buddhist system of thought, practice, and belief, because the 'self' is regarded as being ultimately nonexistent.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, a life is viewed simultaneously as impermanent and illusory but also highly consequential.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, written religious biographies of accomplished practitioners form a distinct genre of religious literature.<sup>40</sup> It is called *namthar* (Tib.

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<sup>38</sup> In the course of her research among the Sherpas S.B. Ortner encountered a similar pattern of behaviour on the part of the laity (1978: 136; 1989: 7-8). - J. Draper has done specific research on this aspect; according to him there is a 'widening cleavage' which he attributes to "... the increasing control by the monastic establishment of [...] spiritual knowledge and power" (Draper: 1994: 79).

<sup>39</sup> On this aspect see Collins (1982).

<sup>40</sup> In a recent anthology the great range of genres actually represented in Tibetan literature has been highlighted by a group of scholars (Cabézon & Jackson 1996).

*rnam-thar*) which literally means ‘liberation’.<sup>41</sup> As its name suggests, whether it is actually self-written or written by devout disciples, the central concern of this literary genre of Tibetan sacred biography is to portray an individual master’s religious practices, spiritual development, and attainment of liberation.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, it offers a teaching as well as instructions for spiritual practitioners.<sup>43</sup> Thus, hearing or reading how revered saints such as Marpa or Milarepa overcame their own personal obstacles can inspire others in their own efforts to attain complete liberation. In his introduction to the life and songs of ‘Brugpa Kun-legs (1455-1529), R. A. Stein cites the famous yogin’s ironic statement concerning the particular value attached to remembering the lives of esteemed Tibetan Buddhist masters. Provided it is ‘useful’ for religious practice, his life is worth remembering. But, as to the profane aspects of his life — the ‘stupid history of my life’ — these are regarded as being not valuable enough for them to be written down on paper.<sup>44</sup>

Lay Sherpas are not accustomed to telling their own profane life histories in any form, and certainly not in an intimate and confessional way. However, when I was researching Au Leshey’s life history among the Sherpas of Solu all respondents understood what I wanted. This easy understanding is due to the fact that Sherpas have some culturally patterned ideas of religious life histories. Like other ethnically Tibetan Buddhist people, most Sherpas are still familiar with many of the details and episodes which colour the sacred biography of Tibet’s most famous yogin, the great Milarepa (1040-1123).<sup>45</sup> A disciple of Marpa The Translator (1012-1097), the first Tibetan patriarch of the Kagyu lineage,<sup>46</sup> Milarepa is regarded as the archetype of the perfect disciple, practitioner, and teacher. Moreover, Milarepa epitomizes the style of the ‘crazy yogin’ (Tib. *smyon-pa*, also rendered as ‘divine madman’ in tibetological literature): unconventional, uninhibited, full of humour, skilled in teaching through story-telling, and possessing great insight into the nature of the world through his

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<sup>41</sup> As to the origin of this literary genre J.B. Robinson has emphasized that biography and history are “.. genres more characteristic of Tibetan than Indian Buddhist literature” (Robinson 1996: 57).

<sup>42</sup> On the separate genre of Tibetan religious literature called *rnam-thar* see Tucci (1949 I: 150-151); Willis (1985); Kapstein (1997: 180). Western translations of Tibetan Buddhist *rnam-thar* of esteemed religious figures, both self-written and disciple-written, have been available for several decades. The most recent ones are by Ricard (1994), Willis (1995), and Gyatso (1998).

<sup>43</sup> Ricard (1994: XVII) refers to the important fact that a *namthar* leaves a “deep impression” on the reader’s mind.

<sup>44</sup> Stein (1972: 14).

<sup>45</sup> Milarepa’s sacred biography was compiled and written some centuries after his death (1488) by Tsang Nyon Heruka (1452-1507), another great yogi; see Lhalungpa (1977: XXX-XXXI). On the biographical tradition of Milarepa see Tiso (1996). At the beginning of the sixteenth century a whole school of biographical literature came into being.

<sup>46</sup> On the sacred biography of the great eleventh-century Tibetan master Marpa of Lhotrak (Tib. *Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros*) collected and written by the ‘mad yogin’ Tsang Nyön Heruka (1452-1507) see Chögyam Trungpa (1999).

extensive practice. Milarepa is therefore highly venerated among the Sherpas who are adherents of the Nyingmapa order.

### **The informants' narratives concerning Au Leshey's life history and the process of remembering**

As Au Leshey had chosen the lifestyle of a yogin instead of a monk's existence<sup>47</sup> the association of his life history with that of Milarepa is inevitable. Accordingly, the narratives I collected were subject to a considerable degree of cultural standardisation. His life history was seen as a shining example of a devout Buddhist practitioner. Hence the diverse narratives mirrored the informants' deep admiration of the exemplary nature of Au Leshey's life history which they perceived and moulded according to Milarepa's *namthar*. Often I had the impression that when an informant began narrating the details and episodes of Au Leshey's life history it was only in the process of remembering and narrating that he became aware of the fact that his local Sherpa community had nurtured a religious figure of such standing. This could be sensed in a certain pride that coloured the vivid narratives.

Indeed, in this context there were several voices, but no 'multiplicity of voices', and there was no negotiating of 'multiple viewpoints' between the different informants.<sup>48</sup> Instead, I had to realize that the narrations of Au Leshey's life history actually amounted to a single view point. In contrast to this, in the case of Buddhist saints such as Milarepa there are various accounts of their deaths. These are consistently presented as a teaching and not solely as historical events that are significant for the writing of a biography. And, as F.V. Tiso (1997: 987) notes, such teaching "... is subject to the modifications introduced by successive authors in a process of editing and rewriting, i.e. redaction."

It is interesting that the diverse narratives focused primarily on Au Leshey as a hermit and *thangka* painter: this in fact only represents the latter part of his religious life history. Those years are described in great detail, while very little information was offered concerning the fifty-five years Au Leshey spent as a monk at different monasteries. In short, the suffering and hardship of the hermit and *thangka* painter constituted the key topos of all narrations of Au Leshey's life history. What remains to be emphasized, however, is the fact that although their narratives depicted Au Leshey as a truly outstanding religious figure among the Sherpas, he nevertheless retained his normal human character. For instance, the narrations never mentioned enlightened dreams and visions or the performance of miracles, which are often

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<sup>47</sup> As a fully ordained *gelong* he deliberately broke away from monastic life for ever. He took a special vow and since then he considered himself as a yogin as opposed to a monk-recluse who is still somehow related to his monastery.

<sup>48</sup> On the 'multiplicity of voices in the field' see Hüwelmeier (2000), on the process of negotiating multiple viewpoints in the field see Shokeid (1997).

found in the religious biographies of Tibetan yogins.<sup>49</sup> Au Leshey did not live the life of a wandering mendicant teaching by means of spiritual songs such as the famous Tibetan yogin Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol,<sup>50</sup> for example.

As for the question of agency, my informants emphasized that from a very early age Au Leshey had shown a strong inclination towards the undertaking of a contemplative life in the mountain solitudes that he had experienced with his father. According to them, the crucial steps Au Leshey took in his religious life - such as the vow never to cross anyone's threshold again - can only be understood as the logical self-chosen way of a religious person of his kind. Being the third son, however, his choice follows traditional patterns: in case there were more sons in a family, the second or third was encouraged to become a monk.

Moreover, their deliberate remembering of details and episodes of Au Leshey's sacred biography made my informants aware of two important aspects of their culture and society at large. Repeatedly, my informants noted that Au Leshey the hermit represented a longstanding tradition in Sherpa Buddhism that has suffered from a severe rupture in the recent decades, and that now this had been lost, because there simply are no Sherpa hermits any more. This was attributed to the recent dramatic change which the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu have to face and come to terms with. My informants also referred to the fact that Au Leshey had practised *thangka* painting according to the principles of Tibetan Buddhist sacred art within a traditional Buddhist setting, but not for a capitalist market. The point they all wanted to raise was that Au Leshey never took any money for his fine pieces of sacred art. This sober comment can be properly understood only with special regard to the current commercialization of Buddhist sacred art, upon which the life of my main informant, the *thangka* painter, for instance, has been more or less wholly dependent.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, through their deliberate remembering my informants came to believe that the individual life history of Au Leshey was reflective of important aspects of Sherpa Buddhist tradition which nowadays are simply lost. According to my informants, Au Leshey's individual life history mirrored two issues which are of special importance for contemporary Sherpas. First, he lived his religious life at a time when the Sherpa Buddhist tradition, which he seems to epitomize to my informants, was still fully alive. And second, his death was perceived as symbolizing the end of the living Sherpa Buddhist tradition because of the Sherpas' current encounter with modernity. Accordingly, Au Leshey's life history is indicative of the last phase of traditional Sherpa Buddhism and the historical border line that clearly separates it from

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<sup>49</sup> On this see, for example, the biographies of *Four Lamas of Dolpo* translated by D.L. Snellgove (1992).

<sup>50</sup> In Ricard (1994).

<sup>51</sup> The recent commercialization of Buddhist sacred art in the Kathmandu Valley is analyzed by Bentor (1993) and by Teague (1997); the commodification of *thangkas* in Dharamsala is described by McGuckin (1996).

modernity. As such, his life history provided a common time frame around which my informants discussed the Sherpas' past, present, and future. It should also be mentioned that their remembering and reconstruction of Au Leshey's life history seems to have made my informants more aware of several historical facts: Sherpa religion, culture, and society have changed profoundly, the ongoing change brought not only visible individual gain (although not for all) but also considerable loss of their Sherpa Buddhist tradition, and that there is an urgent need for the Sherpas to do something to counteract the current erosion of their traditional heritage.

### Conclusion

From Au Leshey's life history we may derive certain broad insights into the socio-economic conditions of Sherpa religion and culture during the first three quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Au Leshey lived in an era when many aspects of Tibetan Buddhist culture (not only in Tibet proper but also in the border areas of traditional Tibetan culture in the Himalayas) started to fade away or at least to undergo profound changes. In Solu-Khumbu, it was a period when Sherpa religion, culture, society and economy reached another stage in their history with the growth of monasticism. In fact, this happened just before the Sherpas' encounter with modernity and the forces of globalisation, a process which began in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the first climbing of Mt. Everest by Sherpa Tenzing and Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953.

Thus, Au Leshey's individual life history mirrors important aspects of the last century of Sherpa history. He had received his religious education at the traditional centre of learning of Sherpa Buddhism that was situated in Tibet just north of Solu-Khumbu. Since the Chinese occupation in 1959 these religious, cultural, and economic ties with Tibet do not exist anymore. Among others, the important monastic centres of learning such as Dza Rong Phu have been destroyed by the Chinese. In consequence the Tibetan cultural area underwent a process of reorientation of Himalayan peoples, such as the Sherpas, toward the south.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, as a monk, Au Leshey witnessed the rise and growth of monasticism in Solu-Khumbu in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was possible mainly due to the success of the Sherpa business community. Au Leshey practiced *thangka* painting according to traditional Buddhist values as religious art; in other words he never 'sold' his art 'on the market'. From the beginning of the eighties (after his death, in other words), *thangka* painting among Sherpas and Tibetans has experienced a rupture in tradition owing to the commercialization of sacred art. Today that process has led to the transformation of the *thangka* genre into 'tourist art'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> On the 'general shift of influence' from the north toward the south see Aziz (1984: 76-81).

<sup>53</sup> On the history of the *thangka* tradition in Tibetan culture, the various schools and on the different styles see Tucci (1949 II); on the use of *thangkas*, within Tibetan culture, on the specific processes in the current commercialization of Tibetan *thangkas*, and the

Au Leshey has without doubt left a deep impression on posterity, not only due to his personal style but even more so because of the way he led a hermit's life for more than a decade. That happened at a time when the hermit's tradition in Sherpa Buddhism was already fading away. Nowadays, after almost a quarter of a century, the remnants of his hermitage are barely visible. Very few of his *thangkas* still exist. Au Leshey is almost forgotten by the local population, clerics and lay people alike, and particularly by the younger generation.

From the point of view of the Sherpas with whom I had the chance to talk about it, Au Leshey's life history serves a dual purpose. The concern traditionally associated with the literary genre of Tibetan spiritual biography is to portray the spiritual development of a religious person's life. Most important to them, however, is the fact that Au Leshey's life history inscribed on paper constitutes a necessary means for the Sherpas to counter the current, threatened loss of their cultural heritage.

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# **Sovereignty and Honours as a Redistributive Process: An ethnohistory of the temple trust of Manakamana in Nepal**

Tone Bleie and Lok Bhattarai

## **Introduction**

In the late eighteenth century, as the British East India Company expanded and consolidated its rule in most of the Indian sub-continent, an army from the small hill principality of Gorkha in the Himalayan foothills extended its rule over a geographically and culturally diversified region. In 1814 the two powers clashed in war, which ended in defeat for the Gorkhalis two years later. The peace treaty marked the end of seven decades of Gorkhali expansion and left them in charge of somewhat reduced but still large territories in the Tarai, the hills and the high mountain region. Ever since, Nepal has been a sovereign state, conceived by its own rulers as the only true Hindu kingdom, unspoiled by Western and Muslim invaders. Its physical barriers, the mist-shrouded Himalayan peaks and the lush tropical forests created natural borders with India and China that have inspired the Western popular image of this Hindu kingdom as living in splendid isolation from both British colonialism and the globalising economic market system.

Our article<sup>1</sup> looks at a hitherto unexplored aspect of this kingdom – how one mountain temple and its surrounding locale, by then called Kaphyāk,<sup>2</sup> played an essential role in the nation-building process during the period of expansion and later. In the ethnographic and historical research on Nepal, emphasis has been placed on temple architecture, temple economics and temple ritual, but without viewing the temple as an institutional whole.<sup>3</sup> The Manakamana (Manakāmanā) temple's historical role up until now is largely undocumented. The few studies that exist (Unbescheid 1985, Khattry 1995, Bhattarai 1998) do not analyse the state-society relationships inherent in temple organisation and cult practices. To remedy this

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<sup>2</sup> This locality was called Kaphyāk in official correspondence from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Kaphyāk was a central territory within the kingdom of Gorkha.

<sup>3</sup> See Allen (1975), Bernier (1979), Regmi (1978), Michaels (1990), Bhattarai (1998).

oversight, we examine how daily temple politics and the temple institution's structural features were formed by and formed the Nepalese institution of kingship over more than two centuries. We do this by considering the temple trust (*guthi*) of the Goddess Manakamana, which from the late medieval period onward constituted an interface between the local society and a nascent Nepalese state ruled by a god-king. The temple trust has remained a locus for royal protection and patronage ever since. The Nepalese trust system, which encompasses various kinds of institutions responsible for a wide range of religious, social and charitable functions, has its parallels elsewhere in the South Asian continent and in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Stein (1980), Dirks (1987) and Inden (1990), amongst others, have documented how Indian kingship underwent radical changes as the Indian princely states that remained outside the British Presidency were profoundly transformed under British colonialism. Unlike the Indian kings, who were gradually turned into ceremonial figureheads during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Gorkhali kingship remained at the apex of personified rule well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This regime was based on ceremonial display, on the politics of gift and service giving, on taxation of production and trade, and on monopoly trade, all features associated with the ancient, pre-colonial regimes of India. Thus, the continued dynastic and religious foundation of the Nepalese state epitomised in the divine kingship renders it an interesting case for comparative political sociology. Except for the works of the late Richard Burghart (1983, 1984, 1987) and Bouillier and Toffin (1989), few have taken up this challenge. Our article is but a modest contribution towards remedying this neglect, through an exploration of the links between the historical past and the ethnographic present of a single temple.

Though we focus mainly on this ancient temple's locally integrative and nation-building functions in the past, its current role - at a time of ethnicization, armed struggle and the state's distributive failure (Nepal Human Development Report 1998, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2000) - can not be emphasised enough. In the early 1970s, before a highway was built in the vicinity of the famed temple, the numbers of annual visitors was around 25,000. In 1998 the late and ill-famed Crown Prince Dipendra inaugurated a modern cable car<sup>5</sup> offering effortless transport from the low-lying highway to the doorstep of the mountain temple, increasing the number of Nepali and Indian visitors to about 50,000 in the following 12 months.

Some in Nepal are currently making astonishingly rapid fortunes. Many more survive on the margins of the new, very unequally-divided affluence - resorting to wishing for better luck. The Goddess's reputed wish-fulfilling powers hold an

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<sup>4</sup> There are the *vaqf* systems of India, Syria, Iran and Iraq and the *dharmada* and *devottar* tenure systems among Hindus in India and the *mortmain* tenures in medieval Europe (Regmi 1978a: 630).

<sup>5</sup> A local prominent business house (Manakamana Darsan Pvt. Ltd.) financed the project and built it with Austrian technical assistance. The investors also run the enterprise. For a discussion on the cultural and economic impact of the cable-car see Bleie 2003.

enormous appeal to both excluded and affluent, Buddhists and Hindus, castes and ethnic groups. Ancient religious ideas of the efficacy of pilgrimage to sacred mountain realms ruled by deities converge with a modern preoccupation with particular tracts of Nepal's countryside as ideal, pictorial landscapes to be viewed. The latter perception of landscape is a result of rapid economic growth, the emergence of leisure time among salaried urbanites and the business community, new opportunities for rapid travel and a surge in nationalist sentiment. The beautiful pagoda-style abode of Manakamana in a serene, emerald green hill setting has become a multivalent national icon.

### **The ethnohistorical approach**

Historians have explained the unification of Nepal into one empire and the continuing nation-building process, which some would argue is yet to be completed, mainly as the results of military achievement, political alliances and a political system in which a ruler's words were commands (cf. Stiller 1973, Shaha 1990, Regmi 1995, Sharma 1997). We suggest that inadequate attention has been paid to the cultural dimensions, although there are important exceptions (cf. Höfer 1979, Burghart 1983, 1984, 1987, Bouillier 1989, Whelpton 1991, Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989, 1993, 1997, 2000, Lecomte-Tilouine 1993, 2000 and Ramirez 2000). Filling these conceptual and empirical lacunae requires considerable scholarly effort.

The complex interrelations between the cultural, social, economic and political foundations of the kingship and of the Manakamana trust constitute a central theme of this and an earlier work of ours (Bleie and Bhattarai 2001). This article covers both the early transformation from a minor (1743-1769) to a great monarchy (1769-1814), and the continuing process of unification and consolidation of the Nepalese state under successive Shah (1768-1846) and Rana (1846-1951) rulers. We present new evidence about the specific political and religious circumstances that seem to have influenced Prithvi Narayan Shah's donations to the Goddess Manakamana, whose realm of influence had hitherto been limited to Gorkha. When this historic case is examined in the light of other evidence about the many other land endowments of Prithvi Narayan Shah (1743-1775) and his successors, we better understand the role of royally sponsored religious rites and trust institutions in the nation-building process of the early empire period. The autocratic Prithvi Narayan Shah's generous donations to major temple institutions (Regmi 1978a: 631-636) in the newly conquered Nepal (originally Nepal designated the Newar city-states in Kathmandu Valley) were motivated by his need to be conferred authority in a public, representative domain wherein the political and the religious were fused. Prithvi Narayan Shah's expanded patronage of Manakamana, the royal Shah lineage's long-established protective deity, was arguably a reciprocal act. Through royal ritual appropriation Manakamana contributed to the successful outcome of the conquest of Nepal. Religious festivals such as *Dasāī* and the lesser known *Barṣabandhan* in

Manakamana represented a powerful mode of public legitimisation and commemoration of Nepalese kingship in all phases, from conquest, through formal installation as great king, and later in the regular display of sovereignty. This kingly sovereignty had to be convincingly demonstrated to ensure continued allegiance of deities, nobles and commoners.

We specifically aim at describing the ethnohistorical dimensions of particular personae, localities and institutions which were part of the nation-building process in the “heartland” of modern Nepal, a term applied by the Nepali historian Regmi (1995: 14-15). The heartland, in Regmi’s sense (op.cit.: 14), included Gorkha and the wider Gandaki region. This was a central geographical area of strategic, political and economic importance. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, quite a number of the ruling families in Gandaki were recruited into the new ruling Gorkhali political elite. The territories outside this core area in the eastern hill region, in the Terai and in the Far West (beyond Bheri River), the “provinces” in Regmi’s terms, were considered no more than colonies.

Our analysis of this trust’s history is mainly based on early modern inscriptions, land and other administrative records, other textual sources relating to local chiefs and kings of the 18th, 19th and the 20th century, and scholarly works on the history of late medieval and early modern Nepal. Our interpretation of past events and institutional changes is firmly grounded in our understanding of the ethnographic present, in particular ritual practices, forms of social organisation and oral history.<sup>6</sup>

Anthropological history and ethnohistory - the hybrid labels behind which we strive to study the interface between history and culture - depend on a combination of methodologies, methods and theory from history and anthropology (Cohn 1980: 216, Dirks 1987: 11, Dube 2001: 2-4). The virtues of a description within the rather narrow spatial confines of one temple institution and of certain aspects of social life are those of circumstantiality, density and particularity. Our collection of the traces which the trust of Manakamana has left of the past deserves the term ethnohistory, rather than history, in view of our focus on the present, i.e. on the structural and cognitive ways in which these traces are embedded in actors’ contemporary meaning systems. Use of the labels “anthropological history” and “ethnohistory” has to be explicated cautiously in the current tense political situation. We share with current Nepalese ethnohistorians, many of whom are political activists, their commitment to contribute to “a history from below”. Yet our approach is not confined to rewriting the history of one or more ethnic groups. Neither do we presume in advance that configurations between the state and ethnic categories and groups<sup>7</sup> have always been

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<sup>6</sup> We treat “myths”, legends and tales as in need of being sorted into distinct cultural genres. These have distinct forms, contents, narrative logic and particular arenas for (re)production. Myths often speak of history in the particular.

<sup>7</sup> Ethnic categories are aggregates of people who share some cultural practices, a real or mythical association with a territory and an ancestor/ancestress. An ethnic group can be

based on dominance-submission or that ethnicity is an archaic cultural phenomenon. Our evidence on the political and institutional context for the local configuration of caste, and indeed of the Magars as “a dominant caste”<sup>8</sup>, may in certain respects question both the *bāhun* (Brahman) conceptions of caste and dominance and those of certain ethnic activists. From a research point of view, the principal questions of agency, power and dominance in this historical and moral context are certainly more tangled than these political combatants are willing to admit.

### **The role of temples in Nepal**

Appadurai (1981: 8) has said that the temple is the quintessentially South Asian institution. A number of informative studies have highlighted the connections between the Indian state, kingship and temple institutions (Mudaliar 1974, Appadurai & Breckenridge 1976, Appadurai 1977 and 1981, Dirks 1987, Stein 1980, Inden 1990, Price 1996, and Dube 2001). Apparently however, only few scholars who study Nepal have followed a similar line of enquiry. This is somewhat surprising in light of the recent surge of scholarly interest in state formation and nation building (Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka & Whelpton 1997, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2000). This interest is spurred by the recent democratic, constitutional reforms and the rise of ethnic movements, including one militant faction which since 1996 has been fighting a guerrilla war against the government and its allies.

First of all we should explain what we mean by a temple. Our main attention is given not to its most obvious feature, the temple as a demarcated sacred space, an architectural structure that harbours the abode of the deity enshrined within it. Rather, like Appadurai and Breckenridge (1976), we are preoccupied with the cultural models which underlie its well-ordered sacred space and the ideas that inhere in the ceremonial practices which unfold in that space. The temple is a system of particularly persuasive symbolic acts. These symbols create and dramatise very basic ideas about agency, authority, submission, exchange and worship. In these arenas both intra-community and local-state relations are renewed, confirmed and sometimes contested.

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mobilised around an overarching identity, which may be used to raise claims on states or non-state institutions.

<sup>8</sup> We cautiously use Raheja’s (1988) definition of dominance. Unlike the Gujars (of north-western Uttar Pradesh) who possess nearly all land and were the *jajmāns* of all the other castes, the Magar and in particular the Lāhe lineage of the Thapa Magar held only a privileged right to land. The Lāhe, unlike the Gujars, saw themselves, and were seen by others, as bringing about wellbeing and auspiciousness not only for the entire village, but for the whole kingdom.

Manakamana as a deity is arguably sovereign in a number of distinct yet related senses. The king established the deity as a sovereign<sup>9</sup> with her own territory by alienating some of his crown land, granting a tract to Manakamana. This was a reciprocal act since we argue that tantric rituals earlier empowered the king to succeed in conquering his new territories in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

As much as the deity is a sovereign over a domain, she is the ruler of a redistributive institution. In developing this analytical perspective we make use of Sahlins' (1972: 188) argument that redistribution and reciprocity should be kept analytically distinct, since they are embedded in different social organisations. Redistribution is characteristically a form of collective action. The resource flow demarcates social boundaries and meets at a centre, in this case mainly at the temple, but also at the state treasury, and then flows outward. Reciprocity defines a relation between two distinct interests. The exchanges express mutuality, but a relatively fragile one, since distinct interests may come to jeopardise future exchange. In Manakamana the analytical use of redistribution and reciprocity helps us to clarify the modalities underlying different forms of worship and the potential tension between the temple as a chiefly redistributive institution, the kingship and the nascent bureaucratic state.

As stated above, the Goddess is a ruler in her domain, which incorporates her own abode with surrounding temple precincts, lands, settlements and forests. The pagoda temple stands on the edge of a ridge high above the terrace-cultivated hillsides and the lush river valleys. Local worshippers liken her temple with surrounding courtyard to a palace, with regalia and rituals similar to those found in the royal palace in Kathmandu.

As we shall try to demonstrate, there is a continuous flow of transactions between the worshippers and the deity. We will concentrate on the kinds of services and resources offered by her worshippers and returned by the deity in the form of shares (*prasād*) from food offerings to the deity, later distributed as sacred substance. By consuming these edible shares the devotees are incorporated into her domain. This incorporation ensures not only fulfilment of the devotees' wishes, but also the proper running of the cosmos. In a previous article we have in rich detail analysed the process of redistribution of rights in the goddess's land and of pooled resources. These resources devolve back to the temple institution in the form of material for the deity's daily and calendrical worship and wages for her servants, the temple staff (Bleie & Bhattarai 2001). Our rendering of these transactions as "dual" is a purely

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<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that the king thereby recognises the deity's superiority to himself as a human god. The king retains the moral authority as the ultimate protector of the universe.

<sup>10</sup> Burghart (1984) has argued that there exists a native concept of the royal functions, based on three distinct spatial notions: total territorial possessions (*muluk*), realm of ritual authority (*deśa*) and the smaller countries (*deś*) inhabited by distinct ethnic groups. Burghart may be right, though more meticulous ethnographic study is needed before arriving at any firm conclusion whether vernacular usage or ritual codification support his scheme.



pragmatic device, allowing us to divide a complex and rich material between two papers. It is essential to underline that these transactions are indigenously conceptualised as an inseparable whole.

### **The rise of the goddess Manakamana**

A rich contemporary body of legends explains the specific background of the Goddess's ascendancy on a particular lofty mountain ridge, which has been her abode ever since. This corpus of legendary tales, kept alive not only by the population in the locale surrounding the temple but also in other locales of southern and central Gorkha, bears evidence of an unbroken tradition that predates the reign of Prithvi Narayan Shah. This tradition, with its gallery of personae and events, has played an important role in creating and sustaining the collective memory of the Devi's emergence, her kinship to the royal house of Gorkha and her affinity to a Magar from Kaphyāk named Lakhan Thāpā.

Legends recount the affectionate relationship between one of Ram Shah's (1603-1633) queens and her faithful Magar advisor. There are no direct hints at any carnal love. This Queen led a secret life as a Goddess (Manakamana), known only to Lakhan Thāpā who became a *Siddha* (accomplished tantric ascetic) under the guidance of Guru Gorakhnath (of the Kanphata Yogi sect), until her husband and King discovered his queen's true nature.<sup>11</sup> This revelation led to a dramatic turning point, resulting in her husband's death and her own decision to commit *satī* (self-immolation). Before entering the pyre, the queen promised her grieving advisor and devotee that she would reappear in divine form and obliged him to become her first devotee and caretaker.

While there are more- and less-Sanskritised versions of the queen's re-emergence as a divine being, most legends concur in narrating how one day a Gurung farmer struck a black stone with his plough. The ploughman unearthed the stone. Blood and milk flowed from the furrow cut by the plough.<sup>12</sup> This discovery, which showed signs of divinity, immediately became known and was connected to

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<sup>11</sup> Tantrism is a historical current within the larger South Asian religious tradition. Tantric practices often have a magical character and centre predominantly on *Śakti*, empowerment through the feminine principle. Compare Unbescheid's (1980) and Bouillier's (1989) important works on the tantric Kanphata sect in Nepal.

<sup>12</sup> The oral and written evidence is as yet inconclusive, but gives support to the Thapas' (Lāhe) claim that they have taken care of the shrine ever since Manakamana first manifested herself. It is also possible that the first caretakers were Gurungs since the origin myths recounted to us by a number of Gurung, Magar, and Brahmin-Chetri informants all say that Dhandhoj Gurung found the stone while he was constructing a terrace on the ridge of Kaphyāk.

the deceased queen's promise.<sup>13</sup> Lakhan Thāpā and some other local villagers raised a small shrine over her stone manifestation.

In these tracts of Gorkha, people currently conceive of the queen (whose name varies in the tales),<sup>14</sup> Lakhan Thāpā, and Gorakhnath as “historical” persons and contemporaries, whose lives and destinies became tangled through their affiliation with the royal court. Local legends' elaboration of Lakhan and Gorakhnath as great *Yogīs* in control of occult forces, performing great miracles, establishing shrines and protecting kings, is part of a Himalayan tradition in which *Yogīs* are associated with conqueror kings (Bouillier 1989). In this ontology, ordinary human beings may turn into deities through, for example, meditation and self-immolation. Also, divine agencies intervene in human history by temporarily taking on human form. Deeds do not belong to any linear past, but manifest themselves in the present through narrative practices and through sacred geographies. From our historical perspective the life and deeds of Ram Shah are uncontroversial. Whether any historical queen formed the background for the mythologies of Manakamana's ascent to divinity is considerably more problematic to verify. We may only speculate that the queen in question came from a local chiefly clan of Magars or Gurungs. This could explain the deceased queen's reappearance in Kaphyāk as a return to her natal community. We face to some degree similar problems in verifying the historical Lakhan Thāpā, as the royal chronicles (*vamsāvalīs*) simply contain references to the legendary tradition elaborated above (Pant 1984, 1986, 1988, 1993). In the absence of other circumstantial historical evidence we have to admit that there are various alternative scenarios explaining the emergence of a proto-version of the currently existing corpus of legends.<sup>15</sup> These intriguing issues cannot be solved at this stage of research.

Most certainly, before the unification period the cult of the Goddess of Manakamana was a well-established ancestor cult.<sup>16</sup> This cult epitomised the social, cultural and political bonds between a locale predominantly populated by Gurung and Magar clans, and the ruling house of Gorkha.

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<sup>13</sup> See Unbescheid (1985) for a detailed analysis of blood and milk as the most pregnant symbols in Sanskrit versions of the origin legend.

<sup>14</sup> In legends we have collected she is referred to as Candramukhī ('having the appearance of the moon') or Līlavatī (having beautiful appearance). Historical documents also refer to the queen as Mahimāvatī.

<sup>15</sup> The many narratives of the disciple-guru relationship between Gorakhnath and Lakhan Thapa cannot be literally historically interpreted in a Western sense. The historical founder of the Kanphata sect probably lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>16</sup> Due to her unnatural death the queen initially became an uncontrollable, potentially malleable spirit (*vāyū*). By installing the spirit in a shrine her powers could be appropriated for beneficial purposes. References to *vāyū* cults can be found in the early royal chronicles.

### **Kingship and the temple trust of the goddess Manakamana**

The institutionalisation of the *guthi* of Manakamana is intrinsically linked to unification into a great empire by force. Until the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Gandaki region was a patchwork quilt of shifting chiefdoms and principalities. Some aspiring rulers actively built up a tradition of royal authority. In 1559, one aspiring royal lineage (with the title Shah)<sup>17</sup> wrested parts of the territory of Gorkha from local Gurung and Magar chiefs by establishing a basis for its own legitimate authority, which demanded continuous renewal through a righteous (*dhārmik*) rule, sponsorship of village rituals and use of military force. These principalities, which belonged to a league of twenty-four (*Caubisi*), surrounded the kingdom of Gorkha's western and southern flank, and engaged in nearly continuous competition and confrontation with both Gorkha and each other. Gorkha comprised a territory bordering on Tibet in the north, the inner Tarai in the south, the principalities of Lamjung and Tanahun (members of the league of twenty-four) at its western border, and the prosperous city states of Nepal (Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaun) in the east. The Gorkhali rulers had since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Regmi 1995: 4) nurtured an expansionist ambition of overtaking these city-states.

The chosen time for the royal grant of land to Manakamana might not be coincidental. In 1763 the Gorkhali king (Prithvi Narayan Shah) issued the endowment of about 200 *muri* of irrigated (*khet*) land in the name of the Goddess and the *Siddha* (the enlightened one). In that year, Prithvi Narayan Shah's military campaign had succeeded in conquering the strategically important state of Makwanpur, whose location in the southern plains gave control over the Bhimphedi-Hetaura trade route connecting the commercial towns in the Kathmandu Valley with the North Indian plains. The Gorkhali king had still not succeeded in taking the three Malla kingdoms of Kathmandu Valley.

The warrior king's intent when making the donation was most likely not simply to show off his religious sentiment. He knew donations of land were meritorious acts of devotion, which would boost the morale of his soldiers and deter adversaries in his rapidly expanding territory and in the many chiefdoms that had actively resisted his rule. During worship he might have made a vow to the Devi. His lineage had already for generations, perhaps dating 150 years back to King Ram Shah, served her as one of their ancestor deities.<sup>18</sup> His ancestors paid homage to the Devi by constructing her house, a beautiful, pagoda-style temple.<sup>19</sup> So far there is no historical evidence in

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<sup>17</sup> The founder of this royal house was Drabya Shah (1559-1570), a prince from the neighbouring principality of Lamjung.

<sup>18</sup> In popular opinion Manakamana and Gorkha Kalika are classified as the Shah dynasty's "chosen deities" (*iṣṭadevtā*). The Shah dynasty has officially proclaimed Kalika as their only *iṣṭadevtā*. The royal sponsor of *Barṣabandhan* at Manakamana temple has been rather unique, indicating the deity's special relation to the royal line.

<sup>19</sup> We have no evidence stating the name of the donor or time of construction or date of inauguration of the temple.

support of Unbescheid's contention (1985:99) that Ram Shah granted land for the upkeep of worship of Manakamana.

A copper inscription plate<sup>20</sup> fixed to the wall of Manakamana temple for more than two centuries provides the earliest and best documentation we have about the land grant. The plate provides evidence that the royal donor had in mind a wider sacred geography. This holy landscape encompassed the nearby shrine of the god Bakreśwar, his huge *liṅgam* identified with Shiva and the holy caves of the *Siddha* (the enlightened one) - the legendary tantric Lakhan Thāpā who was the proto-historical ancestor of the priestly Lāhe lineage of the Thapa Magar clan. The initial grant by Prithvi Narayan Shah of royal crown land ensured a sound resource base for maintenance of the shrine, for daily worship and ostentatious ceremonies undertaken by local temple officials. They acted on behalf of a ruler who, in spite of some temporary military setbacks, proved overwhelmingly successful until his death in 1775.

With a reasonable degree of certainty we are able to establish the circumstances in which the *gūthi* of Manakamana was established and the ritual of *Barṣabandhan Pujā*<sup>21</sup> became a royally sponsored biannual event. Our findings are based on a number of written sources, oral material and published material about the economic and political history of the period of forced unification (1745-1815).

One documentary source is a magnificent embellished bell hanging in front of the temple gate. The inscription states that Prithvi Narayan Shah offered the bell on the auspicious Full Moon Day, Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> of Baiśākh (April-May) 1828 V.S. (1771).<sup>22</sup> This coincides with the earliest date on which *Barṣabandhan* was celebrated according to our written and oral evidence. Hence it is probable that the king donated the bell to the Goddess during the first ever royally-sponsored *Barṣabandhan* ceremony. The time of Prithvi Narayan Shah's bestowal of the bell thus was three years after the Malla kingdoms had been conquered. The Gorkhali king still aspired to conquer the league of twenty-four (*Caubisi*) principalities that clustered south-west of Gorkha. We have to consider two likely pragmatic political concerns, which may explain the King's conspicuous devotional act.

The donation may have been the fulfilment of a vow the king possibly made during previous worship appropriating Manakamana's divine, protective powers, which had effect during the last dramatic phase of warfare (in 1867-1868) against the

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<sup>20</sup> The full text is published in Bhattarai (1998) and in Unbescheid (1985).

<sup>21</sup> *Barṣabandhan* as a royally-sponsored ceremony is as far as we have been able to ascertain only observed in Manakamana and in Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu. In numerous temples *Barṣabandhan* is part of the ritual cycle, but an insignificant event observed without any state sponsorship.

<sup>22</sup> The original bell was broken and replaced by a new one, on which parts of the original inscription are still preserved.

three city states of Nepal.<sup>23</sup> Burghart (1996: 220) has found similar evidence of divine appropriation before this attack. Three days earlier, Prithvi Narayan Shah's younger brother offered a bell to the Goddess Bhairavi at Nuwakot.<sup>24</sup> Another possibility is that the donation was intended to ensure Manakamana's divine support for the Gorkhali's campaign against the *Caubisi* chiefdoms Lamjung and Kaski, launched in the same month of April 1771. Both these hypotheses could explain what motivated the king to donate the bell on that particular *Barṣabandhan*. The Gorkhali conquest was crowned with success that time, a success in which Manakamana got her recognised share.

Successfully in occupying Kathmandu, Prithvi Narayan Shah chose the city as his new imperial capital. Having entered the city, the warrior-lord ordered the installation of Bhagavati at Basantapur near the palace he was about to take over from the Malla king. The palace-temple became the new centre of his religious realm. Our interviews with the Gubhāju priests responsible for the calendrial worship there have revealed that the historical lunar date of the official consecration and installation of Bhagavati (still re-enacted annually in the Kandelchok *Barṣabandhan* ceremony) occurred one lunar month after the donation of the mentioned bell. To us this seems not entirely unintentional, as we shall explain below.

An ancient legend handed down through several generations of royally appointed Gubhāju priests<sup>25</sup> until the present contains certain historical clues. This legend builds on a mythology which claims that the king received the precious living image of Bhagavati<sup>26</sup> from his patron saint Gorakhnath. The legend contains three main narrative themes. One is about the successive movements of Bhagavati (from Gorkha to Nuwakot and later to Kathmandu) at every stage of the military conquest. On a second level the legend elaborates the Buddhist high priests' magic-religious feat through tantric rites, which successfully settled Bhagavati in Kathmandu. A third story-line tells about how the king as a token of appreciation appointed them as god-guardians. These appointments included duties and honours for the Kandelchok and Nuwakot Bhagavati and also for the quite distantly located Manakamana Devi in her

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<sup>23</sup> In March 1767 the strategically located city of Kirtipur was captured after a massacre. Controlling Kirtipur, the Gorkhali could enclose the three city-states in an effective blockade. Kathmandu fell in September 1767 and Bhadgaun and Patan a couple of months later.

<sup>24</sup> Nuwakot was conquered in 1744. The conquest enabled Gorkhali participation in the very profitable trade between Tibet and Kathmandu. Income from the trade provided the financial base for continued and expanded warfare and was the main reason behind the decision to move the capital.

<sup>25</sup> We thank the Vajrācārya priests from Jhwābahāl *ṭol* Kathmandu, who for generations have held priestly responsibilities at Kandelchok and Manakamana, for sharing this legend with us.

<sup>26</sup> The stone image is not a symbol. The living deity inheres in the stone(s), and she/he must thus be attended to as any human ruler.

mountain abode in Gorkha. The legend obviously serves to legitimate why this lineage of Gubhāju priests has held the right to this temple honour ever since.

The legend's last narrative sequence, about two Buddhist Gubhāju's royal part-time appointment, also indicates that they became responsible for a royally-sponsored ceremony, which almost certainly was *Barṣabandhan Pujā*. Local oral tradition in Manakamana narrates that a royal entourage, including the Buddhist Gubhāju and other high-ranking officials, officiated at the ceremony.

The legend's three main narrative themes<sup>27</sup> invite further, less obvious interpretations. The narration of how the deities' spatial movement followed each phase of the conquest implies that the territorial expansion could only occur through a parallel enlargement of the cosmological realm which had its centres in Gorkha. This realm was metaphorically elaborated in a kinship idiom. Manakamana, Gorkha Kalika (whose shrine was within the Gorkha palace precincts) and Nuwakot Bhagavati were conceived as "three sisters", and Manakamana as the eldest of the three. The third narrative element implies that the final movement could not have succeeded without the Gubhāju's own assistance. The narrative indirectly states that these Newar high priests, themselves subjects of the conquered nations, played an active role in legitimising the conquest of Kathmandu. We also suggest that there was a reason why the subsequent dates were chosen for the consecration of the powerful Bhagavati and for the royally sponsored regular worship of Manakamana.

The new overlords needed to broadcast and institutionalise a collective memory (Connerton 1991) about what was indigenously conceived as the deities' instrumental role in the unification itself. The decision to institute two public ceremonies (in Kathmandu and Manakamana) on the two subsequent auspicious full-moon dates, created two spectacles of royal splendour and protective strength, in which the this-worldly and the cosmological were fused. When the conquering Gorkhali entered the Kathmandu Valley they went to the major temples of the conquered Malla kings.<sup>28</sup> The Mallas' major tutelary deities had instantly to be worshipped, to express submission to the gods' sovereignty in *their* own realm.<sup>29</sup> The Gorkhali thereby managed to receive the deities' blessing. The blessing lent the necessary honours and legitimacy to their rule in the new territory.

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<sup>27</sup> Unbescheid (1985: 106-107) has published a somewhat different version of this legend. In its initial sequence the King first forgets his Bhagavati at Nuwakot, and then with the help of the Newar goldsmiths installs another image to reign undisturbed.

<sup>28</sup> The Basantapur Kumari was the living manifestation of Taleju Bhavani. According to *vamśāvalī*s, the last Malla king of Kathmandu, Jayaprakash, instituted the royal worship of Kumari. There is evidence indicating that the king performed more propitiatory rites of Taleju and other goddesses as the threat of the Gorkhali invasion grew (Allen 1975: 18).

<sup>29</sup> The supreme god in standard Hindu texts is termed *Bhūvanpati*, which means "owner of cosmos". A king can only rule through the deities' conferral of authority in circumscribed religious and political realms.

Text-based evidence - a series of four red sealed (*lāl mohar*) royal letters issued in 1850 V.S. (1793 AD) by King Rana Bahadur Shah (Prithvi Narayan's grandson) provide insights into the organisation of the ceremony.<sup>30</sup> The letters were issued to the *caudhari* and the *adai*<sup>31</sup> at the royal palaces in Nuwakot and Gorkha and contain instructions about procuring worship materials for use in the *Barṣabandhan Pujā*. The *lāl mohar* to the storekeeper at Gorkha Palace shows that the ceremony had already become a regular royally-sponsored ritual. This letter, which contains detailed information about all items for worship to be sent up to Manakamana from the two palaces at Gorkha and Nuwakot, makes it evident that by 1793 the size of the income from the *guṭhi* did not suffice for this rather resource-intensive, royally sponsored ceremony. Later the royal authority improved the *guṭhi*'s income base.

One later royal order (issued in 1841 by King Rajendra) describes in great detail the new and old sources of income - which should cover all expenses, including worship, wages and maintenance.<sup>32</sup> The same letter also mentions a caretaker of the *guṭhi* house (*guṭhi ghar citāi garnyā*), who was to accompany the palace officials to Manakamana. We do not know if the earliest caretaker arrived in Manakamana upon royal appointment or by his own effort. We do know that the first family entrusted with this duty settled close to the temple precincts and established a flower garden for the Goddess. Over time the family who had this caretaker function, a menial outer-temple staff duty considered suitable for lower castes, gradually gained enough social influence to claim a more prestigious role as *guṭhiyār*. The *guṭhiyār* functioned as the king's representative during the *Barṣabandhan Pujā*. We have not been able to trace any evidence about the actual circumstances under which the caretakers successfully negotiated entry to an inner-temple function. The fact that they did is suggestive of the existence of fluid caste relations in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a theme we will return to below when analysing the division of labour between inner- and outer-temple functionaries.

During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Rana-led government introduced a national Legal Code which is generally assumed to have enforced a more rigid caste system in Nepal (Höfer 1979). The National Code of 1854 had few noticeable effects in Manakamana. Local Brahmins did not manage to use the Code to increase their share in the temple honours. The pork-eating Magars (classified in the Code as non-

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<sup>30</sup> Royal orders to *caudhari* at Gorkha Palace; to *adai* Rup Narayan Lakshmishankar of Gorkha, to *adai* Hari Padhya of Nuwakot, to *umrāu*, *dwārya*, *jeṭhāburā*, *kaṭuwāl* of Kaphyāk, Bakrang, Siling, Banauti and Bhogteni, regarding *Barṣabandhan Pujā*, from King Rana Bahadur Shah, Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> bright half of Baiśākha (April-May), 1850 V.S. (1793 AD). All orders were found in the archives of Guthi Samsthan (Guthi Corporation), Kathmandu.

<sup>31</sup> In the hills the post of *caudhari* was as storekeeper of all supplies of oil, salt, ghee etc. at a palace. In the Tarai the same title was used for a high-ranking official responsible for tax collection in a Pargana (Regmi 1978: 128). The *adai* was responsible for the kitchen, and the supplies of flour and rice.

<sup>32</sup> Royal order to Rajendra Newar issued Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> dark half of Māgh, 1898 V.S., archive of Ram Kumar Joshi, Manakamana.

enslaveable and ranked above the water buffalo-eating Newars) remained in control of the office as god-guardians. Key ritual functions within the temple community remained ranked and measured by the relative share in offices, temple honours, land, and other privileges granted by the king and his Devi.

### **Rivalry for the guardianship of the trust**

Three royal orders (to be discussed below) which date back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century bear evidence of rivalry for the position of the Devi's principal guardian (*pujāri*). The conflict involved a Newar Buddhist Vajrācārya priest (Gubhāju or Bāṛā),<sup>33</sup> who according to the local folk tradition settled in Kaphyāk under quite extraordinary circumstances.

A corpus of legends that still hold a strong sway over the collective memory in the locality, irrespective of caste and clan divisions, recounts a time of natural calamities that coincided with continuous warfare by the Gorkhali king. According to the legends, the Goddess revealed in dreams to some locals that she demanded from her people the greatest sacrifice, of a human child, in order to be appeased. No family was ready to offer their child. Panic struck a small group of villagers, who set out on the strenuous journey to the new capital, where they presented their petition for assistance to their royal overlord. According to the legends, the palace ordered the *Vajrācārya* priest Gyānkar Bāṛā to accompany the villagers back to Gorkha in an attempt to appease the fierce deity. As the legend goes, Gyānkar mobilised his magical powers to create a substitute (human) sacrifice in a tantric ceremony. Through his tantric practices Gyānkar succeeded in satisfying the goddess's hunger for human flesh and blood. As the story goes, Manakamana was gradually appeased and pacified.

In the absence of text-based evidence we can only speculate whether the royal authority rewarded Gyānkar Bāṛā with a share, together with the Thāpā Magar *pujāri*, in the priestly responsibility for both *Barṣabandhan* Pujā and for the daily worship of the Goddess. Possibly the villagers themselves, who must have been rather impressed by Gyānkar's superhuman powers, invited him and his family to settle with them above the temple.

This well-known legend's literal narration about the Devi as the destructive agency, causing havoc, contains a hidden sub-text, which refers to a specific historical situation. We interpret the expressions "the Goddess's anger" and "her impatience" as indirectly referring to the continuing Gorkhali warfare, which resulted in a very high death toll among young Magars, and to the subject population's own impatience over losing their young. The paradigmatic sovereign stands meta-

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<sup>33</sup> In the official correspondence Gubhāju is used as a synonym to Vajrācārya. In local parlance the non-honorific term Bāṛā is in use. Only in direct conversation with Vajrācārya priests is the honorific term Gubhāju in use.



phorically for the martial kingship, which literally devours the children of Kaphyāk. One of Prithvi Narayan Shah's four regiments was composed of Magars only. The regiment's principal recruitment base was the Marga-inhabited villages of Gorkha, including Kaphyāk.

It seems to us that there was popular discontent in Kaphyāk over losing most of their young men in a seemingly never-ending war campaign, which had already lasted more or less continuously for decades. Such discontent could not be expressed directly in this political and cultural context. Any direct resistance would be taken as an expression of disloyalty and severely punished. The only politically acceptable and culturally meaningful mode of expressing discontent was through the language of their own deity. The legend directly describes their own Devi as the destroyer of prosperity, and the tantric priest becomes, by royal appointment and protection, the restorer of the social order.

The royal decision to send a tantric priest seems in our interpretation to have been intended to serve a dual purpose. The arrival of Gyānkar and his performance would gradually help in restoring the bond of loyalty between the monarch and his subjects in Kaphyāk. The king might have feared that the unrest in Kaphyāk could spread to neighbouring principalities. News about a successful, royally sponsored human mock sacrifice would circulate rapidly in the surrounding locality, ease the discontent and work to strengthen the loyalty of his supporters while instilling fear in his adversaries' minds. Unbescheid (1985: 101-103) has published one version of this legend, which he interprets as a narrative that explains the origin of the whole cult during the reign of Ram Shah. In Unbescheid's structural interpretation, this narrative element shows an underlying logic of reciprocity. The Queen-Goddess demands a human sacrifice to fulfil her promise to reappear as Goddess. The villagers request assistance from the outsider Gyānkar Gubhāju who creates a substitute child that is sacrificed to appease the Goddess. Unlike Unbescheid, we do not think these elements indirectly hint at a historical connection between the establishment of the cult and an actual substitute sacrifice. There exists absolutely no oral and written evidence for any Newar Buddhist presence in Manakamana before Prithvi Narayan Shah's time or for any ceremonial substitute sacrifice (re-enacting the original sacrifice) before its introduction as part of the *Barṣabandhan* ceremony some time during the 1760s.

Although the Bāṛā's settlement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was initially appreciated, it soon turned into a long and bitter "tug of war" between the Thāpā Magars and Bāṛās over gaining and retaining the exclusive right to the office of *pujāri*. The appointment entailed major honours, the rights to a certain portion of the grain revenue, and responsibilities for the temple administration and as the main guardian of the Devi. Thus, the stakes involved in the appointment were considerable. They included more specifically full responsibilities as revenue collector for all the Devi's tillers, rights to reallocate land if any cultivator failed to pay revenue, overall responsibility for the temple management, and full jurisdictional powers in respect of

five specified criminal offences. The position was renewed annually by the palace. The remuneration included rights to farmland, and the right to control the remaining portion of the total revenue after covering all expenditure.<sup>34</sup>

Assessing three royal orders about renewal or transferral of the priestly position in the period 1814-1820, we find that a descendant of Lakhan Thāpā got his right to the office renewed in 1814. Somewhat surprisingly one Nabal Singh Bāṛā, possibly the son of Gyānkar, already the following year snatched the appointment from the Magar *pujāri*. Referring to the early order from 1814, another royal appointment letter from 1820 (1877 V.S.) again transfers all rights and responsibilities previously conferred to Nabal Singh Bāṛā to one Balamant Thāpā (descendant of Lakhan Thāpā).<sup>35</sup>

The notable absence of similar archival evidence of rivalry over the position between 1820 and early 20<sup>th</sup> century cannot be taken as solid evidence proving that the Bāṛās and Thāpā Magars had ceased fighting for official approval of their assignments at the temple. Narrative elements in some folk stories indicate that they gradually came to an informal local agreement about a sharing of the daily offerings (*bheṭi*) to the Devi. From this period onward we have found evidence of intermarriages between the priestly Bāṛās and the chiefly Lāhe lineage of the Thāpā Magar clan. These intermarriages must have curbed the rivalry over the *pujāri*-ship fairly effectively. We do not preclude the possibility that breaches in caste endogamy occurred in Kaphyāk much earlier, as a response to the demographic imbalance caused by the high numbers of casualties and deaths among men who fought in the army during the Gorkhali empire period (1768-1814).

### **Kingship and rituals in honour of Manakamana**

*Barṣabandhan* in Manakamana is the ceremonial year's most important ritual cycle,<sup>36</sup> celebrated both in the Devi's inner sanctum and in her temple courtyard. Unlike in Manakamana, in Gorkha town the main ceremonial worship of the royal lineage deity, the Gorkha Kalika, one of Manakamana's sisters, falls within the pan-Nepali celebrations of *Baḍā Daśāī* and *Caite Daśāī*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> This right to a share of the grain revenue is clearly stated in official correspondence until the Rana Period (1846 AD).

<sup>35</sup> All three orders are published in Bhattarai (1998). These orders are to be found in the archives of the Guthi Samsthan in Kathmandu.

<sup>36</sup> Lecomte-Tilouine (1993) has documented that Manakamana is a rather prominent member of the local pantheon in the Magar-dominated parts of northern Gulmi District, located in the western-most part of the Gandaki region.

<sup>37</sup> Apart from *Daśāī*, other all-Nepali calendar festivals observed in Manakamana area are: *Mahāśivarātri*, *Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī*, *Tij*, *Śrāvaṇ Saṃkrānti* and *Nughāgī*.

Understanding *Barṣabandhan* as a *local* festival and *Daśāī* as a *national* one could easily be misleading. Firstly, it is correct that the religious festival is celebrated within the spatial confines of Manakamana. However, we would be wrong in using the term “local” in a more inclusive sense, involving context of origin and cultural meanings. Based on our insights about the particular political and cultural context in which *Barṣabandhan* was instituted, we argue that *Barṣabandhan* was, and has remained, a *localised* festival. *Barṣabandhan* represents an institutional arena at the interface between the state and Nepali society. Divine kingship is expressed in the root metaphors of both *Barṣabandhan* and *Daśāī*. The king emerges in both the ritual cycles as the first devotee and the victorious protector of the cosmos.

*Barṣabandhan* placement within the lunar calendar in relation to both Buddhist Newari and Hindu festivals provides us with certain clues by which we can grasp the underlying cosmological ideas. *Barṣabandhan* is celebrated in mid-May and mid-November, and falls some weeks before and after the four-month period (*caturmāsa*) when Vishnu is asleep.<sup>38</sup> Both the biannual ceremonies fall at significant points in the agricultural cycle. The spring *Barṣabandhan* is just before the main season of planting paddy seedlings and the autumn festival falls right after the golden sheaths of grain have been brought to the threshing floor.

The ceremony is initiated on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the waxing moon, after *aṣṭamī* (in Baiśākh and Kārtik). The whole ten-day cycle (*Pañcamī Guthi*), is named after the only four days that are considered auspicious and devoted to both public and secret tantric worship. During the secret worship only the Gubhāju priest (currently representing the Guthi Corporation), the *guthiyār thakāli* (representing the royal devotee) and the *jeṭhāburā* (from the local *guthi*) are present. While the secret worship takes place in Manakamana’s shrine, Bakreśwor is also worshipped in his open mountain shrine situated in the sacred forest above. Also commemorating Gyānkar Gubhāju’s substitute sacrifice, the *Murkaṭṭā* - the beheaded torso- and the head (which is buried by Bhairab’s shrine) are secretly worshipped. The Gubhāju and the *thakāli* usually appear in the temple courtyard toward the end of the ceremony in the temple. There the Magar *pujāri* and a Brahmin priest await them to assist in sanctifying five goats and two buffaloes. The huge crowd of devotees observes carefully if the sacred acts proceed in the ritually proper manner.

In this essay we refrain from analysing the multi-layered meanings of the complex ritual sequences.<sup>39</sup> It suffices to say that since nearly all these worshipping implements are used in Newar Buddhist rituals, and most also in Hindu rituals, they

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<sup>38</sup> Vishnu falls asleep on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the bright half of Āṣāḍh (June-July) and wakes up on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the bright half of Kārtik (October-November). We notice that most Hindu calendrical festivals (*Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī*, *Tīj*, *Daśāī* and *Tihār*) fall inside of this four-month period, an inauspicious period during which natural calamities often occur and both humans and animals often fall prey to diseases.

<sup>39</sup> Admission to these esoteric rites is generally restricted to the officiants only. One of the authors of this article was cordially granted permission to observe the rituals.

have both Buddhist and Hindu religious references.<sup>40</sup> The religious meanings of *Barṣabandhan Pujā* are thus multivalent and vary not only between religious specialists and commoners, but also between the various officiants conducting the ceremony behind the gold-plated barred doors of the inner shrine. We confine ourselves here to mention briefly two ritual sequences: *saṃkalpa* and *pujā* of the *Murkaṭṭā*. *Samkalpa* is an initial public act of worship that expresses a commitment. The declaration specifies the donors' names, date and place of the ritual, the types and amount of offerings, and the number of ritual specialists involved in the donation. Such a ritual declaration initiates each stage of public or esoteric worship during *Barṣabandhan*. The way the announcement is displayed demonstrates the relevance of one of our major theoretical contentions, that the ceremony is a spectacle – a representative arena for the royal devotee, his gifts and his subjects. In the secret *pujā* for the *Murkaṭṭā*, head and torso are ritually reunited. In spite of the secrecy surrounding the rituals, local people are aware of them. They take the symbolic reunification to re-enact the unification of Nepal. The head signifies the kingdom Gorkha and the body the possessed territories.

The signifying and transactional similarities that define the relationship between devotees and deities in both the public and secret rituals, and the relationship between commoners and rulers in other ritual contexts, are striking. The deities are indeed worshipped as sovereigns: bathed, clothed, adorned with royal regalia, fed and requested for help and intervention.<sup>41</sup> Our interpretation finds support in much-recited scriptures, which hail the Goddess as the paradigmatic sovereign, as well as in popular notions. Indeed, common devotees liken this worship to a conjugal wedding ceremony wherein their deity is the bride and Bhairab her groom.

Since a Hindu warrior king more than two centuries ago instituted the ritual cycle of *Barṣabandhan*, it appears to have thrived throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in a strikingly non-competitive way between Buddhist and Hindu ritual specialists and commoners. The Devi's proximity to a righteous (*dhārmik*) kingship (*rāj*), annually renewed and displayed in *Barṣabandhan*; her powers as a sovereign in her own right, fulfilling individual wishes when approached through worship; the different caste backgrounds of her temple servants (staff) and of her *guthi* tenants – are all factors contributing to her immense popular appeal. People worship gods and goddesses like Manakamana not because they are pure, but due to their reputation as being powerful.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gellner (1992:146-162), in his study of Newar Buddhism in Kathmandu Valley, describes in rich ethnographic detail a similar situation.

<sup>41</sup> At the heart of the *pujā* is the asymmetrical transaction of foods, which is both supportive and expressive of the distance between the deity and the devotee. A similar hierarchical distance marks the ceremonial feeding of members of the royal house.

<sup>42</sup> Manakamana is considered by many to be a blood-drinking deity akin to Bhairab. We suggest the Goddess is placed in an intermediate category between blood-drinking and vegetarian deities, since the officiant takes every care not to allow any blood from beheaded animals to spill over her stone image.

That the Devi is a sovereign person is vividly expressed in the worshippers' attitudes, which shift from piety and veneration to awe, fear and enthusiastic subordination. The devotees observing the *Barṣabandhan* ceremony share a common understanding of it as a display of royal grandeur and authority. If properly enacted without any inauspicious signs or defilement, the cycle of ceremonies demonstrates to them the king's empowerment through their own local deity. Properly empowered, the king as a sovereign can ensure the orderly running of the cosmos, the transition of the seasons, the propagation of wealth and prosperity and the control of vengeful and mischievous spirits. Common people are themselves not merely passive observers of a display of royal authority. As worshippers entitled to receive some of the deity's *prasād*, they themselves become incorporated into the realm of sovereignty.

Manakamana has remained a national arena displaying a syncretistic and flexible religious politics. This emerges in particular when we look at how devotees have located themselves in relation to both Tantric Buddhist and Hindu symbols, and when we consider the shifting hierarchy between temple offices which admitted both newcomers and longtime residents from different caste and ethnic backgrounds. Even as political mobilisation around ethnic markers has become important in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the religious and political centrality of Magars and Buddhist Newars in this prominent temple trust have not been much used to forward sectarian ethnic or nationalist claims.

### **The role of the temple in the redistribution of honours**

We have discussed the proto-historic role of the famous Vajrācārya priest Gyānkar Bāṛā who was warmly received in Kaphyāk village after his tantric feat of pacifying the vengeful Devi. Our examination of written and oral evidence leads us to conclude that the Buddhist Gubhāju's ritual role in *Barṣabandhan* has remained virtually unchallenged during a period of more than 150 years. We have examined other text-based and oral evidence, which shows that after the Gubhāju (Bāṛā) priestly household had settled in the village, its members claimed a larger share in the ritual honours in the daily worship at the temple. At least in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bāṛā and Lāhe sub-lineages battled for exclusive rights to the position of *pujāri*. The palace itself intervened regularly in this conflict, mostly by renewing the right of Lakhan Thāpā's descendants, but sometimes also transferring the office to the contesting descendants of Gyānkar Bāṛā.

The Bāṛā Newars were not the only Newar immigrants to arrive in Manakamana in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We have discussed the settlement of another family (from Kathmandu), who first was appointed caretaker for the trust's office and later *guṭhiyārs*. As the idea of a caste hierarchy was reinforced outside the temple context of Manakamana in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *guṭhiyār* position became an increasingly valuable asset in the lineage's marriage strategies.

The *guthiyārs* managed to establish affinal relations with Newar merchant castes settled in Gorkha town and elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

The occupational histories of the Bāṛā and of the *guthiyār* lineages (who eventually started using the high-ranking surnames Joshi and Shrestha) provide us with glimpses into the tactics employed by enterprising newcomers struggling for social rank and economic security. The Gorkhali rulers' tactic of "incorporation" of the Newars from the Valley comes to the fore in our case study. Offering official service to members of high-ranking priestly families, both Buddhist and Hindu, ensured loyalty. The royal appointment of descendants from one prominent Magar lineage as the god-guardians of Manakamana helped to strengthen the identification of the Magars of the Gandaki "heartland" (to use Regmi's term) with the Gorkhali "proto-nation" project. Another tactical strategy, hardly visible in Manakamana, yet important in Gorkha town and in the Gandaki region at large, was encouraging Newar traders, shopkeepers and goldsmiths to settle along established trade routes to establish new market centres and trading stations there.

In this subsection we argue that the redistribution of honours or precedence in the form of temple functions and in shares of the redistributed *prasād* of the deity were closely interlinked. Our examination shows a striking variability in the order of precedence of the ritual functions of temple officials and in their shares of the *prasād* in the three main forms of worship - the calendrical festivals, daily and monthly worship, and instrumental worship for the benefit of the worshipper. It may be analytically useful to conceive of "the sum" of any collective shareholder's rights in honours as their share in both the worshipping rituals and the redistributive process of the temple. "Summing up" shares in this context is no simple quantitative exercise. It demands solid contextual judgement.

Since we have previously discussed the ritual shares of the Gubhāju, the *guthiyār thakāli*, the Magar *pujāri* and the Brahmin priests in *Barṣabandhan*, we now turn to scrutinise their shares in the Devi's distributed *prasād*. *Barṣabandhan* is brought to an end when the officials traverse the crowded temple courtyard and enter the trust's office. Well inside, the Gubhāju and the Brahmin priest exchange a mutual greeting (*namaskār*). This obeisance deserves commentary since it expresses a notable absence of hierarchy between the two officials. The chief deities' holy *prasād* is then redistributed. This redistributive process confers honour on all the recipients, including the main officiants and the common worshippers. The redistribution of the sacred food follows a ranked order. The priests and the royal donor's representative come first, followed by the other temple servants and lastly

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<sup>43</sup> The *guthiyārs* maintained their obligations for annual lineage worship in their hometown until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For all other purposes the *guthiyārs* form their own localised patrilineage in Manakamana. The lineage has split into two sub-lineages. One holds the first right as *guthiyārs*. The other has the right to fulfil the duties at the temple when the seniors of the other lineage observe pollution. Sometimes during the festival this division of duties causes internal disputes over relative rank.

the common devotees. Here we choose to concentrate our discussion on the inside and outside temple officials' relative shares, which signal a changing configuration of rank.

The rights of the Magar *pujāri*, the Gubhāju, the two Brahmin priests and the *guṭhiyār thakāli* in the *prasād* do not signal any clear-cut hierarchical order. The participants themselves and the local devotees rather think the shares reveal a functional division of ritual work. For example, the Gubhāju priest is the only one to receive meat from the snout and mouth, as he is mainly responsible for uttering the sacred incantations. Similarly the *guṭhiyārs* get the ears and eyes as concrete symbols of the nature of their services.<sup>44</sup> Only the share of the untouchable service caste, who get the tail as it is said to chase away insects from any animal's body, is associated with the body metaphor - expressive of the lowest-ranking servant function.

*Barṣabandhan* is unquestionably the most important annual calendrical festival in Manakamana. *Daśāī* is another principal ritual. Since the Guthi Corporation was established in 1964, it has taken the responsibilities previously held by the royal authority as the major donor of sacrificial buffaloes for the worship of Durga, worshipped in the variant form of Manakamana Devi. During the 15-day ritual cycle, one of the two Aryal Brahmin priests occupies the central role in the rituals, relegating the Magar *pujāri* to an auxiliary priest who prepares materials, cleans the sanctum and consecrates the animals. The Aryal Brahmin, in this context, is a *mul purohit*,<sup>45</sup> performing the esoteric rites in the inner sanctum helped by the Magar *pujāri*. The distribution of *prasād* following the main ritual steps of *Daśāī* signals a more clear-cut hierarchical order than *Barṣabandhan*. The officiants interpret their relative rank in light of their unequal shares in the *prasād* and unequal roles in the rituals, and agree in according the Aryal Brahmin the highest ranked honour.<sup>46</sup>

To serve the Goddess of Manakamana daily has been the Magar *pujāri*'s principal duty since the earliest days of the temple. The *pujāri* enlivens his Devi, invoking her by sacred formulas, anointing, adorning and feeding her before the temple opens to the public in the morning and reopens later in the evening. Also, the *pujāri* conducts regular worship, including blood sacrifice, during all full moon days (*pūrṇimā*), the first day of every Nepali month (*saṁkrāntī*), and on the two fortnightly *aṣṭamī*. On all these occasions the Magar *pujāri* holds the exclusive right to touch the living stone images, prepares the pure food to be offered and ensures the purity of all other worship materials.

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<sup>44</sup> Otherwise the distribution to the other office holders is usually not based on clear rules, expressive of any hierarchy. It has however occurred, that the head is sent to the King.

<sup>45</sup> *Mul purohit*, or Main Priest, is a categorical designation for the top position within the hierarchy of priestly functions. In Manakamana the Aryal Brahmin is not conceived of as the temple's top functionary.

<sup>46</sup> During *Caitra Daśāī* these shares are inverted. The Magar *pujāri* has the right to the whole body, except for the left leg, which is the Aryal Brahmin's share.

The appointed drummers from the Damai caste<sup>47</sup> serve the Goddess in the mornings and evenings by playing auspicious (*maṅgal*) music during the daily worship and during calendrical rites and social festivals. The musicians have never been admitted to the inner sanctum, as far as we have been able to ascertain. They keep the instruments in their own houses. Since the instruments are considered the Goddess's holy possession, they are laid out before the Devi daily.

Throughout the entire historical period under investigation, the Magar *pujāri* has been the main officiant during worship for the personal benefit of the devotee (*bhākal pujā*).<sup>48</sup> The *pujāri* evokes his Devi, offering gifts of fragrant flowers, money, precious jewellery and appetising foods, including animal sacrifices or substitutes. All sacred food offerings, except the brilliantly red-stained rice (which is considered unfit to consume) are returned to the devotees. The *guṭhiyār thakāli* customarily keeps any offered precious jewellery under lock and key. It has been considered the *pujāri*'s privilege to retain the cash offerings to the Devi.<sup>49</sup> Many devotees think that the offered money transfers impurity and sins from them to the recipient *pujāri*. Even so, neither the god-guardian himself nor his co-villagers conceive of him as the repository of impurities.

Bhattarai (1998) has shown that there was a well-functioning temple organisation in the old capital Gorkha during the time the trust of Manakamana was established (1760-1800). The structure of the multi-caste temple organisation at Gorkha Darbar embodied a rather clear-cut hierarchy of priests (Brahmins), auxiliary priests (including Magars) and outer menial temple staff.

Unlike in Gorkha Darbar, then and now, the relative shares held by the various patrilineages and sub-lineages in the worshipping of Manakamana exhibit no consistent hierarchy. Employing the spatial metaphor "pyramidal" for the graded structure underlying the shares in *Barṣabandhan*, we find that the pyramid "flattens out" near the top. We say this since the (Buddhist) Gubhāju and (Hindu) *guṭhiyār thakāli* are undoubtedly the main officiants, while distinctions between the Magar *pujāri*, the Aryal Brahmin and the *jeṭhāburā*, who all function as auxiliary helpers, are hardly noticeable. In contrast to this fluidity, the Damai musicians' share confers on them the lowest rank.

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<sup>47</sup> We have identified a *lāl mohar* from 1875 V.S. (1818 AD) in the archives of Guthi Samsthan which appoints Dhanya Damai as drummer and assigns land as wages. Regmi (1978: 795) refers to a *jāgīr* grant to Rupa Champa Damai at Manakamana Temple in 1847 V.S. (1790 AD).

<sup>48</sup> Some high-caste pilgrims choose to bring along their own house priest, who then takes over parts of the ritual actions otherwise performed by the Magar *pujāri*.

<sup>49</sup> The *pujāri*'s enormously increasing income is bound to become a very delicate political and legal issue, as the income of the priestly lineage at Pashupatinath Temple has already become.



The pyramidal form of shares and precedence at *Daśāī* exhibit a characteristically “pointed” form. The Aryal Brahmin, acting as *mul purohit*, holds first precedence, followed by the Magar *pujāri* and the Marahatta and Aryal Brahmin reciters. Strikingly, none of those Brahmin lineages that currently hold entitlements in the rituals have in their possession any written official documents certifying their rights. We therefore cannot completely rule out that the two patrilineages’ involvement is of a more recent origin than we initially assumed. *Daśāī* has on the other hand enjoyed some ideological and administrative importance as a state/royally sponsored event in Manakamana since the early days of the Trust.<sup>50</sup> From then onward Brahmin priests most likely had a limited stake in the temple’s ritual process, though they were not admitted as fully-fledged trust members with full rights to trust land (Bleie and Bhattarai 2001).

Drawing general conclusions about the total shares of the different sub-lineages in Manakamana is a challenge. This is so, not simply because of their varying precedence in different principal ritual events. We have also to explain the relative importance we place on scriptural orthodox notions and on popular ideas in analysing the religious significance of ranked honours entailed in daily and monthly *pujā*, calendrical public festivals and worship for the benefit of the devotee. From the scriptural point of view of both Vajrayana Buddhism and Hinduism, worship for instrumental ends represents the lowest form of worship (Gellner 1992). The Magar *pujāri* holds the main share in such worship. Furthermore, he is the main officiant of the daily and lunar worship of the Goddess. Such worship is indeed from a scriptural point of view *essential* for enlivening the deity, maintaining her protection and ensuring auspiciousness in and beyond the community.

Contrary to the scriptural point of view, the Goddess’s own tenants and the overwhelming majority of the worshippers do not consider *bhākal pujā* as a lower form of worship. Moreover, the Goddess’s own tillers understand the relations between themselves and the sub-lineages who hold privileged appointments in the temple as a functional division of shared responsibilities. They all depend on the sovereign Manakamana, whom they are obliged to serve and to whom they owe everything in life. The whole ritual process would break down, causing disaster for all if one function should fail.

Our ethnography therefore demonstrates how misleading it would be to base our analysis solely on a Brahmanistic theological notion of ritual purity, in which the Brahmin priests hold first precedence over a religious domain separated from a kingly political domain. In this ideal model of Brahmin priesthood, morally coded substance is derived both from birth and from a pure way of life. In addition, the Brahmin priest is differentiated from other ritual specialists by his special scholarly knowledge derived from a school of priests. These criteria are of minor if any

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<sup>50</sup> The already mentioned copper plate over the entry gate from 1821 V.S. shows that the responsibilities for mobilising resources and organising *Daśāī* fell on the *guthi*.

importance in the vibrant, popular religion practised in Manakamana's honour. Neither the Aryal Brahmin nor the Magar *pujāri* are expected to spend hours daily in preparatory purification rituals. Both espouse a variety of rationalisations to justify their own omissions and display in conversation a limited grasp of the underlying theological meanings of the texts they recite from.

The *pujāri* position has until recently been considered by far the most powerful chiefly position in the whole locality by the trust members and indeed by the farming population in the wider locality. This position has entailed a comprehensive set of assignments as local headman (*amālī*) since the trust's early days. Since those early years the *pujāri*, in his capacity as headman, controlled the collection of revenue and the allocation of trust land to new settlers. Administrative changes in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only formalised his position as a full-fledged chief. The prestigious appointment itself was a renewable gift from the supreme overlord in Kathmandu. The gift created a deep social bond based on loyalty, tested and affirmed through the cumbersome system of annual renewals. The royal appointment lent sovereignty to the *pujāri*, who became a minor "king" in Kaphyāk, with his own circumscribed domain. At *Daśāi* and at *Sāune Sarṅkrantī* and *Tij*, the *amālī* appeared as a small "king" with his own "court" (*darbār*) of tax collectors and deferential co-villagers. In addition, the *pujāri* in Manakamana controlled many of the overall administrative and management functions at the temple elsewhere controlled by *gūṭhiyār*s (Regmi 1978a:708). Due to their royal assignments, the Lāhe (*pujārī*) lineage, the *gūṭhiyār* and the Bāṅrā lineages have in Manakamana enjoyed privileges such as exemption from the onerous obligatory duty to offer labour to the central royal authority and to their own trust.

Based on the above we conclude that the *pujāri* position was at the centre of a double redistributive system of land rights and religious honours. The Magar *pujāri*'s total share in this double redistributive system remained larger than any other's share, at least until the rather sweeping political and administrative changes in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Until the downfall of the Rana-regime in 1951 the *gūṭhi* of Manakamana was dealt with by a unified royal capacity, which was both judicial and administrative.<sup>51</sup> The *gūṭhi* enjoyed in some respects favourable treatment in the form of occasional exemptions from administrative changes in rates and forms of taxation. The royal authority's interference was basically in two forms: arbitration of temple disputes, such as the Bāṅrās' and Lāhes' conflict over the right to the position as *pujāri*, and very occasional adjustments of tax rates and payment forms. The return of the royal Shahs as the key power-holders in the early 1950s, and the early attempts to

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<sup>51</sup> This was not the overall situation. Major changes in the structure of the Nepalese polity occurred from around the turn of the century; differentiation between the economic and the political occurred through step-wise changes in land tenure (see Burghart 1983, and Bleie & Bhattarai 2001).

democratise the mode of government, including the first steps towards a more legal-rational mode of bureaucratic government, separated Manakamana as well as other trusts from the Hindu monarch's direct control. A rapid bureaucratisation and a series of reforms occurred. These reforms in crucial ways came to alter the ancient relationship between the central state and the trusts.

With the establishment of the Guthi Corporation in 1964, the *guthi* of Manakamana came under its jurisdiction. Some years earlier, the system of local government was changed and the so-called Panchayat system was established,<sup>52</sup> which radically altered the functions and relative status of the temple offices. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the temple officials in Manakamana included the *pujāri*, the *guthiyār thakālī*, one drummer and two or three other musicians who played wind instruments, one messenger (*kaṭuwāl*), one worker (*kārbārī*) and one *jeṭhābuṛā*. The actual status of *kaṭuwāl*, *kārbārī* and *jeṭhābuṛā* declined as a result of the sweeping post-Rana local government reforms. The *pujāri* lost the vital judicial and most of the administrative functions he had single-handedly controlled before the new local Panchayat bodies were established. A part of the right as tax collector was also taken away, as the cultivators were to pay most of their dues directly to the District Land Revenue Office. The *pujāri*, the *guthiyār thakālī* and their kinsmen responded quickly to the threat of the shrinking power base of their offices and ran for election to the Panchayat Council. Empowered through their ritual rank and social status, these lineages have come to occupy most of the posts in the local electoral bodies in Manakamana until the present.

## Conclusion

Our investigations of the relationship between the trust of Manakamana and Prithvi Narayan Shah cast light on the institution of kingship in the new Empire State. We have attempted to highlight the political and cultural context of the temple's establishment – particularly the underlying cultural categories of kingship, worship and authority – a context which motivated Prithvi Narayan Shah's intensified patronage of Manakamana and led him to establish a religious trust in her name. These acts of royal patronage were not only simply signs of victory, they may actually have had something to do with the military outcome. Certainly, the Gorkhali themselves were led by a model of causality which attributed success and defeat to their patron deities. At moments of military victory (or succession to the crown by other means) support of powerful *Yogīs* and deities' conferral of some of their authority on the new sovereign were both essential for establishing his legitimate

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<sup>52</sup> King Mahendra regarded the four-tiered structure at village, district, zonal and state levels, together with kingship, as well suited to promoting development in Nepal. All sovereignty was still vested in the king, and the panchayats had only an advisory function.

rule. The institution of Nepalese kingship formed a particular political economy based on a certain distribution of authority, which was intimately linked to resource allocation based on a particular cultural logic of redistribution.

The redistribution of offices, including their renewals, forged relations based on a hierarchical solidarity between kings and temple officials and trust-tenants, who all received their part of the honours by accepting the royal donations and by participating in the biannual royally sponsored *Barṣabandhan*. This continuous redistributive process not simply consolidated, but notably strengthened the resident Magar, Gurung and Newar clans' identification with the Gorkhali proto-nation project in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The temple institution that evolved incorporated the two lower units of social organisation, the villages and the sub-lineages, within a single encompassing entity with ritual, political, economic and judicial functions. We have described the rights and the modes of worshipping and receiving temple honours. We find that the nature of participation is ranked if analysed with regard to the principal categories of participants: the royal donor, temple officials and common devotees. When we examine the temple officials' own notions of their relative shares in honours we find a structure characterised by functional interdependence rather than by hierarchy. *Daśai*, unlike the annually most important festival *Barṣabandhan* and the other calendrical festivals, shows a more distinctly Brahmanistic hierarchical order.

In Manakamana, Buddhist Gubhāju priests have played prominent roles, initially during the unification period as members of the royal entourage, then in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as resident temple officials and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries again as officials of the king and the Guthi Corporation. The result is an enduring Buddhist tantric influence on the form and content of *Barṣabandhan*. On this basis we say that at least this ritual process in Manakamana, as a national arena for a meeting between Buddhism and Hinduism, is not one of clear-cut hierarchical encompassment. Whether the syncretism of *Barṣabandhan* in Manakamana is an exception that confirms this rule in Nepal, deserves further investigation.

We have in this study combined ethnographic and historical approaches in an attempt to avoid the danger of substantialising categories and hierarchies by underestimating or misinterpreting the context and the process of change, and thereby assigning static meanings to fluid, if not egalitarian relationships stretching over a considerable time span. We have presented a temple-centric view of the social relations between kings, chiefs and commoners, arguing against a view which sees the temple as a secondary manifestation of kingship, kinship and caste. Instead, the Manakamana temple and indeed other principal temples in Nepal deserve to be analysed as constituting a central domain for constituting and renewing multiple social relations, indeed for solving conflicts as well as instituting submission.

In the case of Manakamana the same generous gifts from the royal centre to Manakamana in the periphery came to carry the seeds of destabilisation of the very

hierarchy the gifts were supposed to consolidate. The Devi's god-guardian became a sovereign in his own right, commanding respect and services from his subordinates. Some of the latter were at times envious and had enough standing and influence to contest his honours. In their capacity as protectors, the kings themselves for many generations mediated the rivalry for the right to the position. The gradual split between the administrative and jurisdictional functions, which finally led to the establishment of the Guthi Corporation, shifted the temple politics over rights to offices from the palace (*darbār*) to the courts.

Perhaps because Manakamana is a relatively small temple institution, we have found few serious disputes. Dynamism and flexibility have been its predominant characteristics, evident in the documented caste mobility, which seems related to the fact that the "dominant sub-caste" was a Magar lineage. This lineage has successfully managed to monopolise principal chiefly and priestly functions due to their royal patronage. We would stress that this mobility, so cleverly utilised by the Newars, was never open to the untouchable castes in the locality.

From being a divine protector of military prowess and source of authority to warrior kings, the Goddess of Manakamana gradually became - as an integral part of the nation-building process - a national wish-fulfilling and protective deity. Manakamana no longer granted personal protection and prosperity exclusively to the Shah rulers and her own tillers. Until this day, commoners as well as rulers concerned with their unpredictable fortunes and futures have found it deeply meaningful to appear in front of Manakamana in her imposing abode on a mountaintop in Gorkha.

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*Kāṭṭo khuvāune:*

## **Two Brahmins for Nepal's Departed Kings**

Marianna Kropf

The massacre at Nārāyaṇahiṭī Royal Palace in Kathmandu on Friday evening, 1 June 2001, left the country bereft not only of its king but also a good part of the royal family. Three days later the state-owned Nepal Radio officially announced the death of Crown Prince Dipendra, who had been declared the new king while lying unconscious in hospital, with his uncle, Gyanendra, acting as regent ad interim. Only half an hour later, at 11 a.m., the same radio station together with Nepal TV reported live from Nasalchowk, Hanumandhoka, where the *siṃhāsanārohaṇa* ceremony, the 'accession to the royal lion-throne' was about to be performed on Gyanendra, the late King Birendra's younger brother. A chain of events beyond anyone's imagination was underway that would leave the whole of Nepal's citizenry in a state of shock. The breakdown of ideals embedded in a royal tradition that spans the politico-religious history of the country created a vacuum of values and orientations that will not easily be filled up again.

Amidst the chaos, the palace priests had to concentrate on completing the funeral rituals for the untimely departed kings and eight other members of the royal family. A good number of the mortuary rituals prescribed for the first thirteen days after death did not differ from the practice common to upper-status Hindus, but the 11<sup>th</sup> day offered one exception in the form of a bewildering ritual called *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*. A local brahmin consumed an elaborate meal, was then dressed and ornamented as the late king, showered with presents, and finally sent away on an elephant. He was not only supposed to leave his family forever but also the valley. Not least because its concluding part took an unexpected turn, heated debates arose concerning whether or not such a practice was in accordance with present-day conceptions of kingship and ongoing tradition.

The following overview of the death rituals performed will provide a description of the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* ('accepting of the *kāṭṭo* meal') or *kāṭṭo khuvāune* ('feeding of the *kāṭṭo* meal') as performed for the two kings. The underlying concepts and beliefs requiring a brahmin to be sent off as a despised *kāṭṭe* for the rest of his life require some explanation. Ritual elements – specific forms of *dāna* ('gift-giving') and *brāhmaṇa bhojana* ('feeding of brahmins') – observable at a very critical stage of the postmortuary process harbour some of the answers. Rumours that remains from the late king's funeral pyre were added to the *kāṭṭo* dishes call for additional explanation. The same holds for the selection of the brahmin undergoing *kāṭṭo-*

*grahaṇa*. On which *śāstras* is this whole practice based, and how is it understood with respect to its ritual context within a Nepalese setting? What about the historical sources of the tradition – in particular, its exclusiveness to kings? And finally: What about its future? The *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* struck many contemporary Nepalis as a strange ritual relic. Its actual performance and the growing controversy in its aftermath not only indicate a tendency for rituals to be critically questioned by the populace, they also point towards an increasing pressure on ritual processes to conform to rational criteria.<sup>1</sup>

### The ritual framework

As the schedule of events shows, the death rituals for both kings evince a pattern common to present-day upper-class Hindu communities (see Tables 1 and 2).<sup>2</sup>

The funeral processions for King Birendra and Dipendra from the Military Hospital in Chauni to Paśupati and their subsequent cremations (*dāhasaṃskāra*) were completed within one day after death. Ārya-ghāṭ on the bank of the Bagmati River, below the western gate of Paśupatināth temple, is the cremation *ghāṭ* for Kathmandu's royalty,<sup>3</sup> while Kālamocana-ghāṭ in the southern part of Kathmandu has been the chosen *ghāṭ* for *antyeṣṭi* and *śrāddha* rituals since the Śāhas.<sup>4</sup> It was in this latter location that the *karmakriyā* rituals of the following days were performed by the *kriyāputra*,<sup>5</sup> including the daily offering of a *piṇḍa* in order to progressively create a subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) for the *pretātman*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If not specified or obvious from the context, the technical terms are given in their Sanskrit stem forms, ignoring proper declination. Local names are reproduced in English spelling if so encountered. I am very grateful to Philip Pierce for revising my English and notifying me of inconsistencies, and to Dinesh Raj Pant for reviewing my Nepali transcriptions.

<sup>2</sup> For the details provided, I have relied on information kindly shared by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita, *rājapurohita* and Joint Secretary at the Darbar *pūjā-koṭhā*.

For a more detailed description of day-by-day *antyeṣṭi* and *śrāddha* rituals similar to the pattern documented here, see Levy & Rājopādhyāya (1992: 677-686), Toffin (1979), Michaels (1998: 148-75), Bennett (1983: 92-123) and Parry (1985: 614-624).

<sup>3</sup> The stone platform at Ārya-ghāṭ, where kings have been cremated since medieval times, is called *rājadīpa*. The royal burning ghāṭs of the Patan and Bhaktapur Malla kings were Saṅkhamūla- and Hanumānghāṭ respectively. See Regmi (1965: 710).

<sup>4</sup> *Antyeṣṭi* or *antyakarma* denotes the final compulsory life-cycle ritual. It covers the period between dying and attaining the state of an ancestor (*pitr*) – in the context discussed here, up to the twelfth day after death. On this day *sapiṇḍikaraṇa*, the ritual joining of the deceased to his forefathers, takes place.

The following *śrāddha* consists of a series of memorial and offering rituals performed in honour and for the benefit of the ancestors. Some of these rituals are undertaken upon the completion of *sapiṇḍikaraṇa*; others will only be performed after *ābdika-śrāddha* one year later.

<sup>5</sup> The duties of the *kriyāputra* are generally assumed by the eldest son. If there is no son, another close relative may be appointed for this task. In the case of the royal family, a relative performed this duty for the late King Birendra and Queen Aishvarya. For the sons and the late king's youngest brother Dhirendra, brahmins serving in the Royal Nepalese Army were hired. The eldest son of a king and heir to the throne is allowed neither to assume the duties

As one act of the final day of the *kriyā* period, a piece of the dead king's skull was brought to a *śrāddha-tīrtha*<sup>7</sup> for submersion. For generations of Nepal's kings a *tīrtha* at the banks of Kālīgaṇḍakī River close to Riḍī has been chosen to perform *asthipravāha* ('consigning the bones to the waters'). The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo khuvāune* ('feeding of disgraced food') or *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* ('accepting disgraced food'), on which this paper will focus, attracted a huge number of media people, among them many foreigners who had rushed into the country to reap their share of reports and rumours.<sup>8</sup>

On June 13, one day after the eleventh-day rituals of King Birendra, a rather unnoticed aspect of the traditions relating to the death of kings came to an end in the premises of the old royal palace at Hanumandhoka. All morning the *Rājaguru-jyu*, Puṣparatna Vajrācārya,<sup>9</sup> along with his *gurumā* (priestly wife) and chief officers distributed *ṭīkā* and coins to beggars, street-dwellers, homeless children, *sādhus* (holy men), hermits and pilgrims who happened to drop in to Nasalchowk. On their departure the latter were presented with bags containing foodstuffs (rice, sweets, salt) topped with a one-rupee bill. These materials had been presented to the old palace during the previous days by individuals and by governmental and private organizations within town and from surrounding villages as part of *bicā hayegu* (New. 'obtaining the reason', Nep. *bicāra lyāune*).<sup>10</sup>

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of a *kriyāputra* nor to attend the rituals of the first thirteen days, because of the impurity involved.

<sup>6</sup> *Preta* is used to denote the ghostly existence in transition, which 'lost' its gross human body at cremation but has not still entered the realm of the ancestors. *Pretātman* embodies the concept of an individual's *ātman* as a never-dying animate entity, at times joined to a gross body, then again to the all-encompassing, universal 'soul', *ātman*, or essence, *Brahman*. With *pretatva* I distinguish a state of a *preta* that is already provided with a new, subtle body through the first days' *piṇḍa* offerings, but has not yet reached *pitṛloka*, which is supposed to happen after one year only.

<sup>7</sup> Within Nepal there are several *śrāddha-tīrthas*, confluences of rivers conceived as specially favourable places to perform rituals relating to ancestor worship. Additionally, North Indian *śrāddha-tīrthas* like Varanasi, Gaya or Haridvar are visited for similar purposes by Nepalis.

<sup>8</sup> The funeral processions and cremations of King Birendra and, three days later, of King Dipendra were broadcast live by both Nepal TV and Radio Nepal. The media and public were strictly kept away from the rituals of all other days. No details of individual rituals were therefore reported.

<sup>9</sup> During the Malla reign, Newar Buddhist Vajrācāryas and Newar Hindu Rājopadhyāyas officiated as *rājagurus* (royal teachers/advisers) and *rājapurohitas* (royal family priests). Nowadays their importance for the royal palace is limited to specific ritual functions.

<sup>10</sup> This is a tradition followed since Malla times at the demise of a king, mainly in order to learn about the circumstances of death. A readapted form of it is common among Newar and Pārbate (non-Newar Hindu) communities up to today, as a condolence visit to the family of the deceased, who are provided with foodstuffs they are allowed to eat during the first seven (for Banre/Bare, the highest-status Newar Buddhists) or twelve (for Newar Hindus and Pārbate) days of the *āśauca* (polluted) period respectively.

The thirteenth-day *śuddhaśānti* rituals performed at Nārāyaṇahiṭī Royal Palace were delayed for the late king, queen, and prince Nirajan since it was not appropriate to have them performed with Dipendra's rituals still at the *kriyā* stage.<sup>11</sup>

The *śuddhaśānti* jointly performed for the late king, the queen, and their two sons consisted of a fire sacrifice (*gr̥hyaśāntihoma*) to pacify all kinds of cosmological and other spirit-like forces and to purify the palace and its inhabitants. A further element included a variety of gift offerings to various recipients. According to the *antya-paddhatis*,<sup>12</sup> *vaitaraṇīdāna*, *kapilādāna*, and *pañcadhenudāna* are normally part of the ritual prescriptions with death approaching.<sup>13</sup> As this was not possible under the circumstances, they were rescheduled for the concluding day of the *kriyā* period (see Table 2). *Durmānaśānti* ('pacification of an upset or sad mind'), including a gift of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa to a brahmin, was the only ritual additionally performed for the untimely and unnatural death of the royals.<sup>14</sup> The *uttama ṣoḍaśa* ('highest sixteen'), the third group of sixteen *piṇḍa*-offerings, is to be made within one year, the first *piṇḍa* having been offered on the eleventh day.<sup>15</sup> This series of *śrāddha* offerings will be done after every month, with additional ones after forty-five lunar days (*tripakṣika piṇḍa*), one to five days before completing six months (*unaṣānmāsika piṇḍa*) and one to five days before completing one year (*unābdika piṇḍa*).<sup>16</sup> With the performance of *ābdika śrāddha* after one year, the *preta* is considered to have finally attained the realm of the ancestors (*pitṛloka*), having completed its arduous journey through the *narakas*, a series of underworlds under Yama's control awaiting the *pretatva*, confronting it with sometimes terrible tortures.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As the late king's youngest brother Dhirendra was deprived of his royal status in 1989, and had no home in Nepal at the time of his death, his *śuddhaśānti* was performed at Kālamocana-ghāṭ again.

<sup>12</sup> *Antyeṣṭi*- or *antya-paddhatis* are ritual manuals containing prescriptions of mortuary and postmortuary rituals up to one year after death.

<sup>13</sup> These and further variants of gifting one or several cows with death approaching are understood both as means to complete the person's *karma* and to provide support for the journey towards final release. Besides the high esteem given to any *godāna* ('gift of a cow'), the names of the cows gifted here refer to specific forms of assistance provided according to mythical accounts. They are done only symbolically by common people.

<sup>14</sup> A *saptāha*, a seven-day reading of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa is repeatedly organized by households or in public with the aim of providing *mokṣa* ('liberation') to unreleased souls and of getting rid of obstacles.

<sup>15</sup> The second set of sixteen *piṇḍas* (*madhya ṣoḍaśa*), are offered to various deities and to the *preta* on the eleventh day.

<sup>16</sup> For the majority of rituals, the lunar calendar is followed. According to Darbar (and Pārbate) tradition, the one-year mourning period ends the same lunar month and day as death occurred in the previous year. For V.S. 2058 an extra 30-day lunar month, called *adhikamāsa*, *malmāsa* or *puruṣottama-māsa*, was added between *Āśvina-kṛṣṇa*- and *Āśvina-śuklapakṣa* (September 18 to October 16, 2001). Therefore the completion of *uttama ṣoḍaśa* will take place only after 390 lunar days – for Birendra, on *Jyeṣṭha śukla daśamī* V.S. 2059, the lunar month and *tithi* of his death.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the most essential sources on this subject are discussed in Kane (1977: 1547ff).

The royal palace further keeps the calendrical days dedicated to ancestor worship generally observed within the Valley. The *Gāi-jātrā* was celebrated for the deceased members of the royal family according to Kathmandu custom. On *Bālācaturdaśī* (fourteenth lunar day of the dark fortnight of Mārgaśīrṣa/December) a light for each of the past year's deceased is kept burning all night at Paśupati and immersed the next morning in the Bagmati.<sup>18</sup> The duty to perform *śrāddha* does not end after the first year. With every year completing another annual ceremony (*ekoddiṣṭa śrāddha*) will be performed in the name of the deceased. Additionally, during the dark half of the month of Āśvina/September all the deceased are remembered on the tithi (lunar day) of their death (*ṣoḍaśa śrāddha*). The *śrāddhas* performed at *Mātā-tīrtha* (on the new moon day of Vaiśākha/April, for female ancestors) and at *Gokarṇa-tīrtha* (on the new moon day of Bhādra/August, for male ancestors) respectively, give proof of another local element taken up by the Darbar priests.

For all the rituals, be they related to *karmakāṇḍa* (life-cycle rites) of the members of the royal family or to ritual acts associated with the institution of the king, the Darbar *mūlapurohita* has a team of seven *rājapurohitas* ('royal house-priests'), the priestly body appointed by the palace, at his disposal. Among them, Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita is currently serving as *hākim upācārya rājapurohita* (Joint-Secretary). The officiating *mūlapurohita*, at present Rameśa Rāja Pāṇḍe, further acts as an adviser in matters of *dharma* (Hindu religious law) towards the *Rāja Pariṣad*, the executive body of the palace. Another key function is held by the royal astrologer, currently Maṅgalarāja Jośī. He decides on the timing of every ritual function and also discharges many more advisory duties relating to the palace and the priests. For the death rituals of the deceased royals, additional brahmins were appointed for several of the ritual tasks.

In addition to the rituals under the supervision of the palace, a series of further condolence and mourning events was organized all over the country. These programmes included memorial speeches, wishes for the peace of the the deceased (*ciraśānti* – 'long-lasting or eternal peace'), recitals, *bhajan* (sacred tunes), and a minute's silence (*maunadhāraṇa*).<sup>19</sup> Rituals performed for *ciraśānti* included *rudrī* (Skt. *rudrābhiṣeka*), fire sacrifice (*homa/havana*) and readings from the Bhāgavatapurāṇa or recitations of Caṇḍīpāṭha or Śāntivedapāṭha. The *Durgatī-pariśodhanadhāraṇipāṭha* was recited by Newar Buddhist communities on several occasions, Tibetan monks chose *Paritrāṇa-pāṭha* for prayer. Lamas organized memorial programmes in various monasteries and in front of Svayambhū Caitya. Another common ritual expression of mourning and well-wishing in the name of the deceased consisted of large-scale displays of lights (*savālākh/eklākh battibālne, śāntidīpa*). On the occasion of several such meetings food was distributed to a large number of poor people. Obviously very popular among individuals were offerings of

<sup>18</sup> On this festival see Michaels (1999).

<sup>19</sup> Some of these events included wishes for the prosperous reign of the new king.

floral tributes (*śraddhāñjalidarpaṇa*) at altars built up at crossroads, within temple compounds and, most prominently, inside the main gate of Nārāyaṇhiṭī palace. A variety of photographs, most showing the late King Birendra and Queen Aishvarya, were displayed and worshipped with lights and incense at such altars. Sometimes pictures of the whole royal family were displayed, or else portraits of each of the ten departed royals lined up in a row. At several places *śok-pustakā* ('mourning-books') allowed visitors to express their sorrow and wishes in written form. All these books were collected and stored inside the Darbar palace.

Newspapers appeared for several days with extra inserts exclusively containing condolence messages, some covering a double page. Large-scale public fire sacrifices (*mahāyajña*) with a full-day programme of speeches, readings, recitals and *bhajana* were organized at Tundikhel (nine days) and in Deopatan (eleven days), and similar programmes were reported from other places in Nepal.

### **The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa***

With the completion of the *kriyā* period that furnishes the preta with a subtle body after the loss of the mortal, gross one, another critical transitional period begins.<sup>20</sup> The eleventh day aims at satisfying the *preta*'s material needs, which are presumed to have become virulent at this stage. By fulfilling all those wishes, one hopes that he will finally abandon his previous surroundings and renounce his former this-worldly desires. The *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* is a ritual consequence of this belief.

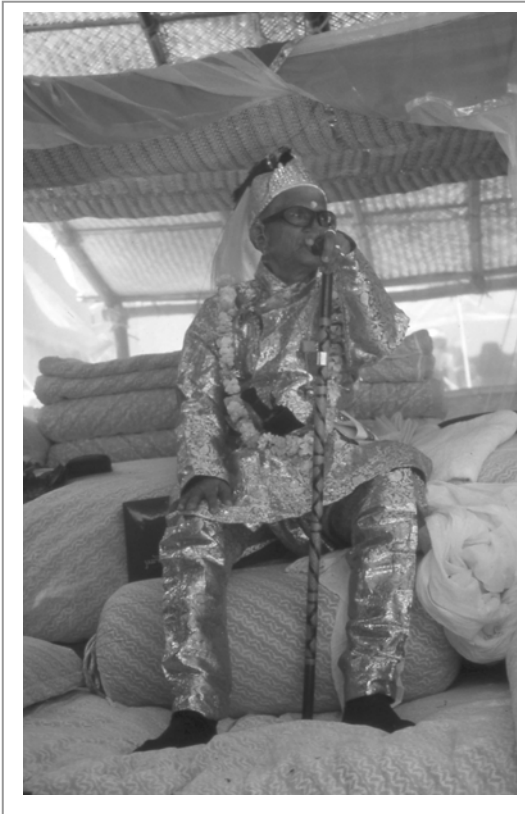
For the two kings, Queen Aishvarya, Prince Nirajan, and King Birendra's brother Dhirendra, a *śayyādāna* ('offering of a bed') was prepared at Kālamocana-ghāṭ as an essential part of the eleventh-day rituals. An additional component of the eleventh-day *śayyādāna* was the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*, which was exclusively performed for the two deceased kings, for King Birendra on June 11, for King Dipendra on June 14. The following description holds for both days as the ritual was almost identical in its outlook and order of events.

At 10.45 a.m., the army opened the temporary gates formed by army tents and barriers to receive officials invited to attend the *kāṭṭo khuvāune*. Some corners were designated for the press which was admitted only with an entry permit issued by the palace. Attention was focussed on one tent whose front was open. It was furnished with all kinds of articles one would expect to find in a middle-class apartment. The living-room contained comfortable chairs, a table, fan, and TV, behind a desk with reading lamp. A house altar bore various deities' pictures, lined up on the back wall. To the right, somewhat hidden from view, was the kitchen, with all kinds of metal cooking ware, a stove, plates, and a dining area on the floor. The bedroom was

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<sup>20</sup> Michaels (1998: 157) gives an illustrative overview of the stages up to the realm of the ancestors.

furnished with a bed, a mosquito net hanging from the top, and a corner table exposing a number of precious items in silver and gold. On the bed, somewhat styled into a throne with the help of cushions and covers, an imitation crown was placed, together with a photograph of the deceased king. Were it not for all those baskets with gifts of grains, pulses, vegetables, potatoes, fruits and – somehow out of place – a goat's shank arranged in between a variety of plates displaying sweets, one could imagine being at a theatre performance. As if to discourage such thoughts, a signboard to the left announced that these were the materials to be offered with the 'bed-gift' of the king on the eleventh day.<sup>21</sup>



The brahmin sitting on the bed throne, equipped with some of the late King Birendra's personal belongings.



Departure on the elephant, heading for Jawalakhel.

Some of the priests and palace officials, all similarly dressed, were busy getting everything ready for the brahmin to be led in at any moment. One did not have to wait long for him to appear. Dressed in a white *dhoti* and wearing the *janāi*,<sup>22</sup> he was

<sup>21</sup> The note for King Birendra's *śayyādāna* reads: 'sva. śrī 5 mahārājādhirāj birendra bīra vikrama śāha-ko 11 au. dīnko śaiyā dāna ko sāmāna'. The 'bed-gift' materials for King Birendra's eleventh day. The same note was written for Dipendra's 'bed-gift', with his name substituted.

<sup>22</sup> Nep., sacred thread worn by the three upper castes as twice-born Hindus.

guided to the kitchen corner and took his seat on a square wooden board facing plates containing the eighty-four varieties of dishes (*caurāsī vyañjana-khānā*) he was to eat. All officials invited got up from their chairs in the shade of another tent to greet him. Once they had assumed their seats again he began to eat, while two or three officials watched him closely. When he finished his meal he cleaned his mouth in the 'bathroom' section to the centre and then moved to the 'bedroom', where he exchanged his *dhotī* for a golden-red garment, attended by priests who sprayed perfume, handed over his robe and socks, and then adjusted his belt and *khukurī* (a traditional Gorkhali knife). Golden ornaments, shoes, sunglasses, and a walking stick completed his attire, some items being the late king's personal belongings.

Finally an imitation of the white-plumed royal crown was placed on his head. Posing in full dress and ornamentation on the bed-throne, he was now ready to receive a second procession of officials for the farewell. Another picture session was inserted for the media people, who were fighting among each other for an unspoiled view. The brahmin was then escorted under a red umbrella to an elephant waiting for him outside. Once he had climbed up to the royal saddle on top, the richly painted and heavily laden animal was driven towards the Bagmati River by two attendants dressed in dark green. On the far shore of the river thousands of people awaited them. Nor did public attention lessen on the way to the *kāṭṭe-pāṭī* in Jawalakhel/ Lalitpur, where they were to stay for few days.<sup>23</sup> Once the brahmin had gone, officials and family members started packing up the goods left behind in the tent. A printed three-page list helped to keep account of all the gifts made to the brahmin.

During their stay in Jawalakhel for the following days, Durgāprasāda Sāpkoṭā and Devīprasāda Ācārya, the two brahmins who had accepted the *kāṭṭo* for King Birendra and Dipendra respectively, were shielded from the public and media by army personnel. Both of them were expected to leave the valley on their elephants on Saturday, with the completion of the thirteenth-day rituals at the palace. But to everybody's surprise they were brought back to their separate homes (both live close to the Paśupati temple area) on Sunday afternoon in a van belonging to the Lalitpur district police. The official explanation of this decision centred on the brahmins' refusal to leave the Valley unless they were provided with a new house and lands to live on – such having been part of the gifts made to *kāṭṭe* brahmins in former times.

Press reports provided some general information on the background of *kāṭṭo khuvāune*. As *The Rising Nepal* stated, "the eleventh-day rituals are performed to cleanse the omen of the dead soul and for its eternal journey". The ritual was elsewhere described as "*svargabāsirājā-ko ātma-lāi mokṣā dilāune karma-saṃskāra*" ('life-cycle ritual duty that allows *mokṣa* to be conferred on the king's *ātman* in heaven') or as being performed for the *ciraśānti* of the king. Further it was

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<sup>23</sup> The *kāṭṭe-pāṭī* is a specific shelter close to the Patan zoo. At least since the death of King Tribhuvan the brahmins used to stay there for some days to rest and sell the goods they could not use.



stated that according to *hindudharmaparamparā* ('Hindu tradition') *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* was part of the eleventh-day rituals to satisfy the *pretātman's bhoga*.<sup>24</sup> Nobody knew whether it was a part of the brain, a piece of the skull, or some bone of the head ground into powder, but everyone was convinced that some part of the king's dead body had been transferred from the funeral pyre to the brahmin's *kāṭṭo* meal. The need for the *kāṭṭe* brahmin in theory to be subsequently sent far from the confines of the Valley was mostly reported as a consequence of his impure state, which implied that nobody wanted to meet him or even knowingly live nearby. One could also read that the loss of both his personal and ritual status would force him to find another source of income somewhere else once the gifts and valuables received were exhausted. The brahmin's departure on the elephant's back in full royal regalia was further understood as a ritual analogy to the king's return to Vaikuntha, the realm of Viṣṇu.<sup>25</sup>

The little background and commentary provided by reports was rather vague or even contradictory. All in all, the information gained from both local and international media contributed little to an understanding of the meaning and history of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*.

### **The tradition of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa***

The following sections will inquire into the tradition of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* as performed for Nepal's deceased kings. Questions relating to the actual meaning of the term *kāṭṭo*, the existence of manuals on the ritual, and its local history and setting will precede an analysis of the core elements of the ritual. The *kāṭṭo* meal and the gifts will be contextualized within the distinct ritual categories of *brāhmaṇa-bhojana* and *dāna*.

The Nepali dictionaries consulted describe *kāṭṭo* as (a) a term related to *kriyā* (or *kiriyā*) or, more specifically, the *pretaśrāddha* of the eleventh day; (b) the food offered on this day to the *preta* (*pretako bhojana*); (c) the gifts offered on this day. The semantic field further includes (d) food one is forced to eat, and, finally, somewhat oddly, (e) a cat's excrement. Accordingly, *kāṭṭe* denotes the brahmin who eats the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo* as well as being a disdainful form of address applied to him thereafter. The *Ratna nepālī śabdakośa* further cites *kāṭṭo* as a term used for the tissue taken from the skull of the dead during cremation. In daily parlance it is a common form of address to express great disrespect, with a strong sense of disgust. The word *kāṭṭo* derives from Old Indo-Aryan *\*kaṭṭa-*, a sideform of *kiṭṭa-* 'secretion'

<sup>24</sup> *Bhoga* here denotes not only suffering from hunger and thirst, but also the longing for material goods and social relations enjoyed while living.

<sup>25</sup> Every Nepali is familiar with the notion of the king not only being a human ruler, but also an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

and *kīṭa*- ‘feces’. It appears also in Nepali *kaṭ* ‘matter rejected during the making of rice-spirit’.<sup>26</sup>

During the official part of *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* no element of a *pūjā*, be it the reciting of a text, the offering of flowers or incense, or the applying of a *ṭikā*, may be observed. Though some *rājapurohitas* were present and guided each of the two brahmins through his tasks, they were outwardly indistinguishable from other officials present. One is led to believe that there is no clear-cut *vidhi* but rather a tradition which re-adapts itself every time this ritual is performed after the death of a king.

As stated by the royal priests on duty, no such ritual handbook exists. The brahmins appointed had to purify themselves as usual; they worshipped at the altar installed along with the ‘bed-gift’ and were then supposed to cook their meal themselves, although they were helped. After the formal consigning of the *śayyādāna*, they received *ṭikā* from the *mūlapurohita* before going to take the meal.<sup>27</sup> The list of gifts given to the brahmin together with *śayyādāna* were, according to the priests present, suggested by them and finalized by the palace.

According to the *mūlapurohita* the whole corpus of death rituals for the perished royals was done according to a current *antyapaddhati* printed in Varanasi. For the 13-day *śuddhaśānti* rituals including *gṛhyaśāntihoma*, *rudrābhiṣeka* and *durmānaśānti*, additional handbooks were consulted.

All the *paddhatis* available in local bookstalls do mention *śayyādāna* as part of the eleventh-day rituals, but none mentions the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*. The rituals for the eleventh day generally include *snāna* for the *kriyāputra*, his dressing in white and the purification of the room where he had stayed for the first ten days as well as of the place where the gift offerings will be placed. The offerings of *madyaṣoḍaśapiṇḍa* (‘[offering of] the middle set of sixteen rice balls’) and *śayyādāna* together with *kāñcapuruṣadāna* (‘gift of a golden image’ of the dead), *dvijadampatipūjana* (‘worship of a brahmin and his wife’) and *vṛṣotsarga* with *rudrahoma* (release of a calf after branding it and fire-offering to Rudra as main deity) are described for the same day. Further ritual elements consisting of special treatments of brahmins, *brāhmaṇapūjā*, the ‘worship of a brahmin’, and *brāhmaṇa-bhojana*, the ‘feast of brahmins’, the latter recommended as a part of the 13<sup>th</sup>-day concluding rituals, do not reflect any relation with the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*.

One must conclude that upon a king’s death exactly the same rituals are performed as for any other mortal of the same *varṇa*. Being a king implies being born into the *kṣatriya-varṇa*. The death rituals performed are in accordance with

<sup>26</sup> See Turner 1966.

<sup>27</sup> Every ritual gift (*dāna*) is introduced by a *dāna-saṅkalpa*, a formula uttered by the offerer mentioning exact time and place, the name/provenance of the offerer, the name of the receiver, the ritual context and merits expected). This part was not shown to the public and I rely on information provided by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita.

those prescribed for this second-highest among the four *varṇas* of Hindu society. A king's *pretātman* is believed to suffer according to the *karma* accumulated during his life in the same way as any mortal. As will be shown, even the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* is not an affair exclusively practised for kings.

### **Historical facts and contexts relating to the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* in Nepal**

Some local newspapers reporting on the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* traced this ritual tradition back to the entry of the Śāha rulers into the Valley (AD 1768) while others declared it to have been practised since time immemorial. Usually it is said to be performed exclusively for kings, though one can come across the opinion that it has been practised for high-ranking army officers (including colonels) of the Rāṇā dynasty as well.<sup>28</sup> From the *Gorkhāpatra*, the oldest daily newspaper in Nepal, one can glean some details on the death rituals performed for the late kings Mahendra and Tribhuvan.<sup>29</sup> For Mahendra, who died in February 1972, the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* was performed by Śrī Gaṇeśa Bhaṭṭa, a brahmin from Bāneśvar, one of the eastern quarters of Kathmandu. The report on the eleventh-day rituals further mentions that the *kāṭṭe* was scheduled to stay for three days in the *kāṭṭe-pāṭī* in Jawalakhel before leaving the Valley.<sup>30</sup>

King Tribhuvan died in Zurich, Switzerland, and his body reached Nepal only five days later, after a stopover in Delhi, where he was paid official veneration. The report on the eleventh-day rituals briefly states that the *kāṭṭograhaṇa* was performed according to tradition, the brahmin selected being a Bhaṭṭa from India who resided in the Naradevī section of Kathmandu. Further mentioned are some of the gifts (an elephant, a horse, and about one *lākh* rupees in valuables from the *śayyādāna*) and the presence of high officials at the function.<sup>31</sup>

A very valuable historical document offers proof of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* performed for Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha, the first of the Śāha kings in the Valley. An official letter dated V.S. 1831 (AD 1774-5), it contains an apology to the son of Lakṣyomana Khanāla, the '*mahābrāhmaṇa*' who had taken the *kāṭṭo*, after locals disgraced him continuously as a '*kāṭṭya*'.<sup>32</sup> One can assume that Lakṣyomana

<sup>28</sup> This was confirmed to me by some local elders, who said that it was common practice for Rāṇā ministers.

<sup>29</sup> File copies of the *Gorkhāpatra* are available at the National Archives in Kathmandu.

<sup>30</sup> The *Gorkhāpatra* on 11 February 1972 reports but factually on the deceased Majesty the King Mahendra's eleventh day rituals at the local Kālamocana ghāṭ and the steps to follow, with a repeated stress on these practices being in accordance with the Vedic ritual prescriptions and with ancient tradition respectively.

<sup>31</sup> See *Gorkhāpatra*, 28 March 1955. Naradevī ṭol in Kathmandu has a large number of Bhaṭṭas who settled there after coming to Nepal.

<sup>32</sup> Quoting from Pūrṇimā, year 7, part 1, 61-62 (note that it was common practice to write the letter ṣ both for *kh* and the retroflex sibilant): *āge bhaimālyā lakṣyomana ṣanāla kana ihā yekādaśāko māhābrāhmaṇa tulyāñuṃ/ tassarthaḥ inkā chorākana jhārā beṭi udhāvanī padhāvanī māpha garibaksaum/ bākinko basyāko ghaḍyāri ropanī 9 tasako potāsameta*

Khanāla himself was no longer around at the time of the release of the document, either because he had died or was out of reach, but the document does not provide clear evidence of expulsion from the Valley. The fact that Lakṣyomana Khanāla appears as the brahmin chosen for the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo* of Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha disproves a widely held opinion that Bhaṭṭa brahmins from India have always been selected as *mahābrāhmaṇas* for Nepal's Śāha kings. Comparing the names recorded in the past, one can only presume a tendency to choose from among the highest-ranking Upādhyāya brahmins for this duty, be they Bhaṭṭas (as confirmed for Tribhuvan and Mahendra) or Pūrvīyās (Sapkoṭā, Ācārya, Khanāla). Since the Śāha rulers, the family priests appointed by the palace are Upādhyāya brahmins of the *Kumāi* section (Pāṇḍe, Panta). It is therefore of no surprise that representatives of this branch are not among the *kāṭṭe* brahmins. According to both the *mūla*- and *rājapurohita* presently officiating, the brahmins are selected by palace officials, but are required to give their consent. Indeed, the brahmin first chosen for Dipendra's *kāṭṭo* refused at the last moment, over the gifts offered in turn.

Brahmins from India may have gone back to their country of origin but, according to the *mūlapurohita* (who added that the current Nepal constitution prohibits the exile of a Nepali citizen) they were only required to leave the Valley, in a southerly or westerly direction, along the roads to Chapagaun/Lele or Thankot respectively. This is confirmed by the fact that the brahmins summoned for King Mahendra and King Tribhuvan were provided with houses and land in the Nepal Tarai.

A report written in V.S. 1894 (AD 1838) states that Śrīkrṣṇa Upādhyāya died two years after eating the *kāṭṭo* for King Siddhi Pratāpa Śāha of Gulmī (a minor independent kingdom at the time, which merged into united Nepal in V.S. 1843).<sup>33</sup>

This proves that the *kāṭṭo* was not only practised at the Śāha royal palace in Kathmandu, but also outside the Valley.

No explicit document has yet been found on the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* for Malla kings. Given the fact that the eleventh-day *kāṭṭo* meal appears to have been widespread among some Newar upper-status communities, one may assume it to have been practised in a similar way for the Malla kings as well. A treatise on the caste system in Nepal ordered by Jayasthiti Malla (14<sup>th</sup> century) and quoted in the Hodgson

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*māpha garibaksyau/ santānaikana māpha bhayo/ bāmki inkā chorākana kāṭyā bhanī helā gari kasaile bhanyā taskana sāsti garaumlāḥ/*

“The deceased Lakṣyomana Khanāla, as he consumed that very eleventh day meal, turned into a Mahābrāhmaṇa. Therefore his son will be given grass land as a compensation, and we apologize. (By providing) nine ropanī land together with the buildings remaining from the previous settlers and including the land tax we apologize. In this way the descendants are compensated. Whoever calls his only remaining son a ‘kāṭyā’ or otherwise disgraces him, will be punished from now on.” Dinesh Raj Pant kindly provided me with this reference.

<sup>33</sup> See Śaṅkarmāna Rājavamśī: *Purātattva-patrasaṃgraha*, part 2. Kathmandu: Śrī 5 ko sarkāra purātattva ra saṃskṛti vibhāga, V.S. 2018 (AD 1960) (*Purātattvaparakāśanmālā*; 7), page 107. Dinesh Raj Pant kindly provided me with this reference.

manuscripts names the 'Bha/Mahabrāhman' as dyers of wool and cotton with red colour, and further notes that they "take the death gifts on the eleventh day and eat a bit of the corpse" (Chattopadhyay 1980: 116). In his description of the funeral ceremonies of Newar Kṣatriyas, Hodgson again associated the 'Bhā/Bhāt' with the eating of a piece of the brain of the dead, extracted before cremation (Chattopadhyay 1980: 84, 96).

Gopal Singh Nepali states that "a similar practice exists among the present Gorkha royal family of Nepal", but is otherwise not common among the Newars among whom he inquired (Nepali 1965: 140). As mentioned by Levy and Rājopādhyāya, Pradhan, and Toffin – referring to Newar communities in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Panauti respectively – following deaths in the upper *thars* (subcastes) of the Newar Śivamārgi, the Bhā/Kārañjit, said to be fallen brahmins, used to be appointed to eat the contemptible meal. According to Levy & Rājopādhyāya (1992: 359-361, 683, 769 n.80) a Bhā assisted the *kriyāputra* in carrying out the ritual obligations of the first ten days, and on the final day was dismissed with a considerable number of gifts after consuming a meal mixed with some part of the deceased's brain. As the authors add, in recent times the boiled rice to be served to the Bhā on the eleventh day is at most simply touched with a bone fragment of the deceased.

In his thesis on Newar Hindu rituals in Kathmandu, Rajendra Pradhan states that the funeral priest (Bhā) is at times identified with the *preta* and he "absorbs the sins of the dead person when he eats a small portion of his skull on the eleventh morning" (Pradhan 1986: 218, 225).

As for Panauti Newars, the traditional *kāṭṭo* meal consists of *cyūra* (beaten rice), honey, clarified butter, and sesame. It is mixed with a part of the skull-bone and served to a member of the Bhā community. One makes sure that the Bhā on his way back home does not look back a single time (Toffin 1987: 222-223). Toffin mentions that this practice is common among non-Newar Kṣatriyas as well, especially Rāṇās and Śāhas.<sup>34</sup>

According to Newar Rājopādhyāya priests, there is a concept of a threefold succession of *śayyādāna* and meals served during the first thirteen days after death: (a) *Rudra-śayyā/Rudra(Śiva)-bhojana* on the first or seventh day (to a Jugi), (b) *Brahmā-śayyā/Brahmā-bhojana* on the eleventh day (to a Bhā) and (c) *Viṣṇu-śayyā/Viṣṇu-bhojana* on the thirteenth day (to the domestic priest).<sup>35</sup> 'Kaṭya'

<sup>34</sup> Toffin (1979: 250 n.14); Toffin relied on personal communications for this statement.

<sup>35</sup> On a more abstract level, these three steps and the respective deities addressed are correlated with the three *guṇas* (*sattva, rajas, tamas*), the basic qualities characterising the human organism (personal communication by Ratna Rāja Rājopādhyāya, Bhaktapur). Such an understanding may not be shared by all, though the reduction of very complex matters to some core principles like the male-female opposition, the three *guṇas* or the five gross elements (fire, water, earth, wind, ether) is quite common among learned Newars.

(New.) is applied to the eleventh-day bhojana only.<sup>36</sup> The relation of Brahmā, the creator god within the trinity, to the *kāṭṭo* meal remains to be explained, though.

As the above mentioned records show, within Newar tradition the duty of *mahābrāhmaṇa* is conferred only on members of the low-ranking Bhā community. Kāpālī (Kusle/Jugi/Jogi) may accept food on the seventh day for the benefit of the deceased, but this is not equated with the *kāṭṭo* meal.<sup>37</sup> Both Bhā and Jugi thars being an integral part of the community, there was no question of sending them off, but they were given the lowest social ranking, none the less. The tradition of serving the *kāṭṭo* meal to a member of a specific *thar* is disappearing among the Newar communities, and the adding of some remains of the dead body has been completely abandoned, according to all informants questioned.<sup>38</sup> As an alternative, the discharge of the meal into a nearby river has become common practice instead. The conviction is still current that on the tenth or eleventh day no outsider, be he a brahmin or anyone else, may accept anything from the mourning household for fear of extreme pollution and trouble caused by the *preta* of the deceased.

Inquiries into local traditions show that *kāṭṭo* was not exclusive to kings but practised within specific local communities as well, albeit with significant variation. With these records taken into account, the distinguishing features of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* as performed for Nepal's kings are the high-ranking brahmin chosen, his consuming a single *kāṭṭo* meal, and his then being sent off on an elephant loaded down with gifts beyond the means of commoners to afford. Several elements add up to the brahmin becoming a most denigrated one, so much so that any contact with him, even by sight, is to be avoided. Deprived of both his previous ritual and social status, he is addressed as '*kāṭṭe*' for the rest of his life.

### The perils of transition

What is it about the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* that provokes such a devastating effect on the consumer's status and reputation? Generally the state of impurity (Nep. *āśauco*, *biṭulo*) attached to house and family members of the deceased keeps outsiders from entering the house, and more especially from accepting any food or water from that household. This rule is followed up to the conclusion of the thirteen-day *āśauca*

<sup>36</sup> In Newār the eleventh-day feeding of the impure meal is called *kāṭya nakegu/kāṭo nakyagu* – 'to feed the impure meal' or *cipa tikegu* – 'to become polluted by tasting'.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Ishii (1995: 116-117). The Kāpālī/Jugi – formerly Śaivite ascetics, but nowadays householders – are not only on that occasion, but constantly conceived as the specialists most able to deal with matters relating to death and the dead. This capacity is explained by the Kāpālīs' proximity to Śiva, the deity most closely associated with actual death, cremation grounds and ghostly hords. He is regularly venerated as Mr̥tyuñjaya, 'the one who has attained victory over death'. On the Kāpālīs' relation to death see Bouillier (1993).

<sup>38</sup> A very practical reason is that few families of the traditionally appointed thars are left, and their members increasingly refuse to accept such despised tasks.

period.<sup>39</sup> The eleventh day is considered as the most ‘dangerous’ in this respect. In some families, even the mourning members of the household completely abstain from taking food during this day. This is explained in terms of the concepts underlying the *antyeṣṭi* rituals. During the previous days the *pretātman* (said to be the size of a thumb, or one *aṅgula*), which consists mainly of the wind and fire elements, has little by little been given a new subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*), created by the *piṇḍas* offered daily. On the tenth day the *pretarūpa* starts experiencing *bhoga*. Consequently the eleventh-day rituals mainly focus on satisfying the bodily and material desires of the *pretātman*. Related to this is the strong wish to have it abandon its ties to relatives and surroundings and leave for its journey towards *pitṛloka*, the realm of the ancestors.

As to the Darbar practice, another reason for the meal becoming *kāṭṭo* lies in the fact that a brahmin, normally a strict vegetarian, is forced to eat meat, a he-goat having been slaughtered for this purpose the same morning. The brahmin, once transformed into a living substitute for the late king, receives all the materials to satisfy the king’s *pretātman*’s *bhoga*, and therefore is to eat meat – meat being part of the daily diet of a Kṣatriya.<sup>40</sup> The brahmin is conceived as a *mahāpātra* (‘great vessel’), in that he channels food and offerings to the king in his transitional form. He is even said to become the *pretātman* itself.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the dishes used to be topped by a piece of the frontal bone of the departed king’s skull, worked into a paste. The sprinkling of any such substance on the *kāṭṭo* meal served in the name of the late kings Birendra and Dipendra has been denied by both the *mūla-* and *rājapurohitas* consulted. They confirmed that this was practised in bygone days, however. As for textual sources, they referred to the Dharmasindhu (DhSi) and Nirṇayasindhu (NiSi).

These compilations based on medieval *śāstras* and *smṛtis* do include *śayyādāna* as a specific ritual gift to be offered to a brahmin on the concluding day of the *karmakriyā* period, usually the eleventh day after death. The DhSi states, referring to the *Padmapurāṇa*, that a piece of the frontal bone is to be ground and mixed with rice cooked in milk (*pāyasa*). This dish is then to be served to a brahmin and his wife.<sup>42</sup> The same text thereafter states that such has not been practised in ‘Mahārāṣṭradeśa’ (Central India) in recent times.<sup>43</sup> As ‘fruit’ of such an offering of

<sup>39</sup> For the chief mourner and all the children of the deceased a less rigid *āśauca* period is kept up to one year. Males dress in white and abstain from consuming milk if their mother died, while in the case of their father’s death they avoid yoghurt. No auspicious ritual is performed or attended, and no compulsory one occurs in the house of the main mourner.

<sup>40</sup> Such was the argument of the *mūlapurohita*. According to the Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra, the feast served to brahmins on the eleventh day has to contain meat dishes (Pandey 1969: 265).

<sup>41</sup> Personal communication by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita. Compare Parry (1980: 108 n.7).

<sup>42</sup> I consulted the Dharmasindhu edited by Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa Khemarāja and published in Bombay by Śrīveṅkaṭeśvara Press in 1974 (V.S. 2041); section on *śayyādāna*, page 748.

<sup>43</sup> The text was published from Mumbai (Bombay), and one is to understand that the compilers were not in favour of such a practice.

the ‘bed-gift’, the deceased’s *preta* is expected to abide happily in heaven, Indraloka (*Puraṇḍarapura*) or the realm of the *Lokapālas*. The NiSi<sup>44</sup> quotes the same *purāṇa*, albeit with alternative details. With the completion of death on the second day already, a bed should be offered together with auspicious objects, including a golden image of the deceased, fruits and cloth, and after worshipping a brahmin and his wife seated on the bed, one offers them a mixture of milk and honey. The text continues with the statement that among *pārvatīyas* – a designation which refers to the communities of the Himalayan regions – there is the practice of serving a part of the skull-bone taken from the ‘forehead’ (*lālāṭika*) mixed with yoghurt and milk in a silver bowl, but it does not make clear the occasion. The passage ends by repeating that this knowledge is found among *pārvatīya* brahmins only. Although rich on elaborations of prescriptions concerning forms and combinations of *brāhmaṇa-bhojana* (‘feast for brahmins’) and bed-gifts relating to death, both the DhSi and NiSi refer exclusively to the Padmapurāṇa as a source on the practice of mixing a part of the skull-bone into a meal served to a brahmin couple. Both texts make clear that this is a practice not generally followed, denying that it occurs, for instance, in Central India (DhSi) or explicitly ascribing it to ritual traditions of the Himalayas (NiSi). Present-day *antya-paddhatis* still include the *dvijadampatipūjā*, the (symbolic) worship of a brahmin couple, on the eleventh day, with the couple explicitly stated to be worshipped while sitting on the bed.<sup>45</sup> But the relation of this to the *kāṭṭo* meal seems completely lost.

### Ritual processing of bodily materials

A survey of the whole of the ritual practices related to death reveals that not only the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* but other postmortuary rituals as well included – or continue to include – remains of the gross body, the major components being the bones and the ashes they are reduced to during cremation. These ritual elements will now be reviewed in order to identify clues to underlying concepts.

The whole corpus of rituals for the dead aims at preventing the dead turning into one of a variety of ‘tormented, malevolent spirits’ (Nep. *bhūtpret*) who may return to torment the living. The fear of trouble caused by unreleased ‘souls’, be they called *pretas*, *bhūtas*, *masans*, *piśācas* or otherwise, is omnipresent. Consequently, precautions are taken in the ritual sphere. During every fire sacrifice performed, they are given their share of offerings, outside the ritual area, in order to stop them

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<sup>44</sup> I consulted the Nirṇayasindhu edited by Śrīkamalākara Bhaṭṭa and published in Varanasi by Thakurprasāda eṇḍ sans bukselar in 1970 (V.S. 2027). The following passages are part of the *trītyapariccheda/uttarārdha/āśaucādīprakaraṇa*, sub-chapter ‘*ekādaśāhakṛtya-nirūpaṇam*’, pages 1224-36.

<sup>45</sup> Inquired on this matter, the acting priests commented that the brahmin couple serves as a symbol of ongoing re-creation.



interfering.<sup>46</sup> With postmortuary rituals several similar acts can be observed. On the way to the cremation ground, grain offerings may be thrown at crossroads for roaming spirits to feed on. Another practice of similar motivation consists in cutting off a fleshy part of the dead body before cremation and burying it some distance away in order to feed and keep away *masans*, a specific category of ghosts that roams around cremation *ghāṭs*, feeding on human flesh.<sup>47</sup> According to the officiating *rājapurohitas*, such a practice was not part of the cremation of the recently deceased kings. However, on the last pages of her book *With a King in the Clouds* (London 1959), Erika Leuchttag mentions it in her description of King Tribhuvan's cremation. According to her a piece of flesh was cut from the area around the navel and then, together with some gold coins, buried on an island in the Bagmati River.<sup>48</sup>

*Asthisañcayana*, the 'assembling of the bones', used to be performed on the 4th or 5th day, the remains of the funeral pyre being untouched until then.<sup>49</sup> Nowadays the remaining bones and ashes are usually committed to the river with the extinction of the fire. The *asthisañcayana* may be merely symbolic, as in the case of the royals, with no real bones involved. However, *antyakarmapaddhatis* may prescribe the collection and purification of bones and ashes from the funeral pyre, which are then placed in an earthen pot to be buried in the jungle or at the riverside. Within the first ten days this pot is collected and brought to a *tīrtha* for immersion.<sup>50</sup> In a former Newar version of the practice, before immersion the bones were collected and arranged in their bodily order, the missing eyes and teeth being replaced with *hatā* (New.) and *kaudā* (small varieties of conch). This arrangement was then worshipped by invoking Viṣṇu and finally immersed in the river.<sup>51</sup> A similar ritual is described by Nepali (1965: 133).

For the *asthipravāha*, the ritual immersion of a piece of bone at a *śrāddhatīrtha* within ten days after death, a piece of the king's skull was placed in a silver box, and the latter wrapped in cloth. One of the *rājapurohitas* was brought to

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<sup>46</sup> The *mahābali* ('great offering/sacrifice') is part of the concluding steps of a fire sacrifice and consists of an offering of food and worship items to the *bhūtpret*. Arranged in leaf plates those items are usually placed at nearby crossroads.

<sup>47</sup> According to Madhan Bhaṭṭa this practice can still be observed at the Paśupati ghāṭs, albeit rarely (personal communication). Compare Stone (1988: 108-109) on the feeding of such ghosts.

<sup>48</sup> The passage in the German translation of Leuchttag's book: "Ein Brahmine schnitt ihm aus der Nabelgegend ein Stück Fleisch, etwa in der Grösse einer Taube. Mit Goldmünzen beschwert wurde dies auf einer kleinen Insel mitten im Bhagmati beerdigt und die darüber angezündeten Wachsstöcke warfen unter dem Atem der schweigend Zuschauenden zitternde Reflexe" (Leuchttag 1959: 255).

<sup>49</sup> For an overview of *asthisañcayana* practices according to a variety of authoritative texts see Kane (1973: 240-244).

<sup>50</sup> Such is the summary of the ritual as described in the *Antyakarmapaddhati* published by the Mahendra Sanskrit University, V.S. 2056 (AD 1999-2000), 49-51. As a comparison with other Pārbate *vidhis* shows, the *asthisañcayana* is a ritual lacking a uniform practice.

<sup>51</sup> Personal communication, Guruśekhara Rājopadhyāya.

the Kālīgaṇḍakī *tīrtha* by an army helicopter to discharge this duty. This *tīrtha* is famous for its *śālagrāma* stones.<sup>52</sup> It is believed that by immersing the bones there the preta of the deceased will merge into the body of Viṣṇu.<sup>53</sup> Raj Bali Pandey quotes a passage from Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra (iii, 10) stating that if one's bones are floated in the Ganges River a dwelling in Brahmaloḥa is secured for thousands of *yugas* (Pandey 1969, 261).

Newars may choose to perform the *asthipravāha* at five *tīrthas* within the Kathmandu Valley – all of them confluences of rivers. These generally include Hanumān-ghāṭ in Bhaktapur, Trivenī-ghāṭ in Panauti, Gokaṛṇa-*tīrtha*, Saṅkamūla-ghāṭ in Patan and Pachali-Bhairav-ghāṭ in Teku (Kathmandu).<sup>54</sup> According to Gopal Singh Nepali, it was common for Newars to perform the *asthipravāha* at those five different *tīrthas* with the scalp, the two shoulder joints and the two kneecaps (Nepali 1965: 133).

A similar conception motivates the scattering of ashes into the water of some holy river, preferably a *śrāddhatīrtha*. Running waters not only stand for effective means of ritual purification, but also for a cyclic energy flow between the earth and the divine heavens, and therefore for a means to ascend the divine realms. Though this was not practised for the late kings, some local communities, Newar as well as Pārbate, will collect ashes from the funeral pyre and later sprinkle them into the flowing waters at one of the *śrāddhatīrthas* in India (Gaya, Prayag, Haridvar or Benares) or in Nepal.<sup>55</sup>

Seen in such contexts, the ritual processing of bodily materials is anything but unique to the *kāṭṭo* meal. Except for the offering of a sacrificial share to the *bhūtpret*, those ritual instances follow a similar pattern. A remnant of the bodily substance of the deceased is collected after cremation and then ritually processed in order to support the *pretātman* in attaining the otherworldly destination wished for him. The medium chosen is a river, ideally a confluence of rivers emptying into the Ganges. Flowing waters are not only conceived as the most powerful means of ritual purification but also as 'bridges' to the realms of the gods.

Still, some unique features remain in the case of the 'traditional' *kāṭṭo* meal. It involves a clearly defined part of the body and is to be consumed by a brahmin. Similarly, in his valuable paper on death rituals and inherent food symbolism, Jonathan Parry parallels the cremation fire with the *mahābrāhmaṇa*'s digestive fire (*jaṭharāgni*), in that both are means of forwarding offerings to a final recipient (Parry 1985: 614, 625). Taking this line of thought further, this would lead to an interpretation of the dead body being offered for a second time, along with the

<sup>52</sup> *Śālagrāmas* are petrified conches in black stone (quartzose). They are conceived as one of the material representations of Viṣṇu.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication, Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita, who was entrusted to perform the *asthipravāha* for both kings.

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication, Ratna Rāja Rājopādhyāya. See also Toffin (1979: 246).

<sup>55</sup> Personal communications.

eleventh-day meal. But such an interpretation runs aground. If cremation is conceived as a fire sacrifice with one's own body offered to the flames, another, symbolic offering of the very same body would stretch the brahmin's digestive capacity beyond its limits. The piece of bone chosen is collected only after completion of the *dāhasaṃskāra*, the skull being one of the parts not wholly consumed by the fire. Any fire sacrifice has its 'remnants'. Whether actually transformed by the consuming flames or not, they are ritually empowered and therefore endowed with specific qualities. They may be used during the concluding part of the sacrifice – be it as offerings to the *bhūtpret*, *prasāda*, *ṭīkā* or as part of the *dāna* or *dakṣiṇā* to the officiating brahmins – or else discharged into a river, but in no instance are they offered again or left to an outsider. The same holds for the leftovers from the cremation pyre.

The piece of bone taken from the central part of the front of the skull itself hints at a different interpretation. *Lālāṭī* refers to the divine 'third eye', the point where Agni or Śiva is located. It is the location of one of the *cakras* and the point where a *tilaka* is placed upon completion of a fire sacrifice.<sup>56</sup> The term *lālāṭīkā*, as it appears in the above quotations from the DhSi and NiSi, is used in the Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra in the sense of 'related to fate or destiny' – supposed to be written on the forehead. Still today it is said that the destiny of a baby can be read on its forehead during the first days after birth. This part of the human body is associated with focused divine energy, even with divinity itself. There, ritual merits are made visible, which increase with every *tilaka* applied. Adding the *lālāṭīkā* bone to the meal served on the eleventh day to a *mahābrāhmaṇa* would thus again help to create a 'bridge' between the human and divine worlds, along the path the *pretātman* is wished to take.

The use of parts of the body or material substances closely related to a specific individual reminds one of practices common in the context of divination, healing or sympathetic magic. Seen from this angle, the most precious part of the deceased's previous gross body may be thought to assure the identification of the brahmin with the preta by providing material contact. A similar explanation may account for the offering of a golden image of the deceased together with the eleventh-day *śayyādāna*. *Abhicāra*,<sup>57</sup> a system of magical practices to affect and transform – whether to heal or harm – is mainly based on material manipulations, empowered language, and specific body-and-mind practices. The basic concepts underlying *abhicāra* – often translated as 'Hindu magic' – are in no way exclusive to a set category like 'magic', rather they appear to be, to some degree at least, an integral part of any ritual. The mantras used in ritual are believed to work in the same fashion, by representing, effecting, attaching, transferring. However, the purposes and merits sought will differ. The *abhicāra* specialist may use people's hair or nails

<sup>56</sup> This kind of *tilaka* is prepared from ashes and remains of the *ghyū* ('clarified butter') used for the fire oblations. It is applied to four places on the body – to the forehead (*lalāṭe*), throat, right shoulder and heart.

<sup>57</sup> On *abhicāra* see Türistig (1985) and Kane (1977, vol 5.2: 721).

to manipulate, trace, or work his intended effect on them. On the other hand, the priest directs his efforts towards bringing the human into contact with the divine.

With such contexts in mind, the bodily substances taken from the funeral pyre and included in further rituals reveal a common intent. They are understood as additional means to ensure that the deceased person is sent in the appropriate direction, toward the realms of ancestors and gods. The primary medium is the sacrificial fire; additional ones are *mahābrāhmaṇas* and rivers or *tīrthas*. And as a recent tendency, flowing water as a purifier and mediator between human and divine realms takes over some of the deprecated functions traditionally is charged by human actors.

### The context of the *śayyādāna* offering

The *dānakhaṇḍa* ('section on gift-offerings') in Hemādri's *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* covers nearly one thousand pages of printed text. Among the *puṇyādāna* (gift offered in the name of a deity to obtain spiritual merits) several occasions for *śayyādāna* are described. The eleventh-day 'bed-gift' to a brahmin is not among them.

In the case of Birendra and Dipendra, *śayyādāna* was one of the gifts offered on the eleventh day to the respective *mahābrāhmaṇas*. A second *śayyādāna* in the name of the two kings was given to the *mūlapurohita* as part of the thirteenth-day *śuddhaśānti* rituals at Nārāyaṇahiṭi palace (see Table 2). As *rājapurohita* Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita confirmed, all the ritual gifts offered to the preta are inauspicious, even dangerous for a human to accept. Therefore, with the exception of the eleventh-day *śayyādāna*, they were immersed into the Bagmati River. Only the gifts of the 12th and 13th day were accepted by the Darbar *mūlapurohita* and other brahmins involved.

In the DhSi and NiSi and in some of the *antypaddhatis* consulted, one finds this meaningful distinction between the two bed-gifts confirmed by a specific attribute. The eleventh-day *dāna* requires a golden image of the dead person (*kāñcanapurūṣadāna*)<sup>58</sup> while a golden image of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa is prescribed as part of the 13th-day *śayyādāna*. These images identify the final receiver of the gift – the *preta* and Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī respectively.

The distinction made above by the *rājapurohita* between gifts offered in the context of death conforms to the one made by Ayodhya Pandas between 'auspicious' or 'worth considering' (*puṇya*, *maṅgala*, *vicāraṇīya*) and inauspicious (*āmaṅgala*, *avicāraṇīya*) gifts (van der Veer 2001: 165). The latter include gifts to pretas or

<sup>58</sup> The ritual manuals consulted do include the gift of a *puruṣa* image in gold, stated to represent the *pretātman*. In the case of the kings, this image was replaced by a framed photograph.

inauspicious planets, or ones meant to ward off evil or get rid of sin or illness. This distinction is important with respect to the kind of brahmin who eventually accepts a *preta/prayaścitta-dāna* or *puṇyadāna* respectively.<sup>59</sup> Whereas low-ranking brahmins or service castes are called upon to accept the former, it is exclusively high-ranking brahmins who accept the latter. According to such a rule, a high-ranking brahmin will never accept food or other items designated for a *preta*, but he will take what is associated with the *pitaraḥ*, the forefathers.<sup>60</sup>

The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo/śayyādāna* for a deceased king requires a high-status Upādhyāya brahmin to offer himself as a *mahāpātra* ('great vessel', 'sacrificial vessel').<sup>61</sup> This represents a major exception, with far-reaching consequences for the brahmin accepting the eleventh-day meal and gifts.

Although Jonathan Parry assumes that *dāna* always implies the acceptance of the sins of the donor (1980, 103) one would rather argue in this case that the *kāṭṭe* brahmin takes upon himself the sins of the final receiver of the gift – the king's *pretātman* still bound by the *karma* of the deceased king. As stated by the *rājapurohita*, the *kāṭṭe* brahmin is not only conceived as a mediator for the food and gifts, but also as being ritually transformed into the *pretātman* itself. Such a conception is confirmed in the DhSi, in the requirement that such a brahmin go through all the *saṃskāra* rituals anew in order to become a human (*puruṣa*) again.<sup>62</sup>

That such a measure was prescribed at least proves that the brahmin can do something about his reduced ritual status, though this may not help him to overcome the loss of social recognition.

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<sup>59</sup> Both van der Veer (2001, 161) and Parry (1980: 102-105) discuss at length the duty of the brahmin to accept gifts – a duty which binds him to the giver's person and the motive behind the gift, and which is a basic source of inner conflict, contradicting as it does the brahmanical ideal of renunciation.

<sup>60</sup> Toffin analyses the various specialised castes involved in Newar funerary rituals (Toffin 1987). As for those derived from brahmin castes among them, he distinguishes three groups: the brahmin, the Karmācārya and the Bhā, Kusle etc. He observes that their affinity with particular categories of divine entities (Vedic-vegetarian deities/Tantric-carnivore deities/demonic-ghostly-malevolent beings) is reflected in the duties they fulfil within the complex of (post)mortuary rituals and the kinds of gifts involved (Toffin 1987: 231-232).

<sup>61</sup> This epithet was used by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita in addition to '*mahābrāhmaṇa*'. As for the funeral specialists at the cremation *ghāṭṣ* of Benares, such a form of address is exclusively applied to the category of funeral priests who offer their services between the first and eleventh day of the postmortuary rituals (Parry, 91-92). In the same paper Parry mentions alternative appellations, such as '*preta-brāhmaṇa*' or '*katkaha*'. Though the latter term may correspond to Nep. '*kāṭṭe*', he suggests that it is derived from Hindi *katila* ('obstacle', 'trouble') and *katu* ('bad') (Parry 1980: 108 n7).

<sup>62</sup> Quote from DhSi, end of the section on *śayyādāna*, p. 748: *pretaśayyāpratigrāhī na bhūyaḥ puruṣo bhavet// grhītāyāṃ tu tasyāṃ vai punaḥ saṃskāramarhati//*

### Scapegoat in royal gear?

Such an understanding is confirmed by the interpretation of the death ceremonies of the hill *rājas* described in Hutchison (1982, App. VII); the appellation of the brahmin as a *pret palu* ('sustainer of the *preta*') confirms notions described above, the escorting of the brahmin across the border while preventing him from selling any of the gifts accumulated are explained as measures to counteract a lurking conflict of authority feared to arise if the former king and his belongings were not physically removed from the state. Adding to this, the precipitate measures undertaken in order to prevent the ruler's lion throne being left empty were motivated by similar ends. The hasty declaration of the crown prince as the new king, while he was in hospital and soon to succumb to his injuries, then Gyanendra's ritual enthronement (*siṃhāsanārohana*) enacted at Hanumandhoka within one hour after the official declaration of Dipendra's death, occurred even through critics disapproved of such hasty action at a time of utmost confusion – it was even purposed to set up an image of Viṣṇu until the circumstances had been clarified. These instances substantiate the conviction that the death of a king initiates not only a critical period from the point of view of his transformation into an ancestor, but also of a possible instability and crisis for the kingdom. Comparing the elaborate series of rituals performed for a king's enthronement and coronation to the ritual addressing his demise as a ruler, one concludes that the only distinctive ritual act is the chasing away of the disguised brahmin as a means of filling the gap, whereas the rest of the postmortuary rituals are conducted according to his status as a human being, albeit with a funeral procession enlivened by the presence of officials, an army band, saluting army formations, and rounds of artillery in his honour. Compared with the ritual embedding of the enthronement, the pragmatic final part of the royal *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*, accompanied by governmental security personnel rather than the palace priests, can be understood as an expression of the desire for the monarchy to prosper unhindered.

### Concluding remarks

The 2001 *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* attracted extraordinary attention among the Nepali people. As it was telecast live by the state-owned TV channel, many people saw and subsequently discussed it. Things did not play out in the expected manner, and this caught the eye of journalists and the general public. The brahmins were sent home instead of being made to leave the Valley, leading people to suspect that a shady agreement had been entered into between officials and the brahmins.<sup>63</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>63</sup> The brahmins especially insisted on receiving a house and land, even as such items had been provided for previous *kāṭṭe* brahmins. In addition, they felt cheated at being forced to sell some of the gifts for a nominal price far below the market value.

several kinds of expectations were dashed. The *mūlapurohita* publicly disclaimed having added anything from the funeral pyre to the dishes served. With the elephants already on their way back to Chitwan National Park and the brahmins still at the Jawalakhel *kāṭṭe pāṭī*, their cry of having been cheated by the government became a public affair. Commenting on the thousands of onlookers coming to Patan, requiring a protective ring of police, the brahmins were compared to the animals housed in the nearby zoo by some journalists. With debates starting over the brahmins' greed, there was hardly scrap of dignity left. Subsequently the whole ritual was proclaimed a fossil from times long gone, and the enactment of it was regretted as having added to the reputation of the country as backward. Raghu Pant, a reporter of the *Kantipur* daily, even petitioned the government to have the personal belongings of the kings taken back from the brahmins before the latter sold them off to private collectors, or even tourists. There was no serious attempt to rectify the performance of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* within its obviously re-adapted ritual framework. The absence of some of its core aspects would have justified doing so.

The eleventh-day *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* is a striking example of a ritual caught between tradition and the rational tendencies and practical requirements of modern life. Its performance was not only affected by a limited budget; altered sensibilities deprived it of some of the main elements formerly contributing to its uniqueness. The practice of sprinkling the meal with a paste made from the deceased's skull, having become devoid of meaning, fell prey to a growing feeling of distaste, if not aversion, for all such 'superstition' of former times. The force with which the acting priests denied having cut anything from the dead bodies or added any remains of the kings' funeral pyre to the eleventh-day meal was in line with a general trend to expurgate ritual practice. The brahmins appointed for the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa*, who would have formerly been made outcastes and sent out of the Valley, had not only to resign themselves to a reduced number of gifts, but also to reintegrate themselves into their previous neighbourhood and community. Their fate was described in terms of social injustice or the consequences of greed, depending on the person asked. Nobody seemed to be any longer interested in the quiddity of the *kāṭṭo-grahaṇa* as an integral and meaningful element of *kriyākarma* rituals, and few would be likely to add their voice to it being continued in future. It has proven incompatible with a society struggling between traditional values and the trappings of modern life, whether they be urban development, a recent democratic constitution or a variety of alternative world-views to choose from.

Table 1: Timetable of events

Date	Place	Events-Rituals	Remarks
Fr 1.6.	Nārāyaṇahiṭī Royal Palace	Massacre	
Sa 2.6.	From Chauni hospital to Paśupati/ Ārya-ghāṭ	<i>Śraddāñjali</i> by officials, relatives and friends offering flowers <i>Śavayātr</i> to Ārya-ghāṭ, <i>dāhasaṃskāra</i> (cremation)	King Birendra, Queen Aishvarya, Prince Nirajan, Princess Shruti
Sa 2.6.		Dipendra declared new king, Gyanendra declared interim regent by the Rāja Paśād	
Su 3.6. to Su, 10.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>kriyākarma</i> , performed under supervision of the <i>mūlapurohita</i> , executed for the king and queen by a relative, for Nirajan by a priest appointed from the army	King Birendra, Queen Aishvarya, Prince Nirajan; ( <i>kriyākarma</i> for Princess Shruti performed by her husband's family and priests)
Mo 4.6.		King Dipendra's and Dhirendra's death announced; Gyanendra ascends lion throne at Hanumāndhoka	
Mo 4.6.	From Chauni hospital to ārya-ghāṭ	<i>Śavayātrā</i> for Dipendra and Dhirendra	
Tu 5.6. to We, 13.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>Karmakriyā</i>	For Dipendra and Dhirendra
Mo 11.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>Śayyādāna</i> for King Birendra, Queen Aishvarya, prince Nirajan; <i>kāṭṭo</i> for King Birendra; <i>dāna/dakṣiṇā</i> for <i>dāgbattī dine</i> Brahmins	
Th 14.6.	Kālamocana-ghāṭ	<i>Śayyādāna/kāṭṭo</i> for King Dipendra; <i>śayyādāna</i> for Dhirendra	



Fr 15.6.	Nārāyaṇahiṭī	Last day for written condolences in the palace <i>śok-pustikā</i> ('mourning-book')	
Sa 16.6.	Nārāyaṇahiṭī	<i>Śuddhaśānti</i>	For King, Queen, Dipendra and Nirajan. (for Dhirendra at Kālamocana-ghāṭ)
Su 17.6.		<i>Kāṭṭe</i> brahmins brought back home	

Table 2: *Antyakarma* rituals performed and *dāna* offered

Day	Ritual	A Actor/R Receiver (real or symbolic)	Remarks
1	<i>śavayātrā dāhasaṃskāra</i> ( <i>dehānta</i> )		1st-6th <i>piṇḍas</i> of <i>malinaṃ ṣoḍaśam</i> offered at once beside the <i>citā</i>
2-10	<i>karmakriyā</i> (Nep. <i>kiriya</i> )	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretātman</i>	7th-16th <i>piṇḍas</i> of <i>malinaṃ ṣoḍaśam</i>
2-10	<i>dīpadāna</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretātman</i>	at <i>Kālamocana-ghāṭ</i> (usually done at the deceased's house)
5	<i>pātheyaśrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretātman</i>	immersion into the Bagmati River
5	<i>asthisañcayana</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> / <i>rājapurohita</i>	'assembling of the bones' (done symbolically)
5	<i>asthipravāha</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	immersion of a piece of the skull at a <i>tīrtha</i> of the Kāli-gaṇḍakī River
5-9	Reciting from <i>Garuḍapurāṇa</i> ( <i>uttarakhaṇḍa</i> / <i>pretakalpa</i> )	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	
11	<i>vṛṣotsarga</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> / <i>rājapurohita</i> , R <i>preta</i>	one he- and one she-calf branded and released

11	<i>udakumbhadāna</i> ( <i>udakadāna</i> )	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretatva</i>	gift of small earthen pots with pieces of wood to clean the mouth (one for each day of the <i>pretatva</i> 's travel to <i>yamaloka</i> )
11	<i>kāñcanapurusaḍāna</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>mahābrāhmaṇa</i>	'gift of a golden image' of the dead
11	<i>dvijadampatipūjā</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i>	(symbolic) worship of a brahmin couple (done with <i>kuśa</i> )
11	<i>śayyādāna</i> and <i>kāṭṭo-grahaṇa</i>	R <i>mahābrāhmaṇa</i> ( <i>preta</i> )	
12	<i>sapiṇḍīkaraṇa</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>preta</i>	<i>piṇḍas</i> emerged in river
12	<i>uttama-pātheyaśrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>mūlapurohita</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	
13	<i>śuddha-śānti</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	
13	<i>śuddha-(gṛhya)-śānti-havana</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	Fire-offering for purification of the palace and its inhabitants
13	<i>rudrābhiṣeka</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	
13	<i>gṛhyābhiṣeka</i>	A <i>rājapurohita</i>	Purification of the palace with water from the <i>rudrābhiṣeka</i>
13	<i>vaitaraṇīdāna</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> R <i>Bhaṭṭa</i> priest of <i>Vāsukimandir</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	
13	<i>kapilādāna</i>	R <i>mūlapurohita</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	
13	<i>pañcadhenudāna</i>	R <i>mūlapurohita</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	
13	<i>daśadāna</i>	R 10 <i>brāhmaṇas</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	given in cash
13	<i>padadāna</i>	R 13 <i>brāhmaṇas</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	
13	<i>śayyādāna</i>	R <i>mūlapurohita</i> ( <i>pretatva</i> )	'bed-gift' along with a golden image of <i>Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa</i>

13	<i>bhojana</i>	R <i>mūla-/rājapurohitas</i> , further brahmins involved, family members, officials	invitation cards were distributed
13	<i>durmānaśānti</i> (includes gift of the Bhāgavatapu- rāṇa)	R brahmin	The only ritual additionally performed for the untimely/ unnatural death of the kings
11, 30, 45ff to 389	<i>uttamaṃ ṣoḍaśam</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i> , R <i>pretatva</i>	16 <i>piṇḍas</i> offered within one lunar year (with the <i>adhikamās</i> of 30 days completed after 390 instead of 360 lunar days)
After one year	<i>ābdika-śrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i>	The <i>pretatva</i> attains the state of an ancestor
Every year	<i>ekoddiṣṭa-śrāddha</i>	A <i>kriyāputra</i>	Annually performed in honour of one's forefathers up to three generations

After the completion of the first year, besides the *ekoddiṣṭa* a number of further memorial *śrāddhas* will be performed according to a monthly or yearly schedule.

This table brings together the rituals performed separately for King Birendra and Dipendra. It reflects the ideal day-to-day pattern and does not take into account the adaptations required for the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> days. The ritual elements, which were kept from outsiders, have been completed according to the information provided by Śekhara Prasāda Paṇḍita, Joint Secretary of the Darbar *rājapurohitas*.

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## **CORRESPONDENCE AND REPORTS**

## **Hope or Despair? Comments on community and economic development in rural Syangja (A reply to Alan Macfarlane)**

by Steven Folmar & Morgan Edwards

Alan Macfarlane's recent article, *Sliding Downhill: Some Reflections on thirty years of change in a Himalayan village* (2002), has refueled the debate about Nepal's welfare in rapidly changing times. Like Macfarlane, the first author of this article has conducted research in Nepal for over two decades, most of it demographically related (Folmar 1992a; 1992b). Although this research did not focus on Gurung culture, much of it was conducted in Ghachok, where a sizable Gurung population resides. The second author, a graduate student in Anthropology, brings a fresh perspective to issues related to Nepal's development and economic growth. We just spent a month (June 2002) in Sirubari, a village reachable by a five-hour walk from Helu, a road bazaar about 20 km south of Syangja. We were there to study the cultural tourism program operated by local Gurungs and its effects on them and Damais, who are an integral part of the community and its tourism business. Our experience reminds us that the economic continuum for Gurungs and for all of rural Nepal incorporates not only economic decline in villages like Thak that spawns pessimism, but also prosperity and hope. We are compelled to report some of our findings now as we prepare them for a more thorough treatment; they bear quite directly on issues raised by Macfarlane and the scholars who responded to his observations.

Thak must not be taken as typical of village Nepal nor should Macfarlane's gloomy assessment be considered representative of anthropologists' views of its economic prospects. As he has said, the situation is complex, more so now than two or three decades ago. Macfarlane touches on this complexity, raising the intertwined issues of demographic, ecological, economic, health and social decline. Demographic problems include population growth and out-migration and their effects on the home village, which exacerbate ecological degradation. Thak's economy struggles with a lack of wealth and development and therefore a reduced quality of material culture; there is growing poverty; land is decreasing in value; wages are not keeping pace with inflation; more people are now in debt. Declining health is reflected in increasing evidence of hunger, perhaps even starvation in Thak. Society and culture are eroding as well, as traditions become lost or misplaced and social relations deteriorate.

In stark contrast, any tourist's initial encounter with Sirubari would impress her that this village is on quite a different trajectory than Thak. A typical tourist is greeted first by a band of wedding musicians and a committee of well-dressed, precisely groomed and friendly people, mostly in middle to late adulthood. She

traverses kempt footpaths of stone, leading to a small temple square, where the lama of the gumpa blesses her and her group. She and another person stay in the separate room of a tidy house of mixed traditional and modern architecture with many modern amenities, including electricity and a toilet. The hosts serve rakshi and *dāl bhāt* modified to fit Western tastes. Most of Gurung Gaun is like this, a quiet reflection of economic prosperity and development.

We concentrated our efforts on Ward 4 of the multi-ethnic community of Sirubari, where the hub of the cultural tourism program is situated. This area and the nearest houses of Ward 1 (of the Panchamul Village Development Committee) include 54 households situated in the cultural center of the village making them the core of cultural tourism. Ward 1 contains another 31 Gurung households that form a more or less separate *gāū* too distant (physically and socially) from the village center to be integral to the tourist program. Gurung Gaun's 54 households include seven that are temporarily vacant, their families alternating residence between here and either Pokhara or Kathmandu for the past several years. Of the remaining 47 households, 37 are headed by men ranging in age from 38 to 85 years, and 80 percent of these have served in the military and now draw a pension (one was a policeman in Singapore). Women headed the other 10 households, of whom four reported having had husbands in the army.

As in Thak, the Gurungs of Sirubari are experiencing unwanted population decline, spurred by similar factors. In June of 2002, the *de jure* population of Gurung Gaun was 232, with a *de facto* population of 172 people averaging a surprising 40.6 years of age. This contrasted sharply with the absentee population's average of 26.9 years, also not particularly young by Nepalese standards. The flight of younger people and a decreasing fertility rate are reflected in a population pyramid that indicates decline. Even more worrisome is permanent out-migration (on which we do not have complete data). Daughters have always tended to move away when they marry, but now many sons also leave permanently for better jobs, educational opportunities for their children and the modern lifestyle that they experienced as children of soldiers. These trends have left Gurung Gaun with a painful lack of youth, accounting for the quiet enjoyed by tourists but bemoaned by many Gurungs. Having too few children means not only that people must find ways to fill in a labor shortage but must also look elsewhere for social roles that substitute for parents and grandparents. This is the reason Sirubari is considered an unhappy (*narāmro*) place by some older people. To them, the paucity of children portends a dreary future, somewhat akin to that of Thak, an aging community, despite being able to sustain itself economically, declining socially, culturally and numerically.

What makes for hope for Sirubari is that these demographic problems are not the tip of an iceberg of other ecological, economic, health and social problems as they appear to be in Thak. There is hope for Sirubari primarily because its people have taken a proactive stance toward their own future, exploring environmentally and community-friendly ways to develop their village and the surrounding area.



The local effort to conserve their environment is a good example of how Sirubari attempts to grapple with the undesired consequences of development. There are potentially many ways the environment can be harmed in this process and the community has exhibited varying degrees of response to the possible problems. For instance, although deforestation and erosion have long held national attention as symbols of environmental degradation, the damaging effects of these processes are minimal in this area. This situation may change, however, as development in Sirubari continues. Two obvious threats to the local ecology are tourists and the new road. Increasing numbers of tourists will demand more energy, packaged goods and sanitary facilities, leading to increased deforestation, litter and groundwater pollution. Construction of the road has gobbled up some farmland and, due to the steep terrain, land above the road threatens to slide downhill. The most immediate hazard is to one house, which sits perilously close to a recent landslide. Although land above the road will eventually stabilize, the road will attract more traffic and along with it the associated problems of pollution and safety, among other issues.

Sirubari is actively attempting to deal with a few, but by no means all, of these problems. For example, until this year, litter was meticulously cleaned from the thoroughfares in the village, but once collected was simply dumped into a nearby stream. Concern for the environment however has prompted villagers to construct a small trash pit, or mini-landfill, where litter will be placed and covered over by earth. Once this pit is full, the plan is to empty it and move the fill to another permanent location, thus keeping this nearby facility open for ease of use. Other more difficult environmental problems have not been addressed yet. An example is disposal of sewerage, a by-product of the detached toilets and bathrooms built to serve the dual purposes of sanitation and tourism. Locals have opted for septic tanks over biogas plants because they view the latter as having too unpleasant an odor for tourists. Unfortunately, they do not appear to appreciate the problems of ground water contamination presented by septic tanks with openings at the bottom to allow the sewerage to seep into the ground below. This design is considered superior to septic tanks that need emptied periodically due to the difficulty of access to the tanks by trucks equipped to perform this task. Besides, this service does not seem to be available anywhere in the Western Development Region. Thus far, attempts to address environment problems related to the building of the road up to Sirubari have not materialized. Nonetheless, one critical observation must not be lost. Even though many ecological problems remain, Sirubari is actively engaged in the process of identifying and evaluating them and is committed to finding effective solutions to them.

The critical factor in Sirubari's approach to its future is its wealth. Local affluence depends on a historical connection to military service. People in Sirubari are fond of estimating that "80 to 90 percent have served," in the armies of Great Britain, India or Nepal. And our statistics bear them out. The economic prosperity

that has followed on the heels of military service in these armies has left its mark on the material wellbeing of the people of Gurung Gaun.

Signs of economic decline in Gurung Gaun are next to impossible to find. Military service means salary during active duty and, more importantly for Sirubari, a pension once a man has retired. Having spent seven or more years in the military a man draws a basic pension which increases with more years of service and higher rank. Thirty-two men reported the amount of their pensions to us, which averaged 5190 Nepalese rupees or \$67 U.S. per month, a considerable income when compared to the approximately \$210 per capita GNP reported for the country as a whole in 2001. Other sources of income reported to us added another Rs. 350 per month.

Of course, this wealth is not evenly distributed, even in the Gurung community, but abject poverty was not apparent in any of the households. Perhaps the poorest Gurung family was virtually landless and had to stretch a monthly income of only Rs. 3,000 (\$40) to provide for a family of five. Consequently, they had none of the modern economic status symbols so prevalent now in Gurung Gaun, such as televisions, dining room furniture, electrical appliances or even a toilet and bathroom. Such items are becoming almost universal now. Among the 47 households in residence during our project, 40 had radios, 28 televisions, 44 an electrical connection and 38 a septic toilet. Other evidence of material wealth includes such items as plastic flowers, screens on doors, dining room tables and chairs, display cases for dishware, tea sets, linoleum floor coverings, rugs, veranda furniture, as well as modern appliances like crock pots, blenders, electric irons, and even an electric generator.

Land is still a primary measure of wealth in Sirubari. Informants estimated that *khet*, land use for irrigated rice farming, can cost as much as Rs 45,000 per ropani. Upland rain fed farmland, or *bāri*, is worth as much as Rs 30,000 per ropani. In Gurung Gaun, the average household owns 11 ropanis of the more valuable *khet* and 5 ½ of *bāri* fields. One household, inhabited by only one woman past the age of 80, has no land at all. Of the remaining 46 households, eight farm their own land (averaging only about 4 ropanis each of *khet* and *bāri*), the other 38 engaging people of other castes to work their land on an *adhiyā* or sharecropping, basis. Not only is the average farm more than sufficient to feed the family, but it is too large for the family to farm without help.

Not surprisingly, we saw no evidence of chronic hunger, malnutrition or starvation, either among the Gurung themselves or their neighbours living in Dalit hamlets. Quite to the contrary, when we report our demographic data more fully, it will clearly demonstrate that infant mortality is on the decline, even among the Damai, whose economic status is substantially lower than that of the Gurungs. Moreover, although the health post in nearby Panchamul does not figure directly into the relatively robust health of the area, one of its physicians rents a room in Sirubari, thus making health care readily accessible, locally. Contributing significantly to the

good health of this community's members is undoubtedly the near universality of toilets and piped water directly to every house or the neighbouring one. The availability of piped water has all but rendered metal water jugs as functionless; they now are displayed as decorative items in Gurung homes. Sanitation is valued in Sirubari as the recent and ongoing community-wide campaign to wash hands, particularly after using the toilet, vividly demonstrates.

Even with all these advantages, the people of Sirubari worry over the aging of their community and the threat of a deteriorating social fabric, instigated by the flight of its sons and their families to more desirable and modern places, such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, India and abroad. In fact, the leadership of the tourism project readily admits that, for them, the main reason for developing the area is to attract the youth back to Sirubari. Income is secondary, both in the sense that it is not the major purpose of the program, nor is it the primary source of income for these affluent farmers. As one man put it, "it is a side business" that helps to fill social gaps and will hopefully, along with other development efforts, entice Sirubari's youth back home.

Whether cultural tourism will accomplish this or other goals remains to be seen. It will certainly be difficult for Sirubari to compete with the lifestyle that lures the young to Kathmandu and places outside Nepal. But the people of Gurung Gaun are not trying to replicate city life; rather, they are striving to blend the best of rural life with the comforts of city life without the major drawbacks that accompany development.

To their credit, the people of Gurung Gaun have opted to exert control rather than fret over a bleak future. That they are taking matters into their own hands is consistent with Bista's expectations in *Fatalism and Development*, in which he asserts that when there is geographic and cultural distance from the Bahun-dominated ethos of Kathmandu a proactive stance toward development is more likely to ensue. As such, Gurungs have led the way developing their corner of Syangja District; their neighborhood has electricity, toilets, running water to each home, some of it even indoor; a motor road that is passable except in monsoon season now reaches Sirubari. Integral to their informal, loosely articulated development plan is the cultural tourism "program" they launched in 1998, which has come to serve as a model for similar programs across Nepal.

A balanced assessment of Sirubari's outlook would not be complete without comment on how other communities are affected by and figure into their development efforts. Overall, the Gurungs' tourism program has attempted, both in practice and theory, to better both their own community and that of the lower-castes in the area. However, differences in development goals between the Gurung and the lower caste communities have not completely been worked out. For example, when asked what people specifically wanted from this development project, answers varied from a functioning water system to nicer homes. Despite disparities between

intended goals of the tourism project, the Gurung and Damai people, in general, referred to the enterprise as “a good thing.” Although Gurung community leaders frequently mention their goals of including every Gurung household into the tourism program and expanding the program into Damai and other low caste households, realization of these goals seems a somewhat distant promise. The need for a more equitable decision making body that would include the thoughts of the lower castes, promotion of the practice of saving money to continue development into the future, and inter-caste cooperation and maintenance of the development efforts come to the forefront when investigating the Gurung tourism endeavor. Despite these kinks in their plans for the future, the Gurungs are actively seeking suggestions to improve their program for their immediate community, the nearby Dalit communities and tourists alike. In fact, they have specifically asked us to make recommendations to them. Sirubari exemplifies a Gurung community that has invested immensely in the preservation and development of their culture through actively initiating and participating in their cultural tourism program as part of an overall development effort. The positive approach they bring to these activities demonstrates that the development landscape of Nepal includes areas where optimism is well placed.

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## **A Covenant with Nepal? Ethics and ethnography during the People's War**

Sharon Hepburn

During my undergraduate education a professor asked our unsuspecting class what would we do if informants asked us to take up arms and help fight their enemies. Never having thought of the possibility, and certainly not having seen mention of such things in our texts, and being naïve and unimaginative, we stared blankly. "Well," he said, "then you've not asked yourselves the big questions." Most of us can avoid such questions in our careers, and may easily avoid the issues, frequently with much approval from our colleagues.

In 1993, as I prepared to leave Nepal after three years, some acquaintances asked me to help prepare for armed resistance to the Nepali state, outlining a plan that closely follows how the People's War has unfolded (although "Maoism" as such was not mentioned). I declined their request. Discussing this with colleagues led to mixed reactions: although no-one thought I should have helped, or at least no-one said so openly, there were differences of opinion about what to do with that information.

As I plan to travel to Nepal right now, my colleagues (at the university where I teach in Canada) respond to knowledge of the Nepal situation in a more consistent way and ask "Isn't it dangerous?", "Aren't you putting yourself in harm's way?", and "Couldn't you just hold off and do your project (on children and tourism) a bit later, when this mess has all blown over?"

Though separated by nine years I face much the same intellectual and ethical questions in both cases. How do we answer "the big questions" in all their variations and forms? How do we deal with the bits of information we all surely have from our time in "Shangri-la" or "the Zone of Peace"? How do we plan and publish our research in a way that does justice to the realities of life as we find it in Nepal? And what are our obligations to the people we write about and how do those complement or conflict with the professional demands of our disciplines? In part we make decisions based on our own conscience; in part we make them according to the norms of our disciplines and professions. In this paper I make one suggestion to be considered when we ask such questions, as we all might today, as Nepal sits on the edge of an uncertain future in these times of rapid change.

As a way of shifting our perspective we might consider the relationship we have with Nepal and Nepalis as a form of covenant. The word "covenant" might ward off many readers as it harkens to biblical covenant and implies a moral bond and obligation that is, for those happy to abide by more secular-sounding codes, foreign to their conceptions of professional life. For all the recent talk in anthropology (to take as an example the discipline I work in) about representation, dialogue, "paying

back your informants”, sharing authorship, and acknowledging who “owns” knowledge, it should be noted that these modern discourses within western academic institutions draw from parallels with current, more secular, “politically correct” issues such as the evils of colonialism, imperialism, and hierarchical views of humanity; they also function within the demands of highly professionalized and institutionalized vocations, as academic careers are these days, where people are generally praised for taking these stances.

The mention of the word “covenant” also evokes its antithesis, the contract, and it is between these views of human/professional relationships that we all sit, at different distances from the two extremes. The nature of the particular contracts we implicitly hold, and covenants we might conceive of, will of course be diverse, and clearly quite different for foreign scholars and for Nepali scholars. Nonetheless, the suggestion I make here is that we consider where we sit between these extremes and think about what to do today as scholars of Nepal, by recognizing where we sit and perhaps sliding a little towards the end of covenant, and away from contracts (in the various forms we hold them) .

In *The Physician’s Covenant* William May questions how the medical profession got to where it is today, with the ideals of the Hippocratic oath being displaced by the emergence of medical corporations and changing professional demands, leaving a situation that might often just as well be served by a “Hippocritical” oath. In this world, the situation between patient and doctor is ruled by contract: payment for services received. May presents an alternative and advocates that physicians see themselves as indebted. His ideal physician is not a benefactor, or philanthropist: he is paying back a debt formed in a covenant. The doctor learns his trade through “practice”: although fully accredited physicians continue to say they “practice” medicine, they learnt the skills that led to accreditation through – quite literally – *practicing* on sick people. Having learnt through practice on some, a physician is then, in May’s view, bound in covenant to help others in order to repay a diffuse and enduring debt.

So considering the possibility of a covenant with Nepal, what of the two situations in my research that I describe above? The first, in which I was asked to help people attain the material and training for home-made explosives for the People’s War, was – to say the least – tricky. While many of us justifiably talked about “writing ethnography in the Janajati-yug” (Des Chenes 1996) there was in fact in the background the question of how long this “yug” with its dominant concern would last for those feeling frustration from injustices of the past. Mikesell (1993) and Nickson (1992) suggested Nepal might have a Shining Path in the making and some of us – myself and any other foreigners who were surely asked to help, and very possibly some Nepali scholars – knew that plans were already solidifying and recruits were signing up. Some of us – by chance or interest – knew enough about the people and situation to write about it, and possibly redirect the focus of public (and academic) debate about the emerging situation which at that point many thought

unlikely. But there were of course the concerns of the ethical injunction we share with physicians to “do no harm” to the people we work with and for. For published scholarship to be meaningful there would have had to be enough detail to make the people in it uncomfortably recognizable. There was also the concern to “do no harm” to myself: it had been made clear that I was not to cross these people requesting my help. “Should I write about this?”, I asked an anthropologist colleague in Nepal: he questioned my concern and reassured me that their dreams of resistance would go nowhere, and that if I did write about it, they certainly wouldn’t track me down to Ithaca, New York, where I was soon heading. Still asking this question in November 2001, with my article providing the context of the request by the proto-Maobadi finally written, numerous colleagues – themselves very concerned about the developing situation in Nepal agreed that the time was so long passed and the situation so changed that I could write without endangering the people involved who were now, in any case, possibly some place else, possibly fighting – and perhaps dying – for the People’s War. Then things changed with the State of Emergency and the anti-terrorist ordinance: who was I to write anything that pointed in any way to anyone who by current law could be arrested and held, and “questioned for intelligence” on the mere suspicion that they might sympathize with the Maoist cause?

As I prepare to leave for Nepal now, with – finally – funds to support a project that I’ve been wanting to do for at least a decade, new questions loom about ethnography in the Post-State of Emergency-Yug. Nepalis, Nepali scholars, and foreign scholars in touch with Nepalis who talk about the present state of their lives, talk of widespread fear, generalized distrust, a societal closing in, and a very uncertain future. The human rights organization INSEC (Informal Sector Service Centre) and Amnesty International (AI) publish highly disturbing reports of killings and violations of human rights. And the suggestions come quickly from others, and from myself: “Why don’t you wait a while?”, “Why not do some other work somewhere else?”, and “Why not move your fieldsite altogether..Nepal might be no good for “normal” research for quite awhile yet?”

In the background of my questioning what to do both with the 1993 material/situation and with my current plans, looms the persistent shadow of self-interest. I am in a profession the norms of which put a very high premium on publishing and on publishing new material: offering a viewpoint off-center from the current focus, yet well documented (as was my information about the situation in 1993) would be approved of. I work in a world of contracts: contracts with the organizations (and taxpayers) who supported my research and have given me the funds to do a project beginning this month; I have a contract with my employer that requires that I publish (or perish). The impetus now is very much to “go somewhere else” or “wait till this all blows over... then go do it, or relocate the project.” Or I could, I tell myself, go to Nepal and do something really benign (but very interesting to me): the

granting agency will certainly understand, and it can all be explained in terms of ethics, by the standards of any official ethical code that I know of in my profession.

Or I could do what I suggest in this paper and that is to slide over even just a little on the scale between “contract” and “covenant”. Like a physician who needs to train, most of us have “practiced” in Nepal, although in different ways: different kinds of research require different kinds of skills, and the situation of Nepali scholars is clearly different from that of foreign scholars. Nonetheless, many theses and books thank people for their patience with ineptness, folly, and other perhaps tiresome shortcomings. Practice has by no means made perfect – certainly not in my case anyway – but I have my accreditation, my Ph.D., my professional qualification that lets me practice without supervision (aside from ever-present ethical standards). I could now even charge people who have offered to hire me – on contract – for my skills: I could be working now – being paid – to work on projects to help *bikās* along a bit in Nepal.

But thinking of my relationship with Nepal and Nepalis as based even in some small degree on covenant, the situation looks a bit different. In this light I have a debt. Perhaps the demands of my career, and the norms of my profession which demand a certain amount of “profit” from salary and grants (in the form of a fairly quick supply of articles and “results”) and, for which I am given credit (tenure, promotion, further grants), are to some degree incommensurate with my covenant, and must be compromised (if only to a modest degree).

We have choices and this is what I suggest we all consider more broadly. Who knows what is really happening throughout Nepal today? Yet, despite the news blackout we have the reports of AI and INSEC. We know that people who see themselves as supporters of democracy (of the Congress Party sort) are targeted by Maoists for their convictions. We have a pretty clear indication of the real possibility of human right violations of the most grievous kind being perpetuated by the army and the Maoists. Villagers’ (and most of us know quite a few of these) lives are often governed these days by concerns that go well beyond most of our research interests. Most of us can see that “both sides have a point” and “the average Nepali is caught in the middle,” sometimes by a bullet, and sometimes simply for joining a movement in order to “eat rice” when there were few if any alternatives. With the war in Afghanistan, the ongoing threat of (perhaps even nuclear) war in Pakistan and India, and escalating violence in the middle east, Nepal is virtually forgotten as Prime Minister Deuba makes deals for “non-combat military aid” with George Bush and Tony Blair. For some of us, the questions and trajectory of our research might directly take us to considering the Maoist situation. Those inspired by the Frankfurt school would have the rest of us change our research to address the situation (as they advocated with the growth of Nazism in Europe). But the rest of us, whatever our specialty, have another option and that is to honour a covenant bound in debt by using our credentials and/or status – which gives us voice which most Nepalis (whether they are the citizens of the country we do research in, or are our fellow-



citizens) don't have – to let their situation and concerns be known. This can be through our scholarly work (for example, Pettigrew (forthcoming), and in her present work on medical care during the People's War), letting the complexities of the situation be known beyond Nepal (especially if our government is offering military support to Nepal). Or we can simply say, as we plan our new projects, "Nepal isn't like it was anymore" and frame our questions in terms that reflect the present context of peoples' lives. To do this we might – like the physician May praises – have to go without "pay": to effectively speak for those who can't – without endangering them, or ourselves (particularly if we are Nepali) – we may have to write anonymously, and devote "research" time to organizations like AI, and helping the refugees that surely will soon be coming to many of our countries.

### Acknowledgments

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## **Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects (CDTD)** **A research report**

by Roland Bielmeier

This dictionary is the outcome of more than 10 years of project work. Most of the data were collected by project members in the field, other data were taken from recent and reliable publications. We started our first project, financed by the Swiss National Foundation, in 1992 with the title ‘Historical-Comparative Lexicon of Tibetan Dialects’. It ended in 1995 and the Swiss National Foundation agreed to support a second project, ‘Foundations of a Historical Grammar of Tibetan’, which lasted with some breaks till 2000.

### **Goals**

A comparison of the lexicon of Written Tibetan, i.e. of the classical and pre-classical language, with that of its modern spoken dialects shows that the latter have undergone a simplification of the syllable structure. However, the nature and degree of this simplification varies between the different areas in which Tibetan is spoken as a mother tongue. The documentation of this historical language change in Tibetan on the phonetic-phonemic and lexical levels constituted the goal of our first project. To work towards this goal, we set out to collect a limited selection of vocabulary items in as many spoken varieties as possible, and to compare this vocabulary with the etymologically corresponding lexicon of Written Tibetan. Our main aim was to discover the principles of sound change in Tibetan over the last twelve centuries. The second project was linked to the preceding project in terms of both data and goal. The goal was, on the one hand, to continue our work with the dictionary and, on the other hand, to extend our research to all linguistic levels. In the first project we had dealt mainly with the phonetic-phonemic and lexical levels from a diachronic point of view. Now grammar was to be included in the diachronic approach.

The basic methodological idea remained the same, i.e. to facilitate a comparison between the grammars of spoken and written Tibetan. We selected a number of spoken varieties for which to write grammars, basing our choice on two criteria. First, we intended eventually to produce reliable grammars from all main areas of linguistic Tibet. Second, archaic or conservative varieties were to be given first priority. Our further aims are to establish a new genetic classification of the Tibetan dialects, based mainly on the principles of sound change, and to establish the dialect geography of linguistic Tibet, based mainly on sound and lexical change.

### **Research group and fieldwork**

In Western Tibet the fieldwork was conducted by myself and Ngawang Tsering. I had already conducted fieldwork on Balti and Ladakhi between 1986 and 1988 and continued this work after the beginning of the first project in 1992. In this I was supported by Ngawang Tsering, a native speaker of the Lower Ladakhi dialect of Nurla. Ngawang Tsering had collected an impressive amount of dialectal data on the different varieties all over Ladakh, especially between 1995 and 1997, and we transcribed and evaluated this data together. Felix Haller and Chungda Haller, a native speaker of Shigatse Tibetan, were also members of the research group for the first project and they conducted fieldwork in Central and Eastern Tibet. They visited Shigatse three times to collect material, but our main informant for the Shigatse dialect is Chungda Haller. Felix Haller finished his Ph.D. thesis on the Shigatse dialect in 1995. This comprehensive grammatical description, including transcribed and translated narratives, was published in 2000.

In addition, they conducted fieldwork in Eastern Tibet, Amdo and Kham, from 1992 to 1997. The first objective of this fieldwork was to obtain a general overview of the dialects spoken in Eastern Tibet. In 1992 they were in Amdo collecting material from Themchen, Kangtsha, Kharmar, Chapcha, Dzorganrawar, Matö, Labrang and Ngawa. The second fieldtrip in 1993 took them to Kham, where they collected material from Dartsedo, Kardze, Derge, Lithang and Bathang. After these two fieldtrips Felix Haller concentrated on the highly conservative North Amdo dialect of Themchen which enjoys great prestige in Amdo. Mostly during the summers from 1994 to 1997 Felix and Chungda Haller collected material on this dialect. Because Themchen was a closed area at that time, they visited it only twice and decided to do most of the fieldwork in Xining, asking their informants to come there. In 1995 Katrin Häsler, Veronika Hein, Brigitte Huber and Marianne Volkart joined the second project. In cooperation with the South-West College of Nationalities in Chengdu, Katrin Häsler conducted two fieldtrips to Kham in 1995 and 1996 and in 1999 presented a grammar of the Tibetan Dege dialect, which also enjoys high prestige in Kham, as a Ph.D. thesis. Part of the recorded material was transcribed and analysed during the fieldtrips. The majority of the transcription and analysis was, however, conducted in Switzerland with the help of language informants from the Dege area. Veronika Hein is working on the Spiti variety of Tibetan in Tabo in Northern India. Since 1995 she has made a fieldtrip to this area every year and will complete her Ph.D. thesis on the Spiti dialect soon. Brigitte Huber conducted almost a year of fieldwork in Nepal (in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001) working on the dialect of Kyirong, north of Kathmandu. As she did not receive permission to travel to Kyirong on the Tibetan side of the border, she worked with Kyirong speakers in Nepal. In 2002 she finished her Ph.D. thesis on the Lende subdialect: this consists of a description of the dialect and also presents a historical perspective by comparing it with Written Tibetan.

Some of the material included in the CDTD was taken from published sources on the Central Tibetan varieties of the Western Drokpas and of Southern Mustang (Monika Kretschmar 1986, 1995), of Dingri (Silke Herrmann 1989), from sources on the Kham Tibetan variety of Nangchen (Margret Causemann 1989), and on the Amdo Tibetan variety of Ndzorge (Jackson T.-S. Sun 1986). These data were entered into the computer during the first project. During the second project Marianne Volkart entered material of the Jirel in Nepal (Anita Maibaum and Esther Strahm 1971, 1973, 1975), while Chungda and Felix Haller entered the Bathang material of the Tibeto-Burman lexicon (Dai Qingxia et al. 1992) provided by Kesang Gyurme who is a native speaker of Bathang Tibetan; the Arik material of the Tibeto-Burman Lexicon; the material of seven Ngari Tibetan varieties complemented by Lhasa Tibetan (Qu Aitang and Tan Kerang 1983); the Dzongkha material of George van Driem's grammar of Dzongkha (1998); and the Golok material from Serta (Richard Keith Sprigg 1968, 1972, 1979).

### **Processing of the data**

The fieldwork data were recorded on tape, transcribed by developing the phonemic analysis of the different varieties, and entered into the computer. With regard to the verbs, simple sentences were elicited and entered into our database together with notes on the verb classification documented by the sentences. In the case of published sources, usually all the available material was taken and phonemic transcriptions were adapted to our system. An English or German translation was added to all entries, as well as a reference to the data source, and the German translation was complemented by an English correspondence.

The last step in processing the data was aimed at establishing the internal Tibetan etymology. This was achieved by applying the historical-comparative method, well known from Indo-European studies, to establish regular sound correspondences between the orthographic forms of Written Tibetan and the spoken dialectal forms. As the data for the dictionary grew, we had to reorganise our database completely, an undertaking which was headed by Katrin Häsler with the help of Moritz Vögeli, who designed the new 'Toblerone' fonts for the dialectal and Written words. She succeeded in simplifying the structure of the database. The most important change was the result of her idea to assign a specific key number to every Written Tibetan lemma, a number that is also assigned to all the etymological correspondences in the different varieties, which are finally to be grouped together under the Written Tibetan lemma. Thus we were able to escape the problem that the slightest difference in word formation would lead to chaos in our database. On the other hand, this new strategy brought us back immediately to the still unresolved problem of how to handle Written Tibetan. We finally decided to build up two data stacks, one containing the verbs of Written Tibetan, aiming at completeness, and one containing all those Written Tibetan nouns, adjectives, numbers, etc. for which we

had dialectal evidence. The Written Tibetan forms are based on H. A. Jäschke's Tibetan-English dictionary of 1881 and its German precursor of 1871, on Goldstein's Tibetan-English Dictionary of 1978 [2001], and on the Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary in three volumes of 1985 (Zhang Yisun et al., *Bod Rgya tshig mdzod chen mo. Zang Han da cidian*. [The Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary]. Vols. 1-3. Beijing 1985). Both the verb stack and the noun stack of Written Tibetan were entrusted to Marianne Volkart, who is writing a Ph.D. thesis on word formation in Written Tibetan. The highly labour-intensive task of assigning the correct etymology to every dialect item was shared among the members of the research team. Basically the fieldworkers were responsible for 'their' dialects, whereas the data from the published sources were dealt with mainly by Marianne Volkart, Brigitte Huber and myself. A further important organisational change, concerning the editing of our dictionary, was the decision to plan the final export of the complete data not into Word, which is unable to process such a quantity of data, but into QuarkXPress.

### **The dictionary**

It has been our aim from the beginning to finally make our data accessible in the form of a dictionary modelled on R. L. Turner's *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages*, (Oxford 1966/1969). Following Turner, who arranged all the Middle and New Indo-Aryan words under the etymologically corresponding Sanskrit word, we decided to arrange all the Tibetan dialectal words according to a new dialect classification under the etymologically corresponding Written Tibetan words, arranged alphabetically according to the traditional Tibetan system. And it was in these early stages of the second project that we decided (still following Turner to a certain extent) to call our dictionary the *Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects* (CDTD).

Two preprints of the verb volume of the CDTD were printed in September 1997 (main volume 253 pp. in two columns, with 1532 main entries of Written Tibetan verbs and 32 dialectal varieties) and September 1998 (main volume 272 pp. in two columns, with 1567 main entries of Written Tibetan verbs and 34 dialectal varieties). These preprints include an introductory section with a preliminary new classification of Tibetan dialects, the phonemic inventories, etc., and to present our results to the international community on the occasion of the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium we printed a third preprint of the verb volume in September 2002. The main volume (325 pp. in two columns) contains 1602 main entries of Written Tibetan verbs with their dialectal correspondences of 67 varieties. This volume is accompanied by two index volumes. The first contains an index of all Written Tibetan words, as well as the indexes of the entries for each dialect (209 pp.). The second contains the indexes of the English and German translations and gives for each word the lexical type based on the Written Tibetan entry, as well as a list of the dialectal varieties in which the word is documented (199 pp.) The first two preprints

of the noun volume of the CDTD including the index volumes are organised in the same manner as the verb volume. They were printed in April 2000 (main volume 557 pp. in two columns, 5710 main entries of Written Tibetan nouns, 57 dialectal varieties) and July 2001 (main volume 646 pp. in two columns, 6006 main entries of Written Tibetan nouns, 67 dialectal varieties). As we could not finish the current revision of the noun volume till the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium, we printed as third preprint only the first revised half of the main noun volume together with the corresponding index volumes. Due to the growing number of pages especially of the noun volume we now printed some of the indexes separately. This may be changed in the final version.

Currently, we are working on the following volumes:

Volume 1 : Introduction (research history, phoneme inventories, principles of presentation, classification of the verbs, classification of the Tibetan dialects and its criteria, geographic features of Tibetan dialects, etc.)

Volume 2.1 : Noun volume

Volume 2.2.: Written Tibetan index

Volume 2.3 : Dialect indexes

Volume 2.4 : English index

Volume 2.5 : German index

Volume 3.1 : Verb volume

Volume 3.2 : Written Tibetan and Dialect indexes

Volume 3.3 : English and German indexes

For further details see <http://www.isw.unibe.ch/tibet/>

Roland Bielmeier

University of Berne (Switzerland)

roland.bielmeier@isw.unibe.ch



## **BOOK REVIEWS**



**Medicine and the Emergency. Re-reading Vincanne Adams' *Doctors for Democracy: Health professionals in the Nepal revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN 0 521 58548 1 (paperback). 251 p., illus., index.<sup>1</sup>**

Reviewed by Ian Harper

In this short essay I re-examine Vincanne Adams' *Doctors for Democracy* in the light of the current crisis in Nepal, and assess this work's explanatory value in the light of the Emergency. In what ways might a re-reading of this theoretically innovative and intellectually challenging book be of use in attempting to understand and explain some of the dynamics of the current situation?

Firstly, consider these two recent events. Shortly after the declaration of the Emergency in November 2001, I received an e-mail from a doctor friend of mine in Nepal regarding, what he called "one of the facets of the present day political situation in Nepal". It related to the arrest and detention of a practicing doctor in December 2001, while he was working in one of Nepal's Medical College. He was arrested by armed police and accused of "medical treatment extended to the Maoists". Information received by the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC) – working for human rights and social justice – had been forwarded to a number of concerned organizations and individuals, including the group Physicians for Social Responsibility, Nepal (PSRN). He was later released in early January 2002. In March 2002, Dr. Mahesh Maskey, a member of PSRN, while on his way to Delhi for a human rights meeting in light of the current situation, was similarly arrested, allegedly for support given to the Maoists. As perhaps the most prominent intellectual – and long-standing health activist – arrested since the Emergency, he was released following an outpouring of both national and international protest. These two events then, represent two aspects of the contemporary relationship between medicine and the state in Nepal. One, the precarious position that many health workers find themselves in, scrutinized by a state apparatus granted

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<sup>1</sup> Since this essay was written Nepal's political situation, which is changing rapidly, has again significantly shifted. Fortunately, the Emergency has been lifted, a ceasefire proclaimed, the Maoist party is no longer outlawed, and discussions with the current government are underway to define the terms of peace talks. The democracy process, however, has been suspended under the terms of the constitution and the current cabinet was selected by the King. This essay was written prior to all these events occurring, and so the context into which we read the significance of the practice of health workers has shifted. As this is one of the points of the article, and since by the time the essay comes to print further changes may well have occurred to Nepal's socio-political scenario, I choose to leave it as it is. However, I ask that those familiar with Nepal read it as written at a particular point in this country's troubled recent history.

exceptional power. The other, the dangers of attempting to articulate solutions and positions on the current crisis that run against the grain of current government opinion.

Over a decade previously, the arrest and detention of Professor Mathura Shrestha, a close associate of Mahesh Maskey, is related as one of the turning points of the Nepal revolution of 1990, an event given key interpretive space in *Doctor's for Democracy*. In many respects ahead of its field of scholarship on Nepal, the text deals with contemporary issues concerning the relationship between professionals and the workings of the modern state. The issues it raises in relation to the political involvement of the professional classes and the modern state are, if anything, now more important and relevant than they were then. Yet the arrest of Dr Mahesh Maskey, doctor and medical activist, seems to have made little difference in the current context of the Emergency. Why might this be? There are two issues I shall explore here (although there are almost certainly others as well), both stimulated by reading Adams' book. Firstly, is this because medicine is a less powerful force in the political workings of the modern state than Adams suggests - that is, that medicine in the workings of the state is over-determined in her text? Or is it because the issues she highlights, the relation between medicine and state politics, are of less explanatory value to the current situation as the political context is so different today? Re-reading her book in light of the current situation involves more than just reading for the facts of what happened; it also raises a number of issues of interpretation and theory. Keeping these two questions in mind I will briefly summarize her work.

Health development, she suggests, is an instrument of modernity that hides its own political contingency. She is concerned here with broad theoretical ideas concerning whether medicine can be politicised without undermining its claims to objectivity, and she explores the links between medical science, politics and truth. It is, as Adams puts it, the line "*between politically convenient truth and scientifically objective truth when political acts are called medical acts and medical acts are placed in the service of political regimes*" (p. 6) that her text explores. It is on these weighty and important issues, on this central theme and conundrum that Adams focuses, using Nepal as a case study. To address these questions then in the Nepal context, she explores the role of medical practitioners in the revolution of 1990. The bulk of her empirical data is drawn from six months of interviews she conducted in 1993.

Her narrative is structured in the following way. Placing an interpretive boundary around Nepal, the state, she articulates the links between medical practitioners and politics (in fact mainly left wing politics, though this is not clearly delineated) and the revolution of 1990 resulting in the re-introduction of democratic polity. She offers a brief overview of the history of Nepali politics, and its movement towards democracy, within a framework, latterly, of "development". The rise of individualism promoted via health development agencies, the rise of the

objectification of disease and the associated delineating of *difference* in order to deal with it are key to Adams' constitution of what makes up modernity. Yet modernity emerges within traditional cultural values, those of family, caste, reciprocity, and within religious, ethnic and monarchical privilege. Her argument is that in the context of Nepal, modernity is seen to emerge within an existing Nepali culture (of *difference*) which is then seen as a barrier, preventing further development, and comes to be classified as corruption within the workings of the modern state.

To illustrate this, she outlines chronologically the events of early 1990, the revolution that led to the formation of a democratic polity in Nepal, focusing particularly on the roles and increasingly important activities of health and medical practitioners in this process. It was, she suggests, particularly the involvement of health professionals, able to speak truth to oppressive political realities in Nepal because of their privileged position in health institutions, that significantly helped shift public opinion against the Panchayat government. This leads into an analysis, based mainly on interviews with doctors and health professionals involved in this critical event, of their motivations for becoming involved. Her concern is with the process of what happens when scientific truths, like medicine, once politicised then become open to accusations of corruption, as medical truths are turned into what she terms "politically convenient" ones. She uses a number of examples, including the Black report in the UK, to illustrate the politicisation of medicine in a number of comparative historical and social settings, as examples of how medical science is sacrificed to the altar of partisan interests. Next she turns to post-revolutionary medicine in Nepal, and how party political affiliations had (by 1993 when she did her six months' fieldwork for this book) become another site for favouritism and corruption, and thus, how the scientific claims to the universality of these truths also come into question. Finally she suggests what some of the implications may be for the development of a distinctive Nepali style of democracy, one that wishes to distance itself from what some consider to be Western and neo-colonial hegemony.

This book is characterized by a tendency to oversimplify historical shifts into all too easily compartmentalised eras. A single chapter on "history and power" in Nepal, for example, simplifies a complex and multi-faceted mosaic, a fact Adams' acknowledges by stating that those who know Nepal may find this section too brief. Also the form of the book is molded by a radical skepticism towards modernity produced by a Foucauldian determinism, reflected in much recent American anthropological scholarship. Theoretically driven, her empirical data and interviews nestle comfortably into this intellectual armchair and much of her book is sweeping in its scope. A legitimate criticism is, I think, that her theory tends to reach beyond the empirical evidence provided. In short, it may over-determine the relationship between modernity, medicine and the state. The revolution of 1990 was a much broader based movement than is apparent from Adams' work, involving other intellectuals and movements in addition to those in the health profession. It would have enriched her account – but simultaneously diminished the force of her

theoretical arguments – to have contextualised the contributions of health professionals within this broader based movement, rather than over-determining their role. What of the lawyers, teachers, writers, artists, journalists and so forth who were also part of the “modern” powers she is attempting to articulate? It could perhaps even be argued that the group of exceptional individuals and activists she highlights and centralises in her narrative just happen to also be doctors and health professionals.

If this criticism is correct, then my first suggestion – that there may have been a tendency to over-determine the place of health workers in the revolution – implies that it is not surprising that following the arrest of Dr. Mahesh Maskey little has changed (this is not to deny that health and modernity are crucially linked, just that this may work most effectively beyond the bio-political domain Adams delineates). Mahesh Maskey then becomes one of the few intellectuals at this time – he happens also to be a doctor and health activist – articulating positions against the state use of force. Secondly, the political transition from Panchayat politics to one of democratic polity was perhaps clearer then than it is now. To what utopian space will resistance to the state’s use of force lead, in an era in which we have supposedly witnessed over a decade of democracy in practice? For many in Nepal the post-revolutionary experiment with democracy has not been positive and cynicism pervasive. The perceived rise in corruption combined with the fact that development benefits are quite obviously not being equitably distributed has undermined democratic idealism, and in no small part this has fuelled more radical alternatives. What spaces are left now for political idealism in Nepal? What spaces for a politically active medical practice, long the cornerstone of an engaged public health? I for one cannot answer this question and, like so many others, I watch with increasing ill ease as the current scenario plays itself out.

The Ministry of Health has stated that all possible war-related injuries are to be reported to the authorities. At a time when people need medical care perhaps even more this indicates that state politics and medicine are certainly linked. In the current situation this says much about the realities of repressive state authoritarianism, currently supported too uncritically by a globalised anti-terrorist mandate in the wake of September 11. Many health workers are now in positions of extreme vulnerability, as they attempt to continue their work. Along with human rights activists, health workers are positioned better than anyone to witness the atrocities committed by government and Maoists alike. Like it or not, those who practice medicine in Nepal will witness human rights abuses, extra-judicial killings, and other excesses carried out by both the Maoists and at the hands of the state granted exceptional powers. The government knows this, as do the Maoists. But both treating and speaking out has become much more dangerous in a situation of political intolerance where unconditional support for the government is demanded from health workers. Not to report injuries to the security forces is to risk accusation of being with the Maoists, an example of the draconian polarisation occurring under the Emergency.

Highlighting issues such as these – to the British government, for example, who are providing support to the army in the current situation – is part of an intellectual's task of speaking truth to power. This surely does not make those who do so necessarily supporters of terrorism, as seems to be the accusation made against anyone in Nepal who currently dares to speak out. It is a terrible indictment that doctors and health workers in Nepal at present are neither able to freely treat, or to freely record and make public the excesses of current politics in Nepal. That more are not doing so, testifies to their vulnerability and the climate of state terror they find themselves in. Those who speak out, and they are all too few, take great personal risks at present, and I for one offer them all the support I can. Looking then at the current Emergency through the awful privilege of witness afforded by medical practice, does bring issues of the current situation in Nepal into sharp relief, as indeed it did in 1990, and as Adams highlights for us.

This too is metaphysically related to issues of the ambiguous relationship between truth (who does not believe we have that on our side), science (including our rationally developed arguments) and politics. That Adams' book challenges us to acknowledge this and think more widely on the subject, and within a theoretical frame that is both provocative and contestable, is the gift of a well-undertaken intellectual exercise. We need now, more than ever, more nuanced ways of talking about, and discussing, the complex political realities that face Nepal in its current crisis, rather than those of good against evil or good government against terrorist. Reflecting on the role of medicine in the current conflict, following on from Adams' work, may be one such window onto a labyrinth of complex political realities facing Nepal. It may not provide any easy answers, but it should make all of us who take positions uncomfortable. Re-reading Adams' book in the current situation in Nepal reminds me of this, and of the need for challenging and innovative interpretive perspectives on a complex, shifting situation full of violence.

***State of Nepal* edited by K. M. Dixit and S. Ramachandaran. Lalitpur: Himal Books, 2002. ISBN 99933-1322-x, vi, 312 p.**

Reviewed by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

Sixteen essays by scholars from the Indian sub-continent, mainly Nepal, have been brought together in *State of Nepal*. Its ambitious aim is "to try and explain contemporary Nepal to the world, particularly its evolution over the last dozen years of democracy" (p. v). This task is very nearly fulfilled by the book, which provides a description of a great many aspects of present day Nepal, and does so in an unprecedented way. Clear and easy to read, the views expressed by the authors have

the benefit of being both synthetic and likely to generate discussion. For all these qualities, *State of Nepal* is accessible to every one and can be highly recommended.

As is almost inevitable with any collective book, the level of scholarship in *State of Nepal* is somewhat uneven: it contains both very subtle papers, among which Saubhagya Shah, C.K. Lal and T.B. Subba's contributions must be mentioned, as well as articles which could gain by greater originality or a more balanced analysis. As space is limited, I will confine myself to just two remarks.

The major weakness of the whole is certainly its lack of historical perspective, even if the goal is to describe the last twelve years. Most of the essays take into consideration the Panchayat era at best, simply ignoring or caricaturing what happened before it: such is the case with R. Pradhan who writes: "it was the Gorkhali kings who spread the [Hindu] faith in its diverse forms across the mid-hills of Nepal". And, "janajati ethnic groups [were] outside the pale of the caste hierarchy till then [the promulgation of the Muluki Ain in 1854]". It is regrettable that the editors included no historian among the "best analytical minds on Nepal".

My second remark concerns the coloration of the book and I will therefore devote a little more space to it. Besides its stated aim of providing an explanation "to the world", the *mleccha* reader is left with the feeling that the goal of the book is primarily to show what is going wrong in Nepal and provide solutions, and as such is addressed to the different tenants of power. This strong practical inflection of the book evokes a kind of modern Hitopadesha which is not without problems.

Some of the contributions, such as K. M. Dixit's, directly address the King, who "must descend from the royal pedestal ...[and] also realise that much of the country's problems of today had to do with the thirty years of the unrepresentative Panchayat system put in place by his father". R. Pradhan preaches the recognition of cultural difference and the abolition of hierarchy (though his remark on the "land-hungry Parbatiya populace" is hardly in itself absent from such prejudice). S. Sharma apparently wants the *rāj guru* to reform Hinduism to give it an equal chance with other "proselytising religions" – a rather odd definition of Hinduism, it must be said, in the Nepalese context where Hindu proselytism has been pretty strong, not only among the "tribal groups" but also the unorthodox Hindus of the Western region. S. Upadhyaya advises "a more assertive political role for the monarchy to guard against the recklessness and impunity of political parties". Is this not the role of the judiciary? D. Thapa's wishful thinking encourages the political parties to unite, and the Maoist leaders "to convince their young followers countrywide of the compromises they would have to make with the political establishment, and secondly reconcile their demands with the present constitution". C.K. Lal advocates reinforcing "inclusive cultural identities such as Maithili, Bhojpuri or Awadhi" on both sides of the Indo-Nepalese border in order to weaken parochial identities and give strength to citizenship. This solution is also advocated by T. B. Subba, but in a more general way: "rather than creating ever more rigid political boundaries which

constrict the cultures that traverse them, it is important to build bridges". The next contribution (S. Shah) recommends "the political parties, the intelligentsia and the market [...] to contemplate creative ways of 'bringing the state back in'" in order to control the NGOs and to guide their activities in a framework which would be more appropriate in the present context. Seira Tamang's solution to the various forms of patriarchies prevalent in Nepal is more internal, since it is anchored in the analysis of these forms - above all, qualitative research on the subject. S. Shakya's article on the economy - a kind of liberal credo - contains a long list of "prescriptions", which are apparently addressed to the government. The same liberal tone is to be found in S. Dixit's article on education which recommends "the communities to pay at least a portion of the costs incurred in running a school", rather than controlling and limiting the fees in the private sector. Similarly, D. Gyawali's interesting analysis of the choices made throughout the history of Nepal in the field of technology deplores the fact that "the main technology choices in Nepal continue to be bureaucracy-dominated instead of being community or market-led". B. Subba criticizes the focus on hydropower and claims that reservoirs should be built instead of big dams, to regulate the water in the Gangetic plain and furnish Nepal with electricity. Even in the field of modern Nepali literature, the conclusion of M. Thapa is full of good counsel: publishers are asked "to stop acting like book-sellers", writers to "push themselves even after they have earned praise", critics "to speak honestly", *et cetera*... In the final article, S. Ramachandaran explains that "the relationship between Nepal and India has to achieve a level of maturity: "Nepali interlocutors dealing with New Delhi require to demonstrate more maturity and seriousness of purpose, instead of being prisoners of empty anti-Indian rhetoric". The only paper in which Weber's demarcation between the scholar and the politician appears, is the one by P. Onta which concerns the recent "media boom".

From the king down to the intelligentsia, all are called upon to make efforts in their field to build up a new, ideal and utopian kingdom of a strange kind, mixing up what may appear as opposite features. This very liberal kingdom to be, without boundaries and hierarchies, without any norms or model (nor even its school curriculum), led by a dynamic private enterprise in the fields of education and economy, should *also* be headed by a strong State *and* by an active king, seen as the ultimate guardian of the general order. There is no indication if this general advisory orientation of the book was a prerequisite from the editors. If it was the case, it would have been good to state this, and if it is a mere coincidence, then we can conclude that M. Thapa's penultimate sentence does indeed summarize the common concern of the authors well: "In short, the world must be changed". This final programme, even more ambitious than what was announced at first, obviously needs to be discussed outside the circle of scholars - and/or with scholars with different orientations, since the prescribed remedies: liberalism, capitalism and pluralism are indeed more revealing of political views rather than things that emerge naturally from scientific analysis. Besides, post-1990 Nepal has seen the emergence of liberalism and pluralism together with political violence, a parallel calling for prudence.

***Growth, Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Resource Management in the Mountain Areas of South Asia* edited by Mahesh Banskota, Trilok S. Papola and Jürgen Richter. Feldafing: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung / ZEL, 2000. ISBN 3-934068-36-7. 590 p. [Proceedings of a conference organised by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), Kathmandu, and the German Foundation for International Development, Feldafing].**

Reviewed by David Seddon

This substantial (5 Parts, 20 Chapters and 590 pages) volume is a collection of essays based on the proceedings of the international conference on Growth, Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Resource Management in the Mountain Areas of South Asia that was held in Kathmandu from 31 January to 4 February 2000. It provides a panoramic view of the current state of thinking on a wide range of issues associated with the theme of the conference, and the constituent chapters range from regional overview to country and programme case study.

The first chapter provides a general overview, by the editors, of the issues and options for the mountain areas of South Asia as a whole, based on the proceedings of the conference. It summarises the main issues raised by the various papers and highlights the options and recommendations made in the detailed thematic discussions on different sectors and aspects of development; it also presents the main conclusions reached and recommendations made by the Conference. Despite some hopeful signs, the main emphasis was on 'concerns and constraints' and on 'the widespread evidence of threats to the livelihoods of mountain people and to the mountain environment, as well as lack of adequate recognition of, and appropriate policies and interventions for dealing with these threats' (p. 51). A number of specific recommendations was made, and it was explicitly suggested that participants should take a lead in their respective countries and organizations in promoting these recommendations and, thereby, the design and implementation of appropriate and sensitive programmes for effective and sustainable development in mountain areas.

The second chapter is a wide-ranging review, by Mahesh Banskota, the Deputy Director General of ICIMOD (the host institution for the conference), of the environmental, economic and social options available with respect to the Hindu-Kush Himalayas in general, drawing attention both to the common issues and concerns of the region and to its heterogeneity. Banskota emphasises five priorities for the region as a whole: developing new opportunities where available; improving communications, transport and services; supporting human resource development; promoting the regeneration of mountain resources; and increasing the capacity of local communities to take the lead in development initiatives (pp. 98-9).



There then follow six relatively general discussions of the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, by Mizanur Rahman Shelley (pp.107-35), in Bhutan, by Choki Lhamu, John Jigme Rhodes and D.B. Rai (pp. 137-70), in the Himalayan Mountain Region of India, by B.K. Joshi (pp. 171-94), in Nepal, by Hari K. Upadhyaya (pp. 195-223), in the mountain areas of Pakistan, by Shahid Zia (pp. 225-46), and in the Hindukush Himalaya and the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau region, by Yan Ruizhen (pp. 247-57). Together with Chapter 2, these provide a regional and sub-regional overview of issues and concerns.

Part III is focused on 'Economic Opportunities and Options', and consists of five chapters, on mountain agriculture in the Hindukush Himalaya, by Pradeep M. Tulachan (pp. 259-74), on agricultural development, growth and poverty in India's mountain region, by Ramesh Chand (pp. 275-92), on commercialisation of natural resources ... the case of forest products, by Madhav B. Karki (pp. 293-320), on enterprise development in the Hindukush Himalaya, by T.S. Papola (pp.321-48), and on tourism ('a regional overview and the experience of Nepal'), by Pitamber Sharma (pp. 349-76).

Part IV consists of four chapters on land systems and natural resource management. Michael Kirk writes, broadly and in comparative vein, on innovative land and resource policy in an Asian context (pp. 377-405), Devendra Chapagain considers land systems in the hills and mountains of Nepal (pp. 407-32), B P Maithani, changing land relations in the Indian Eastern Himalayas (pp. 433-44), and Anupam Bhatia, participatory forest management as 'a promising mechanism for poverty alleviation in the mountain areas of South Asia' (pp. 445-84). Part V concludes the collection, with a set of three chapters on access, equity and linkages. Hermann Kreutzmann discusses the role of transport networks and urban settlements (pp. 485-513), Meena Acharya considers the economic opportunities for mountain women of South Asia, with particular reference to Nepal (pp. 515-40), and N.S. Jodha, examines the role of highland-lowland links in the context of rapid globalisation (pp. 541-70).

This is an interesting and even a useful collection, but with a strong emphasis on the descriptive, the technical and the promotional. The view is very much, however, from 'outside' and, if the phrase can be used with regard to mountain environments, 'top-down' – a lowlander's perspective, perhaps? There is some consideration of the deep-seated and pervasive political, economic and political-economic structural forces working, nationally, regionally and globally, against the effective implementation of the programme which most of the contributors to this volume would claim to seek and support – namely the sustainable development of mountain areas in collaboration with the indigenous men and women who struggle to survive in these difficult and challenging environments. But there is less consideration of how, in reality, these structural biases might be effectively undermined, or indeed of the variety of ways in which mountain people, particularly the very poor and disadvantaged are themselves responding – through mass emigration, insurgency,

and a myriad of other, less dramatic survival strategies and initiatives for change. Now that would have been really interesting...

## Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the managing editor, William S. Sax. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the 'Harvard' format.

*In the body of your text:*

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987, Smith 1992) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

*In the bibliography:*

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.L. 1988. A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya. *Kailash* 6(2): 121-83.

Smith, B.C. 1992. Looking for ostriches. In *Research Methodologies for the Himalayas*, edited by J. Pande, pp. 110-145. Shimla: Mountain Publishers.

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Address for proposals, submissions, etc.:

Prof. William S. Sax  
Managing editor of the European Bulletin of Himalayan Research,  
Dept. of Anthropology  
South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University  
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330  
D-69120 Heidelberg / Germany  
e-mail: o50@ix.urz.uni-heidelberg.de  
Tel.: (+49) 6221 54 89 31  
Fax: (+49) 6221 54 88 98

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