

Deepening and Spreading Suspicion: On the accusation of ‘cunning’ observed among Protestants in the Kathmandu Valley

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Introduction

The Nepali word *calākh*¹, in English ‘clever, astute’, could be used as a compliment to praise someone else’s ability to think quickly. Nowadays, however, it is rare to hear the word being used in such a positive manner in the Kathmandu Valley. Instead, since *calākh* can also be translated with the English word ‘cunning’, it is typically used to refer to those who cunningly deceive others for their own benefit. This negative connotation of the word *calākh* is frequently used by those who belong to the lower castes to accuse the natures of the two major groups of the high castes in the Nepalese caste system, the Brahman, colloquially called the Bahun², and the Chettri. According to folk narratives and stories, especially those among *Janajatis*, the indigenous people of the lower caste (e.g. Caplan 1970, Holmberg 1989, Tachibana 2009), these groups have traditionally been considered as cunning in various areas across Nepal. Today, it is the negative connotation of the word *calākh* that is most frequently used to refer to and accuse their character in the Kathmandu Valley. While some ethnographers, such as Parish (1996) and Tachibana (2009), have made reference to the word in their respective works, they have not paid much attention to its negative meaning. Thus, in this article, I shall consider the accusation of *calākh*.

It should be noted that the word *calākh* is not the only word which

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- 1 The romanisation of Nepali words, for which conventional romanisations have not yet been established, is predominantly based on *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language* (Turner 1931). For the English translation of Nepali words, I mainly refer to the *ek[a]tā brihat nepalī angrejī koś* or *Ekta Comprehensive Nepali-English Dictionary* (Lohani and Adhikari 2067 v.s. [2011 or 2012 AD]) in which contemporary meanings are collected.
 - 2 The Brahman are officially divided up into the Brahman Hill who have their origin in the hill area, and the Brahman Tarai who have their origin in the Tarai Plain, the border plain area of Nepal and India. The word Bahun generally denotes the Brahman Hill, but in daily context the differences between the two are not given great importance.

is used to refer to and accuse a cunning character. The word *bāṭho*, for which ‘clever’, ‘cunning’, ‘skilful’, ‘witty’, ‘intelligent’, and ‘wise’ are given as English equivalents, is also sometimes used to refer to and accuse those who are cunning, and is therefore synonymous with *calākh*. In addition to *calākh* and *bāṭho*, there are several other words in the Nepali language that are more directly translatable as cunning, such as *catūr*, *chaṭṭu*, and *dhūrta*. However, of all of these words the most frequently used is *calākh*, followed by *bāṭho*, while the others are rarely heard. The accusation of *calākh* is thus more precisely the accusation of *calākh* or *bāṭho*, but in order to simplify the description, I shall use the word *calākh* except when quoting narratives provided by interviewees.

The accusation of *calākh* is certainly one of the specific manifestations of stereotypes. In his comprehensive commentary, Eriksen writes, ‘[s]tereotypes need not to be true, and they do not necessarily give good descriptions of what people actually do. Therefore, we must reflect on the causes and uses of stereotypes’ (Eriksen 1993: 24). Taking this insight into consideration, this article reflects upon what caused the emergence of the stereotypical accusation of *calākh* – or, more precisely, how its emergence and thus appropriateness are explained – and how it is actually used. I hope it is evident that I do not judge the objective appropriateness of this stereotypical accusation, and therefore do not endorse it³.

This article differs somewhat from preceding theoretical studies of stereotypes because of its focus on Protestantism as one of the arenas in which people actually experience dense relations beyond their caste boundaries. If stereotypes are group-based perceptions of others that can only be achieved by overriding individualities (Oakes et al. 1994), then regular interactions with people who belong to groups that are stereotyped should result in the rejection or, at least, suspension of stereotypes. Even among Protestants who regularly engage with various people beyond their caste boundaries in churches and the wider Protestant community,

3 Taking up Caplan’s work (1970), Dahal (1996), a Nepalese native social scientist, discusses an important point to be mentioned here, that is, in Nepalese studies, foreign anthropologists have involved themselves in making generalisations, including ethnic stereotypes (for a fair interpretation of Caplan’s work and Dahal’s criticism, see Lecomte-Tilouine 2009). Studies on stereotypes are, however, still of importance in the sense that they are actually ‘used in the rhetorical representations of identity and social relations’ (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009: 24) among local people. Even so, it is necessary to take Dahal’s warning deeply in consideration when dealing with stereotypes.

however, the accusation of *calākh* still circulates widely and deeply. To be clear, this does not necessarily mean that the accusation accurately reflects real world conditions. Rather, it is the stereotypical accusation itself that constitutes interpretations of the world by triggering imagination in people. More specifically, this paper will discuss the following three points: how the accusation of *calākh* binds strongly to whom it is directed, how the accusation is applied to new groups of people, and finally how sometimes objects of the accusation may be freed.

This article is based on fieldwork carried out discontinuously between 2010 and 2012 in the Lalitpur District of the Kathmandu Valley where relatively many churches and Protestant organisations are located. I conducted intensive open-ended interviews where I encouraged each interviewee to talk freely on given topics. I then analysed and compared these interviews for commonalities before raising these common points as topics for discussion in subsequent more focused interviews. In this manner, I was able to determine the appropriateness of specific narratives provided by interviewees. In order to maintain anonymity within this article, all names of the interviewees are pseudonyms and some descriptions of interviewees have intentionally been made ambiguous.

Context of discussion

The Nepalese caste system and suspicion toward high castes

Let me start by introducing the Nepali word *jāt*, which is normally used in daily speech to denote groups of people according to their shared features. *Jāt* has been translated as ‘casta’ in Portuguese and later as ‘caste’ in English and French (Walker 1968, Quigley 1993, Cameron 1998). There is, however, a significant gap between the original word and its translation. Although the word *jāt* certainly implies the conceptual status of people according to the caste system, it is more specifically used to refer to an actual group of people incorporated within this system, namely a tribe or a clan⁴.

4 *Jāt* (or *jāti* in Hindi), is the word that is also used to refer to the distinction between, for example, gender, humans as opposed to non-humans, species or breeds of plants and animals, and gods and goddess. Although the discussion in this article is limited to everyday use of the word among people, for a more detailed and comprehensive commentary on the word see Quigley (1993).

The caste system was introduced in Nepal as a legally endorsed differentiation of people and their hierarchy by the *Muluki Ain*, or the National Law, promulgated in 1854. Often paraphrased as ‘four *varnas* and 36 *jāts*’⁵, its aim was to rank existing *jāts* according to the Hindu *varna* model and to regulate and standardise behaviour of, and relations between, these various *jāts*. For example, such behaviour and relations include enslavement, marriage, and commensality, and it also guaranteed diverse benefits and prerogative roles for the high caste *jāts* of which the Brahman and the Chettri were the principle members (Höfer 2004). The caste system started to take root and to be practised in various regions of Nepal as the government promoted migration of the high caste *jāts* in order to extend state control throughout the country.

Although the Nepalese caste system is said to be constructed according to the Hindu *varna* model, it is in fact unique and complex, as there is regional diversity in its understandings and practices (Bista 1991). Therefore, fieldworkers have tried to elucidate specific appearances of the caste system and inter-*jāt* relationships in different regions of Nepal. Based on these preceding studies, it can be established that the high caste *jāts* have, in general, valued education throughout their history. For example, Caplan (1972) reported in her study of a village in far Western Nepal that, even before the public educational system was established, the high caste *jāts* were committed to educating their offspring through the Sanskrit language and religious texts. Some current literature (Guneratne 2002, Tachibana 2009) suggests that the educational gap⁶ between the high caste *jāts* and the lower caste *jāts* became one of the major reference points of identity construction for both groups, and continued to be regarded as one of the major causes of enduring political, social, and economic dominance by the high caste *jāts* even after the caste system was legally repealed in 1963.

Another important point made by these studies is that, historically, there has been strong distrust and aversion toward the high caste *jāts*

5 There are actually around 70 *jāt* categories identified in the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 (Höfer 2004: 88). The most recent census of 2011 adopted 130 categories when surveying the demography of Nepal (Government of Nepal 2012).

6 According to LeVine (2006: 23), the overwhelming majority of Nepalese children were excluded from modern education in the mid-twentieth century and one of the causes of the exclusion was their low caste status.

among the lower caste jāts. For instance, Tachibana (2009) notes that the Brahman and the Chettri are said to be *chuco* ‘mean’, in a village of the Chepang jāt. According to the Chepang villagers, the Brahman and the Chettri can talk skillfully because they are highly educated, but in reality, they are selfish and do not help others. Moreover, Holmberg (1989: 73) reports that, in a village of the Tamang jāt, Brahmans migrated from areas outside of the village to take roles in the local administration and were seen by the Tamang as corrupt and deceitful. Further, Caplan (1970: 61) records a specific ruse of Brahmans to deceive uneducated, illiterate villagers of the Limbu jāt in order to deprive them of their land, as well as a narrative and a mythical legend among the villagers that specifically denote the greediness and deceitfulness of the Brahman. As shown in these examples, the high caste jāts have been thought of as educated but morally degenerate, or cunning, in various areas of Nepal throughout history.

How are the Brahman and the Chettri thought of nowadays in the Kathmandu Valley, where people of diverse jāts from various regions have migrated and built their lives⁷ and where, in addition to the caste system, secular class distinction has also emerged⁸ (Bista 1991: 44, Liechty 2003)? While it is uncertain if it was brought by migrants or originated in the Kathmandu Valley, the accusation against the Brahman and the Chettri having traditionally been educated in order to take the prerogative roles of priests, governmental officers, and soldiers under the caste system but in a morally degenerate way, has also been observed in the Kathmandu Valley. To denote the character of the Brahman and the Chettri, it is the word *calākh* that is now most often used. For example when we were chatting about his business, a successful business owner of the Tharu jāt, described how he tried to stay away from the Brahman and the Chettri as much as possible because he is afraid of them⁹. According to this business

7 According to *rāṣṭriya janagaṇanā 2058*, or *National Population Research 2058* [2001 or 2002 A.D.], at least one individual of all jāts can be found in the Kathmandu Valley. The major jāts in the Kathmandu Valley are the Newar, the Chettri, the Brahman Hill, the Tamang, and the Magar, composing 35%, 19%, 17%, 9%, and 3% of the population respectively.

8 According to Liechty (2003: 47), wage labour, a new kind of occupational opportunities which is relatively independent of the caste system and also productive of secular class distinction, has emerged and increased as a consequence of the open door policy to foreign countries since 1951.

9 This man of the Tharu told me that, just like the episode that Caplan (1970: 61) reported,

owner, the Brahman and the Chettri could easily take advantage of him without being noticed because they are very *calākh*. During a conversation regarding the character of his students, a teacher of a private educational institute belonging to the Newar *jāt* and a native of the Kathmandu Valley, expressed a similar sentiment by saying he does not want to accept Brahman and Chettri students.

In addition to such conversations demonstrating the accusation of *calākh* against the Brahman and the Chettri, I conducted further focused interviews with individuals¹⁰ from lower caste *jāts* in order to ascertain its circulation in the Kathmandu Valley. In these interviews, I would raise the topic of the *swabhāb* 'nature', of the Brahman and the Chettri and in the ensuing discussion, identify the word *calākh* or specific episodes that exemplify the Brahman and the Chettri as *calākh*¹¹. In the few cases where the word *calākh* was not directly expressed by the interviewees, I would introduce the word into the conversation in order to study the response.

All individuals of the lower caste *jāts* who participated in my research were familiar with the accusation. Younger people, such as high school students, are also aware of this accusation, as they have been taught by their parents. Opinions relating to the accusation of *calākh* are varied. Some variations include: that not all individuals of the Brahman and the Chettri are *calākh*; that the Brahman are more *calākh* than the Chettri because the former have received higher education, and that, nowadays, there are *calākh* individuals in all *jāts* in the Kathmandu Valley. However, these various opinions are normally followed by the confirming claim that a significantly high percentage of both the Brahman and the Chettri are noticeably *calākh*. In most cases, people of the lower caste *jāts* seemed

the Brahman and the Chettri deceived and deprived uneducated Tharu villagers of their land in the village he spent his youth.

- 10 In order to see the general appearance of the narrative of *calākh*, I interviewed both Protestants and non-Protestants of various *jāts*, the Newar, the Tamang, the Magar, the Gurung, the Rai, and the Tharu. These interviewees were people whom I became familiar with in teashops, students at a private educational institute, and others introduced by friends.
- 11 For example, interviewees made such comments as 'the Brahman and the Chettri speak very fast to make you confused, and then deceive you', and 'the Brahman and the Chettri speak by insinuation and deceive you'. When I asked them to rephrase these answers, the word *calākh* [bāṭho] came out of their mouths. In turn, when I asked about the specific appearance of the *calākh* character, 'being adept in speaking' was one of the major answers.

pleased to explain the accusation of *calākh* toward the Brahman and the Chettri. One participant even praised me after I used the word saying, ‘You know very much about real Nepal’.

It should be noted that the Śreṣṭha, one of the subgroups of the Newar *jāt*, are also occasionally said to be *calākh* since many of them have traditionally engaged in commercial activities through which they have reportedly learned to be *calākh*. That is, they have acquired the skills to take advantage of others.

Terminology and sociopolitical change

The word *calākh* was frequently described by participants in my research to originally have been merely an adjective used to refer to an individual who has the ability to think quickly. According to a significant number of interviewees, it was not until approximately fifteen to twenty years ago that the word began to include the negative connotation of cunning. An explanation provided by one of the interviewees is, while still hypothetical, worth noting because it is not only persuasive, but also reflects fragments of explanations heard from others. According to this interviewee, the success of the democratisation movement in 1990 brought many new opportunities to Nepal, for example to start new businesses or Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or even to enter into politics, and in this context, those who had the ability to think quickly – namely those who were *calākh* – started to deceive others more than ever in order to cash in on these opportunities. This is, according to the interviewee, why the word started to carry its current, negative connotation¹².

Indeed, the success of the democratisation movement in 1990, which brought the partyless Panchayat regime to an end and restored multi-party democracy, offered new opportunities. At the same time, it also triggered the rise of ethnic politics through which the lower caste *jāts*, those who had been marginalised socially and culturally throughout history and were particularly marginalised from the 1960s under the Panchayat regime (Burghart 1993), started to actively demand equality

12 It might be better instead to interpret this explanation as it reflects how the emergence, and thus the appropriateness, of the narrative are understood by those who make use of it, as there was an anthropologist who personally informed me that the negative connotation was already observed around 35 years ago. A missionary who had been working in Nepal for more than 40 years, also agreed with the claim of the anthropologist.

and rights (Whelpton 2005: 178). In this kind of ethnic politics in South Asia, the continued dominance of the high caste *jāts*, *bāhūnbād*, or Brahmanocracy, in various sectors of society has often been taken up as one of the major obstacles against social progress (see Hangen 2010, Malagodi 2013). The change in meaning of the word *calākh* might be a specific manifestation of this emerging hostility toward the high caste *jāts*, as democratic consciousness permeates Nepalese society. While the word *calākh* is now used to demean the high caste *jāts*, the word *sojho*, an antonym of *calākh*, translated as ‘direct, straightforward, simple, honest’, is often used by the lower caste *jāts* to describe themselves with a nuance of pride¹³.

This does not mean, however, that the word *calākh* cannot be used in praise of others. If one can quickly understand the gist of a statement or is able to insert skillful and witty jokes into a conversation, he/she is worth being praised as *calākh*. This positive connotation may only be inferred based on additional clues present in the speech itself, in its context, or on certain close relations between the speaker and the individual being described as *calākh*, such as those between family, friends, or teacher and students. But as previously mentioned, the word tends to be interpreted negatively as ‘cunning’ in most other situations.

In the negative sense, the word *calākh* has an additional nuance that is worth noting. As some ethnographers (Cameron 1998, McHugh 2001, Tachibana 2009) have reported, greediness and selfishness are considered a serious moral vice in various areas of Nepal, and the word *calākh* implies moral criticism in the sense that the individual being *calākh* is not only cunning, but also self-seeking. I shall address this point in the later section of this article.

Protestantism in Nepal

A few years after Nepal was opened to foreigners in 1951, foreign missionaries, Nepalese Indians and those Nepalese who converted outside of Nepal started to bring Protestantism into the country. Although there were a few exceptions, ‘the first Nepali [*sic*] Christians experienced relative freedom in the expression of their faith and planting of the

13 The word *sojho* is also used to simply look down on those who are credulous, for example, when referring to those who live in remote villages (also see Piggs 1996).

church' (Perry 2000: 84). However, in the 1960s, Christianity was made to be the object of not only private but also public persecution. Hindu kingship was established by the Constitution of 1959. Following this, the Panchayat regime, which banned political parties and guaranteed royal dictatorship, was institutionalised by the Constitution of 1962 (Malagodi 2013). And then, in 1963, not only proselytisation but also conversion were made illegal by the *Muluki Ain*, or the Country Code (Rongong 2012a). In such a situation, the number of Protestants increased only gradually.

The success of the democratisation movement in 1990 dramatically lessened public persecution and triggered the expansion of Protestantism (Rongong 2012a, 2012b)¹⁴. The 2011 census shows that the population of Christians reached a mere 1.4 % of the total population of Nepal that year (Government of Nepal 2012). But, according to Fricke's 2008 article, the government has actually acknowledged that there are one million Christians in Nepal, or nearly 4 % of the total population. The majority of these Christians are assumed to be Protestants as there were only 13 Catholic churches in 2007, compared with nearly 2800 Protestant churches across Nepal at this time (Nepal Research and Resource Network 2007).

Protestants recognize each other as Christians beyond their denominational differences and have established interdenominational ties. This likely resulted from early missionaries and local Protestants choosing to reject denominationalism during the initial outset of Christianity in Nepal (Pandey 2003)¹⁵. The majority of churches have been interdenominational or free. While there are currently Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and also various other denominational churches in Nepal, as long as one believes and practices the true Bible properly, he/she is considered a Christian¹⁶. Moreover, Protestants have established

14 Proselytisation, however, could still be interpreted as being prohibited under the currently enforced 2007 Interim Constitution. In the 'Religious Right' in Part 3 Section 23, it states the following: 'Every person has the right to hold, practice, and protect his/her religion as handed down to him/her from ancient times, to the extent that suits the contemporary norms of the cultural and social tradition. However, nobody has the right to change other's religion or interfere with their religious practice' (Government of Nepal 2063 v.s. [2006 or 2007 A.D.]: 8).

15 In Nepal, pastors occasionally give the name of their mother church or the umbrella organisation that their church belongs to when answering questions regarding their *siddhānta*, 'denomination', suggesting importance is not placed on the denomination.

16 However, when new denominational churches started to come into Nepal from the late 1980s, there was certain antagonism against them from older churches, for example,

various organisations, including para-church organisations, umbrella organisations, and NGOs beyond denominational boundaries. Through such organisations they have coordinated a wide range of activities, such as the foundation of seminaries, social services, missions, and healing sessions¹⁷. While specific interviews relating to the current discussion were conducted with members of only a small number of specific churches in the Lalitpur District of the Kathmandu Valley, Protestants are connected with each other through such organisational or private networks on both interchurch and interdenominational levels, and therefore, share narratives and practices to a certain extent.

Two important aspects of Nepalese Protestantism need to be considered here. One is the fact that the caste system has been strictly prohibited in Nepalese Protestantism from the outset (Hale 1997). Even though the caste system was officially repealed in 1963, caste-based discrimination still remains deeply rooted in broader Nepalese society. Following Christian teachings, however, Protestants reject such discrimination, and in fact inter-jāt commensality and marriage are positively valued¹⁸.

The second important aspect of Nepalese Protestantism is that, in principle, the accusation of calākh should vanish within the community since, based upon Biblical principles, it is strictly prohibited to deceive others. Conversion entails inner moral transformation. When one becomes a Protestant, the act of deceiving is now clearly defined as sinful and those who are calākh must change themselves. Moreover, canonically, Protestants are supposed to live honestly and to cooperate and share with each other.

refusing their involvement in Protestant organisations and labelling them as *jhūṭo siḱṣa* ‘false teaching’.

- 17 There are various organisations established by Protestants ranging from umbrella organisations, such as the National Churches Fellowship of Nepal, the Nepal Christian Society, and the National Council of Churches in Nepal, to those with more specific missions, for example the Nepal Campus Crusade for Christ, which aims to proselytise young students. Nowadays, there are so many Protestant organisations established that even old clergymen cannot list and explain them thoroughly.
- 18 Unfortunately, the jāt composition of Nepalese Protestantism is unknown since there are no data. It is often assumed by Hindus that the lower caste jāts tend to be drawn to Christianity as a means of escaping the caste system or to receive financial help from foreigners (e.g. Acharya 2002). But this tendency has not been confirmed by my research. According to church leaders, 50 to 70% of believers are first attracted to Protestantism through their own healing experiences or those of family members and friends.

The following anecdote illustrates such moral transformation and also evokes, though I could not discuss it thoroughly in this article, another important topic of study: identity construction of Protestants and their relationship to their old religion. It was Pastor Narayan, one of the most intellectual pastors in Nepalese Protestantism, who first raised my awareness of the accusation of *calākh*. After our first interview about the history of Christianity in Nepal, he suddenly gave me the following advice: ‘Be careful of the Brahman and the Chettri. They are so clever [*calākh*]. They may cheat you’. I later asked Pastor Narayan, who himself is a man of those groups, to explain more of what he meant by the statement, and he described the character of the Brahman and the Chettri and also himself as follows:

The Brahman are the most *calākh* followed by the *Chettri*. It is because they have received higher education. They have studied the religious [Hindu] scriptures. It [to be *calākh*] is learned from Hindu scriptures; Hindu gods deceive each other. [For the Brahman and the Chettri] to deceive others is to prove their ability and therefore is a kind of virtue. It is done for fun and to make a profit. In most cases, it is for profit. Also it is to demean others because of jealousy and for revenge... I had been very *calākh* too, but I had never felt bad in those days... My conscience was dead when I was a Hindu. And when I became a Christian, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, made it alive¹⁹.

In the next section, I will discuss how the accusation of *calākh* binds strongly to whom it is directed, how the accusation is applied to new groups of people, and finally how sometimes objects of the accusation may be freed.

The accusation of *calākh* among Protestants

A circuit of suspicion

Even though the accusation of *calākh* should not exist within the Protestant community based on the Biblical teachings that strictly prohibit the act of

19 Just like Pastor Narayan, Brahman and Chettri Protestants very often explain that they were also *calākh* but learned that it is a sin in Christianity and have since changed.

deceiving, one often hears it from people of the lower caste jāts. What does it mean to be considered calākh among Nepalese Protestants? Pastor Himal, a man of the Magar jāt, is one of those who frequently complained about the calākh character of the *Brahman* and the *Chettri*. For example, when we were chatting about some Protestant organisations that hold up great ideals but, in fact, really do not do anything, Pastor Himal said 'It is because Brahmans and Chettris occupy the high positions in those organisations. They are bāṭho [calākh] and do not work'. When asked to explain further he gave the following description:

The Bahun [Brahman] and the Chettri are bāṭho [calākh] and well adept in talking, yet do not work. Nepal has not developed because they remain in the upper strata of politics and the economy. The Bahun [Brahman] and the Chettri are not in Japan, and Japanese work without talking, don't they? That is why Japan developed so well... The Bahun [the Brahman] and the Chettri do not commit themselves to church events either. Even when there is much work to be done, they say they have other work to do and go elsewhere. But when the jobs are finished they say, 'Yes, we have done very well', behaving as if they deserve credit for the work. In fact, they only become active during events at meal time. We do not kick them out of our church. It is God's command to forgive them, but we must remember.

According to Pastor Himal, one of the typical characteristics of the Brahman and the Chettri is that they do not commit themselves to hard work. Instead they are able to talk well and take credit for and benefit from the work done by others. It was Suman, a Chettri man in his youth, whom Pastor Himal referred to as the most calākh member of his church.

Even so, how do the Brahman and the Chettri relate the accusation of calākh, given that they themselves may be its objects? I approached this issue with Suman in the context of discussion about his conversion experience, current activities, his future goal, and, finally, added the question regarding the accusation of calākh. He answered with a smile.

Not all of the Bahun [Brahman] and the Chettri are calākh, but outside of the Christian community about 80 % of them are calākh. I was also

calākh, but learned from Christianity that being calākh is sinful, and so, fearing God, discarded the habit. However, it is a fact that 20% of the Bahun [Brahman] and the Chettri remain calākh even after they become Christians. So they are under suspicion even in churches. At first, it also seemed as if members of my church found it hard to trust me, but they know that I have changed and they are not suspicious of me anymore.

Suman claimed that he was once calākh, but he has now discarded this old habit, and has consequently, successfully freed himself from the accusation. But in fact (as mentioned above), Pastor Himal considers Suman to be the most calākh person in the church.

Suman is not the kind of Chettri described by Pastor Himal who claims credit and benefit without working. Following Biblical teachings, he has dedicated himself to his church, serving as one of the most active members. In addition, he has also been participating in a mission project as a member of a para-church organisation. Yet, according to Pastor Himal, Suman has only actively involved himself in such activities in order to gain a high position and prestige. Moreover, Pastor Himal believes that the main aim of his involvement in the mission project of the para-church organisation was to obtain a salary and, more importantly, opportunities to become acquainted with foreign missionaries for the purposes of future moneymaking. Pastor Himal believes that, while Suman does not look calākh at first glance, he is hiding his real greed and is, therefore, the most calākh member of the church. The positive contributions that Suman has been making to the church and to Protestantism are reinterpreted not only as evidence of the fact that Suman is actually calākh, but are also used as evidence to prove that he is quite skillful in his deceit.

When asked directly about Brahman and Chettri Protestants who say that they were calākh but have changed and discarded these habits, Pastor Himal answered:

No, no. They just say so. By saying that they had been bāṭho [calākh], they just act as though they are honest to make you believe them. Then it becomes easier for them to deceive you sometime later. This is why they are really bāṭho [calākh].

From the narrative above, it is possible to grasp that Pastor Himal reinterprets the message, 'I am not calākh', as further evidence of the fact that the individual is indeed skillfully calākh.

The kind of interpretation Pastor Himal demonstrates is hardly an exception. When I posed the same question to other Protestant interviewees of the lower caste jāts, specifically asking what they think of Brahman and Chettri Protestants who explain themselves as having changed and no longer being calākh, the majority of them showed a similar reaction to that of Pastor Himal. Those Brahman and Chettri Protestants are frequently said to be calākh, and sometime more skillfully so, precisely because they try to show themselves not being so.

By employing the concept of frame coined by Bateson (1972), the above reaction of Pastor Himal and also the other interviewees of the lower caste jāts could be interpreted as rather predictable. At first, they perceived the speech or behaviour of the Brahman and the Chettri within the frame of interpretation that derives from the presumption that 'the Brahman and the Chettri are calākh'. Even when their speech or behaviour contains a message that possibly contradicts this frame, the message is still forced within the confine of the frame. Thus, the message becomes defined as being invalid or not worth trusting.

When a contradiction between a frame and a message occurs, it is also possible for one to discard or modify the frame and, subsequently, the presumption from which the frame originates or to at least suspend judgment by preserving the possibility that the message is still trustworthy. However, the presumption itself – that 'the Brahman and the Chettri are calākh' – not only makes one reluctant to do so, it also tempts one to perceive these groups as being more skillfully calākh because of the implication it carries. It is from this implication, that 'they can understand and think quickly', that the Brahman and the Chettri are now imagined as being able to deceive others easily without being detected. Thus, it is always necessary to carefully monitor them. A Brahman or Chettri may not look calākh at a glance, but they most certainly are, based solely on the very fact that they are Brahman or Chettri.

In this way, the accusation of calākh creates a circuit of suspicion and binds strongly to its existing objects. It seems as if, in principle, objects are never emancipated from this accusation, although there are some

exceptional cases. Before discussing the case of emancipation, I shall focus on how the accusation is applied to new groups of people.

New objects of the accusation

As already mentioned, targets of the accusation of *calākh* include not only the Brahman and the Chettri, as the Śreṣṭha, one of the subgroups of the Newar, are also occasionally said to be *calākh*. While the Brahman and the Chettri have learned to be *calākh* through the education provided to them for their prerogative roles under the caste system, the Śreṣṭha have reportedly learned to be *calākh* through the commercial activities in which they have traditionally engaged. Nowadays, the accusation of *calākh* has been applied to a new group of people in certain sectors of the Protestant community through logic that does not directly derive from history. The accusation of *calākh*, as directed toward this object, is still forming and is not yet widely circulated in the various networks of Nepalese Protestantism. It may or may not circulate in the future or ultimately take root, but this formation demonstrates the imaginative process that allows the accusation to acquire new targets.

It was Sujan, one of the lower caste *jāts* interviewees serving as a deacon in his church, who first drew my attention to the new target. During the interview regarding the Brahman and the Chettri, Sujan added, ‘We say, in our church, that Tamangs have also become *calākh*’. The accusation of *calākh* directed toward the Tamang *jāt* was also observed in the church of Pastor Himal. Unlike the Brahman, the Chettri, and the Śreṣṭha, who have flourished in the religious, political, and economic centers, the Tamang are known as poor, uneducated farmers. Why, then, have some Protestants started to label the Tamang as being *calākh*?

According to Sujan, Himal, and twelve other informants introduced by Sujan and Himal from three different churches (including their own), the fact that the Tamang have become *calākh* is evident because, following the Brahman and the Chettri, they occupy many high posts in the Protestant community, specifically those within churches, para-church organisations, umbrella organisations, and NGOs. This may simply be a natural consequence of the fact that the *Tamang* make up a relatively high portion of the Protestant population²⁰ or may be the result of the positive

20 Even though there is no data, according to experienced clergymen and missionaries,

contributions that they have been making to Nepalese Protestantism²¹. However, explicitly rejecting these other possibilities, Amon, a Magar man who serves as an elder in his church, asserted, 'It is impossible in Nepal to get ahead [to be active in high posts] without being *calākh*'.

Here, one might pose a fundamental question: what is wrong with getting ahead and becoming active? The answer to this question has already been implied but should be explained in more detail. After the democratisation movement in 1990 succeeded and persecution against Christians lessened, a lot of new missionaries, including freelance missionaries, came into Nepal and started to provide enormous financial support (Rongong 2012b: 484). In such a context, the imagination that one can obtain not only prestige, but also a high salary and numerous additional benefits from obtaining a high post in Protestantism, has arisen. It is thus no surprise that such an image has developed, if one sees that some clergymen of large church groups – especially those who have close relations with foreigners – visit foreign countries, drive cars, and have new computers and mobile phones, or that at least some employees of Protestant organisations earn high salaries. Now, according to Amon, being *calākh* is a necessary condition to continuously compete and win in order to gain these high posts.

This kind of reasoning is similar to the occult imagination observed in Africa. For example, Geschiere (1998), along with Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), reported that the success of others triggers people's occult imagination. That is, those who succeed are imagined to have done so through occult powers. By the same logic, the fact that the Tamang have been relatively successful is now interpreted as a result of them having become *calākh*. Through this kind of imagination, the accusation of *calākh* acquires a new target. It is also not confined strictly to Protestants. Individuals who achieve success often become objects of the accusation of

the Tamang actually showed their interest in Protestantism earlier than the others and have since had a relatively high population among Protestants. In fact, it was one of the living witnesses, an old clergyman, who told me, 'There are relatively many Tamangs in high posts because there are simply many Tamangs in Protestantism'.

21 As I did with Brahman and Chettri Protestants, I conducted questioning with Tamang Protestants about the narrative of *calākh* directed toward them. As a result, there was not a single Tamang Protestant who defined him/herself and the Tamang in the *jāt* level as *calākh*. Rather Tamang Protestants occasionally defined themselves as historically *sojho*, or simple and honest minded.

calākh regardless of their jāts²². These perceptions have started to target people at the jāt level among some Protestants.

Imagination of this kind not only allows the accusation to obtain a new target, but also functions to endorse the accusation of calākh in general at its very foundation both inside and outside of Protestantism. As previously mentioned, the Brahman, the Chettri, and the Śreṣṭha have generally been considered calākh because of their association with higher education, and prestigious and powerful occupations. However, the fact that they have traditionally received higher education and taken the roles of priests, governmental officers, soldiers, and merchants merely explains the historical context of their calākh character. This fact in itself does not necessarily result in someone actually being calākh. In cases where lower caste interviewees brought up the accusation of calākh, I proceeded to ask how they knew that significant numbers of Brahmans, Chettris, and Śreṣṭhas are really calākh now. Their answers varied. Some talked about episodes or rumors, while others talked about their own experiences of being deceived. Beyond these anecdotal and specific responses, the final and absolute evidence most often presented was the fact that the Brahman, the Chettri, and the Śreṣṭha still occupy dominant positions in various sectors of society even after the caste system was legally abolished in 1963 (Bista 1991, Hangen 2010, Lawoti 2012, Malagodi 2013).

To close the section, let me quote the sorrow Amon expressed while we were talking about the Tamang.

In the past, when Christians were so few, we were in strong unity and trusted each other. Later after the revolution [in 1990], it became easy to be a Christian, and then many Brahmans and Chettris started to convert because they saw business opportunities in Christianity. You see, so many high posts in [Protestant] organisations and NGOs are now occupied by Brahmans and Chettris. Following them, Tamangs also started to seek opportunities²³.

22 When I told one of my friends that I was invited to the house of a successful business owner from the Tharu jāt (generally said to be a sojho 'honest, simple'), he showed serious concern and gave me the following advice: 'Please be very careful. That person is very calākh'. In reply, I asked him, 'Why is he calākh? You have not met him'. He answered 'He is a successful person, therefore he has been deceiving others.'

23 Because there are now very large churches and many Protestant organisations, large and small, active and inactive, conspicuous and inconspicuous, it is extremely difficult

Emancipation from the accusation

In the previous section, I discussed how imagination not only allows the accusation of *calākh* to be applied to new groups of people, but also how it supports the accusation of *calākh* in general at its very foundation. In this section, I shall analyse how the objects can sometimes be emancipated from the accusation.

As mentioned earlier, the opinion expressed by the lower caste *jāts* regarding the character of the Brahman and the Chettri was that even though they are thought to be *calākh* at the *jāt* level, not all individuals of the Brahman and the Chettri are indeed *calākh*. A similar belief was also found among Protestants. According to participants in my research, it is possible to judge if someone is *calākh* or not through his/her daily speech, behaviour, and commitment. However, the claim that it requires a considerable amount of time and close, careful observation to appropriately judge the character of a Brahman or Chettri individual since he/she could pretend to be honest, merely presenting him/herself as not *calākh*, was occasionally added.

Additionally, among the Protestant interviewees, Bimal, one of the well-known clergymen of a large church group, has been frequently referred to as an example of an honest Brahman – an exception to the accusation of *calākh*. When his name did not come up in interviews, I would mention his name, yet there were never any negative reports regarding his character. In reality though, none of the informants have ever had close relationships with him. Most of them have never even talked with him. How then did they judge Bimal's character? Judgment of his character was based on widely circulated and positive gossip about him being an honest man. Gossip seems to be regarded as trustworthy in the sense that it is the accumulation of the experiences of many others, and it is therefore assumed to have already been assessed appropriately.

But according to Amon, it is impossible to get ahead (to be active in high positions) in Nepal without being *calākh*. If this is indeed so, how could Bimal have been serving as a clergyman of a large church group? In response to such questions, Amon used the adjective *sojho*, an antonym

to identify precisely which posts are actually taken as high posts, and therefore, the *jāt* composition of such posts is unknown. The participants seemed to think that many high posts are occupied by the Brahman, the Chettri, and the Tamang, because of their obvious presence in various events, newspapers, and magazines.

of the word *calākh*, and referred to Bimal as being *sojho calākh*. Bimal is certainly *calākh* because he is a Brahman and has actively served as a clergyman, but he has not abused this ability for his own greed. Rather he has employed it for the common good of Nepalese Protestantism. In addition to *sojho calākh*, by the same logic, the expression *rāmro calākh*, formed by adding the adjective *rāmro* ‘good, well, lovely, suitable, fair’, was also used in reference to Bimal by other informants.

When interviews reach the point of reflexive reconsideration of the word *calākh*, its positive meaning frequently appears. For example, Bahadur, a Gurung man of in his fifties, serving as an elder in the same church as Sujan, initially replied, ‘Definitely evil’²⁴, to the question of whether being *calākh* is good or bad. As the interview progressed and some issues about church management or negotiation with outside communities were broached, the word became an object for reassessment. According to Bahadur, what distinguishes being *calākh* in the positive from the conventional negative sense is the purpose for which one employs the ability to think quickly. If one uses the ability for their own *lobh* ‘greed’, then they are certainly *calākh* in the negative sense, but, as also implied by Amon, Bimal has not used his *calākh* ability for his own greed. Instead, he has committed himself to Nepalese Protestantism, while keeping his private life simple. In sum, there is no moral vice in being *calākh*, but rather in the abuse of the ability; if one uses the ability appropriately, being *calākh* can also be a virtue.

As mentioned in the first sentence of this article, it is possible for the word *calākh* to still be used as a compliment to praise another’s ability to think quickly. Yet, as also stated above, it tends to be interpreted negatively by default. Thus, the word *calākh* and even those expressions, *sojho calākh* or *rāmro calāk*, are hardly ever used to praise others among Protestants in the contexts in which misunderstandings must be avoided, especially when talking about somebody powerful or admirable. For this reason, other words, such as the word *buddhimānī*, translated as ‘wisdom’ or ‘wise thought or act’, are normally chosen to praise others for having the ability to think quickly. This seems to be the same outside of Protestantism.

24 The word used by Sujan was *duṣṭa*, which appears as one of the equivalents of the word for evil in the Nepali Bible (Nepal Bible Society 1997).

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the stereotypical accusation of *calākh* and its dynamics as observed among Protestants. Firstly, I discussed the case of Suman to show the accusation of *calākh* binds strongly to whom it is directed, and secondly, I showed how the accusation is applied to new groups of people, such as in the case of the Tamang. Finally, I reported how sometimes objects of the accusation may be freed, showing that even though being *calākh* is conventionally understood as a moral vice, it can also be understood as a virtue, as in the case of Bimal. This evaluation depends on how one uses the ability to think quickly, and as a result, the use of the word *calākh* tends to be avoided. It is necessary to do so because people in the Kathmandu Valley are sensitive to the word *calākh*, and, therefore, it could easily be misinterpreted.

Let me repeat and emphasize some of my theoretical findings. The accusation of *calākh* is self-reinforcing. The imagination that the accusation produces, that 'One looks honest at a glance, but he/she could still be deceptive', is able to feed even upon messages that negate the narrative itself, and consequently reinforce it. Therefore, once a target is captured by the accusation, it is difficult to be freed. Actions a target takes to deny that they are *calākh* – honest and contributory actions following the Bible – are interpreted and experienced as the very actions that one employs in pursuit of personal benefit. It seems as though dense inter-jāt relationships do not simply weaken, but rather endorse and reinforce the accusation. Once one is made the object of the accusation of *calākh*, it is difficult to escape it.

The accusation of *calākh* is applied to new groups of people through reasoning similar to the occult imagination observed in Africa by Geschiere (1998) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), whereby those who succeed are imagined to have done so through occult powers. Using this type of logic, the fact that the Tamang have been relatively successful is interpreted as being the result of them having become *calākh*. This logic not only allows the accusation of *calākh* to acquire a new target, it simultaneously endorses the validity of the fundamental elements of the stereotypical accusation both inside and outside of Protestantism.

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