

IMAGE, STATUS AND ASSOCIATION

Aspects of Identity among Newar Gods and Men

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Introduction

In the Valley of Nepal, a Nineteenth Century European visitor observed, "there are as many temples as there are houses and as many idols as there are men". (Kirkpatrick: 1811, 150)

Circumstances are no different today in the Valley, where much of the time, energy and material resource of the Newars is dedicated to the maintenance of good relations with the Gods with whom they coexist. The burden of this paper is to examine the extent to which the identity of each is upheld by this process, with particular reference to a Newar Buddhist clan.

The premise underlying this essay is that identity is a cultural constraint, the product of received ideas and perceived symbols, ritual practice and the experience of group interaction and association. Three aspects of Identity are of particular relevance here: the image, status and association of our title, which shall be defined in greater detail below.

Doctoral research, on which this paper is based, was carried out in 1979/80 in Uku Baha -- one of the traditional "monasteries" of Patan (Riley-Smith: 1982). The Buddhist clan of Uku Baha is composed entirely of Sakya -- the lower order in the Buddhist *Bare* caste, who may intermarry with the higher, Vajracarya, order, but who are denied the right that they retain to officiate as priests; this particular community consists of three exogamous lineages with a total population of approximately 1,500. It represents the largest group of religious craftsmen in the Valley: 84% of households interviewed in a census in 1980 were involved in "god-making"; they produce metal statues of the gods, by the lost-wax method, which -- today -- are generally destined for the curio shop.

The Uku Baha clan occupies a honey-combed network of courtyards, each of which possesses a shrine-house or chapel which is unique to the architectural sub-culture of the *Bare*. The ground floor of the chapel is open and accessible, and contains a peaceful image -- most commonly of Aksobhya Buddha -- known as the *kwapa dyo*.¹ The upstairs shrine, in contrast, is fenestrated with a close filigree of carved wood which bars the interior from view; in this esoteric setting the empasioned figure of a Tantric deity -- the *agam dyo*, most commonly Cakrasamvara -- holds sway, depicted *in coitus* with his consort, his face contorted with rage and lust.

Much of the evidence compiled in this essay is based upon the views of the Buddhist families who dwell among these deities and the associated guardians of the courts (notably Ganesh and Mahakala). But the process of communion between divine images and human interlocutors was observed in communities (Buddhist, Hindu and eclectic) throughout the Kathmandu Valley, providing additional insights which are drawn upon below.

This paper is divided into three parts: firstly, we examine the nature of divine identity; secondly, the fulcrum of commerce between Gods and Men -- *puja* -- is discussed before attention is turned, thirdly, to those aspects of human identity which gain substance through the process of liaison with the gods.

I Divine Identity

Image

There are numerous examples, in the valley of Kathmandu, of deities who are worshipped in aniconic form -- most often, rock formations. But the overwhelming majority of divinities enshrined within the Valley take representational -- usually anthropomorphic -- form. It is this image of the gods which occupies us here.

The Buddhist theory of *trikaya* ("three bodies") endows the divine beings of Mahayana Buddhism with three forms. As the "Body of Doctrine" (*dharmakaya*), the deity occupies the ultimate reality of *nirvana*, and is -- in essence -- void; in the form of a "creation body" (*nirmanakaya*) the god is human, exemplified by the historical Buddhas who have lived on Earth; mediating between the two is the "body of bliss" (*sambhogakaya*), dwelling in a heavenly realm and endowed with the physical attributes of both a human and super-natural monarch (the crown, for instance, and the sign of the wheel on the palm of each hand).

¹According to Locke (1980:14), *kwapa* is a corruption of *kwacapala* -- "guardian of the community"; *dyo* means "god". The image is more familiarly referred to as *kwapa aju* (the latter word here meaning "grandfather").

In stark contrast to the Buddhist statuary of Thailand, whose Theravada creed only recognises religious images which illustrate significant moments from Buddha's history, the divine images which occupy the shrine-houses and temples of the Newars fall mainly within the category of the third, heavenly, form described above. Few Newars will be aware of the theoretical issues, but it is the received opinion of most Newars that divine images correspond to an existing entity present in heaven (*svarga*).

But how is the appearance of the gods known? The iconographic traditions followed by Newar "god-makers" have their foundations in the Pala era (750 - 1150 A.D.), when craft centres flourished in the Buddhist monasteries of Bengal and Bihar (such as Nalanda and Vikramsila). In this period, an extensive iconographic canon was developed, incorporating the gods and demi-gods of Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism, whose appearance and proportion were described in detail. By reference to such Sanskrit texts as the Nispannayogali and Sadhanamala (both of which were translated into Newari), the Hevajra Tantra and the Kriyasamgraha, it is possible to identify a Buddhist pantheon of some 760 gods; many of these take more than one form, and some -- such as Avalokiteswora and Tara -- have almost 30 different emanations. The texts, therefore, provide blue-prints for over 1,000 images. (de Mallman, 1975)

Furthermore, according to traditional canons, the "god-maker", before working his wax into shape, is bound to spend some hours contemplating the deity he intends sculpting with the help of the iconographic texts. The aim is to achieve a vision of this divinity, an epiphany whose shadow may then take solid form from the medium. It has been written that "in order that the form of an image may be brought to mind, the image-maker should meditate; and his success will be in proportion to his meditation". (Coomaraswamy, 1908:3)

The Valley of Nepal was under Pala suzerainty in the Eleventh Century A.D., during the rule of Ramapala, and possibly this was the case from early in the Ninth Century (Jayaswal, 1936:239). With the influx of Buddhist monks from Bengali and Bihari monasteries in subsequent centuries, as they fled Mahomedan invaders, the influence of the Pala tradition on the Newar craftsmen of the Valley was confirmed.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that craftsmen working today are producing their icons with the help of source-books and entrancement. During my 14-month stay in Nepal I saw no "godmakers" using such texts (even though I watched statues being sculpted almost daily), and only one craftsman admitted to possessing such a book. The existence of ancient canons was often acknowledged, but a number of informants held the misplaced belief that the gods were described in the proto-Bengali language of the Tantric songs (*caca*) which are sung before the *agam dyo*; it was argued that if only they

could understand these songs they would be able to produce statues closely resembling the gods in the heaven. Reference to the translation of the "Caryagita" by Kvaerne (1977) proves them mistaken.

Instead, the craftsmen of Uku Baha operate *de yisu*, taking for their models either the statues extant in the shrines and temples of the Valley, or photographs of images shown to them by patrons. Furthermore, once an image has been sculpted in wax, it is common for the artist to make a mold bearing the negative impression of the deity's limbs, features and torso, so that subsequent wax impressions can be struck swiftly and accurately. This means that a craftsman who lacks confidence in his own sculpting skills can copy the work of another by taking a cast of it; so the work of a father or grand-father can be perpetuated over time, and iconographic standards can be maintained.

This pragmatic and down-to-earth approach to generating images of the gods is combined with a craft tradition which evokes the contradictory symbolism of monkhood and progeneration: the shaping tool with which the wax image is sculpted is called a *shilleku* (the name given to the monk's staff carried, for instance, by neophytes in the *bare cuigu* when initiated into their caste) while the earthen mold into which molten metal is poured during casting is likened to a womb, with the mouth and inner passage referred to as vulva and vagina respectively. Such contradictions, as we shall discuss below, are endemic within the *Bare* sub-culture.

Initiation

The importance of adhering to iconographic standards in the production of divine images is recognised by the artists of Uku Baha; but the identity of a god is not achieved by isomorphic resemblance alone.² This fact was emphasised on one occasion when a craftsmen holding an image of Aksobhya Buddha roughly stubbed his foot against it -- an act of desecration which is insulting in the extreme. "Look," he said, "I can do this now...it is all right. Only after the *panistha* would the Lord Buddha be angry. Now there is no Buddha."

The *panistha* -- an abbreviated version of the Sanskrit *pranapratishta* ("imparting of life to the image") is the rite of initiation of a divine image. In the full ceremony, lasting about twelve hours, a Buddhist image will undergo the eight life-rites

²This fact is nowhere better illustrated than in the case of the enshrined statue of the goddess Sitala in Patan, worshipped by Newars seeking to ward off smallpox. Slusser has pointed out that this popular deity actually represents a male figure and meets none of the iconographic criteria appropriate to Sitala. "We can only be sure of one thing, perhaps: that it is not Sitala", Slusser has written. (1972:102)

of *Bare* childhood (male and female) -- establishing its social status -- in addition to two rites which acknowledge the sculpture's divine status. These will be followed by eight consecrations similar to those performed at the initiation of a Vajracarya priest.³

The ceremony is preceded by the priest invoking the appropriate deity to enter the statue, saying

O Lord, I desire to establish you here today -- you who are filled with compassion -- in order that you might show compassion and that we might be able to offer *puja* to you....Just as all the Buddhas live in the Tusita heaven, just as Buddha was placed in the womb of Maya Devi, please come and take up residence in the place I have prepared....I, so-and-so, a great yogi, am engaged in setting up this image for the protection of the world.

(Locke, 1980:210)

Certain images, such as *bunga dyo* or Red Matsyendranath (whose annual festival is probably the most popular of the Newar cycle) are re-initiated annually, while others are reconsecrated intermittently; thus, a family or lineage (*kowah*) will occasionally organise a *panistha* ceremony at which the household gods -- new and old -- of its members receive consecration. In 1977, for instance, the Uku Baha lineage which centres on Mahabuddha Baha held a consecration ceremony in the *agam* room of the "monastery" at which some 15 households shared the cost of 1,000 *rupee* to employ a Gubhaju priest to perform the necessary rites.

It is generally presumed that all those deities who have been enshrined have received the necessary consecration. Newars are susceptible to the notion, therefore, that the fact of enshrinement endorses a sculpture's divine presence (in contrast to the images occupying curio-shops, which are empty shells).

Through a combination of ritual practice and spatial context (consecration and enshrinement), the image progresses from being a token to being the type: the substance of the sculpture is transformed from being an amalgam of earth-bound metal, for instance, to being a projection of the heavenly sphere and the divine presence itself. The sculpture no longer merely represents the god, it is the god.

Association

This exercise in ontology is substantiated through a social process of interaction

³A description of the *panistha*, based on a translation from an undated manuscript found in Kathmandu, is contained in Locke's *Karunamaya* (1980).

which affirms divine identity through acknowledging a god's role as an agent in both the mundane and supra-mundane sphere. That process is *puja* -- worship.

The deity provides his human co-habitants with the opportunity to seek ultimate salvation (through divine grace) or short-term gain (through the stimulation of divine power). This willingness to intercede is expressed, indeed, through the emphasis on frontal representation in most icons, which invites social intercourse; and the gestures of "giving", "blessing" and "teaching" commonly displayed by the icons imply a formal relationship with those who acquire -- through communion -- gifts, benediction and learning.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the gods are treated according to conventions of Newar hospitality and etiquette. Stablein has pointed out that water is offered to the deity "just as among the Newars in ancient times, and even now among elders, water offerings are made to guests" (1976:167); on at least two occasions I saw itinerant images receive the *laasakhusa* rite given to kin on their return home from a ceremonial journey, and whenever the presence of a deity is spirited into a sacred circle or water-flask (as in the *guru mandala puja* and *kalasa puja*) it is common practice for the "guest reception" ceremony to be performed.

The gods belong. The extent and nature of their association with the social networks of their Newar interlocutors is discussed below.

II Puja -- The Protocol between Gods and Men

At a theoretical level within the Sanskritic traditions of the Indian sub-continent, an act of worship involves three elements -- devotion (*bhakti*), vow (*samvara*), and pledge (*samaya*): the devotee takes a vow of faith and pledges an offering to the deity.

In practice, for the majority of Newars, *puja* is a process of devotion and offerings which is reciprocated. The devotee enters into the presence of the god, demonstrating respect and devotion by lowering the head or bowing before the image, and giving offerings -- either directly or through such intermediaries as the "god-guardian" (*dyo pala*) or family priest (*purohit*). In return, the worshiper receives *prasada*, a token of the god's acceptance of the gift in the form of a portion of the offering returned.

The most common offerings are the *pancopacara* -- food, scent, incense, light and flowers, although additionally one may perform music (*bajham*) and sing songs (*stutis*, *otra*, *caca*). The particular type of food and flowers a god receives will vary, depending on his or her identity; all female deities, for instance, are recipients of red flowers,

except for Vasudhara who is given yellow; rice-paddy or husked rice is the most common food-stuff offered, but violent deities such as Cakrasamvara (the *agam dyo* of Uku Baha) or *nassam dyo* (the god of music and dance) require buffalo meat and alcohol.

Every act of worship is presumed to induce both good *karma* through the accumulation of merit and the beneficial distribution of *sakti*, corresponding to two forms of Buddhist practice that Spiro has identified in Burma -- "kammatic" (concerned with improving one's position on the Wheel of Life) and "apotropaic" (concerned with worldly welfare and protection from danger). (1971:12-13)

However, it is recognised that certain forms of worship are geared towards the stimulation, specifically, of one or other type of bounty. Within the *Bare* monasteries, for instance, *nitya puja* ("regular worship") is regarded as a particularly appropriate way of eliciting merit.

Daily Worship

The daily sequence of ceremonies comprising *nitya puja*, performed in main court (*mu baha*) of each community, centres on the chapel of the *kwapa dyo*. In Uku Baha it entails three observances (in contrast to the six described by Locke, *ibid.*:176-180, in Kathmandu's Jana Baha) -- *majhan puja*, *sworpha puja*, and *san puja* ("middle worship", "three o'clock worship" and "evening worship").

The first of these ceremonies, which takes place between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m., has the highest attendance: it is a convention that at least one member of each household should bring offerings to the *kwapa dyo* at this time.

Before the devotees arrive the "god-guardian" -- a clansman of the community (*sangha*) who serves for a two-week period before passing the chaplaincy on to the next in line -- will have swept out the shrine and awoken the image of Buddha, lighting oil lamps and making his own offerings of *pancopacara*, singing a hymn, sounding a bell, and wafting a yak-tail fan before the god; he will also have beaten the *gomashi* -- a hollow pole traditionally employed in the medieval monasteries of Northern India to rouse monks. He is now ready to receive the offerings of the clan on behalf of the *kwapa aju*, standing within the confines of the shrine beside the divine image.

Worshippers arrive, usually carrying their offerings on brass trays. It is not uncommon for small metal figures of a man and woman to be fixed to these trays: they kneel together, hands held out and pressed together in the *namaskara mudra* denoting respect and devotion. They represent the ancestors of the donor household, and are referred to as *aju-aji* ("grandfather-grandmother"); they shall gain merit through this act of worship.

Food, most commonly uncooked rice -- is taken off each tray by the *dyo pala* and is placed at the base of the enshrined statue; a *tika* of sandal-wood paste is applied to the image, and flowers are either strewn around the figure or are stuck into his crown or that of the smaller image of Aksobhya Buddha which is placed at the feet of the *kwapa dyo* and which is referred to as his son. In return, the devotees receive *prasada* in the form of a leaf or petal from a flower, or drops of consecrated water, or even the heat from the flame of the lamp which burns before the deity (this latter being most commonly given in the evening: one warms ones fingers in the flame and applies the radiant heat to the eyes or forehead).

All worshipers arriving at the main clan shrine will have performed their devotions previously at the chapel of their lineage and sub-lineage, where -- again, following an appropriate rota system -- a member of each will perform the part of the "god-guardian". The process of *nitya puja* will also have led them to propitiate the household gods (most commonly Aksobhya Buddha, Padmapani Lokeswor, Manjusri and Tara), the various images in the courtyards of the "monastery" including Ganesh and Mahakala who stand at the gateway, and the *caitya* that stands in front of the shrine, symbolising the five Dhyani Buddhas.

What of the wrathful *agam dyo*, closeted in the upper shrine-rooms of the monastic chapels? As befits such esoteric deities, they are not readily accessible to the majority of daily worshipers, but they still receive attention from those who have undergone the Tantric *dekkha* initiation. This is most commonly taken by a Sakya clansman and his wife in later life, and it is appropriate that within the Uku Baha community, the role of *dyo pala* to three Principal images of Cakrasamvara is performed by the three senior Elders (*aju*) of the community.

The Festival of Light

The annual festival of Mattya (a corruption of the Newar word for "oil-lamp") is another opportunity for devotees to gain merit through participation in a vigorous and fatiguing pilgrimage through the streets of Patan. Every Buddhist shrine in the city is visited, with the participants -- including large numbers of Jyapu (cultivators) from outlying districts as well as from the wards of the city -- spending at least twelve hours on this task; they carry lighted lamps to symbolise Buddha's attainment of enlightenment, and they distribute offerings (especially rice, carried in large buckets) to every Buddhist image encountered on the route.

In 1100 N.S. (1980) it was the turn of Uku Baha to organise this event, at an estimated cost to the community of 11,000 *rupee*. The procession began and ended in Uku Baha, and the clan provided musicians (in particular drummers) to accompany the

peregrination --accumulating great merit for themselves in the process. For four months before Mattya, the "god-makers" of Uku Baha would stop their work at regular intervals, and the sharp metallic tapping of the engravers would be replaced by the sound of drumbeats (or, at the earlier stages, by trainees learning the complex percussive rhythms by vocalisation of the drum-sounds). On the day, a group of young players formed the band of *kaji bajham* ("host music") which had to play before the *kwapa dyo* of every *baha* in the city, while two groups of older men performed at twenty-four different sites in the city.

The festival of Mattya is an occasion for great merriment and camaraderie, with youths dressing up in outlandish costumes and playing pranks, while groups of more serious devotees will parade together wearing distinctive uniforms. It is believed that a large amount of merit is accumulated by participation in this event, and that the benefit is felt not only by oneself but also by one's dead ancestors and relatives.

The Transmission of Sakti

Sakti is a supernatural force, which is distinguished by Newars from physical strength (*bal*). The word is based upon the Sanskrit root *sak*, signifying "to be able", "to be possible", and in common Newar usage it refers either to "power", "ability", "capacity", "strength", "energy" and "prowess", or to the female consort of a Tantric deity who is considered to be his powerful and active aspect.

Gods can distribute *sakti* for the elimination of a particular threat or the satisfaction of a particular desire, rather as the relics of medieval Christianity were believed to be imbued with *virtus*, which could be tapped for the same purpose. Indeed, rather in the fashion of Patron Saints, individual gods of the Newar pantheon are thought to specialise in a particular field of conduct, and will be petitioned accordingly.

Thus, students preparing for an exam will visit the stone statue of Saraswati occupying a shrine in a field behind Uku Baha, to whom offerings are made in exchange for help in the exam. The goddess Sitala (within the precinct of Khumbeswor Temple in northern Patan) was traditionally considered capable of warding off smallpox, and with the introduction of vaccinations for this disease it was common practice to supplement medical treatment with a visit to this deity. *Bunga dyo* is invoked in late Spring to guarantee the monsoon rains, and the first storms of the year are interpreted by many as signifying the pleasure of this small plaster statue at his chariot-festival. *Naga* (snake-gods) are also propitiated to bring rain, as well as to cure boils and elephantiasis.

Wealth, in turn, derives from Laksmi (according to Hindu Newars) or Vasudhara (according to Buddhists). This latter goddess is depicted holding a sheaf of corn or a vase filled with rice and jewels, while making the gesture of giving (*varada mudra*) with her

right hand. "Vasudhara," one Sakya informant told me, "is the goddess who holds the earth. We offer her food, biscuits, sweetmeats...anything except meat. If you worship Vasudhara you will get a good harvest, you will be prosperous, you will be rich, you will be healthy, you will be rich...You will be everything!"

Two days in the month of Gumla (August/September) are dedicated to Vasudhara Puja. In Uku Baha the community fasts on the first day, eating only one meal consisting of bread, curds and milk. In the *sangha's* meeting-room the goddess is worshipped in a rite that involves not only images but also the generation of the goddess within a water-pot (*kalasa*) standing in the centre of a *mandala*, conducted by a Gubhaju priest.

On the second day, images of the goddess are brought out to receive offerings from a procession of pilgrims who -- in the manner of Mattya -- parade through the streets visiting the various *baha*. Gifts included *kissili* (an earthenware saucer containing paddy, a coin, and a betel nut), bread, sweet pastries, incense, peas, bananas, books and even rope. Prominent among the participants were groups of young girls dressed in yellow (the colour of Vasudhara) who sing songs in praise of the deity.

III Image, Status, and Association

We have concentrated on three aspects of the identity of the Newar divinity which correspond to central strands in all forms of social identity. The deity possesses an image -- most commonly an iconic form, but on occasion it may occupy an aniconic seat, such as a rock or orifice; the deity possesses status, acquired through the consecration rite of *panistha*; and the deity's identity is substantiated through association with others in a web of social communion.

Thus, the consecrated image, imbued with the authority, power and identity of a deity, stands within a network of social relations whose maintenance consumes a significant part of the time and resources of the Newar participants.

These human interlocutors are, themselves, furnished with an identity which combines elements of image, status and association. Each individual carries a self-image which owes much to covert, symbolic expressions of myth, history and idealisation; each individual is placed within a network of social associations or groupings to which he owes allegiance; and each individual develops a standing -- social status -- within the group which endows rank, power, privilege and obligation. To what extent are these highlighted by the Newar's interaction with the gods?

Association

There are clear examples within Newar culture where a person's association with specific social networks -- most notably to his or her clan -- is indicated by the patterns

of *puja* directed towards specific images.

Reference to the *nitya puja*, described above, illustrates this point. The devotee daily describes the branch-like structure of the clan in progressing from the household shrine, to the *kwapa dyo* of the sub-lineage, to that of the lineage, and finally to the *kwapa dyo* of the main clan-community within the *mu baha*. By standing at the centre of community worship, this last statue, appropriately enshrined with his "son" at his feet, denotes the essential unity of the clan, while the other icons of the branch *baha* serve as points of reference for the diversity-within-unity which is a central tenet of the *Bare* clan organisation.

In the same way, the responsibilities of *dyo pala* directly associate the functionary with the appropriate constituencies of the clan -- elements which are denoted by specific divinities. Thus, all Sakya men within the Uku Baha *sangha* act as "godguardian" to the *kwapa dyo* of the main shrine; members of the Mahabuddha lineage -- a sub-set of the clan -- will additionally perform this duty for the deity in Mahabuddha Baha; and members of the Mahabuddha Baha's various sub-lineages will act as *dyo pala* to particular images residing in the chapels of the lesser courts, which provide a focus of worship for these smaller groupings.

Of course, the *kwapa dyo* is an institution peculiar to the *Bare*. But the *digu dyo* or *kul devata* ("family god") provides a divinity which is common to all kin groups in Newar society, and beyond (Bista, 1972). Typical of this tradition, the divinity worshipped by the Sakya of Uku Baha takes an aniconic form, as a bare rock enshrined in a field just outside the city limits, south of the main courtyard of the "monastery"; he is Yogambara, a Tantric emanation of Aksobhya Buddha.

This *digu dyo* receives worship at all the main festivals of the year, and is visited by individual households on the occasion of family celebrations (e.g. weddings and birthdays). The tripartite structure of the clan -- and hence the allegiance of individual members to one of three lineages -- is reflected by the arrangement whereby the three *kowah* celebrate an annual *puja* to the deity on separate occasions within a month's span: the metal sheath (*kosa* or *kavaca*) which covers the holy stone at such times is passed from the elder of one group to the next, accordingly.

Liaison with the gods works to demarcate other social groups as well. Thus, a shrine to Ganesh forms the focal point for each *tol* or ward within the city of Patan (as it does for Newar communities elsewhere, and a formal association (*guthi*) will exist to oversee the maintenance of each of these: clan, and indeed caste, boundaries are cut across by the resulting patterns of worship. Similarly, the Uku Baha district (one of ten within

the city, with membership transcending clan, caste and *tol* boundaries) is responsible -- every 10 years -- for organising the Buddha Jayanti procession commemorating Buddha's birthday: the event focuses on a gilt figure of Aksobhya Buddha (commissioned for the district when it led the festival in 1090 N.S. -- 1980 A.D.) which is carried through the streets on a palanquin accompanied by the men, women and children of the area; for the remaining nine years of the cycle the image is housed in the main shrine-room of Uku Baha.

Status

We have illustrated how the process of worship can provide an index of group identity. Additionally, there are general principles at work which determine an individual's right of access to particular types of deity according to his or her social status.

The birth of a child is -- in this regard -- a catastrophic incident which temporarily impacts on the relationship between deities and all members of the newborn's lineage: they are denied the right to conduct *puja* until some 10 days after the birth, once they have undergone the purification rite of *benekeyegu* (literally "ending").

The child's first formal encounter with the gods occurs on the occasion of its *junko*, when after six months it is fed rice for the first time. It is common practice for the mother's brother to carry the baby, at this initiation rite, to visit the principal deities of its community; in Uku Baha, this journey culminates before the door of the *kwapa dyo* and outside the sanctuary of the *digu dyo*. However, under no circumstances may the child approach any closer to the gods in question.

It is only when the young Sakya boy has undergone the initiation rite into his clan and caste -- the *bare cuigu* -- that he may enter into the presence of the god: near the end of the ceremony, the initiate must enter the chapel of the *kwapa dyo* for the first time, placing an offering at the feet of the statue which towers above him, dressed in its crown, jewels and princely robes. The boy is then led around the image in a clock-wise direction by the *dyo pala*.

The Sakya's new status leads to his name being added to the roll of *sangha* members, and he is now due the privilege of serving as *dyo pala* to the *kwapa dyo* images of his clan, lineage and sublineage: access to images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, therefore, confirms his social status within the community. Of course, for the Vajracarya -- or Gubhaju -- families of the *Bare* caste, initiation brings the opportunity to generate the divine presence within such *sacra* as the water-pot or *mandala*.

For girls, this sea-change in their social status -- providing them with the right to carry offerings to the shrine of the *kwapa dyo* -- is achieved by the *yih* rite, when they undergo a marriage ceremony which binds them to Boddhicitta ("the thought of enlightenment"); this, incidentally, is the Buddhist interpretation of the Hindu ceremony for pre-pubescent girls which ritually marries them to the god Narayan.

At a later stage in an individual's social development he or she will undergo the *dekkha* rite, undertaken before the image of the *agam dyo*, after which the initiants (most commonly man and wife) are able to offer *puja* to this deity within their own domestic shrine.

If, subsequently, a Sakya is promoted to become one of the ten elders (*aju*) of his community, his specific status will be marked by his appointment as *dyo pala* to a particular image: the 6th-10th elders are chaplains to the images of Aksobhya Buddha and Padmapani Lokeswor in Gathicha Baha; the 4th and 5th elders guard the Aksobhya Buddha in the eastern niche of the Yataliba Baha *stupa*; the 3rd elder worships Cakrasamvara in Gathicha Baha; the 2nd guards the same god, enshrined in a subsidiary sanctuary in the north-eastern corner of Uku Baha, while it falls to the senior elder (the *thapaju* or "great-grandfather") to serve the *agam dyo* of Uku Baha itself.

In this way, the ritual obligations of the ten Elders imitate the obligations of the wider clan, with those of inferior, or junior, status liaising with peaceful images of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, while those of superior, or senior, status liaise with the wrathful Tantric deities in their hidden shrines.

Death breaks this process of communion: the images have their heads covered as the corpse passes by, and again the members of family of the deceased refrain from undertaking worship until they have been purified. The dialogue ends, as it began, in silence.

Self-Image

An individual's self-image is constructed from models provided by the culture, or sub-culture to which he owes allegiance.

We have, elsewhere, discussed the imagery of monachism promoted by the Bare in seeking to assert their identity against what is regarded as predatory Hindu incursions against the Buddhist ideals of the *vihara* (Riley-Smith, *ibid.*:78-105). Legend portrays the Hindu adept, Sankharacarya, as a particular nemesis for he is reputed to have defeated the *baudhimargi* of the Valley of Nepal, forcing monks and nuns to become householders and to marry, and householders to sacrifice animals.

Credence is lent to these beliefs by claims that certain gods of the valley bear witness to this victimisation. Most notably, the Hindu temple of Cangu Narayan (where an image of Vishnu riding on his vehicle Garuda is enshrined) is said, by *Bare* informants, to have been -- once -- dedicated exclusively to the *bodhisattva* Hari Hari Hari Bahun Lokeswor; this divinity rides on the back of Vishnu. Sankharacarya is reported to have broken the statue, leaving the Hindu deity unburdened by the Buddhist saint.⁴

The image of monachism is promoted among the *Bare* to counter this perceived domination. The architectural, linguistic, and ritual imagery of the Buddhist caste (the very term denotes the equivocal plight of the group!) plays upon an extended monastic metaphor. For the purposes of this paper, our attention is drawn in particular to the practices of the *dyo pala*, and the performance by the *Bare* in certain festivals where -- in association with Buddha images -- the symbolic role of the *bhiksu* (monk) is enacted.

Throughout the course of his term of office, the "god-guardian" will adopt the pose (by, for instance, exposing his right arm and shoulder in imitation of the monk's mode of dress) and manners of a celibate monk⁵, quelling his carnal appetite and observing the appropriate dietary restrictions by eating a single, meatless, unsiced meal a day.

This worship appears to have close similarities with the diurnal *puja* in the courtyards of medieval monasteries in North India, where the image of Buddha was bathed with scented water and was offered flowers, food and clothes to the accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music, and burning incense (Dutt, 1962: 193-4). In his relationship with the *kwapa dyo*, indeed, the *dyo pala* imitates the actions of those ascetic disciples described (in such texts as Buddhaghosa's *Sumangalavilasini*) serving attendance upon Sakyamuni Buddha in the "scented chamber" which he occupied whenever residing in a monastery (Strong, 1977:390-406).

⁴If there is any truth in this story, it could answer an enigma identified by Slusser (1975:91), where she refers to a gilt copper sheath in Cangu Narayan's shrine-room, depicting Vishnu riding on the shoulders of Garuda, which is in two parts...the head and neck of Vishnu being a later casting. If the upper half of Hari Hari Bahun Lokeswor had been violently removed in an act of Hindu iconoclasm, there would quite likely have been damage to the Vishnu beneath.

It is of additional interest that, according to several *Bare* informants, one can pay the temple guardian to bring out and set up an image of Hari Hari Hari Bahun Lokeswor in the inner sanctum of the shrine. Is the lower half of the Vishnu sheath attached to the upper half of a hidden Lokeswor image?

⁵Oldfield noticed this in the last century, writing: "At certain important ceremonies....the priest unsleeves the right arm, so as to have that arm and side of the chest bare, in accordance with the habitual customs of the monks of former days." (1880:141)

The festivals of Pancadam ("five gifts") and Samek emphasise the image of the monk and place particular significance upon images of Dipankara Buddha.

In the Pancadam, *Bare* participate in a ceremony where they play the part of both mendicants and donors: each *baha* set up colourful displays of paintings and divine statues -- the most popular of which is Dipankara Buddha -- and those seeking the five alms walk from site to site carrying sacks into which they place the offerings; as they proceed, they sing hymns which proclaim: "Today treat me as if I were a Buddha in yellow robes, with a begging bowl in hand. Give! Give and you shall gain merit!" Inevitably, images of Dipankara become the recipients of alms at the same time.

This identification with the image of Buddha is taken a stage further in the Samek festival (held irregularly in both Kathmandu and Patan), since each *mu baha* supplies a large mannequin-like figure of Dipankara Buddha (carried by a *Bare* from within the wooden frame which supports the polished brass face and clothed body) which is paraded through the streets to the site of the alms-giving.

According to one informant I was told that the first Samek festival took place in an ancient settlement near Patan:

During the time of Dipankara Buddha, the rich Shrestha wanted to invite Dipankara along with his disciples, the monks. They made a very big *dharma-sala* -- the place where they will offer (alms) -- and established the organisation of a *dam* festival and invited Lord Buddha and his followers. So this was a tradition set up in the time of Dipankara, and even today we are maintaining this.

In Kathmandu, the hosts of the *dharma-sala* are members of the Buddhist merchant caste (the Uray), who present their gifts to the images of Dipankara and their *Bare* associates in a field outside Swayambunath; in Patan the inhabitants of Kwa Baha host the event -- in the grassy court of Nag Baha, providing their fellow *Bare* with cooked rice and vegetable and sweet pastries, as well as paddy and coins. The monkish image of the *Bare* is enacted in the company of associated images of Buddha.

The monachic motif exemplified by the peaceful statues which abound in the open spaces and shrines of the *baha* communities contrast starkly with the image of the *agam dyo*, consuming meat and alcohol, exhibiting wrath and indulging in an act of sexual congress with his consort. But this image, in turn, has been employed by the Newar Buddhists in protecting their identity from another perceived threat: that of proselytizing Theravada Buddhists.

There is a growing interest among younger *Bare* in the teachings of Theravada Buddhism, encouraged by an influx of missionaries (often trained in Thailand or Sri Lanka) into the Valley over the past thirty years. Earlier this century, however, visiting Theravadan monks met with antagonism: Kloppenborg has written that their preaching "tended to point to the rationality and purity of their Theravadan practices in comparison with the rituals of the Newars. This led to public debates, in which the monks' ardour in defending their views often aroused the antipathy of their Newar listeners, who saw their religious customs attacked." (1977:303)

Confronted by this Buddhist assault on their integrity, many *Bare* emphasise their distinctiveness by reference to the particular form of Buddhism which they practice: the Vajrayana school offers the possibility of achieving *nirvana* in this life, through a superior corpus of practices centred upon such deities as Cakrasamvara.

The imagery evoked here is the opposite of the monachic and ascetic, and stands in contrast to the peaceful Buddha image worshipped in his open shrine; instead, there is anger, sexuality, and the consumption of meat and alcohol; instead of highlighting the worship of Buddhas and *bodhisattva* on the eighth and full-moon days of the lunar month (traditional holy days when special ceremonies are conducted before the images), there is the worship of the *agam dyo* on *dasami*, *caurye* and *aunsi* (the last of these days being the darkest night of the lunar month).

It is possible to see here that the images themselves, of *kwapa dyo* and *agam dyo*, which on occasion provide models which Newar devotees will seek to imitate, have contributed to the process of self-identification, the process of promoting a self-image, in the face of perceived threats from Hindu and Theravadan incursions.

A further inwardness should be mentioned here: the traditional distinctions which are drawn between junior/senior, younger/older in Newar life, and which demand reticence from the former and permit a more flamboyant style of manners from the latter, are mirrored in the rules of access to divinities. Younger men serve the peaceful *kwapa dyo*, older men guard the impassioned *agam dyo*; at one level, perhaps, this presents an ideological model which influences interpersonal behaviour and etiquette.

The Deification of Human Agents

It is worth referring here to the ultimate liaison between god and man, when the identity of the two become merged together. The Vajracarya priest exerts control over the gods, and -- as has been mentioned above -- can summon and project the gods into

certain ceremonial *sacra*: this then enables the priest's client to conduct the appropriate *puja*. But theoretically, the priest achieves this through identifying himself with the divinity he is responsible for installing.

Gellner (1988:107) has questioned whether "folk" understanding of the priest's role in the process actually embraces the preceptor's identification with a visualized deity, but this notion is dramatized by the five-coloured thread (*pancasutraka*) which extends from the priest himself to the ritual object which is to contain the deity. At the very least, the priest is regarded as a channel through which the divinity travels, and the well-established shamanic traditions of the Himalayas lay the foundations for the acceptance of such ideas.

There certainly are other occasions where an individual is clearly recognised to have merged his or her identity with that of a god. The Kumari tradition (where a young girl is deemed to be the goddess Kumari, until menstruation drives the Virgin Goddess away, to occupy another's body) is one example of this. And there are ritual dances where performers don masks of the gods (which have undergone the *panistha* consecration) and acquire divine identity.

Examples of these are found in the annual dance of the Astha Matrika (the eight Mother Goddesses of the Hindu faith) performed by *Bare* boys at Dasain in Patan, and in the 12-yearly *gathu piacham* cycle, performed in a variety of sites through out the Valley by members of Kirtipur's gardener caste; the dancers are possessed by the deities the moment they place the masks over their faces, and this is indicated by a twitching of limbs which sound bells around wrists and ankles.

In the *gathu piacham* it is standard practice for a sheep to be sacrificed to the goddesses on each occasion, and the dancers drink blood from the slit throat of the victim. In return, each community acquires *sakti* from the deified dancers; but in a final ceremony (at the end of the year-long cycle of dances) the dancers "die" as the reserve of *sakti* contained in the masks is depleted. The identity with the divine is lost, and each dancer becomes chief mourner to his mask, bearing it in darkness down to a pyre outside Kirtipur where the mask is burned.

CONCLUSION

The dominant ideology of our own modern, North European, Protestant culture sets us within a disenchanted world, where the fay and the divine have been banished or -- at best -- are constrained within tightly restrictive parameters. The Newars, in contrast, occupy an enchanted universe, where they co-exist with the supernatural.

We have shown, in this context, how the deities most commonly achieve their identity from a combination of iconographic convention, social status achieved through the *panistha* initiation rite and enshrinement, and involvement in a web of social relations.

In turn, we have discussed ways in which the social identity of Newars themselves is expressed through liaison with the gods: affiliation to a social group is indicated by association with specific icons; one's social standing -- as determined by grade of initiation -- is marked by the level of access to the gods; and even one's self-image could be said to be partially defined by the images of gods with which one is surrounded. In some cases, the distinction between God and Man is eliminated, and for a period of time the one is identified with the other.

The Anthropologist of Art seeks to divine the cultural content of an artist's work, an exercise which calls for an understanding of indigenous values and the social context of any art-object. In the enchanted universe of the Newars, the enshrined statues of the gods are imbued with complex layers of significance which are reflected in the production and subsequent worship of these images. The aim of this paper has been to show how -- in this process -- significance reflects back upon the communicants to enhance and bolster their own identity.

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