29-30
Summer 2006

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). Since January 2006 onwards the French editorship has been run as a collective, presently including Pascale Dollfus, András Höfer, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, Boyd Michailowsky, Philippe Ramirez, Blandine Ripert, and Anne de Sales.

We take the Himalayas to mean, the Karakoram, 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.

EDITORIAL

EBHR, created in 1991, is a collaborative journal edited alternately by the Südasien Institute (Heidelberg), SOAS (London) and CNRS-Himalaya (France). For the second time, the editorial team will be based in France. We are lucky enough to be now assisted by Bernadette Sellers for proof reading of English. We will also benefit from the help of András Höfer who kindly offered to continue alongside us. And we take this opportunity to thank Martin Gaenzle for ensuring that the changeover went smoothly.

This volume is a double-issue centered on six contributions focusing on the anthropology of the Western Himalayas. The remarkable vitality of the research on Nepal over the last forty years has from the very beginning provided the bulletin with its priviledged focus. Political events in the nineties have been a turning point in the Himalayan studies however, as it became less easy to carry out fieldwork in the kingdom and at the same time new areas opened up in other parts of the range. The bulletin will naturally reflect this trend and definitely widen its scope so as to evenly cover the whole region, reporting on ongoing research in Ladakh, Himachal and Sikkim, but also opening up to the lesser surveyed Uttaranchal, Bhutan and North-East India. Nepal will not, of course, be neglected in the meantime (see Call for Papers p.161). If peace returns, as we all hope it will, time will come for a deep analysis of recent events and their outcomes, a task to which EBHR is particularly qualified to contribute. Offers of articles, research reports, book reviews and general information on all these topics are most welcome.

The bulletin has provided a unique platform for European cooperation in Himalayan Studies. Besides publication per se, its editors have organized specific seminars, or panels within general conferences. We will continue on this path.

Finally, as you have noticed, we have strived to maintain the fees at their existing rate, to keep it affordable for students and post-docs. This means that we have to slightly increase the number of subscriptions. So if you appreciated recent issues of EBHR please make the bulletin known to your colleagues and friends – and be sure to renew your own subscription.

Jay EBHR !

Corrigendum

In our last issue (no. 28), Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka reviewed A *Kingdom under Siege* by Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati. On p. 110, the authors have erroneously been given as editors of this book. We apologize.

Notes on contributors

Daniela Berti is a Social anthropologist and researcher at the CNRS (UPR 299 Milieux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya), she has conducted a great deal of research in Himachal Pradesh (Northern India), in particular on the role of village divinities in village matters and electoral stakes in politics. Her recent research focuses on the influence of an organisation linked to Hindu nationalism, which uses a programme aimed at rewriting local history. She is preparing a project on the anthropological study of tribunals and procedures used in Indian courts of justice.

Elisabeth Conzelmann, Dr. phil, Berlin.
After studying social anthropology and comparative religion in Berlin, she has conducted fieldwork on various subjects in Himachal Pradesh (India). Her publications pertain to kinship, marriage, local and urban caste systems, and the anthropology of food. She is presently working on local religion and local history in Himachal Pradesh based on manuscripts in Pahari language and other materials.

Brigitte Luchesi teaches in the Department of Comparative Religion at the University of Bremen, Germany. She is a trained sociologist, historian of religion and social anthropologist working since many years on forms of local religion in the North-Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. She is also doing research on religious practises of Hindu immigrants from South Asia in Germany.

Prof. **William S. ('Bo') Sax**, former managing editor of the EBHR, obtained his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1987, and taught at Harvard University and Christchurch, New Zealand. He is presently Head of the Department of Anthropology at the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg. He is the author of *Mountain Goddess: gender and politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (1991) and *Dancing the Self: personhood and performance in the pandava lila of Garhwal* (2002), and the editor of *The Gods at Play: Lila in South Asia* (1995). He is currently finishing a book about healing and social justice in Garhwal.

Peter Sutherland gained his D.Phil in Cultural Anthropology at Oxford University in 1998 after a first career in architecture and architectural photography. He currently co-directs the International Studies Program at Louisiana State University, USA, where he teaches classes on South Asia, colonialism, diasporas, and globalization. In addition to several published articles and a monograph in preparation on the travelling gods of the

western Himalayas, his more recent research and publications based on fieldwork in Benin and Little Haiti, Miami, also examine religious tropes of movement in the transnational context of the Black Atlantic.

Denis Vidal, an anthropologist, is a Senior Research Fellow at the French Centre for Research in Development (IRD, Paris) and an Associate Research Fellow at the French Centre for South Asian Studies (CEIAS, Paris). He has been teaching at Paris University, EHESS, and INALCO. He worked in Himachal Pradesh in the 1980's and his Phd thesis (1989) is about the cult of local divinities in Himachal Pradesh. He worked more recently on the social history of Rajasthan then on the economic life in the streets of Old Delhi. His present research is about the visual culture of India, from an anthropological perspective.

Introduction: Divine Kingship in the Western Himalayas[1]

William Sax

The idea of "divine kingship" has a long history in South Asia. According to classical Hindu thought, kings are divine because they physically incorporate part of the divine substance of Vishnu – 6.25%, to be precise.[2] And as Pollock notes, the epics confirm that "(t)he king is functionally a god because like a god he saves and protects; he is existentially or ontologically a god because he incorporates the divine essence" (1991: 47). Classical Indian kings were clearly human, but at the same time they were substantially identified with their lineage gods (Inden 1990; Patnaik 1972) and goddesses (Fuller 1992: 119; Schnepel 1995). Indeed, the king and the god were, in effect, "alter-egos" of each other, and the system as Fuller describes it looks remarkably like those described in this special issue of the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*.

As Fuller puts it,

> At one level, therefore, the state deity-cum-king was displayed as a sovereign unity, so that the human king participated in the deity's royal divinity. At another level and simultaneously, the state deity was displayed as the supreme ruler who had delegated authority to his separate, inferior regent, the human king. The court assemblies therefore provided an exemplary illustration of the king's double relationship with the state deity, whereby he was both a form of the deity and the latter's human representative on earth (1992: 127).

In the Western and Central Himalayas, such divine kingship is alive and well. Kings typically serve as the "managers" of ruling gods, and gods in their temples are often regarded as kings. Royal figures in their palanquins – gods and goddesses, kings and queens – process, circumambulate, visit each other, or receive visitors, and these movements create, maintain (and sometimes challenge) political relationships amongst the territorial units so defined. In short, politico-religious relationships are inscribed in the landscape by means of ritual.

---

[1] This volume is based on the conference Territorial Rituals in the Central Himalayas, held in November 2004 in Heidelberg, Germany. The conference was supported by the German Research Council through the Collaborative Research Area (Sonderforschungsbereich) 619, "The Dynamics of Rituals."

[2] Manusmṛiti 7.5; Ṛgveda 4.42.8-9; Atharvaveda 6.86.3; Mahābhārata 12.68.37-59 and 12.65.29. See Gonda (1969) and Pollock (1991: 15-54) for valuable discussions of the topic.

The most obvious example is the famous Dashera festival in Kullu, discussed by both Berti and Luchesi in this issue. But there are other rituals as well, in particular the great sacrificial rituals (*jag* and *sānt*) mentioned in several contributions (especially Sutherland), which follow a similar logic of inscribing relations of territorial subordination and superordination in the landscape by means of processions and other rituals.

How are we to understand this politico-religious system? In the literature on "divine kingship" and politics in South Asia, one can discern two positions, the proponents of which have engaged in a long debate over the years. On the one hand are Dumont, Stein, and others who have defended the conceptual and empirical separation of religion from politics in the classical polities of South Asia, and who have tended to underplay the importance of ritual; on the other hand are those who insist on the inseparability of religion and politics, and who tend to assert the political efficacy of ritual.

In Stein's view (1977, 1980, 1985), medieval South Indian localities were administered by leading lineages. The power of these lineages was based on their extensive kinship networks, as well as on their political and economic dominance. But the localities in which these leading lineages held the reins of power were in turn organized into larger states (Stein's leading case here is the Chola empire), over which kings ruled in a system of "ritual kingship". According to Stein, "real" power lay at the level of the locality or *nādu* rather than the superordinate level, so that, for example, local tax collection was more thorough and "practical," while at the level of the kingdom it took a "ritual" and tributary form. Moreover, effective military units were concentrated at the local level, and attenuated at the level of the kingdom.

Inden has criticized this model of "dual sovereignty" for implying that the king's royal sovereignty at the higher level is "merely" a matter of ritual, and therefore less real than the pragmatic, lower-level, clan-and-territory-based chieftanship (1990: 209).[3] A similar point is implicit in Dirks' historical analysis of the South Indian "little kingdom" of Pudukottai. He asserts that in pre-colonial times, proximity to the king (articulated primarily through various forms of ritualized exchange) was the crucial guarantor of rank.[4] Dirks acknowledges that in such a system,

---

[3] "It is as though there were gods worshipped and rites performed only at the royal capital and that these were all symbolically unifying, while political calcuation and economic accumulation took place ony at the local level, and that perceptions of self or communal interest brought about real coalitions there" (Inden 1990: 209).

[4] "Acting on behalf of one's lord thus does not constitute the realization of a relationship rationally structured by bureaucratic form and normative

"religion" and "politics" are two sides of the same coin, yet for some reason he retains the dichotomy (1987: 4-5; see also 106-107, 129).

Dirks's argument is explicitly directed against Dumont, for whom caste rank was determined by relative purity, while politics was "encompassed" by religion.[5] Dumont argued that India distinguished religion and politics centuries before the West, and that this distinction manifested itself in a form of kingship that was more purely "political" than the forms of divine kingship found in the West. His argument was based upon a dichotomy of "spiritual" vs. "temporal: he wished to show that the politico-economic domain "necessarily emerges in opposition to and separation from the all-embracing domain of religion and ultimate values, and that the basis of such a development is the recognition of the individual" (1962: 75). The Brahman is spiritually superior, but materially dependent and hence inferior to the king; indeed this "dependence of the Brahman in relation to royal power or, one would almost say, to mere force, accompanies the fact that his preeminence is located on a different plane" (ibid: 51-52). But despite his attempt to theorize the emergence of "secular" from "magico-religious" kingship, Dumont was compelled to postulate a radical ontological discontinuity, a level of "popular mentality" below the "orthodox brahmanical level," where the King retained "elementary notions of a magico-religious nature which have not been 'usurped' by the Brahman" (ibid: 61). And all of this is related, of course, to his well-known theory of caste, according to which it is generated by the opposition of the pure and the impure, which repeats itself at every level of the system, thus generating a hierarchy ranging from the most pure Brahman to the least pure "untouchable".

This model has been criticized by Raheja and Dirks, who argue for a model based on centrality and peripherality rather than hierarchy.[6] Rather than a "spiritually" superior Brahman who ranks higher than the king, but is nevertheless materially dependent on him, the centre-periphery model places the king at the centre of a system of exchanges or transactions, in which other actors derive their power and rank mainly

---

prescription. Rather, it is a relationship established by the actual, though always partial, sharing of the substance [citing the work of Marriott, Inden, Daniel] of sovereignty by the sovereign lord: substance which comes in the form of titles, emblems, land, and sometimes even pre-eaten rice. All these gifts partake of the same transactional logic" (1987: 103). See pp. 283-84 for a useful summary of the position.

[5] According to Dirks, the elevation of the Brahman, and of a system of caste rank based upon what Dumont calls the "religious" opposition of purity and impurity, came about only during the colonial period.

[6] Cf. Tambiah 1976.

through transactions with him. According to this model, rank in the system of castes is not determined in once-and-for-all fashion by an immutable structure based on purity and impurity, but is rather the outcome of human actions and transactions. Rank is contingent, negotiable, and impermanent – adjectives that are far better descriptors of social reality than a notion of transcendent structure. Such a model invites us to look specifically at ritual transactions, and examine to what degree they create and/or transform political and social identities and power relationships.

That is precisely what the contributors to this special issue have done. Berti, Conzelmann, and Luchesi have shown how closely the rank and powers of the king are related to the state deity (and how much the state deity depends on the king). Sutherland writes of the "ritual t(r)opes, by means of which cosmological and theological conceptions of power are politically articulated" in these West Himalayan polities. Sax and Vidal write of the ritual practices of local warriors which integrate them into these divine kingdoms. In short, the contributors to this volume show us that, *pace* Stein and Dumont, religion and politics are thoroughly intertwined in the Kingdoms of the Western Himalaya, and that ritual has powerful social and political effects.

In a series of articles in the 1980s, Galey (1983, 1984, 1986, 1990) showed that kingship continues to inform the culture of the neighbouring Himalayan kingdom of Garhwal, despite the king's absence,[7] and that prior to Indian independence the Garhwali king and the state deity, Badrinath were in many respects alter-egos of each other. Most importantly for our purposes, Galey showed that "territorial control finds, more often than not, its legitimacy in relation to sanctuaries and to units of cult which define social space ritually" (1990:133). Such rituals are the focus of this special issue. What are they, and how do they define social and political space?

The cases discussed are from Western Himalayan kingdoms as well as the smaller territorial units that comprise them. The kingdoms of Mandi (Conzelmann) and Kullu (Berti, and Luchesi) are each ruled by a human king who acts as the "manager" (*devan, kārdār*) of the sovereign state deity: Madhorao in the case of Mandi, and Raghunath-ji in the case of Kullu. These kingdoms are in turn composed of smaller territories down to the level of the village, most of which are "ruled" by their own deities. In periodic ritual assemblies, the gods of these subordinate territories

---

[7] "In short, kingship has survived the eviction of the king and the disappearance of the dynasty. In spite of the fact that it has been officially removed and its palatial headquarters abandoned, its importance as an operating agency has remained almost unaffected" (1990: 130).

process to the capital city and pay court to king and state deity. Sutherland concentrates on the sub-territorial units that made up the former kingdom of Bushahr, where once again, relations of superordination and subordination are created and maintained primarily by means of ritual processions. Here however the processions are understood neither in terms of subordination to a human king, nor to a human king paired with a State deity (as in the case of Mandi and Kullu), but rather in terms of subordination to Mahasu, the "king of gods." The ritual processions create and define territory over which the deity rules, and these territories are strongly associated with the rural assemblies called *khūnd*, the "militias" or warriors of the god. Sax focuses even more closely on these warrior-clans, arguing that their clan-based, territorial rituals are also integral to the constitution of the "divine kingdom." In the final essay, Vidal discusses how the most violent of these warriors' practices – ritualized headhunting – was given up under modern pressures.

Taken together, the contributions illustrate the importance of processional rituals in creating and defining territorial units, and regulating the relations among them and their (human and divine) rulers. They also show how the rituals of these "divine kingdoms" changed over the centuries, as well as the degree to which much has remained the same. Conzelmann argues that the English intentionally diminished the divinity of the ruler of Mandi by making changes in the processional order of the central state ritual of Shivaratri. Sax and Vidal show how the rituals of the warlike *khūnd* have either adapted to modern conditions, or simply (in the case of headhunting) died out because they were no longer acceptable. But as Galey already observed in the 1980s, kingship with its associated ritual forms is far from dead. This is shown by Berti's discussion of the "modern" political uses to which the *Rājā* of Kullu puts his identification with Raghunath-ji, by Sutherland and Sax's emphasis on the continuing cultural and political importance of local "royal" gods and their rituals, and by Luchesi's amusing example of contemporary "urban renewal" in Old Manali and Vashist, under the direction of a local deity on his palanquin.

Can one then speak of a distinctive Western Himalayan "system" of divine kingship? The essays certainly point in that direction. Sax's description of a form of political organization in which the deity rules with the support of his minister (*vazīr*) and warriors (*khūnd*) has remarkable similarities to Sutherland's account, where king-like gods rule over territories which are defined in terms of the *khūnd* or "regional assemblies," and are served by *vazīrs*. Sutherland hypothesizes that the local "system" derives from a pre-colonial Kanait polity. Conzelmann's

historical materials clearly point in the same direction; that is, toward a form of political organization preceding the kingdom, made up of territorial units called *waziri*s. She refers to evidence for such a form of political organization during the medieval period in Kullu as well. Thus the idea that the rituals discussed in this volume derive from an earlier, more widespread form of "divine kingship" is tantalizing; but still unconfirmed. What the essays do show, clearly and unambiguously, is the importance of rituals in constituting the traditional polities of the Western Himalaya.

References

Dirks, Nicholas B. 1987. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom.* Cambridge: Cambridge Un. Press.

Dumont, Louis. 1967. *Homo hierarchicus : essai sur le système des cast*es. Paris: Gallimard.

Fuller, Christopher J. 1992. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Galey, Jean-Claude. 1983. "Creditors, Kings and Death. Determination and implications of bondage in Tehri-Garhwal". In *Debts and Debtors*, edited by Charles Malamoud, pp. 67-125. Delhi: Vikas.

— 1984. "Souveraineté et justice dans le Haut-Gange. La fonction royale au-dela des écoles juridiques et du droit coutumier". In *Différences, Valeurs, Hiérarchie,*edited by Jean-Claude Galey, pp. 371-421. Paris: EHESS.

— 1986. "Totalité et hiérarchie dans les sanctuaires royaux du Tehri-Garhwal". *Purusartha* 10: 55-95.

— 1990. "Reconsidering Kingship in India: An Ethnological Perspective". In *Kingship and the Kings*, edited by Jean-Claude Galey, pp. 123-87. Chur: Harwood. (Originally published in *History and Anthropology* 4 (2).)

Gonda, Jan. 1969. *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View.* Leiden: E. J. Brill. Heine-Geldern.

Inden, Ronald. 1990. *Imagining India.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Patnaik, Nityananda. 1972. "The Recent Rajas of Puri: A Study in Secularization". In *Aspects of Indian Culture and Society: Essays in Felicitation of Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose,* edited by Surajit Sinha, pp. 87-186. Calcutta: Eka Press (for the Indian Anthropological Society).

Pollock, Sheldon I. 1991. *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India. Volume III, Āraṇkyakāṇḍa.* Introduction, Translation, and Annotation by Sheldon I. Pollock. Edited by Robert P. Goldman. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Schnepel, Burkhard. 1995. "Durga and the King: Ethnohistorical Aspects of Politico-Ritual Life in a South Orissan Jungle Kingdom". *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 1: 145-166.

— 1977. "The Segmentary State in South Indian History". In *Realm and Region in Traditional India,* edited by Richard G. Fox, pp. 3-51. Durham, NC; Duke University, Program in Comparative Studies in Southern Asia.

— 1980. *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

— 1985. "Politics, Peasants and the Deconstruction of Feudalism in Medieval India". *Journal of Peasant Studies* XII: 2-3, 54-86.

Tambiah, Stanley. 1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A Royal Ritual of Mandi State

Elisabeth Conzelmann

Introduction

The former Princely State of Mandi in Himachal Pradesh came under British control in 1846 but was governed by its hereditary rulers until 1947. After the abolition of princely rule, Mandi and the neighbouring state Suket were transformed into an administrative district with Mandi Town, the former capital, as district headquarters. Mandi had an area of ca. 1200 square miles. In 1900 the population numbered about 175,000. The population of the district is near 800,000 today.[1]

This paper mainly deals with the Śivrātri Fair, which is attended by more than one hundred local gods and goddesses from the area of the former state and still is the biggest event in the festival calendar of Mandi, a spectacular staging of royal rule even today. I am mainly concerned with the time before 1950, and in fact the festival as it can be observed today is still largely based on the choreography it had during "state time". Formally, the Śivrātri Fair is a kind of cross-breed, combining the features of a local *melā* as is commonly found in this region, and of a royal court assembly, presided by both the *rājā* and by the state god Mādhorāo, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, that is, by both the ruler terrestrial and the ruler divine.

It has been noted that Śivrātri, Śiva's main festival celebrated in the month of Phāgun (Skt. Phālguna; February-March), is not a likely occasion for a royal festival (cf. Fuller 1992: 106ff.). Far more typical is Navrātri, "the nine nights" (dedicated to the Goddess Durgā) in September-October, culminating in Vijaya Daśamī, her glorious victory over the buffalo demon

---

[1] The paper is based on fieldwork and archival studies undertaken between 1987 and 2004. I use unpublished materials, for example a handwritten *bhārthā* (hagiography) of a local god, and a manuscript of the local history of Mandi (referred to as "local history" in the text) based on the genealogical recount of the *rājās*. Some parts, including the title page, are missing. It was transcribed from Ṭāṁkrī script into Devanāgarī in 1947 with the assistance of the owner, a member of the Rajput nobility.
I am grateful to Raja A.P. Sen and late Rani Kiran Kumari for allowing me to read the files on Śivrātri in the archives of the palace in Mandi. Most papers concern the time after 1900 but some refer to earlier periods.
I frequently write of a deity as if he or she was in fact acting, or not acting. This is in accordance with people's ideas and collective experience and practice. I agree with Sax who reasons that deities should be considered as authentic agents in the western Himalayas (2002: 157ff.).

Mahiṣāsura. It may also seem odd that a central part of the main festival of
Śiva should be played by Mādhorāo, i.e. Kṛṣṇa. However, the contradiction
is not felt in Mandi. In terms of local history, the choice of Śivrātri seems
wholly plausible. A regular fair had probably been in existence long before
Mādhorāo was appointed, and a fair on very similar lines is celebrated in
Kullu on Vijaya Daśamī where the god Raghunāth, another *avatāra* of
Viṣṇu, was placed on the throne at almost the same time as Mādhorāo.[2]

The *rājā*s lost their position after independence, but are still
recognized in the context of state ritual. I will refer to the incumbents as
rājā, *rānī*, etc., because I want to avoid repeated formulas such as "the
descendant of the last ruler", and also because the old titles are still used
in Mandi even though this is an anachronism.

The economic and political significance of Śivrātri cannot be treated
here but it should be mentioned that as an event that involves virtually
the whole town and a large part of the rural population, it is of
considerable economic importance, and also serves as a stage for public
appearances of high politicians and officials.

Fig.1: The palace of Mandi (ca. 1915).

---

[2] Rose (1980 [1919]: 474f.); Hutchison and Vogel (1982 [1933]: 458).

Historical Outlines

Mandi emerged as a polity in the 10th or 11th century in the hinterland of the kingdoms of Kullu, Kangra and Suket. Beginning as a tiny chiefdom, by the 14th century it had developed into a polity of more than local power, which was independent of its neighbours in fact if not in name. The first capital near the present town of Mandi was also founded in this time. Few historical data exist about this period but some excellent wooden temples bear witness to the means and aspirations of the founders. The shift of the capital (*nagar*) closer to the present site indicates a reorientation of territorial policy towards the lower Beas valley farther west.

At the beginning of the 16th century, Mandi was finally constituted as a state in the full sense. The rulers unequivocally attained royal status and assumed the title of *rājā* and other requisites of royal power.[3] Attempts to establish a state had been made earlier, but were only successful when *Rājā* Ajbar Sen conquered the site on the other bank of the river Beas and founded a new town there. The capital is one of the central symbols, and sources, of royal power, one of the "seven limbs" constituting a kingdom (Inden 1982: 102). Ideally the buildings, architecture, sculpture and layout of the town all contribute to proclaim - and create - the greatness of the ruler, and this was understood by Ajbar Sen. For him, the foundation was an act of great historical significance, a large step towards power and glory, and he proved to be right in the long run, as Mandi took up its position as one of the more important states of the region and retained it for 400 years. The site must have been coveted by the Mandi *rājās* for a long time but was defended by the *rāṇās* of Suket to the bitter end because of its strategic value.

Once the site was in the possession of Mandi, construction was undertaken on a fairly large scale. In local Rajput history, it is described thus: after his victory (in 1526), Ajbar Sen "thought of building a palace and a capital". First the temple of Bhūtnāth (Śiva) was built where the *liṅga* of the deity had revealed itself. The *rājā* then "took the firm decision to found the town and obtain a palace", and the foundation stone (*pāthru*) was set for "a fortress with a square courtyard and towers on all four corners" and with separate buildings for governing (*davānkhānā*) and for the collection of trade revenues (*zagātkhānā*).[4]

---

[3] This is a shared opinion (Griffin 1990 [1870]: 632; Emerson 1920: 28f.; Hutchison and Vogel 1982 [1933]: 378f.; Man Mohan 1930: 22) which is acknowledged by local history, architecture, cult of royalty, etc. The rulers also entered royal marriage circles (cf. Emerson 1920: 29; Man Mohan 1930 23).

[4] Quotes from the "local history". *Davānkhānā*: from Hindi/Urdu *dīvān*, a minister; *zagātkhānā* from *zakāt*, a revenue, tax, or levy imposed by the *rājā* (cf. Pahāṛī-Hindī Śabdkoś), or, more particularly, "transit dues" (Habib 1999: 72f.).

The scope of the endeavour did not escape his rivals' notice. Alarmed, the *rājā* of Suket sent his spies to enquire about the astrological moment (*muhūrat*) at which the temple's foundation stone had been set. He was told that the moment bore great power (*prabhāv*) and that Mandi would gain command (*hukm*) over the kingdoms in all directions. In order to prevent this, he sent his astrologer to Mandi, who treacherously persuaded the *rājā* to have the foundation ceremony repeated - i.e., the *pāthru* removed and newly set - thus undoing the effects of the earlier ceremony as the propitious moment had passed. When the stone was moved, blood came out of it and the *rājā* realized his blunder, but the magical power (*karāmat*) was gone forever. (There are more examples in the history of Mandi when the power inherent in foundation ceremonies was either destroyed or appropriated by a rival, an indication that the buildings themselves and their astrological conjunctions were believed to generate power.[5])

The next step was the establishment of the town: "Traders" (*mahājan lok*) and "excellent people" (*bhale ādmī*) arrived from distant places, travelling in palanquins (i.e., neither on horseback, as warriors, nor on foot, as poor people would) and were assigned places to build their houses. Finally, the town was given a name: "excellent scholars and astrologers" were called who found out from the scriptures that a *ṛṣi* named Mandav had sanctified the place, hence the name Mandi. (In fact the name Mandi, literally "market", had been in use before; Man Mohan 1930: 22).

Even from this brief description it can be taken that something extraordinary was going on. This is what *Rājā* Ajbar Sen thought himself, and apparently the neighbouring *rājās* thought so, too. The temples, architecture, buildings, the scholars and Brahmans who were sponsored, everything was more magnificent than before. The palace, with a square courtyard and four towers, was built on a similar plan as its predecessor but bigger, boasting the imposing number of "39 apartments". The expansion of trade and changes in the administrative and revenue system are indicated by the construction of special buildings for the government (*davānkhānā*) and the collection of trade levies (*zagātkhānā*); elaborate funeral monuments (*barselās*) also dating from this time give an idea of court life and the cult of the rulers (Diserens 1988). A new kind of society was called for, an urban society with people, otherwise than warriors, who

---

[5] E.g., in the 16th century an ambitious *raṇa*, lord over an important salt mine, wanted to build a temple pond. His priest betrayed him to the *rānī* and told if she arranged for the consecration ceremony herself, the place would fall into her hands. She went there secretly during the night to do so, and soon afterwards the area was conquered by Mandi (Man Mohan 1930: 23).

were wealthy, educated and of high social status[6], and a more sophisticated terminology was adopted: the temples were called *mandir* instead of *ḍehrā*, the palace *mahal*, not *beṛhā*, the town *śahar*, a proper town, instead of *nagar* (which in Himachal is the seat of a ruler but not necessarily an urban settlement).

Another significant change took place in temple construction. The royal temples in the capital were big stone structures in *nagara* style, the first on Mandi territory. This was an explicit departure from the wooden temples in Pahari style the rulers had sponsored before and which continued to prevail in the rural areas. Stone temples, some very ancient, already existed in a number of places close-by[7] and were perhaps requisite for a proper kingdom. A corresponding departure can be observed in the practise of religion. This may seem undramatic but it set apart the urban temples from those of the local deities. In the latter, religious cult mainly rests on two cornerstones: gods or goddesses (*devtā* or *devī*[8]), personified by mobile images (*rath*)[9], leave their temples for touring their area (*hār* or *ilāqā*) and meeting other deities; and they have oracle priests (*gur*) who, in a state of possession (*khel* or *mehar*), serve them as mouthpiece. They are thus immediately present, communicating with people and with each others by the movements of the *rath* and by speaking through the *gur*. Local deities are consulted for most matters of personal or general concern within their area of jurisdiction, and they are a most important ordering force, a factor of power, in the rural areas of Mandi. A crucial role is played by the *gur* who conveys divine speech. The power and efficacy of the system is based on the fact that it is deeply inscribed in the constitution of the local communities and that virtually the whole community is involved. People are wary of manipulation and partiality, and the *gur's* influence is dependent upon his credibility. His authority lasts as long as people believe that he embodies the deity when possessed but not beyond. He is not the deity's representative or "executive force". This is rather vested in the temple management and in the community as a whole who follows divine command.[10]

---

[6] Khatris, later the dominant caste of landholder, traders, and state servants, had been present before but probably were less numerous. See Hesse (1996) and also Conzelmann (1996, ch. 3).

[7] As e.g. Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, and Kahlur. See note 21; Singh (1983); Thakur (1996); Handa (2001).

[8] *Devtā* is male (sg. and pl.), *devī* female (sg.). Collectively, the deities are called *devtā-devī* or *devtā*.

[9] Literally "(temple) chariot"; the *raths* of Mandi are shaped like palanquins.

[10] The working of these forces at the local level are analyzed by Berti (2001), and Luchesi (2004).

This whole complex is absent in the capital. None of the urban temples, with the sole exception of Mādhorāo, had a processional image, and none at all had an oracle attached to the deity. They received regular worship and sacrifices through their priests who were employed by the *rājā*. If they were consulted for an important decision, which occasionally occurred, an oracle as an intermediary was not involved.[11] A tradition that the deities resident in the temples of the capital possessed people does not exist. Perhaps, they were too powerful and "big" to be comprised by a human medium. Whatever the notion, urban priests did not convey divine speech, and they did, and still do, not have an authority deriving directly from the deity.

The installation of Mādhorāo in the mid-17th century as the ruler of the state marked a decisive transformation. The cult of Kṛṣṇa was implanted at the centre of royal power, and the *rājā* turned into the god's vice-regent and first worshipper in accordance with classical concepts of Hindu kingship (Fuller 1992: 127). The adoption of the Kṛṣṇa cult must have been welcomed by the sophisticated urban society as an approximation to mainstream hinduism. It must also have helped to bridge the gap between the urban society and the largely illiterate villagers. By appointing Mādhorāo as the divine ruler and putting him at the head of the local deities, these were transformed into a *darbār*, a royal court assembly. The relationships between the capital and the rural areas of Mandi were thus reshaped. Ranks and privileges of local deities were fixed in relation to Mādhorāo, and the deities were formed into a hierarchy. The court gained more control by imposing on the *devtās* its own order and concept of kingship. At the same time, the villagers were assigned a central part in the pageant of court and state ritual.

The reign of *Rājā* Siddh Sen (1686-1758) should also be mentioned, as it left deep imprints in history as well as in the townscape of Mandi. If we follow the "local history", Siddh Sen was the only ruler of Mandi who openly aspired to become *cakravartī*, a universal ruler (albeit on a very modest scale). Siddh Sen was preoccupied with tantric sacrifice and fortified the capital with a number of temples and other structures meant to enhance his power. Among these was a tank beneath the palace under which the dismembered body of his daughter's husband, the *rājā* of Bhangahl, was buried.[12] Later, a pillar was erected in the middle above the

---

[11] A story famous in Mandi is the decision over the succession to the throne in a kind of ordeal held in the Bhūtnāth temple in the 18th century, in the presence of the *rājā* and the important people of the town (Man Mohan 1930: 59; Nutan 1988: 32).

[12] Emerson (1920: 38) and Man Mohan (1930: 48f.) say Pirthi Pal was Siddh Sen's son-in-law; according to my manuscript he was his wife's brother. The tank,

severed head and a light was kept burning, and at a corner a double temple was erected for Bhairav and Kālī; the area near the tank served as festival ground for the Śivrātri Fair until after "merger".

By the end of the 17th century the Mandi *rājās* ruled over a fairly large area. Within the main territories, local powers had been reduced; internecine warfare receded and local chieftains (*ṭhākurs* and *rāṇās*) were no longer able to assert themselves. It was in this period that the petty chiefdoms were changed into *wazīrīs* one after the other; *rāṇās* and *ṭhākurs* were increasingly replaced by officers of the *rājā* and once-independent principalities integrated into a more regular governmental structure.[13] It appears that by 1650 the Thakurs had fallen into political insignificance.[14] They were excluded from the Rajput nobility; in the Śivrātri Fair, they formed part of the retinue of the local deities but were not socially recognized by the urban high castes in their own right.

The *Pax Britannica* in 1846 put an end to a period of invasions and plundering by the armies of Kangra, the Gurkhas, and the Sikhs which had lasted for several decades and left the country ruined and exhausted; it was therefore proverbially appreciated by the people of Mandi (Mandi State 1908: 16). Unlike Kangra and Kullu, Mandi was not annexed by the British and the *rājā* was granted "full administrative power" within the state (Man Mohan 1930: 113). Boundaries were frozen, and feuds and warfare stopped. Areas which had frequently changed hands between Mandi and Kullu or Suket were now firmly attached to one state or the other, and territorial affiliations became unequivocal. Otherwise, rights in land were not much affected by British Law; major reforms were postponed until after 1900, and even then there was little interference with the administration of temples and temple land (Emerson 1917: 27f.). However, as local powers were increasingly incorporated into an administrative system, they suffered a further loss of political and jural functions.

---

drained and changed into a *bazār*, is still a visible landmark. That Siddh Sen intended to become a universal ruler is only mentioned in the said manuscript: "The work for the Siddh Sagar [the tank] was started. ... The magician Madan told [Raja Siddh Sen] that he should sacrifice a *rājā*, then Mandi would gain universal rule" (*je es talāoā kesī rāje rī bali hoe, to Maṇḍī rā cakravartī rāj huṃg*).

[13] The term *wazīr* generally refers to the post of a minister whether he served a chief or a *rājā*. In the local history, the term is first used for a territorial and administrative unit in connection with Siddh Sen (1684 to 1727). *Wazīrīs* in this sense are not mentioned in other sources. This may be incidental; apparently, Kullu had territorial *wazīrīs* much earlier (Suket Gazetteer 1908: 7).

[14] According to Emerson, the last independent local chief on Mandi territory was conquered around 1650 (1920: 34f.).

It is impossible to sum up all of the changes in the course of the 20th century, which affected all aspects of life. Two developments had a major impact on the organisation of the Śivrātri Fair, viz. the abolition of princely rule in 1947 and subsequent integration of Mandi into the Indian Union – still referred to as "merger" – and the land reforms of the 1950s. The district authorities took over the running of the fair and many of the earlier functions of the *rājā*, and they curtailed his prerogatives as best they could. In particular, they aimed at excluding the court hierarchy and the "state regalia" which were displayed by the *rājā* during the festival. In 1951, for the first time, they enforced that Mādhorāo took part in all the processions along with the *rājā*, and the symbols of the princely state were no longer admitted.[15] Democracy also reached the local gods and goddesses. Previously, participation in the processions had been limited to a small, privileged group, but now they were now opened to "all *devtās*".[16] As the process was no longer checked by the court, new deities began to crop up and attended the fair. All this contributed to undermine the traditional hierarchy, but eventually it led to the near-collapse of the fair. In 1960, the *rājā* stopped joining the processions, and the most prestigious deities began to stay away. Later, the *rājā's* ritual role was tacitly restored for all functions that take place on palace ground although officially this is not taken notice of.

The situation was further destabilized by land reforms. Urban landlords lost their estates in the villages and the tenants, mostly Thakurs or Kanets, became the owners of the land they cultivated. Temple lands (*śāsan*) were also confiscated and redistributed. The temples thus lost their maintenance and had to find new sources of income. The question of who acquired temple land through which channels is still a touchy subject.[17] In order to raise money, temples took to attracting patrons from outside by trying to gain a reputation for curing (or causing) illness and granting

---

[15] In 1950, the *rājā* was accompanied by his courtiers, bodyguard, bearers with whisk of yak's hair etc., and "the State Regalia". In 1951, the bodyguard was replaced by a "guard of honour" furnished by the police, the "Mandi State Band" was replaced by a military band, etc. (Details from the programs edited by the Fair Committee.)

[16] This is explicitly stated in the program of the fair (written in English): "[After the opening ceremony] His Highness will arrive at Shri Raj Madho Rao Ji's Temple from where a Procession headed by all Devtas will start ... Shri Raj Madho Rao Ji, all Devtas and His Highness will return in procession to the former's temple." The participation of both the *rājā* and Mādhorāo, and the inclusion of "all Devtas", are unprecedented.

[17] Much of the land was appropriated by the managers (*kārdārs*) and other temple officials. Conflicts about this are still going on in many villages.

other favours; the deity's power and the charisma of the *gurs* thus became a factor in the competition for clients.

Mādhorāo and the *Rājā* - The Ruler Divine and Terrestrial

The story of Mādhorāo's appointment is well-known: "The eighteen sons born to *Rājā* Suraj Sen all died after birth. Therefore, in the year 1705 [A.D. 1648], he installed Madhorao's image in the palace, and Madhorao alone became the *rājā*", the human *rājās* henceforward acting as his "deputies" or "vice-regents" (Emerson 1920: 63). As is indicated by an inscription on the image, this probably took place during the Śivrātri festival.[18] Mādhorāo is represented by a small, handsome silver image. It normally rests in his temple in the old palace but is taken out in procession on several occasions during the year. By far the most important of these is the Śivrātri Fair in February-March which lasts for eight to ten days and is a complex happening. Mādhorāo, together with the *rājā*, acts as the host of the local deities who gather in the town, giving them a formal reception and leading the processions arranged at various stages of the fair, receiving their homage and presenting them gifts of honour (*cādar*) before they return home. It should be noted that however urgent *Rājā* Suraj Sen's concern may have been (succession by a collateral is always a critical situation) the lack of a son was the occasion but not the cause for handing over the rule to a deity; in Kullu also, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu was placed on the throne, although the explanation is different.[19]

Śivrātri stands out from other festivals in Mandi as it is celebrated as a state fair. Probably a *melā*, a congregation of local gods and goddesses, had already been in existence before Mādhorāo's nomination. As has been mentioned, in its present form, the Śivrātri Fair combines features of a *melā* and of a *darbār*, a royal court assembly. This may come close to its historical beginnings – as the *melā* of Bhūtnāth, which was transformed into a *darbār* by the installation of Mādhorāo. The opinion most favoured in Mandi is that the *melā* has been celebrated since the foundation of the Bhūtnāth temple, but took on a different, "twofold quality" (*dviguṇit ho gayā*) when it was newly inaugurated as a *darbār* of the *devtās* under Mādhorāo.[20] Mandi town has a number of important Śiva temples. Śivrātri is, of course, observed in all of them, but the fair is principally dedicated to Bhūtnāth, whose temple, besides the palace, is the nucleus of the town. Although it is not recorded when the fair was established, the fact that Mādhorāo was made the ruler of the deities of Mandi, and that his image

---

[18] According to Emerson (1920: 35), the date is "the year 1705 [corresponding to A.D. 1648], on Thursday, the 15th Phagan"; see also Man Mohan (1930: 34).

[19] Rose (1978 [1919], Vol. I: 474f.); Hutchison and Vogel (1982 [1933]: 458).

[20] Mian Kashmir Singh in the program of 1982.

was mobile, designed for going on procession, suggests that the local deities were present at the event, and that his function was much the same as in later times, viz. presiding the fair and going in procession.

Mādhorāo's functions in the fair are crucial for the concept of kingship as it worked in Mandi. With Mādhorāo for the first time a form of Viṣṇu assumed a central part in the religious cult in the capital and the state as a whole. Mādhorāo has some remarkable characteristics that are important for his role, and he combines features of both urban and village deities in an unusual way: he is the only deity residing in the capital who has a mobile image which enables him to move about, but unlike the village deities he does not have an oracle. These differences come into play in the Śivrātri Fair and especially the receptions and processions, where the complicated relationships between the *rājā*, Mādhorāo, the courtiers, and the local deities were most visibly enacted and had to be presented in the proper order. The installation of Mādhorāo was a reduplication of the ruler, the ruler divine and the ruler terrestrial appearing as separate figures who, however, were firmly linked, forming an indissoluble couple.[21] This was paralleled by a reduplication of the court, the *darbār* of deities presided over by Mādhorāo, and the *darbār* of men presided over by the *rājā*. I think that this construction solved a problem, a contradictory point in the relationships between the *rājā* and the local deities. It was not a question of the *rājā's* divinity – which was hardly drawn into doubt (Gazetteer 1920: 61) – but rather whether he was divine for the devtās as well as for his human subjects. Nor was it a question of facts; at least in later times the *rājā* of Mandi "exercised over [the *devtās*] ... very definite jurisdiction" (Emerson 1920: 63).[22] Mādhorāo offered a solution to the problem of hierarchy: as he was a god, the deities had to accept his rule, and as the *rājā* acted in his name and lieu, the two of them were legally equivalent.

The *rājā* is closely identified with the deity. Their peculiar relationship is highlighted by a detail from the processional order. The *rājā* participated in processions on four important festivals in the course of the year, Śivrātri, Holī, Daśaharā and Dīpāvalī. On Daśaharā and Holī, the ruler and the god went together, with Mādhorāo's palanquin going in front of

---

[21] Fuller (1992: 106 f.). The identification of the *rājā* with Viṣṇu had reached the area long before but nothing is known about cults. There is no textual evidence but temple architecture can be quoted. Most notable in the vicinity is the temple of Baśesar (Skt. Viśveśvara) Mahādeva in Hat-Bajaura, built in the 9th century (Thakur 1996: 56) with sophisticated reliefs of Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu and Durgā; it was the very place where the future Mandi *rājās* started their - to begin with rather unsuccessful - career.
[22] Diack (1899: 43).

the *rājā.* However on Śivrātri and Dīpāvalī, Mādhorāo was normally represented by the *rājā* (Emerson 1920: 63). Mādhorāo only took part in the processions when the *rājā* was not there.

Why should the ruler not appear along with Mādhorāo in the Śivrātri procession when on other occasions he did so without hesitation? Vidal saw in this a provisional inversion "of the hierarchical relation normally prevailing between king and *avatāra*", the *rājā* stepping into the position due to Mādhorāo (1989: 220). I think that the salient point lies elsewhere. The processions during Śivrātri were essentially different from those on other holidays. These other ritual occasions, although celebrated in public, were largely an affair of the court and the urban society, and deities from outside the town did not take part. Śivrātri is however an assembly of local deities from many parts of the realm. If either the *rājā* or Mādhorāo headed the processions, this meant that their position was identical vis-à-vis the deities. The pomp and ceremonial was alike for both – the same palanquin, attendants, insignia, and music, and the same order of procession. The fact that they occupied the same position in the procession must have brought it home to the audience that sovereignty and royal power were equally embodied by both. The strict separation thus ensured their identification with each other – they were identical in position and function for the participants. This point did not escape the democratic government. It was the reason why the district authorities enforced the participation of Mādhorāo along with the ruler, putting the latter in perspective, and for the same reason, the ruler soon withdrew from the processions for good.

Another question that has rarely been considered is how Mādhorāo actually ruled (or rules). Upon closer examination it appears that everything the local deities of Mandi do or once did – "deciding criminal and civil law, redistributing property, appointing and dismissing officers, settling disputes, levying fines, organizing attack and defence, or the prosecution of feuds"[23] – Mādhorāo does not. He has no *gur* or anyone else to make known his judgements, orders, or advice, nor is there a tradition that he inspired the king, or his priest, by causing dreams or in any other way. Mādhorāo did not take an active part in government at all. He embodied divine rulership but left the business of politics and administration to the *rājā* and the agencies of government – the courtiers, officers, ministers, scribes, scholars, advocates, etc. This does not mean that Mādhorāo was controlled by the *rājā*, or his priests, or other agents.

---

[23] Quoted from the Conference Paper; see also Sax (2002: 157).

Apart from possessing the image, which was and is important[24], there was no point in controlling the god because he kept aloof and nobody could claim that he knew his mind. This construction must have helped to limit the influence of Mādhorāo's priests as they did not have any authority deriving immediately from the god but were employees of the *rājā* in the first place.[25] If Mādhorāo had an executive force it was the Dharmārth, the "State Welfare Office" (more precisely, the "Office for the State Dharma") which was in charge of the temples and kept the records. It was run by scribes and priests, not by divine inspiration. Mādhorāo served as a pivot of the traditional hierarchy of local deities as viewed and shaped by the court. Rank and privileges might be seen as emanating from him, but he did not take direct action. This must have made him more acceptable to the local deities because he did not interfere with them beyond court protocol.

The Śivrātri Fair of Mandi - The Locale

As has been mentioned, the centre of the festival was the Bhūtnāth temple and the palace, along with the residences of the *rājā* and of Mādhorāo, i.e. the very nucleus of the former capital.[26] Other temples are also involved but can be treated only briefly. All of them receive their share of worship, but some have special importance. The Goddess does not play an obvious role at Śivrātri, but the festival is also celebrated in *devī* temples, most prominently Śyāmākālī on a hill above the town. Traditionally, goats were sacrificed there during the fair, and the local *devtās* went there on the second day. Few deities go there now, and animal sacrifices have been stopped. As will be seen below, Siddh Kālī, whose temple is near the tank, receives an animal sacrifice before the fair is concluded.

Two goddesses residing in the palace act as hosts of the fair in addition to Mādhorāo. Not much action is focused on them, and since the festival takes place in the palace few people are aware of them; these are quasi-private goings-on of the royal house. The first goddess, Rājarājeśvarī, does not have an image but is represented by a *śrī yantra*. The temple was near that of Mādhorāo but was shifted to an interior courtyard around 1960.

---

[24] Abduction of images was part of warfare. The question of property also gained importance after "merger" since the district authorities attempted to get hold of the image.

[25] Income from temple lands was rather modest in the case of Mādhorāo (Mandi State 1904: 63).

[26] Like other important religious festivals elsewhere, Śivrātri in Mandi is celebrated in temples and in people's homes by worship, fasts, and other observances. Although this aspect is very important, it is left aside here, and I deal with the public fair only.

During the fair the goddess occupied a separate room near the coutiers' quarters; nowadays, Parāśar Ṛṣi's insignia are kept in the temple. Devī Rupeśvarī, a substantial silver image with tantric features, had been the tutelary goddess of Mandi's strongest fortress and was brought to the capital after the *Pax Britannica.*[27] She is visited by Mādhorāo on the first and last day of the fair. Both goddesses seem to represent different aspects of royal rule. Rājarājeśvarī apparently represents a more impersonal, abstract concept of royal power (*śakti*) whereas Rupeśvarī is more closely identified with the *rānīs.* The relations between Mādhorāo and Rupeśvarī seem to parallel those between the male and female domains of the palace; both represent separate spheres of royal power, the internal sphere which was inaccessible to the public, and the more visible, public sphere.
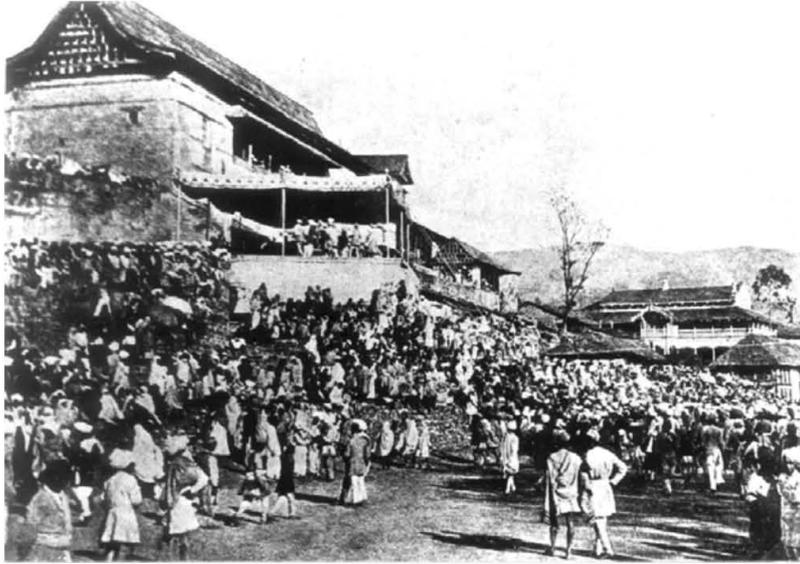

Fig.2: The festival ground with the raja's pavilion during Shivratri (ca. 1915, previously published in Emerson, 1920)

The palace area was much more extended before 1950 than it is today. Much of it has since been included in the public space of the town and

---

[27] See V.C. Thakur (1990: 74).

built up with government buildings, houses, and *bazārs*. Before "merger", most of the important functions took place in the palace or palace area. The main festival ground was spread out between the palace and the tank in front of it; the deities gathered there every day near an elevated pavilion reserved for the *rājā*; the minor processions (*jaleb*) performed on every other day started at this pavilion and went around the tank. The opening and the final processions had a different route. Both started at the palace and went to an open plain named Paddal outside the town, which is now the festival ground. The first procession went there directly, but the final procession made its way through the lanes of the *bazār*, actually a circumambulation of the Bhūtnāth Temple. This route is still followed by other processions of Mādhorāo[28], and by the god Ādi Brahmā on the last day of the fair (to be described below).

The Sequence of Events

In the 1930s, the fair lasted about 11 days. It was suspended during World War II and resumed in 1947. The duration was reduced for financial reasons; presently, it lasts for seven to nine days. I will first give a summary of the program of the fair and then discuss the participants and their relationships. Separate receptions by the *rājā* and Mādhorāo were only introduced after 1950. Earlier, both receptions took place in the palace and were presided by the *rājā* and Mādhorāo together, the gods and goddesses first bowing to the god and then to the ruler.

(1) Nowadays, the first reception is first given by Mādhorāo in the presence of the Śivrātri Fair Committee and other dignitaries; when it is over, Mādhorāo proceeds to the palace and the reception is repeated but presided over jointly by the *rājā* and the god. The very first deity who is received is Kamru Nāg, an important mountain god from the southern part of Mandi. Next come two gods and two goddesses, associates of Parāśar Ṛṣi, Kamru Nāg's rival in rank. This is the time-honoured order. Sometimes a deity opts out – which would have been unthinkable during "state time" – and two others made their way into the group, but otherwise it is unchanged. Every *devtā* is accompanied by its *gur*, *pujārī*, *kārdār*, insignia bearers and a band with trumpets and drums. Mādhorāo has an even larger staff.

(2) On Śivrātri day, Mādhorāo is worshiped and then proceeds to the Bhūtnāth Temple to be present at the *pūjā* there. Traditionally, it was performed by the *rājā* or rather by the "Dharmārth Manager"

---

[28] Cf. Hesse (2003).

in his presence. Today the *rājā* does not participate and the *pūjā* is performed by Mādhorāo's priest.

(3) Afterwards the public reception takes place for the rest of the deities. The program is much the same as on the previous day but takes several hours as dozens of gods and goddesses throng the palace area. This time, the god Parāśar Ṛṣi is received before all others. A strict order of precedence is kept at the beginning, but later it is relaxed and the deities are received as they arrive.

(4) The opening procession on the next day draws the greatest crowd. Mādhorāo is again worshipped, and the Chief Minister or another guest of honour assists in the *pūjā*. The procession is led by Mādhorāo in his palanquin, accompanied by his priest, servants, musical band, and some distinguished *devtās*. Besides officials and important persons of the town, district and state governments, nearly every group and committee in Mandi is represented, from kindergartens to cultural and professional associations. This procession is much longer than the route to the festival ground, and the rear-guard arrives long after the opening is over and Mādhorāo is back in his temple. In theory all *devtās* join, but only a part of them can push their way in, and many arrive by less ceremonious but more easily manageable roads.

(5) During the *melā*, the deities gather on the festival ground every day, giving *darśan*, answering questions, and enjoying each other's company; *raths* can be seen dancing with joy, and celebrating their reunion. When not busy otherwise, *raths* are "sitting" on the ground in long lines, groups being based on status and regional association. The best places should be reserved for the "traditional" participants, but these are sometimes usurped by newcomers, and conflicts keep arising.

(6) A second procession with Mādhorāo takes place in the middle of the fair; it is less pompous but more relaxed than the first one, and was introduced after "merger" as a substitute for the minor processions around the tank.

(7) Two important rituals take place on the last night of the fair and the next morning respectively, viz. the *jāg*, a fire sacrifice performed for the well-being of the ruling house, and the *kār* in which a protective line is drawn around the town by the god Ādi Brahmā and a *jogṇī* (Hindi *yoginī*) associated with him.

(8) On the last day the deities come to the palace early in the morning and are worshipped by the *rājā*. Later, gifts of honour (*cādar*) are distributed amongst them on his behalf. Traditionally these consisted of money, pieces of cloth, sweets, and an occasional coconut; although not valuable materially, they were appreciated

as token of their close link with the ruling house. After 1990 they were replaced by a cash payment given out unceremoniously by the administration and a connection with the traditional gift relationships between the rulers and the deities of Mandi is hardly recognizable any longer.

(9) Finally, Bhūtnāth and Mādhorāo are worshiped again, the last procession of Mādhorāo goes to the festival ground, and the local deities take their leave.
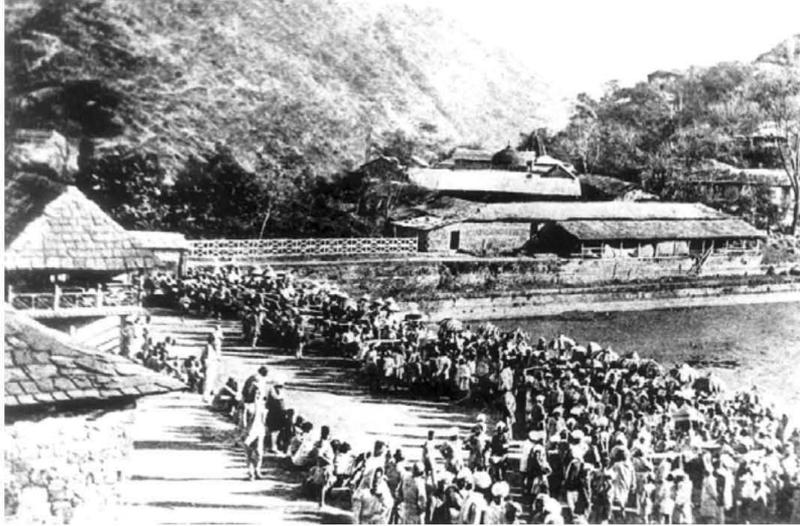
Fig.3: Devtas and people on the festival ground (ca. 1915, previously published in Emerson, 1920).

The Court of the Deities

The idea that there was a separate court of the deities is expressed in a note written after "merger": "In Mandi State on Śivrātri the *devtās* had their own *darbār*, and their rank (*darzā*) was fixed, and they were received by the ruler accordingly".[29] Everything concerning the *devtās* – insignia, gifts, the form of the *rath*, and, most important, temple land – was controlled by the *rājā* and the Dharmārth where the records were kept.

---

[29] Handwritten note, undated, from the palace archive.

The centrality of the ruler and the human court on all occasions can hardly be overstated. During the fair, the deities gathered every day in front of the palace arranged in a long line on the basis of rank and region; the spatial arrangement of the *raths* on the *melā* ground was thus a reflection of the regions that made up the kingdom[30]. Sometimes these are loosely linked together and overlapping, but there are some contiguous areas united by a particularly important deity recognized as suzerain, or elder, by the others. The *rājā* arrived in the afternoon, escorted by his bodyguards, personal attendants including bearers with whisks of yak's hair and peacock feathers; he was received and conducted to the raised pavilion by the "Chief Minister, Executive Councillors, the President and Members of the Shiv Ratri Fair Committee"; the state band played the state anthem when he arrived and left the festival ground. In the evening, *jaleb* was performed, a procession around the tank, the *rājā* sitting in *tam jham* (his palanquin) or, later, in his car if he wished, accompanied by a select group of deities (six gods and a goddess); the exact position of each – whether going in front or behind the *tam jham*, on the right or the left side, etc. – being prescribed by protocol. When the *rājā* was absent, his place in the procession was taken by Mādhorāo; from old programs it appears that the choice who went was the *rājā's*. For every event the list of participants, their position in relation to the *rājā*, etc. was regulated. The *rānī* and other ladies only took part in function within the confines of the palace, and they watched from the upper veranda. The pavilion, called "State Box", elevated high above the festival ground was an ideal stage on which the pageant of the court revolving around the *rājā* was displayed in front and above the court of the deities. Closest to the *rājā*, besides personal attendants, were generally "the Chief Minister, Executive Councillors, the Leading Mians and all the other Mians present in the town and First Class Officers" (Mian was the title borne by the *rājā's* close agnatic relatives). The deities thus witnessed every day the pageant of the court revolving around the *rājā*.

It is no wonder that the new democratic government was keen to reduce the palace's domination of the fair. Opposite the *rājā's* pavilion, where the important *devtās* used to sit, a stage was built for the "cultural program" in the evenings. The slope from the palace has been furnished with stone steps for sitting, part of it covered by a pavilion-shaped roof. It is now the audience who sit in the elevated position, the spectacle being staged below.

By analogy with the *rājā's* court, the deities were divided into "courtiers" (*darbārīs*) and "commoners" or "ordinary *devtās*" (*devtāgaṇ* or

---

[30] This is confirmed by a few old photographs and sketchy lists of the order of seating that survived in the archive of the palace.

devtā-devī). The *darbārīs* with their retinue were and still are accommodated in a separate portion of the palace. Again, the order is hierarchical and the centre is Rājarājeśvarī who represents royal power. Only *darbārīs* take part in the first reception, and on the second one they come before the others. Before "merger" only *darbārīs* were allowed to go in processions; even today only *darbārīs* go near Mādhorāo's palanquin. They include a group of distinguished goddesses, many of whom did not (and still do not) appear in public, indicative of their aristocratic status (not all goddesses among the *darbārīs* are in *pardā*). Another group, the "office-bearers", has special ritual functions which will be described below. Last not least, many of the *darbārīs* have golden masks which were gifted by a *rājā* or *rānī*. For various reasons, about half of the old *darbārīs* no longer attend the fair and their place was taken by others, all of them renowned deities with long-standing relation to the royal house and Parāśar Ṛṣi.

The ordinary *devtās* were ranked but it is not easy to establish a clear-cut hierarchy (cf. Vidal 1988: 224). Some had special merits, such as having granted a victory or the miraculous birth of a son, and were distinguished by royal gifts – precious *mohrās*, umbrellas, standards, silver staffs, fans, and the like – which were displayed in the procession. This still holds today, but any deity can acquire these paraphernalia now if someone pays for them. Most of them stayed in temples or the houses of bigger landlords. Today, schools and other public buildings are also used, and a few deities have purchased land and built their own quarters.

During the fair, the deities, besides the aristocratic goddesses, move to the festival ground where they can be approached by the public for blessings and divination. The order of sitting is no longer officially regulated but some of the regional groups are still intact. In theory, the best places are reserved for the distinguished deities but are sometimes usurped by upstarts who reach early. Affinities are expressed in the form and decoration of the *raths*, the shape and arrangement of *mohrās*, etc. During "state time", the closest approximation to a linear order was probably realized on the last day when the common deities were worshipped by the *rājā* and given *cādar*. For this purpose, they sat in long spiralling lines in the palace garden in order of precedence, and relative rank, or favor of the court, was thus visibly displayed. This is no longer the case; the *pūjā* is still performed, but it is not a public function any longer and the exact order of seating does not matter much.

The number and participation of *devtās* is not easy to establish as proper lists are almost unavailable in Mandi, but the common deities must have numbered about 80 or 90.[31] If the *darbārīs* are added, the number is

---

[31] This number can be estimated by comparing the available lists.

approximately the same today. There is no essential difference between gods and goddesses in status or function but the male gods are more numerous; statistically, the proportion is about 2:1. About one-third of the deities attending now have come up after "merger", but as many old ones dropped out. Some new deities are popular, but few have any prestige in the eyes of the older ones.

The Guardians of the Kingdom

Two important rituals are performed by renowned mountain deities, or their *gurs*, before the conclusion of the fair: the *jāg* on the last night of the fair, and the *kār* in the next morning before the deities leave. The former is a fire sacrifice performed for the protection of the ruling house. It is not a public event and takes place in a palace courtyard. During "state time", few people besides the royal family were allowed to take part; even a few years ago it was not widely known, although it was announced in the programs.[32] In the *kār* a protection line is drawn around the town. Unlike the *jāg*, the *kār* is nowhere mentioned, and I became aware of it only by chance. Both rituals were essential for the well-being of the ruler and the realm.

For the *jāg*, a *maṇḍala* is prepared and firewood is piled on it while the musicians – a big band with drums, *karṇāls*, *raṇsings* and a *śahnāī* – waits. The music begins after the fire is lit. The *gurs*, wearing special garments but no shoes or trousers, together invoke their deities by secret *mantras*. The first *gur* then starts to perform. After putting down his cap and the upper part of his garment he opens his long hair, which is essential for trance. He then purifies his body with water and incense. Before making his first round, he touches a drum. Led by an assistant carrying a silver staff (*chaṛī*), he circumambulates the fire several times driving away demons and evil spirits (*bhūt-pret*), whirling burning sticks from the fire around his body, then the *saṅgal* (iron chains fastened to a staff) and *guraj* (an iron staff, the special weapon of the *gurs*). He finishes by uttering *mantras* for the well-being of the ruling family. An assistant then wraps a white cloth around him and leads him to the side, where he makes predictions about the coming year. The performance is repeated by the other *gurs*. Each *gur* after finishing his part is received by his predecessor with a peculiar dance, said to represent Śiva's dance, the *tāṇḍava*. During "state time", seven or even nine *gurs* used to perform, but now the number is five and sometimes less as not enough new *gurs* are recruited.

---

[32] Since the Śivrātri Fair was accorded the status of a "National Fair", it is covered by TV news and became quite popular.

In the *kār* a magical line is drawn around the town by the god Ādi Brahmā or Ādi Purukh whose temple is near the important Dulchi pass, the inroad of armies from Kullu. The *rath*, accompanied on the way by two *gurs*, follows a route around the old quarters of the town. Along the way, handfuls of barley flour are thrown into the air, and a male goat is taken along. The procession ends at the temple of Siddh Kālī and Siddh Bhairav opposite the palace. One of the *gurs*, wielding two swords, performs a slow dance in front of the *rath* and then suddenly is possessed by Kālī, sticking out his blackened tongue and holding it between the sword-blades. At the same moment, the goat is sacrificed at the temple. The ritual then ends abruptly; the *gur's* trance ends, and Ādi Brahmā, i.e., the *rath*, goes to join the deities waiting for the final procession to begin. One of the *gurs* represents Adi Brahma, the second apparently a *jogṇī* associated with him. *Jogṇīs* are difficult to identify. They are sometimes benevolent but also very dangerous, and people avoid talking about them. Although invisible and unspeakable, they are the constant companions of the mountain gods who are powerless without them, and they turn invariably up in their vicinity.[33]

To sum up: all the deities whose *gurs* perform in the *jag* are close associates of Parāśar Ṛṣi, in effect his ministers; they are an exclusive circle among the *darbāris*, consisting of the deities who recognize Paraśar as their suzerain. That the same group as today also performed in the 1930s – and probably much earlier – is confirmed by the files in the archive of the palace. That they really represent the realm of Parāśar Ṛṣi becomes clear from the *bhārthā* ("legend of the deeds and origin") of one of the gods of the group, Dev Śukdev Ṛṣi, grandson of Parāśar and son of Beās Ṛṣi (who is also identified with the river flowing through Kullu und Mandi). At the end of this text, it is recounted how Parāśar Ṛṣi distributed offices among the deities[34]:

"On this very day, your grandfather (Parāśar Ṛṣi) gave you (Śukdev) the head ministry (*sīrī-wazīrī*) of the eighteen *karlū*[35] (i.e., all the local gods of Mandi),

the office of keeping revenue records (*nīmācār*, from *amīn*[36]) of the eighteen *karlū* he gave to Dev Caṇḍohī,

---

[33] Cf. Emerson (1920: 124); Diserens (1991). That a *jogṇī* with her *gur* in fact takes part was confirmed by a chance note on the payment - made on the *rājā's* behalf - for the ritual (palace archive).

[34] *Bhārthās* are transmitted orally. This one was dictated by the former *gur* to his grandson. In theory, the *bhārthā* is recited by the deity through the *gur* and should be in the first person sg. (Berti 2001: 108ff.), but the one quoted by me is in the second person, the god being addressed by his *gur*.

[35] Correctly, it should be *karḍū* (M.R. Thakur 1997: 48f.).

the office of head of police (*kuṭalpaṇī*, from *kaṭvāl*) of the eighteen *karlū* he gave to Dev Barnāg,

the office of manager (*palsrūmī*, from *pālsrā*) of the eighteen *karlū* he gave to Ṭepru Nāg,

the watch over the four irrigations channels[37] he gave to Nārāyaṇ,

the watch of the four mountains he gave to the god Ādi Braha (sic) of Ṭihrī,

the office of *purohit* of Saraṇḍī (the site of Parāśar's temple) he gave to Mārkaṇḍa."

The "four mountains" refer to the local cosmogony as retold in the *bhārthā*: at the beginning, "the first four shoots of the *parāśar* [which is a tree here] came out, and from the four shoots the four mountains came out", that is, the world of Mandi.

These are the outlines of a kingdom governed by Parāśar Ṛṣi. The offices he distributes are central concerns in the constitution of a polity: rights in land, revenue, police, irrigation, priesthood, and protection from demons and other enemies coming across the mountain passes. Beside the regions (*ilāqās*) governed by his ministers, his realm includes those of many other gods and goddesses. It covers a contiguous area that embraced several *wazīrīs* and more than thirty deities recognized by the Dharmārth.[38] Of the *darbārī devtās* I could make out, almost twenty belong to this area, which leaves only five or six for the rest of the state. The posts enumerated above should be regarded with care. Two versions of a story seldom agree even within a close group of deities. Most of the offices have several incumbents with identical claims, a fact that can only be bewildering for outsiders. Nor is it clear that Ādi Brahmā would recognize Parāśar as superior, since he is a powerful god in his own right.[39]

Although Parāśar's importance is unchallenged, his suzerainty is limited and Kamru Nāg, who is of equal rank, has a similarly large realm in the southern part of Mandi. Besides, a considerable part of the area is attached neither to Parāśar nor to Kamru Nāg, and similar albeit smaller groups can also be identified.

Kamru Nāg had one function of eminent importance: he was the most important rain god of the realm. Parāśar Ṛṣi is equally reputed, and so are Ādi Brahmā and all mountain deities as Hurang Nārāīṇ in the north and

---

[36] A "government officer concerned with investigation of land or revenue claims" (McGregor).

[37] *cahuṁ cale rā pahrā*; this is how I understand it.

[38] V.C. Thakur (1990: 94).

[39] He is also linked with the fiercely independent deities of Cuhār who do not recognize Parāśar. For Cuhār, see Vidal (1988: 129).

Magrū Mahādev and Śikārī Devī who guard the southern border. However, it is Kamru Nāg who has a direct link with the capital, the ruler and Bhūtnāth, and all three of them were linked together in the rain ritual called *gaṛuā,* sometimes resorted to in times of severe drought. In this ritual the *gur* of Kamru Nāg was called, and met the *rājā* of Mandi in the Bhūtnāth temple. They went down to the river Beas and fetched water, which they poured out on the *liṅgam* in the temple. This immediately summoned Kamru Nāg. The story goes that as soon as the water flowing through the drainage channels reached the river again, clouds gathered above the temple and rain would fall unfailingly. A strong link was thus established between Kamru Nāg and the ruler.[40]

In fact, the careful symmetry with which Parāśar Ṛṣi and Kamru Nāg are treated conceals the fact that there are considerable differences in their roles and in their relationships with the *rājās.* Both were privileged in that they did not have to attend the *melā* "personally" but could send their insignia (*niśān*) instead. In the palace, these were placed on opposite sides of the same room (nowadays Kamru Nāg does not stay in the palace any longer). The special treatment Kamru Nāg enjoyed as being the first god to be received in the capital was counterbalanced by giving Parāśar the same position on the next day. The second reception was less prestigious, but by separating them, the question of exact rank could be circumvented. Here, symmetry ends. The processions and the *jāg* and *kār,* deemed essential for the well-being of the ruler and the capital, were virtually monopolized by Parāśar and associates. The deities associated with Parāśar Ṛṣi were more numerous and ranked higher; they furnished the majority of the *darbārīs,* whereas no deity in Kamru Nāg's retinue was admitted.

Parāśar Ṛṣi was the oldest and most powerful lineage god (*kulj*) of the rulers, and his area of jurisdiction must have closely corresponded to the earliest polity, the nucleus of the future state. The area ruled over by Kamru Nāg was added to Mandi much later, towards the end of the 17th century.[41] The fair under Mādhorāo had been working for some time. As Kamru Nāg was a powerful god and lord of many gods and goddesses, an important position and some special function had to be found for him if he was to be included in the Śivrātri, one that would show his direct link to the ruler and the gods of the capital.

---

[40] The *gaṛuā* is part of local folklore and was described to me by several people. Nobody knows when it had last been performed; the most precise answer was "during state time". It is mentioned by Nutan (1988: 33). Belief in this ritual is still strong, and Kamru Nāg is thought to be in charge of the capital and vicinity.
[41] See. Man Mohan (1930: 50; 38f.; 43f.).

Conclusion

The deities in the Śivrātri represent the regions of the former state.[42] The ruler's centrality is less conspicuous since he was removed from public functions. Nevertheless he remains indispensable even now because otherwise Mādhorāo would be without a kingdom, and the reception of the deities would lack all splendour.

In the case of Mandi, the ruling deity is not a lineage god of the rulers. Probably Parāśar Ṛṣi as a local god could not be imposed on other areas. The *rājā* also effectively reduced the influence of the *gurs* by introducing orthodox Brahmanical ritual in the capital. Parāśar retained his position as tutelary god of the lineage but was excluded from current politics. The power of local clans was reduced. In the Śivrātri the villagers were treated as the retinues of territorial deities. The realm of Parāśar Ṛṣi looks like a proto-state, but this holds on the divine plane only. Parāśar Ṛṣi is a deity, as are his ministers, officers and other associates, but there are no corresponding institutions on the ground. Local power was effectively restrained by state government. Communities still were more or less independent with regard to internal and inter-village affairs as long as they did not oppose government. Thus, divine rule at the local level was opposed, and submitted, to royal rule. No deity could act against state law.

This arrangement is quite different from divine kingship as described by Sax (2002: 157) where a god actually "rules as a divine king" and is "served as both a king and a god" by people. In this form of "government by deity (*devatā kā rāj*)" (Sutherland 2003: 33), the god and the king are identical; conflicts cannot arise but it seems to work best when a human ruler is absent or without influence. Apparently, in Mandi a more modern and complex form of state was introduced which had already been established elsewhere, as for instance in Kangra, by abolishing but also utilizing structures of the earlier, constituent polities. Divine rule was completely transformed. The importance of deities and temples within the communities may even have increased when the rule of – terrestrial – Thakurs ended. The fair was an occasion for the deities to do what they liked best: *melnā-khelnā*, meeting at sacred places and playing their divine play. Political power was completely played down, and the ensemble of local bodies were presented as an idealized picture of the kingdom. Attendance of the fair and recognition of the hierarchy are no longer

---

[42] This is a common assumption (Mandi State: 39; 1920: 63; Vaśiṣṭh 1997: 28) and is endlessly repeated. When mapping sites of deities, I found that in fact the *raths* only come from a portion of the state area, viz. the higher regions in the southern and eastern part; virtually no *rath* comes from the area west of the river Uhl or west of the town Mandi.

mandatory now, but the *rājā's* ritual sovereignty still is the most binding aspect of the fair for the *devtās*.

References

Berti, Daniela. 2001. *La parole des dieux. Rituels de possession en Himalaya indien.* Paris: CNRS Editions.

Conzelmann, Elisabeth. 1996. *Heirat, Gabe, Status. Kaste und Gesellschaft in Mandi (Nordindien).* Berlin: Das Arabische Buch.

Diack, A.H. 1899. *Gazetteer of the Kangra District 1897. Part II - IV.-Kulu, Lahul and Spiti.* Lahore: "Civil and Military Gazette" Press.

Diserens, Hélène. 1988. "Les pierres funéraires de Mandi et de Nagar en Himachal Pradesh". *Bulletin d'Études Indiennes* 6: 201-224.

— 1991. "Les yoginī de la haute vallée du Kulu (Himachal Pradesh)". *Bulletin d'Études Indiennes* 9: 61-73.

Emerson, H.W. 1917. *Final Settlement Report of the Mandi State.* Lahore: "Civil and Military Gazette" Press.

Emerson, H. W. 1920. *Mandi State. Punjab Gazetteers. 1920. Vol. XII-A.* Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab.

Fuller, Christopher J. 1992. *The Camphor flame. Popular Hinduism and Society in India.* Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

Gazetteer 1904: cf. Mandi State.

Gazetteer 1920: cf. Emerson, H.W.

Griffin, Lepel H. 1990 (1870). *The Rajas of the Punjab: Being the History of the Principal States in the Punjab and their Political Relations with the British Government.* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Habib, Irfan. 1999. *Agrarian systems of Mughal India, 1556-1707.* Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Handa, O.C. 2001. *Temple Architecture of the Western Himalayas.* New Delhi: Indus.

Hesse, Klaus. 1996. *Staatsdiener, Händler und Landbesitzer. Die Khatri und der Bazar von Mandi (Himachal Pradesh, Indien).* Münster: Lit Verlag.

Hesse, Klaus. 2003. "Kulturelle Räumlichkeit und Stadt. Das Beispiel Mandi (Himachal Pradesh, Indien)". In *Kulturelle Räume- räumliche Kultur. Zur Neubestimmung des Verhältnisses zweier fundamentaler Kategorien menschlicher Praxis*, edited by B. Hauser Schäublin und M. Dickhardt, pp. 89-132. Münster: Lit Verlag.

Hutchison, J., and J. Ph. Vogel. 1982 [1933]. *History of the Panjab Hill States.* 2 Vols. Simla: Department of Languages and Culture, H.P.

Inden, Ronald. 1982. Hierarchies of kings in medieval India. In *Way of Life. Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, edited by T.N. Madan, pp. 99-125. New Delhi.

Man Mohan. 1930. *History of the Mandi State.* Lahore.

Mandi State. 1908. *Punjab States Gazetteers Vol. XII A.* 1904. Lahore: The "Civil and Military Gazette" Press.

McGregor, R.S. 1995. *The Oxford-English Dictionary.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Nutan, Kṛṣṇa Kumār. 1988. "Bābā Bhūtnāth mandir kā itihās". In *Itihās sāksi hai.* Delhi: Sanmārg Prakāśan (31-34).

Pahāṛī-Hindī Śabdkoś. 1989. Śimlā: Himācal Kalā Samskṛti evaṃ Bhāṣā Akādamī.

Rose, H.A. 1978 [1919]. *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province.* 3 Vols. New Delhi.

Sax, William S. 2002. *Dancing the Self. Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal.* Oxford: University Press.

Singh, Mian Goverdhan. 1983. *Arts and Architecture of Himachal Pradesh.* Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.

Suket State. 1908. Punjab State Gazetteers Vol. XII A. 1904. Lahore: "Civil and Military Gazette" Press.

Sutherland, Peter. 2003. "Very Little Kingdoms. The Calendrical Order of West Himalayan Hindu Polity". In *Sharing Sovereignty. The Little Kingdom in South Asia*, edited by G. Berkemer and M. Frenz, pp. 31-61. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz.

Thakur, Laxman S. 1996. *The Architectural Heritage of Himachal Pradesh. Origin and Development of Temple Styles.* New Delhi : Coronet Books.

Thakur, Molu Ram. 1997. *Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Himachal Pradesh.* New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company.

Ṭhakur, Vidyā Cand. 1990. *Maṇḍavya prabhā.* Maṇḍī: Aruṇ Printing Press.

Vaśiṣṭh, Sudarśan (ed.). 1997. *Maṇḍī Dev Milan.* Shimla: Himachal Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages.

Vidal, Denis. 1988. *Le culte des divinités locales dans une région de l'Himachal Pradesh.* Paris : Éditions de l'Orstom.

Ritual Kingship, Divine Bureaucracy and Electoral Politics in Kullu

Daniela Berti

In the years following Indian independence, hundreds of Hindu kingdoms that had been integrated since the sixteenth century into the Mughal and subsequently the British Empires officially came to an end. To paraphrase Galey (1989), the disappearance of these kingdoms did not necessarily provoke the disappearance of kings: royal rituals continued to be celebrated while many members of royal families became political leaders. The persistence of kingship in democratic India is the subject of a recent book by Marzia Balzani (2003), who shows how the descendents of the Jodhpur royal family have partly maintained their prestige both on a ritual and on a political level[1]. In this context, royal ceremonies are still periodically performed by the *rājā* in the luxury hotel-palace of Jodhpur; however they only involve a limited circle of the nobility and not the rest of society.

In this chapter I will present a different picture of "modern kingship". In the former Hindu kingdom of Kullu, in the state of Himachal Pradesh in northern India, the current head of the royal family has entered politics and maintains an important ritual role, which is not limited to the activity that he privately performs in his palace. He has close relations with the villages of the region, through his links with village deities called *devī-devtā*. These deities are considered to be local "kings" in their own right, who rule over specific territories[2]. Each of these village deities is strictly linked to a specific group of high- and low-caste villagers, with different roles: priests, mediums, temple administrators, musicians, and devotees. Each participates, in his own way, in what is locally called (using an English expression), the "deity system". The logic of this system is that village deities are considered responsible for bringing good or bad fortune, adequate rain and sunshine, drought or an abundance of rain, as a direct consequence of their respective devotees' actions. The king, too, is thought to be subject to the bad or good influence of these deities, both in his private life and with respect to problems affecting the whole kingdom.

In other work (Berti, forthcoming), I analyze how relations between the king and these village deities are today considered to be subject to political interference, due to the fact that the king is competing in local

---

[1] For other works on contemporary forms of Indian kingship see also Mayer (1991), Hurtig (1988), Price (1996).

[2] Cf. Vidal (1988), Berti (2003) and, for the Tehri Garhwal, Sax (1991).

elections and that the deities' jurisdictions correspond to "vote banks" for which local politicians compete[3]. In the present article, the focus is rather on the Kullu king himself, and on the ritual dimension of his relations with the local gods and their villagers.

Raghunāth's Staff Bearer

In 1852, during the British administration, the heirs of the Kullu dynasty lost the title of *rājā* when the throne passed to Thakur Singh's illegitimate son, Gyan Singh. Though such a succession was not uncommon in Hindu kingdoms, the British administrators, who had to confirm the honorific attributions, decided to refuse Gyan Singh the title of "*rājā*" and to give him the less honorific title of Rai. Rupi was the area given as *jagir* by the colonial authorities to Thakur Singh, which was repossessed by the Indian State in 1950. But even after this final loss of all their titles and privileges, the descendants of the Kullu royal family continue to be called "*rājā*" by most local people. Even the entrance gate to the palace in Sultanpur, the ancient part of the town of Kullu, bears the engraving "*rājā* of Rupi". It is in this sense that I shall use the term here.

The present *rājā*, Mahesvar Singh, is a politician. He started his career in 1977 as a member of the Hindu Nationalist Janata Party, predecessor of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), when he was elected as MLA in a local constituency. In the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP gave him the ticket for the Mandi Constituency, a large territory that includes, amongst others, the ancient territories of both Kullu and Mandi. He seemed to be the ideal candidate: in Kullu he was the *rājā* and in Mandi his sister had married the local *rājā*. He served many times –the last time being from 1998 to 2004, when he was defeated by a member of another royal family, Rani Pratibha Singh, contesting on behalf of the Congress Party[4]. Mahesvar's younger brother, Karan Singh, is also a political leader. He has served many times as both MLA and Minister in local government. Both brothers live with their respective families and their mother in their palace in Sultanpur.

The palace is directly connected to a royal temple through a private passageway meant for the royal family and their servants, while ordinary devotees and occasional pilgrims enter the temple from the outside. In the temple's courtyard, a sign informs the visitor, "This temple is the private

---

[3] Berti, forthcoming.

[4] Rani Pratibha Singh is the wife of the current Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Virbhadra Singh, who is the current descendant of the Bushahar royal family, a kingdom nowadays included in the Shimla district. She is also Mahesvar Singh's affinal relative.

property of Bhagavan Singh" (Mahesvar Singh's grandfather). As a matter of fact, and in contrast to the neighbouring kingdom of Mandi whose *rājā*, after Independence, abandoned the temple to the state, the Kullu *rājā* has carefully safeguarded his ownership of the temple. It is dedicated to Raghunāth, the *rājā*'s personal deity, and the god on behalf of whom Kullu kings have ruled since the seventeenth century, calling themselves his *"chaṛībardar"* (Staff Bearer). Maheshvar Singh considers that it is his hereditary duty to maintain worship to Raghunāth, and he has recently appointed his eldest son, the *Ṭīkā*[5], as the *kārdār* (administrator) of the temple.

Inside the temple, nearly ten persons are employed at Raghunāth's service. The priest in charge of worship serves the god in his little metal statue four times a day. In the morning, the god is awakened and bathed, his make-up is applied, he is dressed in his royal dress and jewellery, and given a meal inside the royal kitchen. At night he is put to bed. During the day, he seats on his throne with his wife Sītā to his right and the god Hanumān standing in front of him in a position of devotion.

Every morning, Mahesvar Singh's mother, the *Rānī* (queen), attends the main worship while preparing a garland of fresh flowers for the god and playing devotional songs recorded on cassettes for him. The Tikka is also often there, and checks to make sure that everything is done properly in order to satisfy the needs of the god and of his divine entourage.

On ordinary days the temple sees few visitors, with only a few devotees living in Sultanpur coming in the morning to take the god's *prasād*, or to have his *darśan*. One exception to Raghunāth's quite confined ritual life is the yearly Daśahrā festival, when villagers from the whole district and from even farther away come to the capital with their respective deities' palanquins in order to pay homage to the god and to his human delegate, the *rājā*. In past times, this annual visit was compulsory, and was also the occasion for village deities to pay their tribute to the *rājā* as a sign of their political subjugation. Nowadays, village deities are sent an invitation by the Daśahrā committee, which also provides them with some money for their six-day stay at the capital.

Daśahrā has now been declared a National festival, under the control of the state's elected representatives who are the main members of the Daśahrā Committee and who make use of the festival for political purposes (cf. Berti 2005). When Mahesvar Singh was MLA or MP, he was also the President of the Committee and had thus everything under his control. However, even though he is no longer in power and even though the

---

[5] Ṭīkā is the common appellation used for the king's eldest son, Danvendr Singh. The word *ṭīkā* indicates the vermilion mark that is put on the forehead during the puja. It is also a woman's ornament.

Committee is presided by Congress representatives, Mahesvar Singh still plays a central role in the ritual celebrations as Raghunāth' Staff Bearer: dressed as a *rājā*, he holds the Raghunāth's sceptre, is carried in a royal palanquin, and presides over a royal *darbār* (royal assembly) with village deities in attendance. At times, he is also dressed as a priest, takes a direct part in Raghunāth's worship, personally applies the makeup to the divine couple (Raghunāth and Sītā), reads them appropriate Sanskrit mantras, rocks them in their swings, fans them, etc.

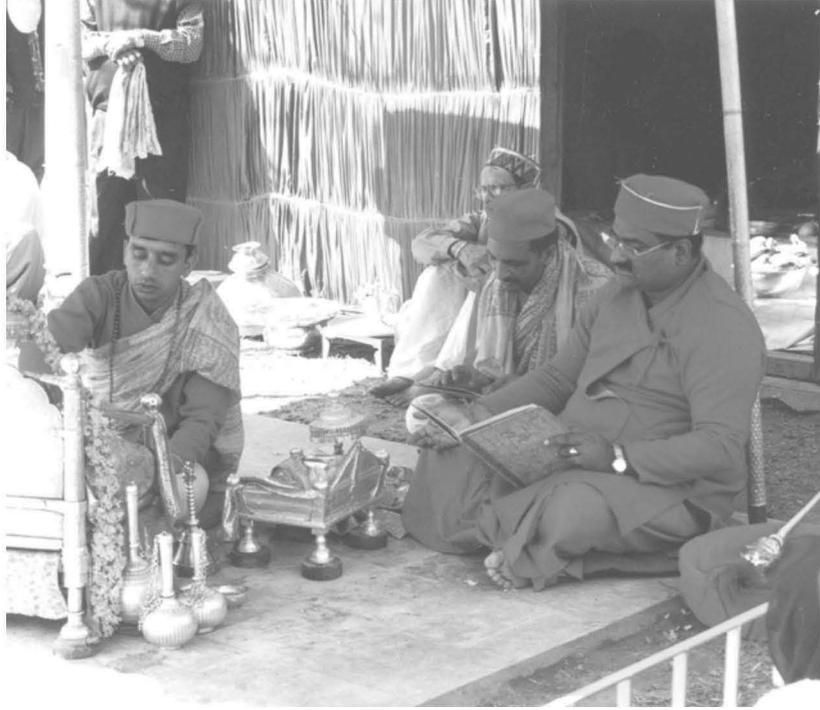**Fig. 1: The raja (on the right) dressed as a priest reads Sanskrit mantras to Raghunath who sits on the throne. (Photo D. Berti)**

For a *rājā* to act as deputy to a god to whom the kingdom has been transferred has been quite widespread practice in different Hindu kingdoms since the twelfth century, and has been interpreted by some scholars as a way for the *rājā* to centralize and legitimate his political

power.[6] H. Kulke (1986b), for example, in his reconstruction of what he calls the royal "deputy-ideology", analyses the dedication of the Orissan Empire to Jagannatha of Puri in the 13th century in terms of "vertical" and "horizontal" legitimation.[7] This kind of interpretation has been criticized by Schnepel as being "a Western, 'Machiavellian' view of society." (Schnepel 1994: 160). In contrast to such perspectives, what this author considers to be important is that, without denying that kings "were aware of the political consequences of some ritual acts, and [that] they made deliberate political use of this knowledge.... [it would be wrong] to ignore that their deeds with regard to the patronage of goddesses were also and even essentially, religiously motivated." (*ibid:* 161)[8]

In the case of Kullu, this coexistence of political and religious dimensions appears quite clearly in the multiplicity of meanings that Raghunāth condenses for the king: he is his personal god inherited from his ancestors, the religious symbol of past kingship, the supreme god and hero of the Ramayana and also, in the local context, the god to whom all village deities owe respect and consideration.

On the other hand, the political advantages that the king gains by worshiping Raghunāth are frequently evoked by local people (especially the *rājā*'s personal or political enemies). In the years following Independence, for instance, Raghunāth's worship was at the centre of a dispute between the then *rājā* of Kullu, Mahendar Singh, and Lal Chand Prarthi, who was minister and MLA. Prarthi often disputed Mahendar Singh's right to exert a monopoly over Raghunāth's rituals. He wanted to put the god's worship under the government's control. In the course of one of their disputes during a procession, which provoked police

---

[6] Cf. Kulke (1986b), Waghorne (1989), Haynes (1990).

[7] By "vertical (or internal) legitimation" the author refers to "the acknowledgement by the king of the dominant autochthonous deities [that] will be aimed at the consolidation of the newly established sub-regional power within the nuclear areas" (Kulke 1986a: 136) while horizontal (or external) legitimation concerns the recognition of the king "by equivalent rivals and potential rioters amongst the feudatories" (*ib.* : 137).

[8] It may be noted however that these religious motivations are not completely neglected by Kulke who states, for example, that when the victorious king had to select for his royal patronage "one or several out of the existing autochthonous cults...[he usually] gave his preference not only according to political opportunism but also to his own individual and dynastic religious tradition. He thus tried to find a cult for his royal patronage which may correspond to both these religious and political intentions." (Kulke 1986: 143). What Schnepel criticizes in Kulke (and others) is rather his disregarding "ritual acts and beliefs as genuine forces and ultimate goals that directly motivate and guide the life of rulers and subjects alike" (Schnepel 1994: 159).

intervention, a man was killed. The case went to the High Court, which confirmed the *rājā*'s exclusive right to worship the god. The decision did not completely put an end to the controversy, and in October 2000 a pamphlet was circulated by another politician, insinuating that the *rājā* was not the real owner of Raghunāth's temple...

Fig. 2: The raja sitting in his royal palaquin is carried all around the town during Dashera. (Photo D. Berti)

Another bone of contention is the *jaleb* procession during Daśahrā. In the *jaleb*, the *rājā* is carried in a palanquin, and makes a circuit of the town to the sound of loud drumming, accompanied by the palanquins of selected village deities. That the *rājā* sits in a palanquin, dressed in royal robes as if he was still a king, is not greatly appreciated by local politicians, and every year this becomes a subject of controversy. This is for instance what a Congress candidate, who was many times MLA in a

local constituency, said about Mahesvar Singh's insistence on performing *jaleb* during Daśahrā in 2004:

> "Mahesvar Singh is not a god! This is a democratic country, we do not have *rājā*s! Now *rājā* is finished, now *rājā* is public. Now *rājā* should not sit on the shoulders of any human being! He is the last *rājā* who is sitting in a palanquin; the other *rājā*s have left this system."

Such accusations are made by those who, for political reasons, are against Maheshvar Singh. The great majority of people, however, although those who may criticize Mahesvar Singh as a person, accept his public ritual role and participate in the "deities' system". This role and this system essentially imply two things: not only is the *rājā* historically entitled to serve Raghunāth, he is also historically bound to the village deities, in relation to whom he is defined as the *mukhyā kārdār*, the supreme administrator.

Before examining what this relationship between the king and the village deities may mean today, I shall analyse the form of the interactions between Mahesvar Singh and village deities, and the "historical" links that established them.

The *rājā* as the "Fountain of Honours"

In contrast with Raghunāth, whom oral stories present as an outsider brought to Kullu by a seventeenth-century *rājā*, village deities are mostly depicted as "autochthonous" of the region, or at least as being already there before the beginning and the consolidation of the royal dynasty.

These deities, too, are said to rule, but in a very different way than Raghunāth. While the latter never incarnates himself in a human vessel, village gods are believed to express themselves either by speaking through their mediums or by "gesturing" through their wooden palanquins which, carried on the shoulders of devotees, are said to move according to the deity's will. Villagers who are under the jurisdiction of a village deity regularly consult it about individual, social and political problems. Consultation takes the form of a direct, informal and often very passionate dialogue. The *rājā*, as well as other members of the royal family, used to consult village deities either by going to their village or by calling them to the palace, with their mediums and their palanquins. The personal relationships that the *rājā* has with these local deities are very intimate, and both deities and *rājā* are used to communicating, expressing their feelings toward each other, and defending their own points of view[9].

---

[9] A similar kind of interaction between the local deities and the heir has been described for Garhwal by Sax (1991: 178ff).

This intimacy must however be constructed and maintained in a logic of reciprocity: the deity must satisfy the *rājā*'s demands and solve his problems, but the *rājā* must also satisfy a deity's requests – for instance, by offering him a big ceremony or by building a bigger temple to increase its prestige.

This last point needs to be developed. We are talking here of a considerable number of gods and goddesses, each of whom is closely linked to a specific group of villagers – their *hārye* who are often in competition with each other for supremacy. This competition is especially evident during village festivals, when deities and their respective groups of *hārye* meet. During these festivals, conflicts often arise about the superiority of one deity in relation to another. The "prestige issue" – as it is locally called – is particularly relevant at the big annual gathering of village deities at the royal capital, during Daśahrā: for the *hārye* this serves as a kind of "barometer" of their deity's supremacy. As Balzani notes more generally for *darbārs* (royal assemblies), they "have always been meaningful to the participants of the rituals as a means of making public and legitimate their relative status and honour vis-à-vis the ruler or leader and other participants. ...The periodic *darbār* gathering served as a forum for revealing changes in status which might, however, be contested by others taking part in the *darbār*" (Balzani 2003: 82) [10].

As is the case for human dignitaries, the crucial mark of the village deities' respective status and prestige is their closeness to the *rājā*. The more a deity can publicly show this closeness, by receiving honours and attention from the *rājā*, or simply by standing closest to him, the more his prestige is recognized and accepted by everyone[11]. The specific relationship a deity has with the *rājā* is considered to be "historically-based", in the sense that it refers to a particular episode that happened in the past. Some of these episodes may be very similar from one deity to another. For example, it is rare that a deity's repertoire of stories does not include some episodes detailing how he/she helped some *rājā* of the dynasty during a period of drought by providing him with rain, and how

---

[10] See Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam (1992), Zins (1995), Cohn (1987), Haynes (1990), Schnepel (1994).

[11] Cf. Appadurai and Appadurai Breckenridge (1976); Dirks (1987). The very first criterion met by the festival administration in order to decide on the amount of money (*nazarānā*) assigned to village deities for their trip to the capital is the "old prestige and traditional form of the deity" (*purātana kirti evaṁ pārampārik svarūp*). This criterion is written on the invitation card that the administration sends to each deity participating in the festival.

the *rājā* rewarded the deity in various ways – giving land or honours, or building a temple or a palanquin[12].

The fact that deities have "historical" relations with the dynasty is constantly put forward by their villagers in order to demonstrate the importance their deity has in the local pantheon. However, in contrast with the story of Raghunāth, known and accepted by everyone, the stories concerning the relationship between a *rājā* and a village deity do not necessarily generate consensus among the different groups of villagers. Moreover, while the reputation of a deity may be widespread in some parts of the valley, the same deity may be completely unknown in another part. Indeed, villagers are eager to have the story of their deity publicly recognised by everyone, published in books, in newspapers or quoted on Internet sites.

Mahesvar Singh is personally concerned with this "prestige issue", since he is still regarded by most of the deities' *hārye* as the one who best knows the royal past. Thus, when there are conflicts about prestige he is consulted by the *hārye,* who ask him to tell them "the entire history of past generations". Mahesvar Singh, too, considers himself as the keeper of what he defines as "contracts" between his ancestors and different village deities that he must respect in order to maintain the dharmic rules.

Whenever he delivers a political speech in a village, for instance, he does not forget to remind the audience of episodes that link him, as *rājā*, to a locality and to its deities – which is not, of course, devoid of political implications. When he was MP for example, and gave a political speech in a village called Banara to persuade villagers to approve the construction of a dam in the area, he said, "With Banara deity we have a relation that cannot be interrupted. Our ancestors have with this deity a relation that cannot be broken. This is a matter of history" (speech held in the village of Banara, 1999).

With some village deities the *rājā* has a particularly close "historical" relationship and a very deep attachment, both of which are constantly enacted during ceremonies. Take for instance the case of Hirmā Devī, a goddess who is considered to be the founder of the dynasty and the "grand-mother" of the *rājā*. The reference to this foundation, and to how she helped the *rājā* to get rid of his enemies, especially a certain Piti Thakur, is regularly evoked by the deity herself through her medium

---

[12] The need for alliances with deities seems to have been a crucial element in the exercise of political power in all Himalayan kingdoms. By analysing documents from the Kathmandu Valley, in Nepal, Burghart (1987) has shown how royal gifts of land to gods was one way for kings to establish personal alliances with them in order to obtain victory for themselves and prosperity for the kingdom.

when consulted by Mahesvar Singh: "There was the *rājā* Bamani . . . there was Piti Thakur in Jai Dhar, I have won, I have turned him away … I gave you the kingdom!"

Indeed, Mahesvar Singh considers this goddess as his *dādī* (grand-mother). He explains that Hirmā is the local name for Hiḍimba, the Rakshasi who, in the *Mahābhārata*, married Bhima, one of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, the heroes of the epic. As he once told me "we (the Kullu dynasty) are from the Pāṇḍav family and Hiḍimba had married into our family! For this we call her *dādī*".

This idea is also expressed in ordinary interactions. For instance, once I saw the *rājā*'s son and his daughter meet the medium of Hirmā devī – a tall and corpulent man, ill-shaven, belonging to a low caste – and say, while addressing his daughter, "Come here, baby! Come to say 'Hallo' to your grandmother!"

Fig. 3: The Raja's son starts to run violently while carying Hadimba's palanquin. (Photo: D. Berti)

Close relations between the goddess Hirmā-Hiḍimba and the royal family are regularly maintained. During the goddess's annual festival, Mahesvar Singh goes to her temple, 40 km away from his palace, and cuts

(or has the priest cut on his behalf) off the head of a buffalo that is sacrificed for that occasion. At that moment, the *rājā* also starts to tremble, showing that he is temporarily possessed by the goddess. The goddess' medium, on his side, risks losing his control in the *rājā*'s sight, and whenever he is close to the *rājā* he ties around his head a black cloth in order to diminish the force by which the goddess manifests herself through him. Even with this precaution, the divine manifestation is so violent that the medium has to be held by other men so that he may not run away or harm anyone. The *rājā*'s son, too, is powerfully linked to the goddess. Whenever he takes her palanquin on his shoulders, he starts to run violently in all directions, driven by the power of the goddess.

Many other village deities have a privileged relationship with the royal family, regularly confirmed and celebrated at ritual level. At any time, one of these village deities can receive a letter or a messenger from Mahesvar Singh who invites him/her to the palace for a consultation with palanquin, medium or both. In the same way, the *rājā* may decide to go to a village to visit his deity. These relationships exemplify, as well as maintain, a wide network involving the *rājā*, the multiplicity of deities and their *hārye*. However, although practically every village deity is linked to the dynasty through oral stories, all these stories do not always correspond to an effective, contemporary ritual relationship. In this sense, Mahesvar Singh may indeed be considered responsible for the "past contracts", since he can decide to confirm them or not in a ritual manner.

Moreover, not only does he continue to recognise some ancient links, he regularly creates new ones as well, with deities whom he personally prefers. And even today, the care he shows for a village deity is a source of prestige for this deity. For instance, he is strongly linked with Pañcālī, a goddess who, since recently, was not supposed to have any "historical" links with the royal family. From an administrative point of view, Pañcālī is included in the category of *nai devtā* (new deities). New deities are locally opposed to *muāfīdar* deities, who got *muāfī* (exemption from taxation) from previous kings.[13] However, Pañcālī nowadays happens to be Mahesvar Singh's favourite goddess, for she is said to have helped him and his brother many times to win elections. As a consequence, Mahesvar Singh shows a special predilection for this goddess: many times he has called her (the palanquin or/and her medium) to his palace, or gone to her village temple, almost forty kilometres from the capital. An inhabitant of Pañcālī's village told me, for instance, what happened in 1998, when the *rājā* stood as candidate in central elections:

---

[13] *Muāfīdar* deities and nai deities appear in two separate lists in the official records which indicate the amount they receive from the Dushera Committee for their participation to the festival. Panchali is always included in a list of the nai devta.

The *rājā*'s party [the BJP] was not in power at that time and the goddess [consulted by the *rājā* through her medium] said, "If you come here with your heart, I will change the kingdom of Delhi". Six months later, in 1998, the government of Delhi changed [the BJP came to power], and the *rājā* got elected as MP! In order to thank the goddess the *rājā* held a big ceremony for her at her village.

These political-ritual links between *rājā* and village deities are in some ways similar to those in the past. In the same way that Hirmā is supposed to have given the kingdom to the first *rājā*, Pañcālī nowadays helps Mahesvar Singh to win elections. Indeed, this similarity of roles was expressed by the goddess herself who, speaking through her medium, said during a consultation, "Oh Mahārāja! I have sent you to Delhi as a Member of Parliament!"

This goddess was quite unknown until recently. Being constantly consulted by the *rājā* and tenderly treated by him during Daśahrā, she has now achieved notoriety. In the course of the past few years, these links have come to be "historically" legitimated. According to a version which is more and more often repeated by the *hārye* of Pañcālī (and first of all by her medium), this goddess was the lineage goddess of the *rājā* of Shangri, a branch of the Kullu lineage. Since the *rājā* of Shangri died without leaving any heir, Pañcālī now claims, through her medium, to be the lineage goddess of the Kullu branch. Mahesvar Singh adds to this story the fact that Pañcālī is one of the names of Draupadī who was, in the *Mahābhārata,* the wife of the Pāṇḍavas, from whom the *rājā* – as we have seen in the case of the story of Hirmā-Hiḍimba – claims to be descended.

Such efforts to transform contemporary history into a history that can produce tradition and honours are however not accepted by everyone in the region. For many, the present alliance between Pañcālī and the *rājā* is nothing but mere electoral strategy, and the honours or attentions that the goddess receives today have nothing to do with the festival nor with "tradition". For example, the story of the ascension of the goddess Pañcālī in terms of prestige has been commented on by the medium of one of the "traditional" lineage goddess of the royal family. Somewhat annoyed by Pañcālī's success with Mahesvar Singh, he said:

Pañcālī is a new goddess; she was not there before. They found her statue only recently. The region where they found it is a BJP region and Pañcālī is also a BJP goddess. This means that if Pañcālī becomes powerful, the *rājā* also will, and that the BJP will get more votes. If he honours Pañcālī, he will get the votes.

The medium distinguished between these profitable but self-interested relations and those based on sincere devotion and reciprocal respect, which bound the royal family to "old" goddesses such as hers:

The *rājā* and the royal family believe first of all in the *"muāfīdar"* goddesses, it is the whole royal family who believes in them, this is a matter of tradition (*paraṁparā*).

Until now, these opinions have been shared by most of the mediums of the ancient goddesses, who look at the increased importance of the "new gods" with condescension, if not hostility/envy. But if Pañcālī's story does become more credible, the goddess will eventually become another "traditional" lineage goddess of the Kullu royal family.

The "chief administrator"

We have seen that the *rājā* is considered to be the "*mukhyā kārdār*" (chief administrator) of the village deities. These days, this role is more metaphorical than literal, since for any juridical or economic problems concerning the management of temples, their *kārdārs* go to the District Commissioner and not to the *rājā*[14]. But there are important ritual consequences for the *rājā*; for example the fact that he has – as Bhoj Chand Thakur, a local lawyer, explained to me – "the prime right of holding an audience": he can call these deities whenever and wherever he wants, in order to consult them.

This right is directly associated by the people with his role as Raghunāth's *chaṛībardar*: "The *rājā* is the chief of the gods and goddesses; he is called chief *kārdār* because Raghunāth is the main deity, before whom all village deities must bow". Moreover, oral stories underline the violent and compulsory power that the *rājā* had over the deities' mediums – or, in an ambiguous way, over the deities. Many stories tell how the *rājā* could also exercise "pressure" on village gods and on the powers (*śakti*) they have over rain or sunshine within their territories. It is said for instance that in time of drought, he used to organize a "universal consultation" (*jāgtī pūch*) by ordering all deities' mediums to come to his palace and by asking all the deities to provide rain – if rain did not fall at once, he threatened to have their heads cut off.[15]

Emerson, a British administrator who governed the region of Shimla shortly after the assumption of ultimate authority by the East India Company, was asked by some villagers to punish the mediums of a very famous god of the region, Kamru Nāg, considered to be responsible for withholding rain. Usually, the measures to be taken in such circumstances were decided by the *rājā* or, in his absence, by one of his representatives.

---

[14] Many village deities still have some land in their name and this land is managed by the administrator. Most of the problems that require the intervention of the District Commissioner concern the management of this land.

[15] See also Vidal (1988: 23).

When the region came under British control, the Administrator occasionally had to assume the royal role.

> It was clearly up to me to do something, and as all arguments failed to convince the people, I finally gave orders to the Wazir [minister of a territory] to call the erring diviners, and without ill-treating them in any way to attempt to bring them to a sense of their duties. The peasants were more or less content with this show of activity, but the results were not satisfactory, and when a few weeks later, the diviners themselves appeared before me, I took the opportunity of reminding them of their duties, and the punishments prescribed for their neglect. They were refreshingly candid. Kamru Nāg's job, they admitted, was to send sunshine and rain in their proper season. If he failed to do so, they (the diviners) were called to the police station and kept confined. If the rain did not then come within a reasonable time, they were made to stand naked in the sun; or if fine weather was needed and rain fell, they were made to stand up to their waists in the river until the sun shone. They knew of no reason why the same measures should not now be taken, but they would like four days of grace, and if no rain came within that time, they would bow to whatever punishment was ordered. So they were given their four days, and as rain fell before they ended, no further action was necessary. (Emerson, manuscript: 62).

The practice of *jāgtī pūch* is maintained by Mahesvar Singh even today. In August 1999 he even decided to renovate the temple of Jagti Patt in Nagar, where consultations are supposed to have been held in ancient times. At the entrance of the temple a sign in English explains the origin of the place to the visitors:

> "Even now during the great hour of natural calamities and other miseries and in order to decide matters of importance with regard to gods and goddesses, all the representatives of god and goddess, gur, pujar etc. carrying the insignia of their devi [...] assemble at this holy place. Head of the Kullu raj family with the order of devi-devta organize the function with traditional reverence. [...] all the gurs [deities' mediums] who are present on the occasion express the views of their devtas after going into trans (sic) and this becomes a base on which to organise havan-yaghya-path [Brahmanical rituals] for the welfare of the people. (Signed) Mahesvar Singh Administrator of Jagti patt temple, Naggar."

What is called *jāgtī pūch* today is far from including "all" village gods and goddesses. The number of deities invited is always limited and depends on the problem to be solved. In these consultations, the *rājā* places the deities' mediums according to their respective caste or to their importance. One specific deity, Pañc Bīr, has to open and close the consultation. In the opening phase, Pañc Bīr evokes, more or less explicitly, the problem that is to be discussed and then, when all the deities have been consulted, he gives the summary and the conclusion.

The *rājā* organized a consultation in October 2001 during the Daśahrā festival. This consultation was requested by the goddess Pañcālī, who

urged the *rājā* to solve a conflict between two groups of villagers competing for an honorific position to be assigned to the palanquins of their respective deities (Berti, forthcoming). One village accused the *rājā* of favouring the other deity only because its jurisdiction was in a constituency where the *rājā*'s brother was competing for elections. By contrast, their own deity was in a reserved constituency from where the *rājā*'s brother could not get any votes. The *rājā* had started to consult the administrators of the two competing gods to try to put an end to the dispute but the gods, speaking through their mediums, wanted the problem to be solved by the deities themselves and asked the *rājā* to organize a *jāgtī pūch*.

Fig. 4: The raja consults the mediums of two village goddesses. (Photo D. Berti)

One god: O Badani[16]! It is your quarrel, not ours. What should not happen has happened. You have to proceed with the *jāgtī pūch*. O Badani: our soul is on the mountain! We will make the decision ourselves!

Mahesvar Singh: Maharaja! Now, what can I do? Today men want to be greater

---

[16] Village deities call the king "Badani", the name of the royal dynasty from whom kings claim to descend, and the king addresses deities by calling them "Maharaja".

than gods. We are doing as our ancestors did, but if you fight each other what we will do?

   Other god: O Badani! You have to keep politics (*rājnīti*) out of religion (*dharma*)! There should be no disparity in our work! You did wrong, you have to organise the *jāgtī pūch*!

   King: You know, Maharaja, we kept politics away from religion. You know eternal things. If we did wrong you have to inflict punishment on us ...I'm following the traditions as told by our ancestors, but still [you think that] I did something wrong and you punish me. The *jāgtī pūch* cannot be set up so quickly! I will do it after Daśahrā at the place you indicate. Nobody is greater than you!

   At the end of this very direct and informal interaction the *rājā* started trembling as a sign of being temporarily possessed by deities. When the trembling finished, he seemed to be very moved and tears poured from his eyes.

   The attitude that the *rājā* has today vis-à-vis village deities must be understood in relation to the contemporary political context. As a politician, Mahesvar Singh requires strong support from village deities, since whatever they will publicly say through their medium or their palanquin may have an impact on their *harye*'s electoral choice. As a *rājā* and a politician, Mahesvar Singh is also most concerned with a "public scandal", especially during the Daśahrā festival, when journalists and cameramen are on the look out for a good scoop for the day, the slightest misunderstanding between him and the deities' *harye* makes the front pages of the local newspapers.

The bureaucratisation of gods' decision-making

The political context of democracy in which Mahesvar Singh is interacting with village deities makes it difficult to maintain the control that he is supposed to have had in the past over the deities' worship.

   In another nearby kingdom, that of Mandi (see Conzelmann, this volume), we know from Emerson's work (1920) that in the pre-colonial and colonial period the *rājā* controlled village rituals by interfering in the nomination of temple administrators and gods' mediums, as well as in the construction of gods' palanquins.

   "[...] a new festival cannot be instituted without his [*rājā*'s] permission, nor a god, who has previously been without a *rath* or litter, be given one without special sanction. A few years ago, the subjects of a village deity wished to change the shape of his idol, from the pyramidal form, popular in some parts of the State, to the form with a large circular canopy favoured by his immediate neighbours; but before they could do so, they had to obtain the *rājā*'s approval.

Ordinarily, the *rājā* does not interfere in the appointment of the god's diviner, but his right to do so is recognised, and for the more important gods it is exercised. This is especially the case where the office of diviner is hereditary in a number of families and changes are accordingly numerous. Each change of office has to be reported for his sanction. Similarly, when the office is hereditary and the family dies out the *rājā*'s orders must be obtained regarding the selection of a household from which future candidates are to be taken." (Emerson 1920: 68).

It would be impossible today for Mahesvar Singh to maintain all these prerogatives. Villagers, and especially deities' *harye*, though they recognize the ritual role of the *rājā*, are very conscious of their democratic rights and know every rule related to the management of the deity's worship. In particular, Mahesvar Singh has no way of interfering in the selection of deities' mediums (what Emerson calls "diviners") – neither as a *rājā* nor as a politician. The very specificity of the mediums' role –to serve as a god's mouthpiece – makes it less easy to control them through political pressure. Most of the mediums, moreover, come from low-caste or rural families and are not used to the official, urban and bureaucratic maze of state power.

Moreover, it should be noted that, at least in the contemporary period, what a god says through his medium is rarely unanimously accepted, and can at any time be contradicted either by another deity or by another "vessel" of the same deity. For instance, in the case where a god has two mediums of different castes[17], it may happen that what is said by the high-caste medium is contradicted by what is said by his low caste one[18]. What a deity says through his medium may also be contradicted by what he says through his palanquin[19]. Here we are indeed in a ritual context where

---

[17]In the cases I have observed, the hereditary character of the office of a medium seems less important now than what Emerson reports for his time, and many deities who before had a high-caste lineage of mediums now have mediums from low caste or, in some cases, they have one from a high caste and one from a low caste.

[18] For Garhwal, see Sax (1991).

[19] Cf. Vidal (1987), Berti (2001). The presence of doubt as such explains why the mediums' answers are always submitted to a number of ritual techniques, which serve as tests of truth for those who are consulting. One of these techniques, for instance, is *oḷe pogḷe* : the person lays three stones in front of the medium and associates each stone with a reply; if the medium chooses the stone corresponding to the reply previously given, this will prove that it was the deity who had spoken and not the medium. Another kind of verification is to ask the palanquin to confirm what the deity has said through his medium, or the contrary. The "relation of power" between the medium and the palanquin varies from place to place and depends on the authority a medium has among the *hārye*. An important factor is the presence of factions among the *hārye* (Berti 2001).

doubt is never absent. Even the people who are most completely implicated in the "deity's system" never exclude the possibility that a medium or those who carry the palanquin interfere in the god's decision and impose their own view – either by speaking on their own or by directing the movements of the deity's palanquin. The doubt that is cast on the veracity of the deities' verdict, although present in any ordinary consultation, takes on huge dimensions in collective consultations organized by the *rājā* since Mahesvar Singh, both as a *rājā* and as a politician, is the target of different accusations. All these factors make the position taken by gods' mediums, when consulted by Mahesvar Singh, hard to predict and to control.

Another, more diplomatic way for the *rājā* to interact with deities and gain the approval of their supporters is to solicit the mediation of what is called the *kārdār sangh*, the association of gods' administrators. A *kārdār* is officially responsible for the deity's land property. Since the British period, in fact, a legal precedent grants to the Indian deities the right to possess, in their own capacity, material property. The deity was considered as being "underaged" and the kārdār was his "tutor". This role of "tutor" is sometimes perceived quite literally, as shown by Norottam, a *kārdār* who, when he understood that his deity had got less money for Daśahrā than another neighbouring deity, said, "I will write to the District Commissioner and I will bring my son [my deity] to first position [by getting more money] so that other deities will regard him with respect".

The *kārdār sangh* was created in 1984 with the official aim of having a representative body of deities' administrators who might be able to defend "deities' interests" during official meetings held by the administration of the Daśahrā festival – for example, of providing electricity in their tents for the duration of Daśahrā in order to guarantee the deities' security[20]. Twenty years after its creation, the organization has become very powerful in Kullu, and has "bureaucratized" the management of deities' affairs: everything is verbalized, submitted to a vote and discussed, making use of official orders and judicial argumentation. In this decision-making process, deities' *harye* interact not only with the *rājā* but also with the District Commissioner, with local ministers or with other state representatives. This is especially evident during the Daśahrā festival when public funds are distributed by the Daśahrā committee among village deities, by giving them to the *kārdār* – who, for this reason, have even recently been provided with official identity cards.

---

[20] During this festival deities' palanquins stay in temporary tents provided by the festival administration. Without any electricity, their devotees immediately start to get anxious about the masks or jewellery that might be stolen.

The official relationships of the *kārdār sangh*'s members to the state administration regarding the practical and juridical matters of the deities' management overlap occasionally with the ritual relationship they have to the *rājā*. This is due to the fact that whenever Mahesvar Singh is in power as a politician, he is also the president of the Daśahrā committee and the distinction between his ritual role of Raghunāth's representative, and his official role as state representative, tends to merge with each other.
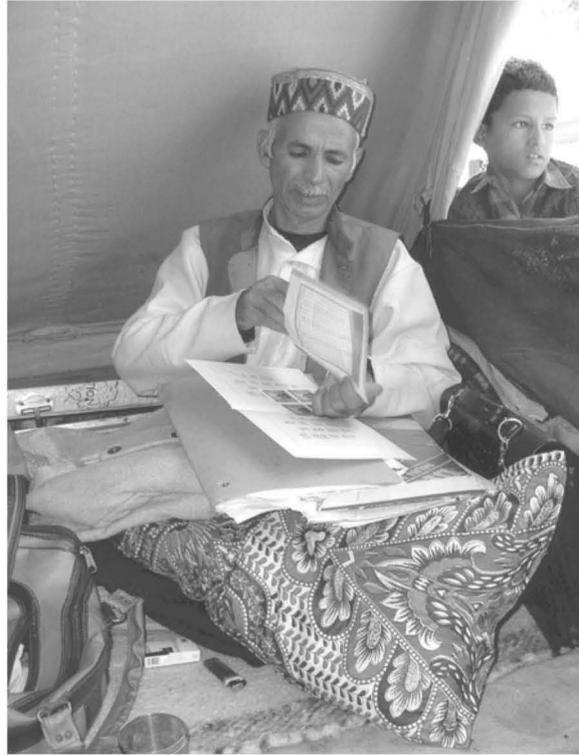
Fig. 5: The kardar Narottam checking the god's papers.
(Photo D. Berti)

Many people – including some *kārdārs* – explicitly denounce the *kārdār sangh* as completely dominated by "*rājā*'s men" who would be under the *rājā*'s pressure. Such was, for example, the reaction of a god's *haria* when he realized that all the *rājā*'s efforts to solve a "prestige conflict" between different groups of villagers during Daśahrā were going through the

medium mobilization of the *kārdār sangh*, without asking the deities by consulting their mediums.

> "This *kārdār sangh* is a *rājā* creation and its members only follow the orders of the *rājā* ... But gods' decision cannot be taken by vote! This is a dictatorship!... You know, elections of panchayat village councils are comingup and the *rājā* wants to favour those who will give him more votes. This is the point!"

From the point of view of the *kārdār sangh*'s members, they consider themselves better than the mediums at representing their deities' positions in public decision-making. For example, at the end of a *jāgtī pūch* when Mahesvar Singh, at the request of the deities themselves, was expecting deities to take position in a conflict implicating two groups of deities' *harye,* the *kārdār* Norottam said this to me:

> "In past times, when there were natural calamities like rain, fire and drought, the deities used to give some direct explanations. But today this does not happen. We *kārdārs* have to do it instead. Like in *jāgtī pūch* on the last day, they [deities' mediums] were all speaking about clouds and sunshine and none gave the solution for those two deities."

What the mobilization of the *kārdār sangh*'s members suggests – through the formal and democratic character of their meetings, the importance given to written documents and articles of law – is that they want to affirm the importance of their role in the decision-making process, and to present their procedures as more eloquent, more verifiable and more effective than those followed during the consultation of deities' mediums.

Conclusion

In the kingdom of Kullu, religion and politics were in the past strictly intermingled. The kingdom was officially ruled by a sovereign god to whom subordinate gods – who were themselves considered as kings at their village level – paid a tribute and showed their respect annually. In the same perspective, the ritual links that a king had with village deities were often presented as a consequence of episodes having a political dimension. The case of the goddess Hirmā/Hiḍimba whose story tells how she became ritually linked with the royal dynasty after having given the kingdom to the first raja is representative of the same kind of intermingling. This observation corresponds to what has been observed in other regional contexts (Burghart 1987, Dirks 1987).

By contrast, in the modern kingship which can be observed today in Kullu, two separate domains – of religion and (electoral) politics – are constantly distinguished by people even though, in practical, they

constantly overlap. This is shown, for example, by the case of the Congress politician Lal Chand Prarthi who, while deploring that the king persists in playing a role that no more exists in a democratic system, had its own ambition, to put the cult of Raghunath under the government's control. Another example of this overlapping is the attitude that gods' mediums have vis-à-vis the political role of the king. While speaking on behalf of their respective gods, they may indeed, from one hand, promote the king's political career in Delhi's Parliament (as in the case of Pañcālī) and, at the same time, accuse him of interfering with politics in religion sphere (as it happens during the *jāgtī pūch*).

In this context, Mahesvar Singh appears to be faced with a delicate task. On one hand, he has to observe and respect what are perceived to be traditional relations between his ancestors and local deities, thus maintaining his ritual role of protector of *dharma*; on the other hand, he has to create new links with his favourite deities without being immediately suspected of pursuing a political calculation.

What appears to characterise the current relationship between the king and the village gods in Kullu is, moreover, the recent creation of the *kārdār sangh*. We are indeed witnessing a bureaucratisation and in some ways, a "rationalisation" of the gods' decision-makings, with the king giving more credence to what the *kārdār* decides by official meetings or democratic votes, than to what the gods themselves pronounce through their human mediums.

References

Appadurai, A. and Appadurai Breckenridge, C. 1976. The south Indian temple: authority, honour and redistribution. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS) 10 (2).

Balzani, M. 2003. *Modern Indian Kingship*. Oxford: School of American Research Press.

Berti, D. 2001. *La parole des dieux. Culte de possession en Himalaya indien*. Paris: CNRS Ed.

2003 La pioggia degli otto villaggi. Giurisdizioni divine e forme di governo nell'India himalayana. In *Terra, territorio e società nel mondo indiano*, edited by D. Berti and G. Tarabout pp.117-129. Col. *Etnosistemi. Processi e dinamiche culturali* (10) Roma: CISU.

— 2005, 'Now It Is all Politics'. Discours sur les changements du Dashera de Kullu (Inde du Nord)". In *Rites hindous: transferts et transformations.* edited by G. Colas and G. Tarabout, pp. 305-341. Col. Purushartha (25) Paris: EHESS.

— forthcoming, Kings, Gods and Political Leaders in Kullu (North India). In *Bards and Mediums in the Himalayas,* edited by M. Lecomte-Tilouine.

Burghart, R. 1987. Gifts to the gods: power, property and ceremonial in Nepal. In *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, edited by D. Cannadine and S.Price, pp. 237-270 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohn, B. S. 1987. Representing Authority in Victorian India. In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dirks, N.B. 1987. *The Hollow Crown. Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michingam Press.

Emerson, W.H. 1920. *Mandi State Gazetteer*. Lahore: Government Printing.

— manuscript, London Indian Office Library (MSS.EUR.E. 321).

Galey, J.C. 1989 Reconsidering Kingship in India: An Ethnological Perspective. *History and Anthropology* 4, (123-187).

Haynes, E.S. 1990. Rajput ceremonial interaction as a mirror of a dying Indian state system 1820-1947. *Modern Asian Studies* 24(3): 459-92.

Hurtig, C. 1988 *Les Maharajahs et la politique dans l'Inde contemporaine*. Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques.

Kulke, H. 1986a. Royal temple policy and the structure of medieval Hindu kingdoms. In *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, edited by A.C. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G.C. Tripathi, pp.125-137. New Delhi: Manohar.

— 1986b. Early Royal Patronage of the Jagannatha Cult. In *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, edited by A.C. Eschmann, H. Kulke & G.C. Tripathi, pp.139-155. New Delhi: Manohar.

Mayer, A.C. 1991 Rulership and Divinity: The Case of the Modern Hindu Prince and Beyond. *Modern Asian Studies* 25 (4): 765-790.

Narayan R., Velchuru, Shulman D. and Subrahmanyam S. (eds.) 1992. *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Price, P. G. 1996 *Kingship and political practice in colonial India.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

Sax, W. 1991 *Mountain Goddess. Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schnepel B. 1994 Durga and the king: ethnohistorical aspects of politico-ritual life in a South Orissan Jungle Kingdom. *JRAI* (n.s.) 1: 145-166.

Vidal, D. 1987. Une négociation agitée. Essai de description d'une situation d'interaction entre des hommes et des dieux. *Etudes Rurales* 107-108: 71-83.

— 1988. Le culte des divinités locales dans une région de l'Himachal Pradesh. Paris: Editions de l'Orstom.

Waghorne, J.P. 1989. From Robber Baron to Royal Servant of God? Gaining a Divine Body in South India. In *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees. Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, edited A. Hiltebeitel, pp. 405-426. Albany: State University of New York Press / Göteborg: IASSA.

Zins, M. J. 1995 Rites et protocoles du British Rajh en Inde. La mise en scène de traditions inventées et importées. *Revue Française de Sciences Politiques* 45 (6): 1001-1022.

Fighting enemies and protecting territory: deities as local rulers in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

Brigitte Luchesi

The Kullu region in the northern Indian State of Himachal Pradesh is known for its numerous local deities, most of whom are housed in temples situated within or near villages. The inhabitants of these villages hold their local deities in high esteem, offering them regular worship and calling on them in private as well as communal matters. When taken out of the temples in the form of their movable images, they are also approached with great respect. During these occasions they are displayed as divine rulers served by a devoted entourage.

I will focus on three deities and will try to point out features which characterise them as rulers. First I will look at Lord Raghunāth, the state deity of the former Kullu *rājā*s, and his public appearance during the annual Daśahrā festival. In the second part I will turn towards two village deities – Haḍimbā Devī of Dhungri and Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi of Vashisht village – and describe recent events that, to my mind, extend our understanding of "rituals of divine kingship".[1] Finally I will try to compare the various activities of these three deities, naming a few similarities and differences.

Lord Raghunāth, divine sovereign of Kullu

The deity Raghunāth, or "Raghunāthjī" as he is respectfully called by his devotees, is the presiding deity of the famous Kullu Daśahrā, celebrated annually in the capital of Kullu District, formerly known as Sultanpur but now also called Kullu. The name Raghunāth ("Lord of the Raghus") is unmistakably that of the Vaiṣṇava deity Rāma. Raghunāthjī's temple is situated near the palace of the former *rājā*s of Kullu in Kullu-Sultanpur. At the beginning of the Daśahrā festival his central cult image, a movable one, is brought to the fair ground (*maidān*) in Kullu-Dhalpur, along with the image of his consort Sītā. A special tent is put up for him to serve as a temporary residence and temple. Here, in the midst of a busy fair (*melā*), which for many people is the main attraction of the Kullu Daśahrā, he is

---

[1] Most of the following descriptions are based on observations made during a number of visits to the Kullu area since 1982. Pioneering studies on divine kingship in the Western Himalayas are those by Galey (1989); Sax (2002), and Sutherland (2003).

Fig. 1: The image of Lord Raghunath on a silver throne. Priests prepare the temporal abode of their deity for the great reception of the local gods on *darbar* day. (Photo: B. Luchesi)

regularly worshipped (*pūjā*) by his priests. During the opening hours he may be visited by whoever wants to benefit from his auspicious sight (*darśan*). Special respect is paid to him by the numerous village gods and goddesses (*devtās* and *devīs*) arriving from all over the district.[2] The *devtās* and *devīs* travel in the form of their mobile images which in this part of India consist of a number of *mohre* fixed to a wooden structure called a *rath*. *Mohre* (sg. *mohrā*) are mask-like metal faces, several of which normally represent an individual deity.[3] Sometimes two or even three deities are considered to be present on a single *rath*. Most often these *raths* can be carried like palanquins on the shoulders of two or more men. It is believed that the movements of the *rath* are produced by the deity in question and that they communicate his or her mood along with other information. *Devtās/devīs* also gather at other times and places, but the Kullu Daśahrā is the largest gathering of all.

The origin of Kullu Daśahrā is said to date back to the 17th century when Vaiṣṇavism was introduced to this region by the *rājās* of Kullu, a process which parallels those in neighbouring *rājā*-doms (Nurpur, Kangra, Chamba, Sirmaur, Mandi[4]). According to the royal chronicles *Rājā* Jagat Singh, who ruled from 1637-1662, had caused the death of a Brahmin, whereupon a curse in the form of leprosy fell upon him. On the advice of his Pandits and hoping to remove the curse, he sent a Brahmin to Ayodhya who stole a famous idol of Rāma. It is said to be the one still used for worship in Raghunāth's temple. The *Rājā* had it installed and put on the royal throne.[5] He proclaimed himself to be merely the viceroy and consequently was healed.

> From this time till its fall this remained in theory the constitution of the principality. There was no distinction between the royal treasury and that of the temple of Rugnath, and the Rajas, on the great festival days, took the front place among the priests and attendants (*Gazetteer of the Kangra District 1897*: 21).

During *Rājā* Jagat Singh's rule a quite considerable amount of land was assigned to temples all over the Kullu region and to the families in charge of them. The deities of these temples along with their entourages were expected to take part in the annual Daśahrā celebrations started by Jagat

---

[2] In 1995 119 local deities were counted (Vashishtha n. d.: 11-17). Harcourt (1972 [1871]: 95) reported 70 to 80 *devtās* and *devīs* in the 1860s.
[3] See the photos and descriptions of various *raths* in Postel e.a. (1985).
[4] For Mandi compare with Conzelmann in this volume.
[5] Cf. Hutchison and Vogel (1994 [1933]: 458-80); Rose (1980 [1919]: 474); Shabab (1996: 73-75).

Singh and held in the capital, the present city of Kullu, where the palace of the Rajput rulers and Lord Raghunāth's temple were situated.
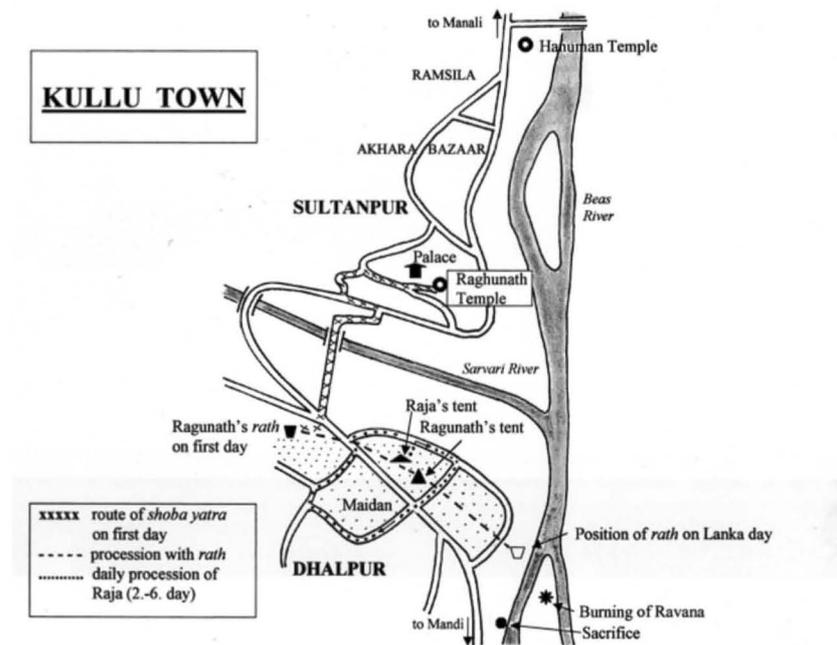

Fig. 2: Map of Kullu town showing the processional routes during the Dasahra days. B. Luchesi.

The royal chronicles present the relationship between human sovereign and deity as one in which Lord Raghunāth was the true ruler whereas the *rājā* was understood as his prime minister (*dīvān*) or *kārdār* (manager), i.e. as his "first servant". In accordance with this concept they ruled together, the deity being a divine king whose power was exercised by the human ruler. The rights of the Rajput *rājā*s (later on *rāo*s) of Kullu were severely restricted by the British during the 19th century and were officially ended in 1947 when the current ruler renounced his throne. But the extinction of Hindu kingdoms in contemporary India has not, as Fuller (1992: 107) has pointed out, brought to an end the royal status of the former state deities nor has it eradicated the idea of divine kingship as an

ideal state model. Kullu seems to be another case in point. In particular, the Kullu Daśahrā continues to provide a stage for the enactment of rituals of divine kingship. Lord Raghunāth and the *rājā* are focal points of various rituals that structure the Daśahrā period. The late Mohinder Singh, the last official *rājā*, who was held in high esteem by many Kulluans, continued to perform the traditional part until his death in 1989, after which his eldest son Tikka Maheshwar Singh, still referred to as "*Rājā Sāhab*" by many, took over the ritual duties. In the following I will sketch those ritual activities that constitute the most telling examples of the ongoing efficacy of the concept of royal divinity in the context of the Kullu Daśahrā.

The Daśahrā festival in Kullu starts on the tenth (*dasvāṁ*) day of the bright half of Āśvin. This is the auspicious day associated with the defeat of Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Lanka, by the divine king Rāma as told in the great Rāmāyaṇa epic, and celebrated in various ways throughout India. In contrast to other regions, however, in Kullu Rāma's meritorious act of slaying his enemy is not celebrated on the tenth day itself, but on the festival's closing day a week later. During the days of the festival, Raghunāth is publicly presented as the divine king Rāma. Unlike the daily rituals in his temple when he is worshipped as a king residing peacefully in his palace, during the Daśahrā days he is shown as a supreme commander and king prepared for war, i.e. as Lord Rāma out in the battlefield. He is accompanied by the *rājā* and by village deities from all over the Kullu region. At certain points the spectators, too, actively participate in the dramatic sequences.

Most of the village *devtās* and *devīs* arrive on the first day of the festival. Accompanied by their mediums (*gur*), priests, managers, musicians and other people from the villages to which they belong, many of them are first of all carried up to Raghunāth's temple in Sultanpur to greet the presiding deity and visit the *rājā* in the neighbouring palace. The deity most eagerly expected is Goddess Haḍimbā from Dhungri near Manali in the northern part of the Kullu District.[6] She is one of the five *kul devīs* (lineage goddesses) of the *rājā*'s family and it is said that the festival cannot start without her. Upon her arrival she is carried to the inner door of the palace from where she calls the *rājā* and asks him to come out and accompany Raghunāthjī to the military camp, i.e. to get ready for the great battle. This act may also be interpreted as infusing the *rājā* with special martial power comparable to the *mīr* of a *jaga* described by Zoller (1993: 233).

By the time Goddess Haḍimbā arrives, the *rājā* has already performed several *pūjās:* he has worshipped Lord Raghunāth in his temple, along with

---

[6] See also Berti in this volume.

the royal weapons, the great war drum, Raghunāth's horse[7] and the various emblems of the deity. Dressed in traditional royal attire and adorned with turban and jewels he joins the god in his temple whereupon everybody gets ready for the *śobā yātrā,* the "splendid procession" with Lord Raghunāth. The god's horse walks in front, followed by drums, trumpets, men carrying banners and the silver sceptre of Raghunāthjī; then comes the *rājā* accompanied by kinsmen and dignitaries, some with royal weapons including the *rājā*'s sword (*talvār*). Immediately after them march temple priests who carry the precious image of Raghunāth on a small palanquin, one of them holding Raghunāth's sword; they are followed by men with the silver throne, the processional umbrella and insignia of the god and finally a number of village deities on their *raths.* The procession moves down the narrow lanes of Sultanpur lined with devoted citizens, crosses the Sarvari River, walks up through Dhalpur bazaar and finally reaches the upper part of the *maidān,* where a large crowd has gathered to receive the procession and watch the god being transferred onto a huge wooden processional cart, also called a *rath.* The accompanying *devtās* take their places to the right, left, and behind this special vehicle, which is only used during Daśahrā. Seeing it in use is one of the highlights of the festival for many Kulluans. The atmosphere is both joyful and intense. Suddenly people seize the long ropes fixed to the cart and start pulling it. Accompanied by enthusiastic cries and the sound of drums and trumpets, the *rath* is manoeuvred to the middle of the *melā* ground where Raghunāth's tent has been put up in preparation for his stay through the Daśahrā festival.

During this period, Raghunāthjī is visited by both human devotees and village deities. Most of these *devtās* and *devīs* will also camp on the *maidān;* fixed seats around the grounds are allotted to them for the duration of their stay. During these visiting hours the image of Raghunāth is seated on the silver throne, lavishly dressed and richly decorated with jewels and flowers, sceptre and other royal insignia placed next to him.[8]

Not far from Raghunāth's tent is a second one designed as an audience hall for the *rājā* where he in turn receives the divine visitors and their human companions. Every day at sunset he goes on a clockwise tour through the camp and visits the assembled *devtās* and *devīs.* Raghunāth's horse is led in front of him. A special event is scheduled for the sixth day called "*darbār*", i.e. reception day, when all the gods come to visit Lord

---

[7] This horse is also referred to as the horse of Narasiṅha, locally called Narsingh, the fierce *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (cf. the photo opp. p. 118 in Chetwode 1984).

[8] The idol of Sītā, Ragunāth's consort, is normally not visible as it is placed underneath Ragunāth's coat. It can be seen during the morning services when it is bathed and dressed.

Raghunāth and then the *rājā*. The climax is reached on the seventh day, known as "Lankā". Raghunāth is again seated in the large wooden cart and – this time without Sītā – pulled down to the southern part of the *maidān* near the Beas River where a large crowd has gathered. He is accompanied by the *rājā* and several village deities. While the *rājā* walks down the river bank, Raghunāth and his priests remain on his vehicle; the *devtās* and *devīs* on their palanquins are positioned to his right and left. From here they overlook the river bed and watch the fire being lit on a small island symbolising the destruction of Lankā and the death of the demon king Rāvaṇa. Not visible from the point where Raghunāth's cart is waiting but to all who managed to climb down the steep embankment is the slaughtering of a buffalo as a sacrifice to Goddess Haḍimbā in the presence of the *rājā*.[9] The "burning of Lankā" and the subsequent arrival of Sītā in a small palanquin are greeted with exclamations of joy by the onlookers. Many of them eagerly join those who start pulling the wooden *rath* back north. Having reached the northern end of the *maidān* the images of Raghunāth and Sītā are transferred to their small palanquin again and ceremoniously transported back to their permanent temple in Sultanpur. The village deities, too, prepare for their journey home.

Viewing the event in its entirety, it is clear that the Daśahrā festival was and still is an outstanding occasion to underline and recreate the royal powers and authority of the deity Raghunāth of Kullu. Of course he is regarded and treated as a divine king throughout the whole year, especially by his priests, whose daily temple services and attendances display features of the etiquette of the former worldly courts.[10] During the Daśahrā festival, however, he can be met and seen *outside* his usual residence engaged in familiar royal *activities*: supreme warrior publicly fighting for the just and good cause against evil forces, defender of his kingdom as part of the order of the universe, restorer and protector of *dharma*. The military events are realistically enacted: the image of Raghunāthjī is brought from his temple in the centre to a place outside the old city boundaries which bears all the signs of a military camp with tents and temporal arrangements. The village deities, most of them

---

[9] Interestingly the location of this island southeast of the southernmost part of the *maidān* corresponds to the geographical situation of Sri Lanka which often is identified with the Lankā of the Rāmāyaṇa. The buffalo used to belong to the eightfold sacrifice (*aṣṭanbali*) traditionally given to Haḍimbā Devī by the *rājā* on this occasion. It seems that it is the only one of the eight *balis* actually given nowadays. Having received this sacrifice the goddess and her entourage immediately leave the scene and start walking home. This is frequently taken as a sign that the festival is over.

[10] See e.g. Fuller 1992: 68-9.

positioned behind Lord Raghunāth or to his left, literally "back up" the leader. He is identified with Lord Rāma who is, as everybody present knows, the epitome of a divine king.

What, then, is the role of the *rājā*? He, too, is on public display throughout the festival, playing the traditional part of the worldly ruler. He publicly acts as the "first worshipper" of Lord Raghunāth performing *pūjās* in the temporary tent temple and regularly seeking auspicious sight, *darśan*. They can be seen acting together, either jointly as in the *śobā yātrā*, the Lankā events and in the daily rounds through the camp or in a temporal sequence as in the *darbār* receptions on the sixth day. Their close relationship is also visible through the spatial vicinity of their tents. As mentioned at the beginning, the former *rājās* have lost their worldly power. During the Daśahrā rituals, however, their descendants are still treated with considerable respect by the groups of visiting local people who accompany the village *devtās*. This may be an expression of the notion still prevalent that the human part of the unity of state deity and king participates in the god's divinity – at least for the duration of the rituals. However, this does not necessarily mean that political or economic power is bestowed on him.

Two village deities from the northern Kullu region

Haḍimbā Devī

The goddess Haḍimbā, also known Harimbā, Hiḍimbā or Hirmā, has been mentioned already in connection with the Daśahrā festival in Kullu town.[11] She is one of the five *kul devīs* of the former rulers and their descendants;[12] all five may be called "royally patronised local goddesses" (Schnepel 1995: 14). In addition she is considered to be the one who chose the rulers of Kullu, which earned her the title of *dādī* (paternal grandmother) of the Kullu *rājās*. It is also said that Haḍimbā is identical with the demoness Haḍimbā who in the Mahābhārata epic is described as the temporal consort of the Paṇḍava hero Bhīma and mother of Ghaṭotkaca. Historical proof exists that in 1553 *Rājā* Bahadur Singh Badani had a temple erected for her in the forest between Dhungri village and Manalghar, today known as Old Manali.[13]

All this characterises Haḍimbā as a goddess whose significance goes far beyond her immediate domain. In the present context, however, I wish to

---

[11] On Haḍimbā Devī see Diserens (1993-94, 1995-96); Jettmar-Thakur (1984b); Luchesi 2002; Thakur 1997: 61.

[12] The others are: Tripurasundarī and Batantī, both from Naggar, Sarvarī from Shuru, Docā-Mucā from Gajan.

[13] For a detailed description of the Dhungri temple see Jettmar (1974: 40-46).

focus on her importance for the villages near her temple, Dhungri and Old Manali. For many inhabitants of these villages she is the supreme deity ruling over the inhabited and cultivated area belonging to these places. She is said to be the one who brings rain, provides fertility for land and animals, and cares for the wellbeing of the families and persons in her vicinity. She is also said to keep demons and malevolent spirits at bay. Her protection is not given automatically, but has to be obtained by subservience and obedience, and regular gifts including occasional animal sacrifices. Her queenlike position, however, is not accentuated by the daily temple services to the same degree as Lord Raghunāth in his permanent temple. One reason for this may be the absence of any three-dimensional icon of her in her temple. Her main representation consists of a hole underneath a huge rock, therefore certain elements of worship deriving from royal court etiquette – like bathing, dressing, parading the cult image – are less important than in the case of tangible images. Explicitly royal aspects become apparent, however, as soon as the goddess is presented in the form of her "masks" (*mohre*) on her palanquin (*rath*).[14]

Haḍimbā's *rath* is regularly assembled and presented to the public at her yearly temple festival in May, at the local Bahadur Singh Fair in June, and also whenever she sets out to visit deities in other villages, or to accept the invitation of particular families who have invited her. Her most spectacular outing is the one to Kullu town some thirty miles away to take part in the annual Daśahrā celebrations. Village deities from other places are invited to both the May festival and the Bahadur Singh fair. The deities who come pay respect to her as the hostess and supreme deity of the place and are in turn welcomed as respected guests whose entourage is fed and housed by the Dhungri/Old Manali villagers.

The assembling of the *rath* is not done by Haḍimbā Devī's priests in the Dhungri temple but by her medium (*gur*) and her first drummer, both of them Harijans, on the platform of Manu Ṛṣi's temple in Old Manali.[15] Like most village deities Haḍimbā Devī has a *gur*, who is one of the most important members of her entourage. The final invocation of the goddess into the *rath* and the *pūjās* in front of the *rath* are performed by one of the

---

[14] There are thirteen *mohre* altogether; twelve are said to depict her, the thirteenth is the representation of Manu Ṛṣi with whom she shares the *rath*. All the faces have moustaches with the exception of the one down at the front which shows a young female wearing a crown and a bridal nose-ring.

[15] Manu Ṛṣi's temple is the place where Haḍimbā's *rath* is kept when not in use. Her *mohre* and other paraphernalia are kept in her treasury house (*bhaṇḍar*) which was erected in the middle of Old Manali.
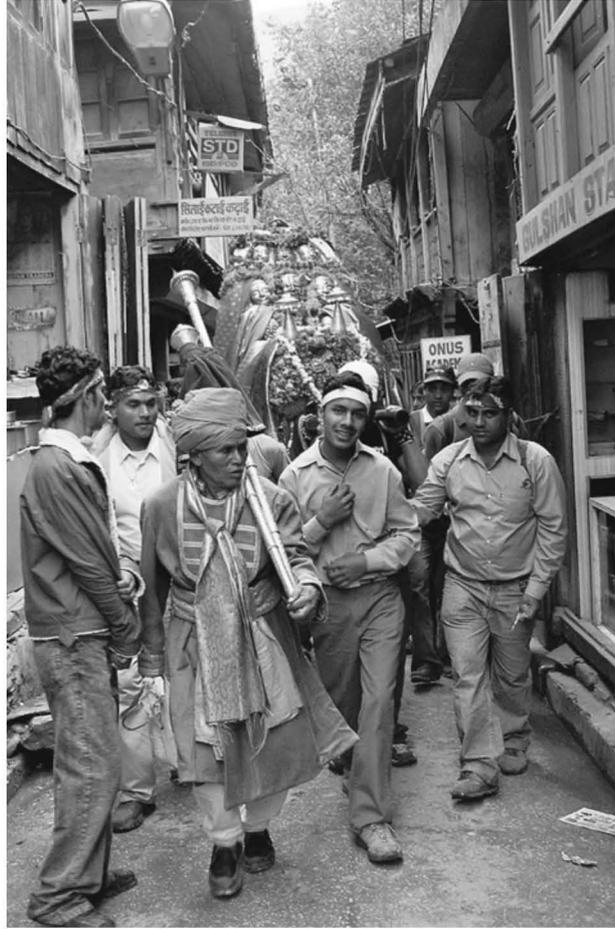
Fig. 3: The *rath* of goddess Hadimba being led by the Raja's messenger to the royal palace in Kullu-Sultanpur. (Photo: B. Luchesi)

Brahmin priests of the Dhungri temple. Throughout her public appearances, the goddess is accompanied by her medium and at least one of her priests. Important other functionaries are the two *kārdārs* (managers). In the past, *kārdārs* were responsible for the distribution and management of the temple land. Like many other village deities Haḍimbā Devī had been allotted land by the former rulers of Kullu. The produce of the land was given as remuneration to the priests and the other servants of the goddess. Today, after the land reforms in Himachal Pradesh in the 1950s and 1960s, most of the land became the property of the former tillers of the soil and only parts of it still belong to the Devī. Nevertheless the office of *kārdār* has remained,[16] as has the office of the *kāmdārs* who act as assistants to the *kārdārs*. Other members of the Devī's staff include a number of musicians, two men from the gardener caste, one from the oil-presser caste, one carpenter, and several bearers.[17]

Haḍimbā Devī's public appearances are always occasions when her high position becomes unmistakably visible: the *rath* is richly decorated with multicoloured scarves and covered with precious ornaments and fresh flowers; like a queen she is announced by the drummers and various wind instruments, she is accompanied by her staff; her sceptre is carried in front of her. The parade always starts from the temple in Old Manali and then takes the path down through the old part of the village where the inhabitants are waiting in front of their houses to greet her with flowers and gifts and pay homage to her. One cannot but be reminded of a respected female ruler inspecting her territory and honouring her subjects with her visit.

When outside her temple the goddess is expected to communicate with her subjects: either by the movements of her *rath* which are understood as expressions of her current mood – delight, displeasure, anger etc. – or by the utterances of her *gur* in trance. Her frequent presentation as easily excitable and obstinate, as a wild and dangerous deity, seems to underline her superior position.[18] This is especially the case when her annoyance is interpreted as wrath directed at her subjects because of misdemeanours or violation of her commands. Frequently the

---

[16] Haḍimbā Devī has two, one is a member of the Brahmin family in Dhungri, the other is from Old Manali. There is also a second *gūr*, mouthpiece of Manu Ṛṣi.

[17] For more details see Diserens (1995-96). On the staff of local deities in general, see Vidal (1988: 79-90).

[18] She displays most of the characteristics commonly assigned to the *ugra* type of Indian goddesses (Michaels e.a. 1996: 22-24).

Devī is explicitly requested to say something, to decide village disputes[19], disclose the causes of disasters and inexplicable events, or predict some future development. Interestingly, the goddess need not appear in the form of her *rath* in order to be able to fulfil these requests for pronouncements, but may be represented by her sceptre. In this form emphasising her rulership, she may also accept private invitations from families to honour a celebration or to help discern the causes of misfortune.

To sum up, Haḍimbā Devī is the supreme local goddess for the villagers of Dhungri and Old Manali. She is believed to exert tremendous influence on their lives. So it is considered advisable to keep her favourably disposed towards her subjects. Haḍimbā Devī is also understood to represent the village to the outside, which becomes especially apparent when she – either as a hostess or a guest – meets other village deities, who are in turn considered to be representatives of their villages. The queenlike position ascribed to her by the pragmatic actions of her staff and her devotees becomes obvious to all when she is shown moving around in the form of her mobile cult image but also when she takes action with regard to village land, which will be discussed below.

Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi

Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi's name and the legends associated with him are reminiscent of the famous seer described in classical literature. There *ṛṣis* are not usually counted among the gods; in Kullu, however, they are worshipped as *devtās*. Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi has a temple in Vashisht, a village which is well known for its hot sulphur springs; it therefore attracts quite a number of tourists from India and abroad. The temple is situated in the middle of the village, down below a *śikhara*-style stone temple dedicated to God Rāma and his consort Sītā. Vasiṣṭha's abode is a rather inconspicuous building made of stone and wood in the typical log cabin style of the region. A gateway leads from the main village square into the courtyard of the temple, from where there is access to the bathing tanks with hot water. The immovable central cult image, housed in a separate wooden cell in the middle of the temple, is made of black stone; the shining bright eyes are a striking feature. The image is clad in a white *dhotī* and turban and is adorned with a sacred thread giving it the appearance of an ascetic. Unlike various other village deities, including Haḍimbā Devī, Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi is known to be a vegetarian god, abhorring animal sacrifices and alcohol. His priest is a Brahmin who inherits this office from his forefathers. He lives in a house at the corner of the temple enclosure with one of its doors

---

[19] Cf. Berti (1998, 1999).

leading into the temple courtyard. Vasiṣṭha's medium (*gur*) comes from the Thakur community to which the majority of the villagers belong.

Despite his distinguishing ascetic features, Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi shares many characteristics with Haḍimbā and other village deities of the Upper Kullu Valley. He is considered to be the protector of Vashisht village and its inhabitants against *rākṣasas* (demons) and other enemies, the provider of fertility for land, animals and people, the supreme authority in cases of dispute, and a deity who will certainly punish those who neglect him or act against his will. He, too, may appear in the form of his *rath*. The main occasions for public appearances are his temple festival in April, his annual *yātrā* (tour) up to Brighu Lake where he bathes, and festivals of various other village gods that he attends, among them Haḍimbā's fair in May. His mood, like that of most of the *devtās/devīs* of this region, can be determined by the movements of his *rath*; otherwise his *gur* expresses his will. Of special significance for Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi are the hot springs of the northern Kullu District, which he is said to have created.[20] The sulphur springs of Vashisht village in particular are considered to be medicinal, and so powerful that not only pilgrims and ordinary visitors bathe in them but also various *devtās* and *devīs*, who are brought to Vashisht to take a bath too. In fact these *devtās* and *devīs* are said to be obliged to visit at least once a year.[21] This enhances the position of Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi: he is awarded the highest rank among those village deities called *ṛṣis* and often referred to as the most important *devtā* of the Upper Kullu Valley.[22] He does not join the Daśahrā festival in the town of Kullu; instead his *rath* is carried to the neighbouring Sītārāma temple where it stays during the Daśahrā days.

Vasiṣṭha's appearance as an ascetic and his characterisation as a vegetarian *sādhu* suggest the picture of a mainly peaceful *devtā* staying in a remote *āśrama* (hermitage) and not prone to display royal attitudes and aspirations. However a closer look reveals something else. First of all, Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi is known to be extremely irritable, a *devtā* easily angered and ready to curse immediately – characteristics he shares with the *ṛṣis* of classical literature. One of the local stories has it that his original *āśrama* was in Old Manali where he was given food by the villagers. Finding animal bones in his bowl he immediately flew into a rage, cursed the fields of Old Manali and moved across the Beas River to Vashisht. Among his preferred divine associates are two other *ṛṣis*, Gautam Ṛṣi and Byās Ṛṣi

---

[20] See Jettmar-Thakur (1984a: 34-5).

[21] There are some exceptions like *devtā* Jamlū from Malana.

[22] A kind of competition goes on between him and Haḍimbā Devī: some say that she is inferior to him because of her past as a demoness and her Harijan *gūr,* which is naturally denied by her staff. In any case he is given the highest place of honour when he takes part in her *melā.*

from village Goshal. The two ṛṣis are represented on a single *rath* together with Kānā Nāg, a very active snake deity who keeps close contact with a large number of his snake deity relatives in the valley. Other close acquaintances are Prasar Ṛṣi from Kulang and Kartik Swāmī from the village Simsa whom people describe as a very pugnacious *devtā* and particularly unrelenting in legal matters. Sometimes the fierce Haḍimbā Devī is among Vasiṣṭha's associates, as in 2004 on the occasion of Vasiṣṭha's temple festival. All these deities are known to be easily aroused, and the punishments they threaten to impose are said to really happen. Western observers are perhaps inclined to take these beliefs as a colourful part of the traditional lore about the *devtās*, however in narrating how these beliefs play out in people's lives, I hope to show the full reach of the village deities' power.[23]

Fig. 4: Women of Vashisht village worshipping Vashishtha Rishi on the first day of his temple festival. In front his medium (left) and his *kardar*. (Photo: B. Luchesi)

---

[23] I first learned about the following events during a visit in the Manali area in 2001. I continued visiting Vashisht village in May 2002, April 2003, April/May 2004 and fall 2005. I am especially grateful to Tara Chand, Gabriele Jettmar-Thakur, Yogaraj Thakur and Pandit Rohit Ram for providing information and help.

I was told in 2001 that early in the same year, a family in Old Manali had invited Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi to come to their village and into their house. They wanted to find out why several family members had died, fallen ill or suffered from other misfortunes. They learned through the mouth of Vasiṣṭha's *gur* that the cause of all their afflictions was that they had built a house on ground not belonging to them. In order to evade further misfortune they were advised to vacate this house and destroy it. Soon afterwards Haḍimbā Devī, too, confirmed these findings. Besides that, she accused other families of being guilty of the same transgression. All of them were given a year's notice to remove the verandas, walls or entire houses she found fault with. Only a short time later Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi started to brand buildings in his own village Vashisht as illegally erected: during his temple festival in April 2001 his *gur* announced that several cases of illegal land encroachment had taken place in the village – especially near the two temples. Things were not left at that. The *devtā* who had been brought out of the temple in the form of his *rath* started to take action. I learned that while outside his temple in the market area he made his carriers push the massive wooden poles of the palanquin into the huts and market stalls near the southern wall of the Vasiṣṭha temple so that they collapsed showing his angry mood. In the same way the new structure above the well to the west was demolished. Several stone and concrete buildings which withstood the attacks were "marked" by the *rath*: people said that it moved right in front of them and repeatedly touched them with the poles thereby indicating the god's wish to have them removed. In this way a number of walls, protruding house parts and whole buildings around the main village square were "marked," along with parts of the temple complex itself, such as the so-called *serai*, parts of which had been used by the priest as a kitchen or rented out. Finally the house of the priest came under attack. Reasons given for this were the supposedly illegal extension of the western front and new windows in the upper storeys from where one could overlook the women's bath tank. The protesting priest, I was told, argued with the *devtā* on the *rath,* emphasising his faithful service throughout the years. In the end he asked to carry the *rath* himself and changed place with the man in the front position – and, so the story goes, pushed the poles into his own house. People took this as evidence that human machinations and village politics were not at play but rather that Vasiṣṭha himself had taken action.

The outcome of all these events was that in both villages, in Old Manali and Vashisht, various buildings were partly or entirely torn down. In May 2002 I witnessed the demolition of a protruding veranda only hours before Haḍimbā's *rath* was made, i.e. the goddess "came out". In Vashisht I saw several demolished buildings; on a number of houses protruding roofs or other parts had been knocked off. The most visible changes had occurred

at the western and southern sides of Vasiṣṭha's temple area: the structure above the entrance and the *serai* had been completely rebuilt. The money to finance the renewal of these buildings, especially the new wooden carvings, had been collected among the inhabitants of Vashisht village but also in the entire Upper Kullu Valley. Most of the construction work had been accomplished by the villagers themselves by sending at least one member of a family to do *sevā*, i.e. unpaid voluntary work. The village square, too, had changed. It looked larger and the demolition of stalls, walls and other constructions allowed an unhindered view of both village temples. The space below the Sītārāma temple was vacant. But not for long. While clearing the area a stone shaped like a *liṅga* had been found which was soon understood as a *svayambhū*, i.e. a self-manifestation of Lord Śiva.[24] Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi was approached and asked what to do and how to proceed. The result was that within a year a small wooden temple was erected above this stone. By April 13th, 2003, the first day of Vasiṣṭha's temple festival, it was more or less completed. Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi and his divine guests on their *raths* came close to inspect it, demonstrating their judgement by their movements: their *gurs* entered the building and conveyed the opinions of the *devtās*. Apart from some minor points the new place for Śiva was accepted by them.

More important in the present context is the behaviour Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi and his visitors showed towards other buildings. Masses of people watched the *devtās* moving across the square and through the village lanes. The gods on their *raths* seemed to be inspecting the changes that had taken place since the last temple festival. Occasionally they could be seen pushing their poles against certain corners or walls. Villagers interpreted this as the *devtās'* command to remove these buildings, too. After the festival it was said that the gods had again given a year's notice to obey their wishes. In April 2004 similar scenes could be observed, not only in Vashisht but also in Old Manali where Haḍimbā Devī attacked a building before starting out towards Vashisht. In Vashisht it was again the house of the priest that was one of the main targets of the *devtās*. Thus, the worries and problems of a family in Old Manali marked the beginning of a chain of events that resulted in the demolition of several buildings in the two villages and the construction of a new temple in one of the cleared spaces – the latter action also meaning that the empty terrain was immediately occupied by a piece of sacred architecture. I cannot go into a discussion of the property laws, which are undoubtedly relevant here. What I find most striking is the extraordinary emphasis placed on the role of the *devtās* as supreme authority with regard to land. The procedure originally followed is a well-known one: a family in need of help and

---

[24] Cf. Luchesi (2004).

advice turns to a deity; it learns that it has inadvertently done something wrong; in order to end its misfortune it is told to rectify the improper action – in our case, to remove the building. The sequence is: misfortune, consultation with the deity, announcement of the reason for the misfortune (wrath of the deity because of a transgression), countermeasures to appease the deity. But soon the sequence changed: the first step now is the announcement by the deity that a transgression has taken place, and only then comes the threat of pending misfortune (in case the given orders are not followed). The gods appear as independently active authorities who publicly and independently battle against land encroachments, without being consulted. The accusation and the warning of criminal proceedings are not enough: the deities themselves start to take action. Their *raths* turn into weapons of destruction,[25] a most dramatic demonstration of their power.

Fighting enemies and protecting territory

The way the three deities I have introduced are approached and treated by their priests and devotees also show that they are regarded as rulers with royal authority. This is immediately apparent in those cases where there are regular temple *pūjās* performed by priests in front of anthropomorphic cult images (Raghunāth, Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi). But it is even more apparent in those situations where the deities are brought out of their temples, either in the form of the regular icon (Raghunāth) or as temporary representations in form of *raths* (Haḍimbā, Vasiṣṭha Ṛṣi). Their public appearances are normally combined with processions or parades through the territory that is believed to be under their protection and jurisdiction. The organisation and outward appearance of these parades follow the example of the former human kings and rulers; they depict the deity as "*rājā*" or "*rānī*" in relation to their subjects.

During certain festivals the deities' roles as supreme defenders and protectors are even more emphasised than usual. As an example I have sketched the activities of Lord Raghunāth during the Daśahrā festival: he can be seen as the divine king Rāma ready for battle, fighting against the demon king Rāvaṇa and, by defeating him, restoring peace and dharmic order. The enactment of the heroic deeds of Rāma brings to mind his role as a perfect king and thus keeps alive the notion of an ideal universal order, "Rām-rājya", Rama's kingdom.

---

[25] Well remembered is Haḍimbā's attack on a police car in Kullu town several years ago.

Village deities who are not understood as manifestations or *avatāras* of Viṣṇu are not likened to Lord Rāma. In former times they were dependent on the generosity of the *rājā*s and were understood to be subordinate to their state deity, Lord Raghunāth. They were obliged to come to the Kullu festival and pay homage to both *rājā* and *devtā*. In the great enactment of Rāma/Raghunāth's glorious deeds they were assigned roles as allies and supporters of the divine king. Many of them continue to play these roles and thus help to keep the idea of Rāma's actions alive. The true places of action of the village deities, however, are their respective villages. There, they are the ones who are considered to be the main defenders and protectors of men and territory. They are believed to have various powers and a strong will in exercising them. In comparison with Lord Raghunāth's position, their power and influence appear more real. They tell people how to react in disastrous situations or decide cases of dispute within the village or between villages. They are understood as forces taking actual, not just symbolic care of their territory. The recent events in Vashisth village and Old Manali have shown them to be extremely active in questions of so-called land encroachment. That they can enforce their will – as is demonstrated by the demolition of several houses – dramatises how they are still considered to be deities with supreme authority and king-like power.

References

Berti, Daniela. 1998. "Una liturgia controllata. Riti brahmanici e possessione in Himachal Pradesh (India Settentrionale)." *Annali di Ca' Foscari*, 37(3):409-437.
1999. "Un dieu maître-chanteur. La résolution d'un conflit villageois dans la vallée de Kullu (Himachal Pradesh)." In *La possession en Asie du sud. Parole, Corps, Territoire*s, edited by J. Assayag & G. Tarabout, Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Collec. Purusartha n°21, pp. 61-97.

Chetwode, Penelope. 1984. *Kulu. The end of the habitable world.* New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

Conzelmann-Hesse, Elisabeth. 2005. "Divine Kingship and State Ritual in Mandi. The Shivratri Fair as a Royal Ritual." In this volume.

Diserens, Hélène. 1993-4. "Légendes de Hiḍimbā Devī et le Mahābhārata dans la haute vallée du Kulu." *Bulletin d'études indiennes* 12-13: 111-126.
1995-96. "Images et symboles des déesses de la haute vallée du Kulu." *Bulletin d'études indiennes* 13-14: 91-115.

Fuller, Christopher J. 1992. *The Camphor Flame. Popular Hinduism and Society in India.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Galey, Jean-Claude. 1989. "Reconsidering Kingship in India: An Ethnological Perspective." *History and Anthropology (4)*: 123-187.

Gazetteer of the Kangra District. Parts II to IV: Kulu, Lahul and Spiti (1897). Compiled and Published under the Authority of the Punjab Government, Lahore: Government Printing, 1899.

Harcourt, A. F. P. 1972 [1871]. *The Himalayan Districts of Kooloo, Lahoul, and Spiti*. Reprint New Delhi: Vivek Publishing House.

Hutchison, J. & J. Ph. Vogel. 1994 [1933]. *History of the Panjab Hill States*. (Lahore 1933), Reprint New Delhi: Government Printing.

Jettmar, Gabriele. 1974. *Die Holztempel des oberen Kulutales in ihren historischen, religiösen und kunstgeschichtlichen Zusammenhängen.* Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Jettmar-Thakur, Gabriele. 1984a. "The Kulu Ṛṣi-Cult: Notes on the Position of Vedic Sages as Village Gods in the Himalaysas." *South Asian Religious Art Studies*, Monograph Reprint Series 1: 25-36.

 1984b. "Hirimbā Devī." *South Asian Religious Art Studies Bulletin*, Special pre-publication extract XI.

Luchesi, Brigitte. 2002. "Haḍimbā Devī – hinduistische Volksgöttin mit überregionaler Bedeutung." In *Hairesis. Festschrift für Karl Hoheisel zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by M. Hutter et al., pp. 327-340. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag.

 2004. "Jetzt auch Śiva in Vashisht. Zur Entstehung und Legitimierung eines neuen Tempels in Kullu, Nordindien." In: *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs/ Religion in Cultural Discourse*, edited by B. Luchesi und K. von Stuckrad, pp. 455-477. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter.

Michaels, Axel with Cornelia Vogelsanger and Annette Wilke (eds.). 1996. *Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal.* Bern: Peter Lang.

Postel, M., A. Neven and K. Mankodi (eds.) 1985. *Antiquities of Himachal.* Bombay: Franco-Indian Pharmaceuticals.

Rose, H.A. 1980 [1919]. *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province. Based on the Census Report for the Punjab, 1883. Bd.1.* Reprint New Delhi: Amar Prakashan.

Sax, William S. 2002. *Dancing the Self. Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal.* Oxford: University Press.

Schnepel, Burkhard. 1995. "Durga and the King: Ethnohistorical Aspects of Politico-Ritual Life in a South Orissan Jungle Kingdom." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 1: 145-166.

Shabab, Dilram. 1996. *Kullu. Himalayan Abode of the Divine.* New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company.

Sutherland, Peter. 2003. "Very Little Kingdoms: The Calendrical Order of West Himalayan Hindu Polity." In *Sharing Sovereignty – Royalty on a Small Scale. The Little Kingdom in South Asia*, edited by G. Berkemer and M. Frenz, pp. 31-61. Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag.

Thakur, Molu Ram. 1997. *Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Himachal Pradesh*, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company.

Vashishtha, S. (ed.), n.d. *Kullu Dev Samagam,* Shimla: Himachal Academy of Arts, Cultures & Languages.

Vidal, Denis. 1988. *Le culte des divinités locales dans une région de l'Himachal Pradesh.* Paris: Éditions de l'Orstom.

Zoller, Claus Peter. 1993. "On Himalayan ball games, head hunting, and related matters." In *Flags of fame. Studies in South Asian folk culture*, edited by H. Brückner, L. Lutze, and A. Malik, pp. 201-237. Delhi: Manohar.

T(r)opologies of Rule (*Rāj*):
Ritual Sovereignty and Theistic Subjection

Peter Sutherland

When west Himalayan drummers play, power presents itself in everyday settings. Objects, people and places are transformed. Things become gods, gods become kings, and oracles give voice to their royal persons. As gods dance and move through the landscape, buildings, trees, persons, and rocks are reconfigured as sites of power in an otherwise unseen web of relations. What is this dance of transformation? What does it mean, and how is the effect of empowerment produced?

In this essay, I argue that the choreography of *pahāḍī* (lit. mountain) gods constructs a rural variant of divine kingship that challenges the way we think the relationship between sovereignty, subjection, and space. Inverting the usual Hindu institution, in which kings rule kingdoms in the manner of gods, here we are dealing with gods that rule peasant communities as kings in a political idiom that problematizes oppositional conceptions of the ruler and the ruled.

Throughout the west Himalayan region from Chamba to Garhwal, "despite the demise of kings and kingdoms [since democratization] kingship lives on", as Galey (1989) suggests, embodied in the practices of Pahari religion. The political life of peasant communities in the region is organized not only by democratic party-politics, but also by a parallel indigenous idiom that villagers call "government by deity", the modernized translation of "*deotā kā rāj*" (lit. rule by gods) offered by an English-speaking, university-trained informant. In addition to ordering the internal political economy of rural communities, local gods also represent the latter in all kinds of external relations – with peers, others castes, remembered rulers, the Government of India, demons, and the great gods of heaven.[1] While divine agency may sound implausible to empiricist observers – as it has from the time of British colonial authors (see Inden 1990) to contemporary historians (Hobsbawm 1978) –, the rhetorical slippage between kingship and divinity it exemplifies should come as no surprise to scholars of Hindu culture. As Christopher Fuller

---

[1] West Himalayan local gods are understood to be the representatives or "watchmen" (*caukidār*) in the human world (*prithvī*) of the great gods Shiva and Kali, who rule the world from heaven (*svarga*). Once a year, in the winter, they gather in heaven for a great assembly at the court of Śiva and Kali.

explains (1992:106-27), Hindu deities such as Indra or Rama are represented as kings – i.e. as royal gods, while human kings are ritually constructed as divine – that is to say, as the incarnation or representative of a state or dynastic deity.

A different set of relations obtains, however, in west Himalayan local government by deity. Rather than constructing human rulers in terms of transcendent relations with heavenly gods, we have earthly gods constructed in immanent relations with human rulers. What I find unusual in this idiom is not the symbolic construction of the divinity of kings – a widespread form of legitimation with which we are quite familiar –, but rather the political construction of gods as rulers. How exactly can a god be said to govern? What ritual and psycho-spatial practices are involved? What cultural conception of agency is performed? What kinds of political subjectivity are produced?

Following a constructivist line of inquiry, I pay close attention to the tropes that make gods into political agents – a process that includes not only turns of phrase, but also what we might call turns of practice – i.e. ritual tropes. The arts of west Himalayan ritual, I propose, enact a symbolic field of empowerment – a liminal space, where discourse is performed as collective agency in practices of memory that reproduce the effects of traditional local rule.

When we place government by deity in cultural context, we find that it belongs to a varied repertoire of ritual practices, which have long given shape to the historical landscape of west Himalayan regional polity. Elsewhere (Sutherland 2003), I have shown how the processional movements of local gods, riding in palanquins in the manner of kings, describe the domains of a former regional polity – local caste militias, chiefdoms, kingdoms, even a quasi-imperial formation – whose intersecting spaces are neither neatly bounded, mutually exclusive, nor hierarchically nested. The overlapping fields of power and political discourses so defined lend weight to Ronald Inden's proposal to examine historical Indian polity as a "scale of forms", a concept Collingwood developed in *New Leviathan* to rethink history in terms of the emergent categories formed by human agency. This essay is not the place to describe again the entire scale of sovereignties defined by this regional geography of movement. Suffice it to say that the remembered landscape of local, chiefly, royal, and imperial domains is reproduced at festival times by the ritual agency of gods in an idiom I characterize as theistic sovereignty.

To understand how theistic sovereignty works in a political sense, I analyze the ritual processes that enable local gods to govern rural caste assemblies as kings or rulers (the Sanskrit/Hindi *rājā* has both these meanings). I then briefly compare the latter with the theistic sovereigns of

two superordinate formations: the now-defunct so-called *gana* of the Tikaral confederacy, and the king of Bashahr.[2] Combining my own fieldwork in two of the Bashahr state's three former districts, Rohru and Chini[3] (now Kinnaur) (see Fig.1), with British colonial accounts of Pahari states and religion, I shall demonstrate how the mixed metaphorical construction of sovereignty as simultaneously divine and kingly in all three cases is ritually performed, in and by a common repertoire of what I call t(r)opologies of *rāj* – the topes and tropes of rule, its characteristic spaces and commonplaces. In order to understand theistic sovereignty, it is necessary to explain two apparent paradoxes: on the one hand, the construction of gods as rulers: on the other hand, the formation of the sovereign as subject. To do so, I adapt Foucauldian theory to the analysis of Hindu ritual practice.

T(r)opologies of *Rāj*

In *The Psychic Life of Power,* Judith Butler (1997:3-4) following Michel Foucault uses the term "tropology" to describe the rhetorical construction of inner landscapes of the mind by figures of *speech* in modern, European theories of subject formation. In what follows, I use the modified spelling, t(r)opology, to suggest a complementary political process: the ritual construction of outer landscapes of collective subjection by figures of *space* in Himalayan practices of governance and state-formation. By collective subjection I refer not only to the production of political subjects, but also to the formation of gods as rulers – i.e. as sovereign subjects, by "inspirational practices" (Thomas and Humphrey 1994) involving what is normally called spirit-possession. In the western Himalayas, the colonization of persons, or "seizure" by divine power (*śakti*) as locals call it, that produces political subjection extends also to objects, animals, buildings, and places. To better explain the agency of gods as rulers, it is necessary to rethink the individualist paradigm of spirit-possession in more general terms as theistic subjection, that is to say, as the ritual means by which gods are made to act as rulers by (and of) the ruled. I propose that such practices are best conceptualized in performative terms as a multi-media set of tropes and techniques of empowerment, whose ritual articulation may be understood to describe a world-ordering circuitry of power.

---

[2] There are many spellings for the name of the former kingdom: Bashahr, Bushahr, Bushahar, Bushahir. In using the first, I follow Emerson's spelling which most closely approximates what I heard in the field.

[3] I use the standard spelling of places-names as found on current Indian maps.

Butler uses the term tropology to describe the discursive construction of the individual subject by tropes of reversal, or turning, in the writings of Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Althusser and Foucault. According to this metaphor, power in the form of dominant norms and disciplines is understood to be "internalized" and "turned against the self" in the production of subjectivity as conscience or self-awareness. Butler underscores the discursive nature of this process by pointing in an important note to "Hayden White's remarks in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) that the word *tropic* derives from *tropikos, tropos*, which in classical Greek meant 'turn'", and to subsequent understandings of Quintillian and Nietzsche that tropes "generate figures of speech or thought" (1997:201-2, n.1). She draws out the significance of this as follows:

> That this turn is considered generative and productive seems especially relevant to our consideration of the production or generation of the subject. Not only is generation what a trope does, but the explanation of generation seems to require the use of tropes, an operation of language that both reflects and enacts the generativity it seeks to explain, irreducibly mimetic and performative (ibid).

My adapted spelling of the term, t(r)opology, is intended to spatialize and historicize Butler's rhetorical analysis of individual subject-formation by shifting attention to the linked formation of collective subjectivity and political domain, in this case by Pahari ritual practice. I endeavor to do so by expanding her Foucauldian focus on texts and discourse to include a practical analysis of the projection of power as sovereignty in space and action – that is to say, an analysis of theistic subjection enacted by the ritual empowerment of objects, bodies, and places. The parentheses I use in my spelling of t(r)opology are used to suggest that both tropology and topology are involved in the political construction of subjects and space, and that the same process constitutes sovereignty and subjectivity in the three competing idioms of government by deity, *gana*, and king.

To understand how gods can act as rulers in political practice, we have to learn what kind of agency this involves. In addition to asking how human political subjectivity and action can be viewed in terms of the agency of a god, it is also necessary to examine an aspect of subjection not studied by either Foucault or Butler, namely: the construction of the sovereign as subject. As the west Himalayan sovereigns in question include both human kings and royal gods, it will also be necessary to interrogate the parallel means by which kings are deified and gods are made kings. I shall focus mainly on the latter, not only due to its unusual nature, but also because the same set of conventions were used to perform the theistic sovereignty of kings. In both cases, it is necessary to understand how gods are made present in physical form and thereby

inserted as agents in political relations with humans. To do so, I propose to examine the ritual t(r)opes, by means of which cosmological and theological conceptions of power are politically articulated: on the one hand spatially, by the localization of unmarked power in objects, buildings, and places as markers of domain – political objects; on the other hand psychically, by the embodiment of theistic power in the persons of both ruler and ruled to make them (in different ways) political subjects.

With respect to the homology in Hindu polity between human kings and divine kings, we find that theistic sovereignty is paradoxically constructed: in the case of the human Pahari king, by subordination to the state/dynastic deity as the latter's minister (*vazīr*) – a fairly common Hindu notion; in the case of the royal god, by a circular logic of self-subjection, to which I return below. In tracing the t(r)opologies of rule involved, I want to show (pace Butler) that the formation of subjects is not limited to textual practices of discursive performance, but is also materially formed and ritually enacted in a multi-media regime of "spatial practices"[4] (de Certeau 1984): "disciplined operations" such as story-telling, building, drumming, dancing, processing, and assembling, that configure relations between landscapes, persons and things. It is these multi-media arts, I propose, that constitute the ritual repertoire of divine habitus.

Tropes of reversal

Bearing in mind the ambivalence of subject-formation noted by Butler, according to which the individual subject is formed by power simultaneously as both agent and patient, it is necessary to pay close attention to the ambivalence of power (*śakti*) inscribed in the origin myths of west Himalayan gods. I refer in particular to the various narrative and ritual *reversals* of power that inaugurate the establishment of theistic sovereignty by the transformation of affliction into empowerment, and curse into blessing.

Two contrasting "figures of turning" characterize competing mythologies of government by deity in Rohru. On the one hand, the narratives of gods classed as *nāg* or *nārāyaṇ* evoke the ontological *transformation* of a deity's "curse" (*doś*) into the blessing of "increase" (*lābh*) that constitutes local theistic rule. This reversal marks the emergence of collective political identity and agency in the figure of a god,

---

[4] Following Michel de Certeau's (1984: 91-130) usage, "spatial practices" refer to such "operations" as walking in the city, story-telling, city-planning, map-making, and touring, by means of which places and spaces are constructed and contested.

who subsequently acts as the benefactor, ruler, and representative of a local rural community.

On the other hand, the origin myths of gods classed as *mahāsū* describe a political *transition* from "government by demon" (*rakash ka rāj*) to government by deity involving military conquest and a ritual contract. After subduing the demon-*rājā*, Kirmat Danu, Mahāsū agrees to continue to protect the regional population by performing a perpetual territorial progress, in return for an annual share of the harvest (Ibbetson, MacLagan and Rose 1919: 414). Throughout Himachal and western Uttaranchal, such rituals of territorialization are one of the primary tropes, by which theistic sovereignty is projected in space by deities touring their domains in palanquins (see Sutherland 2003).

Given that traditional Pahari knowledge about local gods is orally rather than textually transmitted, I prefer not to distinguish "myth" from "ritual" as if they belonged to separate domains of experience – one textual and discursive, the other practical and embodied. Although the indigenous equivalents, "history" (H. *itihās*, P. *bār*, K. *cironing*) and "god's work" (H. *devākārya*) are distinguished in speech, narrative is inseparable from the other practices with which I began, that turn knowledge into power, things into gods, gods into kings, and oracles into their royal persons. In the west Himalayan arts of government by deity, I shall argue, sovereignty is a multi-media effect produced by t(r)opes of power in motion – many, but not all, of which involve reversal.[5]

In what follows, I use the flow of power (*śakti*) between objects, persons and places set in motion and directed by ritual practice to understand how the idiom of theistic sovereignty is formed and performed in networks of connectivity. A full account of the process would describe an expanding scale of sites of ritual empowerment from the smallest of objects, through bodies and buildings, to landscapes, and the triple Hindu cosmos. The following analysis focuses on the first three scales in examining the theistic construction of sovereignty and subjection in local government by deity, then applies the same principles to the *gana* and the Bashahr king at increasingly larger scales. I shall argue that conventional views of spirit possession, based as they are on modern individualist epistemologies and ontologies, are inadequate to theorize the complex colonization by power of objects, persons, animals, buildings, and landscapes, that constitutes Pahari theistic sovereignty. Given the

---

[5] Other important ritual tropes that construct the spaces of the political arena by the processional movements of gods are: 1) circumambulation of a local polity; 2) exchange between local polities so defined, and 3) assembly of many local polities at a center (see Sutherland 2003). In this essay, I only examine the latter.

violent indigenous construction of power this involves, I prefer to view all of these as sites of subjection.

Government by Deity

In west Himalayan peasant polity, collective agency is imagined and enacted in vernacular terms of government by deity – the royal art of ordering and empowerment. Throughout the former territories of Bashahr – the contemporary districts of Simla, Rohru and Kinnaur – rural caste assemblies called *khūnd*, resident in multi-village domains called *ghori*[6], are understood to be ruled by local gods called *deotā*. In other words, local gods stand for, govern, and act on behalf of rural communities in the latter's various world-ordering relations – with peers, former rulers, the nation-state, demons, and the great gods of heaven. Before examining how this institution works, its three constitutive elements need further explanation, namely: *khūnd*, *ghori*, and *deotā*.

Khūnd

The Pahari term, *khūnd*, used in the singular means "warrior", but in Rohru and Tukpa it is also used both collectively and spatially to signify two complementary formations.

On the one hand, *khūnd* denotes a traditional rural political community, namely the assembly or militia of a local agropastoral cooperative. Three caste groups are incorporated in the community of a *khūnd* – albeit unequally. The dominant majority are Khash-Rajput agropastoralist landowners [formerly titled *kanait* (or Kanet) under British rule, a term that is now considered pejorative]. Two other castes traditionally serve them: Brahman agropastoralist landowners [formerly called *bhāt* – also now pejorative] who act as hereditary priests, and subaltern Kohlis, a pejorative title that still competes with the now more politically correct Harijan or Dalit, and which collectively designates individually named castes such as carpenters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, musicians, weavers, and basket makers.

---

[6] Instead of "territory", I prefer to use the term "domain" to describe these and other political spaces formed by the ritual projection of theistic power. Whereas territory is a modern concept associated with the bounded homogeneous space of the nation-state, the older European notion of domain better describes the centrally organized heterogeneous space of Hindu polities.
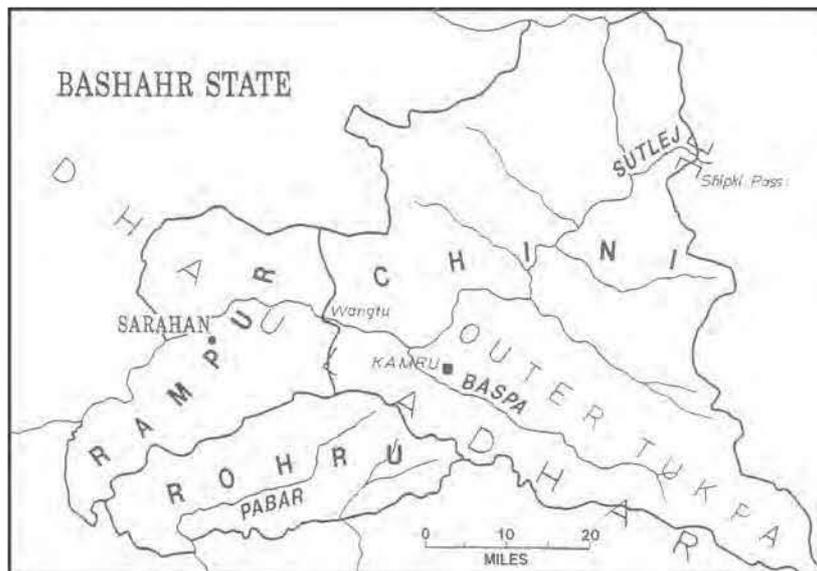
Fig.1: The Kingdom of Bashahr

On the other hand, *khūnd* refers to an archaic form of state administrative territory, one of the six original divisions of the Bashahr kingdom that royal foundation myths describe as independent chiefdoms prior to their conquest. I take these alternative uses to be metonymically related as the basic political units, from which the Bashahr kingdom was formed. This early Kanait geography of *khūnd*s was subsequently re-territorialized by the Bashahr kings according to a Mughal vocabulary of *parganā*s and *tahsīl*s.

Ghori

The usual Pahari term for a minimal political space in Rohru and Tukpa, however, is *ghori*, defined in each case as the domain of a *khūnd* and its ruling deity or *deotā*. Usually a *parganā* contains several *ghori*s. Avoiding Eurocentric connotations of "territory" based on international law, cadastral surveys, printed maps and boundary-markers, I use the term "domain" to suggest the incorporation of villages and land in a

"centrally oriented" polity (Tambiah 1976).[7] While the Rohru usage of *ghori* refers to a multi-village domain, in Tukpa it designates the smaller space of a single village. What is interesting about the *ghori*s of Rohru and Tukpa is their differing histories of political incorporation in Basharh. While the *ghori*s of Tukpa belonged to the original core of the kingdom, formed after Tibetan regional imperium began to decline in the 13th century, the *ghori*s of Rohru were not annexed until 1865, after the imposition of British "protection". Immediately surrounded by four great states, formerly rivals for regional paramountcy – Kullu to the west, Bashahr to the north, Garhwal to the east, and Sirmaur to the south – Rohru's more than forty *khūnd*s, each resident in its *ghori*, together with a handful of chiefdoms or *thakurai*s, remained administratively and ritually autonomous until 1865 – sheltered in the space "between the tentacles" of the state, as Tilman Frasch (2003: 110) nicely puts it – where centralized power was weak. Thus, until that time, the *ghori*s of Rohru may be conceptualized in non-evolutionist terms as an indigenous form of political organization that preceded the establishment of kingdoms in the region and continued to exist as quasi-autonomous or tributary polities after the establishment of kingdoms.

Deotā or devata

According to the traditional idiom of the "Pahari system of goddesses and gods" (*pahaḍī devī-devata* system), each *khūnd* and its *ghori* is represented and ruled by a local deity (*deotā* or *devatā*) belonging to one of two divine "species" (*jāti*). One species comprises deities classed as Nag, Narayan and Jakh, the other is composed exclusively of Mahāsūs. According to a rich corpus of local origin myths, both species of *deotā* with seats in Rohru are represented as foreign powers, immigrants from elsewhere, who inaugurate local governance by violent acts of intrusion: either by taking possession of persons and place in the absence of a previous ruler or, in Mahāsū's case, by defeating an incumbent demon-*rājā* or challenging incumbent local gods.

Spatial Narratives of Empowerment

Origin myths describe how deities became rulers or *rājā*s. Born in distant locations, usually mountain lakes, and sometimes associated with a named mother-goddess, most Khash-Rajput *deotā* (with only a handful of exceptions) are described as initially belonging to a divine brotherhood,

---

[7] In his study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand, Stanley Tambiah (1976: 112) characterizes the field of power in the Indic kingdom as "centrally oriented" rather then territorially bounded in the manner of the modern state.

leaving home, then wandering in the form of a "holy man" or "ascetic" in search of a "seat" (*kursī*), in which to settle and found a kingdom. Accidentally discovered in the form of a "spontaneously generated image" (*utpatti mūrti*) by either a hunter, shepherd, or ploughman, this otherwise invisible "forest power" (*jangali śakti*) initially makes its presence felt in rural society by disrupting order – stealing a sacrificial offering, causing disease, or introducing an epidemic of female possession. A diviner is summoned, a deity is named, and his curse (*doṣ*) is diagnosed – caused, usually, by the sin of misrecognition.

To re-establish order, an entirely new order must be established, organized around the figure of a *deotā* as king. To do so, the disordering presence of wild forest power must be reconfigured in well-ordered form as a tutelary god, then "seated" in a temple. After the deity is established in his seat, an entourage of "officers" (*kārdār*) is appointed to manage temple affairs – each office chosen from a different lineage (*khāndān*) by the deity. While some origin myths are silent on how this is done, others state that the deity himself appoints his officers from different lineages. According to the evidence of contemporary practice, deities still chose their temple officers by a process of theistic subjection. This may happen either indirectly by a possessed oracle who nominates the officer, or directly by some form of divine affliction (*doṣ*) or curse experienced by the nominee himself (it is always a man), which can only be lifted by compliance with the deity's wishes. In both case, selection is understood to be the work of the deity, whose power acts either directly through affliction or indirectly through oracular inspiration.

As embodiment of the deity's power and voice of his will, the temple-oracle, or *mālī,* is central not only to the process of selecting the officers of the temple committee, but also to the performance of theistic sovereignty in public practices of ritual politics. New officers are named by the deity through the "shaking speech" (*cheriyā bolī*) of the oracle and, whenever a new oracle needs to be appointed, the deity is said to select him directly by spirit possession – a process of subjection often involving affliction that may last years, if the candidate is unwilling to comply. This system of oracular appointment and representation is central to the legislative aspects of government by deity as well as to the maintenance of social control and the formation of "docile subjects". Failure to comply with the deity's laws and commands, for instance, also results in affliction by the deity's curse for ordinary members of the *khūnd* or, to put it in other words, by the psychosomatic experience of theistic subjection.

In this new local order, objects, bodies, buildings, and places are ritually empowered as the "signs" (*niśān*) of theistic sovereignty – as will be seen below – and the person of the deity is politically constructed by a discourse of kingship. The temple is represented in royal terms as a

"palace" (*mahāl, deorhā* or "treasury" (*bhaṇḍār*) and the temple officers are conceived as the deity's court or "cabinet of ministers", as my English-speaking informant put it. These include chief minister or chamberlain (*mahāttas* or *vazīr*), oracle (*māli*), priest (*pūjārī*), treasurer (*kājaṁcī*), and storekeeper (*bhaṇḍārī*) – all from high-caste lineages – and in addition a low-caste peon (*halamandī*). Usually unmentioned in the "official" high caste narratives I gathered in Rohru[8], this temple establishment also requires the indispensable services of subaltern drummer-bards, variously called *dhagī* or *turī* in Rohru, without whose knowledge of rhythm and songs the deity's power can be neither evoked nor harnessed in ritual practice.

In comparing variants of divine kingship below, I hope to show that this temple regime of local theistic governance with its deity, *vazīr*, oracle, officers, and drummer-bards forms a constant structure of command, to which supplementary figures such as the *gana* and the king have been added as more complex political formations were formed. Where *khūnd*s are concerned, the deity acts as king/ruler and the *vazīr* as both his minister and temple manager. Before the introduction of democratically elected local headmen (*pradhān*) after Independence, the *vazīr* was also the human political leader of the *khūnd*. In more complex traditional political formations, as we shall see, the deity embodies the sovereign power, a human king or *gana* acts as the deity's minister cum political leader, and the role of *vazīr* is reduced to temple management.

The deity's sovereignty is not only mimetic, however – that is to say, formed as a copy of Hindu kingship. It is also performed by the ritual management and direction of power (*śakti*). Oral narratives of temple-foundation describe the establishment of government by deity in terms of a two-phase trajectory of power. As I describe elsewhere (Sutherland 2004), the primary *introjection* of wild power from the forest that inaugurates government by deity is reversed in a secondary *projection* of power, now in its ritually reordered form as divine, in a movement that constitutes collective political agency – typically by the looting of sheep and goats from a neighboring *khūnd* for the temple consecration sacrifice (*abhiṣek*). What I take this to mean is that the collective agency of *khūnd*s is imagined as the effect of empowerment by cosmological power (*śakti*). Unmarked and unmediated by name, form or site in its original condition, *śakti* is given particular social characteristics, first by personification as a god, then by political location in a network of competition and conflict among *khūnd*s as a ruler or *rājā*. Thus, narratives of government by deity

---

[8] By contrast with my experience in Rohru, the indispensable magical power evoked by low caste drummers is acknowledged further east in the official divine histories of Garhwal.

are shaped by a double figure of reversal: the immobilization of wild forest power as a god in a temple, and its subsequent remobilization as a ruler in ritual practice. This is why many origin myths end with a similar trope: the construction of a palanquin (*palgī*) as the deity's ritual vehicle. The palanquin is the primary means of mobilizing and projecting power in ritual, when the deity as *rājā* tours his domain, visits other gods, or attends assemblies accompanied by his *khūnd.*

But origin myths alone are insufficient to understand what it means to say that Pahari gods act as rulers. Only by paying close attention to the practical evidence of material culture and ritual action can we understand precisely *how* the mythic discourse of divine power, *śakti,* is made palpably present as political agency in small-scale and large-scale t(r)opologies of *rāj.*

In the next two sections, I argue that ritual produces the sovereignty of gods. It does so through a repertoire of formative and performative arts, that once shaped political life in west Himalayan Hindu states prior to democratization. In contemporary temple and festival practices, theistic governance is embodied in the architectonics of theistic power and enacted in the choreography of oracular consultation. After describing these practices that make gods into rulers, I demonstrate, in the final section, how the same ritual t(r)opes are reconfigured in constructing the theistic sovereignty of human rulers: the *gana* of Tikaral and the Bashahr king.

Material Formation: The Architectonics of Power

If a local god is the ruler of a *khūnd*, his capacity to govern is first and foremost that of a "ruler of magic" (*jādū kā rājā*). This is to say that theistic sovereignty in political affairs represents only one moment in the broader movement of world-ordering power, *śakti,* by means of which local gods also heal illness, control the weather, protect flocks and promote good harvests. If similar functions also fulfilled the duty (*dharma*) of Hindu kings, it is only by means of collaboration with deities that kings were formerly able to discharge them. Thus, the visual regime of props in terms of which local gods ritually present themselves as rulers is more than a spectacle of semiosis. It also constitutes a material array of magical instruments or "signs" (*niśān*), in each of which the deity's power is fixed in form by specific architectonic conventions. Without such signs, as Ram Rachpal Singh of Sangla explained, the *śakti* of a deity is dangerous and impossible to control. "It wanders around in the fields, lodges in walls, and hassles people (*ādmī tang kartā*) by fastening onto their bodies and causing possession". To prevent this, *śakti* must be grounded in objects formed by one or both of two conventional designs. One of these is the Indic square

geometry (*yantra*) of the center and four directions, the pervasive form in which Pahari world-order is imagined in discourse, enacted in ritual, and realized in the shape of sacred objects and buildings. This geometry is clearly exemplified in the patterns of dots signifying the number five on the side of a die – one in each corner and one in the middle.

Fig. 2: Sarahan temple roof. (Photo: P. Sutherland)

The other design is the widespread Indic figure of the parasol, or *chatra*, which marks the presence of a king.

These two key architectonic forms are embodied in the four principal kinds of theistic sign (*niśān*) used in ritual practice in Rohru and Tukpa:

1) small hand-held signs such as the dagger (*katār*) or the "mace" (*charrī*) are embellished with a *chatra* to signify the presence, and transmit the power of, the deity's sovereignty;

2) various kinds of ritual vehicle, in which deities are mobilized for temple rituals and festival processions [see below] also incorporate one or more *chatra*s;

3) cosmic diagrams (*maṇḍala*s) constructed for temple consecrations (*abhiṣek*) or sacrificial assemblies (*jag*) are formed by the geometry of the 5-point *yantra* out of colored powders on the ground;

4) the roofs of temple and palace buildings also constitute three dimensional *maṇḍala*s, whose layout is based on the same ubiquitous *yantra* and whose center and four corners are marked as cosmological symbols either temporarily by ritual actions or permanently by architectural elements such as miniature pitched or conical roofs called *chatra*.

Most important among these techniques of signing power is the architectonics of ritual vehicles, due to their centrality in theistic governance.

Ritual Vehicles

Ritual vehicles present both a visual system of classification and a practical idiom of theistic governance. I begin with the former. In the rituals that organize the political life of *khūnd*s as what elsewhere I have called "very little kingdoms" (Sutherland 2003), the design-forms of ritual vehicles are coded by the categories of divine caste and species. Of the three castes that form the population of a *khūnd*, each is represented by a tutelary god of similar caste, whose status is visually displayed by the design of his vehicle (fig. 3). Not all these local gods are classified as rulers or kings, however; some are considered priests or warrior/exorcists. All three castes and their gods have their own separate temples and officers, who both serve their own local caste communities independently and participate in the rituals of the ruling god. Only the gods of the landowning Khash-Rajput caste are considered to be *rājā*s. As the ruler of his *khūnd* and their domain (*ghori*), a royal god's sovereign status is indicated by the sumptuary symbolism of the palanquin in which he rides. By contrast, acting as the latter's theistic priest (*purohit*), Parashuram, the god of all Rohru's Brahman communities or *bhātoli*s, is transported in a "pitcher" (*kalāśa*) carried on the head of his priest. Lastly, Kilbalu, the god of most but not all subaltern Kohli hamlets, rides in a vehicle that emulates either the royal or the priestly design in his multiple ritual capacity as the royal god's minister (*vazīr*), warrior (*bīr*), exorcist,

bodyguard, or policeman (*pulīs*). Thus, *ghori*s are constructed as very little kingdoms by the theistic organization of ritual by caste and vice versa.

Caste category	Social space (or group)	Palanquin design	Species-name (or place of origin) of god	Ritual Function
Khash-Rajput (*Kanait*)	*ghori khūnd*	Roof-type	Mahāsūs	Ruler/king
		Long-hair	Nags, Narayans & Jakhs	
		Chair-type	(Navar valley, Kullu & Kinnaur)	
Brahman (Bhat)	*bhātoli*	Pitcher	Parashuram	Priest
Harijan (Kohli)	*Kohlwāri*	Long-hair & pitcher	Kilbalu	Exorcist, warrior, minister, bodyguard, policeman

Fig. 3: Ritual vehicle designs by caste, location, deity and ritual function.

In addition to caste, the ruling gods of *khūnd*s are also distinguished in terms of divine species (*jātī*) or brotherhood (*birādarī*) by three different kinds of palanquin (fig. 3). Members of the Mahāsū brotherhood, headquartered in Garhwal, ride in silver palanquins named "roof-type" (*chatvālā*) or "box-type" (*sandūqvālā*) for their characteristic shape. By contrast, gods classified as Nags and Narayans (with distant places of birth in Kullu, Kinnaur, Tibet, or Dodra Kwar) ride in "longhair" (*jhāṁgruvālā*) or "chair-type" (*kursivālā*) palanquins. Rohru district constitutes a cultural border-zone, where these regional conventions intersect and hybrid variants are produced such as the heteroprax use of longhair palanquins by Mahāsūs.

The kingship of gods is also conveyed by the symbolic construction of their ritual vehicles.

The roof-type or box-type palanquin

In Mahāsū's characteristic box-type palanquin, the deity's image (*mūrti* or *mūrat*) is hidden inside the box. Usually made of silver and sometimes inlaid with gold, both box and roof are typically ornamented with *repoussé* images of "great tradition" figures such as Shiva, Ganesh, the Pandavas and Kauravas, or Krishna and the Gopis. The placement of a silver parasol at the peak of the roof and a silver ball at each corner of the box reproduces the mandalic geometry of center and four directions, the visual signature of world-ordering sovereignty already noted for some temple roofs. Here, it gives visual form to Mahāsū's paramount status as "king of the gods" (P. *devā ro rājā*) in the Uttarakhand region. A woven silver cummerbund tied around the box, through which the deity's sword

is slung, indicates the palanquin's anthropomorphic construction as the martial body of a demon-slaying ruler.

Fig. 4: Roof- or Box-type Palanquin. (Photo: P. Sutherland)

Longhair palanquins

Brotherhoods of Nags and Narayans in Rohru are distinguished by their so-called "longhair" palanquins (fig. 5, 6, 7), named for their characteristic mop of yak-tail hair. By extension, the gods that ride in them are called "longhair gods". Unlike Mahāsūs, the images of longhair gods are visible.

Mounted in circular array on a wooden frame, facing outwards in all directions, their moustachioed "faces" (*mohar*) made of gold, silver, and bronze are partially covered by the yak-tail hair, that is understood to

protect these deities of valley settlements from attacks by the *sarāwanī* or *sāunī*, the violent multiple forms of Kali that inhabit the mountain peaks. In addition to faces, moustaches and hair, longhair palanquins are also informed by such bodily imagery as skirts and swords and even a cap to protect their hair from rain. At festivals, garlands are placed, as it were, around the deity's neck and head, and worshippers, temple officials and oracles alike treat the palanquin as the deity in person, addressing him as "*rājā*".

While box-type and longhair palanquins are anthropomorphically constructed as individuals, other symbolism suggests that longhair palanquins also represent an assembly of persons. In addition to the single, "authentic" bronze image of the deity, which according to origin myth the god spontaneously generated, other images mounted on the palanquin are conceived of as "copies" made by human hand and donated by royal and chiefly patrons. These secondary images are variously said to depict the deity's entourage of "ministers", "family", and "helpers",[9] and sometimes include the goddess Kali and the spirits of powerful dead temple officers. Thus, a palanquin constructs the deity collectively as *a rājā and his court* thus constituting a mobile political center, whenever the deity goes on tour. This is well illustrated by the long-hair palanquin of the hybrid deity Jakh of Janglik, whose mobile images include the regional god, Bashik Mahāsū, thirteen local "authentic forest powers" (*aslī jangalī śakti*) and a famous former *vazīr* called Razuwan. This overlapping of regional and local powers nicely illustrates the reconfiguration of categories, boundaries and relations associated with local resistance to a dominant regional genre.

Divine Habitus

In addition to material form, mobility is also semiotically coded in the ritual practices of government by deity. Thus, Nags and Narayans are distinguished from Mahāsūs by their characteristic manner of moving. Because of the considerable weight of their palanquins, and the length and flexibility of their wooden carrying-poles, longhair gods are said to "dance" (*nācnā*), moving with a stately bounce and sway that at any moment can turn violent. Due to the shortness and stiffness of their carrying-poles, Mahāsūs, by contrast, do not dance. Instead, they display two alternative modes of movement. Their lightweight palanquins characteristically "shake" (*chernā*) in a more nervous manner, accompanied by the rattling and jingling of their metal fringes, and often

---

[9] The terms I heard were: "ministers" (*mantrī*), "family" (*parivār*), "helpers" (*madadkarnevale*).

move with sudden and unexpected changes of direction. In a second characteristic manoeuvre, they move backwards and forwards in a linear movement called "the knife" (*churī*), which choreographs Mahāsū's projection of military power and memorializes his establishment of government by deity. Mahāsū's oracles also perform the same linear movement in trance, running backwards and forwards while ceremonially pressing the deity's sword into their stomach as the drummers play the 21-beat royal rhythm, *jhoritāl,* and the temple-bard declaims in Mahāsū's voice: "This is the rhythm my drummers played, when I killed the demon-king Kirmat Danu".

While no one I asked could explain this striking gesture of the reversed sword, it seems on reflection to give visual form to the mythic ambivalence of power already discussed, in particular to the classic Vaishnava figure of Mahāsū's transformation from demon-slaying conqueror to benevolent sovereign. Apparently generalizing this interpretation, the oracle of the god Lankura Bir of Kalpa performs the same gesture of reversal in using the hilt of Lankura's sword as an instrument of benediction. Another striking trope of reversal also uses the deity's sword, in this case to indicate an ontological transformation, when the oracle in possession runs the sharp edge of the sword three times across his tongue without causing any bleeding, in order to indicate the bodily metamorphosis caused by theistic subjection – i.e. he is now a god not a man and therefore cannot be wounded.[10] This brings us to ritual choreography.

Subject-formation: The Choreography of Oracular Consultation

Having understood how wild powers are stabilized in the static form of objects and vehicles as local gods, we can now examine the latter's mobilization with persons in the ritual dance of oracular consultation – the means by which gods are made present and given voice as the rulers of *khūnd*s. To do so, it is necessary to distinguish two closely related ways in which the otherwise invisible power of a god is constructed as the person of a sovereign by ritualized choreography and theistic subjection. I start with a child's view of ritual and its basic repertoire of roles, props, gestures and movements.

---

[10] William Sax confirmed this interpretation in the ritual practices of neighbouring Garhwal (personal communication 2005). "In Nanda Devi's processions, the reversed sword shows the invincibility of the bearer: others pound on it with sticks and rocks, but he remains unhurt".

The most conspicuous children's game in Rohru is played with toy palanquins. On many occasions, in Rohru and Tukpa, I have watched boys making them from blocks of wood, sticks and off-cut bits of cloth, then imitating the characteristic body movements of oracular consultation (*pūchnā*). Significantly, playing with palanquins is not a girls' game, because women are excluded from the public rituals of government by deity. To be more precise, upper caste women play no part in temple-management or sacrifice – with one significant exception. In public rituals in Kinnaur, upper caste married women pass under the deity's palanquin with censors filled with smoking incense, to purify the god of any alien powers that might have attached themselves to his vehicle. The wives of subaltern-caste musicians, by contrast, are indispensable to Mahāsū's processional practice as singers and dancers (*devadāsī*).

Seizing an unusual opportunity, I once asked a group of ten or twelve boys, who were making toy palanquins, to stage a performance for my video camera of Rohru's most prestigious sacrificial rite, Śānt mela. Suddenly, it was a production number – "children's śānt". Fathers emerged from nowhere to act as directors, assigning children different roles as temple officials. Some acted as palanquin bearers, bouncing their toy palanquins up and down or making them bow to one side. Others played the part of the oracle, shaking wildly as if possessed or running back and forth, while holding a stick pressed into their stomach. Still others took the role of the deity's *vazīr*, and one adult even brought a sacrificial sheep. Then, with all the parts assigned, officials and palanquins were choreographed in a simplified version of the Śānt sacrifice. First, the toy palanquins were seated side by side in a ritual assembly (*khumblī*), then the children danced in a circle around them imitating the characteristic ritual trope of circumambulation (*phīr*). With this child's grammar of ritual habitus in mind, we can now turn to the thing itself.

Theistic Subjection

It is monsoon time and Jabali Narayan, god and ruler of the Andreothi territory (*ghori*), is halfway through his annual progress (*daurā*). The procession has stopped at a small village called Maktot, where a desperate husband is seeking the deity's help. Why has his wife suffered three miscarriages?

The drummers strike up a gentle four-four rhythm. The palanquin is lifted, and rests without moving on the shoulders of its bearers. As the pace of the drumming intensifies the oscillations become increasingly vigorous and the palanquin starts to bounce up and down. This means that the deity "has arisen" (*utthgayā*). Standing to one side of the palanquin, next to the

vazīr, the oracle lightly caresses the god's yak-tail hair with his fingertips as he concentrates his attention. As the bouncing of the palanquin gets increasingly wilder, its carrying poles creak and squeak in their wooden sockets. When it gets off balance, the *vazīr* reaches out a hand to steady it, being careful not to lend any particular direction to its spontaneous motion. The oracle is still holding the yak-tail hair. Suddenly, his head flips back, his cap flies off and his long hair is exposed. "Seizure [of the oracle] has occurred" (*pakrai ho gayā*). The god's power "has come to his head" (*sīr ā gayā*). With arms stretched down and hands clasped together in front of his belly, the oracle violently shakes his balled fists up and down as if wrestling some powerful animal by the tail. Now the *vazīr* addresses the god and poses him a question, which the god answers through his oracle's voice. Transformed by theistic subjection, the oracle's speech sounds tense and high-pitched, and his phrases come in rapid bursts. "Narayan is communicating through the oracle's shaking-speech", someone next to me explains. "He says there's been a sin. A goat must be sacrificed". After the oracle has delivered this pronouncement, he "counts" barley grains in order to divine the final outcome. When the session is over, the shaking stops, the oracle comes to his senses, and someone casually replaces his cap.

In consultations such as these, Pahari deities intervene in everyday life in order to determine the best course of action to take in all kinds of affairs. In personal matters, *deotā*s diagnose misfortune, heal sickness, welcome brides, bless first-born males, settle legal disputes, or mete out punishment in the form of *doś*. In communal matters, *deotā*s select new temple officials, formulate group policy, distribute grazing and irrigation rights, define territory, fix dates for festivals, issue invitations to other gods, engage in diplomatic relations, and formerly waged war with their magic. In ecological and cosmic matters, moreover, *deotā*s control the weather (Nags in particular have power over rain), ensure the fertility of crops and flocks, protect against demonic disorder, maintain the presence of life-giving *śakti* in their domains, and predict the course of the coming year. All these decisions are determined on behalf of the community by oracular consultation – the means by which a god gives his orders as king by dancing with his temple officers.

The choreography of oracles and palanquins is the focal ritual of theistic governance. The palanquin and oracle each present a different embodiment of a god by giving him material form, voice and movement. Like a Himalayan version of the *deus ex machina*, the palanquin provides a material interface between an otherwise invisible ruler and his subjects. It is, quite literally, to adapt le Corbusier's definition of a house, a machine for ruling.

As with palanquins, there are different styles of oracular practice. Nags and Narayans from Kinnaur have single oracles, whereas Mahāsūs from Garhwal have several. All oracles, however, are understood to be "chosen by the *deotā*" from male members of the same lineage, according to a logic of

hereditary privilege inflected by theistic subjection. When an oracle is replaced or dies, he is succeeded by whichever one of his relatives has the ability to embody and give voice to the power of the local god. Recalling Rosalind Morris's (2002) account of the elision of "mediation and mediumship in Thailand's information age", one villager suggestively described the oracle to me as the deity's "radio station" (*akāśvānī*, lit. voice from space or heaven). Rethinking spirit-possession in constructivist terms as theistic subjection makes it possible to link the Foucauldian concept of subject-formation with which I began to the other concepts of material-formation and state-formation that my t(r)opological analysis of *rāj* includes.

First, I describe the ritual choreography of oracles and palanquins in oracular consultation, the means by which gods are constructed as sovereign subjects (i.e. *rājā*s), and important communal decisions are made by "asking [the deity]" (*puchnā*). Oracular consultation is organized as an exchange of questions and answers between the *vazīr* and the deity. The latter is made ritually present in two kinds of body: a palanquin that dances and an oracle who speaks. In each of the *ghori*s of Rohru and Tukpa, the *vazīr* (also *mothvīn mandīr* or *mahāttas*) is the traditional leader of the *khūnd,* whose work as head of the temple committee consists in making sure that the deity's needs are satisfied and orders are carried out. Modeled on the chief minister of a human king, the deity's *vazīr* acts as the administrator of the divine *rājā*'s commands. It is not his job to determine policy, but rather to execute it, by organizing the *khūnd* to put policy into practice. To learn the divine sovereign's orders, the *vazīr* poses a question to the god, addressing him in his palanquin form, and the god gives his answer in visual and verbal signs – that is to say, through the movements of his palanquin and the trance-speech of the oracle.

The dance-moves of the palanquin are conventionally coded to convey the mood of the god, but are mute. The oracle embodies the deity's power and gives voice to his "orders" (*hukm*) using everyday Pahari vernacular speech peppered with conventional oracular tropes and some occasional Hindi.[11] In this way, decisions are made on behalf of the community by their divine ruler according to an oracular idiom of sovereignty. In Rohru and Tukpa, the process is conceptualized as a five-step chain of command linking:

---

[11] In some parts of Kullu, especially the remote valley community of Malana, the oracle speaks in a divine language that no one else understands except the *vazīr,* who translates what he says into everyday speech. The authenticity of oracles is therefore assessed on the basis of whether they can speak this language of the gods. This was also the case I witnessed in Sangla, Kinnaur in 1988, where the *mahāttas* translated the divine speech of the oracle (*groksh*). On a more recent visit to Sangla, William Sax reported that only the oracle could understand the divine speech (personal communication 2006).

1) deity, 2) palanquin, 3) oracle, 4) *vazīr*, and 5) the *khūnd*. In his capacity as head of the temple committee, as well as traditional political leader and spokesman of the *khūnd*, the *vazīr* acts both as "the one who asks" (*pūchnevālā*), addressing particular questions to the deity-in-his-palanquin-form, and subsequently also as the "one-who-gives-the-orders" (*hukmdenevālā*)(see fig. 5).[12]

Drumming and the mobilization of power

In all this, drumming is the crucial means of evoking the deity's power (*śakti*) in order to animate the oracle, palanquin, and palanquin bearers. In oracular consultation, drumming orchestrates different moments of multiple empowerment as the god's *śakti* is: 1) *embodied* by the palanquin bearers; 2) *voiced* in the oracle's shaking-speech; and 3) *choreographed* in the palanquin dance, whose conventional movements both reflect and performthe god's mood and wishes in a ritual language everyone understands.

When the deity hears the rhythm of the drumming, I was told, he wants to dance. Being a disembodied person, however, he can only do so by using the bodies of his palanquin bearers, through whose legs he is enabled to move. While this sounds like a partial possession of the bearers, no loss of consciousness is involved as in the case of the oracle, who typically cannot recall what he says. But frequent reference to the "automatic" [sic] movements of the palanquin suggests that its bearers at least relinquish their volition by allowing the palanquin to move of its own accord and lead them wherever it will in a spectacle of automatic dancing.

---

[12] I learned of another more complex idiom of oracular consultation while visiting Rawain in 1988 and 1996, a western district of the former Garhwal kingdom not far to the east of Bashahr. Raj Mohan Ranga, *vazīr* of the Kaurava deity Karaṇ, described it as comprising "one deity and one oracle, but two *vazīr*s and two *khūnd*s" [see also Sax 2002]. The ritual roles resembled those in Rohru and Tukpa. The oracle is "the one who speaks" (*bolnevālā*) giving voice to the deity's wishes. As well as being "the one who asks" (*pūchnevālā*), the *vazīr* is also "the one who gives the orders" (*hukmdenevālā*), interpreting the deity's words to the people by issuing specific instructions and making sure they are carried out. Unlike in Rohru and Tukpa, however, there are two *vazīr*s, because the "warriors" (*khūnd* used in its individual sense) of the territory's dominant-caste community are conflictually organized in opposed moieties respectively named for the five Paṇḍavas and sixty Kauravas, heroes and villains of the *Mahābhārata* epic.

Fig. 5: Consulting Jabali Narayan. (Photo: P. Sutherland)

Everyone I consulted connected the spontaneous movements of the palanquin with the bodily perception of weight. Yogendra Chand, elected Member of the Legislative Assembly [M.L.A.] for Chaupal and son of the last reigning king of the former Jubbal state, gave a vivid description of "dancing" the deity.

The palanquin moves of its own accord, regardless of the conscious will of its bearers. Your job as a bearer is to respond and not drop it. Suddenly, it will become heavier on one side and you have to lower that shoulder, so the palanquin tips over and we think that the "palanquin is bowing" (*palgī jhuktā hai*). This is a sign of respect to another deity, a temple, a palace or a *rājā*. It is as if the deity moves the palanquin and you have to follow wherever it takes you -- around the temple, to a particular shrine or tree, through fields and streams, down embankments, over walls and rocky places. Your job is to keep up with the *deotā*, manage your footwork, not slip or let the palanquin fall.

The dancing of longhair palanquins combines four normal conventional moves – resting, moving forward or backward, bouncing up and down (see fig. 6), and bowing to the side – each of which conveys a sense of the deity's subjectivity by expressing his mood.[13] In a fifth less frequently used move, the palanquin seems to escape its bearers' control

---

[13] See Gell (1980).

as it keels over on its side and lies on the ground, its skirts in disarray. The meaning of this depends on context. The same gesture, when violently performed, indicates the god's extreme displeasure, but when gently executed allows the deity's power to be transferred to a recumbent patient in an act of healing. The palanquin is also laid on its side to enable a god to recharge his power, whenever he periodically returns to his mountain-lake birthplace, where his serpent-goddess (*nāginī*) mother dwells.

The Paradox of the Sovereign Subject

Foucault's social explanation of subject-formation by the internalization of norms and disciplines is initially useful to conceptualize the collective aspect of west Himalayan theistic subjection. Throughout the western Himalaya, social order is traditionally maintained by the threat that everyone in a *ghori* is liable to possession by the power of the local deity, if they incur his displeasure. The latter is strikingly exemplified in an extraordinary epidemic of mass possession among the women of Shil village reported by Emerson (Ibbetson, MacLagan & Rose 1919: 310), as well as in the quotidian temple rituals of Mahāsū, which normally involve the possession of multiple oracles. Individualistic or psychological conceptions of possession are of little help in theorizing such cases of mass theistic subjection. Yet social conceptions of collective subjectivity are similarly misleading in attempting to theorize the simultaneous lodging of theistic power in sites other than human, namely: objects, animals, food, palanquins, buildings, places, songs, rhythms, or drums, that is central to the performance of government by deity. Moreover, Foucault's relational model of power is inadequate to convey the substantialist nature of indigenous conceptions of *śakti*. It is precisely in the inter-media flow of power between human and non-human sites, however, that our peculiar object of study is formed: the subjectivity of theistic sovereigns. How then can we conceptualize a mode of subjection that involves not only human subjects and their divine rulers, but also the objects of material culture and the natural environment? What relation is thereby defined between subjectivity and objectivity?

To the extent that the presence of a god as a sovereign agent may be understood as a ritual effect, performed by the coordinated interaction of different ritual arts – theistic subjection (i.e. spirit-possession), trance-speech, palanquin movements, drumming, and so on – it is necessary to recognize the circularity involved in the process. In government by deity,

Fig. 6: Jabali Narayan Dances. (Photo: P. Sutherland)

the subjectivity of the sovereign is apparently constructed in and by the paradox of self-subjection – that is to say, the deity as sovereign is simultaneously presented as both subject of power and object of subjection. This personal doubling is both visualized and ritually enacted. Unmarked power (*śakti*) is made ritually available for political practice in the deity's dual embodiment in material and human forms – in particular, the palanquin and oracle.[14] On the one hand, the palanquin objectifies the theistic sovereign as agent – the subject of power, as it physically dominates its bearers, moving them apparently automatically where it will. But the sovereign power so embodied is mute, without political subjectivity. Filling this absence, on the other hand, the oracle enacts the subjectivity of the sovereign by giving him voice. But the oracle can only do so by becoming a patient – that is to say, by being the object of subjection, subjected to power, a mere medium. In this way, the subjectivity of the god as ruler is produced by a trope of splitting that seems to avoid the paradox of self-subjection. Power expresses itself as both agent and patient – simultaneously embodied as both subject and object *of* power. Theistic sovereignty is thus internally constructed by a figure of reversal, in which supreme power is subjected to itself as ritual other.

This simultaneous conjunction of sovereignty and subjection in the ritual performance of the ruler's subjectivity presents a striking variant to Butler's tropology of subject-formation. If subjectivity is produced by subordination to power, as Foucault and Butler propose, what kind of a subject is the sovereign? Instead of the discursive figure of the subject "turning against itself" to produce the interiority of individual subjectivity, west Himalayan origin myths describe the formation of theistic sovereigns by a double turn – the reversal of reversal. Power is initially turned back on itself to order its original wildness, when introjected into social space as a god. Subsequently, it is projected (often violently) outward in a ritual regime of exterior forms and performance that makes the god a figure of collective subjectivity – the community's externalized icon of identity, agency, and power. Far from being the symbol of the Hindu essences of patiency and superstition as colonial authors argued, the figure of the theistic sovereign in Rohru turns out to be the product and instrument of collective agency. That is to say, the community actively constructs its sovereignty in divine terms (here we are close to Durkheim) and, as we shall see, manages its foreign relations in similar terms, through ritual practices of divine action. A far cry from the orientalist image of Hindu India as "priest ridden", "mired in

---

[14] The deity takes material form in many ritual objects other than the palanquin. The mace and sword are especially important manifestations of his power.

superstition" and therefore incapable of rational world-ordering agency, we find in Rohru that the ritual effect of theistic sovereignty exemplifies and performs the circular process of creativity, in which groups become historical political agents as subjects of their own self-objectification (and here we are closer to Marx).

Thus far, we have learned that local forms of theistic sovereignty are constructed as the ordering of wild power by kingship – that is to say, by mythico-ritual tropes such as the conquest of demons and the domestication of gods. But what orders the power of royal gods so constructed, given that their local sovereignty is apparently self-legitimating? In particular, what regulates their external relations with each other? By way of conclusion, I answer this question by sketching the construction of three competing modes of theistic sovereignty, all associated with inter- or trans-local modes of political incorporation.

State-Formation and the Scale of Divine Kingships

Historians of the Indian state, who have sought to explain how peasant groups were incorporated in Hindu kingdoms, have persistently been hampered by their use of essentialist epistemologies. Thus, post-Independence accounts by Dumont, Heestermann, and Stein, according to Inden (1990: 211-2), echo the views of colonial authors in "see[ing] divine kingship" in pathological terms as "a symptom of India's deficient political institutions" – the "victim" of irreconcilable oppositions between transcendent cultural values and immanent social forms.

> Dumont treats it as a symptom of the systematic subjection of the political and economic to transcendent social and religious values...Heestermann looks at it as a symptom of India's foredoomed efforts to mediate between a transcendent value of renunciation and its opposite, a fragmented society of selfish local leaders. Finally, Stein sees it as the symptom of a transcendent cultural or ritual unity which is at odds with a segmented, local peasant society (Inden 1990: 211-2).

The effect of such an essentialist approach was to render invisible the constructive role of agency in state-formation – especially ritual agency. One particular symptom (to continue the pathological trope) of this dichotomizing view in accounts of Hindu kingship by Stein, Geertz, and Dirks, is the characteristic opposition between ritual and politics (or culture and power). Inden's insightful summary of Stein's analysis of the South Indian state (ibid: 206-211) is readily applicable to the other two authors, namely that unity and authority were thought to be differently constructed at different "levels" of the state, namely: "theatrically" by "ritual sovereignty" (i.e. royal patronage) at the center and

"pragmatically" by "chiefly authority" (i.e. caste and kinship) at the periphery. This opposition is problematic, argues Inden:

> It is as though there were gods worshipped and rites performed *only* at the royal capital and that these were all symbolically unifying, while political calculation and economic accumulation took place *only* at the local level, and that perceptions of self or communal interest brought about real coalitions there (ibid: 209) [my emphasis].

This is clearly not the case in Pahari polity, where gods and rituals construct all levels of political organization. As we have already seen, it is precisely practices of divinity and kingship, not essences of caste and kinship, that constitute and unify local rural polities in the western Himalayas. In what follows, I show that the same ritual processes also shape inter- and trans-local political formations. The evidence of contemporary Pahari religion shows that the ritual idiom of government by deity, with its choreography of oracles and palanquins, constructs different forms of "divine kingship" at *all* levels of traditional political organization.[15] In west Himalayan Hindu polity, I propose, we have divine kingship all the way down from the top or, perhaps to put it more pointedly, all the way up from bottom.

Expanding the geographical scale but keeping the metaphor of embodiment as my focus, in this final section I describe three variants of divine kingship and theistic sovereignty, each associated with the ritual incorporation of *khūnd*s at sacrificial assemblies in superordinate political formations, to wit: the local circle of allies, the interlocal Tikaral confederacy, and the Bashahr kingdom. In each case, the figure of the goddess Kali/Durga orders the incorporation of *khūnd*s and their gods by ritual tropes of spatial and gender reversal to constitute a scale of divine kingships with varying forms of theistic sovereignty.

Egalitarian Kingship and Shared or Shifting Sovereignty

Interaction among *khūnd*s and their gods is governed by an egalitarian idiom of shared or shifting sovereignty. In Rohru and Tukpa, relations between local peasant communities are ordered by two kinds of ritual

---

[15] Clearly both ritual and politics operate at every level of spatial organization. But historical evidence of ritual patronage beyond the royal center is hard to come by, given that surviving textual sources were commissioned by kings and generally represent a view from above. One important exception cited by Inden (1990:220, n.7) is the evidence of the agency of "rural citizenries" inscribed in the "charters of the Karnataka during the Rashtrakuta and Chola imperial formations (eighth to thirteenth centuries...)", which give details of the assemblies of rural and urban caste associations.

t(r)opology: 1) reciprocal visiting every three to six years among *khūnds,* whose gods are related by particularizing metaphors of "brotherhood" or "friendship" and 2) by totalizing sacrificial assemblies held once every 25 and 60 years by each and every *khūnd* in the area, to which all beings in a local world are invited – gods, demons, and ancestors, as well as brothers, friends and affines. The royal function of sacrificial patronage performed by gods at such events exemplifies the collaborative, competitive, and sometimes combative, culture of autonomy among *khūnd*s in Rohru.[16] Equality is never a social or political given; always already a precarious achievement, it has to be ritually made and remade. This agonistic process is evident in the performance of Rohru's most prestigious sacrifice, *śānt mela* (lit. peace festival), during which equality is potentially put at risk by, but simultaneously rescued from, the tendency of patronage to fashion hierarchical relations.

The performance of Śānt threatens to distort the interlocal field of equality among peers by causing an uneven distribution of cultural capital. The extension of hospitality to allied *khūnds* and Brahman clients creates a centralized network of prestation and indebtedness, within which sacrificial patrons are positioned as *primus inter pares.* To counteract this disequilibrating potential, the performance of Śānt is so organized to insure that the royal function of sacrificial patron circulates equally among peers, thus preventing any localized accumulation of symbolic power. Every *khūnd* is a king. This is achieved by complementary strategies of sharing based on displacement and timing.

During the three-day duration of the festival, the prestigious function of "sacrificial patron" (*jajmān*) is made to circulate among all participants (both host and guests) by sharing the task of providing the numerous sacrificial victims. In addition, at a larger calendrical time-scale, the site of performance is made to migrate from the place of one *khūnd* to another, thereby insuring that no single community becomes a permanent center of patronage. Thus, *Śānt* maintains equality among peers by constructing a shared or shifting form of sovereignty whose signature is the ritual body of the goddess.

The customary construction at Śānt of a *maṇḍala* to the goddess Kali/Durga in the temple-courtyard produces a characteristically Hindu version of the body politic metaphor, in which peace (*śānt*) among agents in a local world is performed by the ritual interaction of gods, caste communities, affines, ancestors, and demons. Upon arrival, the vehicles of

---

[16] In neighboring districts such as Tukpa in Kinnaur, the *khūnd*s of Rohru are notorious for their violent and boastful culture of interlocal feuding (*boirāla*), whose celebration in innumerable narrative songs is clearly not an "orientalist construction".

invited gods are seated around the *maṇḍala* in an "assembly" (*khumblī*) in positions that are spatially ordered by caste – the pitchers of the Brahman priestly gods to the east; the palanquins of Khash-Rajput royal deities to the south. This gathering of gods around a single female center gives visual and dramatic form to the classic *Devīmahātmya* narrative of the creation of the goddess Durga's body from the aggregated powers of the thirty-three gods of Indralok (heaven). In a similar trope of gender and number inversion, the twin forms of the Hindu goddess are spatially counterposed to form cosmological horizons, that is to say: the multiple/malevolent Kalis that dwell in the peripheral mountain-top wilderness (*parbat*) are unified and transformed in the singular/benevolent Durga evoked at the settlement center. In this composite female figure of theistic sovereignty formed by the gathering of gods and the transfiguration of the goddess, interlocal political order is metaphorically enacted at *śānt* as the pacification of disordering entities from outside (*bahār*) – local Kalis, demons (*rākaṣ*), ghosts (*bhūt-pret*) and forest-powers (*jangalī śakti*s).

Fig. 7: The ritual t(r)ope of encounter (*milin*) (Photo: P. Sutherland).

Under this world-ordering sign of "pacification" (*śānt karnā*), alliances between local gods are ritually renewed by dancing the protocol of encounter called *milin* (lit. meeting). In a melee of drummers, temple-

officers, trumpeters, and "warriors" wielding axes, swords and umbrellas, palanquins and their bearers seek out allies, jostle for position, move alongside each other, bow sideways, and touch heads together in a "brotherly" gesture of greeting. As they do so, their oracles enact an ambivalent diplomatic ritual involving another t(r)ope of sword-reversal.

The potential violence of sovereignty is deferred, but not entirely disavowed, as the two oracles embrace each other in an ambiguous gesture of negated threat. Figure 7 shows the two oracles embracing between their respective gods, each man holding his deity's sword of authority clasped in his right hand behind his counterpart's back.

Elective Kingship and Embodied Sovereignty

If the figure of the goddess Kali/Durga at Śānt embodies the shared or shifting sovereignty of equality among *khūnd*s and their "kings", the Pabīn sacrifice marks the emergence of hierarchy in an elective form of kingship.

Both Burton Stein (1983) and Nicholas Dirks (1987) have proposed that royal patronage was constitutive of hierarchy in medieval south Indian "sacred kingship", which, they argue, replaced the Vedic institution of the "sacred king". The sacrificial embodiment of divine power by the Vedic king in the *rājasūya, abhiṣeka* and *aśvamedha* rituals[17] was, they suggest, supplanted by a *bhakti* (devotional) discourse of enactment and non-violent worship (*pūjā*). In the latter, the king deployed the sovereignty of his tutelary god in ritual acts of patronage and prestation by constructing exemplary temples and granting land to Brahmans to worship the royal deity beyond the capital. In the process, though Stein does not express it as such, the king took ritual possession of space as domain by promoting theological change. This perhaps oversimplified view of historical change in south Indian polity is problematized by comparison with the data from Bashahr, where neither blood sacrifice was displaced by *pūjā,* nor embodiment by enactment. The primary difference on which I focus is the t(r)opology of state-formation. Pahari ritual memory presents an alternative history of divine kingship as viewed from below, in which the creation of translocal forms of sovereignty was not limited to the top-down creation of networks of clientage by kings, but also involved the ritual construction of translocal political formations from below. This

---

[17] The *rājasūya* was the royal ritual of inauguration involving sacrifice and anointing. *Abhiṣeka* refers to any ritual that involves the consecration of an image, temple or person. The *aśvamedha* was the year-long Vedic horse-sacrifice, by means of which a king proclaimed his paramountcy by conquering the quarters.

process is evident in the gathering of *khūnd*s and their divine rulers at sacrificial assemblies at all levels of political organization in the state.

My second sacrificial assembly, *pabīn* sacrifice, displays the emergence of royal hierarchy in the sovereign figure of the so-called *gana* of Tikaral. According to Sir Herbert Emerson (colonial administrator of the Bashahr kingdom, resident of Rohru and Tukpa, and amateur ethnographer of Pahari religion in the first two decades of the 20th century), the *gana* was a male child installed as a "proto-king" whose reign lasted just a few years until he reached the "age of reason", when another *gana* had to be chosen. The *gana* also acted as an oracle, determining policy by divination, and as such served as the superordinate sovereign of the Kanait confederacy of the five *khūnd*s of Tikaral – each locally governed by its own Nag or serpent-god. From what Emerson tells us, the *gana*'s most important function was to preside as sacrificial patron over the now-defunct sacrifice to Kali at Pabīn.

According to my fieldwork, Pabīn was last enacted more than one hundred years ago at its usual site, the forest-cave of the demon Cisralu. The latter is a residual form of the demon-king Kirmat Danu,[18] whose foundational "rule by demon" (*rākaṣ kā rāj*) was displaced by Mahāsū's epochal establishment of government by deity throughout the region. The figure of the *gana* apparently embodied the aggregated power of the five local gods of Tikaral in a non-egalitarian form of translocal polity, in which sovereignty was ritually constructed at the Pabīn festival as a scale of powers involving not only the *gana*, but also the demon Cisralu and the goddess Kali. In another ritual trope of reversal, the theistic sovereignty of the *gana*, as superordinate ruler of settled space, was periodically reordered in the forest at Pabīn by a heteroprax sacrifice offered to the superior powers of the wilderness, namely the anthropophagous couple of the cave-dwelling demon-king and the mountain-top goddess.[19]

According to Emerson, the *gana* was selected from a group of candidates by the agency of the five gods of Tikaral, and his body was imbued with their collective power in a ritual that blurs Stein's distinction

---

[18] The deity, Mahasu, is said to have gained regional paramountcy by defeating the incumbent demon-king Kirmat Danu. The latter's power, according to the origin myth still told at Mahasu's cult center, Hanol, was destroyed when the demon was hacked to pieces. But in an alternative version of the story, which is also still current on the periphery of Mahasu country in Rohru, three of the pieces, the tongue, the tail and the heart escaped the site of dismemberment and became powerful demons in their own right. The heart was reincarnated as the demon, Cisralu (see Ibbetson, MacLagan and Rose 1919: 304-7 and Sutherland 1998: 330).

[19] Following the Frazerian theme of sacrificial kingship, Emerson (n.d.: ch.12) argued that the retiring *gana* may have been the victim offered in Kali's cauldron at the demon's cave.

between the embodied sovereignty of the sacred king and the enacted sovereignty of sacred kingship.

The *gana* presents a third alternative – an oracular form of elected kingship. While the "Vedic" idiom of ritual embodiment is retained, the ontological distinction between the ruler and his god in Stein's notion of sacred kingship is collapsed in the habitus of theistic subjection that characterizes government by deity. In the Tikaral confederacy, sovereignty was doubly constituted by theistic election and multiple theistic embodiment. The boy appointed as *gana* was jointly elected by the five confederate gods as their king (*rājā*),[20] and their collective powers (*śakti*) were transferred to his human body and person by their respective oracles. "Each of the five diviners", in trance, "lays the standard of his deity – usually a sword or dagger – on the head, hands and other parts of the boy's body" (Emerson n.d.: 12,4). Emerson quotes the following local view: "The gana is chosen by the gods and is endowed by them with divine powers. He is therefore both a god and a *rājā*" (ibid).

This incorporation of multiple powers by the *gana* recalls Inden's (1978:46) analysis of the royal rite of anointing (*abhiṣeka*) described in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. In that Vedic rite, the king was anointed with the essences of the four castes (*varṇa*s), whose representatives were arranged around the throne at the cardinal points. Thus, the king became the cosmic Puruṣa, by whose sacrificial dismemberment the constituent parts of the world (including the four castes) were originally created. In recombining the latter's dismembered limbs [i.e. the four *varṇa*s], the *abhiṣeka* ritual constructed the king as the quintessence [i.e fifth element] of the body politic in a centripetal movement of empowerment that reversed time and centered the world in his sovereign person.

The incorporation of the constituencies of a polity in its sovereign's body is explicit in the consecration of the *gana*. The *śakti* of the five gods of Tikaral is transmitted to all parts of the infant's body – not just to the head as in the *abhiṣeka*. In this case, however, it is the divine powers of local polities not castes (i.e. *khūnd*s not *varṇa*s) that were incorporated in the *gana*/king in a ritual trope that reverses Puruṣa's dismemberment in a masculine version of Durga's birth by aggregation.

---

[20] According to Emerson (n.d.: ch.12), the candidates were arranged in a line, then the palanquins of the five gods moved along the line and selected their choice by bowing towards one of the boys. When the same boy had been chosen three times by all the gods, the decision was considered binding.

Dynastic Kingship and Assembled Sovereignty

We can now apply the lessons learned from government by deity and the *gana* to reconceptualize divine kingship in its usual Hindu sense as the theological construction of a human king.

As elsewhere in India, the kings of Bashahr were conceptualized as divinely appointed "ministers" (*vazīr*) of the state/dynastic deity, in this case the goddess Bhimakali. This status as ministers of a theistic sovereign was inherited from the legendary first king, Aniruddh, who, according to the royal foundation myth (a local version of a well-known Puranic narrative),[21] was anointed by Bhimakali after gaining control of the so-called six Khunts by defeating their ruler, the incumbent demon-king, Banasur. As Aniruddh was Krishna's nephew, the divinity of the Bashahr kings was constructed by the narrative trope of descent from a god. Thus far, we are on familiar Indic terrain.

What makes the Bashahr case unusual and instructive is the participation of local gods in constructing the divinity of the king at Dasara – the annual royal assembly and sacrifice. As in neighbouring Kullu, the Dasara ritual at the ceremonial capital of the former Bashahr kingdom involves a double congregation of both human and divine subjects. The hundred local gods that are said to assemble in Kullu every year are the focus of an international tourist attraction for Himachal. By comparison, the Bashahr Dasara is a local affair attended by only a handful of deities. In both cases, however, the routes traced by gods and their retainers processing from rural temples to the former royal capital reveal the large-scale spatial construction of kingship in each state. To understand this, it is necessary to follow indigenous conceptions of divine power (*śakti*) as collective agency, already discussed. In charting the geography of *śakti* defined by the processional movements of gods that come to Dasara, it is evident that the theistic sovereignty of the Bashahr king was spatially constructed by the same ritual t(r)ope of gathering, we have already seen at Śānt and in the figure of the *gana*. Thus, the power of the king is measured by the number of local gods that assemble at Sarahan, and the sovereignty embodied in the state-goddess Bhimkali is the performative effect of the aggregation of their multiple male powers at her temple. Once again, as we have already seen, power comes from

---

[21] The dominant royal foundation myth associates the establishment of a second royal capital in Sarahan with the rise of a chiefly dynasty based in their original seat, Kamru. It does so by linking the origin myth of the Kamru deity, Bhadrinarayan , to the all-India Puranic myth of Banasura and Vicitralekha through the bridging device of the god Aniruddh, who figures in both the Banasura and Bhadrinarayan narratives.

outside and sovereignty is ritually constructed at a superordinate center by reversal – in this case of its gender, number and location.

Formerly "in the era of kings", 123 "ordinary" and "great" deities assembled at the state ceremonial capital, Sarahan, for Dasara – deities from all parts of the kingdom that embodied the powers of its various constituent groups and their domains (mainly *ghori*s and *parganā*s). Each god was accompanied by the local leaders and armed warriors of a *khūnd*. On arrival at the capital, the gods congregated at the Bhimakali temple, the *khūnd*s massed to form the royal army, and the local leaders convened in the royal darbar, each bringing with them the king's share of the grain-heap – i.e. tax in kind. While this convergence of symbolic, military and economic capital might be seen as evidence of subjection to the king, I suggest that it also demonstrates that the power and authority of the king was dependent on, and actively produced by, the acquiescence and agency of his subjects.

Nowadays, in contrast to the near-by Kullu festival which is subsidized by the state (see Daniela Berti in this volume), Sarahan Dasara is attended by a mere ten local gods. But despite these much-reduced numbers, the choreography of the gods I witnessed there, in 1988 and 1994, gives a good idea of the former political significance of ritual. In particular, it showed the complex construction of divine kingship in several ways: in the parallel agency of gods and human leaders; in the mutual agency of ruler and ruled; in the pervasive symbolism of kingship at all levels of political organization; and in the ritual embodiment of the goddess Bhimakali.

As rural parties converge on Sarahan, traveling on foot across mountainous terrain, the parallel agency of gods and humans is plain to see. The gods in their palanquins clearly embody the local sovereignty of the peasant communities that transport them. While the latter no longer bear arms or bring taxes, the construction of divine kingship at Dasara is evident in the joint ritual action of local gods and leaders. On arrival at Sarahan, each god goes directly to the Bhimakali temple to acknowledge his allegiance to the state/dynastic goddess, then, after the son of the last reigning king of Bashahr has arrived in his motorcade and worshipped the goddess, the rural leaders renew their allegiance to the king in the palace. A four-hour fire-sacrifice is performed to the accompaniment of drumming to evoke the power of the goddess, then an assembly of local gods in palanquins is convened to escort the chariot of the state-god, Raghunath, (Bhimakali's champion or *bīr*) in a grand procession celebrating Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya.[22]

---

[22] The two-inch high gold image of Raghunath is said to be a trophy of war, captured from the neighbouring Kullu kings in the 17th century.

Viewed from afar, in spatio-temporal terms, the power at the center is annually renewed by the ritual convergence of local groups and gods from the periphery. While the power of royal patronage was clearly once important in producing this assembly of clients, it is also evident that the king's wealth and authority were dependent on the mutual consent of local groups to renew their loyalty, pay their taxes, and contribute fighting men to the army. If these were withdrawn, as they were in the revolt of 1859,[23] the king would have neither wealth nor might.

Much of the t(r)opology of *rāj* performed at the Sarahan Dasara belongs to the familiar legacy of brahmanical discourse found throughout India – the legend of Banasur, the Navaratra festival, the royal darbar, and the reference to Rama. What distinguishes this Pahari version of the rite is the indigenous idiom of government by deity. All of the latter's characteristic ritual t(r)opes reappear in the Sarahan performance. The dramatis personae of *deotā*s, palanquins and oracles, the choreographic repertoire of consultation, encounter, procession and assembly, and the symbolic geometries of built form and movement constitute a set of conventional procedures for ordering power among rulers and ruled in theistic terms of kingship and sovereignty – not only in local polities and the Tikaral confederacy, but also in the former kingdom of Bashahr. In particular, the establishment of the royal Bhimakali temple reproduces the characteristic set of temple officers and techniques we have already described for *khūnd*s, according to which an oracle (*groksh* in Kinnauri) formerly enabled the king of Bashahr to determine policy by consulting the state/dynastic goddess.

Dispersed throughout a west Himalayan regional polity at every scale of political organization, these t(r)opes may be understood as the ritual equivalent of a political constitution, whose guiding principles are embodied in practice rather than being textualized as law. If this is the case, we shall have to rethink those structuralist paradigms reviewed above, which conceptualize the Hindu state in oppositional terms of theatrical ritual and real power, and think instead in performative terms

---

[23] The *Himachal Pradesh District Gazetteer: Kinnaur* (1971: 62-3) gives the following account of the revolt. "In 1859 there was an insurrection in the state headed by Fateh Singh, an illegitimate brother of the *rājā.* It is generally alluded to as the dum. Dum is a name given to any popular combination raised for the redress of special grievances, or for enforcing claims to certain rights. It was thus a public demonstration of discontent against the ruler. The method followed for action appeared to be for the malcontents to leave their fields uncultivated till their grievances were redressed. They seldom resorted to violence, being content with the assurance that the apprehension of loss of revenue owing to the general abandonment of cultivation would induce the state officials to come to terms with them as soon as possible".

of a spatial field of "graduated sovereignties".[24] In such a field, both gods and humans are made rulers by the same repertoire of ritual t(r)opes, chief among which kingship signifies the world-forming and world-maintaining power of agency.

References

Butler, Judith. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. by Steven Randall. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.

Dirks, Nicholas. 1987. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Emerson, Sir Herbert. n.d. Manuscript no. IOR 32313 MSS Eur E 321 (untitled and unpublished manuscript on Kanait religion). London: India Office Library.

Frasch, Tilman. 2003. "'In an Octopussy's Garden:' Of Cakravartins, Little Kings and a New Model of the Early State in South and Southeast Asia". In *Sharing Sovereignty – Royalty on a Small Scale. The Little Kingdom in South Asia*, edited by G. Berkemer and M. Frenz, pp. 31-61. Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag.

Fuller, C. J. 1992. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Galey, Jean-Claude. 1989. "Reconsidering Kingship in India: an Ethnological Perspective". *History and Anthropology* 4: 123-87.

Gell, Alfred. 1980. "The Gods at Play: Vertigo and Possession in Muria Religion". *Man* 15: 219-248.

Himachal Pradesh District Gazetteers: Kinnaur. 1971. Edited by M.D. Mamgain. Ambala: Quick Printers.

Hobsbawm, E.J. 1978 [1959]. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ibbetson, Sir Denzil, Sir Edward MacLagan and H. A. Rose. 1919. *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and Northwest Frontier Province. Vol. 1. Lahore*: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab.

Inden, Ronald B. 1990. *Imagining India*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

---

[24] I am adapting a concept used by Aihwa Ong in *Flexible Citizenship* (1999: 215) to describe a very different historical context: the uneven constitution of authority, citizenship and territory in the neo-liberal biopolitics of Southeast Asian states such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

— 1978. "Ritual, Authority and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship". In *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, edited by J. F. Richards, pp.28-73. Madison: University of Wisconsin Publication Series.

Morris, Rosalind. 2002. "A Room with a Voice: Mediation and Mediumship in Thailand's Information Age." In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by F. D. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod and B. Larkin, pp. 383-396. Berkeley & London: University of California Press.

Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Sax, William. 2002. *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pandav Lila of Garhwal*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Stein, Burton. 1983. "Mahanavami: Medieval and Modern Kingly Ritual in South Asia". In *Essays on Gupta Culture*, edited by B. Smith, pp.67-90. Columbia, Missouri: South Asian Books.

Sutherland, Peter. 1998. *Travelling Gods and Government by Deity: An Ethnohistory of Power, Representation and Agency in West Himalayan Polity*. D. Phil dissertation. Oxford University.

— 2003. "Very Little Kingdoms: the Calendrical Order of West Himalayan Hindu Polity". In *Sharing Sovereignty – Royalty on a Small Scale. The Little Kingdom in South Asia*, edited by G. Berkemer and M. Frenz, pp. 31-61. Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag.

— 2004. "Local Representations of History and the History of Local Representation: Timescapes of Theistic Agency in the Western Himalayas". *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 25/26: 80-118.

Tambiah, Stanley. 1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge Un. Press.

Thomas, Nicholas and Caroline Humphrey (eds). 1994. *Shamanism, History and the State*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Rituals of the Warrior *khūnd*[1]

William Sax

In the upper Tons River basin in the Western Himalayas, at the border of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh, the landscape is divided into several tiny kingdoms. The kings of these territories are not, however, humans. They are gods, who have both civil and criminal authority, and who rule from their temples and make their decisions known by means of their oracles. Peter Sutherland puts it nicely when he writes (this issue) that

> In personal matters, *deotā*s diagnose misfortune, heal sickness, welcome brides, bless first-born males, settle legal disputes, or mete out punishment in the form of *dosh*. In communal matters, *deotā*s select new temple officials, formulate group policy, distribute grazing and irrigation rights, define territory, fix dates for festivals, issue invitations to other gods, engage in diplomatic relations, and formerly waged war with their magic. In ecological and cosmic matters, moreover, *deotā*s control the weather (Nags in particular have power over rain), ensure the fertility of crops and flocks, protect against demonic disorder, maintain the presence of life-giving *śakti* in their domains, and predict the course of the coming year.

Each of these divine kingdoms is centered on the god's temple, from where he rules as a divine king. Two of these divine kings are famous from Hindu mythology: Karna and Duryodhana, villains of the great Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*. Although they were friends and allies in the epic, here they are in relations of perpetual rivalry with each other, and also with the third local ruler, the god Mahasu. To what extent can these tiny territorial/political/cultic units really be understood as "kingdoms"? Is this anything more than just an exotic metaphor? Elsewhere (Sax 2000, 2002) I have shown in detail how the language and metaphors associated with Karna (called "king Karna" or *rājā karaṇ* by his subjects), are thoroughly royal, and that his kingship is no metaphor, but rather a literal translation of local cultural understandings. In this chapter, I would like to go further and use traditional Indian political theory to argue that in these three territories, other constituent elements of a traditional Hindu "kingdom" are present as well.
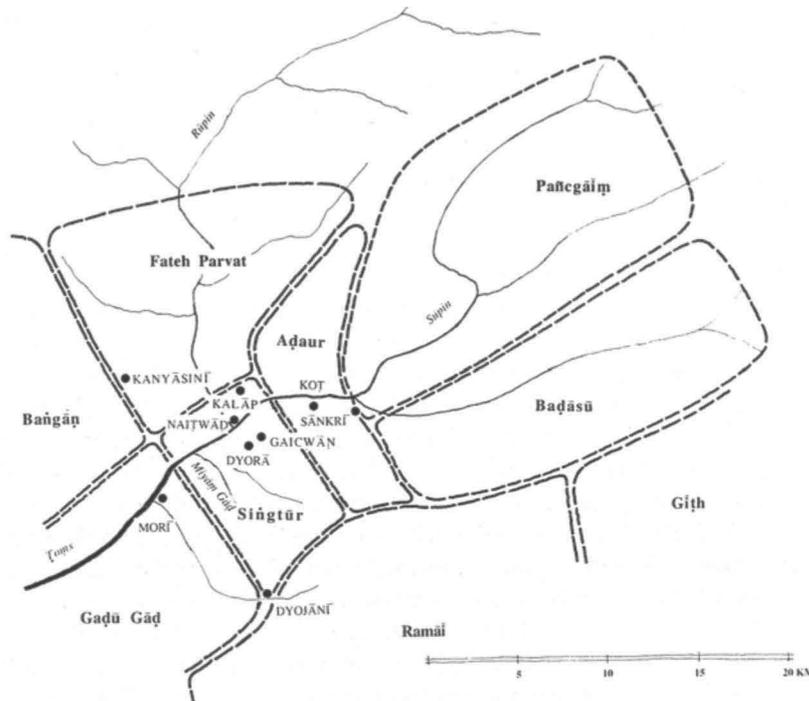

**Fig. 1: Schematic map of the Upper Tons River basin.
(Drawing: N. Gutschow)**

According to the most well-known ancient Indian political theorist, Kautilya the author of the Arthaśāstra, a kingdom has "seven limbs": king, country, minister, army, fortified town, treasure, and ally. If we look at the ritual-political structure of the upper Tons basin, we see that nearly all of these "limbs" are present. First is of course the king, who is the pivotal point of the system, as well as its conceptual centre and the source of sovereign authority. The three "divine kings" Karna, Duryodhana/Someshvara[2], and Mahasu each has his own territory or *deś*, the second of Kautilya's seven "limbs". These territories had (and still have) rather precise boundaries, and the god rules them from a central temple: the village of Dyora for King Karna, the village of Jakhol for Duryodhana/Someshvar, and the village of Hanol for Mahasu (see map).

---

[2] There is some controversy regarding the god's identity, even amongst his own subjects. It seems that he was formerly known as "Duryodhana," but is increasingly referred to as "Someshvara," a form of Shiva (Sax 2006).

These are analogous to the *pūrī* or "fortified town" in Kautilya's scheme; indeed, warfare and feuding were so endemic in this region that many temples, and most of the *bhaṇḍār* or storehouses regularly associated with them, were fortified (see fig. 2). They were built so that in times of war or feud, their defenders could lock the door and withdraw to the upper levels, where weapons were stored along with rocks that could be hurled on their enemies. The fourth of the seven limbs is the *mantrī* or minister, who clearly corresponds to the *vazīr* of these Western Himalayan divine kingdoms.[3] Conzelmann and Berti show (this volume) that in the kingdoms of Mandi and Kullu, the human king acted as minister to the state god. In the upper Tons River Basin, as well as in the former kingdom of Bushahr discussed by Sutherland (this volume) the ruling god is also served by a *vazīr*, normally high-ranking Rajput, who has considerable authority. He manages the god's affairs, but is clearly subordinate to him.

Fig.2: Bhaṇḍār (Photo: W. Sax)

*Vazīr*s have often been politically powerful figures in the past – especially the vazīrs of Mahasu, the "divine king" with the largest territory – and they continue to hold important political office today. The current *vazīr*s

---

[3] The Perso-Arabic word *vazīr* is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *mantri*, or advisor – the word used by Kautilya in his enumeration of the seven "limbs."

of Mahasu, Karna, and Duryodhana/Someshvara, are all involved in local electoral politics as well as temple administration, and much more could be said about them, but for reasons of space I focus instead on the fifth of Kautilya's seven "limbs" – the army (*senā*), and its rituals.

Traditionally, hostile relations between the tiny divine kingdoms of Karna, Duryodhana/Someshvara, and Mahasu were expressed primarily through sheep rustling and feuding. Parties of warriors from one god's territory would join together and steal the livestock of a rival's subjects, or capture their women, and such actions naturally provoked retaliation. Local ballads preserve the memory of such feuds, which often lasted for generations and were sometimes characterized by acts of great brutality, including the taking of enemy heads, which were then offered at the cult centre of the warrior clan (see below and Vidal, this volume).

The term for warrior is *khūnd*, which local persons normally derive from the Perso-Arabic word *khun*, or "blood." A *khūnd* is a warrior and a fighter, someone who is willing to spill blood – either his own, or that of his enemies – in defense of his divine king and territory. As a song from Bangan has it,

> A *khūnd* has his teeth in his stomach
>
> A *khūnd* steals sheep
>
> a *khūnd* fights
>
> and a *khūnd* abducts women (Zoller 1996)

Vidal, in his contribution to this volume, defines the *khūnd* as the "dominant caste" of the region, with a prominent martial ethic.[4] Zoller has also emphasized the *khūnds'* identity as warriors (1996:3), and Sutherland stresses their function as defenders of territory, adding that the core meaning of the term *khūnd* is "warrior" (1998: 180-83).

The *khūnd* are clearly distinguished from the Rawats, also known as *Khaś* Rajput.[5] Traditionally the groups did not intermarry, although this restriction appears to be breaking down in recent years. The *Khaś* Rawats eat only male rams, while *khūnd* eat female goats, as well as male and

---

[4] See also Vidal (1982: 46).

[5] In most parts of the Central and Western Himalaya, the term *khas* or *khaś* is thought to refer to low-ranking, indigenous (as opposed to immigrant) Brahmans and Rajputs, and is therefore a term of opprobium or even abuse (Sax, 1991). In the upper Tons River Basin however, the *khas* are the highest-ranking members of the *kṣatriya varṇa*, often thought to be immigrants, and they are followed by the *khūnd*. In Nepal, the term acquired a derogatory meaning well after the 18th century, but originally applied to all Arya immigrants, including the ruling dynasties of the Karnali basin (see Adhikary, 1988).

female sheep.[6] Distinctions between the two groups are most clearly expressed in their general cultural style, what Bourdieu would call their *habitus.* Rawats are more refined and aristocratic, serving for example as literate administrators. This is why, without exception, the *vazīr*s of the reigning deities are drawn from amongst their ranks. *Khūnd*s on the other hand are warriors: rough, fierce, quick to anger, always ready to fight and drink.

The martial style of the *khūnd* is closely associated with pastoralism, which was the main economic activity in traditional times, and remains very important for the contemporary economy. Much of the feuding between the various territories centered on pastoral disputes. Typical causes of feuds were competition for the rich, high-altitude pastures, the charging of a tax or fee to outsiders for the use of one's own pastures; and the refusal of outsiders to pay such a fee. One can go so far as to say that in this part of the world, "treasure" – the sixth of Kautilya's seven limbs – is reckoned in heads of livestock, especially sheep and goats.

Even today, when so much of the old system has changed, the fierce loyalty that people feel toward their regional god is very strong. To live in a particular territory is to be the subject of its god, and the enemy of his rival. One of the ways these allegiances and rivalries were expressed was in terms of feuding, which had an important ritual dimension. According to the local historian Bijlawan (2003: 48-50), the god would inform villagers that their rivals were grazing on his land. They would then send a group of four or five youths to hide at place where the enemy's flocks were expected to arrive, and hide there. People from other villages who worshiped the same god would cooperate, believing that otherwise he would become angry with them. This secret group, called *khopī*, would spy on the rivals for some time, living without fire, and eating simple foods such as dry-fried flour (*sattū).* Eventually they would return with information about the size of the flock, the numbers of shepherds and dogs, etc. Men would then be sent to every local village to announce that a sheep-rustling (*dhārā*) was about to occur. This summoning or information-giving was called *jaul.* Men would assemble at the god's temple, and reach the site of the *dhārā* during the night, because this is the time the goats stay with the goatherds. They would take their weapons with them – swords, axes, and later, guns – and go to the site of the *dhārā,* singing war-songs. Sometimes they took the god's image with them, at other times they would only take his drums. After a successful *dhārā* they would take the shepherds' clothes, rations, cooking pots, and the *bhāṇḍ,* which Bijlawan refers to as the "symbol" (*cinh*) of the god, a ritual object

---

[6] I have been quite struck, during my several years' research in the area, at the degree to which Rawats express nausea at the very thought of eating female goats.

that protects the animals and the shepherds, preserves their health, and increases the number of animals. It is usually a bell, or a pot, or (more rarely) a ram. They would take the sheep and goats too, of course, then return to their own temple where they would sacrifice a few of them as an "auspicious sign" (*saguṇ*), then divide their flesh amongst themselves.

One of the richest sources for understanding such feuds is local folklore, and especially the *paṃwārā* ballads still sung on public occasions, many of which describe famous feuds from times past. These ballads are the very forms of collective memory. I recorded one such *paṃwārā*, called Tilotta, from the bard Daya Das of Kharsali Village near Jamnotri in September, 1997, and summarize it here. Of particular interest is the way the song describes the systematic destruction and desecration of ritual elements and spaces.

> Two brothers named Nara and Biju went to the fair in Uttarkashi. They were very handsome, with blue eyes and "teeth that shone like birds' beaks". At the fair, they saw a beautiful young woman from the Sapatu clan of *khūnd*s. They abducted her, in the process breaking her nosering, a symbol of marriage, and took her to the tiny "kingdom" (*rājya*) of Tilotta. When the girl's relatives found out about this, they gathered all the warriors (*sitalā*) from their clan, as well as those from all the neighboring land divisions. They prepared for war, and took the palanquin of their god Someshvar with them to their enemies' cult centre in Tilotta. (This cult centre is called a *thāt* – I discuss these *thāt*s at length below). They played their war drums from across the valley in Gyamsu, and the people of Tilotta were terrified. They hid in nearby villages, and in the cattle sheds of their neighbors. When the avenging army reached Tilotta, they broke the chain on their temple storehouse, and they opened the secret chamber where the gods' treasures were stored. They destroyed the whole building and threw it in the river. They danced a victory dance, twirling their axes, and found the culprits, who confessed. They let their (low-caste) musicians stay in the temple in Tilotta, and even sacrificed a pig there! As the bard says, "there was so much destruction in the village that it was like mixing mustard seeds and millet!"

It is clear from this account, and many others, that feuding and inter-clan warfare involved numerous ritual elements. For example, sheep-rustling itself was ritualized, involving the warriors' assembly at the god's temple, the planning of the attack under the god's leadership (presumably speaking through his possessed oracle), a battle procession in which the god (or at least his drums) was brought on his palanquin, the desecration of the enemy's temple and other ritual objects, and a victory procession following a successful raid, culminating with the driving of the sheep around one's own temple. Just as the god's procession around or through his kingdom creates and reiterates his sovereignty, so the ritualized desecration of the enemy's temple confirms one's victory over him.

Next, I want to discuss in greater detail the rituals associated with the cult centres of these clans, which are called *thāt* (in the areas ruled by Karna and Duryodhana /Someshvar) or *jāgā* (in the areas ruled by Mahasu). Most large villages in Rawain have at least one *thāt*, which may be upwards of a meter high and fifteen meters long, and which normally take the form of a large platform made of hewn stones. Each *thāt* is associated with an aniconic goddess, the "mother of the *thāt*" (*thāt-mātā*) or "mother of the *jāgā*" (*jāgā-mātā*). These goddesses are extremely blood-thirsty and violent, and are thought of as the source of the warriors' martial power and energy. Formerly, the *khūnd* offered their enemies' heads there, thus performing a kind of ritual exchange: the sacrifice of an enemy's head in return for assistance in battle.

The *thāt*, their goddesses, and the associated rituals, can be compared with the territories, cult headquarters, and associated rituals of the "divine kingdoms". The processions of the divine king encompass the god's entire territory. The *thāts* however are specific to particular clans: the "mother-goddesses" of the clan cult centers (*thāt-mātā*) are worshiped by no one outside the clan, and are believed to be the ones who "make" the *khūnd* fight: they incite or inspire violence so that they may receive the bloody sacrifices of battle. This is clear from the *paṃwārā* entitled *Chandu*, which is remarkable for its similarity to the *Mahābhārata*. It tells the story of five brothers who successfully resisted the oppression of the neighboring, rival god Duryodhana after a long period of oppression. As the bard sings,

> Call them the Kauravas and Pandavas:
>
> they were defeated and died.
>
> The two clans used to live peacefully
>
> But now it's a war of the pastures![7]

According to the ballad, an upland group associated with the Kauravas (the Bhungaratya clan in Duryodhans's territory) used to collect a "grazing tax" from a lowland group associated with the Pandavas (the Phandatya clan from Karna's territory). This went on for twelve years until one day, the Phandatya's clan goddess Nakuti[8] inspired them to

---

[7] *kaurav na bolū paṇḍāūm*
hanikyek bhānulo joddhā
tāmu na paḍe bhungarāṭhyā phaṇḍātyā
silaun māner kī yoddh

[8] In the eighth year of the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, his troops led by Najabat Khan, the Faujdar of the Kangra Hills, suffered a "shameful defeat" by Rani Karnawati, Queen Mother (Regent) of Garhwal from 1635-1640. She was

resist. According to the bard Bhuli Das, who recited this ballad to me, she "showed her form" by changing the atmosphere of the village, encouraging everyone to unite and resist the Kauravas. The Phandatya's women teased them, calling them cowards etc., so the five brothers brought their animals to the Kauravas' pastures, and grazed them clean! They even cut down the Kauravas' sacred tree! When the Kauravas' god Duryodhana/Someshvar found out about this, he was furious! He had been humiliated, and by a mere five brothers! So he sent his "army" of *khūnd*s to rustle their sheep, but they were protected by their *thāt-mātā*, Nakuti. (When Bhuli Das recited this epic and explained it to me, he identified the goddess very closely with the *thāt*, sometimes even saying that it was "the *thāt*" itself that protected them.) And how did she do so? Here the ballad invokes an idea that is central to the entire complex of sheep rustling: that the timing of the attack is decisive, and must be very exact. The Bhungaratyas have surrounded their enemies in the middle of the night, and are waiting for the right moment to attack.

> My high Nakuti *thāt* is beautiful
> with its fence of Moru trees.

> Oh my heroes of the Phandatya clan
> your fighting dogs bark in the night![9]

But just as the god Duryodhana/Someshvara commands the Bhungaratyas to attack the five brothers, their *thāt*-mother Nakuti realizes that something is happening, and gives energy to the youngest brother, who leaps up and shouts out my favorite line in this *paṃwārā*:

> When the goat is killed,
> the guests gather.

> Wait, you hunchbacked hillbilly pigs–
> My elder brother Bidhi is smoking his pipe![10]

---

subsequently called "Nak-Kati Rani," that is, the queen who shamed (the enemy)" (literally, the queen who "cut noses") (Khanduri and Nautiyal 1997: 276).

[9] ūcī na meri nakuṭi
morūn sobali bāḍ
āgūvāgo laḍe phaṇḍātyā
terī kūkurū kī āḍ

[10] mārīn jab bākuṛī

This puts the Bhungaratyas completely off their timing, and in the ensuring melee, the five brothers manage to defeat their entire "army" by stabbing them in their backsides with sharpened bamboo spikes!

Here we can see clearly that the clan goddess, the *thāt-mata*, is completely identified with a particular shrine, that she is female, and associated with blood sacrifice, and that she provides the martial energy of the warriors. But her energy must be renewed from time to time, and this is done by periodic rituals, as well as by the offering of enemy heads. In February 2004, I traveled to the Upper Tons Basin and to neighboring regions of Himachal Pradesh to find out about more about these rituals. I was particularly fortunate in that one such *thāt* had recently been rebuilt and re-consecrated, so that I was able to get reliable descriptions of the associated rituals, even though I was unable to observe them personally.

The *thāt* in question is located in the village of Thangad, not far from Tyuni at the border of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh. In this region, the term *jāgā* is used instead of *thāt*. Local *jāgā*s consist of stone platforms, just as in the Upper Tons Basin, but here they are surmounted by a stone dwelling (see plate 3). This is also the case with other local *jāgā*s, including the one associated with Dalip Singh, the antagonist in another famous local *paṃwārā*. The ritual functions of these stone dwellings are relatively clear (see below), but their origin is not. I suspect that they have developed out of the residences of early, deified clan founders, and Galey provides some support for this hypothesis (1990: 162), however in the absence of historical confirmation it remains highly speculative. In Thangad village, the *jāgā* had burned down ten or fifteen years earlier, but the local people decided to rebuild it. Feuding was a thing of the past, and the population of the village was steadily decreasing as young men left to gain an education and become teachers, doctors, dentists, and other kinds of professional. However the villagers still considered themselves *khūnd*, and wished to assert and preserve this identity by, among other things, rebuilding and re-consecrating their *jāgā*. It took about two years' intermittent labour to do so, and when the building was finally ready, they brought the ritual book.

---

uttārī ghālitī bheya
thāmathāmi paḍya ṭūṭyā suṅgaḍa
bīdhī dādā tamākū khāṇ deya

Fig. 3: Thangad jāgā (Photo: W. Sax)

This book comes from the so-called *sāñcā* tradition, most likely a form of Kashmiri tantra that was imported to the area in the late medieval period. The manual itself is regarded as a very powerful object: people fear it, and only the officiating priest is allowed to read it or to see it. The rituals of consecration performed on the *jāgā* are very complicated, and space does not permit a detailed description of them. They are extremely bloody and violent, as befits rituals of the warrior *khūnd*, with fourteen animals including a pig being sacrificed. The animal sacrifices are combined with a fire sacrifice (*yajña*) lasting for seven days, the priests of which must undertake a total fast. Interviews with local persons revealed that due to contemporary sensibilities (according to which orthodox Hindus should not sacrifice animals) there was some reluctance to combine animal sacrifice with a *yajña*, even though this is thoroughly consistent with local (and indeed pan-Indian) traditions. But since the ritual was ultimately about the re-vitalization or re-empowerment of the *jāgā*, local people felt that they had to sacrifice animals. As one priest said to me in conversation, "How can there be energy (*śakti*) without animal sacrifice (*bali*)?" A similar situation had occurred three years before, in the re-consecration of a *thāt* in the newly-created Govind Wildlife Sanctuary in neighbouring Uttaranchal. Local people were very concerned that they might be arrested for sacrificing buffalo within the wildlife preserve, but

they did so despite their fears, because of the strong belief that such a ritual would be ineffective without animal sacrifice.

In all, fourteen animals were sacrificed in Thangad: one on each of the first seven days, and seven on the final day. The ritual, which focused on the fire sacrifice performed inside the *jāgā*, was attended not only by the Brahman priests, but also by local Rajputs and village headmen, all of whom brought weapons – swords, knives, shields, iron daggers, spears, arrows, and guns – and left them on the *jāgā*, outside the dwelling. Every day, after the fire sacrifice was completed, they would dance with their weapons and shoot their rifles into the air. Each man would shoot his gun several times while the large *dhol* drums were played. It must have made quite a noise – one can imagine the tumult, the energy, the sheer martial ferocity that was manifest at this time!

Traditionally, one had to take an enemy's head and offer it to the clan goddess on the final day. But "such things are not done anymore," and this created problems for the re-consecration. During the course of the ritual, the *jāgā* manifests by possessing someone, who then confirms the authenticity of the possession by whispering her "secret name" to one of the officiating priests. But when, by the third day of the ritual, the *jāgā* had still not been "born", it was widely believed that this was because they had not offered a human head. What should they do now? They had to find a substitute, and according to their understanding of the ritual, this substitute had to be from another place with its own *jāgā* – that is, from a rival clan. So they decided to rustle a goat from the clan centre of their former enemies, a group with whom they had continuously feuded and whose heads they had once taken. Nowadays things have changed, and they even have marriage relations with these former enemies, nevertheless they had not invited any of them to the ritual, for fear that someone might intentionally defile the fire sacrifice. A group of men left late at night, after a priest had told them the precise time to depart (note the parallels with sheep rustling as described above). They stayed in the forest, watching their enemies, and on the second night, they went to steal the goat. As one participant put it (I have underlined the English words he used),

> They were re-building their *jāgā*, too. They had brought lots of wood for it – huge planks and beams. And they were all totally drunk! Completely <u>down</u>! It was our <u>time</u>, and we were looking down on all this confusion from above. And we thought, "How will we sneak in there when they are making so much noise?" Then something happened – it was the gift of god or whatever, but when the <u>time</u> comes then whatever must happen, happens. We went down, we were very afraid, and as soon as we opened the door, a huge goat came out! And we did as we were instructed – we grabbed it and put it on someone's back, but it was very big! One man carried it, and then a second, and then a third [...] It was late and

we were hungry. We hadn't eaten anything. Finally, with great difficulty, we brought it here to the square. And just as we arrived, the *jāgā* was born! She manifested herself in a young man. Then we sacrificed the goat. The first blow had to be struck by a man who had Rahu or Ketu in his horoscope; cruel planets (*krūḍ grahe*); hard planets (*sakt grahe*). Everyone got a portion of the goat – only a tiny portion, mind you – but everyone got something.

The consecration of the *jāgā* continued until the eve of the seventh and final day. Then they performed another secret ritual, in which three Brahmans and three *khūnd* left at midnight and went to a place at the top of the local mountain, from which the village of one of their traditional enemies could be seen. They took one of their own sacrificial goats and "hypnotized" it with mantras so that it could neither speak nor move. They then propped open its mouth with a stick of wood, cut off its head, and buried it with the open mouth facing the enemies' village. The significance of this was that the goat should "eat" or attack the enemies. I was told that "in the old days" they would have a different mantra for each place on the goat's body, and they would utter them all, and slice the goat with every mantra, so that the enemy would be wounded in those places. And the more the goat bleated, the more effective was the ritual. They performed a small fire sacrifice, and offered a number of extremely valuable things such as gold, silver, gems, precious herbs and coins, along various poisons. All of these were buried at night, along with the goat. My informants told me that this was a kind of payment to the goat, for troubling the enemy.

At sunrise on the next day, the final day of the consecration ritual, they ritually "closed the road" to the burning ground by sacrificing a pig there. Next, the entire village was sealed with a ritual thread. First the *jāgā* itself was sealed by stringing the thread all around it, then an animal sacrifice was performed on the roof, so that the blood of the sacrificed goats poured down from the spouts on the corners. The thread was further strung from the central pit where the fire ritual is performed, in all the four directions. Bows, arrows, and other weapons were hung on it, along with particularly hard things such as pieces of millstone. Animal sacrifices were performed at each of the four "gates" to the village: like the sacrifices on the roof of the *jāgā*, these were intended to drive negative forces away from the village. According to one of the priests, the mantras that are recited at this time "say that no enemy or other harmful force should come from the direction where they are doing the *pūjā*." The sacrificed animals are buried with their mouths facing outward, again in order to defend the village. Everyone stays within the border made by the thread; no one may leave the village.

Conclusion

If we compare these rituals of the warrior *khūnd* with those of the divine rulers, we can see that they are quite different. Royal, kingly rituals such as those described by Conzelmann, Berti, Luchesi and Sutherland in this issue have to do with administration and diplomacy. They consist primarily of processions and of collective meetings. In the processions, the unity of the kingdom is represented and created, either by circumambulating it or by inviting the rulers of its constituent units to process to the "capital," thus showing their subordination to the divine ruler. The collective rituals – the *śānt* or *jāg* – are also performed for the welfare and prosperity of the kingdom as a whole. Here the gods travel from their various places to the center, and this is also a way of ritually defining and creating a unitary "kingdom".

The rituals of the warrior *khūnd* that I have discussed are also of two sorts, but they are different. One ritual complex relates to the abduction of livestock and women, the other to the periodic re-consecration of the clan cult centers. In the first case, the rituals are oriented both inward, toward the clan and its welfare, and outward, toward the "divine kingdom" as a whole. The rituals are directed "inward" to the extent that they involve the maintenance or increase of one's own flock and/or the protection of one's own pastures. One restricts other groups' access to one's traditional pastures, or demands a fee from them, and if this is not paid, one attacks them. Or, from the opposite perspective, fees are unfairly extorted or unreasonable claims are made on traditional grazing lands, and these are resisted. In either case, aggression involves the ritual elements listed at the beginning of this article: the assembly of warriors at the temple, the battle procession accompanied by drums and music, the ritual desecration of the enemy's temple and other sacred objects, and the victory procession culminating with the driving of the sheep around one's own temple. Significant here is the centrality of one's own temple and "divine king," under whose leadership the raids are carried out. This is the "outward" dimension of the ritual, showing that it is concerned not only with the welfare of the *khūnd*, but also with the territorial integrity of the god's "kingdom." After all, the *khūnd* are subjects of the god, so that any encroachment upon their lands is also an encroachment on the god's territory. To defend the *khūnd*s' land is therefore to defend the god's territory.

The rituals of the *thāt/jāgā* are rather more clan-directed. Only the *khūnd* have a direct relationship with their clan-goddess, and her cult centres are sub-parts of the "divine kingdom." Those from outside the clan – especially former enemies – are not invited to participate in her rituals. Certainly the rituals benefit the kingdom indirectly, inasmuch as

they strengthen its warriors, but still they are directed primarily toward the *khūnd* themselves. They contrast with the royal rituals of the divine king, who embodies, as it were, the entire territory. In this sense, the warrior rituals, and especially those related to the *thāt/jāgā*, are subordinate to the rituals of the divine king. They relate to a smaller, subordinate piece of territory, while the divine king's rituals create and define the entire territory. But all parts of the kingdom, and their corresponding rituals, are organic and interdependent – and together they constitute the "seven limbs" of the Divine Kingdoms of the Western Himalayas.

References

Adhikary, Surya Mani, *The Khasa Kingdom : A trans-Himalayan empire of the Middle Age*. New Delhi: Nirala Publ., 1997 [1ˢᵗ ed. 1988].

Bijlawan, Dr. Radheshyam. 2003. *Madhya Himalaya Riyasat mem Gramin Janasangharsom ka Itihas (Riyasat Tehri Garhwal – Dhara and Dandak) (1815-1949)* [History of Village Warfare in a Central Himalayan Princely State (Rustling and Ceremonial Protest in the Princely State of Tehri Garhwal]) (1815-1949). Purola: Bijlawan Prakashan.

Galey, Jean-Claude. 1990. "Reconsidering Kingship in India: An Ethnological Perspective". pp. 123-87 In *Kingship and the Kings*, edited by Jean-Claude Galey. Chur: Harwood. (Originally published in *History and Anthropology* 4 (2).

Khanduri, B. M. and Vinod Nautiyal (eds.). 1997. *Him Kanti: Archaeology, Art and History*. (Prof. K. P. Nautiyal Felicitation Volume). Delhi: Book India Publishing Company.

Sax, William S. 1991. *Mountain Goddess: gender and politics in a Himalayan pilgrimage.* New York: Oxford University Press.

— 2000. "In Karna's Realm: an ontology of action". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28 (3): 295-324.

— 2002. *Dancing the Self: personhood and performance in the pandav lila of Garhwal.* New York: Oxford University Press.

— 2006. "A Divine Identity-Crisis", In *Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality?* edited by Köpping, Klaus-Peter, Bernhard Leistle and Michael Rudolph. Hamburg / Münster: LIT.

Sutherland, Peter. 1998. *Travelling Gods and Government by Deity: an Ethnohistory of Power, Representation and Agency in West Himalayan Polity*. PhD dissertation, Oxford University.

Vidal, Denis. 1982. *Le culte des divinités locales dans une région de l'Himachal Pradesh*. Thèse de Doctorat. Université de Paris X.

Zoller, Claus-Peter. 1996. *Heroic Ballads and the Biography of a Woman: On Coping With Conflicts in the Western Garhwal Himalayas.* Pak-German Research Project, Culture Area Karakorum, Scientific Studies 3.

The test of traditions: an history of feuds in Himachal Pradesh

Denis Vidal

Anthropologists usually assume that the traditions they study are linked to a particular period and to a specific background, which may be social, economic, cultural, political, etc. But it is wrong to assume that when times change and the particular background associated with a tradition changes, this tradition also changes. There is of course change, but it does not come about *automatically*. Life would be too easy if that were so, for the anthropologist as well as for the people in question. In fact, human beings spend a lot of time and energy trying to bring an end to traditions they consider to be anachronistic or problematic. We might even define tradition - rather imprecisely – as a social process that is difficult to end, even when people wish to do so. There is no doubt, for example, that the tradition of feuds, of the sort that have been practiced in India – and more particularly, in the case I will describe, in Himachal Pradesh – belongs to such a category. When I was there, most people believed that feuds were something from the past, something intrinsically wrong and quite anachronistic;[1] and I am quite sure that 99% of the people were quite happy that feuds no longer occurred. But still, as one may imagine, things were not so simple. So what I propose to do here is analyze, on the basis of one example, the sort of concrete processes involved when people try to bring an end to a tradition. But before discussing the case study, I shall have to briefly introduce a more general hypothesis about traditions that, I expect, will not be too controversial. My hypothesis is that traditions have a kind of "experimental" status. In other words, and for anyone involved in one way or another with a tradition, there is, most often, the possibility of asserting or demonstrating its efficacy, its validity or even, sometimes, its legitimacy. So in most cases, it is as important for an anthropologist to understand what constitutes the experimental dimension of a tradition as it is to study, for example, the ritual details that characterize it. Taking into account such a perspective, one understands better, I believe, why people sometimes rather obsessively try to preserve all the details of a tradition, while in other cases they deliberately transform or suppress such details. It is therefore crucial to know how people regard the efficacy of a tradition or some particular aspect of it. Some theoretical aspects of this problem have been be discussed by Pascal Boyer in one of his books

---

[1] See annex III: §2

(Boyer, 1990). But what I would like to insist upon is rather that, in order to make sense of the experimental character of a tradition, one must always consider also the sort of criteria used by people to judge its validity. And these criteria are certainly dependant on the culture in which a particular tradition has its roots.

Studying feuds in Himachal Pradesh

The clans that practiced feuds in this Western part of Himachal Pradesh are called Khūnd ("bloody ones") to differentiate them from other local Rajputs. They are organized into large, patrilineal clans (*dhai* or *birādarī*), comprising anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand individuals, who acknowledge a common ancestry and were divided into several lines of descent (*āl*), sub-divisions (*khāndān*), families and homes.[2] They were

---

[2] The division into clans, dynasties, sub-divisions, families and homes is common to many castes, although the denomination of each level may change. It is the overarching sociological tenor, however, that is most apt to vary from one region and from one community to another. Thus, in the neighbouring valleys of the same state, one frequently comes across comparable clan structures, whose implications, however, are generally confined to a sociology of kinship, a diffuse sense of collective identity and common practices of worship, but without enabling the clans to maintain a true "political" identity. In trying to understand the region's social morphology, we must be wary, however, of an excessive classification. The colonial administration, for example, lumped most of the population under the term "Kanets"; in the valley studied here, they were referred to more precisely as "Khaush Kanets". However, as is often the case elsewhere in India in comparable situations, it would be wrong to credit the term with any deep sociological significance, and still less with any ethnic connotation. These appellations, now largely fallen into disuse (the term "khaush" was still employed, however, by some of my informants as a synonym for "khund"), served mainly to distinguish the bulk of the local population from a handful of dynastic lineages (Mians and Thakurs) related to the rulers of the region's small Hindu Kingdoms, who sought exclusive use of the title "Rajput". Thus, among the so-called Kanets, one could find, in fact, groups of different status and diverse origins. The warrior-clans for example, (particularly the Khund), certainly looked upon themselves as Rajputs, adopted Rajput values and sought treatment as Rajputs. Other lineages, whose members acted as priests (*pūjārī*) for the local Gods, enjoyed a status comparable to if not exactly similar to that of Brahmins. Yet other lineages of 'Kanets' were assigned the equivalent of a lower caste status. Apart from the 'Kanets', practically every other caste can be found in the region, from Brahmins to untouchables, to say nothing of the various artisan castes, although the mercantile caste was virtually absent until recently (According to the 1901 Census, the kingdom's population was 21,172, comprising: Brahmins 16%; Kanets 51%; Rajputs 2%; Kolis 21%; Others 10%).

exogamous and generally married among themselves, although they could make alliances with clans of proximate status in the neighbourhood.[3]

In earlier times, Chaupal district was part of the small Hindu kingdom of Jubbal, and, at least in name, the people paid allegiance to the king and also acknowledged the pre-eminent status of Brahmins. Real power, however, was wielded by these "warrior" clans (*khūnd*)[4] whose writ ran in the wooded hills and valley slopes dotted with their terraced fields and homes. There were about fifteen of these in the valley when my host's brother was murdered, and some of them had more than one thousand members. They practiced an agro-pastoral economy (in recent years agriculture has increased while pastoralism has decreased). Each clan was settled in a particular place in the hills. And such areas as well as the population who lived there – with the exception of a few brahmins and aristocratic Rajputs (Thakurs, Mians and Rawats) – were practically considered to be under the jurisdiction of these clans, even though all of them formally recognized the authority of the State. Each clan had its dependents (*ghārā*). When a conflict arose, all those who lived in a particular clan's territory (its *khaut*) were bound to support that clan. Power was wielded by a Council (*kumbali*) composed of the elders (*siyānā*) of the various families, the priests and the mediums serving the clanic divinities, and representatives of the lower castes. This was the institution that took decisions essential to the life of the clan.

Let us also note that clans' religious practices revolve around incarnations of Shiva (Mahadev, commonly revered in the region as Bijet)

---

[3] Traditional forms of marriage vary greatly, since the clans practiced monogamy, polygamy and polygynandry (a fast-disappearing mode of marriage in which a group of brothers married a group of women, usually sisters).

[4] Local opinion holds that the term *khund* derives from *khun* (blood). In everyday conversation, it applies only to the warrior clans and carries a "brave" connotation. Curiously, ethnographic literature does not contain, at least to my knowledge, any analysis of the traditions described herein. The sole detailed reference I could find is from the Jubbal State Report (Douglas 1907): "In the first place, there are two classes of Kanets, superior and inferior. The former is generally spoken of the Khas Kanets, or real Kanets, a term which has been at times confused with the word Kash. Many of the *khels* of the first class trace their descent from the old *mawis*, and it is said that they are still clearly distinguishable by the quarrels and unruly temperament of their members. Bashahr is said to have 25 *mawi khels*, Jubbal, 24, Keonthal, 10, Kothkai and Kumharsain 6 each and other States, one or two. In Bashahr, they are collectively referred to as Khūnd Kanets, and other Kanets are Ghārā Kanets. Certain religious ceremonies such as the Bunda and Shand sacrifices are only performed in villages where there are Khund Kanets". Convention puts the number of warrior clans in the Kingdom of Jubbal at eighteen. Fourteen of these were in the Chaupal District.

and the Goddess[5] in various local incarnations. The Goddess is generally identified with the territory of dominant clans for whom she becomes a lineage deity (*kuldevī*), playing a vital role within the community, expressing her opinions and desires through a medium. Other deities whose temples are to be found on the territory of these clans are either worshipped by the entire clan or solely by the members of certain castes.

I must now explain why I took a particular interest in the feuds that I will describe. People who have conducted research in Himachal Pradesh know there are very few references to such feuds in the literature on the region. In fact, I found out about them only after I came to know better the family with whom I stayed for some time in the District of Chaupal, which is now at the border with U.P. The head of this family had been very greatly affected, as I discovered, by what had happened to him forty years before. His elder brother had been murdered in one of the endless feuds that were very common at that time between the warlike clans of the valley.

When my host discovered that his brother had been murdered, he took the extraordinary decision not to avenge his death, even though he knew perfectly well that such a decision went against the tradition of his clan.[6] One should remember that in most feuds, there are often very long periods when revenge is not taken. This is widely accepted. But everyone also knows that sooner or later, something will happen and revenge will be taken. I should also point out that it was not only the closest relatives who were required to take revenge. Any member of the clan had the right and duty to do so. Nevertheless, revenge is always taken in the name of the immediate family, and this is why they had to give a ritual payment to those who carried it out.[7]

Therefore, what was exceptional in this case was not only that my host did not try immediately to avenge his brother, but even more surprisingly, that he strictly forbade anyone to do it in his name, telling everyone in his clan very explicitly that he would refuse to acknowledge whoever did so. As a consequence, he was ostracized by most of the members of his own clan. And he was considered responsible for whatever misfortune happened to them, because the medium of their lineage goddess explained

---

[5] Local religious practices were greatly marked by Shivaism and Shaktism. The influence of Vaishnavism was limited to circles close to royalty. Perhaps the most important difference vis a vis the religious practices in the plains is the persistence of blood sacrifice and the limited influence of vegetarianism. Few Brahmins were vegetarian, with the majority readily consenting to consume those parts of sacrificial animals that were exclusively reserved for them. For an analysis of Hinduism in this region, see Vidal 1989a.

[6] See annex II.

[7] See annex I, §6.

to them that the cause of their misfortune was the ghost of the man who had not been avenged. Worse than that, when my host did not reconsider his decision, the goddess decided not to talk anymore to the people because they did not listen to her. This was still the case when I was there.

When I heard this story, I tried to understand why this man had decided to go against his tradition and not take revenge. But I never did get any precise answer to this question. My host simply explained to me that he had acted *rightly*. The violence involved in taking revenge was unacceptable from any point of view: moral, ethical, or religious.[8] And he had simply refused to follow a tradition that he considered to be inhuman. In fact, as I slowly began to understand, my question had little meaning for him. What really mattered to him, indeed, what he insisted on, was the fact that he had had three sons. To him, this was the strongest of all possible proofs that he had acted rightly. And it was because of this, he explained, that he could resist the pressure of other people from his clan. It was also proof that, although his lineage goddess had explicitly disapproved of his behaviour, other, more eminent gods had approved of it. Otherwise, how would it be possible for him to have three children, and especially three boys?

The sociological and historical enquiry

Most of my enquiry about feuds has consisted of analysing their social and cultural meanings.[9] They can be studied, like any other social facts, from many points of view. One may try to understand their dynamics, and one finds that, in this particular case, the focus was always, in the last analysis, on the threat that the ghost of the last victim represented for the people of his clan The tradition wanted that one cut the head of the victim (or that one took, at least a tuft of his hairs) when he was murdered during one of these feuds; as a result of it, a man could not be cremated and he would become a ghost as long as he was not avenged.[10] Of course, when

---

[8] There is no doubt that such feuds implied real violence: as one of the murderers explained it to me: "That was the time of such happenings. If the Khund did not succeed to take revenge, they would get a pregnant woman belonging to the clan of their enemies. If she was having a son, they used to kill him. Such a baby, what excess! Then revenge was taken. If a girl was born, they left her; if this a boy, then he was beheaded. They said: see, we have taken the revenge".

[9] For previous analysis of these feuds, see Vidal 2003.

[10] As it was explained to me: "No the head was not taken; only some hairs of the top of his head were taken. The head was not taken. If the head had been taken, how could they have cremated the beheaded man's dead body; they would not cremate him without head. In the past, the *khūnd* did not give the head back to their enemies. And it was a necessity to cremate the body".

people took revenge on another clan, there was always an element of retaliation involved. But I believe that a more fundamental reason for taking revenge was in order to placate their own dead clan-member. In fact, the collective prosperity of a clan was at stake in the taking of revenge. This was because in most cases (including this one), local divinities' mediums regularly ascribed the misfortunes of life to the ghosts of those who had not been avenged.

Moreover, when one considers the entire complex from a symbolic and religious point of view, and when one studies the rituals associated with feuds, one notices that revenge is linked in many aspects to a sacrificial scheme. This is rather problematic because the idea of revenge is theoretically proscribed in brahmanism.[11] However, considered from a sociological point of view, feuds had many functions; for example they helped to reinforce the links between individuals, and they gave a very strong sense of collective identity to the clans. They also resulted in a well-defined hierarchy amongst the clans that practiced feuding, and those who were considered their dependants. Finally, the most important result of these traditions was that people in the valleys where feuding was commonly practiced had a very strong sense of autonomy vis-à-vis royal authority and State administration.

If one combines these various perspectives on these traditions, I believe that one may achieve quite a fair interpretation of these feuds, from a sociological point of view, and may also provide some sort of insight both into their meaning and social consequences (Vidal 1989, 1994, 2004). But in order to study any process of cultural change, we also need an anthropological understanding of the reasons why people, at certain times, act according with or against their traditions. For obtaining that sort of insight, I believe there is no better method than digging deeper into the historical details of one particular feud. It is what I will do now.

Two schoolmasters.

In this particular case, I was lucky to have been helped from the beginning by two men, both of them school teachers in a nearby village, who had very particular positions in this feud. One of them was both the nephew of the last victim, and the son of the man who had refused to avenge his brother. The other was still in his thirties, but in classificatory terms, he was an elder in the clan of the murderer (see annex). Their mutual friendship was mostly based on their common refusal of these traditions of vendetta, the first because of the influence of his father, and the second because of his self-declared modernism, which made him

---

[11] See Malamoud 1989.

consider such traditions archaic. So my presence was an opportunity for them to try to put an end to the traditional hostility between their two clans.

Encounter with the first murderer

Thanks to these two men, I had the opportunity to conduct long interviews with many people who had been involved in this feud. Above all it is because of their help that people were willing to speak openly to me. One of the most revealing interviews was with the very man who had killed the uncle of the school teacher. This interview gave him the first opportunity of his life to explain his motivations directly to someone who belonged to the clan of the victim; furthermore the person he was really addressing while he was answering my questions was not just anybody in this clan, but the actual nephew of the man he had killed! He was then in his sixties, and obviously he had had a lot of afterthoughts about what he had done when he was not even twenty years old; an act which had the greatest impact on his life, as he explained.

I cannot go here into the whole story but let me say only that shortly after the murder he had been arrested. This was not at all common in those days; it was more usual for the State to ignore such incidents as long as feuds did not involve people directly linked with the *rājā* in one way or another, and as long that they did not harm State interests. And even in this case, after the *rājā* had decided to give justice himself, his sentence was quite mild. According to the accused's own account, he did not at first believe that this young man could have been a murderer. But, against the advice of his own people, the murderer had insisted that he was the killer.[12] He was finally condemned to work as a gardener in the palace of

---

[12] As he explained it, himself: "When I was taken *(afterwards)* to Jubbal, then King Bhagat Chandra told: he looks just like a child; he could not kill any one. He can't be the murderer. Many people then told me not to say anything; but I replied: no; I will never tell a lie; this is not the tradition of my *khāndān* (household). Someone told me that I will be hanged. Never mind; I will accept it. Because I ever have to bear the sin *(pāp) of* having beheaded him; *and I don't want to commit a second sin (?).* They asked me why I thought that the sin of beheading M.S.S. was on my head. He was our enemy. (69) I said that he was like our father [...]. His brother was our *Jamādār* (the *jamādār* was the head of the workers responsible for floating wood). We worked in the wood floating business as coolies. I was a small chap. By looking at me, K.S. used to say: Ô poor boy, you can't deal with this tough job, when the floating wood stopped, he took pity of me. So K.S. his brother was a respectable man for me. K.S. used to say: go and I will make some fire for you to warm up. I would never have slain him; but only God knows. Who had to be slain was to be slain. It was due to enmity. I replied (to my companions) Ô God, you will see that I will not slay him, whatever may happen. But they compelled me and told me: Ô

the *rājā*. As he told us later, it turned out to be one of the most pleasant periods of his life. He was especially proud of the fact that he had looked after the *rājā* himself when he was still just a child. After a few years, he was freed because of some Jubilee in the kingdom.

When he returned home, he married and he had many children; however they were only daughters. And he slowly became convinced (or was convinced by others) that his failure to produce sons was because of the harmful intervention of the ghost of his victim. As he saw it, the ghost did this because he had lost all hope of being avenged by the people of his clan, and was therefore avenging himself. This interpretation is interesting because, in fact, it contradicts the normal understanding of the tradition. The ghost of a victim usually does not attack his murderer; rather he directs his grief towards the members of his own clan until they avenge him.

Finally this man, the murderer, took quite an extraordinary decision in order to escape his fate: he decided to make a year-long pilgrimage all over India, where he performed mortuary rituals (*piṇḍ dān*) for his victim as if he had been his own father. He did it, of course, without consulting the family of the deceased. And now, for the first time, he was in a position to explain all that he had done to one of them. He insisted at length on the fact that, before he had murdered the man, when he was still a child, both of them had spent a season cutting wood in the forest for the *rājā*. This man was much older than him and had been very kind to him. In short, he considered him practically as a father. When he went back home after the year of pilgrimage, he married a younger woman and almost immediately obtained a son. The whole experience gave him a new perspective on his own tradition. As he put it, "If you think from the *khundvi* side, then we have done a good deed, according to khundism. But if we see according to the scriptures, then we find we have committed a sin."

Encounter with a second murderer I will now describe the behaviour of another man who played an important role in this story. He was a distant cousin of the one who had been murdered. He was also the priest of the lineage goddess of the clan. Nevertheless he found himself in a very similar situation to the murderer, because he could not manage to have children. Like the murderer, he ascribed this failure to the fact no

---

son, they were also brave people who slew unborn children. Ô stupid; you say only that because he used to warm you up by making some fire for you. Will you not slay him. At last, I slew him. I will not tell a lie. When I have committed a murder, then why should I tell a lie now; why would I implicate others". (interview: annex III: § 7)

one had avenged the man who had been killed in his own clan. So, more or less at the time when the murderer went on a pilgrimage in order to expiate his crime, this man decided to adopt an opposite point of view. He refused to acknowledge the decision taken by the brother of the victim not to take revenge. And, convinced as he was that he was acting according to the will of the goddess and with her approval, he went with his father on an expedition and they managed to ambush and to kill a distant relative of the murderer. Back in the valley, he tried to persuade the brother of the previous victim to attend a ritual in order to dedicate his murder to the goddess. Back in the valley, he tried to persuade the brother of the previous victim to attend a ritual in order to dedicate his murder to the goddess. But as he complained bitterly, that brother (my host) was utterly furious at what he had done.. It would seem, however, that the brother did finally accept to give him some ceremonial gift for this new act of violence.[13] Still there is a certain sense of morality here, because, to his great dismay and unlike the other murderer, he never did manage to have a son.

When I talked to him, I was in the company of the schoolteacher who was the head of the clan of the new victim. But when the killer began to speak, my friend, the schoolteacher, had a reaction that surprised him, perhaps, even more than us. He started to shake very violently and had to leave. Now, this schoolteacher considered himself a very modern and an enlightened man. But like everyone else who later heard of this incident, he thought that his reaction could only be explained as the reaction of a supernatural being. And one should also know that the story of this last murder had a very particular status. From the point of view of tradition, there was no doubt that the victim belonged to the same clan as the last murderer and was therefore a 'legitimate' victim. Nevertheless his family lived at the periphery of the area where most of the rest of the clan was living, in a valley which was in fact, in the neighbouring state of U.P. Moreover, his most recent victim of the feud was to be simple-minded. He used to vanish for days at a time without anyone knowing exactly where he had gone. So when he was murdered, people did not worry at first. And there seems to have been some implicit consensus in the valley that his death should be regarded as an accident. The paradox is that such an attitude was contrary to the will of the murderer, who tried desperately to advertise his crime. And because he was desperate to attract attention to himself, the people studiously ignored what he said and advised him not to drink so much.

---

[13] See interview: annex IV, §25-26-27.

Conclusion

From a sociological point of view it is not too difficult to analyze traditions of feuding. One must however bear in mind the central paradox of such traditions: on the one hand there is no doubt that feuds were a threat to the clans which practiced them, because they always endangered the succession of generations. The murder of a man prevents him from becoming a benevolent ancestor, and he becomes instead a threat to his own lineage. Until he has been avenged, he will threaten both the prosperity and the posterity of his clan. Of course, once revenge is accomplished, such a risk disappears for some time. But now people have to worry, not about the dead, but rather about their living rivals. So, in one way or another, clans that practice feuds never cease to be threatened, and it is only the nature of the threat that changes, either before or after taking revenge. On the other hand, this perpetual threat also gives them strength. It gives them a strong sense of collective identity compared to other people. It also develops a sense of ethics and courage in them. For example, because feuds often occur between clans which had previously intermarried, women may find themselves in some sort of Cornelian or, perhaps better, Shakespearian situation, where they must betray either their husbands or their natal family.[14] And every *khūnd* knows that he may be murdered for the simple reason that he is a member of a specific clan. This explains, I believe, the collective benefit that clans could gain through these feuds, namely the perpetuation of their local hegemony, since the clans acted as a kind of counterweight to State authority. More precisely, they were a form of local authority that was tolerated by the State. Proof of this lies in the fact that State responsibilities in local administration were most often given to elder people of these clans. As a result, state power and clan power were not incompatible, as one might have assumed, but in fact reinforced each other.

So, one could safely argue that with the dissolution of Hindu kingdoms and with the redefinition of political power and of new channels of authority, such traditions have simply lost part of their meaning, as the power of the modern state has grown. In fact, many people in these valleys commented on the tradition of feuding by contrasting the present and the past, explaining that such practices were legitimate in the past but not in the present Such perspective is also confirmed by the collective response of the population to the behaviour of the two murderers. In the case of the first one who killed a man when the kingdom still existed, not everyone approved of what he had done; but they had to acknowledge

---

[14] see interview: annex 2, § 13, see also Sax, in this volume.

that he had acted in conformity with tradition. His deeds were even acknowledged in the collective memory through local songs, despite his controversial behaviour when he went on a pilgrimage throughout India, to make amends for his crime. But as we saw, the case of the second murderer who had committed his crime much later was very different. Even though he tried desperately to prove to everyone that he had acted in conformity with tradition, few people accepted this. And in fact, most people preferred to ignore the murder altogether.

In the end however, such an analysis of cultural change is perhaps too easy. It runs the risk either of sounding deterministic (implying that people behave differently simply because times change) or exemplifying a circular form of reasoning (people behave differently because times change and the proof that times change is that people behave differently). Now, if one compares the behaviour of these three men, there is something very striking: on the one hand, it is difficult to find more contradictory choices than the ones they made in such a context: the first one breaks the tradition by deciding not to take revenge; the second one had previously killed a man but afterwards, he radically changes his perspective and condemns his past behaviour; and the third one tries, without much success, to restore the tradition by taking revenge.

But on the other hand, what is even more striking is that the three men who took such contradictory decisions nevertheless had something in common, which was the idea that the only real sanction for their acts, and an indisputable proof of their legitimacy, was the birth of a son. It is because of that, but only because of that, that one may consider the worldview of the three of them as very traditional.

In these particular circumstances, the choice of whether or not to take revenge turned out then to be a kind of test of each man's conviction about the legitimacy of these traditions of feud. Not only that, but in their minds the 'empirical' proof of the rightness of their respective decisions was the birth of a son; they saw it as some sort of endorsement by the gods of the rightfulness of their decision. But even from this very specific point of view, there were some striking contrasts in their respective understandings of the situation:

— My host could easily convince himself that he had taken the right decision by choosing not to take the revenge; he had been blessed, after all, by the birth of three sons.

— The man who had killed the brother of my host convinced himself that he had committed a fault even if he did not realise it at the time. It seems that one of the main reasons for this is the fact that he did not have a son afterward, but only daughters. The fact of finally being blessed with a male descendant after he had

gone on pilgrimage in order to appease the soul of his victim, only convinced him further that one should definitely renounce these feuding traditions.

— The case of the man who decided, on the contrary, to renew the tradition of feuding. But paradoxically, it appears that one of the main motivations behind his gesture was also linked to the fact that he had no sons, something he attributed to the displeasure of the goddess for not being heeded when she asked her followers for revenge. But in this latter case, the fact that he did not in fact manage to have a son, even after having accomplished the revenge, seemed to demonstrate that it was wrong to renew this bloody tradition.

Evidently, there is no obvious reason why one should associate the behaviour of the people during these feuds with the birth of a male descendant. But such an association was regularly made by my informants, and if one examined the respective destinies of the main protagonists of this feud from this perspective, it appears clearly that all of them converge toward a same conclusion: whatever may have been the legitimacy of such feuds in the past, the decision not to take revenge, and to reject the tradition of feuding, seemed always to be the correct choice. On the other hand, any attempt to perpetuate the feuds or to renew the tradition, seemed to lead only to misfortune and to a lack of male descendants.

Such example shows very concretely, how, in times of political and cultural changes, people may be driven to question the validity of some of their traditions and to assess, in their own way, the 'empirical' consequences of ending them or preserving them.. But in order to understand what is going on here, we must also be aware that the 'empirical' criteria which are put at use in these sorts of circumstances often correspond to highly specific cultural values (i.e. in this particular case, to the overwhelming importance of producing male offspring).

However, one question remains: must one consider that such an analysis only makes sense for periods where traditional values are changing in such a way that people feel more strongly the need of testing their real validity and legitimacy? I would like to suggest that such an 'experimental' dimension of traditions can rather be found in most cases if one tries to analyse the way people deal concretely with them. But, of course, the importance of such 'experimentations' – individual as well as collective -and the sort of changes to which they lead, also vary according to the ability of a whole community to react to the results of their experiments with their own traditions, at a given period of time.

So, in this particular case, most people in these valleys clearly rejected the ideology of feuds. But people deeply implicated in them were still involved in the very intricate and often dramatic process of proving to each other and to themselves that their decision to renounce their

tradition was the right one. It is this process that I have tried to illustrate here.

References

Berti, Daniela. 2001. *La parole des dieux. Rituels de possession en Himalaya indien.* Paris: CNRS Editions.

Boyer P. 1990. *Tradition as truth and communication.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Malamoud Ch. 1989. *Cuire le monde.* Paris: La Découverte.

Vidal, D. 1981. "Divinités locales de l'Himalaya de culture hindoue", *RES* 1, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., pp.113-118.

— 1986. "Le puits et le sanctuaire; organisation cultuelle et royauté dans une ancienne principauté de l'Himalaya indien", *Purushartha*, EHESS, Paris, pp.31-54

— 1987. "Une négociation agitée. Essai de description d'une situation d'interaction entre des hommes et des dieux", *Etudes Rurales* 107-108: 71-83.

— 1989a. *Le culte des divinités locales dans une région de l'Himachal Pradesh.* Paris: ORSTOM.

— 1989b. "Des dieux face à leurs spécialistes; conditions de la prêtrise en Himachal Pradesh". *Purushartha*, XII: 61-78.

— 1994. "Les restes de la vengeance" in *Violences et non-violences en Inde,* edited by D. Vidal, G. Tarabout, E. Meyer, pp.197-224. Paris: EHESS.

— 2003. "The end of a feud" in *Violence and Non Violence : Some Hindu Perspectives*, edited by D. Vidal, G. Tarabout, E. Meyer, pp.255-79. Delhi: Manohar, 2003 (trans. from French).

Annexes

The following annexes include the recent history of the feud which is described in this paper (annex I) as well as excepts of the testimony of three of three persons who participated in it (annexes II, III, IV). One should be aware that such narratives reflect the different perspectives of the main protagonists of this feud and don't coincide completely between themselves There is also a description of the ritual where the heads of the enemies who participated in these feuds, could be eventually offered to the devī. The names and abbreviations of people and of place included in these annexes have been anonymized.

Annexe I

The story of the whole episode; as it was told to me by the son of the man who refused to take the revenge (29 April 1980).

A Nilai named G. was killed in the fair (*Bishu*) of R........and some other people were badly injured. After some time, the Nilai decided to take their revenge. Sri R.K.S. offered some ornaments of gold to murder some Pilaïk. Because Sri G. was from the K. family, they compelled their *jaildār* to take the revenge. Sri J.,R. and M. were selected to murder any Pilaïk. One night, they took their chance at D........., where Sri M.S.S. was staying alone as he had neither wife nor child alive. Only one nephew, Sri C.R.S. used to come sometimes to his house to visit him. The day before his murder, Sri C.R. compelled him to stay in his house at K., but he refused. He said that he had no fear of the Nilai, over here; he was a worshipper of God and no one would dare to murder an innocent man like himself. Due to his bad luck, however, the Nilai entered into his house; but as they tried to open the door, he woke up and came out. After some time, however, he get back to sleep; he had not been aware of the fact that someone was waiting to put him to death. Soon, he felt deeply asleep and they killed him with an axe (*ḍāngrā*). J. was the murderer. There was another man, called S in the same room, but he did not realise what had been happening because he was fully asleep and dreaming. When he saw the dead body, in the morning, he called everyone around. All the Pilaïk arrived and some of them suggested to take the revenge, the same day. But the brother of M.S.S., Sri K.D.S. did not allow it because he was a very kind and heartily man; he thought that this tradition would be going on, indefinitely; and it was to be an end to it.

All the people belonging to the Nilai and who had participated to the expedition were sent into jail; but after some time, King Baghat Chandra celebrated the silver Jubilee of his ruling; and all of them were -released from jail. J. and R. are still alive; but J. is completely changed, as he has no sons; only four girls were born from him. He thinks that he has been punished by God as has committed the murder of an innocent man. But R.R. is a very cruel man, still nowadays.

Annexe II

An interview with Sri R. K. of the Nilai birādarī in the house Sri O.P.D. (22.10.1983)

My name is R.R., I am eighty years old. We are from Ruslah, our *āl (lineage)* is D.
1.   There are twenty four Khūnds, here, in Jubbal State.
2.   When battles took place, in these days, the ones who took part in the battle were called Khūnds and the ones who hid or were afraid of the battle, they were called *ghārā*.
3.   Nilai had an enmity with Lohran, Shilu, Jathroau, Basain, Pilaï, Paralu and Thundu.

4. We are Panshi and our Jaga belongs also to the Panshi.[15]

5. G.R. was killed in the *bīshū* of the Pilaïk. R.R., J.R., R.S.P. and S. went to take the revenge and killed M.S.S. In the meeting, K. *mālī*, D. Jaildar, M. Nambardar, R. Lambardar, G. Nambardar S. and K., and still other people, all of them were present.

6. D. said: "if you accomplish this very tough task, you will be given a *tolā* of gold". D. was from the R. *khāndān*. R. Lambardar said : "if you succeed to take the revenge, you will be given two *tolās* of gold"; but afterward, nobody gave us anything. D. Jaildar told us during the meeting of N : R. uncle, you will have to go. K told to J. : "J.R. you will have to go"; R. told to M.R.: "you will have to go". K. said that R. from the D. *khāndān* will have also to go. It is how they selected the killers.

7. When we went, we did not care for our life. We wanted only to kill. We had to kill one or two of them; and even if we had to die, what mattered was to fulfil our duty by killing them.

8. That day, 7th of Shravan of Vikrana 1997 (1940) S. Brahmin was sleeping in the same place that M.S. I caught him but he told us that he was a Brahmin, so we left him.

9. We did not bring the head with us; we did not take, even, a tuft of his hairs.

10. According to that period, enmity was right. Is it not told that the duty of Kshatriyas is to fight.

11. If some *birādarī* loses in a fight and admits it, it will be no more battle with this *birādarī*. But if the people of the *birādarī* explain that they have only lost a battle and that we have only to wait to see what will be happening, later on, then fighting will be going on. Nowadays however, this sort of fights are not right anymore. ......

12. Among our dependants (*ghārā*) the lowest ones are the Khanara. You can't eat or marry them. When we (the Khūnds) were going to fight, if we surrounded a man with our bow and our arrows and – if we tried to know his feelings -by threatening to kill him, we normally expected that he would open his shirt and say: 'you may kill me with an arrow in the chest, but my people will take revenge'; but if he was running away by fear, then we caught him and the leather of the string of the bow was put in his mouth. He was then forbidden to come in front of the Khūnd for fighting, and – no one in his *birādarī* could take any part of the fight between the Khūnds. Then he was called a Khanara; and nobody had – any relationship, anymore, with him.

13. The Khūnd were asking some grain (with a metal pot) and some cattle from their dependants.

---

[15] Khund clans are traditionally associated either with the Sathi or to the Pamsya; and by the way of such a categorization, they identify themselves, in a genealogical and ritual manner either to the Kauravas or to the Pandavas.

14. Otherwise, Scheduled caste people were taking part in the fights in favour of their Khūnds; but the Brahmins did not participate to the battle.

15. It happened that some one saw his sister' son fighting against his *birādarī*; but in this case, people did not care for him; they did not spare their affines.

16. Now, it will be a compromise between the Pilaïk and the Nilai, only if they give back our sacred drum (*nagārā*). It was broken by the Pilaïk in the-fair of R.; this is the holy drum of the *devtā*. We will not build any small temple (*sog chaurā*) in order to expiate and to honour the memory of M.S.S. because we did it for taking the revenge of G. If the Pilaïk, don't agree – to make a compromise; then let them prepare themselves for a fight; we are ready to fight.

Annexe III

An interview with Sri J.R.B (at his house, the 1.10.1983)

I did this interview with A. S. S. who helped me to transcribe and translate it. J.R was 62 years old and the interview took place in his house. It was the first time the two men met; and the meeting was tense, at times.

1. We killed a man. We told him to wake up: "Get up; we have come – for the revenge. We must take it at any cost". Then he said: "Ô brother, I did nothing". "Ô what had he done. He was a brave fellow. He was not mischievous. If it was a brave man of your *birādarī* who had been killed, then you also had to kill a brave man. Never mind; he was a nice man; he might have been very bad; but it was not the case was. It was the time –for such happenings. If the Khūnd did not succeed to take revenge, they would take a pregnant woman belonging to the clan of their enemies. If she was having a son, they would kill him. Such a baby, what an excess! Then revenge was taken. If a girl was born, they left her; if this was a boy, then he was beheaded. They would say: " look, we have taken the revenge [...]

Why did the khūnd used to fight between themselves?

2. It depended: if I wished to judge your strength-, or if you wished to judge my strength -; to -judge if I am stronger or if you are stronger than you. Great fights – could begin -, due to very small disputes or misunderstandings. In this particular case, neither a sheep nor a wife had been taken before the fight. When so many disputes were going on, when you could not harm your enemies, you would take their sheep or their wives. It was how enmity was going on. At that time people were very foolish; we were also foolish; but now, we know better. At that time we did not know much. One finds that, according to the *śastrās*, the murder of a man is equal to the murder of sixty cows. You may kill a man or sixty cows; the sin will be the same and you will have to bear it. But if

you think about it as a Khūnd, by taking the revenge you have accomplished a great job. But if you consider it according to the *Dharmaśastrā*, then you have committed a sin.

Speaking about his victim

3. I have accomplished the four great pilgrimages; I have made funerary rituals in his name (*piṇḍ karam*), I made it as if he was my father and as if I was his son.

What do you think about these fights?

4. It was wrong, because in our enmity, we used to go in the night and we killed people in the night. It was foolishness. If you want to fight with someone, then you must tell him to be ready.

What do you know about your kuldevtā?

5. When the Kaurava and the Pandava had their big battle, then millions died in the battle. The heads of these killed people laughed and said : "neither the Kaurava nor the Pandava, none of us were enemies. We lost our lives for nothing. At that time, while the heads were laughing, an unknown power told them in an unknown voice to collect these heads and to throw them toward the hills; this is why thirty six crores *devtās* are worshipped, here, in India. The heads told to themselves" we have been set in that (hilly) place. There I will be in an image, if people worship us. But we want also to go to the haven, and when we will have an opportunity, we will go". They were told that when Ashat and Grahi (eight planets assembling) will take place, they will be released. They will then leave and go to the heaven. It is written in the Sukhsagar. All these *devtās*, they came from the Kurukshetra ground.

How the revenge was taken ?

6. As usual, so many attempts were done. They tried far and wide; but they could not manage to take the revenge. They did not succeed. Lastly, it ended on me. My father was dead and I was only seventeen years old. There were no sign of beard or moustache on my mouth.

7. When I was taken (*afterwards*) to Jubbal, then King Bhagat Chandra said : "he looks just like a child; he could not kill anyone. He can't be the murderer". Many people then told me not to say anything; but I replied : "no; I will never tell a lie; this is not the tradition of my *khāndān* (household)". Someone told me that I will be hanged. "Never mind; I will accept it. Because I ever have to bear the sin (*pāp*) of having beheaded him; *and I don't want to commit a second sin (?)".* They asked me why I thought that the sin of beheading M.S.S. was on my head. "He was our enemy".

8. I said that he was like a father for me.....His brother was our *Jamādār* (the *jamādār* was the head of the workers responsible for floating wood). We worked in the wood floating business as coolies. I was a small chap. By looking at me, K.S. used to say : Ô poor boy, you can't deal with this tough job, when the floating wood – was finished, he took pity of me. So K.S. (his brother) was a very respected man for me. K.S. used to say : "go and I will make some fire for warming you up.

9. I would have never slain him; but only God knows. Who had to be slain was to be slain. It was due to enmity. I replied (to my companions) : "Ô God, you will see that I will not slay him, whatever may happen". But they compelled me and told me : "ô son, they were also brave people who slew unborn children. Ô stupid; you say only that because -they used to warm you up by making some fire for you. Will you not slay him !". At last, I slew him. I will not tell a lie. When I have committed a murder, then why should I tell a lie now ? Why would I implicate others ?

Did you bring his head ?

10. No the head was not taken; only some hairs of the top of his head were taken. The head was not taken. If the head had been taken, how could they have cremated the beheaded man's dead body; they would not cremate him without his head. In the past, the Khūnd did not give the head back to their enemies. And one could not cremate a body without his head.

11. Nilai could not go at the Pilaik places and Pilaik could not come in our place. But this has to change. Justice must be done. this is wanted by God.

Were you alone at this time ?

12. No; we were five or six men. M. and S. of Kh. village, R. K., farmer of Kh. village; these ones were with me. We were not assured to be given any reward. But it was said to us that G. was our uncle, that it was necessary to take his revenge, that they were weak and old now; but that we were young. (If they tried to go they would be afraid to see ghosts)

Did you share the same feeling ? Did you see any ghosts ?

13. I did not see any ghost (*bhūt* nor *pret*). When we came back, all my companions used to walk in front, and I was coming last, because of their fear of ghosts. They were saying : "look, they have come, they will slay us, they will kill us". I asked them what they were talking about, because I could not see anything, just bushes with sharp branches. but they were so frightened; they were becoming mad.

14. Before we killed M.S., we wandered for many days, without finding any one. When we wandered at night, all the doors were locked. We went finally at D..... There R. told us that he had seen a man. I asked him who he was. I thought that I would not know him, because I knew very few people in the Pilaik *birādarī.*

15. R. told me that he is M.S.; I asked then : "is he that M.S., who is the sister' son of the J." He replied that it was him. I said that I will stand ten yards away from his house because I regarded him like my father.

16. When I was a young chap working in the wood floating job, he took pity of me; and he told me not to try to do it by myself when there was any real difficulty with the floating wood. Don't do it, I will do it for you. I will not go in front of him. He would say : is this my enemy that I have been helped by before.

17. Then, we came back from there, and we lived in a cave that we used for a while as a base. And all of them wanted to convince me to slay him. I requested them not to ask me to do this evil's work because he was like a father for me. But they insisted so much.

18. "You must do it, otherwise you will have to promise that you leave N. hamlet and P. hamlet; and you will never have anymore any relation with the Nilai birādarī. And we will be nothing to you". They washed my brain like this for three days. And finally, I slew this man.

How did the enmity begun between the Pilaik and the Nilai ?

19. We had a compromise with the Pilaik. Both Khūnds had promised not to fight again; and everything had been made in order to enforce this compromise. But the family of the K. from the Nilai *birādarī* and M.T. the Pilaik started to quarrel, due to some lady. This was at the origin of the fight.

20. In that time, – people in the *birādarīs* were always helping each other. And it is how the fight of two families became the fight of two parganas. So long ago, people were foolish and ignorant; but nowadays, people have become wiser and they are more intelligent.

21. Today when you refused to take tea (he speaks then to the nephew of his victim) and said that you did not feel well, I told you that if you don't accept a cup of tea prepared in my house, you should not have accepted to come into my house. But you are wise and you agreed to have the tea. Now you see : that is the difference between nowadays and before. When K. desired to go to the fair (*bīshū*) of R. village, the Pilaik ambushed the people coming for *bīshū.*

But is it not true that a compromise is now enforced ?

22. The ones who favoured the compromise have favoured it but others have not favoured it. Some Nilai say that we still want our sacred drum (a *nagārā*). As long as we don't get back our drum (*nagārā*), we can't have relations; we can't go to the places of the Pilaik. And what about the Pilaik ? Do they come to our place ? And do the- S. come to our place? No, they don't come.

23. But I (A.S.S.) have come to the marriages and I came also to some fairs. What do you make generalities like that. I came To Bagna".

24. «You may have come, but not whole heartily. And your father will never come. Your father refuses to take anything touched by me. I requested him ten times to do so : 'O brother, do not behave like this. We are the same. You did not go there. I have visited the four *places of pilgrimage,* which are the four corners of India. I have made the *Piṇḍ Dān Karnā* for him (M.S.S.). In the four *dams*, I treated him as my father and I became his son. I worshipped him like my father. Now if your father says that what happened was unavoidable and that we should forget it; and if he takes food touched by his enemy and if the food that he has touched is given to his enemy, then it will be possible to have a real compromise.

Annexe IV

Interview with Shri R.R.N. of Th..... village (ex service man in British times, Govt Centre complex, High school, Nerwa, Dist. Shimla, HP; 8.10.1983.

1. My name is R.R., my *khāndān* is N., I am 70 years old.

When you brought the head of the Nilai, did you organise any meeting (khūmbalī) of the birādarī, before ?

2. Yes in Th....
3. Was the meeting held near the temple of Jaga ?
4. not under the temple of Jaga, but rather in the village. Half of the people of the pargana was there. In the council (khumbali), chosen people participated, the *numbardār*, the *jaildār* and other respected people were in the council.

Who had been selected then ?

5. Nobody was selected. Nobody dared to select anyone to do this dangerous work. I went with my father.

What was the reason for bringing the head of the Nilai ?

6. Devī was displeased (without it). Nothing could please her without this head of a Nilai. ......

The head which was brought here. For whom revenge was taken ?

7. I slew him to take the revenge of M.S. My *khāndān*'s man was killed

By my relatives (intervention of a Nilai teacher)

8. The Nilai killed him.

Then, from which place did you bring the head ? Did you bring it from S...... ?

9. No from S.......(in U.P. District, Dehra Dun)

Did you go directly to that place ?

10. Yes.

Then what happened ?

11. We lived in a cave for four days. We stayed all this time outside because we could not get any chance of killing a man. There was no floating work in progress.

Did you enter into S.....Village ?

12. No they did not know that we had come to take a head (*sir*) from their area. I am telling you the truth. They came later on to take the revenge. And they roamed in our area. But the poor fellows could not do anything.

Then what happened ?

13. Then we got a chance. One man came at night to fish. He was fishing with a mesh. We beheaded him.

How, was there any fight before ?

14. Yes, there was a fight when we told him that we were going to behead him. We told him : "yes brother, we are Pilaik and you are a Nilai. We have to take the revenge (*badlā).* Get ready. He tried to throw my father and I into the river. He was strong and brave, just like a lion.

Then ?

15. I pulled him back and I struck him with my axe with folded hands. But it was not enough. He got up and he beat my father with the mesh. Then my father took the axe from my hands and separated his head from his body.

Did you bring the head ?

16. Yes we brought the head and it was put in the *devī* (Maha Kali) sacrificial pit (Havan Kund). Yes we put it in the Havan Kund of Devī.

What did the medium (mālī) say ?

17. He was the mālī (intervention of the Nilai teacher).

You were the mālī ?

> 18. Yes. A *Śānt* was not organised, that time. Because, if the Nilai knew it, we would have problems again.

And later on, did you organise a Śānt ?

> 19. Pandit Shiv Ram Jolta was invited, this day. We did the Havan and we told him not to disclose the matter, otherwise he would be killed. When the head is being offered, a wooden *char maṇḍal* is necessary, and then Devī worship is going on. Then Kali will come *(through the trance of the medium, my comment)* and she will say that one will not have to face any form of hardship because she is the one who takes the responsibility for it, she, Kali. Havan is then organised with drum beatings (the ritual sacrifice, my comment) (cf note 3.). And it is what we did. Then we kept quiet and silent. We were in hot water; because we knew very well that, as soon as they would know it, the feud would start again and it would never end.

> 20. When the head is to be put in the sacrificial pit, we call it a "head sacrifice" (*mūṇḍo ra havan*). I beheaded the man for taking revenge; so I am proud of it.

> 21. Before going to behead the enemy, the good day and the good time are calculated and a *pūjā* is done.

> 22. I thought and I said that I will take the revenge for my lineage (*khāndān*); and may happen what will happen ! The day was calculated; and when we came back with the head, a great ceremony was organised. *Havan* was done, *halwa* was offered, gun firing was fired, drums were beaten, the Devī *pūjā* was done and a flag was put on the temple of the Devī.

Did you ask then to the Devī before going what would be the good date ?

> 23. Yes, we asked to the *devī* : 'Yes, brother, go, I am with you' Then, she gave a holy axe (*ḍāngrā*) with her own hands and the Goddess put some threads around my right arm.

When a man is beheaded, does one drink his blood ?

> 24. Yes it is done. I drank a little of it and a little was taken from the edge of the axe (*ḍāngrā*). At that time, my eyes were not open. When I tasted the warm blood, then I became again able to open my eyes and we did not feel any fear, any more. Before drinking the blood, we were feeling so much in danger. Wood trunks were floating on the river; and we crossed the Tons river at night.

> 25. We spent so much money to manage so many things<

Did they give you anything as a reward after that ?

> 26. No the people of the *birādarī* did not give us anything.

But did the S. family give you any reward during the ritual (the śānt)?

27. Yes, I have been rewarded by your father. I was given a woollen coat and fifty rupees. But others did not give anything.

But in the previous *śānt*, I paid myself fifteen rupees to you as a reward.

28. Yes. In the other *śānt*, we have been rewarded.
29. We took a terrible risk for the sake of the *birādarī*. Jai Hind, Jai Devī Mata, Jai ....

Annexe V

Description of the mūṇḍo re Śānt

I have never assisted in person to a śānt (and obviously not to a mūṇḍo re śānt); so one should consider the following account with some caution; but it was described to me by the main pandit who had been officiating in these rituals in the neighbourhood and different people confirmed most of the details; This pandit was also a very respected person in the vicinity, and he was unanimously considered as a very knowledgeable man, which was certainly not the case for all the local pandits and pūjārīs that I met in these valleys. The following description is a summary of his own description of the ritual, without any personal interpretation or extrapolation.

1. This sort of *śānt* is organised only by the Khūnds
2. It is dedicated to the *kuldevata* and the *kuldevī* of the Khūnd. It is not organised at regular intervals, but generally after many years, after a good crop
3. the exact date and hour is decided by the *pandits*
4. the idea is that is the *devī* herself who asks for a *śānt* (through the *mālī*)
5. everyone in the *khōt* participates to it
6. a first meeting is organised with the pandits, the musicians, the warriors and the other members of the *birādarī* are present
7. before the beginning of the *yajna*, one fabricates the *char maṇḍal*, within the temple of the *kuldevī*
   a. 18 iron rods and 18 wood sticks are collected
   b. a circle is done with the iron rods on which are balanced the wooden sticks (making some sort of tiny hut like box
   c. the irons rods are arrows (or identified to arrows ?)
   d. a pot with a ghee lamp inside is put in the middle of the *char maṇḍal*
   e. coloured clothes (red, yellow, green white) are disposed of the wooden sticks of the *char maṇḍal*
8. One hole is dug just besides the temple, and some wood is disposed in it, in order to cook food during the *śānt.*
9. The lamp is lit for the beginning of the ceremony and The lamp should stay alight during the whole ceremony which may last for three days or more.

10. It is also said that one can see the face of the ones who are going to die in the lamp.
11. The first mantras begin; they are recited by the pandits and the *mālī*.
12. The temple is purified with cow urine and milk which is sprinkled with a special stick.
13. The second night, the allies are invited to come and to participate to the *śānt*.
14. In the middle of the night is organised the ceremonial walk around the village (*ṭhaur*)
15. A slightly plaited thread is (*kacha sout*) put up around the village and a goat is sacrificed at each corner of the village.
16. A goat is sacrificed at each of the four 'angles' (*desha*) of the village.
17. The *mālī* (incarnating the Devī) will enter into trance and every one will follow him, wearing torchlights in the night.
18. If one disposes, at this point, of chopped hands of enemies, the *mālī* will be wearing them.
19. When the procession passes the east, a wooden gate is made (with *thamṭī* wood).
20. After the procession around the village, a circle will be made by the village youth around the temple.
21. Holding their weapons, they will sing the *limbera (specific song)* around the temple.
22. The brahmin and the *mālī* are inside the temple.
23. The *mālī* is covered with a cloth of cotton on his head.
24. When a *śānt* includes the sacrifice of the head of an enemy, it is called : *mūṇḍo re śānt*.
25. In this case, according to what was being told to me, the head of an enemy will be then taken in the centre of this circle then taken in the temple and the head will be put in the *havan khūnd*.
26. A special *yajna* will be made in the morning which implies the se of a pot of water.
27. In the early morning, the *devī* will be asked if she is satisfied.
28. She will allow sacrificers to go on the roof of the temple.
29. Barley will be thrown from there.
30. Brahmins will go also on the roof.
31. A she-goat will be sacrificed (preferably black and virgin).
32. The head of it will be given to the *mālī* who remains in the temple and he will drink some blood of the she-goat.
33. Brahmins will sing new songs to send away the kalis.
34. The she-goat will be distributed among participants.
35. Then more goats (preferably, many of them stolen from the enemies of the khūnd) will be sacrificed.
36. Another *pūjā* will then take place inside the temple.
37. It concerns the people of rahu and shani.
38. A special sort of 'hat' (*nau graha maṇḍal*) is put on their head on the flat part of an axe (*ḍāngrā*) or a *kukri*.

     a. The *nau graha* is made with young offshoots of barley and he has been kept previously within or just besides the char *maṇḍal.*

39. Every one follows the man wearing this ceremonial 'hat'.
40. He goes in the direction where the enemies of the *khūnd* are living and throws it into this direction.
41. A goat is sacrificed there.
42. People blow out with contempt in the same direction.
43. An arrow is thrown into this direction.
44. Then everyone is coming back for a dance (but not any more *the limbera*).
45. 12 persons will be given a wooden stick corresponding to their *rāśi.*
     a. The wooden stick will be preciously kept in a pot containing the different products of the cow.
46. Then the *char maṇḍal* is removed.
47. Brahmins are paid.
48. The devī salutes everyone.

CORRESPONDENCE, ANNOUNCEMENTS
REPORTS

CALL FOR PAPERS

The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research is planning a special issue:

The Nepalese Diaspora in the making in European Countries.

Contributions should be sent to the editors as email attachments, both as Word and PDF files. If you are unable to make PDF files, please send a hard copy of your article by regular mail. The final date by which articles may be submitted is 30 June 2007. Style guidelines are provided in the inside back cover of this journal.

The first Nepalese to have left their country to work abroad, the Gurkha soldiers, are relatively well known, notably through numerous studies of them by historians and anthropologists, but the emigration of ordinary Nepalese workers has been much less studied. This has taken place on a larger scale in recent years. Even if the number of workers abroad is difficult to confirm, due to the often informal character of their journeys, analysts have concurred that the remittances sent by expatriates to their families in Nepal represent nearly a quarter of gross national product.

In his seminal book on imagined communities, Benedict Anderson developed the hypothesis that exile enhances national sentiment. Not only does exile develop a nostalgic attachment for one's country of birth, but separation also encourages the exile to imagine his or her nation in a new way by contrast to the image held of it when previously inside its borders. The democratic revolution that has taken place since 1990 and which was recently expressed again in the popular uprising of April 2006 needs to be included in this context of the extended process of national emergence. We suggest that the Nepalese migrants are not unconnected to the ongoing development of this process.

Parallel to the exploration of this general hypothesis, we will attend to the diverse forms in which Nepalese integrate in Europe, and particularly in France, the UK, and Germany. These three countries offer models of integration that are often presented as traditionally quite distinct, but we need to know more about the institutions that underpin these three cases and the usages that the Nepalese migrants make of them.

The questions under consideration concern two orders of linked preoccupations. The first covers the transformations entailed by emigration at the level of the individual on the one hand and the nation of origin on the other, while the second deals with the organization of migrants in the host countries.

Transformations of the individual and belonging to the nation.

- A Nepalese citizen in his/her country will express belonging in terms of his/her natal village or district of origin, while abroad she/he will present her/himself more willingly as Nepalese. Onto these coordinates of identity is grafted the issue of the ethnic minorities, who are currently reclaiming their autonomy. They find a certain sympathy from the part of Europeans, or at least some sections of them, ready to espouse the cause of the oppressed, in an extension of solidarity, which serves to reinforce the idea of the validity of Western democracy. In what ways do exiles remake their identity in this context? How does this "work" of identity influence their conception of the nation? In what ways (financial support, political activism etc...) do they participate in their community of origin?

- Distance favours written forms of expression. It is significant from this point of view that one of the first modern Nepali novels, published by the famous Nepali writer Lainsingh Bangdel in 1947, *Muluk Bahira* ("Outside the Kingdom"), focuses on the problem of exile. This author especially explores the motivations of Nepali travelers to Darjeeling and introduces a reflection of a moral and political dimension on their hard conditions of living. This literary work deserves taking the time to ask how it might have influenced the understanding that Nepalese had of their own country. For all that it provided an expression of the nostalgia they could have for it.

- Beyond literary expression, a phenomenon that has recently expanded and well deserves attention is Internet correspondence. This means of communication is available to almost everyone, even those without a high level of education. Chat sites are on the increase and encourage daily exchanges between expatriates and those close to them back home. New links are also made across ever more numerous personal sites. Telephone has become sufficiently cheap to allow long and frequent conversations. As access to telecommunications has become so normal, individuals are not only exchanging news and information, they are also inscribing themselves into narratives, which can be thought of as sketches of autobiography.

Individual journeys and organization of Nepalese migrants in Europe.

- How do new arrivals proceed? Do they always have a point of contact, a network of Nepalese connections ready to welcome them? What is the role of the various European contacts who are

often necessary to obtaining a letter of introduction prior to receiving a visa?

- What are the criteria in the formation of groups: ethnic membership, geographical origin, professional occupation, kinship relationships?
- As the Nepalese migrants are relatively few, do they ally with other more numerous immigrant communities, or on the contrary keep themselves distinct?

HIMALAYA
The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

ARTICLES:

Geoff Childs Culture Change in the Name of Cultural Preservation

Keila Diehl Music of the Tibetan Diaspora

Calla Jacobson Spirituality, Harmony, and Peace: Situating contemporary images of Tibet

Julia Klein Human Activities and Global Environmental Changes: Implications for the people and landscapes of the Tibetan Plateau

Anne Parker Pilgrimage in Tibet: The yoga of transformation

Donatella Rossi An Overview of Tibet's Religions

Tashi Tsering A Tibetan Perspective on Globalization and Development

Wim van Spengen Ways of Knowing Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes

STORY: Karma-Dondrup Tibetan Nomad Childhood

BOOK REVIEWS

Jeffrey Hopkins, Ann Frechette, Kenneth Bauer, Martin Brauer, Clint Rogers, Paul Hackett.

TIBETAN PEOPLES AND LANDSCAPES

VOLUME 24 NUMBERS 1 AND 2 2004 DATE OF PUBLICATION AUGUST 2006

To order this issue, subscribe to HIMALAYA, or join the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies:

Send $35 (plus $5 or $15 for surface or air mail to overseas addresses) to the address below OR

Subscribe online with PayPal: www.himalayan.pdx.edu/PPsubscription.htm

HIMALAYA* Geography Department* Portland State University* Portland, OR 97207-0751* USA

Please contact hrb@pdx.edu with any questions

BOOK REVIEWS

Invitations to Love. Literacy, Love Letters & Social Change in Nepal, by Laura M. Ahearn. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001. 295 pages , 31 b&w plates, bibl., index. ISBN 0-472-06784-2.

Reviewed by Anne de Sales, Oxford

Laura Ahearn has found a treasure here: a corpus of love letters written by villagers for whom this literary genre is entirely new, if only because most of them are the first generation to be literate. For anyone interested in the transformation of the notions of person and agency, this corpus provides some very precious material indeed. But Ahearn did not find this by chance. She has known the authors of the letters for a long time – since 1982, when she arrived in the village of Junigau (Palpa district) as a young Peace Corps Volunteer. She then became an anthropologist and studied changing marriage practices among the Magar of the area. This book is therefore the outcome of the author's long and intimate relationship with her informants, mostly female, although the letters analysed here are written by men and women alike. One of the two case studies is actually based on the correspondence of the male partner only, and commented on by his female recipient.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part the reader is introduced to the site of the study, the central ward of Junigau, consisting of 46 houses. Then the author presents her fieldwork methods (a model of precision) and the five key concepts that she uses in her analysis, helping to locate the work within contemporary debates in anthropology. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens, concerned with the various interactions between macro-processes in society and micro-processes in the individual, provides a relevant theoretical framework.

Literacy is primarily understood here as a social practice rather than a technical skill independent of its context. The text is analysed in the perspective of the social interactions it involves. *Love* is considered as socially and culturally constructed. The emergence of romantic love among the villagers in the 90s is linked to the rhetoric of development discourse that has been dominating rural Nepal for several decades. Although love is partly described as a fatality – "love happens *to* people", it also appears to empower the afflicted individuals in other realms of their lives and leads them on the path to modernity, individual choice, progress and "life success". *Gender* is seen as the primary field within which power is articulated and therefore directly affected by social

change. In her description of *social change*, Ahearn pays special attention to the tension resulting from the widening gap between the "received interpretations of social forms", or social conventions, and the personal experiences of the individuals. It is argued that, in the situation under consideration, agents are not yet aware of this discrepancy and therefore cannot articulate their rebellion against well-established conventions for behaving and feeling, although they are already striving for new ideals under new constraints. Ahearn refers here to the British cultural historian, Raymond Williams, who provided the notion of "structure of feeling" to pinpoint "the location of patterned micro-processes of social change as they are occurring" (p. 53). *Agency*, at last, is defined as "the culturally constrained capacity to act", and introduces the individual's role in the analysis of social transformation.

Equipped with these conceptual tools, Ahearn proceeds to the description of the transformation of gender and marriages, the second part of the book. Her analysis is based on a comprehensive survey. The disappearance after 1960 of *marriage by capture*, whereby the young woman is kidnapped by physical force, seems to follow on the one hand the growing number of the Gurkha soldiers who enjoy enough wealth to throw a proper wedding and on the other the requisite, generally accepted by now, of the woman's consent. By contrast, in *arranged marriages*, parents do not consult their daughter or even inform her of their negotiations with the parents of the groom. The bride will meet her future husband for the first time on the day of the ceremony. Ahearn gives a fine description of the groom's placement of the red powder in the part of the bride's hair, a symbol of the defloration of the bride and, therefore, the shift from her status of sacred virgin to the status of subordinated wife. Although the resistance of the bride at this very moment is partly ritual, it also offers a space for opposition: "actions that in the past always served to reproduce a system of inequalities became at a very different juncture [in the revolutionary atmosphere of the 90s] ways to transform it or to change the meanings and values associated with it" (p. 98).

Marriage by elopement, whereby the young couple simply "go by themselves", is the third and by now most frequent form of marriage. The courtship tends to be lengthened precisely through love letters. The accounts of elopement by the young women show that they do not conceive of it as being free of coercion, be it their partner's insistence, the urge to silence embarrassing rumours or even fate: "A common thread connects arranged marriage brides' acts of ineffectual opposition with elopement participants' disapprovals of responsibility in their narratives and love letters" (pp. 256-7). A subtle combination of consent and coercion seems to be at the heart of all marital matters, as a comment by a villager makes clear: "In a way, I say that this was probably written to be my fate.

In actuality, we do it ourselves, but it's like that, see? Our fates are written" (p. 256). It could be argued however that this is not specific to the Nepalese situation studied here. The tendency to refer to fate in order to support or even legitimate decisions about one's life seems a rather widespread attitude, even within cultural contexts centred on the supposedly almighty individual. What is specific by contrast is the possibility that Magar women still have to put their fate in the hands of their parents. In a way the range of their choices is even wider than in Western contexts.

In the third part of the book, the author provides information about the written sources of the villagers and their practices of writing and reading over the second half of the 20th century. Besides textbooks published by the Ministry of Education and concerned with the nation building process, there are numerous magazines in circulation. These include publications such as *Kamana* focusing on films, magazines concerned with development and education such as *Deurali* or political magazines such as *Lapha* or *Kairan.* Novels such as *Prem Patra, "Love Letters",* are also very popular, as are love letters guidebooks that provide templates for correspondence with intriguing references to famous lovers – such as Napoleon and Hitler.

This complex literary environment is highly relevant to the topic of the book but would need a much more thorough analysis than simply presenting a list of titles, to which the author limits her treatment. Space constraints may have been one of the reasons for this lacuna. As it is, the historical overview is much too superficial and leads to bold affirmations such as "romantic love has existed for generations in Nepal [...]" (p. 173), which is sustained by no evidence and is in contradiction with the claim of the book that romantic love is a rather recent option in the construction of the relationships between two partners. It might have been better to skip this part altogether, however interesting it may be, and instead use the testimonies of the author's more senior acquaintances – such as her own "mother" in the village, who belong to the non-literate era, so to speak. This would have provided a nice contrast and a historical depth to the corpus of love letters written in the 90s, more in conformity with the project of the book to study social change and the "shift of structure of feeling".

Such an approach might have brought into the picture the coded behaviour of the respective parents of the groom and the bride so characteristic of the Magar marriage system. In this system, based on a prescriptive rule of marriage with the mother's brother's daughter, the wife givers enjoy a superior status towards the wife takers. It is surprising that the author, who does mention this hierarchical relationship between the two groups of affine (pp. 82-83), leaves it aside in both her analysis of

social change and her analysis of the relationships between genders. However, ethnographic vignettes – such as Sarita's father refusing to give his daughter unless he is asked "seven, ten, even twelve times" (p. 241) by the boy's party – seem to indicate that traditional Magar codes are still endorsed by some. According to this older view, a daughter is never completely given to her husband, who remains all his life in debt towards his in-laws. This does not necessarily mean that a woman enjoys a better status, but at least that she is protected from the family of her husband and can always go back to her parents (*maiti*), a threat vividly pictured in mythic accounts. Surely this is an important consideration to add to the equation when opting for elopement, and a Magar woman may be in a different position in this respect from, say, a Chetri or a Brahman.

This being said, the book is highly recommendable. It opens Nepalese studies to a much wider reflection about social change and contributes to a fine understanding of the most intimate transformations of the individual. These love letters express the inner conflicts of their authors caught in a web of social conventions, personal desires and new ideals that Ahearn helps us to decipher. The letters have a strong pragmatic component, aimed at influencing the person who is to read them. This may be why they express anger and hopes but rarely joy, being mostly the reflection of yet unsatisfied wishes. And finally they are the first attempts by ordinary people to put their lives into written narratives, and as such constitute precious documents of a literature in embryonic form.

*Ladakhi Histories: Local and regional perspectives,
edited by John Bray. Leiden: Brill (Tibetan Studies
Library, 9). 2005. x + 406 pages, 36 maps, figures and
plates, index. ISBN 90 04 14551 6.*

Reviewed by Pascale Dollfus, Paris.

This volume illustrates the plurality of approaches to studying history
and current research in the making. It compiles contributions – very
different in length and in style – from researchers from a variety of
disciplines: linguistics, tibetology, anthropology, history, art and
archaeology. Their sources include linguistics, archaeological and
artistical evidence; Tibetan chronicles, Persian biographies and European
travel accounts; government records and private correspondence, land
titles and trade receipts; oral tradition and reminiscence of survivors'
recollections. The majority of the papers were first presented at the
International Association of Ladakh Studies (IALS) conferences held in 1999,
2001 and 2003, and these have been supplemented by a few additional
contributions. I neither have sufficient knowledge nor the space to discuss
each of these papers at length or adequately, I will rather summarize the
content of the book as a whole.

The aim pursued is not to write a history of Ladakh, but rather to
propose – as its title shows – several "histories of Ladakh" (p. 2). As John
Bray, the editor, states: "Ladakh's history has to be understood at several
different levels". The interaction between local, regional and international
viewpoints is therefore one of the main themes of this book. Three
contributions however do not inform us of Ladakh's history, but rather
highlight the character, aspirations, and motivations of those who
planned to visit the region and eventually chose it as their field for
research. In his first paper, Peter Marczell (pp. 183-202) examines
unpublished correspondence (rendered here verbatim) from Dr. J. Gerard,
a Scottish military surgeon, that gives insight into early British fascination
for the Western Himalayas. In the second one (pp. 203-216), he discusses
the Hungarian scholar Alexander Csoma de Koros' use of a pseudonym
during his Himalayan travels in the 19th century. For his part, Poul
Pedersen (pp. 293-308) focuses on the commitment of Prince Peter of
Greece and Denmark to psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex, that
motivated his scientific interest in polyandry, and made him go to Ladakh.

The other 19 remaining essays, put into a historical sequence, lead the
reader from the late 7th or early 8th century, when Ladakh was part of the

Tibetan empire, up to the present day, and recalls – sometimes indirectly – the wars, migrations, conversions, influences and changes which took place in this region over this vast time span. In passing, one welcomes the introductory essay written by the editor himself (pp. 1-30) that gives a useful overview of Ladakh's local and regional interconnections, then examines its political and religious history in greater detail.

The first two papers point out the linguistic similarities between the dialects spoken in the two extremities of the Tibetan speaking world – Ladakh and Baltistan at the north-western end and Amdo and Kham at the north-eastern end. On one hand, Philip Denwood (pp. 31-40) suggests that a millennium ago regular communication must have taken place across the Changthang plateau, which due to a more favourable climate once housed a much larger population at that time than it does today. On the other hand, Bettina Zeisler (pp. 41-65) discusses the position of Ladakhi and Balti within the family of Tibetan languages from linguistic and historical perspectives, and argues that Ladakhi and Balti have their origin in an earlier state of the Tibetan Language, that preceded Classical Tibetan. In other words, "Choskat or the classical book language turns out to be a younger cousin rather than a parent of Old West Tibetan. Thus its orthography cannot be compulsory for the Balti and Ladakhi phalskat".

With Christian Luczanits' essay (pp.65-96), one shifts from linguistic to architectural and art historical evidence such as rock– and stone–carvings, stone-engravings and wood-carvings, murals, statues and all kinds of archaeological relics. The author stresses the importance of studying this largely ignored material to improve our understanding of the early history of Ladakh, and shows in particular how this can help in evaluating the extent of early Buddhism in the area. Next, Roberto Vitali (pp. 97-124) sheds some light on "the one hundred years of darkness" in the history of Ladakh (1280s-1380s). In a paper densely packed with historical detail and footnotes, he analyzes the "fractured secular panorama" at that time. By confronting Tibetan and Persian sources, he introduces the military campaigns of the Chaghatai Mongols (sTod Hor) into Ladakh and Upper West Tibet and the Qarâchîl expedition undertaken by the Delhi Sultanate to stop the former's advance into North-West India. He also makes a thorough review of the sources concerning rGyal bu Rin chen/Rinchana Bottha, a mysterious prince included in the royal genealogy of Ladakh. According to him, this nobleman, who gained power in Kashmir, was a stranger to Ladakh.

Neil Howard (pp. 125-146) continues on the theme of invasion with the raid into Ladakh by Sultan Zain-ul Abidin of Kashmir in the 15th century. In the light of new studies, he questions its route, its date, and its place in the history of Ladakh. Jigar Mohammed (pp. 147-160) reviews the raid of yet another invader, the Mughal general Mirza Haidar Dughlat, whose

armies occupied Ladakh in the 1530s. By way of his paper, the reader enters a new period of Ladakhi history: the so-called Namgyal dynasty, a branch of the existing royal family which ruled over Ladakh from the 16th century to the annexation of the kingdom in 1842.

Drawing on Persian texts from medieval times and on the account of the French traveller François Bernier who visited Kashmir in the mid-17th century, he provides the Mughal view of the region's economic and social affairs. Focusing on local level, Peter Schwieger' contribution offers a complementary perspective, and adds to our understanding of the relationships between the kingdom of Ladakh and local sub-kingdoms and chiefdoms in this period. He introduces two pairs of documents concerning land titles that give a list of the officials and functionaries who were active in He-na-ku [Heniskot], a petty kingdom ruled by an offshoot of the Namgyal dynasty. At that time, in the nearby Suru valley, most of the inhabitants converted to Shia Islam. According to Nicola Grist, author of a Ph.D. Thesis on "Local politics in the Suru valley" from which the essay presented here (pp. 175-180) is drawn, the spread of Islam in Purig was a gradual process. It results "both of Muslim preachers converting the ordinary populace and of chiefs adopting Islam as part of the process of alliance building with the Mughals and the Chiefs of Baltistan". Nevertheless, by 1758 Purig was incorporated into the Ladakhi kingdom. Consequently the Suru valley was ruled by regional administrators (*mkhar dpon,* "Lords of the fort") who were all Buddhists from the Leh capital area. It was still the case in the 1830s, when Ladakh was invaded by the Dogra armies and finally lost its independence.

Following the first Anglo-Sikh War, the state of Jammu & Kashmir was established by the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. It included Ladakh and Spiti, while Lahul became part of British India. The British authorities therefore felt necessary to demarcate the border between British and Kashmir – and between Kashmiri and Tibetan – territory, and they sent commissioners to survey the frontier at two different times (1846, 1871-72). This technical and political challenge is narrated by Neil Howard (pp. 217-234), who discusses the confusion about where the boundary lay and shows that this persists on contemporary maps.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Leh consolidated its status as entrepôt on the Central Asian route. The British established an Agency to supervise trade and, through the security provided, helped the establishment of Christian missions. Based on British government records kept in the National Archives of India, K. Warikoo (pp. 235-248) discusses the trans-Himalayan political and trade linkages between Kashmir, Ladakh and eastern Turkestan. He highlights the increasing involvement of the British in Central Asian affairs, after the Russian conquest of Western Turkestan. Jacqueline Fewkes and Abdul Nasir Khan (pp. 321-334) give an

accurate picture of the traders' networks inside and outside Ladakh based on personal and business papers of two caravan route traders in Leh : a corpus of 1,000 pages written in different languages (English, Uighur, Persian, Tibetan, etc.). The authors were able to precisely trace the movements of goods, and the people involved in the system and the places where they lived. Consequently they identify three kinship-based social networks embedded in trade history: the traders, transporters (*kiraiyakash*, from *kiraiya* "hire"), and to a lesser extent colonial officials. In each case, kinship was a component of strategy. The *kiraiyakash* transporters were not the only group of Ladakhis who travelled outside their own region in order to make money and, at the same time, increase Ladakh's resources as a whole. They were also migrant labourers as Janet Rizvi (pp. 309-320) shows in a innovative essay focusing on the Suru valley and Zanskar, and drawn, as with her earlier work, from survivors' recollections. It is also on oral tradition that Tashi Stobdan's paper (pp. 181-182) is based. The story concerns a dispute over grazing rights between the villages of Stok and Matho that was ultimately resolved by an archery competition.

As we have already noted the expansion of British rule in India paved the way for Christian missionaries. Three papers address this topic. In the first one, John Bray (pp. 249-270) introduces the context in which these missions took place and presents the various Protestant missions that worked in Tibet and the Himalayan border regions in the 18th century (the Baptist Missionary Society, the Anglican Church Missionary Society and independent German missionaries). He highlights their special interest – also shared by the British officials – in linguistic research. In the following essay, Christian Heyde (pp. 271-280) discusses the beginning of the West Himalayan Moravian Mission paying particular attention to the station founded in Keylang by his ancestors, Wilhem and Maria Heyde, who lived there for 39 and 42 years respectively. Their efforts to convert villagers to Christianity met with little success. However the missionaries improved living conditions by introducing new irrigation channels, new crops, new trees, new stoves, and made important contributions to education and schooling. This is the topic of A.H. Francke's paper first published in Germany in 1898 and translated here from German by Gabriela Reifenberg (pp. 281-292). It gives a vivid picture of the problems facing the Leh schools: no fixed timetable, no proper classrooms, and most of all no pupils! As Francke clearly states, the main question was the following: how can the mission teachers persuade the children of the Buddhist Ladakhis to attend school? And secondly, which language should be used in translation and more generally in writings: Classical Tibetan that nobody speaks or colloquial dialects? H.A. Jäschke, the linguist, who was in favour of using Literary Tibetan, opposed W.Heyde and A.H. Francke who

wished to develop local dialects (Bunan or Ladakhi) as a written language. Today like yesterday the desire to write in colloquial Ladakhi ("Ladakhi Palskat") rather than in classical Tibetan ("Choskat") according to the ancient grammar of the 7th century provokes fierce debate (see B. Zeisler in this book). Recently, there has been a lot of criticism, discussion and noisy debate over what some Ladakhi scholars call "the destruction of the old grammar" by *Ladags Melong* (Mirror of Ladakh). Its editorial advisor Sonam Wangchuk presents his viewpoint on this burning issue in the copy of the journal (dated Summer 2005).

After the demise of the Ladakhi kingdom and its annexion to Jammu and Kashmir State, although the Maharajas were Hindus, connections with Tibet and its religious centres were maintained. The main monasteries continued to send monks for religious training. It was the case for instance of Geshe Ye-shes don-grup (1897-1980), whose life and contributions to Ladakh are described in Nawang Tsering Shakspo's paper (pp. 335-352), based on two unpublished autobiographies. In the same way, all the traditional Buddhist artists in 20th century Ladakh have direct or indirect links with Tibet, and in turn transmitted their skills to a generation of painters and sculptors. By reviewing lives and works of some outstanding figures, Erberto Lo Bue (pp. 353-378) highlights the crucial role that these Ladakhi artists have played in preserving Buddhist culture not only in Ladakh, but even beyond, during one of the most troublesome times in the history of Tibetan civilisation.

To conclude, Fernanda Pirie (pp. 379), through the case study of the remote village of Photoksar, analyzes the way anti-hierarchical principles counter social stratification in Ladakh in an ethnological and historical perspective. She argues that these principles of equality derived from social patterns that were established during the kings' era and continue to influence modern contemporary village politics. Thus, while villagers had realised the benefit of selecting a headman who has the knack of dealing with government officials and NGO representatives for an extended term of office, they remain reluctant to have power embodied in one person.

This volume clearly shows that there is not only one way of writing history and it has attempted to uncover several of them. Taken together, it provides the reader with considerable new data and opens the way to reap the fruits of subsequent research. As this book demonstrates, there is still a great wealth of things to be uncovered. To date, while the history of the Kargil and Purig regions has been almost totally disregarded, the history of Ladakhi Changthang has yet to be written. By the way, one may deplore the lack of an essay devoted to nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists inhabiting the eastern plateaus. The Changpas only appear as hold-off shadows when discussing trade networks.

The editing and general appearance of the book are of a high standard, although there are some minor misprints, especially in the spelling of proper nouns. (Concerning Tibetan/Ladakhi translation, no uniform system of transliteration has been imposed.) Alas its price (95 euros, -USD 136) is prohibitively expensive for South-Asian readers.

Last but not least, it includes a useful index and two welcome maps: one situating Ladakh in India's contemporary international boundaries and areas disputed with China and Pakistan, the other showing the different regions composing it. The latter unfortunately is not as informative as it might be. In fact, the toponyms mentioned do not necessary match the names cited in the book (and vice-versa). Henasku, Suru river or Basgo to quote only a few examples are missing. On the other hand, useless names – at least for the reader – are inscribed. Finally, the volume offers some fine black and white photographs, some of them drawn from the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen or the Charles Bell collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. The lovely picture of the cover showing "the leader of the Ladakhi *lo-phyag* mission in 1921" is one of them.

This being said, the book can be highly recommended. It constitutes an important and original contribution to previous publications, but also represents a significant departure from it. Therefore, it remains an essential reading for all researchers who are concerned with the study of Ladakh and Himalayan regions.

A History of Nepal by John Whelpton. Cambridge: the University Press, 2005, 235 pages + Key events, 20 Illustrations, Tables, 6 Maps, Biographical Notes, Glossary, and Index. ISBN 0 521 67141 8 paperback.

Reviewed by Kamal P. Malla, Kathmandu.

John Whelpton is a trained linguist and historian. He collaborated with the late Martin Hoftun and William Raeper on a book on the social and ideological analysis of contemporary Nepal. His *Kings,Soldiers and Priests: Nepalese Politics and the Rise of Jang Bahadur Rana 1830-1857* (New Delhi: 1991) was well received in the academic community in Nepal and abroad.

A History of Nepal is an overview of Nepal, particularly since the 1740s to 2003. Within the space of about 240 pages, Whelpton surveys the process of state formation in the Central Himalayas out of scores of principalities controlled by medieval feudatories. It is difficult to pinpoint in time when Nepal emerged as a state, either in the Claessen's or in the Kautalyan sense. In all likelihood, it was run by provincial governors of the Mauryas, Kushanas and then the Imperial Guptas who mention Nepal's ruler as a *pratyanta-nṛpati* (border king) in ca. A.D. 360. This may very well be a cultural entity rather than a State. For one thing, even during the late Malla period the Nepal Valley did not have a standing army, though it had its own coinage or other paraphernalia and limbs of a political state. Because of its rugged topography, fragmented by mighty transversal rivers, snowy and intractable ranges, tribal chiefdom thrived late in historical times. Few paramount rulers could have held the realm single-handedly because of the incessant nature of migration from the north, south, east and the west.

Whelpton tries to sum up the process of political unification and cultural hegemony of Brahmanical values in the central Himalayas mainly as an outcome of the threat of Islam and the rising power of the East India Company on the sub-continent. This may be so in the initial days of the Gorkhali state, but this theory is half-baked when one reflects upon figures such as Rana Bahadur Shah who would have been delighted to live in Banaras on an East India Company's pension as long as he could, rather than reign or rule a kingdom torn apart by his own kinsmen and retinue. Neither "unification " nor "Sanskritization" are good or adequate terms to describe what was going on in Nepal since the 1740s because neither explains why it took Prithivi Narayan Shah three battles and 25 years of dogged belligerent determination, not to speak of treachery, espionage,

blockade and barbarous treatment, to conquer a tiny principality of less than 8,000 in Kirtipur, whereas the same Gorkhali power triumphed throughout the whole Himalayas from Kumaon-Garhwal to Tista River in less than 25 years.

Although he does not take a "dates-and-dynasties" approach to political history, Whelpton's interest focuses on the achievements and failures of the Shahas and the Ranas, more than on "classical or cultural" Nepal. So he treats the rest of Nepalese history too perfunctorily, telescoping nearly a millennium and a half in less than 10 pages. His chronology of "Key events" is even more revealing, compressing 130,000 B.C. to the Establishment of the Capuchin Mission in Kathmandu in 1715 in less than a page! In this sense, the title of Whelpton's book is misleading: it is only the History of Nepal: 1740 to 2003. Just as there are different "Nepals" there are also different "Histories", depending on one's preferences, as it were. Whelpton's is focused on "Great Men", on Prithivi Narayan Shah, "with a look of determination in his eyes, and his right hand pointing towards the sky" intent upon expansion, with the sky the limit. Chandra Man Maskey had painted a masterpiece of this man, seated upon the Chandragiri ridge, looking at the opulence of the Kathmandu Valley, with intent and gleaming eyes. It is merely a matter of interpretation whether one calls it a "vision" of unified Nepal or a vulture's gaze upon its prey. Perhaps, the only social scientist that divulged this mysterious gaze was the late economic historian, Mahesh C. Regmi, who said that the sole motivating dynamo of Gorkhali militarism was an unquenchable greed for land and income from it. At least, Prithivi Narayan's own letters from the trenches are in a totally different tenor from his so-called "Divine Counsel". The two are so different in style and substance that they could hardly be the work of the same man. Besides, coming from a rural Gorkha background, his espousing the cause of economic mercantilism is totally unconvincing in the history of economic ideas.

The fraternal feuds, among the brothers and sardars of Prithivi Narayan Shah following the occupation of the valley, for power sharing seems to prove nothing other than this acquisitive instinct of the rural elite. That the rise of Bhimsen Thapa, or of Jang Bahadur Kunwar Thapa Chetri or of Shumshers are only the apotheosis of this power-struggle, constantly being hatched in the Nepali court among the clans who descended from *takure* princelings. Among Whelpton's gallery of great men are, of course, the architects of dynastic fortunes founded on the ashes and ruins of each other – triggered by murder, bloodshed, banishment, and recurrent "revisions in the roll" of pure blue blood, proving the now trite dictum: Kingship knows no kinship. To label this power structure "a Hindu State" is a euphemism of a sort, because there

was only a despot or other at its head, commanding contingents of soldiers, always willing to kill or be killed. Before the rise of Bhimsen Thapa, the Gorkhali army was a ramshackle organization; the State only a brutally efficient organization for raising revenue and taxes of all kinds. Landownership was a matter of the patriarch's whim: to be granted or withdrawn on the evidence of personal loyalty. It was only with Jung Bahadur Kunwar's Mulki Ain of 1854 that the Gorkhali state began to have a semblance of civil and military structure to be administered by a legal code verifiable by courts of justice and revenue offices in place.

The ruling ideology of Shah-Rana despotism was neither Hinduism nor Brahmanism, though they showed a superficial respect for the cow, the Brahmin and the Hindu *dharmashastra*. To call their culture "Sanskritic" is only a parody of the timeless values enshrined in the tradition. The Shahs imitated the courtly practices of the Moguls and the Ranas were increasingly attracted to "Westernized" lifestyles, so visibly documented in their *mahal*s, *durbar*s and stucco palaces modelled on 19th century Victorian mansions. There is no doubt that, despite their obscure social origins, they laid dubious claim to Rajput origins and made this claim a legitimate basis for all their social climbing, and the greedy Brahmin immigrant clientele from the plains supported these by lending them a political sacred thread to climb ever higher up the social ladder. It was not for nothing that from the time of Jang Bahadur Kunwar culminating in Chandra's tiger shooting expeditions with Emperors of British India, there was nothing less than a love-hate relationship between the Ranas and British India. The high tide of the Rana Rule was punctuated with two World Wars in which the Rana military and financial support to the British even surpassed the Jang's aid in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Thus Whelpton's claim that "the Shamshers projected themselves as the guardian of the social order enshrined in Nepal's legal system" is not the whole truth, nor is the statement "the Shamshers did try to foster a common Nepalese identity, centred, of course, around themselves". If ever the Ranas ever played what the author calls "the Hindu card" it was only when they thrashed the social reformer Madhav Raj Joshi for preaching a protestant interpretation of the Vedas or when a plebeian non-Brahmin, Madhav Raj's son, Sukra Raj Joshi addressed the first ever public meeting in the heart of Kathmandu and preached the doctrine of *karma* according to the *Gita*!

In itself, history is an uninteresting narrative if it ignores the causes underlying the events which punctuate it, the causes which bring changes not only to the rulers and dynasties, but also to social, economic, political, and above all, cultural life. As we come nearer to present time, Whelpton devotes some attention to these trends. But trends are not the causes, only their symptoms. As an analyst and observer, Whelpton is generous,

sympathetic, but he greatly generalizes in identifying "the trends". In Chapter 4, Whelpton surveys the troubled half-century between 1950-1991, under the heading "The Monarchy in Ascendance", covering both domestic politics and foreign relations. The "*Kranti* of 2007" was an unfinished project, patched-up hurriedly in the mid-stream by Nehru who saw a destabilized Nepal as a potential threat to India, particularly with the Communist takeover in China. In the following decade, the political parties, particularly the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Communist Party split into scores of rival political factions, contesting for royal favour and a place in the political sun. The case of the Communist Party is exemplary: founded in 1949, by 1960 it split into about 22 factions, each leader holding on to an individualized interpretation of the gospel. The fact was that Nepal never had political parties as mature political institutions based on explicit programmes to which their cadres were formally and morally committed. They were only loose groupings of individuals motivated by personal aspirations. So loyalty was to the individual who can give them a share in the pie, not to policies, programmes, much less to a democratic or radical "ideology". They were nurtured in a culture, which Max Weber would have called "patrimonial", and no wonder that the multiparty parliamentary democratic experiment failed after a decade of trial and error, with the Monarchy emerging as the uncontested source and seat of power. The role of China and India in the consolidation of the power of the King is only a footnote to the Teng Hsiao-Ping doctrine that, as long as the cat catches the mice, it doesn't matter whether it is Red or not.

Whelpton's treatment of the Panchayat decades is interesting: he seems to think that it was an outcome of "a freak in south Asian history, almost entirely an unexpected development of the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962". But for it, an Indian economic blockage in October 1962 in support of insurgent Nepali Congress would have put an effective brake on King Mahendra's autocratic ambitions. As Whelpton puts it, "the king was rescued by the outbreak of war between India and China the following month. India now needed Mahendra's cooperation, and on Nehru's request Suvarna called off the armed campaign." (p. 99) This is yet another example of "the Great Man of History" favoured by the turn of historical events, if you like. However, such interpretations disregard the social base of King Mahendra who, among other things, propounded the doctrine of "class coordination" so as not to hurt his feudal power base, harping upon the "Kingdom of the Soul and Heaven" based on ancient Hindu scriptures. Nationalism became the doctrinaire base for legitimizing the monarchy, the crown being the symbol of national unity <u>and</u> sovereignty. However, the annexation of Sikkim in 1974 and the emergence of Bangladesh out of dismembered Eastern Pakistan, with India as an emancipating midwife, narrowed the options of the Nepalese establishment, and the challenges to

the monolithic system, with all political power concentrated in royal hands, became more and more politically visible. There were as many as three amendments to the 1962 Constitution of Nepal finally ending in a referendum to endorse "a reformed Panchayat system " in 1980.

Whelpton does not offer any satisfactory answer to the annoying question: why did it take such a long time for the Panchayat to collapse? And why did it, when it finally fell apart? If it was not again a question of an auspicious and conducive "national and international environment", especially the role of the friends of democracy and of Nepali democrats, what triggered it? Whelpton seems to blame, of all great men of history, Marich Man Singh and his unpopularity, more naively for his being the first Newar Prime Minister or Mukhtiyar! (p. 111)

History, of course, means different things to different scholars and readers. To Whelpton, fortunately, it is not just an unrevealing account of dynastic and political upheavals. At least, in part he explores the underlying forces at work that stir these changes: demographic changes, economic growth, social and cultural influences penetrating the arteries of a society. Part of his explanation probably lies in the movement of peoples into the Himalayas from all cardinal directions, at first from west to east, then from north to south, now from the mountains to the Terai. More recently, the flow of displaced populations from rural poverty to the urban centres is only outdone by those displaced by political conflict. However, the failure of a planned and mixed economy in the last five decades to cope with the rising population and the soaring social and economic expectations are at the heart of social and political discontent. The State in Nepal has always been the stronghold of a few elite families, the so-called *thar-ghar*, and this has not changed. Superficial changes in the political system have not succeeded in making any dent in the exclusivist political structure over the last half a century. Whelpton rapidly surveys the development "achievements and failures" fuelling the disillusionment of a democratic Nepal. The onset of a deepening crisis was, however, not entirely caused by social, demographic and economic factors alone. Nepal's topography is in itself a major challenge to any development planner. So is its geopolitical location as a landlocked country surrounded on three sides by the Indian Republic and on the other side by the snow-clad northern borders, accessible only seasonally by limited narrow passes. Perhaps, the single factor that accelerated public disillusionment with the system was corruption, factionalism and the callous lack of legislative awareness of urgent social and economic issues. That the system is not flexible and responsive is all too nakedly evident when Parliament voted out the Bills for land ceiling, the reservations for dalits, ethnic minorities and women during Sher Bahadur Deuba's final days. The rise of social and ethnic movements and regional

autonomy in Limbuwan and Madhes in particular are mainly symptoms of this malaise. Among other issues the Maoist insurgents successfully took advantage of this.

Whelpton's treatment of the historicity of Nepal as a nation-state, now on the brink of being listed as a failed state, is based on the strong assumption that, "Nepal's emergence into the post-colonial world as an independent state was not preordained but the result of a chain of historical accidents. These included both the emergence of a leader of the calibre of Prithivi Narayan Shah at a crucial point in the seventeenth century (sic!) and also his successors' ability in the following century to adapt efficiently to the realities of British dominance in South Asia" (p. 235). He concludes with an ominous note, "the strength of the reality behind this formal façade (of independence – KPM) remains to be determined" (p. 235).

A History of Nepal lists more than 250 items in its bibliography; however, only five are in Nepali. It gives the reader the impression that the account is mostly based on secondary sources available in English and other Western languages. The 34-page long Chapter 6 on "Lifestyles, Values and Identities: Changes in Nepalese Society, 1951-1991 (pp. 154-188) is a fascinating store of personal observations, but whether it is empirical social history is arguable. The longish section on the Royal Palace Massacre of June 1, 2001 (pp. 211-216) ends in journalistic bathos: "a fresh and full enquiry into the whole affair would nevertheless be most likely to confirm the official version of the events within the Tribhuvan Sadan" (p.216). This is a most unlikely statement from an aspiring historian of Nepal, well versed in courtly affairs.

The book has some useful tables, charts, maps and a glossary of unfamiliar terms for newcomers to the field. Its "Biographical Notes" on about 82 historical and colourful persons is a disproportionately mixed bag of patricians and plebeians, with too many Shahs and Ranas, perhaps. Sadly, the text is punctuated with a number of factual errors, particularly in dates and names. However, the book is a pleasant surprise and easy reading. At least, it is not yet another "historical account" by a pontificating British civil servant, or a medical surgeon, a postmaster general, a military colonel, or a travelling emissary with no formal academic training in the rigours of historiography. The choice of an unsavoury picture of a street scene in Birganj in the early 1970s on the cover-page seems to have nothing to do with history nor with Nepal – ancient, modern or in the making.

Thundering Falcon. An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple by Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod. In collaboration with Tsering Gyalbo. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2005. (Öst. Ak. d. Wiss., Philos.-hist. Klasse, Denkschriften, 333. Band). vii, 422 pp., ca. 220 ill. (fig., maps, drawings, diagrams), 1 DVD. ISBN 3-7001-3495-9.

Reviewed by Rudolf Kaschewsky, Bonn.

The history of Tibet, at least as regards the fundamental period of the early kings, is intrinsically connected with the region of the Yarlung area (situated some 80 km southeast of Lhasa), which was, as the authors rightly state, "the area where the cradle of the Tibetan civilisation stood" (p. 1). One of the most important buildings of this area is the Khra-'brug monastery. This is why its history is inseparably connected with the first (historical) king, Srong-btsan sgam-po (7th century A.D.). The book under review presents detailed studies on the historical, literary, legendary and architectural importance of that first monastery, of the whole region, and of the early history of Tibet in general.

It is a well-known fact that in Tibetan traditional geography "this Country of Snow had the form resembling a supine *srin mo*-demoness" (p. 48)[1] and that there had to be constructed temples "for the suppression of the major and minor bodily limbs" (p. 49) of the demoness. Generally there are three groups, each of them comprising four temples "suppressing" one of the demoness's shoulders, hips, elbows, knees, palms and foot-soles, being arranged under three headings, viz. "Ru-bzhi, mTha'-'dul, Yang-'dul". The book presents a detailed and lucid schedule of the twelve temples according to the relevant sources (chronicles, etc.) (pp. 184-199) and a carefully reproduced "body-map" showing the actual site of the temples on the body of the demoness (fig. 94-98). This "map" and its explanation are extremely helpful for understanding the connection between the rather abstract idea of "limb suppressing" edifices on the one hand and the concrete geographical situation on the other.

The temple suppressing the left shoulder of the *srin mo* bears the name *Khra-'brug*, generally translated as "thundering falcon", whereas in

---

[1] page-numbers without further indication refer, in the present review, to the pages of the book reviewed.

Mongolian texts *khra* is understood as "coloured" and the name of the temple is rendered as *eriyen luu* (Kaschewsky, 1971, p. 178). Rightly the authors emphasize that *Khra-'brug* can be identified "as Tibet's oldest recorded temple", according to "sources that date from the early post-dynastic time" (p. 5), whereas "the beginning of the monastic tradition" is associated with the founding of *bSam-yas* (pp. 21, 22).

The book starts with an introduction (36 pages), which includes iconographic blockprints of deities, diagrams, maps, and photos (among them historical photos made by H. Richardson and G. Tucci). After a general survey on "the position and classification of Khra-'brug in the Tibetan tradition" and on the literary sources (the translation of which is given as Part II) the authors discuss in detail the "historico-geographical delimitations" of the temple and the surrounding area and the "political and religious developments" in the area concerned. (As for the birth-date of king Srong-btsan sgam-po ["born 605?" (p. 5)], this seems to be quite plausible, though the year 617 [e. g. Shakabpa 1967: 25] fits better with the date of ascent to the throne at the age of 13 which is generally assumed to have taken place in 641.) In connection with the administrative location of Khra-'brug (p. 11), the authors do not mention the (old and modern) Chinese name of the temple, viz. *Ch'ang-chu-sze* or *Changzhusi* (昌珠寺, in older maps 常翥寺), which would have been helpful to anyone who is consulting Chinese sources and/or is simply trying to locate the temple; cf., e.g., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu* 1998: 84. (Incidentally, the bulky book does not contain a single Chinese character!) There are very accurate satellite maps of the Yar-lung and 'Phyong-po area (e.g., on p. 12) with inserted place names.

Regarding the "dark period" of Tibetan history after the death of King Glang-dar-ma the authors mention "indications, that at the close of the 9th century monk communities still existed intact in the vicinity of Khra-'brug" (p. 23), whereas the "cultic and religious re-occupation of the temple" did not start before the end of the 11th century (p. 27), and about the historical role of Khra-'brug in the later centuries "we possess no precise information" (p. 29).

One section of the introduction deals with the "building history" of Khra-'brug (pp. 15-21), mentioning the work of "craftsmen from Nepal" and Khotan (p. 17).

The main body of the book is constituted by the literary "sources for the history of Khra-'brug", six texts, which are described in Part II of the introduction and translated and annotated at length, though not completely, but the "relevant passages" only, from p. 41 onwards.

Text A (pp. 6-8, pp. 41-113) is a pilgrimage guidebook (*gnas bshad*) which "arguably was compiled in around the year 1920" (p. 7) and has

miniature drawings of e.g. Atiśa, Śākyamuni, Padmasambhava, bTsong-kha-pa and the 13th Dalai Lama; among the deities illustrated here, figures also the "speaking Tārā" (*sgrol ma gsung byon ma*) (p. 6) – a striking resemblance of the *Bolne Tārā* of Nepal (often mentioned in pilgrim's guides, e.g.), Bodh Gaya and South India.

It is very helpful for the reader that the authors have divided the guidebook under ten headings (some of which are further subdivided in subsections): Introductory Preamble, King Srong-btsan sgam-po, The Ra-sa 'Phrul-snang Temple and the Temples for Taming the Body and Limbs of the *srin mo*-Demoness [being an unnecessary reduplication as *srin mo* itself means "demoness"], The Main Temple and its Principal Sacred Objects, The Temples Outside sGo-drug Khra-'brug, The mChod-rten dBu-lnga, The Circumambulation, The 18 Holy Sanctuaries of the Yar-[k]lung Area, and Concluding Verses.

The (hitherto unpublished) Tibetan text is given in facsimile on pp. 337-353. In the English presentation of the text, it is not clearly perceptible which "relevant passages" have been translated and which non-relevant passages have been omitted; besides, the beginnings of some folios have inadvertently not been indicated – so fol. "4a" should be inserted on page 45, line 2; fol. "17a" on page 73, last line of (the main body of) the page; fol. "18a" on page 75, line 14.

On fol. 3a "the three *chol kha*-s" (regions, districts) of Tibet are mentioned, and as the Mongolian equivalent *ölge* is given for Tib. *chol-kha* (p. 43); however, usually *chol kha* is, in Mongolian, rendered by *egür* (Sumatiratna 1959: 661, cf. Lessing 1961: 301b). And as the authors use no Chinese characters one wonders which *lu* ist meant as equivalent for tib. *chol kha* (ibid.) which usually is rendered in Chinese by *qu* (alias *ch'ü*, 區).

Tib. *a mṛ de va* (fol. 4a) most probably is not "Amideva" (p. 46), but Amṛtadeva which is rather synonymous with *Amitāyus*; *lha ldan* (fol. 4b) should be rendered by *devavat* instead of *devavān* (p. 46), and *mi'i lha* by *mānavadeva* instead of *mavadeva* (ibid.). Fol. 25b *gtsug tor 'khor los bsgyur ba* is rendered as "Ulagriva-" (p. 90) instead of the usual "Uṣṇīṣa-" (cf. Lokesh Chandra 1976: 1895a). Further: Ākarmati (p. 66) for Ākaramati, Āryapalo (p. 76, Index p. 423a and p. 158 Ārya Palo) for Āryabala; Krakuccanda (p. 74, fol. 17a – not fol. 6b as stated in the Index p. 423a) for Krakucchanda.

After the translation of the text itself there follow a satellite map of "Lower Yar-lung" and more than 80 photos of the landscape, the buildings and inner cells, altars and iconographic details (pp. 114-142).

Text B (p. 9, pp. 143-148) is an excerpt of the famous chronicle *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* of dPa'-bo gTsug-lag phreng-ba from the Beijing edition of 1986. Here *gtsang khang* should not be rendered by *gaṇḍakutī* (p. 144) but by *gandhakuṭī* (Edgerton, 1953, p. 209b).

Text C (p. 9, pp. 149-154) is taken from the *rGyal po bka' thang* (*bKa' thang sde lnga*) from the Bejing edition of 1986, presenting detailed descriptions of several chambers of the temples, especially of the *gNod-sbyin-khang*, "not mentioned in the other texts" (p. 152). A diagram (p. 154) is showing precisely the position of the different sections of the "Nāga Treasury" of that gNod-sbyin-khang.

Text D (p. 9, pp. 155-158) "is derived from the 16th chapter of the *bKa' chems Ka khol ma*" from the Lanzhou edition of 1989. In note 6 (p. 157) mention is made of "the confession text Bodhi[sattva]pattideśanā"; correctly, this should be *-āpatti-* 'sin' (Edgerton 1953: 97b) – or *-pratideśanā* 'confession' (*op. cit.*, 363a); and *ciṇṭāmaṇi-* should be *cintāmaṇi-.*

"Text E is the famous inscription of the Khra-'brug temple bell" (p. 9, pp. 159-161), "evidently to be dated (...) ca. 804 A.D. or later" (note 5). That inscription had been reproduced or mentioned in several earlier publications, but partly confounded with the bell of the bSam-yas monastery; the authors have, meritoriously, cleared up the matter (p. 159, note 1). As king Khri lDe-srong-btsan (Sad-na-legs) is mentioned in the text, the authors discuss his and his predecessors' dates, presenting (with sound arguments) a chronology which differs from the usually found dates: hence, Khri-srong lde-btsan's death in 802, Mu-ne btsan-po reigned 802-803/04, Khri lDe-srong-btsan (Sad-na-legs) reigned 804-815/17 (p. 160, note 3).

"Text F is a 84-folio-long *bskang gso* text from the 18th century dedicated to the protector gods of the temple" (p. 9, pp. 162-168) and is centred on *Tshangs-pa dkar-po*, the god, who "assumes the key position" on occasion of "the fifth-month festival *Me-tog mchod-pa*" – described on pp. 289-296, and vividly illustrated by impressive photos of the years 1998 and 2001 and particularly on the accompanying DVD video attached to the book. The text, also included in the attached DVD, was "completed 1763". It should be added that Tshangs-pa dkar-po is also one of the 30 tutelary deities "of the world" (cf. Kaschewsky/Tsering 1998: Nr. 27) bearing the epithet "Lord of life" (*srog gi bdag po*). In note 12 the assumed Sanskrit form of the goddess Nyi-ma gzhon-nu should read *–kumārf* instead of the masculine *–kumāra.*

One finds quite a number of inaccurately transliterated Sanskrit terms and names which cannot all be listed here; see, for instance, Guhyasamāja for Guhyasamāja (p. 146), Dipaṃkāra (p. 73) and Dipamkara (p. 423) for Dīpaṃkāra, Māmākī (p. 424) for Māmakī, *caturaśeti* (p. 423) for *caturaśīti*, *samadhi* (p. 425) for *samādhi* etc.

There are four appendices: Under the heading "The Tradition Concerning Tibet's First Royal Temples" the authors mention the (also ideological) tentative attempts of the Tibetans to reconstruct the "important period considered the golden heyday of Tibet" (p. 171) and

present tables listing the temples (which were to "suppress" the demoness) according to the various chronicles, etc. This is followed by a very impressive description of the "Supine Demoness Painting and its Religious Sites" which provides a lucid help for understanding the tables.

App. II (authored by Guntram Hazod alone) deals with the "beginnings" of the glorious period of Tibetan history in the Yar-lung area, starting with an attempt to reconstruct the pre-Buddhist tradition (pp. 249, 259), thus throwing light on the rule of "pre-imperial" Yar-lung, e.g., king lHa Tho tho-ri (often considered a merely "mythological" figure), and on the shifting of the rulers from Yar-lung and the "Establishment of Royal Residences in the Central sKyid-chu Region". The author is also dealing with "the foundation legend" (pp. 249f.) which gave the Khra-'brug temple its name and which is even today recounted by the locals: "a great bird which in the form of a falcon (*khra*) and accompanied by thundering (*'brug*)", helped the king to dry out the sea when its water had dangerously risen.

App. III consists of a chronological table of immense interest, presenting the authors' findings on the early history of Tibet, from lHa Tho-tho-ri (5th century) to the year 2002; these six pages (pp. 308-313) can be regarded as the most recent and most reliable overview of Tibet's history! In addition, there is a genealogical table "of the Yar-lung Jo-bo-s (11-14th cent.)" (pp. 314-322).

The wealth of mythological, historical, philological, and geographic information is completed by App. IV "Architectural Documentation" with detailed plans and illustrations.

The bibliography contains, inter alia, 14 pages of Tibetan text titles, alphabetically arranged according to (short) title – which at times is not easily to be recognized, thus the Vth Dalai Lama's famous *Gang ga'i chu rgyan* being listed under the heading "Thob yig". In all cases where editions from China / Tibet and also facsimiles from India / Nepal are available, preference has been given to the China / Tibet editions. As "secondary sources" the authors list modern books written by Tibetans; one wonders why here (p. 373) Ye-shes 'byung-gnas is listed between "Dung-dkar" and "Nam-mkha'i nor-bu". Besides, there are seven "Chinese sources", 14 pages listing "European-Languages Sources" and two "Web-sites". In the "Tibetan Index", personal names ("human and non-human"), place-names, and a very limited list of "Texts" are to be found. It is not quite clear why from the vast amount of Tibetan texts mentioned in the bibliography only about 20 have been included in the Index. (The place names beginning with sG- [p. 408b] should have been inserted on p. 409a [after *rGyas sman*].) There is no Chinese index; however, two Chinese names (Guan Di and Guan Yu) have crept into the Index of Tibetan personal names (p. 394).

Thundering Falcon is, in all its aspects, an extraordinary book of highest scientific value. It is and will remain a landmark of Tibetology the importance of which hardly can be overestimated.

References

Lokesh Chandra. 1976. *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary.* vol. II. Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company (Repr. from the New York 1961 edition.)

Edgerton, Franklin. 1953. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary.* Vol. II: Dictionary. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Kaschewsky, Rudolf. 1971. *Das Leben des lamaistischen Heiligen Tsongkhapa Blo-bzang grags-pa (1357-1419).* Teil I. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Kaschewsky, Rudolf / Tsering, Pema. 1998, *sDe-dpon sum-cu. Ritual und Ikonographie der "Dreissig Schutzgottheiten der Welt".* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Lessing, Ferdinand D. 1961. *Mongolian-English Dictionary.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. 1967, *Tibet. A political history.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Sumatiratna, 1959. *Bod Hor kyi brda yig ming tshig don gsum gsal bar byed pa' mun sel sgron me.* Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn chevlel.

Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenhua dacidian, 1998, Beijing: Minzu.

Credit & Culture: A Substantivist Perspective on Credit Relations in Nepal by Michael Mühlich. Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2001. XVI + 376 pp., 9 illustrations, 4 maps, 14 facsimiles, glossary. ISBN 3-496-02721-5.

Reviewed by Werner M. Egli, Zürich.

In respect of the large variety of ethnic groups in Nepal, one wonders why there are not more comparative studies based on fieldwork in different cultural contexts. Apart from comparisons of second hand data, comparative studies in Nepalese ethnography often are reduced on comparisons of ethnic groups with high Hindu castes or on comparisons of different ethnic groups in the locality. Thus Michael Mühlich's study *Credit & Culture* comparing culturally embedded credit relations among Hindu castes, Newars and Sherpas in the localities of Ramkot (Kathmandu Valley), Tansen (Palpa District), Junbesi and Sallerie (Solu-Khumbu District) is especially to be welcomed. The study is based on many years of fieldwork and on a profound knowledge of the rich literature on the groups under investigation, as well as on an extensive search in the archives. This last effort is documented in appendix I with the presentation of 38 Nepalese debt documents (*tamsuk*). Dealing in preliminary studies as well as with the type of credit system shared by Gurungs, Thakalis and Manangis, the author focuses on the credit relations of the three groups mentioned, giving his arguments strong support by using a frame of comparison with the same issues: 1. family structure and property relations, 2. labour exchange and wage labour in the locality, 3. patronage relations, 4. barter and borrowing, 5. credit practices, 6. credit-worthiness and gift exchange.

In addition to the benefits of Mühlich's comparative perspective two further points of his methodological approach seem worth mentioning. Whereas economic topics in many developing studies are usually analysed immediately in respect of economic backwardness, Mühlich takes instead the view of the economic anthropology. That not only allows to take into consideration the cultural context of economic relations as a genuine anthropological aim but could contribute as well, to the determination of possibilities and limitations of the implementation of development programs, in our case the introduction of micro-credit programs; thus Mühlich's context-sensitive approach may contribute to the so often mentioned sustainability of such programs. And third Mühlich tries to reconstruct the historical dimensions of Nepalese credit practices from

the appearance of coinage in the Licchavi period up to contemporary examples of culturally embedded credit cooperatives. The functioning of these cooperatives (cf. p. 99 f.) gives strong support to the practical relevance of Mühlich's thesis. The historical view prevents from comparing isolated communities by emphasizing a wrong idea of their traditional or original culture. Mühlich instead is focusing on the cultural dynamics of local communities in the interactive process of the building of the Nepalese nation-state.

An experience in 1992 that inspired Mühlich to conduct his study of credit relations shed best light on his subject as well as on his approach: "One old woman who lived in a thatched hut near the house of my landlord was able to build a house to replace her hut by means of 'borrowing' voluntary labour. My friend and cook, a Jirel of that area, worked out the plan. It was necessary merely to have an enormous amount of *chang* (home made beer) and some money to buy tree-cutting rights – enough for the tiles of the small roof and some wooden frames. In effect, credit-worthiness was attributed to the woman and she was able to receive voluntary labour from the neighbours because she was offering them *chang...*, considered in this context as a medium of exchange. Since *chang* is an item that is involved in nearly every Sherpa ritual, there is a shared understanding of the value attached to it as a gift. It was in this way that my interest was aroused in ritual as a model for the economic sphere, as a means of creating mutual trust and acquiring help and credit"(1999: 71).

In chapter I of *Credit & Culture* Mühlich develops the economical categories for his analysis. This theoretical discussion is mainly a presentation and defence of Polanyi's substantivist perspective with special reference to Nepal. Critiques of Polanyi's model, as for instance Znoj's approach (1995), in line with transactional analysis developed for the Rejang of Sumatra are rejected with the argument of ethnographic peculiarities (cf. p. 20); other recent contributions to economical anthropology are bluntly ignored. Even in respect of the chosen comparative perspective a more comprehensive theoretical discussion could be expected. For the understanding of credit relations some contemporary approaches would be quite helpful, just in view of three main topics of Mühlich's study: ritual embeddedness of credit relations, social change and trust. In respect of the first topic I think of Godelier's explanation of *L'énigme du don* (1996) going back on Mauss' idea of the role of the supernatural in the exchange process; in view of the other points I think of Ensminger's *New Institutional Economic Anthropology* (1992) considering culturally shaped institutions not only as a more or less stable frame of economic transactions, but giving them an active role in respect of reducing or raising transactional costs, and hereby dispose of much

more explanatory power in view of social change than the substantivist perspective.

Thus Mühlich's hypothesis, elaborated accurately in chapter I.5., is primarily a substantivist one. According to Mühlich, "the forms of community found in Nepal can be divided into three types: those based on a reciprocal principle of integration, those based on the principle of redistribution and, exhibiting increasing international influence, those in which the domination of the market principles is apparent"(p. 46f.). Different types of exchange relations are corresponding to the integration principles and in respect of credit relations this leads to the following questions: "How are credit relations secured or made reliable? What is the meaning of trustworthiness or credit-worthiness under these varying circumstances? And what are the sanctions or checks and balances that keep credit relations going and guarantee some kind of repayment"(cf. p. 48)? Mühlich's answers on these questions concerning the character of security, credit and repayment are summarized elegantly in a schema called *Three-Layer Model of Credit Relations* (cf. p. 51). In the reciprocal type of credit relations credit-worthiness is "a result of service and gifts from debtor to creditor in advance and in perpetuation of mutual debt relations". Credit is "a moral obligation to redistribute or to reciprocate in return for similar help (between equals)". Repayment together with "natural interest", is "secured by a latent sanction threatening exclusion from mutual support". In the redistributional type credit-worthiness is forced by sanction: "fixing the interest rate according to ascribed status, plus gifts as tokens of the status difference between debtor and creditor". As an aspect of redistribution, credit here has "to safeguard longstanding relations of patronage (or to perpetuate dependency relations). Repayments not secured by principles of redistribution are ensured by collateral (initially in the form of use rights) backed by law". In the market-oriented type we find "credit-worthiness by offering simple collateral that provides material security to the creditor. Credit as a single-interest transaction involves a preventive sanction: the demanding of simultaneous repayment of interest and principle. Repayment backed by legal institutions if the credit transaction is carried out according to legal standards".

Mühlich is aware of the idealization of his model and suggests, that what seemingly corresponds to evolutionary types is in effect to be thought of as referring to co-existing spheres of exchange in a given local community (cf. p. 54). The major part of Mühlich's study is an effort to test the idealized model in view of the complex social reality represented by three individual cultures and examples of their local communities. The ethnographic material is presented and discussed following the six issues mentioned above. Skipping these materially rich chapters of the book I

want to turn to some of Mühlich's conclusions in chapter VI beginning with the analysis of the historical development of credit practices in Nepal.

In the course of this development in general as well as in the case of credit-worthiness among the high Hindu castes, the dominant aspect of the economy is redistribution depending on status. On the macro-level, this redistribution formerly went out from the king and his administration. On the micro-level, the historical reality of the castes was replicated by the patron's redistribution of shares of the sacrifice to members of the ritual community and his connection with householders through tenancy and work relations. This practice has continued into the present. If the subsistence of his client was not secured, a patron was under moral obligation to disburse credit to him. Credit is a form of redistribution patronizing those in debt. Among the more egalitarian Newars and Sherpas reciprocity dominates the economic relations. Here positions of power are subject to relations of reciprocity and social control is either determined by a rotational procedure or conferred as support in return for help. In this system the characteristics of gift exchange are also to be found in the credit relations; it is a form of delayed exchange. Continuing status differences are less significant; reliance on future reciprocity counts, exclusion from future exchange is the sanction (cf. p. 268f.).

The family structure and property relations among the high Hindu castes are to some extend again a replication of the patron-client structure and are thus perpetuating the accompanying kind of credit relations. Although among the Newars the subordination under the head of the joint family is to be found, in the case of women it is relativized inasmuch a woman's dowry is considered as her own property. Whereas property in land shared by the family is the basis of high Hindu caste's peasant economy in the highly diversified Newar economy property relations are as well more complex. Thus the familial and the communal integration are not managed by the same mechanism. Communal integration is based on additional institutions, mainly on the funeral and lineage association (*guthi*). This socially important institution may have lost its traditional economic significance as credit association but as recent developments show that function can be revitalized.

The family structure and property relations of the Sherpas are, by contrast, based on the nuclear family. The reproduction of the family as well as the communal integration is mainly based on the inheritance system of "preferential ultimogenitur" (Goody) and individual capacities. According to Ortner, rivalry among brothers over access to property may be a main cause of the nuclear family pattern, but it does not explain the "economic soundness"(p. 272) of the household. As Mühlich correctly

points out, the problem in this society is the foundation of one's own household. Participation in communal property by clan membership, formalized systems of gift exchange and long-term labour exchange contribute to the solution of this problem. But what does "economic soundness" mean in a society with high rates of out-migration? Even if we do not consider migration as an "anomaly" we should not overestimate the exchange and credit mechanisms determined by Mühlich for the economic integration and this seems to be true not only for the Sherpas.

My critical objection to Mühlich's reduction of his approach to Polanyi's substantivist perspective, his overestimation of credit relations in view of economic integration in general and a certain schematism, by looking on the complex social reality through the glasses of the "three-layer model" – on the contrary to the author's assertion –, should not permit to detract the great value of this study. I agree with Mühlich, that his results may "be relevant enough to suggest fruitful avenues of approach for further theory and practice-oriented studies in the field of credit relations"(p. 261). Even if this self-assessment would be valid only for the progress of the economic anthropology of Nepal that would diminish the merit of this study in no way.

References

Ensminger, Jean. 1992. *Making a Market.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Godelier, Maurice. 1996. *L'énigme du don.* Paris: Fayard.

Mühlich, Michael, 1999. "Credit Relations in Nepal", *EBHR* 17 (Autumn): 69-99.

Znoj, Heinzpeter. 1995. *Tausch und Geld in Zentralsumatra.* Berlin: Reimer.

EBHR

SOAS • LONDON CNRS • PARIS SAI • HEIDELBERG
ISSN 0943 8254

EBHR 29-30

Summer 2006