Heir to a Silent Song
Two Rebel Women of Nepal
Barbara Nimri Aziz
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To
My Sitti Mariam Aziz and my mother Nimri Aziz
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FOREWORD

I am privileged to publish *Heir to a Silent Song: Two Rebel Women of Nepal* by Barbara Nimri Aziz and release it on the 29th anniversary of our Centre. I think it is a right occasion to recapitulate the story behind the publication of this book.

On the 27th anniversary of CNAS, on July 17, 1999 Dr Barbara Nimri Aziz’s private collection of 603 books was formally handed over to Mr Naveen Prakash Jung Shah, Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University, who was the chief guest on the occasion, for the CNAS Documentation and Library. The collection includes the books on Nepalese Studies, Himalayan Studies, Tibetan Studies, Women Studies, Indian Studies, Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, and Anthropology and Sociology. From the time Dr Aziz left the academy, she did not consider the use of these books. Dr Harka Gurung, her long-time friend, suggested the collection be donated to CNAS. Dr Ramesh Dhungel, who was then doing his doctorate degree at Columbia University, was instrumental in bringing the collection from New York to Kathmandu.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Harka Gurung mentioned that Dr Aziz had written the story of Shakti Yogamaya, a woman of exceptional ability, directly challenged the Rana regime and the Brahmanically-determined power structure prevailing in Nepal. The extraordinary movement and the personage of this rebel woman were almost entirely are erased from the history of Nepal. Dr Gurung suggested the publication of Dr Aziz’s work would throw light on the obscured history and assist social scientists in exploring the role of women and peasant people in women studies in Nepal. Therefore, then and there, CNAS took on a commitment to publish the book.

On the 28th anniversary of CNAS, on July 16, 2000, Dr Aziz handed over the manuscript of her work to Chief Guest, Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University for the publication. Speaking on the occasion, she expressed her happiness and gratitude to CNAS for undertaking the publication her work.

Today, on the 29th anniversary of CNAS, I am highly honoured to have this wonderful opportunity to have this book released by Chief Guest, Vice Chancellor.

29th Anniversary of CNAS

July 16, 2001

Prof. Dr Tritha P. Mishra

Executive Director
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many women and men were involved in helping me with this study and with the preparation of this book. First and foremost, I thank the women at Mankamana: Bhaktini Aama in whose home I slept; Mahadidi (Vishnu Maya Dahal) whose recall of the details of Durga Devi’s life in the courts were passionate and exhilarating, and so generously shared; Manamaya, expert in the hazurbani songs of Yogamaya, who insisted I be told all the details. She taught me with humor and patience; Mata (Damodara), head of the hermitage, who received me with complete trust and supervised my initiation. Altogether, thirty-two women embraced me, fed and sheltered me and made me want to stay and study with them.

I could not have accomplished this work without the dedication of two assistants, Jangbu Sherpa and Dharma Shrestha. Both young men were patient, loyal translators and supporters. It was Dharma who suggested I seek out Parizat, a contemporary poet in Kathmandu with a message similar to that of Yogamaya’s. Parizat’s trust and assistance were essential to my ongoing work in Manakamana. From her own dedicated circle came Uttam Pant, Murari Aryal, and Binti Subba. Aryal sought out followers of Yogamaya in Kathmandu and arranged for me to interview retired general Mahadev Shamsher Rana, whose troops had arrested Yogamaya and her followers forty-five years earlier. Uttam Pant interviewed Lochan Nidhi Tiwari who was a first-hand witness and devotee of Yogamaya and who verified details about her activities. Murari Aryal worked with Parizat to prepare the translations of the hazurbani into English. Aryal’s excellent translations made it possible for me to more fully comprehend Yogamaya’s art and her political scope. I feel especially honoured by the quality of their work and dedication to this research. My thanks also go to writer Khagendra Sangraula for his additional translations of hazurbani which we include in the text.
I am indebted to Janaklal Sharma. Mr. Sharma, a historian at the National Museum of Antiquities, was generous with his research, and translated a passage from his book for my use.

This book is not simply the result of my visits to the Arun Valley over a period of five years in the early 1980s. It is the accumulation of my adventures in a long career and my enduring, enriching friendships in Nepal. Personal associates in Nepal’s academic community with whom I have worked are Dor Bahadur Bista, K.P. Malla, Prayag Raj Sharma, Subhadra Subha and Ballav Mani Dahal. Most of us have been friends since 1971, and have enjoyed each other’s companionship both in Nepal, and at various seminars. This includes the first, Seminar of Nepal and Himalayan Studies, convened in London in 1973 by Christoph Führer-Haimendorf, my former professor and the doyen of imperial-Nepalese studies in the West.

From the outset of my career, I have enjoyed and benefitted from the boundless support, confidence and advice of Harka Gurung. We began our association when I was a graduate student in London in 1969 and our collaboration continues into the present with the completion of this book. Gurung contributed to my intellectual development in ways that are immeasurable and no words of thanks would be sufficient for his thirty-two years of friendship. Harka Gurung is an idealist but also a pragmatic man, and he saw to it that I had more than moral support, in the hills as well as in the academy. From the beginning of our discussions about Yogamaya, Gurung voiced the utmost confidence in the women at Manakamana. For him, they were the true custodians of this history. Both he and Parizat were especially insightful about their people and their literature. They knew that Nepal was capable of producing a Yogamaya and Durga Devi. They had no difficulty accepting the widows’ reports.

Dr. Gurung also introduced me to Dambar Bahadur Basnet, who, although we met only once, shared little-known details and his own personal impressions about Yogamaya with me. Basnet was a former minister who originated in Kulung, the same village where Yogamaya was born. Some of his own relatives perished with her and, although he was a child at the time, his memory of the rebel was clear.
Basnet was unique among officials I met in his admiration for Yogamaya’s work. He provided me with the quote: “I am not only aiming at that tyrant. My goal is Point Zero.” He also told me her reply to the young herdsman who confronted her at Tordhapur Cave in the mountains: “I am not a god. I am the very one discarded and despised by society. As such, I am compelled to prove my innocence.”

Mark Oppitz, currently director of the Völkerkundemuseum in Zurich, Switzerland, and Mimi Church who worked with Save the Children Fund, were residents in Kathmandu during the 1980s. Both hosted me in their homes, allowing me the solitude to reflect and to rest after hard weeks of research. I am especially indebted to Oppitz for encouraging me to explore creative ways to articulate our adventures with the people of Nepal.

Numerous others hosted me – farmers whose names I did not know – during my work in Nepal as I walked from village to village. I learned about their lives as I witnessed them at work in their fields, passed them on the trails, and ate and slept inside their homes.

Two special people, Parizat and her sister Sukanya Waiba, helped me comprehend in political and economic terms what I observed on the Nepalese landscape. In Kathmandu, I sometimes slept over at their cottage, and while there, learned the stories and histories of the men and women who arrived to ask for help and advice. Sukanya is a remarkable woman for her dedication to her sister, but also for her own political efforts and commitment to helping the poor, and educating children. In her and Parizat’s busy, welcoming home, I witnessed her deep compassion for her people. I shall always remember Sukanya’s cheerfulness and warmth and I thank her for our many joyful evenings together.

Later, back in the United States, I also enjoyed a close personal association with Manjula Giri who was completing graduate studies at the City University of New York. We often spoke about the politics and economic conditions in her country, including the critical 1990 revolt and the formation of a new democracy, and I learned a great deal from her about international politics in general. Being able to critically discuss the western women’s movement with her was also important for my development. Fellow anthropologist Ramesh
Dhungal is another Nepali scholar who I knew in New York. He has been helpful in many ways. I also benefitted from my long association with journalist and publisher Kanak Dixit whose advice about journalism was especially valuable when I decided to move into that field.

Critical stages of this work was funded by various research organizations and I thank them for that support. A National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship financed my first two visits to the Arun Valley; awards from the American Philosophical Society and the American Council of Learned Societies helped me work on the translations of the poems and related research. From 1985 to 1986, I was hosted by the Tokyo University of Foreign Affairs Institute for Languages an Cultures of Africa and Asia. Their generous visiting professorship offered me the time and environment to ponder over my findings and experiment with alternatives to a pure ‘scholarly’ presentation of anthropology. I especially want to thank former director Najimi Kitamura and Shigeru Ijima for making that professorship possible. Thanks also to Hidehiro Okada and Junko Miyawaki in Tokyo, and to my longtime colleague E. Gene Smith of the Library of Congress who resided in India for many years while I was working there and in Nepal. Smith is one of the few ‘Orientalists’ who understood the quintessential power of songs in a people’s history. He encouraged me to follow the ‘traces,’ however faint they seemed, in order to move into the heart of a culture.

I had help from others who freely gave their time to read various versions of the manuscript: Gabrielle Burton, Pat Caplan, Lionel Caplan, Patricia Graham-Collier, Veronica Golos, John Hitchcock, Ron David, M.B. Naqvi, Barbara Soros, Suzi Tharu, and Janice Willis. To all of them I owe my sincere thanks, and especially to Helen Giambruni for her attention to the manuscript and her encouragement in the early states of this project. Final preparation of the manuscript for publication was facilitiated by Nirmal Man Tuladhar of CNAS, Tribhuvan University. His humour, grace and help with important final details made what may otherwise be a tense and painful process, a delight. He and his wife Padma also hosted me at their home in Kathmandu while I prepared the book for printing. I thank him for his kindness and support.
In the late 1980s, my membership in John O. Killins writer’s workshop at Medger Evers College in Brooklyn, New York was important in my development and I am indebted to John Killins for inviting me, and to Anne Wilson, Bertram Baisden and other members of the workshop.

Much work is still needed so that we know the complete histories of Yogamaya and Durga Devi. To encourage ongoing interest in Yogamaya we have included one volume of hazurbani in its original Nepali edition as an appendix to this text. I hope all the hazurbani can be recovered and translated and that court records will come to light before long, so that other activists can expand this preliminary work and provide us with a more thorough account of this phase in Nepal’s history. This is a task which only Nepalese people can do. And I am especially heartened to see so many Nepalese activists and scholars presently pursuing the history of Yogamaya. A new publication Poet Yogamaya – Pioneer in Social Protest (see Further Readings), devoted to the history of the Yogi and reformer, was launched on July 12, 2000, her birth anniversary in Kathmandu.

Many of the women at Manakamana who helped me, have since passed on to join their master in heaven. Parizat too passed away, in 1993. I am sorry they are not here to see this book in print, but I am certain they understood my commitment and were confident I would do my part in keeping their legacy.

Barbara Nimri Aziz
Cultural

Nepal's 21 million people are a highly diverse population. Several religions are practiced in Nepal. More than one hundred languages and dialects are spoken here. Nepali, the national language is used by almost everyone but it is the mother tongue of only 50.4% of the population.

Nepal is composed of three cultural/ecological belts: Tarai (plains along the south, bordering India), hills, and mountain regions bordering Tibet. Different combinations of people occupy each tract. Some tribes, such as Rai, who are the majority in the east, are not found in west Nepal. The Newar people, are mainly concentrated in Kathmandu valley, but live in towns throughout Nepal. Brahmin and Chhetri dominate across the west, but have penetrated through the hills – traditional homelands of the many hill tribes – bringing Hindu influence into the interior of the country.

The Arun valley of East Nepal is a dynamic region in terms of migration, trade, cultural diversity, land transfers, crop cultivation.

For centuries, Nepal has been subject to strong influence from India. Indian influence was furthered by the closure of Tibet after 1959, ending Tibet-Nepal trade and other trans-Himalayan interaction. Increased south-orientation stimulated the expansion of Hinduism. Caste, formerly strong only in the Tarai and the cities, has become characteristic of hill life in the past 200 years, although Nepal has been an official Hindu kingdom since the time of unification in 1769.

The national legal code, the Muluki Ain, adopted in 1854, was based on the classical Hindu caste laws of Manu. This law among other things defines rules of marriage and inheritance. Revised in 1963, its reform value for women was negligible.
Economic

Nepal opened to the world in 1951, and foreign influence grew steadily from then on. First, through mountaineering, then tourism, this affected Nepal's economy. Today, tourism is the primary industry in Nepal with handicraft, garment and carpet industries and mountain-related travel employing over 500,000. Most business is concentrated in Kathmandu valley which has swollen in size to about 1.3 million people. While the tourist related sector flourishes, agriculture, on which most Nepalese depend and where women are mainly employed, is in decline. Food production is decreasing and in contrast to ten years ago, Nepal is now a grain importer.

Huge amounts of foreign aid and expertise affect Nepal's economy and culture, though not always positively. Despite foreign aid the economy is in general decline and is characterized by corruption. Since 1990, 25,000 non-governmental organizations have set up in Nepal, with the declared aim of developing the country. An elitist class has emerged from corruption and foreign-aid largesse. Government schools are deteriorating and other social services are poor.

Political

Early period: In 1769, the country was united under Prithvi Narayan Shah, former ruler of Gorkha. The kingdom's political boundaries today are twice what they were then. Nepal was never colonized by a European or Asian power, although British influence in Nepal during its rule in India was strong. Nepal's then rulers, the Ranas, co-operated with the British. After that, Indian political influence over Nepal continued. The Shah family has long been the nominal head of state, but for 104 years, up to 1951, Nepal was ruled by a succession of autocratic Rana prime-ministers who passed on their office by primogeniture. Under their rule, vast areas of cultivatable land were taken from the original hill people to high caste Hindus. From 1951 to 1959 an elected parliament governed. In 1960, dictatorship returned, headed this time by the Shah king.

Democracy movement: In 1990, a non-violent movement of a coalition of opposition groups – conservative, communist and other
anti-monarchy parties—succeeded in overthrowing the dictatorship. Nepal became a constitutional monarchy. The king remained supreme commander of the army. The royal family also retained its estates and treasures, and other privileges.

1990 – present
A series of elected parliaments, sometimes led by a conservative, sometimes by a communist party, has governed Nepal. Citizens enjoy press freedom; ethnic-national activities are flourishing; there is renewed interest in ‘national’ languages.

1995 – present
A significant and growing Maoist movement has emerged and in five years has become a major political influence, with activities in at least 46 out of Nepal’s 75 districts. It is most active in the western, poorest regions of Nepal. There is wide sympathy in the country for their ideals, and negotiations are underway between Maoist leaders and the government.

Women
As citizens of a Hindu kingdom, Nepalese are subject to Hindu religious law which circumscribes women’s rights. In the 19th century, sati, widow immolation was banned. In 1963, the revised Muluki Ain, the national code, lowered from 45 to 35, the age when unmarried or widowed women are entitled to their property share. Child marriage was banned in 1963, but the practice is still common among orthodox Hindus. The Muluki Ain gives women inheritance and divorce rights; in practice, these are not commonly exercised. Abortion is against the law and women can be imprisoned for this. The rape of women goes often unpunished, and trafficking in women is significantly high. Polygamy, though not sanctioned by the Muluki Ain, is common, especially among higher caste Hindus. Members of parliament in the new democracy are known to have two or more wives.

Women were prominent in the democracy movement in 1990 and in earlier resistance campaigns. Women have held cabinet posts in successive governments since 1990. The new election law of 1991
stipulates that each party should include at least 5% in its women candidature. Women are active in parties but are not found in the leadership.

Being one of the poorest countries in the world, Nepal’s women are correspondingly weak in economic power, literacy, health, and political clout. Women’s organizations are numerous. Many donor agencies focus on women, but they seem to have had little impact.
"I am not only aiming at that tyrant.  
My goal is Point Zero."

Shakti Yogamaya
The author, left, with Damodara, right, at Manakamana

Sanyasi Nanda Devi, devotee to Yogamaya and resident of Manakamana
Damodara in meditation, Manakamana

Vishnumaya Dahal (Mahili Didi), left, companion of Durga Devi from 1948-1973, at her home in Manakamana with other sanyasi
Since 1970, I have been writing about the lives and the history of the inhabitants of Nepal and their neighbors. As a field ethnographer, I was trained to rely on observation and quantification of empirical facts. These 'facts' would be culled from thousands of interviews and observations of the minutiae of people's lives. The patterns that emerged would then be substantiated by local or academic authorities. Finally, they would be checked against the work of earlier anthropologists and historians.

Walking through the hills East Nepal in 1981, I came upon a history two rural women that would not fit the conventional methods of verification. Both women died some years before I arrived. Barely a trace remained of their achievements. Silence greeted my inquiries. The only people willing to talk to me were a group of religious ascetics (bhaktini), women leading isolated lives at a quiet riverside temple. Searching for 'facts,' I found myself involved with stories I could not verify by normal scientific means. The two women I wanted to learn more about had undertaken important political work. Their story was especially significant because they were dissidents, and fought for women's rights as well as justice for the poor and low caste people. Their names were Yogamaya and Durga Devi. These village women called for justice for their people long before the women's rights and civil rights movements in the West. They deserved attention. Their history emerged in the least expected place.

These Nepalese women's work was also significant because it revealed that these women, or anyone, could devise bold and innovative solutions to injustice. They confronted formidable opposition and oppressive regimes, and without international declarations or "human rights" commissions. In these tales there were less facts than in the slave narratives of African Americans. My main source of information was elderly women who, although once they had one been dissidents, seemed unlikely experts. I had to learn to trust their authority.
I had few facts to work with regarding the two deceased dissident leaders. The shrouded widows at the retreat where I would make my base, greeted me as if they had been waiting forty years to tell their story. But they did not begin by declaring "We were 2000 oppressed peasants, young and idealistic, looking for a feminist to get us out of our exploitative marriages, end patriarchy, criminalize wife abuse, and introduce a democracy giving us inheritance rights and equal pay." In their quiet way they began, step by step, to teach me about the lady they called Shakti Yogamaya and then about Durga Devi. Yogamaya employed religious ideals in a non-violent challenge to Nepal’s Brahmanic patriarchy and the elitist structure the high-caste Hindus established across Nepal. She advocated social reforms for equality for women. Yogamaya was born in Kulung village, in the upper reaches of the Arun River. The center of her movement was at a nearby riverside clearing, Majhuwa. From there she dispatched appeals for justice to the then ruler of Nepal, Juddha Shamsher Shah (1932-1945) who wielded absolute power. Although the number of Yogamaya’s followers increased, the authorities dismissed her. But, after a decade long struggle, in 1940, it took an army to drive her to her death. Following her passing, the survivors moved down-river to a shrine, Manakamana. This is where I encountered the group of women who would tell me the story. Shrouded in threadbare saris, thin shawls covering their shaven heads, they seemed a stereotype of humility and passivity. Slipping barefoot along paths, repeating Hare Ram. Hare Ram. Ram Ram, Hare Ram, they prayed throughout the day. I did not suspect that they were anything but simple, illiterate women practicing what seemed like mindless devotion and servitude. Yet half a century earlier, when they were young and newly married with infants, these women had been political dissidents. From that remote mist-filled valley, they had challenged the authority of the palace in Kathmandu.

The second woman, Durga Devi, died only in 1973. She was from Palikot village, across the river from Manakamana. She pursued court cases, and waged a campaign against corrupt and indolent bureaucrats in local district offices. Petitioners regularly trudged to Durga’s house seeking help, but she had no community of followers.
Although a widow, she was irreligious. She possessed legal skills and became an advocate for women’s rights. She demanded competence and fairness from civil servants. She used the courts in a series of disputes. Both these women’s voices had been quieted by the time I arrived in the valley in 1981. But they were loud enough for me to grasp.

Once convinced of their authenticity, assembling the stories about these Nepalese women had to be a People’s history. This required different skills than the ones I had been trained in. I had to rid myself of my own patriarchal bias regarding who and what was an authority. I had to abandon the ideal of objectivity, an assumption that I as a scholar could witness things and events without any subjective feeling about them. Objectivity according to social science standards was an obstacle. I had to apply other criteria. This history demanded a devotion to my subjects – these two long-dead women. Early on, I knew the demands would be special.

On the first night at the shrine with the widows – I intended only to stop the night and then move on – I heard verses sung by the women. The next morning, the women inquired when I was born. Discovering it was within weeks of the death of their master, Yogamaya, they moved towards me. It was as if they had been waiting forty years to teach someone the story of the lady, Shakti Yogamaya.

Over a period of five years, from 1981 to 1986, I returned six times to the Arun Valley hermitage at Manakamana where these widows lived. My stays were almost like an apprenticeship. I gathered some details, then went away, seeking other authorities, only to return to sit with the widows and pursue my inquiries at their side, near the places where their champions had waged their struggles.

The essence of the reform movements I studied relied on the accounts of survivors. From them I gathered more traces of the story of the two women who had devoted their lives to opposing dictatorship, corruption and abuse, fighting for the basic rights of the peasantry and women. I collected the songs – verses which were the main medium of Yogamaya’s campaign. The verses needed no historian to evaluate. One needed to know only the political realities of their time.
The need to gather the details of the story forced me to familiarize myself with the political history and economy of Nepal. Beyond the smiling Nepalese peasants carrying loads of grass through the forest; beyond the grunt of the porter plodding up a mountain; past the migration of children to the cities, right to the callousness of government clerks. I educated myself to comprehend the breadth of abuse, the absoluteness of Rana rule, the limits on women’s rights, the tragedy of child marriage and widowhood, the dominance of Brahmanic right, the process of indebtedness and land loss. Only then did the early political campaigns of these women make complete sense. And, the forces those reformers were up against was formidable.

The experience of finding enlightened, energetic women in rural Nepal forced me look into my own history as an Asian woman—the child of peasant farmers from a corner of the Arab world. According to prevailing Western feminist thought, suffragettes did not come from our homelands. When I learned about the work of women in Nepal, I asked “Why not?” From the example of my grandmother and mother, I knew the capacity of Eastern women. I knew my ancestors’ achievements and their dignity. How they were obscured by the prevailing ‘missionary’ attitude held by ‘experts’ about ‘other’ women. We were seen only as victims.

It was up to us to reclaim our heritage. To celebrate the women of our culture who overcame and prevailed, and led a struggle for equality for all of us.

There were local obstacles to my research to overcome. By the time I arrived in the Arun Valley in 1981, Yogamaya had been dead forty years, Durga Devi eight. Among locals their careers were acknowledged. Yet, not publicly. Instead, their exemplary work remained a shadowy microcosm of ‘women’s stories’ or rumors. According to the authorities, these dissidents achieved nothing.

It became evident to me that these women did not simply slip away into obscurity. They were pushed. Public dismissals of Yogamaya and Durga Devi as fanatics and troublemakers were deliberate. The efforts made to ensure that these women’s history was
never known bring us face to face with a central issue in history making – the application of selective memory. Those in control—from the Rana despot to the officials, priests and teachers, judges and merchants—conspired to keep women as a whole out of Nepal's history. Those in power placed themselves at the center and women at the edge. Not only did authorities refuse to acknowledge their own failures and the need for reforms, which these women highlighted—they denied these women. They were obscured.

The motives for the obfuscation of Yogamaya and Durga Devi were partly economic, partly political, and partly due to patriarchal biases. Neither of these reformers asked for funds to implement changes. There were no costly projects from which profiteers could gain. Yogamaya’s and Durga’s solutions offered no financial benefits to officials.

During our inquiries about Yogamaya in East Nepal and in Kathmandu, our leads to sources were cut off. Fear of a resurgence of her teachings? Or because of moral responsibility connected with Yogamaya’s and her followers’ deaths?

Yogamaya and sixty-eight men, women and children perished with her in a mass suicide. Most of them were Brahmin. According to the prevailing Hindu moral code, now as well as then, if suicides result from non-violent attempts to seek a dialogue with authorities, the government is responsible for their deaths. In Nepal, a Hindu kingdom, such suicides may be construed as 'Brahmin murder.' This may explain why the authorities banned all reference to Yogamaya following her death. It may also be why they covered up the episode sixty years later when I began my inquiries. The nation has never had a public accounting of the death of Yogamaya.

The secretiveness surrounding these women also results from misogyny, in the past and now. In this case, both Durga and Yogamaya threatened male-dominated institutions. Men found their challenges intolerable. They dismissed Shakti Yogamaya as morally inferior. Even today, rumours persist that “she was (just) a religious fanatic who threw herself into the river in an nihilistic fervor.” Sexual laxity was another characterization of Yogamaya. They say she was a prostitute and her followers were sexual deviants. The kindest rumour about
Yogamaya was that she was a communist. At least that appellation acknowledged her political character.

As for Durga Devi, she was brushed aside after her death. She was ‘too smart’ in the courts, and could not be compromised. But in the public’s consciousness, Durga was made to appear ‘mad.’

Of all Durga’s causes, her last campaign, the pursuit of justice for a violated girl, was the chief reason for her profound obscurity. Had it not been for Durga’s attention to that child, the girl may have ‘disappeared,’ or run away to India. Instead, thanks to Durga, the child stayed in her village, became a mother, and a citizen of the town which had wronged her. Her presence reminded people of crimes against girls. The community Durga challenged and shamed sought to deny her accomplishments. She was a firebrand, a scourge in their otherwise unchallenged routines. For the women and other exploited peasants she championed, Durga was a heroine and saviour. She did not stop because of critics, and like Yogamaya, Durga was not intimidated by social convention.

If we have an enduring lesson from Durga, it’s her example of extraordinary love of law. Although her style appeared to be militant, and her view of the courts irreverent, Durga’s regard for civil law was profound. Durga had such respect for the system of justice she grew up in, that she was determined to make it work, even with its defects. She fought people who ignored or abused the law. Much of her efforts were over women’s inheritance rights and in defence of wronged woman. It took Durga eight years to win her own property rights. According to the law, a woman can claim her share of her husband’s property after his death. This is particularly important since many women are married as children and become widows even before they co-habit with their husbands. They are young and vulnerable and easily exploited by their husband’s relatives. Even if she is not abused, a widow feels alone and helpless. She fears that if she does not comply with the family’s demands, she will find herself without even a roof over her head.

To fight injustice in her culture and in her time, to be at all effective, Durga decided early in her life that she had to challenge people face to face, whether a brother-in-law (her dewar), a judge or a merchant or a simple clerk. That became her strategy, her style.
Durga was also a modest woman, despite her boisterous, confrontational manner. Dramatic accounts of her challenging people are many, but there are few stories about her tender-heartedness and generosity. She never turned away a petitioner. She bought the land at Manakamana when the widows approached her for help. Thanks to Durga's endowment, for thirty years Manakamana hermitage has provided a place where widows, abused wives, abandoned daughters, and other women in need can enjoy some security and independence.

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History books do not mention Yogamaya. Yet, Dambar Basnet, leading a secular life in Kathmandu, a man who had served in the king's cabinet before democracy was reinstated in 1990, was not afraid to speak of the Yogi. He remembered her with tremendous respect and love. No doubt hundreds if not thousands of others feel similarly.

In 1983, during my fourth visit to Manakamana, a woman took her life in the river. When the head of the hermitage, Mata, disclosed the news to me, she added quietly, "Some women step into the waters of the Arun even today. What they are doing is political, not religious." Mata believed that these women were reenacting Yogamaya's protest. But, if this were true, these deaths would never be recorded as protest, even if the woman openly declared her political intent. History and the authorities would take over to say: "These unfortunate widows. They are so devoted to God."

My young assistant and translator Dharma Shrestha accepted these dismissals before he began our work together on this project. He and many other local youngsters had been told Yogamaya was a frustrated widow, her suicide no more than a fanatical act. How could he know her campaign was a dream to move his country forward? Until he met the women at Manakamana shrine, how could he imagine that Yogamaya had any connection to his family, to him, or that she offered alternatives for his dear aunt, his lonely father's sister? Before he knew about Durga Devi or Yogamaya, he never perceived his widowed aunt as someone whose rights were denied her, or as someone with any rights at all.

*The light is inside you. Look again.*

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About the time Durga Devi was wrapping up her career in the early 1970s, western feminists were discovering that in Europe and the United States, many of their ancestors' achievements had been excluded from European and American histories. Their predecessors, they found, had accomplished more than was recorded in the supposed authoritative early European and American chronicles. Women had done far more than campaign for the right to vote, or tend the wounded and dying in past wars. They had plowed and built, navigated and taught, provided and defended, remembered and written. They ran the factories while men were at war and they led revolts of slaves. Findings by anthropologists showed the so-called hunting peoples were sustained not by the meat men brought back from their hunts, but rather by the gathering work of the women. Another observation revealed how perishables, the tools of women – straw, wood and pottery – could figure in the repositories scientists use to understand the economy of early societies. A deluge of books by scholars followed these pioneers. Each added more evidence of the biased western historians and scientists. They sought to right the record by subjecting those social and economic models to re-examination.

The feminists of the late 20th century began to document their history with new standards. Books by western women offered revealing self-examinations about western values, social structure and gender. They highlighted the link between the personal and the political. Moreover, western women's creative writing, and thereby literature in general, was propelled to new heights through that self-exploration. Many feminists were social scientists. They realized how narrow and male-oriented their training and research had been, and they began to reshape the nature of their inquiries and analyzes. Comparative cultural studies were given a major boost. With their self-discoveries, European and American scholars and journalists became zealous, and sought to export their idea of liberation. Anthropologists like myself took that excitement with us into our research fields abroad – to Asia and the Middle East and Africa. With new pride, we were eager to demonstrate the universal traditions of women thinkers and creators. This was not as easy as we supposed. We set out on a global mission before we really understood the obstinacy of our own cultural
values, and the persistence of Orientalist biases in our work. We were stuck in the same paradigms as earlier generations. We could not get rid ourselves of an attitude of cultural superiority. Our ethnocentrism lingered on.

When we arrived in Nepal or China, Guatemala or Nigeria, some of us launched into a campaign to document how bad, or, how much worse, things were for ‘other’ women. Many writers, in that phase of zealotry about their “enlightenment,” assumed Third World women were left behind. We became intrigued by the biology and domesticity of other women as if they were “exotic.” Studies poured forth documenting global women’s puberty, their fecundity, their nursing habits, menopausal dynamics, their dowries and wedding customs, their mothering and cooking practices.

The original idea behind comparative women’s studies was to find similarities to help women unite worldwide. Instead, differences often prevailed. In some respects, a western feminist replaced the Christian missionary, convinced she was bringing “advanced” enlightenment. Looking at their still “unliberated” sisters in the rest of the world, her attitude was "Let me help you, give you, show you – poor thing." That was global solidarity as defined by feminist “missionaries.”

Limited and distorted views of global women was manifest in anthropology as well as journalism and political history. Before the 1980s, anthropologists' richly textured studies had largely ignored women. She might be a daughter-of, a mother-of, a wife-of, but this was all. The woman's father was our expert, her son was our translator and her husband was our storyteller. He was the farmer, the dissident, the migrant, the person with time to sit with us. "She does not know your language," or "She is too shy," said the men. Or she simply wasn't there (– because she was working in the fields, with the animals, with the children).

Occasionally an article or book profiled selected women in those distant places to show her possibilities as a secretary, a professor, a doctor\(^1\). If a non-European woman achieved high office, it had to be through some dynastic inheritance rather than by her merits. An Indian, or Arab, or Cuban businesswoman did not exist in Western
chronicles. Any farmer or guru had to be a man. Did we ever dream we might find a Bengali Mary Stanton, a Ghanaian Harriet Tubman, a Thai Emily Dickinson?

My own narrow assumptions about women worldwide were influenced by my education in western universities and from the writings of the new feminists. I didn’t imagine in Nepal I might find activists similar to Mother Jones and Sojourner Truth, two early American dissidents and reformers. How could a woman raised in America and England, even though she was of Arab origin, imagine she might find her true ancestors in Nepal? I was only one generation removed from milking goats and cutting grass. I never thought to tell those villagers in Nepal my own mother grew up in a household like theirs. Or, that she could winnow as skillfully as they did; or how she toiled from the age of seven as they did. My mother wanted to forget and I did too.

Having been educated in the west, I subscribed to the notion that any worthy heroine must be from advanced, progressive Europe. Later I realized this was a myth.

When the time came for me to undertake my research with my new “feminist” awareness, I did not set out in search of the ‘victim’ model of the Asian woman. That was a misguided approach, one drenched with western academic bias. I simply made a modest commitment to spend more time with the women I would meet in Nepal, listen to them, speak to them as people having something in common with myself. I had no grand theory. I thought perhaps I could contribute a portrait of an ordinary woman – perhaps write a biography of a farmer, porter, or shopkeeper, girl or grandmother.

An African American colleague, writer Anne Wilson, told me how important African history was for her as a person of African descent. “We do not know what we are capable of,” she said, “unless we know what our predecessors have achieved in the past.” A colleague in Iraq, an archeologist at the National Museum in Baghdad, presented this same idea in another way. He was speaking about the importance of teaching Iraqi young people the accomplishments of their 6000 year civilization, even during these bleak years under siege. Professor Doni George explained “History is like a bow string which we draw back to create tension behind the arrow. The further back we can draw it, the swifter and farther ahead the arrow will travel.”

Perhaps women don’t know our own capacity because we often remained ignorant about the basic achievements of women – village and urban women. Education, for example. Consider Durga Devi’s ability in law. Durga received private education and extensive training from her father; Nainakala, Yogamaya’s daughter, learned to read and write from her own aunt and later documented her mother’s verses. In my own family, I grew up thinking my mother, all women in my family, and all Arab village women, were illiterate. Only after Sitti, my grandmother, passed on, did I realize she had been literate! She read her Holy Book every day. Her daughter, my mother, had not continued that tradition in the Arab lands where she was born nor had she attended school in the west where our family immigrated. In the process of resettling, she had to work to support the family. She was a young, strong woman and her labour was of more immediate value than her literacy. Somehow my grandmother’s literacy in Arabic had been missed. It did not count into my history, until I made the connection.

Who will redeem the woman warriors, workers and scholars from the history of the Himalayas, the jungles and plains and cities, Egypt and Yemen, India and Nepal? As an Arab woman, I can also relate to the heroines in Western culture. Part of me responds to the social critics Simone de Bouvouir and Gloria Steiman, the novelists Toni Morrison and Margaret Atwood, for example. But they are only part of my intellect and part of my history. I need the Egyptian educators who fought against Imperial rule, Huda Sharawi and Nawal
el-Saadawi², and Khadija the mother of the Prophet Mohammed. I need Indian activist and actress Shabana Azmi, and Nepal’s poet and activist Parizat. Their battles are class ones, economic, political and anti-colonial. These Asian women also embody something of my mother and grandmothers and their mothers, who, after all, cannot be omitted from my link to women in history.

Our Asian and African women possess long histories and abundant experiments in civilization. The lives of Yogamaya and Durga Devi, two Nepalese, demonstrate the leadership of which women are capable. Surely their histories are tangible and forceful examples of Anne Wilson's and Iraqi archeologist Doni George's points. Knowing we did this, we begin to fathom our capacity.

How can Yogamaya and Durga Devi nourish us—women and men—in Nepal and elsewhere?

We need look no further than the hazurbani, the songs of the dissident which Yogamya composed and uttered when she came out of her meditations. They aroused thousands to come together and call for radical political change. Her verses could be a vital bridge between past and present. Today’s protestors employ songs to inspire, to unite, and to propel them towards their goals. If now, why not then?

We will learn about Durga’s response to the rape of a deaf child thirty years ago, and understand. Every Nepalese can recall an incident during the 1990 revolution for democracy when college girls demonstrated at their Pokhara campus, and some were arrested and taken to jail. When news spread that one student was raped, reportedly by the police, it ignited outrage across the land, that fueled more mass political protests calling for the ruler to step down.

Once I overcame my biases I could easily imagine the widows at the hermitage as twenty-year-old women with husbands and children, with girlfriends, and teen age brothers. When Manamaya and

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2. *The Nawal El-Saadawi Reader*, a collection of this thinker’s essays was published by St. Martin’s and Zed press in 1997, and this was followed by *A Daughter of Isis*. Saadawi’s autobiography in 1999, by the same publishers. Leila Ahmed, in her recent autobiography *A Border Passage: A Woman’s Journey* (Penguin, 2000) gives us another important collection of the thoughts of an Arab woman, about personal and political issues.
Bhaktini Aama, two widows at Manakamana, spoke the *hazurbani*, I saw them transformed back to their youth.

And when poet Parizat, first read the *hazurbani* of Yogamaya, she declared, “Yogamaya is my ancestor and her verses my legacy.” I agreed. I titled this book “Heir To A Silent Song.”

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When I spoke to Mata, the head of the widows’ hermitage, during my last visit to her home in 1986, she was deeply troubled by the course of economic developments in Nepal. When we walked together along the sandbar or sat overlooking the river bank, watching women and men at their work, or seeing funerary parties arrive at the burning ghat, or passing travellers en-route to their homes, Mata remarked with compassion about their difficulties. She mainly talked to me about the corruption that continued to infest her country. She was angry about the ineptitude of government, seeing the swelling bureaucracy, witnessing ‘experts’ coming and going, and all the while the lives of farmers remaining static or deteriorating further.

Desperate and rejected women come to Mata for help and she is reminded by them of what difficulties women still face. She hears repeated testimonies about their husbands taking of a second wife, girls betrothed as children, widows losing their land, porters robbed on the road, and Brahmanic tyranny. Mata watches women and men trek to the riverside to beseech Lord Arun for the help they cannot find elsewhere. She does not believe in the power of the Arun river god or the goddess Manakamana and does not like to see offerings wasted on them. Yet, what choice do these poor people have? Many women come to Mata seeking a home at the temple. “How many can I help?” she asks.

म भगवान हँडेन । म समाजले तिरस्कार र घुणा गरेको मान्छे हुं।

*Though I am the one who is despised by society, and discarded,*

*I have to prove my innocence.*

3. See Chapter 7, Conclusion, for some notes about “development” in Nepal.
Mata knew the army still remained watchful and she worried the government would put down any resurgence of Yogamaya’s powerful verses. Yet, each time I returned, she asked me if the hazurbani I had collected on tape and taken away had been broadcast over Radio Nepal, or in a distant land. Mata hoped to lay the ground for a new program that would somehow tackle the enduring ills of her people.

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Redeeming these women was an evolutionary process for me, connected with my re-education and my self-empowerment. At first, I was exhilarated by the drama of Yogamaya’s and Durga Devi’s lives. I found both women clever and heroic. I did not care if they were relevant or not to contemporary Nepal. Before long, struggling to document and understand their work, I was obliged to learn about political conditions. I looked more closely at the special difficulties of women, at the power of Brahmins. I asked: why does a farmer leave his fields to become a porter? Why are girls sent from home to the city? Why is a Nepal-made carpet so cheap, and how can children be employed as weavers? How is land lost, and why a teacher posted to a school in the hills feels lonely? How does money for a project disappear, and what do foreign humanitarian workers do with their salaries?

When confronting patriarchal restrictions in Nepalese society, I began to recognize them in my own society and how they worked on me: in the academy, in the media, in American politics. Eventually, I found the academy too confining. Scholarly language was inappropriate for the biographical style called for in this research. I had to step out of the scholar’s weighty garb to see, and then reject the role anthropology and history played in the mythologizing of peoples—Arab and Muslim, Nepalese and Buddhist. As I continued this work I examined the myths I had accepted about my own Arab people, and that led me to the Middle East, where I devoted most of my energy for the past decade. There I am engaged in self-education and journalism, and in the daunting task of trying to counter the myths and ignorance perpetrated in the west.
Whatever resistance and obstacles I encountered in assembling the stories you will read here, it only helped me pursue my immediate goals in Nepal more effectively, and with deeper understanding. This awakening happened over many years, and it continues. The moment of decision to enter on this path came when my translator Dharma saw how responsive I was to the hazurbani, and advised “when you reach Kathmandu, there is a political woman there you can meet. She writes songs which the young people sing when they move through Nepal, teaching the peasants their rights. Her name is Parizat.” That was the first time I had heard this woman’s name, although I had been concerned with Nepal for more than twelve years! I set out in search of Parizat.

So, one hot afternoon in 1981, after returning from my second visit to the hills of the Arun Valley, I found myself at the entrance to the house of the poet, in the quiet neighborhood of Maipi on the western edge of the capital. In those days the area was not as crowded and densely inhabited as it is today. There were only a few cottages scattered among the paddy gardens, and you reached them by way of narrow paths between the fields. The area was inaccessible to cars, so I left the taxi some distance away and arrived in the neighborhood on foot. Bushes lined the earthen path. As I proceeded along, I saw a rickety wooden gate, and behind it, more green shrubs on either side of a worn path that led to a small cottage beyond. Parizat was expecting me, and was waiting for me inside. But a man in a police uniform stood a few meters in front of the gate. He carried neither a weapon nor a stick. He was posted there because this was the house of an “enemy of the king.” He was there to note the arrival and departure of any activists or other ‘troublemakers’ – students, editors or poor women and men who came to this house day and night. Parizat was a dissident and a strong critic of the government. People arrived here in search of her counsel. Bulletins were drawn up and distributed. Poems and essays were collected and printed, assemblies and committee meetings planned. Men released from prison received succour. Poor people came for a few week’s work, or a place to sleep while in the city, or a small loan to pay for a bus back to their village or to stop the banker
from foreclosing on their mortgage. A runaway girl found shelter and work.

The policeman stood to the side of the gate, not obstructing the passage. This fellow would add my name to a list of suspects, an archive of the hundreds of thousands of patriots determined to secure their freedom. I hesitated for an instant. Then I pulled up the latch on the cross bar and walked ahead.
“... *Death will never perish.*

*Peasants starve, landless die to become an endless column marching arm in arm, each hand a fist.*

*Death becomes a bayonet, pointing to the oppressors. It strikes!*

from “Mreetyu” by Parizat¹

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¹ Translated by M. Aryal and B. Soros. Verses from “Mreetyu” appear in Chapters 3, 5 and 7.
Chapter 1

TO THE RIVER'S EDGE

In 1990, the Nepalese people launched a countrywide protest to win back democracy, and end two generations of dictatorial rule. A remarkable demonstration of will and with no outside help, the Nepalese persisted, and prevailed. Farmers – women and men – and their children, graying mothers and indignant grandfathers, seething students and angry professors, lawyers and shopkeepers, weavers and milk vendors, doctors and unemployed lads and their sisters advanced towards the palace gates of Kathmandu. Many fell, stopped by bullets from King Birendra’s guards. Twisted corpses of youth were dumped in mass graves; sticky brains and caking blood-stained sidewalks, while nearby, royal statues lay smashed, pulled from their bases by the crowds moving ever closer to the palace. Waves of protesters moved forward. Police beat them and bound them. There were so many whom they captured that the army had to hastily construct prisons in open fields to cage them.

During those fiery weeks of 1990, mothers formed a human wall to defend their homes against the army, and liberated the whole town of Patan not far from the capital. The countryside erupted too, and across the hills, government posts came under siege. Offices of non-governmental organizations and the foreign embassies were strangely mute, and the representatives of western democracies and

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2. In 1951 with the end of the Rana dictatorship, a democratically elected government held power until 1959 when King Mahendra staged a coup and assumed absolute authority. This dictatorship was continued by his son, King Birendra.
socialist nations alike stood silent. Not until it was clear the ruler was doomed, would foreign press carry reports about the struggle. Doubtless foreign intelligence agents kept their capitals informed, but publicly none denounced the terror, and no embassy’s foreign office openly commented on the actions of the king’s army.

Resistance could not be wiped out. Even without CNN television coverage or human rights commissions, the Nepalese acted. City commerce came to a halt. Many protestors had nephews and grandsons and granddaughters enjoying freedoms abroad. But they wanted their own liberty at home. Doctors, retired lawyers and librarians joined sit-ins at town squares nationwide, and united with the crowds in their advance towards the palace. Communist marched with civil servant, poet with peon, travel agent with teacher. The palace gates themselves trembled as the crowds swelled and moved forward.

Finally, the King capitulated and called off his riflers. Young Birendra Bikram Shah, occupant of the Lion Throne since 1973, inheritor of the dictatorship, proved to be a man of finite cruelty. (Or was he ordered to acquiesce by an embarrassed American ambassador whose support for the dictator was finally challenged by the reports of corpses and by Nepalese petitions to Washington? A complete communist success in the Kingdom might also embarrass the U. S. State Department.)

But Birendra did succumb to the people’s will. In a late night broadcast lasting barely a minute, the defeated king broadcast his decision to the people. “I shall un-gag the press and un-ban political parties and you may prepare for a democratic election.” His voice quivered. Little was said, but it was enough. Marchers had already reached the twenty foot high iron bars of the palace gate, and they would have ripped them down. Some insurgents wanted to continue the assault, spurred on by rumors that the King had already sent his treasures out of the country and readied his helicopter to evacuate his...

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3. This non-violent revolution lasted 50 days. Communists figured prominently in the movement. Only in the very last stage, when success seemed likely, did international media begin to carry reports of the events, and even then coverage of brutality by the police was downplayed. This was one people’s revolution for democracy, the Americans were not keen to see succeed.
family and his councillors. Those protesters argued that the monarchy must be done away with altogether. But others, supported by the middle class, who had land to protect and who had survived a quarter of century in exile, decided to compromise. The conservatives prevailed and halted the march. Exhausted men and women dispersed to collect their children from the streets and search for their comrades in the prisons and morgues and mass graveyards.

Could that kind of revolt have happened fifty years earlier? Was such freedom ever dreamed of or demanded until then?

In fact, many men and women had dreamed and died for equality before 1990. The two Nepalese women described in the following pages called for reforms from their homes in the Arun Valley. They belong in the history of the struggle for justice in this nation. They belong to the hidden history of women who were cast into the shadow and denied their rightful place in history. Unearthing them and tracing their campaigns became a lesson for me.

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In the 1970s when I was in Nepal for research with the Tibetan people there, I heard from colleagues at the university about an armed rebellion in the hills. They said it was led by opponents of King Mahendra, (1955-1973) who held sway over the country with an iron fist. The revolt erupted in a place known for its ‘troublesome peasants,’ Okhaldhunga town, a major hill settlement east of Kathmandu. That uprising was snuffed out so swiftly it could not be confirmed by journalists, or even members of parliament. How many rebels were killed was unknown, and none discussed the real nature of the uprising. The government’s brutal actions went unchallenged, and appeared to have put an end to any opposition movement.

In 1979 protests again erupted. Demonstrations for a Free Press occurred in the main street of Kathmandu and culminated with the burning of the National Airlines office and the shooting of protestors by government troops. Although the army’s crackdown against the demonstrators was reported in Nepal’s press, the problems that motivated the revolt – elitism, corruption, and the absence of
justice – were buried. The whole episode was treated in the press as a skirmish. Then came a melee at the university where students were badly beaten and jailed. Some were tossed off balconies by police who stormed the campus. The authorities closed the university for many months in order to quell the discontent.

Had those outbursts anything to do with the basic conditions and lives of the masses of the people of Nepal? Press comments and reports focused only on the leftist student movement, and ignored the more fundamental issues – domination by the Brahmin class in the universities and the civil service, no freedom of press, no right of assembly, one political party, graft at all levels of government service, overtaxed farmers bent in their fields, malnourishment of little boys tending their cows, young girls labouring in carpet factories, mistreatment of women who bore no sons, tea vendors in debt, trafficking in women, the illegal transfers of land. These were the very same injustices that drove the successful 1990 revolution, and the same abuses that the women rebels, Yogamaya and Durga Devi struggled against in the Arun Valley two generations before.

Without institutional avenues through which the government could be pressured to reform, any public protest, however peaceful, was bound to be met by violence from the King’s side. Still opposition inevitably erupted again, and when it did, it was again swiftly crushed by the police, or by the royal troops. The authorities portrayed these outbursts by civilians as capricious and marginal. And life would be restored to its seemingly Buddhistic tranquility and mountain splendor – a supposedly stable and certainly a more profitable scenario.

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In recent years, especially after the institution of democracy in 1990, public discontent persisted. But now, the administration had a new tact. Instead of using force, it invoked benign institutional responses to criticism. Under the guise of a Seminar in Development, usually sponsored by foreign assistance, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gathered to “study” one economic problem or other. These agencies had nothing to do with political protests, but
helped make it appear as if the government was responsive to public needs. "Experts" were called together. Economic and social surveys were launched. Western or Japanese or Indian aid agencies allocated funds for whatever solutions the "experts" recommended. More seminars and more seminars, all with ample budgets. The problems were put on an agenda and for the most part that was where they remained. Where these 'solutions' failed, the military and police and the prison wardens had theirs. But the dissenters would not be mollified. Those who escaped the police fled via the underground to mobilize once again. No one knew where opponents would next make their appearance. As the Nepalese critic and poet, Parizat's song above suggests, the poor, who were already sacrificed by the society would sacrifice still again.

In 1981, when I began my inquiries about the history of the Arun Valley peoples, the nation was untroubled, at least on the surface. By the early 1980s, tourism was growing at a rapid rate, along with mountaineering expeditions; UNESCO was undertaking the restoration of ancient temples; monasteries were flourishing and foreigners were seeking "shangrila" in increasing numbers; anthropologists were welcome to set up their 'studies' in just about every valley and hilltop. And the monarch and his court appeared to have everything under control. So I was not motivated to come here by any sense of an impending crisis. I was unfamiliar with the poet Parizat at that time and I knew nothing about her many comrades in prison and in the underground.

In universities in England and the USA where I studied and worked, I thought I had gained an expertise in the culture of the Himalayas, which included Nepal. I was in college during the late 1960s when campuses in Europe and the U.S. were in turmoil and African Americans were amassed in the streets demanding their human rights. My colleagues and I vigorously protested Washington's war against the Vietnamese people. Yet, I somehow remained grossly naive about the People's history of Nepal throughout my graduate studies in
London. This lasted even into my early research forays in Nepal in from 1970 to 1980 when I did extensive field research in the hills, working closely with Tibetan refugees. I confess that I knew nobody who was engaged in political dissent. Even though I saw poverty was widespread, and civil rights were limited, I was unaware of the degree of discontent across the nation.

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Passing through those terraced valleys as I walked into and out of the hills, if I thought about people’s rights, I supposed that any idea of justice or a program to end inequalities couldn’t possibly take hold.

Villagers I encountered seemed preoccupied with simply holding on, and I assumed that was all they could manage. How could anyone living in such isolated places think of change – really basic change? Change originates in the modern educated world of human rights projects and literacy courses and population control. Costly development programs are needed, sending virgin city boys into the hills to educate mothers about birth control, hiring foreign graduates to count trees in order to establish a royal parkland in place of a forest where farmers harvested fuel. This kind of wisdom arrived in Nepal by way of Kathmandu, the capital city, whose importance and wealth has grown alongside the expansion of tourism and foreign aid.

Kathmandu lies some three hundred miles west of the Arun River. Although it’s political arm reaches deep into every corner of the countryside, the capital city has economic connections to the world beyond Nepal. Kathmandu represents an international link to India, and East Asia, then to Australia and Japan, Europe and the USA. From those counties flow development contracts, tour groups, high altitude climbing records, and orders for tens of thousands of handwoven carpets flow back to Nepal. Movies and city buses arrive from Bombay, cloth and paper and pipes from Calcutta, kerosene and oil from Patna, tin and plastic and furniture and computers and light fixtures and canned foods from other parts of India and beyond.

4. The result of this research is reported in *Tibetan Frontier Families*, 1978, Vikas Publishers, Delhi, and numerous scholarly articles.
Kathmandu Valley houses the carpet, cigarette, garment and brick factories where malnourished women and men and children find low-paid work. The tour offices who recruit porters and buy the tents and food for expeditions and walking trips are here. Most of Nepal’s foreign income arrives in Kathmandu and here is where it stays. Most of the budget for a rural project will be dispensed in the city as well. More fine restaurants and private schools serve the growing Nepalese middle class and the battalion of international experts and their families. American diplomats and businessmen in Kathmandu maintain their “Lincoln” school. The British have theirs. So do the Japanese.

For farmers, the capital is a place to sell their labour, peddling rickshaws, hauling loads on their backs, cleaning hotels. For foreign aid employees, carpet and curio dealers, tourists and climbers, Kathmandu is a dream world. To the visitor from abroad – there are 400,000 of us a year – this Himalayan land is part of our own imagined landscape. The poverty is undeniable. Yet, some tourists manage to interpret the hardships of ancient hill people as something dignified – ‘traditional’, they call it. Even the ubiquitous royal portraits, hashish shops and men sleeping in their push-carts, help support our romance-of-timelessness and tolerance. From Kathmandu city, one cycles eastward a few miles to stand under the great, calming eyes of Bodhnath Temple. From these muddy city paths we can follow the ancient routes still used by porters. Golden-faced and cheery, young and old, the Nepalese sing, “We are a traditional people. No outsider colonized us.” Alert and witty, they speak little about their king, Birendra who, from his occasional radio broadcasts, seems to be a humble man. There are rumors about his wanderings incognito through the hills to witness their simple lives. If he does make these expeditions, Birendra might feel as gratified as the foreigner does, when half-clad, underweight children return his wave with smiles. But how can the hill porter or the grass-gatherer wave back, bent under an enormous basket, both hands clutching their tumpline to balance their load?

The present Nepalese dynasty, intact for 231 years, appears to be removed. Whatever hardships these dispossessed subjects may
endure, their sad-faced king and his wife surely is not to blame. It’s the agitators. Any act against the throne, like those carried out against King Birendra’s father Mahendra, was said to be the work of communists, enemies colluding with Nepal’s foreign foes. India, who had already forcible absorbed the once independent states of Sikkim and Goa on the fringes of its land mass, was suspected to have similar designs on Nepal, and was surely the source of any political trouble here. Why should the Nepalese be discontent? According to the nation’s high priests, their ruler is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and, if his subjects worship him, he in turn protects them. What further justice would these people need?

Let’s keep our gaze on the splendid mountain landscape. Do those lofty, terraced fields look like a dictatorship? Where on the mountaintops do you see tanks and helicopter gunships? Do you read any reports of disappearances or torture in Nepal’s newspapers? Their pages are full of felicitations to the monarch.

This comforting image of calm and timelessness can be exotic and alluring, and it is profitable. The picture succeeds year after year in drawing anthropologists like me and trekkers and meditation students to Nepal in ever greater numbers. But our needs and gratifications remain isolated from any local disaffections and political turmoil. It is not in the interests of donor agencies and tour companies, or scholars to lend credibility to a nasty struggle for justice.

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Nothing in history books about Nepal suggests that anything of global significance happened here, except perhaps that a tall British chap named Hillary scaled the world’s highest peak, Sagarmatha – the one foreigners call Everest. In the populated villages of the hills, the rhythm of life is said to be timeless and motionless. The sublime landscape, the sloping sides of the Arun valley and orderly terraced fields are described as if history stood still here and always would.

Here are simple people enacting timeless rituals, repeating the entrenched rites of their long-dead ancestors. Women and men arrive from their farms seeking a powerful river deity. Some cut boughs of
simal leaves and insert them upright into the sand at the river’s edge. Father stabs a chicken’s neck and offers its blood to Lord Arun in gratitude for small blessings the family has received. Petals of Himalayan blossoms flow from farmers’ cracked hands and float down the current of the great river. In a field of golden ripening rice, little girls with sweat staining their blouses, look up from their work. Youths pass carrying hundred-pound loads of supplies on their backs so tourists can travel in comfort.

But no people, neither women nor men, remain motionless in history. Many of these villagers have travelled to Calcutta, Gauhati, Darjeeling, Gangtok and other parts of India. Many hill residents have adult children who live in cities where they work as engineers, clerks, teachers and health workers, and labourers in the lowest paid sectors. Some of the older generation of men and women are themselves migrants to the hills. Many inhabitants are actually recent generations of hill farmer, the children of men and women to came north from India seeking land and a new life.

Ownership of the fields on either side of the Arun River is dynamic as well. Wherever the river valley is flat and wide is now largely occupied by high-caste Brahmin and Chhetri immigrants. They are called Khasa-Bahun because their ancestors arrived in the Arun River region via West Nepal, from north west India. (The royal Shah family originated there as well.) The early Brahmins and Chhetris carved out water channels and sculpted vertical rows of paddy terraces for rice cultivation. Being good farmers, they saved, and acquired more land. Their farming techniques may be more efficient than others, but the newcomers also used political links to their advantage. Today their descendants hold sway over the longer-settled people.

The indigenous hill people are called tribal people by anthropologists⁵; in the eastern hills they are Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Magar, and Gurung, each with their own language, whose farming styles, diet, religion and customs are differ from that of the Hindu settlers. They once owned the fields in the fertile lower flat sides of the

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valleys where they grew maize and millet. Today we find the homes of Nepal’s tribal inhabitants squeezed along the scrappy slopes, pushed to the margins. They moved uphill and grow their grain on the steep hillside, on plots which are ravaged by the monsoon rains which wash away their topsoil which is then deposited on the wide, open slopes owned by Brahmins. These are some reasons why the occupants of the elevated areas have a thin harvest, while the fields of the rice growers are lush and dense with grain.

This flux is not confined to the Arun Valley. Immigrants still arrive into the Madhesh, (or Tarai, the plain stretching along the southern border of Nepal). Families pour across the border from the more populous villages of India, and take over jungle land inside Nepal. On the country’s distant northern frontier, it abuts Tibet. Migration is ongoing there as well. Even the Bhotia Sherpas of the Upper Arun probably did not originally live near the confluence of the Arun and Barun rivers where find them today. Some say they arrived there from Tibet. Another explanation is that they came from Solu-Khumbu to the west, which is still heavily populated by a Sherpa people, but whose language little resembles theirs. It is also possible that the Arun Valley Bhotia have no Tibetan origins at all, but migrated from lower valleys northward, perhaps splitting off from a larger Rai tribe, and changing their culture and language during years of interaction with Tibet, when commerce across the northern passes was more intense than in recent years.

The origin of the Bhotia who live in the upper Arun intrigued my companion Jangbu who, as a Sherpa himself, was making his first visit to this valley. He conversed with these people in Nepali because their ‘sherpa’ dialects were not the same, but he learned that they nevertheless shared some words, farming methods, and clan names. The more time Jangbu Sherpa spent with them, the more questions he had about his own people’s origin.

These dynamics are another demonstration of how this forested valley is hardly a backwater as first appearances may suggest. Arun Valley is in fact an axis of civilization along which people and ideas and culture travel.
Migration is a common feature of history. People move in waves, following invaders who have broken ground by conquest, economic or military, and as one people departs, another follows to take its place. Borders are subject to political as well as geographic vagaries. Sometimes they open and close to allow movement. Other times they confine populations. At the beginning of this century some mountain passes between Nepal and Tibet were cut off by glacial shifts. In late 1950s, due to China’s policies in Tibet, the high plateau was forcibly sealed off from the south, and Nepalese such as the Sherpas who had earlier been regular visitors to Tibet, became south-oriented. It took only one generation to break those northern cultural affiliations that had seemed so deeply ingrained. For example, young people like Janbu speak and write in Nepali, whereas his presents are fluent in Tibetan. Both generations still use their Sherpa language at home, but Jangbu’s three sons, who have been raised and schooled in Kathmandu, hardly speak Sherpa.

This flux is part of the character of the region. It shows how misleading the notion of ‘timelessness’ is. The rebel women whose histories we will explore in later chapters were part of the flow of people into and out of the region.

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Ever since the unification of Nepal under Prithvi Narayan Shah, after his military conquest of Kathmandu Valley in 1769, Nepal became the nation-state we know today, with Kathmandu as its capital. Sometimes Kathmandu opted for a laissez-faire agreement with local leaders. The central government allowed governors considerable independence. However, the central authority maintained a military presence, ready to impose order in a stroke.

When Kathmandu made a commitment to universal education in the 1971, its presence across the land became ubiquitous. Photos of the monarch were pasted everywhere. The portable radio, carrying state-controlled programs produced in the capital, became common. An effective vehicle of imperial rule, the radio helped the palace reach every citizen. Roads were built to link the towns across the south to
Kathmandu. The administration became more centralized. Where roads could not penetrate, airports were the link between the capital and its administrative outposts.

Hilltop airstrips around the country sprouted in the middle of jungles. They seemed to be a convenient commercial link between city and village, or a way to get tourists to their mountain lookouts. But the link was more complicated. Once an airlink was established, other infrastructures followed: an army post, radio transmitters, administrators. These gave the administration, and those benefitting from government contracts, access to every settlement across the nation. This was the history of Tumlingtar, the small airport where I alighted from plane on my second visit to the nearby shrine at Manakamana where I pursued my inquiries.

Tumlingtar, built in 1971, was one of these outposts of government authority. In 1981, when I had begun visiting the Arun Valley, Tumlingtar Airport was just a wide grassy track, abandoned most of the week. A simple concrete shed with two rooms, one for baggage and the other for the ticket clerk, was located at one side of the field. There was no phone and no radio tower.

Villagers who gathered at the airlines office are relatives of arriving passengers, or outgoing travellers returning to their home in the Madhesh plains bordering India, or to the capital. Officials and shopkeepers came to the strip from surrounding villages of Palikot, Dingla or Bhojpur on the west side of the river, or from Chainpur on the East side, or upriver, at Num and Kulung. They arrived to receive a document, or cash for the local bank, or other items that enhance their influence.

In 1981 Tumlingtar closed down during the monsoon months but the rest of the year, two flights landed there every week. Whether or not many passengers disembarked, a landing drew spectators since the Tar lay on a well travelled footpath between Madhesh in the south and the higher hill settlements. Porters—men and women, but mostly men—passed this way, walking northward into the

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6. By 1995, phone lines were installed into every town housing a chief district office. With the installation of satellite systems in the near future, phones links will be possible to every village.
To the River's Edge 15

hills or descending en route to the road-head at Dharan, three days to the south. Seeing activity at the airline shed, they paused, smoked a cigarette, and leaned on one of the posts marking the edge of the field to witness the aircraft's touchdown. Judging by the bemused look of the boys and porters, they might have viewed this technology as if it had little to do with their life.

They are mistaken if they thought so. Then and now that nineteen-seat airplane represents a critical political link between the palace and local administrators, between the rich commercial centers of the country and the impoverished villages up and down the length of the valley. The air-link into the interior meant that troops could be hastily flown into any "trouble spot" anywhere in the country. It meant instant radio contact between the capital and regional centers of power. Because of this link, officials could more effectively represent the central power and vice versa, and with easy backup from the capital, local officials might have felt less need for local support.

The aircraft sat on the grass for a quarter of an hour while passengers disembark and embark and the ticketer's assistant unloads and loads a few bags. Within moments of the plane's takeoff, the field empties, the teashop is shuttered, and the onlookers disappear up the road to their farm, to school, the land office, the market in Dingla town, or to their sister's house somewhere on the hillside. The sound of the engine in the air is heard for a moment, and then everything falls quiet once more.

During successive visits between 1982 and 1986 I arrived in that same Twin Otter plane and felt the soft bumpy touchdown on this ledge above the river. Before we began to descend, we skimmed over a succession of high ridges that separate the rivers – moving above the Sunkosi, the Likhu Kosi, deeper and deeper towards the lush hills. I felt excited and I pressed my face against the window looking for the shrine somewhere below. Halfway through the voyage from Kathmandu I spotted Okhaldhunga town. Soon after, I peered down at
the Dudh Kosi River, and two ridges beyond, I finally sighted the great Arun waterway itself.

From high above, the river is just a thin brown strip cut into green mountainside. It leans east, then curves south like a fragile ribbon that has floated from the sky and lies strung out haphazardly where it landed on the earth. The river seems to be a delicate, fixed track on an otherwise rolling, ragged landscape. How odd, I thought, since it is what really moves, and with ferocity.

The brown shine of the waterway is visible before I can identify a prominent hill, or a cluster of houses, or a mountain path, and before I can catch the glint of tin off a school roof. There are no roadways or canals in this region, but as we begin to descend between the hills, I recognize the few places I know from my previous treks by foot: Dingla town halfway up a hill on the west side of the Arun, then the white dust of a school playground visible on a spur of land, then the thin street of Khandbari stretched out on a narrow ridge. Below the airstrip is the footbridge, then the narrow gorge where the canoe ferry crosses the river, and further upriver, the stony beach that is the burning ghat and nearby, the shrine of Manakamana.

No boats navigate the Arun except the humble ferry. The boatman who ran it charged half a rupee per passenger in 1982, and a whole rupee for a man and load. The boatman and his assistant are Kumal, members of a fisherman caste who inhabit villages near the bank. In the early morning they cross the current by jumping over rocks, then toss their nets into deep pools where fish gather. Any boys playing and swimming in the river are certain to be children of the Kumal. How they love the river, although it sometimes lashes out in fury and consumes them. Not long before I arrived here, one of these lads who was helping his father steer the ferry canoe was swept away in the waters when it capsized. The boy was lost forever. The ferry boat is just a rough dugout log. When one sits deep inside it and it is released into the current, it rocks as if it is completely helpless, and passengers cling tightly to the wooden sides of the vessel. Somehow, the Kumal can steer it safely to the far bank – most of the time.
By 1985, flights were more frequent. With reliable radio contact between centers, weather conditions in the hills were monitored, so planes could land here even during the monsoon months. Officials posted here from other parts of the country built houses beside the airstrip, and their wives moved from their homes to be with them. This meant more business for local shops. A second teashop opened where the men could play cards late into the night. Then a hotel was built. By 1989, an electricity line from the south would reach Tumlingtar and Khandbari, opening the way for television and other amenities, and by 2001, the motor road from Dharan was to extend to Chainpur – just some of the development projects that offered employment for a few of the country’s graduates and profits for local contractors.

Other activity moved along this route. With the growing popularity of Mount Makalu on the border of Tibet directly north of here, many more trekkers flew into Tumlingtar airport. From there, they made their way 23 miles by foot to the peak’s base camp. Land prices in the area began to rise.

The most profitable land deals were made in the vicinity of Khandbari, an hour’s walk from the airstrip. Khandbari was the new Sankhuwa-Sabha district headquarters. As such – it was already a thriving commercial center – Khandbari would flourish. Farmers arrive in town from villages all around, carry the cash their daughter sent from her factory job, or a son earned carrying loads. Each unfolds his measly roll of rupees, and hands his cash over to the cloth merchants, the iron and plastic sellers, and the spice vendors, the tailor and ironworker. They come with their tax payments, their court affidavits and appeals, license fees and land deeds. They hope that perhaps, when their son graduates from school, he will secure one of those chairs in one of those offices, so he can find his father some reprieve from the dizzying bureaucracy, and prevail on his fellow clerks to spare him just a little.

Each time I step from the plane after it lands on the ledge above the river, I am stunned by the utter silence in the air. It is this
silence that tells me I was somewhere else. That silence is a kind of chamber I pass through where I am stripped of the garments of the culture which I left behind. No newspaper. No reference library. No academic circle. No jostling through the busy market lanes of the city. No European pastries, no Tibetan noodles or spicy Nepalese meats. No tick of taxi meters, or clack of carpet looms. The silence prepares me for a new order of things. This outpost, which is one of many strategic specks on an army map, becomes the center of my life. It is the center of the lives of my teachers, and the tunnel through which I will arrive at the history of two local women, both reformers, who called for justice a generation ago.

I arrived at the Arun River by foot after a walk of several days on my first visit here. Descending into the valley of the Arun near the iron bridge below Tumlingtar airstrip, I crossed the great river, then trekked north over the flat river terrace. Passing the airfield, I joined a path used by farmers and porters, officials and merchants, pilgrims and troops.

The monsoon ended a few weeks before my arrival and the valley of the Arun River was steamy hot on that September afternoon in 1981. But I walked through its torrid embrace making my way innocently to my destination.

A thousand feet above me, cool air swept across the eastern ridge. I could have pressed on, to stay at the town on the crest of the hill, en-route further north. For reasons I cannot explain, my companion Jangbu and I continued along the dusty path of the tar, the river terrace, which dipped through the jungle, and took us to the river's edge. A hermitage was located not far upstream, set in a grove of trees and hidden from the main track, well away from any village. Perhaps we would find lodging there.

Knowing nothing about the settlement or its residents, we headed in its direction. We hoped this retreat would offer us respite from the crowded farmhouses we stopped at each night during the course of our long walk eastward from Solu-Khumbu in the central
hills. I started from there with Jangbu, who had quit his teaching post in the district headquarters to join me. He disliked the atmosphere of the town where the school was located, and decided to become a guide in order to travel through the countryside, and eventually to seek work in Kathmandu. During our journey, the farmhouses we sought lodging in were invariably occupied by large families, but the house would double or triple in size with neighbors and their children soon after our arrival. Wherever we stopped, we were an occasion for fellowship and conversation. Although surrounded by warmth and kindness, we got little sleep. At the riverside shrine ahead of us, we hoped to rest for a night.

And, we looked forward to bathing in the river, dozing undisturbed during the hot afternoon, to be lulled to sleep by the soft devotional praises of holy women.

We reached Manakamana and were welcomed by the head of the hermitage. The keepers of the shrine were high-caste women, ascetics, numbering thirty-two. When we met, they were pursuing a simple life of religious devotion. I would soon learn their origins were radically different.
Chapter 2
THE BASKET CARRIER

A line of four men emerges from between the trees. Without breaking their stride, they step into a dusty gully, then up again, hardly noticing the ditch. The route seems a mere path; sometimes it’s barely three feet wide. In fact this trail is a transnational roadway, the main highway between thousands of Nepal’s hill villages – the markets where consumers live – and the commercial centers of Chainpur, Khandbari and Bhojpur from where goods are distributed.

The men walk it in file, behind one another, as if trained. Or chained. Each man moves forward with head down, but his eyeballs are upturned, scanning the road for dangerous obstacles, an overhanging branch, a jutting rock along the inside wall of the road, the protruding root of a tree.

Every one of the men wears a hat – the traditional, rimless topi. Even if threadbare and stained with sweat, the hat makes the men dressed, despite bare legs and shoeless feet. The second man in the line is also watchful. He too must step to avoid the same dangers. A third, in turn, is close on his heels. A few meters behind comes a much younger man, perhaps sixteen. His legs are thin and still sinewy because he’s new to this work. He too is barefoot.

Manu, climbing out of the gully, is really a Nepalese truck. Only, this truck hauls one basket-load every trip it makes. Manu balances the load on his shoulders, taking half the weight with his neck and back muscles, the other half with his legs and feet. Brown thighs, the heaviest parts of his body, bulge above his knees.

The cone-shaped net of bamboo is set high on his shoulders. Made by all farmers here, the doko is so characteristic of the Nepal
hills that vendors sell it in the capital as a tourist souvenir. Tour shops also sell ten inch high dolls with a topi on their heads, outfitted in jackets and tight-calved pants with those cute coned baskets sewn into its back.

The real basket is a handcrafted tool. Extraordinarily lightweight, its construction applies the engineering genius of these indigenous people, the knowledge of generations of craftsmen. It can hold up to 70 kilos and it may last a porter more than one season. The design is efficient and pleasing to the eye. Loaded, it needs skill and strength because a full doko is top heavy, and not easy to balance. Every farm boy and girl learns to keep a firm grip on the lines on either side of his head to stop the load from swaying and tipping. Manu clutches the line tightly. Sometimes he clenches his jaws, as if his neck muscles are tearing at his mouth, like the bit between a horse’s jaw.

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Despite his load, each porter moves smoothly. It’s too early for a smoke break. None of the men can stop before the convoy reaches the ridge half way up the hill. None will rest until sunset, after they cross the bridge at Num. Num is their regular stop, on the fourth day of the six-day job – for a hundred and twenty rupees cash.

The men encounter another convoy. Only two men there, rushing towards them and downhill, heading back to the roadhead. They carry no loads, so the salty tumplines lie loose across the men’s chests. Whump, whump, echo the flapping empty baskets on their shoulders. The limp strap is the only ornament they can wear on this job. It’s flapping sound is soft to some ears perhaps. To these men, it feels like the infinite wind moving through bare trees. It is an echo that flails the backs of these once young and hopeful farmers.

Those porters are returning to Dharan, to reload. They step quickly, but it is no dance. It’s hunger. Each man runs to find work, to earn a few rupees to buy food. In just two days, he descends the space he needs six days to climb under a full basket. He does not wait for his friends as he descends. He’s hurrying, to find work. At the roadhead, he hopes to locate someone from his village to travel with, back through the mountains, back with another load.
Downward he rushes. The men say “One night in Dharan, then out.” Dharan is no village, no town, no city. It’s just a grubby depot at the roadhead. From India to Nepalese cities such as Biratnagar on the border of Nepal and India, trucks bring supplies of kerosene, and rice and sugar and biscuits. At the roadhead depots everything is loaded into go-downs. Those warehouses are operated by fat men – the bosses.

“Yes hazur, no hazur, hazur hazur,” says the desperate porter. The radios of these fat men and their sons blast music into the streets; late into the night they broadcast cheery Nepalese tunes that can set a man’s wrists dancing. But not these porters. For them, Dharan is a hungry, cheerless place.

These farmers stay here only as long as it takes them to find a load to carry. At night they congregate along the roadside near the warehouses. Their eyes move along the street and back again. Waiting, one man washes his alternate pair of shorts while another hand-stitches the strap on one of his sandals. The first turns to a boy he recognizes and asks him who is hiring laborers tomorrow. Two men converse about their village and, if they can locate a common relative, they begin to be close, feeling the other will not rob him on the road. They sleep early, lying within inches of one another for comfort, and for safety. When they awaken, each folds up his blanket, and silently joins the line of foot-truckers. Each walks under a laden basket.

Before sunrise, every morning the paths out of Dharan are dense with men like them, moving one behind another, in a single line, ascending into the hills.

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In the village, everyone carries a basket. They need their basket to haul fertilizer from the cowshed, to gather grass for the house animals, to transfer seed to the field or bear an ill relative to the clinic. It’s the Nepalese farmer’s pick-up truck.

Hauling a loaded basket for wages is another work altogether1. No farmer intends to become a porter. But from year to

1. Its weight is normally 70 kilograms, more than the weight of the porter.
year, the people who once lived from farming their land cannot grow everything they need, and the bartering system between villages has broken down. So everyone needs cash. The children need pencils; a radio needs batteries. The family is accustomed to sugar in their tea. For a wedding, or a funeral feast, they must serve rice.

Cash. Manu needs cash too. He has no more surplus corn to sell, no extra millet. His physical strength is his only source of cash. So he sets out for Dharan in search of work. One by one, farmers join others selling their hillman's muscle.

A man's feet, not his load, betray the life of a farmer who has taken to portering. As the years pass, his neck muscles swell and his feet begin to flatten. His feet are doubly wide at the front, toes permanently spread, to grip the soil, shaped by the ground he walks on under those loads. Month after month, over trails of gravel, through silt along the river's edge, pounding boulders, kicking sand, gripping mud, the skin of his sole grows thick; and like the pad of a cow's foot, it is numb, numb to cold, numb to heat, numb to gravel on the path, numb to the knife edges of rocks and the prick of branches.

But this man is not a cow. His feet are not hooves, not dead leather. Eventually the skin on his feet will crack, the blood vessels underneath will break, and the raw nerves exposed in his skin will scream. But he's got to keep walking. If a sore dries one day, it splits against a rock the next, pressed under the weight of two men—himself and his load.

Manu, the porter, hates this pain because he can never forget it. When he removes his load and sits on a roadside and eats, when he fords a stream, when he sleeps, he feels his feet. He feels them more than he feels the weight of his load, more than the pressure of the tumpline across his forehead. The awful sting in his feet would keep him awake if it were not for his utter exhaustion at the end of a day's trek under that load.

Sometimes, the sting disappears when he sleeps. Then, as soon as the load is in place on his back and his feet flatten out again on the path, the feeling of knives in his soles returns. Pus seeps from the abscess between his toes and sticks to rocks. Bits of sand mix with
blood inside the sore.

Only three more days. He thinks of the packet of cash waiting for him. He calculates. "From my hundred and twenty rupees, I must put aside ninety to carry home." He knows every anna of every rupee he can spend during the six day contract: "four for cigarettes, twelve for tea, nine for the pair of sandals, five for that café meal. The ninety rupees remaining must cover the family's purchases from the market: oil, sugar, salt, matches, a piece of lumber for the door frame, a few tablets, a meter of cloth. Beyond this, until the harvest is in, there is only debt.

As he walks forward, Manu is planning. "Oldest daughter is seventeen; we need her to work the fields while I am away, yet she must also marry. We have been asked for her, and the boy's family will take care of her. It is a good chance."

Manu keeps moving, one foot, then the next. If he slowed down, he would break the momentum and the load will only seem heavier when he starts up again. He peers upward, to the pipal tree a hundred yards ahead. He can rest there and adjust the strap that is cutting into his shoulder. He moves his feet mechanically, propelling himself along the dusty path, towards the stone shelf he knows beneath the tree.

Manu and his cousin Kanchha often travel together from Dharan to Dingla. Kanchha is a good companion and Manu feels they keep each other safe. Nowadays a good travelling partner is not easy to find.

Kanchha is fifteen years younger than Manu and he carries the same load at a faster pace. Still, it is noon and by now Kanchha should have caught up with Manu. Manu does not want to sleep alone tonight.

Manu finally sights the roadside platform and almost stumbles up to it. Slowly, he eases the basket on his back against the hillside. Manu's neck muscles loosen as the basket bottom touches the stone behind him. For the first time in two hours, Manu can pull the tumpline off his forehead. The salty cord drops and rests across his collarbone, and now Manu can hold his head erect. He lets the air come out of his lungs.
The sting on the bottom of Manu's feet rise to his brain. He winces.

Another porter arrived plodding uphill towards Manu. His face seems familiar. He doesn't stop but as he passes he says quietly: "Was that your partner down there in Basantapur, the one who was tipsy last night? He's moving fast, only an hour behind; says to wait for him at the ferry."

Manu nods to the messenger. He feels relief. But another worry pushes into that space in his mind—his daughter. "I cannot send her to carry baskets from Dharan. Only Sherpa women porter nowadays. It's not respectable. It is shame for a Rai man to send his daughter to work on the roads, carrying oil." Manu heard stories in Dharan about the labour brokers and the girls. Sometimes a girl stayed back, thinking she could get an easy contract, but Manu and his friends knew what happened to her.

Last year, Karma's middle daughter never came back. They sent four men from the village to search for her. Even if she had fallen off a bridge, someone would have seen her. No. When a woman disappears, it's always to India.

"Maybe," Manu thinks, "if little Mina can find work in a carpet factory, she can earn enough to pay for her own dowry." He had heard about those factories in the capital whose bosses are foreigners. "The foreigners protect the girls. They give them free rooms too."

Manu resolves that he will send daughter Mina to the factory. He remembers the merchant at Chainpur who helps find jobs for the farmers and sends the girl's salary direct to the family. He can trust this man.

Manu bends to pull the tumpline onto his forehead. He fixes it in place, adjusts the basket into the shape of his back, and straightening his knees, steps forward onto the path.

It's another hour to Khandbari on the ridge but Manu will not stop until he reaches the flat road of the marketplace. He passes the airfield, and starts to climb again. Soon, he sees a group approaching—they are tourists with little green or orange backpacks and steel walking sticks. In the front are two old men, laughing with their Sherpa guides. He feels jealous of these Sherpa men."Those are not Arun
Valley Sherpa. They are from west Nepal. None of them carries a load! They come here with the foreigners because the Sherpa broker pays the local bosses. We must not allow them to work our trails. The bosses take a commission; what do we get? We can haul those packs, tents, blankets, tables and sun-chairs, boxes of toilet paper and trays of eggs." Those jobs are easy compared to carrying loads from Dharan, and many men from here beg for a tourist contract even if it's only for a few weeks a year. Not Manu. He doesn't want to take orders from any Bhotia guy. He doesn't want to watch them swim naked with the foreigners below the bridge. Anyway, four months’ work a year is not enough, not enough ninety rupee clumps of money in his pocket.

A white-skinned man in a green sunhat and with a camera in his hands jumps in front of Manu. He points his camera at the porter and snaps a photo. He gestures for Manu to wait while he sets his meter to take another picture. Manu can't stop. The foreigner moves behind him and Manu can hear clicking. Maybe he's taking a picture of Manu's thick legs, or the old sandals dangling from his basket. The tourists and their helpers disappear down the path and Manu quickly forgets them; he's got to watch the traffic ahead. Three water buffalo loom above him. A herd boy grunts as he urges the animals forward. The beasts step heavily down the rocks towards Manu, moving as if in slow motion. “Water buffalos are stupid creatures, so stay clear of them,” say the farmers. “Without warning, they will charge you. The load goes, then you.”

Manu steps well clear of the path of the oncoming animals.

Halfway up the hill is a teashop. It's the rest stop where he often waits for his partner, and Manu knows it well. Three men are sitting on the bench in front of the shop but they do not nod an acknowledgment. Manu is a just a porter while they are 'officials.' Each wears his civil service uniform, a tailored suit-jacket over his fold-over shirt and cotton trousers. Each has shoes and socks while Manu is naked except for his undershorts and his soiled T-shirt. He hears no "Ho, bhariya!" No "ali kati arak liu hos." (Come oh porter! Have just a sip with us.) The men continue talking to one another.

Manu plods on, stepping on rocks as he ascends. His body moves rhythmically, the momentum from one step helping the next one.
He mustn't stop.

Finally, the path widens. Another five hundred feet to the ridge where the path is smooth and free of boulders. He passes the new hospital; no electricity yet, but they have a real doctor. Doctor Sahib has the authority to requisition a plane seat on the Twin Otter for any patient and that's as much power as the C.D.O., chief district officer. This hospital and the doctor increase the prestige of the town. Land prices on this side of the hill shot up by fifty percent even before the building was completed. A doctor is an important man here.

Manu reaches the ridge where the path moves to the east side of the mountain and he can see the entire valley and beyond, if he looks up. A magnificent panorama of the Milke Danda ridge lies on the northern horizon. But the porter does not seem to notice. His eyes glance to a row of three buildings against the mountain wall. He cannot remember seeing them before. They must be new. The second story of each structure has rooms that open onto a balcony. The shops on the street level are open. In front are children in soft blue school uniforms. The boys and girls run and shriek happily as they move towards school. They skip around Manu. For them he's part of a moving landscape. All porters are bent and silent as they slip across the mountains. No one hears their voices or looks into their tired eyes.

Manu passes the new shops. Glass jars in one store stand side by side along a shelf and they sparkle in the sun. Each is filled with something sweet: candies, biscuits, chewing gum. Their colors are pretty. A bead of sweat from Manu's scalp is running along his neck. He wants to scratch it but cannot take even one hand off the tumpline.

He smells something fragrant. Is it the flowers on the balcony ledge, or the ladies standing there?

Above the shops, women lean over railings of the balcony outside their apartment doors. Each watches her children skip along the path until they have disappeared from view, then smile over at the other women. More lonely wives of clerks. One by one, the women turn away and in a moment each returns to the balcony with armfuls of bedding. Each spreads out her quilts to air on the rail, as the sun now
comes full force above the Milke Danda.

A man steps from a door in the row of shops and enters the path. Manu understands the man’s sense of self importance and he slows to let him pass, then falls quietly behind. The clerk’s flowered topi and civil servant uniform are fresh and crisp. The blue cotton clothes of the man reminds Manu of a suit of his own, now folded inside a wood trunk, up in the village. Manu wears it only at festivals nowadays. Was it two years ago Manu last unpacked it? Was it for Dasain festival? Or was it his young brother’s wedding?

For an instant Manu remembers the feel of that soft cotton on his arms. When he wore it, his people said, a spirit entered Manu. “Watch out for Manu,” they tease. “When he dances, Manu is a killer.” Yes, Manu loved dancing and, although he moved his body ever so slightly, one arm folded behind, and the other in the air, his wrist gently spiraling above his head, even older women giggled. His wife protested half-joking. She herself had fallen in love with Manu when watching him dance. Recalling her gaze then, Manu sighs, and as he does, his grip on the tumpline of his load relaxes.

Suddenly, Manu stumbles. His basket! It begins to tip. He steps sideways under it to rebalance the weight. He pauses, jolted back to the present. Sweat is dripping down his face. But he presses ahead faster and can regain his momentum. Another fifty yards and he steps around the bend of the mountainside and towards the village square. Men and women and children are crisscrossing the open space around him and a shudder of fear overtakes him. Perhaps someone from the village will see him bent under his basket, dressed only in these undershorts and a sweat topi.

He walks across the grand, hard-packed square as if on a stage. But Manu needn’t worry; he’s invisible.

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It happened on a mountain bridge.
A cradle on her back, she crossed
to barter beans for salt.
Unsteady from hunger, she stumbled.
Ahh! The cradle slipped.
The baby toppled,
screaming,
Ahh, into the greedy waves of Kali.
That was death.

from “Mreetyu”
Bhakti Aama, devotee of Yogamaya and resident of Manakamana

Damodara, Sanyasi and Mata of the Manakamana hermitage
Gaurini Cave near Kulung where Yogamaya meditated in 1920s is still visited mostly by women sanyasi

Manamaya, expert in the hazurbani
Chapter 3

YOGAMAYA: Poet, Teacher, Insurgent

I am the child in your lap.
You are the babe in mine:
There is nothing between us, nothing at all.
Your eyes have tears, just like my own.

"Yogamaya had a two-pronged agenda, not just one," explained Manamaya. "Her first target was our Brahmanic system, propagated by Brahmin priests, that gives privileges to a few and makes rules that enslave the rest, and women of all castes. Her second object was our ruler, the Prime Minister\(^2\), who along with his generals allowed corruption and inequality to prevail. Our master, Shakti Yogamaya, showed us how these two evils are intertwined, and she feared neither." With this, Manamaya uttered another of Yogamaya’s compelling verses.

Nowadays Brahmins, live as you wish,
Like lords, you plunder the poor.
How corrupted, you sell your trust.
How deep, the roots of your greed.

1. My translations throughout are loose interpretations. The Nepali text is excerpted from the book of Hazurbani (See Appendix). Although the originals may contain a few errors, we have left them untouched.
2. From 1769 to 1951 Nepal was ruled by a succession of hereditary Prime Ministers of the Rana family. Juddha Shamsher Rana (1932-45) was in power when Yogamaya was active, but her campaign began during the rule of his predecessor Bhim Shamsher (1929-1932).
In these two quatrains lie the essential teachings of a woman who launched a brilliant and a daring political campaign from her base in the hills of East Nepal. It took place during the 1930s, and ended in 1940 with her death, along with sixty eight of her followers who one by one followed her into the thundering current of the Arun River. After leading a campaign for reform and justice, Yogamaya finally confronted the ruler with an ultimatum: “If you do not grant us justice, we will die,” she declared. Juddha Shamsher responded by sending his army to round up the protesters.

The tragedy that resulted remains a stain on the government. The Nepalese authorities covered up the episode and banned all mention of her. Her campaign was thoroughly expunged from the nation’s historical record and almost lost to its political consciousness. But the powerful verses composed by Yogamaya – the hazurbani - survived. And therein lies the story.

*I am the child in your lap, You are the babe in mine.*

On the surface, these lines may appear to be politically innocent. They are not. They embody the very principle of equality and the anti-Brahmanic message central to Yogamaya’s teachings. They call for parity and mutual respect. Couched in the metaphor of a child, defined by two equal partners, Yogamaya’s words appeal to the humble, common origins of each of us.

“There is nothing between us, nothing at all.” In a society in which people are strictly and irrevocably distinguished at birth according to the caste membership of their parents, this invocation is sheer heresy. Her ideal of intermingling was possible only if caste differences were abandoned. Yogamaya called for her people to engage in unfettered reciprocity, through nurturing, marriage, and all other social exchange.

“Your eyes have tears just like mine.” Her words are a tender reminder of the sensitivity of all of us. We have common needs, joys and suffering, she said. Perhaps the tears Yogamaya speaks of here are the laments of men and women, bound against their will by society’s caste rules. Those laws destined some to be lower, and poorer, and thereby suffer many deprivations.

Caste is a system of defining the social world of humans in terms of a hierarchical spiritual scheme, with the ‘high-born’ Brahmin
representing the head of Lord Brahma while everyone else (not born a Brahmin) is ranked below. Considered to be “pure” by virtue of their caste status, Brahmins are segregated by social rules which especially affect Brahmin women. They may only marry Brahmin men and they cannot remarry, even if the boy they are betrothed to dies before they take up residence together. Caste rules were laid out in the Hindu scriptures long ago. The system continues into modern times and defies all attempts to end it. In India it seems as firmly entrenched as ever. During the past century in Nepal, caste practices have spread with the growing influence of Brahmin priests. They have penetrated almost every corner of the country, converting Buddhist and shamanic believers and incorporating them into the caste hierarchy. The Newar and many Gurung, Tamang, Magar and other tribal groups have adopted the Hindu system of segregation. Since caste ideology bestows privileges and moral authority on those deemed higher in the social hierarchy, people accept the ideology hoping to win a high status and the privileges that go with it. Most converts find themselves in the lower ranks. Their efforts to challenge the system are opposed by the priests, the public, and the government. Yogamaya not only rejected her caste status. She attacked the priests.

Eighteen puranas, nine vyakarnas;  
He who knows these is well served.  
Sons of Brahmins, go read your vedas.  
For us ragged ones, they’re of no benefit.

Yogamaya accused the priests of hypocrisy. Their teachings, she said, served only to gain privileges for themselves. The power of Brahmin religious authorities was intertwined with the ruler’s, and Yogamaya’s attacks embraced the Prime Minister (referred by his subjects as Teen Sarkar) equally boldly as her assaults on the clergy.

Teen Sarkar, you are so great;  
Again and again I praise you.  
Like a spider who neither ploughs nor sows.  
Yet swells rich, and richer still more.
She called for the end of the fateful alliance between religion and state. Religious practices would not absolve the corrupt. They would not shield them from Yogamaya’s attacks.

Yogamaya warned those seeking redemption through religious rites to beware. Theoretically speaking, should a worshiper die during pilgrimage they are assured a more favorable rebirth. As the rich approach old age, they attempt to improve their chances of high rebirth with abundant ritual observance, including visiting *tirtha*, holy paces. “You can’t win redemption by paying with what you’ve stolen from others,” said Yogamaya. “Instead of winning rewards in the next life, you’ll be punished for your crimes.”

The four verses cited above summarize the Yogi’s basic message. They are formidable for the era in which she taught them, and daring in today’s political climate too.

In 1981, when I first heard these poems, they were sung and I could not understand the political implications of such creations. I was after all, illiterate in Nepali language and quite unaware of their simple but metaphorical message, being also ignorant of the political history of the region. I was a mere transient, intending to stop only for a night at the hermitage in Manakamana which initially appeared to be a sleepy retreat inhabited by feeble women who had come here to escape their personal problems or the ailments of their society and government, and pray together.

Any child knows an inflated bond.  
*So our Lord is witness to fraud.*

Some play blind to greed and injustice  
*But never, our Lord.*
Enchanted, then smitten, then compelled to pursue what lay behind verses I heard that first night, I stayed on, and then returned to work with those women. Manamaya would be assigned as my teacher by Damodara or Mata, the head of this hermitage. She welcomed Jangbu and me the first time, when we walked out of the hot afternoon sun into the shade of the prayer hall. We bathed in the icy river, then ate, and rested in the prayer hall. That night, my companion slept in shelter of the open prayer hall where male visitors were bedded. I was taken to the hut of one of the women. Before I slept, I heard her singing the verses. I was stirred by their force. These were not the normal praises to the divine, either Hindu nor Buddhist, I had heard living among Tibetan nuns and monks and visiting Hindu ashrams in the course of my travels through India and Nepal. They were unlike the jolly folk songs of the Nepalese hill people. These verses possessed an elegance and a rhythm completely unfamiliar to me. I also felt they carried a special message because the woman who sang them seated in the dark next to me, uttered the words with an energy that seemed to lift her from her piety and old age. I sat up and listened as she continued, and I could not sleep for a long time, as they repeated in my mind. Outside the jungle air throbbed with the calls of night insects and the Arun River flowed with a rumbling chalung, chalung sound.

An evil man’s rule cannot last.
His army is certain to crumble.
Powerless though I am, I’ll say
Your reign will end.

Early next morning I went directly to Mata and asked what were these songs I heard in the night, and she replied quietly, “These are the teachings of our guru.” She leaned her head back against the trestle fence. "Hazur³ is our leader,” she sighed. I did not know Mata but when she said this, she seemed to be unburdening herself of a long held secret.

3. Hazur is an honorific title for a man or woman, secular or religious. Yogamaya’s followers referred to her as Thulo (great) Hazur, and Shakti (holy) Yogamaya.
Mata had already decided that my arrival here was divine provenance. My attraction to and curiosity in the hazurbani now convinced her of this, and she received me as if it was her duty to help me. In the coming days, and on my subsequent visits, she saw to it that I had every assistance from her companions at the hermitage, who proved to be the only reliable source on Yogamaya, and the only people willing to risk teaching me.

Mata, like the other inhabitants of Manakamana, spoke about Yogamaya as if she was still among them. I saw no outward sign of Hazur Yogamaya, no photograph on the wall below an image of Lord Vishnu or next to the color poster of the monarch or alongside the portrait of a local notable. There was no distinguished dwelling, no sign of a monument. "Where is your guru now?" I asked.

"Hazur went to heaven. In the year Vikram Sal 19974." I said nothing, and Mata added: "The gates of heaven opened for her."

This guru was not a man but a woman, they also called Shakti Yogamaya. Being a revered woman yogi poet still did not explain the aura of mystery that surrounded this woman. "And the hazurbani?" I asked.

"These words are the teachings of our master." She did not call them prayers. Before you came, no visitor asked about the hazurbani," she said with a warm smile. "We are glad you are here and we will help you." Then she asked a puzzling question: "Are you not afraid?"

All this greed makes more injustice.
Oh Master, you promised us hope.
God, we watch the helpless die.
Oh Master, what is it you do?

Mata's head was shaven and a thin covering of white hair was visible around the edge of the orange cap she wore. She was clad only in a light cloth sari, the dress of a Hindu ascetic5, a sanyasi. Mata was

4. 1940 AD. The Nepalese calendar is calculated starting 57 years before the Gregorian calendar.
5. Renunciates are called sanyasi. Women renunciates are also known as bhaktini.
68 at the time. A few years before, she had taken complete vows of asceticism. She lived at the shrine, independent of her family, tending a small garden patch beside her hut. She ate only once a day, and never touched meat, milk or eggs. She ran the hermitage but spent most of her hours alone in prayer. Occasionally her sons and grandchildren visited her. I saw how others respected her, the women here, local farmers and other visitors to the hermitage. Despite this status, and even though she was gentle and generous, Mata seemed to me to lack real calmness and inner peace. Later I concluded she regretted she had not accompanied her master through the gates of heaven over 40 years before. Becoming a sanyasi did not seem to reconcile her decision either. So now, was she somehow redeeming herself by trusting me?

Mata did not undertake to teach me. But she knew precisely who among the other women with her would be most helpful for my research. "Come," she said, standing and extending her hand to me. "You will meet Manamaya and Bhaktini Aama. They will teach you about Hazur."

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Manamaya had an energetic voice and was known for her ability to recite the hazurbani uninterrupted for many hours. She sang verses for me during those first days, and with Jangbu’s help, I recorded many of them on my small tape recorder. Although, without translations, I was unaware of their full meaning at that stage. I was however convinced they were something very precious. I noted how, when either Manamaya or Bhaktini Aama sang them for me, they did so in the privacy of their small dwellings, and at night. Why did they not sing these lines in public?

The night before I was to depart after this short visit, Mata called me to her hut, and as if to seal our bond, she gave me a gift. She unfolded a small parcel bound in cloth which she pulled out from under her mattress. She peeled back the cloth wrapping to reveal a sepia brown booklet. She lifted the book from its protective wrap and she extended it to me, cradled in both of her palms. "Take this, along with the recordings you have made."
I turned the book over in my hands. It was not a manuscript but it was something very precious. Mata said, “In here you will find Hazur’s teachings.” I leafed through the book; it began with a few pages of prose, then sixty pages of verse, all in quatrains, and each one numbered. All were in Nepali language. On the back cover was stamped the name of the press. It was not published in Nepal but in north-east India.

Those few days and a handful of verses began a long inquiry, where, verse by verse, episode by episode, I began to piece together an ephemeral, fragmented history. I learned it only slowly and haltingly.

At the beginning, these women spoke about Yogamaya’s spiritual powers. The first verses I learned appeared to extol a state of bliss. Her followers referred to her “fearlessness of nature” and they praised her “meditations in the icy river.”

“Hazur accepted no authority but that of the divine,” they said. "She worked for dharma raj," they told me. Dharma raj? Dharma: religion; raj: ruler. Was this rule by religion? Was she advocating that the ruler be a priest? If so, how could she be anti-Brahmanic?

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Manamaya, who was a frequent resident at the shrine, became my chief guide. She did this primarily by reciting the hazurbani for me, because, she said, these embodied the teachings of Yogamaya.

Parting the year in two,
Accordingly I preform my rites.
In summer, favor a scorching fire;
In winter, delight an icy river.

Praise of nature. Also love of land, or homeland.

Supreme among peaks, this our Himalaya
From where waters flow, Arun merges
And with Barun, flows on
To mingle with Irkuwa.
Here begins a hint of her vision of equality. Manamaya explained how Yogamaya, though her long meditations in the caves and on the bank of the great Arun, overcame distinctions; not just physical ones but social ones too.

From my studies of Tibetan and Indian ascetics, Milarepa and Pha Dampa Sangyas, I had learned about women and men who renounced social life with its burdens of attachments, material and emotional, and escaped to mountain caves, removing themselves from temptations and attachments. They invented techniques to achieve and test their detachment. Yogamaya’s verses, by contrast, seemed to be about creating attachments. She invoked images of her jungle surroundings. But viewed from the perspective of an ideal of equality, the verses become transformed. "As the rivers Arun and Barun mingle," Yogamaya declares. People must merge into a society of equals. We suddenly grasp her political goal: to move towards equality. She and her followers needed a supreme confidence to face those they would challenge in pursuit of this dream. Public rebuke, threats by the priests, and arrest by the general’s troops would follow.

\begin{multicols}{2}

| लोमलैं गदा धर्मको नष्ट पारी। | Virtue, stained by greed. |
| नियो त्यसको थियो नियो पुस हकारी। | Justice, undone by bribes. |
| दोहरो त्यो दण्ड न्यैसमा लगायो। | Though innocent, we lost. |
| थियो जितने मुहा त्यो मुहा हरायो। | Thus, we’re twice punished. |
\end{multicols}

Eventually, Yogamaya’s teachings became a comprehensive utopian ideal, linked with a non-violent political strategy she devised to bring it about. It began four decades before the United Nations sponsored an international convention on women, before the current generation of American feminists was born, and even before Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent Quit India movement was underway, a campaign to rid India of British occupation. But Yogamaya’s movement went further because it included a call to end injustice against women and girls.

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Manamaya was a superb choice as my teacher, and Mata, who had instructed her to assist me, was gratified with our progress. On my
second visit in 1982, and during my stays between 1983 ad 1986, Manamaya was there to take me step by step back into history. This time Jangbu was not with me, but I was lucky to have another assistant, Dharma, a young man from Khandbari town. He came to stay with us in the hermitage and work as my interpreter. As it turned out, he became attracted to Yogamaya and asked the women to teach him the hazurbani. In turn, they treated him like a grandson, and I noted how this modern young man, who was not a Brahmin but a Newar, was completely at home with the lady hermits. Dharma was a faithful translator, but I think his overriding value to our project came from his growing love of Yogamaya, as together we learned more about her campaign.

By day we worked with Manamaya gathering together the disparate fragments of this mysterious, brilliant woman. At night, I retired to the hut of Bhaktini Aama, and after the flames of the hearth faded to a glow, still reclining under her cotton cover, in the dark, she began to recite more hazurbani. We would then rekindle the fire, and I would watch her glowing face transform as she sang. Her eyes were moist and her body was lithe. It was not difficult to imagine this 82 year old woman as a young militant fifty years earlier, beside her guru.

Wealth cannot multiply without fraud
No one says this isn’t so.
The rich make pilgrimage to garner benefits
While we poor go in search of our souls.

Bhaktini Aama stirred the air with her hands, her fingers flicking, her voice rising. She had been one of hundreds of young people who took their children and traveled upriver to sit near their master. There, they were able to name the villains, and to declare their equality.

When greed and malice fade,
The earth will tremble, the corrupt will fall.
Teen Sarkar, hear my verse.
It’s time for justice.
While Bhaktini Aama recited Yogamaya's verses in private, I continued to rely on Manamaya to explain the rationale of the Yogamaya's teachings and career to me. Manamaya was a feisty and frank woman without restraint when speaking about the past or the present. She had not yet taken her sanyasi vows and so she did not shave her head, eschew her jewelry and don the simple cotton sari. But she did receive Mata's permission to build a hut at the hermitage, and lived there a few months each year. "What can I do? I must go home to hoe and plant my fields." A year earlier, she told me, forty years after they had first wed, her husband decided to take a second wife. Why? Because Manamaya had only birthed girl children. When he brought his new wife home, Manamaya, almost sixty, disapproved and refused to be silent. She insulted him and broadcast his abuse and she cursed the old man in public. "I must divorce him and take my land. I cannot live in my own house with his new woman. He expects me to help her. Phuh. My children cry, my grown daughters and their husbands are ashamed of their father. Yet what chance have I in these courts where the Brahmin priests tell our judges how to rule. Phuh. Where shall I go? Shall I become a servant cook? So I am here, with Mata's permission and kindness. I spend winter here. In summer I must go home to harvest the paddy and thresh the rice. I cannot trust anyone to collect my share of the grain and carry it to me here at Manakamana. If I harvest it myself, I take my real share, and I will have enough surplus and put my money in a bank."

Unless she obtains a divorce, and that would be very difficult, Manamaya has no control over the family's land. She could not dispose of even a square meter of it. If she remains in the house, she may use the produce of the fields but she must also cultivate them. Most women do not challenge ill treatment from their husband or his family. If abused, they tend to submit, fearing they will be turned out and find themselves completely homeless and penniless. They tolerate the indignity of receiving their husband's second wife because of that same fear.

Manamaya had loving daughters, but staying with them was not an option for her. Each girl lives with her husband and her mother-in-law. "My girls come to see me at Manakamana. Sahili here is my favorite daughter." Sahili wears a flowered print skirt, and like her
mother, she decorates her hair with a blossom plucked from the jungle each morning. When she visits Manamaya she brings her little girl with her. “Look,” said the grandmother. “Even now, Sahili worries that if she bears no son, her marriage might end the same way as mine.”

But about her guru, she was animated and undepairing. “I was newly married and determined to hear Shakti Yogamaya. Each time we went upriver to Majhuwa, more boys and girls from our villages joined us. I took my sister with me since my husband would not come. Bhaktini Aama took along her husband and her daughter to Majhuwa. Mata’s husband would not join us, and he even tried to stop her; but Mata went anyway. She accompanied her brother and his wife, and all their children. Shanti Nanda joined us too. See how feeble Shanti is – she has more than four score years. Then, she was young, and strong minded. Bharat Dhoj with his new wife, and his uncle and aunt were with Hazur.”

Manamaya spoke of the gatherings at Majhuwa as if they were political rallies, which in fact, they were. These men and women were Nepal’s 1930s equivalent of contemporary American or European protest marches and teach-ins. This Nepalese grandmother talked about them the same way that I hear sixty-year old Americans who took part in their anti-Vietnam rallies speak about that era and the civil rights movement by African Americans which preceded it. “We were discovering the truth, and we convinced our friends and cousins to join us, certain that Yogamaya’s words would change them too. Our numbers grew and we became more fearless, and then our master began to move towards the ruler himself.” Doubtless the young rebels were emboldened by their growing numbers and the conversion of women and men from well-known families. As Manamaya explained: “Some of our people heard Yogamaya teach at Pashupatinath in Kathmandu and left their houses (this was around 1935) to follow her to Majhuwa and they joined us. Often we remained at Majhuwa through the night, singing with our master.”

Your seal is sovereign; clear any path.
Your order is supreme; name any wish.
Unopposed, you decide, you rule.
So go on: Command. Decree. But not forever.
Dharma asked: “What drew you to Shakti Yogamaya when you were so young?”

Manamaya replied, “I was fifteen, newly married—a planned marriage like everybody else. I knew other women were also forced into their unions. Old men take young girls just because a man must have a Brahmin virgin. We endured those unhappy unions and said ‘Ke garna sakchha? – what can one do? It is our life.’ Who dared shout that it was unjust. And we destined our daughters to the same fate by marrying them when they are so young. If a boy died, he left his widow as a mere child. What should be done with her, poor thing? We let the priests answer, and they said she must not marry again—imagine, even though they had not lain together and she was still a virgin—since that would bring disgrace on the family and the Brahmin caste, if a man of lower caste should touch her. So we keep her at home or send her to India to work as a cook, because some think only a ‘pure’ Brahmin may prepare their food. Serving as a cook is all she can do, they say.

“Some of our girl children kill themselves because they cannot bear the loneliness, the abuse in an unkind home, the ordeal of serving others all their life. Even today, some women step into the waters of the Arun to join Hazur. Do you know?

“The first problem is the priests. We allow priests to dictate who is right and who is wrong, who is pure and who is not, who is strong and who is weak. They work with the ruler to make laws and they use those laws for their gain. Whoever ruled, this was the way. So our master’s aim was not to oust a boss man. We know that another guy, maybe worse, would replace him. She showed us injustice was not a mere man who ordered the army to imprison us. Yogamaya’s object was to throw out the political system and Brahmanic laws, and the priests. The whole system had to be undone. That’s what she taught us.”

Through her verses, Yogamaya was able to imbue her followers with extraordinary courage. Some even dared to abandon their caste. Manamaya told me how the Yogi applauded a widow who defied caste law and remarried. She said, “Let Brahmin and Limbu unite. Let the babe in your lap be mine.”
“Shakti Hazur did not give speeches. We did not have to be taught. We felt her guidance through the hazurbani. All our Yogamaya’s teachings are in the hazurbani.”

Those teachings and the assemblies around the Yogi at Majhuwa between 1930 and 1940 mark the later stages of Yogamaya’s work\(^6\). Before her rise, she endured many years of difficulties, starting with her banishment from her village, Kulung. In the early years of the century, when she was still a girl, she had to run away because of her liaison with a man. She went to India and only returned home when she was in her thirties. After resettling near her home, she wandered alone through the jungles above the Arun River and spend long periods of isolation in caves.

Her campaign may be compared with other political protests. But Yogamaya’s strategy was unique, although it clearly belongs to Asia in its religious idiom. “She was deep in meditation night and day,” said Manamaya. “We sat nearby, above the bank of the river, and waited for her to emerge from her meditation, because that was when she would utter her hazurbani. Sanu Hazur (‘little master,’ Yogamaya’s daughter Nainakala) was as her mother’s side and she wrote out Hazur’s utterances. We did not have to be taught. We heard her words, and the spirit arose from within us.”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{दीन धियास हनु भयो त्याह निधां बाठः;} \\
\text{आसामिले कर्जो तियो नमसुक्रछ ठाडः।} \\
\text{तोरे धियास बानस बाुँ मरेछ; } \\
\text{लोभ साहु मारन गयो निन्नु परेछ।} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\* How riches grow by trickery. How riches grow by trickery.
\* You say the debt still stands! You say the debt still stands!
\* I know the dead man paid his due-- I know the dead man paid his due--
\* Yet to his boy, you say ‘give more.’ Yet to his boy, you say ‘give more.’

Yogamaya’s repeated reference to corruption and trickery were directed at the Brahmin class, those families who used their high-caste positions to intimidate the hapless peasants. Meanwhile they

\(^6\) During my research I estimated Yogamaya’s birth at between 1870 and 1880, her return from banishment around 1925, and the start of her political campaign five years later. New research has established her year of birth as 1868. See Bhandari et al in Further Reading.
themselves escaped the law because of their alliance with the government.

Until three hundred years ago, the lives of most inhabitants of the eastern hills – Rai, Limbu and Magar peoples – were subject to the powers of earth and water spirits and mediated by local experts called shamans. Some women and men still use shamans to communicate with those spirits. They appease divine forces with the blood of goats and pigeons, or fire; they call on the earth and water and mountain gods to remove afflictions, to bring them sons and to keep away the hail. In the Arun Valley, villagers offer goats to Manakamana goddess to win a boy child, or they come to the riverbank nearby to make gifts asking for Lord Arun to help women conceive a boy, or pass an examination, or regain their health. Brahmins and other high caste people frown on these beliefs. Meanwhile Hindu influence is spreading into those areas through teachings and admonishing by priests. Even tribal peoples now seek help from the Brahmin priests who claim to possess the solutions for their afflictions. These new experts introduce social rules and order people to obey them as if they were state laws. They dictate to villagers what they may not eat, whom they may not marry, what is pure and impure, and what will befall them if they break these rules. Before 1854, it was usual to refer to the county’s different ethnic groups or caste usages to maintain law and order. Under increasing Brahmin influence social behavior was regulated according to the ancient classical Hindu caste laws of Manu. Then, in 1854, these rules were collected and systematized into a national social code for all Nepal – The Muluki Ain (Law of the Land). Now each group’s allocated place in the hierarchy was spelled out in the code. Grounded in the Hindu idea of ritual purity, the Muluki Ain regulates the lives of every citizen from birth to death, just as shari’a is adopted as the legal standard in an Islamic state, and archaic Hebrew laws apply to citizens of Israel, a Jewish state.

When Hindu priests in Nepal succeeded in consolidating their authority, the political ruler – the king – became its divine figurehead. To be divine, a ruler needs religious sanction and this in turn requires the service and authority of priests. Thus the ruling Ranas and later the Shah monarchs found themselves dependent on priestly sanction and
ceremony. Even with the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990, this alliance endures. Indeed, Nepal’s Sacred Kingship became unassailable, encoded as it was in the new 1990 constitution. Even though democracy arrived after a hard-fought revolution, it did not wipe out privileges of the Highborn. Not even a popular secular revolution which restored democratic processes and elections removed what Yogamaya so fiercely and bravely campaigned against half a century earlier.

An important feature of Yogamaya’s early success was her close association with high-caste women and men like herself. She was Neupane Brahmin, and most of her followers were either Brahmin or Chhetri, members of Nepal’s most privileged communities. Few of them were poor. “Who else could do this work but a Brahmin?” retorted Manamaya. “Any protest from the Rai people would end in a stroke,” she said emphatically raising her arm and bringing it down with a thud, like a heavy *kukri* knife striking the ground. “If they tried, they were wiped out.”

The woman was surprisingly pragmatic. “Because we are Chhetris and Brahmins, we are protected by the law against Brahmin murder. The government could not harm us. It could not strike Yogamaya or Mata down like they could Rai and Limbu women.”

I struggled to understand this logic, and I gradually appreciated the power of the taboo against Brahmin murder. Then I could grasp the implications of Yogamaya’s call for self-reform. As I struggled, Manamaya sometimes grew restless with me, but her impatience proved useful. “Listen to me, White Didi. Our call for change arose from within. We had to change ourselves first. ‘Look again, the light is inside you.’ That Rai woman does not know child widowhood. She does not care what our priests say. We have to pay our priest a thousand rupees and a cow to burn our father’s corpse. But she just brews a bottle of strong *rakshi* for the shaman and he will speak to her father’s spirit. If we throw our caste away, the whole system falls apart. See, the Brahmin loses all his power and his wealth!”

Yogamaya insisted that social status was a fabrication. Rules enslave a woman, all the while purporting to protect her status. “*We,*
said Manamaya, thrusting her forefinger at her own chest, “we have to understand that we are not special, and we must reject those rules which try to claim we are special and separate. We, Brahmins, are the ones who refuse to marry. It is we who refuse food from others, who order others and expect them to obey us because we think we are better. Our sarkar could put an end to this if he were not in the hands of those priests.”

Yogamaya knew the reform-minded Brahmin rebels who supported her felt a strong sense of responsibility. Her appeals were therefore made to her own people to abandon their sense of speciality and their privileges, and rid themselves of the idea of purity. Only then, she taught, would they grasp the meaning of justice. Her religious idiom was appropriate in her time and culture too, a wise strategy few Western people appreciate.

"At that time Nepal was a religious-based regime. The best way to attack it was from inside, with its own logic,” explains Nepalese social critic and geographer, Dr. Harka Gurung. Gurung is a strong advocate of peasant rights in his country and he is an outspoken critic of caste privileges and monopolies. Even though a secular man, he fully comprehends the political dynamics of his country. “Rebellion had to come from within the Hindu community,” he says. “Brahminism itself gave rise to anti-Brahminism. Yogamaya was born Brahmin, and so she understood their logic. She knew the system well enough to design an effective strategy.”

Manamaya elaborated. "If a Rai guy marries a widow, the government doesn't care. His people say nothing as well. But when we defy the law, the Palace trembles. We are shaking the top of the social order. If a Rai girl runs away with a Sherpa, a month later, the couple can return to their house, and the families drink rakshi and dance all night. We? We are banished. Finished. Bhayo,” she said wiping her hands with the air. “If we run away with a lover, our Brahmin family performs our funeral. They consider us dead.” This is why Hazur said 'Look, it is inside you. See, there is nothing.' When we were with our master we lost our fear of the rules and the priests. Hazur taught us to completely purge ourselves of fear.” Her practices in self-discipline which took her beyond death, so that she could face the privileged
class and the inevitable wrath of the government. Steadily and unwaveringly, she was moving towards them.

Perhaps Yogamaya’s anti-Brahmin campaign is more comprehensible if we compare it to the call of contemporary Western feminists for consciousness raising. Women wanting real change first had to reflect on their role in social institutions which placed them second. We must examine ourselves, they said, in order to understand the system we are part of and to which we contribute. Only when we know our role within western patriarchy, can we comprehend the dynamic of our oppression. The 1970s feminists women taught that exploitation was not the action of single men, but derived from a system in which women and men were embedded. Fighting that institutional oppression was a large task because women had to change themselves, their brothers and fathers, their teachers and sometimes their mothers too – the very people they loved and depended on. “You are the babe in my lap, I am the child in yours.” The struggle has not ended in industrialized countries where education levels are so high.

Gandhi, when he was mobilizing his followers in the early stages of his Quit India campaign, advocated dropping caste rules. The great Indian reformer sought to unite his people by calling on his followers, many of whom were high-ranked people, to perform what they considered unclean acts: to take food from anyone, and to clean their own latrines. Those were profound acts of defiance, and difficult enough for Gandhi’s closest associates to accept. Yogamaya went further than Gandhi. She instructed high-caste men and women who joined her to cohabit as they wished, to remarry, to accept food from any hand. Hers was a formidable proposal, so anathema to the society around her, that onlookers denounced her for advocating prostitution.

Yogamaya’s understanding of caste injustices began with her own painful experience as a child. Hardly ten years old, she found herself a child widow because the little boy to whom she was betrothed died. As a Brahmin, she was forbidden to remarry even another
Brahmin and thus could never enjoy a life-partner or be a mother. Yogamaya would not accept this.

"Our Hazur eloped! She was just a girl but see how courageous she was." Manamaya laughed, and waited for me to grasp the significance of this outrageous action by her master. Elopement meant rebellion. Yogamaya began her life by defying Brahmin widowhood. One hears about non-Hindus eloping - not unusual in the tribal societies. But it is rare for Brahmin women, even more unthinkable if she is a widow.

Yogamaya not only defied the ban against remarriage. She crossed caste lines. Her lover - Manamaya would not call him a husband - was of another caste! When she eloped, this young Brahmin woman went into exile. She fled from the Arun Valley region altogether. Manamaya gave me no more details about this episode. "She went away," was all anyone would say, "and for a long time no one heard from her."

The young fugitive crossed to north India, to Darjeeling, most likely because of its Nepalese character. It was the refuge of for many earlier runaways from the north and is known as a city of lovers, refugees and fugitives. Darjeeling, according to historian Janak Lal Sharma, was the site of the Josmani religious movement at that time and he believes Yogamaya was associated with the Josmani during her stay in India7. On my next visit to the Arun Valley, in February 1983, I asked Mata about this. She was curt and defensive. "Yogamaya not part of anything. She was alone," she insisted. Manamaya agreed. "She worked for no one." Devotee Lochan Nidhi Tiwari in Kathmandu and others we interviewed, all maintained that Yogamaya had no teacher. As if that should somehow diminish her achievement.

My companions at Manakamana may have worried that my primary interest was shifting from their master to a larger political movement. They could not or would not help me probe that phase of the rebel's life. But that should not shut the door on this direction of inquiry. The 1980's American feminists were inspired by the Black civil rights movement of the 1960s. Martin Luther King Jr. was influenced by earlier generations of Black American activists as well.

as Mohandas Gandhi, and Gandhi in turn was politicized by his experiences as a union lawyer in South Africa.

One would have expected Yogamaya to grow politically during her stay in India. India was in transition in the first half of the last century. West Bengal was a fertile political ground for young dissidents, and at the time Yogamaya was there, she could have found many ideologies to ponder. Calcutta was a vibrant intellectual center, where the Indian communists played an important role in the emerging independence movement. The city was also a focus of emerging anti-Brahmin philosophy promoted by secularized Hindus. No place in India matched Bengal for its political and intellectual ferment. Given Yogamaya's later political work and anti-Brahmin stand, she could have imbibed at least some of her reformist philosophy and non-violent tactics there.

Former Prime Minister B. P. Koirala told me in 1982 that when he was a lad, he met Yogamaya briefly at his home in Biratnagar, a city in southeast Nepal with close ties with nearby India. "She came to see my father," he said, "so they must have spoken about politics." The Koirala household was well known for its party activities, so the visit suggests the young rebel from Kulung was not politically naive. Unfortunately Koirala could say little else about Yogamaya's visit, except he noted she was not alone. "She had her daughter with her, I remember, a very bright little girl," said the old politician. "Nainakala?" I asked. He replied that was her name, and guessed the girl was about nine years old at the time. Even when I told my friends at the hermitage about B.P. Koirala's comment, Manamaya, Bhaktini Aama, and Mata continued to deny any outside political ties. Yogamaya may have worked alone in Nepal, but before creating her own campaign, the woman from Kulung had lived in south Nepal or India for thirty years and must have been exposed to political issues and ideas. I suspect she also had contact with political parties or leaders.

8. Yogamaya would have been about 45 years old at the time of this meeting, since according to Lochan Nidhi Tiwari who spoke with us in Kathmandu in 1984, Nainakala was born when her mother was nearly 36 years old.
Eventually Yogamaya came back to Kulung, and what motivated her return is another mystery. In any case, she was not alone. "Everyone was shocked when they saw her. She had Nainakala her daughter with her. No sign of a father!"

Yogamaya was scorned and ostracized but she had the support of her brother and she was able to stay on. He must have endured hostility and criticism too but he stood by his sister. With his wife Ganga Devi, he accepted Nainakala as his own child. Ganga Devi, an educated woman, tutored Nainakala while Yogamaya started her career.

Yogamaya did not remain long in Kulung. She left her daughter with her brother and sister-in-law, and set out to explore the surrounding region. Wandering the trails, moving up and down the banks of the Arun River, Yogamaya witnessed the daily trials of her people. She saw the cracked and bleeding feet of porters carrying their contracted loads for the fat merchants. She heard testimonies about abandoned little girls. She learned how peasants were disposessed. She witnessed the vast fields belonging to men who were friends and officials of the Ranas. She saw how stones were mixed with grain, how women were forced into marriage, and later driven out, replaced by another wife. And from time to time, she retreated to meditate.

The forest is wondrous,
our mountains majestic.
Bare of houses, a place for a hermit.
Thus, I pray. I meditate.

"We need strength to live in the jungle." To Manamaya, Yogamaya's solitary expeditions were a prelude to her later revelations. "She feared nothing. She needed no food to sustain her. She moved alone, from the icy rivers into the jungles and through the hills, north to Khempalung Cave, and south to Halesi Cave, and further into the mountains, to the border of Tibet." This period of wandering was doubtless important in Yogamaya's development. And in her verses we can see a growing love for nature and homeland.
Living off the fragrance of blossoms,
Concentrating in the sun.
Oh, evidence of the world, look.
Come, favor me as you wish.

With Mata I visited Gaurini Cave a short distance upriver from Manakamana and saw where Yogamaya had lived alone for several years. The cave was on a rocky slope above Majhuwa – a mere ledge under a huge overhanging rock. Although it was overgrown with vines and ferns, and not visible from the trail, Mata located it without difficulty. She pointed out to me the fresh flowers and oil which were obviously left there not long before we arrived. “Whoever believes in our master’s power comes here and make offerings.” Mata spoke in a hushed tone, and I thought, “Is worship of the rebel still forbidden?”

At the end of her months of wandering, Yogamaya stayed at Gaurini. “She stopped here to do her tapasya (austerities),” explained Mata. “She fasted. She subjected herself to the bitter cold of the Arun River. She sat with barely any covering during the winter nights. She denied herself sleep. She took a vow of silence.” Whoever speaks openly about Yogamaya today describes mainly her tapasya, not her political campaign. They recall her abilities to defy nature, about how she overcame feelings of cold or heat, hunger or loneliness. But perhaps they are implicitly praising her defiance of Brahmanism?

Yogamaya’s did not begin her political attacks until after she gained recognition for her tapasya. It seems that her yogic accomplishments began to attract attention. People who had once scorned her now began to show admiration. “Some said she was a god. They made offerings to her,” said Manamaya. “From villages on both sides of the Arun, women and men came to Gaurini in search of her blessing. They asked for her advice.” Yogamaya’s social trespasses were forgotten, at least while she directed her powers towards defying nature.

Eventually, at the insistence of the growing numbers of worshipers who sought her out, Yogamaya moved from Gaurini to Majhuwa, an open, uninhabited slope close to the river. Majhuwa was near a footbridge over the Arun and not far from the ferry crossing, so
it was easily accessible from both sides of the river.

This is where she stayed for nearly five years and where she gave birth to the hazurbani. Under the tall trees beside the great river, Yogamaya emerged from meditation and began to utter verses, unlike anything anyone had heard.

पक्षीहृद्व सांत गान गर्ने,
सुन्दे माता निी बृहत हर्ने।
स्वा स्वा गाँर फॉर नदी सुसाउने,
सुन्दे माता निी बृहत बुसाउने।

So beautiful the bird's song,
It kidnaps the heart.
So gentle the river's whistle,
Our heart is again captured.

Witnessing her yogic powers, worshipers returned to their homes and urged others to hear the Yogi. Some experienced visions, and others spoke of their spiritual transformation. From Dambar B. Basnet, I heard the story of the young Tibetan herder who threw a stone at Yogamaya when she was meditating at Tordhapur Cave, and then realizing she was a yogi, apologized and begged her forgiveness. She replied "I am not a god; I am the one discarded and despised by society. Thus I am obliged to prove my innocence."

More young farmers arrived in Majhuwa and eventually Yogamaya’s following exceeded anything seen in the area. Before long it would number two thousand.

Forty years later, Manamaya remembers her experiences with the Yogi. "Knowledge of what we can achieve surged from within us. We believed we could change our society and solve our problems ourselves." She pressed her fist under her ribs and twists, pushing upwards. "No one commanded us to do what we did." Manamaya insists. Hazur Yogamaya did not lecture on the ills of government, or tell us to rebel. "The truth lay in the hazurbani. She gave us the courage. That is all."

At Majhuwa, Yogamaya was joined by her brother, by Ganga Devi, and by Nainakala. Nainakala was now educated, and she and her

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9. Estimated date is the late 1930s.
aunt stayed at Yogamaya's side, ready to transmit her teachings when she came out of her meditation. “Nainakala wrote down the hazurbani as Hazur revealed them to her,” said Manamaya. “Ganga Devi was there too. It was Ganga Devi who created the music for the hazurbani. You will find no verses like those we sing.”

Why fear execution?
A body is mortal, after all.
I arrived and exist by divine grace.
And being mortal, I’ll also be gone.

These words and their music captivated young men and women with their simple beauty. Then they reached into their social conscience to stir the imagination of the young people and awaken their political longings.

The light is within you,
And you are inside the flame.
After all there is nothing;
Look again. There is nothing.

‘There is nothing to it. Have courage,’ said the Yogi. Yogamaya did not order her followers to march on the palace or attack local police posts. What she advocated was simpler, and at the same time infinitely more profound. “She told us: ‘You can change your life. You have it within you. There is no barrier but what you yourself build’.”

It is noteworthy that her verses and philosophy did not attract old men and women, those usually seeking religious consultants and devoting themselves to prayer in their twilight years. Yogamaya appealed to the young. The majority of her followers were like Manamaya – young and adventurous. Many were newly married couples with young children. “Our parents stayed away from Yogamaya. We, me and my girlfriends, Mata and her brother, came to hear new ideas.” Brothers brought their sisters, women their husbands, fathers their sons and daughters. They were young and hopeful. They
did not seek redemption for past crimes, but dreamed for ways to change their future.

One of Yogamaya’s disciples was Prem Narain, a young mendicant who enjoyed a reputation as spiritual seeker. Some of his followers were Arun Valley Brahmins who lived in Kathmandu and gathered at Pashupatinath during the winter months. One was Lochan Nidi Tiwari who in 1984 told Uttam Pant about how Narain received a letter from Ganga Devi inviting him to the Arun Valley.

“Prem Narain. You have been searching for God all over. But God is here in Majhuwa. If you want to meet God, you must come here.” And Prem Nairain replied “She cannot be a God because she has many husbands. So, I cannot come there.” And when Ganga Devi received this, she reported this to Yogamaya who responded: “Prem Narain is proud, but he will nevertheless arrive here within seven days.” Prem Narain was in Assam at the time he received the second letter, and he was overcome by a feeling that he should return home. He excused himself from his fellow sanyasi, and set out by foot for the Arun Valley. On the way he stopped at a shop to sleep and in the night awoke to see a bright light with the sun in the middle of it. Yogamaya appeared to him there, and asked him “What do you want?” He replied he wanted mukti (salvation). And then Yogamaya threw all the fragments of the light at him, which broke into thousands of bits of paper, and she declared “Here, take which piece you want. But only one of them has the mukti in it.” Prem Narain was afraid to pick the wrong piece, and said, “I do not know what kind of mukti is good, you must tell me which to take.” With this, Prem Narain seemed to awaken from a trance and told the proprietor of the shop that he must leave, and he set out in the night and before long he had reached Dharan, and from there walked straight north and
reached Majhuwa within seven days from the time of Yogamaya’s declaration, and he met her and remained one of her most devoted servants.

Lochan Tiwari also reported that Yogamaya later sent Prem Narain to Kathmandu to petition one of the high ranking Ranas with whom she had a good relationship. Prem Narain promised him that if he fulfilled Yogamaya’s twenty-six demands, he would remain in power for twelve years. When Yogamaya petitioned Juddha Shamsher after he assumed power in 1932, Tiwari tells us, she asked “What about my edict?” The first of these demands was prohibition of child marriage. The second was discontinuation of tax on the poor.

When Prem Narain stayed at Majhuwa to be with Yogamaya, many of his own followers moved there too. And when he declared she was his guru, they did the same.

Prem Narain died with Yogamaya, but his sister, Nanda Devi, who was also a devotee of the rebel survived, and I met her at Mankamana. She had been living there as a sanyasi since her brother and Yogamaya and the others ‘left this world.’ “Was Prem Narain involved in creating the hazurbani?” I asked. “Did he help Yogamaya develop her political ideas?” She replied, “My brother was a yogi, but beside Yogamaya, he was a child.” Nanda Devi showed me a collection of his handwritten poems. But when Dharma translated a part of the manuscript for me, we were disappointed. Narain’s verses were conventional praises to the divine, devoid of the rhythm, intelligence or bite of his master’s. We could find no hint of political advocacy in them either, and I was forced to accept what the ascetics and Manamaya told me, Yogamaya was the only source of those political invocations. Parizat said this too, when she examined the hazurbani in the book Mata had given me. Nothing across Nepal paralleled the Yogi’s political wit and audacity, and Parizat, an accomplished political poet in her own right, even declared that

10. Yogamaya lost what sympathy she had inside the palace when Juddha Shamsher came to power. If it is true that she met with a Rana leader, that may have been Bhim Shamsher, Juddha’s predecessor who was reportedly slightly more tolerant.
Yogamaya was her ancestor and political model.

Yogamaya repeatedly called for a ‘dharma raj’ and eventually, I understood this as ‘rule by truth,’ or justice. In the above verse, she plays on the word ‘raj’ as both the ruler (prime minister) and an ideal justice. If the ruler is imprudent or irresponsible, there can be no justice, she says. The above verse lays responsibility for justice on the ruler. Thus, it says, his neglect is the cause of injustice. In other words, Yogamaya is accusing her supreme leader of total negligence. As calm as these lines may appear in such a simple poem, they were a rude attack on Nepal’s ruler, equal to blasphemy and certain to incite government reaction. Consider her irony in the last line – even justice by chance. ‘Justice by chance’ means no justice at all.

If these barbs aroused officials – and they did – they also alarmed the public. Some anticipated a government backlash, and families who were not part of the movement cautioned their loved ones who attended the Yogi to abandon her. “We would not leave.” said Manamaya. “She sought justice, and no more than justice. From the beginning this was her aim.”

Yogamaya herself showed no signs of retreating. Having confronted the trials of nature, Yogamaya was prepared to face death from any source. Mahatma Gandhi practiced fasting during his youth in England, and later he adopted extreme forms of fasting as a political challenge, putting responsibility for his death squarely on the
shoulders of the British. This enabled him to confront his political enemies and fearlessly face the very people who might strike him down. This was the basis of the civil disobedience Yogamaya employed. She seemed to court a confrontation and stood ready to face a ruler who had unhesitatingly wiped out opponents for demanding far less than she was. Eventually, the dictator did order his troops into the Arun Valley to crush her movement and silence her.

Before this happened, another challenge faced the reformer and her followers – the wrath of their families and neighbors who became incensed by the group’s attack on caste proprieties.

अंध मेरे जात धियो
ब्राह्मण कूलेमा।
अहिंले मेरे जात छैन
राख छु चुलेमा।11

Before I owned a caste
Belonging to Brahmin clan.
Now look, I have no caste.
Ho, I chucked it there in the hearth.

Sung in the rhythm of the hazurbani, these lines are so cheerful and light that they belie their explosive content. The poem’s brazen message would be easy for any Nepalese to grasp. She says, ‘chuck out the rules of marriage that divide us,’ and then she adds, ‘throw them there, in the fire.’ The fire? One can hardly imagine more flagrant disrespect. Her choice of the hearth as a dump for something to be discarded as trash is awesome. The hearth of a Hindu (or Buddhist) home is not an incinerator. Nor is it just a cooking place. It is sacred. The hearth endows the house with sanctity. Strangers may not cook, gather, or eat here. Since the hearth symbolizes exclusiveness, one could find no place more outrageous than the hearth to toss caste into. This simple quatrain advocates nothing less than shrugging off one’s Brahmin caste, which implies doing away with all caste. But this was very different from the rejection of social rules by individual yogi.

Yogis are respected and their anti-social behavior is tolerated in this society where their action is individualist and follows the conventions of renunciation. Yogis can flaunt any social norm because they have left society, including their caste status, and relinquished any

rights in society to take up the life of the ascetic, the fourth, final stage in Hindu life. Renunciates have wide licence and are admired for their powers of concentration and self discipline. Yogamaya was different. She used her self-discipline to defy society, urging others to break (Hindu) social rules while continuing to live as householders.

"We began to feel we too did not need our caste," said Manamaya. "Bharat Dhoj told his family he would not take the Brahmin wife they had chosen. Then, one of the Brahmin widows living at Majhuwa joined with a man and lived with him as his partner." This kind of cohabitation violates a fundamental and deeply ingrained concept – Hindu purity – a principle upheld in the chastity of a Brahmin woman. People become uncomfortable at the mention of such a liaison. It is almost as abhorrent as incest in western society. So Manamaya lowered her voice as if the news could still invite reproach. "They said Hazur was creating a haven for prostitution. Villagers came to our meeting threatening to kill our guru.

"Yogamaya met them directly and she defended the couples. 'I have given them this power,' she told them. 'It is not them you assault; it is me.'

"I was there. I heard her." Manamaya pulled held back her shoulders, and placed one hand on her hip in a posture of defiance. She continued quoting her leader: "'They have done nothing wrong; it is I, I who have given them the power to do this.' And they went away."

Surely the men and women in the assembly knew that public criticism would not subside so easily. To my question about their anxieties, Manamaya replied, "As long as we were near her, we felt we could do anything. Other women and men at Majhuwa began to live together too."

Meanwhile, from all sides pressure on Yogamaya mounted. "Ask Mata how her husband tried to keep her back. But she went secretly, taking two of her children with her. My parents told me not to go there. All of us, we began to visit our master at Madjuwa after nightfall." Even so, some were dragged away when villagers converged on the gathering place by the river to fetch their children and wives and brothers from what they thought was a den of prostitution and blasphemy.
Yogamaya would not cease. If she was not denouncing caste, she was lashing out at the priests. Most Hindus understood how the Brahmin leaders, the canonical experts and the ritual priests, worked with the commercial interests, the ruler and his court. Others certainly complained about the excesses and likely scorned the priests, but only in private. No one but the Yogi voiced criticism with such language.

Who may that spider be?  
And how much silk does he hoard?  
Reflect on this  
And you'll have enlightenment.

Yogamaya was asking her nation to challenge the wealth of the powerful. Confront injustices, she told them. For her, enlightenment was social awareness, awareness of the causal relation between the privileges of the few and injustice for the rest.

She called on her ruler to reflect, a plea which Manamaya says was not confrontational. "She was not his enemy, you see. She did not ask for his downfall. Hazur even traveled to see our Sarkar, to ask him face to face to take responsibility for his people. ‘Give us dharma raj,’ she said again and again. Hazur believed the ruler had the power to do good and she never abandoned her personal appeals to him."

‘Though I am a speck, I petition you.  
Be informed about our conditions.  
We have no benefits, no help.  
As long as there’s injustice, I’ll petition you."

Once when she petitioned the palace, she went to Kathmandu herself. Although she did not obtain an audience with the ruler, she saw her message delivered. Later she sent Nainkala her daughter, and only got as far as the ruler’s secretary. Manamaya referred to a letter in verse which Nainakala wrote to her mother reporting the encounter. “He asked Nainakala: 'Child why do you wear this yellow cloth (her ascetic robe)? Get home, dress in red and be married.'"
But the rebel was undeterred by these rebuffs. She intensified her campaign with ever more piercing attacks against cheaters and their accomplices.

What swindlers sell as butter others burn for incense
whose odious smell... is greed. Corruption! How it stinks.

Yogamaya’s metaphor of incense captures the immorality of cheating. Even in modern times, merchants commonly lace their grain with sand or stone, leaving the buyer to discover this deception after arriving home. Sometimes as much as twenty percent of a sack of grain are stones and sand. By all accounts, earlier in the century, it was just as widespread, yet few of the cheaters were ever punished. This verse describes how adulteration is exposed when a cheater burns his offering of incense. Like the Hindu hearth, incense has spiritual significance. Foul-smelling incense insults the divine and is a mockery of religion. Manamaya explained: “You have seen incense sticks. We mix wood and herb powder, and offer their lovely fragrances to our gods. But when those thieves light incense for the god, it is vile because of what they have mixed in it. It stinks, and it offends our gods. Are they not ashamed, defiling our own god!”

In a single stroke, in four lines, Yogamaya attacks the piety of the cheaters and identifies these crimes as a sin.

A regular theme of Yogamaya was the collaboration between business interests and political power.

"We all know how these injustices persist," said Manamaya. “Before Yogamaya, no one challenged them. With our master, all that changed."
At the peak, the Yogi’s local following reached 2000 or possibly more, composed of local farmers but also wealthy families from the city. On her visits to Kathmandu to petition the ruler, Yogamaya stayed at Pashupatinath where she performed her feats of endurance. Hindus from India and from very corner of Nepal converged at this holy place every winter. Women and men from Bhojpur, Chainpur, Kulung in the Arun Valley who lived in the capital were among those drawn to Yogamaya’s call for justice. Soon many of them joined the core of her most faithful supporters. Some left the city when Yogamaya returned to Majhuwa, to live at her retreat. They included women and men from the most notable families of the region – Tiwari, Basnet, Pande, Adhikari, Chapagai.

As her popularity grew, Yogamaya and her followers found themselves increasingly isolated. The ruler would not respond to her appeals. Local villagers denounced her. The young rebels may have shouted the audacious hazurbani into the night air ready to die with their leader. But they did not go into the villages to help farmers counter corruption or abuse. They did not recruit Rai and Magar people whose lands had been lost by trickery to the incoming Brahmins, and whose debts doubled and tripled and then were passed on to their sons. They did not go into the courts to challenge false land claims. They did not tutor young women to read and write; they did not

\[\text{Nobel Raja, hear our plea.}\]
\[\text{Wise Raja, give us justice.}\]
\[\text{Intelligent Raja, choose wisely.}\]
\[\text{Remove pain from your land, grant joy to those who suffer.}\]

12. By oral transmission, through Manamaya. Attributed to nainakala.
boycott taxes, or build bridges or rally on the steps of the courthouse. Instead they became entrenched at their retreat by the river, and found themselves cut off.

There is hardly any doubt that the authorities were following the activities of the rebel closely. The palace ignored her, but she persisted, finally adopting a strategy that courted death. She sent a letter to the palace with her demands clear: ‘We insist on dharma raj. Allow Brahmin widows to marry. Let our people unite with whom they wish. Stop the marriage of small children. No more protection for the rich. Remove the priests, and give us laws that do not serve only Brahmins. If these demands are not met, I and my people shall die by fire.’

Within two days of her dispatch, government troops descended on Majhuwa. Manamaya remembered: “Yes, Hazur was ready to immolate herself.”

The warning was similar to Gandhi’s threat to the British Raj to fast until death. The Nepalese government feared liability for any Brahmin’s death if Yogamaya and her followers should die. It would be considered murder since Hindu law itself forbids the murder of any Brahmin, for any reason. Yet neither was the ruler willing to negotiate with her, so instead he chose a cowardly and foolish course.

यो कलिको मुख्य आसन्त भुवन छो सून।
पिपिर छाँटकरने लाउन छाइने छन्न।।
यो कलिको चुनू हुनाले चोरि हुद्दछ।
नेक्न ता भन्दा धीन्धु मेरे जोर हुद्दैन।

This era rests on a throne of gold.
The nuggets we enlightened, discard.
Leave them to those greedy ones.
Devils, thieves, how they lust for it.

The Yogi and her followers identified the riverbank at Majhuwa as the site of their immolation and began assembling logs for their pyre. Among the hundreds involved in the preparations were Mata and Manamaya, Bhaktini Ama, Nanda Devi and Mahadidi. Recalling the awesome sight of the growing heap of wood, Manamaya became more animated. “We all joined in. We carried wood from either side of the Arun to the slope at river bank. Some were big, naked trunks of trees washed down by the monsoon from the Upper Arun. You see them on our beach. We chopped and tugged, and pushed. In a
month we had a heap of logs as high as the roof of a house."

What may have alarmed the government more than the report of the pyre was the list of two hundred and forty names attached to the notice. "Of course my name was there," said Manamaya proudly. "So was sister Mata here, and her brother, and his wife and children, and the Basnet family, and Prem Narain. This was our challenge to the ruler. He had to grant us dharma raj. He refused to meet with Yogamaya but he could not ignore this."

Manamaya's voice carried no feeling of outrage. She spoke about a logical non-violent strategy that, in theory, could have worked. She was certain, as was Yogamaya, that Juddha Shamsher Rana would not murder them.

This approach may seem archaic to us today, but Yogamaya's strategy fit the social framework of the time. As Harka Gurung explains, Yogamaya was probably correct to employ a religious principle. "Her enemy was not religion, but the abuse of religion," he explained. "At that time, governance was largely according to Hindu values. The ruler felt he was a devout, righteous person. Any rebellious act had to be a religious one in order to appeal to his religious principles. Another strategy wouldn't have gotten them even this far."

The troops who arrived from Dhankuta in the night and marched on Majhuwa could not harm these rebels. "There were hundreds of soldiers," recalled Manamaya. "They captured Hazur first. They took her and everyone at Majhuwa. The General had the list of our names that had been attached to Hazur's demand. They began their hunt. Soldiers moved from village to village searching for us. They locked Hazur and the women in Siddha-Kali Mandir (a shrine in Bhojpur town). They took the men down to Dhankuta jail."

Manamaya was among those who escaped. "Word spread that the government was going to arrest all of us - Hazur and everyone on the list. I hid with a neighbor and stayed there two weeks. The troops spread throughout the valley, searching door to door, but they did not find me." Manamaya admits it was really terrifying. The whole area was under military control. Mata escaped too and sent her husband to Bhojpur to inquire about Yogamaya's fate. She was imprisoned but
Later in Kathmandu I obtained the government’s version from Mahadev Shamsher Rana, the commander who led the troops into Majhuwa. He was governor of Dhankuta and father of the political advisor to the present king, Birendra. The old general spoke about his mission against Yogamaya purely as a military strategy. "I wanted to surprise them, to forestall their flight or their attempt to carry out the threat. We moved on Majhuwa from all sides; we ambushed the group at night.

"Yogamaya was unpredictable. We captured eighty of them there, including Yogamaya. The others we searched for in the weeks that followed. There were over two hundred names. We had the list. We found their homes and we questioned their families. With Yogamaya in our custody the young people did not know what to do. Most gave themselves up easily."

How greedy they are, discarding justice.
How proud, forgetting their mortality.
Oh we poor, we plead for truth.
Helpless, we pray to Vishnu.

"Was Yogamaya dangerous?" I asked.
Telling this story, the old general was at ease. He was living in retirement at his son’s house near the palace and received us while surrounded by several small grandchildren. He was a very tall, thin man, with the whitest skin I have ever seen in a Nepalese. He spoke English with a British accent, and even remembered the name of his English tutor. As he spoke, he lifted one little girl of about six years old onto his knee and, without a hint of moral concern about what he was reporting, proceeded to tell us about the capture of Yogamaya.

"They were very dangerous," he replied. "They were communists, you know." Then he qualified his remark to assure me that Yogamaya was no real threat to the ruler.

"Was she anyone’s agent? Was she working on behalf of an organization or party?" I asked.

The general quickly dismissed this idea. He estimated the size of Yogamaya's following at "over a thousand." He agreed
it was large, but added “they were all simple villagers.” I thought he said that to minimize to me the degree of their threat. I asked him if he had ever seen a photo of the Yogi. He said no and said he was certain none existed. Then he added, "I think however that I have a file."

“A file?” I repeated.

"Yes. From the court proceedings," said the old man. "I confiscated all the documents and brought them to Kathmandu. There ought to be copies in the courts too," he said. "But we had a file. I think it is still in this house. I will look for it. Come back tomorrow."

The next day Murari received a message from the general informing us that the documents could not be found. The general said the house staff may have burned the paper for fuel on some chilly winter night! This and other mysterious disappearances during our inquiries in Biratnagar warned us that the history of Yogamaya still troubled many people. This led me to conclude that even forty years after the uprising, people remained fearful and nervous. Testimonies from the old women at the river hermitage were permissible, but somebody gave the order that no written documentation should find its way into our hands.

तिरुनेताधि मासि दिनु चोंगलाई दिनु कादी।
धर्म समी निमापु गन्नु बीटा न फाती।
सराँथि उत्रने छन्नु धर्म जागनेछ।
राजा मैत्र भारदारलाई ठककर लागनेछ।

Kill the corrupt; behead the thief.
Judge with virtue, eliminate lies.
When our charioteer arrives, truth will reign.
And smash king and courtiers too.

I returned from Kathmandu to Manakamana after meeting the General to learn more from Manamaya about Yogamaya’s imprisonment. “They held Hazur and a hundred and forty disciples for several months. News about the capture spread through East Nepal and everyone was watching.” Manamaya told me Yogamaya’s imprisonment became an embarrassment for Kathmandu. The Yogi and her fellow captives continued their campaign from their prison cells, a temple and a large house. The prisoners could see into the

13. Murari Aryal who helped translate the hazurbani arranged this interview and accompanied me to the general’s house.
village around them, and could be heard in the neighborhood. "They began to sing the hazurbani and soon, passing townspeople stopped to listen. In Bhojpur, women and men who had never before heard the poems approached the prison and stayed there."

Bird's songkidnaps the heart.
Then a gentle river's whistle holds it.

The followers of Yogamaya had the same reception at Dhankuta jail. Hazurbani the men sang lifted through their cell windows into the village air. The neighbourhood was enchanted. "At Dhankuta," said Manamaya, "the troops themselves were smitten. Off duty, soldiers and policemen took their families to sit outside the prison in the evening."

अन्यकाल्मा न्यो घुसले फटाउन नागदा, फँटला क्रष्ट मिर्नाल ज्यो घुमा निसकी जाया।
बहने मात्र पचेको छ मरे पच्छै छैन, सम्भ राख सत्य बचनौ भूटो हुने छैन।

Fat bellies burst.
And those bribes ooze out
To poison you.
So savor your riches... while you can.

The popularity of the hazurbani was beginning to embarrass the government. It came forward with an offer of amnesty. "They said they would release the Yogi and her followers in return for a promise. Yogamaya must cease her advocacy. They must disband and quit their site. Most important, they must not utter the hazurbani.

Yogamaya accepted the order without protest. She signed a government document forswearing her utterances. The other prisoners followed her and one by one they dispersed and returned to their homes.

General Rana thought he had finally put an end to the rebellion, and gratified by his apparent success, left the area.

But they underestimated Yogamaya. She could not be quieted so easily. She began plans for a final assault. This time, she presented no demand, and said nothing outside her circle of devotees.

Manamaya leaned forward to share a secret. "This time Hazur sent word only through her most trusted aides. They told us to come to
the riverside at Majhuwa to be with her. We were to tell no one and bring nothing with us. We were to assemble after midnight.

"Oh, some of us knew what it meant. My husband told me not to go, and I stayed back. Mata decided not to go, but her brother and his wife and all their children went."

Manamaya and the others knew details of what happened because an 11 year old lad named Dhoj witnessed it all from his hiding place and told villagers after he fled. Manamaya told me: "The boy had gone with his grandmother to join Yogamaya. He told us how he pulled himself from his grandmother and ran from the gathering and hid in a tree. From there, he saw everything. There were sixty-nine people. The children were crying. So were some of the others."

The river was high and running swiftly. It was Asoj, the sixth Nepalese month, in late summer when the monsoon rains are heavy. The Arun roared chalung chalung, chalung chalung.

"Yogamaya closed her eyes and stepped into the river first. Then Ganga Devi and Nainakala followed her. Then Prem Nairain. A whole family jumped next, the father tossing his screaming son into the current, then stepping forward with his wife who clutched a baby in her arms. One by one they followed. Each woman removed her jewelry before departing, each family signed its name.

And then there was nothing but the awesome call of the great Arun.

In my dream, I saw destruction.
How Shiva, lifting his spear, sent thunder, hail, lightening.
Crash. Chaos will rule, everywhere.

Yogamaya entered heaven. So did those who accompanied her into the current.

Even today some of the surviving members of her movement express regret that they did not join her, and I suspect Mata is one of

14. Jalsamadhi: in Sanskrit, seeking eternity by immersion. This kind of sacrifice in a religious context carries honour.
those. She has taken the vows of *sanyasi*, and leads a life of prayer and meditation, a noble and worthy course in the Hindu tradition. But I felt she preferred the more radical course and was pained over her failure to take it. By the 1980s, Mata was watching her country slip deeper and deeper into the grip of corruption, with the authority of Brahmin priests unabated, with women still mistreated and Brahmin women doomed to endure premature widowhood and live childless throughout their lives. Perhaps Mata knows that Yogamaya’s call for *dharma raj* was the best solution.
Chapter 4

A GIRL CHILD NAMED LAXMI

"Laxmi must work," the woman said to her husband. "We need help in the fields. What harm can come to her there? The field is safer than the house where she has twice spilled boiling milk. She's not this much use," mother argued, marking the tip of her smallest finger with her thumbnail.

The weary woman stopped speaking to reach out and haul the pot of bubbling rice off the hearth. Then, still without rising, she pulled another pot onto the iron grill over the fire. In it was a stew for the milch cow—a mixture of potato peelings, onion skins, rice husk and other edible garbage. Next, she pulled a fist of salt from a basket hanging on the scorched wall behind the fire and she splashed it into the mixture, and stirred for a moment. She stopped and took a deep breath, then leaned over, into the hearth. Holding her plaits behind her neck with one hand, the woman bend over until her face almost touched the pot's bottom. With her right hand, she poked at the half burned sticks of wood in the circle of ashes. The she blew on their ends to ignite the fire. A few flames broke under the vessel; then she picked up the ladle to stir the mixture as she resumed her complaints. "Laxmi is fourteen. The girl has been idle too long. We keep our daughters with us so they can work and be of some use before they marry. Then they are gone."

Laxmi sat nearby, wordless, as her mother continued. From the time of her birth, the child had exhausted her. Every mother needs the help of a girl, especially after she births a son. A normal girl, even at the age of six, can coddle and feed a baby brother, rock him to sleep, clean him. By the time she is nine, she can support the baby strapped
on her back, so her hands are free to help her Aama. Girl and baby follow mother from place to place, and when the infant cries, sister lets mother unstrap him and suckle him for a few moments. In the fields, in the courtyard, inside the house, a girl child is a great help.

"Thuli, see your brother, pick him up, hold him, sing to him, pat him." "Thuli, stand here so I can bind him to your back." "Thuli, light the fire," then "Thuli, rock your brother. Carry him to Sasu. Bring him here."

"Thuli, the milk!" "Thuli, more fuel under the pot. Thuli, heat water."

But how could Laxmi do any of these things? She was blind. Somehow her Aama found a way. She strapped the baby to Laxmi’s back and directed the girl to walk in a circle, holding a rope anchoring her to the central pillar of the house. She told her, “keep him calm, keep him calm. Rock from side to side as you step around the post.”

The little girl had grown remarkably competent and could manoeuver herself through the house as well as creep across the courtyard. She taught herself every inch of the stony square in front of the house. Should she step beyond these stones, however, she might topple into the terrace below. The courtyard ended with a drop of four meters, her father told her, and if she were carrying baby, they would both die. If that happened, he told her, her spirit would be lost forever and all the family would be visited by demons. The only time Laxmi ventured outside was when she was roped to someone, and she stumbled along behind.

Once, Laxmi walked behind her mother all the way to the town, and hadn’t fallen once. The child was so pleased, in her enthusiasm she told her father when they returned home, "Baba, I walked to the town. Baba, next time, I shall fetch little brother from school." Her father laughed at his girl, but Aama had no patience. "Silly girl, you are blind," she scolded. “Who will accompany you? Silly blind girl. How can you lead your brother?”

Before schools came to the hills, every boy was put to work by the time he reached seven. With other lads in the neighborhood, they brought their cattle to search for sprigs of grass on the side of the
paths that has been overlooked by goats or foraging women. By day, a young son watched a few cows, and in the evening, he helped bed the animals and bind together what extra grass they collected in their baskets. During planting and harvest time, boys worked side by side with adults in the paddy fields. Generally, until they are strong enough to wield a scythe to cut and gather grass, and carry a bari loaded with fodder, little girls stay near the house. This does not mean they are idle. They watch animals in the courtyard and chase away birds from sheets of drying grain. Indoors, they help prepare food, and of course they take care of the younger children as well.

After schools were introduced, little girls would herd and weed and harvest. Somebody had to take over the work the boys once did since the boys were now at school. Actually, for girls old enough to herd welcomed this change. They could flee their mothers’ incessant calls for help. In the fields, moreover, they found new companions – other girls sent to herd for the same reasons. The girls taught one another songs and skipping games on the pathways above the riverbank while their animals grazed nearby. For a few hours they escaped the confines of the house and become mere children.

Laxmi wishes she could take the animals along the roadside too, just to be with other children. Every day she hears them passing above the house. She longs to join them, cutting grass from between rocky ledges, running after any wayward animals, finding juicy roots to chew. Oh, if only she could see.

In the house with Aama and Baba lived Thulo Aama, Laxmi’s grandmother. Thulo Aama was more patient with Laxmi. She trained her blind granddaughter to do many useful things. She spread the corn seeds on a mat to dry, and then called Laxmi to the courtyard. She sat her on the edge of the straw mat and put a thin pole in the child’s hand. "Laxmi, here is the lathi to shake at the birds so you can help me guard the corn." And so the girl raised her switch in the air and yelled "wha, wha, heee’ ya!" to the hens and ravens she heard flutter down near her. At first that was fun. But after two days of sitting, waving her rod in the darkness, Laxmi was tired. Thulo Aama told her she was not to move,
but Thulo Aama went away to look after the baby and left Laxmi sitting in the sun alone with only the birds as companions. Alas, Laxmi had to chase away even these little visitors.

The birds did not take long to learn that the little sentry could not see them. They waited and watched the child, and, seeing how she remained motionless, they lunged onto the blanket of drying seeds, pecked a few kernels and flew off. Before she heard the seeds dropping from their beaks, they were gone. Laxmi flailed her rod and shouted "jau, jau," but it was too late.

"If she were deaf and not blind, she would be more use," her mother said. Indeed, maybe that would have been better for the child too. She would not hear Aama's curses and complaints. "At least, if she were deaf, she could go into the fields and help gather corn or cut the rice paddy. She could thresh. She could even operate the rice crusher."

But Laxmi was not deaf. She could hear her mother's complains. She could hear the skipping of boys and girls on the path above the house. She could hear her brothers reading their schoolbooks, and father calling to them, "Shabash, shabash!" Bravo, bravo!

Laxmi's mother eventually convinced her father that the child should work in the terraces. One day, father led the girl across the courtyard and guided her down, over two terraced ledges to the first paddy field below the house. When they reached the terrace where she was to work, he tied a rope to her, and anchored it to a peg in the ground, as he did with a cow. Sometimes father took her to the field; sometimes uncle did. There they put a scythe in her hand and told her to cut everything in the plot around her. Uncle showed her to feel her way over the ground and keep within the boundary of the mud parapet. "Don't step outside the edge," Father warned her. "You'll fall over like an old cow."

These terraces were small, but since Laxmi was blind, she worked slowly. There was no one to stay and watch her, so they left her in the field alone. It was on one of these mornings that the teacher, Prabhu, saw the girl groping across the field. The young man knew Laxmi. Who in the entire Arun Valley would not know a blind child? Moreover, moments before, Prabhu had secretly watched the girl's
uncle make his way up the mountainside, leaving the child alone. The young man stepped off the path and made his way down to the terrace where the girl sat in her tender, dark cage. “Laxmi?” he said softly, stepping towards her.

Laxmi knew this voice. She remembered Prabhu had visited their house one day. He was to marry Ram Bahadur’s daughter. Aama had talked about their betrothal, and the man had stopped at their house himself.

Prabhu was a teacher, Aama told her. He was to be posted to the city – to Biratnagar – and his family wanted to marry him before he left the Arun River Valley. Aama and the other women were glad he was going away because they did not like young men working in the school. ‘Things had happened’ between teachers and school girls, her mother had said. The men went to the Pradan Panch officer who filled out his reports and levied a fine of barely five hundred rupees against the man. This was all he could do, he said. “The best thing is take your girls out of our schools.”

That is precisely what happened. Families decided that schools were not a safe place for their daughters. High schools were few and located only in the towns. Now they almost emptied of girls, especially village girls. Wealthier town families meanwhile could send their daughters to boarding schools in the cities where they would be better supervised.

The government was embarrassed by this exodus. Elementary schools in each cluster of villages were costly. Could His Majesty’s Government be expected to build special schools for the convenience and safety of girls?

Meanwhile a temporary solution was proposed. Principals in the area agreed to hire only married men in the schools. This would surely remove the chance of trouble arising between teachers and girl pupils.

Laxmi heard her father and mother talk about these things, but she could not comprehend the real problems, and certainly saw no connection between them and her own life. For her, Prabhu was a teacher and he was to be married to Karma, the daughter of Ram Bahadur, the cloth shopkeeper. The wedding was very soon because
Prabhu was leaving to take up his new job in the Tarai far to the south. She remembered that Aama said Prabhu was going to Biratnagar, and it sounded to Laxmi that he was a very successful man.

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Soon the town would witness the marriage of the teacher Prabhu and Karma. A wedding is a grand affair in a village where debts, accidents in the jungle, lost goats and abnormal births are the usual news. Weddings provide a change from routine, and whether or not they know the boy and girl, everyone debates the match, speculates on the dowry, and evaluates the go-between who helped finalize the union. The women compare views on how beautiful the bride is, how light her skin in, how heavy her jewelry is, how smooth her hair is, and how she works and talks and walks, if she is shy or weepy, talkative or sullen, bossy or demure.

Laxmi heard all the gossip. Even though no one spoke about her marrying one day, the child found herself entertained by all the talk about other girls' weddings. She laughed when the others laughed, and she found herself agreeing that Prabhu was a fine and handsome young man.

Prabhu and Karma's marriage was only a story for Laxmi until one day before the wedding when the boy and his father actually came to her house. "Prabhu, come. Drink." Laxmi's father insisted. He boasted of his wife's fine liquor and the men obliged and stepped down the path into Laxmi's house. The room filled with neighbors who came to offer felicitations. They would later say how well they knew the groom. Prabhu and his father laughed with everyone as if they all were deep friends and drank with them for many hours before setting off for their own village late in the night. Some neighbors stayed on, drinking and discussing Prabhu's good character long after the guests had left.

Laxmi's mother and father were gratified. Now this family could report authoritatively on all the details of the betrothal, the negotiations, the dowry, the boy's new appointment. Such talk was not only worthy entertainment in a quiet hill town; it cemented relations among families. But where did Laxmi figure in all this?
“Oh, Laxmi, daughter of Rajendra.” the man called softly. Laxmi knew Prabhu’s voice from his visit with his father to her home that day. So, although Laxmi was alone in the field and Prabhu called to her, she was not afraid. She did not know how long Prabhu had watched her or how he had looked up and down the terraces to see that no one passing on the paths above could see them. The child heard only his kind voice. "Laxmi,” he said, as he arrived where she sat. “You are working too hard. Here, I have a cigarette for you."

She felt safe. "Rest and I will help you," he said, and he lifted the scythe out of her fingers and held her hand, easing her to the ground. She felt tired, in the mountain sun and being alone, his presence made her feel good. She liked him because he was a teacher. She felt for the cigarette as he put it to her lips and his fingers touched hers. She let him hold the cigarette to her lips. She relaxed against the earth wall of the hillside.

The cigarette fell away and she felt a warm hand tighten on her thigh. She felt fingers pressing into her flesh. As rough hands pulled at her skirt, the cloth pushed higher against her chest and face. Then his body was half covering her.

Laxmi was confused. What did he want? She had not been taught to resist. Being blind, she had always welcomed the touch of someone else, a hand finding her in her darkness.

Something was wrong now. The man was laughing. Why was he laughing?” she asked herself: "Prabhu, why are you laughing?” she asked.

She began to struggle and push him away. This made him laugh more. Her skirt was pulled free of her legs. He grabbed her close. His voice softened. "I'll take care of you. Don't you want me to take care of you? I will take you to the schoolroom and teach you things.” He laughed again. He liked her the night he saw her in her house, he said, and once more he grabbed her legs and still laughing, began to rub against her and push at her. He moved his hands up and pulled her blouse above her small breasts. She liked the sensation of being close to another person, yet something was not right. She felt more confused. Now he drew away from her to pull her to her feet and away from the ledge of the paddy field. He pushed her against the mud
wall of the hillside. She did not know it but, sheltered by the wall, they could not be seen, neither from above nor from below.

The man grabbed at Laxmi’s thighs and pulled her legs around him. She felt him completely cover her, pushing harder. She felt pain, but did not know where it actually came from. The man pushed her still harder against the earth and began scolding her. "Be still, be quiet," he hissed. He was smothering her with his weight, pushing his body again and again against her. Then, he suddenly stopped and his heavy body fell against hers. Her legs felt wet. She thought she had done something wrong. She waited, afraid. He pulled away from her and told her to be silent and he would help her. He pulled down her blouse, pinching her tiny nipples as he held her chest in his hands. Her body hurt and she began to cry. Then the man began to speak softly. He patted her skirt and stroked her small feet. He had suddenly become gentle. "I'll come again. We'll do this again. I'll teach you many things." But, he warned, "You must tell no one."

"He is a teacher, an educated man," she thought. "He will come and finally I'll learn to read." Despite the pain between her thighs and the unpleasant memory of his weight on her, Laxmi did not feel angry.

But Prabhu never returned, and Laxmi felt sad but she told no one what happened. After many weeks of waiting, secretly hoping the nice teacher could find her again, she asked her father to take her to the field to work. "The paddy is harvested!" her mother said. "Did you think we will wait for you to clear the field? What a silly girl!"

By late August, two months had passed and Laxmi did not have her menses. She did not know the significance of this and did not think about it. She was still waiting for Prabhu. One day she heard her mother say his name. "Perhaps he is coming here," she wondered. But no, the family was discussing Prabhu’s marriage. It would take place in a few days and some of their neighbours would go to town to watch the arrival of the groom. None of these families were wealthy so the weddings were not lavish. Nevertheless a marriage was an exciting spectacle for the children and a chance for people to gather in the town. All the adults agreed that the bride looked beautiful. They said Karma was the prettiest of Ram Bahadur's three daughters.
Bahadur had insisted his daughters would not marry a village boy. He was proud that his first daughter was to wed a teacher. Yes, people said, Bahadur made a good match for his daughter. Prabhu had paid 1,500 rupees cash — a reasonable sum — to Bahadur, and provided the food for the wedding guests. It was not chicken curry. Only the wealthiest merchants in Khandbari could afford to offer meat to wedding guests. Prabhu's family sufficed with a small plate of cold churra, crushed rice, with a spoonful of curried potatoes and some chutney on the side for everyone. Government officials, shopkeepers, school boarders, the policemen, and all their wives and children came to the feast.

The groom would arrive long after the banquet ended and night had fallen but many of the guests lingered in the square to wait for him. A groom's appearance was the climax of the wedding, a celebration of the hero coming to take his prize. Perhaps today's rowdy parade of the mounted groom into the girl's village is a carryover from the past when in some localities, young brides were secured in the course of battle, taken by force, and carried off on a horse by the victor.

The appearance of a horse in town nowadays carries special significance because horses are not used in the hills, neither for plowing nor for transport. They serve only a ceremonial purpose, to carry a visiting district official from the airstrip, for example, or to carry the groom to his bride's house on the night of their wedding.

So there was Prabhu, arriving to fetch his new bride. Accompanying him were cousins and neighbors from his town. They walked on either side of the horse as his attendants. The all male party was led by boys banging drums and tin pots and playing flutes. The lads pranced back and forth in front of Bahadur's shop on the main street of town.

Karma, the bride, was in a bedroom at the back of the shop, surrounded by her sisters and girlfriends. She waited among the whispering, giggling girls, outfitted in her red dress and garlanded with flowers and jewelry. Her head was wrapped in a scarf and her face was barely visible. Karma seemed happy, although she acted diffident and bashful, as girls must on this occasion.
Her mother was proud too, but when she heard the girls snickering, she scolded Karma with a smile. "What is this? Why do you smile, girl? You must weep. You are going to leave home and go far away. Shameful girl. What kind of daughter will they think I have? Weep, weep."

In the street beyond, the drumming sounds grew louder. Boys surged towards the edge of the square. From the dark path below, shouts and clanging sounds rose into the clear night. From the street, onlookers saw the light of a lantern, swaying from its pole. Prabhu's entourage slowly made its way up the hillside to the town square. The petromax lamp hissed in the night air, and a boney, white horse stepped forward under its light. "The groom is arriving!" yelled the small crowd waiting in the square. Boys clapped and skipped in front of the tired looking horse as it slowly moved forward. More cheers rose as the children pranced around Prabhu. The warrior had arrived to collect his bride. Even though the horse was docile, Prabhu sat on it's back tentatively. All eyes were on the young man, and they cheered madly, although Prabhu remained rigid on his mount. Perhaps he was concentrating on keeping himself from falling, uneasy in his oversize suit.

A canopy with gold and red trimmings was anchored on the horse's rump, held upright by two of Prabhu's aides. It silhouetted the hero. Prabhu gripped the arms of the helpers walking on either side of the horse and he shifted awkwardly in the saddle, waiting for them to direct the horse forward. Men shouted, "The groom, the groom! Clear the way." Children joined in. "Clear the way! The groom, the groom!"

Horse, rider and his attendants proceeded slowly down the street amid the clanging and shouting. In front of Bahadur's shop, they stopped and finally Prabhu was helped off the horse. He quickly disappeared into the dwelling, and the petromax lamp was extinguished.

The horse and the crowd were left in darkness, and the clamor ended. One after another the boys dispersed to their homes to tell their parents about the arrival of Prabhu the conqueror. The square was dark and quiet.

Next day, almost unnoticed, the bride and groom walked out of town and down the mountainside to Prabhu's family's house. Karma's
A Girl Child Named Laxmi

sisters cried openly and her mother wept too as they watched her depart. Neighbors reported Karma was smiling as she walked with her young husband at her side, accompanied by her two brothers carrying the dowry of utensils, bedding, two suits of clothes and a carpet. (It was more than the remaining daughters would see at their weddings.)

On the third day, according to custom, Karma returned to visit her parents. Returning to her maitighar even for a short visit was usually a happy day for a girl. But this young woman's smile was gone. Everyone noticed her miserable composure; they were not surprised however since the rumour had already reached into every household in the town. There were many grim faces in the street that day. The families had suppressed the information until after the wedding, but now the news was out. Prabhu was to be the father of a baby carried by another girl. Still more shocking, the mother-to-be was little Laxmi.

Details spread from one house to the next about how, in the days before the wedding, Laxmi's mother became suspicious about her blind child's condition and Thulo Aama, took the girl to a woman who did some things that frightened her and finally the girl yelled, "Prabhu!" When they calmed her, she told them how he had visited her in the field. Then, the rumor said, Laxmi's father went straightaway to the boy's house and confronted Prabhu's father. The marriage was only hours away and Prabhu's father laughed and chased them out of his house. But Laxmi's father returned after the wedding when Prabhu's bride was there, and he had the hapless child with him as his evidence. Poor Laxmi. She wept and hid her face and her father squeezed her arm and shook her shouting, "Stop stop, stupid child!" Karma began to scream, pulling her hair and turning in circles as if she had gone mad. Prabhu finally broke down and cried and then tried to run away. The older men fell silent, surveying the disaster.

When details were known, the men of the town gathered together to address the calamity. They called the boy's father and Laxmi's father to their council. All were distressed and angry with Prabhu and condemned him, but they had to move swiftly to solve the problem. Although it made no one happy, they came to an agreement. Prabhu's father would pay a fine. The self-appointed council prevailed on Laxmi's father to accept. The next day the two men met in public to
drink together and to laugh once more as friends.

After this no one saw Karma or her husband for a long time. Karma stayed with her mother for a few days, then left quietly by the path below the town to return to her husband’s house. People said she wept and wept. Meanwhile Prabhu was dispatched to Biratnagar without delay to begin his assignment, according to plan, as a school teacher.

The town’s inhabitants gossiped about the episode for many months. The men seemed more involved than their wives in the ongoing discussion about how this had happened and who was to blame and what else could have been done. Several of these men were town notables and had been deeply involved in the betrothal, and the celebrations. They had to redeem their self-respect. The go-between of the match, for example, was Madev, and he had to protect his reputation as a match-maker. The attendants who led Prabhu on the horse and celebrated his manhood in the public square would not be shamed.

Each of the men in turn asserted the emotional needs of an educated man. They discussed the custom of child betrothals, at least for girls. Perhaps they should send girls into marriage at the age of eight, as their fathers had done. They argued the monetary settlement between the fathers: how much? what terms? Some said that Laxmi’s family should have hushed up the pregnancy and said nothing about the rape. A few argued that Prabhu was a coward for breaking down and admitting his crime.

But no one talked about the pregnant blind girl.
Here was death.
That ragged cart-puller,
crushed on the road
by the shiny car
of a drunk city guy
in slick white suit, as he sped,
fleeing in the night...

from 'Mreetyu'
श्री दुर्गा देवी धिमिरे स्वर्गीय जाविलो सर्वार्थं २ मैसुवा २८ माघ १९
Chapter 5

DURGA DEVI: 
Advocate, Patron, Prosecutor

After Yogamaya’s death in 1940, Majhuwa was abandoned. Whoever of her followers remained, dispersed. Some went back to their village. Others returned to Kathmandu. A few became wandering ascetics and made their way to India, merging into the spiritual or the earthly currents of the great land, flowing from one Hindu holy place to another. Who would know their past? Did it matter?

By 1960, a handful of women, each for her own reason, moved down-river a few miles to the sacred place called Manakamana and camped at a sandbar beside the great Arun. Into their group, although not part of pious life and she never would be, came Durga Devi. She was born around 1918 and died at Manakamana in 1973.

Durga began to attract attention in public confrontations with her brothers-in-law about 1940, when she was rather young. Although her appeals started even earlier, the details of which we will presently hear. Durga was a more contemporary sort of activist. She was a political agitator in the modern American sense, and her language was secular. No one was less like Yogamaya than Durga. A flamboyant and cantankerous woman, Durga was no poet even less of a visionary. Compared to the unworldly Yogi with her piercing, beautiful verses, this rebel was a graceless peasant who shouted her way into history. Passive resistance was not her style. Durga was a woman of immediacy.

Durga was religiously conservative. By caste she was Chhetri, ranked just below Brahmin in the Hindu caste hierarchy. She did not
challenge caste protocol as Yogamaya did. She followed Brahmanic rules regarding marriage. She accepted her widowhood as a child, and observed rules about food purity, even hiring a Brahmin woman to cook for her and so maintain the house’s ritual purity. So Durga Devi did not seek to end laws imposed by the caste system.

Durga campaigned to see that the law – concerning land, inheritance, rape and abuse, debt trickery and extortion for example – as it existed, be respected and implemented. She found ample reasons to concentrate on these injustices. Corruption, graft, caste privileges, abuse of power and bureaucratic laziness were still rampant in 1960 although by 1951, the Rana regime had ended. Nepal had a nine year period of democratic government, but it was replaced by a new dictatorship, the Shah kings. For 104 years they had been powerless, retained by the Ranas only as symbolic heads of state. Now it was their turn at tyranny. The new dictator was King Mahendra. Beginning in 1962, his first five year plan provided for some economic development and social welfare. For this, he created a delivery system, a network of administrative posts to reach into cities across the plains and into the hills. By the time Durga began her work bureaucratic abuse by the new civil service was flourishing. Officials worked according to the size of a bribe, the courts continued to favor the rich, women were abandoned without land if they objected to their husband’s behavior, and men violated young girls while police turned a blind eye.

To counter the abuse and exploitation she saw around her, Durga’s goal was that government officials observe the law, that police apply the law, and that courts be fair. She appealed to the courts to keep her share of land after her husband died; she helped people who were cheated to name the culprits and demand justice from the police; she came to the defence of a violated child; she helped women who were abused; she badgered government clerks until they did their job. She brought to this goal her literacy and a profound knowledge of law and legal procedures, a skill she learned as a child accompanying her father to the courts. Although Yogamaya sought to reform the Nepalese legal code, Durga found some protections in it. The problem, to her eyes, was corruption. According to her, if the Muluki Ain were faithfully applied, it could offer people justice.
Durga conducted her campaign in street confrontations, filing complaints against whoever attacked her, harassing clerks and fighting in the courtrooms of the district towns of East Nepal. And she did this almost singlehandedly.

In 1981, during my inquiries about Yogamaya, I met Durga's lifelong friend Mahadidi. She was another resident at the hermitage, a Brahmin widow, also a former devotee of the Yogi. After Yogamaya's death and before taking up residence at Manakamana, she was Durga's cook and confidante. Their association lasted for 25 years, until 1973 when Durga died. They lived together, first in Malta, Mahadidi's village, during the 1940s and 50s. Malta is within a half day's walk of Tumlingtar, and not far from Chainpur, district headquarters at the time where Durga fought her earliest legal battles. The court was located in Chainpur town.

The two women traveled often – to Banaras, Hardwar and Assam, Darjeeling and other places in India. At home, Mahadidi witnessed many of the public encounters her friend provoked. Mahadidi was not a social activist herself, and she did not discuss Durga in an ideological way. Over several long conversations, whenever I visited Manakamana, Mahadidi taught me about her departed companion. She spoke with surprising dispassion. While I found this odd on the one hand, it was to my advantage in piecing together this biography of Durga. Mahadidi did not have her own agenda. She was not trying to eulogize or champion her friend. Her detachment made the history of this heroine all the more convincing. Her reports proved highly reliable.

"Who owns this land where you have built your houses?" I innocently asked Mata one morning. We sat on the hill overlooking the beach sloping towards the river.

"Durga Devi bought it for us," she replied. Mata's response to my question was simple and rather matter-of-fact. From where we sat

1. Mah- short for mahili, the term for second daughter. Didi is the respectful term for elder sister, also used for non-relatives.
on the hillside above the hermitage, we could see most of the fields and jungle that belonged to them. The place where the women lived stretched along the bank of the Arun for a quarter of a mile. At its southernmost frontier, their property started at the pebbled *sati ghat* where corpses are brought for cremation. It included the open sandbar, and extended upriver to a cut in the forested hillside where one has to leave the water’s edge and climb uphill.

The Kumal fishermen walk onto the beach from the river, jumping from rock to rock across the current. But that is not the customary route. Most visitors trek through the jungle from the hillside above and walk downhill towards the river. Funerary parties on their way to the burning *ghat* pass at the edge of Mankamana so as not to disturb the women and proceed down the beach to build a pyre at the water’s edge. Worshipers at the nearby shrine of Goddess Manakamana and those who make offerings to Lord Arun in the current also pass through the settlement.

Half of the hermits’ land is an open beach and garden. The rest is a tree-sheltered hillside, not more than ten acres altogether. An ideal location for a retreat, it is isolated but still accessible to worshipers and others, mostly families of the old women. A large thicket of banana trees and some mango trees on this land belong to the hermitage. A prayer hall was built on a clearing in the middle of the property. Around it, scattered under a grove of lemon and lime trees are thirty-two small grass roofed huts—the homes of the ascetics.

Until 1960, the area was uninhabited. “Tell me more about your patron,” I asked Mata.

“She was a wealthy lady, and she always helped women. She gave it to us,” she said.

A woman? I thought of the Buddhist culture of Sherpas and Tibetans. I had studied with nuns in the Solu district of Nepal a few years before and knew when a rich Sherpa or Tibetan woman takes up a life of contemplation, she donates her personal wealth to the nunnery she joins. Or she founds and supports a new nunnery. “Was Durga such a woman?” I asked.

“A rich sanyasi? No.” replied my host. “Durga Devi was her name. In 1960, she bought some land here and constructed the path
through the jungle to the river. In 1963 she bought us another piece beside the first and you see what we have in front of you. Mahadidi knows all about her; she will tell you.” Mata laughed, amused by the idea of their patron as a holy lady.

When Dharma, my translator, and I arrived at her hut, Mahadidi was expecting us and appeared delighted by our mission. She poured each of us a cup of milkless tea with mint leaves, and plunged directly into Durga’s career in the courts. “We call her Jethi Devi, victorious Devi,” said Mahadidi, “because she always won.”

“She was a widow; so was I.”

“In those days,” explained Mahadidi, “the courthouse was in Chainpur. Durga was already involved in the case against her brother-in-laws. She could not stay in their house because of the animosity between them. She could not remain anywhere in Marwa village, where the disputed land was located. She needed to be close to Chainpur to be ready to pursue her work at the courthouse. So she came to my village, Malta. She built a house and she asked me to be her cook. We stayed together for 25 years, until near the end, when she became ill and we moved here to Manakamana.”

Such an contract between two widows was rare since widows are normally destitute and rely on the forbearance of their families. Except for wandering ascetics, who are mostly men, few people live alone in Nepal. Neighbours would not have been thrilled to have Durga and Mahadidi in the village. Villagers from around the region sought out this odd couple for help, but Durga was by then well known for her cantankerous ways and was not welcomed into Malta homes. Local residents considered Durga meddlesome.

She was also unpopular with officials. Durga would not overlook the corruption in the government offices which was rampant even by the 1960s. “You were in Khandbari,” Mahadidi told me. “You saw clerks drinking tea and playing cards and gossiping on the job. You know how the elected representative uses dynamite to fish for himself and his fellows! How his friends buy up the land when he tells them that is where the hospital will be built. What do they care about

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2. Durga was about 19 years old when she began this eight-year long court battle for her land. It would have been around 1940.
the porter who comes to them for help, holding a paper from the landlord which he can’t read? ‘Go to that office;’ ‘we are closing;’ ‘come next week;’ ‘go back to Bhojpur, this is not registered in our district;’ ‘we have not received any police report; go and ask them for it,’ and so on. That’s what they tell the fellow who has lost a day’s work and has walked four hours from his house to their office.”

Mahadidi told us how, in order to learn about goings on in the locality, her boss waylaid children, or met them in the fields when they were idly watching their cattle. She bribed them with candy to tell her their family gossip. She asked them who was beating whom, who had been cheated, or insulted, which auntie was sent away, or which little girl was unfed. Being an outsider in Malta Durga had no sister or aunt to tell her these things. In any village of sixty or fewer households where the even minor disagreements become public knowledge, children know as much as adults do about people’s affairs.

Durga must have lived an isolated life if she needed to cajole children for information. Perhaps officials and other men threatened villagers to stay clear of this woman. But I was more interested in Durga’s jural activities. To lodge complaints in the courts she would have been educated in law. But when Durga was a child, there were hardly any village schools and few girls were educated, even up to class five. The New Education System plan was introduced only in 1971. Palikot village where Durga was born, could not have had a school until after that. Where and how was this child educated? Where did this women study law?

"Sher Bahadur Ghimire, her father, taught her," came the answer.

Some children were schooled by a family member. In this case, the leap from basic literacy to a legal career was immense. I pressed Mahadidi for more details. “Was Ser Bahadur a lawyer? Perhaps a distinguished judge?” My naivete about Durga’s father also amused Mahadidi.

The man was not an unknown character in the valley, but he was a far cry from a respected judge. Mahadidi did not actually say he was a scoundrel but it was apparent that she did not care for him. In fact, I never heard anyone express a word of admiration for him.
"He was a man of the courts. Always in the courts, getting more and more land". He probably loaned farmers money. Many fell into debt, and although land is not supposed to be transferred, Sher knew how to collect their deeds. He travelled on his horse from one town to the next, filing foreclosures wherever the fields of the wretched farmers were registered: Dingla, Bhojpur, Dhankuta, even Kathmandu. Knowing jural procedures, Sher could file his papers himself and make his case directly to the judge. He may have paid the judges as well. The poor farmers had no one. Most could not read or write. And there were no lawyers to defend the poor. So Sher Bahadur collected one field after another, from courts on that side to courts on this side (of the Arun River). And Durga went everywhere with him. She was a young girl. She had her own horse, one she chose herself which was larger than her father’s mount. He entrusted his legal papers to the girl and she carried these in her saddle bag. "She kept them with her in the courtroom. At the nod of her father, Durga opened the bag and fetched the relevant document.

"I never met Sher Bahadur. Only I heard that people feared him," said Mahadidi. This reminded her about the abduction of the woman who became Durga’s mother. "He was traveling by horse on the trail between Palikot, his village, and Dingla. Over there, on the ridge," she said, pointing across the river. "He saw her walking with her servant. She was married but Sher wanted her. So he ambushed them in the jungle and took her. He told the servant to go home and tell his master he would pay for the woman. Later, he sent the jari (divorce fine) to the woman's old husband. That was all." The abduction was treated according to procedures for elopement which was not uncommon in Nepal.

Sher Bahadur became a wealthy man but did not sound like a wholly noble fellow. He and his brother Bir Bahadur may not have been above bribing others, they became so rich. Durga learned to read and write from her father. So she must have learned the ways of the courts from him. She was not a lawyer. But, understanding legal formalities and being fearless, she defended herself. But she would put her skills to different use than her father had. From the time of her childhood, she showed a righteous bent and a deep concern for others.
Durga’s first known appeal, for example, was a heroic (or defiant) act on behalf of her brother. He could not have been much older than 15, but somehow, he and his father were in trouble. In fact, they were in prison in Kathmandu. According to Mahadidi, they had slain a Rai man who had attacked them.

The episode occurred around 1928. Durga was hardly 10 years old herself when she accompanied her mother and uncle on a visit to Kathmandu. This was still the time of the Rana dynasty. The country was ruled by the same dictator, Chandra Shamsher, whom Yogamaya would challenge. Durga later told Mahadidi what happened. “The family was walking in the main road in the city, when a carriage, escorted by guards, appeared in the road. It was drawn by four great horses. When people saw his carriage they knew the ruler was inside and hurriedly moved aside, turning their eyes down. Durga did not step back when she saw the ruler’s coach. She ran into the path of the horses and she grasped the bridle of one of them, somehow bringing the team to a halt. ‘My brother, my father,’ she shouted at the ruler, as if she ever could see him from where she stood. ‘My brother, my father, let them free, they are innocent. Oh Sarkar, I ask you to release him.’” That was all Durga said, according to Mahadidi. She told Mahadidi that she saw the ruler look at her, and when she let go of the harness, his carriage swept on. Then, she reported, the police surrounded Durga, her mother and uncle.

"They could have been taken away and jailed, maybe shot. Others saw this. You can ask in Kathmandu. They will remember.” According to Durga’s account to Mahadidi, the police questioned her uncle but they did not arrest any of them.

Victory awaited them in the Arun Valley. Soon after the family arrived back in Palikot, Sher and his son also returned home. They’d been freed from prison! According to Mahadidi, Durga’s demand to the ruler had made this possible.

“Thereafter, Durga was at Sher Bahadur’s side, mounted on her horse, riding with him and with her uncle, Bir Bahadur.” They always moved by horse going to and from their business affairs. Apart from high ranking officials who tour remote villages on horseback, only this trio travelled this way. Mahadidi said they wanted to be
certain everyone took note of them as they passed. Little Durga’s brother was not among the team. It seems he was a sickly child who would not survive long.

“Sher’s daughter carried his satchel holding his legal files. Durga accompanied the men right into the courtrooms. She followed everything her father and uncle did.” Probably her education was largely acquired this way, and by studying the documents her father discussed with her. They were a formidable team. They shared many more victories over land and Durga’s sense of right and her feeling of invulnerability must have come from their successes.

Despite his adventures in law, Sher Bahadur was a traditional man. Even though he saw that Durga was educated, he still betrothed her as was the custom, when she was 6 years old. Her ‘husband’ was a 9 year old boy she had never seen. He also arranged the marriage of his son when he too was just a child.

Durga was a widow even before she took up residence in her marriage house. Her brother, Sher’s only son also died before he received his young wife, so she too became a child widow. Neither girls could remarry and neither would have children. The dowry was paid, the marriages legal, and the girls would eventually move to the home of their dead husbands. Durga’s little sister-in-law would come to the Palikot house, and Durga would be sent to Manva village, where her child husband was born. Sher Bahadur Ghimire was Chhetri caste, yet he followed the Brahmin practice of prohibiting a widow to remarry. This almost guaranteed that Durga would be subject to abuse. If Durga had not been able to protect herself and her sister-in-law, we would have two more cases of injustice and two more examples of aggrieved women.

Since Sher Bahadur survived his son, he might have anticipated problems over inheritance might arise and he could have searched for a solution, even if that involved breaking with custom. But he did not. On her side, even as she matured and faced difficulties in her husband’s house at Marwa, Durga never challenged her father’s decision regarding her marriage. Ending child marriage and
widowhood were part of Yogamaya’s struggle, but not Durga’s. She neither fought to overturn her fate as a child widow, nor did she campaign against the practice in general.

Durga knew she had to move to her husband’s house in Marwa even if he was not there. But for several years she continued to spend much of the year in Palikot with her father and mother. Only when her father died, did she move permanently to Marwa. It was 1933 and she was 153.

Durga was happy at her home in Marwa at the beginning. Her husband’s brothers were still adolescents and their wives had not yet moved in. The early cheerfulness was due to her affection for her Sasu (her mother-in-law). There was a magic union between them. The Sasu welcomed the girl from Palikot. Indeed, the older woman was devoted to the young widow. And they forged an remarkable partnership. As we shall see, her Sasu’s actions on behalf of Durga were critical in her career. Their bond would last until the old woman, with Durga at her side, gasped her last breath and was consumed in fire at the burning ghat near Manakamana.

This kind of bond between women was rare. If a women has several sons, she receives the wife of each into the same house, and she usually dispenses her affection to those daughters-in-law who bear the grandchildren. Her eldest son's wife is frequently her favorite because she gives birth first. But Durga was childless and a widowed daughter-in-law in this condition is usually a disadvantage. Without a husband to protect her, or a male child to assure the line, a widow can be subject to cruel treatment from her mother-in-law. It is not unusual for her to be shunted aside and, if she stays on, live a miserable existence on the margin of the family. Some young widows run away. If she is lucky enough to have a brother willing to take her in and give her work, a widow might return to her maitighar. That option is only possible if the brother’s wife agrees, and even then, a widow is not always kindly received.

3. Sher and Bir Bahadur died violently. The police reported they drowned after a landslide swept them into a river but Durga maintained they were murdered by people who ambushed them and stole their legal files.
My translator Dharma was listening carefully to my discussion with Mata about the difficulties of these child widows. She knew his family, and seeing his thoughtful mood, not unkindly reminded him about his Phuphu, Dharma’s father’s elder sister who had been living with them since before Dharma was born. Mata guessed that Dharma and his brothers and sisters hadn’t thought much about that loving, but sad aunt. “Your Phuphu was a child widow. She left her land and did not want to fight, so she came to your father’s house (her maitighar). Your mother said she could stay, but if she did not agree to work as your Aama’s cook, you may never have known your sweet Phuphu.”

Dharma was deeply moved by this information. He thought over what our friend had told him and began to recall for us the ongoing tension between his parents over his father’s sister. He told us how, after his auntie ran away when he was a child, his older brothers went in search of her and brought her back to their house. “She has no money, no jewelry, no land, Father told us. He said Phuphu had run away after an argument with our Aama.” Dharma remembered that his mother and auntie hardly ever spoke to one another. Dharma had thought this was a personal problem in their house. He believed his Phuphu a poor relative whom his father was helping. He thought she stayed with them because she loved Dharma and his brothers and sisters. Now he understood that she must have had rights to some land somewhere, and that she had lost her fields because she hadn’t demanded her rightful portion. Dharma, with tears in his eyes, promised he would go home in a few days to talk to his auntie. He had a new awareness of the depth of her history and he wanted to learn more about her past.

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As Durga’s campaign demonstrates, legal redress for women is available. Even if she is widowed and childless, a wife retains some rights in her husband’s family property. And these rights are guaranteed in the national social code, Muluki Ain. Few women feel able to assert this right however, just as they will not legally challenge their husband if he brings a second wife to the house. But Durga was different. She decided she would not forfeit her land. She was 25 and had been living
in Marwa for almost ten years, working her fields, caring for the animals, repairing the house and enjoying the confidence of her Sasu. She was not about to let her *dewar* (husband’s brothers) and their families take the produce of *her* fields.

But what man voluntarily gives up his dead brother’s portion? To insist on her share, Durga needed the court’s sanction and she would have to fight for it. A public dispute of this kind was certain to bring the scorn of the whole village on a woman. Was Durga ready for all this?

Mahadidi reported how all three of her *dewar* joined forces in their determination to take Durga’s share for themselves. “First they tried to win their mother’s support. A woman will usually side with her sons, but Sasu refused.” This was critical. Sasu’s support for Durga was essential because, as the senior woman of a household, the deeds to the land were in her possession, not with her sons. Although women may be subject to many constraints, and even though they do not ordinarily overrule their sons, they are the head of the house and as such can decide how shares are divided. “All three *dewar* found their own mother standing firmly with Durga. ‘You must give Durga her share,’ she told them. The men asked their wives to help assuage Durga. ‘Promise her anything,’ they pleaded.” But Durga could not be mollified. Finally the men decided on a trick.

“They would marry Durga off, to an outsider. It would be against our caste rules and it might bring shame on the house, but they calculated that it would pass, and in the short term, they could live with the gossip. They thought that if Durga were sent far away, she would be forgotten soon anyway.” So they began to search for a new partner for their troublesome sister-in-law. They even agreed to offer a small dowry to help lure a husband. It was worth the sacrifice of some of their savings to give someone else her ill temper and her rights.

Mahadidi only learned about this from Durga later, but in her report to us, she spoke with the enthusiasm of a spectator at a sports match.”Everything was arranged. The groom was a man was from down in Madhesh and he was on his way to fetch Durga. An old, old man,”Mahadidi said with a pleading look. She grimaced and pulled her spread fingers down the sides of her own face to paint a picture of a
withered old soul. Mahadidi's large eyes opened wider as she continued. "Durga did not know. The Madheshi was due that day and he was already near Marwa, about to claim his wife! Hah. He had his musicians with his party and they began to play their horns and drums as they came nearer to the house. You can be sure the brothers and their wives grinned with delight. Their saucy sister-in-law would be gone."

"They miscalculated. Durga's Sasu knew the men's plan and she did not like it." Up to this point she had remained silent. But something made her change on the day when the old man came to take Durga. "You will never believe what she did, that Sasu? Against her own sons!"

"Against her own sons!" she repeated. Mahadidi's enthusiasm for Durga's mother-in-law was infectious. This Sasu was the kind of mother-in-law every Nepalese woman dreamed of. "Against her own sons," she said again.

Dharma and I were not the only ones enjoying this tale. Another old woman from the hermitage had been listening from nearby, leaning on a shade tree. She smiled as she stepped into our circle and crouched right in front, between me and Mahadidi. She knew the story, but she wanted to hear it again. She sat on the ground, leaning forward to hear Mahadidi finish the tale. Her thin sari was pulled over her close-cropped head reminding me that she too had probably been a child widow, a desolate sister-in-law. How much of a model were Durga and her Sasu for this woman? Or is this just a wild story?" We all waited for Mahadidi to continue.

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This is a cherished moment for an anthropologist. A field researcher often finds herself groping blindly in the early stages of an inquiry. In my work in the Arun Valley, I began without a map, not knowing where I would end, unaware of how few people would or could verify this history. In retrospect, I feel I was blessed with a degree of naivete and by these women's tolerance of me. Like my innocent questions about the poems, or the ownership of the land where the women lived, my naivete led me here. But having stayed on, finding that their lives were so charged and controversial, I had to
make a special commitment to them.

We anthropologists are visitors here. We usually can’t see beyond the colorful and curious customs of our hosts to enjoy the deviant and daring. We don’t usually seek out the abnormal since the norms are difficult enough for us to make sense of. We concentrate on learning people’s habitual ways because custom tells us how the society holds together and that is what we want to know. We seek endless examples of caste norms, of inbuilt or ‘inherent’ exploitation or inequities, of backwardness, of the ‘endurance’ of traditions, of family values, of people living the same way century after century. We become so enchanted and overwhelmed with the norm – after all we are only visitors and do not have to abide by these rules ourselves – that we can’t imagine anything else. Especially in Asia, the Arab lands and across Africa. That is not because social life in India or Burma or Bangladesh is inherently inflexible, but because of our own limited vision.

Most anthropologists develop a narrow view of what is possible, for example, in Asian societies. We are sent to understand these norms and the power of the rules of these cultures, so we too have vested interest in them. We accept a picture of social rigidity because many of the people we speak to are firm about what they can and cannot do. We encourage them to tell us what is normal, and we record that. We hear so many stories about forlorn and abused widows that the practice seems unassailable. If we feel too angry about their problems, we won’t stay long. If we feel nothing can be done, we write about the ‘tenacity of traditions’.

Mahadidi’s account of Durga Devi cut through all that. This was more than a story. It was these women’s history, these peoples’ history, and as such it became a record of their potential.

It was during those few weeks, hearing such stories, that my aims as a chronicler changed. I found my skepticism fading. My British professors stressed the need for skepticism, in order to better evaluate ‘truth.’ I decided that to continue this pursuit without the usual tools of verification – news reports or chronicles of other examples, or statistical occurrences – I had to evaluate the report qualitatively, perhaps with my emotion. I learned there are times when
facts themselves cease being paramount. Facts can be useful, but they can be highly subjective too. And facts have their limits. The personality and the character of events can be more significant, and just as real, and could lead me to the truth as much as empirical facts could.

I abandoned my scepticism. I allowed myself to enter this history and I did something a scientist should never do. I found myself cheering Durga, cursing her dewar, and feeling the thrill of an approaching victory. She would never let that toothless old dog take her, never let her brothers-in-law dump her. I also felt a growing confidence that Sasu would not betray Durga.

I was no longer a detached observer. I felt destined to be here with Mahadidi and the other widows. I resolved to write Durga's story without empirical facts. Durga was a heroine for me. Sasu had to help her, and she did. Sasu crossed the line to openly ally herself with her daughter-in-law, rushing to Durga to warn her of the old Madheshi's arrival. There was still time for Durga to escape.

"But Durga did not run away. Not Jethi Devi," Mahadidi assured me. She devised a plan, of sorts, for the unsuspecting fellow. In what was to become her style, she positioned herself for an assault, running into the path and singlehandedly confronting him and his party. Mahadidi laughed as she continued the tale. "She attacked the poor chap. And he turned and fled in the opposite direction, back to Madhesh." And Durga? "She was screaming, cursing the old man and her dewar. The whole village was watching." The men must have been chagrined. What a blunder. They had not only lost their dowry. They had aroused Durga's wrath. Their failed scheme made Durga even more determined to have what was hers, and more. She had Sasu, who would always be her accomplice. Soon after, Sasu handed over the land deed to her favorite daughter-in-law — a kind of parting gift. They had taken the first step.

A woman cannot just walk away with a deed and cash it in. There would be a court hearing. Moreover, Durga's share was not one coterminous piece of land on a hillside. One plot was many hundred feet below near the river surrounded by her brothers-in-law's shares — another bordered the path to town — another lay in the meadow on the
shade side of the mountain – another was east of the house. Until now the family ploughed and seeded and harvested the fields together. Who would want to purchase these disparate plots?

First Durga would have to go to the court to force a sale at fair compensation. Then she had to somehow exchange plots so hers would be coterminous and she could cultivate them independent of her relatives. This would take time.

Durga’s struggle for possession of her land involved a series of court cases lasting eight years. During this period, Durga moved to Malta and lived with Mahadidi while she supported herself from the produce of her fields in Marwa. Sasu watched over her land, but Durga regularly returned there to plough and sow, to hoe and harvest. The two women tended Durga’s fields together, and when Durga returned to her temporary home in Malta, Sasu sent Durga her share of the harvest. She sold whatever grain she did not need and put her profits in the bank.

The court battle continued and at times became ugly, with Durga and her three opponents shouting insults at one another in the streets, first in Chainpur, where it is said, she actually kicked a judge, and later in Khandbari, after the courthouse was moved there (not in flight from Durga but because of a district re-zoning). Administrative towns are the domain of men, mostly government men. They and the hangers-on who befriend high officials and rich merchants, and profit from government contracts. The town center is their clubhouse. They have their own way of doing things, their own culture. To the last person, from Bhojpur to Dhankuta, the men of the Arun Valley knew about Durga Devi. Here was a woman, a widow with no formal education, who was intent on using government, not bribes or tricks, to secure her rights. Sympathy among the town’s inhabitants lay with Durga’s brothers-in-law. And that would grow as the dispute dragged on.

On my early visits to Chainpur and Khandbari just after I first learned about Durga, I inquired about her among town residents. Those who volunteered a comment were dismissive of Durga and told me that she was not worth my time. They offered no details about her work, only repeating, “she was a troublemaker; she was always making
trouble." This was their simple, singular characterization of Durga. They had made up their minds long ago that she was either a troublemaker or 'mad'. Everyone spoke in the same sulking tone, as if she had personally hurt them.

I had already lost any chance of befriending these gentlemen with my earlier inquiries about Yogamaya. They had described her as a communist whore. Now here they were summing up this lady in equally derisive language. Yet, I found the men's reactions instructive. Their hostility to Durga Devi was founded in their solidarity with her brothers-in-law. Some of them had widowed sisters-in-law staying in their own homes, women whose shares they were enjoying. They must have thought: "What if she decides to follow that troublemaker's example and take possession of her fields?"

I suppose I was fortunate that these men were not hostile towards me. After all, I was a visitor in their country and they could have had me shipped out, or pressured the women at Manakamana to end their association with me. Their dismissals and rejections only made me more curious.

The men – police, clerks and merchants – hated that abrasive style of Durga's. She was confrontational in most of her dealings with people, and this was unacceptable to the culture. She probably seemed like the ambitious and angry American or European women today who are labeled 'militant'.

"Durga felt pity for the women and men who simply needed the help of a clerk – even a high-school educated boy could ease their hardships with a few kind words and an hour's help over formalities. She was angry at these officials because they didn't do their job. They sit with the bosses to feel important; they play cards with each other because they are bored, feeling so unimportant. They have the simplest work, those office fellows – keeping reports, directing papers from one office to another, telling our uneducated citizens the rules. They send these poor people away and take bribes to help the rich get more. Our Durga would not be sent away so easily."

Durga marched into town every week with one complaint or another. She accused police of taking bribes, the land office of extortion, the banks of corruption, the school superintendent of fraud.
They misplaced her files, requested more forms, and otherwise harassed her at every turn. When she was spotted heading into town, word spread through the offices, and whomever could slip away shut their doors and disappeared for the day. “Durga always won, and they didn’t like that,” was all Mahadidi said about this. “Our people are poor. They cannot write. Who will help them?” asks Mahadidi. “One day a man brings a sample from a sack of corn he bought at the market last week; it is laced with stones. He knows who sold it but he is unable to confront the man alone. Would Durga help him? A woman came in search of protection from a husband who beat her; he would throw her out if she did not accept his new wife. Would Durga file a report for her with the police? Another arrives to report that her husband died last month owing 800 rupees and the landowner says that to pay off the debt, her son must work for him until the monsoons – nine more months. She has no way of knowing if the debt is real. She fears the landlord. How can she find out about her husband’s debt? What is she to do?”

Mahadidi was the only witness to those private moments at their house in Marwa where Durga faced the pitiful women and men who came for help. Only she heard Durga’s kind, searching questions: “Who will help them? Who will stop this cheating?”

“Sometimes she cried,” Mahadidi told us. “She became angry and she wanted these peasants to be angry too.” Mahadidi mimicked Durga, flinging her arms around. ‘What! They can't do that. Tell him the law does not permit a second wife. You can divorce him and take your share. Your son does not have to work for the guy. Demand they show you the debt paper and your husband’s signature. Go back to them and tell them there is a law that protects you. Tell him,’ she said.

“But they could not do it alone. They were afraid.”

Durga was a person of action. One example had to do with the grain measures. Merchants were well known for their tricks, especially using grain measures with false bottoms. The police were supposed to check the measures of grain sellers, but for a small bribe, they ignored it. Durga did not let these things pass. I was told how our self-appointed prosecutor would choose the busiest time of the week - market day when crowds of people gathered in the town. From a
corner she would watch a merchant measuring grain, and when the moment was opportune she’d lunge at the man, grab the measure and smash it against the ground, its false base exposed. Durga would send a child (no adult would cooperate with her) to fetch the constable, while she stood over the evidence, shouting accusations at the merchant.

In the short term, these ambushes could be considered victories for Durga. Yet what about the long term costs? Young people, like my assistant Dharma, never overcame his negative image of Durga Devi, even though he was learning about her history and beginning to appreciate her accomplishments.

Dharma was twenty at the time of our work, but his memory of Durga was formed while sitting with his father and other adults eleven years earlier when he was nine. He often heard the men talk about her, and he recalled seeing her once. “She was screaming, running through the square, shouting ‘police, police!’ She had her kukri knife in her hand, and blood was streaming from her head. We all laughed,” he admitted. “She was bahulai – a crazy woman.”

Mahadidi knew about that incident and told us what she remembered. “See Dharma,” she said. “That happened in Chainpur. Durga was still in the courts trying to get her land. She was at the courthouse every week. After one visit, she and a brother-in-law were screaming at each other in the street. She always carried a pole as well as her knife. She swung her stick at the man and they hit each other. She was cut in the head, and I took care of her.

“You didn’t understand Durga, sweet Dharma. Yes, she was bleeding from that fight. But why? Because she went directly to the police office, screaming, showing everyone along the road her bleeding face telling them they were her witnesses. She insisted the police see her cuts and bruises and write their report. There and then, before she left the town, she filed a charge against her brother-in-law for assault. Again they went into the court. And you know Dharma, he had to pay her for that. Jethi Devi.”

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After Sasu, her only ally died, Durga continued her work. Meanwhile, she began to give away some of the wealth she
accumulated. The summer after Durga returned from Banaras to Tumlingtar, there was a flood that swept away the river bank around Mankamana. Until then the Mankamana stone on a ledge in a rock on the beach was accessible to worshipers, but after that flood villagers could no longer reach the rock. “Durga did not believe in the power of Goddess Manakamana. She said only ‘ignorant hill people’ worship the spirit. That is not our religion. They cut pigeons and goats to please those gods. They eat meat. We do not,” said Mahadidi. “But Durga had pity on the peasants and when they asked her to help them, she could not refuse. She build a new shrine for Mankamana on the hillside, and had the stone brought there. She made it strong, of brick and wood. She put aside money to pay a custodian for years to come, to live at this place and look after the shrine. He is still here.”

Durga bought ten or more acres of the land around Mankamana. She bought it for the women who now live there. She paid for the construction of the praying hall in the center of the plot, and had workers build a levy fifty meters from the beach to hold back the Arun during the monsoon months when the river swells to many times its size. She hired men to build paths and she helped women who did not have money to put up their own huts. She ordered hundreds of fruit plants from the south of Nepal and she worked with the women to make a garden of trees across the hillside. Even today, the women still harvest the fruit to earn money to pay for their needs.

Were these moves a sign that Durga was growing more pious? Was she making amends with the divine, perhaps reflecting on her early sins? Was she finally abandoning her political mission?

Mahadidi laughed and assured me that Durga fought until her last breath. “You still do not understand Durga Devi. She never cared about dharma. When she saw people in need, she could not turn away. She gave away food to beggars. She took pity on the poor. That was just her character.”

Durga had one more adventure in court, a final battle. She would fight for her own brother's land, the property which passed to his widow (the buhari, or daughter-in-law) when Sher Bahadur and her mother died. Like Durga, she was a widow from childhood and thus had no children. Since Durga had no other brothers, this woman found
herself the sole heir to Sher’s Bahadur’s estate. It was a full half of what he and Bir Bahadur had accumulated in their careers, so it was sizable. This did not seem right to the seven sons of Bir Bahadur who asked, why this little widow with no sons should own half the land, while seven brothers and their families shared the other half? They decided they would take their uncle’s lands.

You can be sure Mahadidi knew the details of this episode too. She knew that Buhari had the land deeds in her possession. For years, she had resisted pressure to turn these over to her cousins even though they had tried to convince her that she should let them take care of the land for her, and they would care for her too. When they saw she was unyielding, they threatened her and finally they planned an assault to take her land by force. “Those men were serious and Buhari knew one person could help her. Durga. She called Durga and Durga went straightaway to live with her sister-in-law in Palikot. The very next day, she registered Buhari’s petition with the Bhojpur court, to separate the fields and sell them off.”

Mahadidi was one of the few people who could tell us about the brothers’ scheme to steal the deeds. “Without those papers, they calculated, the women could prove nothing and they set out for the Palikot house to rob her. But Durga had a plan. Instead of running away, the two women waited alone for the men, as if inviting a confrontation. “They locked themselves into the house. They were defenseless,” said Mahadidi smiling. She knew her boss would win.

“When the brothers arrived, the women refused to let them in, so they began to push on the door. Durga and her sister-in-law were ready.” According to Mahadidi, just before the men forced their way in, Buhari tossed the roll of documents to Durga waiting in the corn bin loft, and without the attackers knowing, Durga escaped through a window into the night.

Mahadidi was astonishingly casual as she continued the story. “The intruders found Buhari alone, acting terrified. She watched unprotesting, as they ransacked the house searching for the papers. But it was too late. While they were going through every corner of the house, Durga was on her way to the police. She walked to Bhojpur that very night and she went straight to the police office. She said she was
fleeing burglars who had broken into her sister-in-law’s house and were in pursuit of her. Next morning she filed charges against the men—all seven of them—for assault, breaking into the house and attempted burglary.” She took on her own uncle’s sons.

“The men were charged and paid heavily. During the months of legal proceedings, Durga stayed in Palikot until she won her Buhari’s right to dispose of her lands as she wished. In the end she sold her fields outright.”

Another fantastic story? Both Dharma and I were listening with disbelief. By now we knew Mahadidi was not one to exaggerate. Eventually the court documents could be retrieved from Bhojpur court and when that happened, everyone would understand Durga’s skills.

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Our one final story from Durga’s audacious career may be the most difficult to document. It never reached the courts but it engaged Durga in a no-holds-barred assault in defense of a raped child. I can’t recall how I first learned about the little girl. Perhaps it was when we heard rumors about a teacher in Khandbari who had molested a student. This case was worse because it was not a high school teacher, but a policeman who had attacked a little girl. It was all the more horrifying because the child was deaf and unable to speak.

I looked at Dharma when we first learned this and he shyly admitted that he had heard something about it. “It was very bad,” was all he said. Again only Mahadidi would explain the details, because it was part of the history of Durga’s victories.

"Sometimes," Mahadidi began, “we have children who are homeless, even here in the hills. Little ones—girls, but sometimes boys too. That was Don Kumari. We called her “Lalo,” because she was deaf. She came from somewhere across the Milke Danda mountain. Maybe because she was handicapped, her family felt they could not look after her all her life and they sent her away. Or maybe she ran away and they did not care enough to look for her. We did not know.

“She stayed with the Sherpa woman in town, the one who kept the drinking room, and Sherpani fed the child. Don Kumari was so helpless and simple so no one thought she might be in danger. She had
lived with Sherpani for four years, and one day Sherpani figured out that little Don Kumari was pregnant. She noticed the child had become more nervous and hid when any man came into the shop. She cried and cried. Sherpani was angry but did not know what to do. She sent a message to Durga, and Durga told her to bring the child to our house at Tumlingtar.

“Oh what a scene. Of course it was clear the child had been raped. Durga said they must find who did this.

‘Only Durga would say it. ‘Who did this to you?’ She shook the girl in her anger. Then Durga remembered the child was unable to hear, or to speak. What should be done?

‘Durga decided it was useless to go to the police, or the district officer, or to the Pradan Panch, the elected party official. We had no clues, and no one would help us. Durga went to the town and called women together but even the few who met us said nothing could be done. Perhaps they feared the molester was someone in their own family.’

But what about Dom Kumari?

Durga decided there was only one thing to do. It was painful for the little girl, but Durga forced her. ‘She took the child by the hand and marched her in front of every man in the town, even boys, every one over the age of 15. Durga instructed the girl to look at him, and shake her head yes or no. They stood like that in front of the school principal, in front of each teacher, before each government officer, each shopkeeper. Every time the child shook her head, Durga would pull her away from the shocked man and marched to the next fellow. The men protested; some turned their face away and Durga accused them. They had to stand to let the little girl inspect them.

‘Durga even went to the police station. The town was horrified. What was she doing? Indeed it was there, on the veranda of the police post the little girl began to scream and cry. ‘Is he the man?’ asked the older woman, pointing jabbing her hand towards him. He wore glasses, one of the few men in the village to wear glasses. The girl was certain.’

‘Durga walked out of the station and to the government office. She forced the top man, the Pradan Panch, to go with her to the head
of the Khandbari police and she filed charges directly against the policeman. Rape. It was a horrible accusation. You could not find a man in the street that day."

Durga stayed in town that night to make certain the papers were processed without delay. In the morning she was at the courthouse.

"A clerk from the police office brought a note to the court. The man in question, the defendant, has been posted out of town, it said. He left during the night, ordered to report to West Nepal. It was urgent and he had to leave before morning."

Had she been younger, Durga probably would have taken off after the man. She would have hunted him down. All she could do now was file a charge. Nothing happened. It lay in the court file until Durga died. "No one spoke about it after that," concluded Mahadidi. I inquired about Don Kumari during my visit to town some months later, but I did not try to meet her. Among those I questioned about the episode was Dharma’s mother. She nodded yes, and then, like others, then turned silent.

Lest people forget this wrong and to make certain they would remember, Durga would care for the violated child – the mother and her baby. "She opened a bank account for Dom Kumari, and arranged for Sherpani to take care of her. When the baby, a girl, was born a few months later, they stayed on with Sherpani. Durga left them enough money for years to come. They would be comfortable, and the baby could eventually go to school."

By the time I learned this history in 1984, the child was twelve years old. She and her mother had remained in the town and the child was attending school. Dom Kumari never left their little room at the Sherpa woman’s house, but the girl, who was not deaf, was often seen on her way to and from school.

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Dharma was more willing to accept that history than his mother was, even though Durga was no heroine for him. I was sorry Durga never won his appreciation, as Yogamaya had. Dharma understood the style and the mission of Yogamaya well – far better
than I did, even though he was born long after Yogamaya passed away and he knew little about her before this sojourn at Manakamana. He overcame whatever doubts he had about Yogamaya when he heard her history from these women. Not with Durga Devi. While I became increasingly excited about Durga’s work, Dharma remained skeptical. If she was not mad, she would always be a troublemaker in his eyes. Only once, when he learned about Sasu’s death, Dharma showed sympathy and admiration for the fighter from Palikot.

When Sasu was near death, Mahadidi was beside Durga and could tell us everything that happened. “When we came back from a visit to Darjeeling, we found Sasu had fallen ill. She called for Durga and we went to the Marwa house to see her. Her sons were at her bedside with their wives and all of their children too. But Sasu insisted that her first daughter-in-law must be beside her as well. The end was near, she told them, and all of them were to accept her wish. She was their mother. Then she announced that Durga, not her sons, must make her sraddha. This was Sasu’s order.” It was a supreme act of solidarity between a woman and her daughter-in-law.

Sraddha is the Hindu commemorative funeral rite which the eldest son normally performs. By custom women take no part in the sraddha. If a man or woman has no son, another male relative will take over. None of the women at Manakamana, some of whom were present at Sasu’s sraddha, could break with this tradition. Yet Durga would do her duty for her mother-in-law.

A young Nepalese told me about the importance men attach to this duty. His own father had renounced the world and gone to India to live out the remainder of his life as a sanyasi. “When we become sanyasi,” he explained, “we do sraddha at that time because it marks our social death. Every son considers the sraddha for his mother and father a duty. For us it is an honour — an honour which, if we cannot answer it, we are forever unfulfilled. My father went away to Banaras and his fellow sanyasi undertook his sraddha for him, so I, his son, was denied my right.”

Mata said in her own case, she could not deny her children their wish to do her sraddha when she decided to leave her family and take up residence at this hermitage as a sanyasi. “First my children
would not agree to my plan,” she said. “They cried. They said I could not leave; they begged me to stay with them. Only when they saw I was unwavering, did they relent. And my sraddha? That was the biggest problem. The older boys understood but Kancha, my youngest wept and pleaded with me, and I could not pain him for the rest of his life. So I allowed him to go with me to Banaras, where he performed his duty as my son. He is a sweet child.” Then she added, “I was not as strong as Durga’s Sasu.”

Yes, Sasu was indeed an extraordinary woman. Mahadidi said that Sasu’s family accepted her wish, knowing they could never dissuade her from her decision. “When the old woman expired, all of them were beside her. But only Durga bathed the corpse of her beloved mother-in-law.

“She bound Sasu’s body in white cloth, then wrapped it in an orange shroud. She prepared the old woman’s bier as well. The men stood back as Durga lifted the lifeless body of her dear Sasu on her own back. She carried her all the way from Marwa to the riverside, to the ghat, over there on the river’s edge. The others followed silently, obediently.

“I saw my friend weep. She prepared the pyre. She tended the fire while the body of Sasu was consumed. Then Durga herself searched through the ashes to find the piece of skull. ‘We will go to Banaras straightaway,’ she told me. ‘Prepare our things.’ She paid the Brahmin priest for his service. And we left.”

Dharma listened in astonishment and then pressed Mahadidi for an explanation. “How did her sons allow this?”

“Every son respects his mother and cannot refuse her final wish, especially at the moment when she is about to leave this world. Sasu ordered them to obey her. She had supported and protected Durga through all her struggles and her sons knew this. They could not oppose their mother.”

Later, when Durga’s time to die was approaching, in the last hours of her life, her companions at the hermitage carried out her funeral rite. Her family was also present. After weeks of illness and four days without food, when it was clear Durga had not long to live, the indefatigable warrior called her family to her bedside — her three
Dewar and Buhari, her brother’s widow from Palikot. Durga’s faithful companion Mahadidi was present along with a priest to administer the sanyasi mantra to her. A clerk from the land office had arrived to record her orders regarding deposition of her property. He wrote out Durga’s orders: most of her wealth was to go to Manakamana shrine and hermitage, to be administered by Buhari; the remainder would revert to her husband’s house but she stipulated how it was to be used. Ten percent of her crops was assigned for the support of Dom Kumari, the violated girl and 10% would be used to upgrade the trails around Manakamana. The document was signed by Durga, her dewar and witnesses. Then Durga dismissed everyone except Mahadidi and the sanyasi from the hermitage. They stayed to light her pyre by the Arun River when she left this world nine hours later. Jethi Devi.

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Eight-year-old labourer, a Tamang girl, at her loom in a factory in Baudha, Kathmandu. Photo by Mani Lama
Chapter 6

LITTLE WEAVER GIRL

Her oldest daughter had gone to the big city and now it was young Maya's turn. Maya was nine, a healthy and diligent child. "You are a big girl now, and you can help Aama even more." Aama spoke softly, stroking her daughter's hair. "School is of no use to poor farmers like us." The girl did not answer. She had heard her mother speak like this before. "Look at the boys in the marketplace. Sunil is with his friends at that table in the street playing at the karam board while the sun moves across the sky, from east all the way to the west." Where, Aama wondered, did these lads find the rupees to buy tea at a shop, when at home she hadn't enough money to buy rice.

Aama had wanted Sunil her son to work in a factory in the city. But he refused. "I am an educated boy," he snarled. "Anyway, weaving is women's work. I am going for government service, so I can help our people. I must be near the officers, the Pradan Panch and the policemen, with Bahadur who distributes the seeds, and with Purbu who gives out condoms and pills."

When Sunil began to study, every house sent a boy to school. Aama herself had said that Sunil should never haul loads up the mountain, like his father and his uncles had. She did not want him to walk barefoot through the town, wearing only undershorts and a thin shirt, carrying a heaped load of sugar and books and cloth for other people to enjoy.

But by the time Sunil finished school, there was no work in any of the town offices, and all the teaching posts were filled. Aama wondered what to do? "We haven't enough food or money for clothes. Last year, we sold one cow; we have only two goats left. I even leased
some of our paddy to another villager, and soon I must repay the loan I took against the land. We might loose our fields altogether. Thank the gods for a girl like Mahili Didi.”

Aama was managing only because middle daughter had found work in the city. Every two weeks Mahili sent an envelope to her mother. Aama might find fifty rupees there, sometimes a little more. She needed every anna of it. Because there was no more wood on the hills to be collected, she had to pay for kerosene for cooking. If enough fuel was left from the previous month, Aama might have enough money to buy a little more cooking oil, or some beans for them to eat instead of those chillies every day. Still, there was never enough.

So that young Maya could have an egg now and then, Aama kept two hens. “Now,” she calculated, “if Maya leaves to work with her sister, I can sell the hens and buy a new water pot. But I shall miss this kind child of mine.”

Since she’d turned six years old, Maya was at her Aama’s side, helping with the new baby or preparing rice, or cleaning the grain. She had told her mother, “teach me Aama, and I shall learn quickly. Then you can rest.”

Aama smiled and watched Maya mending the baby’s dress. She thought, “Yes, she is a quick learner and she is obedient.” She looked at the child’s long arms. “Her skin is glossy and brown, like mine. But she is too thin. And her hair is dull.” She wondered if Maya had enough food to eat. She reached out to stroke the girl’s hair. It was speckled with dust and bits of straw, and her braid had not been knotted for some days. Maya’s body was skinny, but her face was round and her eyes bright. She was a cheerful girl and never asked anything for herself. Even though she was still a child, Maya was aware that there wasn’t enough food for each of them to eat their fill. So, like her mother, she took less in order to leave be a bigger share for her brother Sunil.

She never spilled grain or oil, or wasted even a spoonful.

Aama looked at the girl’s threadbare dress, its print now faded. It had become too short, and it pulled tight at Maya’s shoulders. “Now that you are almost ten, sweet Maya, we must buy you a real Nepalese skirt. And a satin tunic.” She pulled the girl towards her on the mat
where they sat. The child reached out with both arms to lay them on
mother’s legs. She let her head fall onto Aama’s thigh and turned to
look up at her mother, waiting for those brown hands to rub her hair
and pull her closer, into that warm lap.

“Would you like to go and live with Mahili Didi in the city?”
Aama asked the child. She drew her hands downward along the sides
of her daughter’s head, bringing them together under the child’s chin.
Maya shook her head, and gently pulled away. She missed her older
sister and many of her friends who had gone there too. “But what
about Aama?” she asked.

“Aama needs you to be with Mahili. Your sister has found
work for you and soon she is coming to take you there, to teach you
carpet weaving in the big city where our Raja and Rani live. You will
see a very big castle with high walls around it. Please Maya, make us
tea”

The little girl left her mother’s lap and skipped across the room
to the earthen jar. Aama reached for the baby lying on a small blanket
not far from her and pulled him to her body. She lifted her blouse to
give the child her breast. Maya meanwhile scooped out a measure of
water with a tumbler and brought it across the room and poured it into
a pot on the hearth. She knelt and blew at the embers until they ignited.
Then she lay down, this time beside her mother and leaned against her
shoulder while the baby sucked noisily at her mother’s breast. Her
mother lifted her free arm to brush Maya’s hair from her face. Maya
needed mother’s comforting arms, however thin they were.

The next week Mahili arrived home. With her, she brought a
gift for Maya, a new plaid green skirt, and Maya was happy and
without removing her worn clothes, she wrapped it around her. She
tried not to think about leaving her Aama. “Mahili needs a helper, my
little Maya. Your sister will show you many new things, and teach you
to weave with real wool. No more corn mats like those I taught you.”
Then she ended, “You can visit me whenever you like, my cheery
daughter.”

In the morning Aama sat on the threshold of her door, cradling
her infant in her lap, as she watched Mahili and Maya climb the path
from the house to the main trail and turn southwards. Maya wore her
new skirt. She needed no suitcase. The only possessions she carried were her hair comb and a brass cup. Oh, yes, and five silver rupees from Aama. She had folded them all into the cloth band she wound many times around her waist. No more short frocks for Maya. She was a grownup now, going to work with big sister to help her Aama. Mahili walked ahead, clutching the straw mat which Aama had woven just for Maya. This would be the child’s bed in the dormitory where they would live.

Visiting Kathmandu for the first time should be a great adventure for a nine year old. Maya had never seen the city, although she once rode in a bus. She knew there were many electric lights there, and bicycles and cinemas and so many shops, and factories too. That was where other girls and boys from Dandagaon worked.

The journey took them two days. During the walk, Maya had lost one of her hair ribbons and her green blouse was stained under her arms. “Don’t worry my sweet; we shall buy you a pretty green bow when we reach Kathmandu,” said Mahili.

On the edge of the city, Maya saw a bus and cried, “Stop bus, stop.” The bus was badly rusted with some patches of white paint here and there, and it was very, very big. Mahili reached out and grasped Maya’s arm, and pulled her back. “Come. That bus does not go to our home. We live in this direction.” They walked for another hour, although Maya noticed the bus had gone down the very road they were following.

Finally the girls arrived at a shed hidden behind a row of shops. Maya followed her sister into the building. Its walls were wooden boards, and she could see the sky between the slats. The room had no loft, and no ceiling, just a roof of tin sheets high overhead. The floor was earth, pitted with shallow cooking basins. Around each depression lay utensils: small trays and glasses, a teapot, or a brass rice pot, and a small kerosene burner. Each of these clusters was a hearth. It marked the “home” of one family of workers who lived in the barracks. Corn mats were rolled up and pushed against the wall. Clothes hung from nails stuck into the boards or on posts set into the earth. Towels and cotton covers draped over rope strung between posts and along the wall. The air was dusty. From somewhere in the distance
Maya heard a strange clacking – thump, thump, thump, thu-thump, thu thump. Was it the clatter of someone threshing rice, or perhaps cars? Mingled with the thump thu thump, she heard voices, sometimes giggles, sometimes a shriek, and occasionally the line of a song. They were children’s voices, children’s coughs and giggles, children’s shrieks and songs.

Maya remembered her friends. “Where is Sunita? Where is Rani?”

“They are at work in the factory,” Mahili answered softly. “We will see them tonight perhaps. Now, let us go to buy rice, and kerosene and your new ribbon. This is our holiday little sister.”

Mahili put Maya’s bedding beside her own, took the little girl’s hand and led her into the neighborhood. Wherever they walked, Maya heard the thu thump, thump, thu thump. It was a sound she did not know, and she felt it was not a pretty sound, but she said nothing.

When they returned, the girls cooked their rice over the hearth beside their mats. When they had finished eating Maya washed their plates under the tap outside, then returned to her sister’s side. She sat beside her sister, turning around so Mahili could plait the shiny green ribbons into her hair. “Tomorrow we shall begin work,” explained the bigger girl. “We will sit side by side. I will be your teacher and we will send Aama our money.” This made Maya feel happy. Soon, the sisters were asleep, their arms entwined around each other while the thu thump flapped through the air around them.

It was not yet light when Maya felt a hand rocking her shoulder. “Kanchhi, Kanchhi – time for work. Up, come. Look, I have some sugared chyura for you.” Mahili held a bowl of flaked, cold rice in her hands and offered it to the little girl. Having bribed Maya to her knees, the older girl now brushed her hands over Maya’s forehead and pushed her hair back. “Quickly, we must go. We will take our tea in the factory.”

Even the purple of early morning had not yet arrived. All around her, along both sides of the shed, Maya could make out the humps of sleeping bodies curled under their blankets. These were the weavers from the late shift who had returned long after Maya and Mahili fell asleep. Coughing here and there, the wheezing of an
asthmatic interrupted the silent room. Maya thought she heard a little boy or girl crying, and calling ‘Aama, Aama.’

Maya folded her mat into her sister’s, rolled them into one bundle and pushed them against the wall. Then she wrapped her skirt tightly around her hips and followed Mahili outside. “Are we going to ride a bus?” asked Maya, as she moved into the dark path. She was walking towards the thumping sound, and it grew louder. “Some day, maybe we will ride a bus.” Thu thum thu thump, thum, thu thump. Mahili raised her voice over the din as she walked into the factory. “Look, we are already at work!” They had walked along a muddy lane outside their shelter into a nearby building. This place was many times larger than where they slept. It too had an earth floor and a tin roof, and walls of loose-fitting boards.

The room was immense but it was divided by rows of heavy platforms extending from one end to the far wall. It was really a factory, a carpet factory. The wooden scaffolds on each platform looked like machines with arms extending out from their body, and sheets of rope joining the various joists. These, Maya would learn, were looms. Carpets in various stages of completion were stretched over each machine. Maya looked up and down the corridor where she stood. She saw some children already sitting at the machine, as if tied there. A single bare electric lightbulb hung from the roof above them, so she could not see their faces clearly. “Is Sunita here?” she asked Mahili.

“Hush. This is a factory and we must begin work. It is not a place to meet our friends,” explained Mahili as she climbed three feet onto a wood platform, as if entering a machine of rope and paddles. “Come Kanchhi. Sit with me and I will teach you to weave.” She fastened a strap behind her back to tie herself to the loom, then showed her sister how to fasten her little body as well. “This is the first lesson. This rope will stop you from falling off if you should become sleepy.”

More children arrived and quietly moved down the corridor. Each climbed up to a loom to begin work. This was their station to which they came every day, six days a week. Maya smiled with her cheerful brown eyes at two girls who sat nearby. They looked to her to be her own age. They smiled, and one asked her, “Where is your
Maya began to speak but the child’s eyes had already turned away, to her work. Her hands were reaching among the rows of strings in front of her, and her partner was doing the same. Their little golden fingers appeared and disappeared through the strings, then clak, clak, thu thum thu thump, clak clak. “Watch me, watch me,” Mahili said. The older girl lifted balls of wool, each a different color, from inside the loom and dropped them into her lap. Next she pulled a rope taunt, unwound a ball of yarn and made a knot around one in a row strings very held tight from the bar at her stomach upward to a rod inside the loom. She pulled the knot closed, then looped the wool around the next string, then a dozen more, then pulled out another coil of wool and knotted six of that color through the strings. “Look at my feet, watch my feet,” she whispered. Then the whole loom began to groan – clak clak, thu thum thu thump.

Maya was peering under the loom to watch Mahili’s legs, but her sister had begun another operation with her hands. “Now see my hands.” She removed a pair of iron scissors from under her thigh and reached forward with it, snipping at the knots in the string. Little Maya gazed though the dim light in bewilderment, from where her sister’s feet paddled, back to hands lost among the net of strings, down again to her feet. “Watch me carefully. You have to learn by yourself, little Maya.” Maya turned for help to the two girls at the loom beside her, but neither child looked up from their work.

After many hours Maya’s eyes burned from the strain of peering through the dusty air and her legs were numb from sitting so rigid in the loom. Flicks of wool covered her face and her eyes had become red. “I must stay awake. I must help Mahili,” she said to herself, trying to follow her sister’s movements through the dim light. The older girl repeated her movements, uncoiling, knotting, snipping, hammering, with her feet clacking periodically though the hours.

Finally the older girl spoke. “It is time for food. Come.” She climbed down from her perch at the loom and Maya followed her sister back to their corner in the barracks. They were too weary to speak to the other workers, who in any case were absorbed in preparing their own rice.

The light through the boards had now disappeared. The sun had sunk somewhere behind the Himalayas as the sisters ate in silence.
Had they not been so hungry, surely they would have been too exhausted to lift their hands to their mouths. Mahili picked up the empty plates and left. “I will serve you today, sweet baby.” Before Mahili had returned from scrubbing the pots clean, Maya was asleep.

The next day the girls again rose before the sky turned purple. They washed their faces in the dark, rolled up their mats again, and again filed into the factory. The next day, it was the same. Maya sometimes slept without removing her clothes. Before the first week had ended, her legs ached all night. She had hardly walked at all during these days.

On the fourth day, Maya took the threads in her own hands. She felt happy now that she could do what the other children did. “You are a good student. How proud Aama will be,” said the older girl.

In four weeks, Maya and her sister together had finished the carpet. Two boys came and cut it off the loom, and for the first time Maya realized what they had made. It was soft and lovely, and she told her sister how pretty it was. Somehow Maya knew she must not suggest they make such a carpet for themselves to lie on in place of the scratchy corn mats in their sleeping room.

On Saturday, the factory closed. This was the only chance for Maya and her sister to wash their hair and scrub their clothes. Maya sat in the sun across from Mahili who had rinsed her hair for her. Their tangled, wet locks fell over their shoulders, and they laughed softly and planned their afternoon. “We must buy rice, and some cooking oil,” said Mahili. Noting how her sister’s fingers had begun to swell, she added, “and flower hand cream for Maya.” I must take care that her little fingers do not crack, she thought.

After their bath, the sisters joined Sunita and Rani around their ‘living place’ on the ground and together the four girls cooked their rice. “Our brother has come from the village, bringing with him these pickles.” Mother made this from burned sesame and from sour mountain lemons. It could not be found in the city. “Here, here,” said Sunita to the sisters, and spooned some onto their plates. The girls were happy sharing their food, but Maya fell silent. “Why did Aama not send me something special?” she asked herself.

Each four weeks all the workers in Maya’s shift were paid, and the weavers, in turn, had an hour off work to collect their wages.
Mahili walked back from the office with the money in her fist, and, joined by Maya, the two girls huddled together as if they had found a treasure. Mahili slowly unfolded the bills. Three hundred rupees. “What shall we buy?” asked Maya excitedly as she watched her sister count their earnings. Mahili was concentrating. “We must send 100 rupees to Aama; we need 100 for our food, and twenty for kerosene, thirty for a blanket for you, and, let’s see, five for soap, and twenty to pay back the loan from the oil seller.” Maya was quick to calculate how much this left them. “We have twenty-five rupees! Please, please, let us buy bund roti from the milk shop, and a glass of sweet milk,” she pleaded. Mahili’s little sister was still growing. “She needs milk, and sometimes an egg, especially since we could never have meat or cheese,” she told herself.

First Aama’s share had to be taken care of. Mahili sought out a trusted courier who would deliver the hundred rupees home, and she gave the lad five rupees for his help, like each worker did, so he might at least pay for his journey to the village and back. The rest of her money the older girl pushed into the folds of her waistcloth where it would remain untouched until Saturday.

Without taking their tea that morning, the sisters set out, hand in hand, for the shops. They bought rice and paid what they owed for last month’s cooking oil. Then they skipped to the tea shop. There Mahili surrendered four rupees for bund roti and milk. The sisters sat side by side on a bench in the warm sun. Maya dipped chunks of white bread into the hot milk and Mahili laughed as Maya rocked her head far back to catch the dripping bread in her mouth. How lovely it was to have a few rupees for bread and sweetened milk.

They left and as they walked along the streets towards the big avenue, they passed more workshops. Maya did not have to see inside the buildings to know these were carpet factories. She recognized the clak clak thu thum thu thump from behind the wooden boards. She suddenly felt like running. She did not realize how much she had grown to hate that drone.

Mahili was quick to pull the child from her unhappy thoughts. She skipped to her side and clutched her little sister’s hand. “Next holiday, we shall visit the palace? Or shall we go to watch visitors at
the gate of big hotels? Or take darshan to the lord Swayambu on the hill?

"Today, let us find Devi so she can write a letter to our Aama," said Maya. "Yes, I will tell her what a good girl I am. What nice gift shall we send Aama? A white plastic ladle, or a new bracelet, or paper-wrapped candies?"

Later, after they had finished dictating their letter, Mahili saw how sad Maya seemed. She said "My little sister, do you know we can finish a whole carpet from start to finish in only three weeks. If we make almost twenty carpets in one year, how much is that for us. Many thousands of rupees, no? So much money!"

Maya could now sit for five hours at the loom before her back began to pain her and she had to ask her sister to let her rest.

The sisters spend many more months in the city, working their shift in front of the same dark loom. Aama sent them pickles sometimes, but no letters. Every time the girls dispatched money home, they sent along a note with news about their friends, the children around them. What news could their mother report?

The sisters had been working together almost a year when, one early morning soon after she had begun her knotting at the loom, Maya heard a shriek not far from where she sat. Then there was the thunder of wood collapsing, and more shrieks. It was the only time she remembered in the three years Maya was here that the the thud thump stopped. And out of this silence rose young, thin cries. Younger children began to cry.

Mahili and two other bigger girls unstrapped themselves and ran down the walkway to where the weeping children were huddled. On the floor, pinned under the broken loom, they saw little Rani. Her arms were splayed and her legs were bent under her. A beam of wood lay over the lower half of her body. She was screaming and each time she yelled, a wave of sobs came from the others. The older girls were frightened too. But they had to take charge, so they stepped close to Rani and pulled at the beams to try to free her. The structure above them creaked and then broke apart and more pieces of wood collapsed around them. The girls jumped free but now they saw that Rani was very still. A mass of string and rope and boards covered her. No one
dared to touch the structure again. They all stared at Rani. "Rani is dead, Rani is dead," one finally uttered, and then others cried out the same. Huddling near each other, the children backed away from their friend's body. Suddenly orders came from behind. "Get out, get out all of you. Out. Quickly. All of you, to your quarters," shouted a man rushing towards them. He was the manager and he quickly cleared the whole room. Soon a car arrived and two more men rushed into the factory. They carried Rani into the car and said they would take her to the hospital. "Stay in your room, all of you," spat the manager as he rushed off with the child.

In their barracks, the children sat in clusters. They awakened the workers from the early shift. Maya had never seen the hall filled with so many people. "All these boys and girls work with us in the factory?" she asked herself. "All of them are workers like me?"

The older workers made tea and spoke in low, worried voices. The manager returned and ordered the workers back to their looms, but he spoke quietly. "Everything is alright. Rani was only cut a little, and as soon as she feels better she is going home. There is no reason to cry," he said, and again told them to go back to work.

When Maya and the other children returned to their machines, they could not find the broken loom, only a wide empty space in the row of workers where it had stood. Rani’s partner did not come back. "She was given extra money to work in the manager’s house," they said.

Some foreigners visited the factory not long after that accident. With them was Thulo Manchha, the manager, a Tibetan man who spoke German and English as well as Nepali. Mahili whispered to her sister, "if they ask about Rani, shake your head and say you know nothing. No one was ever hurt here, remember. If you say anything, the factory will close and Aama will have no food." Thu thum thu thump thump thump. The visitors took photos and the children smiled because they wanted to show how happy they were to work here. They jumped up and stood proudly beside their loom while their pictures were snapped. The men argued as they walked past the rows of workers. Some of the intruders peered closely at a few of the children and asked the owner what tribe they came from and how many carpets they could
finish in three months. The men were always talking in numbers - rupees, dollars, dates, colours, knots per inch, this many twin carpets and that many double sized. Then they got in their car and drove off.

Rumors spread up and down the rows of strapped-in workers. Mahili frowned and bit her lip thinking, “How can I convince them that Maya is fifteen?” The same thought must have been troubling every little boy and girl along the row of looms. They began to whisper their fears. “It is because Rani died.” “They don’t like children to make carpets.” “You have to be fifteen to work.” “Maybe the factory will close and we shall all be sent home.”

Weeks passed. The accident with Rani was almost forgotten. And no one came to write down the ages of the children at the looms.

Meanwhile Maya had been to see a cinema and her sister bought her a new skirt as well. At those moments she thought the city was a wonderful place to be. Sometimes she saw that Mahili was troubled. One night as she and Mahili and other weavers crouched over their fires cooking their dinners, boys they knew from the villages arrived. These visitors worked as dyers at factories near the river. Only big boys and girls can manage dying work because of the heavy loads they must manouevre. They have to boil water in big pots, stir the heavy bundles of wool through the coloured stew, and pull the dripping bundles of wool onto drying racks. The plant where they worked was built alongside the river because it needed lots of water for the dyeing, and for rinsing the yarn. The workers pour the waste dye water into the river when they were finished. They had been doing this for many years.

But now things were changing. “They want to close our dye factory,” said one of the boys who had arrived at Maya’s barracks. “It is the foreigners again. They came and photographed our work and went to the river with their medicines. They say they found poison in the Bagmati River. It is killing the water, they say, and this is bad for Nepal. They told us we must not wash wool in the river anymore.”

“Will we lose our jobs? Will they send us back to our village?” asked Maya. Even the weavers began to weep because they knew that if the dye sheds closed, so would their factory. “We shall go to Patan,” said Mahili to the others. “There are factories there.”
"I have searched for work there," replied an older boy. "Those factories supply rice and peas but the rice is not good rice, and the pay is low." Another added: "They will not take us. They say we are just children."

The workers from the dye sheds had a proposal. "We are going to refuse to work. We will tell the bosses we will not work until they provide a half day school for the youngest workers." Maya's eyes opened wide when she heard this. "School? Will somebody teach me to write?" she thought.

There were more demands listed by the group. "There must be better lighting in the shed. They must build a closed-in shower for every hundred workers, a toilet for every fifty. They must build sinks for our kitchens. We will ask for a kilo of rice for each worker, each week."

The children looked at one another, their eyes wide with puzzlement. "How? Who will give these things to us? The bosses? What work must we do for them?" They felt nervous and the girls turned to look at one another. They were thinking of the stories about some girls who went to play with the bosses. They heard these girls slept in real beds and they used the indoor showers too. Would these children also be sent to the cottages of those men? "How shall we pay for the school and these nice things?" they asked.

Padma was one of the older girls. She stood up and spoke. "We shall not pay. They shall pay. We have a right. We have a plan. " We are listing our demands here," and she held a paper in front of her. She repeated the list of demands they would put to the bosses. Then she read out the plan. "We shall stop working on Sunday, the day after we collect our pay. We will sit outside the factory and not allow any new workers to take our places."

A boy Maya did not know stood up. He was from a factory in Patan city outside Kathmandu. Maya had never been there but she knew there were many carpet weavers there. The man spoke softly to the group. "Our weavers have saved money every month since a year ago for this. We will help you. Every week we will send you your food. Our workers will come and sit with you, to block the entrance to the factory. The dyers from the wool washing plant will be here with you
to make certain no one steals your pots and bedding. They will surround this shed so you will not find yourselves in the street. You will be safe. They have been trained; they will protect you.”

Maya felt confused. But she saw how happy the older boys and girls looked. She glanced over to her big sister who sat beside Padma. Mahili smiled towards Maya.

“A school?” Maya thought to herself. “Shall I really go to school. Aama will be so pleased when I will be able to write her a letter by myself.”
Then there are the collective deaths:
the hungry, patriots fighting for freedom,
peasants wanting their land.
No, death does not end.
It becomes a fraternity. We embrace.
Death becomes a voice. Words appear on walls.
It becomes a call. An oath. A Promise.

from “Mreetyu”
1990 Democracy Movement. The man stop the statue, attacking statue of King Mahendra, was shot and killed moments later by the king's troops. Permission of Indira Dali

Curfew is imposed across the capital, April 1, 1990. Himal Photo Archive
Four martyrs of the 1990 protests lie in Bir Hospital morgue, Kathmandu. Leaders of the demonstrations estimate 3000 unarmed protesters were killed by the military. After democracy, there was no investigation of shootings, rapes and torture by the police. Some protesters who were arrested and jailed have never been located. Permission of India Dali
victory demonstration of the king stepped down. Photo by Min Bajracharya
Children spinning yarn at one of thousands of unregulated carpet factories in Kathmandu

Women are prominent in today's Maoist movement. Photo by Sudhir Sharma
Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Maya, sent far from home to labour as a weaver; Laxmi the blind child left alone in a field; and Manu carrying loads through the mountains toil through hard times, year after year – each clings to his and her dream. Manu longs to be a farmer again, to work his land and dance at the weddings of his relatives. Laxmi craves for the companionship of other children, and wants to learn to read. Maya yearns to return to her mother’s side, their debt gone, their land redeemed.

There are so many young people like Maya, Laxmi and Manu in Nepal. They work in conditions approaching slave labor simply to pay off debts and buy food for their families. Despite the arrival of democracy and numerous donor agencies over the past half century and declarations by world bodies to end poverty and exploitation, the numbers of poor and are increasing instead of declining. What is to be done?

*Raja sits in his palace/ and does not care to see
if we poor have justice – even justice by chance.*

Shakti Yogamaya

The Rana ruler is gone. The Nepalese king no longer has absolute authority. At considerable human cost, his subjects fought for a democracy to allow them to participate in government and to be free from exploitation and the whim of any dictator. They brought a multi-party parliament and the freedom to speak. In 1991, a democratically elected government took office. Successive elections and
administrations followed. Some were led by Communist Party candidates. Some were led by the centrist Congress Party. But for the Mayas, Laxmis, and Manus, things have not improved.

Economic decline is often linked to war, such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Congo, or El Salvador. Decline is also due to misrule, mismanagement and exploitation, sometimes by outside powers, sometimes from within. Nepal was not a site of international conflict, only a dictatorship – and that was overthrown. In 1990, the Nepalese press was ungagged. Democracy, which the Nepalese enjoyed from 1951-1959, was restored. The new arrangement was a constitutional monarchy, with a parliament free of dynastic despotism. The ‘free’ parliament could have used its popular mandate in the wake of the political change to take the necessary bold steps to reorganize the country and cleanse the military. It could have ended the monarchy and formed a republic. It could have done away with the priests who sanction the king’s deification, and tried the officers who shot protestors. It could have repealed Brahmanic laws that chain women. It could have imposed fair labour standards in the factories, and reformed the legal system to ensure justice. It did not.

The Shah royal family remained nominally the head of the land with its wealth, its court and its privileges intact. The king remained supreme commander of the military. Nepal continued to be a ‘Hindu state,’ and this gave priests continued influence over legal and ethical matters. Brahmanic hold on power was as firm as ever, the weak were as vulnerable as before, and the debts remained and multiplied.

Statistics – if they are really necessary to convince us of what we witness in the flesh, the factories and the fields – show educational opportunities lessening, living standards of the majority of people lowering, and the number of poor increasing. Those reports also point to worsening conditions for women. All are the outcome of general deterioration and a growing disparity between rich and poor.

In 1990 Pramila Upadhyay supplied me with official statistics on the status of Nepalese women. She reported, the literacy rate for women at that time was 12% as compared to 41% for men. Women’s contribution to the household income was calculated to be 53% of non-
marketed subsistence production and 22% of cash income, although women's contribution in terms of work hours averaged 25% more than men's. In 1990 the percentage of women in the labor force was 43 out of 41% employed for the whole population. A recent study of labor in Nepal show these trends continuing, with women taking a heavier burden of agricultural work.

With the beginning of the millennium, statistics on poverty, literacy, the gap between rich and poor, the budget deficit, and other economic indicators still put Nepal at a sorrowful place in the list of 'developing nations.' Literacy among women is listed as 24%, just above Afghanistan (21%), not far behind Bangladesh (30%), and half of the rate for Cambodian (58%) and Indian women (51%). The secondary school enrollment ratio for Nepalese women is 33%, higher than Afghanistan and Bangladesh at 12% and 13% respectively. The infant mortality rate per thousand for Nepal is 77, half that of Afghanistan with 147, a country which has been devastated by war for more than two decades. But it is slightly higher than the rate for Bangladesh. Mortality for children under five in Nepal is 108. This parallel's Bangladesh at 102, and is less than half that of Afghanistan with 248. The average life expectancy for Nepalese is low. A new report released in July 2000, reveals a shocking statistic for Nepalese women – their average life expectancy is merely 47, making them a demographic exception where, universally, women's life expectancy is a few years more than men's.

Globally Nepal still ranks among the poorest five countries in the world, even though other nations at the bottom of the list cite wars or terrible natural disasters. Little has changed since 1990 in Nepal. There has not been much real progress since 1940 when Yogamaya was at the peak of her campaign. The 1999 statistics reinforce this general picture of the conditions.

Yet the attention given to economic development in general and women’s rights in particular in Nepal has been considerable. Before 1990, Kathmandu had a handful of non-governmental organizations engaged in humanitarian and development projects. By the end of the century, when the number of those foreign agents had sharply increased, the schemes and procedures of modern governments and international aid groups didn’t seem to be achieving much beyond benefitting politicians and bureaucrats. Indeed those internationally devised strategies may actually have hindered effective change. Criticism of development policies and the public’s call for change were mollified by labels and budgets and promises of new programs. These programs reached out to employ potential critics, and thereby absorb the talent of many idealistic women and men in communities who believed fairness could be achieved through institutional means.

Corruption in government is a major issue and a major obstacle to progress. Ironically this was a target of Durga Devi and Yogamaya’s campaigns.

*What swindlers sell as butter, / others burn as incense / whose odious smell is greed. / Corruption! How it stinks.*

Shakti Yogamaya

Despite the political change of 1990 and the restoration of a multi-party system and democratic freedom, it is generally agreed that corruption has worsened during the last decade. Graft and fraud have become features of everyday life and each administration, whichever party rules.

As conditions across Nepal worsen and the administration’s incompetence is exposed, Yogamaya’s and Durga’s strategies seem thoroughly reasonable, to say the least. Yogamaya’s remarks to Nepal’s leaders more than sixty years ago are poignant, and pertinent

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5. In 1962, the number of registered N.G.O.s in Nepal was 15, in 1990, 219, and by 2000, it had reached 10,475. See D.R. Dahal, “Problems and Prospects of the Relationship between Government and NGOs in Nepal,” April 2000, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
today. The stench of corruption has grown so powerful and widespread that many, especially young people, desperately search for alternatives. The migration of Nepalese outside the country has increased both in volume and destination. They travel abroad in order to accumulate some money to build a house or pay off debts. Nepalese Sherpa, an ethnic minority in Nepal, number 600 families in the New York City area. Most work as housemaids and menial laborers in the same low paying and unskilled sectors in which illegal Mexican migrants work. One now finds Nepalese employed in mainly low paying jobs in Europe, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, the Arab Gulf countries.

The insurgent Maoist movement in Nepal doubtless recruits its members from those youth who can find no legitimate alternative to toiling for almost nothing, and growing poorer by the year. The Maoist program has taken hold in the Western hills of Nepal in the past five years. They move into a village, throw out corrupt officials, kill the police and institute their own administration. They force the rich to hand over their wealth and fields in order to redistribute these to the poor. They are described as having "liberated" numerous villages this way. The police tried to wipe out these rebels but failed. According to reports, a recent confrontation between government forces and the rebels resulted in the killing of innocent people. It seems that countering the movement by force is almost impossible because their members are not confined to one area. The movement is becoming widespread, and increasing in membership. Both police and government troops are afraid to enter areas under Maoist control.

The violent tactics of the Maoists alienate many citizens. The movement has little sympathy from abroad because of its leftist ideology. No one knows what to do. Some wealthy hill farmers are fleeing their villages out of fear that the insurgents will arrive at their doors. At the same time the movement recruits new members from among the poor. Many Nepalese admit that the rise of the radical Maoists in Nepal in recent years is an expression of public

disillusionment with unfilled promises from successive administrations and unchecked greed by office holders.

In the preceding pages, I pointed to the irresponsibility of local officials and merchants. They were the object of Durga Devi’s relentless campaign for justice. But I do not wish to characterize all Nepalese men in an unfavorable light. Men take up government jobs because they need work. The civil service – a major employer in the country – is often the only place one can find a job. These men often start their careers in distant outposts in the hills. They begin with some idealism. Then they find themselves embedded in a system which has disagreeable ethics and culture. They cannot resist. They become contaminated. Any crime in the professions I discussed should not brand all civil servants and businessmen as criminals. Moreover, they do not operate in a vacuum.

Corruption and greed are global diseases. I have encountered incompetent, mean officials in the course of my personal dealings in my own American bureaucracy. And, almost everywhere women are paid less than men for the same work. Women are also prevented from advancing on a par with men. Class and ethnic bias exists in U.S. schools, hospitals, civil service and military, and corporations. The dealings between private contractors and the U.S. Department of Defence is well known. Their collaboration is particularly significant because of the huge sums of money involved, and the corruption goes on year after year. American critics of government handouts for multi-million dollar industries – largely unheard and ineffectual in their pleas – call this “corporate welfare.” Bad management in government is ubiquitous and probably on the increase everywhere, in Moscow or Prague, Cairo or Beirut, Mexico City or Washington, and it will doubtless continue as the trend towards extreme wealth on one hand and massive poverty on the other increase with the spread of world privatization as managed by the big powers. A few more millionaires are created while billions of women and men are pushed into new depths of poverty.

Few state governments however can match the example of the agency which is mother of all bureaucracies – the United Nations. With its hundred thousand dollar-plus salaries, the U.N. manages to
maintain a veneer of professionalism and to float above the corruption it breeds. The U.N. is moreover, a male-dominated institution, which, along with the non-governmental organizations (N.G.O.s) it fosters, has infiltrated every corner of the world. It feeds on poverty, removing responsibility for health and other services from governments. It recreates a colonialist culture, working political alliances, and helping to promote men into the international bureaucracy. In a regional N.G.O. office, one finds foreign staff alongside local staff. Local employees, although they may do the same work, receive a small fraction of the salaries of the foreigners. And, they have none of the ‘perks’ such as paid home-leave, free lodging and extra pay for hardship posts. Those local employees also witness schemes foreign co-workers employ to keep as much of their salaries in their overseas bank accounts, while incurring few local expenses. Whatever dollars those N.G.O. staff receive in ‘the field’ often do not get exchanged at the official bank rate, but are cashed in the local black market. N.G.O.s also foster greed and competition by renting whatever buildings, vehicles, etc. they use. Since their budgets are considerable, they provide a tidy fortune to the local merchants able to secure contracts to supply them. Even middle class people become resentful of routine abuse and opulent lifestyles followed by these foreign personnel.

The United Nations and its donors may be able to boast that benefits result from the massive funds it doles out. At the same time, the U.N. and their spin-off agencies are a primary source of cynicism and corruption worldwide. No U.N. office or N.G.O. would support historical documentation of women like Yogamaya or Durga Devi, nor do they fund the humanitarian and political work of poet Parizat and her people.

The stories I document here, semi-fictional and historical, portray patriarchal abuses of power – secular and religious. There are many competent and caring men throughout Nepal and this characterization should not be applied to all.

Political ineptness and abuse of women by powerful men is worldwide. Misogyny too is universal. It is promoted in the theological seminaries of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

These and other abuses I describe belong to an international culture of inequality. American culture and government play a major
role in creating or supporting many inequities through their economic foreign polices. All foreign donors are aware of the economic disparities that their own development projects generate. They work with an emerging elite in Nepal, or Nigeria, or Mexico, and surround themselves with members of that class in their circles. They also know of the increase in poverty and crime, and the political resentment their policies breed. In response to the growing hostility of the poor and marginalized people in the countries where they exercise considerable influence, the American foreign missions simply protect themselves with larger "palaces." Their embassies have become virtual military fortifications on the edges of the capitals of the world.

Colonialism is widespread today and is growing, even though there are few ‘political’ colonies left. With the increasing power of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, organizations promoting a capitalist economic system, we find more poverty existing alongside obscene wealth. It’s occurring on an unparalleled scale. The experience of Nepal is one example.
SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS


Giri, Manjula. 2000. *Women’s Struggle for Pro-Democracy Revolutionary Moment in Nepal*. Kathmandu


"I am not only aiming at that tyrant. My goal is Point Zero."
Shakti Yogamaya
APPENDIX I

Introducing The Hazurbani

*Hazur*: “master,” Yogamaya. *Bani*: her message. Here, we include one volume of Yogamaya’s sayings in the original Nepali. This is a photo offset of the booklet gifted by Damodara, who headed Manakamana Ashram during the years that I visited the community. It was published after 1950 in Kalimpong, India, by Mani Press, not long after the death of Yogamaya.

This is in not a comprehensive collection, but it is the only book I was able to obtain at the time and I drew heavily on it for my research on the teachings of Yogamaya, their creator. Almost all the translated poems cited in Chapter Three of “Heir to a Silent Song” were taken from this collection.

From the time of Yogamaya’s ‘entry into heaven’ until 1990, while copies of this and other collections of Yogamaya’s work existed, even though Rana rule had ended, free political expression in the country was still forbidden and the book was hard to find. Whoever owned them, it seemed, kept them in secret for fear of arrest. Banned during the Rana period, broadcast of the *Hazurbani* either orally or through these texts was also dangerous during Panchayat rule (1960-1990). Uttam Pant, who took up research on Yogamaya after 1981, learned that some volumes similar to this were in the possession of survivors of Yogamaya’s movement living in Kathmandu and East Nepal. He secured copies only by determination and daring.

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1. Although this text may contain a few grammatical or typographical errors, we reproduce it as it was originally printed.
The political message of the *Hazurbani* is well established, and self evident in the text itself. Translations of the few poems we provide in Chapter 3 demonstrate the indisputable political message of her work.

But there is much more to the *Hazurbani*. For political philosophy, women’s history and Nepali literature in general, this work is of added benefit. The short, pithy, often witty, and poignant quality of Yogamaya’s creations demand that her work be made widely available. Their reproduction here is to introduce her teachings to the largest possible audience. Any Nepali-speaking person will feel immediate access to her philosophy and will enjoy and appreciate her wit and daring. Activists, and perhaps even bureaucrats will find the verses of use. With this publication we hope to stimulate translation into other languages for writers, teachers, women’s advocates, patriots and scholars.

My personal introduction to the *Hazurbani* was through oral transmission. During my first two visits in 1981 with the custodians of Yogamaya’s legacy in East Nepal, I did not know this book existed. I heard the *Hazurbani* being sung by women who knew them well—women who fifty years earlier lived through their creation and dissemination at the height of Yogamaya’s political attacks against Rana tyranny. I collected some on audio tape. I transcribed these with the help of an assistant, Dharma Shrestha. Before the translations were complete, even with my rudimentary knowledge of Nepali, I could feel the power of Yogamaya’s verses.

The music of the *Hazurbani* is important. Their rhythm, created by Ganga Devi, Yogamaya’s sister-in-law, is unique. I am told it has characteristics of the ‘hill music’ of East Nepal. In this respect, they are cultural creations emanating from of that specific region. But the quality of the poetry is high by any standard, according to literary authorities. Their impact on Nepalese of every caste and ethnic background seems profound. I expect they will find admirers across the world.

The reaction of many Nepalese people to the poems, particularly politically savvy people and poets, speaks much for the verses’ political force. Nepalese from the East may have long held
these verses dear. "Though as time passes, the Hazurbani find favour everywhere in the country. When they read these verses for the first time, poet Parizat, Harka Gurung, Murari Aryal, Uttam Pant, Khagendra Sangraula and other savants and writers, grasped their literary excellence and their political daring. Since 1990, with the restoration of democracy, more of Yogamaya's writings are in circulation and more people are using these verses in their ongoing political work and it appears they are stimulating vigorous research about this pioneer."

At first Yogamaya's political agenda was not entirely clear to me. But I suspected these verses were special. Pursuing their meaning, I brought them from the hills to Kathmandu and showed them to a number of people. All immediately grasped their value. The pre-eminent poet Parizat, recognized Yogamaya as a literary figure of stature and included this book in a 1984 conference in Kathmandu on literature by Nepalese women. I have hardly met a Nepalese, who, reading this work for the first time, is not exhilarated by it. One man who said that he still faces misunderstandings over his inter-caste marriage told me how relevant he found a verse by Yogamaya. He read it to his wife and daughter in order to help them understand his own feelings about shedding his Brahmin orthodoxy many years earlier. Just before this publication went to press, a Nepalese writer looked at this book and remembered seeing the poems in his youth, some 35 ago. He was impressed by them at that time and was eager to take a closer look. When he began to examine the poems, preparing to translate some verses for this book, he seemed thrilled.

In view of the corruption that is so rampant in Nepal today, we read Yogamaya's early attacks on corruption with new hope. Her words offer us a weapon with which to fight for justice. Even 70 years after their creation, living in a very different era from hers, we feel her contemporariness. She speaks of universal issues. Her language is fresh and her wit invigorating. Therefore, this venture in the wider dissemination of her teachings and creations.

2. See Bhandari et al. in Further Readings
APPENDIX II

The Hazurbani of Yogamaya: A Nepali Text. Reprint of Collection Published in Kalimpong, 1940
श्री मूर्मिका

अंग नमः शिव शकि सत्य सचेत शरणा गत,
लंसार रूपि समुद्रबाट पार हुने उत्तम मागः

श्री भक्ति योग मायाको श्रुत्स वर्णः न, बौद्ध नेपाल पुर्वः ४ नम्बर मजुवा सिंहे कोठिन्य गोश्त न्यौराने ब्राह्मण कुलमा जनम भैः, शन्तकरका हरेक व्यवहारमै रस लाई चालि, मानव व्यवहार गर्दै जाँदै निराचारको बिजा रोपण मै मानव लिखिन्छान् श्री बन्द्रा नारायण; उत्तर व्याप्ताङ्कु छिमालाय आदिमा समेतै जाँदै मन्मा सात्त्व नभै अर्थाहू वर्णः श्री इन्द्रा वस्ति सक्रमः।
मजुवा त्रृणेण घाटमा रहि श्री सर्द्धैः भगवानको आधालि उम तपस्या तर्क बडौँ हैः जाँदै भोः। तपस्याको वर्णः गर्नै लाई हामीं—
अविष्कार द्वारा विचार न भएका मानव तन्वात वर्णः गर्न के शकौँछः।

ठन्डमा जल शैया गामिमा पश्चाभिन आर्य गरिइ इत्यादि
कष्ठ देखाउँदै कहिने अन्न पानी तानि गुफाको आधार गर्न
कहिने कहिने निराहार रहने, कहिने श्री गजाजीका सेबाहरा
फलाहार रहने कहिने गाईको दुई मात्र कहिने अमलाका नावा
मात्र, कहिने फुल्को बासन मात्र, कहिने चौका गात्र आसारा गरि
आइ आगेका लोकापवादवाई सहन गर्न श्री गजाजीदुरुगाई तपो-
बलको विचार दिन्छै समिपमा रहेका दुखि जनवाट सेवा खिन्छ
तपोबल योग सक्तिदारा सूक्तका भविष्यमा दुई हाँकि सुनुँ खिले
राखने लेखने कोहि नहुँदै मानव तन्मा सम्भवनुबंधकि गजां दविवट
गरिएका सेवाहरा तृकाङ्का भजन बाहिलाई कुमा गरि वस्तियो
শোভিষ্ণ্বকাস্থ লাগিস হনে বিষ্ণু সাধন নামলেখ নিরক্ষিত পঞ্জ ৮ কৈ পুনর্নিন্দে আমাদা নিম্ন বিন্দু নিম্ন ফিন দিতে এক্ষত বিষ্ণু শ্বসন গত্ত লাগিস হনে বিষ্ণু সাধন নামে দ্বিতীয় পঞ্জ স্মৃতি বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে সো বিষ্ণু ১৪ পঞ্জ পিছে লেখিম পালন নিম্নচক্র কাঢ়া সাধন নামলেখ পালন করে বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে সো বিষ্ণু ১৪ পঞ্জ পিছে লেখিম পালন নিম্নচক্র কাঢ়া সাধন নামলেখ পালন করে বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে সো বিষ্ণু ১৪ পঞ্জ পিছে লেখিম পালন নিম্নচক্র কাঢ়া সাধন নামলেখ পালন করে বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে 

শোভিষ্ণ্যকাস্থ শিক্ষা নিম্নলিখিত পঞ্জ ১৪ পঞ্জ পিছে লেখিম পালন নিম্নচক্র কাঢ়া সাধন নামলেখ পালন করে বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে 

বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে 

শোভিষ্ণ্যকাস্থ শিক্ষা নিম্নলিখিত পঞ্জ ১৪ পঞ্জ পিছে লেখিম পালন নিম্নচক্র কাঢ়া সাধন নামলেখ পালন করে বিষ্ণু শ্রুতি রোপন হনে।
बाहारु, सचेत, "शिव भक्ति दो सांगिक लगात सारा आफना भक्त दार्शन बाल्य सक्षम हृदि भजना आला भें तपोरा ब्रह्म भक्ति शरिमा करकमला छाप लगाई भक्ति दार काैि हृदयमा लिनु भयो तपोराय योग शक्तिमा आनन्दकी सीमा रहें वर्णन गर्ने हामी अभ्यमय दूँैं केवल अंतर्क्षरण पुनः सकै न प्रश्न \nशरण ............

हृदि भज भनि सारालाई चेताउन लागलु भयो लोकबाट \nस्तुति निन्दा बराबर आईँ घरतु निन्दा एकै रूपबाट पान गरि हुन्यो राजधानिसमा समेट चेताउँनु पर्छ भनि पर्ण नारायण बाई पठाउँ भयो श्री ३ चन्द्रमा सुखना गद्दी गद्दी स्वस्त हुन \nनपाउँ बाह्नु मुक्त हुनु भयो। श्री ३ भिमका पालिया बिन्ति पनुद्वारा श्रवण गराउँदा गोकृष्ण उत्तर बाहिनि गुफामा राखने हुनमा \nभैं पर्ण गुफामा गुफामा राखेनु भयो, विच्छमा नेपाली बाहि भने \nभक्ति बनाइए भक्त श्री ३ पद्रा, श्री गुदा भक्तराज खचन निधि \nसमेटबाट सेवा गरिनु भयो श्री ३ मा भने बारात्वाप हुन नपाउँ \nबाह्नु पनि मुक्त हुनु भयो पुर्वकात श्रवण हृदया श्री ३ जुझका पालिया \nश्री पर्ण गुफामा राजदूर्बारमा लगि श्री भक्तिजीको वर्णन देव श्रवण \nगराउँदा श्री भक्तिजीले पठाउँ भयोको शुभना पत्त्वै पत्त्वै धर्म पहला \nगर् भनि सत्य कसोद मैं तसको चिथि १ फलको मुँगो श्री भक्ति \nजिमा चढ़ाउँ नल्लुस् पात्रबाट दिनु भयो, सो प्रतिज्ञा खिस \nसार्वै लिङ्क श्री पर्ण श्री भक्तिजीका चरणमा दाखिल भें पुर्व \nवर्णन बिन्ति गद्दी भयो। तेस पनि पूर्वायाम खाड़ि बृहदिमा आक्रम \nदिनु मैं पानी मात्र जलाहार गरि १२ दिन गद्दी भयो सो आत \nसमापि बार १९८८ साल भाद्र श्री क्रमण जन्माष्टमिका रात नदिहे \nसो आक्रम दिनु भए पनि इत्यादि पार गौरखपुर भने जगा \nभैं २२ अग्नि गरि तपस्या गर्ने बाल्य भयो सो गौरखपुर भने जगा
श्री गण्ड बाहादुर दे् ३० नरेन्द्र बाहादुर द्वारा माता शिव कुमारी प्रितेये मनि
गौरतन रखाड़ेंगु भयो र श्री आवाड बाहादुरे पड़ानन्दको
आश्रम दिखा पाठान्ता राम मन्दिरमा, ७ राथू आसन ।
ढिन में पुर्वश्रम गोशपुरा मालु भयो र साग लिंग पिलो
फाक मुठे मानु श्री बाउ बाले मानो प्रिती मेधा कार्तिक खुशक
गुणियाँ संस्माना ढिन होला भणे मिश्रा पत्र देभि श्री २ मा 
ठाँड़ा समेत सुखना पठाँडु भयो आज सम सा काबोल धर्म
पाठनाको चिन्ता न देखता उत्तर टोडाडु हिमालयोमा तप्या गारी
बस्तु भई गुरा बर्ष दिनपछि पुर्वश्रम मल्वा व्योंसिमा आसन भयो
र स्याँ आफे नेपाल राजथानीमा गई श्री ५ मा सुखना गरछु,
भति पाल्टु भई बाहको इञ्ज्टा श्री ५ मा धियो तापनि बाहिरे 
जाने रूढ़ छैन, जानु हुंड़ेन भति अस्क न्यावाहारि भतत्ते रोकी श्री ५ मा 
दृढ़िन दिन मनाहि गर्ने भयो भति बतसङ्क धौर ढुंढ़ा भत्का 
वचन स्वीकार गर्ने पन्ने श्री ३ का ढुकमते श्री फुटपति निकट बस्थ
घरमा आश्रम भयो हरेक शाला वेदान्त बाहानांदि भक्तिजी छेड आई 
चल लागो नित्या नुक्ति वरोहर चले हरे तेंढ़ाई दुर्घ दिन दियम्के 
लागी मेठे त्यु और धन आज अर्पण गरीं भति हनुन हत्तिले श्री 
भक्तिजी छेड बिन्ता गरेका तिन दिन मै बहहि वस्तुपुर्ण गाड़ि 
जाने बाटो तिर्दे झाड़ी छाड़ि भयो र नेपाल बाइ दोहि भए पनि 
पैडा भयो बाह्य दृष्टि श्री दुगैतिका दिन श्री भक्तिजी र बाहिरे 
का पूर्व बायँ भक्तवाद श्री पस्पमति मन्दिरमा राखने ढुकम भें 
श्री ३ महाराज जुड़को श्री पस्पमति नाथस्मा सवारि मै श्री भक्ति 
छेड बस्ति दोहरार बाला ढुंढ़ा ज्ञाना राजमा उदय भयो सो सुखना 
राष्ट्र पत्तिमा दिन दाबिय छु खेल गर यदि नारे जसको पाँड़े भरे 
आउँछ उस्की नगरी छाड़ि छैन भणे समेत भाणा ढुंढ़ा मैठे के 
गरुँ पछि तपाईं लाई के चाहिए भति ढुकम ढुंढा केवल सयु धर्म 
विषया पाड़े भति वैण ३ पटक सम सिक्का सयु धर्मको भिक्षा


(2)
शेखमे गुरुक भये, धनिफका १५ मैनामा हिहीबाहादुर, ईथर बाहादुर, सुजें बाहादुर, भलबाहादुर ४ भाई कुटे। तेक बाहादुर शेखबाट जवर-जस्ति भाग ग। श्री प० प्रे म नारायण १८ मैना बाद र बाँकर भाई हे १० नरेन्द्र बाहादुर, पहल्मान, गोबिन्द पुरा ३० मैना भए पछ हाथम गर्न दैनिक यदि मन्याँ भने अन्न सवाल बमोजिम बुझाएँ भने अद्विते कागज गराई छाड़ि पिय। धर्म भिक्षा सत्व कबूलको बदला में भेल नेपाली धर्म प्रभु कि माथा १९९८ साल आशाड़ ३१ गते शनिवार हि शानि एकादशिका दिनमा श्री मदकुमार सहित ६८ जना जल समाधि मै परमधाम जाँतु भयो। बाँकर १२१५ जना बाहाँका भक्त आमा बिनाका पुत्र आँखा बिनाको स्थल जल बिनाका माथा जस्ता मै आज सम्म रहेका छों तर कामेमा बसेका समेटेका छों, त्यस पछि पत्रमृत्तिको सेवा गर्दछे श्री ब्रह्मचारी माधा-नन्दजी रहनु भयो, नेपाल उत्तर बाहिनि गुफामा बाहाँको देहान्त भये पछि, हाँ श्री ब्रह्मचारी पशुलाल जि पत्रमृत्तिको सेवा गर्दछे रहनु भयेको छ, भविष्यका लागि जो हुन पछि दृष्ट ईन्छा।
भूरि

30 नमः शिव शक्ति सचेत शरण गत 30

30 श्री सक्ति सत्य शरण गत सा हुँदामा,
पाण्डाराय नादि सवं देवं, प्रशंसा तामा।
आकाश धारु धैर्य अनि जल,
सूर्यं सवः देवर पितृं को वल॥

१

बेदव अन्य व्याकरण र छन्द माहं,
पुण्यं पवित्र जति तिर्थ र ब्रह्म माहं॥
ऋषिह्रु सकल्य व्यानि र ज्ञानि माहं,
जोछो जति सकल मान्यत यो जगतुम॥

२

जोछो जति सकल खूसि रहितितु होस्,
हुन ई अनाथ भानि दृषि वालितु हितु होस॥
वैरव प्रव व्यतित भांत थिएन ईक्ष्ठा,
दितु भयो अहिते जाहें गर्न शिक्षा॥

३

नाँड ठाँउ गाउँ पति लेक्कु बेहीं,
द्या गग्नाथं अरियपुर एही।
बतहौं धण्ड कन जस्नु दिपको,
भारतें भुमि मुख्य पवित्र नैहो॥

४
पर्वतो माहो मुख्य मनेर भनुर, निमाल्रे देखि नही बहुविच। नाँ अरुण हो संगमा बरहण छन, इत्रा दती फेरि त्यहि मिसिनिद।

गिरि कुट प्रमाणानि सुखावृति मृदुलिच। तेष सिनीय माणानि सुरसेना गुने नั�। अरुणो दुः वर्णन अरुणो वय बरहै। नदी रस्म चढ़ा देव दै स्य राज प्रमु जिता। अरुणा स्या माहाराज बरही पाप हारिणी, पूजयन्ति देवताद देवि सर्वे काम फल फार। तपका बलैले कल्योग माहु, चले बहुत शब्द मुहरार माहु। शरीरको धर्मेछ बोल्त पन्ने, हुने कुरा जोच कहाँनन।

त्र्वेणि घट, को पनि शक्ति नाटु छन, अरुणूर घट पछि हुने छन। इत्रा सबै नाम्त पछि भन्नन, इत्रा वति घट त्यहि मिसिनिद।

बिख पोखरि लिङ समेतू खड़ा छन, पछि याह्न श्रेष्ठ तुला हुनेछन। याहाँ बढ़ा पत्थर छनु रहेछा, गुफा मनोहर अति बेसभएका।
सच्चिद योगवाणि

ज़क्कः सुसोभितं बनवारि पारी,
पवंतुखः छन्न अति भारि भारी ॥
बसि निजक्सा पति छैन वाहँ, तपं गर्नाहि अति बेस, छ लाहँ ॥

९
वज्राणि घाट र त्रिवेणि भए ईं क्षेत्र, शक्तिर मुखी पति छन्न पवित्र ।
दुर्गः पुरि घाट भए इसात, मनानादिले पापः सवहुन्छ नाश ॥

१०
सूर्यः उपस्य अति चन्द्र पश्चि,
मन्नोह आनन्द ईवार खास ।
बैराघ्य मन्म बहुते उदाई, पागाधः सरि में वनमा कुदाई ॥

११
बैराघ्य मन्म यो लिप्र बल, इथं सेिण भारि सुरथ कल ।
छलो भुमि फेिण हैवैन कोहिँ, बिधासः गर्व मा बहुत व्याहँ ॥

१२
पनीहुलः अति गान गमे, सुन्द्रै माहँ विन्च बहुत हने ।
खो खो गरि केिण नवी सुसाहि, सुन्द्रै माहँ विन्च बहुत, सुसाहि ॥

१३
यक्तो शुश्रूष्टिमा वशृेर भक्ति 
चं शीव सत्य शरणा गत हेव शक्ति । 
हुम्बैं जति संकुशि बहुत बहुवाई 
तपे गरें इंचा मनमा उवाई ॥

१४
यक्ता जनस्की पतिः हूं सित्रा जाती 
क्रुः मा पनी हिन्तु बहुत भारी । 
उस्मा पनि फेब्य आज नैगो 
संश्चन्नु संतापः अति द्विण नैगो ॥

१५
कस्ता तबहाँ अबके मगनूँ, 
अनारि हूं नाथ कसोरि तर्खी । 
अपी पति जन्म कती लिन्चे हूं, 
चौराँचि लाखः जन्म विती सके हुन ॥

१६
चिन्तयों प्रसुलित त कँ म भुल्हये, 
सन्ताबिषे घेर कसोरि झुल्हये । 
हानाथु थिन्चे बहुतें झुल्हयो, 
शनंसार विषे घेर बहुतें भुल्हयो ॥

१७
यस्ते तबहाँ बहुतें पुकाराई, 
गह्वृं तपस्या अब तित्रो भारी । 
तपूः को निवाँ विन्तु तपस्या गर, 
ल्यौला शरणमा तिगः लो नाड ॥

१८
भने यो खाना पनि केहि दिना, आत्मा बिषे तपस्विको तत्तीयान मिल्ना। वैनाथ जगत्को सब आस छोड़ौँ; पाशा जति छन्, ई चुढाई तोडौँ।

१९
आशा ई पाशा सब छाड़ि दिनेछें, खालि फात के सत नाम छियेन। छाड़ि नेभने प्राण सरण ढेउँ; रोकौँ टोकौँ मलाई न लगाई ढेउँ।

२०
अन्त स्थरण एहि छियर मन्ना, बस्तु भयो हर नमानेर मन्ना। कोहि दिन किनार्म कोहि दीन वन्ना, एं हीव सत्य सरणागत यो छ मन्ना।

२१
फल्को तबाशन कोहि दिन छियर, सुयः तरफ दिहि बहुत छियर। लोक का हे झास्ती तिमहि हेरि ढेउँ; इच्छा भए को वरदान ढेउँ।

२२
कै दिन धप्को पनि बास्ता छिन्ने, फात जल्दी मात्र पियर हुने। एक पातको अभ चिरेर आदी, लोको बनाई छुद खाने रति नमागी,।

२३
दिनमा तुई अमला तखाई,
ब्यतित् भयो कार्तिक मैनालाई।
कै सुफामा यक मास बस्नु,
निर्वाण मे यो ब्रतमा रहनु॥

24
यक वर्ष दिनका दुई भाग खाई,
गन्ते विधी आफ्नु रित्रु जनाई।
गद्दि भए मा पनि अभिन तापु,
ठिण्ड भए मा जल भित्र पस्नु॥

25
यति हुन ई कष तपस्का भनेर,
वित्यो वर्ष चौध को शक्ने गनेर।
कुपा भो प्रभुको तपस्का सङ्कोले,
खोलेकै छ बाति विचार गछि जस्ते॥

26
हाँसा चरित्र रति छैन ईन्का,
दूया भो प्रभुको वितेस्त्रु कुदिन्त।
हाँसु र छत्रु रति छैन भक्ती,
सदा सङ्केतेहुरी शिव शाती॥

॥२७॥
प्राकृतन्त्र पालो त्यसलाई दिन्छ,
मता भित्र हुन्छ समुन्मै रहन्छ।
दिन्छ म दिन्छ अभिमानु नराहु,
जति प्राज हुन्छ तिमि बोले खास॥

28
योगवैणि

कपट केहि मन्मता कहित्वै नलिन, कोहि केहि अनोसः तथि शान्ति चिन्य ॥
रिस रागः र शेती कहित्वै नगर्वूँ, सदा चिन्त नित्य मनि माहिम मञ्जूः ॥

२९
लठाद वाट प्राणः आखिर तिम्रो लिङ्गाः, ईश्वर जो चै तिम्रो ल्यो पूर्ण गहिला ॥
यस्तो प्रभुको छ आदर भएको, केहि डर नमानेर प्रख्यात् गरेको ॥

३०
सर्वं येता सत्य शिवः प्रकाश, निर्मुः खरूप भो गुणे छ खाश ॥
अहो यो कलोमा तपस गर्छ करले, जगताभाई बाँध्यो यहि सोह बसले,

३१
तपस्याले गर्वी याहि वेद पाए, प्रवें धियो कल्पत गाथ गाए ॥
तपस्या गरी मन्त्रले लोकं बनाए, महाप्राण यो जो छ खड़ा गराए ॥

३२
तपस्या गरी देव लोकमा गएका, तपस्या गरी अङ्ग दित्यढः बनेका ॥
तपस्या गरी चित्र आकार बनेको, तपस्या भई क्षेत्र आदि बनेको ॥

३३
तपस्वाले गर्दा सबै तिथि बर्तं
तपस्या गरी आत्मा विषय भर्तं ।
तपस्याले गर्दा सबै देह बोने,
तपस्याले गर्दा प्रभुलाई बिल्ने ॥

३४
तपस्याले गर्दा असतं शान्ति हुने,
तपस्याले गर्दा भय भानित सिलने ।
तपका प्रतापले परम्प्रासित मिल्छ,
तपस्या गरे नाम उत्समु रहन्छ ॥

३५
तपका प्रतापको बल्यान जाङू
अन्धी समानको हो भनी नठाङू ।
तप पूर्ण हुँदा गर्ने छ थर्कने,
ब्रह्माण्ड कंपित भई लोक डराउँने ॥

३६
तपको अवाज यस्तो भनेर अोङू
बल्यान सबै गर्ने शकिन्छ कैले ।
तपको प्रताप चिन्ता कती नसकनु,
दोष दीनु ता व्ययं हुरे नसकनु ॥

३७
नविद्या नसाख्त नअभ्यास धीयो,
तपका प्रतापले त आत्मा उदायो ।
इन्छा हुँदामा इन बौणिण हेनुँ
एक बार सुजन्धो यहि पाठ गन्छु ॥
पनें छ आखीर अवबंध मनुर्
कृप्णार शेखरी रति कै नारुर्।
बचै बातको छेड़ छ विल महाँ
दोस् ता नदिनु केहि हमिम माहाँ।।

३९
युग लोकको यो चलन हो केहि
सामा हुन यो बाणी जति हो भएको।।
आशा छहन रति केहि हाँस्रो
चलबलोस लोक माहाँ यो राष्ट्रो।।

४०
कहिँ छहन रति केहि याँहो
परें चलोस हो सब लोक माहो।।
हाँजर छाँछाँ हरि नामु कहेए
सन्ताप जति हुन लोकमा सहेए।।

४१
घँघे भई यो सत नामगाँई
दया हबसु नाथ सब लोक खाई।।
सुपूणसस्करू कहुण गरि योस्,
परें जगत्स्मा अबता छिर योस्।।

४२
आनन्द को व्योति जगाई याँहो
प्रकाश गराएर निरास रूपमा।।
नित्रे प्रभृ ते को कन दासु भएर
सब हेति पाँड सम दंडि दिपर।।

४३
आचार बाणी र नियम हेतुः
अत्मा विषे केहि बिचार गर्दछ
नारायण बाबा जगतो हो भनि जानि छिन्नौँ
अैसैख्रय लोको सब छाडि विषौँ ॥

४४
भजन् अति भारि बिचार गर्दछ
tप्रभावले बर वाक्य सिद्धा
लोकमा सबैले अब दोषास निदुँछ
इस्तर सगी छन सबै शक्ति लिडुँछ ॥

४५
बरै व्यतित्व बाईस भैगो बढेछ
tपस्यामो बल्द्यो भनि सक्षु कैले
आधार जतिले इन्को गरेयौ
इन्का शरणमा जति जनम परेयौ ॥

४६
क्याबाबाद् दया भैगो बहुत रानो
सन्ताप रखेन अब केहि दाच्रो
हरी भजन् ता दिन केहि भैगो
वाराहसी सहि साठ अधास्मा हो ॥

४७
मैना आषाठ हो तिथि पूणियामा
बारैस योग्यां कर्ष यि सिल्द्वियामा ॥
गुरुहूँले सब दृष्टि सीद्वा
भृक्षग सदृश अदि सब देव सहाय हुँदा,
४८
हन्न्या यहि भो इति भक्ति मांहि,
खाने जति बिजु सब छोड़न माहि।
आकाश देखि जठ बिन्दु आयो,
जल्देखि ब्रम्माण्ड खड़ा गरायो।

49
जल्दाट सम्पूर्ण साखा बनायो,
लो जल्दे यो सम्पूर्ण जगत् भरायो।
यहि जल् रहेघ सबै खानु लाड़िैँ,
जल्दे चलन सबं कती बताउँ।

50
यती बुक्षि यो जल्दे हमेको,
अनाज बस्तै जति बिजु बनेको।
लो बिज खाँदा केहि दोष लागाने,
लो चीजले प्राण पनि खानु पने।

51
असक्ष अस्यां पनी यहि हुने,
तेहि चीज उत्तम फलाहार बनाने।
तेहि चीजलाई कन बिष, भनिन्छ,
तेहि चीजको औषधि यो बनिन्छ।

52
यहि चीजले हन्न्य जगत् मा खाँदा,
लहि चीजको दोष, अति हुन लागो।
त्यसेको हासाउँ त्यसेको हाँगाउँ,
त्यसेका ह इच्छा त्यो आफै खुशाउँ।

53
आपूर्ते यो आफँ छ खाई रहेको, तवे घर चलनेयो छ सारा चलेको । तवेहै यो गड़हरे छ जगतसब बनेको, जगतसब जम्मा आहारा बनेको ॥

54
आहाराको राहा भनि सबै काहाँ, आहारिचलेको छ यो जाहाँ ताहाँ । एलोक लिन्छ सबै छाड़ि दिन्छ, यो स्वेच्छ पिन्छ यसैहै जिन्छ ॥

55
जाहाँ तक रहन्छ ताहाँ तक कहन्छ, शरीर छाड़ि दिन्छ म ता शुद्धि हुन्छ ॥ जनि खाने फल फूल अनाज छाड़ि दियेन, हरे नाथ द्या होसे एक्नाम नाम लियेन ॥

56
हरी भक्त जो छो रति भन्न डर, जो आफँ ३ ईँध्या तिमिहेकु गर । दरिमक आल्म्बन मेँ सुकि हैँखा, आनन्द मेँ त्यो पदमा रहेखा, ।

57
फरक नपारी कन मुक्त हुद्दने, आनन्द सागर सहजेसहजेतरिने ।
ईँध्या हुँद्दमा सब दुःख हुद्दल, द्या हुँद्दमा सब आश दुःखल ॥

58
येक्ता बचन अमृत मुख पाई।
बम्यो कोहि भक्त हरी नाम गई।
यि भक्तको आशा गरि रहेका,
हरी नाममा निक्स सुरय कसेका।

59
भूलन त कोही व्यवहार छाड़िहु रही।
तिरा पछ्गङा कन घागी जान्त।
शान्त रहूँ बाघु हड़िहु बड़िहु नगर,
केल्यान हुन्डु रति भर न डर।

60
हे बाघु शान्त सब शान्त शान्त,
अन्तकरण यो छ माहि एकान्त।
चड़का गरी बोल्न पनी नहुने,
भक्त यिनि हृन र बोल्न हुने।

61
शान्त स्मराबु को बचने नजाते,
आफु समानको गम मात्र ठाते।
याहि तक्को यति यादु छ वाहि,
पक्षात् के गाढ़ अब दैव काहि।

62
हेरी जगतो अब के त हुन्छ,
केल्यान सबेको पछि चित्त हुन्छ।
वें: रहूँ लो पछि बाजने हेर,
लोक्स्मा हुने भो बिन्ता अब बिन घेर।

63
सजीव को हो बिचेतसा नपतुः,
सजनको सप्तस कहिल्यै नढाड़-नुः।
आक्षा विषे नामु हरिको बिचारतुः,
प्रणबं माहाँ मन्त्र बहुत पुकारन्तुः॥

६४
यो मात्र लोक भरिमा बुझ बाचचे होतां,
अकं उपाय गरिनेत काहाँ कबोला।
यो धेर बिन्ती कति गर्लूँ अते,
तागत् पुङे पो गरि सक्हु मैले॥

६५
अन्सार मिंदा यति हो लेखको,
एकू लक्षका छिद्रसे यो देखको।
दिवानिशि हि दिन दि इन वाणि हंसूः,
कस्तो हुनेछ दिन दीन विचार गन्तुः॥

६६
क्षटा हुंदैन इन वाणि विचार गदर्गः,
पर्देन आपति अवसय तर्घः।
योगदेखि वाणि कन निस्फिद्रामा,
पाज्रे नपाई कन राखल नपादंद्रामा॥

६७
वाचखु थिदेन छोरी त समू माहाँ,
सुप्ती दितु भो उदि पात्र माहाँ।
अश्वरं वाचके उनिमा थिएन,
कुङ्खा हुंदामा नलिनई भएन॥

६८
ब्रह्म: वर्ष, व्यतित भो र नसुल्ता माहे, 
ईँचा उदाह लेखियो अरुणा किनारमा।
दिनभा पढ़ी एक सबले विचारमूँ,
विचार पुगे दुःख हुँदैन तनूँ॥

६९

पद्मो त स्वार्य गुरु हो थो मिलेको हैन,
आत्मा विचार गर्दा मिल्ने परेन।
अठाक्षि साल महिना भो आधार थी मा,
लेखि समाप भई गो रविचार दिनेमा॥

७०

तपोभृति महात्म्य
नमः शिव शक्ति सचेत सत्य शरणागत ओऽ
शिव ३ ओऽ शिव ३ ओऽ शिव ३ शिव ३
विष्णु ३ ओऽ विष्णु ३ ओऽ विष्णु ३
ब्रह्मा ३ ओऽ ब्रह्मा ३ ओऽ ब्रह्मा ३
शक्ति ३ ओऽ शक्ति ३ ओऽ शक्ति ३
सत्य ३ ओऽ सत्य ३ ओऽ सत्य ३
गृह ब्रह्मा शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः नमः
गृह शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः नमः
आत्मा ब्रह्म महात्मा ब्रह्म परमात्मा ब्रह्म:
गृह शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः नमः
सीर ब्रह्म गजुर ब्रह्म माहां मुख्य अल्ला तिमि
एक ब्रह्म ओऽ गृह ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमोनमः
गृह शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः नमः
ज्योति ब्रह्म जुकि ब्रह्म माहां मुक्ति साचा
वाचा पुण्य पवित्र तिमि एक ब्रह्म ओऽ गृह ब्रह्म
शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः: २

ध्यानका ध्यान माहां ब्रह्म माहां तत्व माहां तपश्या
तिमि एक ब्रह्म ओऽ गृह ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः
शक्ति शक्ति माहां मुक्ति माहां जुकि घोर मन्त्र
अघोर मन्त्र दिख्या गायत्रि तिमि एक ब्रह्म
ओऽ गृह ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य ओऽ नमः: २
आत्मा हृदि घट घट वासि अन्तर्यामी गुरु अवनिवासी
विभ सृति ज्योति क्रूरत सत्यानंतर तिमि
एक ब्रह्म अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २
अं गुरु शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २ निर्देशन निराकार
निराकार आत्मा सुदिर्म सुभूमि प्रकाशम ब्रह्म अं
गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २ चार युग्का चतुर्युंक्ति
ब्रह्मा चारवेदि अश्र सिद्धि तिमि एक ब्रह्म अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति
सत्य अं नमो नमः २ चार वेदि अस्थार पुराण नव व्याकरण तिमि
एक शुद्ध ब्रह्मको चाकर तिमि एक ब्रह्म अं गुरु ब्रह्म
शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २ चार जाति छति वर्ण अनन्त सोभाय
तिमि एक ब्रह्मको लिला अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं
नमो नमः २ ब्रह्मा विष्णु माहादेव ने देवता तिमि एक ब्रह्म अं
अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २ चन्द्र सूर्य सारा तारा
ज्योति गुरु एक ब्रह्मको देख ज्योति अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति
सत्य अं नमो नमः २ अनन्त ज्ञानी श्रेष्ठेशेर सारा तमि
योगान्तर तिमि एक ब्रह्म को इच्छा अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं
नमो नमः २ अनन्त धूप अनन्त दीप अनन्त दीप अनन्त मुक्ति
तिमि एक ब्रह्म अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २
अनन्त धर्म अनन्त कैलास अनन्त दैवकुण्ड आकाश
पाताल ब्रह्माण्ड तिमि एक ब्रह्म को इच्छा बाचा अं
गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः २ ब्रह्माण्डको भित्रका
तिमि एक ब्रह्मको ब्रह्माण्ड भित्रका चन्द्रमा नहीं अं गुरु
ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः ! अं जगतीभी ईश्वर
महेश्वर वैद्योगिक दशम अवतार तिमि एक ब्रह्मको आदि शक्ति
सारथीका लिला अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोनमः २
गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः नमोऽ्रमः ॥ शिव शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ धर्मः स्थापनः श्रवः अं धर्मः स्थापनः असतः खारणः सारा बिकारारः सारा सेविकारः भूमार्गः भूमार्गः धर्मः उत्तरारः धर्मः युगः बनाजः धर्मः चलनः चलानः प्रणः प्रणः गराजः स्थः स्थः प्रतिपालः सारा बिकारारः आत्मा उज्ज्वलः पारः भ्रातः खानः सारः अं गुरू ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ धर्मः स्थापनः शिवः स्थः स्थः असतः खारणः सारा बिकारारः सारा सेविकारः भूमार्गः भूमार्गः धर्मः उत्तरारः धर्मः युगः बनाजः धर्मः चलनः चलानः प्रणः प्रणः गराजः स्थः स्थः प्रतिपालः सारा बिकारारः आत्मा उज्ज्वलः पारः भ्रातः खानः सारः अं गुरू ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ शक्ति भक्ति जि धर्मः स्थापनः अं धर्मः स्थापनः असतः खारणः सारा सेविकारः भूमार्गः भूमार्गः धर्मः उत्तरारः धर्मः युगः बनाजः धर्मः चलनः चलानः प्रणः प्रणः गराजः स्थः स्थः प्रतिपालः सारा बिकारारः आत्मा उज्ज्वलः पारः भ्रातः खानः सारः अं गुरू ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ शक्ति भक्ति जि धर्मः स्थापनः अं धर्मः स्थापनः असतः खारणः सारा सेविकारः भूमार्गः भूमार्गः धर्मः उत्तरारः धर्मः युगः बनाजः धर्मः चलनः चलानः प्रणः प्रणः गराजः स्थः स्थः प्रतिपालः सारा बिकारारः आत्मा उज्ज्वलः पारः भ्रातः खानः सारः अं गुरू ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽ्रमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽरमः ॥ गुरू शक्ति सत्य अं नमोऽरमः ॥ शक्ति भक्ति जि धर्मः स्थापनः अं धर्मः स्थापनः असतः खारणः सारा सेविकारः
उकार एक राह २ शक्ति भक्ति जि एक राह २ जुफ़क मुक्ति एक राह २
श्री गुरु राह शक्ति सत्य २ ओ० गुरु राह शक्ति सत्य २ साचा
वाचा सत्य शाक्ति २ ओ० गुरु राह शक्ति सत्य २ साचा बाचा
सत्य शाक्ति २ ओ० गुरु राह शक्ति सत्य २ राह जोति जाग
जाग २ आत्मा ज्योति जाग जाग २ महात्मा ज्योति जाग
जाग २ एक निति ज्योति जाग जाग २ राह धुनि जाग जाग २
बेद धुनि जाग जाग २ सत्य राह धर्म छिट २
शिव गुरु धर्म छिट २ विश्व ताकुरधर्म छिट २ साँचो धर्म २
साँचो धर्म २ दया धर्म २ दया धर्म २ साँचो धर्म २
लोक लाई २ दया धर्म लोकलाई २ निति शुद्धि भक्तलाई २
शुद्धि समुद्र भक्तलाई २ निति जागा भक्तलाई २ सर्वत्र नयाक भक्त
लाई २ सत्य प्रकाश, भक्तलाई २ सत्य शक्ति ज्यरण ठेक २
ध्यानित्तिले देरी ठेक २ आपना भक्त बीचलेक्क २ बचा बेगळे
बीचलेक्क २ बहाण्डय नघाई ठेक २ सारा बिकारबारी ठेक २
सेवा सघ्ना मारि ठेक २ ठुरुक न्याय न्याय ठेक २ भक्तका
जिव को भेंट ठेक २ आउतु जातु मेंट ठेक २ विचार मनकाड २
नीज धर्म पैराई ठेक २ सारा भवन, धर्म ठेक २ सत्य शाक्ति
लाई ठेक २ आकाश, पताल, धर्म ठेक २ अस्त, लाई ठेक २
श्रीशिवलक्ष्म, फालकी ठेक २ रामाचार्य पारा ठेक २ कर्मका कांगन,
काटी ठेक २ आउतु जातु मेंट ठेक २ शत, शक्ति ज्यरण ठेक २
लिएको लङ्घ पारि ठेक २ यो मायागाई चिनाई ठेक २ अस्त,
रस पियाई ठेक २ आपना भक्त जियाई ठेक २ भीलका पारी नदाड़ २
ऊँडा पारित झार २ गणन मई धुना पाड़ २ प्रकाश, भई वेल्ल
पाड़ २ शुद्धि प्रकाश, पारि ठेक २ काल जोति पारि ठेक २
माया कल्य चिनाई ठेक २ यो मायाले धुमाओ २ यो मायाले
फिराड़ू २ यो मायाले गिराड़ू २ मायो विश्व सक्त को २
माया तिरो अगम हो २ माया विचे मुक्ति भो २ सत् शक्ति
शरण देउ २ काय सिद्धि पारि देउ २ रक्ष पालकु होईदेउ २
चालु चित रोक देउ २ बिजुरि मन्त्राई खीचिवेद र २ गर्भका
दुःख सम्भाई देउ २ अन्य कालका दुःख सम्भाई २
चौथुक जन्मका दुःख सम्भाई देउ २ दुःख सुख देवि पुसाधा
देउ २ उगा विशा खारि देउ २ एकामय पारिदेउ २ रामराज्य
पारि देउ २ सत् शक्ति शरण देउ २ लिएको छिथै पारि देउ २
नित्य जागा पारि देउ २ सत् प्रकाश पारि देउ २ सत् शक्ति
शरण देउ २ अल्प वुक ३ ता माफ देउ २
सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं
सत् अं

[ इति प्रातः ]

सायम

अं नमः बिष शक्ति सचेत सत्य शरणागत अं
सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं सत् अं
अं शिव ३ अं शिव ३ अं शिव ३ अं शिव ३
अं बिष्णु ३ अं बिष्णु ३ अं बिष्णु ३ अं बिष्णु ३
अं ब्रह्मा ३ अं ब्रह्मा ३ अं ब्रह्मा ३ अं ब्रह्मा ३
अं शक्ति ३ अं शक्ति ३ अं शक्ति ३ अं शक्ति ३
अं सत् ३ अं सत् ३ अं सत् ३ अं सत् ३
अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोनमः २
गुरु सक्ति सत्य अं नमो नमः नमो नमः २
अं सीर ब्रह्म गुजुर ब्रह्म महां मुल्य अल्प तिमि
एक ब्रह्म अं गुरु ब्रह्म शक्ति सत्य अं नमोनमः २
शरण देउ २ माहूँ दया गरि देउ २ आफँ अचि सोरि देउ २
शुद्धि कार्य भरि देव २ सत् ज्योतिमा सारि देव २ शुद्धि प्रकाशु पारि देव २ भय भूति खारि देव २ असतःलाई मारि देव २ सबकौ सेवि शारि देव २ भूषिको भार टारि देव २ लोकमा धर्म सारि देव २ ध्यसि राज्य पारि देव २ प्रजा धर्मि पारि देव २ साँचि धर्म लोक लाई २ दबा धर्म लोकलाई २ लिंग शुद्धि भक्तवास २ शुद्धि शमुज्ज भक्तलाई २ सत् आंं सत् आंं सत् आंं सत् आंं हेम तेर ४ असतः होम ४ विकार होम ४ जन्म होम ४ मन्त हाम ४ गर्भवास गरदेळ होम २ सत् आंं सत् आंं सत् आंं सत् आंं शरण छेड २ सारादेव हंदि देव २ ज्योति गुड़ हंदि देव २ शक्ति भक्ति राजी होड २ ब्रजा विष्णु जागारी २ महादेव जागारी २ चन्द्र सुर्य जागारी २ तारागण जागारी २ महा सागर जागारी २ मन्त हावा जागारी २ वृद्धी माता जागारी २ शक्ति मुनि जागारी २ सारा तपि जागारी २ तीर्थ वत जागारी २ पूज्य पवित्र जागारी २ जप तप जागारी २ मूल मन्त्र जागारी २ खाड़ा खवा जागारी २ तत् तपस जागारी २ ध्यान खान जागारी २ महां मन्त्र जागारी २ घट वासिं जागारी २ अन्तर्यामि जागारी २ अक्षानि जागारी २ सारथि जागारी २ अर्ग्नशक्ति जागारी २ जल ज्योति जागारी २ शक्ति भक्ति जागारी २ सारा जगत । जागारी २ सत् का शब्द जान देउ २ बिच्चाट निक्कौ देउ २ कृष्ण माहो खगाई देउ २ निज धर्मां पाँचाइ देउ २ सारा भवन भकाइ देउ २ चौथ लोक भकाइ देउ २ आकाश पताख भकाइ देउ २ असतःलाई हकाइ देउ २ सृक्षिको चलन फकाइ देउ २ स्वर शब्दले डगाई देउ २ सत् आंं शरण छेड २ सारा देव खड़ा ही २ असत मार्ग खडारी २ छटो मार्ग खडारी २ सेवि शार्म खडारी २ सारा देव जागारी २ पृथ्वी माता जागारी २ सत् का शब्द जागारी २ शक्ति भक्ति जागारी २ सत् शक्ति शरण छेड २ मुख पुक ४ ता माफ देउ २
जगत्न भिन्न तिमि छौ २ तिमि भिन्न जगतु छ। आकारिका होइन केहि। हेदैँ लंदवा छैन केहि। ज्योति भिन्न तिमि छौ। तिमि भिन्न ज्योति छ। आकारिका होइन केहि। हेदैँ लंदवा छैन केहि। जल भिन्न तिमि छौ। तिमि भिन्न जल छ। आकारिका होइन केहि। हेदैँ लंदवा छैन केहि। खानि प्रयुक्त तत्व हो। तत्व चित्र सक्ष को। तत्व चित्रें उत्तरगो। तत्व चित्रें मुक्ति भो। तत्व भिन्न तिमि छौ। तिमि भिन्न भावण छ। आकारिका होइन केहि। हेदैँ लंदवा छैन केहि। वेद भिन्न तिमि छौ। तिमि भिन्न नेद छ। आकारिका होइन केहि। हेदैँ लंदवा छैन केहि। सर्वेत्राण तिमि छौ। तिमि भिन्न सर्वेत्राण। शब्द भिन्न तिमि छौ। तिमि भिन्न शब्द छ। आकारिका होइन केहि। हेदैँ लंदवा छैन केहि। सारा प्रयुक्त तत्व हो। तत्व चित्र सक्ष को। तत्व चित्रें मुक्ति भो। आकारी पाताल हरोइन। जल ज्योति रहोइन। सारा जगत्। ख्य भो। लय भाको हेनेंको। सुर्थमा बसि देउ। तार ख्वबर केहि देउ। सत् शक्ति शरण देउ। सत् शक्ति शरण देउ।

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तपोभृति वर्णन

इति
ष्ठी भक्तिजी का योग काणी

30 नमः शिव शक्ति सत्य शरणागत

श्री शक्ति सत्य शरणागत परंतु,
भक्त वाक्य संक्षेपमा बिस्तार गर्दछु।
गिद्ध को जस्तो भाषा आयो श्राहणु भक्
पैल्हा दोषु छ ब्राह्मणालाई होइन न अन्तर।।

ह्यूँ विजातिको भाषा हृदा गिद्ध का जस्ता छन्,
मालुप गरिए बुझ न सके अरे असल्दु छन्।
भाषा सुनि न भुलु अर्थ विचार,
अन्तरकरणु बुझ सके छुट्ठा विकार।।

पुरोहितको बुझ्दि हेर निक चिन्ने युक्ती,
याटी गोल्ले बार जम्गा केल्ले हुन्छ्यो मुक्ती
याटी गोमा बार जम्गा भन्दै तारवी मासी,
तिन गोल्ले विन्नि गरिनु पापु विमामा सार्थौ।।

यौटा घर भाद्र क्षाई अर्कस प्रहरमा आटि,
प्रहरु विन्नि गरिनु पुरोहित दै ढोट।
बिचा छिन्न ब्राह्मणले व्यज्ञानका धनी,
वनियाङ्का कामुका धारे उत्तम मणि पनि।।

७
ब्रह्म चिन्ते ब्रह्मण भनी उत्तम गराई
ब्रह्मणधर्म सत्य छाड़ता देव दराई।
बैद्य साहू अघि छोड़ा ससतो गरायो,
ब्रह्मणधर्म बेपारि छनौ भाउ दरायो॥

5
ब्रह्मणको बेपार देखि बैद्य दरायो,
बैद्य बेपार के लाई गरोसै फाउदा हरायो।
लोभ बढि ठह्रै स्थायो मालमू न पाउँने,
यति छोटा खेल्मा पति कत्रो सुआँदने॥

6
शंकरजिका मेदू शाणिमा कुवै पर्वर दृन,
युपू भरिनो आयु दिए कसो गुर्दै दृन।
सभा मनमा असृते सरी गिता पढ़को,
जानि जानि ब्रह्मणले के काम गरेको॥

7
अघि ब्रह्मण-भारि पण्डित सुदामाजी थिए,
दुख थिए तै पलि तिकुन बेपारस्र गए।
निति शाखा बिचार गरी ब्राह्मको भरमा रहे,
दुःख सुख कर्म चिनि धर्म थांदा भए॥

8
धन्य कृषि सुदामाजी धर्म छोड़नेम, आफ्नु धर्म न छोड़नाले दुःख पाएनो,
नुग राजा धनि थिए माहा दृस्ती भए,
तैमि ती सरा सरी खोइ खर्म गए॥

9
मनको भ्रमणह नछुटनाले शन शेपारो भए,
त्यो अपिका भक्त कामले पिछे खार गए।
गौरी शंकर व्यथे बेच्छो बिचार नगरी,
सारै गोशा हुन भयो शंकर भी हरी॥

१०
महाराजका जागिरदारलाई कुछ दोष दिचें,
जसले मनमा उद्या भयो सांहि बतारें॥
येसै बाका पिरोशले घरे प्राणिरोक्षा,
अनाथसु मिल्त गरछन जाणै कसै होइला॥

११
धर्म समै विचार गरी इलाक्यू गरेन,
पैसा भए वरेहा लाई दडा परेन॥
कुल ता हाम्मो वाः िण हो छैनाँ कुम्भमा,
जात्ता सत्य छैन हाम्मो राख चुहिमा॥

१२
येसै बातको अर्थ न लाई दहतां पाईनो पैसा
घरे घर बायो भने बेर ता लाईनो।
धर्म धामने निसाफिले यति चाह पाउन,
कुन कुन जातु जुम जुम ल्याउछ जात्मा मिलाउन॥

१३
बियनेलाई माछि दिनु चोरलाई दिनु काठी,
धर्म संहिर निसाँफ गर्नु वाँटा न ढाँटी।
सारथि उत्रने छन धर्म जागेनछ,
राजा मंत्रि भारदारलाई ठकर भागेछ॥

१४
होइन मैले बोले को ता योग, छ चलेको, 
बिचार गन्न सजनहार तब्बो खोलेको।
हुरिजिले अटको काम नभई छोडू, तिहाँ, 
जान त म जाने होइन फेर ता परोइन।

१५
धन्य हरी कुपाल को यथा भएँ,
सूर्यबाट दुर्पिन हेदरी बेला गएँ।
रिस्र र सेख सत मैले होइन गरेको,
जगतू भरको दुःख मैले देखु भरेको।

१६
छाड़ बालु पाजी काम यो बियाज बढ़ाइँने,
भगवान लयो लावो बिनि बढाइँने।
असुतसरिय वोणि बले योगमा। भए जरी,
धेर दौँढ़ छाड़ु पदरी होला के गती।

१७
गदरी गदरी लोँड़ भाड़ हुँद्रे जँडामा,
कुन कुन विरता पन्नछन हो पापका फाँदामा।
भउ होला यस्तो भापा कस्ते गुनेछन,
भगवान भक्तजनके यस्तो गुनेछन।

१८
ख्यानमा देखन लायेय सागर मरेको,
भगवान का शक्ति बिना होइन करेको।
भउ होला यस्तो भापा कस्तेगुनेछ,
हेदु होला कुछ दिनमा कस्तो हुनेछ।

१९
स्वप्नामा दूरिच्छि भग्न पाने बाला,
महादिवले लिनु भयो बिजुलिको भाला।
बिजुलि र ब्रजसंगै असिना भई स्वर्ग,
त्यसेषे बेला जगत भरमा को कोहोलो पर्दछ।

२०
बाला चला बृहस्पति ढाला पालि बगाइन,
मृत्ति सका गर्दौ हुन्छ धर्म जगाईन।
भग्न होला यो बाल, लागाई कर्ते बतायो,
तपसका प्रभावले शक्ति यो आयो।

२१
आज मलाई भग्न भयो धर्म हरेको,
सबै बेला ताप मोक्को संयोग परेको।
धर्म छाडौं क्या हो भने आफ्नो निर्णय छाडौं,
ब्राह्मण हरू बन्न लागे शुद्ध जातको जोडियो।

२२
ब्राह्मण, भई सबै चिन्तको बिकुन गरेको,
मार्तिक भईं दुर्विश्रुको कपट हरेको।
अहिले गदी भलादृश्यमा आफ्ना सुनाइदै,
भिट्ट जरा हालि सक्यो लेभि धुसाइने।

२३
अन्य कालमा यो धुसाइ फटाइला धाँदा,
बढौ कष्ट मिलि जाला यो धुस, निकी जाँदा,
अहिले मात्र पचेको छ भरे पनि हैन,
सम्भव राख सत्य बचनु, झुटो हुने छैन।

२४
जति कमाव सम्पत्ति ब्यारि घरैमा,
दौँ धिया परें भये ज्यम डरैमा ॥
धुमाई धुमाई दुःश्चु मुख दिने छन्,
राखसु जस्ता दैत्याहु इजजत् फिने छन् ॥

२५
धितिदेस्वं बिधि तिता भएकै छ आहे,
यहि धिति बिभाले विन्ति गरें मैले ॥
आसामिले पहिले कर्ज तिति सकेश,
साहु भसे लोभिले ता बाँकि भनेछ ॥

२५
दौँ धिया दुलु भयो यहि निर्धि बार्टे,
आसामिले कर्ज तिन्यो तमसुकृ ठाड़े ॥
छोरो धियो बालख बाबु मरेश,
लोभ साहु माम गयो तिनु परेश ॥

२७
हरू केटा तमसुकृ मा थेति बढ़ेको,
अन्तरयामि प्रभु देति धर्म छाड़ेको ॥
लोभर अन्यायका अक्षर लेखेको,
आफु तत्तं भगवान्ले रछ देखेको ॥

२८
होइन मैले बोलेको ता योगू छ छलेको,
बिचार गरें झानिठाई आत्मा खोलेको ॥

२९
स्तोत्र वदा

जन्म नर अथ भूमि समायो,
साना दुःखा पाथिहरु चलायो।
विन्दु दुःखा लिनु पर्वतं तो साना,
अथ मुख्य त्यो हो कुमभिप्रका बाँधा जानृ॥

३०

तस्को फल ता आज के अमृत भैले,
समपूर्ण कष्ट भने सकसे भैले।
कही सकतु छैन बढी कष्ट पाङ्गुला,
सदा तम दुःख पिए दिनु विताउला॥

३१

फेरि जन्म हुन्छ बढा दूःखि कुल्मा,
हिन्दै नष्ट भईगो लिङ्गा दिखा धर्म।
एक बार की योगी कदापि यो होइस,
विना दैव ईश्वर जन्मे ठने छैन॥

३२

धर्म नष्ट पारी फेरि काही जोतुं,
जन्म हुन्छ याहिं भिक्षा मोगी खानु।
शरिर हुन्छ रोगी नराद्रो छ हेरें,
सबै प्राणि हेलान बढा नेत्र तरें॥

३३
ब्यारेछू झान् म सवै चित्त लाउँ, जन्म हुन्छ याँही धर्म खुब् मगाउँ। जगत्मा म भए एकै नाम दिन्छू, चलना को यो धर्म म समझाई दिन्छू।

३४
माछन् कि भर्षे डर डैन केहि, आलर काल गतिको छ भिरेको देहि। प्रभुका कुपाले गरि जन्म हुन्छ, निहुं काल गतिले गरि जानु पर्छ।

३५
गाई तिथि बस्ने र झानीहरुले, एक सत् पुकारनु भने होत भैले। बहुत विनित लाउनु सत शब्द गाउनु, प्रभु छन् कुपाल धर्म खुब्म मगाउनु।

३६
नही धर्म लोकका डुबेको छ शोकका, छोड़ि धर्म दिदा परे दुःख भोग्ना। प्रभु सत् कुपाल त खानि दयाका, म ता देख्न लागेप्रत्यक्ष्ष्ठ भएका।

३७
केहि दोष दिन्छू सुनि लेउ अर्थे, छुटे ता यो होइन देउ मफ् सवैले। सरकारका इ अघ्या अदाल्च रहेका, लोकको निःश् हेन राखि दिएका।

३८
लोभे गर्व धर्मको नष्ट पारी,
निया त्यसको धियो धियो घुसु हकारी।
दोहोरा त्यो दश्द त्यससमा लगायो,
धियो जितने सुहा त्यो सुहा हुरायो॥

३९
यसै लोभे गर्व अन्याय परेको,
मालिकहुले आशा राखे नौ भरेको।
प्रभु देख्न लागें त्यो निर्धारि मरेको,
मालिकहुल हो यो के कामु गरेको॥

४०
बाबा बिद्वि मन्न समा दोषु नराखी,
निर्भर छाडि दिए घुलेमा तयारी।
कलियुकका मालिक घुलेमा छनु राजी,
कलियुकको बुद्धि कति कथा पाजी॥

४१
दोस्तोभाषा
योगी जनको चल्न केहि विस्तार गद्वृः,
उच्छ निचं भाष विन्यु शरण पद्वृः।
योगी जनको आशनु बोधि बस्ता बनेमा,
आफ्ना मालिक माहदिव जप्या मनैमा॥

४२
वनका गौरि शशिर माँगि भन्न लागे होला,
मनका गौरि शशिरजिलाई खुमाइसके होला।
कुमार ता योगि जनले एउटा लाई हुन्,
धौन बाबा धौन बाबा बर्षैति तो भन्न।

योगि शोला बन लागो भित्रि पत्रेँ पत्र,
तो सम्पति लुकावें धन रत्न किन नत्र।
योगि जनको चलन यस्तो धर्म काहूं जाम्नू,
ईशरमा सत सुरु, झुन दिन्त्र तिनको लाम्नू।

माया ताम्न सजिलो छ लोभु छ ताम्न कोटिको,
लोभि चिते भयो भने करम हुन् छोटी।
कय जस्तो माया रछ रछ जस्तो लोभु छ,
जाहू माया बस्न गयो त्याहिं लोभि छोटे छोटी।

शिष्य तो है कैलाश जान्छ नगरै छोडःदिन,
सबे योगि कैलाश जालान भजू पद्रेंह।
अरकाको चित्र हो भनी बिचार गरोइन,
लोभि चित्त भयो भने धर्म हेरोइन।
यस्तो स्वभाव, बस्तो भने दुःख पाँचेछ,
संसार तरी जादैन तो याहि आउँछेछ।

४८
बाबु त्यस्को मरि गयो काहाँ गएछ,
कुर्को माया नमणदि छोरे भएछ।
आफ्नो त्यस्कि मरिकन दोसा कुल्ला सरिछ,
दोसा कुल्लकी कन्याभी हस्त दिछेछ।

४९
माया जिले संयोग पारि फेरि गुमाउँछ फकाहिँ,
तो अपिकी नातिजिक प्यारि छुन आइँ।
यति हुँदो गुप्त छन्नी बाहि खेल्दा रछन,
सुक्त पद्को रस्ता छोपि वेदै खेल्दा रछन।

५०
सुक्त हुने युक्त हर तैन कसैमा,
आफिन प्यारि मायाजिका परे ब्राह्म।
मरिक माया तपायो भने अफिँ हुने छन,
चाँस पश्चि मिनै माया फकिदिने छन।

५१
तिन माया हसाँडैछन प्रिति बढाँडैछन,
शील गरेन सिद्ध जनको जन्म भसाँडैछन।
हे दैव कुपाल माया तिथ्री सिपालू,
मायाजिको चारिहि म कवित निकालू।

५२
श्रुतक हुने दिनको दुःख कहिन्छ म थोड़ा,
लेकाँ छ मन्थ हल्मा बिचार गर्नु होला।
सबै बात कहिन्छ म छैस्तो हुने छैन,
सबै दुःख कहिन्छ मने सुनि सक्छै छैन।

53
श्रुतक्षङ्गाई दिनेहरू भन्छन भाज मन्थो,
कर्म अनुसार त्यसङ्गाई बड्रो दुःख पन्थो।
बार पाउ कसी कसी ढहो गराउँछ,
बन्धुकर्म सुलूक भनि उम कराउँछ।

54
कौँडाबाला लघु लखि रागि हुले हाम,
नौगो छ यो ठल्ला छैन दुत्ति ढाङे तान।
कटि कुटि चून्यै भैरौ बिल्कुल्दैन व्यास,
छोरो चाँदि भन्छ जाहाँ गछुँ क्षत्रो पास।

55
कुटि कुटि निलो पारि दुबि दिन्याउँछ,
नाताहरू सुलूक भनि उम दिन्याउँछ।
फर्कै माताहारीरू लखि व्यास व्यास धोन्ना,
लो शरीरको सुन क्षिकी कुमिब पाख्मा थन।

56
पापिहरुको खुन क्षिक्क कुण्ड मरेको,
कुलेको छ गन्ध चल्ने किरा परेको।
यमराजका दुतहरू जम्मा भि जान्छन,
कुमिब पाख्मा थन भनि तेसलाई बैजान्छन।

57
बहेंदे छ शरीर भरी धारा राग को,
ठुले भन्न कमाई तरी य ढे हो जागत्को ।
हरामढा छनु दुतहरू सातो हरिविन्दन,
बिचित्राइ दस्तु भनी हुकमु गरिदिन्छन् ॥

५८
काठो सङ्गैए हस्ता छस्तै तालु फोरि दियो, यमराज आई फेरी तालु जोड़ि दियो ।
दुष्पद दिन दियो देह मर्ने नपार्ने, यमराज लियुरि छनु दुया नबाउँने ॥

५९
ल्याउ यस्को खाता हेरौ तलो रछ काम,
कुन्दै दिनै भजो यसै चोरते खोइ हरी नाम ।
हेरौ सक्काई बहि पत्र छैन हरी नाम, जन्मे देखी आज सम्म लोभि तेरो काम ॥

६०
कति थियो धन तेरो स्वच्छ, कुन्दै दिनलाई,
कति थिए संतान तेरा छोरा नाति भाइ ।
कसैले दिनछ शरण, तेरो कहिए याहि आई, यसै भन्नै दुतहरू धुकछन लसलाई ॥

६१
तेरो बुझि बिप्रियो (त) दोष नदे कसलाई, छैन तेरो ल्याणु गर्ने अहिले याहि आई ।
हेरौ माता जाति छ लो कहिद गर्दैन, भिन्न भने चोर बुझि को सगरि छोडौँदैन ॥

६२
লস্কা নিতি লাইদিয়া পুরাণ খাণ্ড তাড়েন।
নির্থা হৌতা যজমান র ঘের খাত গরোইন।
লোহি হৌতা পুরোহিত র চিত পরোইন,
যতো বড়খাপ পল্লা জসুকো পতিত তরোইনক।

৬৩
পুরোহিতে হে সন্তোষি ভট্ট দক্ষিণার হো চিত,
যজমান কিন্তু তর্নে আহিবাদ দিনর।
শান্ত খন্তাগু খিনস্তে ধর্ম ফলাইলা,
আর বাসু জাতি বন্ধাদিত্বার বাসন চলাইল।

৬৪
পল্লাতে চালা পাড়ে গড়ন খাড়ের,
ঘের করম্ভার নামে প্রেক্ষা নিলন।
যো বাত্র মন্দা পল্লাতকে চিত দুর্বলের,
অনুষ্টিকর দৃষ্টি পদী নর্ত সুখে দে।

৬৫
শ্রী শিচলাগু বাসন চলনে বানাকো ধূপ হোক।
চৌর বহুবিদাই পাট্টাই বাহির লনকাল।
ঈশ্বর বেনে হোনামা চৌর বহুদ্রো ভালা,
দুখ পাড়ে নিবুত গতি সন্ধ্যা লোহি চালা।

৬৬
চট্টক জসা সংসারা খননা জসু বেলেঁ,
প্রাণিহৃদুক্ত হোম্যা তৃণাকো মেলা ছ।
সম্পাতকো যো তৃণা কুঁঁ ঘটাই,
ভগবানকা ভজন পুট্টি চিত খনাই।

৬৭
बेला बस्त मने सबौ सायो होला बिलें, सम्पत्ति ता याहि बस्बा जानु पछि रिंते। सबौ चिज पछि हो सबौ याहि बिलें, ठुला भाग्य सत्संक्लेच हानिन्द्र पद, मिलें।

६८
भगवानको भजन गरे बुल्डो पाइन्छ, ठुलो भाग्य सत्संक्लेच उत्स जाइन्छ। कप्के बुल्ख बिलबाळाइ जुगालेह ढाक्यो, यो होभिन नवनिर्माण पकर हुन आँखो।

६९
कप्के बुल्ख बिलबाला आल्मा माहीं छन, ठुलारल सबौ जासके तब देशिन्छ। कप्के बुल्ख बिलबाला बिखु यसो गरी, एक बटा पटा होला सम्भा बेस गरी।

७०
गितापदः ता शान ता हुने तत्र नजुकिने, अगमु विजुको माजुमून नभो रुलिन्त नमिन्ने। गुण ता दिने अन्तरयामिदुर्वन दिने बिखु, बिविज्ञका नामबाट छ उक्लने बिल्खु।

७१
गुण, दिने ता अन्तरयामिदुर्वन दिने शीख, यी आल्मा गुफा भिख बसेको छ जीव। ठुल्को ठुंगो बुल्झ रहिन्छ बासन, बुङ्गल, अगमु तव खोली सकें लोक, ता बुक्लेन।

७२
बासनका महिमाले मसला ता किनठूँ,
भक्तिरुको खभावः पती भगवानले चिनठन् ।
भगवानको नामु मध्ये विषयको नामु जबर,
लेखि सर्दे बिन्ति पत्र छाडः तार खबर ॥

७३
आयो मेरो तार खबर मन्त्रहरु धरि देउँ,
आफूँ सय महादेवः यसको निसाब् गरि देउँ,
गिद्दुःतो जस्तो माणा आयो सवालुँ सुनाई देउँ।
के के भन्नुँ कुनू कुनू जन्नुँ सो वात् यहीं ठेउँ,

७४
अधि पति रामचन्द्रदेखि यसै अनेखें,
पोविदेखि दुःख बचन लो तो सुनेखे ॥
यसि स्थाप्न गर्न भनि अौतार लिएखे
खुदा पति राजपत्राई मारि दिएखे ॥

७५
अहिले पति सुभाईनें चाला छिन्न भो,
हो किन होइन शक्त जातूँ संक्रेप दिन्न भो ॥
बैद्युःभा जाने ईच्छा लिए लमेमा,
आफिन सिता लक्ष्मिनाई लयागे बनेमा ॥

७६
रामचन्द्रका हुकूमते बनमा जायूँ भो,
तिखा पुणि लक्ष्मिजः ता एकर जानूँ भो ॥
अहिले पति सुभाईनें चाला छिन्न भो,
हो किन होइन शक्त जातूँ संक्रेप दिन्न भो ॥

७७
काला ब्रह्म गोर्ने हिल्य न पियार गर न हो, अर्थ हि र भन्डारी गाउँदा खिले जो हो। जान त म जाने होइन यक्ति भने अहिले, उपलब्धिका वश होलान् भने ठान्नु माई।

78
कालो ब्रह्म सय भन्नु सबैले मांडुम पाउँदै, गायत्रको जप् गाउँदै कहिले नलाङ्गौ। गोयचा ता अक्ष्मज हुन् खेत भूषण भिन्निन। कालो ब्रह्म कालो गाजल्लि तिनले यागी दिनछिन्।

79
होइन माई बोलेको ता योग छ चलेको, बैराग लिने जनहुल्ला तब बोलेको।

80
प्रेम
अधि बिष्णुजीले गायत्र दिनु भो, ब्राह्मण् नहुँदा उ आफै दिनु भो। गायत्रको जप् यो साखो छैन याहौ, गायत्र पूँचिन बिष्णुका समि पाई।

81
बिप्रादिवाहै जपतां लोभको दिन्नु भो, गायत्र माता प्रसुल्ले दित्रु भो। रुद्राक्ष देखिक इबि उठेको, प्रत्यक्ष धर्म शिवले ढुँढेको।

82
चार युग मध्ये कलियुग, अध्यायो,
कलिका पदाथं करेहो पारेरो।
यिन तीन युगः हो अभान्ते मिलो,
कलियुगः को अमलः काँचो पातः को तितो॥

83
यिन तीन युगः कलिमार ढाहे,
कलियुगः को बङ्ग छ काठे र पारे।
यिन तीन युगः वाडः यस्तो गोहा,
कलिको गहना र गिणु र लाहा॥

84
शरीर छन्दः कलिमा तुमा निर्यां ठेढः,
यथः युगः होलान्नः यिन वेष्टस्त्र रुक्का।
कलियुगः शाखः श्री क्रिया चरित्रः,
यथः युगः शाखः माहः झाअ विष्णु पवित्र॥

85
कलियुगः स्वभावेः चार गछुः यस्तो,
यथः युगः स्वभावः फोटिकः झलके जस्तो।
यथः युगः स्वभावः कहन्छु म थोडः,
नारी जबले विश्रासः मातुनः है अथोर॥

86
सुन्दर सपेतः का पवित्र सारी,
हरिमा लिक्का अति खर झारी।
मधुसुब बचले गरि बोलि दिने,
झानको स्वभावः मनीखु लिने॥

87
हि हि गनें हौसो रहदैन जान्छः 
एकु बार मसुकक हौसो यो रहन्छः।
रहदैन खभावु अघोरी अभोजा,
मुर बचनको खभावु फिनें होला।

88
लक्ष्मको खभावु छ धर्म मा रहेको,
सारा लोकु सुनन्छ यो अथमुले कहेको।
प्रश्नु अन्तरयामिम आफु जारु हाँका,
जातकी म छु ब्रह्मावकी अभोजः।

89
को हो लायो लोक्सा म जस्ती अभागी,
तत्व बिन्ति गछु (मु) दुयाको लागी।
हुँ मनु मैँहे हिते जानि लेको,
भक्ति अधमृ हुँ उभाष्टिम देव।

90
यो प्राणु लामलाई ब्रह्माव जाती छु अटोः
सौंभो बिन्ति गछु रति भर नहाउँदी।

91
दोहो भाषा
सूर्यजिका बरिपरि सावा रहन्छन्,
लोक्मा साक्षिम सूर्यजि छन् सौंभो कहन्छन्।
कसुरु हेरि दुःख दिन्छन् बेसिम दिर्दैनन्,
सूर्य जिता सौंभो बोल्छन् घुसुः ता दिर्दैनन्।

92
लोक भन्छ ज्वालामुखि बिकि गरेँ घर,
बिभु ठाकुर पुस्तु हुन्छ गोशा भई हेर।
घरै दिन भो सम्भाउँदैछ लोक टेक्दैन,
ज्वाला आफै प्रकट हुन केहि बेर छैन।

९३
ज्वाला वदि अभि रूप्ले जगत् जलाउँदैन,
ज्वाला वदि जल्यो भनि कस्तो मालुम पाउँदैन।
घर दिन भो सम्भाउँदैछ पयार मानेरन,
हितका वचन दिव्रो मैले दिन जानेरन।

९४
भगवान्को वशे अन्नर आन्तो भक्तौ,
कसो गरि हेतु सैले भस्म भपैको।
सांधि सांधि हो हो मेरो नामः,
झानका गर्भे भिन्न म छु बुझ मेरो कामः।

९५
झानका गर्भे भिन्न म छु खाउँ पर्दैँन,
यो झान्याट उन्त्रे पछि नखाई छुदैँन।
यही चौराख लाईले खाटाउ खोदा अधाइदैँन,
नखाई र नात्राई राजि छुदैँन।

९६
सांधि सांधि हो हो मेरो नामः,
झानका गर्भे भिन्न म छु सम्भा मेरो कामः।
झानका गर्भे भिन्न म छु बोल्नु छु दैँन,
यो झान्याट उन्त्रे पछि नबोलि छुदैँन।

९७
एकै शब्द बोलन नपाई जगत् रहर्षन,
सारथि सारथि यो हो मेरी नाम्।
श्लोका गर्भं भिन्त्र म छू बुझ मेरे काम,
श्लोका गर्भं भिन्त्र म छू खेलनु परीन्॥

९८
यो श्लोकात पंचे पछि यो लेख् थामिदैः,
गुडु गुडु लेखनु पर्ने जगत् पक्का छैन्।
होइन मैंले बोलेको ता योगः छ चलेको,
इच्छा गर्ने संगत् संग शब्द खोलेको॥

९९
यो संसारको रित जो छ विन्ध चढाईल्ला,
बहा विषु माहेश्वरको आसान ढगाईल्ला।
सत्य शिव माहांत्वको ध्यान म धरौँल्ला,
विषु ठाकुन्न झिकाह ने को छोड़ुँल्ला॥

१००
अन्तरयांमि ईश्वर सित चैत पड़ौँदैः,
हुँ तुँदिछु खुद्रो कर्म लागौँ म गरौँदै॥
अन्तरयांमि ईश्वर सित चैत पहौँ,
शक्ति चलने विषा न पि के को छोड़ुँल्ला॥

१०१
अन्तरयांमि अविनासि मालिकु भिन्त्र छन्,
बहा विषु माहेश्वर ता कर्म दिने हुनौ।
शक्ति शालि अविनासि मालिक दोभा छन्,
अविनासि को हुन अने कर्म बेटो ने हुनौ॥

१०२
अन्तर्यामि अविनासी देखुन यसोरी,
श्राद्ध न्योति मस्तकः भरी मर्यं कसोरी।
यो शरिरमा रघु फिन बिहोस मा होइन,
शुद्धे रति काहुन विचेतमा छुजैन॥

१०३

ईघर उत्तेकर शव्दमा शक्ति नलोई,
हत्र पत्रु गमुता पाउने छैनौ सेवा न दीह।
सेवा तदह सनसारमा जसले जानि गर्ली,
अन्य काल्मा सम्भनाले सनसार लो तर्ल॥

१०४

सबै रस्ता खुलने रचन रोका परोउन,
आँफि सबै उड़ने छन दोष, कैहि राहोउन।
हृद्र कण्ठ एक मुखि हे अजि गरेछन,
अजि सुन्द्र भगवान्को आसन, डगेछन॥

१०५

ब्रह्मा विषु दिव तिनै जम्मा भएछन,
त्यै दिनहरेति लोकमा खबर गर्व रहेछन।
देवाहुरु बिन्ति गर्व भुमार धरे भयो,
जत्री देखु विषु ठाकुर लोकमा बेर भयो॥

१०६

कोहि प्राणिले महान् बेचै कपट भिलाए,
कोहि प्राणि महान् कभि लो धूप चलाए।
धूपको वासना छैन एउटा कपट गनाए,
लोकै भो जुझे देवाहुरु बिन्ति चढाए॥

१०७
सवायं योगवाणि

ब्राह्मणों ते सति धर्मे सब छाड़ि दिए,
जगतमा भ्रष्ट कौं सब गवर्ण मए।
आहि आहि पन्यो प्रभु श्रृद्धा कमलेछे,
सारा लोकमा छाड़ियो प्रभु नाचा धमनि।

१०८

यसो भन्दै देव्य ताह्रू जोड़ते कराए,
विष्णु ठंकुर गुस्ता भई सब्राह्मण अराए।
योगि जनुहे हठ गरी शहस्र पुकारूने
मान भिद्दानु पन्त लामो सति उतारून।

१०९

सति जपि ध्यान गरि देउ चार बेदका सोजि,
आफु आत्मा गरुं हुन्छ श्रानको खोजि।
सति जपि ध्यान गरि देउ विष्णुंजिका सोजि,
आफु आत्मा गरुं हुन्छ माहिं श्रानको खोजि।

११०

सति जपि ध्यान गरि देउ शिवजिका सोजि,
आफु आत्मा गरुं हुन्छ शकि श्रानको खोजि।
सति जपि ध्यान गरि देउ हिमालयका सोजि,
आफु आत्मा गरुं हुन्छ तिप श्रानको खोजि।

१११

सति जपि ध्यान गरि देउ शुर्यजिका सोजि,
आफु आत्मा गरुं हुन्छ प्रताप श्रानको खोजि।
सति जपि ध्यान गरि देउ चन्द्रमाका सोजि,
आफु आत्मा गरुं हुन्छ अंबिष्णको खोजि।

११२
सत्य जय क्यानुगर्ं देव सम्प्रदाय कों सोजी,
आयु आमा गत्ति हुंह गांग सागर शाल्क खूंजी।
शिखर्दिखि कुपा हुंहा मैंवेप पाएँको,
अपना भक्त हुँक्या पद्धर सुचना दिएको। ॥

११३
सयुष्कन्त्यः मैं हृं एडटा बोलता बसेको,
गुणजको माज हुंहाँ छ सयुष्का पसेको।
पौज मेरा देर छ जन्मा विश्वा रहन्छ,
एक्क छिन्मा हराउछ एक्का म हुँह। ॥

११४
व्रजा विश्वा महेधर ता एक स्वप्न हुन्नैः
म मात्र ता हुंहन भक्ते साधिक दोष्णा छन।
विश्वा गुप भाको अहिंके चौकोझि साल भएह,
श्रांणको साँबो धर्मे तब उड़ि गएह। ॥

११५
भगवान्ने साँबा भक्त राखे हुँन साह्रि
विश्वुलरे उत्सरे छन आफ्ना भक्त साह्रि।
छोके भन्ना विश्वुलराई कुन प्रमाणैः जानौँ;
आपन्न विश्वस्त्र बस्त जाहाँ विश्वु उन्ने माएँ। ॥

११६
उल्ले विश्वु पुकारी मा दुःख टर्ने छ,
पिरे पिरे भक्त्देवि धर्म सर्ने छ।
सालु कम्यर कछो बर्ण सिधा उमेप,
सारा बौरास् कार्या राखि अल्गिएका थै। ॥

११७
सामू बिन्ति तिन्का गर्दै वाङ्मा चढ्दै थीप । छैन जगत् भवन् भो फात् तमासा हेर्दै थीप ।
क्या हो कोनि देखि यस्तो भने कसो होला, सिद्ध युनि भान धान छाने सुने सेदिग्न गर्दै ॥

११८
गोका धनि गुवाखालाई द्वारा हुदैन, गडारामु छिन् गुवाळिमा श्रद्धु पुकारिन ।
चरन् समि जबल्छै छैन रुन्त्र खुरु, खिर्मजङ्गा चिन्ता गर्न जानिन् खुरु खुरु ।

११९
गाई जाँदा गोहु पनि सङ्ग गएक्या गोहु जाँदा दुनियाँमा दुःख भएकृ।
दुःख पद्म गाई सबै कैठामा गएक्या, दुःख देखि देवताले द्वारा गरेछन् ।

१२०
देवताहरु चिन्ता गर्न्छै गोहु फिराउन्, मनि भयो गाई साथ गोहु फिराउन्।
छाडू देउ सवाल पुगोस नेपाल सबै माधुर्म पाउनु, माहराज्मा माधुर्म हवस् मनिरङ्कु जाउन् ॥

१२१
पत्यार परे आफ्ना राजमा धर्म चलाउलाई धर्मि राजा भने लोकमा नाउ कसाह्नाई ।
पृथि मनि रछ तुरो तलाउ जमेको, यहि तलाउने रछ जम्ने चौरास थामेको ॥

१२२
भर्म सम्भ्रि सत्य मान सेवि नगरी,
कन्हि चौरासू कुबाई देखना, सबह श्री हरी।
तबाद मनि दींखो किसिम बन्दरो भएँ,
यहि भित्र पाताल पुरि शहर रहेह।

१२३
उज्ञायो ५ सुन्दर सबै शहर देखीदा,
प्राणीहुँ ससना छन् देह ५ रीता।
मधुरै ५ शब्द सबूको वाणि कलीता,
कोथ सेवि छैन रती छैन भयता।

१२४
सारा मैंहे राजा देखें बि पुरुष नारि,
जय शब्द गर्व रहन वल्ल राजा भयर।
कुछ पड़ि यहि बसि नेत्र भुमाएँ,
सिद्ध रुपि तपस्को दर्शन यहि पाएँ।

१२५
नमस्कार त दुबै जनको बराबरी भयेँ,
मेसा मन्मा बिदलाई सोँभे लहड़ुँगो।
कति सम्भा बसू हुन्छ पाताल पुरोभाएँ,
याह्देखि उठि गुरु पाल्लु हुन्छ काहाँ।

१२६
शिद्ध रुपि तपस्वि हुन सांबै बताएँ,
भगवान भक्ति भलि भनि तिनभे मालुम पाएँ।
विष्णुजिको मजि हुँदा बसकोह यहि,
विष्णु लेख्मा प्रकट- हुँदा उटि जान्छ वाहि।

१२७
শিশু রূপ তপস্বি হঁনে ধরিনি নবলন,  
জাহি তাহি প্রাণিত তত্ত নবলনে ।  
শিশু রূপ তপস্বিকে মন্ত্রে ঈশ্বর পারে,  
ঝাঁঝাঁ সম্প ঈশ্বর পায় খবর বাতায় ॥

১২৮
সানা খাল্কা মাকরালে ধারগু ছাড় দিয়ো,  
লো ধাঁচামা সারা চৌরাসে শুধোয় দিয়ো ।  
ক্যা হো কোনি দেখান যায় শাঙ্গ গরোন,  
বিচার গরি চিন্যা মনে সন্নায় তরোন ॥

১২৯

শ্রেষ্ঠ

ইতা ছন্। যিনেমা লাই দিন দিনেমা,  
যিনেকে নমস্কার ছ হে ছিন ছিনেমা ।  
যি তা ছন্। যিনেমা যিনেমা উনিন্দু,  
যিনেকা কুপালে ম যিনে বনিন্দু ॥

১৩০
যিনেলাই ভজ্জ যিনেলাই জাপ্প,  
যিনে দিনিন্দু গুলি র যে ধুম সক্স ।  
যো মায়া ছাড়ি জন্ম ধুম ঝাড়ি,  
মিলে পূর্ণ বাঙ্গা উত জান্ন পারি ॥

১৩১
कसै विकसै होसै असलै हो इ जान्छ। 
एकै किनमा हाजिर ब्रह्म लोकमा रहन्छ। 
निराकार भजु रति छैन काछी, 
देखिन्छ ज्ञान ज्ञान सब लोक बाहिन।

१३२
अंग्रा अनभु झल्किएका, 
धेरै घन तलाउ अनेक टल्किएका। 
घन ब्रह्म उज्ज्वल छ छायाँ तदाउमा, 
अयतन सुन्दर व्यान के लगाउँँ।

१३३
ब्रह्म उपर पक्षि गाना गरेका, 
बुझियो अगमतत्व सुन्दर खोलेका। 
लाहे एक छ उबा फटिक्नै बिटेको, 
दस लाख योजन छ त्यो अलिको।

१३४
पर ब्रह्म प्रास हुम्मू हिंद धाई। 
उंते ब्रह्म बेगले खिने ज्ञान उढ़ाई/अ। 
त्यसं उबा माही चढ़ि हेरै ताहीं, 
देखिन्छ लोक सर्व नजिक माहीं।

१३५
उन ब्रह्म बेगले बिचैर ल्याउछछ, 
सम्पूर्ण लोक ता नजिकमा देखाउछछ। 
कोहिल नजाने छ उ ब्रह्म लोक माहीं। 
सबै जन भुलेछै यहि ज्ञान भोगमा।

१३६
त्यो ब्रह्म लोक ता अगम हो अपार,
मेरो नमस्कार पुरुषो सब बार बार।
मुख्यहरू हो सबै के भएका,
गति आफ्नु आफै निचिन रहेका॥

137
सबै दुखी दुखी कति सुख खोजेछौ,
निसिद्धु ता सगै छ के को भाग्य रोजेछौ।
ञ्ज्वाला र सुदार भए अमोघा,
के दुनि कोनिर र म देखिउ उल्ल।

138
इ दाना वेचन त दुगुन्व काशी,
हरे काशी साक्षि भरे पछ फासिर।
एक फुसिख रुद्रक्ष उड़ि गए छन,
शहर माइहौ केहि अरज गरे छन।

139
अरज कठोरको छ काहिं खपोला,
रुद्रक्ष वेचने त काहिं बवोला।
यो विन्त्य गुशु म दृशका लागी,
रुद्रक्ष वेचनेछौ सारें अभागी॥

140
धरमको ढोका बिचमा छ सारू,
ढोका निचिरे हुँदै जासू।
भक्ति युक्तका सहजैमा छिरे,
ढुला शरिरका अहवारि फिरे॥

141
भक्त मलिन्द्रा सहजः ति फडः के,
कोपिः चमण्डः अभिमानि अडः के ।
भक्ति अभक्ति कन छँनि लिए,
रुद्राक्ष बेचनेलाई अति कष्ट दिए ॥

१४२

यसै बलत्त्मा म सुरथः पुरेंछ,
बमु बमु सदा शीव पुकार विपंछ ।
भूलोकि प्रफिणि तिमि किन आयो,
कस्ले बतायो र यो थाहा पायो ॥

१४३

ईच्छा के छ मनसि सव ई बताईः
मालिकः ता भिषि हुः अब ता नष्राई ।
शक्तर प्रभृत्को यति मजः पाईः
मैले पनी कष्ट पाउ समाईः ॥

१४४

शक्तर प्रभृत्को गरि दष्टि विद्रोः
भेमि घरेको छ ल्याटः माचिनूः ।
बालुवा माइः छ लो चिनि मिसेकोः
यही दिन मैले मिडहिन्ति गरेको ॥

१४५

बालुवा मिर्ची त चिनि छुस्वाईः
पाअः यसेको अब लो मिदाईः ।
माथमा सदा शिव छन यहौ भोग ल्याउः
यस्को यसेले यो पियासुः मेटाउः ॥

१४६
यो कलिको सुल्य आसन सुवर्णहो सुन,
धिरे धिरे शानिरहेले खाउन छाड़ते छन्।
यो कलिको सुन, हुनाले चोरि हुईछ,
लोक ता भन्ने दौराने मेरो जोपर हुँदैन।।

१४७

मृतक हुने दिनमा पनि यहि सुन खुशाहुन,
खर्च जाने भए पनि यहै फिराउछन्।
सम्पत्ति ता श्रद्धा मान्ने सन्ताप फिराउने,
देख गाने हरी नामू यो मति फिराउने।।

१४८

धिरे धिरे यो कलिको ख्वाब नामेछन्,
माहा राजका पलटन सबै सपेठ पानेछ।
जात्र त म जाने हुनु यति भने छौ,
अहिले हत्पत् गरुँ छैन पछि बुझने छो।।

१४९

यो फैसाका चलने भित्र लोभ पाप रहेछ,
खाने खाउने विजत बसु पट्टो भएछ।
पहिला मालिनु कम्पानिलाई पिछे मालिन मोहिर,
मास्ति दे खानु फैसा चलन निकिर्ज जाला फोहिर।।

१५०

यो फैसाका चलने भित्र लोभ पाप रहेको,
कोहि दिनमा हुने बात यो अन्सार कहेको।
माहा राज छन, दवारमा हन्ने आउदैनुज।
दुखि जन्नते निप्रा निसाफ, सिधा पाउ नय।।

१५१
जागिरदार लोभि छन्न निमा हें। यहैंनन्, मदुः पते श्रार हो बिचार गर्दैः नव।
दुःबि जन हो हात जोड़ि सत्य पुकार,
अको हादो सहायता छैन बिष्णु गुहार।

१५२
आफ्रा बिष्णु लक्षिते कल्याणू गर्ने छन्,
वैतन्य जिवू, खुलकामा दर्षर्न दिने छन्।
होइन भैले बोलेको ता योग ह चलेको,
थामि सकनु नहुदामा शब्द खोलेको।

१५३
बिमनलाई बिमफा हूँ भनि सक्खु काहाँ,
तै पनि केहि बिनित गद्रू बिष्णु शरण माहाँ।
हरि शकुर माहादेवः ते शिष्टा दिउः भो,
मेरो पनि चित्त बुझ्यो जाता खिन्न भो।

१५४
मेरो जाता शकुरजिमा शरण, पन्न गो,
तब खोलो मर्जि छैन बुझ्न सक्खा को।
कहते ज्यात्रा तमास् गरुः हैने म आबैन,
भगवानको दुया भए लोकसा म आबैन।

१५५
भगवानको दुया भए जन्म दिइबैन,
कहते दौँल्झ सुख भरु चित जाबैन।
छैन मेरो चित्त यहाँ खो हरेर,
आफ्रु बिष्णु दुर्घन् दिन्धूम बिस्मा शरेर।
एकान्तमा बसेकै हूँ बिनित गरेर।

१५६
सर्वत्र योगवाणि

दोस्तो भाषा

गोरशा राज मै तपस्गद्यूँ, सय शीत के ध्यान म पद्यूँ। साँचा धर्म के खोजि गद्यूँ, बिष्णु ठाकुर के पाउ गद्यूँ।

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मन्का मालिक्मा पेच, पो पछत की, तम गुण पाल्दा हुन् वो अधि सर्द दी। सेंबि देखि ता बहुत झडसूँ, हरिका आउँमा बात गद्यूँ।

158

रिसका पेचमा पन्तू धारि, यो इह मल्ल के शक्ति मल्लूँ। सुन्दर बुझु न हो बिन्धु बाहाते, मल्ल छो कि कोह झटु मानले।

159

बिन्ति गद्यूँ सकौर मारु होस्, अब ता धर्मको सिरिति बाँधु होस्। लोभि लुक्त चालू सकल दुःसैँख, उल्ला लोकमा ज्यादा उठ्ने छ।

160
लोभि चालके दुःख पाउछ,
अवत धर्मको युग आउछ ।

दुःख बुद्धिका सेलिगीने छ,
अवत धर्मको युग सिनेछ ॥

1६१
सुनन सत्य नाथ् विन्दु हीन होस्,
अवत धर्मको योग हीन होस् ।
सकल घटू घटू ज्ञान छिटूनु होस्,
अवत धर्मको घोड़ फिटूनु होस् ॥

1६२
लोक लोभि भो धर्म छैन गो,
तिभि बिना प्रभु धर्म साने को ।
शुद्धिबातछे अव्याचार भयो,
सकल डुलिछन भूभार घेर भयो ॥

1६३
सत्य शक्ति नाथ् सकल जानदछौ,
तिभि त भक्तको विन्दु मानदछौ ।
आफना लोकको हाल ह्यंनु होस्,
विन्दु गए नाथ् भृति पेनु होस् ॥

1६४
सकल प्राणिले धर्म छाड़े बिदे,
सत्य फिरहो किसा गाड़छे ।
सत्य छोड़ु गयो धर्म गइ गयो,
तिरात सबू नयर्न भइ गयो ॥

1६५
शब्दमय योगबाणि

शुद्धा बातमा सब अवि सदृङ्ग, पैठि ते दुःखें विहिजत् गदृङ्गन। सांत्वों छोड़ै दिए र शुद्धो बोलचन, पैठि ते दुःखें हुर्मां खोलचन।

１६६

अधम भक्ति हूँ बिनति शेषत्रू, तिस्रा लोकको हालु यो देखत्रू। बिनति गदृङ्गू हि छ बिनति याही तिस्रा लोकमा विचित्रति हैन केहाँ।

１६७

सत्य नाथ के पस्चि धाममा, अन्तािङ्गे दो रहें वस्ता काममां। बिश्य दुःखका छाडयो मान्ये मन्ति छू म त तिस्रा झान्ये।

１६८

आपना लोकको रक्षा गर्दै होस, धनको भाय्य सबृ हैह छू होस। धनका भाय्यमा दुःख लग्दा हुन, झानको भाय्यमा शानु भाय्या हुन।

１६९

धनका भाय्यले पोखँ ल्याउँदो हो, झानको भाय्यमा गुण पाउँदो हो। धनका भाय्यले लेखि गर्दै हो, झानको भाय्यमा मन्त पाउँदो हो।

１७०
धनका भाम्यले यमपुर भर्दा हो,
श्रानको भाम्यभा खगा सदा हो।
धनका भाम्यले प्रृत्ता सदा हो,
श्रानको भाम्यभा शिव लोक सदा हो॥

1७१
सुनन सत्ता नायस् बिन्ति ढीलु होसेः
अब त श्रानको भाम्य ढीलु होस॥
बौलहालका छाटले उभे आफ़ा आटले,
मुठुक खायेक ढाँटले यो अर्काका राजमा॥
आएकि छ दुः काजमा,
नौते छु र जान्दिन छूटो बिन्ति मान्दिन॥

1७२
हरिका तिर्थ हुन महिमा गर्नेलाईः
जान भागे सबै बाहिर मन्हेलाई॥
अधि त निर्याको सम्पत्ति हुरे,
कृत्रिम बसेर खर्च ले गरे॥

1७३
पटिया काम नभेदौ दौलथ जन्मेन,
होइन भजता कोिह पाउँदैन।
सम्पति हुनेको तिर्थमा छ फलैः
दुस्लिये गाँड छै आत्मा चिंने बलै॥

1७४
हरि त नित्य छन्न हदयमा संगै
मुक्ति छैन की तिर्थमा नगै।
अयम भक्ति हृः र बिन्नि लेख्त्वाः
मुक्ति विने नाथ: सब ठाउ देख्त्वाः॥

१७५
काशि क्षणमा गै बस्तछन नु हाई
कहो देख्तां ति क्रुणा बन्द्रकाई।
महिमाने गरी बस्तछन क्षणमा
हरि ता उत्तुये हाम्रा नेत्रमा॥

१७६
देख्तां हरि शकल लोकभरी
काही जानु हो भूलिण मनारी।
जान लागे सब वास्ती काशि गर्न पाई
इच्छा गद्दछन्देह फेन लाई॥

१७७
बाहुरि बिचा हुन लोभमा पार दिने
मिठिन बिचा छन जान सार दिने।
आफणा चित्तमा पर्षेह हेतु होस
हरिको नित्य ध्यान बसेर गर्न होस॥

१७८
अकों देखो काम सौँचो छैन कयै
आलमाको बिचार गद्दछु म थै।
आलमामा पसी पिरिलो लावनको
अमाछि कामू लिंझा गर्न लाडने जो॥
अमालि कामू लिदा कति बिघि गो,
काराजाज लिया छाडू दियो।
वितमा पसी खान लागि गो,
दर देखाई देखाई खान लागि गो॥

माया त मद्दै वायन व्यारिको,
आफ्ना साथ मा जान तयारि भो।
अथैं भक्ति हूँ लेखिङ्गे यती २,
सकल जानने छौ विन्ति खाउ कती २॥

होझन मैले बोलेको ता योग छ चलेको,
दुःख मानने भक्त जनलाई संक्षेप, कहेको॥

चौरास, भित्रै हल्मन सबै चौरास, बाहिरको,
चौरास, बाहिर हुल्म जाने ब्रह्म लोकमा गयो।
चौरास, भित्रै हेष्ठन सबै चौरास, बाहिरको,
चौरास, बाहिर हेन्त जाने ब्रह्म ज्योतिभयो॥

चौरास, भित्रै लान्छन सबै चौरास, बाहिरको,
चौरास, बाहिर खान जाने माङ्गूँ तपि भयो।
अक्षर भित्रै बोलन सबै अक्षर बाहिरको,
अक्षर बाहिर बोल जाने अन्तर्यामि भयो॥
आयु भित्र देख्छु सबै आयु बाहिरको,
आयु बाहिरको सन्न्या राख्ने एउटै मुखा हो।
उहाँ हो मुखा उहाँ हो निर्णय देखि ठोलो होइन केहि,
निर्णय अहिले चाहिँदैन सगुण बताउ येदिँ।

१८५
अवि नाशि निराशमा नियू वास्तग गर्ने,
अवि नाशि को हुन्छ भने कर्म नास्ता गर्ने।
अवि नाशि जाहि ताहि बस्तै वस्तिन्न,
निराशमा नभेक त्यस्को कर्म मालिन्न।

१८६
सारा कर्म तोडि यस्मा चित ल्याउ,
हितका बचन सुनाइ दिर्य । सबै मालुम पाउ।
अजिं गर बिन्ति गर आशा छोड्ने,
सब भरकै भए जाउँ रस्ता लिप्न।

१८७
छाप चिनका जाहि लाम्यो ताहि लाम्यो चोइनु,
हुकुम भए गो न्यस्कृत रस्ता खुला गराई दिँदै।
सत्यकबाट निसेका जिब्र प्राप्ति हुन्छ ताहि,
छैन त्यस्को देह याहाँ रहर्तै राहन्छ काहि।

१८८
विष्णु देखि थोडै मुनि महादेव को रूप,
माथमा मुझैल्ल नागा, (को) माला यूलो बिर छ खुब।
कोहिं भन्ना हो हो यो बात। कोहिं भन्ना होइन,
दुबै रक्म नबोलित याहाँ हुने छैन।

१८९
कौन भन्ना हो हो यो बात होइन भन्ना जस्तो,
सम्भा राख केहि दुःख भोगि पलि त्यस्तो।
होइन मैले बोलेको ता योग छ चलेको,
इन्छा गरि सजन जनस्मा तब खोलेको॥

1९०

गजल

पुक्तां मेरा सुझा भवन धृति मेरि माता, (प्री) पुत्रि भित्र जम्मा जति सम्बलियका नाता।
जति मेरा आत्मा गुरु सागर मेरा साहित्या,
आचार्य युनि पुत्रि माति बासाहि हो मेरो खाशा॥

गुरु मेरा अन्तर्यामि बिन्ति कति खाउ,
यहि सुझा खला भित्र चेति भई बस्त पाउ॥

हरि हरि हरि स्मान गछु सन्तापः हर हर,
शिविको ध्यान म ध्यान मित्य खर खर।
हरि हरि हरि उँच सत्य उँच हरि,
आर्द्धिरि तनमन सुभेकि छ हरिलाई नगरी॥

हरि मेरा मन भरि लाई गर मन्मथरी,
हरि हरि हरि उँच सत्य उँच हरि।
तन मन मैले सुभेकि छ हरिलाई नगरी,
हरि मेरा मन भरि लाई वनाउ साफ गरी॥

हरि हरि हरि अंच सत्य अंच हरि,
हरि हरि हरि मन भरि लिभ्रो नगरी।
बस हरि साफ गरि लिभ्रो मन परी।
यो सम्भवा समृद्धि भव कृपा पौचि गइ गो,
सुरस्व माध्य सबार गरि याद आउत मेंगो !
बलु भयो हद्रमा याद मेरा आई,
यि गुण दिन लानु भो है साता मलाई ॥

191

हद्रमा सुर्य प्रकट लागो कृपा मह,
चन्द्र माजी उदावत भो मेरा घटमा बड़ !
गुरु मेरा घटमा प्रकट सम्भव नविचारि,
जाला मेरो चित काहाँ ल्यों ल्यों हँगारि ॥

192

बसोस चित धिर सित सत नामं यो पढ़ुईं,
जावसे, मेरा सह्यरजीमा सुरथ्यु खुप बड़ूड़ें ।
गुरु मेरा अन्तर्मोि सत नामं पढाई देऊँ।
जाला विष्णु महेश्वरले शक्ति चढाई देऊँ ॥

193

प्राण मेरो ओहोर दोहोर गई बारस्वार,
यि प्राणको मूल अद्व नाभि दाति सार।
नाभिदेखि बड़ि प्राण मन्तको सम्भि गंगो,
मन्तकदेखि फिरि उधो नाभि सम्भि भंगो ॥

194

नसा मासि जानेका छन प्राणका रहीले ।
अगमू तब छिटियो लोकमा बुक्शेन करीले ॥
दोस्तो शब्द

भर्मका राजा उत्रन लागे लोक हो अब ता बेष छैन,
फढ़के कर्म चश्चल भयो लोक हो आयु ता घेर छैन ।
अकछा दर्शन हरि नामृ बिना लोक हो मुखि ता मिलैन,
शिव हरि सवि मनमा लिए लोक हो दुखेहे दुर्दैन ॥

1९५

आखिरि जनम भई गयो नरमा लोक हो नमरि दुर्दैन,
शिव हरि सवि मनमा लिए लोक हो दुखेहे दुर्दैन ।
विष्णु ठाकुर शिव हरि सवि लोक हो यहि नामृ पुकार,
आखिरि जनम भई गयो नरमा लोक हो गाल ता नपार ॥

1९६

जन्म छ नास कर्म यो खोटि लोक हो अब ता नमुन,
अनिय लेट्मा मायाका जालमा लोक हो लौ अब नहुब ।
औसर पद्म पाठाले गदी लोक हो मनुष्य जन्म भी,
ईश्वरको भजन गरेनौ भने लोक हो यो जन्म व्यूह गो ॥

1९७
तिर्थ जाये तिर्थ तुहाये मन की भ्रमण नाह छुटि आवे ||
बिना ष्ण के सें भेद नाहि पावे कैसे जनम छुटावे ||
बिना द्या से कौन सुख पावे ||
आशा नाहि मारत फेर जग में दुमि आवे ||
आशा मारा जोहो सो भक्त इस्मारा रस गुणेले चीन ||
बाहि विनण महे सतसंह छु आवे द्राेन दीन ||
भेट पुष्प कछु नाहि चाहिये आसिवाद लिन लाई ||
अन्य काल्मा पल्ले बिपति रौला हैं मन पहुलाई ||
हरि हरि चरणको मनु गाई ||
भक्त दिये ष्ण बताई ||
शिव शिव हरि हरि निस दिन भजना नाहि राख्ना तु सन्ये ||
अनूर्त कोल्मा पल्ले बिपति रौला हैं मन पहुलाई ||
मायेमा सुकुल मोति जहावे ||
हिरा ग्लान से सिर छपावे ||
कानन कुंडल कल्लण लावे ||
जगमग जगमग ज्योति जगावे ||
इं हुं सदा शिव शमु आवे ||
भक्ते दर्शन पावे ||
ताल मृद्ग बेणु वजावे ||
चौसदि योगिनि मनु गावे ||
विस्म आफ़ै चमर डोलावे ||
माहदिव में मिलि मिलि ध्यान व्यागवे ||
मै माहदिव कि भक्ति संग मिलि जावे ||
फेर जग में कछु नाहि आवे ||
जनम जनम का दुःख निभावे ||
मेरा उपर ता दयालु हुनु भो आफै प्रभू देखियोौ।
कोकलाई पनि दर्शनै दिनु हवसुः सबै ज्ञानका स्वस्वित है।
दर्शन वकसनु भो हरे हजुरले यस्यौं काहीं तकः भनुः
आश्रय पनि मान्यु यसैं वस्त्रमा मजा व यस्तो हुनु।

१९८
कर्मौं मात्र गरैर दुःख यिनका कुर्सिला कसारी याहिं,
दर्शन वकसनु होसुः श्री सत्य रुपले भक्तिका बिनु माहिं।
जिन्ती गछँ शरण म पछि भणवान सत्ता शक्तिका हैं पुरा,
हे ज्ञानका चतुरा प्रकाश हुनु हवसुः मेरा यिन्हुः हुनु कुरा।

१९९
मेरा जन्म बहुत विरेछ नरमा घेर कर्मौंको भोगः गन्यो।
मेरा दोषः सब माफः गरी दिनु हवोसुः वस्मा शरणमा पन्ये।
भक्त होः कि अभक्त होः म पनि सबै वुड़ौः हजुरले परो,
मेरा आशाय चैन केहि नरमा सेखि अर्थासो क्षण्यो।

२००
गन्तै चैन म आश चैन केहि अब ता सेखि समताहुः
गर्वैं केहि पन्यो भने पनि प्रभूः तै तपः गमला बहु।
गदछैं यहि तपः तपस्ते जति सबै दुया भए पाऊः
ब्रह्मा विष्णु महेश्वका हजुरसमा यो अजि सबै लाउँछ्य।

२०१
याहौँदिवः सिवाय दोषों अरू क्यै लागैः रागस् सति, मेरा बिन्त चुनी प्रकट हुन छूस तारा भूतस् लौ भनी।
अ शृङ्गः उ ० तफः पत्राणी नभाइ कन मयो पूर्वका कल्पनालछ,
सत्का चित् बायल बाच के अ ० ० ० म ० स ० हुँडा ब्रह्म शक्ती हुनाले


2०२
कुन हो सत्ता बिचारने बुध जनहस्ते गोचराणो चरणाको, 
वायो तित् जो समाधि तित गुण रहित शुद्ध एक चित् रहेको।
हुँडः जो भयाको नभाइ नभाइके एक दुख देखि भिन्न,
जोहो सो मोहि होटा अ ० ह ० म ० विच हुँडा माष्ठि सुत्त आकु भिन्न।


2०३
बदृता बाणी बिचारने परम जनहस्ते भेद कुन वेद को हो,
कस्मा के भक्त सबक्त अगम पदविको रूप अरूप सत्य कोहो।
व्यापक अत्यत हुँडा भस्म रस सुख रूप शान्ति निर्माण जोहो,
सोहि हो सत्य साँचो अपनत घटना सचिदानन्द को हो।


2०४
यला जो नाथका नाथो अ ० ह ० म ० ट्रुटिमा श्यास निखास जोहो,
जानुन सबसे बिचारी अगुण मय स्वरूप शुद्ध चैतन्य जोहो।
कस्मा के गरा गराके गावक्षन गरिने कुन कुरा के कहनु हो,
संहँल्यहै छैल जम्मा कस्मी हुन गयो यो लठारो फँजुल हो।


2०५
सर्वाय मैग्वानि

सहङ्ग ईशार भनिन भूरिको जो हुँकुमः सत्य साँचो, सहङ्गै सत्य खङ्गङ्ग हो अष्ट्र पनि नवहुँद्रे मैं गयो कत्रो खाँचो। अन्तरालमि भ्रू विना खङ्गङ्गका के गाँउ तिन्रो बयानः, शाकङ्गरे झरी घाना भयो र अहिले मेरा सुफङ्ग्रू भो नयनः।

२०६

यी सबै गुण मिलेका तपस्का सक्नुै।
यी गुणु पाउन सक्ना र सहजमा कस्ते।

२०७

ढोभो भाषा

भग्वानको इङ्ङ्रा यो छ (कि) भक्ताङ्ङऊ न चाँडैने, हरिले वाणि ढेर उत्तमान हुँकि मशाउँने। दुबो बन्तो इङ्ङुम हुँकिसि बल्लाले काने, सम्बाइ दिन्छौ सब्चे मुदूर्त दुःख पर्दै खाने।

२०८

कर्त्तो र निगुरे झिनााङ्काका मन्ता, दुःखिले खाँदौ मुलू आनाङ्कुका गुण्डा। माहाङ्जनका सम्पतिङ्ग चिन्त पोतै ल्याउँछ, मन्त्रमा सन्तोष नहुँनाले गुण्डा विजाउँछ।

२०९
सन्तोषे दिने ईशार छन्न भिन्न हेतु होस, बाहिरि सन्तोषे नबोज्जु होस बिचार गरेन होस। बाहिरि सन्तोषे क्षण्मा नाश हुनेछ, भिन्न सन्तोषे चिन्न जाने काम्यता हुनेछ।

२१०
घडि घडि इन्ने बाणि हेनें गरु होस, ढ बाणिको भेद पाये कुस्ता सबै दोष।
संबंध गरि हेतु होला दुख नमानी, गाने छैन ढ बाणिले कोडि केहि हाँनी।

२११
कोलाहल शब्द चला सबै डराउँना, आदर्श भइ बिचार नपाई तसै कराउँना।
यिनै बाणि बिचार गनेन धैर्य हुने छौ, हाइ हा नाथ शक्ति सत्य शरण दास्रो ठेक।

२१२
निन्दा बेसि नहुनेको आत्मा डरोइन, आफि सत्य भजन दनि तसै हो छोड़ोइन।
भगवानको सुचन दुःस भक्क जनमा बेसि, माठुर दुःस बिन्ति पनि ठेलेके छि एँह।

२१३
बेसि कम्ति जो भएको माफ गरि दिनु, जम्पैले यशि थर्म तिर विन्न धर दिनु।

२१४
(अत्तारि भाषा)

लब्धु पारि लामा गाउँ । ज्ञान ज्ञानेको इष्ट लाउँ ॥
बल्को मन्त्र ज्ञाताउँ । उठि जाने ज्ञान म सिकाउँ ॥

२१५

पत्थर बुद्ध जबल्ल ज्ञान । भस्म हुन्छ भस्मै खार ॥
यो बिल्मे बिलाई बिलाईर । सबै सार्वत्र बिलाईर ॥

२१६

कैलासको ढोका खुलियो । दुनिया तो के मा मुखियो ॥
यहि धन जन्मका गुरुमार्धाम । हासि त जाइ जाउँ यसि हुन्छ ॥

२१७

मायार पास्को लहरो । रस्तालाई पान्यो पहरों ॥
चन्द्रमा सूर्यम अभिन जलै । साखा त उज्झिय सैन्य दलै ॥

२१८

शक्ति ज्ञान छाडुदै गाल्नालाई । पृष्ठि ता दुन्नाइहरु पाल्नालाई ॥
शक्ति ज्ञान छाडुदै यो गाल्ने । पृष्ठि रेदु उष्ण पाइन हो पाल्ने ॥

२१९

पिता पुर्वी हाम्रो भरियो । टुटुराको बढानु भरि भो ॥
टुटुरा सबै को मै लाटो । मुक्ति पद पाउँ तु बाठो ॥

२२०
युक्ति पद्मः रक्षा जान्देनः
श्रद्धा गुरुः तपः गर भन्देनः ।
सन् गुरुः सहिष्ठ महादेवः
सैथाड़ नेको शरण लेऊः ॥

२२१
पारस्परिण जस्तो मान न सेरोः
गाँक्रे च्याउँ जस्तो धन तेरोः ।
वहीं खच गरन त बिलोभ गईः
कसो गरि तेरो पाप मछः ॥

२२२
लोभ पाप चुढ़ी चढ़ लाइः
वहीं शिव ॐ मा होम लाइः ।
शिव शिव शिव ॐ शिव ॐ
भय आनि सबौ गइः होम ॥

२२३
शिव शिव शिव कोई शीघः
वहीं शिव भिन्न को मैं जीघः ।
क्रुः क्रुः क्रुः कोई क्रुः
सोर हजार राधेको एक क्रुः ॥

२२४
राम राम राम राम राम सेहः
रामायण को धुम धाम ।
राम राम राम श्री राम राम
आत्मा भिन्न बनो बिष्णु धाम ॥

२२५
बारें भाषा बोलने भो,
अन्तर कुरी एउटै हो॥
भाका र भाषा भुमाञ्ज,
अभिमानि मुझो रमाञ्ज॥

२२६
अठार पुराण नौ व्याकरण,
यहि सचेत जिब्को सबै चाकर।
बाप्नको छोरो बेदु पढ़ौ, म भाज्ने लाई मेद पर्छ॥

२२७
परंतु कि छोरी खालकी,
यहि सृष्टि माया जालकी।
अहिन्छे ता भन्छे सत् खालकी,
मेरे झान भित्र देखौ रय् पालकी॥

२२८
तेरा काखको मै नानी,
मेरा काखको तै नानी।
दोखो त अर्को होइननी,
तैरे अख्बा भित्र देखौ पानी॥

२२९
यहि पानि भिक्नको मै नानी,
होखो त अर्को हैननी।
सबौ सागरमा हेर पानी,
दोखो त अर्को होइननी॥

२३०
एकान्त सुश्रेष्ठ माहूँ भ्यानः
माहूँ राखौँ बाबू लामा धानः।
यहि लामागानको विचार गर,
बाहिर त नहेर भिन्न हर। ॥

२३१

सुखः का द्राही रमाएः
राजाहे धर्मे कमाएः।
राजाहे धर्मे गरि दिएः,
पैसा त घेरै छर दिए। ॥

२३२

धन्य हो राजा तिनः सकारः
सदामी विन्दूः बारस्वारः।
माकुरो कपासः को कमाई नदाउने,
क्षाई धागाले र उद्हि पर अन्न ॥

२३३

यो माकुरा भिन्न को होला,
क्षति छ है माकुरा(धारी) धागाको(धो) पोला।
यो विचार गरैः को होला,
बैलन्त जिब जो होला। ॥

२३४

३० नमः दिवाय
सर्वांथं योगं बौणि भनेर जात्र।
विद्वान्तकों भेद पनि कैहि ठान्।
मिल्तैन सामन्य धृि प्रन्थ नाहिँ
मिलने ४ पिछे सब शाब माहिँ ॥

कसैँहि यसैँहाँ गिदु झझ मानूँ
कसैँहि अगमू तत्व भनेर ठानूँ।
एकै एक पूढ़े गारि अर्थ बन्द्वा,
आउँ यो धर्म युग नाम यसैँङ को चढ़ा ॥

जो बचु पछ महिमा यसको बनावोसं,
लोकैँ पनि अब त शृू यो होस पावोसं
सर्वांथं योगं बौणि ४ नाम यसैँहं
लेखी समाप्त कन आज भईँ गो ॥

(सर्वांथं योगं बौणि)
प्रवचन

प्रथना

ब्रज श्रीम भयो रहदा तिमि,
स्मिर भई याही श्री बसिन् जमि।
हजुरस्व लमी प्राण रास्ताचौ,
दरश बक्सियोस्, नाथ खोजदचौ॥

हजुर कि कथा भक्ति जीवनी,
स्नेह मैं खिदा पाप नाबिनी।
अवण निवाले शान्ति दाबिनी,
प्रहण गर्छ जो द्रानि हुनिनी॥

अति मिठो बचनिद्व वाक्य श्रन् ।
कविहरू पनी मन् पराँछन्॥
दीन दास हूं मोहमा परी,
अभय बक्सियोस् अस्ति सरी॥

—चित्तामणि
सकेर रामन परिपूर्ण गुरा
सुभिंदुहोसनल हामे कुरा
धर्मात्मी रामन तिमि धर्म धाम
आपाती रामन तिमि ज्ञान चिनार
बिंबही रामन जिबेर रचत गरिपोश
स्वरामुक्ता धर्म अच्छे अच्छे लारियोहे
स्वरामुक्ता धर्म अच्छे अच्छे लारियोहे
समूही तासा अच्छे म माहा
समूही स्वारा भी देशर ता हा
अनुष्ठान लगे (अच्छे देर भागा)
सहोसन माहेरामको रामना दुःख
पानु दुर्बिलेकै समूह मुसल
Barbara Nimri Aziz is an anthropologist who has travelled extensively in Nepal. After completing her Ph.D. at the University of London, she worked in Nepal and other parts of the Himalayas for two decades and published widely in scholarly journals. Her first book was *Tibetan Frontier Families* (1978). She is co-editor of *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization* (1985).

This book combines Aziz's growing interest in politics with women's history. During the past decade, since leaving the academy, Aziz has worked in the Arab World, fusing an enduring love for ethnography with journalism. She is based in New York where she is a radio host and producer.

*Translation of the poem on the cover by Shakti Yogamaya.*

Fat bellies burst. / And those bribes ooze out / to poison you.
So savour your riches . . . while you can.