

## EBHR 44 Spring-Summer 2014

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to EBHR 44, which contains its usual eclectic mixture of material.

First, the renowned historian of the Central Himalaya, Maheshvar P. Joshi, presents the folk narrative known as '*Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī' as an example of a common heritage in support of his argument that Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand formed a single polity for several centuries under the Katyūrī dynasty. He traces the origin of the narrative to the sixth century Sanskrit drama the *Devī Chandraguptam* and examines the functional aspect of folklore and its efficacy in the articulation of ideology and political power.

Next, Laura Kunreuther of Bard College describes the ways in which some ordinary Nepalis in Kathmandu began to write, rewrite, and preserve traces of their heritage and personal history during the 1990s. Basing her discussion on a number of detailed case studies, she describes how public discourses can influence people's understanding of their possessions, their inheritance and personal selves within a social world. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the workshop on 'The Creation of Public Meaning During the Democratic Transition in Nepal' held at SOAS in July 2012, which formed a part of the SOAS-Martin Chautari International Partnership Project funded by the British Academy.

In our third article, Matthew Maycock, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Glasgow, describes the implications of the establishment of a People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment for the inhabitants of a Kamaiya settlement close by. This article provides an account of the 'People's War' from the perspective of bystanders to the conflict who were actually more affected by its aftermath than they were by the conflict itself.

Finally, I have taken the liberty of adding as an endpiece my own translation of an essay by the Nepali poet Lakshmi Prasad Devkota (1909-59) on his fraught relationship with the English language, which I think speaks as much to the present day as it did to the Kathmandu in which it was first penned, some 85 years ago.

With this issue, my period of office as Managing Editor of the EBHR comes to an end. The journal now returns to the Südasien Institut of the University of Heidelberg, where it will henceforth be produced by an

editorial team headed by Professor William Sax. More senior readers may recall that Heidelberg is where the Bulletin took birth. I recently came across a letter dated 15 July 1990 from Richard Burghart, its founding editor. Richard wrote, 'I am not quite sure whether the academic world requires yet another journal, but a number of colleagues at the recent DFG/CNRS meeting in France thought a Nepal/Himalayan newsletter would be helpful'. Later in the letter he remarked, 'Depending on subscriber response, we might in two years close down, or carry on, or expand...'

Well, carry on we did, and twenty-four years later I believe the EBHR has proved its worth. Our list of subscribers now includes many university libraries, 250 hard copies are printed of each issue, and the journal now goes online after twelve months of hard copy publication. EBHR articles are cited very frequently by scholars working on many different Himalayan topics and themes, and I strongly believe we are making a real contribution to scholarship on the region.

I would like to take this final opportunity to thank all members of the UK editorial board for reading and reviewing dozens of submissions over the past four years and for giving up their time for meetings and the like. Arik Moran and Heleen Plaisier have been as generous with their time as they have been indispensable, and I must also thank our contributing editors across the world for their support and encouragement. Finally, none of this would have been possible without the vital help of Chiran Ghimire, Rita Bhujel and Deepak Thapa at the Social Science Baha in Kathmandu, to whom we should remain eternally grateful.

So *haardik dhanyavaad* everybody, and my very best wishes to Bo Sax and his colleagues for the next four years in Heidelberg.

– Michael Hutt

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Maheshwar P. Joshi** is a historian and archaeologist with a Ph.D on temple architecture and iconography and a D.Litt. in numismatics. He is a retired Professor and former Head of the Department of History, Kumaun University, Nainital, Uttarakhand, and former member of the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology, Government of India. He is currently an Honorary Fellow of the Doon Library and Research Centre, Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand, and Collaborator, CNRS, UPR, 299, Villejuif, France. Joshi, who has been actively engaged in research on the Central Himalaya since 1963, has contributed nearly 150 research papers and over fifty articles on Central Himalayan history, culture and archaeology from prehistory to modern times. He has authored four books and jointly edited ten books, including the *Himalaya: Past and Present* series of the Association of Studies on the Himalaya (with Dr. Allen C. Fanger and Dr. Charles W. Brown). Currently, Joshi is working on the source materials for a study of traditional metalwork, art and architecture, water management, political, socio-economic and cultural history of Uttarakhand and Far Western Nepal.

**Laura Kunreuther** is an associate professor of anthropology at Bard College, and has been a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania during the 2013-2014 academic year. Her interests in Nepal range from discussions about publics, media, cultural memory, gender, modernity, and most recently, sound in the Kathmandu Valley. Some of her published articles appear in *American Ethnologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, and *Studies in Nepali History and Society*. Her recent book, *Voicing Subjects* (University of California, 2014) discusses various discourses about the 'voice', as a political metaphor and an intimate medium of communication, in relation to emerging publics and subjectivities in Kathmandu.

**Matthew W. Maycock** completed his PhD thesis, which focused on masculinities in post-conflict Nepal, in 2012. Using ethnographic methods, the thesis focused on a group of recently freed bonded labourers, and on changing forms of embodied masculinity, family practices, labour and

mobility patterns. Maycock has complemented his research on conflict and masculinity in South Asia by working for a number of years on gender mainstreaming (explicitly focusing on men and boys) within public health in the UK. He is currently doing post-doctoral research at the Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow. His research there focuses on masculinity and health within prisons, using ethnographic methods in a number of secure institutions in Scotland.

# The *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī as Narrated in Doti (Far Western Nepal) and Uttarakhand (India): Text and context

Maheshwar P. Joshi

The items selected from the past are often so chosen as to legitimize the values and codes of the present. In selecting and recasting cultural items we highlight some and marginalize others. *The act of selection becomes a dialogue with the past* (Thapar 2000: 4, emphasis added).

## Introduction

Based on the testimony of inscriptions (the earliest dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD), literary accounts, and local traditions it may be suggested that Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand formed one single polity for centuries under the Katyūri dynasty. Therefore, both regions inherit a shared past or collective memory. The *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, a Katyūri princess, as narrated in Doti (Far Western Nepal) and Uttarakhand (India) is an example of this common heritage. This paper traces the origin of the Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī narrative to the widely known theme of the sixth century AD Sanskrit drama the *Devī Chandraguptam*, which in turn is rooted in the Imperial Gupta history of the fourth century AD. Using the princess as a motif, as in the *Devī Chandraguptam*, it shows how certain important events form the contexts that mediate the folklore under discussion and how its texts are modified accordingly. It also examines the functional aspect of folklore and its efficacy in the articulation of ideology and political power.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that before the emergence of the nation states of

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1 This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper presented to the 'Nepali Folklore: Third National Conference', at Dhangarhi, Nepal, October 21-28, 2013. I am thankful to Prof. Dr. Claus Peter Zoller (University of Oslo, Norway) who drew my attention to the issue of motif in folklore studies, and to Dr. Monika Krengel (formerly University of Heidelberg, Germany) for the suggestion to include brief introductions to the *jāgara* and the *bhārata*. I am beholden to Dr Franck Bernède for providing me with a copy of the transcribed version of the Himalayan folklore in his collection. I am also thankful to the reviewers of this paper for their helpful suggestions; however, I fully own the lapses in presenting English summaries of the original texts in Dotiyali and Kumaoni as well as any overstatements and interpretations of the data.

India and Nepal, the Central Himalaya (parts of Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand) formed a single polity under the Katyūrīs. Literary and archaeological evidence suggests that the Katyūrīs were the lineal descendants of the Kuṇindas (Joshi 2007). Inscriptions dated between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD show that their kingdom was called variously Karttṛpura, Kārtikeyapura, Kārtikapura, and Kartiyura (modern Vajjnath, District Bageshwar, Uttarakhand); therefore they were christened as Katyūrīs (see Joshi, forthcoming). Inscriptional evidence from Far Western Nepal also reveals that the appellation *Katyūrā* was already in vogue in the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, as evidenced in the copperplate inscription of Śāka 1411 (AD 1489) of the Raikā king Parvatī Malla (Pāṇḍeya 2065 VS: 96). There are two phases of the Katyūrī rule. The earlier phase may be called the Central Katyūrī (c. AD 650-1200) when the Katyūrīs ruled from Kārtikeyapura and their kingdom extended from Far Western Nepal to Garhwal, and the latter phase when their kingdom disintegrated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD and gave birth to several independent principalities, mostly established by the scions of the Kārtikeyapura Katyūrīs, among which the following are known from the inscriptions (Joshi 2005):

1. The Brahmas/Bams, the Pālas, and the Raikās (in Far Western Nepal-adjoining eastern Kumaon region, Uttarakhand);
2. the Later Katyūrīs (in Katyur, District Bageshwar, Uttarakhand);
3. the Later Katyūrīs (in Baramandal, District Almora, Uttarakhand);
4. the Later Katyūrīs (in Pali, District Almora).

It may be noted here that inscriptional evidence proves the existence of the Katyūrīs from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD. Interestingly, they are still invoked, albeit only culturally, in Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand as evidenced in the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā, alias Jiyā Rānī, which is part of a larger corpus of narratives associated with the Katyūrīs. The *Bhārata* of Maulā is a narrative sung in Far Western Nepal to entertain the people, whereas the *Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī is a narrative performed in spirit possession séances. However, as we will eventually note, the texts of these two narratives are based on a shared past or collective memory.

In recent years narrative analysis has gained wide popularity and has become a common approach not only in the humanities and social sciences but also in the natural sciences (Czarniawska 2004: 2-3, *in passim*).



For a student of history, narrative analysis is exceedingly useful in unfolding the past in the absence of historiography (Thapar 2000: 1-5 and 21-23, Hegarty 2012: 15-23, *in passim*). Indeed, White considers:

the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them* (White 1975 [1973]: 2, Joyce 2002: 4-17).

Hegarty's recent study of the *Mahābhārata* shows that as a narrative the *Mahābhārata* has 'a strong sense of the past, of its approach to that past and of its own purpose', as it forms 'part of a wider textual and social context in early South Asia'. Therefore, in his work he moves 'from narrative analysis to inter-textual comparison and historical reconstruction' (Hegarty 2012: 2). Hegarty draws our attention to 'the role of narrative in the formation of consensus understandings of both past and place' (*Ibid*: 4), which makes it an 'empowered activity' (*Ibid*: 7). Hegarty's insightful observation on South Asian historiographic traditions, in which he says: 'the absence of "historiography" or "history proper" in no way equates to the absence of a consciousness of the past', is central to the present essay, because in this respect narratives bear on cultural memory (*Ibid*: 21-22) or a shared past (*Ibid*: 95). He shows how the *amṛtamanthana* (churning of the ocean) episode is a narrative construction of the Vedic past associated with the ritual of Soma sacrifice (*Ibid*: 95). He notes:

[...]there is compelling evidence to link the Mahābhārata's cosmogonic narrative of *amṛta* churning with the *soma* pressing that is so central to Vedic ritual practice...

In the Mahābhārata, it is the *yajña* that is 'inserted in time' and... also inserted into place. Ritual is, however, subsequently usurped by alternative modes of religious practice. Indeed, the stage is set for the encompassment of *yajña* by *kathā*, that is to say, of ritual by story. It is of critical importance in this regard, then, that the churning of the ocean narrative provides the basis for an aetiology of not just the cosmos but also of the Mahābhārata itself, and furthermore that these two creations are fundamentally interrelated. Here we will move

from a series of complex parallels between creative ritual action and stories that dramatize ritual action to a concerted attempt to replace rituals with stories: a narrative *coup d'état* (*Ibid:* 99-100).

As regards places, Hegarty (*Ibid:* Ch. 4) gives a detailed analysis of places occurring in different chapters of the *Mahābhārata*. He aptly remarks:

What is of key importance is the global reach of this description and its anachronistic inclusivity (which would be the case whatever the period of composition of this portion of the *Mahābhārata*). By this I refer to the fact that the authors of the text, regardless of the first- or second-hand sources of their geographical information, chose to present the known world as it was at the time of authorship and not at the time of the historical action they describe. Our fabricated heroes, the Pāṇḍavas, have been inserted in a quasi-Vedic past, but have been situated in a very contemporary place (*Ibid:* 148).

It has already been noted that the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī is part of a larger Central Himalayan narrative placed under the rubric of the Katyūri *Jāgara*, which also includes the famous oral epic *Mālūsāhī* (Meissner 1985). For a student of Central Himalayan history, Hegarty's mode of analysis of the *Mahābhārata* as a narrative, if extrapolated to the Katyūri *Jāgara*, can serve as a useful tool in unfolding the shared past of the Central Himalaya in the absence of its historiography. We will eventually notice that in the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, we come across the cultural memory/shared past of the Central Himalaya of Kārttikeyapura times inserted into the quasi-Katyūri past situated in contemporary places like Ajaimiryākoṭa, Bānghāṭa, Gubari, and the *paṭṭi* of Kumāūm in the case of the Doti (Far Western Nepal) text of the *Bhārata* of Maulā, and Chitraśilā, Kāṭhagodāma, and Raṇachulāhāṭa in the case of the Uttarakhand text of the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī. It may be noted here that

[...] the etymological definition of text is much broader. Specifically, *text* is derived from the Latin *texere*, which means “to weave.” This aspect of the definition suggests that text is like a cloth, a material object, woven of many different threads, all combined to create a coherent whole. The word also figuratively suggests the “theme or

subject on which anyone speaks; the starting point of a discussion” (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). So in its most encompassing sense, *text* can refer to words, objects, ideas, and behaviors. Frequently, when we use the word *text*, either on its own or in conjunction with the words *folklore* or *folk*, we intend it to mean all these complex possibilities, as well as the particular content of a particular item of folklore (Sims and Stephens 2011: 19).

In the following section of this essay we will notice how skeins of different ideas, situations and characters are woven into the pattern of the Maulā/Jiyā Rānī narrative. So far, only two texts of the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī are known, namely, the Dotiyali text (hereafter DT) sung in Far Western Nepal and the Uttarakhandi text (hereafter UT) current in Uttarakhand, India. Here I will give a summary account of these two texts which shows that the particular content of both texts is the seizing of the Katyūrī queen Maulā/Jiyā Rānī by her consort’s opponent.

### **The *Bhārata* of Maulā (DT)<sup>2</sup>**

Literally, *bhārata* means war (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]: 753, 798). However, in Far Western Nepal it denotes legends of heroes and heroines, which in genre are analogous to the legends of the *Mahābhārata*. Also known as *huḍakeli*, these are sung during festivals and ceremonies (Bināḍī (in press), Zoller 2001: 84 and fn. 14) by folk musicians called *damāīs*, who belong to the Śūdra community. The DT of the *Bhārata* of Maulā informs us that King Pirthāmadeu of Ajaimiryākoṭa (capital of Doti, Far Western Nepal) had seven queens, amongst whom Maulā was the chief queen. She had no progeny, therefore she went out on a pilgrimage and ultimately settled at Bānghāṭa, where she practiced austerities for years and prayed for a baby without being impregnated. While she was bathing there, her matted golden hair fell into the river and was carried far away by its current to a place where it was netted by the royal fishermen of Kumaon. Taking it for gold, they presented it to the Kumaoni kings Sāladeu-Bisāladeu, who at once noticed that it was a tuft of golden hair. Fancying that a woman with such hair ought to be beautiful, they ordered the fishermen to find

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2 I am thankful to Sri Vasudeva Pandeya who kindly sent me a copy of the DT which is being published by Prof. Jairaj Pant.

her and bring her to them. The fishermen found Maulā at Bānghāṭa and forcibly took her to the Kumaoni kings who proposed to marry her. Helpless, Maulā agreed to this, provided that the kings arranged for her a good house built separately (independent of the residences of the other queens), got a *sijurako sāḍo* (bedcover?) knitted for her, and finally arranged a grand sacrifice for the marriage ceremony there.

The kings agreed to the terms; accordingly, Maulā was brought to the ceremonial place. The marriage rituals commenced and Maulā made five circumambulations with King Sāladeu, uttering: ‘salutations to *buvā* (father/fatherly) Sāladeu’ on each circumambulation. Sāladeu stopped the rituals because Maulā had addressed him as *buvā*. Then he asked his younger brother Bisāladeu to marry her instead. Maulā again made five circumambulations, this time with Bisāladeu, uttering: ‘salutations to *kkā* (uncle) Bisāladeu’ on each circumambulation. The ritual was again stopped, because she had addressed Bisāladeu as *kkā*. Compelled by the circumstances, Sāladeu-Bisāladeu adopted her as their daughter, and thought about arranging her marriage with a suitable prince. Accordingly, they sent invitations to the princes of the four cardinal quarters. Thereupon, Maulā pleaded: ‘o *buvā* you should have invited only one person, you have committed a mistake by inviting princes from the four quarters, it will create animosity’. In the meantime she conveyed a letter through her parrot to King Pirthāmadeu, informing him of her situation and asking him to attend the event of her marriage in the garb of a *jogī*.

King Pirthāmadeu arrived at the fort of Sāladeu-Bisāladeu in the garb of a *jogī* on the fateful day. When Maulā saw him present there, she announced that since she could marry only one person, whereas there were many prospective grooms, if they agreed she would toss up her necklace in the assembly and would marry him on whose *tāṭa* (neck) it fell. The princes agreed. Thereupon, in the name of her chastity and steadfast devotion to her husband, Maulā tossed up her necklace, praying that it would fall on the neck of King Pirthāmadeu. Her prayer was granted and the necklace fell on the *tāṭa* of King Pirthāmadeu, who disclosed his identity in the course of events, and they were reunited.

**2. The *Jāgara* of *Jiyā Rānī* alias *Maulādevī* (UT):** The term *jāgara* is derived from Sanskrit *jāgr* (awakening), and contextually offers varied meanings (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]: 416, Staal 1963, Smith 2006: *in*

*passim*, Joṣī 2011: *Adhyāya* 4). In the context of the *Jāgara* of Maulā it stands for the spirit possession ritual (on *jāgara* rituals see Fanger 1990, Krengel 1999, Zoller 2001: 82, Bernède 2001, Lecomte-Tilouine 2009), in which Jiyā Rānī, alias Maulādevī, is invoked along with her consort Pritamadeva and their attendants, all of whom are deified. Their respective spirits possess specific individuals who are seated in a definite order (Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatta 2009). The UT has some minor variations, but all represent Jiyā Rānī/Maulādevī as the queen of the Katyūri king Pṛthipāla/Pritamadeva captured by the *Turkī* /*Paṭhāna* (local expressions in folklore, denoting Muslims) at Chitraśilā near Kathgodam (District Nainital, Uttarakhand) and her rescue by *Nau Lākha Katyūrī* (the Nine Lakh Katyūrīs).<sup>3</sup> It may be noted here that the historicity of the characters portrayed in the narrative cannot be established because their names are not found in the vast corpus of epigraphic source-material; nor do they fit in with the diachronic frame of Central Himalayan history.

In the present study I am using the Pali Pachhaun (District Almora) text collected by us (Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatt 2009; Joshi *forthcoming*) as it is in vogue in the very heart of the Later Katyūri territory. It narrates that King Pṛthipāla of Raṇachulihāṭa (Kārttikeyapura, capital of Central Katyūri, modern Vajjnath, District Bageshwar)<sup>4</sup> had two queens, the elder being Gaṅgāvatī and the younger Jiyā Rānī. It is said that once Pṛthipāla went to Haridvāra (District Haridwar, Uttarakhand) to take a ritual bath, when simultaneously Jairāja Khātī of Bhilare and Sunapati Sauka of Bhoṭa also arrived there to bathe. These three met and promised that as and when the occasion arose they would establish matrimonial alliances with one another. Accordingly, in the course of time, when Jiyā Rānī, daughter of Jairāja Khātī, was twelve years old, she was married to the hundred-year-old-Pṛthipāla. She was a devout person and wanted to give birth to a righteous son. Therefore, she prayed to Śiva who was pleased with her devotion and assured her that she would be blessed with the desired son,

3 The *Jāgara* of Maulā alias *Jiyā Rānī* forms part of the corpus of the Katyūri *Jāgara* which has been collected by several scholars, notably, Prayāga Joṣī (vide Śarmā 2007), Bhaṭṭa (2002), Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatt (2009). One of the Garhwali versions published by Oakley and Gairola (1977 [1935]: 121-26) represents Joshimath area (District Chamoli) as the place of the event with Narasiṃha as the presiding deity and the abductor as 'Bhaga Turank [Turk in other versions], Raja of Bhanikot'.

4 Other versions of the UT current in Garhwal represent him as king of 'Katyur-garh' (in Joshimath?) (*Ibid*) or Khairāgaḍha (Bhaṭṭa 2002) in Garhwal.

provided that she bathed in the Gaulā and prayed to him as Chitreśvara Mahādeva at Chitraśilā (near Kathgodam, District Nainital, Uttarakhand) without any companion. Jiyā Rānī requested Śiva that because it would be dangerous for her, a woman, to go to Chitraśilā alone she may be allowed to take her *Guru* Gavāli along. Śiva consented. On the first day of the month of Māgha she took a bath in the Gaulā, and arranged her *nau gaja* (nine yards) and *aṭhāra hātha* (eighteen hands, also equal to 9 yards) long golden hairs, one of which broke off and flowed to Kāṭhagodāma (some three kilometres from Chitraśilā). At Kāṭhagodāma seven Turk brothers, each riding a horse, were crossing the Gaulā. Their horses' feet became entangled with Jiyā Rānī's flowing hair. The seven brothers climbed down from the horses and pulled out the hair. Fascinated by its length and golden colour, they at once felt a desire to carry off the woman to whom it belonged.

Meanwhile, as directed by Śiva, Jiyā Rānī prayed at Chitreśvara and conceived miraculously without being impregnated. In the course of events the left eye of Jiyā's *Guru* pulsed. Taking it as a bad omen and anticipating danger, he asked Jiyā to go back. In the meantime the seven Turk brothers arrived at Chitraśilā. The *Guru* directed Nisau Mahara, who had accompanied them from village Maharagaurm, to hide Jiyā. Nisau Mahara cracked a boulder with his dagger and Jiyā was hidden in the crack. However, Jiyā's hair remained exposed and the Turks detected it. They told the *Guru* to take the woman out so that they could carry her away. The *Guru* said that the woman was King Pṛthipāla's queen, that he had no right to give her to them, but that if her rescuer did not arrive within three days he would get her married to them.<sup>5</sup> The *Nau Lākha Katyūri* (Katyūris numbering nine hundred thousand) arrived in time and rescued Jiyā Rānī. After ten months she bore a son who was given three names: Dhāma Deva after *dharma* (righteousness), Dulā Sāhī after *dūdha* (milk), and Satauji after *sata* (truthfulness).

5 Pāṇḍe (1977: 53) summarily notes that when Jiyā Rānī was captured at Chitraśilā and was being taken away on horseback by Sayyada Paṭhāna, she agreed to go with him on the condition that he would treat her as a daughter for twelve years, and that if the Katyūris did not rescue her within the stipulated time she would marry him. When the Katyūris learned about this they sent their army and she was liberated. It compares well with a somewhat similar motif from India, which reads 'Abducted princess tells her abductor to wait for her menstrual period of 12 years to terminate' (Thompson 1955-1958: motif number K 1227.10.1).

### Context

It is clear that these two texts narrate one, single event, i.e. the capture of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, queen of Pirthāmadeu/Pṛthipāla/Pritamadeva, a Katyūrī king, but their respective contexts are different. Here the term *context* is used ‘to mean everything that surrounds the text—the setting, people, situation—anything in addition to the expressions, item, idea, or objects being shared’ (Sims and Stephens 2011: 19).

Thus, the DT sung in the Doti region of Far Western Nepal represents Pirthāmadeu as the king of Ajaimiryākoṭa (Far Western Nepal) and situates the event in the region from Bānghāṭa (?) through Gubari (?) across the *paṭṭi* (strip of land) of Kumāurī (Kumaon) where the *koṭa* (fortified palace) of Sāladeu-Bisāladeu was located. No mention is made of the precise location of the palace of the Kumaoni chief. However, Sām̐kr̥tyāyana (VS 2015: 67) reports an inscription of AD 1597 from Vajinath (District Bageshwar) recording the name of the Katyūrī king Sukhaladeva. If Sāladeu and Sukhaladeva refer to one and the same person then he can be identified as a Katyūrī king. Be that as it may, it is clear that the DT refers to the capture of Pirthāmadeu’s queen Maulā by Kings Sāladeu-Bisāladeu of Kumaon, who amicably give her back to Pirthāmadeu. It is clear that the DT is sung in the context of the royal families of Doti and Kumaon, who evidently formed a homogeneous community, interrelated either through the common Katyūrī lineage or else through matrimonial alliances between the Katyūrī and Chandra lineages.

The UT narrating the legend of Jiyā Rānī is sung in the Kumaoni districts of Nainital (Ranibagh, Mukteshwar, and Baitalghat region), Almora (Salt, Pali Pachhaum, Borarau, Kairarau, Dhamush, and Doba), and Bageshwar (Katyur Valley), and in several areas in the Garhwali districts of Pauri (Rikhadikhal, Idakot Malla, Dhumakot) and Chamoli (Joshimath). It invariably situates the event in the context of Jiyā Rānī’s capture by the *Turkī/Paṭhāna* (i.e. Muslims) at Chitraśilā (Ranibagh-Kathgodam) and their encounter with the Katyūrīs. Interestingly, available evidence from the works of contemporary Muslim historians coupled with local traditions clearly shows that the Muslim inroads into the Kumaon hills from this region took place when the Chandras were ruling in Kumaon and the Paṁvāras in Garhwal (Atkinson 1884: 520-29, 537-39, 543-49, 561-65 and 581-90, Zaidī 1997: *in passim*, Joshi 2012). Therefore, the Muslim encounter with the Katyūrīs is a fiction. As may be noted, the context of the UT is

noticeably different from that of the DT in that here the actors involved belong to two heterogeneous communities representing two different religious communities and nativities. It may be added here that the Rohelā Muslims were much despised in Uttarakhand, owing to their iconoclastic activities and heterodox religious practices (Bahadur 1916: 192). That is why, despite traditional political rivalry and protracted wars between the chiefs of Kumaon and Garhwal, when the Rohelā Muslims occupied Kumaon and vandalised Brahmanical temples the Garhwali king came to the rescue of the Kumaoni king (Joshi 2012).

### Discussion

It is worthwhile noting here that whereas in the Doti region the *Bhārata* of Maulā is sung to entertain people, in Uttarakhand the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī, also called Maulā, is performed exclusively as a spirit possession ritual under the priesthood of the Dāsa section of Śūdras. Jones (1976), in his analysis of different forms of spirit possession in the Nepal Himalaya, observes that spirit possession plays a significant role in sociological functions. In the traditional society of Uttarakhand, spirit possession rituals, called *jāgara*, play a significant role. Thus, while studying the Kumaoni *jāgaras*, Kregel notes:

The protection of territory and keeping it free from guilt and the intrusion of evil is relevant for both, house- and *dhuni-jāgars*. In both contexts, actively dancing and speaking supernaturals are linked to a mythological past. The deceased kings who were the original owners and protectors of the land form the core of the mythological past. Their sufferings and struggles as well as their authority are present today and are kept virtually alive through the rich folklore presented in the first part of the *jagar*. These legends are an indispensable part of every *jagar* and they contain a message in their own right. They strengthen the territorial identification of the listeners, although these deified kings are not bound to one place. Their legends describe adjacent areas and holy places and widen the territorial imagination...

A general feature of *jagars* is their articulation of ambivalences. The suffering person (victim of an evil spirit) experiences at the same time the potential powers of a 'judge' pointing to offences that concern the family or community as a whole. On the one hand, *jagars*



serve to re-establish and confirm social order; on the other hand, they provide a critique of human desires and actions. Powers of the person are, apart from acting as mediums, expressed through the power of curses. Anger and dissatisfaction, as attributes of personal feelings and reactions, are only given space in this context. Curses are of a female domain. With regard to property rights—a mail domain—intentions and motives do not count; traditional rights are applied purely and simply without taking persons into account (Krengel 1999: 280-81).

Spirit possession in Uttarakhand is predominantly a Dāsa (Śūdra community) vocation, which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Joshi 2010 and 2011, Jośī 2011, Berreman 1963, Dumont 1959). It is enough to say here that one of their sections claims to belong to the Maheśvara *gotra* and another claims descent from the Āī Dāsa son of Brahmā and his consort Gautamī Devī. Such beliefs lent them a ritual status corresponding to that of Brahmins, which is further strengthened by their claim to being the ‘Dāsa’ (slave/attendant) of the concerned deity. By virtue of this ritual status, like the Brahmins, they tailored genealogies of their clients and assigned them Katyūrī status—the process of Katyūrisation—whereby a multitude of Uttarakhandi people were transformed into what is proverbially known as *Nau Lākha Katyūrī* (the nine hundred thousand Katyūrīs), as may be noticed in the Katyūrī folklore sung in Far Western Nepal, Kumaon, and Garhwal.<sup>6</sup> In the Katyūrī *Jāgara* sung in Uttarakhand, some of the legendary Katyūrī princes, who are otherwise portrayed as cruel characters during their lifetime, are deified as benevolent spirits. Interestingly, many other deified spirits are also invoked along with them, one of them being Lākuḍa-bīra. Elsewhere, I have shown that this Lākuḍa-bīra is in fact Lakulīśa, the twenty-eighth incarnation of Śīva (Joshi 2007-2010). Thus, here we notice the amalgamation of a great tradition with a little tradition. Significantly, in the course of *jāgara* rituals, the *jāgari* (the

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6 Some of the *vamśavalīs* (genealogical accounts) bearing on the Katyūrī lineages are preserved in manuscripts found in the private collections of the folklore singers under reference. A xeroxed copy of one such manuscript collected by the late Sri Chandra Singh Rahi, the famous Garhwali folk-musician, from a folklore singer of Joshimath (District Chamoli, Garhwal), was made available to me by Piyush Bhatt, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi (see Plates 8a-8b-8c, Joshi (forthcoming)).

priest in the *jāgara* ritual) commands the deified spirits (see Plate 1) so as to enable the devotee to communicate directly with the deity (Fanger 1990: 179). This is a feat that is beyond the capacity of a Brahmin priest, for the invoked deity is always represented symbolically in the great tradition. Since these *jāgara* rituals used to be performed in village shrines attended by a large number of people, the *jağari* was able to publicly display his ability and power to bestow divine status on his patron as the lineal descendant of some deified spirit or another. At the same time it also meant that if the *jağari* could control the powerful spirit of the deceased princes, the living one could also be managed. To some extent these measures also served as deterrents to tyrannical rule. Thus, spirit possession played a significant role in the political society of Uttarakhand (Joshi 2010, Jošī 2011: *Adhyāya* 4-5).

Historically, after the decline of the Central Katyūri kingdom the socio-political functions of Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand took different courses, therefore the texts of the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī were regenerated in keeping with changed contexts, as will be clear from what follows.

The famous Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp, while analyzing the contents of the folklore compiled by Afanas'ev, notes:

In a series of wondertales about the persecuted stepdaughter I noted an interesting fact: in 'Morozko' [Frost] (No. 95 in Soviet editions) the stepmother sends her stepdaughter into the woods to Morozko. He tries to freeze her to death, but she speaks to him so sweetly and so humbly that he spares her, gives her a reward, and lets her go. The old woman's daughter, however, fails the test and perishes. In another tale the stepdaughter encounters not Morozko but a *lesij* [a wood goblin], in still another, a bear. But surely it is the same tale! Morozko, the *lesij*, and the bear test the stepdaughter and reward her each in his own way, but the plot does not change. Was it possible that no one should ever have noticed this before? Why did Afanas'ev and others think that they were dealing with different tales? It is obvious that Morozko, the *lesij*, and the bear performed the same action. To Afanas'ev these were different tales because of different characters in them. To me they were identical because the actions of the characters were the same (Propp 1997 [1984]: 69).

It may be noted here that Propp has shown that, despite its compositional imaginary, folklore is by and large embedded in historical events. He says:

It is obvious that the study of folklore cannot be limited to the investigation of origins and that not everything in folklore goes back to a primitive state or is explained by it. New formations occur in the entire course of people's historical development. Folklore is a historical phenomenon and the science of folklore, a historical discipline. Ethnographic research is its first step.

Historical study should show what happens to old folklore under new historical conditions and trace the appearance of new formations. We cannot ascertain all the processes that occur in folklore with the transition to new forms of social structure, or even with the development within the existing system, but we know that these processes occur everywhere with surprising uniformity (*Ibid*: 11).

Interestingly, while discussing the subject-matter of history, Collingwood emphasises events that express thoughts, elaborating upon which he adds:

Thus the vague phrase that history is knowledge of the individual claims for it a field at once too wide and too narrow: too wide, because the individuality of perceived objects and natural facts and immediate experiences falls outside its sphere, and most of all because even the individuality of historical events and personages, if that means their uniqueness, falls equally outside it; too narrow, because it would exclude universality, and it is just the universality of an event or character that makes it a proper and possible object of historical study, if by universality we mean something that oversteps the limits of merely local and temporal existence and possesses a significance valid for all men at all times. These too are no doubt vague phrases; but they are attempts to describe something real: namely the way in which thought, transcending its own immediacy, survives and revives in other contexts; and to express the truth that individual acts and persons appear in history not in virtue of their individuality as such, but because that individuality is the vehicle of a thought which,

because it was actually theirs, is potentially everyone's (Collingwood 2012 [1936/1940]: 303).

Using these statements to explain the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, a critical analysis of the event of the queen's capture leads us to visit the famous Rāma Gupta-Dhruvadevī-Chandragupta episode. This is the central theme of Viśākhadatta's drama the *Devī Chandraguptam*, a lost work dating from *circa* the sixth century AD. The core of its content is preserved in several sources,<sup>7</sup> and runs as follows: There were two brothers of the famous Imperial Gupta dynasty, namely, Rāma Gupta and Chandra Gupta. The former is represented as a weak king who suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of a Śaka king (4th century AD) and is consequently forced to surrender his queen Dhruvadevī to the latter. In order to save him from this humiliating situation, his brother Chandra Gupta seeks the support of a supernatural power by practising *vetāla-siddhi* ('vampire's support', a magical practice) and goes to the camp of the Śaka chief in the garb of Dhruvadevī and assassinates him. Later on, feigning madness, he also assassinates Rāma Gupta, marries Dhruvadevī, and ascends the throne (for the original passages and reconstruction of the episode see Bhandarkar 1932, Gupta 1974: 135-56, Raghavan 1963: 863-82).

Thus, the theme using a princess (here Dhruvadevī) as a motif recurs in several literary and other works noted above, albeit in different contexts: 'simply defined, a motif is a small narrative unit recurrent in folk literature' (Garry and El-Shamy 2005: xv). As may be noticed, here the motif emerges from 'attendant circumstances of the action' (Thomson

7 The core plot of the *Devī Chandraguptam* is preserved in the *Abhinavabhārati* of Abhinavagupta (early eleventh century AD), *Śrīṅgāraprakāśa* of King Bhoja of Mālava (AD 1011-1055), and *Nātyadarpaṇa* of Rāmachandra and Guṇachandra, pupils of Hemachandra, preceptor of the Chālukya king Kumārapāla (AD 1145-1171), and the *Nāṭaka-lakṣhaṇa-kōsha* of Sāgaranandi. The narrative was so popular that it was also written in Arabic, and later on Abul Hasan Ali translated it in his *Majmal-ut-tawārikh* (13<sup>th</sup> century AD). In addition, stray passages of the drama are also found in the *Harsha-charita* of Bāṇa (c. AD 650), the court poet of Emperor Harsha, the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* of Rājaśekhara (early tenth century AD), the *Āyurveda-dīpikā-ṭīkā* - a commentary on the *Charaka-saṃhitā* written by Chakrapāṇidatta (12<sup>th</sup> century AD), copper plate inscriptions of the Rāshṭrakūṭa kings Amoghavarsha (AD 800-878) and Govinda IV (AD 930-935), and the *Rājāvalī* of Mṛtyuñjaya Paṇḍita written as late as AD 1808 (Bhandarkar 1932, Raghavan 1963: 863-82, Gupta 1974: 135-56, 291, Thaplyal 2012: 147).

1955-58).<sup>8</sup> Thus, originally there appears a 'political episode dramatised in *Devī-Chandra Gupta*' (Bhandarkar 1932: 193-94) that tells of the fate of a princess in the context of her consort's weakness or strength in military action. In the *Harsha-charita* it is summarily stated that the Śākapati was assassinated by Chandra Gupta in female garb due to the former's lust for the other's wife; here the context is clearly the lustfulness of the Śākapati. The reason for this lust may be explained in the light of the *Majmal-uttawārikh*. It is the only work that states that the princess (i.e. Dhruvadevi) was charming, that she possessed extraordinary qualities that made every prince want to court her, and that for her part she loved only Barkamāris (i.e. Vikramāditya, an epithet of Chandra Gupta). It is told that Barkamāris brought her to his home. However, King Rawwāl (i.e. Rāma Gupta), the elder brother of Barkamāris, took hold of her. This news reached his father's enemy, who, taking advantage of the situation, invaded Rawwāl's kingdom and forced him to surrender the princess and his allies' daughters. Thereupon, Barkamāris came to the rescue of his family's honour by entering the enemy's camp dressed as a woman, along with his trusted attendants, to assassinate the raja and his retinue. Later on, feigning madness, he also killed Rawwāl, married the princess, and ascended the throne. Thus, here the motif gains prominence by virtue of her charming qualities. The *Āyurveda-dīpikā-ṭīkā* uses the narrative to illustrate potentials of human conduct in the context of sham madness, i.e. when a sane person feigns madness. It says, 'perceiving fraud is *upādhi*, its meaning is disguise (*chhadma*), its result is the consequence that takes place later. For instance, to obtain [the] murder of his brother and others at some later date Chandra Gupta fraudulently declared himself mad' (Gupta 1974: 150). Significantly, in the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* the narrative is retold in the context of *kāthottha* (an historical event), illustrating an example of literary composition meaning 'that some king named Śarma Gupta [most likely a mistake for Rāma Gupta] having been besieged by a Khasa (Śaka) ruler was compelled to give him his queen Dhruvasvāminī' (*Ibid*: 149-50). It is this very work that situates this episode in the Central Himalaya. Accordingly, the women of Kārttikeyanagara sing the glory of Chandra Gupta, the

8 Some related motifs recorded by Thompson (1955-1958) are as follows: No. T52.7. *Princess asked for in return for sparing palace*. India; No. T104. *Foreign king wages war to enforce demand for princess in marriage*. Icelandic; No. M146.7. *Vow of enemy chief to marry princess of besieged city*. Jewish.

assassin of that *Khaśādhīpati* who had inflicted a humiliating defeat on Śarma Gupta and forced him to offer his queen Dhruvadevī to him (i.e. the *Khaśādhīpati*). Bhandarkar (1932), on the authority of Śaṅkarārya,<sup>9</sup> shows that this *Khaśādhīpati*, living in the Himalaya, was the preceptor of the Khaśās, and that this event took place at Vaijnath (Kārttikeyapura of the Katyūri inscriptions, modern Vaijnath, District Bageshwar, Uttarakhand). He further adds that the name Khaśa ‘is almost the letters Śa-ka reversed... with a slight change’.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the *Devī Chandraguptam* is retold in different contexts, and accordingly the character of the motif—the ‘princess’ (i.e. Dhruvadevī)—also tends to change. Thus, the original narrative, i.e. the *Devī-Chandraguptam*, depicts the motif as a symbol, the possession of which determines the political hegemony of a ruler; in the *Harsha-charita* it is an object of lust due to which a ruler loses his life; and in the *Majmalut-tawārikh* the motif represents a charming princess of remarkable qualities, hence a bone of contention. This last image of the motif was also adopted in the folklore of the Central Himalaya, albeit with modification (Propp 1997 [1984]: 93), as the princess (Maulā/Jiyā Rānī) was portrayed with golden hair and great character, ‘something remarkable or worthy of remembering’ (Thompson 1955-58). Such a motif was ‘important enough to be remembered, something not quite commonplace adoration’ (Garry and El-Shamy 2005: xv, Oakley and Gairola 1977 [1935]). That is why her abduction was a common concern for the people of her husband’s kingdom. It may be added here that abductions ‘by humans are also a part of folklore and literature, but Thompson did not include many motifs about human abductors’ (Silver 2005: 381).

Thus, the *Devī Chandraguptam* served as a prototype for the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī. It agrees with the observation of Allen and Montell that folklore

[...] tends to represent the past in terms of prototypes and their subsequent re-embodiments. Oral narratives generally cluster around particularly important events and people. Time is telescoped to bring key events into direct association. The original protagonists may be

9 Śaṅkarārya wrote a commentary on the *Harsha-charita* in AD 1713 in which he glossed the term *Śakapati* as *Śakānām-āchāryaḥ* (‘preceptor of the Śakas’) (Gupta 1974: 148).

displaced by characters who are locally more prominent, or more relevant to the present' (Allen and Montell 1981: 32-7).

In this connection Collingwood's observation is worth citing:

Because the historical past, unlike the natural past, is a living past, kept alive by the act of historical thinking itself, the historical change from one way of thinking to another is not the death of the first, but its survival integrated in a new context involving the development and criticism of its own ideas (Collingwood 2012 [1936/1940]: 226).

Obviously, as I have already shown, on account of its uniqueness, the event of surrendering the queen of the defeated king to his victor was a widely known motif, as such at some point of time it was also spatially associated with the Katyūrī territory, i.e. Uttarakhand and Far Western Nepal.

Indeed, it is to the credit of the authors of the folklore of Doti and Uttarakhand that they re-situated the story of *Devī-Chandraguptam* temporally and spatially in the changed regional historical contexts. It corresponds to selective copying:

Selective copying is frequently motivated by a need to adapt the copied elements to local conditions and 'needs', e.g. to pre-existing repertoires, to cognitive orientations (as manifested in the organization of kinship, polity, ownership, ideology of the human self, aesthetic ideals, etc.), or to the demands of an audience and the circumstances of patronage (Zoller 2001: 97-8).

It is clear that here the motif originates in classical Sanskrit literature, but a horizontal relationship (Zoller 2001) between the *Bhārata* of Maulā and the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī is obvious. Thus, in the case of the Later Katyūrīs of Doti who styled themselves Raikā, history reveals that their main political rivals were the Kumaoni kings belonging to the Chandra dynasty, with whom they were engaged in protracted war, alternating with the occasional truce resulting in matrimonial alliances (Atkinson 1884: 527 ff, Joshi: 2005). It is interesting to note that these two dynasties rose to power almost simultaneously in circa 14<sup>th</sup> century AD and continued to flourish up to the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD, until both were uprooted by

the Gorkhas. Interestingly, political rivalry between the chiefs of Doti and Uttarakhand finds an echo in several folktales of this area (Oakley and Gairola 1977 [1935]: 9-10, Gaborieau 1977: xxix-xxx, xxxiii-iv, Bernède's archives [*Huḍakeli/Bhārata* of Bhiyā Kaṭhāyata], Joshi (*in press*)). It is in this context that in the DT at first Maulā is described to have been captured by the Kumaoni kings as a gesture of animosity, and later on, as a matter of reconciliation, they return her to Pirthāmadeu of Doti with due courtesy as their adopted daughter.

In the case of the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī, it alludes to the Rohelā (Muslim community of Rohelkhand, roughly Bareilly region, UP) invasion of Kumaon, their seizing of Almora, the capital of Kumaon, and their eventual defeat (AD 1743-45) by King Kalyāṇa Chandra of the Chandra dynasty (Joshi 2012). It may be noted here, as already mentioned above, that the Muslim inroads into Uttarakhand hills took place only during the post-Katyūrī period, when Uttarakhand was divided into two main principalities, namely Kumaon under the Chandra dynasty and Garhwal under the Paṁvāra, who were constantly at war with each other for political hegemony. However, when the Rohelā Muslims from the adjoining plains invaded Kumaon and occupied its capital Almora, the Garhwali king came to the rescue of the Kumaoni king (Joshi 2012). Clearly, using the theme of the *Devī Chandraguptam* as a trope, the folklore singers were performing for the audience of Kumaon and Garhwal to warn them of the impending dangers of Muslim inroads into the hills, and the potential consequences of such an eventuality. Therefore, the Katyūrīs were represented as the principal characters in the UT because they were respected equally by the people of Uttarakhand as their rulers before the rise of the chiefdoms of Kumaon and Garhwal. This fact is supported not only by the Katyūrī *Jāgara* but also by a large number of inscriptions and monuments (Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatt 2009, Joshi (*forthcoming*)). The audio-visual representation of this aspect can be witnessed in the annual fair held on the occasion of the *Uttarāyaṇa* (*Makara Saṁkranti* = transition of the Sun into the zodiac sign of Capricorn [Makara] on its celestial path, mostly falling on January 14) at Ranibagh (District Nainital), where thousands of devotees of the Katyūrīs from different villages of Kumaon and Garhwal assemble on the eve of *Uttarāyaṇa*, and hold the *Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī village-wise from dusk to dawn in a spectacular display of the spirit possession ritual (see Plates 2-7; Joshi *forthcoming*).



Interestingly, both the DT and the UT avoid mentioning the humiliating defeat of one of the principal characters (i.e. the consort of the princess, here the Katyūrī king Pirthāmadeu/Pṛthipāla/Pritamadeva), which forced him to surrender his queen Maulā/Jiyā Rānī and resulted in a fratricidal war. Instead, the texts depict the royal couple reunited without any blemish. Admittedly, such an episode did not fit into the context of the belief system of the socio-political milieu of Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand and was therefore not included in the texts. White aptly remarks:

The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does is test the capacity of a culture's fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of patterns of 'imaginary' events (White 1987: 45).

Thus, here the functional aspect (Propp 1997 [1984]: 117, Sims and Stephens 2011: 181-82) of this folklore is clear.

Elsewhere, I have shown (Joshi 2010 and 2011, Joṣī 2011: *Adhyāya* 5) that the traditional singers of the Central Himalaya used folklore to spread an ideology of divine or superhuman elements in some of the characters of royal lineages, which successfully brought about coherence in a faction-ridden political society in the interest of the ruling class, who were the patrons of the folklore performers. This ideology enabled the rulers to exercise power to contain their subjects, collect revenue, and muster up courageous persons to defend their territories or wage wars against their enemies. This accounts for the survival of ruling dynasties in the Central Himalaya for centuries without maintaining any regular army, as evidenced in traditions and archaeology. Significantly, folklore also inspired individuals to develop courage and might, and to display it publicly, apparently as a deterrent to oppressive rulers. This genealogy of folk performers, to use Foucauldian terminology, is couched in *jāgara*, *bhārata*, *huḍakelī*, etc., and is current all over the Central Himalaya.

It has been suggested that '[a]lthough critical studies tend to focus on the ideology of dominant groups, these are always opposed by subordinate groups, which can overcome both coercive and ideological controls'

(Miller and Tilley 1984: 13). However, the above discussion, though brief, clearly shows that subordinate groups can also create ideology and thereby command dominant groups. In fact, in traditional Central Himalayan society, the folklore singers (sadly taken for subordinated groups) acted like the elite group (Jośi 2011). That this ideology continues to hold ground as strongly as ever, even after the old regimes have vanished, follows from observations in the Census Reports of 1901 and 1931:

The Doms [the folklore singers of present essay] have always believed in the power of evil of the ghosts of injured persons and in *karma* (reincarnation), and as Mr. Burn (now Sir Richard Burn) pointed out [in U.P. Census Report of 1901] ‘these two beliefs, which are shared by many Khasiyas, were not without considerable effects on practical morality, one result of which is seen in the fact that hardly any police are required in the hills’ (Turner 1933: 560).

While discussing the text and context of folk traditions, Wadley (2005: chs. 4-5, and *in passim*) lays special emphasis on ‘performance’. She notes:

A performer of an oral epic must know much more than a melody and accompanying words. Although elaborate dramatic treatments of epics (such as found in *nautankī* performances) immediately catch the eye and appear to be the most complex performative treatments, the sung narrative traditions have their own complex, innovative, and creative means of performance (*Ibid*: 145).

As may be noticed, the two texts of the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī sung before two different audiences clearly show two different contexts of performances and support Wadley’s observation. These texts bear ample testimony to the ingenuity of the authors of the folklore in weaving historical events, rituals, and cultural praxis into a narrative texture.

### Conclusion

These examples clearly show how context shapes text. The texts reveal that for their authors it was the event that mattered and not the characters associated with it; they were not concerned about whether

those characters were real or imaginary. Thus, folklore tends to represent the past in terms of a unique event. From generation to generation the performers had the recollection of that event, which each generation resituated spatially and temporally as the then prevailing politico-social context demanded. It is implied then that the authors of these texts are selective in preserving the memories of the past. Interestingly, Hobsbawm has noted similar situations in Western traditions:

The element of invention is particularly clear here, since the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so (Hobsbawm 1996: 13).

While concluding, it may be noted that the literary, archaeological, and ethnographic evidence clearly suggests that Uttarakhand and Far Western Nepal comprise one, single culture area (Gaboreau 1977: xii, Joshi (*in press*)). The *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī is an icon of this oneness.

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Plate 1: Spirits of the deified Katyūrī kings offering their salutation to the *jagari* (folklore singer belonging to the Śūdra community) in the course of the *Jāgara* of Maulā/ Jiyā Rānī in front of the temple of Jiyā Rānī at Ranibagh (District Nainital, Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2012).



Plates 2a-2b-2c-2d: *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī in action (Uttarāyaṇa annual fair), possessed persons and devotees from Mukteshwar (District Nainital, Pl-2a, night of January 13, 2012), and Salt area (District Almora, Pls-2b, night of January 13, 2012; 2c and 2d, night of January 13, 2013) in Kumaon. Note the female figures representing Jiyā Rānī.





Plates 3a-3b: Night procession of the devotees after a ritual bath, with folklore singers from Mushiya Khan (District Pauri, Garhwal, Pl-3a, January 13, 2012); procession being led by persons possessed by the Katyūri spirits waving daggers – the Katyūri attribute (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2013).



Plate 4: Devotees from Dhumakot (District Pauri, Garhwal). The second one from the left is dressed in traditional Katyūri upper garments. To his right is the folklore singer and to the left the female medium of Jiyā Rānī (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2013).



Plate 5: Persons possessed by the Katyūri spirits with Jiyā Rānī in the centre. From Talla Salt, District Almora (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2013).



Plate 6: Devotees from Garhwal (including persons possessed by the Katyūrī spirits) taking a ritual bath in the Gaula, marking the commencement of the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī on the eve of the Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair (night of January 13, 2014).

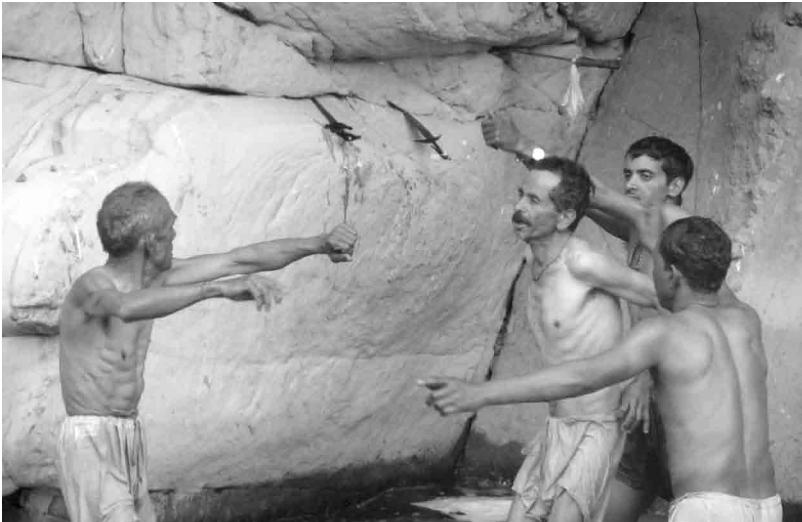


Plate 7: Guru Kaśmīrī group (from Bhaunikhāl, Salta, District Almora) belonging to the Śūdra community, possessed by the Katyūrī spirits and driving daggers into the cracks of a rock across the Gaula at Chitraśīlā-Ranibagh, thus re-enacting the feat of Nisau Mahara, an attendant of Jiyā Rānī (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2012).

की मोला वला और जहाँ  
 वीहो गजी एक स्यामीस  
 सैत नीर र शैत की ओला  
 हे जीत गेगे डारैत का वस  
 ओला लोरी वी तैजे मुरज  
 बं सौ राज कं व्या के ल्यु र दु  
 सं सौ राज म लो म लो दे वी  
 गोर क्यार व डो ब ताल मुर  
 मित्त स म र य का ती च  
 मित्त म  
 मी म मी ड का व्या म लो  
 साप व न का ता पा सा र वा  
 ताल को सा मु वा सा ते  
 गज गे को सौ ग ना त म  
 नो ला पा र्यु र को सा ब ल  
 म पा प्र यो म र जा ओ स त  
 के प रः बा स ती के पा व  
 गे र के पा रः स वा ल का  
 की र म पा डो र जा फो र

इका पाठ। इलरा देव का पाठ।  
 तलरा देव का पाठ। अजे पिचा  
 का पाठ। पीथम देव का पाठ।  
 राजा दुलासाई की ओला दे  
 रिंगोडा शैत थोकदार। सब  
 सोजन का नाती। मोदे सिम  
 शैत का नाती। कैला बाबु देस  
 शैत का नाती। दल भारत का  
 नाती। दल व चन्द्र का नाती।  
 वीरना मंग शैत का नाती। च  
 मुर का नाती। मुर सिंग शैत का  
 नाती। मुर सिंग शैत का नाती।  
 वीर न्वार निग शैत का नाती।  
 जीत बोलो गु ना व सिंग  
 का बंयों की जीत ओला जी  
 दाल शैत का बंयों की जीत  
 वीर जी। कमेडी वाला धो  
 दा। सोवन बरास का नाती  
 मुजा बली वीर सिंग का नाती।  
 कीरी कोर सिंग का नाती।  
 सोवन सिंग शैत का नाती।  
 कीर सिंग शैत का नाती।

कुंदु शैत का वटा की जीत का  
 जी। म सिंग वारा शैत की वस  
 बली स च्चर रांग जहाँ वीहो  
 चमाली वाला शैत ओर  
 सत पाली वाला प धान च  
 मडाली वाला म सिंगोडा  
 शैत ओर डीव वाला शैत  
 सब दल व चन्द्र का नाती  
 मी। ओर गीत व  
 रिंगोडा शैत जहाँ वीहो  
 जी। ओर रिंगोडी दे  
 रिंगोडा शैत हुवा हे स  
 बंसी हे जी। गोडाल शैत  
 की बंमावली लिखतंग  
 शैथारा गुमां ड्यों की बसा  
 बली म लिखतंग राज म  
 जी बड़े राजा इन्द्र जै पाल  
 का पाठ। सिंगोर राजा  
 सारि का पाठ। बुने राजा  
 साद साद का पाठ।

Plates 8a-8b-8c: Pages of the manuscripts recording genealogical connections of the Katyūris with 'Rīgoḍā Rautas' and 'Rauthāṇa Gusāmi' clans: (plate 8a: Page 5 of the manuscript mentions 'Rīgoḍā Rauta' as 'Kaṁtha Kaṁtyuris', (plate 8b: Page 6, mentions, among others, Katyūri kings 'Pīthamadeu and his son Dulāsāi' (respectively husband and son of Jiyā Rānī/Maulā Devī) as predecessors of 'Rīgoḍā Rauta' clan, and (plate 8c: Page 7 of the manuscript completes genealogy of the 'Rīgoḍā Rauta' clan, which is followed by 'bamsābali' (genealogy) of 'Rauthāṇa Gusāmi' clan.

## Publics Of Heritage And Domestic Archives Among The Nepali Middle Class

Laura Kunreuther

In an article in *Himal* entitled 'Gods in Exile', Kanak Mani Dixit (1999) demands the return of hundreds of religious icons and statues of gods and goddesses from foreigners who have bought or stolen this cultural property from Nepal. Dixit questions the motives and agendas of a Western collector seeking authenticity through exotic objects that are far away and still in use. But he also lambasts what he calls 'the cultural elite' in Kathmandu for their participation, or passive collaboration, in the sale or theft of these objects. 'While the citizenry watched helplessly as the gods and goddesses went into foreign exile', he writes, 'the cultural elite looked the other way' (Dixit 1999: 9). Dixit, himself a member of the cultural elite and an upper-class media tycoon, highlights the recent significance of heritage and the preservation of cultural history throughout the Valley. This discourse has affected the way in which people talk about monuments, buildings, and other spaces marked as past in the city, as well as the way people think and talk about their own personal inheritance in their homes.

The theft and sale of statues, cultural icons, as well as texts and household items, increased especially after the 1980s when tourism became a dominant industry and the vast majority of Nepalis in the Valley became dependent on a cash economy.<sup>1</sup> The history of the movement of Nepali cultural property across Nepal's borders can be traced back to long before the dissolution of Rana rule in 1950. Such traffic in cultural heritage was no doubt a vital part of the small colonial presence in Nepal during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as it was in India, and certainly the interest in tracing cultural heritage in Nepal is clear in several accounts of colonial scholars (e.g. Hodgson 1874, Oldfield 1880). Dixit suggests that the disappearance of this cultural property is an effect of the crumbling importance of the Valley's communal institutions, and Kathmandu's

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1 One might also argue that the significance of *retrieving* cultural statuary became all the more important precisely because of the growing tourism in the Kathmandu Valley.

encounter with a headlong modernity.

While many have bemoaned the loss of history in Nepal's confrontation with modernity, as in other places this sense of loss is what characterises modernity, particularly in the past two decades of democratic reform. In this moment, history has become a more centrally debated subject in the public sphere, and public urban spaces have become increasingly marked as relics or traces of the past. Ethnographers, political scientists, and cultural historians writing since the 1990 *jan andolan* have stressed the significance of this political transition for enabling new narratives of history. With new narratives of the cultural past, new political and cultural identities rise to the surface of social consciousness; and vice versa: new political and cultural identities require new narratives of the cultural past (Lawoti 2007, Tamang 2008, Des Chene 1996, Hangen 2009). It is no surprise that during the 1990s many in Kathmandu began to write, rewrite, and preserve traces of their cultural or national heritage and their personal history in a variety of ways.

Scholarly attention has been paid primarily to the political stakes raised by emerging social groups and reform movements, and the narrative contexts of their attempts to change the state. Here I take a different approach. What does it mean to become part of a public? And how do public discourses that circulate around people influence their understanding of their possessions, their inheritance, and personal selves within a social world? How can we begin to think about the effect of the growing public sphere<sup>2</sup> on people's personal projects, particularly the growing importance of and desire to be recognised within publics in which they may not be active, contributing participants or listeners? Each of the stories I explore here engages with the question of how public discourses of history and heritage may, unwittingly and indirectly, affect individuals who are not directly a part of that public.

The people I discuss here are not scholars, members of the elite literati, or political activists. Their efforts at preservation are more closely connected to their homes, while the narratives about these objects, books, and houses stretch out beyond the limits of their family to an imagined

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2 I am relying on Habermas' definition of a public sphere as a space of engagement (in his terms, a space of rational debate) between actors who debate political and social issues outside the domain of the state, ideally to keep a check on political power (Habermas 1989).

public. Their reflections on the possible history that may be carried in their inherited objects relate to much longer histories: Newar Buddhism, the history of public education, and the significance of printed books for gaining knowledge, in contrast to religious palmleaf manuscripts used for ritual purposes. During the time of this research, the value of the past was actively promoted through several intersecting institutions or industries: the boom in the heritage industry associated with UNESCO (which set up offices in Kathmandu in 1998), the discourse of heritage and its tangibility (in regions and specific homes) associated with the new politics of the *janajatis*, and the market for antiques or old things. The fact that the practices and discourses of such institutions were a vital part of the public sphere—in newspaper debates, TV serials, magazine articles, and popular culture—meant that people who were not active in these projects could draw upon and transform their messages to suit their own purposes.

This essay is based on research that was conducted primarily during the mid-1990s, and so it represents a specific moment during which personal and national history was being reevaluated after *jan andolan I*. In more recent years, the re-evaluation of the past has only accelerated with the growth of the *adivasi janajati* movements to create a federalist state based around ethnicity. While the Nepalis I describe do not discuss their projects in clearly political terms, their desire to preserve a specific ethnic or familial past that can be projected as a part of national history may be used to tell a political story. The demise of a strong state-sanctioned version of national history may be, for instance, the other side of why a new constitution has been so difficult to write.<sup>3</sup> The ethnographic examples I present below provide a small window into these broader questions about reimagining pasts. The broader aim of the paper is to show precisely *how* the discourse of history is appropriated by people: what linguistic strategies they use, what objects they choose to call history, and what sentiments are simultaneously invoked—to imagine that possibilities in their personal or familial pasts might one day be recognised by others as history.

Consider the following more recent examples that can be found easily in the Nepali press:

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3 I thank Sanjib Baruah for clarifying this point.

1. Upendra Shakya, along with many other Kathmandu residents (including an Austrian and US expat), restores vintage motorbikes from the 1950s-60s.<sup>4</sup> An article, written for 'The Week' section of *Republica*, quotes Shakya saying 'I feel like I own a bit of history'. Another vintage bike owner, who inherited several bikes from his grandfather, notes his sadness at 'the sight of a lot of old bikes gathering dust and mold in garages'. The discourse of history expresses people's sentimental attachment to these objects with personal and familial value (cf. Miller 2008). It also suggests an implicit association with foreigners, some of who came to Nepal aboard vintage motorcycles in the 1960s-70s. The government has apparently capitalised on the sentimental and aesthetic value of the old by imposing an additional tax on such vintage vehicles.
2. An article entitled, 'A walk into heritage'<sup>5</sup> (ESC Nepal, November 2011), describes the wish for contemporary *bahals* (residential areas organised around a courtyard) to be recognised as valid tourist sites, 'places where the past lingers'. The article describes the wish of a former ambassador to the EU, Durgesh Man Singh, to revitalise *bahals* because they are 'glimpses into history' and they could provide tourists with 'daily performances of culture and tradition' (ibid).
3. Publications produced by *adivasi janajati* organisations frequently publish revisions of history as a part of their political message (Hangen 2005, Tamang 2008, Onta 2011a). The prominent boycott of Dasain, beginning in the early 1990s and reaching a peak in 2002, became an important debate in several *adivasi janajati* magazines (Hangen 2005, Onta 2011a). As Hangen argues, of central importance in these debates is the question of the 'true history of Nepal'. In their revisions of history, they seek to overturn ritual practices like Dasain and ritual markers, like *tika*, that they claim celebrate the Hindu oppression of *adivasi janajati* groups (Hangen 2005). Such revisions of history have become an

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4 Katry, Cilla and Asmita Manandhar. 'Vintage and Retro Rides'. *Republica*, [http://archives.myrepublica.com/2012/portal/?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=38777](http://archives.myrepublica.com/2012/portal/?action=news_details&news_id=38777), November 25, 2011.

5 Bisht, Kapil. 'A Walk Into the Heritage'. *ECS Nepal*. [http://www.ecs.com.np/feature\\_detail.php?f\\_id=509](http://www.ecs.com.np/feature_detail.php?f_id=509), October 31, 2011.



increasingly prominent public means by which various ethnic groups make claims of indigeneity to specific regions of the country and challenge dominant state narratives. Even those who are not part of the *janajati* movements have heard the claims of indigeneity that have become a vital part of the public sphere.

These examples illustrate some of the major and not at all surprising aspects of intersecting discourses about history in contemporary Nepal. As an aspect of the heritage industry, the value of the old is clearly a globalised phenomenon, integrally tied to the way outsiders and tourists view the nation (Herzfeld 2009, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, Bruner 2004). As Herzfeld points out, ‘the worldwide celebration of “heritage” [produces the] curious irony that local distinctiveness has now become a generic good’ (Herzfeld 2009: 305). Yet the value of the past is not, of course, limited to the global significance of heritage within the tourist industry or UNESCO, nor is the global product of heritage the same across the globe, as Herzfeld points out. Example three suggests that public discussion of history is also obviously a national project; it has become a hotly contested subject central to the changes various Nepali political groups envision in the identity of the nation and the state.

E. Valentine Daniel has distinguished between the relatively ontological being of heritage, in which the past is an active component of the present, and the epistemological seeing of history (Daniel 1996). With history, questions about knowledge—what there is to know and how we know what we know—are central.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Anar Parikh (2012) shows, history and heritage are often intertwined among heritage activists in Mumbai and Anamagar, and the same is true in Kathmandu. Heritage activists tout their knowledge about the past as much as the material evidence supporting that knowledge. The idea of history, I argue below, often relates to aspects of heritage that are given value by the market or by international forces like UNESCO.

Such discourses of heritage are of a very public nature and they circulate widely, sometimes among unintended and unaddressed audiences. Public discourses are defined by circulation that cannot be controlled or

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6 As Chakrabarty points out, this distanced stance of the seeing historian is only made possible by the existence of what appears to be its opposite: ‘anachonism is regarded as the hallmark of such a [historical] consciousness’ (Charkrabarty 2000: 238).

fully known by the producers of public meaning. Publics hail people into their discourses, constituting that audience into a mass subject (a public) whose members may share very little with each other except their attention to similar public discourse (Warner 2002, Cody 2011). Public and often global discourses about preserving national heritage and the cultural value of the past, I suggest, provide a language for those not directly involved with such projects to think and talk about their own family inheritances and their own personal pasts. The cultural significance of these different memory projects extends beyond the individual actively working in the political field, or the world of Nepali scholars, or in any of the institutional organisations mobilised in the heritage project. They are part of a broadly shared sensibility about the cultural past, a structure of feeling that characterises post-democratic and newly secular Nepal.

### **Heritage Lost: UNESCO, Preservation, and Markets**

The sentiments expressed in Dixit's article quoted at the beginning of this article echo a much broader fear about the loss of cultural heritage among many contemporary residents in Kathmandu.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the industrialising England of which Raymond Williams writes in *The Country and the City*, the romance of a rural way of life is not the primary object of urban nostalgia (Williams 1973). Instead, upper-class Nepalis like Dixit focus their attention on the loss of cultural objects, statues, icons and buildings—all visual and physical signs of the city's decay. Connected to this urge to retrieve cultural property is the recent surge since the mid-1980s in restoration and conservation projects of temples, buildings, and monuments throughout the Valley, all of which are supported by international organisations.

UNESCO is one of the main institutions to promote cultural heritage,

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7 The interest in preserving artifacts and revising cultural and national histories of Nepal dates back to long before the contemporary moment—religious temples and statues are constantly being restored and repaired, and these acts of preservation are engrained in the very use of these spaces as religious sites (Owens 2002). While family-based restoration of small temples has been going on for centuries, at least since the 1970s the large-scale restorations of temples have been almost entirely dependant on Western aid funding. In addition to temple restoration, historians during the 1940s and especially after the dissolution of Rana rule in 1951, engaged in a nationalist project to revise and amend Nepali history by looking at temple manuscripts, in order to 'rejuvenate our own ancient knowledge' (Pant 2002: 7, cited in Onta 2011b: 6).

and the Nepali government's efforts in promoting the Kathmandu Valley as an attractive tourist destination (see Owens 2002 on the reinvention of Swayambhu stupa as a world heritage zone and Hausner 2007 on Pashupati temple also becoming a world heritage zone). The history of UNESCO projects in Nepal sheds light on the way Nepali heritage or history has been influenced in part by broader global agendas. UNESCO's first major project in Nepal was the Hanuman Dhoka Conservation Project, undertaken in 1972 to coincide with King Birendra's coronation (Bajracharya et al. 1993: 44). In 1979, UNESCO designated the Kathmandu Valley as a World Heritage Site and established an office in Kathmandu in 1998 (Owens 2002). UNESCO helped to establish the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, based in the US, which is one of the most active organisations financing the restoration or rebuilding of numerous buildings, temples, houses, and the other palaces throughout the Kathmandu Valley.

UNESCO's global project to preserve cultural heritage may be seen as part of an overall imperial strategy to signify certain objects, buildings, and people as exceptional examples of tradition or heritage (Collins 2008). As John Collins has argued, UNESCO has given heritage a redemptive power that animates both meanings of the word 'exception' —those things and people which are marked as noteworthy as heritage are extraordinary examples of the very essence of cultural tradition and, simultaneously, they are often excluded from the centre of national planning. Heritage is, writes Collins, 'a technique employed by nation-states and transnational organisations to lift objects out of impoverished contexts and burnish them so that all members of society may make out some shared, if factitious, basis of belonging' (Collins 2008: 297). Collins' argument focuses on people who have been tagged by UNESCO as the 'symbolic ancestors' of Brazil, and who themselves now claim that they are a 'form of patrimony, or possessions of the nation' (Collins 2008: 282).

The redemptive value of heritage that Collins identifies may go beyond those particular buildings, objects or people specifically marked by UNESCO. There is a broader structure of feeling about the city's cultural heritage, as Dixit's article suggests, that touches people beyond those directly involved in heritage projects. Heritage is linked to ideas of patrimony, or material items of the past that are passed down to future generations. Ideas of heritage have links to domestic inheritance practices, and therefore the growing interest in heritage promoted by agencies like

UNESCO provides a language for Nepalis to discuss and dispute their familial inheritance.

The booming heritage industry in the Kathmandu Valley—which works closely and in tandem with the tourist industry—clearly often serves as a source of cash. Consider the story of Manoj Shrestha,<sup>8</sup> a middle-aged man from the center of Patan, who considers himself Hindu and whose family is part of the merchant caste of Newars. In 1998, I met with Manoj Shrestha, who told me about a dispute he had with his brother several years ago as they were dividing their *angsa* property (ancestral birth-right property). The conflict centred around the importance of cultural heritage. His brother wished to knock down his inherited portion of their 18<sup>th</sup> century home in order to build a new concrete home. ‘This would be destroying our own culture!’ Manoj exclaimed. He used the English word ‘culture’, which is frequently invoked by those working in the heritage industry, suggesting a view of culture promoted by agencies like UNESCO that is materialised in physical objects or buildings. It is unclear exactly when this dispute took place, but it is worth noting that a portion of his house had been renovated by an American architect, who no doubt had many conversations with Manoj about the historic and cultural value of his house, during 1995–96. Manoj took his case to the Department of Archaeology, and through their work (*uniharuko kam*)—the details of which he left extremely vague—he was able to prevent his brother from executing his plan. In 1997, the house was designated as a house worth preserving by the GTZ Urban Development through Local Efforts (UDLE), and soon gained support for restoration through the Department of Archaeology and UNESCO. According to Manoj, when I spoke with him in 1998, UNESCO proposed to rent the house on a long-term lease and turn the house into a guesthouse providing bed and breakfast.<sup>9</sup> Manoj laughed as he told me this. ‘More than the Nepalis, the foreigners will be happy about this! One day this house will become a museum!’ he

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8 I follow the accepted anthropological convention of using pseudonyms for all the people represented in this essay.

9 In 1976, UNESCO described one of the fundamental principles of the organisation as being that ‘cultural property is a basic element in a people’s identity’ and ‘a deprivation of possession which is a deprivation of being’. Ironically, as Herzfeld has pointed out, heritage ‘too often...entails the destruction of local society in the name of preservation’ (Herzfeld 2008: 310). In this case, Manoj was a beneficiary of the UNESCO plan. More research is needed to determine who, if anyone, suffered in this transaction.

chuckled, suggesting his own awkwardness around this proposal. Manoj seemed reasonably happy to enter into this contract (at the time, Manoj said they initially offered him 2.8 million rupees), though he had not made his final decision. If he agreed, he told me, he too could build an enormous concrete house with the money like his brother.<sup>10</sup>

In 2006, eight years after our initial conversation, the Shrestha house opened as a traditional bed and breakfast inn with Manoj and his wife as the innkeepers.<sup>11</sup> It is one of several homes in the Valley that have been targeted as ideal houses for restoration and the promotion of tourism (Dixit 2006). That one's own house could become an abstracted display of a Nepali (or Newar) home has profound implications for how people like Manoj imagine their family history in connection to the nation. When a house becomes a museum, as Manoj once called it, inherited property is no longer simply a means of generating familial affections and memory, but it also becomes a potential icon of national history. Being a Newar house that is advertised as exemplifying the traditional lifestyle of the Kathmandu Valley, it perhaps unwittingly participates in some of the most heated political debates about the Valley's true indigenous inhabitants being Newars. The tension is also between elite Nepali engineers and architects, who are actively pursuing a reconstruction of the city, and middle or lower-class Nepalis whose houses and objects are the sites of their desire.

Manoj's ambivalent wish (at the time) to turn his house over to UNESCO also resonates with the increasing symbolic significance of *angsa* or ancestral property that became a subject of public debate in the mid-1990s. *Angsa* is less a resource on which people depend to live and more a statement of *how* one lives (Kunreuther 2009; Karpowitz 1998). *Not* dividing one's family's *angsa* is a sign of familial harmony that accumulates over the years, and this has become an important form of symbolic capital among today's urban middle class residents. The symbolic significance of *angsa* exists alongside the wish to live one's life separate from one's

10 A small but growing number of Kathmandu Nepalis have turned to rebuilding their homes in what they refer to as 'old style', adorning a new concrete home with fixtures like old wooden Nepali windows, most of which are newly constructed. This is most evident, not surprisingly, in areas like Patan where more old buildings are still standing and where the heritage industry is most active.

11 More research is needed to determine the specific process and contractual relation that supported this transformation.

brothers and to declare one's independence from the more restrictive aspects of genealogical ties. When a house can become a museum, this form of symbolic capital is taken to its extreme: no longer would the *angsa* simply be a sign of familial prestige, but it would condense the family's genealogy into a sign of national and cultural heritage. When a house becomes a national icon of heritage it transforms the private property of a family into a public symbol and evidence of a broader historical narrative. '[T]his house not only belongs to the "Shrestha family"', they advertise on the website to the inn, 'but also to all "Heritage lovers"'.

### **Curio shops and houses: the sale and display of Heritage**

The tide of conservation and restoration projects ebbs and flows with a growing contraband market for Nepali household items, sold to wealthy Nepalis and foreigners as authentic traces of a Nepali past. The logic of the heritage industry works, then, not only through the preservation or conservation of buildings, temples, and houses. It also sustains a market of Nepali household items in curio shops that have proliferated with the preservation projects over the past twenty-five years. The sentimental significance of inherited possessions is often compared to the potential price of the objects in these shops. The common rhetoric of historical or cultural significance used in the heritage industry has been given another accent by people who are not directly involved in this industry.

When I visited Nepalis in the *bahals* of Patan, frequently an Indian merchant would arrive in the inner courtyards with a large wicker basket slung over his shoulder that he would set down and begin shouting in Nepali, 'Old things! old things!' (*purano chij, purano chij*). This was an invitation to sell any household items the residents might have in their homes: preferably, the merchant told them, objects from one or two generations back. People knew that once these artifacts were sold, the objects suddenly became valued as antique or simply old. Through contact with these merchants and by traversing public discourses of preservation, objects from one's family inheritance become items that could be lost to the market or marked as antique; they are an ambivalent sign of one's own wants and the desires of others.

Instead of emphasising the cultural or historical significance of public buildings, their own inherited objects become the means to possess what many Nepalis often referred to as 'history' (in English; in its Nepali

equivalent, *itihās*; or in the Nepali word for culture, *sanskṛiti*). History (*itihās*) usually refers to interpretations of events, an accurate portrayal of facts. As a popular discourse among many Nepalis, though, the discourse of history (*itihās*)—and its association with cultural heritage—is often used as a more general term to discuss objects, artifacts and buildings that have recently acquired cultural significance and that people often fear have been or will be lost. The public discourse of history has become a way to discuss inherited objects that one could potentially sell, or objects that one could choose deliberately not to sell. By withholding such objects from the market, a person's familial inheritance becomes not only a material trace of their own genealogy, but also, as they describe it, a relic in their possession that carries national and cultural history.

Many farmers and members of the emerging Nepali middle class I knew would regularly sell items from their homes to pay for a wedding or for house repairs. These items would then be carried to one of the many curio shops that were filled with bronze bowls, pots, dishes, lanterns, and wine and water jugs. Nepalis use these same shops to trade in their old bowls, dishes, and kitchenware for newer, more sturdy kitchen items, exchanging the weight of the metal for another item of the same weight. With the current emphasis placed on craft by those in the heritage industry, the goods are now distinguished not only by the weight of the metal, but also by the object's age and aesthetic value. It is precisely because these household objects have become aesthetic objects that they help cultivate sentiments for history among Nepalis who sell their items as well as among those who collect. This transformation traces the 'cultural biography of things' (Kopytoff 1986), as objects move from one regime of value to another, endowed with the added significance of history.

Sunita Sakya is a middle-aged woman from the highest Newar priestly caste. She lives in a *bahal* in the middle of Patan that has recently been designated by UNESCO as a site worthy of preservation. Once, Sunita told me, she sold some large keys to one of the travelling merchants who frequently traversed through her *bahal*. She was not particularly disturbed by the sale: 'the keys no longer worked in the door anyway', she said. In many ways, she did not think of these keys as her own. They were items stored in her husband's house from long ago, and items to which she, even as a full member of the house, remained somewhat unconnected. But the sale did give her a keen awareness of the traffic of things that

she partially facilitated. 'Now those things are so expensive they never can be brought home', she told me. With sardonic humour, she chuckled, 'Nepali people don't have the chance to travel. Only our things can travel and see the world'. Sometimes she asked me if the houses in the United States were filled with these Nepali items, or how many museums held items like her keys.

Sunita's keen awareness of the changed social life of such objects became all the more clear after visiting a Newar friend of hers who had married an American. Usually, the world of the sellers from *bahals* of Patan and the world of the foreign or elite buyers do not intersect within the space of either of their homes. There are rare occasions when they do meet, like this one, and these moments reveal social tensions which are materialised in the changed meanings of such objects. Sunita remembered the visit by recalling the display of household items that were sold in curio shops:

I walked into the room and I was amazed by two things. First, there were all sorts of old Nepali things, Nepali pots, wine vessels, bowls, puja items, a Newari window all along the walls, all laid out to see. Things that we would put under the bed, too old to use. The other thing was how clean the bathroom was—I couldn't even go, I might make it dirty!! I stayed in the room while she made me tea and I couldn't keep my eyes off these things. It was not yet a year since my mother had died, but I forgot. I took the milk-tea and drank the whole cup. I wasn't supposed to have milk for a whole year, but I forgot. Then when I got home, my throat closed up, I was sick and couldn't eat. *Dai* [her husband] asked me then, 'Did you drink milk in your tea?' Then I knew, I remembered. That's why I got sick. I had to stay in bed for three days to recover.

Sunita's surprised reaction had to do in part with a confrontation and recognition of her own hardly noticed habits and things: the old bowls and pots that she, like most other Nepalis of her class, kept under the bed or in a trunk. The display she confronted represents what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) would call the 'aristocratic aesthetic', which elevates everyday objects to the status of art. The pots, old Newar windows and bowls that Sunita saw on the wall of her friend's home placed a distance



in time and space between the owner's current life and Sunita's current life, as well as between the object's current display value and its past life of everyday usage. They were no longer the separate pots and bowls that might be brought out individually for a wedding or holiday feast. Rather, they presented an abstract image of Nepal and Nepali history, an aesthetic image of history or culture writ large. As Susan Stewart argues, the collection always works against history, precisely because of the decontextualised and personalised nature of the display (Stewart 1993). The narrative is no longer related to the particular history of an object; rather, it becomes a narrative of the owner's aesthetic sensibility and self. In this case, the display is more complicated because while it may erase traces of the object's use, it may also be valued as traces of the owner's past, a person who had in many fundamental ways severed her ties with Nepali and Newar communities.

To Sunita, these objects seem to be both an embarrassment and a potential source of pride. 'Why shouldn't Nepalis be doing this also? Making these old things look so nice?' she asked me rhetorically, despite the fact that the friend she visited is Nepali and Newar like herself. Sunita's confrontation with this display is a confrontation with the material inequalities—obscured through ideas of history and aesthetic taste—inherent in the efforts to preserve or display heritage. Unlike Dixit, who argued fiercely against the sale or theft of Nepali cultural objects, Sunita is not schooled in the cultural politics of buying and selling cultural property, though she knows the implications quite well. Her confrontation with these class differences is not at the level of an articulate class or third-world politics, but at the level of latent structures of feeling (Steedman 1987). Being arrested by the sight of things that resembled the household objects she simply pushed under the bed, Sunita told me that she momentarily forgot her own memorial practice.

The market for such household items is quite clearly linked to the growth of the heritage industry, as relayed to me by an owner of one of the curio shops in Bhaktapur. Foreigners as well as elite Nepalis involved in many of the conservation or preservation projects began to come to his shop in the late 1970s, he explained, and purchased everyday kitchen items that they described as well crafted or antique. He quickly learned that he could raise the price on such items, and soon hired a staff of Nepalis and Indians to search out such old things (*purano chij*) in people's houses.

‘They mainly look in the farming communities’, he said, referring to the lower- and lower-middle class areas of Patan and Bhaktapur. I turn now to the reflections of one of these farmers, Gyano Maharjan, who has begun to think of his household items and religious texts as tokens of history.

### **Domestic archives: inherited objects as tokens of history**

Gyano Maharjan lives just outside the *bahal* where Sunita lives and is around the same age. He is from the caste of farmers, a group that maintains ritual and religious obligations to the Sakyas but are generally considered less strict and more open to innovations (see Gellner and Quigley 1995). When I first got to know Gyano in the mid-1990s, he lived in the family’s old brick-and-mud house, three storeys high, located just across from an old rice mill and adjacent to the Patan *bahal*. The second floor of the house was a neighbourhood gathering place to watch professional wrestling, American cops-and-robber films, and the Saturday Hindi film. Often when I met with Gyano, he was upstairs on the roof feeding his doves. ‘I’ve kept these doves for years’, Gyano told me, pointing to the chicken wire cages behind him. ‘They will never be eaten by a cat up here. I love them, care for them here’. He sprinkled some grains of corn on the bricks, where the doves pecked away. ‘I feed them, and I let them fly. But they always come back. They know where they are fed. They might fly away for a while, but they return. They know where they belong’.

Like many of his neighbours, he has sold some of his family’s possessions to the itinerant merchants in search of *purano chij* but, unlike many of the others I spoke to, he told me that he now regrets his decision to sell. In my conversation with Gyano, he elaborated what he felt was a shift in his own attitude toward his family’s possessions. The objects that Gyano discussed with me that day—jewellery, books, coins and other objects he had inherited from his parents—were parts of Gyano’s domestic archive that he discussed in terms of history rather than in the idiom of genealogy (*vansha*). He used both the English word ‘history’ and the Nepali word for written histories, *itihās*. His conversation wove between the things and people that fly away and then come back, some that are lost in the flight, and others that he now deliberately keeps to make certain they will always know where they belong.

I refer to the practical work of actively reimagining one’s past through objects, books or houses as the creation of domestic archives. Domestic

archives reveal a relationship between the personal, the home, and the state,<sup>12</sup> and they are a growing effect of a public heritage industry that often evades public or scholarly attention.<sup>13</sup> In Nepal, the first archive for important documents of the state was called the *Jaishi Kotha*, or the room of the astrologers (Thapa 1967), thus suggesting a connection between collecting, the interpretation of the past, and the generation of possible futures. Astrologers are called upon to read into the future to determine what lies ahead and what actions should be taken in the present moment. As keepers of the archive, they also prescribe what documents should be kept for the future. The astrologers' social role as readers of the future—that is, their ability to determine fate—was directly connected to their literary skills. The government report describing the founding of this archive notes that 'in actual practice the word [*Jaishi Kotha*] denotes the writing chambers, and these came to be so-called because it was the astrologers, who, in consideration of their monopolistic literacy in the ancient days, were employed in the beginning as the writers and keepers of documents' (Thapa 1967). Their ability to perform these prophetic acts in the archive was based on their ability to write, and their knowledge of written texts.<sup>14</sup>

The popular urge among many like Gyano in Kathmandu to save traces of a personal, familial or cultural past illustrates what Jacques Derrida (1995) calls 'archive fever'. Archive fever refers not to the pulse or intensity of inscribing documents within an archival space; rather, the concept refers to the simultaneously reproductive and destructive forces

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12 The notion of an archive is rooted in the law and the home. We describe texts in an archive as being *housed* there, and the Greek *arkheion* was the domestic residence of the rulers, as well as the place where their documents were stored (Derrida 1995: 2).

13 Domestic archives are not in themselves new phenomena in Nepal. Inheritance customs require that certain household objects, property documents, and written genealogies be kept and passed down between family members. In this sense, archiving in itself is not exclusively a modern practice, despite the necessity of state archives to produce modern stories of the nation (Stoler 2009). Yet the way that these archiving projects are conceived of now and the frequent search for these desired pasts in material evidence – buildings, vehicles, objects, documents, or other texts – is an aspect of modern historical consciousness in Nepal that brings together history and heritage (cf. Chakrabarty 2000: 239). It is a way of knowing the past that is closely linked to processes and practices of archiving, and imagining that documents and material traces of the past have important public and often national meaning in the contemporary moment.

14 For an intriguing comparative discussion of the prophetic nature of written history see Florida (1995). See also Ahearn (2001) for an analysis of the relationship between writing and agency in Nepal.

involved in *any* process of recording, documenting, storing or saving a body of knowledge and transmitting it through time. This observation is not new nor exclusive to Derrida; many have noted the dual processes of remembering and forgetting, saving and losing, entailed in any practice of archiving or preservation (e.g. Stoler 2010, Steedman 2002, Trouillot 1995, Burton 2005, Stewart 1993). It is clear that Derrida's use of the term 'archive' is not meant to be about actual archives; but rather, a metaphor for practices and desires to uncover or reveal in the origin of knowledge, ideas, texts, and things. The domestic archives that people create out of their inheritance exhibit a similar tension between possession and loss: between which inherited texts or objects will be deliberately held on to and which will be lost or sold.

As Gyano spoke to me about his domestic archive, he described objects he had once sold and what he claimed to be a relatively new attitude toward his family's possessions over the past few years that he linked to education and the knowledge that is required to recognise that something is of historical value. The most desired inheritance today, Gyano and others would repeat, is education and the skills required to earn a living.<sup>15</sup> When Gyano was young, he decided to go to school, much against his parents' wishes. Entry into the world of national education, he told me, led him to sell one of the family's religious texts formerly used for ritual purposes.

Gyano curtly admonished the older generation for being steeped in a religious ideology that prevented them from *really knowing* the contents of this book. Having decided to go to school after he was twenty years old, he entered into a new relationship with books and the new communities that centered around these texts. The context for reading secular books in school was obviously quite different from the context of calling upon palm-leaf manuscripts to serve as esoteric symbols of ritual power. These differences in technology are paralleled by the different communities to which these texts relate. The religious palm-leaf texts that are kept within Newar homes are signs of belonging to caste-specific Newar communities. The printed books distributed at schools were part of forging a Nepali national community during the Panchayat years. With a bold stroke of

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15 The emergence of personal earnings (*niji arjan*) as a legal category in the 1977 amendment was a result of the general shift towards middle-class families' increased dependence on earned income that required specific learned skills (Karpowitz 1998).

pride about his education, Gyano refused his grandfather's command to never open the puja books kept for religious purposes:

My grandfather used to do puja to this book. 'One should keep this one', he said. 'No one should open and see it', he said. We kept it, kept it, kept it ... But I (say), 'A book that one should not even open and see—is that really right?!' So I opened it and read it. I saw what was inside. And it was *very* good. 'I didn't even know that we had such a good book as this', I told someone. La!!  
 Their person found out and came (to my house). 'I'll give you 80,000 for this', (they said). Well after seeing that much money ... La, they bought it and went off with it.'  
 'So your father had not read what was inside either, had he?'  
 'No, he hadn't read it! He didn't know anything'.  
 'You, on your own...'

Gyano interrupted me:

I forcibly (*jabarjasti*) went out against my parents' wishes and studied [in school]. How many of my friends came and yelled, 'This must be studied/read'. Nowadays, it is pointless to live, if one has not studied. Everyone said this, so I also went to study.

Books were to be read, he learned in school, and implicitly the knowledge one gleaned from books was to generate money. By opening up these religious books, Gyano imputed another significance to the sacred object, and began imagining it as something that he might sell. As he reflected on that moment over thirty years ago, he regretted that he 'did not know' the value of these books—not as money, but as tokens of a more abstract notion of history. He regretted not listening to his grandfather's wish to keep the book—yet for a different reason than his grandfather ostensibly gave. Gyano viewed the sale of these books in terms of his own connection to a broader social history.

'No one knew', he tells me, as if there had a revelation some years back. 'No one knew anything about this...It did not mean anything then'.

‘There was no meaning?’ I ask, a bit perplexed. ‘And now there is meaning?’

‘Now, because there is meaning, now we don’t sell! That’s what I’m trying to tell you. ‘Why sell?’ people started saying. When I too found this out, I didn’t want to sell even one thing’.

‘How did you find out?’

‘Instead of selling, I put things in a trunk’.

‘When did you find out?’

‘It only lures (*lobh lagcha*) you. If one sells and sends away [such things], later our own history, one would not be able to see. I found that out... We couldn’t see our own *history* (*hamro afno \*history\* herna sakenaum*)’.

He remains deliberately vague about how or when he began thinking in this way, but it is easy to surmise that this desire emerged from the public discourse about history, heritage, and education that surrounded him: “‘Why sell?’ people started saying’, Gyano reports. Instead of selling he puts it in a trunk, creating his own domestic archive, his collection of treasured items that become tokens of his own history, evidence of a broader cultural past to which he belongs. Gyano’s description of peering inside the book bears a striking resemblance to his later desire to see history. In both cases, the emphasis on seeing is an apt metaphor for possession and for the knowledge from which Gyano and his family had been excluded. The religious texts that his grandfather told him to worship and to keep closed were signs of esoteric knowledge that remained inaccessible to them as members of the Maharjan caste. Opening up this forbidden source of knowledge is an act of possession that ironically leads to Gyano’s sale, or dispossession, of the religious text. Seeing, as E. Valentine Daniel (1996) suggests, best captures a way of relating to the world that places an emphasis on questions of knowledge: what there is to know and how one should know it. Here, seeing connects to an objective form of knowledge—such as history—that can be learned about through books. Unfortunately for Gyano, he only learned that he could see history *after* he had already sold the religious texts he peered into.

Gyano spoke about the objects that he saved in a trunk as items that he could potentially sell, but actively chose not to. His father’s collection of old coins of buffalo leather, clay, and silver, for instance, would fetch

quite a few rupees, but Gyano tells me forcefully: 'Even if someone came to buy these coins for a lot of money, I wouldn't sell even one!' We can almost hear Gyano's regret in this statement about having once sold texts that he now feels he should have kept for the sake of history. Paradoxically, while education is what leads him to feel this sense of regret, initially it was education that led him to peer into the forbidden texts and sell them, allowing the texts to circulate as commodities (rather than sacred objects) in the market. He told me about his mother's jewels, stored in a box below: 'Those jewels I need to keep, and do nothing with them. She bought them with her wishes (*icchale kineko*), so without doing anything to them I put them away. Later they will be nice to look at. Later they will become *history*'. By referring to the objects he inherited from his parents as tokens of *history*, he imputes a sentimental and broadly cultural significance to these personal items, projecting their meaning onto a wider social sphere. By referring to them as objects that he could sell, Gyano affirms both their personal and historical significance. Implicitly, it is also an assertion that he has no need to sell, a statement of his emerging middle class status.<sup>16</sup>

There are two different publics to which Gyano's self-declared novel interest in history can be linked. His attitude toward his inheritance is implicated in the broader state and internationally-funded heritage industry discussed above, institutionalised in organisations like UNESCO that emphasise the importance of saving cultural heritage in the form of material culture. Members of UNESCO had visited Gyano's *tol* several times and designated the temple inside the *bahal* as worthy of preservation. He also had contact with the discourse of preservation through his daughter who took a job with UDLE, one of the key organisations supporting the restoration of old homes.

His designation of the inherited objects from his parents as tokens of

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16 While I do not discuss this here, Gyano's changed relation to his inheritance was quite likely also affected by the 1962-64 Land Reforms. Regmi suggests that socially and psychologically they were among the most profound reforms in the history of Nepal, especially for farmers, who found themselves catapulted into heavy dependence on cash (Regmi 1976). The Land Reforms were particularly difficult for farmers like Gyano's family, who had been servants or functionaries of the Rana government. Operating under a basic feudal system, they had received fields rather than a salary as compensation for work. Unlike Indian *jagirdars*, in Nepal there was no compensation for these fields. As Regmi writes, there was very little opposition from the *jagirdars* because they were 'too few and demoralized' to pose any real resistance (ibid.: 86).

history could also easily be understood in terms of the growing public discourse of (ethnic nationalist) organisations that proliferated in the 1990s, and Gyano's occasional participation in the *Maharjan Samiti* for members of his Newar farmer caste. The *Maharjan Samiti* was not considered by all to be a true *janajati* group.<sup>17</sup> But like other *janajati* groups, they are similarly devoted to learning the history of this Newar farmer caste, gaining political access to resources they feel they have been denied and transmitting their discovered history to their children. 'A person born from the place of farmers should not leave these things', Gyano told me. 'Many times I said to my daughter, "We are from the farmer caste... Other work when compared to farming is a bit higher, this means nothing to us. Born from this earth, one must show how to work it, and to study, too". That's what I say (to her)'. Later, he clarified: 'One should *know* that [we] are farmers, but one does not have to do the work of farmers' (*kisan hau bhanera thaha-paunu parchha, tara kisan ko kam garnai parcha bhanne chaina*). Possession of knowledge about one's caste/ethnic identity requires possession of history and knowledge about one's past—a common motto in many *janajati* organisations as well as among global heritage organisations like UNESCO. Mary Des Chene quotes a banner held by members of a Tamu *janajati* organisation that succinctly states the agenda of many *janajatis* groups: 'If tradition is lost, knowledge will be lost. If knowledge is lost, culture will be lost. If culture is lost, the *jati* will be lost' (Des Chene 1996: 111). When this history has not been written or remains largely inaccessible, inherited objects and artifacts from one's family become possible sources for a future knowledge of this cultural and familial history.

In the public forums of magazines, speeches, songs, and historical tracts, *janajati* activists have taken up the task of writing their own histories (see Des Chene 1996, Fisher 1993, Gellner et al. 1997, Hangen 2009, Tamang 2008, Onta 2011a). But this popular and passionate engagement with history writing is not limited to those directly enmeshed in *janajati* politics at state level. One middle-aged man, Kiran, who lived in the same *bahal* community as Gyano and Sunita, spent the better part of two years collecting documents, making photocopies of foreign and Nepali histories, taking rubbings of temple inscriptions and compiling his own religious

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17 Newars were of different minds about whether they should be considered *janajati* or not. See Gellner 1997. At this time, however, the public pull of the *janajati* movement was compelling to Newar farmers like Gyano.



texts and personal writings with which he planned to write a history of the *bahal*. Like Gyano, he was an occasional participant in the *Maharjan Samiti*. But his reasons for creating this history, he claimed, were not for the organisation, nor did he express a specifically national or global political agenda. Rather, he wished to teach the minority of Buddhist high caste Sakyas in his *bahal* and the surrounding area that the Maharjan farmers were in fact the original, indigenous (*adivasi*) inhabitants of the area. Using the relatively new and popular designation of *adivasi* that has gained traction among *janajatis*, many in this Newar farmer caste were (and still are) devoted to proving that they were the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. When I went to visit Kiran in his house, he showed me his domestic archive—an enormous green trunk filled with his collections of hundreds of pages of handwritten notebook paper that outlined his ordinary history. He refused to let me look at the documents until he had finished writing. While recent important scholarly work focuses on the political projects of these ethnic nationalist groups (Hangen 2009, Lawoti 2007, Onta 2011, Tamang 2008), the public *janajati* rhetoric has a force that potentially shapes people's thinking of their personal inheritance as a token of a broader history.

### Conclusion

In this essay, I have discussed different everyday events in which Kathmandu Valley residents express a desire to see history (*history hernu*) as an emerging way of being in the Valley. Using the English word for 'history', as Gyano (who otherwise speaks no English) does, suggests its entanglement with international interests that I have discussed above. But it is not a global agenda alone that has shaped the significance and meanings of the past in Nepal. I have suggested that these personal projects resonate with a broader structure of feeling, evident in the recent proliferation of revisionist histories published by ethnic minority organisations, especially after 1990. This structure of feeling is also part of the growing heritage industry, populated by a small but vocal group of middle-class Nepali architects who work in tandem with German or Austrian development/preservation projects.

The individuals I discussed in this article are all from Patan, and all are Newar. The urge to save traces of one's personal/familial past is not something specific to Newars, to Patan, or even to *janajatis*. Yet, given

the number of Newars in the capital region, they (and especially the buildings in which they live) do have a particularly prominent place within the heritage industry throughout the Kathmandu Valley. International global heritage activists like to assert the prominent place of Newars in the history of the Valley, and frequently describe the Kathmandu Valley as the ancient home of the Newars. These international projects dovetail with the local *janajati* movements that have sought to link ethnic groups with their proclaimed original territory. Though they are all Newars, the three individuals all occupy different social positions within broader Nepali (and Newar) society. Manoj is more solidly situated within the middle class in terms of education and access to global knowledge and resources, whereas Gyano and Sunita remain at the edge of middle class life. While Sunita is a Sakya woman from the highest Newar Buddhist priestly caste of scholars and religious experts, Gyano's parents were completely illiterate. He pursued an education much against his parents' wishes when he was twenty years old. In terms of caste, then, Gyano is considered somewhat lower in the hierarchy than Sunita. But, as a man, he has certain privileges unavailable to Sunita, most fundamentally the security of his place within his family home and inherited genealogy. While the feelings they express for the objects under discussion—inherited and dispossessed—are connected to their specific biographical trajectories, they are not only expressions of their autobiographical or narrative identities. Rather, they speak more broadly to the conflicts inherent in these overlapping social identities, and they are to some degree the products of the public discourses of heritage and cultural preservation that surround them.

The desired stories and objects of Sunita and Gyano suggest that ideas about heritage and history production itself shape the practices of saving, producing, and the circulation of objects and narratives through domestic archives. The making of domestic archives—by collecting objects inherited from one's parents as Gyanu does, by carefully displaying old objects in one's home as Sunita witnesses at her friend's home, or in restoration projects on one's home that follow UNESCO heritage ideas as Manoj does—all generate affective memories that conflate notions of the personal with notions of the historical. These objects, texts, jewels, coins and homes are felt to be profoundly precarious, and may or may not become the stuff of public history in the future. Inherited objects and texts become a way for

non-political, emerging middle-class participants to imagine their own lives as part of a social history that either has not yet been written, or one in which they are not represented but imagine that they may one day claim as their own.

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# 'From the Outside Looking In': Living beside a People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment in far-west Nepal

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This article fills a gap in existing research on the Maoist 'People's War' (1996–2006) in Nepal by considering the implications of the establishment of a People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment for those living close by. This article complements the growing literature on the 'People's War' and the implications of the war for everyday lives in Nepal (Hutt 2004, Karki 2003, Lawoti and Pahari 2010, Manandhar and Seddon 2010, Pettigrew 2012 and 2013, Pettigrew and Adhikari 2009, Thapa 2003). Furthermore, while there has been limited research undertaken in and on the PLA cantonments (cf. Ogura 2010), none to date has specifically focused on the implications of living next to one.

More specifically, the perceptions and experiences of the inhabitants of *Kampur*<sup>1</sup> *Kamaiya*<sup>2</sup> *basti* (settlement), situated adjacent to a PLA cantonment will be explored in this article. The importance of rumours relating to the PLA is a particular focus. Three main periods within *Kampur* will be examined, as will experiences of the conflict prior to the cantonment being established, accounts of life next to a cantonment and finally the implications for the *basti* of the cantonment closing in April 2012. I conclude this article by examining what the legacy of the cantonment is in the lives of those living next to it.

This article provides an account of the 'People's War' and its aftermath from the perspective of those who in most cases were bystanders to the actual conflict. The narratives that are examined below facilitate a consideration of the implications of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in 2006 and the establishment of the PLA cantonment in

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1 The name of this settlement and all the names of research subjects have been changed.

2 The *Kamaiya* refers to both a system of bonded labour and a group within the broader Tharu ethnic group who are predominantly located in far-west Nepal. The *Kamaiya* were traditionally bonded labourers. While this system was abolished by the Nepal government in 2000 some remnants of the system still remain. Following 2000 many *Kamaiya* were freed and resettled in various locations across Nepal. These *Kamaiya* are called *Mukta Kamaiya* (freed *Kamaiya*), who were given a small piece of land (5 *kattha* = 0.3 hectares). The village referred to here is a *Mukta Kamaiya* village.

2007. Ultimately, this article argues that living next to a PLA cantonment has had a range of complex implications, although as I go on to illustrate, this is in a context in which the lives of the two groups of people became increasingly intertwined. This article is based on fieldwork material collected via a range of ethnographic methods.<sup>3</sup>

### **Kampur Basti**

Shortly after the Kamaiya were officially freed from the Kamaiya system of bonded labour in 2000, over 1000 locations across Nepal were chosen for their resettlement. Kampur Basti in Kailali district, far-west Nepal, is one such settlement, and like many others in rural areas the land appropriated for it was previously dense jungle of little economic worth and limited agricultural potential. Kampur Basti comprises 35 houses slightly set back from the east-west highway, with dense forest on three sides. The highway traverses the entire length of Nepal's flat Tarai, with the Indian border only around 10-12 kms away to the south. A rutted mud track that becomes a muddy river during the monsoon rains leads from the road through the *basti* and into the forest. When the Kamaiya families settled in Kampur, each was allocated a plot of 5 *kattha* of land. More recently (since 2005-6) a number of Dalit and Haliya households (around 15) have been established at the edges of the *basti*.

The land given to the Kamaiya in the *basti* is not very fertile and is insufficient for subsistence, so alongside the food the villagers produce from this land and the rice and lentils purchased with the little income they are able to generate from labouring, the forest is an important resource. Each family has a simple, two-room concrete building with a tin roof. The buildings are poorly constructed and the villagers are not happy with them, as they are hot in summer and cold in winter. Some use them for storage or rent them out to pregnant PLA cadres (as described below) or visiting researchers. All the families have built an adjacent mud hut where they cook, eat, drink and socialise. The sides of these huts are covered with mud reliefs, often depicting the forest and hunting, once more illustrating the importance of the forest.

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3 The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Nepal throughout 2009 complemented by short field visits in 2011 and 2012. Methodologically, it is based on a multi-method approach (principally utilising participant observation, life histories and focus groups) within an ethnographic framework.



### **The Kamaiya from Kampur**

The first time I met many of the villagers from Kampur Kamaiya Basti was on Kamaiya Freedom Day (17<sup>th</sup> July). It is quite difficult to explain the importance and joy of such an occasion for a group of people who only ten years earlier were in a situation of slavery. The day is a quite wonderful celebration of Kamaiya culture and a collective expression of the joy of having been freed from what were feudal economic and social ties (BASE 1995, Cheria 2005, Chhetri 2005, Giri 2009, Karki 2001, Informal Sector Service Centre 1992, Rankin 1999, Sharma et al. 2002).

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, the main event took place in dusty sports fields in the centre of Kailali's district HQ, Dhangadi, with tractors and trailers loaded up with people having slowly but surely brought Kamaiyas from all over Kailali district. It was a fortuitous day on which to meet many of the villagers with whom I would live on and off for a year for the first time: this was something that was often pointed out to me by the villagers. That same evening I went on one of these tractors with the villagers for the first time to Kampur Basti. The evening was filled with much eating, drinking, dancing and a celebration of having been freed from the system that had defined many of the villagers' present lives. Older villagers shared their experiences of having been freed and some of the conditions they had lived in prior to 2000. Kampur that evening was filled with an energy and feeling that I find quite difficult to describe. By the time we got to the village it was quite late, so I could not see much other than the dim lights of fires burning in various places with people dancing and singing. It was unlike any other night I would spend in the *basti*, and it marked the beginning of a key stage in my fieldwork.

As this brief outline of Kampur Basti and the Kamaiya living in it indicates, it is located in a marginal place of little apparent importance. This was also reflected during the 'People's War', during which time the village was relatively immune from the worst effects of the war. I consider this in more detail below.

### **Experiences of the 'People's War' in Kampur (2000-2006)**

Initially, during the main period of fieldwork, undertaken in 2009, upon which this article is based, most villagers seemed to think that Kampur was not badly affected by the 'People's War'. However, as time passed I was trusted more and people talked more of their experiences during this time.

I would argue that Kampur had been reasonably badly affected during the conflict. I visited several villages that had had a far more difficult time, while conversely there were places (principally urban) and some Village Development Committees<sup>4</sup> in which fewer problems occurred.

A battle between the PLA and Nepal Army (NA) had taken place in Kampur during the 'People's War'. This battle was recalled quite regularly by the villagers and was quite well known in the wider area, as a number of PLA cadre and NA soldiers were killed. This was a very difficult time in the *basti* with the battle lasting for one afternoon. Bullets and bombs damaged a number of the houses to the north of the *basti*, although none of the villagers were hurt or injured (as many had run into the forest when the fighting started). However, some livestock were killed during the battle.

This was the only battle to occur in or close to Kampur throughout the conflict and seemed to have a range of meanings for the villagers. It seemed important to some villagers, although not to all. The young men in the village seemed to like to talk about it more often and seemed to exaggerate the significance of the battle for both the PLA and Nepal Army, not least in relation to the number of people who had been killed.<sup>5</sup> Due in part to their experience of this battle, the PLA were considered in several regards as 'better' than the NA, as they were considered to have done less harm to the villagers in the *basti*. This reflects an ambient support for the PLA in the *basti*, something that is considered in more detail subsequently.

Apart from this battle, on a number of occasions men from the Nepal Army or Police came into the *basti*. These experiences helped to shape the negative perceptions of these State forces during the 'People's War'. At such times, the State forces were looking for Maoists and/ or weapons, although they never found either in Kampur.<sup>6</sup> These were particularly difficult times with the police (who came more often) sometimes coming in the middle of the night and always being quite aggressive and violent

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4 Village Development Committees are the smallest administrative unit in Nepal.

5 All of the four PLA cadres who had been present during the battle in Kampur I was able to interview thought the battle was of little significance within the wider context of their experiences of the 'People's War'. I was unable to interview any NA soldiers who had been present at this battle.

6 These experiences were common to many Kamaiya and Tharu. As the Tharu are largely quite poor, state forces often assumed that they supported the PLA. This was also the experience of many ethnic groups and low castes in Nepal. Ultimately this approach sometimes became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

when carrying out these searches.<sup>7</sup>

These searches significantly shaped the villagers' perceptions of and lack of trust in the state (even in 2012), as they had limited access to other elements that might have had a more positive influence on their lives (such as education or health services). I was told by a number of villagers that a heavily pregnant woman had been pushed to the ground on one of these occasions. Furthermore, some of the male villagers told me stories of their wives and daughters having been treated and spoken to in ways they found quite offensive and difficult.

Gender is critical here to help to understand the specific ways in which these processes happened. There were a range of inappropriate behaviours in this respect although there were no reports of anyone having been raped on these occasions.<sup>8</sup> In relation to the treatment of some of the women in the *basti*, I was told by some male villagers that it was inappropriate to discuss this with their wives or daughters. This I respected although I did explore the implications for the men affected. It was very clear that this was something that the men in the village found particularly problematic when they recounted their experiences of the conflict, not least because they were often present and forced to watch but were unable to do anything to stop the police treating the women in the *basti*. When one middle-aged man was discussing this with me he became emotional; this was one of the very few times that I saw a man cry as this was not considered appropriate behaviour for men, especially in social settings. Even those men whose wife or daughters had not been directly affected by this police behaviour displayed similar feelings; therefore this was something that had an impact on the entire *basti*.

There are a range of reasons why it was women who were treated like this, while men seemed to experience a different set of abuses, largely involving them being pushed around and on some occasions being beaten up quite badly. This largely relates to masculinity: by mistreating the women in the *basti* the police were attempting (quite successfully) to humiliate the men from Kampur. The behaviour of the police resulted in a substantial subversion of a critical aspect of their masculinity, i.e.

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7 Ogura (2007) and Pettigrew (2004) have examined similar experiences in Rolpa and Rukum districts.

8 Something that has been reported in many other instances during the Peoples War: <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=opinionforums&id=25&lang=en>

their ability to protect their female relatives. In the *basti* the more senior men considered sons or other male relatives to be more able to cope with physical threats or violence, and less in need of their protection. I was informed by a number of villagers that the forms of violence perpetrated by the Police were also not uncommon during non-conflict times. However, it was during the People's War that the extent and intensity of such abuses were much higher.

In these situations it was very difficult for villagers to know what official body to report these issues to, because it was actually state bodies committing these abuses. Therefore, they had not been reported to any official body or human rights organisation. However, once a conversation began relating to these experiences it would often go on for some time. This in part related to some of the villagers' expectation that I would be able to help them get compensation or help them highlight their problems to someone else who could help them in this way.<sup>9</sup> These were expectations that I consistently tried to lower and over time this was less of an influence on the way I was perceived.

Ultimately, the violence perpetrated by the police in Kampur had an important impact on the *basti* that was very different from the impact of the behaviour of the PLA when its members were in the *basti*. On a number of occasions PLA cadres had stayed in the *basti* during the conflict. The villagers had no warning when the PLA would come: they tended to stay for one night, often demanding food, and then moved on to another village. The villagers had no choice but to accommodate the demands of the cadres (which many considered to be unfair), although I heard of no instances in which the PLA were violent towards the villagers. During these times the PLA tried to recruit younger villagers, but their lack of success reflected limited support for the PLA in the *basti*.

The general sentiment within Kampur prior to 2007 was a general (but not universal) support and agreement with the objectives of the PLA and the wider Maoist movement, as this was understood within Kampur. Over a series of interviews and discussions I discovered some knowledge of Maoist ideology within the *basti*, as a consequence of the educational efforts of the PLA and latterly the Young Communist League (YCL).

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9 This reflects the rise of a locally specific type of 'compensation culture' in post-conflict Nepal, which will be the focus of a subsequent article.

However, no one in the village had decided to join the PLA and I was told that at no stage had anyone been planning to join, despite the problems outlined above. Additionally, no one I spoke to in the *basti* had at any stage considered joining the Nepal Police or Army. The way this was expressed implied that it was almost inconceivable to join either side of the war, but of the two options joining the Nepal police or army was the less likely, due in significant degree to the ways in which the two sides behaved while in the *basti* during the war.

For the young men in the *basti* the war was a particularly difficult time. Older men were not the focus of so much of the PLA's recruitment effort and consequently were less likely to be targeted by the police and army. I was told by a number of villagers that this resulted in some young men having been forced to migrate to avoid recruitment into the PLA.<sup>10</sup> The times when the PLA stayed in the village seemed quite difficult times: the young men from the *basti* told me that they didn't want the PLA there at all and that, while not as bad as the police, they behaved with a certain type of arrogance. These men felt quite unhappy that another group of men (and some women) could come into their *basti* whenever they wanted and order them around. These feelings of resentment re-emerged when the cantonment was established (as is considered below in more detail), with those in Kampur Basti mentioning that PLA cadres had a certain air of superiority when they came into the *basti*.

### **The cantonment**

As per the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (which was signed between the Maoists and the then Government in 2006), the PLA were located in 28 'temporary' cantonments - seven main and 21 satellite cantonments (three for each of the main cantonments) in 2007. Each of the main cantonments corresponded to a division headquarters, while each of the satellite cantonments corresponded to a battalion.

Kampur cantonment was a satellite cantonment of the seventh division of the PLA and contained around 800 cadres.<sup>11</sup> The cantonment was

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10 Migration in this context was something largely available only to young men. Some young women from other villages had moved to urban areas to work as *Kamlari* (female, bonded, domestic workers) but none had left Kampur to do this type of work.

11 This is the figure most often mentioned in interviews, although population estimates ranged from 600-1000.

situated to the north of the east-west highway, which marked the southern boundary of the cantonment. This was of particular importance for the cantonment's inhabitants as the road represented many things, including the possibility of going to other parts of Nepal and India. While sitting in buses passing the cantonment along the highway, passengers always seemed very eager to see inside the cantonment and would often discuss the latest local gossip about the PLA (for example, that a cadre had been in a fight in a local town, or that female PLA cadre slept with many men in the cantonment: such rumours tended to be quite negative). Throughout 2009 I consistently observed people looking into and discussing the cantonment as buses went past, although this level of interest had declined by 2011.

On a number of occasions buses refused to pick up PLA cadres waiting by the roadside, due to rumours in local towns that there were some 'trouble makers' (always described as young men) within the cantonment (something that was consistently denied by the PLA). There were many stories about various problems arising between PLA cadres located in cantonments and communities around the cantonments.<sup>12</sup> This implies some potential tensions between the PLA and the local community, which will be elaborated further below.

The cantonment was located in marginal land provided by the government, although the Maoists ultimately decided where all of the cantonments were located when they were established. This was land that was not farmed or inhabited prior to the establishment of the cantonment, and was of little economic value. Kampur cantonment had been established two years before my first visit in early 2009, by which time it seemed quite well established, with the jungle almost completely cleared. The cantonment was free of litter (unlike the road outside) and seemed to be far better integrated with the surrounding jungle than the *basti* over the road. This was despite the cadre within the PLA not relying on the jungle as much as the villagers from the *basti*.

The government provided electricity and water, although, as in the rest of Nepal, both were only available intermittently. I was told by various villagers that the PLA subsequently decided to provide water to

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12 For example, see: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=PLA+man+assaults+girl&NewsID=295787>

Kampur Basti.<sup>13</sup> Despite the best efforts of the PLA to settle in Kampur and establish a comfortable living place in difficult circumstances, ultimately one could not help but be reminded that it was recently thick jungle and there remained an overall feeling of marginality. Red flags were tied to many buildings and trees throughout the cantonment and in various places there were photos of Mao, Lenin, Marx, Stalin and Prachanda, who were given equal status in many Maoist posters and photographs. Unlike the *basti* there were no obvious signs of religious commitment (as one might assume within an explicitly Maoist space). Despite this, I did notice a number of cadre who more subtly expressed their Hindu religious beliefs through the wearing of certain items of jewellery (particularly necklaces, which could be worn discreetly).

In 2009 I spent time inside the cantonment, interviewing and spending time with PLA cadres (playing chess, volleyball etc.) Over time, I became interested in the interactions between the PLA and those living close by.

### **Living next to a cantonment (2007-2012)**

This section will illustrate that due to the close proximity of the cantonment, the 'People's War' has had a more profound influence on the *basti* since the end of the conflict than it did during the conflict itself. Over the five-year period that the cantonment existed, Kampur Basti and the cantonment become increasingly intertwined with each other.

While Kampur Basti and the cantonment were very close to each other, located on either side of the highway, there was a more much larger and established village composed of an ethnically mixed group of families, also called Kampur, five minutes down the road to the east. However, unlike Kampur Basti, in this village the economy was focused on the business the East-West Highway brings. There was limited interaction between PLA cadres and the inhabitants of the more established village, while cadre could be seen in Kampur Basti daily. There were a number of reasons for this, the most obvious being proximity, but some PLA cadre agreed that the people in the *basti* were more friendly towards them, and are almost entirely Kamaiya, who the Maoists saw as a group

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13 This might not have strictly been the case, as there are reports from other communities living close to cantonments received drinking water as a consequence of a German NGO: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Communities+near+ex-PLA+camps+benefiting&NewsID=359457>

that generally supported their movement.

Importantly, the interactions between the inhabitants of the *basti* and the cantonment were somewhat one-sided. For example, the PLA cadre could go anywhere in the *basti*, but the villagers could not go anywhere they liked in the cantonment. This resulted in curiosity about the goings on in the cantonment among those in the *basti*. Villagers frequently asked me questions about what was going on and what I thought of the PLA, because I was regularly inside the cantonment.<sup>14</sup>

Two years after it was established, the residents of *Kampur basti* had mixed feelings about the cantonment being so close by. Initially there seemed to be a consensus that it was not a good thing, particularly amongst the younger men in the *basti*. Furthermore, in 2009 most villagers were ambivalent about the possibility of the cantonment closing, as many did not see it as directly benefiting them. Despite this, there were a number of ways in which some of the villagers benefited, through, for example, increased business at their shops or through renting out a spare rooms to pregnant female PLA cadres. The *basti* received a reasonably regular supply of water as a consequence of the cantonment connecting a number of taps in the village to their water supply. Furthermore, at times of planting paddy and harvest some PLA cadres would come into the village to help, although not all households wanted or accepted such assistance.

The decision taken at the higher levels of the PLA to pass a rule resulting in pregnant cadres not being permitted to live in the cantonments had a number of consequences for *Kampur*. This meant that a number of female cadres moved into the *basti*, and that there was a more regular flow of people coming through the *basti*. There five female cadres living in houses in the *basti* in 2009, and nine in 2012. This was one of the more obvious areas of interaction between the cantonment and the *basti*.

Despite the economic benefits of this arrangement, some villagers didn't want these women in the village at all. The female cadres were in the *basti* because they were pregnant and were not allowed in the cantonment. However, it was clear that they would rather be back in the cantonment where conditions were better and their husbands and comrades were closer. Despite some households taking advantage of the opportunity to host a pregnant cadre, other households refused to do this under

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14 This was also an important influence on the ways in which I was perceived in the *basti*.



any circumstances. This was partly a response to various rumours about the PLA – for example, that PLA cadres had HIV/AIDS<sup>15</sup> and therefore some people did not want them close to their children. There were also rumours that the pregnant PLA cadres stole eggs from the *basti*. I was unable to find anyone who had actually had some eggs stolen from them and when I suggested that this could have been another villager and not one of these women, I was told that this was impossible between Kamaiya so it had to be one of the PLA cadres.<sup>16</sup>

In my initial interactions with a group of five pregnant PLA cadres, I was told that I couldn't speak to any of them without a senior commander's approval. I had already obtained this, as I knew the commander quite well by that stage, but the women were still unwilling to speak to me. Furthermore, the female PLA living in Kampur uniformly seemed to dislike me and my presence in the *basti*; they attempted to cause a number of problems for me and seemed to be the source of many of the rumours that related to me. For example, there were rumours that I was spying on the PLA cantonment. Furthermore, I later discovered that I was also the subject of a number of rumours emanating from the villagers themselves. Some villagers thought I was a Maoist because I was so interested in the cantonment and had also spent a lot of time there. While this was not generally a problem, such rumours and the women's dislike made it difficult to spend time in the houses in which they lived.

Initially, when it became clear that these women had a problem with my presence in the *basti* I was concerned about it, but over time I realised that it was an interesting response to my being there and I became more interested in this response to me, and why they viewed my presence as a problem. My perception was that they viewed me as interfering and a foreigner (perhaps with imperialist tendencies) with no good reason to be in the *basti*. Unlike the majority of the cadres I met during my fieldwork in Nepal, they did not seem to approve of my research interest in the PLA

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15 HIV and AIDS were used quite interchangeably by the respondents who used these terms in relation to PLA cadres, but I didn't hear either HIV or AIDS mentioned in any other context. This reflects an aspect of the 'otherness' of HIV/AIDS prevention programmes and activities that Stacey Pigg (2001, 2005) has examined more widely in Nepal.

16 Unlike researchers working in other similar contexts (for example, around US/NATO bases in Japan, *cf.* Enloe, (2004)), in Kampur *basti* I did not hear of an increase in the number of brothels or prostitution as a consequence of the Kampur PLA cantonment having been established.

and the People's War. Furthermore, these women seemed quite resentful of being in the *basti*, did not interact with the villagers and most days they would stay together in a group. Language was an important barrier because none of the female cadres spoke Tharu, or seemed to know much about Kamaiya culture and customs.

Nordstrom and Robben (1995) call for the analysis of rumours to be made central to the analysis of conflict, as this can provide important insights into the experience and perception of events during times of conflict.<sup>17</sup> In Kampur Basti I heard many rumours about both the PLA and myself and my research assistants from various sources, but mainly from the woman in whose house I lived.

Having spent quite a lot of time in Kampur Basti, I could see how some of the rumours that circulated there were very insightful in relation to how the villagers perceived the cantonment.<sup>18</sup> Many of the rumours related to the PLA and the sorts of people the villagers viewed the cadres to be. A particularly memorable rumour that I was told by several people was that PLA cadre had HIV/AIDS and that I should be very careful when I was near them. I was told that many of the PLA took drugs and that they didn't want them anywhere near their children. Some of the women in the *basti* viewed PLA cadres as a direct threat to their children. Such views were quite common in 2009, but were less frequently shared in 2011 and 2012. This might have been due to a number of factors. Perhaps these initial perceptions had proven to be implausible over time, as the PLA cadre became more integrated into the life of the *basti* and were evidently not unwell, or perhaps the villagers were more hesitant to express such views as a consequence of the greater integration of the female PLA cadre. Furthermore, my relationship with those living in Kampur had changed quite significantly during this period: having spent significant time there in 2009, the sorts of conversations I had were quite different to the ones I had in subsequent years. Despite remaining close to a number of villagers, there was greater distance with some of the villagers with whom I had limited contact in 2009. One of the consequences of this increased distance was that I was less likely to be made aware of these sorts of rumours

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17 Rumours have been considered in relation to a number of major events in Nepal's recent history, including the royal massacre in 2001 (cf. Hutt 2001, Whelpton 2005).

18 I would argue that this is equally important during post-conflict situations, especially in peripheral places such as Kampur.

and negative views, if were still held in 2011 and 2012.

### **Relationships between young men from the cantonment and the *basti***

Despite gradually increasing interactions between Kampur Basti and the cantonment between 2009-2012, young men from Kampur continued to express the greatest concerns about the cantonment. Most of the Kamaiya men from the *basti* viewed the cantonment in largely negative terms; my impression was that they would have preferred it to have been located elsewhere. However, several PLA cadres would visit their pregnant wives in the *basti* and so were often around, which led to friendships with a number of villagers. These were not usually Kamaiya or Tharu cadres but tended to be young Magar men from the hills of far-west Nepal (mainly from districts such as Jumla and Kalikot).

The relationships that did emerge between young men from the two locations were most often evident in the competitive expression of specific aspects of physical prowess and strength via certain manifestations of embodied masculinity.<sup>19</sup> An important homosocial space in which the competition between the two groups of men was quite evident was in a local establishment called the Skype Bar. This had been established close to the cantonment as a consequence of the cantonment having been established. The Skype Bar was an interesting setting in which to observe forms of competition between men, particularly around competitive drinking. This reminds us of Connell's observation that performances of masculinity are largely for other men (2005), something that is particularly relevant in a male-only setting.

I spoke to several men about this bar, which was notorious in both the cantonment and the *basti*, not least because there were no similar places

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19 Men's bodies have an important impact on constructs of masculinity, and vice versa, but this can be in ways that complicate and problematise masculinities. Although there are important links between bodies and masculinity, they are not seamless: quite the contrary, as Whitehead (2002: 191) suggests: '...many men fail to achieve a seamless, constant, symbiotic relationship between their bodies and dominant discourses of masculinity.' In relation to the specific context considered here, tensions were quite evident between the often malnourished bodies of Kamaiya men who were trying to perform forms of embodied masculinity that were heavily reliant on strength and physical prowess. Conversely, PLA cadres seemed to have a relatively fewer tensions in this regard.

around and it was frequented by the PLA. Some cadres I spoke to said they would never go to the Skype Bar as it had developed a somewhat notorious reputation for excessive drinking and on occasion fighting. If these cadres drank at all, they preferred to do so while they were on leave, in local towns some distance from the cantonment. Due to the senior PLA cadres' public abstinence from alcohol, the PLA cadres who came to the bar seemed to do so relatively discreetly. Conversely, men from Kampur Basti rarely went to the bar, largely as a consequence of their limited disposable income.

Despite some friendships between PLA and Kamaiya men, some Kamaiya men consistently discussed PLA cadres negatively. They said that when PLA cadres were in the *basti* they behaved with an arrogance that some of the younger Kamaiya men found particularly difficult. This was especially true for 'senior'<sup>20</sup> men, who felt that the PLA cadre did not sufficiently respect or acknowledge certain hierarchies in the *basti*. The young male PLA cadres who came into the *basti* were considered the most problematic and challenging, while female PLA cadres did not seem to be of much concern. The presence of male PLA cadres subverted the position and standing of all the men from Kampur Basti, but particularly more senior men. More broadly, this was reflected in areas of competition between the young men from the *basti* and those from the cantonment, although the challenge seemed to emanate more from men in the *basti* than from those in the cantonment.

In a number of conversations with women from Kampur, some slightly different perceptions of the PLA and the cantonment emerged. A number of women talked to me about the *basti* feeling safer in some ways because the cantonment was close by. However, it was difficult to untangle this from the increasing level of security that came as a consequence of the end of the 'People's War'. One woman discussed lower levels of violence and particularly domestic violence in the *basti* after the cantonment was established. I was told that this was a consequence of some of the PLA commanders being women and to the pregnant PLA cadres in the *basti*, in which made the men behave differently towards their wives. However, this was the account of only one research subject, and I was not able to substantiate these changes more broadly with other villagers. This

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<sup>20</sup> This does not simply relate to age but more to social standing as a man.

illustrates that the cantonment had a wide range of consequences for the lives of those living in Kampur Basti, and that these consequences were experienced quite differently by those living there. For some, the cantonment was an opportunity and something quite positive, but for others the cantonment was a negative influence on their lives and caused disruption to the perception that they had of the quiet and harmonious village that was established in 2000. As a consequence of visiting Kampur over a period of years, I was able to observe a change in the composition of these two groups as gradually more trust was established and more economic benefits seemed to be shared around the *basti*. In 2012 more people viewed the cantonment and the PLA positively than in 2009.

The opening of the cantonment in 2007 was a momentous event in Kampur Basti, a place where little of significance had happened previously. Below I turn to consider what the closing of the cantonment has meant for Kampur Basti and offer some insights into the sustainability of the changes that have been illustrated so far.

### **The closing of the cantonment**

After the cantonment closed in April 2012, a number of interviews were conducted with villagers regarding the process of closing the cantonments and how the village reflected on living next to the cantonment after it had closed. In 2009 and 2011, the respondents had had a range of feelings regarding the cantonment, although over time some of these views had become more positive.

According to the villagers, Kampur cantonment was closed in January 2012 and fully emptied by the end of April 2012. After the PLA left a number of Nepal Army soldiers were stationed in the cantonment, to guard it and ensure no one settled illegally there. Throughout this process the villagers from Kampur Basti had still not been inside the cantonment. Over the six years that the cantonment had been in existence various buildings and facilities had been established within it. These represented a marked improvement on facilities within the *basti*. Therefore, some in Kampur were interested in moving into the cantonment and using it to improve the situation of those from surrounding villages. However, this seemed unlikely to occur, despite landlessness remaining a significant problem within Kailali district.<sup>21</sup> There were various rumours in the *basti*

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21 In 2012 there remained significant numbers of illegally settled Kamaiya in Kailali, who

that Khaptad Multiple Campus was trying to move into the cantonment to use the buildings and facilities there. Should this happen, this would provide various economic opportunities for those living in Kampur Basti. However, given the low levels of educational achievement in the *basti* (in 2009, no villager had passed the SLC), it was unlikely that anyone from Kampur would be able to study at any campus located in the former cantonment.

As the Kamaiya are among the poorest and most marginal groups in far-west Nepal, the respondents, perhaps unsurprisingly, focused on the loss of economic opportunities that the cantonment closing represented. Having a cantonment of around 800 PLA cadres living next door meant that the shops the Kamaiya had established (mainly since 2007) were busy and profitable. However, after the cantonment closed this was no longer the case, and very little trade came from the east-west highway. Also, the initial resistance of some in the *basti* to renting out rooms had declined over time, and the income this brought into the village had been a very useful additional source and diversification of income. Ultimately, as a consequence of the cantonment closing, the *basti* had lost many customers to rent rooms and buy goods.

Furthermore, when the cantonment was closed, the water supply to the *basti* was switched off. As Kampur is such a marginal place there is little chance of it being reconnected. This, combined with the unavailability of additional (and free) labour at times of great demand (mainly planting and harvesting), meant there was unhappiness in much of Kampur Basti that the cantonment had closed.

All respondents were asked if they had stayed in touch with anyone from the PLA following the closing of the cantonment, in order to get a sense of the longevity of the relationships that I had observed between PLA cadres and villagers. The informants I spoke to were still in touch with some PLA friends, but had lost contact with more fleeting acquaintances. Staying in touch with PLA cadres has proved to be quite difficult, as the vast majority of the PLA decided to self-retire and moved elsewhere (this problem was compounded by the limited communication options in the *basti*). While this was not officially confirmed, various informants from Kampur informed me that of the 800 PLA cadres living in Kampur

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were still waiting for government-allocated land and support.

cantonment, only 160 had joined the Nepal Army, and the rest were retiring. As a consequence, the social relations that had developed over the years of the cantonment's existence were beginning to fragment, particularly as none of the PLA cadre seemed to be staying in the local area.

Finally, I asked villagers to sum up how they felt about the cantonment closing. The consensus seemed to be one of sadness, for the lost relationships and economic opportunities, and also for the loss of the assistance that the PLA cadres provided the village at times of planting and cultivation. While the range of political views in the *basti* had remained quite consistent during the lifetime of the cantonment (there remained some resistance to the PLA and the Maoist movement more generally, and support for other parties), there was also a consistent acknowledgement of some of the aspects of support that the village had received as a consequence of living next to the cantonment.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored experiences of the 'People's War' in a village in Kailali district in far-west Nepal. The establishment of a PLA cantonment close to the village meant that the war had more of an impact on this community after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. Now that the cantonment has closed, this raises the question as to what (if any) is the lasting legacy of the cantonment on the people who lived next to it. I asked a number of villagers from Kampur this question and their responses can be summed up by one respondent, who told me, 'Kampur Basti was forgotten before, and now it will be forgotten again.'

The three main sections of this paper have shown that the establishment, existence and closure of the PLA cantonment were major events in the lives of those living in Kampur Basti. While this article has shown that there are interrelated pros and cons to living next to the cantonment,<sup>22</sup> the establishment and closure of Kampur cantonment appears to be an event that has had a lasting significance in Kampur basti.

My respondents had and have mixed feelings about the cantonment's existence and subsequent closure, but on the whole they were sad when it

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22 There does not appear to have been much research published on the implications of living close to an army base in South Asia. The following examples examine the positive and negative aspects of this for local communities close to NATO/US Army and Airforce bases: Cooley (2008), Enloe (2004), Lutz (2001, 2009a, 2009b) Tobe (2006).

closed down. Ultimately, this article has shown that, just like the passengers on the buses going by, Kampur's residents remain on the outside looking in, at the goings on inside the cantonment.

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## WORKSHOP REPORTS

**Conference on ‘Contemporary Tibet: Politics of transformation, identity and resistance’ organised by Dibyesh Anand and Tsering Topgyal, London, 28 February 2014**

Dibyesh Anand and Tsering Topgyal

This one-day conference was a joint event between the Universities of Westminster and Birmingham. The conference was divided into three panels tackling different yet overlapping themes: (1) transformations and (re)assertion of Tibetan identity; (2) Chinese policies and Tibetan resistance; and (3) the international politics of Tibet. The conference speakers included both established and up-and-coming Tibet scholars.

Chaired by Tsering Topgyal, the first panel opened with Katia Buffetrille (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris) who spoke about how Tibetan nomads in Amdo are caught between harsh Chinese policies, especially forced ‘sedentarisation’, and the purist exhortations of lamas to adopt vegetarianism. Katia Pisetzsky-Tsarkova (PhD candidate, SOAS) talked about Tibetan nation-building and resistance through the construction of a literary, virtual world which bridges the diaspora-homeland chasm and provides a resilient space for reproducing Tibetan identity. James Connell (University of Birmingham) spoke about how exile Tibetans remember, reconstruct and challenge class in traditional Tibet in ways that resist the Chinese claim of having liberated the Tibetans from serfdom.

In the second panel, chaired by Dibyesh Anand, Martin Mills (University of Aberdeen) tried to put the self-immolations inside Tibet in the broader context of rights violations and resistance in contemporary China. Next, coming from an anthropological perspective on material culture, Imogen Clarke (PhD candidate, Oxford University) analysed the Tibetan use of traditional dress to resist assimilationist pressures from the dominant Chinese, Indian and Western cultures. Lama Jabb (Oxford University) then showed us how Tibetan writers in Tibet are commemorating the 10 March uprising through poetry. Finally, Kate Saunders (International Campaign for Tibet) spoke about the new narrative of cultural resilience spreading across the Tibetan plateau and straddling the diaspora-homeland divide as a formidable challenge to Chinese control.

Martin Mills chaired the third panel and Tsering Topgyal began by arguing that China has moved on from a strategy of trying to deny the Tibetans international political space to one of trying to shape both the exile Tibetan discourse as well as what foreign governments say about Tibet. Following this, Seokbae Lee (PhD candidate, University of Westminster) analysed the nature of Chinese interests in Tibet. Dibyesh Anand closed the panel by pointing out the precariousness of the Tibetan exile polity in India, arguing that India is becoming increasingly hostile towards the Tibetans.

Each panel was followed by lively discussions based on questions from the audience and exchanges among the panellists. For an academic conference, the event attracted an enviable number of attendees.

## Conference panel on 'New Histories of the Himalaya' organised by Catherine Warner and Sara Shneiderman, Philadelphia, 27-31 March 2014

### Arik Moran

The Association for Asian Studies' Annual Convention, held at Philadelphia on 27-31 March 2014, hosted two panels on 'New Histories of the Himalaya', organised by Catherine Warner of Washington State University with the support of Sara Shneiderman from Yale. Thematically divided between the role of the state in mountain polities and questions of belonging and identity, the panels brought together specialists working on both sides of the Atlantic for a series of fruitful discussions. The first panel, 'The State in New Histories of the Himalaya' (28 March), examined the role of state institutions in disparate geographical settings through an even distribution of papers on the mountain chain's impact on relations between India, China and Tibet on the one hand, and its effects on implementations and conceptualisations of sovereignty in the quintessential Himalayan state of Nepal on the other.

Enquiring into the practice and meanings attached to Tibetan scarf (*khatag*) exchanges within and outside of the Tibetan world, Emma Martin surveyed the intricacies of the tradition in the plateau on the basis of Tibetan historical texts, and proceeded to outline its adoption, alteration and sanctioning as a central component in Lhasa-Calcutta relations upon the thirteenth Dalai Lama's flight into exile in British India. The complexity of the different types of *khatags* – which was made palpable through the circulation of actual specimens among panel attendants – and the variances in their usage according to the rank of persons involved in their exchange showed how an established tradition was fused with the Mughal-derived diplomatic protocols of British India to create a new 'diplomatic grammar' along the Anglo-Tibetan frontier. Addressing the consequences of Partition for Himalayan borderlands, Bérénice Guyot-Richard discussed the impact of 'competitive development' by China and India on the Arunachal Pradesh boundary. Beginning with the reconfiguration of political boundaries in 1947 and bolstered by significant state interventions in the wake of the Sino-Indian War (1962), the region became a bone

of contention between Delhi and Beijing, with both parties allocating prodigious budgets to the task of cementing influence along the frontier. For residents of the area, however, the geopolitical interests guiding state policies afforded new ways to improve standards of living in the contested border zone, as Indian initiatives (e.g., road networks, increased military presence) and Chinese countermeasures (improved infrastructure, the establishment of schools along the frontier) were exploited in a markedly eclectic manner. The improved access to commercial and political centres in the subcontinent thus served to empower villagers within India, while the same persons could still send their children to the Chinese schools across the border (which were assessed as being better) on a daily basis. These advantages notwithstanding, the overall conditions along the frontier remain far from ideal, placing Arunachalis in a continually volatile state vis-à-vis the powers along their borders.

This multiplicity of sources of authority was not peculiar to the Sino-Indian border, having persisted throughout the Himalaya. Closely examining the strata of authority and competing notions of sovereignty in nineteenth century-Nepal, Michael Bernardo challenged the claims made for the kingdom's alleged 'exception' as a rare example of an uncolonised country (a claim implicitly enforced by Catherine Warner's presentation, summarised below). Adopting the vantage point of World History, Bernardo examined territorial disputes between Kathmandu and British India to argue for a 'connected history' of the mountain-plains boundary, which was sustained by differing, and often conflicting, conceptions of sovereignty in the autonomous pockets that dotted the Nepali landscape. The tenacity of local political languages, which remained acutely relevant throughout these pockets long after the Shah 'unification', underlined the depth of fragmentation within seemingly robust state structures. These observations are far from parochial, their salience urging further questioning of the as yet insufficiently explored methods, institutions and adaptations of Maithili culture among the Mallas, a substantial lacuna right at the heart of the current, Kathmandu-centred historiography of Nepal. The extent to which the centre actually controlled its remoter dominions notwithstanding, claiming a place at the helm of the Nepali state was persistently conditioned by inter-familial dynamics among the country's elite, a point stressed by Sanjog Rupakheti. Revisiting the 1855 martial alliance that facilitated the transition to the Rana Regime,

Rupakheti presented archival evidence that highlighted tensions between private households and secular officials in the state's transition to a new power regime. In investigating the interplay of dynastic privileges with emergent state institutions, a case was made for the importance of gender and patriarchy as key axes in the socio-political order of early Rana Nepal. The state, according to this analysis, emerges from a renegotiation of gendered power relations as influenced by anterior notions of dynastic privilege, and not from Weberian paradigms of a purely professional secular administration as the foundation of modern nation-states. Taken together, the four papers opened a comparative perspective that was aptly assessed by panel chair Chitralekha Zutshi, and which paved the way to several important exchanges in the succeeding days of the conference.

Shifting from mechanisms of state to the impact of its institutions on socio-cultural formations, the 'Identities and Belonging in New Histories of the Himalaya' panel (31 March) featured papers with close regional foci, from Assam through Nepal to Kumaon and Himachal Pradesh. In a sensitive exploration of the 'mixed race' progeny of Nepali and Khasi women with British personnel in Assamese tea plantations, *Jayeeta Sharma* delineated shifts in the values associated with ethnic categories. Dexterously combining archival data with contemporary interviews with descendants of these relations, Sharma presented the ways in which the institutions that provided education for 'mixed race' children from the plantations – most pertinently, what is today known as 'Dr. Graham's Homes' – inevitably led to their segregation and inadvertent subsumption under Imperial categories of 'Asian' and 'non-Asian'. What was perceived as shameful during the Raj, however, becomes a matter of pride in today's multi-cultural Britain, where the singular matrilineal heritage of these migrant labourers' descendants emerges as a central element in life story narratives. The lot of women in Himalayan history was subjected to additional scrutiny in Catherine Warner's presentation on a certain 'Hindu woman of the city' in 1830s Kathmandu. Through a close reading of archival sources within the framework of agency, gender and class relations alongside insights from Nepali literature, there emerged a fascinating depiction of the vicissitudes faced by subalterns in the bustling Himalayan metropolis. Tracing debates over a certain 'woman of the bazaar' (whose identity remains unresolved despite numerous references in the archives) and her liaisons, the Kathmandu Durbar's attempts at exerting its authority



while accounting for the reservations (dictates?) of the British Residency revealed a dynamic urban setting in which foreigners, locals and political powers negotiated policies based on competing agendas suggestive of profound connections between the supposedly isolated capital and subaltern groups from India.

Sustaining the emphasis on stories as a means for engaging with the past, Sanjay Joshi explored the different types of 'belonging' (affective, possessive or other) at play in early British Kumaon. Charged with the administration of a 'non-regulated' province for over 30 years, Gordon Ramsay's largely autocratic rule left a legacy that is reflective of the fluctuations of British Indian history. Joshi persuasively proposed that the flow between person and place had more to offer than mere geo-affectivity, the almost unbounded mandate Ramsay held having facilitated a paternalistic rule that efficiently answered immediate concerns among his subjects and that was vastly reduced with the Kumaoni assumption of regulated status after his departure. Despite its unwieldy nature, Ramsay's rule seems to have been permeated with a sense of obligation that derived from affective belonging, the extent of his pioneering successes being paradoxically lost in the legalistically more liberal, yet heavily bureaucratized government of his successors. Farther west, Arik Moran examined the impact of the Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-16) on the formulation of regional identities in today's Himachal Pradesh. Presenting the common version of the war in Himachali historiography, which relies on a juxtaposition of 'barbaric Gorkhas' with 'soil-born' (*bhumika*) rulers personified by the Raja of Kangra, Moran addressed divergences in parallel narratives from local dynastic chronicles and archival records. Although broadly consistent with factual developments in the region, these variant readings of history belied deep affinities between the conquerors from Nepal and their subjects, the differences between the parties being craftily construed by recourse to multiple registers of identity that include imperial (Indo-Persian), North Indian (Rajput) and distinctly local conceptualisations of kingship.

In a lucid discussion of the panel papers, chair Sara Shneiderman (Yale University) outlined the exciting new directions these opened for further research and their importance for substantiating the links between historians and anthropologists of the region. The conversations that ensued addressed both panels and quickly led to a questioning

of core premises underlying Himalayan Studies, such as the validity of the perceived wisdom that recurrently casts the mountains as peripheral, given the abundance of testimonies to unifying denominators in both the (Tibetanised) east and the (Khasa/South Asian) west. The ways in which such cultural unifiers were advanced through state institutions and their concomitant narratives prompted further discussion on their role in constructing, obstructing and mediating divergent notions of identity across the Himalayas. Finally, the broad perspective on diverse Himalayan settings encourages contextualised comparisons of the state's role in creating and reifying difference, an appropriate counterpoint to 'belonging'. Cross-referencing archival sources with András Höfer's study of the *Muluki Ain* (1854), for example, would help to explain the motives for certain legislative measures (e.g., Warner's urban-based woman and Sharma's migrant-labourer workers), adding nuance to understandings of state functions in the Himalaya and opening paths for further comparative research (e.g., with related norms in Tibet and British India). These and related questions are to be addressed in a special issue of *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* that is currently in preparation and due to be published within 18 months.

## Workshop on 'Kiranti Culture in Contemporary Nepal', Vienna, 4-5 April 2014

Marion Wettstein

This international workshop was organised by the members of the research project 'Ritual, Space, Mimesis: Performative traditions and ethnic identity among the Rai of eastern Nepal' funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). There has been a growing academic interest in the diverse traditions of Kiranti<sup>1</sup>-speaking groups in East Nepal since the 1970s. In particular, linguists have done extensive research on and documentation of the highly variable languages belonging to the Kiranti subgroup of Tibeto-Burman. However, ethnographic studies have lagged behind: whereas detailed grammars now exist for more than a dozen Kiranti languages, this is not matched by thorough descriptions of cultural traditions. Therefore the workshop aimed at giving a platform for the existing expertise on Kiranti cultures and, bringing together linguists and anthropologists, to discuss the present state of research. A particular focus was put on 'Kiranti religion', which is a label acknowledged in the Nepal Census since 1991 but which is still a little known entity. In the present political context of ethnic politics it will be of particular interest to study the changing configuration of these traditions.

In the opening lecture, 'The study of Kiranti religion as an emerging field', Martin Gaenszle (ISTB, University of Vienna) gave an overview of the published academic work on the Kiranti, focusing on anthropological works. It can be observed that ethnographic work among the Kiranti concentrates on topics identified as core concepts by N.J. Allen and Philippe Sagant in the 1970s, such as ritual and ritual specialists, myth and recitations, as well as kinship and power. Gaenszle characterised Kiranti religion as 'a religion that very much lives through the language'. Even if the *muddum*,<sup>2</sup> a widely recognised term for the oral tradition and cultural knowledge, refers to a common concept, each local group possesses distinct traditions. Given that the Kiranti constitute one of the largest ethnic

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1 The designation 'Kiranti' is nowadays increasingly replaced by 'Kirat' in Nepal itself.

2 Also called by other cognate terms.

units in Nepal, it is astonishing just how little anthropological and ethnographic work has been conducted among them. Focusing on religion as a topic, it is important to understand how reformist movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the impact of the ongoing political restructuring in Nepal shape new practices and understandings of religion.

The traditions of the Kiranti groups are essentially oral traditions, and knowledge and practice are still today mainly handed down from mouth to ear and through performance. The Kiranti traditionally had no script, but today numerous books are printed in what is called the Limbu script, which now is also taught in various schools. Boyd Michailovsky (LACITO/CNRS, Villejuif) pointed out the historical development of this script from its beginnings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century until today in his lecture 'On the Limbu (Sirijanga) script in the 20th century'. Sirijanga is regarded as the inventor of the Limbu script but until the late 1920s no further documents can be found written in it, after which it was revived by Iman Singh Chemjong in Darjeeling. In a detailed account of the personal histories of the protagonists, Michailovsky traced the development of the script and how it made its way to reach Phalgunanda Lingden Limbu, a key figure in the reform of Kiranti Religion. Through him the script became closely linked to a new form of religion, and we are confronted with the contemporary effects of an old theme in Himalayan mythology: bargaining for religious authority through scripts and books.

Written sources about or from the various Kiranti groups, if they exist at all, hardly ever reach further back than maybe a century. Reconstructing history is therefore a major challenge. Grégoire Schlemmer (CNRS, Paris) suggested in his lecture 'Persistence through changes: evolution of the Kulung Rai religious practice during the 20th century' that by the means of precise and detailed ethnography one can attempt to reconstruct it even under these circumstances. He showed that writing a history of the Kulung Rai – as a model for any local culture lacking written sources – means primarily bringing a chronological order into ethnographic data and linking this chain to the few events that can be dated precisely. In this way he could show that in this specific local case the forest and hunting rituals are among the oldest. Healing rituals followed, as illness is said to have come from outside and therefore has to be healed by rituals coming from outside. House and territory rituals are very important today, but compared to the other ritual types they are a rather recent phenomenon.

He could show that in this reconstruction it makes no sense to search for a 'pure' tradition, for 'what counts here is not what is original, but what is important'.

Ritual recitations are often performed in special languages, the *muddum* languages, which are distinct from the ordinary local languages. The comparison of these two registers stood in the centre of the lecture 'The language of invocation vis-à-vis the language of communication' by Vishnu Singh Rai (Guest Researcher at the University of Vienna, funded by the Open Society Foundation). The language of daily communication is a two-way process between the speakers in a proper dialogue, it is prosaic and features little musicality. The ritual language of invocation, by contrast, is one-directional: a poetic, creative monologue with a high degree of musicality. On the basis of many examples from the Chamling Rai *muddum* language, the creativity of this speech register was shown in order to establish that ritual language is not archaic and fixed. Rai pointed out that the idiosyncratic use of suffixes and binominals often pose particular problems in the translation of such recitations, and because words can have many meanings simultaneously ritual language is more difficult to understand than ordinary language. Kirati ritual language is a field still little researched among linguists and anthropologists alike.

Another aspect of Kiranti religion, and of cultural practice among the Kiranti in general, that has only marginally been researched so far is that of dance and performative movements. In her lecture on 'Dolokumma: layers of cultural knowledge and practice in the *sakela* performance of the Dumi Rai'. Marion Wettstein (ISTB, University of Vienna) examined the themes which are assembled in the *sakela* dance of the Rai, and how they are interlinked. She analysed the layers of performance, such as the mimetic dance movements, the lyrics of the accompanying songs, the ritual event and recitations into which the dance is embedded, the mythological stories connoted, and many more (agricultural techniques, crafts, fauna), and showed how these can be arranged into a densely woven cocoon of cultural knowledge and practice related to the experience of dancing. This, she suggested, and the fact that anyone from the community can participate in this lay dance (while it can be performed independently of territory by opening a dance space on any ground), makes *sakela* highly suited for implementing and embodying community feeling and notions of ethnic identity, a main reason why the dance is currently

intensely promoted by Rai cultural activists in Nepal and in the diasporas.

Another theme recurrent in Kiranti cultural activism is that of territory and ancestral homeland. In his lecture 'Walking with the ancestors: new approaches to the study of ritual landscapes in Eastern Nepal' Alban von Stockhausen (ISTB, University of Vienna) demonstrated how ritual landscape is turned into a statement about political territory. By performing pilgrimages formerly not known among the Rai, by tagging ritual places with inscriptions, by making stations of the imaginary shamanic journey into public ritual spaces for real, landscape becomes democratised and is transformed into a map of ethnic self-definition and identity. In order to document this landscape, von Stockhausen presented a method of ethnographic map-making by the help of GPS logging that allows a precise linkage of detailed ethnographic and geographic data.

In the concluding discussion it was suggested that a researchers' network for Kiranti Studies should be set up which will include linguists and anthropologist as well as researchers from other fields interested in Kiranti culture and history. An online platform that allows academics worldwide to join will be hosted by the ISTB, University of Vienna. On behalf of the Kiranti researchers in Nepal, Vishnu Singh Rai informed that the Kirat Rai Yayokkha, the cultural and ethnic umbrella organisation of the Rai, is planning to organise a conference on Kirat studies in mid-August 2015 in Kathmandu and welcomes the international academic community to take part. Updates on this and other events, as well as the researchers' network, will be given on the Kirat Studies website at <http://www.univie.ac.at/kiratstudies/>.

## BNAC Nepal Study Day, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford, 24-25 April 2014

Krishna Adhikari and Sondra Hausner

The Britain-Nepal Academic Council's twelfth annual Nepal Study Days saw twenty papers presented to an audience of some 50 participants, with robust and lively discussion throughout the two days. Panels covered more than eight topics, and the dynamic mix of discipline, region, approach, and topic meant that experts and students from all fields could exchange ideas that engaged with Nepal's history, culture, environment, and politics in a concentrated forum.

Two panels on **religion** explored the enormous diversity of religious practice in multiple areas of Nepal. These discussions ranged from classical religious studies, such as Yolmo concepts of sacred geography (Zsoka Gelle) or contemporary Bhaktapur Christians' view of divinity (Ian Gibson), to questions of political and religious identity, as with Gurung discussions about the relative merits of Bon and Buddhist identity (Florence Gurung) or Bahun and Chhetri debates over *kul puja* in the contemporary landscape (Krishna Adhikari). A final strand focused on new religious movements, in the case of Tenrikyō, a Japanese-inspired sect with an extended history of diplomatic relations with Nepal (Marilena Frisone), and the social context of conversion, particularly the ways in which Nepali Christians relate to other members of their communities (Ole Kirchheiner).

Under the rubric of **tourism**, two presentations investigated the powerful ways in which the material representation of Nepali cultures plays a significant role in drawing people into the country, and the ways in which actors from all over the world participate in these on-the-ground exchanges: politics around building on the site of Lumbini reflect global debates about who owns – and has the authority to represent – Buddhism (Kalyan Bhandari), and a previously unexplored long history of embroidery shops in Thamel (on Japanese sewing machines!) uncovered beautiful panels of finely crafted hippie icons – embroidered patches of yin yang eyes and yetis, among others – as the literal and material symbols of where, and how, the transnational encounter between Western travellers and their visions of the mystical East actually happens (Ken Ishikawa).

The final panel of the day focused on **health and diaspora**, exploring first the role of caste in health, using self-reported data that suggests that members of lower caste groups are disadvantaged in healthcare provision, and thus in health outcome; government policies do not show evidence of improving this social situation (Ram Prasad Mainali). The final paper of the day focused on Nepali rock bands in Camden, with a great deal of evidence for a thriving Nepali artistic culture among youth in London, with strong transnational links (Premila van Oomen): the Nepali diaspora is alive and well—inspired by Pink Floyd, perhaps, but sustaining its own creativity in vibrant ways.



## BOOK REVIEWS

## **Autocratic Monarchy: Politics in Panchayat Nepal**

by L.S. Baral, edited by Pratyoush Onta and Lokranjan Parajuli. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari. 2012, 500 pp., (Chautari Book Series 70), ISBN 978-9937-8389-9-3, price Rs. 600

Reviewed by John Whelpton

Leelanteshwar Sharma Baral (1923-1997), who also wrote under the names Isvar Baral and L.S. Baral, was a hill Bahun by descent but was born in the eastern Tarai. A dedicated scholar of Nepali literature, politics and history, he was educated mostly in India and spent the greater part of his career there, teaching Nepalese studies at the Indian School of International Studies and, as it became in 1970, the Jawaharlal Nehru University School of International Studies. His time in Delhi was punctuated by two extended stays as a researcher in London, where he gained his Ph.D at SOAS. He was also a founder member in 1947 of the Nepali Rastriya Congress and in 1990, following Jan Andolan-I, was appointed vice-chancellor of the then Royal Nepal Academy by the Congress-led interim government.

Both because of his location and perhaps also his sometimes rather ponderous style, Baral's work has not in the past received the attention it deserves. However, his doctoral dissertation, 'The Life and Writings of Prithvi Narayan Shah', was made accessible on-line<sup>1</sup> in 2011 and now his principal essays on Nepali politics, covering the period from 1959 to 1979, have been collected together by Pratyoush Onta and Lokranjan Parajuli and published with a substantial introduction that disclaims any intention of providing an 'intellectual biography' but in fact presents an excellent survey of his work and the background against which it was produced.

There is no authoritative narrative of the Panchayat period, in sharp contrast to the years from 1950 to 1962, covered by Joshi and Rose's magisterial *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*. We therefore have to rely on studies of particular aspects, some of the most useful being those by L.S. Baral's former student, Lok Raj Baral, and one of the targets of the elder Baral's trenchant criticism, Rishikesh Shaha. There are also a few very brief

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1 See <http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rarebooks/downloads/> (accessed 4 March 2014)

general surveys in works dealing with a longer period (e.g. Hoftun et al. (1999)). L.S. Baral's thirteen papers in this volume do not radically challenge the view one gains from these other sources, but remain useful for their detailed description of certain episodes (e.g. the run-up to the 1975 second amendment to the 1962 constitution) and of institutions (particularly the Class Organisations analysed in chapter 7) and for documenting the changing perspective of a well-informed 'insider-outsider'.

Though a major figure in the development of Nepali literary criticism, L.S. Baral's cultural identity, unlike that of many Nepalis, was not one based on distancing himself from India. In Kathmandu in the 1950s, when he worked as a lecturer at Padma Kanya college and as a literary editor, he was known for walking the streets in a dhoti and kurta, whilst later on some Panchayat ideologues queried (wrongly) his Nepali nationality, and Parijat, one of the 'progressive' authors who criticised his 1990 appointment to head the Academy, reportedly described him as 'a strange Indian import.' In his analysis of Nepal-Indian relations, which are the focus of the last three chapters in the volume, his bi-cultural background meant that he was well able to see things from the Indian as well as the Nepali perspective. He characterises the Indian government's approach from 1963 to 1971 as one of 'appeasement' of the royal regime which only encouraged more demands (pp. 434-5) and also complains about unreasonable criticisms of Indian aid projects (pp. 437-8).

Baral's personal standpoint on Nepali politics evolved over the twenty year period on which his essays focus. He appears first as a strong Congressite, optimistic in the book's first chapter (co-authored with A. Appadorai, the head of ISIS) that King Mahendra would be able to work with the party despite the extensive powers he retained under the 1959 constitution, but then bitterly critical of the royal dismissal of B.P. Koirala's government whose achievement was 'little short of a miracle' (p. 118). However, in his paper on 'The Changing Constitutional and Political System of Nepal', originally published in 1977, he argues that, following Suvarna Shamsher's acceptance of the royal regime in 1968, Koirala, released from prison the same year, threw away a chance of a rapprochement with the king by public talk of confrontation. Baral writes also of the 'series of amateurish and facetious looking acts of terrorism carried on by fits and starts from 1973 onwards by some young persons under Koirala's influence' (p. 390). There is also some evidence of disillusionment with the

opposition as a whole, with references to 'so-called democrats' in the final chapter of the book, which analyses relations between India and Nepal under the Janata government and suggests that India had no real interest in the restoration of multi-party democracy in Nepal

It is uncertain exactly what would have emerged if an understanding between B.P. Koirala and Mahendra had been reached. In 1984, after the last of Baral's essays had been published, Shambhu Prasad Gyawali, who as attorney-general had drafted much of the 1962 constitution, published details of his own role preparing successive drafts of an amended version, work which was unfinished when Mahendra died in February 1972.<sup>2</sup> There is some confusion over the exact chronology, as veteran Panchayat politician Navaraj Subedi (2012/13: 9) claims that he was himself made chairman of the drafting committee in 1968 but that the whole project was aborted when B.P. refused to remain silent for three months after leaving prison. However, both Subedi and the Gyawali family report Mahendra telling his associates it was time to pay back the 'loan' (*nāso*) he had taken from the people.

We still await a full narrative of the Panchayat years, but in the meantime this volume makes a useful addition to the resources available.

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2 Information from S,B. Gyawali's son, Deepak Gyawali. The father's account was published in his 2041 V.S.article in Rajdhani and republished in Gyawali 2055.

3 <http://books.google.com.hk/books?id=MX22o4PJ3Q0C&pg> (accessed 4 March 2014)

## **Explorers and Scientists in China's Borderlands, 1880-1950**

Edited by Denis Glover et al., Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011, 300pp., b&w photos, maps, ISBN978-0-295-99117-7 (hardback) 978-295-99118-4 (pbk.), \$ 75/35

Reviewed by Alex C. McKay

European exploration of south-western China during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century produced a considerable body of knowledge concerning that area. In recent years the opening up to tourism of the remoter parts of China has enabled the academic gaze to return to those realms once labelled the 'Sino-Tibetan marches', for they lie between the centres of Han Chinese and Lhasa Tibetan civilisation. The region is home to a patchwork of tribal groupings who are today increasingly drawn into modernity, particularly in the forms represented by the Chinese communist state.

This timely volume of papers, which derives from a University of Washington symposium, examines the contributions of a number of individuals who worked in these regions prior to the communist take-over. These travellers have in common the fact that they were all linked to institutions of collection and classification. Consciously or unconsciously, they shared in the idea of a 'high' (that is, Western), culture vis-à-vis a world of nature, which included tribal societies which were (in that paradigm), properly represented in Natural History museums.

None of this eclectic selection of travellers was particularly interested in Asian high culture, and while participants in, or at least beneficiaries of, the contemporary process of European imperialism in China, they were also witnesses to the process of Han Chinese imperialism against the non-Han cultures of the south-west. It was with those colonised peoples that they tended to identify. That identification produced a body of work that is today situated in on-going processes of identity formation, for many of the individuals discussed here are now honoured for their role in cultural preservation by the descendants of those among whom they worked. Some, notably Joseph Rock, are even locally commodified for domestic and international tourist consumption.

There is a total of 14 contributors, including film-makers, and a

number of chapters focus on issues of visual representation, the creation of a 'culture of display' in which the field of vision was structured to 'emphasize the subjective, empirical gaze of an imperial viewer and to deflect the power of the return gaze' (p. 30). These classifying and categorising projects implicitly supported contemporary theories of race, yet also contested their presumed hierarchies. Not only did many of those discussed here comment favourably on their tribal subjects vis-à-vis the Han, but other intellectual currents might also be involved, such as the identification of a tribal group as descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Only a nuanced examination of individual approaches such as is provided here can properly reflect the complexity of these patterns of encounter, and reading those examined here by no means encourages a simplistic model of power relationships in this process of knowledge construction.

While a number of European and Chinese explorers are discussed here, seven are the subjects of separate chapters, and as expected several are identified as escaping the boundaries of their own class background. In the case of the botanist George Forrest (1873-1932), who made seven expeditions to China in search of alpine flowers, and Ernest Henry Wilson (1876-1930) who made two plant-collecting expeditions there, their lower class origins were reshaped by their successful careers. The Swiss Fritz Weiss (1877-1955) and his writer wife Hedwig (discussed in a chapter written by their grandchild and film-maker Tamara Wyss), were of Jewish ancestry, and their peregrinations among the Nuosu, a sub-tribe of the Lolos, reflected both the imperial context of Fritz's employment by the German consular office and a more personal search for a reflection of their own ancient imagined society.

The social rise of botanist Joseph Rock (1884-1962) also came as a consequence of his work. In a collaborative chapter with no less than five authors, the extent to which Rock's published work is actually dominated by his studies of Hawai'i rather than Asia is brought out, but the less attractive aspects of his life and work are largely ignored, giving a somewhat unbalanced picture of the man.

Like Rock, Paul Vial has recently been re-evaluated as his writings are utilised by local church and tourist board interests and within the development of Yi studies as a specific field. Vial, who worked among the Sani Yi in eastern Yunnan during 1887-1917 as a 'religious leader, ethnographer, linguist and agent of empire' (p. 150), was a man whose memory

'has been suppressed, manipulated, and exploited to legitimize changing values and worldviews' (p. 151). A strongly anti-Han moderniser, he established his own model community among the Sani, thus offering an alternative path to modernity.

David Crockett Graham (1884-1961), a Baptist 'missionary, educator, natural historian, museum curator and anthropologist' in western Sichuan from 1911 to 1948, is the subject of two chapters. Graham was the long-time editor of the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, a treasure trove of writings that would surely repay a modern reprint. The increasingly academic Graham eventually returned to the USA to undertake formal studies in anthropology, having won renown for the more than 400,000 specimens he sent to the USNM/Smithsonian. Graham's work has also been reassessed in modern China, and he is beginning to be seen as an exemplar of Sino-Western cultural exchange.

The final chapter discusses Sweden's Johan Gunnar Anderson (1874-1960) and his Chinese contemporary Ding Wenjiang (1887-1936). Anderson, the Director of Sweden's Geological Survey, was invited to China in 1914 to advise on mineral prospecting. Ding, the British-educated Director of China's National Geological Survey, was originally his host, and was a strong believer in positivist science as a universal value. Ultimately, the linguistic and ethnological studies of these two friends served the Republican Chinese model of modernisation.

While the subjects of individual chapters occasionally overlap, this well-illustrated publication is to be welcomed. It is a cohesive collection that celebrates its subjects' achievements while remaining critical of many of their assumptions. It is of considerable relevance to those interested in similar historical processes in the Himalaya and provides a valuable stepping-stone to further scholarship in this area.

## **Making Faces: Self and image creation in a Himalayan valley**

by Alka Hingorani, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013, 160 pp., 134 illus., 128 in colour, ISBN 978-0-8248-3525-5, Price \$45.00

Reviewed by Ehud Halperin

In the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh (North India), worshippers place *mohras* (metal face-images) and *chhatris* (gold or silver parasols) on *rathas* (carriages), and consider these the material manifestation of divinity. In this relatively short book, Alka Hingorani documents and theorises the artistic creation, meaning and cultural value of these religious objects. Hingorani gives special attention to the unique place occupied by the artisan in the production process, which, she argues, assigns him the role of a cultural critic in this remote Himalayan region.

A welcome contribution to a growing body of work produced in recent years on the Western Himalaya and on the less studied Kullu district, the book's main strength is its detailed account of the artistic features and production process of the *mohras* and *chhatris*, and the high-quality illustrative photos that accompany it throughout (the author's advanced degree in photography is well attested in this volume.) Hingorani also provides useful, if somewhat repetitious, theoretical observations on the performative aspects of the ritual production process; the local characteristics, significance and meaning of religious art; the expressive qualities of the sacred objects (which she likens to material speech acts); and the potentially socially destabilising aspects of the encounter between artist, patrons and audience. The main weakness of this study is the limited ethnographic data that is provided to support these theoretical claims, which leaves the reader wanting more detailed illustrations of how things actually unfold on the ground.

Chapter One opens with a brief background on the topography, history and customs of the Kullu district, followed by an account of a recent conflict that has emerged between two local deities concerning the places occupied by their carriages in the annual Dashera festival. This case study, which effectively illustrates how important the material aspects of religious practice are in this region, provides an excellent entry point to the



whole book. Hingorani then presents the main themes of her study: the manufacturing of *mohras* and *chhatris*; the way in which the ‘population that commissions the object, simultaneously a thing of material and meta-physical value, actively shapes it through discussion and dispute, criticism and defense, of both process and product’ (p. 11); and the liminal, and thus socially critical, place occupied by the artisans producing these objects.

The second and third chapters (‘The Object’ and ‘The Process’, respectively) constitute, in this reader’s opinion, the best part of the book. In Chapter Two, Hingorani introduces the *rathas*—the wooden carriages that, once adorned with *mohras* and other religious objects, are imbued with divinity. These *rathas* ‘have become the repositories of community wealth and the *mohras*, individually, some of the most valuable objects in the material culture of the region’ (p. 17). The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to presenting the typology, history and artistic analysis of *madimukhas*, the special *mohras* made of cast metal that may last centuries and are therefore considered the chief representation of the deity in the carriage. Hingorani insists that we should not merely study these *mohras* as artistic objects but should understand them within the wider cultural and social context in which they are produced and used, where they function as ‘repositories of relationships and form an enduring sediment of the cognitive structures of Himalayan society’ (p. 22).

It is this wider cultural context that the book’s third chapter examines in detail. Unlike the *madimukhas*, most *mohras* wear out rather quickly as a result of their different metal composition, and must be melted and remoulded every two or three decades. This periodic reproduction, in which delicate innovations and artistic interpretations are introduced to old patterns in a process that involves artist, patrons and audience, renders the *mohras* both stable and shifting objects, and grants them their unique value in this remote Himalayan society. Hingorani carefully documents the technical and ritualistic aspects of two creations: a parasol for a deity named Shesh Nag, which takes several weeks, and a shorter moulding of a Shiva *madimukha*, commissioned by the author herself for the purpose of study. The text is interspersed with beautiful photos that make the process highly accessible to the reader. Alongside the detailed descriptive account, Hingorani offers several theoretical observations, suggesting, for example, that the artist’s preparations echo those made by classical Indian musicians before performances (p. 38), and that the ritual

arena functions as a Foucauldian heterotopia, a real place ‘in any society where conventions are confounded... repackaged, often inverted, always contested’ (p. 42). While these suggestions are interesting, they are not always sufficiently validated by the ethnographic data. At other times the analysis itself is somewhat thin. Hingorani’s reading of the animal offerings made during the ritual, for example, is based solely on Rene Gerard’s interpretation of sacrifice (‘to protect the entire community from its own violence’, p. 43), thereby missing a world of regional meanings that accompany this popular, yet highly controversial, practice.<sup>1</sup>

In the fourth chapter (‘Speaking of Aesthetics’), drawing on ancient Indian as well as contemporary theories of aesthetics, Hingorani argues that the *mohras*, which function as both religious and aesthetic objects, acquire meaning that ‘is generated and kept alive through a process that involves the sustained participation of the community in the dialectic between idea and action, the interchange of expectation with response, which controls both change and continuity’ (p. 34). Thus, she explains, the ritual production and evaluation of *mohras* enables villagers living in relatively autonomous villages to see themselves ‘as part of a socio-cultural-economic amalgam... [that] constitutes and reconstitutes itself as a unified entity’ (p. 83). Intriguing as the theory may be, the reader is presented with only broad illustrations of how this process manifests itself on the ground. The two examples given by Hingorani—one of a short exchange between the artisan and his patrons evaluating his work, the other of a village crowd assessing the artistic quality of a new silver belt made for a deity’s *ratha*—are brief and sparse. There is not enough information about the views expressed by participants, the criticism and counter-criticism levelled, the sophistication of the evaluations offered, the elaborate aesthetic values acquired, and the complex dynamics that are supposed to be taking place in this dialectical process of aesthetic production and reproduction.

In the fifth chapter (‘The Artisan’), Hingorani makes an interesting claim concerning the unique role of the artisan as social critic. The artisan, who is itinerant by profession, is often a temporary visitor in

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1 For a recent discussion of the debate over the legitimacy of animal sacrifice in Himachal Pradesh and the way in which ‘ritual practices like goat sacrifice have become a space where Himachalis struggle to define themselves, their gods, and their histories’ (p. 210), see Elmore (2010).

other communities. His constant movement between social contexts ‘permits the initiation of an alternate discourse of society and of selfhood, [and] the possibility to transgress the commonness of an ordinary life and imbue it with the uncommon’ (p. 100). Hingorani illustrates this point by presenting several ideas and narratives put forward during the ritual production of a parasol by Taberam Soni, the chief artisan whose work she has followed in previous chapters. These illustrations—Taberam’s criticism of the caste system; his claims that low-caste musicians are close to the gods; and his reworking of a printed myth in order to elevate the status of artisans and artists—are useful but few, and make the reader wish Hingorani had presented more such materials throughout the book. Moreover, the ‘self’ that is being criticised here by Taberam seems to be based in caste alone, while other plausible elements—such as gender, financial status, political orientation, particulars of religious faith and practice, etc.—are conspicuously missing. The examples also focus on the artisan’s statements, with hardly any mention of the reception of his ideas by his audience. Again, it is regrettable that the evidence does not substantiate the theoretical claims.

In the Epilogue, Hingorani, who was unable to witness the consecration of either a *mohra* or a *chhatri*, examines instead the consecration of a new temple, which, she explains, is ‘not much different’ (p. 109). She wraps up the book by suggesting that the religious objects discussed should be seen as material speech acts made in a social and cultural language: ‘They are part of a complex signification system whose inherent polysemy is in constant friction with the fixed meaning that context often conditionally secures during active usage of the language’ (p. 110). Captivating as this observation may be, it remains unclear what the details of such material conversations are, as well as what is being said by these objects in these contexts. While the reader readily accepts that ‘an exploration of responses elicited by the work of the artisan and an assessment of the dialectics that frames such response offers the least mediated apprehension of the aesthetic aspiration of a community of people’ (p. 112), this reader wishes there were more such responses presented in the book explicitly and in detail.

To sum up, Hingorani’s book provides a useful account of the history of *mohras* and associated objects of religious art in the region, a textually detailed and visually captivating documentation of their production

process, and a plausible theorisation of how their aesthetic features are intimately associated with their sociocultural function and meaning. The book's main weakness is the imbalance between sophisticated theoretical analyses on the one hand and somewhat thin ethnographic evidence to support them on the other. There is a relative paucity of detailed ethnographic accounts of the actual exchange surrounding the production, reception and evaluation of the objects by the parties involved, especially the views expressed by the audience. The reader is also left wondering about the effects of modernity, capitalism and contemporary culture, and the reasons for the author's somewhat ahistoric approach in this regard. Nevertheless, Hingorani's work will be quite helpful for scholars interested in Himalayan and particularly Kulluvi religion, culture and art, as well as in theories of material culture and the role of art and artisans in rural societies.

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## **Discourses of Awareness: Development, social movements and the practices of freedom in Nepal**

by Tatsuro Fujikura, Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2013, 310 pp. ISBN 978-9937-594-03-5, price 600 NRS.

Reviewed by Celayne Heaton-Shrestha

This book combines historical and ethnographic analyses to explore the ways in which the project of development in Nepal has helped to produce new forms of imagination and socio-political engagement. It argues against 'post-development' discourse theorists who cast development and social movements as alternatives and consider development to be 'anti-political'. In contrast, Fujikura argues that in order to understand Nepal's political present, it is essential to turn to the history of development in Nepal.

The argument is laid out over the course of eight chapters, including a conclusion and introduction. Chapter 2 is primarily conceptual, and sees Fujikura argue for a perspective that takes seriously discussions about awareness and consciousness. Chapter 3 explores one particular model of development, 'community development' (CD), which, it is argued, has had a profound influence on subsequent socio-political processes in Nepal. Fujikura shows how CD as a technology of reformation and improvement embodied a certain political rationality, including a notion of 'how democracy works'. In chapter 4, Fujikura turns to the work and reflections of Japanese NGO workers to examine the continuities and changes in 'bottom-up' development in Nepal, from the CD of the 1950s to the more recent 'rights-based' approaches. He argues that a recurring theme in development in Nepal has been the attempt to forge a constructive relationship between the people and the state. The next three chapters focus on the 'targets' of development, or more precisely their political projects. Chapter 5, one of the most successful chapters in the book, delves into how self-identified village leaders have engaged with the discourses and techniques of development. Fujikura argues convincingly that the actions of these leaders should not be seen as the expression of a desire for upward mobility. Rather, these should be understood as a way of seizing and exercising agency in relation to national and local communities,

of being moral, responsible agents recognisable by living villagers and ancestors, as well as the state and other agents of development. In chapter 6, he considers the relationship between the actions of participants in the Maoist People's War and the project of national development in Nepal. He highlights the fact that the Maoists and state schooling shared assumptions regarding the existence of the Nepali nation as an object of attachment and ground for political action. He further argues that it is this attachment that propelled the Maoists towards revolutionary forms of action. The next chapter continues the exploration of the political projects of the 'targets' of development and focuses on the Kamaiya liberation movement. It traces the origins of the movement and the NGO BASE, a key supporter of the movement, and the former's link to CD programmes. The chapter also highlights the similarities between the discourse of awareness, awakening, and the need to change behaviour and consciousness in BASE and Maoist songs and discourse. In doing so, it ties together the themes of practices of development, discourses of awareness, reformation of subjectivities and political action. This is followed by a conclusion in Chapter Eight.

As a whole, the book effectively updates the critical conversation concerning development in Nepal. In urging that we explore the productive, enabling side of development, Fujikura is in agreement with recent work in the anthropology of development elsewhere (e.g. Crewe & Axelby 2013). Similarly, his suggestion of a link between contemporary political engagements and development forms part of a broader shift within the anthropology of development, away from viewing development as a mask of power and towards conceiving development as the practice of politics (e.g. Li 2007, Bierschenk 2008). Further, in the spirit of this recent work, the account is subtle and complex in its representation of the agents of development. The differently positioned characters—be they the instruments or targets of development interventions—are presented as reflective, discerning and even flexible in their thinking. This is a far cry from the representations of the 'post-development' theorists, rightly criticised for their tendency to deny reflexivity and responsibility to the agents of development (Mosse 2013) as well as their dichotomous constructions (e.g. Harrison & Crewe 1999).

Broad in scope and ambitious, the book is also peppered with insights and challenges to existing understandings in the regional literature. In

Chapter 4, for instance, Fujikura suggests that development in Nepal has involved anything but the promotion of neo-liberalism, as often argued, and points instead to the inherently contradictory nature of development. He holds, with writers such as Li (2007) and Gould (2007) that development should be thought of as an ensemble (or *assemblage*) of disparate elements, ideas and interests, rather than a monolithic enterprise. In Chapter 7, he questions the commonly accepted account of the relationship between the emergence of the Maoist movement and development in Nepal, namely that a major factor was the ‘failure’ of development (e.g. Sharma 2006; Deraniyagala 2005). He also counters arguments that development and democracy have not engaged each other in Nepal since the 1990s, arguing instead that a vision of democracy has been central to the development endeavour since the 1950s.

The book’s breadth and ambitiousness, however, do not always work to its benefit. At times the insights feel like tangents; and certain themes remain unelaborated, notably the topics of pedagogy and discipline and also that of alliances between individuals from different social backgrounds. Similarly, the accounts of the Maoist and Kamaiya liberation movements are somewhat sketchy and receive more thorough treatment elsewhere, including by the author himself (e.g. Fujikura 2011).

Also, while the move away from the pessimism of development discourse theorists is commendable, I found myself wishing for a more balanced account—that is, for a more thorough engagement with the arguments of ‘post-development’ theorists, and the less agreeable experiences of the encounter with development recounted by, inter alia, Nanda Shrestha and Mark Liechty (e.g. 1997). The issue of power is surprisingly downplayed in the account (leaving me wondering about the extent to which the author might be engaging in some antipolitics of his own). I was struck, in the introduction, that the two individuals quoted as people ‘who did not know anything’, were both women, one from each of the movements explored in the book, and yet this did not give rise to a discussion of the power dynamics within the movements. I would have wished to see a discussion, in other words, not only of how (and whom) development enables but also disables—enabling the ‘practices of freedom’ of which Fujikura writes, while also turning some or all of its agents into ‘prisoners of freedom’ (Englund 2006).

Overall, however, and a few editorial issues notwithstanding, the book

is an interesting, at times insightful and thought provoking study and will certainly be of interest to students of development and social movements in Nepal, and anyone interested in understanding Nepal's political present more generally.

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## **Maoists at the Hearth: Everyday life in Nepal's civil war**

by Judith Pettigrew, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, 188 p., ISBN 978-0-8122-4492-2, \$55.00/£36.00

Reviewed by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

*Maoists at the Hearth*, by Judith Pettigrew, synthesises several of her earlier publications on the Maoist movement in Nepal. Written entirely in the first person, one could view the book as the field journal of an anthropologist working in a politically troubled context. As a matter of fact, the narrative makes room for her observations in airport waiting rooms, on dinners in Kathmandu and for hesitations about which dress is most suited to the political situation in rural areas. But if it gives a lot of space to the anthropologist, the aim of the book is primarily to offer an account of the years of the Maoist armed movement in Nepal through the prism of a village community. Both the anthropologist's and the village community's views and experiences converge in a specific place, conventionally named Kwei Nasa, which the author knows intimately. The site of her research before the start of the conflict, Kwei Nasa is a farming community that is predominantly populated by Tamu (one of the indigenous peoples of Nepal, also known as Gurung) and located near the town of Pokhara, in the highlands of central Nepal. The author made several prolonged visits to Kwei Nasa during the years of the People's War, sometimes alone and sometimes with an assistant.

In the space of six elegantly written chapters, which blend descriptions, events, facts and analyses, Pettigrew paints six scenes of the locality, and of Nepal, at various stages of its revolutionary history. These scenes, starting with the years 1991-92, which saw the return of multi-party politics, proceeding to the Second People's Movement in 2006 and concluding with the elections for the Constituent Assembly in the spring of 2008, document various phases of the intensification of the movement as they were experienced by Kwei Nasa villagers.

Over many situations or events, such as the encounter with Maoist armed fighters, that the author herself experienced and observed while in the field or those that have been narrated to her on the spot by some of her relations, Pettigrew attempts to describe and account for the impact

of what she calls 'structural violence'—a form of violence expressed in terms of deprivation, fear, and humiliation, as she explains in the introduction. There is indeed no question of acute violence in the locality under study, which is located away from the Maoist Base Region and the main sites of hostilities and on the periphery of an urban centre where a large contingent of the Royal Army is posted, but of a climate of intense fear punctuated by visits of Maoist activists who profoundly disrupt the lives of villagers.

Judith Pettigrew's observations focus on the villagers' daily life, and on the disruption of their basic daily tasks, such as grazing cattle or cooking dinner. As she shows, these are deeply disturbed by the context of structural violence, and undergo profound transformation from their status of virtually automatic, repetitive acts that are seldom reflected upon to become 'challenging tasks', charged with a vital dimension, which not only mobilise the villagers' energy, but also prompt them to reflect upon their actions under these new settings.

It is in this register, to my eyes, that the anthropology of wartime undertaken by Judith Pettigrew is particularly inspiring. The importance of studying daily tasks in a context of structural violence is no doubt the central thesis of *Maoists at the Hearth: Everyday life in Nepal's civil war*. Exposed in the introduction, and amply illustrated throughout the book, her anthropological approach to a context of political violence through the study of changes in routine tasks opens a fruitful path so far little explored, which will certainly attract the attention it deserves.

**Die Agravāls in Rajakshetra (Kumaon Himālaya):  
Lebensstile, Habitus, Ökonomie und ‚Puritanismus‘ in  
einer Händlerkaste**

by Ulrich Oberdiek (Indus. Ethnologische Südasiens-Studien Band 14)  
Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010, 515 pp., ISBN 978-3-643-10556-1, price 49,90 €.

Reviewed by Hans Jürgen David

Ulrich Oberdiek's book is the publication of his habilitation treatise and is based on his extensive fieldwork in the foothills of the Himalaya. The book focuses, as the title states, on 'the lifestyles, habitus and economy of the Agravāls – a merchant caste in the Kumaon Himalaya'. The central theme of his work is to examine the question of whether there is a puritan lifestyle among the Agravāls. This publication is enriched by the author's in-depth ethnological research, providing a rich understanding of the local merchants' culture through his work with about fifty families and interviews of almost one hundred individuals.

In the first chapter, the book deals with the term 'puritanism' very extensively. The author makes it clear from the beginning that he does not want to present a comparison between historical puritanism and related phenomena in India, but to sketch the 'cultural logic of historic puritans' as a trans-cultural phenomenon (p. 25) and to see if there is something similar to be found among the Agravāls. Oberdiek then takes issue with Weber's view on the subject. Bringing the discussion into the Indian context, the author makes use of Olivelle's (1998) 'vocabulary of purity' (pp. 57-58) and exemplifies the views of Carstairs (1963), Roy (1975) and Bharati (1972), mainly by addressing the topic of sexuality. In the following, Oberdiek explores Marriot's (1976) model of 'Indian ethnology' in terms of historical puritanism. Before Oberdiek discusses his fieldwork in the Kumaon foothills, he presents the reader with a further introduction to cultural puritanism and helpfully summarises the idea of puritanism: 'Puritanism can be seen basically as a striving towards a purity, which is culturally diverse and defined within the framework of a purity/impurity-system' (p. 146).

In the next section Oberdiek gives a very detailed exposition on the Agravāl caste. After showing that the Agravāls also address themselves as

Baniyās or Mārvārīs (pp. 149-152), and thereby touching upon the concept of ‘jāti clusters’ (Mandelbaum 1984), Oberdiek goes into the mythological origins of this merchant caste. This is mainly based on Bharatendu Hariśchandra’s text *Agravālom kī utpatti* (‘The origin of the Agravals’) (pp. 158-171). Further, he presents two additional Hindi texts, the *Urucaritam* (‘The Tale of Uru’; Vidyālaṅkāṛ 1997) and *Mahālakṣmī vrat kathā* (‘The narration of the observance [in honour] of the great Lakshmi’; Vidyālaṅkāṛ 1997 and Agravāl 1993), both of which try to connect the Agraval caste with its mythological founder, the king Agrasen; a translation of the texts is given in the appendix (pp. 455-467). The last part of this chapter is dedicated to the geographical setting of this vast research. The name Rajakshetra is clearly a pseudonym for a small township in Kumaon, which is easy to identify because Oberdiek gives enough hints about the actual place. Along with the detailed description of Rajakshetra, the author also explains the relationship between the Agravals and the other castes in the area. The Agravals do not necessarily see themselves as superior to other merchant castes, but are aware of their ‘position as outsiders in Rajakshetra’ (p. 216). They do not inter-marry with other Kumaoni Vaishyas, as Oberdiek states that they demand large dowries, which makes them in fact endogamous because local merchants cannot meet the expense these entail, or are not willing to do so, because the Agravals are often associated with dowry related poisonings. While other castes in Rajakshetra largely perceive the Agravals as greedy and avaricious in terms of character, they are also described as ‘neither *bhog* (materialistic) nor *yog* (disciplined, religious)’ (p. 218).

In the second chapter, the author begins with the actual ethnographic research, which provides a framework for the field studies presented in the fourth chapter. Here Oberdiek goes into detail about what he calls the ‘central cultural complexes, selves and identity of the Agravals in Rajakshetra’ (pp. 227-237). The first complex he touches upon is dedicated to initiation rites (*samskaras*) and festivals, where he presents a marriage ritual and the Holi festival as case studies. The latter serves as a perfect example for the dichotomy between puritan and hedonistic behavior. The author’s informants give diverse opinions on the character of the Holi festival, ranging from an Ayurvedic reason—the informant B4 sees spring as a time of liberality (‘[h]e thinks this, without being explicit, in a sexual sense’), and therefore negative in a ‘puritarian’ sense—to the belief that it

represents a typical festival of the Agravals (pp. 258-259). Before closing the chapter with the concept of purity/impurity (pp. 305-309), Oberdiek discusses the topics of economic behavior, figurative speech and social control.

Oberdiek dedicates the third chapter to his informants. Many of them own shops, where most of the interviews were conducted. Since questions on 'the subject of "puritanism" in India are among sensitive topics, especially topics on sexuality', the author 'did not ask directly for these subjects, but only kept interest when they appeared in general conversations' (p. 312). Of these persons, 56 were male, 28 female, while 10 were Brahmins whose comments were compared with Agraval views. Oberdiek describes the five key informants in detail in the following section. In the fourth chapter presents several case studies arranged by different topics (sexuality; body, food and intoxicating substances; economy; politics) and concludes with a precise summary (pp. 432-436) of how these 'thick descriptions' can be interpreted. The book concludes with the fifth chapter on the findings of this vast study. Oberdiek comes to the conclusion that the Agravals 'live according to traditional caste-norms' (p. 437). They assess their economic success not in a religious way; rather it is seen as a skill that has to be learned with *discipline* in the early years of one's life (ibid.). Oberdiek states that "'the Agravals" do not exist in the sense of following a homogeneous behaviour, sharing the same perspectives, or forming a uniform group; rather the individual persons or families are imprinted in different ways that are expressed in social, business and religious issues' (pp. 438-439).

The appendix contains the above mentioned translations of the *Urucaritam* and the *Mahālakṣmī vrat kathā*, as well as a table of all the informants and a list of kinship terms of the Agraval caste in Rajakshetra (pp. 479-480).

Oberdiek's book gives the reader a detailed ethnographic description of the Agraval caste, a topic that, including the whole caste of merchants, has long been neglected by academia. This is enriched by an in-depth discussion of puritanism in general and how this concept can be brought into the Indian context. Furthermore, the whole book is filled with different interesting case studies. This book will be of immense value to every scholar with an interest in puritanism, the merchant castes and Himalayan culture.

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## **A Noble Noose of Methods, The Lotus Garland Synopsis: A Mahāyoga Tantra and its commentary**

by Cathy Cantwell & Robert Mayer. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften, 449. Band. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens Nr. 73. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012, 375 pp., with a CD-ROM attachment, ISBN 978-3-7001-7273-4, 105.28 €.

Reviewed by Péter-Dániel Szántó

There has been an increasing awareness that the period stretching from roughly the middle of the ninth century to the turn of the first millennium was, in major areas where Buddhism was active on the Asian mainland (I am thinking here of East India, Tibet, and China), a time of political uncertainty, in the sense that there seems to have been a complete breakdown of centralised control. Historical evidence (such as inscriptions) is indeed scarce. However, it is very clear that this political instability not only did not cause a stagnation in religious matters: on the contrary, and perhaps for precisely this reason, the said period witnessed an incredible burgeoning of new revelations (mostly of the esoteric or tantric kind) and vigorous exegetical discussion.

The texts edited in the work under review date roughly to this period, or perhaps somewhat earlier. The ‘Noble Noose of Methods’ (henceforth TZ, after the Tibetan title, *Thabs zhags*) is a scripture still revered in the Tibetan cultural sphere, first and foremost among ‘followers of the old [translations]’ (Rnying ma pa). The authors, foremost scholars in the field of early Rnying ma pa studies (and beyond), present here not only a critical edition of the TZ (pp. 103-228), but also an edition of an early commentary (henceforth TZComm) that survived in the famous Dunhuang cache of manuscripts (pp. 229-348).<sup>1</sup> The two editions are prefaced by an in-depth philological (but also methodological) study (pp. 1-102), and followed by an Appendix concerning the pantheon of the cult taught in the text (pp. 349-362), a short bibliography, and an index. There is also a

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1 The TZComm is not presented as a critical edition (in spite of the fact that other reviewers refer to it thus), but as a diplomatic transcript with missing passages lifted over from other witnesses. The boundaries are carefully pointed out.

CD-ROM attachment containing the images of the Dunhuang Manuscript, IOL Tib J 321, from the Stein Collection at the British Library.

The core of the work is a critical edition of TZ itself, which is a veritable philological tour de force. The authors went to great lengths to obtain every single accessible witness, including very rare and hitherto only very rarely used prints and manuscripts such as the Bathang, Hemis, and Tawang canons. The complexity of the work undertaken should at least be suggested by the fact that in the end there are 21 witnesses used for the edition, which results in a rather complex and at first sight daunting apparatus. This remains true even after the first chapter, which is the only one recording every single reading. The authors were not willing to compromise for the sake of simplicity, and rightly so: after some initial efforts, the careful reader is amply rewarded.

In the Introduction quite a lot is made of the stemmatic method and its application to the TZ, but, again, rightly so. Recent times have witnessed the appearance of several studies concerning the not inconsiderable theoretical and practical problems of the stemmatic method. This has led some to dismiss it almost completely; on the other hand, even eminent scholars seem not to have given up on the rather orthodox principle that an edition cannot be called critical unless it succeeds in establishing a stemma, i.e. a (hypothetical) 'tree' of textual transmission. The present reviewer thinks that one cannot be dogmatic in this approach and tends to advocate that while a critical edition is entirely possible without necessarily succeeding in establishing the precise history of transmission, the stemmatic method should nevertheless be used in cases where enough material and material of a suitable nature is accessible. In other words, one must be pragmatic and adopt, or indeed develop, a method that is best suited to what is dictated by the nature and quantity of the material under scrutiny. This may not always be successful, but herein lies one of the most beautiful aspects of scholarship: everybody is more than welcome to improve on previous work.

The present case is fortunately one in which the stemmatic method can be used, and with profit. For—and this is only one of the reasons, but one that we must insist on, since it is a veritable philological treat—the TZ was transmitted in some cases in a rather awkward way: it seems that the root-text was for some and at some point lost, whereupon editors were constrained to extract it from its commentary, which was available



to them. This, needless to say, resulted in a garbled transmission. The authors are, I think, successful in untangling this formidable problem, and manage to establish a plausible archetype of the root-text with an assured hand. However, at the same time they are not reluctant to point out what had remained conjectures or mere hypotheses. This, what one might call ‘editorial honesty’, is something that normally should be expected, but, sadly, it is not so often observed in actual practice.

One would wish to go through the work and discuss it page by page, especially the Introduction, which is rich and thought-provoking. However, due to constraints of space I must limit myself to only a handful of disjointed observations.

TZComm, as the authors state (p. 2), ‘displays some sign of probable authorship in Tibet, or at least, contains some material most probably composed in Tibetan. Its Chapter Six glosses the Tibetan term for *maṇḍala*, *dkyil 'khor*, according to its two halves, giving first an explanation of centre (*dkyil*), followed by an elaboration on circle (*'khor*). The note added (n. 2) states: ‘It is unlikely that the Sanskrit word, *maṇḍala*, could have been similarly separated into two parts with exactly these implications’. The note further down cites Mi pham: ‘*maṇḍal ni snying po'am l'*’ etc. First of all, we should point out the transmissional error (or Mi pham’s own) *maṇḍal* for correct *maṇḍa*, cf. e.g. *bodhimaṇḍa = byang chub snying po*. In fact there are such explanations in Indian semantic analysis, where *maṇḍala* is explained as *maṇḍa+la*. Typically, *maṇḍa* is taken to mean *sāra*, ‘essence’, which can be glossed further according to the context, and *la* is taken to stand for the rare verbal root *lā*, ‘to give’, or, more often, ‘to take’ (cf. Pradīpodyotana p. 41, 42, 45, 94, and elsewhere).

The authors place great emphasis on the fact that there is an effort throughout the commentary to interiorise ‘external’ elements such as ritual procedures, a tendency usually associated with later Rnying ma pa authors. This effort is already present in the Indian context by this time. Moreover, the example cited here (p. 5), namely that empowerment (i.e. initiation) can be obtained both through ritual articles and through awareness, but here (in the TZ) it is through the expressive power of awareness (*rigs* [this spelling is often employed for *rig*] *pa'i rtsal*), has a striking parallel in the kindred tradition of tantric Śaivism. Abhinavagupta describes the highest kind of officiant as one who has been initiated by ‘the goddesses of one’s awareness’ (Tantrāloka 4.43ab).

Perhaps the least explored area in the book is the issue of parallels and works cited by the commentary (primarily pp. 84-86). The authors are of course aware of this and promise more work on the subject. Exploring textual pools cited by commentators (especially such early ones) is a matter of utmost urgency if we wish to establish a relative chronology of texts. It might be pointed out, for example, that the citation attributed in TZComm to the *Dpal mchog dang po* (that is, the *Paramādyā*<sup>2</sup>) cannot be traced in the version transmitted in the Gsar ma canons. The same is true for the 'Gu hya (or *Gu hya ti la ka* in the non-Dunhuang transmission): the text does not match anything in the most obvious candidate, the *Guhyendutilaka*. On the other hand, one is struck by the close resemblance between the stanza beginning with *lam gyi nang na* (p. 108) and the famous verse on the superiority of Vajrayāna from \*Tripiṭakamalla's \**Nayatrāyapradīpa*, which was already current in ninth-century Indic exegesis: *ekārthatve 'py asaṃmohāt bahūpāyād aduṣkarāt | tīkṣṇendriyādhikārāc ca mantrasāstraṃ viśiṣyate ||*.<sup>3</sup>

No masterpiece is ever free of errors, and the following list contains very minor points. In the Acknowledgments (p. vii), the Japanese name order is observed for Tanaka Kimiaki but not for Tsuguhito Takeuchi. The old, Mongolian-style pronunciation is retained for the Kanjur and the Tenjur throughout, although the authors are otherwise very careful to distance themselves from old habits that die hard, such as using \**anut-taratantra* for *yoganiruttaratantra*. In the Indian context 'charnel ground' or 'cremation ground' is more appropriate than 'cemetery' (p. 3, 9). The expression *de rigueur* should be spelt thus rather than *de rigure* (p. 22). It is debatable whether 'synopsis' is the best choice to render *don bsdus pa*: perhaps 'digest' is more appropriate, whereas we should reserve 'synopsis' for *sa bcad*. In discussing the codicological feature of highlighting in the Dunhuang Manuscript, the authors state (p. 36): 'It is clear that highlighting of the chapter titles would seem redundant since it is obvious that they are root text'. Doubtless, the authors are aware of contrary examples,

2 What exactly the *Paramādyā* is is a rather complex question. I have examined the *Adhyardhaśatikā* and the so-called \**Paramādyamantrakalpakaṅga* as transmitted in the Derge canon. An examination of the Chinese translations best-known under their Japanese moniker as the *Rishukyō* cycle might prove revealing.

3 Loosely translated, this would read: 'Although the goal is the same [as in the case of non-tantric Buddhism], the teaching of mantras [i.e. esoteric Buddhism] is superior because it does not fail, because of its manifold means, because of lack of asceticism, and because it is meant for those of the highest ability'.

such as the *Herukābhīdhāna*, where chapter titles appear later, therefore this sentence could have been phrased more carefully. Goddesses with animal heads are referred to (p. 39) as ‘zoomorphic’, whereas in truth they are ‘zoocephalic’. What the authors interpret as ‘patience’ (p. 68 for *bzod pa* on p. 235) is perhaps better rendered as ‘tolerance’.



ENDPIECE

# Haai! Haai! Angreji

by Lakshmi Prasad Devkota

translated by Michael Hutt

## Translator's note

Born in 1909, Lakshmi Prasad Devkota published over forty volumes of writings before his death in 1959. There are multiple translations of his most popular work, a long narrative poem entitled *Muna-Madan*, first published in 1936, and of a number of other popular poems, but despite Devkota's lauded status as the Mahakavi ('Great Poet') of Nepali literature, the vast majority of his output remains untranslated.

Although he is known mainly as the composer of some of Nepal's most profound and exquisite poetry, Devkota also penned a large number of essays. The 290-page volume *Lakshmi-Nibandha-Sangraha* ('A Collection of Lakshmi's Essays'), first published in 1945, contains 37 essays on a wide variety of topics, of which this is one of the best known.

Very few of Devkota's essays have been translated (Manfred Treu's excellent rendering of 'Asharhko Pandhra' is the only one I have seen in print),<sup>1</sup> though several are famous among the Nepali cognoscenti. It is possible that aspiring translators have been deterred by what David Rubin calls 'the unpredictable originality of the poet's mind and the frequent obscurity of his diction', which is in evidence in several passages here.<sup>2</sup> As Abhi Subedi remarked in a very helpful response to an emailed cry for help with several of the more opaque phrases, '[Devkota] makes his own expressions'.

The date of this essay's composition is uncertain, but it refers to events and developments from the poet's student years. Devkota enrolled at the Darbar High School in 1921 and married in 1925 at the age of fifteen. In 1926 he passed the Patna University matriculation examination with a first class and went to Trichandra College to study science the following year. It was at this time that he began to work as an English tutor for the children of the Rana elite. His growing interest in

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1 'A translation of Lakshmi Prasad Devkota's "The Fifteenth of the Month of Asadha"' *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 20(2): 149-64.

2 David Rubin: *Nepali Visions, Nepali Dreams: The poetry of Lakshmi Prasad Devkota*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980: 55.

literature led to him to abandon his study of science, and in 1930 he received a BA in English, mathematics and economics from Patna University. David Rubin (1980: 7) writes that this was the only BA awarded in Nepal that year.

As an account of a young Kathmandu intellectual's encounter with English in the early decades of the twentieth century, the essay appears to me to be of considerable interest to anyone researching issues such as language and globalisation in Nepal today.

'Alas! Alas! English' is the best translation I could come up with for the title, but I am not at all satisfied with it. I have therefore retained the essay's Nepali title, which seems to me to encapsulate its tone much more faithfully. The rest of the translation is also far from perfect, and I hope someone will improve upon it one day—and also undertake to translate Devkota's other essays, many of which are equally deserving of a wider readership. MH

When I was eight years of age, my elder brother had just recently passed his Entrance and he was earning upwards of three hundred a month at the tuition school of that time. I regarded him as the ideal of the world. And Mother too often used to tell me, pointing him out with a finger of love, 'That's how you should study, Baba, just like your brother.' I was afraid of him, just as young lads are naturally afraid of Mahatmas who have attained an ideal. When I saw in him the grandeur, pomposity, weightiness and profundity that a master should possess, I was immediately cowed and my soul would wait for that golden age to arrive when I too would pass in the first class and be able to stand in front of the boys with a cane in my hand, and threaten and scold them!

At that time, passing in first class seemed like the summit of the world. I could not see the attraction of learning rising any higher than that. It seemed to me that the essence of Mahatmahood lay in being able to stammer out some English and I wanted to follow my wetnurse's instructions, 'you must earn money, you must study English, you must be a master' to the letter. But I did not know with what pain, with what cries, with what worries that person called 'a master' had to place his soul in the dustiness of the ordinary in the charmless task of earning a living, and how he had to sit with his head bowed low, even as he saw the lofty sky.

I went on studying, went on growing, and the Entrance seduced me, called me on, took me up the hard climbs, just like Gosainthan summoning the rain—perhaps I can say in very thin cold air and on a diet of corn

flour. I had no wish to play. My obsession with 'I have to study, I have to earn money' was taking me away, not allowing me to look to either side. A young boy can easily get information from the faces of his worried parents, and in a poor home the idea that the search for economic means is life itself can easily be inscribed on his heart. I wanted to become a master, in order to earn money, to make the home bright, to help my brother, to take everyone to milk and rice. In my keenness to pass quickly, I gave up playing. I found no flavour in my food. My brain was always spinning in Baburam Master's geography lessons, as if I had taken cannabis. I dreamed of the pages of my English book, I slept on the pillow of a book. Although I accompanied my younger brother in his games between four and six o'clock sometimes, more often I would lock the door and stay in the room wearing out my eyes until dusk. My studying went on until 12 o'clock at night and from 5 o'clock in the morning, and in this way I spent five years, in order to pass with a first class.

My studies were supposed to be for nine years, but I finished them in five, and during these five years I did not taste my food, I must have looked at my face in the mirror very rarely, and in many private things I was like a competitive friend who had vowed never to wear shoes until he passed with a first. You could even say that I never spoke to the world, nor did I ever take the lead in its works. I was very unpopular in the society of women, because I never stepped out to take part in their shopping and such like. I was possessed by the need to pass. After I passed with a first in Patna University in 1926 my nose rose a little higher, but my heart was not content. I wanted to study further and the lure of a BA began to call me.

When I arrived in Trichandra College, my hesitancy was loosened a little by the manners on the other side of Rani Pokhari, and I began to debate a little, to come forward to speak. But by then my fellow college students just called me taciturn, devious and conceited. At that time Wordsworth's poetry affected me greatly. I used to write a few poems in Nepali and English and often showed them to the teachers. And it was from this time that I began to taste the pleasure of being a master. I had to give tuition from four until six in one place and for three hours each morning and evening in another, and along with this I had to study science too. I did not study; in class I just listened, then got up to go. For at least two days each week I stayed at home and wrote poems.

When I got my BA I started giving tuition for as much as thirteen hours



each day. The mild *ganja* of 'have to earn, have to teach English, have to become a master' put me on a bicycle and sent me around the city. I did not speak Nepali, I did not speak to people who spoke Nepali, but if I met someone who spoke English on my way I would become thunderously voluble. It seemed to me that there were no words in Nepali. Emotions could not be expressed in it. It was as if Nepali was not the language of a scholar. When I spoke Nepali my tongue became tangled up, after I had spent thirteen years polishing it. I thought in English and talked in English. When I spoke Nepali I was deaf and dumb, when I spoke English people turned their faces toward me with a look of appreciation. If I spoke Nepali, students looked down on me, but if I stammered English the noses of their pride hit the ground. It seemed to me that the fact that no progress had taken place in Nepal was because English education had not been extended enough. When I saw the pandits they seemed like 'fossils': very old, not yet reached by the light of modernity, conservative, devoid of science, narrow. Putting all that Indian medieval slumber onto their heads, I said to myself, 'How constricted you are!' Because I too was the son of a pandit, I had some reverence for the ancient civilisation and culture, but none the less I felt 'something is missing! Something should be added, improved, increased!' 'Where is the life in them? Like creepers, clinging, clinging'. I could not explain or reform them in English. A shame!

I wanted to reform, to bring in a new age. What kind of age? One in which all Nepalis would be able to speak English. To write articles in English. To read books on physics and chemistry and make new discoveries. To reconcile the social situation in accordance with Marshall's economics. [Nepal would be a place] where doctors would know chemical formulae, where people would take classes in happy human life, where Nepalis could beat the drums of their importance in front of the world, with the red sparrowheaded letters of advertisement. What did I want to reform? I cannot say.

If I had not had the habit of writing I would have been a completely useless donkey. The pen developed me and took me along and I came to understand the country, the times, and the situation a little, but English tries still more to turn me into a translation and a fake. The critics gave me the name of *exploiter* (an exploiter is someone who makes materials from another's thought and creation and tries to become rich), as if I brought

out my English in the manner of a Nepali translation, although I had always carefully rejected conscious imitation. I had to erase and set many things aside. The first battle was between the thoughts of an English habit and habits of thought, the next between the echoes of the conscious and unconscious, which constantly tried to penetrate the classroom.

It was at that time that I understood what a mistake it was to study English. What translations we are becoming! Our book of education was becoming one that taught us to become a translation. We called that thing 'education' which set off an earthquake in our beliefs. We were deprived of our *swadeshi* values. We thought of our literature as separate from religion and life. We despised the ordinary and the uneducated. We had become distant from the habits of Aryan thought, but even so we straightened the ears of the ignorant, flashed our spectacles at them and showed them our magnificence. It was as if we were wayward, we were deliberately forfeiting our *swadeshi* independence. We treated our language with contempt.

I truly began my education when I left college and began to see life. Then I understood that there is no education in the husk of the university. The people who are called 'learned' are those who replace the magic of life with the mechanicalness of a book, who want to place their own race into a foreign pattern and carry out reform while covering their eyes. To study is just to weave a foreign net, just to translate and become translated.

We take our school habits along with us even into adult life and we are becoming corrupted. Someone who reads English a lot seems like a scholar to us, and an affection for the long words of the English dictionary penetrates our lives. We become wordy bombasts; forsaking truth, we debate in words. Competitive quarrels about who knows the most turn on superficial matters with foreign habits. We argue about matters from the other side of the ocean and close our eyes to our own intimate and proximate affairs. We like to lord it over our *swadeshi* brothers; as soon as we see an English *saheb* the upright heads of the graduates bow like the comb of a cock who has eaten salt. To speak English and to shake the hands of the English is understood to be the apex of the education of a member of the Aryan race. We want to write in English when our own literature cannot even go *ryain ryain* like the hollow but broken violin of a *gaine*.

Now I wonder, what did I gain from studying English? Our normal life time is probably about 25 years. With fifteen years of study we become a

BA. If you add ten years of childhood, that is where we end. Our education is so mechanical, blunt and dry that all it does is agitate the glands of our *swadeshi* brains. We have no aim other than salt and bread. We are sold for money and we are selling the souls of the world. With our minds thinking only of money, we are sharing out the world's children, as teachers sitting all dressed up on chairs. We snatch away the milky language that sits easily on their tongues and we distort it, we put on English spectacles and onto their easily developing minds we load the tyranny of western opinion. But I give my studying boys sarcastic praise. A boy who agrees to study English by becoming like a ox with a rope through his nose must be unhealthy. We want natural strength there, but where a foreign chain is put on human nature what has the poor ox gained after it has been made to plough for so many days? Dry grass! Nothing more had been written. Neither this blue ink of the hills nor these green pages of the forests!

That's all! That's all being a graduate amounts to! To show your ability in the world on the strength of a husk of paper! To wear away your bones for 70 rupees! Not to know how to pick up a bamboo pen! To be a translation of English; to corrupt your habits of thought; to teach from the morning until the curfew cannon to make donkeys be like donkeys in the thirst to spread butter on your bread; to show off your false conceits; to rob the world; and what else I cannot say.

For a graduate Krishna is the king of the Purana story. There is no truth in the *Bhagavat*; Vyas becomes a thief; Pashupatinath is a rock; *hejlin* becomes sandalwood; the tomato becomes wholesome food; mankind is oppressive; the Puranas become cunning threats; heaven is a void; Yamraj becomes casual conversation; the truthfulness of the Vedas is lost, and ancestors become fools.

How much do we know when we become graduates? It's like the proverb about the lad who goes to fetch water and drowns in his own vessel. Many people are afraid to speak English, let alone write it. Saraswati merely makes the parrot of examinations repeat mechanically what it has learned by heart. As soon as we emerge from the examination room the limit of our knowledge is reached and our enquiry comes to an end. We wrinkle like peppers and dry up. And life becomes canes, threats and dishonesty.

But there is salt in this same English; this English is sweetmeat for children's mouths. Here is India's 20<sup>th</sup> century; here are modern eyes;

here are foreign connections; here is international debate; here are the Indian courts; here the sun does not set; here there is pomp and wealth. This is our daily life. What does it lack, this English?

For the student of English there are the daughters of the well-born, in the Babu Sahebs' homes a chair, in the school a cane, in the college a beard, at the trading centre money, in the foreign office honour, to the translation bureau a summons, on his bread butter, pomp abroad and conceit at home, a nose held high among his friends, fifty rupees in an hour and a good standing in the world: hail hai! Angreji! You get the job at the set rate, you shake hands with the Viceroy, you go to London, it is by your glory that we sit here eating, where the learned pandits just sit growing wrinkled.