

**39**

Autumn-Winter 2011

**EBHR**

**EUROPEAN BULLETIN  
OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH**

## European Bulletin of Himalayan Research

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For subscription details and back issues (>3 years)  
<http://www.digitalthimalaya.com/ebhr>

The EBHR is published from Kathmandu in collaboration with  
Social Science Baha (<http://www.soscbaha.org>)

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Articles should be written in English and should not exceed 10,000 words in length, including footnotes and references. When preparing your manuscript for submission to the EBHR, please observe the following conventions.

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Use British English spellings, e.g. 'colour', 'supervised'.

Use single quotation marks throughout, except for quotes within quotes, which should take double quotation marks. Do not use scare quotes.

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The titles of books and the names of newspapers and journals should be given in italics with initial capitals.

References should not be given in footnotes, which should be used sparingly to provide supplementary information.

Diacritical marks may be employed for the transliteration of terms from Himalayan languages, but should be used correctly and consistently. Personal and place names should not take diacritical marks.

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References in the body of the text should use the Harvard system, e.g. '(Hacchethu 1997: 17)' with a space after the colon and no comma between author and date; where there is more than one reference listed, put commas between them, not semi-colons.

When listing references at the end of articles, give the surname of the author followed by initials, e.g. 'Malla, K.P.' not 'Malla, Kamal Prakash'. Give the main title of a book with capital letters, but use lower case in the sub-title after an initial capital. Use lower case after an initial capital for the title of an article or book chapter.

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[Monographs]

Bennett, L. 1983. *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and symbolic roles of high-caste women in Nepal*. New York: Columbia University Press.

[Chapters in books]

Ishii, H. 1995. 'Caste and kinship in a Newar village'. In *Contested Hierarchies: A collaborative ethnography of caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*, edited by David N. Gellner and Declan Quigley, pp. 109-57. Oxford: Clarendon.

[Journal articles]

Scheppele, K.L. 2003. 'Aspirational and adversive constitutionalism: the case for studying cross-constitutional influence through negative models'. *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 1(2): 296-324.

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## EDITORIAL

The work involved in producing a scholarly journal is, more often than not, a labour of love. Academics based in the Euro-American world are given scant credit by their employers for editorial work, but we do it because of our sense of belonging to an academic community, for which a Bulletin such as the EBHR provides a focal point. It is therefore very heartening to draw readers' attention to two noteworthy examples of academic generosity within these covers.

On 22 June I received an email from one Mr William Eustace of Malvern, which read as follows:

A colleague of yours gave me your e-mail address as she thought you may be able to help me. Whilst sorting out some old papers I came across an old exercise book which was given to my Grandfather, Sir Harold Glover, whilst he was Chief Conservator, Punjab Forestry Service. Dated 1937 it is hand written and describes folk-lore stories in the Kunawar region of Northern India. In spite of my being born in Lahore (my father was in the Indian Civil Service and for a time was District Commissioner of the Kangra District), my knowledge of Hindu and Buddhist Gods and Deities is very limited and I find reading the stories difficult. If I could find someone who understands this subject, together with the place names, and is prepared to type the contents of the book (only 66 pages), then it would bring to life a part of my family history that both I and other members of my family could enjoy. Whether the contents are of any interest to a wider audience, I have no idea, but perhaps you would be able to answer that.

I forwarded this email to Arik Moran, and the result is the article published in this issue entitled 'An Unpublished Account of Kinnauri Folklore'. I am most grateful to William Eustace for offering this to us, and to Arik Moran for taking the time to edit and introduce this most interesting text.

The second example of academic generosity to which I would like to draw readers' attention is the contribution made by John Whelpton, Mark Turin and Burkhard Quessel to the completion and online publication of the Hodgson Catalogue, on which we report in this issue. I urge EBHR readers

to visit the catalogue website and browse there at leisure: the Hodgson archive contains something for almost everyone.

I am also very grateful to Anne de Sales for granting us permission to publish the text of the lecture she delivered in London on 31 October. Writing of this quality deserves an audience far wider than a university lecture theatre can accommodate.

A specialist peer-reviewed journal such as the EBHR can provide young scholars with an opportunity to present their work for the first time to a Himalayan Area Studies readership. Usually, this is the work of researchers working at postdoctoral level: Chiara Letizia's highly topical article on the evolving understandings of secularism in Nepal is a prime example. But in this issue we are also very happy to publish an article by a Ph.D student, Jelle Wouters, which recommended itself to us because of its focus on India's little-studied Northeast and its critique of a key text.

This issue also includes an interview with Sapana Malla-Pradhan, a leading Nepali human rights lawyer, marks the passing of the great Tibeto-Burman linguist Keith Sprigg and the Himalayan explorer Michel Peissel, and ends by celebrating the achievement of Jhamak Ghimire, who is an inspiration to us all.

Michael Hutt, January 2012

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Jelle J.P. Wouters** completed an M.Phil in Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford in 2010. Currently he is a Ph.D candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, where he is working on state and nonstate, indigenous approaches to socio-economic development. His publications include 'Revisiting Srinivas's remembered village' (*Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, New Series 2(1-2): 44-65) and 'Reconfiguring colonial ethnography: the British gaze over India's North-East', in *North-East India: A handbook of Anthropology* (forthcoming, edited by Tanka B. Subba).

**Arik Moran** completed a D.Phil in History at the University of Oxford in 2010. His research concerns the formation of communal identities in the West Himalaya in the 18-19th centuries, and changes in social and political culture among Rajput elites against the backdrop of British expansion and oral epic traditions. He is currently working on a project on social memory in oral traditions in Himachal Pradesh. He was appointed as lecturer in the Department of Asian Studies, University of Haifa, Israel, in 2011.

**Chiara Letizia** is a social anthropologist and historian of religions, and a researcher and lecturer in cultural anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. Since 1997 she has been conducting research on religion and society in Nepal. She received her PhD from the University of Rome in 2003 for a thesis on Hindu pilgrimages in the Tarai, and conducted post-doctoral research at the CNRS in Paris in 2004 on the adoption of Buddhism by Tharu and Magar communities in relation to ethnic claims and political change. From 2009 to 2011 she was a Newton Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, where she conducted research on understandings of secularism in Nepal.

**Anne de Sales** holds the position of Chercheur at the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in association with the University of Paris Ouest Nanterre. Her doctoral research focused on the shamanic tradition of the Kham-Magar of Northwestern Nepal and resulted in a monograph entitled *Je suis né de vos jeux de tambours* (Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 1991). Her



recent work concerns the social and cultural impact of the Maoist uprising in rural Nepal, with special attention to local narratives. She is also co-editor with Robert Parkin of *Out of the Study and into the Field: Ethnographic theory and practice in French anthropology* (Berghahn Books 2010).

# An Unpublished Account of Kinnauri Folklore

by Sur Das, introduced by Arik Moran

Stretching along the banks of the Sutlej River from the border with West Tibet to the Shimla Hills (Himachal Pradesh, India), the remote region of Kinnaur (also spelled 'Kanawr', 'Kunwar', etc.) is among the most fascinating, if least understood, parts of the Himalaya. A major obstacle to comprehending the region is the notorious difficulty of its language, which is a Tibeto-Burman dialect that greatly differs from the Indo-European Pahari spoken in adjacent parts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The complex cultural world of Kinnaur, which draws from the West Tibetan, Hindu and indigenous Pahari cultural zones that surround it, has consequently been exceedingly difficult to access, with the few insights into it limited to comments found in travellers' accounts and anthropological interpretations by researchers specializing in and around the region. This paper redresses this shortcoming by presenting a hitherto unknown account of regional folklore that was written by a local Kinnauri in 1938.

The text, originally titled 'Himalayan Folk-lore Stories', was recently discovered among the effects of Sir Harold Matthew Glover (1885-1961), a high-ranking official in the colonial Forest Department.<sup>1</sup> Glover commissioned the account from a subordinate ranger while on tour in 'upper and lower Bashahr', the erstwhile kingdom of which Kinnaur formed the easternmost portion. The author, the notable (*negi*) Sur Das of Sangla, wrote the text in cursive English in a notebook of 67 pages, measuring 18x22 cm.<sup>2</sup> Sur Das was highly esteemed by his superior, who cites a passage from

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I wish to thank William Eustace for providing me with a scanned version of the text presented in this paper and his permission to reproduce it here for a wider audience, as well as additional documents and information on his grandfather, Sir Harold Glover.

- 1 Sir Harold Glover was born in Worcester, England, and educated at Worcester Royal Grammar School and Magdalen College, Oxford. He entered the Indian Forestry Service in 1908 and served as Political Assistant to Superintendent Hill States, Simla in 1914. In 1925 he officiated as Conservator, becoming Chief Conservator of Forests, Punjab, from 1939 to 1943, when he retired. During 1944 he was employed on special duties by the Punjab and Baluchistan Governments and in 1945-6 he was Forest Adviser to Allied Control Commission, first in Germany and then in Austria. He wrote a number of technical articles and, in 1945, published *Soil Erosion in the Punjab*.
- 2 Sur Das wrote his account over three days (3-6 June 1938), apparently in consultation with

the notebook (the concluding lines of ‘Phulma and the Ghost’, see below) in a personal letter, asking his undisclosed addressee whether he did not ‘think that well told? Particularly in a foreign tongue by a Bashahri!’ That the officer’s appreciation of Sur Das was shared by the government of Bashahr and his countrymen can be deduced from his elevated social status, his father (who also finds mention in the booklet) having been the kingdom’s appointed police officer (*darogah*) in Sangla, the Baspa Valley’s main village, which is adjacent to Kamru, the original abode of Bashahr’s ruling dynasty. The text thus offers a view of local customs and beliefs as perceived by the early twentieth century Kinnauri elite, which had successfully guarded its social status through privileged access to both the British and Bashahri administrations.<sup>3</sup> This does not detract from the account’s validity as an articulation of popular perceptions, because (before the arrival of migrant workers for the vast hydraulic projects along the Sutlej in recent decades) the regional population was and remains truly miniscule.<sup>4</sup>

The insights to be gained from Das’s stories are far from trivial. The first chapter, for example, offers an overview of the socio-political functions of Kinnauri popular religion—locally known as *devta ka raj* or ‘government by deity’—that is startlingly congruent with the recent findings of anthropologists working in the region. The *devoirs* of the various postholders (*mathes, kardars, chelas*) attached to village gods (*devtas*, here ‘deotas’) thus clearly point to a continuity between early twentieth-century and present-day socio-religious practices (Sutherland 2006) that is similarly reflected in the particular mode of possession exhibited by the deities’ spokespersons (Berti 2001). Early evidence of the perplexed effects of the introduction of novel technologies to Kinnauri society may be discerned in the author’s defence of the *devtas*’ traditional function as healers in light of the arrival of contemporary, western trained-doctors. The same chapter also offers important information regarding the history of Bashahr and evidence of its origins in the Baspa Valley. The visits of the presiding goddess of Bashahr, Bhimakali of Sarahan, to the ancient

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village elders. The notebook reached Glover in Lahore four days later.

3 On the relations and consequences of the British Forest Department’s activities in Bashahr, see Moran (2007).

4 Even in 1971, a whole generation after Sur Das wrote this, the population of Sangla Tehsil, which encompasses the entire Baspa Valley, constituted a mere 10,789 inhabitants (Raha & Mahato 1985: 21).

goddesses at Astangche (a site between the ancient capital of Kamru and Sangla) thus offer evidence of the royal family's persistent ties with the valley and its deities through ritual. The author's comment that Kalan Devta of Kamru is 'the soul [of] ... the grandfather of the present raja of Bashahr' (fn 32) further underscores the links between the kingdom's rulers and the Baspa Valley, while affirming the intuition that West Himalayan village gods are frequently deified representations of deceased human leaders. The interplay of theistic and human sovereignty is also evinced in the ruler of Bashahr's extending land grants (*muafi*) to Jubbal Narayan, the paramount deity in Jubbal, a tract that had developed into an independent chiefship by the time of Das's writing. In doing so, the raja would have increased his prestige among the followers of a deity that lay beyond the political boundaries devised by the British with their arrival in the West Himalaya (c. 1815). Such seemingly minor vignettes add an historical depth that underlines Peter Sutherland's call for a closer scrutiny of the analytical categories used when addressing questions of religion, power and sovereignty in the region (Sutherland 2006).

The stories appearing in the second and subsequent chapters are almost exclusively derived from the subjective experiences of local inhabitants. These provide a close encounter with Kinnauri narratives that is rarely attained in contemporary sources. The altercations of peasants and hunters with mythic creatures, for example, attest to the unique blend of West Tibetan and Hindu beliefs that pervade Kinnauri society. This is patently evident in the case of the Kalis, the female 'fairy-like mountain spirits' who inhabit high altitude regions and who are believed to be vastly more powerful than the *devtas* that manage village life. The same spirits also control the elements and are habitually offered sacrifices to secure good weather conditions, but they may also launch devastating hailstorms and/or steal the highlanders' crops when angered. The formidable risks involved in incurring the Kalis' rage are exemplified in the story of Malu the hunter (*shikari*), whose venture into their territory and subsequent killing of mountain game (which is considered Kali's property) resulted in lifelong madness (see story 3 in chapter II, below).

Beyond Kalis and *devtas*, Kinnauri folklore boasts of numerous ghosts possessing lesser powers. These included not only maleficent beings such as the *ghoras* and *shin-dans*, but also the spirits of deceased members of the community. In possessing a member of the deceased's family, these

latter could enforce social norms and rules, such as ensuring the proper dispersal of the ashes of the deceased in a selected location, or safeguarding polyandrous marital contracts when these came under threat (stories 2 and 1, respectively, in chapter V, below). Again, the agreement of these early twentieth stories with the findings of anthropologists in neighbouring regions (e.g., Sax 2009: 21-22) points to the remarkable continuity in Kinnauri (and, more generally, West Himalayan) society and help validate recent explorations in the field.

Before delving into Das's stories, a few technical notes on the body of the text and its mode of presentation are in order. Apart from rare instances of obvious misspellings (e.g., 'fructure' for 'fracture') and cumbersome syntax, which have been corrected, the transcription below follows the text's original format, which consists of a 'preface' and five 'chapters': 1) village deotas and devis, demi-gods and goddesses (pp. 1-15 in the original); 2) Kalis and Matingos, the fairies (16-32); 3) Other Spirits and Ghosts (33-46); 4) Báyuls, the hidden habitations (47-53); 5) Life and Death (54-66). Das also wrote numerous notes in which he translated Kinnauri and Pahari terms into English, and sometimes added additional glosses. These have been retained and, where appropriate, supplemented with the definitions provided by Tikka Ram Joshi's contemporary dictionaries of Pahari and Kinnauri (Joshi 1989).<sup>5</sup>

## Himalayan Folk-lore Stories

### N. Sur Das

#### Preface

This short note briefly deals with Folk-lore Stories prevailing mostly in Kunawar, and has to amuse its readers with what good spirits (deotas) and rakshasas (evil spirits) do in human life over here. The belief in doings of good and evil spirits and their very existence are being challenged now due to the growth, though slow, of the new culture of this twentieth century. In the remote past centuries, bad administration by the rulers ruled in

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5 To many of Sur Das's notes I have added definitions from the Pahari and Kinnauri dictionaries (Joshi 1989), marking them as 'PD' and 'KD'. Given the notorious difficulty of the Kinnauri language and its limited spread (in 1971 there were less than 50,000 Kinnauri speakers in all (Raha & Mahato 1985: 21)), it is hoped that these additional definitions will prove useful.

difficult mountainous countries like Bashahr. No regular communications were there. Four to five miles journey from one village to another formed a whole day's hard march. The man's social position was in [the] dark and spirits danced in his mind. But the man of today has already begun feeling himself self-confident and is able to make use of rationality. Both deotas and rakshasas, therefore, are growing weaker with the dawn of light on man. But the thing is, today, good and evil spirits may be there, yet their existence has not as much to do with human life as it was thought in the remote past. It is difficult to deny the very existence of spirits – super human beings.

### Chapter I: Village Deotas and Devis<sup>6</sup>

Almost each village has got its deota or devi in Bashahr, like those in Kulu and [in] part of Mandi. Deotas and devis are of different origin. Some are Narain's [Narayan, Vishnu], said to [have] come from Badrinath [in Garwhal] and others are Nāgās [serpents], said to have sprung up in high-lying mountain lakes. Again, other deotas are thought to have come into being from this or that place. It is believed that some deotas came out of 'Gu-Rag',<sup>7</sup> a growing stone. For instance, the deotas of Pangī, Rarang, Khawangi and Rogi are thought to be brothers springing up from a growing stone (gu-rag) at Pangī.<sup>8</sup> That growing stone is enclosed within a small temple so that nobody touches it. If anybody touches a growing stone it is desecrated. The person touching a growing stone is made to offer a sheep or a goat, generally a young one, to the offended growing stone by the

6 Deotas=demi gods=good spirits, devis=demi goddesses=good spirits [PD p.31: *deo* 'a deity, a village god'; *debi* 'a goddess'].

7 Gu=to grow or growing; rag=a stone [KD p.70: first person pronoun, 'I'; KD p.120: *rág/rágg* 'a stone'].

8 [AM:] These four villages are situated on the right bank of the Sutlej River, facing the Kinner Kailash Range. Rogi (Roghi) lies about an hour's walk west of Chini (also called Kalpa), which is located immediately above the modern district headquarters of Rekonng Peo at an altitude of approximately 3,000 meters. Khawangi, Pangī and Rarang are three villages along the Indo-Tibet Road (and thus closer to the Sutlej River) situated to the east of Peo and opposite Powari, the administrative headquarter of the erstwhile wazirat of Tukpa. The claim that these villages' sibling devtas originated in the 'growing stone' of Pangī was nevertheless contested during a recent visit to Roghi (July 2008), where a knowledgeable youth asserted that these deities had originally come from Rohru, hinting at a past migration from the latter region to Kinnaur and incidentally explaining the enduring ties between the devtas of both regions (see, for example, Moran 2007: 164-6).

village community. Even if nobody sees a man touching a growing stone, he fears [the] growing stone and confesses his contact with the growing stone God. A man touching it and then keeping quiet is sure to come to grief. Why should he not boldly confess his touching [the] growing stone and be away from ‘doshang’?<sup>9</sup>

The deota or the devi of a village has got a ‘rathang’ [*rath*, a palanquin], a body made of wooden framework, and the same is decorated with fine cotton or silk clothes over the body and the neck is adorned with metal faces [*mohra*], generally of silver or gold. The head for [the devta’s] hair is provided with dark-red coloured ‘yak’ tail hair. The wooden framework body receives two long well planed poles, one on each side, so that the two poles project on both sides (back and front) of the carriage [of] the body so as to facilitate [an] up and down motion of the body of a deota. Two men, one for [the] back and the other for [the] front [of the *rath*], are required to carry up the deota or the devi, as the case may be, and they have both the poles on their shoulders and the devta or the devi dances up and down [through their movements]. There is no difference in the [form of the] body of a deota and that of a devi. The devis have got nose rings (‘balus’) in their front face nose. The front face is called ‘shir mukhang’.<sup>10</sup>

It’s not that there is only one deota or devi in a village. Some villages have got two deotas bearing [one] body.<sup>11</sup> There are many other deotas and devis in a village [that are] having some form of body, or [having] faces only, or having none [at all]. These subordinate deotas or devis are under the village deota. Some of them are advisors and others are just like peons for carrying out the orders of the village deota. These village deotas or devis are not to be touched by dogs, and some are not to be touched by Kolis, Lohars and Badis. For example, Sangla Nag is not touched by these low caste communities. All deotas and devis are not touched by a whole family when a child is born or when a death of a member occurs, for 8 to 13 days. If touched by untouchables, the deotas and devis become polluted.

9 Doshang=anger of good spirits towards [an] offending man or woman [KD p.57: *doshang* ‘defect, blemish, fault’].

10 shir mukhang= Front face made of a complex of metals [PD p.115: *shir* ‘head’; KD p.83: *mukhang=khákang* ‘the mouth’ (possibly from a joining of the Hindustani *muh* with the Tibetan *khá/khás*); also, PD p.7: *bálú* ‘a nose-ring’].

11 [AM:] The custom of more than one deity sharing a *rath* is also found in Kulu, where the *devta* Manu of Old Manali and Hidimba, the area’s presiding demoness, share a palanquin.

The effect of pollution is removed by offering a 'bali'<sup>12</sup> of a sheep or a goat.

The village deota or devi has a regular establishment consisting of musicians, kardars, the mali or chela and two or more of *māthās*.<sup>13</sup> Musicians play upon musical instruments with the deota or the devi. Kardars are responsible for the deota's income and expenditure, treasury and the corn stores. The mali or the chela has to issue the orders of the deota or the devi by throwing his cap off his head by a special musical accompaniment, [while] standing by the side of the deota's or the devi's 'rath'. It is said that the spirit of the deota or the devi enters the body of the mali and makes him speak what he or she wants to order for. The *māthās* are meant to refer the requests of the community or a man to the deota or the devi. Almost every case touching the interests of the village community is referred to the village deota or devi and his or her decision received.

If anybody in a village falls ill, the matter is caused to be referred to the village deota or devi by the family members and the deota or the devi hint out the cause of the trouble and at the same time the remedy for the cure is told. The cause of illness is generally attributed to spirits and the remedy therefore is told in offering a 'bali'. The ill body, after making 'bali' by his family, recovers. No doctor or 'vaidi' [Indian doctor] was consulted in the long past. In these days, [the] use of a doctor or a vaid is coming into vogue, but in many cases [an] ill man will first consult his village god or goddess and with his or her permission he will avail himself of the services of a doctor or a vaid. If the deota or the devi is not consulted, the treatment by a doctor or a vaid is doomed to result in failure.

More than often, hopeless cases of illness are brought before the deota or the devi of a village and it is not uncommon with the deota or the devi to say beforehand that the case is hopeless and the patient is not going to live long. Apparent wounds and fracture cases are not received by the deotas or devis for curing. They used to go to voids even in the distant past. At many a time cases attended by the deotas or devis resulted in death of patients. But do our modern doctors and voids succeed in all cases that go to them? Certainly not.

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12 Bali=offering of an animal generally a sheep or a goat.

13 [AM:] The Kinnauri dictionary defines *māthas* as 'a sept of Kanets' (KD p. 102), the dominant caste in Himachal Pradesh. In the 'Pahari dialects', the same term appears as *mauta* or *kamdar*, which is given as 'an official ... [who] corresponds to a naib-tahsildar and decides petty cases' (PD p. 67).



The village deotas and devis have the power to check epidemic diseases, they can make the clouds to shed rains, [they] can dry up the clouds and [they] can help a man or the whole community in fighting with his or their foe. Some years past, there was rinderpest (cow disease) in the state. The [presiding] deota, Nag, of Sangla Village, was requested by the village[rs] not to let in the disease. The deota went to Sangla Kanda [a ridge west of the village] and all the cows and oxen were gathered together at Rangalti [probably at the foot of the ridge]. In the whole herd of village cattle, two cows were already infected. The two cows foamed and frothed through their mouths and were restless but were unable to walk on. The deota went round and round the herd, the two cows inclusive, and drove the disease off to the other side of 'Rupau' [the eastern ridge that flanks the Baspa Valley and connects it with Rohru via the 'Rupin Pass']. The two cows immediately recovered and there was no cattle pest.

This year (1937), summer cholera was proceeding upwards from Tranda side [i.e., the tract along the left side of the Sutlej River situated between Rampur and Wangtu Bridge, the western boundary of Kinnaur]. Chandike Devi of the village and the deota of Chini said that they will not let in the disease beyond Rogi, but they caused the people to offer some 24 sheep and maunds [measuring unit roughly equivalent to half a litre] of wine downside towards [countering the advance of the] cholera. The cholera was bribed in time and did not come up even to Rogi.

Deotas single-handed or with the help of Kalis (to be dealt [with] in [a] later, separate chapter) bring down rains for the good of the crops. The writer of this note knows his village deota, the Nag of Sangla. Whenever there is drought he is asked to bring down rains. He asks for a black coloured goat and offers it to kalis and brings down rains. He offers a goat to his [original] home side sometimes. His home is in 'Borár' in Mazibon Kanda, the source of the Tons River [in Rohru]. He sometimes goes to the Barar Lake, his home, [in order] to see his home folks and to bring down rains. If he goes there rain is certain to come, but his going there is expensive to the public. Some twenty sheep and goats are required to offer to the kalis [encountered] in the way and [also] for his home gatekeepers, the 'Prolias'.<sup>14</sup>

Some deotas and devis are more prominent and their prominence was

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14 Prolias=the guard at gate, gatekeepers [PD p.104: *praul* 'gateway of ruler or chief'; KD p.118: *prauli* 'the king's gate'].

recognised by the state rulers of past times and they are still enjoying the[se] prominent position[s]. For instance, Bashahr Deota of Rampur side is awarded with a fairly big ‘muafi’ [stipend] in cash annually, which is a fixed sum recorded in revenue papers. He is a State Deota for bringing rains when required and stopping rains when no more required. Maheshwar of Sungra, a village [between Sangla and Rampur, more on which below], also enjoys an annual ‘muafi’ for presiding over the Dasahra (Dasmi) festival ceremony. Badri Nath of Kamru village performs [the] ‘raj tilak’ [ceremony] of a new Raja of Bashahr ascending to the ‘Gaddi’.<sup>15</sup> [The] raj tilak [is performed] by Badri Nath and that is performed in Kámru Fort. The new rajah has to go there (to Kámru Fort) for Rajtilak.

[The last two lines of this page are crossed out in the notebook, but they can still be made out to have read: ‘Chandike Devi of Kothi is [consulted] to ward off epidemic diseases into the state.’ This phrase is repeated in a slightly different form at the close of the chapter, below-AM].

Kámru is the biggest seat of deotas and devis in Bashahr with reference to its connections with the state throne. Badri Nath Deota, [along] with other deotas and devis in Kamru Fort and devis at Astangche (a place midway from Sangla and Kamru), foresee and forebode the coming evils and fortunes to the Royal family. The predictions are made once a year and that in the month of Mágh (January-February). Other deotas within the state also make predictions for the throne in the same month of Mágh annually, but [the] fore-tellings of Badri Nath are correct in precision to a word.

Royal family members, when [they] pass away from this world, their souls pay [a] visit to Kamru Fort and pay their respects in the way of farewell to Gods and goddesses within the Fort. Some 7-8 years back, when the writer’s father, negi Ram Sukh of Sangla, was the Kārdār, the State Darogha [head of police] in Kamru Fort, he with Gita Ram Kaith were sitting within the fort in their morning prayers, Sandhia.<sup>16</sup> It was about 8 pm [when] two women in Gágrá and Choli<sup>17</sup> came flying in the air and they entered the fort through one of the loopholes of the fort. [These] loopholes are not big enough to

15 Raj-tilak=coronation ceremony; gaddi or gadhi=throne.

16 Sandhia=morning and evening prayers to god.

17 Gagra=old Indian women dress worn below waist down to foot; Choli=old Indian woman dress for a modern shirt [KD p.50: *chóli* ‘a woman’s upper garment’].

receive in the body of a woman. But the two souls passed through without bending. Wonder! They then went on to the body (Murat [*murti*]) of the first goddess [and] paid their homage to the goddess by sitting on their knees and drooping down their heads. After this they passed away through the same loophole, flying in[to] the air. Negi Ram Sukh was simply aghast and did not dare to talk with his companion, Kaith Gita Ram. When the two women[']s souls were no more near about the fort he uttered, 'what a wonder we have seen today'. Kaith Gita Ram said, 'nothing of that'. Kaith did not see the two souls. Negi Ram Sukh then related to him what he actually saw with his [own] eyes. It was not a dream. It was living reality. Negi Ram Sukh is a strict monotheist and he has got only one Parameshwar<sup>18</sup> (all mighty god) in his mind. His nine-year's residence in Kāmru Fort seems to have shaken his belief in monotheism. He is never given to gossip and lies.

In those days when the two women entering the fort through loopholes and going away through and via [the] same route were perceived by N. Ram Sukh, State Darogha, two of the Ranis of the Raja Padam Singh [r. 1914-1947] were seriously ill. A couple of days later the sad news of [the] passing away of both the Ranis were received to the grief of all [the] public.

The state has sanctioned budget provision for puja in the Kamru Fort and at Astangche. The provision is renewed from year to year. Every third year the state goddess Bhima-Kali or Māhā Mai comes to Kamru to meet the goddesses at Astangche and in the Kamru Fort. These Goddesses are elder than her (Bhimakali) – 100 goats are cut at Astangche by the state when Bhima Kali meets those goddesses at Astangche. In the fort there take [place a variety of] regular 'pujas'. Some of the deotas in the fort want he goats only. Some want she goats. Some want sheep, while Lankura<sup>19</sup> wants rams. The Devi wants pudding- Parshadr [*prasad?*].

Again, from the foregoing narration it will be assumed that each village has only one or two deotas or devis. That is not so. Generally each house has its Kim-Shoo<sup>20</sup>—a house god. Trifling matters of ailments, [the] fixing of a day for going out for a journey, [the] striking of an auspicious day and hour for sowing fields and [the] selection of this seed or that seed are settled

18 Parameshwar=omnipresent and all-powerful God, the only God of the universe.

19 Lankurá=a state god that lives at Sarahan, Rampur and Kamru.

20 Kim=house (kanwari), Shoo=demigod (kanwari), together 'house god' [KD p.88: *kim* 'a house, home, dwelling, from Tibetan 'Khyim'; KD p.134: *shú* 'a village deity in [the] ground, the village god'].

at home by the house god, the 'Kim-Shoo'. Of course there will not be a foolish zamindar to repeat[edly sow] the same crop. There are alternatives for the change [of crop] and the best alternative is required for the heaviest return in the harvest. A man does not know what crop will succeed in a particular year or a season. But the deotas and devis know the future and their decision for the better into the future is sought for.

The state has different deotas for different purposes. As Bashahru Deota is for the weather, Badri Nath is for the Raj Tilak [ceremony], Maheshwara of Sungra village is for the Dasehra festival performance. [Thus] the state, as has already been mention[ed], has deotas responsible for [the] prosperity of the state. Chandike Devi of Kothi is for checking the prevalence of epidemic diseases in the state. Narain Deota of Jabbal [Jubbāl] Village in Rohru Tehsil is for warding off evil spirits causing harm to the royal family. Now, Sir Emerson, the late Governor of the Punjab, was in Bashahr as the State Manager in his early service period. He was touring once in Rohru Tehsil and one of his little babies fell ill at or near about Jabbal Village. The zaildar of that ilaqa suggested to Sir Emerson that the deota of Jabbal be consulted and be asked to cure the baby of its trouble. The deota was accordingly consulted about the ailment of Sir Emerson's child. The Narain Deota of Jabbal said that he would make the 'Tanda'<sup>21</sup> from over the child and he would be alright.

The suffering baby's treatment was resorted to the 'Tanda' by the Jabbal Deota. By the next day, after [the] 'Tanda', the child recovered fully well, relief coming by slow degrees and commencing immediately after the 'Tanda' process. Narain Deota of Jabbal enjoys a lump sum Muafi annually from the state revenue. Similarly there are other deotas in the state responsible for this or that time of living.

[The] end with deotas and devis.

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21 Fanda or Tunda or Tuna=a ceremony performed by a deota or a devi from over an ill person to ward off the evil from him. It often consists of offering a sheep or goat for relief of the diseased. [See also PD p.127: *tunda* 'one who has no hands'].

## Chapter II: Kālis or Jogins (Joginīs in Kulu) or Sonigs the Fairies, the angels and ‘Matingo’<sup>22</sup> the earth Goddesses

Greeks and Romans had their angels the fairies. Bashahr and other adjoining hill states have their fairies, the Kālis or Jogins or Sonigs and Matingo, the Goddesses under [the] earth [/ground]. Those elderly people who ever had the chance of seeing these spirits—the ‘Kalis’ and ‘Matingos’—make almost no difference in their appearance. They wear black garments and they keep their head uncovered with[out] any headdress. They have long golden hair flowing down to their waist. They never grow old and they are ever in their bloom. Kalis live in high mountains, [among] their peaks and in their depressions, the lakes, while Matingo[s] live under [the] earth, lower down the mountains and near habitations. Kālis like flowers and live amidst them in mountains. In summer fairs flowers are brought by youths for the village deotas and devis and it is believed that Kalis also come down with flowers and meet with the village deotas, enjoy [the] sight of [the] fair and then go back to their home.

Kalis and Matingo are more powerful than village deotas and devis. They are able to bring down rains, [and] able to cause hailstones to fall down to the destruction of crops when they are angry. They do lots of things that are beyond the power of men and women. Kalis haunt human habitations of their [own] accord. The following stories will show Kalis haunting human habitations.

### *Story no. 1:*

Some two hundred years or below have rolled away when Kalis were [last] seen in Sangla Kanda. An old woman who was one eye blind had to remain in her dogri [a shed for sheep and goats] in Sangla Kanda behind all [the] other villagers. Her people were late in threshing barley and wheat grown in Kanda and the old woman was left behind to keep watch over the harvest.

In Bashahr, in old houses and dogris, people kept and still keep only one door-leaf [open] so that as little air goes in the room opened by the door as possible.

In about the centre of the door leaf a hole about as big as an eye socket is bored through so that the door leaf could be bolted with an iron key called

22 Matingo=Mating=Earth; o=belonging to – i.e., living under castle = goddess living under earth [KD p.102: *māting/mātyāng* ‘earth, mud’; KD p.110: o ‘in, appended to noun’]; Kālis=[lit.] attired in black garments=goddess in black dress, fairies living in mountains.

'onthangsatang'.<sup>23</sup> The old one-eye blind woman had to live in Sangla Kanda in the month of Katak [October-November], when it is severely cold in there. Once it was a moonlit night and she had already closed her door. She heard somebody talking outside but she was sensible enough not to open her door. She kept the door closed, but fixing her operative eye socket in the keyhole, [she] had a glance outside, when she saw 12 black-garmented virgins, the Kalis, the fairies, dancing in a circle hand in hand and round about and round about they danced to a chorus of song sung by them and [that was] about the old poor one-eye-blind woman inside the walls of the dogri. The [lyric] of the song was 'there is nobody in upper dimanthan [place name?], nobody in lower dimanthan and nobody in upper serio but there is one in lower serio. She is one-eye-blind old woman and she is peeping at us through her door hole but we fear her and her eye'. They danced together [in] full enjoyment of the dance and [at] the chorus they brought forth upon the old woman. Then they went away. The old woman was not harmed by the Kālis, the 12 Jogins/Joginis.

*Story no. 2:*

Phagli Fair comes around every year in the month of Phagan (February-March). Once upon a time there was this Phagli Fair going on in Yangpa [near today's villages of Rispa and Ribba], the last village in Bhabe Valley [apparently the name of that portion of the Sutlej Valley that runs from Peo to Morang, i.e., along the northern aspect of the Kinner Kailash]. It was daytime and the circle dance was going on. One [person], Pobi by name, of Ráotain[?] family, was leading the dance. He was a very handsome youth and was very expert in dancing. It must be remembered that fairies, the Kālis, enjoy [the] sight of fairs [even] though we are not able to see them. Pobi was dancing, leading the circle dance. All of a sudden, in the broad daylight, a swarm of humming bees came round about 'Pobi', the dance leader, and the circle dance. The 'Sonigs',<sup>24</sup> the Kalis, came in the form of a bee swarm and hissed him into nothing for human beings and carried him in their midst. A search was made for Pobi by all in the dance and in the

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23 Onthangsalang=bolting key [KD p.111: *onthang* 'a strong wooden bolt'). A sketch of a hook appears next to the footnote with the caption 'shape of a bolting key'. The 'leaves' mentioned in the text are, in fact, wooden planks that are vertically situated one next to each other to form a door-Ed.].

24 Sonigs=joginis, kális, the fairies.

village. [There was] no trace of him but his ‘chogā’<sup>25</sup> sleeve that was found on a mountain peak above Yongpa village. [That] the fairies took Pobi with them was certain and Phagli [Fair] consists of singing songs in honour of Kāli, and Kalis are given offerings of incense (‘dhoop’), good edibles and libations of wine (‘sharing’).<sup>26</sup> But [what] did [the] Kalis do with Pobi nobody knows. Kalis are offended with white or black garment[s] of men, they say, and [a] nice singer and dancer is also likewise undone by Kalis.

Kalis are very particular in preserving wild mountain game. They are offended when high-lying mountain game is shot. The following story (no. 3 under this chapter) will illustrate the anger of Kālis at Shikaris that shot a ‘thofo’, a ‘warr’.<sup>27</sup>

There was a shikari [hunter] called Mālū of Chetha, a family in Sangla Village. This story of Mālū is not very old, as Mālu was younger than the writer of this story’s grandfather. This story is at the most 65 years old [i.e., 1871 CE]. One day, Mālu with another Shikari companion went out a-hunting and scaled up Kailash Mountain that stands at the back of Sangla village. In search of shikar, the two shikaris reached the higher region of Kailash beyond which even grass fails to grow. Mālu’s companion refused to go on further. Mālu climbed up the cliffy Kailash when he came across a herd of Blue Sheep, the ‘warrs’. He shot one of the ‘warrs’, which rolled down to his exhausted companion. Malu hastened down to his companion to join in [the] joy of his fellow shikari to see the ‘warr’ shot dead by Mālu. The skinning of the shikar was at once started by the two shikaris and the work was yet half complete when they ([the] two shikaris) heard Kālis calling out [to] one another higher up in the Kailash and talking about the shot [animal] and [the] diminishing [of] their cattle<sup>28</sup> by one. The two shikaris heard the Kalis saying: ‘all [the] other cattle have come but [a] one horned ox which is missing seems to have been killed by yonder human beings’. The shot ‘warr’ happened to be one horned while the other horn was broken somehow or other, perhaps in the fight with others or due to a

25 Chogā=a man dress for a coat. In Kanawr it is called ‘chhubā’ [PD p. 25: *chogā* ‘a kind of long cloak’; KD p.48: *chhubā* ‘a garment, cloak’].

26 Dhārang/Shārang=(Kanawri)=libations to deotas, devis and kalis, etc.

27 Thofo, warr=(kanawri)=blue sheep [KD p.158: *wārr* ‘a deer’; KD p.130: *shárr* (in upper Kinnaur) ‘hill antelope’].

28 Cattles of Kalis=wild mountain game animals, the blue sheep, the Tibetan sheep, the Langrols [?] and the shears [tigers?] are the cattle of Kālis. It is said that these are used by Kalis to fetch up rice grams and shan; shān=rice grains with husks still unpounded, paddy.

fall that might have [been] had by the 'warr'. The reply to the first talk from new quarters by other Kalis was: 'if our one horned ox is undone by those shikaris, the shikaris, in case they do not compensate our loss of our ox, should suffer heavily'. This last sentence of the Kālis in Kailash Mountain was reverberated by Kailash Mountain as if it confirmed the sentence of the Kalis for the two Shikaris. The shikaris came home with the day's earnings in warr meat and a gloom in their minds for the worst that they were sure to befall to their lives. That night passed away and the following day brought pain and unrest for them shikaris. Sangla Deota was consulted and the Kalis were offered 2 goats from the shikaris and libations by the deota of Sangla. Malu's fellow shikari recovered alright. But poor Mālu! He became crazy and mad. He lived long after in craziness.

*Story no. 4:*

The Kalis are offended when cow or an ox skin is put in any of the high lying lakes. When there is a great drought year the village deotas cause a cattle skin to [be] put in high region lakes and the Kalis, [in order] to purify the lakes, shower down rains. It is said that there was a lake above Chini village from which [there] gushed out water for the ample water supply of Chini and the villages near about Chini. On a drought year day, [in order] to make the Kalis bring down rain, a cow skin was thrown into that lake. [The] kalis did not make the sky rain, but the lake goddesses transformed themselves into two doves and flew off to the other side of the Sutlej River into Barang Forest [opposite Chini, on the left bank of the Sutlej on the northern aspect of the Kinner Kailash Range], where water gushed out just after the two doves sat down on the earth. The lake above Chini went dry and it is not ever likely to have it again [filled] with water. The fairies became very much offended here with the cow skin and left the lake forever.

The Kālis are thought to use the wild mountain game animals as their pack animals and [to] bring shān [unpounded, husky rice grains] upon them from the rice growing valleys and ravines at the foot of the mountains. Many years [have] passed [since] when the following story, no 5, was told and heard:

Ramasarain is a good rice-growing valley in Tehri Garhwal State [south of the Baspa Valley]. In that valley, rice crop was expected to yield the highest outturn in kind in a particular year. It was just ready to be mowed when it hailed heavily in hailstones so that the rice crop, the shān of Ramasarain,



was half destroyed. The Kalis managed this fall of hailstorms with the sky [so as] to snatch away the part of [the] rice harvest from Ramasarain, and that in their usual [mode of] invisibility. The winter following that hailstormy autumn passed away and the spring came in when licensed or unlicensed shikaris were out after shikar [game] that [had] descended to lower elevations with [the] snowfall of the previous winter. Those shikaris of Garhwal, as well as of Bashahr, in their respective shikar jurisdictions in high elevations, [both] saw ‘shān’, the husky rice grains, fallen along the highest mountain ridges in a regular track way. Some of the shikaris thought that the storms blew up the shān and struck against the mountain ridges and [that] the latter squeezed the former (storms) and made to shed shān on them. Other shikaris thought a bit in a different way. For them, the ‘shān’ seen by them on high ridges was due to [a] whirlwind which might have passed through and over, encircled [the] paddy in its action and took [it] up to [the] sky, which threw the shān back on [the] ridges [that were covered] with snow. It was at last that a shikari saw a ‘warr’—a he blue sheep—dead in a high mountain Nulla [valley] with a sack full of Paddy on his back, as ordinary pack animals would do often. Birds of same feathers flock together. Shikaris often meet one another and exchange their experience in shikar. The story of [the] paddy track along [the] high mountain ridges was told and admitted to be a fact, a reality, by others, while at last the story of a dead ‘warr’ with [a] paddy sack on his back was made known by a party of shikaris. The Kalis brought ‘shān’, the paddy from Ramasarain, on their pack animals, the blue sheep, via [the] high mountain ridges to Kailas or [the] Rupan Series of mountains and [the] paddy kept falling off [along] a regular track, and [it was concluded] that one of the loaded blue sheep, the warrs, [had] slipped down [a] high mountain side and died of the fall with [a] sack stuck to his back [only] to be [subsequently] found by humanity.

Enough with talk and stories on Kālis.

‘Matingos’, the goddesses under [the] ground, the sisters of Kālis, will be jealous of their sisters and will curse us. The earth goddesses resemble Kālis in their dress, in their behaviour and in their ‘Karāmāt’.<sup>29</sup> But they do not live on high mountains. They live under ground in valleys near about

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29 Karāmāt=manifestation of power for the good of humanity by superhuman beings.

habitations. There are several Matingos, the earth goddesses, in outer Tukpa, the tract above Raturang [Rarang] Gorge to Chhitkul [the last village in the Baspa Valley], and two of them are well known. One is at Batseri Bridge on the left side of the Sutlej River [sic; the actual river is, of course, that of Baspa] and the other at Astangche, midway [between] Sangla and Kamru. These earth goddesses are very powerful. Those at Batseri Bridge are given 'puja' by [the] deota of Batseri [a village further up the valley from Sangla, midway to Rakcham] generally, and occasionally by the deotas of Sangla and Kamru for the welfare of their respective villages. But whoever the 'puja' giving deota may be, the deota of Batseri must be there to preside over the 'puja' ceremony of the Batseri Bridge Matingos.

Astangche Earth Goddess, the Matingos, are given 'puja' [by] Badrinath Deota of Kāmru once every month and the expenses are borne by the state along with [the] Kamru Fort expenses. These goddesses are so elderly, as has already been told in the first chapter, that the state goddess Bhima Kāli comes to Kāmru Fort every third year (on the month of November) when 'parnāwth'<sup>30</sup> fair takes place.

*Story no. 6:*

Once upon a time, during the reign of Rajah Mahendar Singh of Bashahr [1815-50], Maheshawar Deota of Sungra Village, at the concluding of Dasehra Festival at Sarahan, solicited the then Rajah's permission in writing to go up to Kāmru and to offer 'puja' to the earth goddesses at Astangche. [The] Rajah [at] first refused permission, saying that anything bad may happen since the earth goddesses know Badri Nath Deota of Kāmru alone and no other deota ever did go there. Maheshawara Deota persisted and the Rajah's permission had but to be given. Maheshawara of Sungra, with all pomp and show [and] with all his musical instruments being played upon, went on to Kāmru. A warm reception was offered by Badri Nath of Kāmru for his guest deota, the Maheshawara of Sungra. A peaceful night [passed] for the deota and his 'parja'<sup>31</sup> [*praja*, subjects] of Sungra at Kāmru.

[The] next morning, Maheshawara asked Badri Nath to accompany him to Astangche to offer 'puja' to the great earth goddess there. Badri Nath

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30 Parnawth=a religious fair held of Kāmru when the [state goddess of Bashahr] Bhimakali comes there once every third year and various 'puja' ceremonies are followed by [the] gathering together of [the] deotas of Baspa Valley and a dance in Kāmru Fort.

31 Parja=progeny, the public, the ruled, the subjects.

refused to go with Maheshawara and advised him not to go himself too, saying that no other deota ever gave 'puja' at Astangche but Badri Nath himself, and that the idea of Maheshawara's going there should be dropped lest any harm may befall to either of the parties concerned. The resolute Maheshawara would not drop his idea and alone he went to Astangche. He bowed down his head to the earth and [raised his] feet up in the sky. Whenever any deota goes to meet and to offer 'puja' to any Matingi, the earth goddesses, the deota throws his 'yak' hair head down in the earth and his feet go up in the air so that the deota assumes the posture of a man's summersault. Maheshawara Deota assumed this posture at Astangche. Lo! He could not rise up, his head sticking to the ground. The earth goddesses at Astangche were enraged at having a stranger deota at their place to offer them 'puja'. From under [the] ground, some of the earth goddesses managed to catch hold of [the] hair of the deota's head and held him firm with his head downward.

Badri Nath was informed of the Maheshawara's [being] stuck to the ground with [his] downward head at Astangche. He (Badrinath) ordered Kalan<sup>32</sup> Singh Deota's arm, the pole, to be sent on spot at Astangche and to put one end of the pole sufficient[ly] down below the earth near the stuck head of Maheshawara and then to pull up the pole with a jerk, as if the deota of Sungra was a big stone or a log stuck to the ground, and [the] lifting up was to be done by a big pole [that was] held and being manipulated by so many hands. The process was acted upon and up erect the deota of Sungra rose, but with him and stuck firm to his gigantic yág [yak?] hair head, rose two Matingos, the earth goddesses, in rage [and] holding the deota head hair in their clutches. They were attired in black and their golden hair waved down their waist. They were very beautiful virgins, but they were seen by [the] Sungra and Kāmru people [assembled] there [so] they flew down to Gurguro near Sangla and the two Matingos have since then become [the] Gurguro 'Matingos' [who] are given 'puja' by Nāg [Deota] of Sangla. Poor earth goddesses! They were enraged with the deota of Sungra and they insulted him very much [by] keeping him stuck to the ground. But they themselves also lost their home for their becoming [exposed in]

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32 Kalan Singh Deota=next deota to Badri Nath in Kāmru, bearing the ratha as Badri Nath does. This deota is the soul of a raja, grand father of late Rajah Shamsher Singh. [AM:] the person alluded to is most likely raja Ugar Singh (r. ±1775-1810), who died during the Gorkha invasion of Bashahr, c. 1809-1815.

public. They could not, and still cannot, go to Astangche as their home. Later on they were seen by many in the daytime going to Astangche to see their sisters underground at Astangche and then to return [on the] very [same] day to their new abode, Guguro. Nay, even some people heard [the Astangche Matingi] calling, 'Oh Gurguro living elder sisters; come to us, have a talk with us and then go back to your place, Gurguro'. [The] Astangche living earth goddesses liked their elder sisters going to them for a chat and then back to their new place [that they'd] earned by their wrath at Maheshawara. As for Maheshawara, he could not dare to go to Kamru from Astangche but home at Sungra he went, [travelling for a] day and [a] night with his dignity lowered down by the earth goddesses of Astangche.

### Chapter III: Other spirits and ghosts.

Besides deotas and devis, kalis and earth goddesses, there are, it is said and believed, other spirits, which stand in between good and evil spirits. [The] 'ban shira'<sup>33</sup> spirit is of this category. Ban Shira guides a man in his night journey through a forest and quarrels with ghosts for a man and overpowers ghosts the evil spirits. But at times Ban Shira causes men and women ill and he has to be offered this or that offering for curing the diseased on account of his 'doshang'. In all cases of fairs, good edibles are cooked in each house and then offered in the name of Kalis, earth goddesses, the village deotas and devis, 'Kim-Shus', and Ban Shira is also named while making offerings. The belief is that all good spirits participate in the offerings, the 'pujas', provided they are named while making offerings. So ban shira is a deota and not a rakshasa, the ghost.

'Chan' or 'Chon'<sup>34</sup> is much dreaded, as whoever comes across this ghost cannot live. This ghost has one eye beset in the centre of his forehead and the eye is very sharp and glaring and never misses to spy whatever comes in front of it and within its range. Fortunately, it cannot see side ways nor can it see upwards and downwards. It sees quite straight in front like a gunshot. Kalis let it loose during [the] night and it descends along spurs and mounds to the rivers in search of cremation grounds by the riversides. 'Chon' licks up ashes of burnt dead bodies and he likes it as much as cattle would like

33 Ban shira=a spirit living in the forest and in big trees [KD p.34: *ban, banang* 'forest'].

34 Chau or chon/chou=an apparition having horse-like body and a man's head with only one eye in the centre of forehead. It is believed to be the Kalis riding horse [see also KD p.47: *chho-gyäll* 'the deity Yama, from Tibetan'].

licking up salt every now and then. It is for this purpose that Chon has to come down from mountain peaks, the home of Kalis, to the riverbanks. Chon walks on with a noise resembling that of ‘argās’,<sup>35</sup> the bell-wreath green [placed] round the neck of riding ponies and horses in Kanawar, and in Tibet as [a] horse ornament. So it is fortunate that so cruel a ghost as Chon has to give alarm when walking. In case anybody happens to hear a Chon passing nearby he has simply to sit down not in the passage of a path or a road but by the side [so as] to avoid sight of the ‘Chon’. Generally, the spurs, the Dhárs, are seen having waving rags (flags) and ‘Māni-Phani’ stone heaps. This is done to keep the Chon away from there. The flags (Dhar Chhad) and the Mani-Phani stone heaps (Māne) are near about villages where Chon, if not driven away, would do [a] lot of harm to the people.

Some stories on Rakshasas will now justify the closing of this chapter.

*Story no. 1:*

There is a big cave just on the left side of the Themgarang Khad near Sangla [about halfway up the valley to Batseri, alias ‘Boning Saring’]. Ag,<sup>36</sup> the cave, affords accommodation for hundreds of sheep and goats and their phawals, the shepherds, and the cave is called ‘Bhujalang Ag’. In this cave lived two shepherds of Sangla Village with their flock of sheep and goats. One day, one of the two shepherds went home for fetching up rations for themselves with a word to return back by evening of that very day. He could not return with rations and his companion had to live alone with sheep and goats in ‘Bhujalung’ cave. There used to live a ghost in Bhujalang. He was on the watch to see the two shepherds part from each other [so as] to play mischief with one of them when alone. The chance for the ghost therefore came. The shepherd with flock at Bhujalang cooked food for himself and his fellow shepherd who was to return out of the remaining rations to their complete exhaustion. Light of the day diminished by slow degrees and the darkness thickened likewise. No companion returned for [the] Bhujalang cave shepherd. Just when it was quite dark he called out for his expected colleague but the ghost responded [instead and said] that

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35 Argās=a number of small bells wreathed in a leather strap and put round the neck of riding horses and poneys in Kanawar and in Tibet [KD p.31: *argā* ‘a garland of small bells for ponies’].

36 Ag=a cave [KD p.29: *agg* ‘a cave, den’].

he was going to him. The shepherd not knowing that the answer was from the ghost, was very glad that his companion returned to him and did not leave him alone. The ghost, assuming the form of the body of a man, came on. The ghost had no clothes on his body, but had long hair like monkeys or apes. Goats are more sprightly and alert than sheep. They sneezed and flocked together as if a leopard pounced upon the flock. The ghost proceeded on to the fireside and took his seat just opposite the shepherd who was pale with fear. The shepherd and the ghost did not enjoy any indulgence in talk nor [had] they stood up for boxing. The ghost assumed imitative behaviour. So, if the shepherd stood up the ghost too stood, and [if] the shepherd offered fuel to the fire the ghost would do the same. If the shepherd feared the ghost, the ghost repaid. When the shepherd spread out his bed for sleep the ghost jumped in the bed and was ready to sleep with the shepherd.

The shepherd rose up and had a stick in his hand and lifted up the stick for striking at the unwelcome companion, the ghost. But the ghost did not fail to have another stick in his hand and rose [as] if to strike at the shepherd. The shepherd lost courage and let his stick down and the ghost followed immediately his example. The poor shepherd was fatigued after all [of this] and felt sleepy in spite of the fear of the ghost. He slept a little while sitting and the ghost is said to [have] be[en] going away laughing and shrieking when the shepherd woke from his nap. Poor shepherd! He ought not [have] go[ne] to enjoy his nap. He lost his soul while he was asleep [in] a nap. The ghost had the upper hand and snatched away the soul of the shepherd when he was inactive in sleep. But he lived for some time later after this event, but actually to what period nobody can now say. [The] next day, the home-gone shepherd came with rations to hear the story of the visit of ghost to his companion at Bhujalaing. The story of the ghost was related in full details to his companion that came with a load of rations by the shepherd who had the bad luck of having a ghost the previous night. The story was narrated in sobs as the experience of the preceding night was so bitter and the arrival, after all, of his colleague, so comforting and relief-inspiring that the story was doomed to come out in sobs.

*Story no. 2: Of a skin ghost.*

Some 35-45 [c. 1895-1905] years ago, a skin ghost is said to have been seen and have been encountered in Sangla Village. One of the Māthes of Sangla

Deota, named Phulma Nand (now dead), was going from his (home) house to the deota temple to join with his colleagues in keeping watch at the temple. When he was halfway [to the temple], a skin rolled [to] this side and that side in [front of] his feet so that the effort of the skin was to fell down the Māthes. He took courage and did not fall but kept treading on the rolling skin ghost till at last the skin ghost was tired and transformed itself into a tree-like, long erect shape. He looked like a 'prai'<sup>37</sup> in darkness and went on growing thicker and still longer whenever Phulma Nand the Māthes looked up at him the ghost, Phulma was about to lose courage when he recollected two things said of ghosts—(1) never to fear them but to take them as toys for man's play and (2) never to look up but to keep the eyes looking downside so that the ghosts are never able to defeat a man nor are they able to grow up bigger and bigger. Phulma kept his eyes down and gathered himself, ready for the wrestle with the ghost. The ghost became as little in size as a man. Phulma caught hold of him and they went on boxing. The Māthes Phulma got the ghost within his embrace, pulled off some hair of [the] moustache of the ghost, [a portion of] which hair, it was said, the Māthes possessed during the whole of his afterlife, to show to people and to relate the story. Unfortunate it is for the writer of these few pages [that he] missed seeing the ghost moustache hair with Phulma Nand, the Māthes. When within the strong embrace and [as it] was losing [its] moustache hair, the poor ghost wept and shrieked shrill[y] and grew thinner and thinner till at last [he] transformed himself into nothing and got out of cruel Phulma's grasp and ran away shrieking in [a] shrill [voice] again and again. A ghost is a toy for a man!

*Story no. 3:*

As has already been told that Phagli fair comes round every year in the month of Phagan and the Phagh Fair at Kāmru lasts for [a] full 15 days. Badri Nath Deota of Kamru has seven elderly deotas, the Le-Shu, in Kamru Fort, who come out to preside over Phagli and give 'darshan' to the public.<sup>38</sup> Each deota has his metal face (muhra or morang) and the seven faces of the seven elderly deotas are taken to Shuwindang, a place about half a mile [on the] Sangla side from Kamru. There at Shuwindang is a prai [pole; see fn

<sup>37</sup> Prai=a long post erected just in front of temples generally.

<sup>38</sup> Le-Shu (Shoo)=leg or le (Kanwari)=elder or elderly; shu=deotas, demi-gods; darshan=conspicuous sight of big sould or deotas enjoyed by others, the public.

37, above] and this is decorated with cloth and then the seven faces of the seven elderly deotas are set in the clothed prai in a column for 'darshan', the public view of the seven gods. The seven villages above Brua Khad are represented on that auspicious day of 'darshan' of [the] seven deities by a fairly big number of people from each village. [It was] for this fair at Shuwindang that villagers of Chauzu came once in a bad, snowing weather. In the number was a woman who left her little baby in preference to [having the] sight of [the] seven deotas. After full enjoyment of the darshan, the day was closing and the villagers of Chauzu stayed at Kāmru for the night, but for the woman who left her little child behind. She could not rest for a night of Kāmru but ran away alone for Chauzu, though it was getting dark when she left Kamru and her companions. Pulio is a place midway from Chauzu and Raturang [Gorge]. There lived a ghost, 'Pulio Rakshasa'. The poor woman was benighted and the ghost stood in her way at Pulio. Nobody knows how, but the poor woman running home for her child was transformed into a stone [that is] still lying there and her ornaments, worn by her that day for the fair, are also said to be there in the form of 8 stones set in that big stone, the [petrified] body of the woman. [The] next morning, the fair-going party from Kāmru returned, but the mother of that little child, [who was] being looked after by its father, never returned. [An] enquiry was made on her [fortune], but she had left Kāmru for Chauzu the previous evening when the fair concluded and when it was getting dark. Even at Kāmru a search was made, but they [only] found at Pulio an unusual stone in the path with small stones set in it. 'Pulio ghost devoured her and transformed her body with ornaments on it into this stone', was the judgment passed by the searching party. We do not know if Pulio Rakshasa is still so cruel as it was when it transformed the poor woman into stone.

*Story no. 4:*

Once upon a time Phulio Fair was going on at Sungra, nearly 2 miles [on the] Sarahan side from Nacher. All the people having danced [they] went home, but one man [stayed there] asleep, as he was remaining at the temple. When no human being but himself was there, a gang of Rākshasas, the ghosts, came in the Santang<sup>39</sup> saying: 'there is a human smelling here about and

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39 Santang=dancing ground attached to a temple [KD p.128: *sāntan*, *sāntang* 'the enclosure of a temple, where the village people assemble to sing and dance at certain ceremonies'].



the human being will make a nice morsel for us'. This is translation of their dialogue in Kanawri. The utterance of Rakshasa was: 'Mānus gānan dundule, āng e-grassāng'.<sup>40</sup> The man was courageous, he ought to [have] be[en]. He rose on his feet and said: 'do not devour me now but let me lead a dance of your party.' He snatched away the 'Pyurg', a small three edged sword, from the hands of the Rākshasa, the ghost who was about to lead the dance, and the dance went on whirl about and whirl about, but he, the only man leading the dance of ghosts, was busy thinking of getting out of the gang of dancing Rakshasas. He thought of a water-well near Sungra temple and led the dance of ghosts to that direction. All the ghosts were fully absorbed in the dance and it came to the well site. The man with 'gurze' [dorje?] in his hands jumped into the well, which was not more than knee-deep. He turned himself under [the] half roping of the well, but the ghosts, too, were good engineers. They thought of 'measuring' [the] water depth. They had a ball of woollen string. They tied a small stone at the end of the thread and plunged it in the water. The man, being under [by] half [the length of rope] of the well, kept rolling up the thread again into the ball, so that the ghosts finished their ball of thread and said: 'the water is endlessly deep and we can do nothing to have the man out of it now. Alas, we lost the first chance of devouring him. We lost a ball of fat in that man'. [And in Kinnauri:] 'grosu petingo Panang Chhos ne māmima Fone zhub'<sup>41</sup>, [that is:] 'we [should have] devoured that man of Sungra village, [with] a ball of fat in his stomach, when we first saw him'.

The day dawned and the gang of ghosts could no longer harm the man in [the] well. They had vanished. The man came out of the water well, related the story and showed the 'gurze' of the ghosts. The man was of [the] 'Borantu' family of Sungra and in honour of his cheating the ghosts, his successors have to dance with that very 'gurze' of [the] Rakshasas for three rounds compulsorily, leading the dance in Phuliach at Sungra every year.

Now, away with ghosts.

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40 Manus=of men, of humanity; gānam=smell; dundule=prevailing sharply; āng=me, my; e-grersang=one morsel; gurze=a small three edged sword for dancing.

41 Grosu=a man belonging to Grosnam (Sungra); petingo=in the belly; panang=a ball (of butter and fat generally); chhos=fat.

#### CHAPTER IV: Bāyuls,<sup>42</sup> the hidden habitations.

In Kanawr, there were a number of Bāyuls, the hidden habitations, once, and there are still some, while the others have become known to the outside world. Nesang, opposite Kānam on [the] other side of the Sutlej, and Enla near Urni [west of Chini], are the two villages which once were hidden from the outside world. These two villages were Bāyuls. The people of Bāyuls have no connection with any country near and far off, but they enjoy a blissful life. They have everything and anything at their disposal. It is not certain to say whether the people of Bāyuls have any connection with spirits, the super human beings. The moment they become known they forget their past life and it is long before they can adapt themselves to the means of our living, [here] with us [in the] outside world. One thing Bayul people never take is salt that is not enjoyed by Bāyul men and women so long they are in [a] Bāyul, [a] concealed habitation. The shepherds of Murang side [Moran, east of the Kinner Kailash Range] played mischief with Nesang and so [did] those of Urni with Enla Bāyuls. They came across, at both the Bayul places, [some] regularly fashioned water springs, the 'Bāyus'.<sup>43</sup> The shepherds grew curious and told the stories of nicely fashioned bayus to their home people, who advised them to throw salt in the water springs. The experiment was made. No sooner [than] the salt in [the] water was used by the Bāyul people, then the screen of their concealment broke away and they with their hamlets became visible and known to the world outside. But they forgot their previous life. There are still some places suspected to be Bāyuls. Bitingla opposite Sangla Kanda on the right side of the Rokli River, Kashang, above the present cultivation, and in Lishnam Gad [opposite Urni on the left bank of the Sutlej]. These are the three places known to the writer of these notes. At Bitingla and in Kashang, drums and trumpets are beaten and other musical instruments played, and the sound is heard at just [the moment when] night falls or [at the] dawn of day or at mid day time. Two stories that are known to the author of this narration are herein reproduced for the diversion of the reader.

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42 Bayul=a hidden or concealed habitation of humanity, but not of deotas, devis or kalis etc., [rather] of good spirits.

43 Bāyu=public water place=flowing of water through a channel or then falling on the ground from a height of 3' so that when required water pots are placed at the mouth of the channel and water fallen in [KD p.37: bāyū 'a pool, an oblong water pool'].

*Story no. 1:*

Many years ago, when a shepherd used to take his flock of sheep and goats for grazing in Bitingla,<sup>44</sup> there he used to see a nice water spring where he daily got seven very thin shelled walnuts and some other fruits ('palus') for him to eat, but those edibles were never known as to by whom and how they were daily kept there for the shepherd. [The] curiosity of the shepherd grew keener and keener every day, till at last he took home the seven walnuts to show his home folks and to make [them] partake of them. When the walnuts were delivered to [his] home people, who cracked them to eat them, inside something else but [a] kernel was found. What of that? Unfortunate! In each of the walnut[s] was found a snakeling and not the usual kernel. The shepherd's home people, who had the opportunity of having a walnut, ran outside the house to throw away the contents of the seven walnuts in all and then back to the fireplace they came and went on cursing the shepherd. They thought that the small snakelings were [purposely] enclosed, one within each of the seven soft-shelled walnuts, [in order] to befool them by their shepherd member. But the shepherd was very honest in this particular dealing with his home folks. Next morning he again drove his flock to 'Bitingla'. Leaving his flock to follow him up, he ran to the bāyu, the water and spring site, to find if the daily present for him in seven walnuts and 'palus' was there that day, too. Nothing was there that day. Even the water spring from which sweet sparkling water was daily enjoyed by the shepherd was hidden, concealed by [the] inhabitants of Bitingla. They became angry with the shepherd who was trying to make known the secret of Bitingla. Since then nobody knows of the walnuts and the water spring.

*Story no. 2:*

Once upon a time there was a shepherd in Lishnam Valley lopping [a] Breli (Quercus Hex) tree for fodder of his flock of sheep and goats. The tree was a big one and the shepherd happened to have a fall off the tree. There was nobody near about. At the fall he shrieked and fell into [a] swoon. His flock flocked together just before nightfall and went to its dogri. The family members of the shepherd thought him to be coming later with a load of

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44 Bitingla=(Biting=a wall, and La=cliff, cliffs)=a cliff-walled place just opposite Sangla Kanda on the right side of the Rokli River.

lopped leaf fodder for the kids fed at the dogri. But the time went on and it grew dark and no shepherd came. A search was made with lit up torches but he could not be found. The search had to be put off to [the] morrow's daylight.

The poor shepherd had many serious wounds and was senseless for hours together. The Lishnam Bāyul people took compassion upon him and carried him into their hidden abode, washed his wounds and healed them with various herbs. There were many people there but he could not recognize any of them. They talked in the [sic] language that was not known to him, but they were very obliging people. The shepherd regained his health and was happy with the Bāyul people. Anything he thought for having—that was offered [to] him immediately. To him it appeared that there was nothing that cannot be had in [the] Bāyul of Lishnam, and that the Bayul people were so expert to read the inmost desire and thoughts of a man that even the faintest emotions and sensations could not avoid their knowledge. On complete recovery, the shepherd, though [he] was eased with every comfort and having no mind to come out of the Bāyul, went [on] a [certain] day out for a walk. Unfortunately and unknowingly, he happened to cross the limits of the Bayul when an idea of returning back to his hosts struck him and backward he turned his steps and walked on. This time he was not walking within the Bāyul, where everything seemed in bloom and in bountiful. He was walking in the forest and in the waste but could not reach where he wanted to go in[to]. He missed the hidden habitation and had to go home. Since that hour, Lishnam Bayul was never seen again. Shepherds are said to have heard [a] local band beating and the cocks crowing every now and then at midday time or just at dawn and at [the time of it] getting dark.

Only so much as has been narrated is known to the writer of these notes about Bāyuls, the hidden habitations.

### **Chapter V: Life and Death.**

In high-lying countries like Bashahr and its [sub-region of] Kanawr in particular, even [the] earning of a meagre living is not easy. The people have to toil hard from morning to evening and that all [in] field work. In [the] execution of daily work, many a man and a woman had their lives cut short by a fall over a bridge, a slip, by failure in crossing streams or rivers,

by falling down a mountainside, by falling off a tree climbed for animal fodder lopping or for having [to bring] down the fruits or nuts as the case may be, and being washed away by floods in summer rains and by snow-slips, the avalanches, in winter.

So accidental deaths are many. But an accidental death of a member of any family is harmful to the family as well as to the deceased. The deceased man or woman's soul not knowing as to how it lost its carnal body, hovers about the place of [the] accident and haunts his home folks. The soul is heard shrieking and weeping about the site of death and sometimes near about its home. It would be seen then that the soul [would have] liked living more, but could not do so due to the mishap [that happened] to its life, and that there is something real in [the] life of humanity besides the carnal body. [The] soul is there and [it is] real.

When the soul of a person who suffered accidental death is heard during night-time weeping or shrieking about the place of [an] accident, Lāmās (followers of Buddhism) are brought there to guide the soul away to heaven from that place. To do this, the lamas read their prescribed precepts from their books, erect a heap of Mane-Phane stones and a flag to wave over [it]. The soul is [thus] guided to heaven and does not roam about there. In case the departed soul cherishes ill-feelings towards its family members, the effect of that ill-feeling is very bad upon the life of [its] family members and of their prosperity: this or that family member shall be keeping ill, cattle would not milk, would not increase in number, and the field crops fail, fruit trees would not [bear] fruit, but would dry [instead]. This state of things following the death of a person is attributed to the ill feeling of the deceased and is called 'shi-dai'.<sup>45</sup> To ward off 'shi-dai' also the Lamas are resorted to. They go to the house where the evil spirit of a dead person causes harm and out of their books the prescribed readings are read out and meanwhile a clay, small sized statue or idol to represent the evil spirit of the dead is got ready and kept there, where the reading of Buddhist books is going on. A day is enough for this. After night fall any oil of nuts or seeds is boiled in an iron vessel (karai) and with reading of 'Mantaras', the clay small idol is thrown into the boiling oil in the vessel so that the evil spirit of the dead is burnt and destroyed

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45 Shi-dai=(shi=dead, dai='dain', an ill, evil)=evil spirit of a dead person causing harm to alive relatives.

and no more harm can it do now. The destroyed mass is thrown to a river or buried in the ground. Throwing of barley along the passage of the destroyed idols is also done to make sure of the evil spirit's destruction doubly sure.

The soul of the dead body more often enters in another man's living body to express its desire, [just] as the spirit of the deotas and devis do in their Chailas [chelas], the Malis or gurs. This thing is not uncommon. When a person dies he leaves his will behind, which is the case all over the world. His will has to be executed. Whenever a dead person had been a very strong minded one in life and after his passing away his will is not found being executed, his soul enters the living body of his dearer relatives and expresses his sorrow and grief on that account. The following stories will bring the subject matter quite at home to the reader:

*Story no. 1:*

Some 45 years ago, a girl of Bari village [a few kilometres west of Nichar on the left bank of the Sutlej] was married to a brotherhood at Chagaon [some 20 kilometres distance up the Sutlej Valley, on the right bank just before Urni]. The girl happened to love only one of the 4 brothers and did not like to talk even with the remaining 3 brothers. Unfortunately, the girl lost her husband just after a couple or two of her marriage [years?]. She would not like to have any of the three remaining brothers of the dead person. The girl's father came to Chagaon with two other men, common relatives to him and to his son-in-laws. He wanted his girl to love and live for the 3 brothers or any one of them, but she said that she was [a spouse only] for the dead and none else, and that she wanted to pass away her life at her father's [home] in the sacred memory of her lost husband. Her father, seeing his daughter determined in her own way, agreed to have his daughter back to his home and they were about to go when the soul of the dead man, the girl's husband, entered into the body of one of the two men that came to Chagaon with the father of the girl. He fell down all of a sudden and trembled forcibly, just [as] a man does when having high temperature in Malaria fever. He was caught hold by 3 men there in the house and was cooled down by making him drink water and [they] enquired of him the cause of that. He replied that he was the soul of the dead husband of the girl and he did not like her going to her father's. He said he would like her [to] stay at his home and live with his brothers as their wife. She, the girl, having great love for

the dead husband, had to agree to the wishes of her husband's soul. She is still alive and is living with one of the deceased husband's brother[s] as her next husband. The soul afterwards never returned to [possess] any relative.

*Story no. 2:*

In 1934, an old man died in Bai Village in Bhabhe Valley. He remained ill for many months and he knew that the time for him to leave this world of human beings had come. He was a rich man, but [he] did not go beyond Wangtu [the western limit of Kinnaur] during his whole lifetime. He did not know where Sarahan and Rampur [the state capitals of Bashahr] were. He had a large flock of sheep and goats to look after. Though he had shepherds in a [great] number for that, but he would like to have a complete supervision over his shepherds and home servants [and therefore never left Kinnaur]. Now that the death would come was certain in his case and he wished that his ashes be carried to 'Hari Dawar', the Ganges. After his death, his two sons that were there held a council and decided that as one of them was keeping bad health and the other was required to look after home affairs, while the third absentee could not be expected back from the Rajah's 'durbar' [court], it was decided in the private council of the two sons that the ashes of the deceased father should not be picked up for being sent or carried to the holy Ganges. The soul of their father entered the body of their relative woman, [who was] sitting in another room with women, and after the usual quivering with high temperature of another spirit in the same body, [she] said: 'my last wish for you, my sons and home folks, was to see my ashes carried to and drowned into the holy Ganges, but just after my leaving my body forever you have forgotten me and the ashes are not to be sent to the holy Ganges. This is the only pain and concern for me, which makes me remind you of my last words'. The two sons agreed to have the ashes picked up and carried to the Ganges and the soul of their father left the relative woman alone, in whom it [had] manifested itself for [the] revision of his last word even after his death. The ashes were carried to the Ganges and no more trouble arose from the soul of their deceased father.

The soul of a deceased person entering into another person's living body to express its last word is called 'Grohas'.<sup>46</sup> So the 'shi-dai' and 'grohās'

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46 'Grohas' or 'Gorhach'=soul of a deceased person entering into a living person's body and speaking out its desired words through the tongue of that living person's body [see also, KD p.70: *grová* 'a goblin'].

are the same one thing appearing in two different colours. 'Shi-dai' has ill-feeling for his family members and harms in many ways as described before, while 'grohas' enters the living body of another man and speaks out whatever it desired last to be done by its living members. It has no ill feeling if his words, spoken through the medium of another living person, are properly carried out. On the contrary, the 'Grohas' turns into shi-dai if it is not obeyed. When a person dies, his body is carried on a bier to [the] cremation ground. Generally, a white sheet of cloth is held up by two men, one on each end, so that the broad side hangs down waving in the air. This stretched sheet of cloth is moved just ahead of the bier of the dead body. It is believed that this white stretched sheet of cloth guides the soul out of the house and away up to the cremation ground to make it know that the body has been burnt and nothing of it remains at home so that the soul may not return home to trouble its living relations. Barley is thrown, broadcast in the track through which the bier is carried to the burning ground. It is said that the soul of the deceased is guided by this way also to the cremation ground and that it does not return afterwards to home.

A death that takes place in epidemics and [in which case] the dead body is buried in [the] ground in place of being burnt, is thought to be very profane. The soul does not find its place in heaven and has to remain midway so long as the relatives of the dead do not go to Kurukh-Shetar [Kurukshetra], a pilgrimage of Hindus and offer 'Pind-dan'.<sup>47</sup> Now in Kanawr, at the death of a man or a woman, a number of Lamas are called for and their holy books about life and death are read to guide the soul to heaven through the darkness. The deotas and devis and any good spirits have no control beyond [the] life of a man. When a person dies the good spirits can do him no good at all. Now, the growing belief here about [this] is that Buddhism purifies a person while alive and guides [his soul] to heaven when dead.

The Lāmās' most common prayer is 'Om mani-padme-hum'. This [can be] translated in many colours. When it is cited in a prayer to Him, it means that the almighty god lives within a lotus flower. When it is read for the dead man's soul, it tells the soul to leave the paths of demigods, the deotas, of spirits (midway [between] demi-gods and men), of men, of beings other

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47 Pind dan=giving material offerings in the name of deceased of pilgrimages. The 'tirthas' the sacred places, a metal body is made and put through the process of cremation so that the dead is provided with a body for the next life after rebirth.



than humanity, of the animate and inanimate world, and to choose the upper most white path that leads to heaven direct.

A word may again be said of that white sheet of cloth kept before the bier. It also makes a white track way for the soul to guide it to heaven.

Buddhism, [which is] good as in its own unadulterated form, has condescended [sic] to the living of its followers. Buddhism here means a means for earning bread for Lāmās.

Finish

Mr Das, FR,

ROC dated 3-6/9/38

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## Keeping the Hill Tribes at Bay: A critique from India's Northeast of James C. Scott's paradigm of state evasion

Jelle J.P. Wouters

The Barbarians come out at night. Before darkness falls the last goat must be brought in, the gates barred, a watch set in every lookout to call the hours. All night, it is said, the barbarians prowl about bent on murder and rapine. Children in their dreams see the shutters part and fierce barbarian faces leer through. 'The barbarians are here!' the children scream, and cannot be comforted. Clothing disappears from washing-lines, food from larders, however tightly locked. The barbarians have dug a tunnel under the walls, people say; they come and go as they please, take what they like; no one is safe any longer. The farmers still till the fields, but they go out in bands, never singly. They work without heart: the barbarians are only waiting for the crops to be established, they say, before they flood the fields again (Coetzee 2000 [1980]: 134).

'Barbarians' and state projects have always been antithetical. Throughout history, the demolition or capture of states by marauding 'barbarian' armies has always been a possible scenario (Bronson 1988). This threat was always both real and imminent, to the extent that a state's political life-expectancy depended on its ability to ward off raiding nonstate tribes. This is the basic thesis of this article, which, on a broader level, criticises Scott's grand narrative, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia* (2009), in which he argues that, over the long term, the peopling of the hills is best understood as 'the history of deliberate and reactive statelessness' (2009: x). In this view, upland peoples intentionally withdrew from the oppressiveness of state-making projects in nearby valleys. They fled upwards and concealed themselves in the intricacies of the hills, steering clear of state appropriation.

Here, my historical references are to Northeast India, which forms the western borderland of Zomia in Scott's usage of the concept. 'Zomia', as originally imagined by Van Schendel (2002), refers to a vast, contiguous highland region, located at the fringes of both political spaces and academically-defined 'areas'. It provides an alternative way of thinking

about regionalisation, situating, as it does, upland Asia at its centre of attention.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I do not claim to present a fully coherent reconstruction of history. Rather, my argumentation should be read in the spirit of Leach's statement that 'It is not the anthropologist's task to write history, but if history is to be elaborated with the aid of inspired guesses then the special knowledge of the anthropologist becomes relevant so as to point up the probabilities' (Leach 1960: 49).

I will begin with an historical account. When British colonial forces extended their influence into the Brahmaputra Valley, an officer reported a host of state-like structures, which had been put in place over the valley's fertile soil by hill polities:

We found the Assamese Valley surrounded north, east, and south by numerous savage and warlike tribes whom the decaying authority of the Assam dynasty had failed of late years to control, and whom the disturbed condition of the province had incited to encroachment. Many of them advanced claims to rights more or less definite over lands lying in the plains; others claimed tributary payments from the villages below their hills, or the services of *paiks* said to have been assigned them by the Assam authorities (cited in Mackenzie 1884: 7).<sup>2</sup>

This suggests that early state projects—with their potential agricultural surplus, concentrated manpower, and the overall amenity of life believed to prevail there—made a strong impression on those living in the less

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- 1 In Van Schendel's definition, Zomia stretches from the central hills of Vietnam in the east to west Nepal and Kashmir in the west, including parts of China, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Scott confines its western border to the Naga and Mizo Hills in India's Northeast and Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (Scott 2009: 16). Scott argues that Zomia 'qualifies as a region in the strong sense of the term' (*ibid.*), yet he fails to explain why he proposes to shrink its surface vis-à-vis Van Schendel's initial proposal. In any case, Scott's inclusion of 'Southeast Asia' in his title is politically mistaken, as not only the Naga and Mizo Hills but also Manipur, to which he also refers, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, clearly all belong to the political realm of South Asia. On the whole, however, his analysis largely stops short at the Indo-Myanmar border and thus reasserts the South Asia/Southeast Asia academic divide, which the intellectual case of Zomia is supposed to transcend. By extending the discussion on state-hill tribes relationships westward, this article recognises the potential usefulness of Zomia as an ethnographic field of study.
  - 2 *Paik* refers to a type of corvée labour system under the Ahom Kingdom in which a large number of males were expected to render services to the king.

productive uplands. For them, state resources became an object of aspiration, if not, at times, an essential supplement to cover their basic needs. Taking a cue from the historical case of Ahom-hill tribes' relationships, outlined below, I will argue (and herein lies my main critique of Scott's narrative) that the plains provided too essential a resource for those living in the relatively 'barren' hills to ignore.

### **Scott's grand narrative: 'evading the state'**

James Scott has influenced the course of political anthropology over the past four decades, and catchy phrases such as 'weapons of the weak', 'hidden transcripts', 'moral economy' and 'seeing like a state' continue to appeal to many. His latest work, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), is no different in the impact it has made. In a vast, complex and multi-layered treatise, of which this brief summary is necessarily an abridged and over-simplified one, Scott challenges much received wisdom about primitivism, arguing that nonstate hill peoples (so-called 'primitives') should not be seen as archaic vestiges, left behind by the evolutionary sequences of history. On the contrary, they have deliberately sought refuge in the stateless hills, where they have been the architects of their own marginality, for reasons based on their desire to keep the state at arm's length.

Scott quotes Ernest Gellner's classic *Saints of the Atlas* (1969) to claim that, from a historical point of view, tribalism is a state effect, and that political autonomy is not a given, but a deliberate choice. Nonstate people, therefore, are perfectly aware of what they have rejected, namely the oppression of centralised political rule. He also finds an intellectual companion in Clastres' *Society Against the State* (1977), which is an anarchistic interpretation of native peoples' social organisation in post-conquest South America. Elevating it to the status of an epigraph, Scott adopts Clastres' stance that: 'it is said that the history of peoples who have a history is the history of class struggle. It might be said with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of peoples without history is a history of their struggle against the state'. And indeed, Scott's narrative is one of withdrawal, avoidance, 'self-barbarization', social and political fragmentation and economic minimalism; all deliberately practised by hill dwellers to avoid state appropriation.

In Zomia, 'becoming barbarian' resonated with not becoming a subject of the state. It meant fleeing the adverse effects of state projects in the valleys.

For those wishing to evade the state, the complexities of the undulating hills and elevated mountains, or the ‘friction of terrain’ as Scott calls it, provided the opportunity. Hill populations are, therefore, ‘best understood as runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys’ (Scott 2009: ix). After settling in the hills, the narrative goes, the newly arrived escapees intentionally rendered themselves illegible from a state’s point of view. In fact, virtually everything about their livelihoods can be read as strategic positionings to keep the state at bay. ‘Their physical dispersion in rugged terrain, their mobility, their cropping practices, their kinship structure, their pliable ethnic identities, and their devotion to prophetic, millenarian leaders effectively serve to avoid incorporation into states and to prevent states from springing up among them’ (ibid.: x).

While populations in the hills were marked by centrifugal movements, a centripetal process characterised life in the valley state. It was based on the inclusion and absorption of people, and devoted to restraining them from sprawling into illegible zones. Power, Scott argues, transposing Geertz’s treatise on the *Theatre State* (1980) in Bali to Zomia at large, boiled down to manpower. Hence, it was the appropriation of people, rather than a quest for territory, that was the key to state making. After all, a concentrated and legible population was needed to produce a systematic surplus, as much as it was a prerequisite for military defence. An ambitious state, therefore, functioned as a ‘centripetal population machine’ (2009: 64), which constantly sought to replenish and expand its manpower base. As migrants did not usually draw in voluntarily, the valley state had no choice but to resort to scouring its periphery and capturing, absorbing and enslaving nonstate peoples.

At the core of Scott’s analysis is the binary distinction between the valley and the hills. This division largely corresponds to the delineation between state and nonstate spaces, which constitutes the real fault line. It must be added, however, as Scott himself qualifies, that ‘nonstate space’ is not a synonym for hills; it points more generally to locations where a state has a particular difficulty, often because of geographical impediments, in concentrating manpower and production (2009: 13). Despite their fundamental disparities, Scott asserts that valley and hill spaces are also deeply connected, that their history is a symbiotic one, and that they ‘have to be read against each other to make any sense’ (2009.: 27). Scott’s

anarchistic reading of history, as he himself acknowledges (2009: xii), makes little or no sense for the period following the Second World War, after which the territorially-conceived nation-state became the nearly exclusive form of sovereignty, virtually erasing the last nonstate spaces from the political map.

In Scott's theory, the adverse effects of early state-making projects predominate: taxes, slavery, *corvée* labour, epidemics, and warfare. The reverse option, that the pre-modern valley state also had much to offer, albeit unintentionally, to those residing in the nonstate, remains, by and large, under-estimated. However, these benefits were many and various; harvests, fish, agricultural implements, manpower, clothes, cattle, and advanced weapons. The quest for control over these resources and over arable land in the plains is, I argue, pivotal to understanding pre-modern political fluctuations, perhaps more so than a Scottian focus on a massive, unidirectional, and sustained fight from the lowlands to the hills. Nor did hill peoples have an instinctive propensity for statelessness. An opposite flow, involving people deliberately moving from the hills into the 'state-ridden' plains, was equally pertinent. In fact, most of the pre-modern states that existed in the Brahmaputra Valley were established by erstwhile hill dwellers, who had descended and crushed, or taken over, existing state structures. Notably, a sizeable number of the offspring of these former valley kingdoms, like the Chutiya, Kachari, Dimasa, Jaintia and Ahom, are now again found inhabiting tracts in the hills. Hence, if viewed through a wide historical lens, people may have been both plains people and hill dwellers at different points in their history. Local origin and migration stories, as I will illustrate, testify to such a dialectic, in a way that a common legacy of flight, which one would perhaps expect on the basis of Scott's theory, is by and large absent in India's Northeast. The narrative presented here, although far from being deterministic, has the further advantage of complicating the artificial hill-valley binary which has been so embedded in scholarship on the region, and which Scott's argument ultimately reinforces.

### **The case of Ahom-hill tribe relations**

Once a mighty kingdom, stretching its dominance over all corners of the Brahmaputra Valley, the Ahom Kingdom eventually decayed in, as Gait puts it, 'the "sleepy hollow" of the Brahmaputra valley ... [where] it was only

the intervention of the British that prevented them from being blotted out by fresh hordes of invaders, first the Burmese, and then the Singphos and Khāmtis, and also, possibly, the Daflas, Abors and Bhutias' (Gait 1926: 8). When the first Ahom, a Tibeto-Burman speaking community, crossed the Patkai range into Assam in 1228, coming as they did from the northern and eastern hill tracts of Upper Burma and Western Yunnan, they encountered acute competition and rivalry among tribes residing there. Amidst this turmoil, Sukupha, an Ahom noble, organised his forces and reportedly overpowered the Tangsas, Noctes and Wanchos, who made their homes in what is now Arunachal Pradesh (Luthra 1971: 1144). Slowly at first, and not without setbacks, the Ahom extended their sway over the Brahmaputra plains. By 1539, for instance, Ahom territory had expanded to twice the size it had been around 1407 (Guha 1983: 19), and around the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Ahom occupied almost the entire valley (Luthra 1971: 1144), a position they would retain until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the following discussion is less about Ahom governance in the plains, which has been described in notable detail elsewhere (e.g. Gait 1926; Guha 1983, Sarma 1986), than it is about the relationships between the Ahom government and the surrounding hill tribes.

The Ahom cultivated different relations with different hill tribes. Hence, framing Ahom-hill tribes' relations in terms of a single, progressive narrative would involve grave over-simplifications. Nor were hill tribes themselves placid in this process; the Ahom incorporated some in the ranks of their army, but there were also instances in which a hill tribe sought the support of the Ahom army to intervene in an inter-tribal conflict (Luthra 1971: 11). Raids and retaliations occurred with notable frequency too: most of the historical sources testify to this. Yet there is more to early valley-hill relations than hostilities. Some hill Naga communities lived chiefly by manufacturing salt, which they retailed to plainsmen. The Ahom government raised revenues from the salt that was brought down, and the Nagas in turn depended on the markets in the plains for certain foodstuffs and goods (Robinson 1959 [1841]: 383). Mofatt-Mills reported an occasion on which about a thousand Angami Nagas descended to the plains to trade with merchants in salt and cornelian beads. He noted how the 'utmost goodwill was manifested towards the authorities and the people of the plains' (Mofatt-Mills 1969 [1854]: 126). On the whole, the Naga Hills, Robinson writes in 1841, '[have] always been accessible to the people of the

plains; whilst the Nagas on their part, have always been permitted access to the markets on the frontier' (1959 [1841]: 383).

However, trade relations, where they existed, were not infrequently overshadowed by acts of warfare, as hill polities swooped down and looted villages lying within Ahom jurisdiction. Most probably, they did not plunder the plains because of their 'most rapacious nature' (Devi 1968: 270), or their 'savage' and 'warlike' state of being, as many colonial accounts would later claim. More plausibly, they raided the plains out of sheer necessity, given that 'technical backwardness and poverty of resources kept the tribes dependent on adjoining areas for the supply of essential commodities' (Sikdar 1982: 17). Often in a state of being 'too poor to be able to trade' (Peal cited in Devi 1968: 20), because the uplands were less productive than the more fertile plains, plundering may have been their last resort. Devi (1968) has reconstructed a pattern, based on a study of historical cases, which, in an abridged version, is as follows: after a hill polity launched a successful raid on the plains, the Ahom King retaliated by directing his military forces into the hills. Violent battles ensued, killing or capturing a large number of hill people. More often, however, the Ahom army would find the hostile village completely deserted, as its inhabitants, not keen on confronting the superior Ahom forces, had already taken refuge in the jungle or moved to higher altitudes. The Ahom army was usually able to recapture some of the stolen goods, and took revenge by setting the abandoned village ablaze. Yet hill peoples regrouped quickly and their thatched houses were quickly rebuilt; it was only a matter of time before they gained sufficient strength to pillage the plains again.

The booty from a successful raid on the plains invariably consisted of grain, goods, weapons, agricultural tools, and persons, who were enslaved in agriculture and animal husbandry in the hills, or used as payment or tribute to neighbouring tribes. The abduction of plains people needs to be stressed here, because the absorption of manpower is usually thought of as a state activity, not a tribal one. Gray, an enterprising tea-planter, narrated how during a visit to the hills an Assamese woman told him how she was captured by the Singphos, who raided her village and took all inhabitants into slavery. She had been sold to a different community and separated from her relations. In the course of time, a Singpho had married her and she had two sons by him. Even though fifty years had passed, she had not forgotten her mother tongue, nor her memories of the plains



(1959 [1893]: 416). The colonial officer Peal was astonished when, during an exploratory expedition in Singpho territory, he stumbled upon a village whose inhabitants were clearly not Singphos. He found out that 'these people are the descendants of Assamese carried off by the Singphus some 80 or 100 years ago, and reduced to slavery' (1959 [1881]: 99). Slave raids on the plains were apparently widespread. The Hill Dolpha, too, 'annually kidnapped large numbers of men and women, whom they consigned to perpetual slavery' (Robinson 1959 [1851]: 175).

At times, hill groups did not just raid the plains, but notionally exerted sovereignty over them. The Jaintias, for example, extended their sway from the hills into the plains in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Jaintia king at the time, as recorded in inscriptions on coins and copperplates found in the plains, was referred to as 'Parbhat Ray', which may be translated as 'Lord from the Hills' (Gait 1926: 262-3). The hill Abors also wielded absolute power over the Miris of the plains, who they claimed as their dependents and runaway slaves. The Abors asserted an inalienable right to the gold and fish extracted by the Miris from the Dihong river. The Ahom government implicitly recognised Abor suzerainty over the Miris by relieving the latter of all revenue charges (Mackenzie 1884: 34-5).

Hill polities, in acute need of resources, were ever ready for an opportunity to raid the more productive plains. Hence, the more the Ahom valley state expanded towards the hilly peripheries, the greater the territory it had to defend, and the more vulnerable to raiding tribes it became. The concentration of manpower, and the systematic production of surplus, were no doubt important for the Ahom state in consolidating its core. What needs to be stressed, however, is that its continued existence equally relied on the Ahoms' ability to fend off marauding hill tribes. When, in the long run, military interventions against hill groups proved inconclusive, the Ahom government resolved to change tactics and 'coercion' was replaced by a policy of 'seduction'.<sup>3</sup> Seduction came in the form of the so-called *posa*-system, a government scheme that offered conditional long-term coexistence to hill tribes as an alternative to Ahom suzerainty. Probably anticipating that it was a craving for resources that instigated predatory raids, the Ahom government opted to make the produce of several villages along the foot of the hills liable to the demands from surrounding hill

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3 Here I am borrowing the terminology coined by Ferguson and Whitehead (2000 [1992]).

tribes. During Pratap Singh's reign (1603-1641), for instance, 'the Akas, the Dufflas, the Miris, and the Abors' were granted the right of levying *posha* which, apart from annual collection of goods in specified areas included labour-service of the Assamese *pykes* for which the ryots were given corresponding remission from the state's revenue demand' (Mackenzie cited in Mishra 1983: 1838).<sup>4</sup> In return for these privileges, the hill tribes had to refrain from making inroads into Ahom territory (Devi 1968: 270).<sup>5</sup> When mere containment was not the sole rationale, it was the creation, or sustenance, of trade relationships that propelled the Ahom state's political adjustment. The Noctes, for instance, controlled the salt wells located in the foothills. Although once routed by Ahom forces, they had over the years regained strength and had fought back Ahom incursions with notable success. The Ahom, eager to ensure regular supplies of salt, resorted to a policy of seduction. In return for negotiated access to the salt wells, the Ahom government recognised the political ascendancy of the Nocte chief, bestowed an honorary post upon him, and offered the Noctes an annual supply of foodstuffs from the plains (Misra and Thakur 2004: 183-4).

#### *Secondary state formation in the hills*

Secondary state formation, the establishment of smaller states in the shadow of powerful valley states, is seldom debated in discussions on

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4 *Posa* arrangements have also been documented elsewhere along the valley. The Tablungia Nagas, for example, were granted fishing waters in the plains, along with the services of fishermen, to supply them with dried fish (Devi 1968: 33-34). Similarly, revenue-free lands and fishing waters along with retainers were granted to the Noctes, Wanchos, (Luthra 1971: 1144), Konyaks, Aos, and Lhota Naga tribes living on the borders of the Lakhimpur and Sibsagar Districts (Devi 1968: 271).

5 The British colonial administration did not do away with the existing *posa*-arrangements, but 'bought out' hill peoples' suzerainty over the commercial plains by assigning them with annual stipends, which were paid in cash. For example, the claims on the plains by the Monpas of Towang were bought out by payment of an annual sum of 5,000 rupees while the hill peoples of Shergoan and Rupa were granted an annual payment of 2,526 rupees (Luthra 1971: 1145). The payment in kind to the Daflas was commuted to 2,543 rupees and the Miris and Adis received 2,178 and 3,312 rupees respectively (Sikdar 1982: 22). This policy was condemned as an admittance of state weakness by many and Kar has rightly noted that a sense of embarrassment runs through colonial accounts about this payment of 'blackmail' (Kar 2009). The official view on the matter, however, is perhaps well illustrated by the following statement from an agent to the Governor General: 'The money will indeed be well spent if we can purchase security to the inoffensive people of the plains' (cited in Kar 2009: 66).

Zomia, and yet Fiskesjö (2010) has convincingly shown that manifestations of state formation were evident among the pre-colonial Wa people on the hilly Burma-China frontier. The presence of highly profitable mines, which the Wa sought to control and exploit, was an import catalyst in this process. Fiskesjö suggests that the presence of salt wells among the Naga might have resulted in a similar process, a proposition with which I would agree. The fixed location of Naga-owned salt wells, which the Naga systematically exploited, incited processes of upland state-formation. State-like structures were especially marked among the Angami Naga, who, besides the manufacture of salt, also practiced terraced wet-rice cultivation in the hills (Hutton 1921: 70-2) and were described by Butler as the most 'powerful and warlike', but also the 'most enterprising, intelligent and civilized' of all Nagas (Butler 1969 [1875]: 293). Angami Nagas regularly indulged in such 'state-like' activities as warfare, levying tribute from neighbouring tribes, and slavery.<sup>6</sup> In pre-colonial times the Angami village of Khonoma established a monopolistic protection racket. In spite of frequent dissensions within, it emerged as a strong power centre which levied widespread tribute and was known and feared from afar (Hutton 1921: 11).

Secondary states usually emerged on the basis of a control of natural resources or trade routes. Over time, some of them evolved into large-scale predatory powers which were based on conquest and subjugation just as much as primary states, although the latter were often more reliant on agriculture than trade (Fiskesjö 2010: 261). The primary state (the Ahom in our case), appears to have been careful not to invoke the wrath of strong power centres in the hills. The Ahom's implicit recognition of the hill Abors' suzerainty over the Miris of the plains testifies to this. Instead, attempts were made to purchase peace from them. As this involved the surrender of *de facto* sovereignty over some produce and some stretches of arable land in the plains, it can be seen as a sign of state weakness. Yet, this policy

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6 Acts of war usually ended by the losing side agreeing to pay an annual tribute to the other, 'the tribute being either merely a nominal one of a few beads or a substantial payment in mithan or salt' (Hutton 1921: 156). At times, the inhabitants of defeated villages were, if not killed, taken into slavery. That slavery took place with notable frequency among the Angami is suggested by the existence of standard measures of the value of slaves. Mofatt Mills wrote: 'the value of slaves and cattle is strangely estimated at the following rate, a male slave is worth one cow and three conch shells, a female slave is worth three cows and four or five conch shells' (Mofatt Mills 1969 [1854]: 290).

of 'seduction' simultaneously enabled the Ahom to cultivate a *status quo* of relative stability with adjacent tribes, some of which were sufficiently powerful to endanger Ahom rule in the valley. In its final evaluation, the extraordinary resilience of the Ahom Kingdom was perhaps not due to its military power, concentration of manpower or systemic produce of a surplus, but evolved, in the words of Luthra, around its 'tact, diplomacy and statesmanship, of a high order in formulating a *modus vivendi* with the tribes' (Luthra 1971: 1144).

### **Local origin and migration stories**

The history of the relationships between the Ahom and the hill tribes suggest that hill polities deliberately expanded, or aspired to expand, to the more productive plains. Hence, when one adopts a wide historical lens, hill polities, or sections of them, have been both plains people and hill dwellers at recurrent points in their genealogy. Of course, groups did not move up and down as coherent units: fissioning, fusing and the incorporation of new entrants constantly altered their demographic and social composition. Local oral histories in India's Northeast support such a reading, although it should be stressed that such stories are circumstantial; they are interested and historically positioned tales which permit a certain drift by selective forgetting and remembering. The following brief excursion is indicative, I suggest, not necessarily for its historical accuracy, which can hardly be evaluated, but because it sheds light on how contemporary hill peoples in Northeast India themselves explain their present location in the hills.

A story current among the Garos locates their place of origin in Tibet. It recounts how they descended to the Brahmaputra Valley, stopping at various places on the way, before finally moving up again to their present location in the hills (Endle 1911: 3-4). The Mikirs narrate how they resolved to move down and place themselves under the protection of the Ahom government after they were habitually harassed by warring Khasi chiefs (Lyll 1908: 5). Mills recounted how a hill group, the Molungr, was driven into the plains by raiding Ao Naga forces. The Molungr became dispersed; some returned to their village to live under Ao suzerainty, some crossed the Brahmaputra Valley and settled in the hills to the north of it, while others walked up into the hills again and settled at higher altitudes (Mills 1926: 10). Roy believed that the Adi of present-day Arunachal Pradesh most likely came from the north across the Himalayan barrier: 'they might have come

in a sweeping mass down to the plains of Assam and have been driven back afterwards into the high-lands' (Roy 1960: 12). The legends of many Naga tribes, including the Sema, Tangkhul, Angami, Mao, Somra, and Chakeshang, point to Meikhel or its surrounding area as their place of origin, from which they have dispersed in various directions over the course of history (Horam 1975: 30). Meikhel, located a little to the south-east of present-day Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, is an area of undulating hills. The Kacha Naga, in turn, refer to the Japvo Mountain as the place from which they originated. A story among the Khasis tells that they came originally from Burma and descended across the Patkai hills to Assam, and later moved up into the hills again to their present location (Gurdon 1914: 21).

The reason for residing in the hills and not in the plains is also explained in some origin stories. Among the Angami Naga, Hutton has recorded a story which goes roughly as follows: the husband of *Ukepenopfü*, their ancestress, was very wise but had a frightening appearance. In order not to scare off his two sons he lived in a vessel, waiting for them to grow up to share his knowledge and wisdom. One day some people told the boys that they had a father, although they had always been told that they did not. *Ukepenopfü* could no longer deny the fact but warned them, 'I will show you your father, but he who gets frightened cannot acquire his knowledge'. She took them to the vessel and introduced their father. The elder boy, who became the ancestor of the Nagas, was frightened and ran away. The younger was not scared and the old man went with him to the plains and passed all his knowledge on to him. This explains, the story concludes, 'why the Nagas are poorer in knowledge and cunning than the men of the plains' (Hutton 1921: 261). Another Angami version tells how two brothers each took a different path. One blazed his path on the *chomhu* trees, the other marked it on *chemu* trees. While a blaze on a *chomhu* tree remains white for several days, that on a *chemu* tree blackens quickly. As a result, most of the followers of the two brothers tracked the path of the first boy, which eventually ended in the plains, while the few who followed the *Chomhu* blaze stayed behind in the hills (ibid). Mills narrates a tale in which the Lhota Nagas and plainsmen are represented as one and the same people, who migrated from a place called Lengka, which is located somewhere north or north-west of the Naga Hills. For reasons unknown they split into two bodies, one of which became the plainsmen of the Brahmaputra Valley, while the other became the Nagas of the hills (Mills 1922: 3).

While movement is clearly embedded in all of these stories and none of the hill groups claim to be autochthonous to their present location, a shared narrative of flight, which would add flesh to the bones of Scott's theory, is by and large absent. Some groups do refer to a past life in the plains, but this does not precede their descent to the plains from the hills. This points to a 'hills-plains-hills' movement, rather than an origin in the plains from which they then fled to the hills. In addition to this, a number of hill communities refer to a place in the hills, or a mountain-top, as their mythical place of origin. These narratives reject an initial migration story altogether, and maintain that there has been an *emergence* in the hills.<sup>7</sup> Stories like the one told by the Angami Naga suggest that, rather than the outcome of active political deliberation, their location in the 'barren' hills is the result of a sudden twist of fate, or a failure of understanding on the part of their forefathers.

### **Intruding into the state: an antithesis to state evasion?**

Scott's theory of state evasion, not surprisingly, calls up vivid responses. Its originality, evocative powers and bestowal of historical agency on peoples who were earlier imagined to have none is widely acclaimed. However, criticisms abound. Many of these are broadly sympathetic. Tapp concludes that, on the whole, 'much evidence is on Scott's side', though it may be 'over-painted' (Tapp 2010). Taking the cross-border Thangmi community in parts of Nepal, India and China as her example, Shneiderman introduces contemporary empirical evidence of the historical intentionality of upland peoples vis-à-vis the state, suggesting that Scott's analysis may have more contemporary currency and political relevance than he himself allows (Shneiderman 2010: 292). Others are more critical. Lieberman describes the evidence for a sustained flight from the lowlands to the uplands as 'thin' (Lieberman 2010: 333). Rather than state-repelling egalitarianism, hierarchical relations (e.g. patrilineal clan systems, matrilineal marriage structures), often intermeshed with customs of gift-giving and 'feasts of merits', also shaped political organisation in the hills (Barth 2010: 175). Scott's model is also said to suffer from a 'strong whiff of functionalism', while his conception is 'anything but Popperian' (Subrahmanyam 2010:

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7 Such a narrative of historical emergence, rather than one of migratory waves, is observed more widely among indigenous communities (see Kuper 2003).

26). It is also over-generalised, liberally referencing, as it does, a theory, Leach's *Political System of Highland Burma* (1964 [1954]), which is itself thin in evidence and widely disputed (Sadan 2010). The Ahom-hill tribes narrative outlined above, coupled with the stories contemporary hill peoples tell themselves about their own history, forces us to question the sequence of events that Scott wants us to believe.

In his *A History of Assam*, published in 1926, Edward Gait presents us with what would appear to be a direct inverse of Scott's paradigm. Rather than portraying hill tribes as deliberately evading the state, he presents them as constantly on the alert for an opportunity to raid the plains, or, even better, to oust existing rulers and grab control over the Brahmaputra's fertile soil. His formula goes something like this: Hill groups, the Ahom being a prime example, descended to forcefully capture tracts of the plains. Some of the plains people were accommodated, others were pushed into the hills. The Ahom then established and consolidated their supremacy, thanks to the material resources generated from the fertile soil of the valley. Thus, initially they were able to fend off the now scattered forces of the former valley rulers, who were not quite ready to give up their access to the plains and tried to regain it by carrying out attacks. In the long run, however, the damp and relaxing climate of the valley, coupled by the great material prosperity that people enjoyed there, resulted in a tendency towards deterioration. As Gait puts it: 'Any race that had been long resident there, though rising in the scale of civilization and gaining proficiency in the arts of peace, would gradually become soft and luxurious and so, after a time, would no longer be able to defend itself against the incursions of the hardier tribes behind them' (Gait 1926: 7). A tendency towards internal disintegration over time, for there was no national spirit among the small communities co-opted by the valley king, diluted the central administration. When the valley kingdom showed initial signs of decay, surrounding hill polities would intensify their offensive; they would harry the plains with constant raids, encroach in all directions and eventually reduce the valley to anarchy. Then, Gait continues, 'would come the opportunity for some enterprising hill chief to swoop down with his tribesmen, or a confederacy of kindred tribes, and, after sweeping away the effete remains of a worn-out nationality, to establish his followers in its place' (ibid.: 7-8). In the beginning, the material resources produced by its fertile soil would add to its strength. However, 'time would bring its revenge; and, in the end, the

new dynasty would sink just like the one which it had subverted' (ibid.: 8).

Undoubtedly, Gait's narrative is over-drawn; as such, it too is imaginative. It importantly shows, nevertheless, that the pre-modern valley state not only stirred a sense of fright, but also functioned as a magnet that pulled hill groups down in their search for resources and arable lands.<sup>8</sup> The observation that hill groups expanded downwards into the more productive plains strays away from Scott's emphasis on a sustained fight from the lowlands to the highlands. Such a sequence, however, is remarkably similar to another argument by Ernest Gellner, which he takes from Ibn Khaldun, and to which Scott does not refer. Contrasting city-dwellers with pastoralists on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Gellner argues that the luxury which surrounded townspeople, not to mention their delegation of politics and defence to their rulers, rendered them weak and indolent. This was in contrast to pastoralists, who were inclined to be courageous, and were virtually all armed. Further, pastoralists preferred to situate themselves beyond the pale of the state and to rely on a non-labour intensive life-style. Taken together, these factors predispose pastoralists (and here Gellner's argument takes a crucial turn) 'towards a life-style which incorporates raiding, and of course the defence against raiding by others. This in turn provides the training which makes shepherd tribes state-resistant, and yet at the same time turns them into *potential state-founders*' (Gellner 1983: 12; emphasis mine). Gait's narrative, and the case of the Ahom-hill tribes' relationships, testify to such a reading and indeed suggest that, on the whole, the line separating predatory raids from state-making projects was a fragile one. In fact, the history of state-formation in the valleys was, to an extent, a history of nonstate peoples expanding their sway downwards, in the process co-opting or scattering former rulers.<sup>9</sup> The

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8 Scott's narrative fails to explain why, if the hills were peopled by recurrent migratory waves of state-evading peoples, the issue of overpopulation never really emerged. Would it be possible that there was always space for new arrivals to squeeze in and celebrate their statelessness by making a living out of swidden cultivation? This sequence of events is all the more unlikely when one considers that slash-and-burn agriculture is perhaps not labour-intensive, but is surely land-intensive. That the hills never became overcrowded, and even today are comparatively less densely populated than the plains, suggests that, either the number of state-evasive peoples was, (contra Scott), relatively modest, or (and this aligns with the thread of my argument), that people also moved away from the hills, into the more productive plains.

9 Gait links, albeit somewhat artificially, the relatively brief existence of many dynasties in the Assam plains with the slow and intermittent character of the advance of Hinduism



British, who arrived and later also departed via the sea, provided a major exception to this sequence.

The contest was over the fertile soil along the Brahmaputra River and the control of state-generated produce; as such, it was a contest for the ownership of the valley. One should be wary of reasoning too much in typologies, as some highland groups were numerous and sufficiently powerful to raid the plains and impose state-like structures, while others, hunters and gatherers at the opposite extreme, may not have tried to venture into the plains with equal force. On the whole, however, the process of hill groups moving down was significant. To illustrate further, the search for arable lands has led sections of hill tribes, like the Garo, Miri and Tiwa, to migrate to lower altitudes or plains, which has, over the years, led to them developing identities different from those left behind in the hills. Indeed, the highly fertile river islands and banks of the Brahmaputra River continue to attract land-hungry migrants (Subba and Wouters, forthcoming).

*The valley-hill binary as a 'colonial effect'?*

Much of the scholarship on Northeast India is characterised by a valley-hill binary, just as a highland-lowland dichotomy figures dominantly in the literature on Southeast Asia. For Burling, who considers India's Northeast culturally part of Southeast Asia, a deep-rooted and widespread contrast between hill dwellers and plains people paradoxically provides the most important unifying theme of the region (Burling 1965: 4). Ultimately Scott reifies this binary, suggesting that this relatively sharp division has been a historical constant.<sup>10</sup> There are, however, good reasons to assume that

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in the region. He points out that Hindu priests found their way to Assam but generally confined their attention to the king and his chief nobles, from whom alone they had anything to gain. They would then try, often with notable success, to convert them. For the king they would invent a noble descent, while the nobles were admitted to the rank of Kshatriya. The Hindus would, as a reward, enjoy lucrative posts at court and lands granted to them by their proselytes. If the valley dynasty lasted long enough, ideas of Hinduism would gradually filter down and replace tribal religious practices, as happened in the case of the long-lasting Ahom Kingdom. More often, however, the dynasty would be overthrown before ideas of Hinduism could trickle down. Some of the survivors of the aristocracy would become merged into a Hindu caste but on the whole Hinduism would sink into triviality, except in cases where its priests could succeed in inducing the new rulers to accept their ministrations (Gait 1926: 10)

10 Scott's analysis subsequently shows a hint of statism, because it comes down to an almost

the valley-hill divide in India's Northeast (and this argument might have a wider application in Zomia) became socially more marked and decisive only after the colonial annexation of the adjacent valley. Before colonial times, this binary appears to be socially less relevant; flows of people, goods, ideas and residence-patterns across it were more frequent, and, on the whole, more of a continuum.

Leach was well aware of this valley-hill continuum, arguing that 'valley' and 'hill people' not only interpenetrate politically and culturally, but also territorially (1960: 60). For Burma he argued that, while on a crude level of generalisation the hill Kachin and the valley Shan are quite different from one another in terms of social and political organisation, religious views and agricultural practices, there exists a great deal of continuity between them, given that they are 'almost everywhere close neighbours and in the ordinary affairs of life they are much mixed up together' (1964 [1954]: 2). This perpetual ethnic mingling even leads to some families considering themselves simultaneously Kachin and Shan (*ibid.*). Lehman also stressed this mutuality for the Chin. The Chin, he argued, are a 'subnuclear society', a term he proposes for societies who reside in the margins of state formations and whose society and culture must be understood in terms of their relationships with complex, nuclear valley societies. Such societies are neither fully peasant nor purely tribal; they have characteristics of both (1963.: 1-2).<sup>11</sup>

A similar kind of fluidity seemed to exist in Northeast India, yet all of

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primordial urge, or the innate idiosyncrasies of ethnic psychology, for statelessness among hill peoples. Valley peoples, in turn, are represented as predisposed to a state-life by virtue of their decision, despite their political agency, not to escape state enclosure (although one must acknowledge, as Scott himself points out, that in many cases they stayed because the state prevented them from moving away.)

- 11 Far removed from civilisation, self-governed, self-contained and self-sufficient, much akin to Wolf's 'people without history' (Wolf 1982), the highlanders of India's Northeast have been regularly represented as dwelling in isolated out-of-the-way places, since 'time immemorial'. Eaton, for example, argues that the Naga have always been economically self-sufficient and 'never developed sustained trade relations with the plains people ... institutionalized intervillage warfare and the cultural values on which it rested, which included headhunting, had the effect of narrowing very considerably the Nagas' vision of the world' (1997: 249). This isolationist perspective also enjoys political currency, as rebel groups revert to this narrative in order to enhance the legitimacy of their demand to be excluded from the Indian polity. However persistent this depiction might be, there is hardly any evidence that corresponds to such a view for pre-colonial times, as the case of the Ahom also indicates.

this suffered a blow with the colonial annexation of Assam. For mercantile reasons, the British concentrated on administering the plains, which were commercially viable in ways the ‘barren’ hills were not. In the words of Lord Dalhousie, speaking as Governor-General of British India,

I dissent entirely from the policy which is recommended of what is called obtaining a control, that is to say, of taking possession of these hills, and of establishing our sovereignty over their savage inhabitants. Our possession could bring no profit to us, and would be as costly as it would be unproductive’ (cited in Elwin 1969: 162).

In fact, one major source of contention was the British policy of pushing the hill tribes up into the hills, alienating them from land previously under their control and granting such land, formally declared ‘wasteland,’ to tea planters and immigrant peasants from Bengal. The hills, on the other hand, were declared off-limits for land transfers to non-tribal outsiders’ (Karlssoon 2011: 270).

This sense of isolation took further shape with the imposition of an inner line, whose official purpose was to provide a territorial frame to British capital (Kar 2009: 51).<sup>12</sup> More deeply, Kar continues, it was to ‘demarcate “the hills” from “the plains”, the nomadic from the sedentary, the jungle from the arable – in short, “the tribal areas” from “Assam proper”’ (ibid.: 52). It subjected the region beyond to a permit regime and, although total seclusion was not enforceable because hill and valley people needed to meet for trade purposes, more stringent regulations reduced the frequency of these interactions. In this process, the unenclosed territory came to be seen as ‘outside of the historical pace of development and progress... where the time of the law did not apply: where slavery, headhunting, and nomadism could be allowed to exist’ (Kar 2009: 52). In the dominant representational order, and propelled by ideas of unilineal social evolution, hill dwellers came to be seen as the opposite of ‘British civilisation’, as well as inferior to the alternative civilisation presented by the high castes of the ‘mainland’. This eventually led to the ‘invention of tribes’, a process through which uplanders became socially construed as collectively backward and sharing

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<sup>12</sup> In 1919, the region unenclosed by the inner line was renamed as the ‘backward tracts’ and the idea of ‘backwardness’ thus became inscribed in its official designation.

characteristics that were fundamentally different from those inhabiting the plains.<sup>13</sup>

From this point of view, the hills took on their identity as remote places peopled by insulated tribes only after the colonial annexation of the Assam plains, which isolated and essentialised hill dwellers in unprecedented ways. In any case, 'remoteness' is not an objective status. It has a position in topographical space, though as Ardener has convincingly shown, it 'is defined within a topological space whose features are expressed in a cultural vocabulary' (Ardener 2007: 214). Hence, as historical constants, the categories 'hill people' and 'valley people' are problematic; they do not just refer to a 'natural' division of space but are also a reflection of socially constructed images and perceptions, which can hardly be called static over time. As a decisive, socially meaningful and deep-rooted demarcation, the valley-hill binary, which lies at the heart of Scott's argument, might therefore better be seen as a colonial and academic construct, rather than a perpetual ethnographic reality.

#### *Some concessions to Scott's theory*

Scott, it needs to be stressed, is not unaware of all of the above. He remarks, for example, that 'Many valley people are, as it were, "ex-hill people", and many hill people are "ex-valley people"' (2009: 27), yet this insight, adequate as it is, is subsequently submerged by his emphasis on a massive, largely unilateral and sustained flight from the plains to the uplands. Scott often starts an argument with bold and eloquently asserted claims, then uses subsequent paragraphs to introduce complexities. He accepts, for instance, that the world of pre-modern states was not always only threatening but at times also attractive to nonstate peoples. Its potential surplus could form a target for raiders from the hills, incidentally culminating in racket-cum-blackmail relationships, with hill groups extracting tribute from sedentary communities. For instance, the Kachin controlled the Bhamo area in the plains and appointed Burmese and Shan headman there. However, he then

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13 To grasp this process at work, Van Schendel has usefully coined the term 'tribalist discourse', which points to the remarkable resilience of images of tribes based on the 'presumption that all tribes share characteristics that are fundamentally different from, even opposite to, those of civilized people. Principal among these are 'childish' qualities that betray a lack of socialization: immoderately emotional behaviour (revelry, sensuality, extravagance, cruelty, fear of the supernatural) and naivety (credulity, incapacity to plan for the future)' (Van Schendel 1992: 103).

moulds this sequence into his general argument by arguing that when marauding tribes did raid valley settlements they generally did so to the extent that they 'killed the goose that laid the golden egg' (2009: 151). This was because different hill polities eyed the same valley resources, with none of them sufficiently powerful to permanently control them. Scott also acknowledges that hill tribes like the Karenni were notorious slave-raiders, but he then argues that slave raids on the plains were 'yet another process by which valley people became hill people in Zomia' (2009: 152). However, this reasoning negates the common thread of his own narrative, namely that the peopling of the hills is the result of applied political agency. Now, Scott cannot have it both ways because being captured and dragged into the hills clearly does not amount to much of a choice. Keeping these added complexities of Scott's theory, to which I have alluded only briefly here, in mind, my assessment of it is not entirely hostile or wholly antithetical. However, I do assert that the primary emphasis should not be on withdrawal, flight and evasion.

### **Conclusion**

Most if not all interactions between hill dwellers and plains people, Leach argued, 'related to the fact that as a general rule the valley peoples are producers of rice surplus to their own requirements, while equally, as a general rule, the hill peoples suffer from a rice deficiency which must somehow be made good from outside' (1964 [1954]: 22). A similar dialectic was applied by Lehman. The Hill Chin in Burma, he argued, were 'acutely aware of their own disadvantageous situation' (1963: 216). For those Chin living at higher altitudes, where resources were more scarce, capturing resources from the plains was particularly vital, to the extent that their entire social and political organisation became an adaptation to this end (*ibid.*: 27). What Leach and Lehman already knew is that state projects in the valleys, their military might and very real oppressiveness notwithstanding, had a lot to offer, however unintentionally, to those living in the relatively unproductive hills.

Scott's account of deliberate state evasion is in line with a widespread theoretical disposition in the anthropological literature on state and resistance in which, following Spencer's critical assessment (2007: 45-6), the state, or its pre-modern manifestation, is reconfigured into an absolute externality. It is essentialised as a source of apprehension, coercion and

fear, one that imposed itself without leaving any spaces for negotiation. Thus, Scott paints the pre-modern valley state as a constellation of power from which nonstate people had nothing to gain other than oppression and misery. This analysis corresponds with Subrahmanyam's characterisation of Scott's work as, above anything else, that of a 'pessimistic romantic' (2010: 26), but it departs from the analysis presented here which, on an abstract level, rather aligns with Ortner's view that 'in a relationship of power, the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal' (1985: 175).

The case of Northeast India shows that the fertile soil of the Brahmaputra Valley, and the abundance it produced, attracted hill groups down to the plains. For nonstate peoples, it provided an opportunity, so that accessing these resources and possessing fertile lands in the valley became objects of aspiration for them. This desire translated into brisk flows of trade and persons in some times and places; in others, however, it erupted into fierce conflicts over land-holdings in the plains. Whereas Scott insists that the history of hill peoples is the 'history of deliberate and reactive statelessness' (2009: x), this article argues that the history of those dwelling in the hills can equally be read as the history of their deliberate attempts to access state resources. A consequence of this is that the survival of a valley state depended on its ability to keep marauding hill tribes at bay.

### **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to David N. Gellner, Tanka B. Subba and Arkotong Longkumer for their insightful comments and suggestions at various stages of the writing of this article. I also thank the Huygens Scholarship Programme, whose generosity has sustained me over the past two years. I have not had the privilege of meeting James C. Scott; and although I challenge certain central aspects of his grand narrative, there is much to admire about his book. Ultimately, his work has made us all think more critically about these important issues, and for that I am highly obliged to him.

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# Shaping Secularism in Nepal

Chiara Letizia

## Introduction

On May 18 2006, Nepal's House of Representatives declared Nepal a secular state and suspended the political powers of the king, thus putting an end to the two-centuries-old Hindu kingdom. Nepal's secular status was reiterated in the Interim Constitution of 2007, without specifying which model of secularism should be established, and finally the Constituent Assembly declared Nepal a secular federal, democratic, republic on 28 May 2008.

How is secularism understood and how can it be implemented in a country with a large Hindu majority, where Hinduism and the state have, until very recently, preserved a symbiotic relationship through the institution of Hindu kingship (Sharma 2002; Toffin 2006)? This article presents some preliminary findings from research conducted in the districts of Banke, Dhanusha, and Morang, and in the Kathmandu Valley, between 2009 and 2011.<sup>1</sup>

Since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nepali rulers have styled themselves and their culturally and ethnically diverse subjects as Hindu, making Hinduism an essential component of national identity. Even today, Hindu influence remains a reality in the legal system and everyday institutional practices, and there has been little attempt to reform the numerous legal provisions that are inconsistent with (what the West thinks of as) secularism or to minimise the government's interactions with religion (CCD 2009:1). The state is still involved in the management of trusts associated with Hindu gods and temples; government funds are spent on Hindu religious festivals; cow slaughter and conversion are still outlawed;<sup>2</sup>

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1 My fieldwork, conducted from September 2009 to April 2010 and November 2010 to January 2011, was made possible by the generous support of the Newton International Fellowship. I would like to thank Anne de Sales, David Gellner and an anonymous EBHR reviewer for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. All my gratitude goes to Philippe Gagnon, my husband, for his assistance in connection with legal matters during fieldwork and his patient revision of this text.

2 Despite its secular framework, the 2007 interim constitution still bans conversion through proselytisation and affirms a right for people to profess and practise their religion only 'as handed down to them from ancient times having due regards to traditional practices'.

Plate 1. On the day of Ram Nawami (24 March 2010), President Yadav and former king Gyanendra Shah both visited the Janaki temple within the space of only two hours. Each of them entered the temple for the puja shaded by the same honorific parasol (source: Republica, 26 March 2010).



**Mr President !...  
Ex-King wants the  
umbrella back.**

many laws are based on Hindu norms and values; Hindu temples are found in government buildings, schools, military camps and courts; public holidays are mostly Hindu festivals; and the President of the Republic has in many instances replaced the former Hindu king at public religious functions. In short, secularism seems to face many challenges.

Questions about the future of secularism in Nepal assume and reify secularism as a part of a modernity package that is challenging the deeply

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Thus, the right does not extend to the convert. Previous constitutions contained the same provisions, all the way back to the Rana and Panchayat periods, during which they were used to exile Buddhist monks and put Christians in jail. While people are still being indicted for the crime of cow slaughter (now justified on the basis that the cow is the national animal), the number of prosecutions against proselytisation (*dharma parivartan garaune*) has dwindled since 1990 (especially after criminal sanctions against the converted were removed), and none were found to have taken place since 2002. Resistance to the removal of these bans is strong, and they remained in the concept papers of the Constituent Assembly and the new draft Criminal Code presented to Parliament in 2011.

religious and traditional Nepali society. However, a recent debate in the social sciences has historicised the very notions of secularism and secularisation and questioned their intrinsic association with modernisation (Cannell 2010). A review of the main arguments in this debate will be useful before returning to the Nepali case.

### **Secularism in the social sciences' recent debate**

The main characteristics of secularisation—a decline of religious beliefs and practices correlating with increasing modernisation; the privatisation of religion; and the differentiation of secular spheres (state, economy, science), understood as their emancipation from religious norms and institutions (Casanova 1994)—are all interrelated in European history. Therefore, there is a general assumption that they are part of the global modernisation process. However, the debate has recently shifted to the religious and historical context in which secularism evolved, and has led to ‘an unpacking of secularity as a religious-free neutral and universal development of European modernity’ (Göle 2010: 43). So it has been acknowledged that secularisation makes sense only within the context of a particular historical transformation of Western European Christianity: the generalisation of secularisation as a universal process correlated with modernisation and transferred to other world religions and other cultural areas is highly problematic (Casanova 2009). As early as the 1980s, the anthropologist T.N. Madan (1984) questioned the thesis that the historical *process* of secularisation, which separated the two domains of ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ in Western society, with the former being confined to individuals’ privacy, was a precondition of modernity everywhere.

However, to acknowledge that secularism is a product of Western history specific to Latin Christendom does not imply that it is not suitable for non-Western civilisations. Rather, what needs to be considered is how the Christian Western European dynamic of secularisation has been globalised and how religious traditions respond and are reinterpreted, producing multiple formations of the secular in different historical and political contexts. These multiple secularisms should not be approached as replicas or ‘deficient copies’ of the Western original, but as distinctive formations. José Casanova suggested recently that secularism, a ‘western essentialism’, should first be deconstructed by emphasising the various patterns of secularisation *within* the West: protestant/catholic, European/

American, etc. This should open up the way to a less Eurocentric and more comparative analysis of patterns of secularisation in other secular modernities (Casanova 2010). In the same way, as Rajeev Bhargava writes, we should attend to the histories of secularism and examine the transnational and historical development of the secular idea:

Secularism too has a history made at one time largely by Europeans, then a little later by North Americans, and much later by non-western countries. Non-western societies inherited from their western counterparts specific versions of secularism but they did not always preserve them in the form in which they were received. They often added something of enduring value to them and, therefore, developed the idea further (Bhargava 2010: 65).

The task is not to catalogue the variety of secularisms in the world, but to develop new concepts and identify practices at work outside the secular/religious opposition (Cady and Shakman Hurd 2010: 8).

Scholars are calling for a 'de-secularisation' of our secularist and modernist categories (Casanova 2009) to describe contemporary religious developments. Indeed, the categories that have been used until now, such as the 'de-secularisation of the world', the 'return of religion' or the 'deprivatisation of religion', all point to a simple reversal of a postulated previous process of secularisation, and remain therefore within the same paradigm. The notion of the post-secular expresses the need to coin new concepts and to find ways of accommodating religious claims in liberal institutions (Habermas 2008, Casanova 2009, Molendijk *et al.* 2010, Rosati 2011). The post-secular debate shows that modernity does not necessarily mean the disappearance of religions from the public sphere, and invites us to abandon the model of secularity as a public space free from religious arguments, religious symbols and religious groups (Casanova 2011).<sup>3</sup>

Talal Asad (2003) has argued that the religious and the secular are neither immutable essences nor opposed ideologies and that their mutual construction as interdependent concepts gain salience with the emergence of the modern state. While secular rationality was defining law, economic

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3 Casanova proposed that pluralist societies 'need to create neutral civic and political secular spaces in which all religious and non religious people can not only coexist peacefully but also partake in the same equal rights and freedoms' (2011).

relations, and statecraft in the modern world, it was simultaneously transforming the conceptions, practices and institutions of religious life (Mahmood 2009: 836). Through state and civic institutions, secularism 'has historically entailed the regulation and reformation of religious beliefs, doctrine and practices to yield a particular normative conception of religion (that is largely protestant Christian in its contours)' (Mahmood 2009: 858). The normative impetus internal to secularism reorganises religious subjectivities in accordance with a liberal political rule that is retrospectively called 'a religiously neutral political ethic' (Mahmood 2006: 328). This is why secular consciousness cannot meet the challenges of increasingly plural societies where *different* forms of religious subjectivity need to be recognised and legally acknowledged. Mahmood's reflections are relevant to the case of Nepal, as we shall see that the notion of *dharma* exceeds the notion of 'religious' constructed and regulated in opposition to the 'secular'.

#### *Approaches to the Nepali case*

Despite social scientists' deconstructions, 'secularism', translated by the expression *dharma nirapeksata* ('autonomous from/ indifferent, impartial to *dharma*'), was introduced as a contribution to the modernisation of 'New Nepal'. The concept is now embedded in public speech, at least in urban centres.<sup>4</sup> If the 'package' has been delivered, it has also produced local responses that need to be examined with a view to empirically testing the western secular/religious opposition.

Fieldwork concerned with the concept of secularism itself was conducted in Nepalgunj, Janakpur and Biratnagar and to a lesser extent in Dang.<sup>5</sup> The aim was to collect the views of various social agents: politicians who either launched or opposed secularist campaigns; the legal community and the police who interpret, wield or impede what they perceive as the coercive power of secularism; the religious communities that are most concerned about secularism; social activists who may link secularism and their action

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4 The expression *dharma nirapeksata* was unfamiliar to many people: sometimes, while chatting about my research in the streets, I was asked if it was a new religious sect, or a new party.

5 Nepalgunj, Janakpur and Biratnagar were selected as important urban centres, each exhibiting a different population mix and reflecting the complexity of Tarai dynamics. In Nepalgunj, militant pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim organisations follow an antiseccular agenda, while the large Muslim community differentiates itself from the larger Madhesi movement.

on the ground; and lastly intellectuals who help to shape the meaning of secularism in the public sphere. I also attended District and Supreme Court cases concerning the reform of religious traditions, and followed the public debates they generated, in order to observe how they contribute to shaping the fluid notion of secularism.

It is not yet clear to which type of secularism the state is committed, and the concept is obviously still in the making. A recurring sentence in the interviews was *sambidhan lekheko chaina*, ‘the constitution is not written’, to indicate the insecure place occupied by secularism in the still undrafted constitution. However, secularism was taking shape beyond the Constitutional Assembly, through incidents between the Maoist government and religious devotees, through court cases, and also through antiseccular campaigns and demonstrations. These various events provide opportunities for a public debate to take place on the matter of secularism and relations between the state and religion. Indeed, the ethnographic enquiry into these practices and events is able to grasp the processes through which secularism is taking shape in all its complexity.

In this paper, I will focus on the meaning of secularism shaped by the campaign of 1990; on the understandings of secularism that emerge from interviews conducted in the Tarai, focusing on anti-secular discourses; and finally on two court cases concerning Pashupatinath temple and the goddess Kumari, which are respectively the first case to judicially invoke secularism, and a landmark case for secularism. The aim here is to offer a perspective from which to begin to analyse the formation of Nepali secularism, and to provide some data on local understandings of secularism and the forces which are presently shaping it.

#### *The shaping of secularism in the 1990s*

The declaration of Nepal as a secular state has been a cherished goal of the religious minorities and ethnic groups since 1990, when the People’s Movement overthrew the Panchayat regime, and provided the context for the rise of ethnic-based political identities. Nepal’s diverse populations (collectively defined with the neologism *janajati*) appeared on the public stage, demanding that the new constitution guarantee ethnic, religious and linguistic minority rights. Nepali citizens began to openly criticise Hinduism’s political role in maintaining social and economic inequalities in favour of high-caste Hindus. In this context, Theravada Buddhist monks



and laymen began a movement which demanded that the forthcoming constitution should abolish the Hindu state and declare the country secular. This was perceived as a way to achieve a multicultural, inclusive, democratic society (Leve 2007: 84). For the activists, secularism would not banish religion from public life but would recognise religious diversity and bring an end to Hindu high caste domination. Secularism was redefined as ‘the institutional instantiation of freedom of religion and religious equality’ (Leve 2007: 94).<sup>6</sup>

Religious activism and the movement for secularism were thus tightly linked. The same Newar intellectuals, both laypeople and monks, who introduced a reform of Newar Buddhism through Theravada-inspired modernist and rationalist ideals, also campaigned for this kind of secularism. They were soon joined by *janajati* activists in search of their ethnic identity (Letizia forthcoming, Krauskopff 2009). They even united in a common project of awareness camps to spread Buddhism among the *janajatis* and increase the number of Buddhists in the National Census of 2001 (LeVine and Gellner 2005: 234; Letizia 2006).<sup>7</sup> In short, the activists who were working to promote secularism were Buddhists, who also had a modernising project of reform of their own traditional religion and a political programme to spread Buddhism throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

Although the 1990 constitution officially recognised ethnic minorities, it continued to declare the state to be Hindu. The campaign had thus failed to achieve its objective, but had contributed to the shaping of Nepali secularism none the less. The state and religion were not separated; instead, the democratic state had the duty to recognise and be the patron of all religions equally.

### **Towards a multi-religious Nepal?**

The strength of this vision of secularism as ‘equal respect and opportunities for all religions’ was sustained in the period of transition towards the

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6 For example, the Theravada monk Aswagosh wrote: ‘Secularism means that the state must be unbiased towards all religions. It does not mean that religion must be stopped’ (Aswagosh 1994 quoted in Leve 2007:94).

7 The same type of activism can be observed today for the 2011 Census. It seems to remain captive to the logic of pro-Hindu state activists, who argue that Nepal should be a Hindu state because 80% of Nepalis are Hindus.

8 Their activism led some activists and intellectuals belonging to Magar and Tharu communities to adhere to Buddhism and rewrite their groups’ history, affirming a Buddhist past (Letizia 2006 and forthcoming).

republican regime and its first governments. The first step considered 'secular' by media and the public was the declaration by the Nepal government in late 2007 of a number of Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Madhesi, Tharu and Kirant festivals as national holidays in a calendar hitherto permeated by Hindu festivals.<sup>9</sup> Although this was considered as a minor gesture by activists who expected the government to take bolder moves towards implementing secularism, it was nevertheless welcomed by the religious minorities, who felt that they had been heard, and newspapers contributed to this positive appraisal. As Deepak Thapa notes, 'Even that little has certainly helped religious minorities feel greater ownership of the state, and that can only be considered a progressive step' (Thapa 2010).

However, the reaction of the majority of the population has not always been equally positive. A Hindu Newar lawyer based in Nepalgunj commented that secularism brought only more holidays for obscure festivals:

When I arrive at the Court, sometimes I find it closed because of a holiday, but nobody knows which kind of festival it is. What is this, a multi-religious or a secular country? When I was young, there was no need for these national holidays: we were adjusting. In Kirtipur the majority of students were Newar, so at the time of Sithi Nakha the school was almost empty; and when another community was having a *mela*, the students belonging to it were not coming to school, saying: *yo hamro sithi nakha ho* ('this is our Sithi Nakha'). Everything was accommodated locally, but now everybody wants to be recognised nationally.

Even the Maoists, the strongest advocates of secularism,<sup>10</sup> did not take radical steps to implement it in the period during which they led a government coalition under Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.<sup>11</sup> Despite

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9 The National Council of Churches reports the announcement of the national holidays of Christmas, Lhosar, Chhath, Eid Bakr, Maghi (Tharu) and Ubhauri Udhauri (Kirant) on 28 December 2007: [http://nccnepal.org/news/news\\_details.php?newsID=14bfa6bb14875e45bba028a21ed38046f5e41](http://nccnepal.org/news/news_details.php?newsID=14bfa6bb14875e45bba028a21ed38046f5e41)

10 Secularism has been part of the Maoist agenda since the 40-point demand was submitted to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4 February 1996 by Baburam Bhattarai on behalf of the United People's Front Nepal, before the launch of the 'People's War'.

11 However, there were some significant events, labelled by detractors as the beginning of a Cultural Revolution, such as the 'incident' during Indra Jatra in 2008, when Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai announced a cut in government funding for religious

their own atheist views and ideological opposition to religion, which they see as a means of exploitation of the poor,<sup>12</sup> in this domain they adopted a gradual path to change and adhered mostly to the mainstream vision of secularism. For example, a Maoist leader in Dhanusa District considered the respect for all religions and the inclusion of other religious minorities in Nepal as ‘an initial step toward real secularism’:

We understand that people don't know our ideology of historic materialism and that if we impose it, breaking temples, the people will escape; so we try to educate them: on one hand we honour their religious faith and on the other we discuss with them. (...) Here in Nepal, rulers control people through religion. The state should be kept away from any religion. It is difficult to do this in a short time and is a difficult task because people are attached to religion: if we start showing secularism directly to them, we will become very unpopular. But we can bring the topic to a big debate. For now the state should respect people's faith. As a first step, it is better to start to give equal treatment to all religious followers. Nepal has been under Hindu religious influence, but there are so many other dharmas: Islam, Jaina, Christians and ‘natural religion’ (*prakritik dharma*). It is our duty to bring awareness to these people, to tell them that this country is theirs too. With the development of modernity, I think that there will be a gradual disappearance of strong religious beliefs. (Interview, February 2010)

From 2008 onwards, public spaces such as Khula Manch or Tundikhel in

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festivals, and the infamous events surrounding priest appointments at Pashupatinath temple, which are discussed below.

- 12 More than religion itself, the Maoists condemned its manipulation by ‘reactionaries’ who they said oppress people under the mask of Hinduism. They sought to abolish all forms of exploitation in the name of religion. During the ‘People’s War’ (1996-2006), the Maoists adopted inconsistent attitudes towards religion. They declared that religion was ‘the opium of the people’, occasionally prohibited ‘superstitious cults’ and sometimes deliberately violated religious taboos. But they also summoned shamans, worshipped deities, visited pilgrimage places, etc. Anthropologists have showed how Maoists communicated and built their movement around symbols reinterpreting Hindu notions of place and sacrifice (Ramirez 1997; de Sales 2003, Lecomte 2004, 2006). In 2006, the Maoist leader Prachanda declared: ‘We respect all the religious beliefs of the masses, even if our party teaches its officials and cadres a more scientific and secular point of view’ (<http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/Prachanda:%20Our%20Revolution%20Won/1431107>).

Kathmandu were at times taken over by Muslims, Christians, Tamangs, Gurungs, and Madhesis for national meetings and ceremonies: as a result of secularism, the capital city is becoming visibly multi-religious. In many interviews, the notion of *space* for religious minorities emerged as an important theme associated with secularism. In the words of a Dalit Maoist cadre in Janakpur in 2010:

In Janakpur there is a majority of Hindus, but there are minority groups like Buddhists and Christians: they are kept in a small corner and oppressed. Here there is Janaki Mandir but not a Christian church, even if people want it. For a true secularism, we need also a church and a Buddhist temple. (...) In Lumbini, one can feel to belong to Buddhism and feel authorised to adopt Buddhism, while here it's a big stage for Hindus only. Here is the Janaki city, the land of Hinduism; we don't get the environment to feel that there are other religions. People should be given the possibility to practice secularism, that is first of all to give them a *place for worship*. There should be an *environment* for secularism.

The theme of space—for all the communities to prosper peacefully, without any of them suffering as a result of the growth and strength of the others—is also evoked in the metaphor shared by a Nepali Congress leader in Janakpur:

A *dharmasapeksa*<sup>13</sup> state is like a small pot overcrowded with many plants; a *dharmanirapeksa* state is a big piece of land where you transplant all those small plants from the little pots, to give them all more space to grow and prosper.

In the Tarai the presence and visibility of religious communities is not only measured in space (religious sites, processions, etc) and time (festivals in the calendar) but it is also a matter of sound, as loudspeakers playing Kirtan Bhajan and the Muslim call to prayers compete in the soundscape of many cities.

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13 The term *dharmasapeksa* (*sa+apeksa*) = 'dependent on/ related to dharma', 'dharma-oriented', is used to qualify the Hindu state.

*A brittle and contested secularism*

The ethnic and religious minorities who pushed through secularism, supported by the Maoist insurgents, have been largely unrepresented on the political scene, which remains dominated by high-caste Hindus. Even among the politicians who supported the inclusion of secularism in the Interim Constitution, there was no strong commitment towards it and many did not really want it, nor were they clear about its implications.<sup>14</sup> For them, secularism was above all else a move against the king, in the hope of removing the religious basis of his power, rather than a more specific project of society.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it was not uncommon to hear ‘pro-secular’ politicians state unofficially that they disagreed with secularism or were not sure that it was appropriate for Nepal. A leader of the Madhes Janadikari Forum (MJF) told me during an interview in Biratnagar that the MJF was a secular party, but off the record he admitted:

We are not really convinced about secularism; my feeling is that secularism has been declared because there was no choice: the political discourse was taken over by the Maoists, and became so popular, that if someone opposed secularism, he automatically came across like a royalist.

Many politicians and some members of civil society who had supported secularism felt that it had been hastily declared, ‘in a dictatorial way’. They seemed to have forgotten the 1990 popular movement and the members of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities asking for secularism in a mass demonstration in front of parliament in 2006.

By the beginning of 2010, it was evident that the May 28 deadline for completing the Constitution would be missed: as the larger peace process and constitution drafting process stalled, anti-secular voices progressively rose. ‘Right-wing’ forces became active in many ways: in religious rituals and campaigns in favour of the restoration of a Hindu state; in the discourses

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14 Subash Kattel (2010) remarks that while big political parties expressed their commitment to secularism in their manifestos for the CA elections, no party explained or defined the word.

15 My interviews confirm Sudhindra Sharma’s opinion that politicians accepted secularism as a part of the Maoist agenda and as a way of weakening the Hindu monarchy, but did not give much thought to secularism *per se* (interview, October 2009).

of Indian Shankaracharyas and BJP leaders; in the attendance of the former king at religious festivals to gather support; in the campaign of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party for a referendum on secularism and monarchy, etc. (see Appendix).

These actions, actively supported by some members of the government, were simply dismissed as royalist and reactionary, and left unaddressed by politicians and intellectuals, with a few exceptions (Acharya 2010; Thapa 2010). As Deepak Thapa argues, these voices for a Hindu Nepal were silencing any effort

to start reflecting on how to build a secular Nepal that was inclusive and respectful of religious minorities. However, I would add that a debate on building a secular state cannot simply ignore or dismiss these Hindu fears, but has to take them into account in order to show clearly what secularism is not. Labelling these voices as 'reactionary' will not remove their power, because they are built around widespread arguments, fears and slogans, which the Hindu Right can develop into extreme political positions.

### Fieldwork in the Tarai: Understandings of Secularism

#### *Secularism in the Tarai: a fluid and multivocal notion*

My research in the Tarai focused on local perceptions of and reactions to secularism. The Tarai is a place where, hypothetically, the impact of secularism might be more keenly felt, because of the simultaneous presence of deeply religious Hindu communities, a significant number of Muslims (15%), an increasing number of Christians, and groups linked to the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh-based Hindu Right. Generally, *dharma nirapeksata* appeared to be a sensitive, uncomfortable concept, sometimes generating

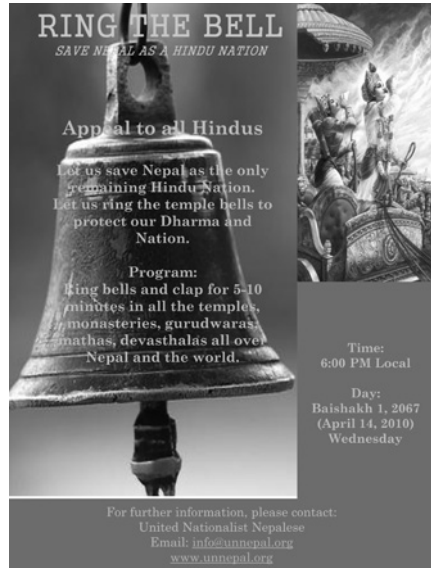


Plate 2. One of the many campaigns for a Hindu state launched in the Spring of 2010

strong feelings. Thus, one of the enriching (if sometimes demanding) features of fieldwork there was that one-to-one interviews often turned into collective debates, attracting passers-by. Secularism also appeared as a fluid and multivocal notion, differently understood according to the religious, political, social and geographical situation of the individuals, with a potential for conflict.

Few of the intellectuals whom I met outside Kathmandu legal circles understood secularism as a wall of separation between Church and state. Echoing the 1990s vision, people belonging to religious minorities, *janajatis* and civil society understood secularism as the abolition of Hindu primacy, the opportunity for all religious groups to receive equal recognition and a step towards inclusiveness. Maoists welcomed secularism as a step towards the elimination of a deep-rooted feudalism based on Hinduism; for the Hindu fundamentalists, it was a despicable and uncalled-for measure attacking the identity of the country and leading to communal violence; Muslims saw it as a good opportunity to get the *shari'a* enacted as their community's own personal law and to receive more state support for their community's schools (*madrasahs*); Christians, (mostly evangelical Churches) understood secularism as implicit permission to proselytise, despite the letter of the law.

Many of the people interviewed (opponents and supporters alike) associated secularism with a sense of freedom (feared or welcomed), and saw it as a step towards the religious freedom of groups and individuals. Many explained secularism as the freedom to select and change one's religion (although the current constitutional right of religion is restricted to following one's ancestral religion). The conflict between this sentiment of freedom and the letter of the law was often expressed, even by police and public prosecutors, who felt uneasy about the enforcement of old laws in a changing environment.

### *The Muslim Perspective*

When Muslims started pressing for the recognition of their separate identity, disentangling themselves from the Madhesi' voices, religion entered the scene of Tarai politics. The Muslim vote was one of the reasons for the Madhesi parties, often dominated by Yadav or Maithili high castes, to include secularism in their manifesto. A MJF politician in Biratnagar stressed that he had to back secularism, realising how fundamental the support of the large Muslim community was to his party. However, I was

told by a Tarai Madesh Loktantric party leader in Janakpur:

Secularism in Madhes means the relation between Hindus and Muslims. Leaders of Madhesi parties do not trust Muslim voters as they do not vote on the basis of party loyalty, but instead follow their religious leaders. So, many [political] leaders will not go for secularism, because the political behaviour of Muslims can't be counted on and these leaders prefer to have the stable support of strong and dominant Hindus.

In both cases, the Muslim community's vote is understood as a factor that must be taken into account when deciding whether to be for or against secularism.

Among Muslim leaders and activists, the understanding of secularism as the equality of all religions serves the minority rights agenda of providing special treatment to marginalised religious groups. Thus, the citizens of a secular state must have the freedom to practise their own religion and follow their own way of life, and different personal laws (in this case *shari'a* law) should be applied to different communities. Muslim leaders in Biratnagar are sure that secularism, if it is well implemented, is a promise to different religious communities that they will be free to expand and affirm their rights. Never the less, they emphasised that after the declaration of secularism their situation had worsened. Fear and insecurity had grown in the community, as 'Hindus started attacking Muslims as if Muslims had asked for secularism', which they had not done. In their view, secularism has brought to Nepal the kind of communal hatred which can be witnessed just over the Indian border. It prompted a strong reaction from Hindu fundamentalist groups, which feared that secularism would make Muslims stronger and Hindus weaker.

#### *The Hindu Activists' Perspective*

During my research I met many people whose views were opposed to secularism.<sup>16</sup> Since there had been no systematic information campaign

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16 The choice of fieldwork locations and the people met influenced the research outcomes deeply. A different view of secularism would surely have emerged had the fieldwork taken place in Thabang in Rolpa, or among Buddhist Newar activists in Lalitpur. The anti-secular voices encountered here speak neither for Nepal as a whole nor for all Tarai districts.



after the declaration of the secular state, the task of explaining secularism to the masses was carried out by the Hindu Right activists.<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, those who tried the hardest to define secularism and who gave it the most space and importance in their discourses and actions were its opponents and not its advocates. This allowed them to capitalise on fears that secularism would empower other communities and weaken Hindus.

However, anti-secular Hindu voices should not all be lumped together. In my interviews with Hindu activists, a third line emerged, somewhere between pro-secular state republicans and pro-Hindu state royalists. The promotion of a Hindu state was clearly disentangled from its former association with the monarchy.<sup>18</sup> Apart from royalist associations and parties like the World Hindu Federation and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal, there are other organisations and parties promoting a Hindu republic, such as the Nepal Janata party<sup>19</sup> and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS).<sup>20</sup>

The views reproduced below were expressed not only by royalist and republican Hindu groups, but also by Hindu progressive and democratic intellectuals involved in social activism and the reform of their communities (e.g. human rights lawyers fighting the tradition of menstrual seclusion and social workers leading programmes for women's empowerment). The assumption that activists who challenge religiously-sanctioned discriminatory practices must also be supporters of secularism proved to be wrong. For example, a progressive Hindu lawyer in Biratnagar who fights against dowry practices was strongly anti-secular. Her fight was not motivated by secularist convictions but rather by a wish to reform Hinduism and remove the bad aspect of this tradition that she attributed to a degeneration of original Hindu practices, due to lack of education.

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17 By 'Hindu Right' I mean the Nepali associations and political parties connected with the Indian RSS, the Shiva Sena, the BJP and the VHP, which share an anti-secular discourse. Among them, I interviewed Nepali members of the Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh, of the Shiva Sena Nepal, of the Janata Party (a branch of the Indian BJP founded in 2006,) and of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (founded in 1990 and affiliated with the RSS).

18 The journalist Amish Raj Mulmi (2010) asks: 'Can Hindutva be a political ideology without the monarchy, traditionally seen to be the 'Protector of the Hindus'? Or is it compatible with the current strain of left-wing fervour, which remains committed to a secular, republican state?' (See also Mulmi 2011).

19 The Nepal Janata Party also proposes its own form of federalism.

20 The HSS is an umbrella organisation for many associations. In the Tarai, its hostels (*Janajati Kalyan Ashram*) are widespread. Food, shelter and education are provided there to poor young *janajatis* in order to educate them in their 'real culture', i.e. the Hindu religion.

This research confirmed that legal prohibitions against conversion and cow slaughter are the focal points around which the opposition to secularism is based. ‘Secularism’, for my Hindu interviewees, meant allowing proselytisation and cow slaughter, the former understood as the unfair conversion of illiterate people who would be lured by economic advantages (fuelled by a ‘Christian conspiracy’) and the latter as non-Hindus asserting their right to eat cows. The most recurrent argument was that secularism, because it gives religious minorities these rights, leads to disrespect and communal violence.<sup>21</sup>

In theory secularism is a good thing, but in practice it is an insult to religion, as it is the freedom for any religious community to not respect others’ religious sensibilities and this can bring only violence and disrespect. People will be free to eat cows in front of Hindus and offend them.

Secularism will give free way to cow slaughter, hurting the feelings of Hindus: people will kill cows as the Maoists do in their banquets; Muslims, in the name of secularism, think that they have the right to slaughter cows: in Nepalgunj you can see cow meat in the market, before it would have been unimaginable!

Secularism allows conversion, attracting poor and illiterate people through money to another religion: in this way the non-proselytising Hindu religion will disappear.

I fear that behind secularism there is an evil design. I am afraid that outer forces will be luring poor families and make them inclined to become Christians.

This is often connected with the argument that secularism (and the conversions to other religions that will be its result) will cause Nepal to lose its identity and culture:

Christians are converting our indigenous people. In this way, they are taking away by force our Nepaliness (*nepalitva*), our dignity as Nepali; and they are so rich and active! Mr Lama will become Christian, Mr

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21 Christian or Muslim leaders, when questioned about secularism, would indeed summarise it as the freedom to proselytise and to select the religion of one’s choice.

Mandal will be Muslim, our identity will be lost and will become an historical memory.

In the world there are so many Muslim and Christian countries: why can't Nepal, where the majority is Hindu, be a Hindu country?<sup>22</sup> There are many countries for Islam and Christianity, but only one for Hindus, our holy land of Gods and Goddesses. Secularism is the loss of the last Hindu holy land.<sup>23</sup>

Another frequent criticism is that secularism was decided upon without consulting the population, by only a few politicians. Moreover, the critics say, it is a foreign concept imposed by countries which do not implement true secularism within their own borders:

It is a politically imposed decision that is not supported by the population, which is in majority Hindu and should have the right to decide by referendum.

No country in the world has a real secularism, as it is a contradiction in itself. In the US they have secularism in the constitution, but it is not a real one: why do you want us to be secular if the American president makes his oath with his hand on the Bible, and the Queen of England is the chief of the Anglican Church? So why do Western countries want to impose in Nepal what they did not achieve for themselves?

Interviewees tend to equate secularism with religious tolerance. They observe that secularism is not necessary because religious harmony has always prevailed in Nepal and that Hinduism itself is a secular religion, all encompassing, tolerant and respectful of all religions, neither dogmatic nor proselytising. Proselytising religions are therefore considered as a disrespectful disruption of toleration and harmony:

When the state was Hindu, 16 lakhs Muslims and many other minorities lived peacefully in Nepal. The only result of secularism has been the

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22 The percentages quoted in the interviews vary from 85% to 92%, ignoring the data of the Nepal Census of 2001, according to which 80.6 % of Nepalese are Hindu).

23 I was also told that global Hinduism, referring here to Hindu communities in Canada and the United States, envisions Nepal as the 'Hindu Vatican' (Daman Nath Dhungana, personal communication).

loss of this religious harmony and the opening to violence. Hindus are scared of Muslims and are reorganising to defend themselves.

In Hinduism there is no dogma, no Pope; you are free to believe or not, to practise or not, and you can follow different rules and sects; nobody can excommunicate you; Hinduism is freedom and toleration. Secularism means to be free to practise and respect the freedom of others. And we Hindus live and let others to live.

Part of the anti-secular rhetoric is built on the argument that the term 'secularism' (*dharma nirapeksata*) is unthinkable for Hindus, since it literally means 'keeping away from *dharma*'.

What is the *dharma* of the sun? To give light. What is the *dharma* of humans? Humanity, to do good to others. *Dharma nirapeksa* means to keep away from *dharma*; just hearing this word, I feel sick. I am not ready to digest it. If we humans don't follow humanity, our *dharma*, we become like beasts.

This understanding of the expression *dharma nirapeksa*, and the conviction that Hinduism is a tolerant 'secular religion', need to be analysed further.

#### *The unpalatable meanings of dharma nirapeksa*

The expression *dharma nirapeksa* is problematic for many Hindus, as it can be understood either to diminish Hinduism so that it becomes merely one of many religions, or as an invitation to live without *dharma*. The common understanding of *dharma nirapeksa*, as the separation of the state from a particular religion and as the equal treatment of all religions, has both required and crystallised an important conceptual shift in the meaning of *dharma*: the word can now apply to *any* religion practised in the country. However, for many Hindus, *dharma* still refers *only* to Hinduism (and all religions included in the 'Omkar family'). In the 1935 and 1963 Muluki Ain, only Hinduism was defined as *dharma*; non-Hindu religions like Islam and Christianity were called *mat* 'beliefs', which must not 'ruin *dharma*' through proselytisation (Gaborieau 1994: 63).

According to Angur Baba Joshi (2006: 78-82), *dharma* 'sustains the individual, the family, the society, the nation and the world', and touches every aspect of human conduct from birth to death and beyond death.

The author distinguishes Religion, defined as ‘customs based on faith and systems of worship’ with communities distributed into different religious pigeonholes, from Dharma, which spiritually unifies the whole world. The latter is referred to as the ‘eternal and original dharma’ (*sanatana dharma*) which precedes all other religions in a temporal and hierarchical sense. *Dharma* is the ever-present order of the universe which, strictly speaking, cannot be called ‘Hindu *dharma*’, for it is everyone’s order, Hindu and non-Hindu alike (Burghart 1996: 283).

One of the ‘undesirable’ effects of *dharma nirapeksa* is the reduction of this multi-level notion of *sanatan dharma* to the narrow western sense of ‘religion’ as one of the many religious paths (considered equal by a neutral state) that an individual can select and follow.<sup>24</sup> This ‘diminishment’ is also mirrored by the revolutionary change proposed by the Fundamental Rights Committee of Nepal’s Constitutional Assembly in 2009, which added the ‘right to not believe’ to the classical definition of ‘right of religion’.<sup>25</sup> This may explain the strong image used by a Hindu lawyer from Janakpur to illustrate *dharma nirapeksata*: ‘Secularism is like sons strangling their own father’. *Sanatan dharma*, as the father of all religions, is being supplanted by its offspring (Christianity and Islam) because of the freedom and legitimacy that secularism has given them.

As observed above, one of the interviewees stressed that he could not ‘digest’ the expression *dharma nirapeksa*, which he saw as an invitation to people to live without *dharma*, the very thing that makes them human. The meaning of secular as ‘not being related to religion’ here shifts from a characterisation of a non-religious state and comes to designate a non-religious individual. In order to address the indigestible nature of this expression, it may be useful to come back to Angur Baba Joshi’s definition

24 This Hindu diminishment of post-secular Nepal sharply contrasts with the Hindu encompassment noticed by Sondra Hausner (2007) during the five years of Gyanendra’s rule (2001-2006).

25 The Right of Religion in the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 reads as follows: ‘Every person shall have the right to profess, practise and preserve his/her own religion as handed down to him/her from ancient times (*parapurba dekhi caliaeko*) having due regards to the social and cultural traditional practices (*pracalit samajik evam samskritik paramparako mayarda rakhi*)’. In the Preliminary Draft of the CA Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of 2066 the sentence was changed in this way: ‘Every person shall have the freedom to profess, practice and preserve his or her own religion in accordance with his or her faith (*aphno astha anusar*), or to refrain from any religion (*kunei dharmabata alag rahane*)’.

of *dharma*. There is a basic *dharma* common to all human beings (*manava dharma*) and a special *dharma*, according to the social position of the individual (mother's *dharma*, daughter's *dharma*, Guru *dharma*, disciple's *dharma*):

The attributes of Dharma (...): patience, forgiveness, self control, non-stealing, purity, wisdom, knowledge, truthfulness, not getting angry etc. (...) are inborn positive basic human qualities which are eternal and universal and which uplift and qualify human beings to be the crown of creation. (...) Manifestation of humanity is proportional to the demonstration of these attributes in daily life. *Otherwise, one is reduced to no more than a beast in human form* (Joshi 2006: 79; emphasis added).

In the same way as there is a King's *dharma*, there is also a subject's *dharma*. The late king Birendra once said: 'In Nepal, the monarch and his subjects have been governed by Dharma, a system drawn from the Hindu religion. The King cannot change this value system' (Shaha 1975: 7 quoted in Hachhethu 2003: 57). The religious identities of the state and of the individual are connected. Hinduism is not a private matter; it needs the state's laws if it is to be sustained. So it is understood that a *dharma nirapeksa* state will not be governed by the religious ideals that support the order of things and that people will live without the spiritual development that defines their true human nature (and their place in society).

Not surprisingly, the debate on secularism has focused on the expression itself (Kattel 2010). Activists in both India and Nepal have rejected the notion of *dharma nirapeksa* and campaigned for alternatives, including *sarva dharma sapeksa* 'in relation to all the dharmas' (Rayamajhi 2010), *sarva dharma sambhava* 'equal regard to all religions' (Shrestha 2006) and *pantha nirapeksa* 'denominationally neutral' (Srinivas 2009).<sup>26</sup>

Rayamajhi (2010) affirms that the meaning of *dharma nirapeksa* is 'state without religion', something that cannot exist anywhere in the world, as no political power can eradicate values, beliefs and traditions. He admits that the word 'Hindu' has come to be associated with caste discrimination, which

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26 *Pantha* can be translated as 'sect', i.e. a way of life chosen by a religious group to which one chooses to belong, such a group being termed *sampradaya*. *Pantha nirapeksa* means that the state is not biased toward any sectarian viewpoint, but that all the differences will be included in an encompassing vision of *dharma*.

results from a misunderstanding of Dharma. Therefore, as an alternative to both a Hindu state and a *dharma nirapeksa* state, the author suggests ‘the new republican state of Nepal respectful to all *dharmas*’ (*sarva dharma sapeksha lok ganatantra rajya naya Nepal*). The alternative to *dharma nirapekshata* is ‘a state built on the moral basis of the *sanatan arya vedic dharma*, which teaches friendship, love, equality, justice, tolerance’ (*sahishnuta*).

This is what the BJP wants for India and hopes to apply in Nepal as the only remaining land of Hinduism. The BJP’s position is ‘that Hinduism be given a special status and be recognized as a cultural identity equivalent to Indian-ness, so that one could be a Muslim Hindu, a Christian Hindu or a Buddhist Hindu’ (Gellner 2001: 338). This was the logic of the words of Kamal Thapa, the chairman of Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal :

When we talk of a Hindu state, we are not only talking about a Hindu nation: our emphasis is on the Hindu identity of the state. We are not in favour of the state protecting one particular religion. What we would like to have is a Hindu state with total religious freedom (...) Hinduism has become a part of Nepali culture. Thus, by retaining a Hindu state, we are trying to promote a unique national identity (Thapa 2010).

While tolerance is a positive value in society, able to reach social spaces and practices that cannot be legalised, the Hindu Right’s usage of notions of tolerance and equality between all religions, in an attempt to appropriate secularism and incorporate it within its political rhetoric, is a different thing altogether (Cossman and Kapur 1997). If secularism simply means respect for all faiths, then there is no need for it, because Hindu religion already wholeheartedly welcomes all religions. Actually, it is the only religion that expresses true tolerance: proselytising religions do not, because they claim to be superior. Therefore, the right to propagate one’s religion—an integral part of religious liberty—is deemed by the Hindu Right to be a violation of tolerance and religious freedom (Cossman and Kapur 1997: 147). In this logic, only a country based on Hinduism can be truly secular, and the notion of toleration ends up meaning the supremacy of Hinduism.

Nepal’s steps toward religious pluralism are often read by the Hindu majority through a language of religious tolerance. However, the notion of *sarva dharma sambhava* ‘equal regard to all religions’ and the notion of *dharma nirapekshata* requested by Nepali civil society from 1990 onwards

need to be unpacked and disassociated from one another. The former is based on religious tolerance while the latter is based on social inclusiveness and participation; the former's equality is formulated on a spiritual level and does not necessarily get rid of hierarchy, while the latter's equality is based on the notion of equal citizenship. As Richard Burghart writes:

Harmonious religious relations are not a matter of mutual respect by private practitioners of different religions of equal value; rather religious harmony derives from the acceptance of one's place in a system of unequal value. In other words, the basis for religious tolerance does not lie outside the system of religious ideas itself (1996: 291-292).

The language of religious tolerance (mostly used by the Hindu majority) operates within the Hindu religious system while the language of religious pluralism (mostly used by *janajatis* and religious minorities in their call for *dharmanirapeksata*) exits this system and operates at the level of minority rights, invoking respect between religions of equal value.<sup>27</sup>

### **The shaping of secularism by the judiciary: two court cases**

In the absence of any constitutional or governmental guidance as to the meaning of secularism, the concept has so far been shaped through public debates and incidents. Some of these gave rise to petitions before the Supreme Court, giving the judges the opportunity to rule on various aspects of the relation between state and religion, and thus to play a crucial role in defining the fluid notion of secularism. A growing judicial activism in Nepal has challenged many laws and practices as being unconstitutional and inconsistent with human rights through the system of Public Interest Litigation (PIL).<sup>28</sup> These petitions also dealt with questions involving religious traditions, as in the two cases briefly analysed here, referred to as the 'Pashupatinath case' and the 'Kumari case'.<sup>29</sup>

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27 For instance, the following exchange took place in the Biratnagar jail between a Hindu serving a sentence for a crime connected to anti-secular activism (A) and a Muslim co-prisoner (B). A: 'Secularism is about equality of religions and religious harmony, but we already had this: there was no need for secularism to get that'. B: 'Yes, in the past there was harmony, but it was under your control, while now there is freedom'.

28 See article 107 of the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063.

29 These cases are mentioned only briefly here, but detailed articles by the present author are in preparation (Letizia (forthcoming) a, Letizia (forthcoming) b).



The ‘Pashupatinath Case’ is a collection of six PILs concerning events that took place between the end of 2008 and September 2009, around Nepal’s foremost Hindu temple.<sup>30</sup> Here only one of these events will be recalled, together with the petition on which the Supreme Court focused for its detailed judgement. At the end of December 2008, the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) governing board, headed by Nepal’s then Prime Minister, the Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, appointed new Nepali priests in Pashupatinath temple, breaking with the old tradition of appointing Bhatta priests from South India. This occurred in the context of a double campaign by the UCPN (Maoist) which was asserting the sovereignty of the Nepali nation against the old tradition and demanding transparency and accountability with respect to the rich donations received by the priests and their assistants in the course of their ritual performances.<sup>31</sup> The appointments provoked massive protests, both at home and in India, where they were supported by the BJP. Three PILs were almost immediately filed asking the Supreme Court to invalidate this action, and the court promptly issued an interim order to revert to the *status quo*. Faced with this, the Prime Minister revoked his decision and the Indian Bhatta priests were allowed to resume their regular duties at the temple.

One of the PILs, filed by lawyers Lokdhoj Thapa and Binod Phunyal, argued the principle of secularism.<sup>32</sup> The petition did not limit itself to the particular appointment of the Nepali priests; more importantly, it attacked the whole structure of Pashupatinath, pleading that the law which created the PADT violated the principle of ‘separation of Church and state’ and was unconstitutional. The Trust itself, not just the appointment of the priests, was the problem and a new organisation instead of the present state-controlled PADT should be established so that the temple could operate free from state intervention, in compliance with the concept of secularism. This petition, to the best of my knowledge, gave rise to the first Supreme Court

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30 On Pashupatinath temple and the complex dynamics of belonging around it, see Michaels (2008, 2011).

31 A settlement of these issues was recently announced, whereby donations will now be handled by the Ministry of Culture and priests will be paid by the state (Ankit Adhikari, It’s official: Priests to get salary, [www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2012/01/23/nation/its-official-priests-to-get-salary/230746.html](http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2012/01/23/nation/its-official-priests-to-get-salary/230746.html))

32 Lok Dhoj Thapa and Binod Phunyal vs. Prime Minister and Patron of Pashupati Area Development Trust, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers *et al.* Writ Petition no. 0366 filed on 16 Poush, 2065 B.S (31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008).

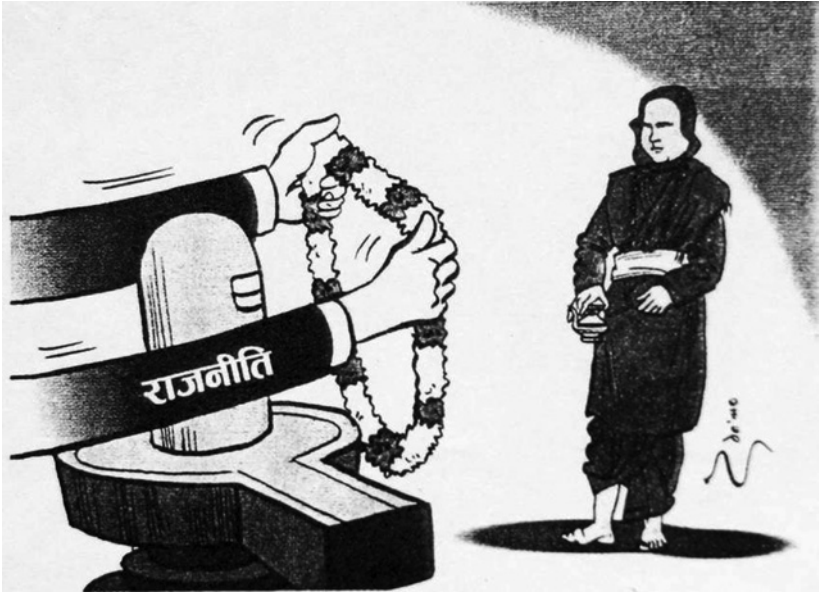


Plate 3. The events at Pashupatinath and the relationship between politics and religion were commented upon in many articles and cartoons

(Source: *Nagarik*, 8 September 2009.)

decision explicitly dealing with the newly declared secularism. In defending the right of religion, the petition introduced the idea of ‘freedom from state interference’, which was inconceivable under a Hindu state. The petition articulated secularism as a principle whereby the state may not intervene in the activities of religious institutions or in the exercise of the citizen’s right to religion, the focus here being that it is the religious institution which needs protection. The petitioners also pointed out the absurdity of appointing (Maoist) non-believers as the patron, the president and the secretary of the Trust, and charging them with the maintenance of Hindu institutions. This line of argument owed much to the confrontational actions of the Maoist government, which marked the end of the symbiotic relationship between the state and Hinduism. This government challenged the system and awoke protest against what was perceived as a ‘cultural revolution’, thus prompting a reflection on the need to separate state and religion.

It is somewhat paradoxical that the first petitioners to judicially invoke secularism after its declaration did so in order to protect a time-honoured Hindu tradition from the new secular state led by Maoists, using the notion of

secularism against the very same party which had so strenuously militated in favour of a secular republic. These incidents and the debate that followed led to a shift in the meaning of secularism, to incorporate the principle of non-interference of the state in religious matters.<sup>33</sup> In the judgement rendered on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2010, the court agreed with this principle, though it did not take this opportunity to make a more robust analysis of secularism. It also agreed that the management of Pashupatinath should be reformed and made accountable for the large amount of donations made by devotees. The court held that an overall reform of the Pashupati area was necessary and that a detailed master plan dealing with the worship, the priests and the *guthi* of Pashupatinath, should be immediately made in 'accordance with the values of a secular state'. The court recommended turning to India as a proper model for Nepal to study, as a secular state with a large number of Hindus. As things now stand, the Court has ordered the formation of an expert committee to study this complex situation and make recommendations.

Far from being only a Kathmandu-based incident, this case inspired similar discourses in other temples. For example, at the Janaki temple in Janakpur meetings were held of traditional stakeholders to confront the fact that they could no longer rely on a government led by a king, the protector of religion, but had to deal with a government led by Maoist 'atheists'. Thus, the language of secularism was used to secure the autonomy of the religious domain, which should be given rights to administer itself, and be subjected to as little state control as possible.<sup>34</sup>

The second case studied, regarding the tradition of the 'living goddess' Kumari, originated from the concerns of human rights activists. In 2005, Pun Devi Maharjan, a Newar human rights lawyer, brought the tradition

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33 Nilambar Acharya, chairman of the Constitutional Committee said: 'We want to free religion from the state: why should religion be burdened by the wrongdoings of the state? Rulers do good and bad. If religion is not separated, all the bad doings of rulers will be directed towards religion. The state is an instrument of coercion, with the military, the courts, prisons, laws; but religion is an institution of love, it is so different, why should religion be linked to these institution? This is why we are making Nepal secular. We want to free religion from the state, otherwise what the state does, Hindus will be blamed for' (Interview, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2010).

34 The idea of 'independence from the state' pleased the Mahanta of Janaki Mandir, despite his prior anti-secular convictions. It could be called 'a second line of defence of the tradition', an eventual space for compromise.



Plate 4. Nepal's President, Ram Baran Yadav, receives a blessing from the Kumari of Lalitpur (source: Basanta Maharjan 2010).

of Kumari under the scrutiny of the court in the name of child rights.<sup>35</sup> The case did not concern only the famous (national) Basantapur Kumari, who traditionally blessed the king and now blesses the President during her annual chariot festival, but concerned all the children worshipped as Kumaris in the Kathmandu valley.<sup>36</sup> The PIL was filed while the state was still a Hindu kingdom, and the verdict was rendered in 2008, when the state had become a secular republic. No explicit reference to secularism was made in this case, and yet it allowed the judges to reflect on the relation between religion and the state, and their judgement can be seen as a landmark case for secularism. The very fact that the goddess was scrutinised in a court as a human being capable of being deprived of human rights mirrors the political and symbolic transformation of that period.

The petitioner surveyed the conditions of the Kumaris and the restrictions imposed upon them by their ritual life (which are stricter for the national Kumari), and argued that the Kumari tradition violated numerous legal provisions, including the Constitution of Nepal, the

35 This case has been first studied by Axel Michaels (2009).

36 On the cult of Kumari, see, among others, Allen (1996), Shakya and Berry (2005).

Children Act, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, to which Nepal is a signatory. The petitioner did not seek to abolish this cult, but to reform it so that it would conform to human rights standards. She argued that unless the human rights of these children were fully guaranteed, the tradition could eventually die out. During the case, representatives of the Newar community invoked the right of religion, affirming that the Kumari tradition was its exclusive domain and should not suffer any ‘outside’ intervention. They were refusing the reduction of the living goddess, whose status is above mundane rules, to that of an ordinary child. They also denied any wrongdoing.

The 2008 judgment<sup>37</sup> strikes a delicate balance between the claims of Newars to their traditional religious rights, the position of the Hindu majority (to whom almost all judges belong and for whom the Kumari is a revered tradition), the importance of the Kumari as a national deity, and the claim that the state has a national and international legal duty to uphold human rights. The court established human rights as the primary set of values of the state and pronounced the primacy of social reforms based on human rights over traditional religious practices:

If any custom or tradition has caused any infringement to the fundamental rights [...] this Court is competent to enforce the enjoyment of rights thus infringed. This court may also issue an order prohibiting such custom or tradition by law. In case of conflict [...] religion must yield to provide space for social reforms. Religious practices cannot be an impediment to social reforms. [...] The State may prohibit such practices and dogmas if they tend to create impediments to any human rights (Bhattarai 2010: 130).

The existence of state values that are independent from and prevailing over those of the religious tradition are an essential requirement of the notion of secularism. Without referring to the principle of secularism, the court thus established one of its cornerstones and helped to secularise the newly declared secular state, by distinguishing the domain of the religious

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37 Pun Devi Maharjan vs. Govt. of Nepal, office of Prime Minister and Council of Ministers and Others. NKP 2065 B.S. (2008) vol. 50 n. 6: 751-776. The verdict has been republished by the National Judicial Academy in both Nepali and English in a collection of landmark decisions of the Supreme Court on gender justice (Bhattarai 2010).

(practised by communities) and the domain of human rights (protected by the state).

However, the court determined that the Kumari tradition itself did not infringe the human rights of the Kumaris, using the argument that the rules applied to them are not based on written tradition but on ‘oral traditions and beliefs’ and thus are not inherent to this tradition: any Newar could modify these rules. The court recognised the Kumari tradition as an integral part of Newar culture and explicitly considered Newars as ‘agents of change in their traditional custom and practices in tune with the times’. Indeed, the court provided a forum for this to happen: after the main hearing in October 2006, the court ordered the constitution of a committee of experts, all Newar (including the petitioner herself), to study this issue and to submit a report within three months.<sup>38</sup> This gave members of the Newar community an opportunity to look at their own tradition with ‘secular eyes’ or at least to compare it with secular human rights values. Such a committee offers an example of the constructive role played by the court in shaping new understandings of the religious tradition, as a powerful forum for raising awareness and negotiating reform.<sup>39</sup> The court refuted allegations of child labour and took great pains to distinguish ‘child labour’ from ‘Kumari work’ (that is, sitting on her throne to receive worship) and to identify the latter as an essential part of a particular Hindu and Buddhist devotional practice.

However, in the end, the court acknowledged that *past* Kumaris, due to confusion and backwardness, may have been deprived of their fundamental rights and held that the state must help and support them, as it is ‘the duty of the state to work for the promotion and improvement of its religious and cultural customs’. In the judges’ view, the state should appreciate the Kumaris’ contributions to the cultural and religious life of the nation, and should make arrangements for their social security. The judges finally ordered the creation of a new committee to conduct a study on how the Kumaris’ rights can be promoted, and also issued an order to the

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38 The report of the committee was presented to the Supreme Court in 2007, but both the petitioner and the representative of the stakeholders felt that it did not take into account their vision. They therefore filed their own dissenting reports, later published in Vajracharya (2009).

39 The composition and terms of reference of the committee outlined by the Court in the Pashupati case also indicates that it will serve not only as a think-tank, but also as a discussion forum for stakeholders from all sides.

government to implement the report of the committee once it is submitted.

With these fine distinctions, the judgment avoided labelling the Kumari tradition as a discriminatory practice, while leaving space for change and reform. The judgment assumed a distinction between religion and the state: the court and the other branches of the state have secular ends, and yet they engage with religion to enact social reform and to ensure compliance with constitutionally-recognised human rights.<sup>40</sup> However, this primacy of human rights does not involve any intention to diminish the presence of religion in the public sphere. Instead, the state has a duty to promote and support this religious custom, which is considered valuable for the social, cultural and religious life of the nation. Actually, no one involved in the court hearings paused to consider whether secularism precluded the continued financing of the Kumari tradition by the state.<sup>41</sup>

The Pashupatinath case and the Kumari case both illustrate a rather unusual form of secularism. This ascribes an active role to the state in both supporting and reforming religious traditions, in clear contrast with the neutral stance and no-relation policy that is generally seen as a mark of secularism in the West. These cases are contributing to the evolution of the notion of secularism in a Nepali context. However, the limits of this emerging notion have only just begun to be outlined and tested and they will certainly be tested further if real inclusivity is implemented. Both cases deal with the Hindu-Buddhist religious traditions of the majority of the population, and are associated with national pride. They also have been debated among the high-caste Hindus who dominate the legal and political fields. The Pashupati case already shows the necessity of at least amending the state-religion institutional links. The Kumari case did not extend to any consideration of whether the President receiving a *tika* from the Kumari might amount to a failure to exercise his secular office. However, what would happen if a Muslim president was to celebrate the festival of Eid in his capacity as Head of State? Court cases involving the relationships

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40 This engagement with religion is also a prominent feature of the Pashupatinath case, to the extent that while the judgment acknowledges that the state should not interfere, it also orders a thorough review of the temple's institutions and practices.

41 That secularism could not possibly mean the removal of state funding was clearly manifested in the outrage of the Newar community during Indra Jatra in 2008, when the Maoist Finance Minister announced a reduction of government funding for religious festivals in his budget speech. His decision was quickly revoked after intense popular protests.

between religious minorities and the state will certainly modify and shape the notion further; and a truly inclusive policy which allowed a significant number of persons other than high-caste Hindus to occupy positions of authority at the Court and in the government would naturally lead to (and be a reflection of) a more effective separation between Hinduism and the state. This is something that is difficult to imagine in the current situation.

### Conclusion

The data discussed in this paper point to a distinctive form of secularism in the making. This recognises religious communities and their festivals and gives them a space in the public sphere (e.g. the inclusion of minorities' festivals in the national calendar, or the Muslim request for their own personal laws). So far, secularism has not prevented the state from financing Hindu religious institutions, but has instead been seen as an opportunity for religious minorities to claim equal support. The state is given the active duty to enhance and reform religious traditions, as both the Kumari and the Pashupatinath cases showed.<sup>42</sup> So far, the notion of separation between state and religion has been legally invoked only to protect a Hindu religious institution from (non-Hindu) state control. The analysis of the processes shaping secularism in Nepal suggests that a model of secularity as a public space free from religious arguments, religious symbols and religious groups is untenable in practice. What conceptual framework could be used to describe this form of secularism? And how might this model assuage the fears expressed by Hindus? The normative reflections of Rajeev Bhargava on an (idealised) Indian form of secularism and his notion of 'principled distance' (2010: 63-105) may be of some help here.

Bhargava argues that Indian secularism has to differ from the classical liberal model, which dictates strict separation between religious and political institutions and recognises individuals and beliefs but not groups and practices (Bhargava 2010: 25-26). The circumstances of India (and the same could be said for Nepal)—an enormous diversity of religious communities; social practices emphasised over individual beliefs; many discriminatory religious practices in need of reform—dictate that religious freedom must also include the right of religious communities to carry out

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42 The Court assumed it had full jurisdiction to guide and oversee the disentanglement between state and religion, and to define the contours of the future relationship between them in the light of Indian experience.



their own practices, and that equality of citizenship applies also to the religious groups to which citizens belong. In the absence of a unified religious organisation, reform within Hinduism can hardly be initiated without the help of the state. Bhargava introduces the notion of ‘principled distance’, which entails a flexible approach to the matter of state intervention in the religious domain or its abstention from it. The state has secular ends and is institutionally separate from religion, but it can engage with religious issues at the level of law and social policy; whether the state intervenes or not depends on what strengthens religious liberty and equality of citizenship (Bhargava 1998: 536; 2010: 87-96). This form of secularism accepts religion as a resource that ‘manifests itself as individual belief and feeling as well as social practice in the public domain’ (Bhargava 2010: 88).

Bhargava’s reflections throw light on possible ways in which secularism might be shaped in Nepal through a contextual moral and legal reasoning freed from the rigid application of a Western concept, thus reducing the potential for fundamentalist reactions and mistrust between communities. The Kumari case is an example of how religious traditions in Nepal can be analysed, questioned, reinterpreted and yet also upheld by the judiciary as a response to the challenges of state secularisation. The Pashupatinath case also seems to be going in a similar direction, and to address the issue of the boundaries between state and religion. This could lead to a ‘religionisation’ of the courts, which are being called upon to decide what religion is and what it is not. However, I suggest that this distinctive form of secularism could find more acceptance in Nepal ‘by embodying the idea of respectful transformation of religions’. This would be in the line of ‘a venerable tradition of religious reformers, who tried to change their religions precisely because they meant so much to them’ (Bhargava 2010: 91). As shown in the Kumari case, the notion that religious traditions must accept the challenge of modern times is widely accepted and allows for substantial reforms to take place without hurting the ‘religious feelings of the people’ that are recurrently invoked by fundamentalists.

While I have suggested in this article that secularism in Nepal should not be appraised with reference to a normative western model, I have also attempted to demonstrate that the redefinition of secularism as a local version of ‘religious harmony’ cannot satisfy the claims for equality and inclusion for which *dharma nirapekshata* has been a rallying call since the 1990s. I have proposed that *dharma nirapeksata* should be distinguished from

the notion of religious tolerance, through which the Hindu Right tries to encompass minorities, presenting Hindu *dharma* as neutral, so that attempts by religious minorities to assert their rules, their needs or their religious subjectivity appear to be deviant and threatening. As Brenda Cossman and Ratna Kapur have remarked, 'the formal equality of the Hindu Right means that the dominant community becomes the norm against which all other communities are to be judged' (Cossman and Kapur 1997: 147). The state seems to be acting neutrally only when it reinforces the practices of the Hindu majority. So, if Hindus do not need special rights (to the extent that legal rights are based on Hindu cultural norms and practices) why should minorities ask for them?

It could be argued that secularism in Western countries (which is a product of a particular religious history, producing a particular concept of religion) also presents itself as a neutral space and considers diverging religious subjectivities as exceptional. Both Hindu tolerance and Western secularism imply the norm of a majority offering a neutral space for religious minorities, provided that they do not deviate from the norm (like, for instance, Muslims in France or Christians in Nepal). A way out of these normative models can be found only through the identification of pragmatic solutions in a process of continuous, respectful and self-reflexive compromise and experimentation.

The elite of Nepali social activists, lawyers and politicians, Western-educated or working with Western advising bodies,<sup>43</sup> and brokers of Western notions of secularism, will have to negotiate the coexistence of different understandings of and oppositions to secularism in Nepal, and in the Tarai in particular. Nepal is a post-secular laboratory, where the state's policy must walk a tightrope, upholding 'absolute' secular values such as equal citizenship, and yet balancing the Hindu majority tradition, Hindu fears, and the claims of minorities for social, political *and* religious recognition. The emerging form of Nepali secularism may not merely contribute to a rethinking of the Western categories of the secular; its continuing evolution may also be most instructive for European countries whose multiculturalist model is in crisis as they come under pressure to accommodate religious diversity.

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43 Among them, an important role is played by the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue, an initiative of the UNDP project 'Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal'.

## Appendix

### The dark months of Nepalese secularism, February-March 2010

12 February

At the inauguration of Siva Mandir in Janakpur, Nischalanand Saraswati Shankaracharya gives a speech in favour of monarchy and the Hindu Kingdom. He affirms that it is necessary to have the rule of the King to have a Hindu state and to save Nepal's 'Hinduness' (*hindutva*), as Hindu religion is disappearing from the world.

On the same occasion, the Mahant of Janaki Mandir says that the 601 members of the Constituent Assembly cannot impose secularism in a country where there is a majority of Hindus.

To the disbelief of Maoist cadres, the Maoist leader Prachanda worships a buffalo in a religious camp in Chatara, Sunsari district, to appease the



Plate 5. A cartoon mocking political leaders, including from the UML and UCPN (Maoist), who along with thousands of other people attended Swami Ramdev's yoga camp in Kathmandu in March 2010

(source: *The Kathmandu Post*, 1 April 2010).

bad influence of Saturn (no party, Maoist included, wants to alienate Hindu voters).

22 February

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal calls a strike in the Kathmandu Valley demanding a referendum on secularism, federalism and republic.

Deputy Prime Minister Sujata Koirala attends a religious ceremony, where she declares that the demand for a Hindu state cannot be ignored and must be incorporated in the Constitution. She says that Hindus form 85% of the population and that ignoring the feelings of the majority in the Constitution will trigger a catastrophe in the country. She states: 'A Constitution framed without encompassing the grievances and agenda of Hindus would be futile and meaningless'.

The Free Student Union in Valmiki Campus issues a press statement demanding that Nepal be declared a Hindu state and that 'ancient religions, norms and values of the Nepali Society be preserved'. They add: 'We will not be able to accept a secular State' (...) Hindu religion is the backbone of the country and it is the identity of the country and it should be protected at any cost'. They demand that a decision on this issue be taken by a referendum.

1 to 9 March

Kalidas Baba conducts a 9 days fire-sacrifice (*Rudracandi Akanda Mahayagya*) for the restoration of a Hindu state, attended by the ex-king. Many politicians attend to express their support, including NC leaders Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Khum Bahadur Khadka, and Vice-President Paramanand Jha, all of whom make pro-Hindu, pro-monarchy speeches. According to Kalidas Baba, even Maoist leaders attend during the night.

13 March

Back from Haridwar, Vice-President Paramanda Jha openly supports the restoration of a Hindu state and holds meetings with pro-Hindu organisations in Kathmandu.

22 March

Former president of Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Rajnath Singh, attending GP Koirala's funeral in Kathmandu, declares that he would be

very happy if a Hindu state was restored in Nepal and that his party will always support this agenda.

An underground group called Bhisma Ekata Parishad enforces a violent strike in Kailali and Dadeldhura districts, in support of a Hindu state and the cow as national animal. Nepal Shiva Sena chairman Manoj Shrestha issues a statement expressing solidarity with the strike.

24 March

President Yadav and former King Gyanendra visit Janaki Mandir in Janakpur in order to celebrate Ram Nawami. With only two hours difference, they enter the temple for the *puja*, both covered by the honorific parasol and accompanied by the temple's Mahanta. Gyanendra gives a TV interview, where he says: 'I do not think that monarchy has ended, this is an hypothetical question (...) If we turn the pages of history monarchy has faced ups and downs, exits and entries are common.. Let the people decide what they want'.

28 March

Former Prime Minister and founding leader of NC Krishna Prasad Bhattarai declares that the 'excellent' 1990 constitution must be revived (as the promulgation of a new statute for May 28 is not possible) and that federalism, republic and secularism were 'hurriedly imported concepts'. The fact that political parties in the Constituent Assembly are divided on these concepts, he says, shows that they work against Nepal's genuine identity and needs.

29 March

Kamal Thapa, chairman of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (in the vanguard of the pro-monarchy and pro-Hindu state movement) gives a interview in *Republica* national daily, titled 'Girija Babu was completely in favour of monarchy', where he explains that a Hindu state is compatible with total religious freedom.

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# LECTURE

The Ninth Annual Lecture of the Britain-Nepal Academic Council  
SOAS, London, 31 October 2011

## **Time, Identity and Historical Change in the Hills of Nepal**

Anne de Sales

### **Introduction**

Change has been an omnipresent theme in Nepali cultural production since the 1950s and throughout the Panchayat era. The title of the first play written by the young Bhupi Sherchan in 1953/4 was *Paribartan*, 'The Change'. This was an early attempt, Michael Hutt tells us, 'to produce creative Nepali literature in a revolutionary mode' (Hutt 2010: 26). In the same vein, the progressive songs produced by the cultural front of the then banned political parties repeatedly pushed a single argument: the necessity of change. The lyrics give elaborate descriptions of the prevailing injustice, exploitation and hardships suffered by people, and follow up this assessment with the promise of a bright future after change. However, as Ingemar Grandin puts it, 'change is also where progressive rhetoric comes to a full stop' (Grandin 1996: 7). The future is alluded to in general or metaphorical terms, as if the quest for change were less about transformation strictly speaking than about its possibilities. What the vague but overwhelming notion of change expresses is the hope for change.

Well, change did happen, didn't it? To be sure, the transformation of a Hindu kingdom into a possibly Federal Democratic Republic is radical enough. In the span of eighteen years, between the popular upheaval of 1990 culminating in King Birendra's gift of a constitution to his subjects, and the proclamation of the Republic of Nepal by a Maoist-led Constituent Assembly in May 2008, the country went through ten years of a revolutionary insurrection and a total political transformation. It does not follow, however, that the social fabric of the society or the economic conditions of the country have been transformed in the same radical and obvious manner.

As a matter of fact, if we are to believe a recent study by Piers Blaikie, John Cameron and David Seddon, not much has changed over the last couple of decades. The three authors re-visited the rural households that

they had surveyed for their famous book *Nepal in Crisis*, published in 1980. Their conclusion is that 'The most important empirical conclusion about social change in rural western Nepal over the past 20 years is the degree of continuity' (Blaikie *et al.* 2002: 1267). And again, 'The data suggest that social, natural and produced capital have all remained more or less constant over 20 years.' Contrary to the pessimistic predictions of *Nepal in Crisis*, there has not been a slide into deepening poverty for the majority of the population, but on the other hand there has been hardly any significant development either. However, they also observe that, contrasting with this condition of stasis, 'human capital has shown a profound upheaval and a high degree of mobility and adaptability' (*ibid.*). Blaikie *et al.* are not the only observers to have stressed that resilience is a constant and enduring quality of Nepal's populations.

As we say in French: 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose' or 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'. The supposed wisdom of this adage rests on a logical confusion between two different orders of things, the two different levels of observation and experience: the multiplication of changes at one level may hide a structural continuity at another, or, the other way round, a feeling of continuity may persist in spite of structural transformations. And if change pops up so frequently in ordinary conversation, it is because it is part of our daily experience as the passage of time: it is common to all of us, but its identification depends on the point of view of the speaker. In other words, when people speak of change, they speak of themselves. What needs to be understood is the relationships between subjectivity and social change.

So how new is Naya Nepal? How are we, as social scientists, to assess the changes Nepal is going through? How should we include in our analysis the different scales of space and time involved in the changes as they are perceived? In this lecture I will begin by discussing the methodological difficulties there are in identifying ongoing changes. If objective, quantitative changes do exist, the inherently subjective dimension of the notion of change, and its eminently ideological character in a revolutionary period, merely multiply the points of view. However, what all these different points of view share is the perception of time. This became clear to me during my visits to the same area in western Nepal, and even to the same village, over the course of thirty years. Thus in the second half of this lecture, I will concentrate on the Magar community that I know best

with a view to exploring how the people and I have experienced change. I will describe the different time scales at work in their oral literature and daily practices, and show how these various understandings of time are part of the community's identity and provide the motivation for its actions. Finally I will analyse a particular event that took place in a village that was declared the capital of Maoism, and has been given a central part in the revolutionary epic of Prachanda. This event took place during a calendrical festival in the course of my last visit, in June 2010. To borrow a phrase from Sally Moore, I shall call it a 'diagnostic event', insofar as it shows change in the making or history at work.

### **I. Social change: a methodological conundrum**

*'plus ça change...': rupture and continuity*

It would be presumptuous of me to try to review in a few words—or even many words for that matter—the theoretical and methodological problems attached to the study of change that have always been at the heart of history and sociology. I will confine myself to a few remarks concerning the development of my subject, anthropology, in relation to its two sister subjects, sociology and history. It is interesting that the theme of social change was very much in vogue in the social sciences in the 1960s before once more subsiding into obscurity. A recent study reveals that the number of articles published in international journals since the 1940s mentioning 'social change' in their titles reached a peak in the 1970s, before falling by half and then dwindling even further in the following two decades.<sup>1</sup> This drop in the number of publications reflects an evolution of social sciences about which it may be useful to speculate briefly.

After the second world war, sociologists tried to understand the transition of their (mostly western) societies towards modernity and, following the great sociologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several theories of social change were developed. These theories aimed at isolating one main cause or motor of all social changes: the material conditions of production, development of technology, mutation of values, class struggle etc; all changes would result from inner contradictions or, on the contrary,

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1 108 scientific papers in sociology identified in J-Stor claimed to study social change in their title in the 1970s, against only 72 and 57 in the next two decades, even though the total number of identified articles increased (Tremoulinas 2006: 4).

from external forces. Sociologists were even ambitious enough to make scientific predictions concerning the evolution of their society. The empirical complexity of social change and the evolution of sociology itself caused them gradually to abandon this ambition in the 1980s. Thereafter, the sociologists tried rather to build their case studies as paradigms for the study of change and ceased to look for general or scientific *theories* of social change.

In the domain of anthropology after the war, in spite of the fact that many countries were aspiring to their independence and were engaged in the process of nation building, most ethnographers (though not all) would conclude their monographs with some dutiful remarks on their host societies that were changing 'under the influence of modernity'. It was clear that for most anthropologists social change somehow fell into a residual category and was a mere addendum to their essentially synchronic studies: as if change was something that began only once they had departed from the field. All this is well known and has been rightly and sufficiently criticised. The subsequent conversion of anthropologists to history and the fact that they started to take into account the temporal dimension of the societies they studied rendered the category 'social change' obsolete. Change no longer stood apart from the study of the society but was inherently integrated into it: hence the gradual drop in publications claiming to study social change. But can history account for social change as it is happening?

The historians of the French revolution have taught us to distinguish between the event itself and the causes of that event: the event, says François Furet, is political and ideological while its causes are to be found in the economic, the social and the administrative structures of the society and operate on a different time scale (Furet 1978). The causes go much further back in time and develop gradually, almost unnoticed, while the event itself obeys different dynamics, such as a combination of partly random circumstances that precipitated the course of things. The event has a date and may look like a rupture in both the historical development of the country and the experience of the social agents, while the causes will be best understood as continuities. This is why thinking in terms of the dichotomies between rupture and continuity, or before and after, leads to frustrating dead ends if we want to explain or grasp the nature of social change. Change is necessarily *both* rupture and continuity.

This is not so much of a problem when dealing with the French revolution, which happened in a relatively distant past. It is up to the historians to organise the ‘facts’ at their disposal in a chronological order and gradually introduce the interwoven causes of the event so that the reader will be able to make sense of what happened. The different scales of time and space can be introduced one after the other in a discursive manner. I am not suggesting that the corpus of the historian is closed—the archives, no doubt, will keep generations of researchers busy—nor that she or he is dealing with a dead past. But if the past of the French revolution lives on, as it certainly does in French identity, for instance, then the historian will leave the anthropologist to study *how* it lives on. So, to answer the above question—whether History can account for changes as they occur—it is clear that change, understood as being both continuity and change, is almost contradictory to a chronological enchaînement of facts—that is the way that the standard view of History is defined. History is necessary to understand the diachronic transformation in the structure of a society and how the past has given rise to the present forms that the ethnographer observes, but it is not sufficient to understand change as it is happening.

Let me develop this point a little further. The 1990 Jan Andolan, the inception of the People’s War six years later and the insurgents’ successful overthrow of the monarchy in 2008 challenged the analysts who had to explain these historic events. Apart from retracing the relevant circumstances and the series of happenings that led to these major events, social scientists turned to historians and theoreticians of nationalism to identify the trends underlying the historical evolution of the country from a pre-modern society into a modern nation. In the light of works like those of Benedict Anderson, who has often been invoked by South Asianists, the Nepali revolution appears as a possible and coherent—although obviously not inevitable—development of the Panchayat years. I will mention only four of these trends: 1) the considerable efforts on the part of King Mahendra’s government to promote literacy made it possible for a far larger portion of the population to claim their participation in the political process at a level beyond their local affairs; 2) the printed press generated a rational-critical discourse and the development of public meaning; 3) the decline of the belief that society was naturally organised around and under a monarch, ‘who ruled under some form of cosmological divine dispensation’, went hand in hand with the transition from a ritual

representation of power to a participatory mode whereby people could assert themselves; 4) the growing diasporas of Nepali workers all over the world intensified the imagination of the home nation through an ever more effective technology of communication and, we might add, although this would deserve further attention, also supported a patriotic feeling that would eventually develop into the aspiration for a republic. Let me conclude with Anderson's observation that 'even the most radical revolutionaries are always, to a certain extent, the heirs of the deposed regime' (Anderson 1996: 163).

*Change as an ideological value and as a subjective feeling*

If the Maoist victory only precipitated the fall of a weakened regime, then the notion of radical change that is so pervasive in public discourse is partly ideological. This does not mean that it is a lie, and that it tends to dissimulate an unchanging state of affairs—a bitter criticism levelled by people who find themselves facing the same difficult economic conditions as *before*. The recurrent reference to change—even if it takes the form of a complaint about the lack of it—consists rather in the idea that it is human action that caused it—or failed to cause it. Either way the order of things is questioned. Change does not just happen; it has to do with human agency and therefore with reflexivity. This is a first conclusion.

Change is also something that people feel. They feel that something is happening, that times are changing, and that things are going too fast or, on the contrary, not fast enough. Jean Chesneaux, a Marxist French historian specialising in contemporary China, suggested that 'this perception was only confused, quasi-imaginary at the time of the old millenarisms. But the meaning and the awareness of historical mutations become increasingly clear as history advances' (Chesneaux 1976: 134). For Chesneaux and also Benedict Anderson, who developed similar views a little later (Anderson 1983), this perception is informed by similar transformations that had taken place in the past or even, we may add now that communications are so fast, at the same time, in other parts of the world. The Nepali revolutionary movement that built on the model of the Chinese revolution while claiming solidarity with the Peruvian Shining Path provides a good illustration of this cumulative process. It partly accounts for the relative speed with which the Nepali Maoists achieved the overturn of the last Hindu monarchy in the world. The Russian writer Tchernichevski expressed the historical



acceleration of the most retarded countries in a very vivid manner when he compared History to a grandmother, who likes her youngest children best. Chesneaux observes that 'in the struggle for socialism, the conscious perception of a changing era becomes an active and collective factor of evolution' (ibid.).

Seen in this light, change is best defined as a value in the sense that Dumont gives to this term—unlike an abstract idea, a value is embedded in human action. In contemporary Nepal, this value is at the centre of a series of other values that reflect the mirror image of the old order of things: it is the people that are sovereign, not the king; the old society of privileges is now founded on equality; the subjects of the kingdom are being converted into citizens.

Let us recapitulate: if the study of how societies change remains a central concern of social sciences in general, 'social change' as a reified category has proved to be unproductive and has been gradually abandoned by sociology and anthropology. A critical review of some of the reasons why this might have been the case led us to clarify the concept of change as it is used in public discourse in Nepal today. Change then is best defined as a value at the center of the revolutionary ideology, and it involves human agency. It is also a general subjective feeling that depends on the speaker's perception of time or, more precisely, his or her being in time. In other words it is reflexive, and to this extent concerns individuals' identities.

*The Kham-Magar, a society at the periphery propelled to the center of the nation*

In order to go beyond these generalities we now need to explore a specific case. The Kham-Magar community seems particularly well suited to our purposes in the sense that thirty years ago it was practically invisible on the political map of the country—hardly anybody had ever heard of this population. When the residents of the southern bazaars such as Ghorahi or Tulsipur, in the west of the country, saw the Kham-Magar shepherds coming down with their flocks of goats and sheep from the Mahabharat range in winter, they would simply call them 'those who live in the high corner of the country'. But, as you know, it was this corner of Nepal that Prachanda made the heart of his guerrilla war, the Ching Kang hills of his own epic, or its Yan'an, depending on whether the propaganda chose the point of departure of the Long March led by Mao in 1934 or its destination. In a few years villagers were propelled onto the front stage of national

politics and the media. They had to expand their perception of reality to different scales of time and space.

Like most localities in rural Nepal, especially in remote areas such as the high valleys of the districts of Rukum and Rolpa where their villages, their fourteen VDCs, are situated, the Kham-Magar used to be largely indifferent to national politics beyond the local advantages that they could secure from local politicians who were well connected with the government. In various articles and along with other authors such as Kiyoko Ogura (Ogura 2007, 2008), I traced the impact of the People's War on the Kham-Magar country, the early mobilisation for the Communists in the village of Thabang, and how gradually after the 1990 Jan Andolan, the revolutionaries won over the other localities with various degrees of success. In line with the reflections on change that I have just developed, I will now turn away from the historical chain of events that led to the current situation and try to understand what being historical means for the the Kham-Magar, and what this implies for their perception of themselves.

Local mythology is not irrelevant to the understanding of political and historical change. I will explore first what the oral, mostly ritual literature of this ethnic group, who speak a Tibeto-Burman language, tells us about the creation of the world and of human beings. In the same way as the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, shapes the vision that the Judaeo-Christian world has of men and women and their capacity for action, the shamanic chants of the Kham-Magar shape their vision of the human condition. And in the same way that we (unless we are creationists) do not believe in this mythic narrative, the Kham-Magar do not literally believe in theirs, but it never the less offers certain clues about what it is for them to be human in this world.

## **II. Time and identity among the Kham-Magar**

### *The paradox of the human condition*

The creation of the world and human beings takes place on a massive time scale, which is not however without direction, since it is characterised rather by a general decline. The god Mahadev shaped five human forms from five different metals, the first one from gold, the most precious metal, and the fifth from iron, but none of these metallic races ever showed any sign of life. Parbati tried on her own, using soil and animal faeces. The

creature made from these decaying materials came to life and breathed. The narrative continues with the four ages of the Hindu world. These are characterised by a more specific moral decline. The men who were one hundred cubits tall grew shorter through the ages until they reached their current size in the dark age in which we live. Their initial beatitude had given way to the injustice of the powerful, to corruption and oppression.

Indra, king of the sky, sent his daughter Somarani in marriage to his sister's son, her prescribed partner, into the human world that was shrouded in permanent darkness and in which people had to work hard to survive. The unfortunate girl was given a dowry, a box that she was not allowed to open on the way. Consumed by curiosity, Somarani disobeyed and let out nine suns and nine moons that burned everything on earth. Treating evil with evil, she committed eight more sacrilegious faults that each caused one star to disappear until only one sun and one moon were left in the firmament. Thereafter, the alternation of day and night made life possible on Earth.

As mentioned above, the cosmogonic myth develops in a time that is not without direction since it is vitiated by a decline in morality. But there is no prospect of salvation. Human beings are not given any finality other than their reproduction on earth. It also seems that perfection or wholeness are not for humans: the most precious creature does not move, and eternal light is not viable. In the same vein, we are going to learn that men should not want too much. Here is how the first village community was taught this fundamental ethical principle:

The offspring of a man multiplied and grew richer and richer. But what they gained in wealth, they lost in virtue. Not only would they boast of their opulence but they would also live in total autarchy: neither goods nor daughters had ever crossed the river and the hills marking their village territory. It is clear that our villagers were incestuous. The god Bhagwan taught them clan exogamy the hard way: when, disguised as a beggar, he was refused hospitality by the greedy villagers, he caused an earthquake that buried the whole village. He spared only an old infertile couple to whom he granted a son. As the boy grew older, he started to flirt with unknown girls whom he met at the crossroads. His girlfriends turned out to be witches who were quick to make him sick. This is the paradox of the human condition: the marriage that men must undertake in order to father offspring is also a commitment to misfortune and death.

*A rhythmic temporality*

We see that the mortal condition of the human beings is closely associated with the rule of exogamy. It fixes the limits within which men can try to have some control over their lives. It is in this perspective that we have to understand the Magar requirement for a man to marry the daughter of his mother's brother. There is no need to dwell on the implications of this formal type of marriage system here, except to note that this requirement entails the need for at least three participant groups, since you cannot give a woman to the group that has given you one. In the event that there are only three exchange groups, as is actually often the case among the Kham-Magar, we see that in the third generation a woman comes to marry and procreate into the lineage of her maternal grandmother. In theory, and sometimes in practice, part of the dowry in movable property (jewelry and copper jars) that passes from mother to daughter comes back to its starting point. Thus, the requirement to marry the daughter of the mother's brother gives a generational rhythm to the marriage system that goes in cycles. These cycles are not achieved at the same time but are linked to one another after a minimum of three generations—hence the notion of rhythm.

In the same way as the Magar try to keep control over the circulation of their women through the imposition of a certain rhythm on the rule of exogamy, they also try to control time and organise their activities through subtle arrangements combining economic, ritual and cosmological constraints. Farming and transhumance are punctuated by both the seasons and the ritual calendar. Men do not feel that they are the ultimate owners of the land they plough. They acknowledge their dependency on the piece of nature from which they extract their subsistence, and to which in return they pay their rent, so to speak, in the form of sacrifices. The major village festivals take place when everyone is at home in the autumn, prior to the annual move to the South, and after the shepherds have returned in the spring.

Thanks to these various rhythms that are in tune with one another, the year runs with the implacable regularity of a clock, but a clock whose parts are not mechanical parts but social conventions. Trying to find out in advance when exactly a village festival will take place is a frustrating experience that all ethnographers of pre-modern societies have to face; yet everyone concerned will be ready at the right time. A village festival does

not have a date, but happens as the result of social adjustments to the stars. This is also why ritual calendars vary from village to village as if each had its own interpretation of the cosmos. I hope to have shown that temporality is a central concern of the mythic establishment of humanity in the world, even if we are far from the universal time specified by the minute and the hour of modern city folks.

As Bourdieu remarked about the Kabyle farmers, in the same way as it is important not to want too much or to be too greedy, it is also advisable not to hurry. Here is how Alfred Gell develops Bourdieu's argument: '...if an event is not already an inevitable element in the working out of the preordained flow of socially expectable happenings, then there is no point in making special provisions to bring it about; indeed to do so borders on sacrilege, disrespect towards the established order of things' (Gell 1998: 16). This remark is also relevant to the Magar villagers who like to mock those who, while in the village, behave as if they were in a city, hurrying things along or looking at their watches and not simply at the sun to know what time it is. The day of a farmer is, no doubt, as full as a Kathmanduite's day, but farmers do not act as if they were busy. But this is changing, hence the mockery.

The mythical narratives depict a world in which human beings act on the reproduction of their community and on the time that flows through the imposition of rhythms. Human existence has no moral purpose, but the myths develop an ethic of moderation without which human life is impossible on earth. The myths also depict a community that is reluctant to exchange with the outside world.

#### *A structural antagonism*

The mythical ideal of endogamy is actually achieved in the big villages that count up to 300 or more houses. Unlike in the myth, the rule of exogamy is respected but women circulate between local lineages *within* the same village, and until recently this was the case for up to 90% of marital unions. This is of course an important feature, because the group's control of marriage patterns ensures the transmission of its fundamental values and contributes to the preservation of its cultural particularities. The identity of the villagers, or more accurately their collective self—the situation does not require at this point any discursive or reflexive definition of their identity—is built on their belief in their autonomy, their sense of forming

an independent totality and even a world in itself, centred on the village.

At this point I would like to report that during my first visit to the Kham-Magar villages in the district of Rukum, thirty years ago, one question that some people asked the school teacher who accompanied me at the time was whether my seed was compatible with theirs. Many among the villagers had not been in contact with white people yet and wondered whether I was quite human like them. This ontological doubt, if I may so call it, is illustrative of a particular way in which a collective self can be formed in contrast to 'others': if we are human beings then you are not, since you are not from our community— something quite different, as we are going to see, from the process of defining one's differences in terms of a historical identity.

I said 'belief in their autonomy', because this autonomy is of course an illusion. The illusion is supported by the Kham-Magars' subsistence economy, their economic quasi-autarchy, their geographical isolation, their lack, until recently, of political participation at the national level, and so forth... but it remains an illusion nevertheless. One need only mention their dependence for cash on the international hashish business for the past half century, and on current remittances from migrant workers abroad or, in the cultural domain, a ritual language that is heavily influenced by Nepali and testifies to a long history of exchange with the dominant caste population. However, and this is the whole point, this illusion is less tenable the further these remote rural communities are involved in the wider world. As they multiply their relationships with other people, they compare themselves with them, compare their village customs with the urban lifestyle, in Nepal and far beyond, and thereby become aware of new possibilities.

The ideal of the autonomous community led by an ethic of moderation and organised within a rhythmic temporality has not disappeared. It remains an ideal for the old generation and a fallback position for most villagers in case things should turn bad in their life or in the world—it is significant that, as far as I know, no villager has sold his land: sheep, yes, but not land. However, the younger generation aspires to look beyond their village and, to use the local expression, stop holding onto their cows' tails. The act of comparison that used to draw positive strength from a subjective antagonism against others and their values now leads instead to growing frustration. This frustration is clearly one of the main motivations behind the mobilisation of the youngsters in favour of the Maoist insurrection, a

reaction that has been amply demonstrated. However, what is less clear is how these young people see themselves in the current situation, where several scenarios of the future are available to them. Before examining a concrete situation that will help us to shed some light on this historical change, I will say a few more words on the subjective antagonism of the closed community and the emergence of the political claim of cultural difference.

*From subjective antagonism to political claim of difference*

Indeed, the antagonist approach denies, or at least reduces, the relationship with others to its simplest form, since these others are conceived as contrary to oneself. By contrast, considering oneself as different from other people requires one to establish more complex relationships with them. These complex relationships may lead people, at both individual and collective levels, to feel dominated by the image that more powerful people have of them. They may even come to integrate this image into their own definition of themselves and lose all self esteem. Even resistance to the image imposed by the dominant group or class traps the dominated group or class into a mirror game out of which it is difficult to escape, since the dominated subject ceases to be the point of view from which he or she looks at him or herself. These subtle and always changing mechanisms of alienation are the focus of a good part of our sociological and anthropological studies. Concerning Nepal, Tracy Pigg for example has shown convincingly how a set of prejudices about the backward and credulous peasants permeates the ideology of development and puts rural people in the paradoxical position of being the targets of projects of which they should be the agents (Pigg 1992). Sanskritization processes and attempts by the ethnic groups to reform their local customs can also be analysed from the perspective of this game of mirrors, in which dominated groups find themselves trapped into paradoxes, trying to assert their identities in terms of values to which they are opposed.

In Nepal the political use of cultural identities and the emergence of ethnicity came into the open after the 1990 andolan, a topic that the book edited by David Gellner, Joanna Pfaff and John Whelpton started to explore (Gellner *et al* 1997). What makes ethnicity a specific form of identity is its relationship with the history of the nation and with nationalism. In an essay on 'Times and Identities', John Davis vividly expressed this special

relationship: 'Ethnic identity', he wrote, 'has to be encrusted with antiquity and scarred with repressions...it has to be expressed in terms of linear, culminatory history if it is to be a valid claim against the state' (Davis 1991: 18). In other words, in order to become a full member of the nation on an equal footing with the others, the minorities need to convert their original collective self and specific historicity into a historical ethnic identity. This does not go without saying.

### III. Historical change

#### *The festival in honour of the gods of the locality*

As long as the Thabangis saw that the recognition of their *jati* and, above all, of their village, was growing at the national and even international level, they had no reason to decline what was being offered to them as a symbolic reward for their commitment to the revolution. The urgency of the war, during which the population was constantly mobilised by a Party that protected inhabitants from State repression as much as it exposed them to it, may have made it difficult for them to express or envisage any sort of dissidence from the Maoist rulers. However, once the Party joined the government, priorities changed for both the leaders in Kathmandu and the villagers at the local level. A brief look at the celebration of the festival in honour of the gods of the localities in 2010 will serve to illustrate this change.

Kham-Magars consider this festival as an exemplary element of their cultural community, partly because it is a celebration of the gods of the locality and partly because it involves several days of colourful dancing, for which the whole population practises for up to one month in advance. It takes place in June, just before the monsoon rains upon which the September harvest depends. The ritual consists in the youngsters of each exogamous lineage spending the night at the top of Jaljala mountain, the abode of the god Braha, and bringing wildflowers and one pine tree back down to the village the following morning. One of the trees is planted at the centre of the dance ground where men and women will dance for several days until, the villagers say, the rain comes. The dances, however, should not start before the sacrifice of a ram is made to Bhume, the god of the soil, to secure the success of the future crops. It is said that in past times, before 'civilisation', an old man, not just an animal, was sacrificed to the god of the soil. The Maoists, in a further effort towards civilisation, banned the blood





Plate 1. Young villagers, accompanied by Tailor-Musicians, returning from the hilltop site of the Braha temple with a tree-trunk to set up in the dance-ground during the Bhume festival. Photograph by Anne de Sales.



Plate 2. Santos Budha leading the Bhume dance (Thabang, June 2010). Photograph by Anne de Sales.

sacrifice to Bhume in 1997, when the first People's Village Government was established in Thabang. Instead, they transformed the ritual into an occasion for the reverence of elderly people: in 2010, Santos Budha gave his blessing (*tika*) and some money to five old men before the assembled villagers.

A great deal could be said about this important festival that concerns the very foundation of the community on its ancestral site; the history of its clans and their occupation of the land; the relationships of the Magars with the two service castes, particularly the Damais (the Tailor-Musicians), whose role is central to the dancing; finally the relationship to the local gods, Braha, at the top of the mountain and Bhume at the bottom, since the vertical axis between their two shrines is the principle underlying this ritual of prosperity.

What should hold our attention here is that soon after the insurrection, the Maoist ban on blood sacrifices became an object of open contention. A few villagers started to complain that as a consequence of the reform the crops were not as abundant as in the past. One year, the women protested against the ban and bought two male goats with funds from their association and had them sacrificed to Bhume. The Party cadres opted for a more lenient attitude than during the insurrection and turned a blind eye to this development. Yet they refused to reconsider their general decision concerning the ban on blood sacrifices, on the grounds that it was a 'barbaric' custom, antithetical to a progressive society. In 2010, there was no attempt to bring a sacrificial animal, but many villagers complained that 'this festival without a sacrifice was like an animal without a head'; in other words, incomplete and meaningless. The fact that this view was expressed not only by women and elderly people but also by the president of the Youth Club suggests that it cannot be dismissed as a conservative wish to return to the status quo that had prevailed before the insurrection.

The 25 members of the Youth Club of which Mahesh is the president belong to a generation that was born in the 1980s, after the Kartik Operation. They were brought up in an environment characterised by constant harassment from the government for being communist. Several of them, such as Mahesh himself, took part in various actions as members of the Balsangathan, or children association (Zharkevitch 2009), and those who did not leave the village in order to pursue their studies in Dang were engaged in the local militia or helped as sentries, messengers, and volunteers

in military operations. The Youth Club provides what Mahesh likes to call a 'social service'. This means checking that the new rules are respected: keeping alcohol consumption and gambling under control (rather than banning them completely as was the case during the insurrection); dealing with day-to-day quarrels among villagers; checking that Blacksmiths and Tailor-Musicians are not subjected to prejudice, and that both teachers and children attend school; and keeping the village in order, especially during political and cultural programmes or elections, when large gatherings of people must be channelled through the village. The Youth Club therefore works in close collaboration with the Party that rules over the village.

However, during the 2010 festival, Mahesh openly expressed reservations about the leaders of the Party such as Santos Budha, who he said holds a 'narrow view' of how to achieve social change. He criticised the lack of flexibility of their methods that consist, he said, in getting rid of everything that belongs to the past. He himself, by contrast, sees this past identified as tradition as an important way for Kham-Magars in general and the villagers in particular to be 'recognised' for who they are, and also as a precious commodity for tourism. Mahesh's criticisms pull in two different directions: on the one hand, he wants the leaders in Kathmandu to remain closer to the spirit of revolution that animated them during the insurrection and that can only justify the death of the martyrs; and on the other hand he argues that they should be more open to other experiences likely to facilitate a better integration of the villagers at the national and international level while preserving their specificity as Kham-Magars. I am tempted to quote here what Dipesh Chakrabarty wrote of the Subaltern Studies project that 'can only situate itself theoretically at the juncture where we give up neither Marx nor "difference"'.<sup>2</sup> This is exactly what Mahesh is trying to do. The problem of course is how to do this.

The celebration of the Bhume festival in 2010 helps to correct the image that the elections gave of the Thabangis, who for half a century had voted in unison as a monolithic community in favour of the communists (de Sales, forthcoming). It is clear that fifty years of communist education, including fifteen years of Maoist propaganda, had not rendered the Thabangis incapable of thinking for themselves. It is also clear that their metaphysical recognition by the local god is as important for most of the villagers as

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2 Chakrabarty (2000: 71), quoted in Pouchepadass (2004).

their political recognition within the Nepali nation. If this need was swept under the carpet during the insurrection, it resurfaced soon after through the villagers' demand that their festival should not be devoid of meaning. A sense of moral outrage underlies their claims. Santos Budha, himself a shrewd politician, sensed this need at the celebration of Bhume Puja in 2010 when he concluded his speech with a quotation from an old communist of the early days, who used to say: 'Our Braha will protect us from those who would do us harm'.<sup>3</sup> However, if Santos' use of Braha is primarily instrumental and clearly aims to legitimise the New Rule, how are we to understand Mahesh's position?

*From alienation to hope*

The Nepalese revolutionaries demanded of their troops complete political and personal commitment to the cause, the result of an inner transformation, a kind of conversion that extracted the individual from a world that was understood as pre-historical. In this sense the individuals had to dispose of their differences. However, the difficulties in mobilising peasants and their will to involve ethnic populations led the Maoists to fan the resentment of these groups against the dominant classes and castes who had despised or even actively suppressed their cultural differences. This is how, in 2002, the Maoists established a Kham-Magar district that was supposed to be at the heart of the resurrection of the old medieval Magarant. This project was openly justified as a necessary historical transition in order to mobilise a population that had been hard hit by the insurgency.

Once culture acquires a political purpose, it becomes a new object of knowledge and challenges. It was a lived world and it becomes the culture in which people can act in new ways. And this is what we could see during Bhume puja. Santos and his party wanted to reform the local culture, a culture that was centred on the sacrifices to the local gods to whom the farmers pay tribute in return for human occupation of the site. As agents of social change they wanted to retain what was worthy of a 'civilised' culture and abandon what they saw as the bad or useless elements. How could Mahesh, who also considers himself to be an agent of social change, be in favour of a return to blood sacrifice, a practice that flies in the face of the dominant ethical imagination?

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3 In Nepali: 'hamro naramro sochneharubata hamilai hamro Brahale bachauncha'.

In the practice of killing the sacrificial animal lies the meaning of the custom, its vitality in the true sense, since it preserves the exchange between blood and prosperity on the basis of which the community has survived ever since it established itself on the site. Is it possible that Mahesh's rejection of the reformed ritual represents a refusal to act without being able to make sense of action?

This is his own capacity of action on the world that he stands for rather than a return to the bosom of tradition. He refuses to be just a puppet for tourists, even if he also has tourists in mind in his defence of the ancient ritual. In this sense, he did integrate the image that outsiders may have of him and his fellow villagers. However, rather than seeing him as the victim of a mechanism of alienation, I suggest that Mahesh draws from his local tradition the dynamic that allows him to project himself into the future, as a historical actor in a community open onto the world. To speak of a 'return' to the tradition would be inaccurate, if only because the conditions in which the sacrifice would be performed again, if it were to be restored, have changed for ever. The Bhume sacrifice will never be what it used to be before the ban, an uncontested practice. The ritual no longer goes without saying, and distance from custom entails some distance from oneself. And in this distance lies the capacity for action to transform the world.

What was at stake during the 2010 festival were representations of the future more than of the past. What makes the difference between demoralisation that leads individuals to flee the country on the one hand and the collective search for a solution to the crisis on the other hand is, to speak like Bourdieu, the possession of symbolic instruments. In other words, to impose the standards of one's own perception and to be perceived as one perceives oneself allows the group to keep control of the crisis and avoid reactionary resentment in response to the feeling of general degradation that haunts the countryside. The desire to be consistent should not be confused here with following tradition blindly, and the possession of symbolic instruments may not necessarily mean the politicisation of ethnic differences. As I have just said, it is misleading to think that tradition could repeat itself, while the politicisation of cultural differences tends to freeze these differences artificially.

The disputes that took place during the 2010 festival are the sign of the cultural production of a contested collective identity between class and ethnic group. This involves a transformation of self and, through

its projection into the future, the insertion of that self into history. The advocates of blood sacrifice, like its opponents, have become historical actors in the same way, and have become so knowingly. It is significant that this form of historical consciousness found its expression during a calendrical festival: the celebration of the ancestral site could not offer a better opportunity for the actors to confront different time scales and rhythms and adjust themselves accordingly. These constant adjustments are what creates the impression that time is passing, whereas, in fact, it is we who are changing.

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## REPORTS



# The Catalogue of the Hodgson Collection in the British Library

John Whelpton and Michael Hutt

The long awaited online catalogue of the Hodgson Collection was launched by Michael Palin at a function hosted by Oliver Urquhart, the Head of African and Asian Studies, at the British Library in London on 25 July 2011. It can be accessed via <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/hodgson>. In what follows, we will introduce the Collection, present a biography of Hodgson, and explain how the Catalogue was created.



Ramesh Dhungel shows Michael Palin items from the Hodgson Collection at the British Library in 2006. Photograph by Michael Hutt.

## The Collection and the Catalogue

In the United Kingdom, the papers of Brian Houghton Hodgson are now preserved at the British Library, the Royal Asiatic Society, the Zoological Society of London and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The Hodgson papers preserved in the African and Asian Studies Reading Room of the British

Library were deposited in the India Office Library in 1864 following earlier deposits (between 1838 and 1845) of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts and the complete Tibetan Kanjur and Tanjur. In 1921 the papers were bound into 95 volumes (the numbering of the volumes runs to 108 because of the presence in the collection of 13 scrolls). Decisions about how to order the Collection were taken partly with regard to the physical dimensions of each document, with items of similar size being bound together. Thus, while the content of many volumes can be encapsulated in a single subject heading for the volume as a whole, others contain documents relating to a variety of different topics. In many cases items belonging together (e.g. an original manuscript and its translation) have been bound in different places, simply because they were written on different sizes of paper.

The Catalogue describes a total of 972 items in 108 volumes and rolls, comprising a total of some 15,300 folios, plus scrolls, unnumbered notebooks and loose letters. It is ordered by volume and item, with folio numbers given for each item. Ramesh Dhungel, who prepared the first draft of the catalogue, describes the Collection as ‘an uncategorised encyclopaedic 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century record of Nepal’ and enumerates the following subject categories:

diplomatic correspondence, Nepal’s politics and administration, the military system, the land system, agriculture, geography, natural resources, routes and trails, revenue and taxation, trade and commerce, state expenditure, ethnic studies, Buddhism (Newari and Tibetan), Buddhist art and iconography, traditional Buddhist and Hindu architecture, the Nepali legal and judicial system, border problems and disputes, Himalayan and hill languages (including grammars, dictionaries, vocabularies, epigraphy-script and alphabets), Sanskrit Buddhist literary texts, genealogical accounts, chronicles, institutes or special reforms by different rulers, general and historical accounts of Nepal, prominent temples and deities, accounts of military campaigns and territorial expansion (including details of wars with Tibet and China), originals and copies of academic correspondence, copies of Sanskrit and Newari inscriptions, palm-leaf manuscripts, and medieval and modern royal orders’ (Dhungel 2007: 45).

Of this enormous body of material, only twelve volumes of materials in

English had been fully catalogued (in 1927) before the initiation of the current project. In 2001, Michael Hutt of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and David Gellner (then of Brunel University, now of All Souls College Oxford) proposed that a researcher/cataloguer should be employed to produce a descriptive catalogue of the Collection, and applied to the Leverhulme Trust for funding. This was granted, and the Nepali historian Ramesh Dhungel was employed for a period of three years from 2002. The work turned out to require more time than had originally been estimated, but with the extremely generous support of Michael Palin and the Friends of the British Library the project was able to retain Dr Dhungel's services for a further eighteen months and thus produce a complete first draft of the catalogue. The Leverhulme funding enabled it to secure the services of specialists in Lepcha (Sonam Rinchen Lepcha, Helen Plaisier), Limbu (Bairagi Kainla), Newari, (Shukra Sagar Shrestha), Dehati, Maithili, Avadhi and the Kaithi script (Chandra Prasad Tripathee) and Urdu and Persian (Firdous Ali) in order to assist Dr Dhungel in his work.

The work of editing the catalogue has since been completed by John Whelpton, an independent scholar based in Hong Kong, and Mark Turin, a researcher based at the University of Cambridge, working mainly in their spare time. The complicated technical work of converting the catalogue into an interactive format fit for online posting has been undertaken by Burkhard Quessel.

The original aim was that the catalogue should not only provide clear information about the contents of each item in the Collection but also include references to any published works which reproduced the text of an item or discussed it in detail. It has not been possible to do this absolutely comprehensively but it is hoped that the indications given will ease the task of researchers. Web publication of the catalogue will make it feasible to incorporate additional information of this sort as it becomes available and the editors invite anyone working on the documents in future to submit details they feel should be added. A good example of what can be quarried from the materials is Ramesh Dhungel's essay on the clash between the Limbu scholar and religious leader Srijanga and the Tibetan lamas of Sikkim (Dhungel 2006).

One particular area where further investigation is needed is the relationship between the various *vaṃśāvalī* texts in the Collection and similar ones published or extant in manuscript form, either in Nepal's

National Archives or in private collections in Kathmandu. The term *vaṃśāvalī* literally means ‘genealogy’ but it is used more generally to denote a class of documents that provide narrative history, as well as for simple dynastic family trees. The labels *Bhāṣāvāṃśāvalī* or *Gorkhāvāṃśāvalī* may refer to specific publications: respectively the two volumes issued by the National Library (Paudel 1965 & Lamsal 1968-9) and the work of Yogi et al published in Benares in 1952. The terms are also used to denote general groups of texts (viz in the first case, any Nepali-language historical accounts of the Kathmandu Valley and, in the second, accounts of Gorkha and its conquest of the valley), as well as the two hypothesised primary texts from which each group is thought to descend.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that as well as original vernacular *vaṃśāvalī* texts the Hodgson Collection also includes English-language translations or summary translations produced by Hodgson and others. Some of these were published in Hasrat’s 1970 anthology, but while Hasrat lists all the documents he consulted he does not give separate references for each of his extracts and may in some cases have combined material from different places in the Collection.

A starting point for researchers is the work of Baburam Acharya, who suggested that the original versions of the *Bhāṣāvāṃśāvalī* and *Gorkhāvāṃśāvalī* were written in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by two brothers, Buddhiman and Sharman Singh (Acharya 1967: 36-38). Ramesh Dhungel, however, believes that a third brother, Jitman Singh, produced the version of the *Gorkhāvāṃśāvalī* found in vol. 51 of the Collection. Researchers should also be aware of the work of Leelanateshwar Baral, who made extensive use of Hodgson’s materials and provides the most detailed discussion available in English (Baral 1964, now available online at [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rarebooks/downloads/Baral\\_1964\\_thesis.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rarebooks/downloads/Baral_1964_thesis.pdf)).

### **Brian Houghton Hodgson: a short biography<sup>1</sup>**

Brian Houghton Hodgson was born on 1 Feb 1801 at Lower Beech, Prestbury, Cheshire. His year of birth was almost certainly 1801, not 1800 as often stated: the confusion probably arose because Hodgson and his family used inclusive reckoning for age. He was the second of the seven children of

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1 See also Whelpton (1999) and Whelpton (2004). For more detailed accounts of Hodgson’s life and work, see Waterhouse (2004).

Brian Hodgson (1766-1858), country gentleman, and his wife, Catherine (c.1776-1851), daughter of William Houghton of Manchester and Newton Park. The name 'Brian' had also been borne by his grandfather and great-grandfather, landowners in the Midlands and Northwest England.

Following his father's failure in a banking venture, Hodgson's family had to sell their home at Lower Beech but financial difficulties were partly offset by family connections, including a great-aunt's marriage to Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, and also by his mother's gift for making friendships. The family remained for some years in Cheshire before moving to Macclesfield, where Hodgson started his education at the Grammar School under Dr. David Davis, and then to Congleton. In 1814 he transferred to Dr. Daniel Charles Delafossie's seminary at Richmond, Surrey, while the family settled at Clacton, Essex, on his father's appointment as Warden of the Martello Towers through the patronage of Thomas, 2nd Earl of Clarendon. In 1816, James Pattison, Director and later Chairman of the East India Company, who had been a neighbour at Congleton, nominated Hodgson for the Indian Civil Service.

From February 1816 to December 1817 he attended the Company's training college at Haileybury. While waiting to take the entrance examination, he stayed with T.R. Malthus, who was Professor of History and Political Economy at the College and had been a Cambridge contemporary of his mother's friend, William Smyth. Malthus was a formative intellectual influence, turning him from 'a young aristocrat in social feelings and sympathies' into 'an advanced liberal in politics' (Hunter 1896: 23). Hodgson passed out of Haileybury at the head of his year, with prizes for economics, classics and Bengali.

Arriving in Calcutta in 1818, he led a full social life while continuing the study of Sanskrit and Persian at Fort William College. He was particularly successful with Persian, then still an official language within British India as well as the medium of written communication with independent Indian states, but a near-fatal attack of fever prevented him from completing the three-year course and made it essential for him to obtain a hill appointment if he was to remain in India. Probably through the influence of an aunt's friend, Lady Elizabeth D'Oyly, who was a second cousin of the Governor-General's wife, in late 1819 he was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Kumaon (viz. present-day Kumaon and Garhwal: Kumaon had been annexed from the kingdom of Nepal in 1815, during the war which ended Nepal's expansion

along the Himalaya and deprived it of a third of its conquered territory.<sup>2</sup>) Hodgson worked on the revenue 'settlement' under the Commissioner, George Traill, who was a strong believer in a paternalist administrative style and in detailed study of the land and its people. In 1820, probably on Traill's recommendation, he was promoted to the Assistant Residency at Kathmandu, working under Edward Gardner, who had previously been Traill's own superior in Kumaon. Since the conclusion of the 1814-1816 war between the Company and Nepal there had been peace without cordiality. The country had been compelled to accept a British Resident, but he and his staff were not permitted to travel outside the Kathmandu Valley and, unlike the situation in many of the states within India proper, the Resident was not a *de facto* supervisor of the local administration. Dissatisfied with enforced idleness, Hodgson again used his connections to secure an appointment as acting Deputy Secretary in the Persian Department of the Calcutta Foreign Office. However, in 1823 his health again broke down and he was advised to either return to England or take up a position in the hills once more. Leaving the service of the Company was not an option for Hodgson, whose salary was the main source of income for his parents and six siblings back home. Thus at the beginning of 1824 he had to return to Kathmandu in the subordinate position of post-master, becoming Assistant Resident again when a vacancy occurred the following year.

Advised by a friend on the Governor General's Council that sufficient local knowledge would make even a young man a potential candidate for the full Residency, Hodgson threw himself with renewed energy into

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2 By Hodgson's time the British normally referred to the state formed by Gorkha's expansion as 'Nepal' and to its people as 'Nepalese' or 'Nepali' and this usage is followed here. However, until late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the state's own inhabitants normally used 'Nepal' in the old sense, referring just to the Kathmandu Valley. As the king's official titles contained no geographical reference, other than the conventional phrase 'crest-jewel of the circle of mountain kings', it is unclear what name the ruling elite themselves gave to their state during Hodgson's time. The phrase *gorkha sarkār* (Gorkha government) is, however, found in an 1850 document (Dixit 1973/74: 23) and remained in regular use until the 1920s, when it was changed to 'Nepal government' (Gellner 1986: 124), reflecting British usage but presumably intended to stress the unity between the Rana rulers and the indigenous population of the Nepal Valley. Certainly from the 1850s onwards, and probably throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ruling elite styled themselves 'Gorkhas' or 'Gorkhalis', whether or not their own ancestors had actually come from the Shah dynasty's original kingdom of Gorkha, and this usage was followed by Nepalis resident in India,

the thorough investigation of all aspects of his surroundings which he had begun during his first period in Nepal and on which his reputation now chiefly rests. As well as studying local institutions and commerce, he learned Khas or Parbatiya (as the Nepali language was then known), and also Newari,<sup>3</sup> the Tibeto-Burman tongue of the Kathmandu Valley's indigenous inhabitants. Despite family obligations, which kept him in debt until 1837, he retained at his own expense a group of local research assistants and trained himself and some of his staff as naturalists, specialising particularly in ornithology. In later years he would publish some 127 zoological papers and describe 39 new mammalian and 150 new bird species. He was also an avid collector of Sanskrit manuscripts and Tibetan printed volumes and was the first to reveal to the West the Sanskrit literature of northern, or Mahayana, Buddhism, which had been preserved only in Nepal. He distributed around four hundred manuscripts between libraries in India, Britain, France and Germany, and those sent to Paris enabled the Sanskritist Eugène Burnouf to produce his seminal studies. Hodgson himself, with the help of his Nepali friend and helper Amritananda, sought to interpret his Buddhist materials, the results being published in learned journals between 1828 and 1837 and mostly reprinted in his 1874 *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal*. He was mistaken in accepting Amritananda's classification of Buddhist doctrine into four 'schools'—a misinterpretation

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3 Here we use the names for these languages that were current in Hodgson's day, and which he used in his correspondence and research papers. The names 'Khas' and 'Parbatiya', while they remained in colloquial use for longer, appear to have been replaced for official purposes in Jang Bahadur Rana's time (1846-1877) by 'Gorkhali', which was in turn supplanted by 'Nepali' in the 1920s (Clarke 1969: 251; Hutt 1988: 32-34). 'Newar' as a term for the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, who call themselves '*newa(h)*' and their language *newa(h)-bhae*, is not found in the written record until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century (Gellner 1999: 5) but might derive from a hypothetical Prakrit form of the Sanskrit *nepāla*, which was itself probably an aryanisation of a Tibeto-Burman term (Malla 1983). The word was used in the form 'Neuâr' by the Jesuit missionary Desideri, who visited the Valley in 1721, and 'Newar' was employed for both people and language by Kirkpatrick and Hamilton, so Hodgson was certainly not the first non-Nepali to use it, as claimed by Shakyā (2006). He might, however, have popularised 'Newari' for the language, with the 'i' suffix, commonly used in adjective formation in both Nepali and Hindi. Many Newars have for some time objected to the term 'Newari', which had become standard usage among linguists, and more recently there has also been a campaign to replace 'Newar' with the current endonym 'Newa'. Some *janajati* activists have also begun to demand that 'Nepali' be renamed 'Khas Nepali', on the grounds that all languages spoken in Nepal are equally national languages.

that may have been prompted by the design of the questionnaire Hodgson himself presented to the pandit. As he later realised, he was also wrong to argue that the Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures were older than the Pali texts of southern ('Hinayana') Buddhism. Nevertheless, a leading authority could still write in 1987 that 'His perspicacity was truly amazing and much of what he wrote remains valid in terms of the considerable amount of later scholarly work to which his discoveries gave birth' (Snellgrove 1987: 2-3).

Hodgson finally became Resident in his own right on 21 January 1833, having already functioned as Acting Resident between Gardner's retirement in 1829 and Herbert Maddock's appointment in 1831. He brought to the job a strong conviction that Nepal's continuing resentment of the loss of a third of its territory after the 1814-1816 war, its isolationist policy and its maintenance of a large standing army were a continuing threat to peace and that this should be removed by encouraging the growth of commerce and by employing the country's 'surplus military manpower' in the East India Company's forces. He initially shared the belief of the previous Residents that it was best to continue to work with Bhimsen Thapa, the powerful minister who had dominated Nepalese politics since 1806 and, since the war, had sought to present himself to his own countrymen as a bulwark against the East India Company and to the Company as the man who could persuade his countrymen to keep the peace. As the decade progressed, however, Hodgson became convinced that Nepal's outlook would become more pacific if the direction of relations with the British was in the hands of the young King Rajendra rather than Bhimsen, who depended on the goodwill of the army. Hodgson began pressing for direct access to the king and for concessions on trade, but was restrained by the Indian government.

While not yet intervening directly in the factional struggle, he sympathised strongly with Bhimsen's opponent Ranjang Pande and was particularly influenced by Ranjang's Brahman ally, Krishna Ram Mishra. When Bhimsen himself sought to buttress his position by moving closer to the British, Hodgson in effect aided the opposition by ensuring that no substantive negotiations took place during a mission to Calcutta led by Bhimsen's nephew in 1835-1836. In 1837, Bhimsen was arrested on suspicion of involvement in the death of the king's infant son; the child had allegedly drunk poison intended for his mother, the senior queen, who was a backer of Ranjang. When the king asked for his advice, Hodgson recommended that Bhimsen be kept in custody while investigations continued. Bhimsen's



fall did not bring increased cordiality with the East India Company, because both the king and the Pande faction were ready to capitalise on anti-British feeling both at home and among other independent Indian states. In summer 1838, Hodgson transferred his sympathies to the Poudyal brothers, Brahmans whose family had long been rivals with the Mishras for appointment as *guru* (spiritual preceptor) to members of the royal family. He had a cynically realistic attitude towards their motives, having characterised them in 1833 as 'men of the world who have been ours, aforesaid, *for a consideration* and are ready to be again on like terms' (Whelpton 1990: 57). Nevertheless, he formed a particularly close relationship with the second brother, Krishna Ram Poudyal, frequently reporting and seconding his opinions in letters to the Governor-General. His collaboration with Brahmans was probably facilitated by the vegetarian and teetotal lifestyle he had adopted after a recurrence of his liver complaint in 1837.

During 1839, moves by Ranjang's faction threatened the financial interests and even the personal safety of much of the nobility and many looked to the Residency for political support. In April, Bhimsen Thapa was rearrested and in July he committed suicide in prison. According to the official report of the Nepali officials who brought Hodgson the news, he wept on hearing it; he had at first refused Bhimsen's smuggled plea to intervene on his behalf, believing himself bound by government instructions not to interfere in the factional struggle, and his request to the Governor-General for permission to speak out had been sent too late.

Instability continued into 1840 with the temporary occupation by Nepal of 200 square miles of British territory and a brief army mutiny that seemed at one point to threaten the Residency itself. As well as successfully demanding a Nepali withdrawal, the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, now authorised Hodgson to press the king to appoint new advisors who were friendly to the British, a policy which had been proposed the previous year by the Governor-General's council but rejected as premature by both Auckland and Hodgson himself. Having committed substantial forces to his ill-judged intervention in Afghanistan, Auckland was not in a position to fight a full-scale campaign against Nepal, but the movement of troops closer to the border and Hodgson's manoeuvrings secured the appointment at the beginning of 1841 of a 'British ministry' headed by a collateral relative of the royal family and including both Krishna Ram Mishra and his more prominent brother, Ranganath. Hodgson was active in the new

administration, which continued until 1842, his task being eased by the death of the senior queen in October 1841 but complicated by the emergence onto the political stage of her son, Crown Prince Surendra. In April Hodgson was involved in a public clash with King Rajendra over a British subject who was party to a commercial dispute with a Nepali and who had taken refuge at the Residency. He subsequently withheld from the king a letter concerning the incident from the new Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, which Hodgson believed would weaken the position of the pro-British ministers. Enraged, Ellenborough initially ordered Hodgson's instant dismissal but subsequently relented and left him in post with instructions to disengage gradually from his entanglement in internal politics.

He accomplished this successfully and in December 1842 was an enthusiastic observer of the 'National Movement', a concerted effort by most of the nobility with backing from the army to make King Rajendra curtail the excesses of Crown Prince Surendra and grant authority to the junior queen, Rajya Lakshmi. Because of his failure to save Bhimsen, Hodgson was distrusted by Bhimsen's nephew, Mathbar Singh Thapa. Nevertheless, over the months preceding Mathbar's return to Nepal from India in 1843, Hodgson sought to influence him in Rajya Lakshmi's favour, while declining to give him any direct assurance of his future safety. In May 1843, Hodgson sought Ellenborough's permission to remain in Nepal until 1844. This was ostensibly to complete a general study of the country on which he was now working, but a story still current in Kathmandu's Muslim community suggests that another reason may have been the birth of a third child to Begum Meharunnisha, a Nepali Muslim with whom Hodgson had probably been living since the early 1830s.<sup>4</sup> Although King Rajendra, with the agreement of the leading courtiers, took the unusual step of writing to ask the Governor-General to allow the extension, Ellenborough insisted on his departure and offered him an appointment as Assistant Sub-Commissioner at Simla. Taking this as an insult, Hodgson resigned from the Bengal Civil Service. He was given an impressive send-off by the royal court on 5 December 1843 and sailed for England from Calcutta on 7 February 1844.

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4 For this oral tradition see Joshi 2004. The issue remains controversial and the editor of the volume in which Joshi's essay appears argues that, given the care Hodgson lavished on his openly acknowledged children, Henry and Sarah, he would not have abandoned a third child had one actually existed (Waterhouse 2004: 9-10)

Recent studies have modified the portrait of Hodgson as the complete master of events in Kathmandu which is offered in the biography by his personal friend, William Hunter. It is now known that even Lord Auckland, who allowed him a free hand in late 1840, seemed to sense that Hodgson's sudden enthusiasms could leave him open to manipulation and complained of his writing 'so strongly from slight impressions'. There is also much to be said for the view of Lord Ellenborough and of his successor in Kathmandu, Sir Henry Lawrence, that the East India Company's interests were better served by simple reliance on its own military strength than by involvement in factional politics. Nevertheless, Hodgson did succeed in keeping the peace, and the war with Nepal which Auckland had thought likely to come was avoided. The regret expressed in Kathmandu at his departure was largely genuine and stemmed from a belief that he had saved the country from a clash with British India which would have ended its independence. Hodgson's own popularity amongst many of his colleagues, and the recall of Lord Ellenborough by the East India Company's Court of Directors in 1844, would have enabled him to resume an official career, but he stood by his decision to resign. After spending time with his parents in Canterbury and with his sister Fanny in Holland, to whom he entrusted his two elder children, he returned in 1845 to South Asia to continue his research in the Himalaya. As the Government of India would not allow him to return in a private capacity to Kathmandu, he settled instead at Darjeeling, a hill station established six years earlier just to the east of the Nepal border and under the superintendence of Archibald Campbell, who had been his assistant in Kathmandu. He mixed little with the local European community, perhaps because of his unhappiness at increasingly racist attitudes towards Indians. The botanist Joseph Hooker stayed with him from 1848 to 1850 and he himself usually visited Calcutta during the winter months. He was also joined by his son Henry, who died at Darjeeling in 1856. He maintained communication with Kathmandu and was for a time entrusted with the education of Gajraj Thapa, a son-in-law of Jang Bahadur Rana, who had come to power in 1846 and whose family was to rule Nepal until 1951. In October 1857, he helped persuade the Governor-General, Lord Canning, to accept Jang Bahadur's offer to lead a Nepalese force into India to assist in the suppression of the 'Mutiny'.

He continued his zoological work and wrote on the physical geography of the Himalaya, but concentrated in particular on the ethnology of the

peoples of northern India, making extensive use of the comparative study of their languages to argue for common origins. His belief that all the 'non-Aryan' peoples of India belonged to one great 'Tamulian' family was misconceived, but he successfully demonstrated that many languages of Nepal and north-east India belong to what is now known as the Sino-Tibetan language family. These studies also reflected his concern with the position of 'aboriginal' ethnic groups in relation to later, Hindu settlers and a belief, first formed in Nepal, that less Hinduised peoples were more reliable supporters of British power than the higher castes from whom the old Bengal army had been largely recruited. At the same time, however, he also advocated mass European settlement in the hills. Hodgson also continued the advocacy of mother-tongue education for the people of India which he had begun at the height of the controversy between 'Orientalists' and 'Anglicists' in the 1830s. He maintained that the modern Indian languages were capable of use for scholarly purposes, in the same way that modern European languages had supplanted Latin for learned writing, and stressed the desirability of enriching them from Sanskrit or Persian rather than by importing loans from English. Lord William Bentinck had in 1835 decided the issue in favour of the use of English as the medium of both education and administration, but opinion had begun to swing Hodgson's way and his view that public funds should support mass education in vernacular languages was officially accepted by the government in 1854. During a visit to Europe in 1853, Hodgson met and married Anne Scott (c.1815-68). His Nepali partner, Meharunnisha, who remained in Kathmandu in 1843, had probably died shortly before this. His wife returned with him to Darjeeling, but in 1857 her health broke down and because of this and also his father's illness, Hodgson returned to England in 1858. He settled down to the life of a country gentleman in Gloucestershire, first at Dursley and then at Alderley, but after 1883 he wintered at the 'Villa Himalaya' at Mentone on the French Riviera. His wife died in January 1868 and the following year he married Susan Townshend, a clergyman's daughter from Co. Cork. His children born in Nepal had all died at an early age and there were no children from either of his formal marriages. Although Hodgson himself had been plagued with ill health in Nepal and India, he enjoyed a long and vigorous old age, continuing to hunt until he was 68 and to ride a horse until he was 86. He remained intellectually active, receiving visits from his old friends and fellow scholars and also holding a candle for Gladstone and (after 1886) for

Irish Home Rule amongst the largely Tory local gentry. He died peacefully at 48 Davies Street, London on 23 May 1894 and was buried in the grounds of the church of St Kenelm at Alderley. A plaque on the inner wall of the church is inscribed as follows:

TO THE BELOVED MEMORY OF BRIAN HOUGHTON HODGSON OF THE BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE. HON. DCL OF OXFORD. FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY. CORR. MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE. HON. MEMBER OF THE GERMAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY ETC. ETC. AS RESIDENT MINISTER AT THE COURT OF NEPAL HE RENDERED DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY AND TO THE CAUSE OF ORIENTAL LEARNING. HE DIED 23 MAY 1894. HAVING LIVED MANY YEARS AT ALDERLEY GRANGE IN THIS PARISH HE WAS BURIED IN A VAULT NEAR THIS CHURCH. IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE OF TWENTY-FIVE HAPPY YEARS THIS TABLET IS PLACED HERE BY HIS WIFE SUSAN HODGSON. REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

Hodgson published around 200 articles in journals and newspapers. His most important writings were re-issued as *Essays on the Languages, Literature*



John Whelpton, Michael Hutt and David Gellner beside the Hodgson memorial plaque in the church of St Kenelm at Alderley, July 2011. Photograph by Michael Hutt.

and *Religion of Nepal and Tibet* (1874) and *Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects* (2 vols., 1880), which are regularly reprinted in India and Nepal. He donated over 400 Sanskrit manuscripts and several hundred Tibetan wood-printed volumes to European libraries and to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, and in 1864 turned over his collected materials on Nepal to the India Office Library. He presented over 10,000 specimens (mostly birds) to the British Museum and also a folio of almost two thousand zoological drawings by himself and his assistants.

Among many other distinctions and honours, he was made a Corresponding Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain (1828), Fellow of the Linnaean Society (1835), Chevalier of the Legion of Honour (1838), Fellow of the Royal Society (1877) and Honorary D.C.L. of Oxford University (1889).

Surviving photographs and the busts in the Asiatic Societies in Calcutta and London confirm his biographer's reference to his finely-cut features and dignified bearing. He could be over-impressionable and over-sensitive while, to a modern reader, his writings sometimes show signs of pomposity and, less frequently, of a patronising attitude towards the South Asian peoples among whom he spent so much time. These failings were more than offset by a strong sense of personal responsibility, prodigious intellectual energy and enthusiasm, and an obvious ability to inspire affection and often fierce loyalty among many of those around him.

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# Report on 'Changing Dynamics of Nepali Society and Politics'

Khem Shreesh

In an attempt to understand the tremendous changes Nepal has undergone in the twenty years since the first restoration of democracy in 1990, an international conference entitled 'Changing Dynamics of Nepali Society and Politics' was held in Kathmandu on 17-19 August, 2011. The conference was hosted jointly by the Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD), the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies (ANHS) and Social Science Baha (SSB) with the support of the Open Society Foundations and the Swiss Confederation.

There was a preponderance of young and emerging scholars among the paper presenters, although established scholars were also well represented. A total of 31 papers were presented in twelve parallel sessions during the conference, namely: 1) State-building in a 'new' Nepal; 2) Politics of social change; 3) Devolution and local governance: bureaucracy, leaders and popular participation; 4) Identity politics: region, caste and religion; 5) Identity movements and strategies; 6) Civil society, participation and resistance; 7) Nation and culture; 8) Identity politics, conflict and 'new' Nepal; 9) Politics over time and space; 10) State and foreign policy; 11) Market and social change; and 12) Socio-economic changes, compulsions and lives in rural and urban areas. Each session was chaired by a senior scholar and each paper was commented upon by a discussant from a related disciplinary and research background.

Selected individuals from academia, government and research organisations as well as policy makers and young scholars also took part in the deliberations. A couple of Nepal scholars from India were also invited to participate in the conference as a means of continuing our engagement with Nepal's most important neighbour.

In general, the papers focused on the dynamic nature of change in society as an outcome of internal and external interactions, and also on resistance and adaptation to those changes. The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2011, delivered by James F. Fisher, formerly Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at Carleton College, Minnesota, set the tone for the conference. Fisher reflected on his four decades of research experience in Nepal and the changes that have occurred in society over this period: the transformation

of rural areas, family structures and politics and society in general, and 'globalisation'. The lecture was based on his original research in Dolpa in the northwest Nepal and his study of Sherpas in the eastern Himalaya, and also from his observation of political figures and their lives in the half century since he began working in Nepal.

Politics was a dominant aspect of the conference, and the papers presented had four broad characteristics. First, while each paper looked at the Nepali state from its own disciplinary standpoint, some papers tried to engage with the Nepali state and society more closely by looking at the rise of ethno-nationalism and its decisive role at the present juncture in Nepal. Such papers looked at the policies and practices of past governments and regimes with an emphasis on representation and recognition, or the lack thereof.

A second recurring theme was federalism and the protracted transition to equitable peace and social justice. The papers and the discussions they provoked focused on various models of federalism and the possible problems posed by them, and on how federalism could invite another round of conflict.

A third approach was to look at the politics of change in terms of mobilisation and the production of identities. Thus, several papers focused on spatiality and regionality, and in particular local politics and their relation to national-level politics. They discussed the rise of identity politics and how the state has attempted to ensure recognition based on ethnicity, caste, region and religion, and focused on how identity movements gained currency in the post-1990 period and momentum during the present period of transition, and have been mediated to some extent by civil society actors and communities who have sought and promoted participation in all spheres of society. They also highlighted the struggles against and resistance to externally imposed constructs and notions.

The fourth feature of many papers was their focus on the social changes brought about by politics, which has undergone change in meaning and substance over time from one dominated by a ruling elite to a broad-based representative democracy. However, minorities still face the obstacles of inadequate representation and a lack of access to services and social justice. Along with socioeconomic change, politics has heralded a promising future for some while for others it represents a continued life of hardship and isolation from family and society.

The conference was also an opportunity to organise plenary public events in the evenings. The first evening was devoted to ‘Sanghiyata ra Yeska Ayam’ (Federalism and Its Dimensions) with two speakers, Mahendra Lawoti and Anil Bhattarai, focusing on two different themes. The second evening saw a discussion based on a presentation on ‘Rajnitik Sankramanma Nepal’ (Nepal’s Prolonged Political Transition: Where Are We Heading?) by Nilamber Acharya, chair of the Constitutional Committee of the Constituent Assembly. The third day saw a panel discussion with scholars working on education deliberating on ‘Shikshyama Chunauti: Ek Bahas’ (Emerging Trends in Education: Challenges and Opportunities).

It is planned to publish papers from the conference in three volumes under the broad themes of ‘state’, ‘identity’ and ‘socio-economic change’.

## INTERVIEW

## Women, Law and Democracy in Nepal: An interview with Sapana Pradhan-Malla

Gérard Toffin and Shova Shakya\*

Sapana Pradhan-Malla was born in November 1963. As a practising lawyer before the Supreme Court, she has been an advocate for the rights of Nepali women in several landmark cases. She is a founding member of the Forum for Women, Law & Development (FWLD) (*Mahila, Kanun तथा Bikas Manch*), Legal Aid Consultancy Centre (LACC), Lalitpur, and of the Public Interest Litigation Forum (Pro Public), non-government organisations. She has published extensively on the legal status of women in Nepal. Since 2008, she has been a member of Nepal's Constituent Assembly. She has been awarded the 2008 Gruber Foundation Women's Rights Prize alongside two other activists from other countries for advancing gender activities.<sup>1</sup>

### **'I can speak Bhojpuri more fluently than Newari.'**

*GÉRARD: Sapana, would you first tell me about your childhood?*

SAPANA: I was born and brought up in Nawalparasi. Although I'm Newar by birth, four or five generations of my family have lived there, so we are more like locals and I've adopted the Terai culture.

*GÉRARD: Was Newari spoken at home?*

SAPANA: My grandparents used to speak it fluently. All their daughters-in-law come from Kathmandu and they send their daughters to Kathmandu. As a consequence my mother speaks Newari fluently but not my father. I can speak Bhojpuri more fluently than Newari. When I reached class five, I decided to come to Kathmandu because all the members of my family used to study there. I was the youngest and my parents wanted me to stay with

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\* Gérard Toffin is Director of Research at CNRS (Paris). He has been conducting research in Nepal since 1970 and he is currently working on women's legal issues in the Kathmandu Valley. Shova Shakya is a Harka Gurung Research Fellow (SIRF, Lalitpur). At present she is focusing her research on Newar single women. This paper is part of a larger research project, 'Justice and Governance in India and South Asia', co-ordinated by Daniela Berti, CNRS.

1 This interview was recorded on 18 August 2010 at FWLD, Thapathali, Kathmandu.

them. As a result, I fell behind in my studies. I only started studying the alphabet in class three. The standard of education was poor in Nawalparasi, so there was no option for me but to come to Kathmandu.

### **University and first professional experience**

*GÉRARD: You got your Masters degree from the University of Delhi in India?*

SAPANA: My first degree is from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu where I graduated in law in 1987. At that time no Master's degree existed in Nepal. India was the nearest and most affordable, so I decided to pursue my studies there. I did my Masters in law at Delhi University in 1990. That's where I could really focus on my studies and learn how to survive in a competitive environment. After that, I went to Italy to learn skills such as arguing a case and the art of writing. An education in law is not enough until you learn the appropriate skills.

*GÉRARD: Did you stay there a long time?*

SAPANA: I went there twice. Once for a development lawyers' course where you learn to draft contracts to launch joint ventures and how to advise clients. That was for three months. The second time it was for an investment and enterprise lawyers' course.

I specialised in corporate management in India. On returning to Nepal after completing my university education, I started my law practice and focused on company law. I was a corporate lawyer and I took on a lot of work in foreign investments, joint ventures. Later on, I also focused on industrial relations. That was right after the first democracy movement (1990) and there was a lot of agitation and industrial unrest in the country. So I started practising labour law as well. I was doing rather well in that field until I suddenly realised that I wanted to help the women who came to me asking for help. At that time I wasn't able to. It wasn't only socio-cultural prejudices that existed in society; even the law was influenced by socio-cultural values. So I gradually started examining their cases. However, I wasn't able to help them because the law itself was a barrier to justice for women. Then I decided to work on improving the law and reforming discriminatory law. That's how I started my journey towards gender equality.

*GÉRARD: I'm impressed by the interviews I've been able to hold with young lawyers*

*of your generation here in Nepal. Many lawyers are women. Am I wrong or are there a large number of women lawyers in the country?*

SAPANA: It is encouraging to see the numbers but in actual fact there are not that many. If you look at the statistics, how many women are lawyers and license holders in Nepal? Five or six percent. Of those how many come to the profession? And how many of those continue to practise when they're married? Even if they do remain in practice, how many are able to compete in the profession? Now that's a multi-tiered question you've just raised. The legal profession is not easy. It's a demanding profession requiring a lot of time and reading. You find yourself forever having to study. In our culture there is no sharing of responsibilities, so women are still expected to do everything at home. Because of that women are not able to find a balance in their professional lives, compete with male lawyers and find a balance in their own personal lives.

### **'Equality is the key to democracy'**

*GÉRARD: What other factors led you to fight for women? Of course there was the political change after 1990. Democracy must have played a major role.*

SAPANA: I've always said that democracy is very important in order to respect, protect and promote rights. Because of the democratic environment, we were able to express our frustrations and demands. Although at the time it was a new democratic environment and changes were slow coming. I would say that our voice was respected, not least because of the freedom of expression. In terms of changing the law, the 1990 constitution provided new provisions for public interest litigation (PIL). Now if a group's rights are violated, anyone can go and file a case. This provided a large avenue for us to challenge the law and to make the State accountable for outlawing any discrimination and for ensuring equality.

*GÉRARD: Over the last two decades you have been involved in many confrontations. You were involved in the Kumari controversy, at least as it was traditionally practised under the king's rule. You have also been involved in gay and lesbian's rights, abortion and so on. Now that you are a Member of Parliament, what would you say is the common link behind all these struggles?*

SAPANA: It goes back to my childhood. I always wanted to challenge issues such as discrimination, exclusion, restrictions and how minorities are treated. Whether it is women or children's issues, gay and lesbian rights,

all these people are a minority. As for women in particular, they are a majority, yet they are marginalised. All these groups find themselves in an unbalanced power relationship; they don't have any access or control over resources and they are deprived of equal opportunities. Consequently, they are excluded from the decision-making process. So, the common thread is to establish some form of equality. Equality is the key to democracy, the key to the rule of law.

*GÉRARD: Nevertheless, you live in a country where hierarchy is the basis of all social links, not only in the villages but also in the urban environment.*

SAPANA: Yes, there use to be a class and caste hierarchy and the country was under the heavy influence of religion. However, we have been able to challenge that. Religion is definitely a sensitive issue. Immediately after the second revolution (2006), the attack was aimed at religion. I am a Hindu, born and brought up as a Hindu...

**'Religion is just an individual belief.'**

*GÉRARD: You are wearing a necklace bearing a figure of Ganesh.*

SAPANA: Yes, I'm wearing Ganesh. It's just for fashion, and my mother gave it to me. I like my culture. I believe religion is merely an individual belief. Unless you can challenge those things you cannot change the structure that has been created through history. Without challenging caste hierarchy how can you introduce equality? Without challenging patriarchal hierarchy how can you introduce equality for women? Without challenging traditional notions how can you talk about gay and lesbian rights? You simply cannot. Without challenging religion and culture, how can you talk about legalising abortion or criminalising marital rape or ensuring equal inheritance rights?

We adopted quite a strategic approach in the process. Instead of openly declaring war on religion, we challenged those cultures, those values which discriminate [against] certain groups, whether it be women, Dalits or Janajatis. We started with discrimination and violence; that was our point of entry. As far as gay and lesbian rights are concerned, I was committed to them because these minorities used to be tortured by the police. How can the police who are supposed to protect and create a secure environment abuse them? We fought against abuse, discrimination, violence, and that really helped us to become politically stronger in striving for equality.



### Legal changes

*GÉRARD: Women's legislative and judicial status has changed tremendously from legal and legislative points of view over the last two decades. A number of provisions in favour of women regarding equality between the sexes have been adopted, not to mention the abortion rights obtained in 2002 and the equal rights for daughters and brothers regarding parents' property. As for marriage between people of the same sex, just this morning I was reading an article in a Nepali newspaper about a priest who married two homosexuals in Pachali temple in Teku and who said: 'I don't know if it's a good thing or not but I did it and we have to adapt to change.'*

SAPANA: Yes, I received an email about that.

*GÉRARD: Even if some issues have not yet totally been recognised by the Supreme Court, as you said, the mindset has changed tremendously. From a legal point of view, in some sectors Nepal is even more progressive than India. Can you comment on these marriages between people of the same sexes, on Nepal being more progressive than in India and on the incredible series of reforms within just two decades of legislation? You're probably going to say that there is still a lot to do, but we have indeed already witnessed major waves of reform.*

SAPANA: Again I think it's because we are still focusing on transforming democratic values within the state structure. The opportunity has been created because of the momentum. In matters of development, Indians are still ahead. Yet, in terms of reforming law and expanding rights, we may have gone further. I think it's all down to the political context. Here, the insurgency, which challenged inequality and unbalanced development, played a great role in the overall process.

Lots of changes have indeed taken place but that's not due to the political parties. Major advances in women's rights have come about thanks to us, women lawyers, who started challenging the law through research, advocacy and public interest litigations. There's been a huge contribution from NGOs, such as Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), Legal Aid Consultancy Service (LACC) and Pro-Public. These are the three main organisations that have taken a leading role in challenging the law. As a result, property rights have been reformed, abortion legalised, and a new human trafficking law enacted. We now have a new domestic violence act, and an anti-sexual harassment bill is being examined by Parliament. Even in the forthcoming Interim Constitution, many women's rights are now protected.

### Gay and lesbian rights

SAPANA: In terms of gay and lesbian rights, a publicly self-declared gay is now a Member of Parliament, which itself is a symbol of change in the country. It's not only because the Supreme Court says that the gay identity has to be respected. Their existence has to be recognised by the State and as a result, the upcoming constitution states that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or of different genders. We have had this adopted in the upcoming constitution on which we are working, but at least the manner in which it has been drafted has already been acknowledged.

Those are the major changes that have taken place so far. Same-sex marriage has not in fact been recognised. In the same decision the Supreme Court stated that they've asked the government to look into the possibility of same sex marriage because marriage laws, as they stand at present, specify that marriage must be between a man and a woman. So, regarding the social event between people of the same sexes that took place and was publicised on different TV channels, the government did not interfere because it's a private matter. However, there is a marriage chapter in Muluki Ain that says that, if any rights are violated you can file a case; such as in cases of child marriage or forced marriage.

A problem arises if they wish to register a same-sex marriage in court. Declaring themselves spouses is not a contentious issue. However, legal recognition of their marriage in the eyes of the law is problematical if they wish to be recognised as a married couple. For this reason, when the domestic violence law was enacted, Sunil Babu Pant<sup>2</sup>, Binda Pandey, Arju Deuba sought to recognise family relations, the relations between any persons living together. We tried to address their concerns but we failed. The alternate language I proposed to the committee was to include the word 'dependent family', so that it would recognise any person living together within a family relationship, including the helpers at home. However, a majority of parliamentarians refused to recognise this. We failed to understand their position. If there's violence inside the home, it has to be recognised by the State, and the victims have to be guaranteed the necessary protection and justice. Unfortunately, a majority of Members of Parliament were against it.

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2 Sunil Babu Pant is the founder and director of the Blue Diamond Society (an organisation fighting for the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and the transgendered (LGBT). He is presently a member of the Constituent Assembly.

### **Religious and civil marriage**

*GÉRARD: Let us compare France and Nepal. In France we have two types of marriage: the optional religious marriage and the compulsory legal marriage which is celebrated before the mayor at the town hall...*

SAPANA: Here too we have both types. A religious marriage can be registered but only if it is between a man and a woman. Through a religious ceremony, one can be recognised as a couple but if problems arise during the marriage, no particular help is provided.

We therefore encourage people to register under the Personal Incident Act<sup>3</sup> for documentation and statistical purposes. However, one can choose to get married in court, which is the lawful way of marrying.<sup>4</sup> Upon registering the marriage, information is recorded that might come in useful in cases of marital problems. When a relationship is not recognised by law, then you cannot claim any rights.

### **'Having a law is not enough, but having a law is important'**

*GÉRARD: Despite all the progress and changes, the situation of women still seems very far from this ideal, progressive picture. In many places, it rather fits the description given by Lynn Bennett in the case studies she undertook in the early seventies. There are large discrepancies between the urban settlements in the Kathmandu Valley, some district headquarters and rural Nepal. How are the reforms implemented in rural areas?*

SAPANA: Although there have been some improvements, that is not enough. There are many laws and policies that need to be improved upon. Having laws is not enough, yet having laws is important because without laws you cannot make the State and State institutions accountable. Once you have laws, the next step is: how to apply them, whose responsibility is it to promote laws, to create institutions, generate resources and change the mindset? Law and society go hand in hand. Consequently, investments have to be made by the government, donor agencies as well as by civil society.

The challenge right now is to implement the laws we have and we are focusing our efforts on this. We are talking about the de facto, practical

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3 In Nepali this act is called *Byaktigata Ghatana Darta Ain*. In that process, the marriage is recorded at the Municipality Office (*Nagarpalika*), section: *Panjikadhikari Shakha*.

4 Court or legal marriage is called *darta bibaha* in Nepali. In that case the marriage is registered at the CDO (Chief District Office). It merely involves registering both parties, with no civil ceremony.

realisation of rights, for which we all need to work together. In the past, there was the denial of rights through law. Now that laws have been adopted, how do we transpose them into real life? At least, people now have access to justice. But how do we make the legal system function properly? How do we make pro-poor services available, how do we obtain legal aid, how do we set up a programme of legal literacy or economic empowerment?

Having some knowledge of law is not enough. Women need to be educated. As I always say, law is inclusion. Though law can create an external policy framework, empowerment is necessary. We have to develop the inner capacity of women so that they can claim their rights. Inclusion and empowerment go together. On the subject of empowerment, my first priority has always been economic empowerment. Unless you have achieved that, even if you do have rights, you cannot exercise your choice. For example, there are many cases of bigamy and domestic violence, but women have no choice but to live with the family. Either the State has to make alternate arrangements or women have to be economically independent so that they can exercise their choice.

### **Fight for laws, fight with guns**

*GÉRARD: Would you say that building democracy in a country like Nepal is more about fighting for laws than fighting with guns against the State? What will be the role of the judiciary and law in this democratisation process?*

SAPANA: Building a democracy in a country is achieved through the rule of law. When we say rule of law, we definitely do not want to use guns and that is why we have initiated this peace making process. Guns can never bring peace and development to a country. With guns there would be anarchy, which would last forever.

### **The Kumari issue**

*GÉRARD: Now, I'd like to talk about the Living Goddess Kumari. There are burning debates on this topic, mostly in the Kathmandu Valley, between supporters and opponents of the Kumari religious institution. The Kumari goddess was linked to royalty and kingship. Obviously in the present situation this link has had to be severed. What is your position regarding this cult?*

SAPANA: The major criticism we face about advocating the Kumaris' rights is: why talk about the rights of a few girls? Nevertheless, let me just make a few remarks. Firstly, even if a single individual woman's rights are

violated, that case is a concern for human rights activists and the State. The actual number of persons is not the point here. Secondly, we do respect Newar culture and the prestige issue is also involved here. There are many Shakyas who feel that it's their culture and they should be allowed to practise it. We do indeed respect their culture. I respect ancient traditions; it's a personal choice. Yet on the other hand, you also have to consider science, development and technology.

Today, we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Can we still believe that a living goddess can confer political power on the rulers? Is it a credible institution or not? Even if you believe it, and it is a source of pride to the family, what about the child? What about her right to freedom, right to be with her family, right to entertainment? Those rights are recognised by the Child's Rights Convention.

Up until the age of 10 or 11, she is a goddess, and from then onwards she becomes an ordinary human being. How will she cope with this sudden change from bestowing blessings on her devotees to becoming an ordinary human being? What kind of psychological trauma will she suffer? Indeed, the concern we have been raising over the years is that even if you want to practise this cult as a cultural tradition, the child best's interests should be considered. And that should come first. Does the Kumari have equal opportunities as far as education is concerned, equal opportunities to develop as a normal child in an environment that she needs to evolve in? Other things trouble me. I don't believe, for example, what the Kumari's priests say about menstruation; that she is polluted after reaching this stage in her development, and that she is therefore no longer a goddess. If I am a goddess, I should be a goddess forever. Menstruation is a mere reproductive function.

*SHOVA: It is also said that there should be no wound on the Kumari's body, and that no blood should flow from the goddess's body.*

SAPANA: Traditionally, an ex-Kumari wasn't even supposed to get married. But that was challenged and changed. Now many of them do get married. It was also said that as long as you are a virgin, you are a goddess. Why is there a demarcation line that puts a price on virginity? We also have to challenge the right to sexuality and to equal sexual relations. Because of all these issues, my position has been that this religious institution needs to respect children's and women's rights.

*GÉRARD: It's rather a particularly interesting case. One of the main issues here deals with the separation between religion and civil society, a process that happened in France and Western countries in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is a very challenging question from a sociological and comparative point of view.*

### **Feminisation of professions**

*GÉRARD: There has been a growing feminisation of professions in urban areas, in the police force, airline companies and law. What is the main impact of this transformation on family life and society at large?*

SAPANA: I would say that it will bring positive changes to the country, to society, to the family....

*GÉRARD: Even if it's more difficult to cope with family life as very often women have to juggle between their job outside and work inside the home...*

SAPANA: When you work at home, the work you do is not recognised. When you work outside, your contribution is recognised economically; your independent existence as a citizen and your identity is recognised. We are also challenging the notion that a woman has to stay at home inside the house and take care of the children, because that responsibility can in fact be shared. So it's also a call for social change, for sharing responsibilities inside the house and taking care of the children. It's what we want to target; the line we have proposed in the constitution is that sharing responsibility and taking care of the children, as well as recognising women's contribution to the household, should be recognised as contributing to the national income. Moreover, the benefit of women working in the police or in the legal profession also challenges the notion that women should only work in service sectors, in traditionally 'feminine' jobs such as airhostess, nurse, teacher, etc.

Consequently, women now make up 33 percent of the CA in Parliament. We are now working in technical fields, in the political realm and in power structures. Although there are not enough of us, our part in the nation-building process is on the rise. If women do not contribute to nation-building, how do you expect the country to change? So what matters is not only having adequate laws, but also citizens who are engaged in the process of change.

### **Citizenship and women**

*SHOVA: How is the issue of taking nagarikata pramanapatra (citizenship certificate) in your mother's name progressing?*

SAPANA: This is a major issue that we will be working on in the upcoming Constituent Assembly. At the moment, a woman is recognised as a legal descendant. Based on blood relationships, she can confer citizenship on her child, but if she's married to a foreigner, she cannot. The child has to be born in Nepal and has to permanently reside in this country. These two conditions have to be fulfilled. Even when this is the case, a child is only entitled to become a citizenship through naturalisation.

The difference between citizenship by descent and naturalisation is that the former is a right whereas in the second case you have to apply for naturalisation and it's up to the State whether to grant it or not. Furthermore, you are not entitled to any public positions if you have obtained naturalisation. You can never become president or prime minister. So, on the one hand, a woman is recognised for her lineal descent in conferring citizenship but in the event where she's married to a foreigner, that right is withheld. This restriction is completely discriminatory.

### **Single women**

*SHOVA: There are problems where women are abandoned by their husbands or husbands' families. When a mother has to apply for her child's nationality, she faces difficulties in public administrations.*

SAPANA: Yes, even though the law has changed, there are cases of harassment by public employees.

*SHOVA: On the top of that they ask for extra money. Just last year, a lady paid about 20 thousand rupees to a public employee to obtain a temporary citizenship certificate and passport for her son.*

SAPANA: She should not have accepted. Since you yourself are working on single women's issues, I would like to inform you that two decisions have recently been taken by the Supreme Court. Even though a woman can confer citizenship on her child, any public employee will refer you to your husband's district. However, according to the Supreme Court's decision, you can now go to your mother's place of residence where she acquired her citizenship. It doesn't have to be your father's house. Even if a woman is married, she has a choice of whether to take citizenship in her father's name or in her husband's

name. This is a new decision on the part of the court. Before, if you were married, you were only allowed to take citizenship in your husband's name.

*SHOVA: If she's still single and has a child, then it's a problem for her when applying for her child's nationality.*

SAPANA: She can apply for citizenship through her father's name or after submitting her husband's death certificate and a copy of her husband's nationality.

*GÉRARD: Is this a major problem? Have you come across such cases that have a wider national bearing?*

SAPANA: Single women are really well organised. Single women's associations (Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group, WHR) are very active. Because of their collective voice, their issue is perfectly visible. But there are deeper problems at home and in society. Socio-cultural problems, the kind of stigmatisation they undergo, and the restrictions applied to these women are intolerable. However, in terms of legal problems, all the barriers have been brought down. All old laws which discriminated [against] single women have been amended. Now, a woman has equal rights to property, and even if she remarries, she doesn't have to return the property. These changes have indeed been made. Now what needs to be done is to empower single women, to involve them in income-generating activities and to educate them. The government has allocated an 'earmarked budget' for them. This year the budget provides single women with allowances but only when they reach the age of 60.

*GÉRARD: Is this allowance given irrespective of land ownership?*

SAPANA: It should only be given to socio-economically backward groups and immediately after a woman becomes a widow, not after the age of 60. This is what we are trying to push through parliament. There is a possibility that the forthcoming budget may address this issue.

### **'Politics can change'**

*GÉRARD: You became a member of the Constituent Assembly in 2008, as you were already familiar with political affairs. How has this experience been for you? Did it seem perfectly natural for you to enter politics? To act in civil society is one thing, to deal with different political parties is another.*



SAPANA: It has been a new experience for me. I have always been very vocal and active, and had already started demanding my rights at an early age. Once on the inside, the situation was quite different though rather a strategic one for us. Politics can change things. It can prove to be very good at bringing change to a country. Since all the political parties are open to change, I see this as an opportunity. But the way we used to be active outside is not the same as being inside where you reach a consensus between different political parties. We are not now only working on individual rights, we are involved in different rights groups, and negotiating for rights is not an easy task. At least I feel that as insiders, we can influence different political parties as well as my own political party (United Marxist Leninist, UML). Sometimes we can negotiate directly. We can act as a bridge between political parties and civil society.

### **A country in a transitional phase**

*GÉRARD: The main aim of this assembly is to draft a constitution. Is there a link between this work of reflecting on different topics and the drafting of such a constitution?*

SAPANA: The country is in transition. We are in a conflict transformation process. Establishing non-State actors as a mainstream political party and changing the whole political system from a monarchy to a republic is far from easy. After creating an entire movement within the nation and inculcating certain aspirations in the population, attempting to meet these expectations is a formidable endeavour. A series of promises, a range of goals have been set out, but successfully prioritising these goals in order to achieve them represents a real challenge.

We could have separated the Constituent Assembly and parliament, which isn't what we did. That was one of the mistakes we made. The CA could have just focused on drafting laws. Another mistake is that the Constituent Assembly does not function as an elected institution. If you look at the Interim Constitution and its Preamble, you will note that it was adopted and based on a political agreement. And now we want to make a new law, a new constitution through the Constituent Assembly.

The Assembly is focusing more on political negotiations rather than on the people's needs and expectations. More consensuses are being reached within the political parties, which are again another diversion in the Assembly, at least that's the way I see it. We could have separated

the power-sharing and the constitution-making processes. But when you give the political parties all the power to draw up a constitution, the whole process happens to be dominated by politics.

*GÉRARD: It's also a very interesting process. Due to its population's fabric, its own problems, Nepal is inventing and negotiating a new republican model. It will not be on the same lines as the Republic of India since traditions are different.*

### **Uniform code of law, personal law and law for minorities**

*GÉRARD: In addition to judicial differences between Nepal and India comes the question of a uniform code and personal laws. As you know, in India Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis have had their own traditions recognised in matters of family marriage and so on. In Nepal, as far as I know, a uniform code of law prevails. Are you in favour of modifying this uniform code in response to the demands put forward by Janajatis and other minority groups? What is your position on personal laws and a distinct code for minorities?*

SAPANA: We have already agreed to respect pluralism. Pluralism is a precondition for democracy. When you recognise the concept of pluralism, you also recognise the principal of legal pluralism. Nepal is now recognised as a multi-national and secular state. Diversity therefore has to be considered in terms of caste, class, religion, ethnicity and language. In that context, yes, we have to respect legal pluralism. We have to observe the customs and traditions of the different ethnic groups and religions. It is our duty to respect personal beliefs.

Some Muslim groups are asking for their own personal law to be an integral part of the code. As a human rights activist, I cannot say no and not respect their choice. Yet this cannot run counter to the constitutional values that promote non-discrimination and equality. We cannot compromise on the values that have been promoted by the constitution. For this reason, we have proposed a language in the constitutional framework that says: any culture, any tradition, and any religion, if discriminatory, will be recognised as a form of exploitation. We have thus tried to create such mechanisms to deal with possible threats. Another aspect is that yes, we have one unified code but that code was based on Hinduism. We want to depart from this.

*GÉRARD: Nepal is now a secular country.*

SAPANA: We want to have a unified code, respecting human rights norms and values, prohibiting discrimination and respecting equality; a code

which doesn't treat anyone differently because of their religion or culture. If this has a negative outcome, it will not be tolerated.

### **Parity**

*GÉRARD: My last question is about parity. India is on the point of adopting such a measure for its political assembly.*

SAPANA: This hasn't been finalised in India. Their objective is quite different. They introduced this policy for a year, for one term, and only in parliament. There are some reservations at local government level. But here in Nepal, women already hold 33 percent of the seats in parliament. We are still not satisfied with that figure. Why only 33 percent, why not 50 percent? Why only in parliament? We want parity in all state structures.

So, we are targeting 50 percent in our negotiations, not only in parliament but in the overall structure. The language we have proposed in the forthcoming constitution is that if the President is a man, then the Vice-President should be a woman; if the Speaker is a man, then the Vice-Speaker should be a woman. That measure has been accepted, but since then we have submitted an amendment proposing a term of office for each, one term for a man and one term for a woman. We are trying to negotiate this proposal. In ensuring women's political involvement, we have moved much further than India.

*GÉRARD: In France, some feminists contest this reservation system for women, saying that it's not democratic, i.e. it goes against equality. There is also a debate about introducing reservations for other categories of people in several Western countries.*

SAPANA: If you look at different instruments of human rights, including the European Convention, affirmative action doesn't mean forever. It's a compensatory system of justice. Until minorities/marginalised groups reach that level, it's a special, temporary measure. Reservation is not permanent. It doesn't have to be for a quota or a seat, it can be in any other environment, any other socio-economic system. I don't think it should be seen as a challenge to democratic values. It should be seen as a means to ensure democracy because democracy means equality.

*GÉRARD: You rightly pointed out that it is temporary. That is a very good point. Thank you very much for granting us this interview.*

**Acknowledgements**

This interview was transcribed and first edited by Sushma Amatya. We would also like to thank Bernadette Sellers (CNRS) for proofreading the English.



## OBITUARIES

## Richard Keith Sprigg (1922-2011)

Heleen Plaisier

With the death of Richard Keith Sprigg on September 8, 2011, the Himalayan scholarly community has to say farewell to this pioneering intellectual, who was a generous mentor and engaging friend to many of us. Keith Sprigg remains well known for his important contributions to Tibetan, Lepcha, Limbu, Burmese and other languages, as well as for his Firthian approach to phonology, applied to the field of comparative Tibeto-Burman linguistics.

Keith Sprigg was born in Melton Mowbray in the United Kingdom on March 31, 1922 and completed his first academic degree in Cambridge, where he received a First Class Honours in the Classical Tripos in 1942.

He joined the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and between 1943 and 1947 he served in the UK, India, Ceylon, Singapore and Japan. During this eventful period, he managed to pursue his linguistic studies and obtained War Degrees, a B.A. in 1944 and an M.A. in 1947.

In 1948, Keith started working at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London as a Lecturer in Phonetics. He studied Tibetan in Kalimpong and Gyantse, during visits in 1949 and 1950, during which time he was mentored by David Macdonald. This visit not only kindled a long-lasting interest in both Tibetan and Lepcha, but in Kalimpong Keith also met his future wife, Ray Margaret Williams, a great-granddaughter



**Dr. Sprigg presents a paper to the Tenth Annual Conference of the Linguistic Society of Nepal at Kirtipur, November 1989.**

Photo by Michael Hutt

of David Macdonald. Keith and Ray married in 1952 in Melton Mowbray.

During 1951 and 1952, the Lepcha scholar Karpfoo Tamsang from Kalimpong worked with Keith on the Lepcha language at SOAS. In 1955-6, Keith and Ray went on an expedition to Nepal to do fieldwork for six months. The country had not been open to foreign visitors for long when they travelled from eastern Nepal to Kathmandu, which made for an interesting and impressive journey. Keith was able to collect abundant material on the languages he had become interested in, such as Limbu, Newar, Bantawa, Sherpa and Tamang.

Following this long fieldtrip, Ray and Keith had two children: David, born in 1957, and Maya, born in 1958. Keith continued to work at SOAS, and the first fieldtrip would be followed by many others, to Sikkim, Pakistan and India. He completed a Ph.D. in the 'Phonetics and Phonology of Tibetan (Lhasa dialect)', and was promoted to Reader in Phonetics at SOAS in 1968.

After Ray suffered a stroke on New Year's Eve of 1975, she remained partially paralysed and her health was fragile. In 1980, Keith took early retirement and he and Ray settled in Kalimpong. There, Dr Sprigg became something of an institution. He was much liked by the local residents, to whom he would often address an elaborate greeting in their native language, which left some of them dazzled even after many years of him doing so. Many scholarly guests from all over the world came to seek his advice and guidance, or simply to enjoy his and his wife's delightful company. Those who did not know Keith Sprigg personally in Kalimpong recall the sound of his bagpipes, which travelled far in the hills and was familiar to many.

In 1982 he was awarded a Litt.D. by the University of Cambridge, and on his 65th birthday a Festschrift was presented to him (D. Bradley, M. Mazaudon and E.J.A. Henderson, eds, 1988, *Prosodic Analysis and Asian Linguistics to honour R.K. Sprigg*, Pacific Linguistics). A bibliography of his work up to 1987 can be found in this Festschrift. For his work on Lepcha language, culture and history, Keith was awarded the K.P. Tamsang Lepcha Language and Literary Award in 1996. In 1997 he was made a life member of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, which refers to him as 'a champion of the Lepchas'.

When Ray died in 1999, Keith returned to the UK and initially stayed with his children. He later remarried and lived in Crowborough, Sussex, with his second wife, Elizabeth. In his later years, Keith was struck by macular degeneration, but although his eyesight slowly deteriorated, he



kept working and completed a dictionary of Balti, which was published in 2002 (RK Sprigg, *Balti-English English-Balti Dictionary*, London: Routledge Curzon). Elizabeth and Keith enjoyed travelling and visited several conferences together. Keith kept in touch with the academic world and his colleagues and former students until his health started giving away. During the last year of his life, Keith was not in good health and his eyesight was very poor. He was lovingly nursed by his wife at home.

Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing this remarkable man may recall that Keith appreciated saying a cheerful goodbye, along the lines of 'Happy we have met, happy we have been, happily we part and happy we shall meet again.' We remember his intellectual sharpness, his generosity and his unfailing sense of humour. Keith Sprigg will be dearly missed by many.

## Michel Georges Francois Peissel (1937-2011)

Roger Croston

Michel Peissel, who died on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2011 aged 74, perhaps travelled more widely throughout the Himalayan and greater Tibetan regions than any other westerner. Between 1959 and 2003 he undertook 29 major trips to the region. Another passion was for the eastern coast of the Yucatan, Mexico. Although regarding himself as an amateur adventurer rather than an academic, he wrote more than 20 books and was involved in 22 documentary films, mostly on his Himalayan and Tibetan expeditions and including a four part series, 'Zanskar, the Last Place on Earth', for the BBC in 1980. He was fluent in several languages, including Tibetan. He was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and was the youngest member of The Explorers' Club of New York when he joined. Frequently he had to battle with Indian, Chinese and Nepalese bureaucracy in order to cross disputed borders. He was twice banned from India and on occasion declared *persona non grata* by China and Nepal. He was someone who loved solving geographical puzzles and making cultural comparisons. For example, he once found an amulet in Lhasa of a similar design made by Scythians on the Black Sea 2,000 years earlier and wondered what historical links there might be.

The son of a French diplomat, whose negotiating skills he learned to use with great effect, he was brought up in England and France. He learnt English before French, because his father was posted to London when he was young. Peissel studied for a year at the University of Oxford and for a year at the Harvard Business School, dropping out from both. Subsequently, however, he obtained a doctorate in Tibetan Ethnology from the Sorbonne, Paris.

At the age of 18, he became fascinated by Tibet after having read Fosco Maraini's book *Secret Tibet* and he started to learn Tibetan from Sir Charles Bell's *Grammar of Colloquial Tibetan*. However, Tibet was sealed off to foreigners following China's annexation of the country in 1950, so he looked at a possible career in economics and attended the Harvard Business School. After a year, in 1958, he decided to take a spring break to Mexico with a companion, and exploration replaced economics in his life. In

Yucatan, Peissel continued on alone and in 42 days he walked 200 miles to Belize, coming across fourteen unknown Mayan archaeological sites en route. He wrote his first book, *The Lost World of Quintana-Roo* (1963), about this journey,

In 1959, his interest turned again to the Himalaya when he hoped to get permission to enter Bhutan. However, authorisation was denied him until 1969. Therefore he decided to go to Nepal and study the Sherpas in Solu Khumbu. In Nepal he penned his second book, *Tiger for Breakfast* (1966).

Peissel and his translator Soko Karmay spent several months in the remote and minute kingdom of Mustang during the summer of 1964. He was the first westerner to reside there for long enough to study and record its culture and history. With this material, he completed a doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne and wrote a cover story for the National Geographic Magazine in 1965. His third book, *Mustang, a Lost Tibetan Kingdom* (1967), won several major awards and became an international best seller. It secured him a reputation and the finance to support further adventures. He visited Nepal and Mustang again in 1966 and 1967.

In 1969, he was finally able to cross Bhutan from west to east and was one of the few westerners, other than diplomats and doctors, to travel through the kingdom. About this journey he wrote *Lords and Lamas, a Solitary Expedition across the Secret Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan* (1970).

In 1972, as a spin off from his sojourn in Mustang, Peissel published *Cavaliers of Kham: the secret war in Tibet*, which got him into serious trouble with the Americans, the Nepalis and the Chinese, who banned him from visiting China for years. Other than George Patterson of the *Daily Telegraph* [London], who filmed the conflict with Adrian Cowell in the mid 1960s, he was the first to describe in detail the bitter guerrilla war that had been fought for 20 years by the Khampas. During the 1950s and 60s, the Khampa rebels were supported by Nationalist China (from Taiwan), the American CIA, India, and even the USSR. They would attack the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army posts and military convoys on foot or horseback, using only rifles. Soon afterwards, Mustang was closed to foreigners for the next 25 years because of political sensitivities and in 1974 the Khampas were eliminated by Nepalese forces due to Chinese political pressure. In 1991, Peissel made a return visit to Mustang to investigate ancient cave sites.

In 1972, he made an expedition of 1,200 miles along with Michael Alexander and Bob Cordukes in a one-man hovercraft, up sections of the

unnavigable Kali Gandaki River in Nepal that included a gorge section flowing between the 26,000-foot peaks of Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. This journey is described in his *The Great Himalayan Passage: across the Himalayas by hovercraft* (1974). They claimed to have pioneered the sport of shooting up rapids.

In the mid to late 1970s he turned his attention to the other minor kingdoms of the Tibetan cultural zone, which he visited as soon as foreigners were permitted to enter, namely those of Ladakh and Zanskar, about which he published *Zanskar. The Hidden Kingdom* (1979).

In 1980, he travelled to the source of the Ganges and the next year studied the Minaro people of the upper Indus, recording an extensive vocabulary of archaic Shina. He was intrigued to encounter long nosed, fair skinned European looking people, who some think may be descended from the troops of Alexander the Great, or who some regard as Aryans or refer to as 'Dards', the name used by Herodotus for the inhabitants of 'the region of gold digging ants'. The latter, he concluded, were burrowing marmots, which threw up goldbearing sand. Further research took him, in 1982, across the Indo-Pakistan cease-fire line in disguise, having dyed his hair and skin with walnut juice. Consequently, he published *The Ants' Gold* (1984) and continued this research in 1996 to theorise that the Dansar plateau in Baltistan was the true location of Herodotus's account.

In 1982 he made a winter journey around Mount Minya Konka in Kham and in 1986 penetrated humid, tropical southeast Tibet around Pemako and the pilgrimage region of Tsari along the great bend of the Brahmaputra river, which until then had been visited by very few western visitors.

His next interests led him to, in 1992, 1993 and 1994, to tiny isolated Tibetan valleys to study ancient breeds of pony sized horses, namely the thoroughbred Nangchen Horse and the Riwoche Horse which resembled the primitive horses depicted in ancient cave paintings. He studied horse care and equine pharmacology in Tibet and undertook further research along with Dr Ignasi Casas in 1995.

Another journey during 1994, along with Sebastian Guinness and Dr. Jacques Falck, took him along an unfrequented, difficult route to the historical source of the Mekong River by following the branch of the Black Mekong. About this journey he wrote *The Last Barbarians: The discovery of the source of the Mekong in Tibet* (1997). (However, satellite photography later proved the White Mekong branch to be 2.6 miles longer.) In 1997, Peissel

went to Guge in western Tibet in search of cave sites and salt routes and a year later was on the Western Changthang plateau filming Tibetan bears, blue sheep and wild yak. He again crossed the plateau in 1999 to film more wildlife and to study the Sengo nomads. A further journey was made in 2000 to Amdo, as well as to the spectacular 160 foot tall, dry-stone tapering Towers of Pasang Kongpo, some of which have survived 700 years in an active earthquake zone. Peissel's final journeys were to Pe Yul in 2002 and other areas of eastern Tibet in search of animalistic art objects and Scythian traditions and, in 2003, to lower Mustang and Patan to study bronze casting.

Meanwhile, Peissel continued his interest in boats. In 1987, along with Mexican archaeologists, he built a sea going ancient Mayan style dugout canoe and travelled 500 miles along the Mexican Yucatan coast to replicate 10th century Mayan trade. The following year he fabricated a replica Viking longboat and with a crew of six navigated up the River Dvina and down the River Dnieper from the Baltic to the Black Sea, a 53 day, 1,500 mile journey recreating that of the Varangians, a group of whom, the Rus - 'the men who row' - founded the state of Rus and the Russian monarchy.

In 2003, in one of his last books *Tibet, the Secret Continent*, Peissel distilled his knowledge of his many Asian adventures. In it he describes high altitude flora and fauna; the history of Tibetans from the stone-age to the golden age of Tibetan Buddhism and the rise of the Dalai Lamas; he relates the spiritual aspects of everyday life and chronicles the exploration of Tibet from the early Portuguese missionaries to the 1904 military invasion of the British and the 1950 military annexation by China; he describes the destruction of the Cultural Revolution and the more recent reconstruction of monasteries and the relative relaxation on religious and cultural practices; he expresses his concern about the ethnic swamping of the Tibetans by Han Chinese and what he saw as the second class status of Tibetans in their own land. He concluded that Tibet is much the same as the proverbial elephant described by blind people: everyone grasps a different aspect, but no one gets the whole picture. During his 40 years of traversing over 12,000 miles on foot and horseback with various companions in the Tibetan cultural region and the Himalayas he conversed with hundreds of locals whom he found, as have so many, to be particularly endearing. Peissel was perhaps the only traveller in the region ever to have seen, touched and understood the whole animal.

Michel Peissel was married three times: first to Marie-Clare de

Montaignac, with whom he had two sons; second to Mildred Missy Allen with whom he had a son and a daughter; and finally to Roselyn LeBris with whom he had another son.

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## BOOK REVIEWS



## Territory, Soil and Society in South Asia

edited by Daniele Berti and Gilles Tarabout

Delhi: Manohar, 2009, 379 pages, ISBN 9788173047824

Reviewed by David N. Gellner

The long shadow of Louis Dumont's masterwork *Homo Hierarchicus* hangs over the anthropology of South Asia still.<sup>1</sup> Some would have us believe that its influence was always pernicious and that Dumont achieved nothing, except to distort the vision of subsequent generations. This is surely too extreme. But there are certainly many points on which it is necessary to engage with his conclusions and to ask why he argued as he did.

One of the issues where Dumont's *obiter dicta* have been seriously misleading is in his insistence that the Indian (or South Asian) village has 'no sociological reality' as he and Pocock put it in their foundational manifesto, 'For a sociology of India', in the first 1957 issue of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. Dumont and Pocock were arguing against the romantic view of India as made up of hundreds of village republics. What they were arguing for was a view of Indian society in which caste and kinship were the primary determinants of identity and belonging, and territory and economic position, while not irrelevant, were supposedly subordinate to them.

The book under review is an attempt to challenge this idea with nine empirical chapters arranged chronologically from the earliest Vedic times to the present, focusing on notions of territory, soil, and social belonging (though 'belonging' as such does not appear as a theoretical term). As with most edited collections, some of the chapters engage more with the main theme (as least as defined by the editors) than others.

The first two chapters, by Sanskritists Michel Angot and Gérard Colas, deal respectively with ideas about space, ritual, and sacrifice in the Vedas and with ideas about gods and their ownership of territory in texts and inscriptions. Angot's paper is long, detailed, and suggestive, but remains bounded by the world of the texts, a world that presupposes a nomadism

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1 Full title: *Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications* (first published in French 1966, standard English translation 1980, University of Chicago Press).

that the bearers of the texts had already given up. Colas' chapter discusses Mimamsaka theorists such as Sabara who sought to defend iconophobic Vedism but clearly already knew of divine images that were supposed to own territory. Colas argues that is likely that 'A traditional Indian scholar could at the same time claim "erudite", or even iconophobic positions, and worship a divine image according to his personal education and family culture' (p.115). Colas' paper, grounded in a comparison of texts and inscriptions, comes up with a negative, though if correct significant, finding: the philosophical texts of ancient South Asia did not feel the need to philosophise about the relationship of a deity with its territory, leaving that to legal texts and to daily practice.

The next section of the book, on land, soil, and the sense of belonging, opens with Phyllis Granoff's chapter on geographical boundaries in medieval religious practice, ranging over Jain, Buddhist, and Vallabhite sources. Her conclusion is that what appear in the texts as sectarian debates about the right way to perform rituals are in fact geographical disputes between different peoples. In the following chapter we move to the ethnographic present: Caterina Guenzi and Sunita Singh examine the ways in which astrologers in Banaras diagnose soil. The poor bring a sample of the soil to the astrologer; the rich often pay for an astrologer they trust to travel long distances to examine a prospective house plot and perform rituals on the spot. Astrologers believe that they can sense the qualities of the place. One told them, 'If you are a pure, wise and honest person, omens come out by themselves' (p.195).

The fifth chapter is a long and detailed paper by Caroline and Filippo Osella, entitled 'Vital exchanges: land and persons in Kerala'. They begin from E. Valentine Daniels' rightly celebrated account of personhood and the land in the second chapter of *Fluid Signs: Being a person the Tamil way* (University of California Press, 1984). They go on to show how Keralans' ideas about persons, territory, and dwelling are deeply implicated in each other, with consequences for the way houses are built and people are cremated and the ash and other remains buried (unlike in other parts of South Asia, they are not washed away in rivers). They end with a plea for avoiding any 'all encompassing root metaphor' or model 'which entails predictability, coherence, consistency and so on'—in other words (unlike Sarah Caldwell's *Oh Terrifying Mother* (OUP 1999) or Dumont, whom they don't explicitly mention) they prefer an explicit methodology of 'bricolage

[which] may in the long run turn out to be far more generative and suggestive of connections' (p.234).

The third and final part of the book, 'Religious and Political Territories', has four chapters, by Gérard Toffin on the Newar villages of the Kathmandu Valley, by Gilles Tarabout on temple disputes in Kerala, by Daniela Berti on divinities and mediums in Himachal Pradesh, and by Christiane Brosius on BJP propaganda videos. Toffin establishes definitively that territory is a fundamental principle at all levels of Newar social organisation. Dumont himself used such materials (then only available from a superficial but none the less perceptive paper by Fürer-Haimendorf) to argue that Nepal was quite different from India. What Toffin does not establish is that territory in any sense *trumps* kinship. Territory works hand in glove with kinship at every level. Only in very rare and exceptional cases do non-kin ever get absorbed into the territorial unit. For all practical purposes such fluidity in kin groups (so common in Southeast Asia, for example) does not occur. The key question is whether there is any truth in Dumont's view that Nepal is quite separate from India, or whether rather, as argued by Sylvain Lévi (*Le Népal*, 1905, Leroux) and Robert Levy (*Mesocosm: Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city in Nepal*, University of California Press, 1990)—neither of whom is mentioned here—the culture of Newar towns and villages is *typical* of India, though at an earlier period of history.

Tarabout returns the discussion to Kerala and introduces some valuable nuances into the discussion of territory in pre-modern India. In fact, far from Indians having no sense of territory, as the stereotype would have it, territorial jurisdictions are everywhere: 'If anything, far from having no territory, we have too many of them!' (p.284). The point then is that Indians did indeed have the notion of clear boundaries between territories—they were not all fuzzy as often claimed—but they *were* often overlapping and extremely complex. Such shared sovereignties could not be accommodated into the state-making of the colonial regime. This is illustrated through the case of the Annamanada temple, control of which was disputed between the kings of Cochin and Travancore for over a hundred years, until finally settled in 1909. In her chapter, Daniela Berti shows how local divinities with precisely defined territorial jurisdictions still play a key role in local life, speaking through their mediums, and providing legitimation to local politicians. Christiane Brosius, in the final contribution, looks at the ways in which the Hindu Right in India imagined and projected new ideas about

the Indian nation and its territory through the new video media in the early 1990s. This material is now also available in her 2005 book, *Empowering Visions: The politics of representation in Hindu nationalism* (Anthem).

It is a pity that *Territory, Soil and Society in South Asia* had to wait six years from its original publication in Italian in 2003 to appear in English and that, having done so, it could not have been provided with an index. It is a pity too that Levy's *Mesocosm* (cited above) was not drawn into the conversation. None the less, the collection is valuable for its attempt to support Dumont's contention that 'India [more properly: South Asia] is one' even while rightly disputing his downgrading of the territorial principle. Most South Asianists and Himalayanists should find plenty of good material to think about in this volume.

# **Karakoram in Transition: Culture, development and ecology in the Hunza valley**

edited by Hermann Kreutzmann

Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006, 419 pages, ISBN 9780195472103

Reviewed by Davide Torri

This volume collects the research efforts and insights of several scholars on a very peculiar area of the Karakoram, the Hunza Valley. As stated by the editor in his preface, the Hunza Valley has been the focus of scholarly attention for many years now. The book is thus an attempt to bring together a wide range of contributions from different disciplines, schools of thought and backgrounds in order to 'present the state of knowledge as well as to provide an insight into the complexities of the cultural, ecological, and economic assets of the Hunza Valley' (p.4).

Divided into three parts, the volume addresses a range of issues, including the geology, history and anthropology of the area. Section One is devoted to the environment and its resources: a natural history of the region is depicted, starting with reports of geological features of the Hunza Valley since the Quaternary Glaciation, geomorphology and case studies on 'transglacial landforms', followed by detailed essays on forests, flora and fauna.

Section Two deals with history and memory: several chapters highlight the complex history of the area, a cultural cross-roads of strategic significance since ancient times, as testified by a report on rock inscriptions in several languages. The relationship between history and memories is also explained in the intertwined play of written and oral testimonies, and oral sources are called in to reconstruct the account of the battle of Nilt (1891) and the story of Zawaar Mayun Ali of the clan of Yabon (p.225). A couple of chapters are devoted to an analysis of the linguistic mosaic comprising several languages (Burushaski, Shina, Wakhi, Domaaki, etc.).

The last chapter of this section functions as an ideal bridge between Sections Two and Three, with its focus on the comparison of photographs taken by Lt. Col. David Lorimer during the 1930s with those taken by Julie Flowerday in the 1990s.

The third section, devoted to culture and development, explores several

on-going projects, including the restoration of historical buildings such as the Baltit Fort, NGO activities, and changes in the agricultural and economic landscape, education and tourism.

The volume thus presents the reader with several topics, each of them in a very detailed and specific manner. This could also prove to be its central flaw: despite appreciating the multidisciplinary approach (the only way to really describe such complex realities), readers may be unable to fully understand each contribution, given the high degree of specialisation required for each field.

The conceptual frame of the volume is reminiscent of the Gazetteer tradition of the late British Empire, and a geopolitical and strategic interest is highlighted in the preface. The starting point for transition and transformation (the main key words according to the editor, see p.1) is the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, while the last chapter, 'Story of Our Transformation' written by Nazir Sabir, ends with a reference to the local impact of the 9/11 terror strikes in New York.

Located at a vital cross-road between empires, the Hunza Valley's strategic value has been long recognised: it was one of the first places to be connected to the plains through a telegraph line and, later on, the mighty peaks of the Karakoram witnessed the building of one of the highest highways in the world. Now, as ever, Hunza is a threshold opening towards different directions (Afghanistan, China, India) in one of the world's most troubled regions.

It is certainly true that what may appear to be a remote corner of the world is, in fact, connected with events unfolding somewhere else (as the recent, and still unclear, showdown in Abbottabad demonstrates), but it is equally incorrect to assume that everything must be linked to 'western' interests. The story of transition and change in the Hunza Valley has a much longer history, as the chapter written by Jason Neelis clearly shows. In his essay entitled 'Hunza-Haldeikish revisited: epigraphical evidence for trans-regional history' (pp.159-170), Neelis analyses rock inscriptions from the area that provide valuable information on the history and culture of the Hunza Valley, establishing beyond doubt its role in 'trans-regional patterns of cross-cultural transmission between north-western frontiers of South Asia, the Iranian borderlands, Central Asia, Tibet, and China' (p.159). Inscriptions in several languages ranging from Sogdian to Tibetan and Chinese indicate that the region was a major

cultural crossroads and a strategic location from the first millennium CE onward.

The strategic role of the Hunza Valley during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is further analysed and carefully described by Irmtraud Stellrecht's 'Passage to Hunza: route nets and political processes in a mountain state' (pp.191-216), focusing on Afghan, Chinese, Moghul and British interest in this regional centre of power. Lying at the centre of an area of mountain passes, the valley was identified by British intelligence as a possible gateway for Russian armies in their march toward the south in the years of the 'Great Game', when the Mir of Hunza was the custodian of the routes leading up to the Pamir. This ultimately led to the British conquest of Hunza in 1891 (p.199).

The rich bio-cultural diversity of the Hunza Valley is a precious heritage to be preserved and this volume may well help to spread understanding of this while disseminating interesting materials collected by researchers over the course of the last three decades. The volume is a valuable contribution for all those interested in the region. It challenges narrow approaches based on single disciplines and instead promotes comprehensive knowledge that encompasses natural sciences and humanities, bridging a critical divide that still seems to dominate academia.

## **Nature, Culture and Religion at the Crossroads of Asia**

edited by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010, 382 pages, ISBN 9788187358466

reviewed by Nayanika Mathur

This collection of essays sets itself the agenda of revisiting the hoary anthropological debate on nature and culture in a region that it describes as constituting the 'crossroads of Asia': the Himalaya. I was initially intrigued by the additional reference to 'religion' in the title but the preponderance of religious philosophy, thought and rituals in subsequent chapters explained this inclusion. The collection is divided into two parts with the first dealing, in fact, with choice concepts in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and shamanism.

Charles Malamoud discusses the utopia of a forest hermitage as a stage of life and sacrificial rites as illustrative of the deployment of nature within Sanskrit literature. Stephane Arguillere ruminates on the concepts of nature and culture within Tibetan thought, and concludes that to posit a distinction between the two would constitute a misunderstanding of this philosophical tradition. In an expansive paper, Marc Gaborieau studies Arabic texts and Himalayan and Indian ethnographic material to draw out convergences between Hindu and Muslim conceptions of nature. In an excellent piece, Roberte Hamayon argues that the words 'nature' and 'culture' should not be taken as seriously as their actual operation within native conceptions of Siberian shamanism. Following this classical anthropological move, she concludes 'although "Nature" and "Culture" may help characterise the analytical models drawn from Siberian data, these categories are nonetheless too vague, sometimes even misleading, to account for certain aspects of native conceptions' (p.113). Her conclusion, thus, is similar to the one arrived at by Arguillere, though in a different context.

While the first part of this edited volume deals directly with the theme of the collection, the contributions are (with the exception of Hamayon) restricted to a somewhat schematic debate on nature/culture within the great traditions that they explore. It was thus with a rising sense of anticipation that I turned to the second half of the book, which claims to attend to ethnographic particularities of the Himalayan region.



The first two chapters in this section certainly lived up to expectations. The editor, Lecomte-Tilouine, kicks off with a sketch of the *janajati* movement in Nepal. Her contemporary account of the intimate relationship between claims of indigeneity and biodiversity conservation is an astute illustration of the modes through which 'nature' can be mobilised for purposes of political rights-making. Furthermore, the irony that the same ideology of conservationism that is mobilised to make claims on the state itself poses a strong threat to the traditional lives of *janajatis* is not lost on her. Ben Campbell proposes the concept of 'environmental subjectivity' to explore aspects of human-environmental relatedness. He proceeds to do so in an extremely accomplished manner by engaging with current sets of writings and ethnographic material drawn from Tamang-speaking communities in Nepal. Interpreting and connecting myths to the contemporary cultural politics of conservationism allows for a forceful argument on the limitations of the utilisation of Western concepts of nature.

These two contributions are followed by a somewhat formulaic interpretation of rites among the Mewahang Rai in Nepal by Martin Gaenzle and an undifferentiated account of Jad pastoralists' perceptions of their social world in Garhwal, India by Subhadra Channa. Claus Zoller's short account of love in the Indus Kohistan made for interesting reading but did not quite gel with the mandate of this collection. Similarly, Rachel Guidoni's piece on Tibetan relics and their 'position in nature and culture' appeared a tad forced. The two chapters on different facets of agricultural practices in Yunnan by Wilkes and Bouchery carried with them fresh ethnographic details. The final article by Chiara Letizia mulls on what makes river confluences sacred. She asks if it is the entry of, so to say, culture into nature that endows these spaces with sacredness, but concludes convincingly that this would be a specious analytical framework to adopt.

Overall, this is an enjoyable collection of essays, with each piece acting as a stand-alone contribution to aspects of a region that remain, perplexingly, understudied. I did feel, however, that more theoretically charged arguments could have been made on 'nature, culture and religion' by engaging in a fuller manner with the extant literature. As it stands, this book falls just short of pulling together an ethnographically rooted, distinctly Himalayan perspective on what remains one of the most enduring debates in the social sciences.

## **Not Exactly Shangri-la**

Martin Moir

New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2009, 264 pages, ISBN 9788129115461

reviewed by Michael Hutt

Martin Moir is the retired deputy director of the Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library in London. In this, his first novel, he relates the adventures of one Timothy Curtin, who has recently completed a doctorate in something vaguely Tibetan and is now researching the history of the Himalayan kingdom of 'Kalapur'. In his capacity as the secretary of the 'Royal Himalayan Centre' in London, Curtin organises a lecture by the visiting abbot of Kalapur's main monastery. In the course of his lecture the abbot reveals that a secret document entitled 'The Lives of the Lamas' will shortly be made available to selected foreign researchers, and before he departs he hands Curtin an official invitation to visit Kalapur. As Curtin embarks upon his scholarly adventure, we learn that a violent struggle is going on in Kalapur, in which the construction of the kingdom's recent historical past is a major bone of contention. Curtin's research therefore has major political implications, and he finds himself under pressure to reach a set of prescribed conclusions, particularly with regard to the mysterious death of a senior lama some sixty years earlier.

Moir's novel, which is clearly inspired in part by James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, is a curious mixture of colonial-style adventure story, pseudo-scholarly travelogue, romance, and modern political allegory. At its best, it is very entertaining. For instance, the question of the existence or non-existence of the yeti is a principal concern for the members of the Royal Himalayan Centre, who are sorely divided over the matter, and Moir's wry account of their argument is great fun. The narrative also displays a close familiarity with Buddhist Himalayan cultures, and Moir describes the religious environment well. However, although it is told with some panache, this reader found parts of Moir's story somewhat unconvincing and winced at some of the Orientalist stereotypes that appear in the course of its telling. When Hilton wrote his novel for an English-speaking readership between the wars, the Himalaya could safely be treated as a mythological setting. But as I read *Not Exactly Shangri-la* I found myself questioning the

wisdom of setting an adventure story in a polity that is fictional but which is located none the less in a real cultural and geopolitical milieu. On the other hand, of course, this is a novel that was not written for a nit-picking Himalayanist academic, and I must end by expressing my appreciation of the way in which the author has deployed his scholarly knowledge and creative imagination.

## **New Nepal: The Fault Lines**

Nishchal Nath Pandey

New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010, 164 pages, ISBN 9788132103165

reviewed by Milly Joshi

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 21 November 2006 and the peaceful elections to Nepal's first ever Constituent Assembly on 10 April 2008 are milestone events in the history of Nepal. As these landmark events transpired, 'New Nepal' became a much-coveted dream for many Nepali people. Nevertheless, there was a lot of ground to cover and challenges to overcome before the promise of a New Nepal could be realised.

Nishchal Nath Pandey's *New Nepal: The Fault Lines* offers a comprehensive documentary analysis of Nepal's contemporary political milieu following the People's Movement of April 2006. The aftermath of the People's Movement, the metamorphosis of the Hindu kingdom into a federal democratic republic, and its concomitant challenges and perils are outlined. The author clarifies his position in the preface: 'This book will strive to analyse the events of the post-Jan Andolan II stage, including the background in which repeated amendments were made to the interim constitution, and highlight major fault lines that need to be addressed if durable peace is to be achieved' (page xiii). Ironically, issues that brought masses of people together and contributed to the success of the People's Movement—that is, issues of identity, language, religion, ethnicity and region—are themselves now being debated, inhibiting the drafting of a new constitution.

In chapters one to three, Pandey focuses on the immediate aftermath of the People's Movement, the most discerning effects of which were the unleashing of a storm of protest (following the first amendment of the 1990 Constitution) and the unprecedented emergence of a number of armed forces in the Tarai. The newly formed interim government found itself negotiating a fine line between holding a Constituent Assembly election and drafting a new constitution against the backdrop of the crisis in the Tarai and the growing distrust between and within the parties themselves. Pandey outlines the array of contexts (some historically significant and some highly dismaying, for instance, the Lahan incident, the Gaur massacre

and the mayhem in Kapilvastu) in which repeated amendments were made to the Interim Constitution.

As the book progresses, the author draws out a series of faults within Nepal's peace process. To begin with, he critically analyses the relevance and challenges of implementing federalism in Nepal in a context where the very structure of federalism is a moot point. Pandey castigates leaders for creating the illusion that a federal system will be a panacea for all political and social ills. According to the author, given the country's unique history of unification and the diversity of its population, a federal system based on ethnicity/caste, language or region cannot be the ultimate solution to social exclusion, but would rather be the impetus for the creation of an insurmountable chasm between its people. Pandey argues that if federalism were to be implemented in Nepal, it would need to be implemented with certain caveats. He also argues that issues of language and religion developed political traction during the post-revolutionary period, triggering debates and a series of unanticipated events that acted against the sentiments and wellbeing of the general public (such as the bomb blast in the Church of the Assumption in Patan). The author warns of serious consequences if language and religion become dominant issues in Nepal's political realm.

In chapters seven to ten the author highlights the key issues and challenges confronting the nascent federal republic, namely the integration of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the Nepal Army; the exigency to deconstruct old political traditions (those that foster anarchism); and the revitalisation of an economy shattered by a decade-long Maoist insurgency. The author considers the integration of the PLA into the Nepal Army as the key challenge for New Nepal's peaceful trajectory, as integrating rebels (who are deeply influenced by political ideology) into the national army would be a new initiative not just for Nepal but also for the whole of South Asia. The challenge is deepened by the fact that these armies have been in conflict for more than a decade. Among the Nepali Congress and other parties, scepticism and fear that the Maoists might control the Nepal Army following the integration of the PLA is further delaying the process of integration. Chapter seven addresses the series of political events and debates that finally culminated in the resignation of Prachanda as Prime Minister. Pandey also highlights (in chapter eight) the role played by the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in the peace process through its monitoring of the ceasefire agreement, the surveillance of PLA cantonments

at seven sites and, most important of all, the electoral assistance provided by UNMIN to the Election Commission, and the monitoring of the historic CA election.

In the closing chapters (eleven and twelve), the author describes Nepal's relations with India and China regarding trade, transit and tourism. Nepal's relationship with India has been at best ambivalent. Following the People's Movement, India was thought by many rightists (pro-monarchists) to have been a catalyst behind the downfall of the monarchy, and was held accountable by the mainstream parties, namely the CPN (Maoist) and CPN (UML), for the sudden emergence of armed forces causing unrest in the Tarai, questioning India's interest in gaining influence in the Madhes or the whole of Nepal. Chapter eleven highlights key issues in Indo-Nepalese relations that propelled debates during the post-revolution period. Among these were the collapse of the Koshi embankment (which led to a demand for the revision or repeal of the 1950's treaty) and the issue of land encroachment along Nepal's borders. The author also recommends areas in which Nepal needs to foster ties with India in order to rejuvenate its economy and forge sound relations with its neighbour. In chapter twelve, Pandey outlines various aspects of Sino-Nepalese relations, such as the issue of Tibetan refugees as well as tourism, connectivity and border trade, with a focus on goods that have potential in the Chinese market. The author finally specifies resource areas in which Nepal should initiate joint ventures with China to uplift its economy.

Overall, *New Nepal: The Fault Lines* provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of political developments in Nepal following the April uprising in 2006, in the light of historical events. On the one hand, the book offers a synopsis of the key events that ensued from the People's Movement, while also providing a critical analysis of issues concerning state restructuring. However, the book does show deficiencies in dealing with some significant issues relating to the process of social exclusion. For instance, the author fails to unpack the historical carryover of social exclusion embedded in the process of Nepal's unification. Pandey presents the 'history of unification of Nepal' in a conventional, rather than critical, way by not questioning Prithvi Narayan Shah's legacy of consolidating 'Asli Hindustan', which continued throughout the Shah dynasty. The author writes: 'Nepal was united by King Prithvi Narayan Shah the Great (1723 A.D-1775 A.D) by bringing together 22-24 different principalities belonging to various castes and ethnic groups.

Recognising this delicate ethnic composition, King Prithvi had named his country a “garden of different flowers” (p.41).

Basing his discussion of the issue of language on Dev Raj Dahal’s work (1996), Pandey writes, ‘it was natural that in the country, which is invariably multi-lingual, the politics of language turns easily into a thorny issue and that was why Nepali language was developed as a lingua franca for the past three centuries, which served as a link language among different communities’ (p.63). Nowhere in the book does the author seek to question the historical orchestration of the ‘linguicide’ of many ethnic minorities rendered by the state’s adoption of a one-language policy. According to Oommen (1986), one language, one religion and one state policies demanding that the population of the state become homogeneous despite its ethno-cultural heterogeneity were a ‘pathological obsession’ that ‘had and can develop into extreme nationalism of the fascist variety, leading to genocide and/or culturocide; that is, the systematic liquidation of the cultural identity of minorities’ (pp.53-57).

The author also articulates a strong dissatisfaction regarding Nepal’s secularisation. He writes, ‘In Nepal’s independent history of over 200 years, we have never had the state telling its subjects what religion to belong to or dictating the religious practices of the people’ (p.68). He further argues that the secularisation of the country has in fact instigated a gradual erosion of the religious harmony that remained undisturbed for centuries prior to the official declaration of Nepal as a secular republic. However, it is not the case that Nepal has never had communal clashes between religious groups. Dastider (2007) gives a list of clashes that took place between Hindus and Muslims at different times before Nepal’s secularisation, although those clashes were quickly defused by the then rulers. None the less, Dastider adds that ‘communal clashes in Nepal remained a rare event as long as Muslim minorities kept a very subdued and low profile, and did not raise any objection to their low caste status, or the overall deprivation they suffered for professing a religion which was considered inferior to the official one’ (2007:164). By suggesting that Nepal was inherently secular despite its status as a Hindu kingdom, Pandey seems to have ignored the institutionalisation of social exclusion (gender, caste/ethnicity and religion) under a dominant Indo-Aryan culture that allowed the penetration of Hindu patriarchal ideology into the legal system of the country, as manifested in the civil code of 1854 and its amendments.

Despite the author's failure to deal with certain issues pertaining to social exclusion, the book is valuable and important for making sense of recent political developments in Nepal and their implications on the national and international stage. Highly analytical and descriptive, this book will cater to the interests of a wide range of researchers, analysts and academics interested in or even new to the political dynamics of Nepal.

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## **Looking at Development and Donors: Essays from Nepal**

Devendra Raj Pandey (edited by Seira Tamang)

Kathmandu, Martin Chautari, 2011, 419 pages, ISBN 9789937838924

Reviewed by Jeevan Raj Sharma

Foreign aid has been the subject of a great deal of development rhetoric in Nepal. Although its objectives have rarely been met, foreign aid continues to shape Nepal's development's priorities, modalities and outcomes. Currently, around 70 percent of the country's development expenditure is financed by external aid and this has remained more or less constant for the last four decades. Clearly, foreign aid has been a key part of Nepal's development experience, and of its successes and failures. Pandey's book documents and examines the 'symmetrical relationship' between the history of 'failed' development and foreign aid in Nepal and is concerned with fundamental questions: Why has there been very little development despite six decades of foreign aid? Is foreign aid part of the solution or part of the problem? Pandey's intellectual position is rooted in his premise that 'failed' development is manifested as rampant poverty, widespread corruption and violent conflict. The book offers a sad and ironic picture of development efforts and foreign aid in Nepal. The author demands accountability from donors:

Much of the malaise is the result of ineffectual Nepali institutions and actors ... However, given the symmetrical relationship between foreign aid and development in Nepal and the embedded unequal donor-recipient relationship, foreign aid cannot escape scrutiny and responsibility for what has and has not happened. (p.11)

Unlike his previous book, provocatively entitled *Nepal's Failed Development*, the current volume is a collection of 24 discrete essays on the broadly defined theme of development and donors. Except for Chapter 1, which was written specifically for this book as a way of providing an overall framework for the collection, these essays have been published separately over the last three decades as newspaper articles, official presentations and academic writings. The chapters are arranged chronologically under

three headings ('Panchayat Period', '1990 Democratic Era' and 'The Year 2000 and Beyond') with a very short six-page introduction by Seira Tamang. The chronological organisation of the book not only reflects the distinct political environments of each period but also global trends in regimes of foreign aid.

Pandey's writings are not just informative but also highly analytical, with conceptual clarity on a range of topics. The key merit of the book lies in Pandey's rich historical and reflective analysis, thanks to his background as head of the foreign aid division in 1970s, finance minister in the first 1990 democratic cabinet, leading specialist of development and leading civil society activist in the last decade or so. As Tamang asserts in her introduction, 'Despite, or perhaps because of, the many avatars that the author has taken over this period, the essays display a remarkable consistency' (p.1).

Pandey's essays offer critiques of development and donors on several fronts and possess a rich potential for further analysis and research for readers interested not only in the history of foreign aid in Nepal, but also for those interested in the theoretical scrutiny of development and foreign aid more widely.

Pandey writes, 'the development partners were able to promote 'the demand side' of the right-based approach to democracy, development and development cooperation' (p.402). He adds, 'however, when the "supply side" is weak, the process creates a room for conflict' (p.402). This raises an important point: Was the Maoist insurgency, which took hold, spread and was ultimately successful, somehow linked to the nature of the aid policies that foreign donors and agencies implemented in the country over the last few decades? More broadly, should we conceptualise the conflict as a consequence of a perceived 'development failure' in Nepal? The case that Peter Uvin argued with respect to the development enterprise in Rwanda (Uvin 1998) may well also be applicable to Nepal. In developing countries such as Nepal, where foreign aid provides such a large share of the financial, technical, ideological and human resources of government and civil society, development aid cannot but have played a crucial role in shaping the processes that contributed to the emergence of the conflict.

Pandey raises the issue of the 'depolicitization' of development policy making and thus the issue of sovereignty in the context of foreign aid and associated 'political' intentions, demands and conditionalities. He takes

issue with donors' concern with governance, which has expanded the domain of policy making to civil society and NGOs. Throughout his writings, Pandey asserts that development is not a technical but rather a political process, and emphasises the importance of ownership and accountability in policy making. He writes,

The corruption-afflicted, misgoverned countries generally need, and the donors can always provide, suggestions and advice on what might be done as remedies ... But the donors must be cautious that they do not design policies and programs in such a way that they end up owning them, releasing the recipient from the much needed accountability. This requires that the advice and suggestions do not 'graduate' to *command* and *conditionalities* that become counterproductive. (p.238)

Pandey's writings remind us that an intricate relationship exists between donors and the regime in Nepal. Not only have foreign donors been a key tool of political legitimacy for all kinds of regimes and governments in the past, but as Shah (2008) has argued, they have also played an important role in regime change and state reconstruction in Nepal through their funding and influence.

Overall, despite the richness of the information and analysis presented in the book, we are not in a position to answer the question of why foreign aid continues to be poured into Nepal when it has not produced the desired development outcomes. As post-structuralist scholars of development have reminded us, rather than taking development failure as self-evident, we need to ask what purpose foreign aid has served if not the stated objectives of development. For those interested in the state, has foreign aid with its discourses on governance and corruption had a profound, negative impact on the capacity of the Nepali state and its legitimacy to govern? Let us hope that Pandey or another scholar will interrogate these questions in the future.

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## **La Fête Spectacle. Théâtre et rite au Népal**

Gérard Toffin

Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2010, 198 pages, 34 colour photos, ISBN 9782735113132

Reviewed by Arik Moran

Gérard Toffin's study of the Indra Jatra (hereafter IJ), the central festival of the Kathmandu calendar, is a cultural exploration of the 'ethos' of the greater part of the Newar population residing in the Nepali capital (p.xxx). The scope of his analysis is ambitious, encompassing ethnography (including the author's three decades of intermittent observations of the festival), history, Sanskrit traditions and theories from the domains of theatre and anthropology. The sources and methodologies of these domains are examined through the complementary axes of 'spectacle' (chapters 2-5) and 'theatre' (chapters 6-7), which are closely connected through their underlying ritual functions (chapter 8, conclusion) and ultimately exemplify the cultural syncretism of Kathmandu society as manifested in the IJ.

The IJ's central components are outlined in the introduction. These include rituals connected with Indra, processions (*jatras*) of the goddess Kumari, and the widespread worship of Bhairava. Despite dating from different periods and consisting of starkly divergent practices, the ensemble of these components forms a cohesive cultural product that is at once unified and diverse. It is by tracing the links between these elements and resolving their internal contradictions that the meanings behind the IJ are unravelled. To facilitate this enquiry, Toffin points to three fundamental ambiguities of the IJ (p.17): (1) although it is a celebration of royal/state power, the presiding deity of the festival is popularly represented as a weak prisoner; (2) as a Hindu state-level festivity, how is it that one of the most important ritual activities of the IJ is entrusted to a Buddhist girl (the anthropomorphised goddess Kumari) of the Shakya caste of goldsmiths, which is perceived as particularly lowly by Brahmins, whose religious specialists play a key part in overseeing the celebrations? (3) finally, despite being a festival that commemorates the Newars' defeat at the hands of foreign invaders, the primary participants in the IJ

remain the autochthonous residents of the Kathmandu valley. In order to resolve these paradoxes it is, according to Toffin, necessary to account for the fact that the IJ constitutes festival, theatre and ritual all at the same time. Accordingly, the first chapter delves into the connection between these three elements, offering a concise review of scholarly literature on theatrical aspects of ritual (pp.27-30), a discussion on the participatory nature of festivals (pp.33-34) and an exploration of the rituality of theatre (pp.34-37). The coexistence of theatre and ritual, which at times borders on the inextricable (as in plays that entertain spectators while acting as rituals that ward off evil spirits), is thus harnessed to justify the study's mode of enquiry.

The next four chapters address the factual unfolding of the IJ with an emphasis on its ritual and festive/spectacular aspects. The first of these traces the changing character of Indra in Sanskrit culture, from Vedic king of the gods to secondary deity in Puranic literature, and concludes with a detailed description of the Vedic predecessor of the IJ, the *Indra Mahotsava*. The third chapter examines the rituals pertaining to Indra during the eight days of the festival (usefully summarised in a table, p.51) in Kathmandu today (pp.50-54). The paradox of Indra's ambiguous status is also resolved on this occasion: as king of the gods, the deity affirms royal/state power through elaborate rituals that culminate in the erection of a pine mast (*yashim* or *lingam*) in front of the palace grounds, yet, as a deity charged with fertility, the god is popularly represented as a prisoner (as punishment for his stealing of flowers/cucumbers, according to a local myth) who is readily accessible (via the intermediation of Buddhist priests) to the Jyāpu peasants who form the bulk of IJ participants (pp.54-61).

The next chapter arrives at the 'the very core of the *fête-spectacle*' (p.67), namely, the processions of the goddess Kumari and the widespread worship of Bhairava. The goddess's processions through and ritual activities in different parts of the city, which appropriately conclude with the sanction of the state in the royal compound, are thus shown to unite the geographic, social and political components of Kathmandu (pp.67-72), affording an explanation for Kumari's contradictory position as both venerated goddess and seemingly low-caste Buddhist girl. The links between the horrific deity Bhairava and the goddess are noted in the dancers bearing masks of the former who accompany the processions and who, until 1849, used to engage in ritual battles between troupes from the lower and upper

parts of the city (p.79). The Shaivite deity is further present in various neighbourhoods during the IJ, where representations of its head are placed on raised platforms by the Jyāpu peasantry, whose worship includes the drinking of rice beer from a straw protruding from the god's mouth, the revelry that ensues corresponding with classical characterisations of the festival as a space that challenges, or even inverts, normative behaviours. The blurring of boundaries between spectators, participants and deities is facilitated by the contrast between the public display of Indra(s), Kumari and Bhairava(s) in the course of the IJ and their concealment during the remainder of the year (pp.80-83). The fifth chapter outlines the numerous funerary processions that take place during the festival. In highlighting the protective functions of ritual and its relation to the city's communal life (through the delineation of geo-political boundaries between neighbourhoods and of the city as a whole), it brings into consideration the role of Bhairava as a deity associated with death and that of the king, as protector and chief sacrificer/sacrifice of state.

Chapters six and seven engage the second axis of research, which links the IJ with theatre. Delving into the theory of classical Indian theatre (*Natyashastra*), Toffin points to an intrinsic connection between Indra as the founder of theatre in classical Sanskrit culture and as presiding deity of the festival, since both phenomena are aimed at 'strengthening the kingdom and its inhabitants, upholding the socio-cosmic order (*dharma*) against obstructive forces and removing sickness', rendering the IJ 'a commemoration of primitive Indian theatre' (pp.97-99). The centrality of dance to Indian theatre and its recurrence in the IJ are then elaborated upon, along with a useful survey of the multiple theatrical performances enacted during the festival (pp.103-113). The seventh chapter enters into the aesthetics of Newar visual arts connected with the festival (masks, in particular) and a discussion of the tensions between its Brahmanic and Tantric elements.

The final chapters link the preceding expositions with the disciplines of history and anthropology. Endorsing Hocart's reading of ritual as a tool for maintaining social cohesion, the eighth chapter makes an important connection between the ritual aspects of the festival and its underlying purpose of upholding the cosmic order through sacrifice, a goal that has similarly been shown to constitute the purpose of Indian/Newar theatre (pp.128-129). This is followed by an instructive survey of the primary groups

participating in the IJ, their associations (*guthis*), their functions and the importance of locality (pp.133-134). The ninth chapter resolves the third paradox noted in the introduction, according to which the autochthonous population's participation in the IJ effectively commemorates its submission to Parbatiya invaders during the eighteenth century (a defeat popularly conceded in the expression '*yamyāh, yamdyā*', 'the Festival of Kathmandu, Kathmandu lost'; p.142). This apparent contradiction is explained as a form of resistance: because the internalisation of the historical defeat is secondary to the indigenous elements of the festival (i.e., the popular vs. state-level worship of Indra, Bhairava, Kumari), it allows for a cultural autonomy that upholds Newar identity in the face of the erstwhile conquerors (p.143). The final chapter provides tentative chronologies for the beginnings of the IJ's components: the festival is dated to the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the popular representation of Indra as prisoner to (at least) the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Kumari's chariot processions to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Mallas, although the cult may predate this by five centuries (pp.147-152). Changes in the modern era, including an augmentation of the IJ's spectacular character under the Rana Regime (1846-1951) and the weakening of inter-caste ties as a result of democratisation in post-kingdom Nepal are noted in the closing section (pp.153-155).

Resuming the central argument of his thesis, Toffin concludes with an emphasis on the socio-historical contexts that contributed to the amalgamation of ritual, festival and theatre in the IJ. The problems inherent in ritual are convincingly presented by rallying Hocart's distinction between 'specialized' and 'general' rituals, which nurture a persistent duality in large-scale rituals (pp.160-162). The participation of spectators as a prerequisite for the festival's success is consequently affirmed by noting the IJ's essential constitution of a grand-scale 'metamorphosed ritual' that is supplemented by theatrics (e.g., the focal point of festivities around the raising of the pine mast at the palace grounds). The importance of accounting for social and historical cleavages is underlined in the final section, which calls for more nuanced interpretations of the 'socio-cultural ethos' and 'categories of thought' (p.167) to be discovered from the careful study of the IJ's details.

As a study in culture, the *Fête Spectacle* admirably achieves its goals. It uses empirical data and theoretical elaborations efficiently to advance an interpretation of the ethos of a society through the interdependent

elements of festival, theatre and ritual. This approach inevitably leads to selective readings that are not always congruent with the author's ethnographic observations. This is clearly seen in the grouping together of the rituals connected with Indra, Kumari and Bhairava as the core activities of the IJ, which counters their participants' claim that these are distinctly separate (if overlapping) events (p.71). The drawing of parallels between orthodox and heterodox elements in Nepali (Brahmanical/Tantric) and Ancient Greek (Apollonian/Dionysian) theatres (pp.121-123) may also seem tenuous, but would no doubt appeal to the broader readership at which the study is aimed. These minor points need not detract from the important contributions made in the linking of different theoretical strands. The tying (and vindication) of Hocart's emphasis on ritual as the primary tool for promoting social cohesion with Roger Caillois's stress on the rituals underlying festivals (pp.128-129), for one, is a particularly welcome observation that illustrates the usefulness of this multi-disciplinary approach. In conclusion, Toffin's study of the eight days in which Kathmandu transforms itself to bring state, public, gods and humans into intimate contact with one another through the theatrical, ritualised chaos of the IJ, offers important insights that remind readers of the broader questions underlying festival celebrations, both in and beyond the Himalaya.



## **Himalayan Languages and Linguistics: Studies in phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax**

edited by Mark Turin and Bettina Zeisler

Leiden: Brill, 2011, 322 pages, ISBN 9789004194489

Reviewed by Nathan W. Hill

The work under review is the twelfth volume in the series 'Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region'. This series has heretofore comprised reference grammars of Tibeto-Burman languages, typically the outcome of Ph.D dissertations originally submitted to Leiden University. These eleven grammars are of uniform high quality, providing detailed and clearly written linguistic information, while eschewing the maelstroms of faddish currents in theoretical or typological linguistics. Indeed, the researchers associated with the Himalayan Languages Project have arguably contributed more to advancing Tibeto-Burman linguistics than all other working scholars combined. This twelfth volume mostly constitutes papers originally delivered at the 11th Himalayan Languages Symposium, graciously hosted by Krisadawan Hongladarom at Chulalongkorn University in 2005. One of the editors (Mark Turin) and three of the contributors are associated with the Himalayan Languages Project.

The volume opens with a paper by George van Driem in which he outlines the contributions of linguistics, archaeology and genetics to the population history of the greater Himalayan region. Most of the genetic data van Driem and his team have compiled remains unpublished; this essay is consequently more exciting for what it presages than what it reveals. I lack some of van Driem's optimism about the role of genetics in the study of prehistory. Historical linguistics and archaeology offer predetermined populations for investigation, but genetics does not. The Tibeto-Burmans are speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages. The Brākhuṭi culture is characterised by a habitation site and unifacial choppers. But how does one assign ethnicity to a blood sample? The answer in the Peoples' Republic of China appears to be to look at the nationality (民族) on someone's identity card. Witness Chen *et al.*'s use of the terms 'Han Chinese', 'Tibetan Chinese' and 'Mongolian Chinese' (2006). The reader

would have benefited from van Driem's insights on this problematic.<sup>1</sup>

In the second essay, Plaisier presents a detailed comparison of four systems for the transliteration of the Lepcha script. In addition to the material aid this essay will bring to librarians and students of Lepcha alike, it offers Plaisier an opportunity to present convincing arguments in favour of her own system.

Huysmans offers readers a description of the Sampang verbal system. Like all Kiranti verbs, the Sampang verb is complex and much analytical work is required in order to make sense of it. Huysmans presents seven successive analyses, and contextualises the Sampang verb against the backdrop of proto-Kiranti as proposed in a series of articles by van Driem (1990, 1991, 1992, 1997). The Leiden school has already made great achievements in the description and analysis of Kiranti languages and this glimpse of Huysmans' forthcoming Sampang grammar suggests that this progress will continue unabated.

Scholars without affiliation to the Himalayan Languages Project contribute another six papers; three of these do not disappoint. Suzuki offers an updated English version of his previous article on the phonology of Sogpho Tibetan (2005). As in his other works on the phonology of Tibetan dialects, Suzuki first surveys the consonant, vowel, and tone inventory of the dialect, with special attention to allophonic variation. He then contextualises the dialect, discussing the sound changes that derive Sogpho Tibetan from Classical Tibetan, and compares certain features of Sogpho Tibetan with other Khams dialects. Some text samples and instrumental phonetic data would render Suzuki's study even more useful. The bibliography of this article unfortunately has many mistakes in

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1 Equally a problem, and deserving of van Driem's comment, is the grotesque cultural, historical and ethnographic naïveté of so many working in genetics. For example, almost all genetic studies reiterate a claim that the Tibetans are descended from Di-Qiang tribes (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1988: 6005, Gayden 2007, Zhao 2009); such claims are of no historical value (Beckwith 1977: 1-3). Geneticists' use of linguistics is no better. Yao *et al.*'s study of mitochondrial DNA erroneously concludes that 'linguistic and geographic classification of the populations did not agree well with classification by mtDNA variation' (2002: 63). Depending on outdated theories of linguistic classification, they regard the Turkic and Mongolian language families as sub-branches of 'Altaic' and see Tibeto-Burman, Chinese and Zhuang-Dai as three branches of 'Sino-Tibetan' (2002: 65). Commitment to Matisoff's 'Sino-Tibetan' theory similarly vitiates the conclusions of Su *et al.* (2000: 588).

Japanese transcription (e.g. 研究 appears as *kenkyu*, *kenkyuu*, and *kenkyuus*, p.73).

Dotson's study of the vexing Old Tibetan term *khrin* is a model of thoroughness and clarity. Analysing the use of this term in both legal and ritual contexts, he hypothesises that the original meaning is 'tether', which in legal contexts means 'judicial punishment' (p.93). Far from a dry lexical study, this paper insightfully engages a number of themes in early Tibetan society and religion, offering close readings of many passages. The paper deserves to be read multiple times; pearls such as the treatment of verbs of giving construed with the recipient in the absolutive (p.91) might be easily overlooked.

Rehman's paper presents nearly the first information ever on Kundal Shahi and Hindko, two Indo-Aryan languages of the Neelam Valley, and, by way of comparison, also treats Kashmiri. While these languages generally conform to the expected picture of split ergativity in Indo-Aryan languages, there are interesting differences in detail. For example, ergative marking in Hindko is not obligatory (p.228). As the author himself admits (p.231), any discussion of ergativity in three languages over a mere fourteen pages is bound to be cursory.

The remaining three papers fall short of the overall quality of the series and volume. Basing his investigation on work by Dixon (1982, 2004) and Givón (1984), Kiryu explores a grab bag of words that he dubs 'adjectives' in Newar. Sentences such as '[m]ost adjectival words can be negated by *ma-ju*, although some may not be' (p.107) show that Kiryu is using 'adjective' as a pre-established category, and does not classify Newar lexemes according to their structural form classes; the conclusion that Newar has adjectives (p.128) although 'there are no unique morphological properties that distinguish adjectives from nouns and verbs in Newar' (p.101) is consequently circular. Kiryu's choice of theorists is unfortunate; de Saussure, F. (1916) or Bloomfield (1933) are surer guides through strait gates and on narrow ways. The simple English words 'flash' and 'remain' gainsay Givón's proposal that nouns and verbs exist on a 'time scale', with nouns on the most stable side and verbs on the side of rapid change (p.107, cf. Givón 1984: 55). The greater part of Kiryu's essay catalogues Newar words according to 'thirteen concepts that adjectives prototypically

denote' (p.108), according to Dixon. Parts of speech categories are not semantic classes; if they were, 'burn' and 'fire' would be the same part of speech. Semantic categories, even when written in capital letters, exist in the mind of an author and not in the structure of languages. Since 'les entités abstraites reposent toujours, en dernière analyse, sur les entités concrètes' (Saussure 1919: 190), what are the concrete entities on which 'HUMAN PROPENSITY' (p.108) rests?

Bartee's paper is besprent with inaccuracies and omissions, such as the identification of Minhe Mangghuer and Akha respectively with 土族語 Tüzúyǔ and 哈尼語 Hānyǔ<sup>2</sup> and the categorisation of Naxi as a Lolo-Burmese language (strangely contradicted on p.175, n. 53). Tibetan spelling also gives her some trouble (correct *slob.grwa.ba* on p.136, versus incorrect *slab.grwa.ba* on p.138 and *bslab.grwa.ba* on p.141). In addition, her bibliographic knowledge is weak; the discussion of Khams and Nanzhao history omits seminal studies such as Backus (1981) and makes no mention of the bizarre renaming of the county of her fieldwork in 2001 from 中甸 Rgyal-thaṅ to 香格里拉 Shangri-La. More worrisome than such small mistakes is Bartee's complete mischaracterisation of the Standard Tibetan verbal system. She shoehorns this language's three-term evidential system into a two-term 'conjunct/disjunct' framework. As sources for her data and analysis she cites Denwood (1999), Garrett (2001) and Tournadre (2003).<sup>3</sup> She has not read these works carefully. None of these authors employs the terminology 'conjunct/disjunct' and both Garrett (2001: 209 n. 1) and Tournadre (2008) pointedly rejected the value of these terms and the *Denkweisen* that they facilitate.<sup>4</sup> De Saussure tells us 'la langue est un système dont tous les termes sont solidaires où la valeur de l'un ne résulte que la présence simultanée des autres' (1919: 159); and Haspelmath more recently reminds us that 'pre-established categories don't exist' (2007). Bartee appears not to agree with these opinions.

2 In fact, Tüzúyǔ encompasses both Minhe Mangghuer and Huzhu Mongghul (Dpal-ldan-bkra-shis, *et al.* 1996: 1) and Hānyǔ is a language distinct from but closely related to Akha (Lewis and Bai 1996: 1-2).

3 Tournadre (2003) was published in Ithaca and not in New York, as stated on p.182.

4 Bartee even writes that the sentence *na na-gi-yod* 'I'm chronically sick' is ungrammatical (p.143), apparently unaware of Tournadre's (1996: 223) and Denwood's (1999: 151) discussion of this very sentence.

The last and longest of the papers in the volume is a mixed bag. Zeisler describes a number of phonetic and morphological features of the Šam-skad and Gyen-skad dialect groups of Ladakhi. Confusingly, she treats several dialects at once without offering a phonemic inventory or morphological overview of any one. The paper appears to have three conclusions: (1) these two dialect groups are quite distinct; (2) phonetically conservative dialects are not necessarily morphologically conservative and phonetically innovative ones not necessarily morphologically innovative; and (3) Old Tibetan was already used as a *lingua franca* in Ladakh at the time of the Tibetan empire. The first conclusion is an important contribution to Tibetan dialectology, the second a well known but significant insight of great importance to work in historical linguistics, which always bears repeating. The third conclusion is unwarranted on the basis of the evidence presented.

Zeisler's article is brimming with detailed observations and insights. Her examples of the reanalysis in compounds in the Gya dialect of *b-* from the initial of the second morpheme to the final of an original open syllable initial morpheme (pp.264-265) provide new data for an on-going discussion. She elegantly employs her dialectological observations to elucidate the philological interpretation of the words *yab-med* 'ancestor' and *yas-se* 'from above' in early Tibetan texts (p.276 and p.284). The observation that work on historical linguistics should take inflected verbal forms into account and not just uninflected stems (p.258) may be taken for granted in work on other language families, but in Tibetan linguistics it is trail blazing. Although in places her citations could be more extensive,<sup>5</sup> there is no doubt she is an accomplished philologist. Zeisler's skills as a field worker are less impressive. Inexplicably uninterested in basing her description on the linguistic behaviour of her consultants, she complains in a number of places of their inconsistent judgments (p.261, n. 44; p.267, n. 58). A native English speaker, asked how many vowels English has, will

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5 In her discussion of *hu/ho* as a demonstrative (p.279), the failure to cite Dotson's interesting observations about *ho-tshal* (p.87) is rather surprising. Because *hu* is directly attested as a third singular demonstrative (I.O.L. Tib J 737.1 lines 141-142, cf. de Jong 1989: 112), there is a need to infer the existence of such a usage on the basis of forms such as *hu-bu-cag* 'we' and *huñ-nas* 'and then', etc. The speculation that this pronoun is related to the sentence final morpheme *-ho* requires further demonstration.

normally answer 'five'. Asking one's consultants how many phonemic tones a dialect possesses (pp.251-258) is not an effective way to learn the answer to this question.

Although there is some danger that these three methodologically weaker papers will perpetuate conceptual or factual errors in the hands of the innocent, the auspicious price of €108 will presumably guarantee that only committed professionals will acquire the volume. Such researchers will find it a valued addition to their libraries.

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ENDPIECE



## Me at the Beginning of Life

Jhamak Ghimire

[Jhamak Ghimire was born with cerebral palsy in Dhankuta, Nepal, in 1980. She has published eight volumes of poetry, stories and essays and has a regular column in *Kantipur* newspaper. She can communicate only in writing, and to write she holds a pen between the toes of her left foot. Jhamak Ghimire was awarded the Madan Puraskar, Nepal's most prestigious literary prize, in 2011 for her collection of autobiographical essays, *Jivan: kanda ki phul?* There follows an English translation, by Michael Hutt, of the opening chapter of this book.]

I have understood now that life is a beautiful flower of creation. Whether my own life falls within my definition of life, well, I do not know. When my heart wept I survived, because inside the pain laughter was restless each moment. When I say that somehow or other I survived a burdensome life, few will believe me now. The truth is extremely bitter, the reality equally insipid. Many times while leafing through those pages of memory I myself have shed tears. Such unlucky lines of fate were inscribed for me when I fell to the ground from my mother's womb.

On the sixth day after my birth my mother bathed me and washed me and made me clean, and put me to sleep with an exercise book and a pen under my pillow. It was a folk belief that Fortune would write my line of fate on that night. Mother, you wanted Fortune to draw a good line of fate right across my brow. But that was just your belief. Yes, Fortune did not draw my line of *karma* well that night, nor did it write a good line of fate.

Time had filled my pockets with packages of ill fortune. I was a girl who had been robbed by fate, who had neither the sweetness nor the joy of life. So how could life be as I had imagined? In the end I had to live, and so I did. But I lived as if there was no difference between the life of an animal and the life of a human being. The only difference was that even though I lived an animal's life, I ate rice, that was all. A life without the invisible sympathies and sensations of the human heart, which has no hurt, no colour, no individuality: perhaps only a very few people get through this condition. A poet might want to write a beautiful poem about escaping

from this kind of life, some sensitive person might like this story. But at that time my life was such a burden that it hurt me, and it had become hard to endure the pain.

In everyone's eyes I was someone who had been cursed by the gods, because in this life I had received the fruit of sins from a former life. I had been born into a society whose culture said that people lived from one birth to another. So I was a thorn that pricked everyone's eyes. When they saw me those eyes did not fill with sympathy and that heart never melted with love. Who were very displeased with me, who were very angry. In the end, how right was it for them to be like this to a tender, innocent child? I had no option but to endure all of those things in silence. Inside my child heart, the question continually arose, 'How am I to blame for all of this?' I had no medium through which to express this, no language, no way of indicating through gestures, no power to utter it. I had life, and that was all, and the little breath that was tangled up with it. How suffocating was my life? There was no exit from it anywhere. If there had been any way out, a river of life would have flowed unceasingly along with time.

Blessed Nature! You gave birth to me to endure the cruel behaviour of human beings and you awoke the meaning of being me. When I was restless with suffering you became my mother and wiped the tears that seeped from my eyes. The mother who bore me also gave birth to me, even though it was to suffer pain, she fostered me for nine or ten months in her womb and gave birth to me. In this neither she nor I was at fault. It was the fault of fate. Is the definition of disability merely to be born with a bodily incapacity? If so, why do they not consider Homer incomplete? Why did the world never consider the Nikolai Otrovskys, the Helen Kellers incomplete? These people were weak in body, just like me. But they wrote history before they departed, they left us a different perspective, they set down the meaning of being human before they passed away.

But me? I was born in a world very different from theirs, born in a different geography. For this reason I lived a life that was so unequal and low grade that maybe only an animal could have lived such a life before. When I achieved awareness, the shoots of consciousness had begun to sprout in me, I think. But even achieving awareness became like a curse. I did not have a voice with which to speak, nor any strength in my legs to walk. Nor was there strength in my hands that I could fill a basket with *godavari*, *makhmali* and *sunakhari* flowers. No, I had nothing of this at all.

I was a helpless girl bereft of all these things, whose mind was filled with a longing to run on the hills, but whose feet did not have the strength to support her body. I longed to talk with others, but I had no voice! Because these desires were ones that would never be fulfilled, they fell upon me, wounded.

Yes, I was so robbed by fate that I was unable to even get up from my bed. My poor grandmother, whitehaired like the moon over the hill, might have picked me up and taken me on her lap. How she must have longed that her son's first offspring would call her 'grandmother' in its baby voice, that it would pull at the wrinkles on her face with its little hands. But grandmother, I could not fulfil your wishes. Your other grandchildren fulfilled them. All I did was hurt you when you carried me on your back, how you must have loved me, no?

At that time the economic condition of our home was not so good, to the extent that it was very hard to manage two meals a day, morning and evening. I have heard that mother and father often went hungry at mealtimes, but somehow or other they fed us children. Grandmother, even that was not enough for you, you fed me and made me greedy even though you went without food yourself. And on top of that, you took me to sleep with you and you gave me many different things to eat every time I woke up, all through the night. Aha, how good it tasted, the food you gave me!

Grandmother, if you had not wrapped me in a torn up petticoat and put me in a bamboo basket I might still have been peeing and soiling in my bed today, or I may have already arrived with you in the heaven that people imagine. I don't know. But because of you I touched the various colours of life and understood life from various angles, and experienced the beauty of life myself. Grandmother, you are not with me now, that is your misfortune. But you are still living all through my heart and mind.

## INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

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published by the EBHR Editorial Committee  
in conjunction with Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, Nepal