HIMALAYAN MOUNTAIN CULTS
SAILUNG KALINGCHOK GOSAINKUND
TERRITORIAL RITUALS AND TAMANG HISTORIES

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On the way to Thulo Sailung, 1996
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Every possible and imaginable perspective has its necessary place in spatial dimension. I say ‘perspective’ meaning a privileged point for observing reality, capable of providing a sense and an understanding of its surroundings.

Here we have a volume illustrating pilgrimages. We have mountains, lakes and watercourses. Flags hanging from a string, ruins of rough stone buildings near the peaks, and vermilion powder left on a rock. For the people that come this far, these places are—without distinction—sacred realities, where sacred means drawing a line between things, distinguishing, separating and then recomposing, making apparently heterogeneous realities converge in a single order.

Farther off and lower down are the villages. There, people live and survive. Peasants, shepherds and, now and again, something else as well. People who, every year, depart, guided by shamans, to go and visit those mountains, lakes and watercourses. These, therefore, are sacred pilgrimages, aimed at recreating the invisible threads that bind the living to those sites from which, at the dawn of time, the founders of their race emerged. The purpose of such itineraries is to draw on inexhaustible sources of power, vital for community survival. Going on a pilgrimage thus means simultaneously reactivating a shared memory and paying worship, as well as petitioning.

Setting out on a pilgrimage, however, also means cutting through space, choosing a precise direction. For those taking part in this collective rite, the direction itself generates a specific optical perspective that, subsuming the sparse and dissimilar space that faces us, reproduces it to our eyes from a new and coherent point of view. Setting out thus signifies moving through a transfigured space, newly marking the territory, grading the values scattered throughout the area, reorganising it according to a hierarchy of meanings, giving it gender, unearthing living symbols. Throughout the journey, the physical realities of the natural landscape merge with figured elements, images,
names and characters that are the basic connotations and points of reference of this specific perspective. Sometimes even the natural landscape that we cross is embedded and extended in a still wider living macroscopic space, now of cosmic dimensions, whose extreme terms of reference become the chtonic regions inhabited by ophidian beings and the luminous upper dwellings, kingdom of the pure celestial deities.

Every possible and imaginable perspective has its necessary place in spatial dimension. If this applies – as it does above – to the sacred geographies of the Tamangs of Nepal, it also applies – and to a greater extent – to the task of ethnographic writing. Indeed, beside the meanings usually attributed (report, analysis, interpretation, and so on), its constant task appears to be that of offering a perspective (whatever it may be) within the limited and bidimensional space of a volume.

In this specific work devoted to the cult of sacred mountains and related pilgrimages, writing can only back up the specific features of the theme chosen. The theme is approachable and, in some way understandable, only when taken in its dynamic dimension.

The text backs up and meticulously copies the route indicated by the live words of shamans and informers, constantly enriched with critical investigation.

In this volume, the ethnographic aspect goes much further. It adds meaning and widens our prospects of understanding through the immense number of black-and-white photographic images. Effective photos. Beautiful. Photos that speak for themselves, adding depth to the text and becoming essential to the work, so that the reader never feels something is lacking, never needs extra verbal or descriptive support to make these images clearer and more comprehensible than they are in themselves.

The photographs are embedded in and travel lightly through the pages, a selection testifying to the conscious choice of offering a multi-faceted view of the work: not merely what mediates between and blends verbal and visual communication, but also what allows ethnography and aesthetics to merge smoothly together. In a few words, authentic visual anthropology: a single space, potential viewpoints, the freedom of choosing a perspective.

Martino Nicoletti, Kathmandu, January 2007
Tama Kosi Valley and Gauri Shankar Himal

*View from Charikot, 2001*
Nepal is renowned for the snow-capped Himalayas that stretch along its northern border to Tibet. Well known, too, is their sacred status as the abode of the gods, as indicated in the names of these great peaks: Annapurna, the Goddess of Plenty; Gauri Shankar, home to the Lord Shiva (Shankar) and his consort Parvati (Gauri); Ganesh Himal, sacred to the elephant-faced Lord Ganesh - just to name a few that have made the country famous. These sacred seats are considered inaccessible and remain forbidden to human beings.

Despite this mountain image, the largest part of Nepal consists of the lower, densely populated regions known as the Middle Hills. This is an area of intensively cultivated valleys and skilfully terraced hillsides. At elevations above 2,500 metres, especially in the foothills that merge with the high Himalayan ranges, dense forests of rhododendron, when blooming in springtime, create an enchanted world of its own. In summer their grasslands are used as pasture for livestock. Here too, in spaces long inhabited and cultivated by humans, certain natural features - peaks, rock outcrops, caves, and lakes - are considered sacred. The villagers see them as the seats of their divine protectors and as the ‘custodians of their land.’ In contrast to the ‘forbidden’ Himalayan peaks, these sacred sites - above all those on centrally located mountains and mountain lakes - are the scenes of spectacular feasts with shamanic, Buddhist and Hindu cults.

On the full-moon nights of July-August the rugged peak of Kalingchok, the flat, grassy mountaintop of Thulo Sailung, and the shores of icy Gosainkund Lake become the scenes of large popular festivals and destinations of many pilgrims. On such occasions these sites vibrate to the sounds of shamanic drums. The night becomes a great feast for all: A festival get-together where alcohol flows in abundance and the young people enjoy their flirting. The whole night is spent in dance and song. Blood or milk is offered to the deities in whose honour these festivals are held: They will protect the people who live in their domain.
Hindu woman taking a ritual bath in the sacred waters.

Lake Gosainkund, 1996
The present book is an anthropological study on the history and formation of these communal feasts and rituals on Sailung (Thulo Sailung and Sanu Sailung), Kalingchok and Gosainkund, lying in the central Middle Hills of Nepal. Not only are they the home of unique ‘Himalayan’ shamanic practices and Buddhist/Hindu rituals, they also provide tangible evidence regarding the history of these regions that lie so near the Kathmandu Valley, yet have barely been studied. These festivals and rituals, too, outline the complex interrelation between the shamanic beliefs of a local Himalayan society and the political religious structures of the powers in Buddhist Tibet and the Hindu kingdom in the Kathmandu Valley.

The major protagonists of the three festivals described – Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund – are the Tamang people, the largest and most widespread Tibeto-Burmese speaking ethnic group in Nepal. Their main settlements are in the regions surrounding the Kathmandu Valley, in the west as far as the river Buri Gandaki and in the east to the river Likhu Khola and beyond. This study, therefore, focuses primarily on their rituals and local histories within the realm of the three sacred sites.

As an introduction to the Tamang rituals on Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund, I begin (in Chapter I) with a study on the Tamangs’ Buddhist and Tibetan affiliation as constructed in their Buddhist cosmogonic and genealogical texts, which, too, reappear in many local oral histories. Their clan genealogies, again, are united through various schemes of clan classification - the five clans, the Twelve Tamangs and the Eighteen Great Clans - which go back to early forms of socio-political organizations and show a strong bond with the Tibetan Buddhist world. The history of the Tamangs, in fact, has been largely shaped by the greater history of the Buddhist Himalayas and by their location on the ancient trading routes between the two powers: Buddhist Tibet and the Hindu Malla kingdom of the Kathmandu Valley.

The clan structure and marriage pattern, which organize the Tamangs’ village life, is the other focus of the introductory chapter. Their social structure is inherently related to their religious worldview and concept of a ‘territorial binding’, which actually lie behind these grand communal festivals. The Tamangs’ concept of ‘local binding’ begins in every household, is present at every village seat of the territorial and protector deities and extends to every region’s
ritual centre for its main divine protectors, on a mountain top or mountain lake.

Geographically the three ritual sites described here – Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund – are located in the Middle Hills to the north and northeast of the Kathmandu Valley, and are part of the modern-day administrative districts of Rasuwa, Sindhu Palchok, Dolakha, Ramechhap and Kavre Palanchok. These sites lie south of the high peaks of the main Himalayan range, from west to east: Ganesh Himal, Langtang Lirung, Jugal Himal, Jobo Bamare and Gauri Shankar. All are located near the ancient trade routes that follow the deep gorges cut by the main north/south rivers, the Trisuli, Sun Kosi and Tama Kosi, since early times connecting the Kathmandu Valley with the Tibetan Plateau. Although these three major rivers actually rise further north in Tibet, their sources are today identified within the Nepali state. Thus, Gosainkund Lake is viewed as the source of the Trisuli, and Kalingchok the source of the Sun Kosi and Tama Kosi. The transference of the ‘sacred’ sources of these main rivers within the borders of the Hindu kingdom is obviously of political importance – an interesting mode of integrating these regions and reinforcing their sacred status.

The Gorkhali conquest (in 1768) brought many demographic changes to the mountain regions, in that many Hindu castes have migrated to the Middle Hills and Hinduism has become the state religion. Today several Hindu castes and ethnic groups go as pilgrims to these festivals and the general Nepali public considers these sacred sites as the seats of Hindu gods and goddesses.

The rituals performed at these sacred sites in the central Himalayas contain similar shamanic concepts that in various ways have become integrated with the homogenizing and de-localizing structures of the Buddhist and Hindu religion. The three rituals, in fact, reveal different forms of accommodation of the older with the ‘greater’ religious traditions. The obvious differences in these feasts and rituals are not only the outcome of previous differing local social and political contexts, but can also be traced back to their diverse locations between the former Buddhist holdings of southern Tibet and the earlier Hindu Malla kingdom. The historical context of the ‘contesting’ powers from Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley in the Himalayan borderland thus forms the last part of Chapter I.

Since the ancient Tibetan kingdom (7th to 9th century), the
Himalayan region - especially the areas adjoining the old trading routes - has come under Tibetan Buddhist influence which has sought to subjugate the local deities and communal rituals. When the Malla kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley expanded their power to the north, they, too, for their own political interest, supported Buddhist masters from Tibet in this region. At the same time they made the sacred sites of important communal feasts – like Gosainkund and Kalingchok – their own pilgrimage destinations. The powers from both north and south, with their differing religious strategies, thus sought to extend their authority over these sacred mountains and lakes. The local legends and the course of the rituals reflect this Himalayan history well.

The Tamangs consider the Sailung region with the summit of Thulo Sailung, together with Timal, as the original home of four of their clans – the Moktan, Ghising, Yonjon and Bal/Dong. Therefore the chapter (Chapter II) on the mountain cult on Thulo Sailung, besides the legendary interpretations of the sacred landscape and description of the fertility rituals and Buddhist propitiation of the dead, includes a detailed discussion on the local Tamang Buddhist construction of clan history. The subsequent chapter (Chapter III) focuses on the rituals on Kalingchok, the history of the region, and the local meaning of a territorial deity, the ‘mighty’ Bhimsen. It compares the Tamangs’ ‘female’ fertility cult on Kalingchok with the ‘male’ ancestral cult of Thulo Sailung, which too represents the merging of ongoing Hindu–Buddhist rivalry. Of the three sacred sites, Gosainkund (Chapter IV) is located on the most important historical trading route between the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet. Its sacred landscape is rich in meaningful legend. The rituals and legends clearly contain traces of an ancient Tibetan mountain cult. Here the Malla king’s policy of religious land donations (Nep. guthi) to Tibetan Buddhist priests has not only shaped the communal ritual on Gosainkund, but also reveals an interesting former strategy to strengthen their hold on the Buddhist Himalayan borderland.

All four chapters are based on previous publications and presentations at conferences of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS), which have been revised and reassembled as one coherent work. The studies were conducted within the framework of research projects on ‘The Mountain Cult in Tibetan and Tibeto-Burmese Communities’ and ‘Ethnology of the Tibetan Landscape’
The concept of the tripartite world:

High summits – realm of the gods  
Forests, agricultural lands, and meadows – home of the living beings  
Rivers – place of the waterspirits and source of fertility  
In the Himalayas the great rivers coming from the Tibetan plateau are important passages for trade routes, and their fierce waters form effective boundaries between territories.
(from 1994 to 2000) of the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Vienna funded by the Austrian Fund for Scientific Research (FWF).²

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Finally, a note on the use of Tamang, Tibetan and Nepali terms: the Tamang language has no script of its own. Their terms are written phonetically. Conventional Tamang terms, except for names and titles, are given in italics without special marking. Terms and names clearly deriving from the Tibetan language are followed by a Tibetan transcription (Tib.). Nepali words are marked as such (Nep.).
Villagers enjoying a visit to town
Singati, 1985
Cumhur Khojd 2001

Tense and hectic atmosphere at the weekly market.

Day used for a Maqsiiti mass meeting.
Sancha Mai
Pongdi, January 1996

49 year-old Sancha Mai (on the right) describes her daily life:
"The whole year we do what we have to do: We have to cut grass for the cattle, we have to carry it to the stable and give it to the cattle. We bring the cattle to the water, lead it back to the stable and tie them. Then the children arrive from the school and want to eat. They go to the stable. Then the next day in the morning, when the day begins, there is the same work waiting, to bring grass, to look after the cattle. Daily I work on my fields with the hoe (kodalo). Now I plant maize, in the month asar we plant millet. Some harrow the fields in advance, some carry the basket (doko) when they sow. There is a lot of work in the fields."
Who are the Tamangs? Tibetan Affiliations and Schemes of Clan Classification

Much of the history of the Tamangs can be traced solely through oral sources. Today only a few members of the older generation – above all, Buddhist priests and shamans – are still acquainted with the orally transmitted origin myths and local histories and know how to recite the clan genealogies. Of the scant written evidence available on the history of Nepal’s Middle Hills north of the Kathmandu Valley, some can be found in autobiographical Tibetan texts and in documents regarding religious land endowments (Nep. guthi) given by Malla and later by Gorkha kings. These, however, rarely go back any further than to the 18th century. Other important historical information is also provided by records on the former kipat lands, which were autonomous regions allocated to indigenous communities during the early Gorkha kingdom.¹

The Tamangs, however, do possess their own written histories, listing the Tamang clan ancestors and places of origin. They are part of their Buddhist cosmogonic texts, written in Tibetan script and language, and are titled Kukpa Khachyoi (Tib. lkugs pa kha dpyod [2?]), Jikten Tamchyoi (Tib. ‘jig rten tam spyod), and Ruichen Cyopge (Tib. rus chen bco brgyad). Much of this information reappears in the genealogical texts of the individual clans, called dungrab or phorab (Tib. gdung rabs, pho rabs). Though these texts differ on details, there is broad agreement as to their Tibetan origin, connected to the early Tibetan kings at the beginning of their Buddhist era. The texts begin with the story of creation of the universe, similar to the classic Tibetan Buddhist myth. They include references to Gyagar (Tib. rgya gar), the Tibetan name for India, the country of Buddhism’s origin, and to Samye (Tib. bsam yas), the first Buddhist monastery founded in the 8th century AD in central Tibet. The clans in these Buddhist genealogies are related to Buddhist saints or protectors of the
Buddhist doctrine who are important to the Nyingmapa (Tib. rnying ma-pa), Kagyudpa (Tib. bka brgyud-pa), and Drigungpa (Tib. 'bri gung pa) schools. Some of these genealogies are also followed by a list of place names, starting from the Buddhist centres in Tibet, naming a series of Buddhist monasteries along the old trading routes, then turning to earlier and more recent Tamang settlements in Nepal.

Tamang history – oral and written, as seen through Buddhist reinterpretation - reflects Buddhist history of the Himalayan mountain region. To ‘excavate’ a Tamang history within this context has been a difficult and challenging task. Bringing together the Tamangs’ textual and local oral histories and legends with studies on their communal cults on sacred mountains and lakes can serve as an ideal starting point in approaching local Tamang histories.

The more local the historical investigation, the more precise the data becomes. The Tamang local histories described in the following chapters, along with the communal cults, concern the regions around Thulo Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund – that is, the mountainous regions between the Kathmandu Valley and the Tibetan border, from west to east in Nepal’s districts of Rasuwa, Sindhu Palchok, Kavre Palanchok, Dolakha and Ramechhap.

Within their own living space, the older generation can still give details on which clans arrived first and from where they had migrated, where the clan-based chiefdoms were located, in which areas a small kingdom (gyalsa, Tib. rgyalsa) is said to have existed, and to which clan (rui, Tib. rus) the former Tamang king (gle or gyal -ba) belonged. In many local histories, the religious land endowments, guthi, granted to Buddhist lineages, have played a decisive role. With these guthi grants by the Malla kings, the first Buddhist monasteries (gompa or ghyang) were founded within many older Tamang regions, while at the same time the lineage of the Buddhist priest was given the local political and religious authority. This not only introduced a fundamental change to the local religious formation, but also to the local socio-political structure. The new Buddhist lineages intermarried and became assimilated with the local population, and - as will be shown in the cases of Gosainkund, Kalingchok, and Thulo Sailung - transformed the local ritual centres into Buddhist pilgrimage sites. The ritual performances practised at these sacred centres, as well as the legends associated with the places themselves, still reveal traces of the local history and reflect
the chronology of immigration and political domination from Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley.

**Linguistic Background and Origin of the Tamangs**

Linguistic studies have shown that the language of the Tamangs goes back to an older proto-Gurung-Thakali-Tamang language group, which suggests a common origin with the Gurung, Thakali and Manangi (see Höfer 1979: 7) further to the west. The oldest textual reference to the ethnonym ‘Tamang’ dates back to the 14th-century annals of the Gungthang kings, where a people called the ‘Taman Se Mon’ of the kingdom of Serib (7th–14th centuries CE) are mentioned as inhabiting the lower Mustang in the Kali Gandaki Valley, west of the Annapurna range. But the first official record of the Tamangs as a distinct ethnic group – in that period defined as a ‘caste’ – is much more recent: in 1932, the Nepalese government acknowledged the Twelve Tamangs (Jungi Tamang, Nep. Bahra Tamang) as an official designation, to distinguish them from the Bhote, the Tibetans, and the Lamas, the Buddhist priests. Here it should also be borne in mind that the unity of the present-day Tamangs has to some extent also been emphasized by a shift of political pressure after the founding of the Nepali kingdom in the late 18th century, whereas earlier the ethnonym ‘Tamang’ had been applied to more or less distinct groups with similar origin myths. The Tamangs in earlier history were never united to a political entity with a common central force. On the contrary, prior to the era of the Nepali kingdom, local clan-units were scattered throughout central Nepal and at that time referred to themselves by their clan-names rather than with an ethnonym.

**Tamang Clans: Names, ‘Circles of Ancestors’ and ‘Marriage Circles’**

A brief excursion – in this context – into the origin of the numerous names of the Tamang clans; names and number vary even from region to region. In Dolakha and Ramechap district, I once counted more than thirty clan names.

Some of the names are explained by legends, like the one described by A. W. Macdonald (1980) in which eighteen clan names are associated with the different body parts of a yak, thus implying
Marriage ceremony  
Chayarsaba, 1986  

from top to bottom:  
The bride’s village welcomes the bridegroom party beating drums and singing the songs of the bard (tamba). The two happy ‘elders’ (ganba) of the bride’s and bride groom’s families, who had arranged the marriage. The relatives from Chayarsaba are paying respect to the new couple with the Hindu rite of washing the feet.  
Photographs Peter Freiss
a socio-political unit of eighteen clans. Other clans got their names from the locality where they settled, as was often the case with local clan fission: e.g. Gangthan (gang – hill), when they settled on the hillside, Shyungpa (or in Nuwakot Shyungtan, shyung – river), when they settled by the river, Ngarten when they built a stone house (ngar), and Choten when they lived at the edge of the hill. When a newcomer was integrated by marriage, he and his offspring could receive the clan name Shyangtan or Shyangpo, deriving from the Tamang kinship term ashyang, ‘father-in-law’ and at the same time ‘mother’s brother’. The clan name Shyangtan is especially persistent throughout the Tamang communities, a testimonial to this policy of assimilating outsiders within their kinship pattern. Some of the most prominent Tamang clan names, though, are reminiscent of the old Tibetan proto-clans: e.g. Dong, Wa in Rumba (rui of Wa), Mu in Moktan, Go in Gole, and Lo, to name just a few. To this topic I shall return in greater detail below.

Most Tamang clans are also sub-clans of a single clan and claim descent from the same ancestor and propitiate the same protector deities. In the Tamang language, these clan units are known as the ‘circle of ancestors’, meme khor (Tib. mes mes ‘khor), today often called by the Nepali term suage bhai, ‘brother clans’. Every meme khor unit has its specific offering ritual to the ancestral and protective deities, by which they differentiate themselves even today. The meme khor are exogamous clan units which, at supra-regional and local level, define the ‘marriage circle’, the gnyen khor (Tib. gnyen ‘khor) – who may marry whom, or who is considered as a ‘brother’. Which clans constitute which meme khor is consequently an important matter for local marriage practices and incest rules. Only a few Tamang clans have no ‘brother clans’ and are thus not part of any meme khor. These, again, might represent the most recent groups assimilated into Tamang society: such examples are the Lungpa, Lamakhor, Negi and Kyungpa.

Five Ancestors, Twelve Tamangs and Eighteen Great Clans

The composition of today’s Tamang clans can be seen as the result of a long history of waves of migration, of local fissions of clans, and of assimilating new groups. Since remote times, the Tamang clans had also been part of two larger schemes of clan
Marriage ceremony
Chayarsaba, 1986

More a feast for the old than for the young. The jolly ladies are enjoying the songs of the Tamang bard, the tamba.

Photograph Peter Freiss
Budda Tamang with his grand daughter
Chayarsaba, 1986

“Sometimes I have very beautiful dreams. I am eating yoghourt, I am swimming in milk up to my neck, I am drinking buttermilk, I am milking the cows. I see very beautiful dreams.”
classifications: the Twelve Tamangs (Jungi Tamang) and the Eighteen Great Clans (Ruichen Cyopge). These clan classifications are the only supra-regional forms of socio-political organisation among the Tamangs, based on uniting a larger number of clans or - as will be explained below - of (village) groups. Early clan groupings were confined within the local ‘marriage circle’, the gnyen khor – a local group of clans linked through marriage affiliations – as for example among the clans grouped through the scheme of the ‘five clan ancestors’, the khe nga, in Sailung. The main task of the ‘marriage circle’ was to integrate, regulate and unite a local group to differentiate it from its neighbours. These local groupings of clans became integrated – perhaps even re-named – by the larger schemes of clan classification which probably arrived with a new migration and Buddhist influence from the north. Such new classificatory schemes were most likely linked to Tibetan political expansion to the south of the Himalaya range and may even go back to early taxation systems, subordinated under the umbrella of the Buddhist religion.

The classification of the Twelve Tamangs echoes the early Twelve Tibetan kingdoms in central Tibet. Today not much is known about the Bahra (or ‘Twelve’) Tamangs, which may be the reason why they have now become associated with twelve clans, though no written text of the Twelve Tamangs specifying these twelve clans is known. Nor have I encountered any common origin myth regarding the Twelve Tamangs. According to a Tamang Buddhist priest from Risiangku, the Twelve Tamangs are associated with the ‘Twelve Guardian Goddesses of Buddhist doctrine’ (Tib. bsTan srung ma bcu gnyis). The Twelve Tamangs are also linked to the political union of Twelve Capitals (Gyalsa Jungi). The most cited example among the Tamangs is Bahra (again, ‘Twelve’) Timal. Here there are said to have been twelve villages under one king called Renjen Dorje. This might also indicate an earlier form of a federal union of twelve local (village) groups linked to tax revenue and social stratification, rather than a group of twelve specific clans.

By contrast, the Eighteen Great Clans, also termed in Nepali as Athara Jat, the ‘Eighteen Castes’, explicitly refers to an ideal unit of clans. The term appears in the Tamang Buddhist text titled Ruichen Cyopge – literally meaning the ‘Eighteen Great Clans’. This, in fact, is an ancient Tibetan clan classification closely linked to the Tibetan Buddhist religion and often related to the ancient Tibetan clan Dong
In the text of Ruichen Cyopge, all Tamang clans derive from a common ancestor called Dong Chenpo, the Great Dong. The appearance of other ancient Tibetan clan names among the Tamangs may well be linked to the advent of the scheme of these Eighteen Great Clans. Although in earlier anthropological works and even among some Tamangs themselves the Twelve Tamangs are equated with the regions to the west and the Eighteen Great Clans with the regions east of the Trisuli river, these two classifications mostly relate to the same Tamang clans. Moreover, neither in the texts nor in the oral histories is any explicit mention made of two separate Tamang areas. The differentiation into ‘Westerners’ (Nuppa) and ‘Easterners’ (Shyarpa), often utilised among the Tamangs of Rasuwa and Dhading, is more likely to be a local geographic reference, used not only among the Tamangs.

Some of my Buddhist informants described the Twelve Tamangs as the later of the two classifications. However, it seems to be the one that was suppressed with the arrival of the scheme of the Eighteen Great Clans, which in turn might be connected to the growing importance (or to a second wave of migration?) of new Buddhist lineages among the Tamangs, probably also promoted by new guthi grants by the Malla kings. In some places the Tamangs use the phrase: ‘gyam pila, gyam dila’ – ‘the upper path and the lower path’, identifying the Eighteen Great Clans with the upper, ‘superior’ path and the Twelve Tamangs with the lower, older, and therefore ‘inferior’ path. It was only with the introduction of the text of the Ruichen Cyopge – so it is said today by some Buddhist priests – that Tamang civilisation began.

**Tamang Clan Dong and Ancestor Dong Chenpo**

Dong Chenpo, the ‘Great Dong’, in many Tamang clan genealogies plays a significant role as ancestor. The Dong clan is one of the most ancient and prominent Tibetan clans. The famous Tibetan epic hero Gesar, for example, was from the Dong clan. In Tamang myths, the origin of Dong Chenpo is always associated with the ancient Tibetan kingdom. According to the most frequently told legend in the Sailung and Timal regions, Dong Chenpo and his wife Mam Wali Sangmo (also explained as a manifestation of Dasin Dolma,
"In my heart what shall I do? My parents have given me in marriage to him. In my heart I ask myself, will I spend my future with him or not?"

Maili Tamang
Chayarsaba, 1997
Her mother Maya Tamang, on the future of Kanchi:

“The future of my children will be like mine. If we don’t move to an easier place the children will grow up here, they will become married to a place like here, they will have to work in the fields, they will carry loads, they will work as farmers. Their future will be like mine: To work in the fields, to carry, to bring the shaman day and night.”
"Love is like eating rice and feeling full. Love is in the heart. This woman is my wife, she is beautiful, I like her, that is love."
Maya Tamang  
*Chayarsaba, 1997*

"... when one sees a man and feels love, when the man sees a woman and feels love, when warmth arises, that is love. Then come children. After the children have been born, the father loves them, the mother loves them. They cannot separate any more."
Tib. brag-srin-sgrol-ma) had nine sons and nine daughters who are considered the nine great-grandfathers and the nine great-grandmothers – ake ku and mam ku – of the Eighteen Great Clans.

Chyoiku Lama from the Titung clan (a ‘brother clan’ of the Dong) of Sisakhani in Kavre district cites an interesting account with further details on the origin of Pha Dong Murku (Father Dong Murku, Murku was explained by him as meaning the ‘head’ of the family) who was born in Kalten Lhayul:

«He came from Gangyul to Gangula, from there to Phasang Ngyengdi(?), to Rhakhola, to Gangtamang, and to Gangtasungi. There his son Lama Minuri Gyalso was born in Gangtasungi. He lived in Namla Phursang in Tibet, where his son Lama Ketun Palki was born. He also lived in Namla Phursang. Only his son meme Lama Chyungrulului Gyalsa moved to Uisamye.»

This oral historical account exemplifies many Tamang origin myths I have recorded, in which Tibetan terms are mixed with Tamang and Nepali terms, the ancestors are assimilated with place names, and moved from place to place – like metaphors for a construction of historical links, whose meanings have been forgotten. Uisamye (Tib. dBus bSam yas) for the Tamangs means the first Buddhist monastery Samye in the central Tibetan province of U. Gangyul could be from the Tamang language and mean ‘mountainous country’. The name Minuri Gyalso - similar to the term Mina kugi mentioned among the Gurung and Sherpa - could well derive from the Tibetan names Minyag (Tib. Mi nyag) and Gyalgö (Tib. rGyal rgod), two ancient kingdoms north-east of Tibet and places of origin of the Dong clan as discussed by Stein and Ramble.20 Lama Ketun Palki could relate to Lhalung Palgi Dorje (Tib. Lha lung dPal gyi rdo rje), the Buddhist monk who assassinated the last Tibetan king Langdarma (Tib. Glan dar-ma), as a reference of the Tamangs’ migration to the south of the Himalayas at the time when Buddhists had to flee Tibet.21

In another myth told in Timal, concerning the classic Buddhist Tibetan ancestress, the rock demoness, Mam Wali Sangmo, the wife of Dong Chenpo, is explained as a female deity of mid-space, tsen (Tib. btsan), who gave birth to nine sons and nine daughters. In the story the nine sons and daughters, who were nine brothers and sis-
ters, had to commit incest to give birth to the Eighteen Great Clans, which then allied with local marriage circles. The incestuous marriages of the ancestors of the Eighteen Clans appear as a further emphasis uniting the patriclans.

According to a Gole Buddhist priest from Dapcha near Namo Buddha, an older myth precedes the Buddhist story of Dong Chenpo and Mam Wali Sangmo:22

At the time of the gods, human beings also existed. There were eight gods (lhaye ku cham) and nine humans (kolme ku cham). This is mentioned in the oral text (sherab) of the shaman (bompo). The gods were only eight. The humans were nine. The daughter of the gods (lha i bum) was Gangsalmo, the son of the humans (mi i bum) was Syoldomo. They got married. This is the oldest story!

This, as purportedly the oldest legend, might reflect the ancient concept in which the ancestor of a patriclan allies with and settles on a sacred female terrain. Note also the similarity of the name of the female tsen Gangsalmo with the land of origin Gangyul, the ‘mountainous country’ mentioned earlier. Gang is the Tamang word for hill, and Gangsalmo in the Tibetan Buddhist procreation myth reappears as the rock demoness who, with Avalokiteshvara as father, gave birth to the human race’s progenitors.23 Note also that at the source of Gosainkund, the mother deity is called ganga.

An old Buddhist priest of the Gole clan (Lasang Lama) told of another version of the Book of Eighteen Great Clans (Ruichen Cyopge) in which all the Tamang clans are classified in the scheme of nine meme khors. The number eighteen, which appears only in the title, in this case may refer to two times nine. In all other texts titled Ruichen Cyopge that I have collected so far, the nine brother clans of the Dong form a separate distinct meme khor. Lasang Lama names the following nine ancestors who married nine female tsen (in his account their names are not mentioned) and also refers to nine different places of origin; a list of the most important Tamang clans and an interesting list of origins in Tibet and the Buddhist Himalaya:24

Meme Dong Chenpo, the meme of the Dong, lived in the country (yul) Gyanak Gyalsa; he had nine descendants (Nep. bansa).
The ancestor of the Yonjon was Hunga Raja, he was king (gle) of Dagar; he had five descendants.
The ancestor of the Thing was Saipaur. He was king of Sokhar; he had three descendants.
The ancestor of the Waiba was Gyalbun. He was king of Solgum. He had seven descendants.
The ancestor of the Ghising was Saipala. He was king of Sergi Gompa. He had three descendants.
The ancestor of the Shyangbo was Rig gle (king of Rig). He was king of Syang Gyalsa. He had two descendants.
The ancestor of the Moktan was Semiju Rinpoche. He was king of the Mugu Gyalsa.25
The ancestor of the Lungpa was Lungpa. His rui is Lungpa, and his name is also Lungpa. We did not hear of any other name. He lived in Sergi Kilkhor, whence he came here.
We do not know where the ancestor of the Lamakhor came from.

Now, here the Dong are clearly mentioned as coming from the kingdom of China (Gyanak Gyalsa) – or does this simply mean further to the east, where Minyag Gyalgo is located? The Yonjon clan is associated with the ancestor called Hunga Raja from Dagar, which means the famous meditation cave Trakataso (Tib. Brag dkar rta so) of Milarepa (Tib. Mi la raspa [1040 - 1123]), north of Kyirong (Tib. sKyid grong). The Thing clan is associated with Saipaur of Sokhar (or, to add to the confusion, Saipaur in another genealogical text is the ancestor of the Yonjon!).26 Saipaur of Sokhar – does this point to Sokar in the Yarlung Valley (Tib. Yar-lung Sog-kha) of Central Tibet, where the ancient Tibetan kings had come from? (see Hazod 2000) The Waiba descend from Gyalbun, the ‘seven kings’ of Solgum (?). Lungpa is rare as a Tamang clan name, but like the origin of the Yonjon (Dagar) and Ghising (Sergi Gompa – ‘Golden Monastery’), the story refers to the classical Tibetan king’s (Buddhist) descent from the sphere of the gods to the earth on the ‘Golden Mandala’ (Sergi Kilkhor, Tib. dkyil khor, Skt. mandala).

In the Kathmandu Valley near the famed Bodhnath stupa, I was told of another interesting scheme of clan classification by a man from the Jimba clan, who had studied the local history of the Tamangs. According to him there were originally only seven clans, which later divided to seven meme khors.27 The following list of meme
khors also corresponds to the list of the main Tamang clans known today, their origins again being in ancient Tibet:

They came from Ui Tzang (Tib. dBu gTsan) and Rushi (Tib. ru bzhi – the four horns) in Tibet. Ui Tzang had 12 provinces. The people from Duku Yul in Rushi (the horn of dBu?) were great warriors. After being conquered by the king from Lhasa, they fled to Nepal:
Meme khor of four clans: Yonjon, Bomjan, Lopchan, Dumchan.
Meme khor of seven clans: Waiba, Rumba, Gyaba, Marba, Tuba, Jimba, Sumba.
Meme khor of seven clans: Gole, Dongba, Bal, Bajiu, Gangthang, Shyangtan, Titung.
Meme khor of two clans: Thing, Nyasur.
Meme khor of four clans: Shyangtan, Moktan, Pakhrin, Thokar.
Meme khor of three clans: Lo, Ghising, Glen.
Meme khor of two clans: Blon, Shyangbo.

This origin myth clearly refers to the ancient Tibetan kingdom of the 7th to 9th century. The ‘four horns’ at that time were the four Tibetan provinces with their own military and administrative units, each possessing twelve military units of a thousand men. The central provinces or ‘horns’ were U and Tsang. The number seven is a classificatory number often used in the Newar tradition, so it is hardly surprising that it should have been adopted by the Tamangs who settled in the Kathmandu Valley. Even the Dong and their brother clans have been reduced to the number of seven.

Early Population North of the Kathmandu Valley

There is scarce written evidence mentioning the inhabitants of the central Middle Hills north of the Kathmandu Valley. Two 17th century autobiographical Buddhist texts mention the ethnic composition of this region. The 6th Shamarpa Chökyi Wangchuk (Tib. Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug) in his biography (written in 1629) described his journey from Kathmandu to Tibet. He distinguishes between the ‘Mang-kar’ and the ‘śNye-shang-pa’ living along the Indrawati and the Sun Kosi rivers. His disciple, Third Rigzin Yolmopa Tulkhu Tenzin Norbu (Tib. Rig 'dzin Yol mo pa sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu), who had travelled through the same area a few years
earlier, however, mentioned the ‘rTa-mang of the eastern and western gorges’. ‘Mang-kar’, according to Erhard, denotes a (Hindu) population living to the south of the Himalayas and most probably refers to the large ethnic group today known as the Magar. Oral history collected in this region confirms the presence of an earlier Magar king in the village of Barkhu. In Barkhu the villagers speak of a former Magar king who was defeated by two Tamang kings belonging to the Thokar and Ghale lineages. As to the former presence of the ‘sNye-shang’, who in the same text are also described as Tibetans, the following etymological explanation given by the father of the first king of Bhutan, Tongsar Pönlop Jigme Namgyel (Tib. Khron gsar dPon slob ‘Jigs med rnam rgyal [1825–81]), in a different source, can be of interest:

It is said that the name sNye-shang came about because it is a settlement that in earlier times was taken in possession by people of sNye-mo and Shangs in gTsang. Above it is what has become famous under the name ‘glacier fringed Yol-mo in Nepal’.

Below ‘glacier-fringed Yolmo’ (Nep. Helambu) lies the valley of the Indrawati river. Here the Tamang clan Gole – their main settlement is Thangpal Gunsa – still has a dominant role. According to local oral history, in earlier times they were an influential Tamang clan, especially north and northeast of the Kathmandu Valley. Were the Gole earlier part of - or even descendants of - the ‘sNye-shang’ who had arrived from - or had connections with - central Tibet, Gungthang (or Manang)? And might the name Gole derive from the ancient Tibetan term ‘goba’ meaning ‘chief’, ‘tax collector’? Since at least the 13th century, the Nyeshangpa have been documented in Tibetan sources as belonging to the Gungthang kingdom in the region today known as Manang, the area northeast of the Annapurna range. The Nyeshangpa are said to have served as soldiers for the Malla kings as far as the area of Dolakha, an old Newar town northeast of the Kathmandu Valley. Together with these questions it is also of interest to note that important guthi grants by the Malla kings, like those connected to the stupa Namo Buddha north-east of the Kathmandu Valley and to the monastery Chari Ghyang in Charikot, are still in the possession of members of the Gole clan. Another feature that might support the hypothesis of the
earlier political importance of the Gole clan, is that the shamans of the Gole clan at some point in history were banned (by a new political power?) from taking part in the pilgrimage to Gosainkund.

To return to the ancestor of the Thokar, the clan of the Tamang king who defeated the Magar king of Barkhu: the oral account of this clan reflects the movements of the Buddhist religious masters active in the Himalayan region until the 18th century, pointing to the religious and political influence of the rulers of southern Tibet on Langtang, Yolmo and Gosainkund.

Tamang Concept of Space and ‘Local Binding’

Tamang communities still practise the demarcation and ordering of their living space through ritual. In this sense, even today, the Tamangs can be defined as ‘localised’ and ‘territorial’, based on the sacredness of nature. The ritual ‘local binding’ is mainly connected to pre-Buddhist shamanic tradition. It is rooted in a chthonic concept whereby members of the patriclan together with their shaman call upon their ancestral and protector deities and honour their territorial deities, so as to establish a ‘consecrated’ affiliation to their terrain. This concept is a central element in the fabric of their relationship to their living space. In the Himalayan areas as well as in Tibet, specific mountains, sources of the great rivers, and mountain lakes naturally play a central role as a common ritual focus – the mountains also as a visual body for local identification, the water sources as the sources of fertility, and certain lakes as the abodes of souls.

As described above, the structure of Tamang communities is based on clan and prescriptive marriage rules. In the context of their living space this means that their marriage circles – in the present less than in the past – are bound together not only through their reciprocal social and economic obligations, but also through the celebration of communal rituals, like the propitiation of their ancestral and territorial protector deities. For every Tamang individual – especially until 1962, when new civil laws and private property of cultivated lands introduced by Nepal’s Government brought a fundamental change – it was essential to be part of the traditional social network in which family and clan relations regulated social and ritual responsibilities and obligations, which in turn structured all entitlements, inheritance rights and consequently access to agricul-
The former headman of Melung
Sailung, 1995

“This land und these fields belong to the ‘lord of the earth’ (sibda). The land is in the power of the ‘lord of the earth’. The mightiest of all in the world is the ‘lord of the earth’.”
tural and pastoral land. In other words, until very recently, the life of every Tamang was determined by his/her local patriclan and 'marriage circle'. The local communal rituals periodically reinstated the individual's territorial rights.

Important for this ritual union between men and living space are the locations of the sites where the periodic rituals are performed, which are seen as the seats of the protector, ancestral and territorial deities. Of interest is the fact that, among the Tamang communities, the same deities reappear at the same sites: in every house by the hearth (kutap), in every village by a grove of trees, called the seat of the 'lord of the earth' (sibda neda than), and at a nearby water source, called the seat of the 'White Goddess' Seti Devi or kartikya (Nep). And in every region the Tamangs have their communal religious centre either on a sacred mountain or by a mountain lake.

According to many Tamang legends, it was their ancestor arriving with his protector deity who first discovered and propitiated the territorial gods, thus founding the ritual relation with the territory.

**Marriage Affiliations and the Three Stones of the Hearth**

In the main and often only room of every Tamang household, the quadrangular fireplace embedded in the mud floor, with its three upright stones used as a support for cooking pots, serves as the ritual centre for family rituals: name-giving and marriage ceremonies, death rituals and offerings to the ancestors. It is at this hearth that the protector and ancestral deities – the family's own and those of its in-laws – have their seat and where they are propitiated. Relating to this site is a Tamang saying:

*We have to offer to the 'god of father's line' (pholha), to the 'warrior god' (dablha), to the 'god of the in-laws' (shyanglha), and to the 'god of the territory' (yllha).*

The three supporting stones of the fireplace correspond to the three hearths of the three equally regarded lineages of the marriage circle, but also to the protector and territorial deities. Today with the Hindu religion as the state religion, many Tamangs explain the same stones as the stone emanations of Lord Mahadev and the fire as his soul. Mahadev in the Hindu pantheon represents Shiva. For
the Tamangs, Mahadev also possesses the characteristics of a territorial protector deity like their ancestral deities, otherwise in the Tamang language called *sibda*, 'lord of the earth', *yullha*, 'god of the village', and *pholha*, 'god of the male line'.

A Tamang shaman from the village of Chayarsaba (in Dolakha district) also explains the sacred hearth in terms of the roles attributed to husband and wife:

&quote;We say with the three stones of the hearth we have settled in the house. This house and hearth belongs to the wife and daughters of the house. When we men leave for foreign lands, the hearth stays in the house. We have to remember the hearth and we have to return to it. Mahadev [the hearth] is like the mother of the house.&quote;

With the sacred meanings of the hearth, not only the relationship between husband and wife is explained but also the relation of the household to its land, which too is understood as a marriage alliance between the patriclan and the terrain, conceived as 'female'. The female terrain is thought of as fixed by the stones in the fireplace which represent Mahadev – just as women in everyday life are confined to the house, whereas men, represented by the ancestral deity at the hearth, are considered as free to leave. The same shaman from Chayarsaba expresses this idea with the following words:

&quote;Earth means woman. We men are the sky. We reach everywhere. The house belongs to the woman and the water belongs to the woman. You women all have your own place. There is a saying, women have no clan and men have no home. Woman means house, man means foreign land.&quote;

These two narratives also demonstrate an ancient concept in which the forces from below are linked to the woman and are thought of as the stable and fixed realm, whereas the upper domain, the sky, whence the passing clouds bring the fertile rains, is connected to the man and his patriclan.

**Female-Male Polarity at Village Shrines: Bhumethan and Kartikya**

The same complementary concept of female terrain and male patriline is apparent in the interpretations of the two main sacred
sites present in every Tamang village, where all villagers communally propitiate their protector- and fertility deities. One is located under a grove of trees (Nep. bhumethan) and is considered the seat of the ‘lords of the earth’ (sibda neda, Tib. ghzi bdag gnas bdag), today often called by the Nepali term bhumne raja bhume rani, ‘king and queen of the earth’. Even today, Tamang farmers consider these ‘lords of the earth’ to be the most powerful deities in their villages, since they determine the fertility of their crops and protect from natural disasters. They determine the people’s livelihood, and seasonal offerings to them are considered essential for agricultural subsistence.

The second sacred site in every Tamang village is located by a rock or cliff where water springs or gushes from a rock. In Nepali this is called kartikya or Seti Devi Than. This is where the ‘seven mother deities’ (mabun) – in the Hindu reinterpretation the seven kali amas and Seti Devi – together with the fertile water spirits (lu, Tib. klu) are said to have ‘appeared by themselves’ to relieve the people of diseases and to prevent misfortunes. At this site also, Bhairav, the fearsome form of Shiva, as well as Ganesh, the son of Shiva, the ‘lords of the earth’, and the tutelary deities of the Tamang shaman, the ‘wild shaman’ (Nep. banjankri) and Rite Guru, are said to take their seat in the nearby trees during the offering ceremonies. Seti Devi – the name is also used as a collective designation for all the pacified female deities – is described by the shaman as “living in the water, flowing with the water, and living with the male and female water spirits, with the ‘lord of the earth’, the ‘wild shaman’ and Rite Guru.” Seti Devi is seen as the female force connected to the fertile waters of the earth and to the healing powers of the shaman. To her the villagers pray for personal strength, fertility, vitality and wealth. This is the site where the villagers offer iron and copper tridents, which are struck into the earth as symbols of Mahadev/Shiva. In explaining this site, the shaman from Chayarsaba said:

Water is [in the] land – I have shown you the place of Seti Devi – water there comes from the rock, water spouts from the earth, because it has rained a lot from the sky. There are small children. They have a flawless body. When their age grows, water will come from their body – I feel shy to talk like this, I feel uncomfortable – the rock became wet, the
human body became wet, the earth became wet. This is good; otherwise there would be no water, there would be no crops, the people would have nothing to eat. Lu means snake, when we ask where the lu comes from, we say, it comes from the woman. Lu is created by women. Lu is created in the earth. When my daughter, my wife gives birth to a child, it means lu.

The water spirit lu in this context is related to the sexual act and transferred to the idea of fertility in general. Lu is explained as being born from the earth as from a mother’s womb. Another common expression among Tamangs referring to the same concept of the source of life is the story of the marriage between the ‘deity of mid-space’, the tsen, and the water spirit, the lu, as a requirement for crop yields or indeed life in general. In the Tamang worldview, blood, water and everything that sprouts from the earth are associated with the female force and are closely related to the role of the birth-giving mother. According to a saying among Tamang laypeople, a baby is born from the ‘blood-lake’ of the mother’s womb from which it receives its flesh and blood. From the father it receives its bone (rui) which in the Tamang language also means ‘clan’. It is not the earth itself that is regarded as female, but the fertile sources in the earth below which are fed by the rains from above. This polarity between the birth-giving source of the earth below and the fertilising rains from the sky above is also expressed in the Tamang word for village, namsa, which derives from two Tibetan terms: gnam – sky and sa – earth.

Communal Feasts on Sacred Mountains and Lakes

As in every house and in each village, in every region too there is a ritual centre - either located on the top of a mountain or at a mountain lake - where the same deities preside: the ‘lord of the lands’ (sibda), the ‘mother deities’ (mabun, mamo, Seti Devi, kali ama and ganga), and the ‘water spirits’ (lu). The deities here are regarded as the patrons and protectors of a defined region. They are explained as the ‘elders’, and those of the villages as their younger siblings. Each year at the full moon night in July-August, the villagers gather on these mountains and lakes to perform their ritual offerings and to feast. The summits of Thulo Sailung and
Full moon festival in July/August

_Thulo Sailung, 1993_

One of the Tamang men holds his lance high while the other uses an umbrella as a substitute. There is a legend that the lance was once given by a king. The lance also is a symbol of the male clan and an attribute of the ancestral deity.
Kalingchok and the shore of the Gosainkund Lake are such regional ritual centres. In the past these large communal rituals and feasts possessed a highly political role for the local community. They affirmed their affiliation to the deities’ domain and thus confirmed their political and territorial rights within the region.

Local legends, as well as the structure of the ritual, reflect the history of this religiously-defined policy on land. Some of the legends even go back to the ancestor’s initial ritual claim on the territory and to his first propitiation of the local deities. Buddhist reinterpretations often tell of a Buddhist master who meditated near the sacred site and appeased the same deities. The myth told on Sailung, for example, speaks of five Tamang clan ancestors (khe nga) who are said to have come each with a specific tool for taking possession of the place, thus establishing the five Tamang clans as a local ritual and political unit. On Gosainkund, on the other hand, the ritual unit consists of an association (named the guthi) of several Tamang villages responsible for the upkeep and organization of the feast. This guthi association is headed by a Buddhist priest whose great-grand father is said to have accomplished a powerful deed and thus been granted the guthi land endowment and leading religious and political role by the Malla king.

This territorial claim of the first ancestors and the ritual authority of the Buddhist priest are symbolically re-enacted every year at the full moon festival in the monsoon rains. Nevertheless, up to the present, these annual events are dominated by the dancing and drumming shamans in their long white gowns and remarkable headdresses. The Tamang shamans arrive with their village followers who carry lances (Nep. tarwar) and/or ritual knives (phurba). With these they symbolically re-enact the ancestor’s first ‘opening’ of the female source to let the water flow so as to ensure fertility and health. Even today at the house altar of every shaman, this lance or ritual knife is placed beside the ceremonial vase (bhumpa), the symbol of the female. The lance is taken to every festival on Sailung and on Kalingchok. At Gosainkund the ritual knife is smeared with butter and struck into the earth near the seat of ganga, the source of the sacred lake. On Kalingchok, Tamang men even stab a knife into the earth before they descend, as they say, ‘to pin down Kali Mai’. The shamans at these festivals act as mediators between humans and otherworldly beings and thus assume a spe-
cial position between the community and the local deities of their living space. It is the shamans who are able to communicate in a state of trance with the protective mother deities – the mahun, kali ama, Seti Devi, or ganga. At the same time they communicate with their tutelary and ancestral deities (‘the wild shaman’ and Rite Guru) and with mythical or historical, now deified kings, e.g. Golmo Raja and Rani, etc.\textsuperscript{45}

Today in many Tamang regions, the Hindu god Mahadev replaces the local patrons, that is the sibdas and yullhas. At the same time the Tamang shamans consider him as one of their own ancestors, who has his seat in a crystal they carry along on their pilgrimages to sacred sites. At Gosainkund, many shamans even tie the trident (Nep. trisul), the symbol of Mahadev, on their backs, thus appearing to embody Mahadev themselves. The clearest version of such an embodiment is expressed at a remote festival in the village of Deolang in the northern Dolakha district. There, Mahadev is said to come flying at midnight from his abode on Mount Gauri Shankar and to enter a Tamang medium, known locally as the dangur. Through the dangur, Mahadev becomes visible and present to all the people attending the festival, and everybody tries to touch him to receive his blessing.\textsuperscript{46} According to the local priest of Deolang, Mahadev comes for his marriage with the mahun, the seven sisters. The bodies of the bompos and dangurs are thus the site where the lower female and upper male sources unite and where the former sacred and profane rulers continue to maintain their presence.

Himalayan Borderland between the Malla Kingdom and Tibetan Buddhist Estates

Similar to the ancient Tibetan ‘mountain cult’,\textsuperscript{47} the great communal religious rituals south of the high Himalayan range – as celebrated at Gosainkund, Thulo Sailung and Kalingchok – were first only of local significance. With the expansion of neighbouring powers into the Himalayan border region - first the ancient Tibetan kings, then the Tibetan Buddhist monastic estates, the Malla rulers from the Kathmandu Valley, and lastly the Nepali kingdom -, these communal rituals entered their sphere of interest. In fact, the present ritual’s structures have, to a great extent, been shaped by their location within the fluid Himalayan boundary zone where political powers
A Tamang bompo carrying a trident (trisul) with decorative ribbons on his back and playing his drum. The trident is an attribute of Shiva, with which he opened the spring of Gosainkund. For the Tamang bompo Mahadev is one of his ancestors who's tool he carries on his back to the sacred source of Gosainkund.
have for centuries competed for religious dominion. These religious policies resulted in various syncretistic religious forms, as also in a continuing rivalry between the shamanic, Buddhist and Hindu traditions - another characteristic of these sacred sites and their cults. Thus the Himalayan borderland fostered unique political concepts based on ‘religious empowerments’, like the Tibetan Buddhist concept of the sacred ‘hidden valleys’, beyul (Tib. sbas yul), and the Mallas’ land endowments jointly with the ritual associations, the guthis. The Tibetan and Newar rulers became the patrons of the major rituals and their religious masters were acknowledged as having local authority. Therefore, although the cults on Gosainkund, Thulo Sailung and Kalingchok still refer to an older ancestral and shamanic tradition, these sacred sites have since become part of a Buddhist and Hindu landscape linked to the sacred centres of power in the Kathmandu Valley and in Tibet. Gosainkund even became an important pilgrimage destination for the Newar Malla, then the Gorkha Shah kings.

In the Kathmandu Valley, a great Hindu civilisation developed since the rule of the Licchhavi dynasty (3rd to 9th century CE). By contrast, most of the adjoining northern mountain region up to the Tibetan plateau became influenced by Tibetan culture. Early Buddhist influence in the Himalayan region goes back to the ancient Tibetan kings, who ruled from the 7th to 9th century. King Songtsen Gambo (627 to 649 CE) is credited with the introduction of Buddhism from India and China. During his reign, the first Buddhist temples as far as the Himalayan borderland were constructed in order to suppress the Tibetan demoness – the untamed female and autochthonous forces of the Tibetan land – and the conversion of the Tibetan people to Buddhism began. The Tibetan empire extended its power far beyond the Himalayas from its southern province known as the ‘supplementary horn’ (Tib. Ru lag), an additional province to the four major provinces, the ‘four horns’, of Tibet. The centres of southern Tibet were Dzongka (Tib. rDzong ka – later the capital of the Gungthang kingdom), Dingri (Tib. Ding ri), Sakya (Tib. Sa skya), Lhatse (Tib. lHa-rtse), Nyalam (Tib. gNya’-lang), Shigatse (Tib. gZhis-ka-rtse), and Gyaltse (Tib. rGyal-rtse). Trade between Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley at that time began to flourish along the two main routes, one leading through Kyirong, the other through Nyalam (north of Kuti).
The local accounts in many Himalayan regions ascribe the first Buddhist ‘binding’ of the local demoness and other territorial divinities to the famed Buddhist yogi Padmasambhava (‘Guru Rinpoche’), a tantric sage of the 8th-century from the Swat valley (in present-day Pakistan), who assured the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. The great Tibetan empire collapsed in the 9th century CE after the assassination of the last king, Langdarma. Part of the Tamang clan genealogies assign their origin to this time, which was a period of major Buddhist migration to the south of the Himalayas, where they sought refuge from persecution in Tibet.

In the 11th century, Buddhism revived in Tibet. At that time the famous hermit Milarepa was active in many Himalayan valleys and became the founder of many Buddhist meditation and pilgrimage sites. In the 13th century, the principality of Gungthang with its capital at Dzongka became a powerful force in Southern and Western Tibet and an important support for the spread of Buddhism throughout the Himalayas. This period saw the emergence of two sub-orders of the Kagyudpa school, the Drigungpa and Drukpa (Tib. ‘Brug pa) schools. They built a powerful network throughout the Himalayan region, extending from Ladakh and Purang (Tib. Pu rang) in the west, to Bhutan in the east. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the royal house of Gungthang was the patron of Nyingmapa sacred treasure finders (Tib. gter ston), who ‘opened’ or ‘re-opened’ the sacred ‘hidden valleys’ (beyul) within or near ‘hidden boundary regions’, as in the Himalayan valleys of Lapchi, Rolwaling, Yolmo and Langtang. The biographical text of Rigzin Nyida Longsel (Tib. Rig’dzin Nyi zla klong gsal, who died in 1695), for example, reflects this Tibetan history in the borderlands. He writes that the valley of Langtang was originally opened by the famed female mystic Machig Labdrön (Tib. Ma gcig Lab sgron, 1031–1129) and then re-opened by himself in 1680. These Himalayan ‘hidden valleys’ were to become the centres of many renowned Tibetan Buddhist intellectuals. The Himalayan Buddhist concept of beyul not only regulated a religiously conceived space and served as a refuge for the Tibetan or monastic courts in times of political crisis. The policy of beyul in these Himalayan regions through their religious masters also connected rulers from Purang, Bhutan and Central Tibet with the kings of the Kathmandu Valley. Ever since the 14th century, it was through Tibetan Buddhist masters who also took part in the building and
restoring of the two main Swayambhunath and Bodhnath stupas that the Tibetan rulers maintained good relations with the ruling elite of the Kathmandu Valley. Of the sacred sites described in the following chapters, Gosainkund is located nearest to Tibet, and thus closest to its sacred landscape. The lakes of Gosainkund lie south of a Buddhist ‘hidden valley’ – the ‘Hidden Land in Langtang’ (Tib. sbas yul gLang ‘phra ng) also known as the ‘Hidden Land Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form’ (Tib. sbas yul gNam sgo zla gam). Gosainkund also became part of the geographic Buddhist mandala with Nyalam to the east, Yolmo/Helambu to the south, Mangyul to the west, and Palthang (Tib. dPal thang) to the north. And ever since the time of Milarepa in the 11th century, the people of Yolmo, southeast of Gosainkund, have had continuous relations with the Kagyudpa, Karmapa and Nyingmapa schools of Tibet. Many other Buddhist disciples, from the Drigung and later on from the Byangter Nyingma schools, arrived in Yolmo via Gosainkund.

Kalingchok lies further east and not far south of the ‘hidden valleys’ of Rolwaling, Lapchi and Chubar in the upper reaches of the Tama Kosi valley. According to Huber, Tibetan Buddhist history in Lapchi, too, begins with the arrival of Milarepa. From his teachings emerged the Drigungpa and Phamodrupa (Tib. Phag mo Gru pa) schools, who there set up the first monastic communities in 1215 or 1217 under the patronage of the Lo rulers (southern La stod). Until the mid-15th century, Lapchi was a large Buddhist centre from which the Buddhist religion spread southward as far as to the Sailung region northeast of the Kathmandu Valley.

The political dominance exerted by the Malla rulers of the Kathmandu Valley over the mountain regions surrounding Gosainkund, Sailung, and Kalingchok began mainly in the 15th century during the reign of King Yaksa Malla of Bhaktapur (1428–1480). He extended his power to the north as far as Nuwakot, a fortress along the main trading route to Tibet. It was during his reign that Gosainkund was for the first time (in 1447) mentioned as a sacred Hindu site, to which he initiated a royal pilgrimage. Further to the northeast, his trade with Tibet also prospered via the small vassal state Dolakha, at that time already a fully fortified city. The ruler of Dolakha, Kirti Sinha (who ruled until 1453), supported the northward territorial expansion of King Yaksa Malla. In Dolakha, as in all
Malla capitals of the Kathmandu Valley (especially in Patan), Buddhism was supported despite Hindu rule. For the Hindu ruler and his population the nearby mountain Kalingchok became the seat of the Hindu deity Kali Mai as the protectress of their sovereignty, whereas for the Tamangs and Tibetans the same mountain maintained its Buddhist interpretation coming from the Tibetan north. In 1595, King Mahendra Malla of Kathmandu expanded his kingdom northward as far as to Kyirong and to Listi (Tib. Li ti/ Li khrí). He also regained Dolakha after its brief period of independence. His son Lakshmi Narasinha even brought Kuti, the trading point south of Nyalam, under his governance.

The policy of Malla rule in this mountain region now under their control was to bestow ‘religious land-donations’ on Tibetan Buddhist priest lineages, who thereby became their appointed local patrons. There may well be a connection between the Buddhist masters who conducted the renovations of the great Svayambhunath and Bodhnath stupas in the Kathmandu Valley and the Buddhist masters who received the guthi endowments. The most notable was Yolmopa Tulku (Tib. Yo1 mo pa sprul skus, 16th to 17th centuries) who became the ‘overseer’ of the ‘nine valleys’ north of Kathmandu - the ‘nine valleys’ most probably referring to the regions of Yolmo (Helambu) and northern Sindhu Palchok. Like the Buddhist ‘hidden valleys’, the policy of guthi endowments to Buddhist priests from Tibet there served to consolidate political control by the Malla kingdom, particularly along their trading arteries to Tibet. It provided them with loyal local religious and political patrons who at the same time were recognised by the local population and strengthened the Mallas’ economic and political relations with the Tibetan monastic estates.

The 6th Shamarpa Chökyi Wangchuk, who travelled from Nyalam to Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan in 1629/30, describes in his travelogue his political mediation as a Kagyudpa hierarch between the ruler of Tsang in central Tibet and the Malla court. His political role indicates the importance of the Buddhist Kagyudpa school at his time in establishing relations with the Malla court. His subsequent visit to Yolmo illustrates the area’s significance for the dissemination of his school in this mountain region.

From 1642 onward, the centralized rule of the 5th Dalai Lama in Tibet brought significant changes to the political dynamics in the
Himalayan border region. Many monasteries of the Karma Kagyupa, Drigungpa and Drukpa schools in southern Tibet were converted to the now dominant Gelugpa school and attached to the new provincial administrative centres, the dzong (Tib. rdzongs).

Under Gelugpa rule, too, a policy of religious land assignments was reinforced in Tibet, when considerable landholdings of the aristocracy were donated to monastic institutions. The 17th and early 18th centuries thus became a time of political unrest in Tibet culminating in civil war (1727/28) which was ended by the Tibetan ruler Sönam Tobgyä (Tib. bSod nams stobs rgyas [1689–1747]) from Pholha. At that time in the southern and southeastern border region of Tibet many sacred ‘hidden valleys’ were systematically visited and ‘opened’ by tertons of the Nyingmapa and masters of the Kagyudpa school. The sites were chosen not only because they were said to possess special qualities, like the spiritual presence of Padmasambhava or of the early yogins of the Kagyudpa school, but also because they served as ideal places for new political alignments.61

King Pratap Malla of Kathmandu (1641–74) took advantage of the political turmoil in Tibet and with the help of the Buddhist schools deprived of their powers launched two military incursions into Tibet, which were resisted by the forces of the 5th Dalai Lama. After this event, the Malla kings apparently increased their guthi endowments in the region of Yolmo to priests of the Kagyudpa and Karmapa school. Was this to support those who had helped the Mallas’ military incursions into Tibet, who were resisting the Gelugpa rule of the 5th Dalai Lama?

Now, how did this history shape the sacred Tamang sites in focus here? At Gosainkund, the offering rituals are headed by the heir to the Buddhist guthi bestowed by a Malla ruler now residing in Yolmo (Helambu). The ritual shows traces of a former Tibetan mountain cult where the mountain represents the local protector, the yullha, who is related to the fortress of the former local ruler. On Gosainkund too, a vivid shamanic cult continues, which is important for laypeople. The Gosainkund festival, in fact, possesses an interesting structure intertwining the sovereignty of the Buddhist guthi heir with the local Tamang communities and their shamans. From the Kathmandu Valley many Newars and from Yolmo many Yolmopas make pilgrimage to the festival at the Gosainkund Lake. The festival on Kalingchok, although it lies close to the Tibetan bor-
der, on the other hand, shows strong influence by the Hindu Devi cult related to the Hindu rulers from the Kathmandu Valley and former Dolakha principality, whereas the Buddhist interpretation never gained any importance. Contrary to the Tibetan Buddhist religion, the Hindu religion integrated the shamanic blood sacrifice. Sailung to the south is located furthest from the Tibetan border and nearest to the Kathmandu Valley. There the large communal feast on Thulo Sailung maintained its ritual independence from both the Tibetan and Newar rulers. Of all the ritual spaces described here, its oral history related to the territory and the communal ritual on Thulo Sailung is associated with a Tamang corpus of clans. Thulo Sailung is the sole mountain to become an abode of their dead. Its summit, too, has become a pilgrimage destination for Tamang Buddhists, and shamanic sacrifices have been abandoned.

To conclude: according to Tamang legends, the gods arrived with the people. With their propitiation – at the hearth, at the shrines of every village (sibda than and kartikya), and at the sacred mountains and high lakes – the Tamang communities became bound to the domains of these their protector deities. These rituals were necessary to demarcate their living space and to perpetuate local individual and communal rights. With the growing political influence of Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley, the ‘great traditions’ of Buddhism and Hinduism ‘detached’ the local deities from their local meanings and integrated them into wider religious-political realms. The changing religious policies – first a mightier Buddhism, then Hinduism – caused a dichotomy within the present religious practice among the Tamangs. On one side, the Tamangs’ ancestral and protector deities of the clans remained as part of the Buddhist realm connected to the ancient Tibetan kingdom, and the Tamangs identify themselves as Buddhist. On the other side, their ‘lords of the lands’ and the protectors of the shamans eventually became part of the Hindu pantheon and their former Buddhist interpretations have faded.
Chorten
Near Kalingchok summit, 1993

During a rest stop the shamans place their lance, drums, sacred vase and trident on the chorten’s plinth.
Ruins of the main chorten
*Thulo Sailung, 1997*

During the festival on the fullmoon of July-August, *saun purnima*, the pilgrims crowd around the ruins of the largest group of chorten on the highest point of Thulo Sailung, the seat of the local protector Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo.
II

The five Tamang Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain Thulo Sailung

Geographical Setting of the Sailung Region

The Tamangs consider Sailung as one of their ancient areas of settlement and as their own domain prior to the founding of the Nepali state. Sailung lies at the junction of three administrative districts: the northern portion is in southern Dolakha, the eastern part in Sindhu Palchok and the south and west in Ramechhap. The highest point of this mountain region is Thulo (‘Big’) Sailung (3,300 m), a rounded, green mountaintop marked with four groups of Buddhist stone stupas, by the Tamang called chorten (Tib. mchod rten).

From the summit in clear weather there is a stunning view northward to Mt Kalingchok (3,810 m) and to the chain of Himalayan snow-peaks, with Gauri Shankar the most prominent among them. Looking to the south, the distant Mahabharata range forms the horizon. All the rivers of the Sailung region have their sources near Thulo Sailung, from where they flow into the much larger rivers originating further north in Tibet. It is these rivers that form the boundaries of Sailung: the Sun Kosi marks the border to the west and south and the Tama Kosi to the east. The Charanawathi Khola with its source on Kalingchok defines the border to the north.

The higher areas of Sailung are covered with large and beautiful forests and small pastures for goats, cows and a yak/cow hybrid, the tsauri. On the middle and lower slopes and along the river valleys perch many villages surrounded by their rain-fed and irrigated terraced fields.

To the south of Sailung lies another renowned Tamang region called Timal. It is a small mountain range – Timal Dada – in the Kavre Palanchok district, stretching along the southern riverbank of Sun Kosi. Its highest point is named Kottimal (2,048 m), the place of a former Tamang palace-fortress near the Vishnu temple known as Narayanthan. The Tamangs of Timal and neighbouring Sailung in
The chorten of the four directions, Thulo Sailung, 1997

The poles near the chorten were put up during death rituals and are left there to fall apart.
myth and through marital alliances are related. The Timal Tamangs, too, venture on pilgrimage to Sailung, but mainly to their own sacred site – a cave – on the southern slopes of the region of Sailung called Sanu (‘Small’) Sailung.

An old foot-trail leads over the summit of Thulo Sailung, which, before the motor road to Jiri was built in 1978/79, formed the major link between Kathmandu and the Eastern Middle Hills and Solu Khumbu. Another ancient trading route leading through the Sailung region earlier linked Tibet with India: starting from Nyalam leading to Dolakha, the ancient Newar town; then through Bhedapu, Phasku and Melung, three major Tamang villages in Sailung; from there it continued further southward to Sindhuli and the Ganges plain. The former importance of these two foot-trails through the Sailung region is attested by the ancient Buddhist *chorten* and the rich architecture of the old villages.

**Sailung’s Shamanic, Buddhist and Hindu Landscapes**

The Tamangs, especially those living east of the Trisuli river, regard Thulo Sailung as one of their most sacred places (*nye*, Tib. *gnas*) and as a main Buddhist pilgrimage venue within their own domain.¹ The four groups of stone *chorten* on its high green summit are each related to the Tamang communities living in the direction to which they are oriented – the group to the south, today in ruins, being the largest of all and located on the highest point. The four *chorten* call to mind a Buddhist mandala transferred to the landscape of Sailung. The main rituals held here are Buddhist rituals focused on offerings to the souls of the deceased.

In the Tamang Buddhist concept, the main proprietor and protector of this sacred landscape is known as the ‘lord of the sacred land’, the *nyegi dagpo* (Tib. *gnas gi bdag po*). The Tamang also call the *nyegi dagpo* of Sailung Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo, ‘Sailung’s White Male Lord of the Earth’ (Tib. *pho’i gzhi bdag dkar po*). As the name indicates, this deity is of the *sibda* category, ‘the lord of the earth’ – the fertility deity of the cultivated lands, who here, like the gods of the ‘upper realm,’ is considered as ‘white’. The syllable *pho* attributes the deity with a male line, in the Tamang context, meaning the patriclan. The Tamangs in Sailung explain that the green mountaintop Thulo Sailung with its *chorten* is the seat of the *nyegi dagpo* or Sailung Phoi
Sibda Karpo, whereas his actual temple (Nep. bhume than) is located in a forest above the village of Burunga (also known as Andarbung), which is also said to be the first settlement of the Moktan clan in Sailung. The temple of Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo is also the largest of all the village sibda deities of the entire Sailung region. Its importance compared to the other sibda sites is also stressed by the many tridents stuck into the ground and by a roof with a three-coloured curtain, as often used in Buddhist monasteries. In Burunga the following myth is told of Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo:²

*In former times when the people did not have enough iron and copper pots and kettles for the big festivals, they could go to the place of the temple [of Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo] and ask for the necessary pots. They received the pots on the spot. They did not see the deity but they sometimes saw a white deer and could hear a voice which told them to return the pots clean. Once a Tamang took a pot and returned it dirty. Since then there were no more pots available from there, no voice was heard and nobody ever saw the white deer again.*

Among the Tamangs large pots are usually needed for the great marriage and funeral ceremonies. The pots, therefore, may signify the local Tamang communities allied through marriage and the deer mentioned in the legend may represent the unifying force going back to the power of the ancestors, ensuring the well-being of its people. In the Himalayas the deer is often a symbol connected to the ancestors and appears in various forms in several Tamang rituals. For example, the shaman sticks the horn of the deer in his belt when he goes on pilgrimage to the mountain Thulo Sailung or to Gosainkund. The deer (or goat) is also the main offering at the Buddhist ancestor ritual in Timal (doila), where a deerskin is displayed near the pole of the ancestor and ancestress.³ What can the pollution of the pots and the disappearance of the deer signify? Cooking pots, especially valuable copper vessels, are the traditional marriage dowry which daughters inherit from their mother. One interpretation of returning ‘polluted’ copper pots may be a rupture of the traditional marriage circle of Sailung’s clan unit and a declining importance of the maternal line. This, too, may have been related to an end of the ancestor’s ‘power’ linked to the shamanic tradition, due to emerging Buddhist dominance.
The temple of Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo, Burunga, 1992

The temple is located in a forest above the village and houses the protector deity of Sailung. It is the largest sibda temple of the region, provided with a roof and decorated with curtains. Numerous tridents are placed next to the stones representing the many territorial deities. Above are hanging bells donated by visiting pilgrims.

Three rocks, Thulo Sailung, 1992

A popular legend identifies the three rocks as tiger, snake, and cow representing the Hindu, Buddhist and autochthonous traditions.
The other important sacred sites of the Sailung region are two caves: one is located in the northeast below the summit of Thulo Sailung, the other in the southwestern part, a few hours’ walk above Pongdi, at Sanu Sailung. Both caves have stalagmites and stalactites from which ‘milk’ is said to ooze on two full-moon nights – in July/August (Nep. saun purnima) and in December/January (Nep. pus purnima). These nights are deemed auspicious and the villagers with their shamans go on pilgrimage to these caves: the villagers from Sailung to the cave near Thulo Sailung, and the villagers from Timal to the cave at Sanu Sailung. The two caves are believed to possess sources of fertility and health, and pilgrims pray there for sons, for relief from an illness, or for personal success and wealth. Near the cave on Thulo Sailung is another, much smaller cave with a very low second exit, almost too small for human passage. This exit is called the ‘door of dharma’ (Nep. dharma dhoka) or ‘door of sin’ (Nep. pap dhoka). It is held that only those who have not committed sins in the past year are able to pass, so pilgrims squeeze themselves through this door in hope of ridding themselves of any malevolent forces which might be attached to their bodies, and of emerging ‘pure’ – as they like to say – like the newly born. Next to this is a third small cave, called the Godavari cave. Here every twelve years at the full moon of August/September, regarded as the most auspicious time for pilgrimage, white water is said to flow. This too is explained as ‘milk’, in which the pilgrims take a sacred bath, a Hindu custom for ritually purifying the body. The cave of Sanu Sailung also has a dharma dhoka: a narrow gap between the large phallic stalagmite and the rear wall of the cave. Near the cave is the source of the Sailung Khola; this stream is believed to swell into a river of ‘milk’ during the full-moon nights of December/January and July/August, when the pilgrims take their bath there.

A characteristic feature of the various interpretations of the sacred sites and of the rituals practiced on Sailung (as on Kalingchok and Gosainkund) is the simultaneous presence of three different religious traditions: Shamanic, Buddhist and Hindu. Here too, the development of religious diversity cannot be explained merely by the diversity of its present-day population. It is rather the result of a centuries-long history when power was extended by the medium of religion. Today these three traditions partly overlap – with more congruence between the shamanic and Hindu traditions.
with regard to the caves, and at the shorten on Thulo Sailung with the dominance of the Buddhist tradition.

The two sacred caves of Sailung, at least since the Gorkhali conquest of the late 18th century, have been identified as the seats of the Hindu god Mahadev, the popular form of Shiva, together with his female consort Seti Devi, the ‘White Goddess’, a form of Parvati. Here, side by side with the shamans performing their rituals, Hindu priests recite their sacred scriptures. The Hindus have also created their own legend to explain why the cave is holy: a shepherd discovered that his cow was giving milk to the rock inside the cave, and thus he realised that the large upright phallic rock (in Sanu Sailung much larger than the one in the cave near Thulo Sailung) was Mahadev himself. And concerning the cave on Thulo Sailung, people say: “When a yogi meditates inside the cave for five years, he can see an invisible door which leads into the interior of the mountain.” The cave is in fact considered the entrance to the world beyond, or the netherworld, the realm of the nagas (Nep., serpent deity) who guard the treasure! Here too, however, the Tamang add a Buddhist interpretation and explain that Mahadev is simply another form of Padmasambhava, ‘... when he had the face of Shiva and drank no alcohol and ate no meat.’

Among the Tamangs today one can notice a frequent shifting from Hindu to Buddhist and to autochthonous names. Even Sailung’s main Buddhist protector, Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo, by Tamang laypeople and shamans alike in the same breath can be explained as a manifestation of the Hindu god Mahadev. These three religious traditions in local legends are related to each other in an ongoing rivalry, where victory over the ‘other’ remains a popular theme. On Thulo Sailung, this coexistence and rivalry of Hindu, Buddhist and shamanic traditions is embodied most prominently in three large rocks that almost block the old main footpath near the summit. Of these rocks the following creation myth is told:

_A long time ago when earth, moon, rocks, and sky were still one, the king of the tigers (Nep. singha raja) lived on top of the mountain. At the same time when the earth was created, when gods, men, and animals were separated, these sacred stones came into being. A cow was grazing on the meadows of Thulo Sailung. The king of the tigers pur -
sued the cow. He wanted to kill her. The cow ran and the tiger jumped after her. Suddenly a snake appeared from the soil and stood between the tiger and the cow. The three of them transformed into these three stones, and thus the cow was saved from the tiger.

Today in popular belief the cow is taken to symbolise Hinduism, the tiger Buddhism, the snake the fertile forces underground. Note that in the story the tiger existed first: In Tibetan tradition, the tiger (or white snow lion) is associated with the upper white realm of the gods (lha). The cow, like the Tibetan yak or in many Himalayan legends the deer, is associated with the world of humankind and animals and with the realm of the ancestors. The underworld is seen as the dominion of the lu and nagas, the waterspirits. The myth also reveals the classical Indo/Tibetan concept of a tripartite worldview with an upper, a middle and a lower realm – the gods in the upper, the living beings and spirits of the ancestors in the middle, and the water spirits and chthonic forces in the lower realm. The Buddhist symbol in the Tamang legend represents the upper and the Hindu the middle realm. The Buddhist tiger (or the gods of the upper realm) sought to destroy the Hindu cow (or living beings). This story may also be meant as a reminder of the power of the underworld, and that neither tiger nor cow could ever claim permanent victory.

Buddhist marks of victory in the Sailung region are associated with imprints found in stones: of two rocks near Thulo Sailung, one bears the footprint of Padmasambhava, the other the imprint of his sword. But the Hindu faith also claims its ground on Thulo Sailung: about one hundred meters below the chorten of Thulo Sailung on the slope facing Kalingchok, there is a flat rock that is explained as the seat of Kalingchok Mai, the blood-thirsty Hindu goddess Kali, who has her dwelling on the rocky peak of the mountain Kalingchok to the north. Beside her rock are small phallic stones and a few tridents stuck into the ground. People say that shamans and pilgrims unable to travel the difficult path up to Kalingchok may present their blood offerings to Kalingchok Mai here. Further up on the summit of Thulo Sailung, however, no animal sacrifices are allowed – an additional indication of the local dominance of the Buddhist religion. And although the altitude of Thulo Sailung is actually 500 m lower than Kalingchok, people claim that the Buddhist realm of Sailung is
higher than that of the Hindu mountain of Kalingchok. To back up this assertion the following tale is told:

A long time ago, when a wild hen flew from Kalingchok to Thulo Sailung it was unable to land on its top. The long flight had made it so tired that it could not fly upwards any more. Therefore, instead of landing on the summit it landed on the slope below. Today a large stone marks this spot. However, when the wild hen then flew from Thulo Sailung to Kalingchok it could easily land on its top.

This rock lies well below the summit of Thulo Sailung, in the midst of a rhododendron forest, clear for all to see.

The Crystal Mountain Thulo Sailung

The currently most widespread explanation of Sailung is ‘Hundred Mountains’. It is said to go back to the Nepali term sai (‘hundred’) and lung, an ‘old’ Tamang word for mountain. However, in Tibetan, in which the Tamang language has its roots, lung means ‘inhabited valley’. The translation of ‘Hundred Mountains’ probably developed only with the arrival of other Nepali-speaking people after the conquest by the Gorkha rulers. It is basically a geographic term describing the topography of this large mountain massif with its numerous surrounding valleys.

The name Sailung, though, clearly points to a Tibetan/Tamang origin. In Sailung, I recorded the following legends connected to the origin of its name, which also provide an interesting insight into how the Tamangs perceive the sacred mountain Thulo Sailung. One legend told in Sailung – probably the earliest – reflects the shamanic concept of a ‘soul crystal mountain’ and is connected to two of Sailung’s Tamang clans, the Moktan and the Yonjon. The story refers to shamanic healing and to belief in the ancestors’ power for the well-being of the coming generations. The legend was told by a Tamang informant in Doromba:

A long time ago there was a bompo from the Yonjon clan who had come to the summit of Thulo Sailung. There he found a crystal with a glowing fire in its centre. When he took the stone in his hand, the power of the crystal (Nep. dunga shakti tyo) made him shake like the bompo does
when possessed by a spirit. For six generations the same Yonjon family kept this crystal in their possession. The sixth generation, however, used the crystal to throw at people and committed ‘sinful deeds’ (Nep. papko kam gareko) with it. This caused a storm with lightning and thunder, which killed the cattle. No more sons were born to the Yonjon family and the crystal was passed on to a Moktan nephew. In the fourth generation of this Moktan family, the Moktan bompo went to the other side of the Tama Kosi to heal a sick person. When he came back over the river to Sailung, the crystal had lost its fire and with it its power. Today this crystal is still in the possession of the same family, in the hands of Padam Bahadur Moktan, of the seventh generation, living in Daduwa below Rajvir Gompa. Sailung received its name through this crystal: shel-yungba, shel, the ‘crystal’, and yungba, the ‘rock’.

A Tamang lama (Tupten Gyaltsen) from Sailung explained the crystal as an ancient bompo symbol of an abode of their ancestors’ souls. The ‘fire’ (Nep. shakti) of the crystal is said to reflect these souls and to provide the sacred power through which the bompos can communicate with the ancestors. Possession of the crystal, in the context of the tale, is regarded as a means of access to the ancestors’ power. Misuse of this power leads to immediate punishment by the higher forces in the form of natural calamity, infertility and disease. The fire of the crystal in the legend also seems bound to a specific domain attributed to the realm of Sailung and the power of the ancestors also remained confined to this domain. The crystal’s fire extinguished after it crossed the river Tama Kosi. The river thus marks the boundary of its power and defines the limits of the ancestor’s terrain, in this context that of Sailung.

Of interest in the legend told above is that the first owner of the crystal was of the Yonjon clan and the second of the Moktan clan. In contrast, the oral history told in Sailung considers the Moktan as the first to have arrived and the Yonjon are connected with the arrival (or rather revival?) of Buddhist doctrine among the Tamangs. Even now many Tamang Buddhist priests in Sailung and Timal are from the Yonjon clan. One possible explanation of the ‘sinful work’ committed by the Yonjon bompo with the crystal could refer to their abandoning shamanic belief in favour of Buddhism. And what of the extinguished fire? Perhaps it refers to the loss of local power associated with the ancestors and activated by the shamans, which
was then taken over by the doctrine of the Buddhist priests?

There exists another Tamang explanation for the term Sailung. A Tamang Buddhist priest from Doromba explained that it derives from the Tibetan/Tamang terms sa – ‘earth’ (Tib.), yi (genitive), and lung (Tib. sa-yi-lung), which could roughly be translated with ‘the earth’s inhabited, cultivated valley’, and might be connected to the ‘Male White Lord of the Earth’, Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo.8

Yet another interesting explanation is put forward by Charles Ramble (1997a) in his article on the ancient Tibetan ethnonym ‘Se’. Ramble points out that ‘Se’ in the Himalayan region was an ancient ethnonym used to designate a Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman speaking population; it included what are today known as the Tamangs at a time when (e.g. for the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley) there existed no differentiation between Tamangs and Tibetans. The Newars of the Kathmandu Valley still use the term ‘Sem’ or ‘Se’ for Tibetans. He suggests that the name Sailung may earlier have been ‘Selung’, meaning the ‘Se Valley’.9 That could well go back to a time when the Tibetans/Tamangs – that is the Se – were the dominant population in the region of Sailung, though the ethnonym Se among the Tamang has been forgotten.

To summarise: in the legends of the Tamangs there exists a relation between the mountain of Thulo Sailung, the crystal, the abode of the souls of the ancestors, and the healing power of the shamans. The deer and his pots of the legend represented an earlier unit of clans as well as the marriage alliances forming the local Tamang community. The souls of the ancestors on Thulo Sailung together with the ‘lords of the earth’ guaranteed the well-being of the people and the fertility of the soil.10

Ritual Practice on Thulo (‘Big’) and Sanu (‘Small’) Sailung

Buddhist Offerings to the Dead

The Tamangs don’t explicitly name Thulo Sailung as the abode of their ancestors, although the chorten on the green summit of Thulo Sailung are in fact the sites where they commemorate their dead. The Tamangs, although Buddhist, place great importance on souls (bla) and on the rituals to guide them to the netherworld after death. The Buddhist death ritual (gewa, Tib. dge ba) is thus the most significant and elaborate ritual, for which Tamangs are obliged – and are
Indeed willing - to spend a fortune.

The arrival of the Buddhist religion has changed their former concept of seven souls as constituting the life-force of a human being, as well as the previous belief that souls are attached to a specific territory, the abode of the ancestors. In Buddhist reinterpretation, the ancestral deity of the Tamang clans was replaced by the protector deity, the pholha, linked to the Buddhist religion. The Buddhist lama introduced 'the way' (Tib. bardo) to lead the 'consciousness' (Tib. rnam shes) of the deceased into the land of the sorga, a heavenly realm before the next rebirth. In folk-belief, however, Tamangs continue to believe that, after death, the souls will stay near to the place and people they knew during their lifetime. And if they are not guided to the land of sorga, then the errant souls become evil spirits. If the relatives do not take leave of the dead in the proper way and if the Buddhist priest is not able to lead the soul to the sorga, the souls will pose a threat to them.

Thirteen, ideally fortynine, days after cremation, the gewa is celebrated in the deceased's house for three days. It is a complex Buddhist ceremony aimed at gaining merit for the dead, for the family to redeem his debts and to ensure a better rebirth for him. An effigy of the dead (shiba gur, Tib. shi ba'i gur) is fashioned and thus the deceased is physically present for the last time. Relatives bring their last presents, placing them in front of an altar built by the house, provide him with their last services, and bid farewell. Towards the end of the ritual, his consciousness is guided by a long white cloth (lamden) on the 'white path' to the land of the dead, the sorga. A goat is sacrificed and shared among those present, and a cow is donated to the Buddhist priests who conducted the ceremony. The final act in the gewa ceremony is the burning of a small piece of paper on which the name of the deceased is written. A piece of bone, taken at the cremation and later placed inside the effigy for the gewa to guarantee the presence of the soul, is crushed to powder. This powder is mixed with the ash from the burnt name and butter, and a butter lamp (marmin) is formed. The Tamangs may light this butter lamp at the end of the gewa ceremony right there on the temporary altar, or may keep it to burn it later in a Buddhist gompa or at a Buddhist chorten. In the Sailung area, many Tamangs carry this butter lamp to the chorten on Thulo Sailung where for three years further rituals are performed for the soul.
The gewa death ritual, Ghyang, 1992

Ideally, the gewa ritual should take place 49 days after cremation. For this elaborate ritual fifty Buddhist priests were invited to lead the soul of the deceased through the interim worlds (barde) to the land of the heavenly realm before rebirth (sarga).

top: An altar was built with dough figurines (tormos) representing Buddhist and protective deities with thankas hung in the background.

above: Buddhist priests reciting the Book of the Dead.
The gewa death ritual, Ghyang, 1992

top: The son of the deceased offers his last services, pays her last debts, and bids farewell to his mother. The figure (shiba gur) in the centre of the table contains a bone fragment from the deceased’s skull. Food offerings from her relatives are placed around the figure.

above: Towards the end of the ritual the Buddhist lamas perform a dance around the shiba gur.
Communal meal, Ghyang, 1992

Following the gewa ritual every relative, friend and neighbour is invited for a last meal by the son of the deceased.
Local stories tell of the old rivalry between the ancient shamanic and the Buddhist tradition concerning who may perform this death ritual. The following story, a variant of one widespread throughout the entire Himalayan region, is told in Sailung. It describes the defeat of the shaman by a Buddhist master, after which the shaman was no longer entitled to perform the death ritual. This myth also affirms the shaman’s relationship with the souls of the dead. It was told by a bompo during his pilgrimage to Thulo Sailung:

Naru Bon and Chari Lama had the same grandfather, and both of them had died in Chari Ghyang. Naru Bon and Chari Lama were competing in Chari Ghyang for the sole responsibility for the ceremony of the gewa. Originally it was the bompos who carried out the gewa. After the corpse was burnt, an effigy of the dead (gur) was built and the bompos gave it the ability of speech. When Chari Lama came, he quietened the effigy, and it was not able to speak any more. Since that time the gewa ceremony was taken over by the Buddhist priest who brought the books.

Naru Bon most probably refers to the Bonpo priest Naro Bönchung (Tib. sNa ro Bon chung), who in the Buddhist Kagyudpa tradition lost the battle against Milarepa on Mt. Kailash. This story must have been the model for the story told by the Tamangs of Sailung. It links their Buddhist tradition with the school of Milarepa, just as the arrival (or revival?) of Buddhism in this region is associated with Chari Lama and his founding of the monastery Chari Ghyang in Charikot - the same Buddhist gompa, where - in the legend - the competition took place. The myth also tells us that the oral shamanic tradition is related to the shaman’s ability to make speech issue forth from the dead ancestors, whose mouthpiece he becomes. With the arrival of Buddhism, the shamans’ speech and oral knowledge were ousted by the written texts of the Buddhist priests. Since that time, Buddhist priests have become responsible for the gewa.

An interesting point of the legend is the common ancestral origin of Naru Bon and the Buddhist priest.

Now to turn to the rituals performed for the deceased after the butter lamp with the crushed bone and the ashes of the name of the deceased has been burnt at the chorten on Thulo Sailung: These rituals among the Tamangs are called ‘kilkhorla tsho phulba’ (Tib. dkyil ‘khor mchod ’phul ba), the ‘mandala offerings’. For this the Buddhist
Mandala offering to the dead

Thulo Sailung, 1997

top: On the new moon of November-December a ‘mandala offering’ by the Buddhist priest is performed at the chorten on Thulo Sailung. The deceased’s relatives light 108 butterlamps.

above: The deceased’s relatives offer flour to the fire and prostrate around the chorten.
Mandala offering to the dead
Thulo Sailung, 1997

At the end of the ‘mandala offering’ a pole (mehe) is erected. Here the daughter of the deceased is performing her prostrations.
village priest comes together with the family of the deceased to their respective chorten on Thulo Sailung. The most auspicious day is considered to be the new moon of November/December (Nep. mankshir aunsi), another good day being the full moon of July/August (Nep. saun purnima). Today it is not only the Tamangs who commemorate their dead relatives on Thulo Sailung, but most of the population of Sailung, including Hindus. The Tamangs, however, are the first to arrive. They often come in family groups on the day before the new moon of mankshir and camp inside the cave of Mahadev for the night, where they sing, play cards and even gamble. The Hindu population follows the next day and night.

The people of Sailung also call the new moon of November/December the 'new moon of sadbiu' (Nep. sadbiu aunsi). The term sadbiu (Skt.) denotes a mixture of ground cereals (except millet) and is considered the main component at the 'mandala offering'. Other offerings are flowers, 108 butter lamps (marmin), and alcohol (airak), which are placed on the altar built by the Buddhist priest in front of the chorten. The priest reads from the text called Domang (Tib. mDo mang). The family members of the deceased circumambulate the chorten with prostrations for three times, occasionally throwing the sadbiu flour into the air. For the first two years after the cremation, relatives also offer sadbiu at the highest point of the lush green summit of Thulo Sailung and, as at the chorten, circumambulate the summit three times. Thulo Sailung is consequently also known as 'the mountain where sadbiu is thrown' (sadbiu duaba gang). On the third year after the death, a wooden pole (Nep. mehe) – symbolizing the tree of life – is erected by the relatives on the summit of Thulo Sailung in honour of the deceased and circumambulation of the pole is carried out as a final act. On the 'new moon of sadbiu', no Tamang bompo comes to Thulo Sailung. In the reverse case, no Buddhist priests enter the cave of Mahadev.

The 'mandala offering' reinforces the Buddhist concept of a geographic mandala on Thulo Sailung, whereby the souls of the dead become integrated into the Buddhist realm, and in theory detached from the shamanic ancestral abode of Sailung. But here again, folk ritual and the choice of the location for the chorten reinstate the significance of the mountain of Thulo Sailung as the abode of the souls, where the caves by the lay people are considered as a kind of access to them. The throwing of sadbiu flour on Thulo Sailung indicates a
further important aspect in folk belief, which also became integrated into the Buddhist ‘mandala offering’: the linking of the ancestors with the fertility of their lands.

Shamanic Rituals for Fertility and Wealth

Two caves, one below Thulo Sailung and one in Sanu Sailung, are the main sites where shamanic rituals take place on the full-moon nights of July/August and December/January. Two days before the Tamangs’ pilgrimage to the caves, they abstain from eating meat. The night before, the bompo consecrates his ritual paraphernalia in front of the altar erected by the fireplace inside his house: his headdress (sortat), adorned with peacock feathers, porcupine needles and cowry shells; his chain of rudracche (Nep.) nuts; a chain with bells (syang syang rolmo); his ritual knife (phurba); his drum (nga) with a three-faced ritual knife beautifully carved as handle; his bamboo drumstick in the form of a snake; his iron lance (Nep. tarwar); a sacred vase of brass; and his long white robe (Nep. jama). After that, sitting cross-legged in front of the altar where incense is burning, he calls out the names of his teachers, his tutelary gods, the ancestors, Mahadev, Seti Devi, Ganesh of Sailung, and Kalingchok Devi, then the local territorial gods and goddesses (yul lha, sibda neda) of his village and of the neighbourhood. He continues his recitation of place-names and their deities, undertaking a ‘verbal journey’ along a specific route from the village to the places of the ancestors, through parts of Nepal and even to towns in India. He requests the presence of all protector deities related to a mythical past and of their contemporary living space, that is, to where they come from, and now live, travel and work.

On the next day, the shaman begins his ascent to the sacred mountain of Thulo Sailung. He is accompanied by male helpers who carry his lance held high, like a sign of victory. One bompo explained that it was the king who earlier presented them with the lance. He wears his long white gown, his headdress with peacock feathers and continuously plays his drum with a characteristic repetitive rhythm. The villagers accompany him in groups and sing either to the rhythm of the drums or their own joking riddles. On his way up, the shaman stops at certain mountain passes, rock crevices, springs, and in front of Buddhist chorten. When other
Jannai purnima pilgrimage, Thulo Sailung, 1997

top: Hundreds of villagers with their bompos ascend to the cave and chorten on Thulo Sailung for the jannai purnima (fullmoon night in July-August).

above: At the entrance of the cave incense is kept burning.
Jannai purnima pilgrimage, Thulo Sailung, 1997

*top:* The assistants of the bompo arrive carrying the lance, an attribute of their ancestral deity.

*above:* Not only Tamang bompo but also shamans of other ethnic groups join in for the pilgrimage, here the jankri of the Hindu Chhetri caste and a female shaman of the Sherpa.
Inside the cave the bompo once more perform their drumming session and get into a trance.
Bompo in trance

Sanu Sailung, 1990

On their way to Sanu Sailung bompos drum, sing, and dance to attain a trance.
Bompo
Sanu Sailung, 1990

At the entrance of the cave the bompo and his followers bow to Mahadev. The horn of a mountain goat is seen sticking off the back of the bompo.
shamans arrive from the other directions, they often join in performing a drumming séance. First the rhythm follows a constant three-beat to which the shamans dance; then it rises into a crescendo until their bodies begin to shake. Together they fall into a kind of trance and ‘shake’, during which they pronounce formulas in a rhythmic and melodic song. When the bompos first meet, they greet each other formally by bowing, as they also do at the end of their drumming session before they depart. At every house on the way up to Thulo Sailung, families welcome them with offerings placed on a table in front of the house: a bottle of alcohol decorated with flowers, incense burning on glowing coals in an earthen pot, and coins. Here too the shamans play their drums, ‘shake’ and speak the magic formulas. Thus by the time they have reached the summit, they have consumed an abundance of alcohol. The young people accompanying them from time to time sing their refrains ‘lha gyal’ ('victory to the gods!') and ‘bompo se, bompo se’. They too dance and drink copiously – the pilgrimage becomes a veritable feast for everybody!

When the pilgrims and the shamans arrive on Thulo Sailung, they first proceed to the cave of Mahadev, and only then make their way further up to the chorten on the summit. They circumambulate each group of chorten clockwise, constantly beating their drums. At the highest and largest group of chorten, many tea stalls are erected. A great number of vendors display their goods for sale, and hundreds of people gather to gossip and enjoy the festival. The following night they spend inside the cave, where they pray and place their offerings near the tridents, the symbol of Mahadev, stuck in the ground by the right-hand wall: flowers, coins, milk, incense, and red powder for Mahadev and Seti Devi (Hindus also call her Sailung Devi). They crowd together in groups where the young women and men continue to flirt and sing. Early in the morning they first go to the neighbouring small cave where they squeeze through the ‘door of sin’. Before leaving the cave, they collect the ‘milk’ – the liquid dropping from the cave ceiling and stalagmite, called the blessing of the gods – in small bottles to take home with them.

On the same full-moon nights, bompos and villagers – many from Timal – go on pilgrimage to the cave of Sanu Sailung, but this time without the lance. And since the cave is so small, most pilgrims here camp in the nearby forest by the small brook, the Sailung Khola. Here, in contrast to Thulo Sailung, there are no Buddhist chorten.
Instead, the pilgrims, before returning home, descend the next morning to the Buddhist gompa in the village of Pongdi, where the Buddhist priest has prepared an altar for the local gods.

The Five Ancestors (Khe Nga) of the Tamang Clans in Sailung and Timal

The Tamangs’ history in Sailung and Timal is mainly associated with four clans: Moktan, Yonjon, Ghising and Bal. According to the local legend told by an old man in Burungga in Sailung, originally five brothers migrated from Kuti, the old trading post between Nepal and Tibet, to northern Sindhu Palchok, then headed eastward across the Sun Kosi river. One version of the same legend (told by Karma Siddhi Lama from Risiangku) specifies that the five brothers had come from a cave named Chhiriwa,17 north of Kuti and that they were of the Moktan clan. From Kuti they travelled to Jalbire and Balephi, two villages near the Tibetan border along the old route between Kathmandu and Kuti. At one Buddhist gompa the five brothers are said to have founded the corpus of five Tamang clans. They became the five ancestors, the khe nga, of five Tamang clans: Moktan, Yonjon, Ghising, Bal and Brokchan. Myth and oral history agree that the ancestors of three clans – the Moktan, Yonjon and Ghising – settled in Sailung. The ancestor of the Bal settled in the adjoining region of Timal, and the ancestor of the Brokchan clan returned to Tibet. The name Brokchan, so it is explained, derives from the Tibetan term brug pa, meaning ‘nomad’.19 This myth clearly places the origin of their common ancestor in Tibet, and situates the origin of the five clans within the Buddhist tradition. The return of the ancestor of the Brokchan clan to Tibet maintains the affiliation of the four clans of Sailung and Timal as ‘brothers’ of Tibet.

The ancestor of the Moktan, so continues the local oral history told in Sailung, founded the village of Burungga; the ancestor of the Yonjon, the village Risiangku; the ancestor of the Ghising, the village Taleju; and the ancestor of the Bal, the palace-fortress of Kottimal in Timal.

This is what the people from Sailung say: from the three villages Burungga, Risiangku and Taleju, their descendants – here too the local histories told in the various villages agree – spread to the following settlements: Pongdi, Phasku, Phulashi, Phedbu, Melung and
Ghyang. That these are ancient villages that used to have considerable local importance is confirmed by their location on the old trading route and by the old Buddhist gompas (some replaced by modern concrete buildings) above the villages. Although the present-day population of these villages includes other Tamang clans as well (the Gole, Thing, Rumba and others) and other ethnic groups (Newar, Thami, Brahmin, Chhetri, Damai and Kami), the original founder-clans are still predominant in number, and even today, most of the influential and rich belong to one of these three clans. Moreover, most of the other Tamang clans claim to be a ‘brother clan’ (Nep. suage bhai) of the three founding clans, deriving from the same ‘circle of ancestors’, meme khor. Thus, the Pakhrin, Thokar, and Shyangtan are the ‘brothers’ of the Moktan; the Bomjan, Lopchan and Dumchan of the Yonjon; the Gyaba and Lo of the Ghising; and the Gangthang, Gole and Shyangtan of the Bal in Timal.

At some point, the Tamang community of Sailung and Timal may well have been a socio-political union allied through marriage and under the common protection of one sibda deity, who in their legends once distributed the large pots and took the form of a deer. The scheme of the five clan ancestors, the khe nga, reappears in one of their Buddhist texts and may go back to the time when the common sibda was made the ‘lord of the sacred land’ (nyegi dagpo), the Buddhist protector Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo of Thulo Sailung.

The Five Ancestors in the Tamang Buddhist Text (Kukpa Khachyoi)

The same five ancestors are mentioned in a Tamang cosmogonic Buddhist text, the Kukpa Khachyoi (Tib. lkugs pa kha dpyod [chos?]) meaning the ‘Language of Signs of the Dumb’ (see pages 92/93). The Kukpa Khachyoi is written in Tibetan script with poor spelling and interspersed with Tamang words. I found it in the Tamang village of Phasku with a family of Moktan lineage, who say it originates from Burunga, the village known as the first Moktan settlement in Sailung. It is the only Tamang text so far discovered that mentions the corpus of five clans – other than the Ruichen Cyopge, the text on the ‘Eighteen Great Clans’, which is found in many Tamang villages. The Kukpa Khachyoi, like the Ruichen Cyopge, is a Buddhist text which integrates local Tamang tradition and history with Buddhist
Traditional houses, Phulashi, Sailung, 1994

Market day, Melung, 1994
Village gompa, Phasku, Sailung, 1994

Entry to gompa with prayer wheels, Phasku, Sailung, 1994
Geneology of the Yonjon

Doromba, photographed 1993
The text begins like a narrator talking to an audience:

Namaste, I request all of you to listen to me, I want to tell you something. In the earth are the stones, in the sky the sun and moon. Among you may be present a mayor (Nep. mukhya), a rich person, ‘wise old men’ (ganba) and ‘the men of honour’ (gansum).24 If I don’t tell you anything at this gathering, then we would remain like animals (without culture). My knowledge is not precise, I cannot explain all meanings, I am not well educated, I am not very articulate. This is how I am. I know how to tell you the history of the people (mi chyoi nam thar); I know how to tell the ‘language of signs’ (Kukpa Khachyoi) to those who don’t understand. I now open the curtain (yolwa).

The speaker continues to emphasise his own humble knowledge and remarks on the extinction of the historians of the past: of the great tamba lion (tamba singi), the great peacock lion (mrawai singi),25 the most intelligent (rikpachyan), and the most experienced (khaipachyan, Tib. mkhas-pa chen). The text proceeds with a Tamang version of the classical Tibetan Buddhist myth of creation of the universe and of the first four kingdoms on earth: the kingdom of India (Gyagar), Mongolia (Hor), Zhang Zhung and Tibet (Siangsiangboi), and China (Gyanak), placing themselves within the old Buddhist world in southeastern and central Asia. As in Tibetan Buddhist mythology, mankind descended from the primordial couple, the monkey (a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara), and the rock demoness Dasin Dolma (a manifestation of Tara).26 To be able to feed the children, so the text explains, Buddha gave the parents seven kinds of fruits and 25 varieties of grains, and he gave them a land named Ampur Lanka (Sri Lanka?) where crops could be harvested within twelve hours – like a metaphor for the beginning of civilisation. Only then was the human child able to speak. The child was then asked, ‘Who shall become king of the five countries?’ and the child replied: ‘Makkorno!’

The text after that refers to important historical characters of the ancient Tibetan kingdom and the beginning of its Buddhist era. Though the spelling is simplified, the names are recognisable, albeit not in true historical order: King Thisong Detsen (in the text Thi song dev chan), founder of Samye, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet; Songtsen Gampo, the first Buddhist king in Tibet, and to Gnithi
Chenpo (Tib. gNya' khri btsan po), the first mythical king of Yurung Thangthung (Yumbu Lhakhang, the ancient fortress tower of the Tibetan kings in the Yarlung valley?).

There follows a list of political positions and religious specialists of the Tamangs, similar to the order in early Tibetan society: The king (gyalpo) is greatest in human power, the minister (lonbo) in political power, the priest (lama) in religion, the shaman (bonpo) in offerings, the mayor (choho, Tib. gtso-bo) in advice, the parents (ganba) for the three ages, and the young women are the ornaments of the village.

Next are listed the five khe, the five ancestors of the Tamang clans of Sailung and Timal. Tamang informants in Sailung explain khe as an old term for the ancestor of a clan (rui).27 This word, however, is never used in colloquial Tamang. Even in the Kukpa Khachyoi text, the term khe is mentioned only in the heading of the chapter on the origin of the five ancestors. In the following quotation from the text, each ancestor khe is addressed with the title 'rinpoche', meaning the 'jewel' of Buddhist doctrine, and every clan is associated with a protector deity, the phola (Tib. pho lha), who took possession (Tib. lha bab) of the ancestor at his place of origin (Tib. babsa). And to each khe is attributed a specific 'tool' or 'sign', unique among the Tamang Buddhist texts of origin:

The Moktan: The first clan which came into being was the Moktan. The first Moktan rinpoche is Semjyu Rinpoche. He carries his phola that is called tsen. Where did his phola take possession of him? The phola came with him from Mako Gyalsa. The sign of the Moktan is the big golden knife (sergi churi, Tib. chu gri), When he looked into the future, he stabbed his golden knife into the rock and water spouted from the rock. The sign of the first Moktan rinpoche is this.

The Yonjon: the clan of the Yonjon comes into being: The name of the first rinpoche of the Yonjon clan is Hunga Raja. His phola is Lama Konjyo Mahankal. Where did his phola come from? With him [Hunga Raja] was a black iron statue [a four-handed Mahankal]. The phola came into the statue in Gompo Chhasi and thus came with him.
Hunga Raja made a basket out of bamboo (chelnu).
It became golden and he put water into it.
The sign of Hunga Raja is this.
The Ghising: the clan of the Ghising comes into being:
The name of the first rinpoche is Gobkui Rinpoche.
His phola is Changri Jyoho.
Where did his phola come from?
He took possession of him in Sergang Gyalsa.
He took a cotton cloth and threw it into the sky.
It became a black cloud and rain was made. Rain makes better crops possible and allows many people to live together.
The sign of the first Ghising meme is this.
The Brokchan: the clan of the Brokchan comes into being:
The name of the first rinpoche is Saibu Rinpoche.
He worships the phola Dong Mar Tsan (Tib. ldong dmar btsan - the red tsan Dong).
He took possession of him in Tsakri Tsong.
He made the first fire with the firestone (metsap).
The sign of the first Brokchan meme is this.
The Bal: the clan of the Bal comes into being:
The name of the first rinpoche is Tabal Rinpoche.
He worships the Döi pholha (Tib. mdos pho lha). 28
He took possession of him in Rangla Gandhiri.
He constructed the hoe (to).
The sign of him is this.

As in the local oral version, in this Buddhist text the Moktan clan also came forth first. Moreover, the text is claimed to be from Burunga, recognised as the first settlement of the Moktan on Sailung and the location of the temple of the Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo. This may indicate that the Moktan once possessed local authority in the Sailung region.

The Kukpa Khachyoi text can also be interpreted as representing the view of the Moktan, in which the clans are placed in the following order and each one through its tool is linked with a specific task:
It is the Moktan who 'open' the place through stabbing the rock with the golden knife so that water, the source of fertility and life, can begin to flow. The Yonjon provide the golden basket to carry the water. The Ghising have the connecting link with the upper world,
The Kukpa Khachyoi manuscript from Phasku

Phasku, photographed 1993
The marriage of the ancestor and ancestress – *ake and mam* – is symbolically reenacted. The ancestor is represented in the shape of a face (similar to that of Bhairav) made of bamboo and cotton threads, the ancestress has the form of a receptacle (*top, left*). The ancestor and ancestress will be placed on a pole.

The Buddhist head lama (*lobon lama*) leads a man dressed as a women, his face hidden behind a cloth, around the pole. The man holds the ferment (*martsa*) for making alcohol – a gesture to remind of the incest the nine brothers and sisters who founded the Eighteen Great Clans (*Ruichen Cyopge*) of the Tamang committed. The man is supposed to take over the sin with this gesture and to die in the same year. The Doila ends with the destruction of the ancestral pole and a final public performance, where an ancient king appears and the present society is mocked.
Most important for the *doila* ritual is the erection of the ancestor pole – built of bamboo and coloured cotton threads. The ritual lasts seven days and is presided over by a Buddhist head lama. The lamas are seen dancing around the pole and various offerings are placed in front of the white cotton cloth.
the cotton cloth, to generate rain and thus keep the water flowing. The tool of the Brokchan is the firestone to make fire, and the tool of the Bal is the hoe needed for agriculture. Together, these five tools made it possible for the five clans to take possession of the place, to settle, to make it prosper and to practise farming. Whereas the Moktan had come first, the Yonjon brought the receptacle for the sacred water, a symbol of the Buddhist religion, the Ghising are close to the realm of the upper world (like the ancient Tibetan kings?), the Brokchan with the firestone brought a requisite for civilisation, and the Bal the techniques for agriculture. Thus the five clans are bound to a unique Tamang unit based on their different divine and secular tasks. And we may recall that it is the descendants of three of the clans – Moktan, Yonjon, Ghising – who honour their dead at the three Buddhist chorten on Thulo Sailung and go on pilgrimage to the cave nearby. The fourth clan, the Bal, who have settled in Timal and make their pilgrimage to the cave of Sanu Sailung, construct their own ‘mythical ancestral mountain’ at the ritual named doila (Tib. mdos) (see Steinmann 1992). Within this text the Bal are part of the corpus of the five clans, but through their territorial and ancestor rituals they clearly set themselves apart. Even today, only a few of the Bal clan have settled in Sailung, but they maintain close relations through marriage affiliations.

According to the history of origin as told in Timal, the first ancestor of the Bal came from Tibet to Timal as a baby hidden in a basket full of wool (Tib. bal) – hence their clan name of Bal. In one version they first went south as far as to the river Ganges and then headed back north to Timal in the Middle Hills of Nepal. In some way or other, the history of the Bal would seem to indicate the coming together of the peoples from the north and the south (and from the Kathmandu Valley). Today, the Tamangs also claim that the Bal were the first to settle in the Kathmandu Valley and cite the similarity of the old Tibetan name ‘Balpo’ for Nepal.

**Reconstructing a Mythical Past**

The names of the clans, ancestors, protector deities and places of origin mentioned in the Kukpa Khachyoi to a large extend overlap those mentioned in the texts of the Eighteen Great Clans, the Ruichen Cyopge. Their Tibetan orthography, though, from text to
Chari Ghyang
*Charikot, 2000*

Tamang Buddhists believe this to be the oldest gompa in the area from where Buddhism spread to the region of Sailung. The original gompa was unfortunately destroyed and replaced by a new building in the 1980s.
text sometimes diverges. Whatever the history of the names—whether old local names receiving new meaning through the Tibetan script, or with the Tibetan Buddhist text new Tibetan names were introduced among the Tamangs and the old were forgotten—some of the names of the clans as mentioned in the texts in their Tibetan spelling provide remarkable references to the old Tibetan clans. Moreover, the places and protectors linked to these clans point to specific sites in Tibet and to figures prominent in Tibetan Buddhism. Most of the Tamang Buddhist priests, unfortunately, had forgotten the original background of the various names and places—probably one of the reasons for the muddled and inconsistent orthography of the names, which were copied from text to text and slowly altered from generation to generation. The spellings sometimes follow the pronunciation used in the oral histories rather than the orthography used in Tibetan. The historical reconstruction is therefore entirely based on a hypothetical comparison of names and should be taken as such.

I begin with an interpretation of the orthography of the clan names and of their places of origin mentioned in the text of Kukpa Khachyoi, where the protector deities ‘took possession’ of the ancestors. What do the spellings reveal, the places of origin refer to, and to which historical time may the origins of the clans go back? As they are part of a corpus of clans, I presume that these origins also constitute a unit. The origins of the five clans stated in the text are as follows:

Mako Gyalsa, the ‘kingdom Mako’, of the Moktan,  
Gompo Chhasi, the ‘protector Chhasi’, of the Yonjon,  
Sergang Gyalsa, the ‘Sergang’ kingdom, of the Ghising,  
Tsakri Tsong, the ‘fortress Tsakri’ of the Brokchan,  
Rangla Gandhiri of the Bal.

What may they tell us? The first part of the spelling of the Moktan clan bsmog bstan may derive from the Tibetan term rnor meaning ‘helmet’, which may have been a sign of a dignitary-chief, with the second syllable bstan referring to the ‘doctrinal teachings’ of the Buddhist religion. Thus, bsmog bstan may be seen as an epithet through which the Moktan are placed within the Buddhist tradition. A possible explanation of the origin ‘kingdom of Mako’
could derive from ma rgyud, the ‘kingdom of the mother’s lineage’. Another possible origin for the name Moktan could be the ancient Tibetan clan name dmu (or rmu, smu, mu). In Tibetan tradition, the dmu were associated with the maternal line of the first mythical Tibetan king Nyathiri Tsenpo (Tib. gNya’ khri btsan-po), who was born in the land of the dmu and descended to earth with the cord of the dmu (Tib. dmu skas). The dmu in ancient Tibet were also considered as the ancestors of the people of Khotan (Li), Phrom or Persia (Ta-zig), but also of Nepal. Incidentally, the Tamangs often pronounce Moktan as ‘Muktan’. In another written version on the origin of the Tamangs, Mako Gyalsa is spelled and pronounced as Mugu Gyalsa (Tib. dmu rgyud?), which translates as the kingdom of the lineage of the dmu. Taken together, Mako Gyalsa could be a reference to the divine kingdom of the ancient Tibetan clan dmu, the line of the wife of the mythical Tibetan king gNya’ khri btsan po, in the text mentioned as Gnithi Chenpo.

The spelling of the clan name Yonjon, yon mtshan, reveals the combined meaning of yon – ‘auspicious’ and mtshan – ‘given name’, that is ‘auspicious given name’ – which correlates with the idea of a Buddhist title as a given clan name, as may have been possible in the case of the name ‘Moktan’ above. Gompo Chhasi, the Yonjon’s place of origin, is specified as follows in another text on the clan’s origins (Ruichen Cyopge): Nakpo Cyagi Gompo (Tib. nag bo-lcags gi mgon-po), which literally means ‘Guardian of the Buddhist doctrine of black iron’, defining the origin of the Yonjon as an iron statue of a Buddhist protector. As the Buddhist protector is known among all the Yonjon as the four-armed Mahankala, their genesis too is closely linked to Buddhist teachings and the protector deity Mahankala. Or, as was explained to Parshuram Tamang, Gompo Nakpo Cyagi also refers to a monastery above Lamusango in northern Sindhu Palchok, known as Gompa Nakpo Cyagi. However, the name of the ancestor Hunga Raja, spelled h’un gah ra dza, poses a riddle. Hunga Raja has also been described to me as a ‘powerful lama’ who had left Tibet. In one version, he is said to have come from the south (or he was a learned lama who had received his Buddhist teachings in the south?) and became the teacher of many Tamang priests. Hunga Raja, too, is cited by the Tamang shamans as one of their tutelary deities. At the time of Hunga Raja, so it is told, the Tamangs dispersed to many parts of Nepal. A Tamang priest – Lasang Lama
(Gole) from Dapcha – even described him as the king (gle) of Dagar, meaning *Brag-dkar rta-so*, the sacred cave of Milarepa above Kyirolong. Further clues might be given by the written genealogy (phorab) from Doromba, which lists the following first ancestors (meme) of the Yonjon: the phorab starts with *meme lha mi mu rjes btsan po* [...] *meme ru ta chen po, meme ro lang deo, meme ru dbang phyug chen po, meme ru btsan rgyal po, meme h’un gah ra dza*, and is followed by a list of a further 79 names. The names overlap with those of other Tamang genealogies (e.g. the Moktan). *Meme ru dbang phyug chen po* here is placed fourth in the Yonjon genealogy and may well connect it to Trakar Daso Tulku Chokyi Wangchuk (*Brag-dkar rta so sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug*) (1755), a Buddhist saint important for the diffusion of byangter teachings in northwest Nepal, who travelled from southern Tibet (Mangyul and Kyirolong) in the late 18th century. The Tamangs of *ksiangku* (the main Yonjon settlement in Sailung) follow the Byangter teachings of the Nyingmapa school. Hunga Raja is also said to have built the eight Buddhist monasteries of Sailung! In yet another version he had eight sons who founded the first eight Buddhist monasteries there.

The name of the clan Ghising is spelled *gi zhing* (another spelling is *bgyis shing*), which may refer to ‘happy field’ (Tib. dge zhing?). The ancestor Gobkiu Rinpoche (?) came down to Sergang Gyalsa, the ‘kingdom of Sergang’ (Tib. dBus gSer khang?), which in one text of the ‘Eighteen Great Clans’ (Ruichen Cyopge) is written *gsers dgo rgyalsa*, the ‘golden capital dgo’ (go - south?), and in yet another version *gsers dgo kha*, possibly the ‘golden door’, or even ‘the golden mountain’ (Tib. gsers gangs rgyal mtshan)? Their lineage protector is Changri Jyoho, the Jyobo (or in Tib. Jo bo) of the ‘Northern Mountains’; in another text (Ruichen Cyopge) is specified as the ‘god of the pure red young lamb’, *lug gu btsang gmar gi lha*. Now the ancestor in an oral version is named Saipala - meaning Saipala of the Yarlung Valley in Tibet? of Sergi Gompa, the ‘golden monastery’, which closely resembles the ‘golden southern door’ or ‘southern golden capital’, all of which might refer to the famous Tibetan myth of the arrival of the first mythical Tibetan king on the field in Tsethang – which again may be taken as references to the early Tibetan kingdom and the mythical beginning of Buddhism in Tibet.

A possible translation of the ancestor Saibu Rinpoche of the
Brokchan clan – the nomads (Tib. ‘brog pa) who had returned to Tibet – could be the epithet ‘precious son of the earth’ (Tib. sa’i bu rin po che) who ‘came down’ at the ‘Tsakri fortress’, Tsakri Tsong (?). The lineage protector (pholha) is Dong Mar Tsen, ‘the red btsan of the lDong’. According to Steinmann (1987a: 211), this is also the Bomjan’s pholha, a ‘brother clan’ of the Yonjon; according to their legend they arrived from Nili Brakar, which Steinmann claims was a monastery in Kyirong.

And now, the Bal clan: as mentioned earlier, they are the main clan to settle south of the Sailung region on the hill of Timal. Local legend says that their ancestor fled from Tibet as a baby hidden in a basket of wool. Bal-po in Tibetan also means Nepal, specifically the Kathmandu Valley. The Bal frequently use the clan name Dong. Their place of origin in the present text is called Rangla Ghandiri – or could this be Rongla Ghandiri, i.e.: Ghandiri of the Rong, the lowland people? Now if we substitute for the place of origin, ancestry and protector of theBal those mentioned for the Dong (since they themselves refer to the same root), we come back – like the closing of the circle – to similar names as mentioned earlier among the Moktan, Mugu or Mako: The Dong came down to thos rmur sku sa and the Dong’s pholha is rmur sku lha.

In summary, the unit of the five clans embraces the following aspects: with the Moktan appears the reference to the divine kingdom of the ancient Tibetan clan dmu, the line of the wife of the mythical Tibetan king gNya’ khri btsan po; with the Yonjon, the four-armed Buddhist protector Mahankala is introduced, a reference to the monastery Gompo Nakpo Cyagi above Lamusango in northern Sindhu Palchok, from where their Buddhist lineage may have been derived, and to the Nyingma treasure-finder Trakar Daso Tulku Chökyi Wangchuk (1775–1837); with the Ghising we encounter another mention of the mythical Tibetan king of the Yarlung valley and possibly a link to the kingdom of Bhutan further west; whereas the Bals’ name of origin – ‘fortress Tsakri’, Tsakri Tsong (Dzar Dzong near Muktinath?), and Ghandiri of the Rong – is ambiguous, meaning either the Tibetan Dong or a lowland people.

The dating of the arrival of the Tamang clans in Sailung and Timal remains difficult, whereas the foundation of the scheme of the five clans of the Kukpa Khachyoi text, the khe nga, seems to be connected to the arrival of the Buddhist Nyingmapa byangter lineage in
Sailung. Early Buddhist influence, though, in the Sailung region, began with the founding of the Buddhist monastery of Chari Ghyang (in Charikot) by a Buddhist master possibly linked to the Kagyudpa and Drigungpa schools in Lapchi, which since the 14th/15th century was a thriving Buddhist centre. The following myth which tells of the origin of the monastery is reminiscent of the solitary meditation practised by Milarepa and his followers:

According to the myth, on the hill of the present Chari Ghyang in ancient times there used to live a lama devoted to the gods Akamchchar and Bakamchar. While he was deep in meditation the days passed by and he completely forgot himself. The lama meditated for many, many years. During that time his beard grew long and a bird built its nest in it. So his name became Chari Lama, meaning the 'priest with the bird's nest'. Later a gompa was built here in memory of this lama and was named Chari Ghyang.

At the end of the Kukpa Khachyoi text is an interesting list of place names which largely corresponds to the list presented in a written genealogy (phorab) of the Moktan clan. Though this is quite a recent list of Moktan settlements in Nepal, it partly suggests the route of their migration and partly the spreading of a Buddhist lineage among the Tamangs. As at the very beginning of the text, here too Yurung Thangthung is mentioned first, meaning Yumbu Lhakhang of the ancient Tibetan kings. Next are named Kichatar (?), Trisulganga (the mountain at the Trisuli river – or Gosainkund, the source of Trisuli?), Nuwakot (the old fortress), Najakabitas (?), Thangsin (below Kakani in the Likhu Khola valley), Shiva Mantan (near Dolalghat), Hukse Sikarpur (?), Yurgu (near Balephi, south of Barabhise), Chautara (capital of Dhading district to the west), Phulping, Tangdam Phaltu (Thagam in northern Dhading), Listi (the old toll station south of Kuti), Dungnam (Duguna north of Listi, the fortress at the Tibetan border below Kuti built by the Ranas), Narayanthan (close to Kottimal, the old capital of Timal), Barabhise, Dabi Tirtire (?), Tautali (on the eastern bank of the Sun Kosi near Barabhise), Boza (Boch near Charikot), Makaibari (near Charikot), Charikot, Dolakha, Jilumati. Finally come the settlements of the Moktan in the regions of Sailung and Timal: Burunga, Risiangku, Dhading, Sailung, Alampur, Doromba, Salu, Bhara Timal, Gorpani.
(near Pongdi), Syongto, and Bangtil. From this listing, we can discern a west–east migratory movement of the Moktan from the districts Dhading (west of Kathmandu) and Sindhu Palchok to Sailung.

As hypothetical as these comparisons may have been, the coming of the present Tamang Buddhist teachings to Sailung and Timal may well be connected to the spread of the bgyang terma teachings of the Nyingmapa school related to the treasure-finder Trakar Daso Tulku Chökyi Wangchuk with the centre in Dagar Taso north of Kyirong, via Yolmo and Sindhu Palchok. This, too, may well have been connected to the guthis granted to Buddhist masters who renovated the Svayambhunath stupa with the consent of the Malla kings. The most recent gompa, Rajvir Gompa built in 1972 near Thulo Sailung, shows a re-emergence of the Drukpa Kagyud (Tib. ‘Brug pa bkra’rgyud) school on Sailung, also stating a continuing importance of this Buddhist line in the present Nepalese state.

Other local legends reveal further clues concerning the past of Sailung. One legend tells of neighbouring powers that threatened the Tamangs of Sailung. Near the Tamang village of Phedbu, a small temple named Phunde Mandir is said to commemorate a victory. Local tradition holds that it is dedicated to a man of the Thokar clan, an important clan in the Gosainkund area and a brother-clan of the Moktan, who won a fight against a Newar from Dolakha and a man of the Gole clan. What is interesting in this legend is the alliance between the Newar and the Gole, who, in my opinion, had earlier played a significant role further to the west and north of the Kathmandu Valley (near Namo Buddha and in the Indrawati Valley of Sindhu Palchok). Dolakha, to the north of Sailung, had, since the 14th century, been an important fortified city under the sovereignty of the Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley. How far their territory extended southwards is not documented, but this legend affirms that it had an influence on the Sailung region. Other local stories clearly tell of a former Tamang kingdom, the kingdom at Talejugang of the Ghising. Other legends mention a Golmo king whose domain was supposed to have been on the southern bank of the Tsauri Khola. He is said to have fought against the Ghising king of Talejugang. The Ghising king ruled from his own fortress (photang, Tib. pho brang), the remains of which can still be seen near the village of Doromba. In the late 18th century, during the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the kingdom of the Ghising in Talejugang is said to
have been destroyed. The ‘Golmo king’ in Doromba was explained as a Pahare, and the name ‘Golmo’ could derive from an ancient Newar term for ‘fortress’, thus suggesting their link to the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley. In a legend told in Sailung, ‘Golmo king’ is also associated with the arrival of other ethnic groups. He is said to have had seven sons, who were the ancestors of the Thami, Majhi, and Pahare – that is, of both the Kiranti and Indo-Nepalese groups. The Golmo Raja is also a well-known tutelary deity of shamans. Temples dedicated to Golmo Raja and Golmo Rani are found near the village of Bulung in northern Dolakha district and in Manegaon in northern Sindhu Palchok, and there are certainly others. In both places he is said to have ruled as an ancient local king and remnants of a brick fortress still exist.

New Ordering of the ‘Lords of the Earth’ in the Nepali Kingdom

After the last Nepal–Tibet war (1854–56), the history of Sailung took a decisive turn. Many of the Tamang guthi lands were confiscated and given either to army members from the Hindu Chhetris or to Magars as a reward for their service to the Gorkha rulers of Nepal. Six Tamang Buddhist gompas of Sailung (Chari Ghayang in Charikut, Risiangku Ghayang, Bangtali Ghayang, Pongdi Ghayang, Nagarje Ghayang and Dongma Ghayang), which during the reign of Rana Bahadur Shaha (1832–55) had been given as guthi donations to Deva Dharma Lama of the Drukpa Kagyud school from Bhutan, shortly afterwards under the rule of Jang Bahadur Rana (1846–77), were given either to Hindu religious institutions or to members of the army: Chari Ghayang came under the guthi of Dolakha Bhimsen, Risiangku Ghayang under the guthi of Tautali Mai, Bangtali Ghayang (?), Pongdi Ghayang was given to the Basnet family of a military officer, Nagarje Ghayang to unknown persons, and Dongma Ghayang was given to the guthi of Kottimal in Bhara Timal (according to documents in possession of Parshuram Tamang, Kathmandu). The government had feared that during the Nepal–Tibet war of 1854–56, they might have allied with the Tibetans. This transfer of land rights also meant that the Tamangs offering rituals to the land gods were now directed either to the guthis of the Hindu temples of Bhimsen and Tautali Mai or to government officials. Only during the first democratic government in Nepal in 1951 were these guthis
returned to the Tamang gompas.

Today only the name of the sibda, together with the myth, remain as evidence that Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo once might have been the main protector of the entire Sailung region. Nowadays his temple and domain is confined to the village of Burunga and only in legend to the summit of Thulo Sailung. Every other Tamang village of Sailung has a sibda deity of its own, where the people carry out their individual sibda offering rituals. The sibda of Burunga, although this temple still is the largest, has become one of many. Today the offering rituals (sibda choppa, Tib. gzhi bdag mchod pa) to the individual village earth-deities, as also to Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo, reflect a more recent political ordering: they are carried out in a hierarchical order reflecting Gorkha supremacy. The rituals begin with the offering to the so-called Gorkha deity of the Nepali government; only after that may the offerings to the other sibda deities start: on Saturday, to Tangjyo Mai, the protectress of the former district capital; on Tuesday, to the Risiangku sibda neda, on Thursday, to the Burunga sibda neda; on Friday, to the Bangtali sibda neda, and so forth.

Even within the temples dedicated to the earth deities, the same hierarchy now applies. In Risiangku, for example, eleven sibda deities manifested in stone are stuck in the earth in a row in a small covered temple (lha jyang) situated on the hill above the village. The central and largest stone is explained as the head sibda (mul sibda), known as the ‘sibda of the hill-peoples’ (Nep. pahare jhatko sibda), or the Gorkha deity (Nep. Gorkha deuta). The next is Tangjyo Mai; only then comes the Risiangku sibda. The other sibdas are classified as ‘sibdas who are friends of the Harasiddhi’ (Nep. Harasiddhiko sati sibda) – reminders of a former Newar presence? In the month of May/June, the offering ceremony at the temple is led by the head dhami, the Tamang ritual specialist for fertility rituals, of the Yonjon clan.
The tridents, attributes of Mahadev/Shiva have been piled up by generations of pilgrims to Kalingchok. The waterhole of Seti Devi and Mahadev is located under this mound of tridents. In the distant background is the double peak of Gauri Shankar.
Kalingchok and Thulo Sailung: a ‘Female’ and a ‘Male’ Mountain in Tamang Tradition

North of Thulo Sailung lies another popular destination for pilgrimage: the sacred mountain of Kalingchok. Tamang popular tradition sees Kalingchok as the abode of the goddess Kalingchok Mai. A quadrangular stone on its small rocky summit is believed to be the manifestation of her fierce aspect as Kali Mai, while a small pond hidden underneath a giant pile of small and large tridents houses her peaceful form – Seti Devi in union with Mahadev. The Tamangs assign Kalingchok Mai to the ‘seven sisters’ (mabun) and classify her as one of the mother-goddesses, the mamos (Tib. ma mo). On two full-moon nights, in July/August and October/November (Nep. kartik purnima), the villagers with their traditional healers, the bompos, ascend the mountain. There the bompos – so they say – unite with the goddess Kalingchok Mai, or as Höfer aptly describes it, enter with the goddess through the drumbeats into a ‘unio mystica’ to gain life-force and healing power for the living. Pilgrims add further copper and iron tridents to the pile, and offer the blood of female goats to Kali Mai. Before leaving, some of the Tamang men stab a knife (Tib. chu gri) into the earth of Kalingchok Mai, as they say, to ‘pin her down’.

Thulo Sailung, in contrast, is regarded by the Tamangs as the abode of the territorial deity Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo, ‘Sailung’s White Male Lord of the Earth’, who in their Buddhist interpretation is renamed as the ‘lord of the sacred land’, nyegi dagpo. At the chorten located on its green summit, Tamang Buddhist priests perform ‘mandala offerings’ for the better rebirth of the souls of the deceased, thus confirming Thulo Sailung as a sacred Buddhist site and as an abode of the souls of their ancestors. Two caves, one below the summit and one at Sanu Sailung, are regarded as the seats of Seti Devi and Mahadev. It is here that Tamang laymen and shamans spend the full-moon nights of July/August and December/January. However, on Sailung, the shamans have surrendered to Buddhist dominance and refrain from offering blood to the fierce female deities.
At the beginning of the 20th century the capital of Dolakha district was shifted from Dolakha town to Charikot. When the new road to Jiri was built in 1976 the center of administration and the bazar were shifted from old Charikot to a new market along the paved road to Jiri.
The rituals on these two mountains, for the Tamangs, form a complementary male-female ritual unit; at the same time they reflect differing accommodations of the shamanic tradition resulting from the rivalry between the two great religions, Buddhism and Hinduism. Kalingchok is primarily regarded as a fierce female deity closely related to the Hindu pantheon. Popular tradition emphasises her violent and bloodthirsty aspect in which the shamanic animal sacrifice for the benefit of the living is considered essential. By contrast, Thulo Sailung is seen as the seat of a male territorial deity and as a Buddhist pilgrimage site from which the fierce bloodthirsty female deities are banned. The chorten on its summit stress the mountain’s role as a Buddhist realm where the souls of the deceased are propitiated.

Geographic Unity of Kalingchok and Sailung

Kalingchok, with its small rocky treeless peak at 3,810 m, is located in Dolakha district, south of the Lapchi Khang Range. Adjoining to the south is the region of Sailung with, as its highest summit, Thulo Sailung (3,300 m). Moreover, Kalingchok and Thulo Sailung are the summits of two neighbouring mountain massifs with a common natural boundary delineated by two major rivers springing from the Tibetan plateau – the Sun Kosi forming the western and southern, and the Tama Kosi the eastern boundary. The Tama Kosi (as Bhote Kosi) flows through the valley of Lapchi, passes Kalingchok and Sailung to the east, and finally joins the Sun Kosi to the southeast of Sailung. A partial boundary between Kalingchok and Sailung is provided by a tributary of the Tama Kosi, the Charanawathi Khola, which has its source on Kalingchok.

Both mountain summits, Kalingchok and Thulo Sailung, are today within easy reach of the Kathmandu Valley: Kalingchok is accessible by the main trail starting from Barabhise, a new market town on the Arniko Highway. Both can be reached from the road leading to Jiri. They, too, are located on former important trading routes that connected the Kathmandu Valley with the Tibetan plateau. The old route from Kathmandu to Kalingchok passed through the Newar town of Dhulikhel, the Tamang villages Pongdi and Risiangku in the region Sailung, and the old town Dolakha;
from there it continued over Kalingchok, along the mountain ridge and further northwards to Kuti and Nyalam in Tibet. Dolakha in the past was the political and economic centre at the crossing of several trading routes linking the Kathmandu Valley with the regions located further to the east, and Tibet with Kathmandu and the Ganges plain in the south.

**History and Ethnic Composition**

The former principality of Dolakha, located at the southeastern edge of the Kalingchok massif, has, since the 13th century, formed the political, economic and religious centre of the present expanse of Dolakha district. Today a run-down 'queen’s palace', many temples, stupas and large brick houses with elaborately carved windows bear testimony to its great past. The inscriptions found in its main temples – Bhimsen temple and the Devikot temple of Tripura Sundari – in the old town paint a clear picture of the religious structure of former Newar Hindu rule whose monarchs made rich donations to the temples.¹

The principality of Dolakha in the 14th century became a vassal state of the Malla kingdom in the Kathmandu Valley and its rulers supported the Mallas’ territorial expansion to the north. From the 16th century onward, the Malla kings dominated the areas of the upper Sun Kosi valley up to Listi and later as far as the trading point Kuti.² Though small, the principality of Dolakha prospered through its trade with Tibet. It did, indeed, become an important trading post between Kathmandu and Tibet, where even silver coins were minted for the Tibetan estates as well as for the Malla kingdom.³ To intensify their relations with their Tibetan customers, the Newar Hindu rulers at that time generously supported the Buddhist religion on their terrain.

Here too, the centralistic and theocratic rule of the 5th Dalai Lama’s government, established in 1642, brought significant changes to the political strategies of the Newar rulers.⁴ Pratap Malla (1641–1674), king of the Kathmandu Valley, for the first time presented official land donations, guthi, in Dolakha to his own (Hindu) administrators, as documented in inscriptions in the Bhimsen temple, and reduced his support to Buddhist masters in this Himalayan border region.⁵ And, according to Miller (1979: 110), in 1730 King
Jagajjaya Malla (1722–1736) finally gained control of the upper Tama Kosi Valley where he appointed a Hindu administrator (Nep. guthi - yar) in Deolang as the local chief and head of the local religious association and made land donations - guthi. Jagajjaya Malla as well is said to have taken steps to control some ‘rebellious Bhotiyas’ in the northern part of Dolakha district ‘who were building forts and killing cows’. By then, the valleys northeast of Kalingchok near Bigu and Bulung (south of Deolang) had become important for their silver, iron and copper mines. Another wave of major changes for the Buddhist Tamang population was caused by the second Nepal–Tibet war (1854–56). Because of fears that the Tamangs would side with Tibet, many of their Buddhist landholdings (guthis) in the regions of Kalingchok and Sailung were transferred to the Hindu temple in Dolakha, dedicated to Bhimsen.

One inscription found in the temple of Bhimsen tells of the earlier composition of the ethnic groups: Newars, Thamis and Senja – the Newar ethnonym ‘Senja’ referring to Tamangs, Sherpas and Tibetans. The earliest settlements of the Kalingchok region, though, go back to the Tibeto-Burman Thamis (Thangmi) and Sunuwar people of the Kiranti language group. The main villages of the Thamis at present are close to the town of Dolakha, which in their oral history they claim to have founded. Today, as well, in the area of Kalingchok as in Sailung, the Indo-Nepalese Chhetri and Brahmin form the majority of the local population. The Tamangs are the second largest ethnic group, followed by the Thami, Sunuwar, Newar, and the untouchable occupational castes Kami, Damai, Sarki and Majhi. They all revere Kalingchok and Thulo Sailung as sacred mountains.

The earliest Tamang clans said to have settled in Dolakha district are the Rumba (today mainly in Laduk) and the Pakhrin, also named Pain, of the village of Bulung further to the north. The Tamang clans Moktan, Gangthan, Yonjon, Ghising and their brother clans are linked to the history of the clans of the ‘five ancestors’, the khe nga, of Sailung and Timal. The oral history tells us that they entered Nepal from Kuti, moved to northern Sindhu Palchok and then crossed the Sun Kosi. Some settled near Kalingchok, but most continued eastward to Sailung and Timal.
The bompos’ paraphernalia

Kalingchok summit, 1993

The bompos arrive on Kalingchok with their drums (*nga*), lances (*tarwar*) and sacred vase (*bhumpa*). The handle of the drum has the shape of a ritual knife, the *phurba*; and the drumstick the form of a snake.
The Festival on Kalingchok: Kalingchok Jatra

Both Miller (1979) and Macdonald (1983a) have described the Kalingchok festival (Nep. jatra) taking place at the summer full-moon of July/August. The following account is of the festival at the full-moon of October/November, as celebrated by the Tamangs in 1994 and 1995.

Together with Tamang villagers from Makaibari and their shamans, I began the pilgrimage at Karidunga, a small market town near a devastating quarry of limestone on the road to Jiri. Many of the villagers took their small children along. The Tamang bompos were dressed in their long white pleated gowns, some merely in white trousers and shirts. They wore a headdress with peacock feathers and porcupine quills bound by a long red and white ribbon; they carried necklaces of rudracche beads and a chain with bells across their shoulders. As on all their pilgrimages, the Tamang bompos continuously beat their drums holding it using the three-faced ritual knife (phurba) as a handle. The bamboo drumstick has the form of a snake. They walked or rather danced up the mountain in a three-step rhythm. One of the men carried the trident (trisul), another the lance (tarwar), and a young unmarried girl the sacred vase (blumpa). On this full-moon night most of the pilgrims were Tamangs, some Thamis and a few Sherpas and Chhetris.10 We soon passed through dense forests and the grazing lands of Sherpa families. At a spot they called ‘sixteen khros’ (Nep., approximately 32 miles) the summit of Kalingchok could be seen for the first time. Here they greeted the deity Kalingchok Mai by bowing and drumming in the peak’s direction and honoured her by placing small offerings on a stone. After several hours of walking, we reached a valley where a small brook is fed by an additional spring, recognisable by the rising bubbles. This spring is explained as the ‘tail’ of Kalingchok Mai. The pilgrims sprinkled themselves with water from the spring before crossing the brook, the symbolic borderline of Kalingchok Mai’s ‘inner domain’. At dawn we reached the valley just below the summit of Kalingchok through a rock gate adorned with copper tridents, known as the ‘copper gate’. At this natural gateway the pilgrims stuck more tridents into the rock. In the centre of the valley stands a white Buddhist chorten and nearby a few basic lodges and teashops. When we arrived, they were already packed
Pilgrimage to Kalingchok, 1993

top: The 'copper gate' is adorned with numerous copper tridents. It leads to the valley below the last ascent to Kalingchok. Here the view towards the Mahabharata range and Thulo Sailung to the south.

above: The valley below Kalingchok with several lodges where most of the pilgrims stay for the fullmoon night. In the centre is a white chorten. Photograph Ruth Stracha
Pilgrimage to Kalingchok, 1993

top: On a chilly morning after the fullmoon night the pilgrims walk to the top of Kalingchok (center, top of photograph) to bring their offerings to Seti Devi, Mahadev, Kali Mai, and Ganesh.

above: When the pilgrims arrive at the small rocky top of the mountain, they first circumambulate it three times, while drumming and singing.
Bhagawati Kunda
Kalingchok summit, 1993

Piles of copper tridents and bells above the pond of Mahadev and Seti Devi offered by generations of pilgrims.

*Photograph Ruth Stracha*
Pilgrims leaving the small and rocky summit
Kalingchok summit, 1993
Photograph Ruth Stracha
The *bompo* plays his drum on top of the child's head to transfer the godly power onto the child for its wellbeing. After the child has been dressed in new clothes the *bompo* places the blessing (*tikka*) on the child's forehead. In the background can be seen the pile of tridents.
Kali Mai
Kalingchok summit, 1993

A goat is sacrificed and its blood poured over the stone representing Kali Mai.
The Buddhist priest performs a jinsek (life-force strengthening) ritual for a sick man. The man's wife is seen on the right assisting the priest.
with hundreds of pilgrims who had come for the full-moon night. Other pilgrims spent the night huddling together in a cave below the summit. All night long, the men and women sang alternating songs and the bompos invoked the goddess Kali Mai with the help of their drums. They said that Kali Mai ‘comes into their body’.

At daybreak began the final climb. From the lodges it takes one hour to reach the iron bridge that leads to the rocky top of Kalingchok from the west. A constant stream of groups of pilgrims, each led by bompos, circumambulated the summit clockwise three times, then stopped in front of the large pile of tridents with the small pond underneath. Hindus know the pond as Bhagwatikund. This pond, more of a waterhole, has a natural rock on its northern side, is fenced on the east and west by stonewalls and left open to the south. Thousands of copper tridents have been piled on the wooden construction above the pond by many generations of pilgrims. Tamangs consider this rock and pond as the seats of Mahadev and Seti Devi and name the rock Mahadeuthan. At this sacred site the pilgrims added further copper tridents and offer flowers, cows’ milk, coins, uncooked rice, vermilion powder and butter, and lighted butter lamps. The bompos played their drums in front of the Mahadeuthan, went into a trance holding their drums horizontally in a free space below the tridents and above the pond. The adults removed the old, worn-out clothes of the children and dressed them in new, ‘pure’ garments. Next, the bompos placed the offerings of rice grains and red powder lying on the Mahadeuthan on their drums and from there onto the heads of the children as a blessing of the gods. They applied a tikka (Nep.) blessing to the forehead of every participant. Afterwards the pilgrims, with the bompos at the head of the procession playing their drums, proceeded to the stone of Kali Mai. The seat of Kali Mai is a flat quadrangular rock to the southeast of the summit. Here the bompos sacrificed the blood of the female goats that they had pushed, pulled, or even carried up to the mountaintop. The goats were slaughtered by a single cut through the throat, and their blood was poured over the stone of Kali Mai. The head was separated from the body and the tip of the tail of the dead animal was placed in its mouth. At the same time other bompos and men sacrificed a cock to the god Ganesh, whose seat is a vertical stone slab to the northeast. After the animal sacrifices, all the pilgrims exchanged tikkas on their foreheads and flower
garlands, according to seniority and social hierarchy. All the while we had a spectacular view of the white double peaks of Gauri Shankar. The sacred vase was filled with water from the Bhagawatikund to take home as a blessing from the goddess. Before the procession left the summit towards the east, one of the men took a knife from his belt and thrust the blade into the ground where the descending path began.

At the same time, almost in the midst of the shaman’s drumming and blood offerings, a Tamang Buddhist priest from Makaibari performed a very different ritual which he named jinsek (Tib. sbyin-sreg). He explained that it was a ‘Rudri’ ritual with purification through incense (Tib. bsang) and water (tui). He performed it on behalf of a Tamang household, of which only one woman was present to assist him at the ceremony. He further explained that the ritual completed the setting of the pole with the prayerflag, luntar (Tib. rlung ta) by the woman’s house. She added that her husband had been very ill. The priest drew a mandala (kilkhor) on the ground and stuck a sprig of juniper (payu) into each corner of the mandala. In the centre he built a small pyre of wooden branches. Then he sat on the ground behind a wooden board on which he had placed the offerings: a bowl of milk, a sacred vase with ‘holy water’, tui chu, and his Buddhist text titled Domang. The woman placed four plates with the flour of different grains (sadbiu), uncooked rice, bread (sel gyeng), and fruit at the four corners of the mandala drawing. The priest recited from the text Domang and lit the pyre. While the fire was burning the priest sent the woman to sprinkle flour, sadbiu, mixed with butter onto the fire as an offering. Next she poured holy water from the sacred vase into the milk bowl. Then the priest poured the mixture of milk and holy water back into the sacred vase. At the same time the woman added flour and butter to the pyre to keep the fire burning. Finally the woman carried the milk bowl with the mixture of milk and holy water to the Mahadeuthan, and poured the liquid into the pond.

The Benevolent Mother Goddess, her Sisters and her Conquest

Tamang pilgrims regard the mountain Kalingchok above all as an emanation of Kalingchok Mai. On their ascent, when they get the first glimpse of the summit, they bow in the direction of the moun-
tain as a greeting to the goddess in person.

According to a legend told by a Tamang from the village Makaibari in 1994, Kalingchok Mai decided to come down from her snowy abode on the Tibetan border to restore the cosmic order so that the people would be able to live on her terrain:

When sun and moon were rising at the same time, when all the vegetation dried out and every living being died, Kali Devi came by herself from Tshering Jomo, a white mountain in Tibet, to Kalingchok because she knew that people will live there who will bring her offerings.

In popular Tamang belief, the Himalayan peaks with the name Jomo are considered as the abodes of female deities. Moreover, the Himalayas in the Tamang language in general are called Jyomo Gangri. The mountain of Tshering Jomo can be seen clearly from Kalingchok: on arriving at the summit, the majestic white twin peaks of Gauri Shankar come into sight. The Tamang Buddhist priest, who performed the *jinsek* ritual, explained Gauri Shankar as the residence of the ‘Five Sisters of Long Life’ (Tib. *Tshe ring mched nga*) who gather at the five lakes on Lapchi Khang Range. Kalingchok Mai is one of them. According to this legend, like the ‘Five Sisters of Long Life’, she is the precondition for life and her arrival re-established the cyclic order and made the territory of Kalingchok suitable for human habitation. For the Tamang *bonpos* and pilgrims, Kalingchok Mai is also considered to be the eldest of a group of ‘seven sisters’ or ‘seven mothers’, the *mabun*, with their seats in separate locations. For them she is the most powerful of all the seven mother goddesses. Kali Mai of Dakshin Kali, south of Kathmandu, is said to be the youngest, suggesting a divine affiliation with the power in the Kathmandu Valley – a reminder of the former political relations between Dolakha and the Malla kingdom. The remaining five sisters were unknown to the present Tamang informants. Miller (1979: 10-12), quoting a Newar from Dolakha, gives Tripura Sundari from the Devikut temple, Bal Kumari, and Bajra Jogini – all in old Dolakha town – as three of her sisters. The others – irrespective of the number seven – he named are: Mahankali to the north in Charanwati valley, Kamala Mai at the confluence of Gurumti Khola and Tama Kosi near Suri village, Kalika Mai in the valley of Dabi Khola to the south-west of
Kalingchok, Baidi Maithan above the Thami village of Piskar, and Taouthali Mai on the western flank, and others – all in the vicinity of the mountain massif Kalingchok as though indicating a union of the Devis’ realms, maybe the domain of the former principality of Dolakha.

When the pilgrims reached the summit of Kalingchok, they first circumambulated all the divine manifestations. After that they visited the rock and pond buried under the enormous pile of tridents. The first god the Tamang pilgrims and bompos brought their offerings to was Mahadev. Then they filled the sacred vase with water from the pond to take home as Kalingchok Mai’s blessing. More tridents, the weapon of Mahadev, were added. Only then did the pilgrims proceed to perform the blood offerings at the stone platform to Kali Mai, the threatening aspect of the mother goddess whose fierce powers are believed to cause various diseases, at the same time as healing and strengthening the ‘life-force’ of children and adults. The pilgrims dipped a finger into the thick blood on the stone and smeared it on their forehead as her blessing. The last of the deities to receive an offering was Ganesh – in the Hindu pantheon the commander of the attendants of Shiva, the gan, and the ‘remover of obstacles’, and, according to Miller (1979), for the Thami an ancestral figure in the form of sikari (Nep.), a mythical and ancestral hunter. Finally, before the pilgrims and the bompos left the summit, a Tamang man stabbed a knife into the earth to ‘pin down the goddess’, so that, as he explained, ‘she will not be able to follow them to their homes and harm them’.

In accordance with the ritual sequence, the Hindu priests point out the higher hierarchical status of Mahadev/Shiva, even though Kalingchok Mai is given priority by laymen and shamans. Rarely, but nonetheless, the mountain of Kalingchok is classified by some Hindus as a male mountain, as the ‘seat of Mahadev’, Mahadevthan, devaluing the female aspect of the male-female union present in its sacred interpretation. Even the Tamang Buddhist priest from Makaibari who performed the jinsek ritual on the summit explained that Kalingchok was conquered by Padmasambhava, and that the deities of the mountain were subjugated to Buddhist doctrine. He also called this a Buddhist offering ritual for the strengthening of the life-force of living beings, ‘Rudri ritual’, indicating that the offering is made to the Buddhas of Rudra.
A Tamang pilgrim 'pinning down' Kali Mai

*Kalingchok summit, 1993*

A pilgrim rams his knife into the earth as it is believed that this will pin down Kali Mai and prevent her from coming down to the village and harming its people.

*Photograph Ruth Stracha*
David N. Gellner (1992: 342) explains the 'Rudri ritual' as belonging to the Nyingma Mahayoga tradition and as a deliberate inversion of a Saivite ritual. In the Hindu tradition, Rudra is alternatively identified with various demons – the preta, yaksa, raksasa,6 and in the Tibetan tradition with the demon srin po. In the Tibetan Buddhist text Padma Thanyig of the 14th century, Rudra is described as lying on his back, like the defeated Tibetan demoness (Tib. srin mo) who represents the Tibetan soil and holds the 'Wheel of Life' (Tib. srid pa'i khor lo) – a well known theme of the transformation of the demon and demoness into divinities corresponding to the transformation of 'wild nature' into a civilised and sacred territory. In this concept, the Buddha of Rudra becomes the 'Master' of the three realms: of gods, men and demons. His counterforce – or more aptly - according to the Hindu concept - his divine energy, shakti – is considered to be his wife Kali (in Tibetan Dus mch'an ma).17

Even though both 'great' traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism have conquered or appeased the fierce and demonic aspect of the live-bestowing goddess and stress the male dominance of the female-male union, the ritual practice of the laypeople and shamans on the rocky summit of Kalingchok is still rooted in the ancient concept, in which the female forces are thought of as the fertile sources of the earth, on whom they, like many generations of pilgrims before them, place a trident to symbolically re-enact the 'opening' of this female source to let the water flow, so as to ensure fertility and health.

Her Mighty Brother Bhimsen of Dolakha

In the ancient town of Dolakha lies the temple housing another mighty local deity: Bhimsen, who embodies strength and power. The entire population of the Dolakha district, as well as the Tamangs as far as Timal, consider him as the most powerful 'territorial' deity, to whom they offer the blood of many male goats and cocks. For the Newars from Dolakha and the Kathmandu Valley, he has become the 'protector' of their trade. In the local belief he, too, is considered to be the 'younger brother' of Kalingchok Mai. A small shrine heaped with tridents is dedicated to her on the western wall, which surrounds the temple of Bhimsen.

The name Bhimsen derives from Bhima, one of the five Pandavas
of the Hindu Mahabharata epic. According to the Newar saying, he came to Dolakha during the time of their secret exile and is connected with the introduction of the Hindu religion. Bhimsen’s stone manifestation in the centre of the temple is also called Bhimesvar and, like the rock and pond on the summit of Kalingchok, is explained as the united power of Rudra and Bhagawati. The most striking feature is that this stone is known to ‘sweat’: liquid is said to occasionally ooze from the stone. This ‘sweat’ is taken to indicate a political crisis in the kingdom of Nepal – be it the death of a king or a threat to the power of the royal family. Bhimsen of Dolakha is thus considered as a ‘protector’ of the rule of Nepal’s kings, but also as a voice of the god’s discontent. Bhimesvar is said to have ‘sweated’ in 1949, just before the Rana prime ministers lost their ruling power, and also before 1990, when fierce demonstrations ended the authoritarian rule of the monarch. The chief district officer of Dolakha himself – so the local people tell – at that time had to worship the statue of Bhimesvar, and the ‘sweat’ of Bhimsen was carried in a cotton pad to the royal court in Kathmandu for sacrificial offerings to appease the god.

The Tamangs, too, claim Bhimsen as their ‘protector’. Some Tamang informants in Dolakha district even went as far as saying that Dolakha was originally a Tamang territory, although the Thami are generally acknowledged to be the indigenous population of the region, later subjugated by the Newars. A Tamang man told a myth, according to which Bhimsen was discovered by a member of the Moktan clan:18

A man from the Tamang clan Moktan possessed several chickens. On the spot of the Bhimesvarthan there was a tree and every night one of his chicken slept in this tree. The people were astonished about the unusual habit of this chicken and took a closer look. Thereupon the chicken explained to the people that it was a manifestation of the god Bhimsen.

According to numerous inscriptions in the temple of Bhimsen, in the past much land was donated in the name of Bhimsen. In the mid 19th century during the Nepal–Tibet war, as mentioned above, the guthi of the Bhimsen temple received many land grants formerly donated to the Buddhist gompas – such as the guthi land of Chari.
Ghyang and part of the guthis of the Buddhist monasteries in the Sailung region. He thus truly became a mighty local ‘landlord’. In that sense the Tamangs living east of the Sun Kosi classify him as a sibda deity, ‘lord of the earth’ who has gained ‘authority’ over the regions of Dolakha, Sailung, as far as Timal. In their village rituals, Bhimsen of Dolakha indeed does have the characteristics of a sibda deity and, like Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo of Sailung, is included in offerings to the sibdas to ensure the fertility of the fields. He too is worshipped through the central pillar at the construction of every new house.

According to another Tamang myth, recorded in Risiangku (Sailung), Bhimsen, like Kalingchok Mai, came on his own, in the form of a stone hidden in a basket carried by a man - again of the Moktan clan - who was migrating from Tibet to Nepal. The route of the myth also reminds us of the migration route of the ‘five ancestors’ of Sailung, the khe nga, from whom the Moktan clan derived:

A family of the Moktan clan came from Tibet to Nepal. They had to carry heavy loads in baskets on their backs. A god, the sibda Bhimsen, hid himself in one of the baskets and thus was carried unnoticed by the Moktan travelling from Tibet to Nepal. When they reached the river Sun Kosi, the Moktan built their camp for the night on its shore. The next morning they took three stones, including the stone from the basket, to build a fireplace to cook rice. But the stone from the basket always fell and made it impossible to cook. One of the men finally became so furious that he hit the stone with his foot. Blood oozed from the stone and the man who had hit the stone immediately died. Another man began to shake like a bompo and through him they could hear the god speak: ‘I am Bhimsen and I have come with you from Tibet to protect you, and you hit me!’ The Moktan were sorry and asked for his forgiveness. Then all the Moktan gathered to decide in which direction they should proceed. They decided to move on to the east. When they crossed the river Sun Kosi its water spirit (lu) took all their jewellery. They carried the stone, Bhimsen, with them and put it at the place where it is now, in the Bhimesvarthan in Dolakha. At the time when they were living in Dolakha there was a Newar king and this king was very cruel. One day a man of the Moktan clan killed the queen and they had to flee and hide in the forests near the present Tamang village of Makaibari. After fourteen years they were discovered by the Newar, but
the king said that they should not be killed, since he needed people for his kingdom. It was then that a Tamang guthi was founded at the Bhimesvarthan in Dolakha.¹⁹

In this myth, the Tamangs – and in particular the Moktans – claim that Bhimsen is a protector from Tibet who had come with them (on their trading journeys or even on their flight from Tibet?), thus asserting, through Bhimsen, former Tibetan/Tamang importance in the principality ruled by the Newars. Though in both the legends Bhimsen is attached to the Tamang Moktan clan, he does not possess an ancestral role, an ancestor who – as in the Tibetan tradition – acquired his seat on the summit of the mountain. Bhimsen is manifest – as in the Hindu tradition – in a phallic stone which is discovered by chance and deliberately placed on the site of the present temple. His stone manifestation, unsuspectingly used as a hearthstone, prevented the rice from being cooked. As said earlier concerning Tamang social structure, the three stones of the hearth symbolise three clans allied through marriage. The ‘fallen’ stone indicates his undomesticated character, but it also might indicate the break-up of a local marriage alliance. The legend also shows features of the Hindu myth where the five Pandavas seek refuge in the forests. It, too, reveals a break in the Tamangs’ role in that region, though they were later compensated with a guthi. The domain of Dolakha, obviously, was well protected by Kali Mai from Kalingchok and the Sun Kosi river with its water spirits formed an effective boundary.

Hindu-Buddhist Rivalry over Kalingchok and Sailung

What is the historical background of the two local ritual variations that has led to the ‘male’ and ‘female’ mountains? In both regions – of Kalingchok and Sailung – the three traditions, shamanism, Buddhism and Hinduism, are present, each bringing their own definitions and interpretations. But the prevalence of either Hindu or Buddhist practice is notable on each of the mountains, resulting in differing accommodations of the older shamanic tradition. Kalingchok was dominated by the Hindu Newar rulers, for whom Kalingchok Mai as Kali Devi had become their protectress against the outer (predominantly Buddhist) realm as well as the guardian
deity of their expansion towards the north. Her ‘brother’ Bhimsen became Dolakha’s protector of fertility and well-being within their territory and of the ruling power. Hindu caste rules formed the basis of the principality’s social structure. However, the Newars from Dolakha - at least until the mid-18th century - continued to respect Tibetan Buddhism, since it was important for their trade with Buddhist Tibet. After the conquest of the Gorkha kings (in 1768), especially during the reign of the Rana government (1846–1950), the mountain of Kalingchok and the temple of Bhimsen remained as important religious sanctuaries for the ‘protection’ of their rule. Evidence of this is found in the great donations placed on the summit of Kalingchok: two huge bells donated by a colonel named Dal Bahadur in 1909; a pillar with a brass lion on top donated by Colonel Rajpad Bhakta in 1916, and another large bell donated in 1946 by Shanker Shamsher Jang Rana, the son of the former prime minister Chandra Shamsher Rana.

Unlike the case of Kalingchok, the area of Sailung has long been the main region of Tamang settlement, and the summit of Thulo Sailung is considered as the abode of their dead. The Tamangs there retained an autonomous status, but incorporated a Buddhist ‘conquest’ in their society. Thulo Sailung became a Buddhist centre of the region, a destination of pilgrimage, a Tamang gnas ri. During the Rana period (1846–1951), as almost everywhere in Nepal, in the Sailung region the Hindu religion was enforced. Kali temples were erected, notably on the banks of various ponds. However, after the end of Rana rule and especially with the upcoming Tamang ethnic policy since 1990, the Tamang Buddhists began to regain their local predominance and several Kali temples were removed. Today, the ponds near Thulo Sailung contain no ‘black water-spirits’ (mlangai lu), for Hindus connected to the goddess Kali, and no blood offerings by the shamans are allowed.

Among the Tamangs this historic rivalry between Buddhist and Hindu powers for dominion is continued by a rivalry between the shamans and Buddhist priests for the life-strengthening and healing rituals, as well as for the ‘territorial’ rituals – the ritual for the dead that the bompos lost to the lamas long ago. The shamans need animal sacrifice to appease the ancestral gods, mother goddesses, and territorial protectors, the sibda and yulha deities. It could easily be aligned to the Hindu religion with its own practice of blood offer-
ings to the various forms of Durga and Bhairab. Whereas for the Buddhist priests, propitiation without blood offerings is still their main claim for their ‘higher’ civilization, having replaced them with dough figures (tormo). This rivalry, too, has been transferred into a rivalry between Kalingchok, the seat of Kali Devi, and Thulo Sailung, the Buddhist centre – as the following story of the battle between the fierce Hindu goddess Devi and Padmasambhava, here called Mahadev, recounts:\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{In the Tamang village of Kangla, which faces the mountain Sailung, the fierce goddess Kangla Devi started a dispute with Mahadev of Sailung. Mahadev was more powerful and defeated the goddess by causing a large landslide beside her seat.}

The landslide area is enormous and can be seen from afar. For many farmers it meant a great loss of agricultural land. At the same time, Tamang legends tell of the complementary character of the female goddess of Kalingchok and the male god of Sailung, reinforcing the necessary polarity of female and male in Tamang tradition. According to a legend told by the Tamangs of Risiangku:

\textit{Sailung has given Kalingchok the seeds of many flowers, trees and fruits. That is why Kalingchok has such rich vegetation. On the other hand, Kalingchok has given Sailung only roasted seeds, which were unable to sprout on Sailung.}

Sailung Phoi Sibda Karpo sends his sperm to Kalingchok Mai, where it sprouts richly, thereby ensuring fertility and a great variety of plants. Kalingchok, by contrast and corresponding to the woman’s role in daily life, sends roasted seeds, which cannot germinate. How is this to be interpreted? The story obviously attributes the ‘male’ Sailung with a higher potential for fertility than the ‘female’ Kalingchok, thus attributing higher status to him. This agrees with the Tamang Buddhist perspective, which according to Tibetan Buddhist belief dominates the land, conceived of as female.\textsuperscript{21}

In India as well as in Tibet, the earth in ancient tradition was seen as a female divinity, and – as among the Tamangs today – the mountains were linked to the goddesses. In India, Hindu Devis of
local and regional significance for nearly three thousand years have
attracted suppliants for their blessings and protection. The word
shakti, especially with the rise of the Tantra, came to be used to
describe these female divinities. Shakti means ‘energy’ or ‘power’,
understood as the life-energies of the world, firmly associated with
both the nourishment and the uncertain vagaries of nature. All the
many aspects of nature in the Hindu tradition became manifest in
the pithas (Nep.) – the ‘seats’, ‘benches’ or ‘sanctuaries’ of the god-
desses – like the rocky seat of Kalingchok Mai on Kalingchok.

In the Tibetan concept, according to J. Gyatso (1989), the
demoness srin mo (Tib.) – among the Tamangs the mabun and mamos
– represents the forces in the earth, which were pinned down
through ‘sky pillars’ (Tib. gnam gyi ka ba), ‘earth nails’ (Tib. sa yi phur
ba), ‘stone pillars’ (Tib. rdo ring) by the early Buddhist Tibetan kings
to demarcate their possession and their dominance. But one of the
primary activities of the ancient Bon tradition in Tibet, at least from
the time of the quasi-mythical King Gri gum btsan po, has also
involved suppressing the srin and the ’dre. Likewise, on Thulo
Sailung, the Buddhist ‘nailing down’ of the deities’ realm of Sailung
was accomplished through the many chorten. The Tamang bompo tra-
dition on Kalingchok, however, undoubtedley has traits of the Hindu
Tantric tradition of the Shiva-Shakti cult in which the trident has
become a significant tool. But it also contains traits that resemble
those of the ancient Bon. In language and etymology regarding the
protector and territorial deities, however, the Tamangs are closer to
Tibetan culture. The bompos periodically invoke the goddess into
their bodies in order to receive her energy or power - shakti. And, as
on Kalingchok, Tamang men and bompos bring their lance and ‘pin
her down’ with a knife, to demonstrate their right to make use of
the land within her realm.
Pilgrims bringing their offerings to the sacred spring

Gosainkund, 2001

The spring is the source of Gosainkund lake and located under a huge bolder. Pilgrims place their offerings to the 'seven mothers' and collect the holy water in a vase (bhumpa). The shamans drum and 'shake'.
Tamang Offering at the ‘White Lake’ of Gosainkund: Tsho Kar Choppa

Gosainkund: Geography and Hindu Pilgrimage

One of the most famous destinations of pilgrimage in the mountains north of the Kathmandu Valley is Gosainkund Lake. On the full-moon night of July/August the local population and many pilgrims from the Kathmandu Valley gather at its shore. When the sky is clear, a tawny-coloured rock can be seen below the surface of the green-blue lake: this rock is identified as Mahadev/Shiva or Avalokiteshvara.¹

The lake fills the bottom of a small high valley located at 4,381m above sea level in the Gosainkund Range of Rasuwa district. It is surrounded by slopes that rise abruptly on three sides. On the fourth side, the lake opens towards a small rocky ridge, from which its waters plunge into lake Bhairavkund (also called Nagkund, lake of the ‘water spirit’) below. On the opposite side, the lake is fed by a spring that emerges beneath a huge rock boulder. According to old sources, there used to be three clefts in the large rock, from which the water poured in a perpetual cascade into the lake some ten metres below.² In fact, Gosainkund Lake is one of a series of lakes: above it is a smaller lake, named Suryakund, ‘Sun Lake’; the local people say that a landslide destroyed the lake that used to lie below Bhairavkund, which was called Saraswatikund, the lake of the ‘goddess of speech and knowledge’. Instead today, a waterfall plunges into a small pool below. On the higher pasture above the lakes of Gosainkund is another group of lakes, called the ‘nine lakes’ (Nep. Noukund). Adjacent to the north of the Gosainkund Range is the Langtang Valley bordering on Tibet. To the west lies the impressive river valley of the Trisuli, along which the ancient trading route crossed the high Himalayas to Kyirong and to central Tibet. On the eastern side of the Gosainkund Range lies the well-known Buddhist centre Yolmo, in the Nepali language known as Helambu. Today, Gosainkund Lake is reputed to be the source of the Trisuli river. In
fact, the stream that springs from this lake is merely a tributary of
the great river, whose true source lies north of Kyirong, on the
Tibetan plateau.

Today Gosainkund is widely known as a Hindu destination of
pilgrimage. The earliest known document mentioning Gosainkund
goes back to 1447, describing the royal pilgrimage of King Jaya
Jaksha Malla Deva of Bhaktapur (1428–82) to Shivaluti or Silu, the
‘lake of Shiva’ (the old Newar names for the lake). According to the
document, he walked for nine days to cover the 80 km to the sacred
lake, where he stayed for three nights and four days. He bathed in
the lake, gave alms and gifts, including a gift of cows; from there he
went to Tokha (?) and arrived at the temple of Sri Chandranarayan.
Three days later he went to the sacred shrine of Pashupatinath in
Kathmandu and, after bathing, returned to his palace. Today in the
Kathmandu Valley it is also believed that the water sources of the
Kumbheshvar (‘lord of the water pot’) temple in Patan, of the Bura
(Old) Nilakantha pond at the foot of Shivapuri and the pond of Bala
(Young) Nilakantha by the Balaju springs, all originate from
Gosainkund – thus linking this mountain lake with the sacred realm
of the Kathmandu Valley.

According to G.S. Nepali, for the Newars the full moon in the
monsoon-season marks the completion of rice planting. For the
Hindu upper castes, it is the day when they change the sacred
thread and their priests tie protective charms around the wrists of
the faithful. Janai purnima is also an important day for the Newar
Buddhist lakhe jatra, when they celebrate the victory of Buddha
over the tempter Mara.

In the Tibetan text 'Dzam gling rgyas bshad, the Buddhist master
Lama Tsanpo (Tib. Bla ma Btsan po) in 1820 recounted the classical
Hindu myth of how the lake of Gosainkund came into being and
became sacred:

Once upon a time the gods and the demons (Skt. asuras), wanting
ambrosia, churned the ocean. At first, the sun, the moon, Kamala,
Hayagriva, etc. emerged from it. After that, an evil creature with nine
heads emerged. When they continued to churn, a full bottle of
(Kalakuta) poison appeared. Fearing that if it fell into the hands of the
asuras, they might use it to harm the gods, Shiva took the bottle of poi-
son and swallowed it. The strength of the poison turned his throat blue.
’Throw the stick’ chorten

near Laurebina pass (4.500 m), 2001

Pilgrims throw their walking sticks on this chorten as a gesture that they have overcome the most difficult climb.
Unable to endure the scalding sensation in his body, he plunged into a cold river amidst a mass of icy mountains. The gods put his recumbent body in this place, say the Hindus.

The pilgrims at Gosainkund say that Shiva, in his pain, thrust his trident into the boulder from where three streams immediately gushed forth; their water collecting below formed the icy lake of Gosainkund, where Shiva is manifested in the tawny-coloured rock. Thus opened, these triple sources – today there is only one beneath a large rock – are considered to be the source of the Trisuli river. The same text emphasizes the Buddhist interpretation: that the lake is the home of a water-spirit (lu), whereas the rock below its surface is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara – a classic example of the co-existence of various religious traditions, so characteristic of the Himalayan region:

[...], there is a pilgrimage place in a mountain hermitage called Gausan-sthan. There, in a pool like a lake, is an image self-originated from stone, in the form of a human. Its light blue neck is covered by a saffron scarf and it appears to be lying in the supine position with nine cobra heads. Even though it is well known all over India that Indian heretics consider it to be dBang phyug (Shiva) and revere it greatly, there are many Buddhists in India and Nepal who do not believe in that image. Moreover, among the Tibetans, who call it Klu gan-rkyal (‘supine naga’) or Klu gdol-pa (‘the outcast naga group’), there are many who do not believe in it at all. [...] It is actually an image of ’Phags-pa Thugs-rje chen-po (an epithet of Avalokiteshvara).

Many Hindus start their pilgrimage to Gosainkund three days before the night of the full moon, usually walking in large groups of friends, colleagues or family members. The main footpath for the pilgrims arriving from the Kathmandu Valley starts at the village of Dhunche, an old Tamang settlement along the ancient trading route and now on the motor road. From Dhunche the trail leads up through dense forests (where the Langtang National Park begins) to the small settlement of Chanden Bari (elev. 3,250 m), earlier a pasture where, in the 1960s, Swiss development aid established a flourishing cheese factory. There is also a well-built Buddhist temple, the ‘Wooden Monastery’, Shing Gompa (Tib. shing dgon pa). Here all the
various routes from the Trisuli valley converge. Pilgrims spend the first night at Chanden Bari – the Kathmandu folk in the lodges, whereas the villagers crowd into the temple. Here one finds the first temporary health posts set up for Kathmandu pilgrims, who frequently suffer from altitude sickness. On the second day they continue to the high pass of Laurebina (Nep. lauro bina, 4,500 m), where they throw down their walking sticks by a small shorten, as a sign of having surmounted the highest obstacle en route to the pilgrimage site. From there, they continue through high pastures to a narrow path along rocky slopes, then pass the dark lake of Bhairavkund before making the final ascent to the shores of Gosainkund Lake itself. At the lakeside, the Hindu pilgrims first visit the small Shiva temple, where they place their offerings of milk, coins, grains of rice, red powder and flowers by the Shiva linga. A Hindu priest, in attendance only during the festival, ties the sacred thread on the wrists of the pilgrims. The pilgrims spend the night at one of the many temporary inns and lodging huts built by local Tamangs. At dawn the next day they take a ritual bath in the icy waters of the lake and place their offerings on the southern shore of the lake, turning it red with vermilion powder. Then they proceed to the source below the boulder above the lake, called ‘trident hill’ (Nep. trisul dada). Here the pilgrims take water as a blessing and crowd to a man who places a blessing on their foreheads (Nep. tikka). He comes from Yolmo and is the last descendant of the ‘blessing’ priest, locally called tikka lama.

Tamang’s Feast and Offering at the ‘White Lake’

The Tamangs form the majority of the local population and are clearly the main protagonists at the full-moon festival of Gosainkund. The lakeshore feast brings together people from the Tamang villages east and west of the Trisuli river, as well as Tamangs and Yolmopas from Helambu in the Melamchi valley. This is an especially enjoyable time for young people, who gather for singing competitions, forming large dancing circles, some of the girls and women still wearing their beautiful Tibetan-style dresses and colourful felt hats – the same traditional way of dressing as in Kyirong, across the border in southern Tibet. They come in large village groups, accompanying the bompos asked to lead them to
The bompo holds his precious crystal which for him embodies Mahadev. Bompo claims that his crystal is still growing.
Bompo in front of his altar
Dhunche, 1996

The *bompo* poses with his ritual outfit and drum. The vases of the 'seven mothers' (*mabun*) and the measure pot (*chhene*) with the attributes of Mahadev can be seen on the altar. To the left of the altar is the lance, to the right the trident.
Gosainkund. The number of followers of each bompo, so they say, determines his prestige: only the best bompos venture to Gosainkund, because it is considered a risky undertaking where other bompos will seek to defeat them. This festival, too, is a welcome opportunity for young girls and boys to escape from arranged marriage plans and choose their own partners by eloping at the end of the festival.11

In the Tamang language the two sacred lakes Bhairavkund and Gosainkund are known as the ‘Black Lake and White Lake’, ‘Tsho na Tsho kar’ (Tib. mtsho nag mtsho dkar). The janai purnima festival at Gosainkund is called by the Tamangs the ‘Offering at the White Lake’, ‘Tsho kar Choppa’ (Tib. mtsho dkar mchod pa). For the festival, a guthi – a communal association – is formed, consisting of the four Tamang village communities Syabru, Dhunche, Barkhu and Yarsa. These villages are the largest and possibly the oldest Tamang settlements close to the lakes of Gosainkund. The guthi’s function is to supply the grain for the alcohol consumed at the festival. Each year, every household in these villages is expected to contribute one pathi of grain (= 4.56 dm³) to the guthi. The villagers claim that, until the Langtang National Park was established in 1976, they were entitled to the money offerings made by the many pilgrims at Gosainkund Lake – and in fact on the festival night in 1996 I witnessed a fight over this question at the lodge by the lake.

The Tamangs’ pilgrimage starts the night before, when the bompo invokes the deities at his house altar: Mahadev of Gosainkund, the seven kaliamas or mabun – here also called ganga –, the ‘village god’ (yullha), ‘lord of the land’ (sibda), and ‘lineage god’ (pholha). He summons the souls of their ancestors and bids them to accompany him on the pilgrimage to Gosainkund. The bompo wears his ritual dress (long white gown, headdress and chains of bells and rudracche nuts)12 and decorates his altar. He fills a clay pot with glowing coals from the fireplace and places sprigs of juniper on it for the fumigation offering (Tib. lha bsang). When enough juniper smoke has filled the room, he starts drumming, together with his assistant seated beside him. Above the altar the seven vases decorated with flowers of different colours are said to represent the ‘seven mothers’, the mabun. The bompo of Dhunche explained that they are regarded as the ‘mothers’ of the seven souls (bla) of every child until it is fully grown. Each of the seven mothers is associated with a fundamental
domain in every human being: the white *Kali ama kakar gyalmo* is responsible for the development of the sense of smell and ability of speech; the yellow *Kali ama woyiser gyalmo* for the closing of the baby’s fontanel; the multi-coloured *Kali ama chhimi gyalmo* for eyesight and hearing; *Kali ama lhaden syangmo* (colour unknown) for bodily appearance; *Kali ama duble syangmo* (colour unknown) for the development of the throat and inner organs; *Kali ama bude gyalmo* (colour unknown) for intelligence; and *Kali ama mentsen gyalmo* (colour unknown), which gives the male and female sexual organs. These seven mothers are linked to the well-being of the children just as they are connected to the causes of their diseases: according to the *bompo*, when one of the seven souls leaves the child’s body to seek refuge with its mother (*mabun* or *ganga*) at the source of Gosainkund Lake, the child becomes ill. The *bompo*’s task is to bring the soul back to the sick child. The *bompo* from Dhunche described this as ‘to convince the soul to leave *ganga*, and to lead the soul back to the sick child so that the child may heal’. Their aim at the Gosainkund festival is to pay homage to the seven mothers/*ganga* to strengthen their relationship with them.

On the shelf above the seven vases, a brass pot (*chhene*) is placed, inside which the attributes of Mahadev and other ritual paraphernalia are kept: a crystal (*shel yungba*), which is explained as the manifestation of Mahadev. The stone is said to be still growing and is used to counteract the powers of the witch (Nep. *bokshi*). A stone knife (*tho yungba*), a dark smooth stone with an edge reminiscent of a stone-age tool, which is said to have fallen from the sky during a thunder storm and is used to prevent thunderstorms, hail and erosion. A wooden knife (*chhu shing*), which is used to cut (sic!) water. The other items are a fermenting agent (*nrartsa*) to brew their beer, a ritual knife (*phurba*), peacock feathers, porcupine quills (*dumsing*), and the horn of a wild mountain goat. On either side of the house altar are placed a trident and a lance.

Until far into the night, the *bompo* offers incense to the gods and goddesses, invoking the deities and drumming himself into a trance. The next day he adds corn, butter lamps, oil, and a bottle of alcohol to the brass pot with Mahadev’s crystal, the stone and the water-knife. The pot is carried by his assistant, and the *bompo*, drumming and dancing, leads his group of villagers on their pilgrimage to Gosainkund. A young unmarried girl carries a sacred vase with the
Bompos and Tamang pilgrims
below Gosainkund, 1996

Bompos are leading the way beating their drums. The group of Tamang pilgrims follow them enjoying singing. It often takes three days from the villages below Ganesh Himal to the lakes of Gosainkund. Note the different hairdresses among the various bompo groups.
Dancing Shamans
On the way to Gosainkund, 1996

The shamans dance to their three-beat drum rhythm – the three steps are an expression of the mediation between the three realms: the upper, middle and lower worlds.
Located above Shing Gompa is the older and now abandoned monastery Pulung Gompa. It was founded by a Karmapa Lama. Like Shing Gompa, it is built with four central pillars representing the four villages forming the ritual association, the *guthi*, for the full-moon festival on Gosainkund: Syabru, Dhunche, Barkhu and Yarsa.
Two lamas from Barkhu  
Near Shing Gompa, 1996

The two lamas accompanying the bompos shared the responsibility to host the Tamang villagers of the guthi association in Shing Gompa. They have been enjoying food, drink and dance like everybody else.
New temple of Tsendenlugo
Tsendenlugo, 1996

On the last day of ascend the pilgrims pass this small new temple where according to a myth a demoness (sungma) was convinced by a yak to abstain from eating men. To this day a Tamang dhami performs the annual sacrifice of a sheep.
Gossipkind, 1996

Girl with sacred vase
Dancing and drumming circles
Gosainkund, 1996

On the way to Gosainkund at every house bompos and pilgrims are welcomed with snacks and alcohol. The pilgrims dance and sing to the drumming of the bompos.
Young pilgrims singing

Gosainkund, 1996

Girls and boys form dancing circles and mock and tease each other singing.
Assistant with offerings
Gosainkund, 1996

The shaman’s assistant waits outside the Shiva Temple with a basket containing the bompo’s paraphernalia and offerings.
Assistant with offerings
Gosainkund, 1996

This assistant holds a plate with fruit, bread and maize offerings. The offerings will later be placed next to the Shiva lingam.
Dancing circle
*In front of the Shiva temple, Gosainkund, 1996*

Girls and boys dance throughout the night. The girls wear their beautiful Tibetan style dresses, embroidered felt hats, and shawls draped cross-wise.
Dancing circle

In front of the Shiva temple, Gosainkund, 2001

This photograph was taken five years after the one on the left and, already, a change in style of dress can be observed.
The shaman makes an egg dance on his drum while circumambulating the temple three times. The egg is then put on the Nandi (bull) in front of the temple.
Initiation of a young bompo
*Shiva temple in Gosainkund, 1996*

After the performance of carrying the egg around the temple the *bompo* touches the adept's forehead with his drum.
Morning after the fullmoon night
Gosainkund, 1996

Pilgrims and shamans walk to the source of Gosainkund. Hindus take a ritual bath in the lake’s icy waters.
The ‘blessing lama’ (tikka lama) at the spring

The source of Gosainkund lake, 1996

Tikka lama, the direct descendant of Karma Lama has come all the way from Gangyul in Helambu (Yolmo) to give his blessings (tikka) to the pilgrims.
Attributes of a Tamang shaman

Gosainkund, 1996

This bompo on his way to Gosainkund is seen wearing a number a distinctive attributes: Chains of rudracche nuts, a chain of bells, porcupine quills used as a shields of protection against the ‘other worlds’; and the horn of the mountain goat as a reference to the earthly beings of the ‘mid-space’.
ritual knife. The villagers – the women in their Tibetan dresses and many of the men wearing traditional felt jackets – on their way up enjoy singing and, as in Tibet, dance linked together in chains and stamp their feet. At many homes the families welcome the pilgrims and shamans. Bottles of alcohol, a brass pot with flowers and an earthen pot with glowing coals are placed on a table. The bompos place their brass pot with the paraphernalia and the sacred vase on the same table, and start beating their drums in front of the house. On this occasion it is considered an honour to serve alcohol in abundance.

The first night the Tamang groups spend in the large hall of the Buddhist Shing Gompa in Chanden Bari, where the bompos continue their drumming and the women and men their singing. Shing Gompa is preceded by an older gompa, Pulung Gompa – even said to be the first Buddhist gompa of the area – which now stands abandoned in a small meadow half an hour’s walk further up the hill. The roof is still mostly intact, but the old stone building is empty and left to future collapse.

The two gompas share a common architectural feature: both have four main pillars in the centre, supporting the large assembly hall. They are said to represent the four Tamang villages of Dhunche, Barkhu, Syabru and Yarsa – the same villages which form the guthi association for the festival on Gosainkund. Thus, they are visibly placed in a mandala of the Buddhist realm. On this night, alcohol is distributed to all pilgrims staying in Shing Gompa. And here the last descendant of the founder of the gompa, locally simply named Karmapa Lama, is responsible for providing the guthi villagers with a meal and for performing the Buddhist ritual at the altar of the gompa. He is also nominally in charge of the maintenance of the two gompas.

A long time ago during the Malla era, so the local people tell, Karmapa Lama arrived from Kyirong to meditate in a small cave by Gosainkund Lake. After saving the Malla kingdom from the plague, he was given a large guthi land-grant in Yolmo (in Gangyul), the right to build a Buddhist temple at Gosainkund, and the duty of upholding the Buddhist religion. In the name of the Malla king he became the Buddhist sovereign of the area, in charge of bestowing the blessing (tikka lama; the full story is recounted at the end of the chapter). His descendants still own the guthi land in Gangyul and,
as stated in the guthi document (Nep. tama patra), are still obliged to provide rice for the festive meal and to be present at the Gosainkund festival to give blessings to the pilgrims.\textsuperscript{15} Today the descendants of the Karmapa Lama are no longer Buddhist priests, so they have asked the Buddhist priests from Barkhu to perform the Buddhist ritual for them at Shing Gompa. At dawn, the two priests arrive at Shing Gompa, dancing and singing together with the bompos and villagers from Barkhu. After entering the gompa, the priests take their seats, while the bompos continue drumming in the hall with the four pillars. The chhene and bhumpa are placed to the left of the altar on the rear wall of the gompa.

Early the next day the groups of bompos and their followers, and the Buddhist priests with the group from Barkhu, all proceed to the lake of Gosainkund. On the high pasture known as Bhyanglung, they pass a place called Tsandenlugo, the ‘place where the tsen hid’ from the demoness sungma (Tib. srung ma) (the legend is recounted later). Here a sheep is sacrificed by a dhami, the Tamang specialist for fertility rituals, to appease the demoness on Gosainkund. Today a new small concrete temple stands on the site.

After the Laurebina Pass, the way leads through more pasture-lands and then over a rocky path crossing steep slopes. The pilgrims pass the small pond called Gyangluti (‘hillpond’?) filled by the waterfall, and Tsho na, the ‘Black Lake’. Here the people recount that a bompo of the Tamang clan Gole tried to defeat its two snakes (lu), but instead was killed by them, his blood turning the lake first red, then black. (His legend will be recounted in detail later.) Earlier another lake is said to have existed between Gyangluti and Tsho na: Goma tsho or Tsho mar (Tib. mtsho dmar), the ‘Red Lake’, in Hindu sources named Saraswatikund. Before it was washed away by a landslide, it was said to have been the dwelling of a snake of the seven colours of the rainbow. Its shores were reputed for the variety and quantity of medicinal herbs growing there. Finally the pilgrims arrive at Tsho kar, the ‘White Lake’, i.e. Gosainkund Lake itself. First, each group thrice circumambulates the small Shiva temple. The bompos enter the shrine beating the drum, and the assistants with the plate of offerings, while most Tamang men and women join the large singing and dancing circles on the open ground to the left of the Shiva temple. On this occasion, a group of bompos from the Tamang village of Thoman (or Thongban) on the western side of
Trisuli also come with their young adepts (boys of twelve or thirteen), still dressed in everyday clothes but carrying chains of rudrache beads, beating drums. For their initiation the boys circle the Shiva shrine twice, with their bompo teacher leading them. Then the old bompo places an egg on the back of the bull Nandi, the vehicle of Shiva facing the temple, and sings his mantras towards the Shiva shrine, after which he touches one adept with his drum and hands it to him. Now the boy starts singing and drumming shyly. The old bompo takes back the drum and turns it horizontally. Placing the egg on the drum together with some rice and vermilion powder taken from the Shiva lingam, he beats the drum, making the egg dance on the membrane. With the ‘dancing egg’ he circumambulates the shrine three times. Hindu Yogis are seated nearby, asking for alms. Near the Hindu shrine, Buddhist poles with prayer flags, the luntar, have been erected.

The Buddhist priests from Barkhu arrive with the bombos. They too dance and sing around the Shiva shrine before entering it. Then each bompo proceeds with his followers, the assistant holding the chhene, the young girl the bhumpa and a third the plate with offerings, to one of the four stone-built houses, the ‘governmental hostels’ (Nep. sarkar pati), where they will stay the night. In 1996 these were the only permanent houses near the lake, and are linked to the four Tamang guthi villages. (Since then several tourist lodges have been built.) Each group seems to know in which house it will spend the night. The pilgrimage group from Barkhu with the Buddhist priest stay in the house on the upper left, together with the group from Thoman, whom they call their ‘brothers-in-law’. The chhene with the religious paraphernalia, the trident and the bhumpa are placed near the upper wall of the house for the night. With each new group, the circle of dancers grows. The singing and stamping of feet of the dancers continues the whole night long.

As dawn breaks after the full-moon night, the Tamang groups, led by the bombos, go towards the source, the seat of the nzabun or ganga. On the way they wash their faces in water from Gosainkund - they say, to be purified of their sins and to be able to see the rock of Mahadev. The bombos with their followers arrive, drumming their way to the source. There they first squeeze themselves into the small cave beyond the rock, the place of the source, and drum themselves into a trance. Then they fill their bhumpas with water from the
source, considered as a healing essence, and sprinkle some of the water on their group as a blessing. Near the source on top of the rock they place their offerings of red powder, incense, rice, coins, milk, and flowers. Then they crowd around to receive a blessing in the form of a tikka on the forehead from the descendant of the Karmapa Lama who has come from Gangyul. Afterwards they climb onto one of the rocks above the source. There they place the chhene and bhumpa in a niche, take out their tridents and phurba, place them into the soil, smear butter on them, blow mantras and then give some of the butter to each person in the group, who all try to knead small figures out of it. A little further up, where the ground flattens out and is called tshe gang, ‘the hill of life’, the bompos again beat their drums. Here, they say, white ash should appear on the drums as an omen of the gods. The ash will be mixed with butter and placed as a tikka blessing on the foreheads of the pilgrims. The colour of the appearing ash is supposed to prophesy which kind of cattle (cow or sheep) will reproduce in the coming year. The bompos beat their drums horizontally and everyone watches eagerly for the ash to emerge. Only a few go to the nearby cave up the hill known as Drukgang (Tib. 'Brug khang), which is the place where the founder of Pulung Gompa, Karmapa Lama, meditated. Even now Buddhist lamas as well as bompos come here for retreat. At the end, all the groups walk round the entire lake of Gosainkund before leaving Gosain than the same way they came.

**Tracing a History: Legends on the ‘Black and White Lake’**

Hindus say that the tawny-coloured rock in the lake representing Mahadev – who in myth opened the spring with his trident – is also a manifestation of Vishnu ‘... like a lotus on the quiet surface of a lake, or like human consciousness on the darkness of the unconscious, so the earth now reposes, fresh and fair, on the waters of the cosmic abyss’ (Zimmer, 1990: 78). Vishnu, in their belief, is also seen as counteracting the antagonistic force of the great serpent king who in the Hindu legends again and again threatens the evolution of the world. Buddhists see the same rock as Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

By contrast, the Tamang healers, the bompos, explain Mahadev as one of their ancestral protectors (pholha). They carry his crystal and
trident when going on pilgrimage to pay their homage to ganga at the spring of Gosainkund. The following myth is told by a bompo of the Titung clan from Dhunche. It shows wonderfully the multiple religious identities of one and the same god whom they see as their personal protector. The myth also offers an explanation of the discovery of Gosainkund and of the origin of the full moon festival:

Long, long ago Gosainkund was a difficult place where people could not see, could not hear, where people should not come. The gods (lha) were flying in the air and talking to each other. They saw a mountain and they saw a lake surrounded by the mountains. They saw Mahadev in the form of Chengresi (Avalokiteshvara) inside the lake, and he had four hands and four heads. The heads of Mahadev were looking in the four directions: to the east the face was clean, bright and beautiful, because the sun rises in the east. To the west the face was dirty, black and with big goitres on the neck, because in the west there is no sun. To the north his face had the ears and eyes of a human being, and the nose and mouth of an elephant. To the south his face was like that of a wild boar. He had the body of a human being, and the head of a cow with horns. On top of the four heads looking in the cardinal directions was a head like that of Shiva – a human head with big earrings. The body of Mahadev was that of a human being.

The division of the world into a dark west and bright east is a classic one in many mountain regions, where the pronounced difference between the shady and the sunny side of the slopes is a major factor for the quality of making a living. In this myth the metaphoric elephant associates Buddhism with the Tibetan north and the metaphor of the wild boar, an early incarnation of Vishnu, links Hinduism with the south. Avalokiteshvara/Mahadev becomes the centre of the mandala, assuring his benevolence for human settlements and cultivation in all directions. The cow may refer to the bull Nandi, the vehicle of Shiva, or to a Tibetan protective deity, the yak, the ancestral deity of the ancient Tibetan kings, who has his seat on Yarlha Shampo, and who will appear in another legend below. The myth continues:

Gosainkund is said to be the head of Mahadev, Pashupatinath in the Kathmandu Valley is his feet, the right eye is the moon, the left eye is
the sun, his ears are the stars. Mahadev is sitting on gold and silver. The east is the sunny side, where people are beautiful and rich and possess many fields. The west is dark, where people are ugly and poor and their fields are barren. When the gods saw Mahadev, he said to them that all people were to make pilgrimages to him at Gosainkund at janai purnima and bring offerings and that he would help them all. Mahadev would fulfil the wish for wealth, and ganga would fulfil the wish for a child and for cattle.

Here Gosainkund is depicted as part of a larger realm, that of the Hindu Kathmandu Valley and of the cosmos in general. The gods (lha) who discovered Mahadev within the lake related his message to the people, whether poor and ugly or bright and beautiful. The shaman from Dhunche also explained Mahadev as the brother of ganga. All pilgrims should wash themselves with the water of ganga if they wish for fertility, children and cattle, or need to be healed. From Mahadev they may wish for wealth.

Another legend – this one told by an old Buddhist priest of the Thokar clan from Barkhu village – tells of a protective deity who once appeared in the form of a yak. He freed the people who had settled in Barkhu from having to offer their sons to the man-eating demoness sungma. The demoness, too, is associated with the Gosainkund Lake and became Barkhu’s protective deity (yullha).

When the great-grandfather (meme) reached Barkhu, his family deity (Nep. kuldeuta) was caught up there on Gosainthan. First she devours the eldest son. Mahakali is Chengresi, but in fact inside him is the sungma, the demoness (Nep. rajesh) who ate the first son, every year she ate a son. She was eating and eating and almost caused the extinction of mankind. So she told the people to offer her a dong. ‘If you don’t bring a dong, then I have to eat your eldest son’, she said. They went as far as Kailash to find the dong but could not get one.’ The demoness said, ‘if you are not able to fetch the dong by today, I will eat you. It is said that on the mountain there are huge animals [the dong]. They are supposed to have nine horns and are said to be bigger than elephants. She needs to eat one dong each year. ‘You are not able to bring one each year, so I have to eat you.’ On this day the eldest son was grazing the yak. The mother yak said to him, ‘Today you will be eaten’. He should stay on that day in her fold, she would save him from death, she said.
He agreed to do so. [...] ‘I will talk today with the demoness.’ So he did as he was told. At night, at about one o’clock she came, the Mahakali deuta, and asked ‘What is there for me today? There is no food for me.’ She asked ‘where is the man?’ The yak answered, ‘I have not seen him.’ Then the yak said that the Mahakali could eat her instead since the man was not there. The yak said: ‘You can eat me, but you should also agree to what I say’. Mahakali answered, ‘I will agree to what you say.’ So the yak said that if Mahakali could count her hair, she could eat her but if she could not, she should not eat her. Having promised, Mahakali started to count the hair of the yak mother, from her tail upward. When she was about to count the hair of the head, the yak shook her neck and confused the counting. So Mahakali started to count all over again from the head. But when she had reached the tail, the yak shook her tail and the counting got confused again. Before Mahakali finished counting, the cock crowed. And with the coming of the day, Mahakali had to leave. The yak told Mahakali that she should not eat men from now onwards: she should eat yak instead, because they have horns on the head and a tail at the back, cannot speak, and can reach heaven when eaten as an offering. Men should not be eaten. Afterwards she did not eat the yak. Since then we call the place Tsendenlugo up there in Bhyanglung.¹⁶

Today the sungma/Mahakali is appeased by the offering of a sheep. According to another story also recorded in Barkhu: ‘A long time ago, Mahadev was roaming around. He liked Barkhu and he liked to stay here.’ In Barkhu the village deity (yullha) is said to be Mahadev of Gosainkund, and at every full moon of April/May (Nep. mankshir), a ritual offering is made by the Buddhist priest as well by the bompo and dhami. It is also called the offering of Gosainkund Mahadev to which every house in the village of Barkhu has to contribute. In former times, some say, the dhami made an offering at the full moon of October/November. The dhami from Barkhu explained the offering as follows:

One chicken is offered to Ganga Devi, one cock is put into lake Tsho na, one chicken is given to the tsen (Tib. btsan) called Syauri mang (mang – ghost). One sheep is given to Mahadev in Tsendenlugo. But Mahadev there we also call Gotaksung and he is a tsen. And one goat is given to Tojyotsen of Yangerdzong. We say the goat is for Yangerdzong, which is

¹⁶
the name of the palace of the former Ghale kings in Barkhu, but in fact it is the sacrifice for the sungma. This is the bompo tradition.

Thus Mahadev is considered to be the yullha of Barkhu and the tsen, the ancestral spirit of the former Ghale rulers. Even today the Ghale distinguish themselves from the Tamang, but speak the Tamang language and in Barkhu have close marriage ties with the Thokar clan.

The local Tamangs say that the Thokar ‘opened’ the region west of Gosainkund Range and were one of the earliest Tamang clans.\textsuperscript{17}

The clever Thokar are supposed to have stuck their ritual knife (phurba) into the earth in all directions. They had come from Uisamye (Samye, the first Buddhist monastery in Central Tibet), and walked over Bongjo Dada (?) to Nepal. In Bongjo Dada they did not know where to continue, so they sent ahead a shell (dung) with its mantras to find a place suitable for them. It arrived at the place today called Dhunche. This is why the Tamangs call the village Dunglang or Dungchyo. It was the Chhetris who later introduced the name Dhunche.

The Buddhist priests who perform the Buddhist rituals at the festival on Gosainkund in the name of the descendants of the Karmapa Lama are from the village of Barkhu and belong to the Thokar clan. Another oral history of the Thokar lineage combines their origin with the history of Buddhism and explains the spread of the Thokar in the area: from Gyagar Dorje den (Tib. rGya gar rdo rje gdan) they went to Samye in Central Tibet. From these historical Buddhist places the ancestor of the Thokar, Paltisomya by name, came to a cave at a place called Lelung (?), from there he went further south to Dagar (Dragkar Taso), then to Kyirong, and to Lengdisyung.\textsuperscript{18} There his son meme Tsawang Norbu was born. The son cleared the forest nearby in Khangshing and settled there. After the death of his father he went to Langtang, where he had four sons. One son settled in Shyabru, one in Dimre (his descendants are also in Thongban and Chilime), whereas the second oldest and the youngest ones stayed in Langtang. The youngest went to Noukund, the ‘nine lakes’ and settled in Yarsa. The second went to Namche where he married, but he left his wife and his parents-in-law behind and went on to Riburma (?), then on the way back he settled in Melamchi (in
Yolmo) where he had one son. The son went to see the festival on Gosainthan and from there settled in Barkhu. Since their ancestors separated in Langtang, this Thokar lineage is called Langtang Gyalba, the ‘kings of Langtang’, in contrast to the other Thokar lineage, which is called Pare Gyalba (the ‘kings of Pare’?).

The Tamang village of Barkhu is one of the four villages of the Tamang guthi of the festival. It is said that in earlier times Barkhu was the local political centre with a palace (Tib. dzong) – first of the Magar kings, then of the Thokar and Ghale kings. Remnants of the ruins of the former palace of the Ghale kings, the earlier-mentioned Yangerdzong, can still be seen. Campbell (1993: 26), who carried out extensive research in that area, quoting Stiller (1973: 111) confirms the former existence of minor chieftains with dzongs administering the area: “Prior to the capture of Nuwakot by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1744, the area of the upper Trisuli valley must have been a region of petty dzong-centered chiefdoms alternately drawn between political accommodations with Kathmandu and Kyirong.” Barkhu, together with Shyabru and Dhunche, is situated on the old trading route from Kathmandu to Kyirong. The people of Shyabru earlier paid taxes to the court in Kathmandu as well as to Tibet.

A myth about the Black Lake, Tsho na, describes it as the seat of the naga – hence the name Nagkund – and explains why today no Gole bompo are allowed to come to this festival. The Gole bompo wished to defeat the naga with spells to get access to its jewels:

Long ago a Gole bompo came to the Black Lake from below with an assistant shaman (in another version with his wife). In the middle of the lake the shaman saw two snakes (in other versions the ‘king of the snakes’), which owned a large quantity of jewels, and he also saw a rainbow. He told his assistant shaman that he was going to go down into the lake to conquer the two snakes with his mantras, get hold of the jewels, and carry them both out of the lake on his shoulders. He told the assistant not to be frightened, but to beat the drum, and said that on no account was he to drop the drum and run away when he came back up. The shaman went down into the lake and his assistant shaman drummed for three hours. Then the shaman appeared with the two snakes on the surface of the water, but their tails were still under water. The assistant was terrified and stopped drumming and ran away. When the drumming stopped the shaman lost his power and the snakes
dragged him down into the depths of the lake, colouring it red with his blood. Later the lake turned black and was called ‘Tsho na’. And today it is said that a force draws all Gole shamans into this lake.

Gole is a Tamang clan whose original settlement in Nepal is known to be Thangpal, east of Gosainkund and Yolmo, in the valley of the Indrawati river. In local accounts, the Gole once seem to have played a more prominent political role among the Tamangs. Interestingly, it is the Gole who are associated with the demonic side of the lake where their bompo was defeated – maybe signifying the defeat of their earlier power?19

The following detailed narrative told by a bompo in Barkhu recounts the emergence of the Buddhist tradition, or how Tsho na, the ‘Black Lake’, came to be situated below Tsho kar, the ‘White Lake’ – a metaphor for the elevation of ‘great tradition’ Buddhism due to the abuse of a ritual brotherhood (Nep. mith):

Gosainkund (Tsho kar) and the Nagkund (Tsho na) became brothers (ritual brothers). After becoming brothers they looked for a place a little below Bharku in which to settle. They heard the crow of the cock, but this was a dirty place, so they moved from there a little up to a cave in Sabingo. There was a green bird by the cave. The bird did not let a single leaf fall. If the wind blew a leaf into the cave, the bird picked it up and took it out. The bird lived on a pine tree at the entrance of the cave. Two or three years passed before the lakes inside had dried out. Today this cave is dry and used as a place for cattle. From there they moved to Chanden Bari (at Shing Gompa). When the brothers arrived there, they thought that the place was too small for both of them, and tried to decide whether the elder or the younger brother should be the one to leave. The younger brother said that they should either stay together or leave together. Then Tsho na, the elder brother, went to find a place. He found a very good place and built his palace and stayed there. One week passed and Tsho na did not come back. And the younger brother Tsho kar went to search for his elder brother. He found him, and thus the elder brother lived below and the younger brother lived above. The Tsho kar was above and the Tsho na a little below. The elder brother had a bad heart, because he had found the place but had not informed his younger brother. Once the younger brother Tsho kar asked the elder one which he would like to eat: a nine-horned or a two-horned animal. The
elder brother thought that the nine-horned one would be a big one, and answered 'the nine-horned one'. The younger answered, 'all right, you eat the nine-horned one and I will eat the two-horned one.' So the younger brother ate a goat, while the elder brother got a chicken. The elder brother kept quiet. Then from the top of the hill the younger brother cursed him with the following words: 'May all the waste produced by the travellers (pilgrims) when they are washing and eating fall on you below! I respected you like my father and you neglected me so. Now you are below me, so may all the garbage fall on your head!

This remarkable legend is full of symbols – like the crowing cock, which marks the end of the night, the time of otherworldly beings; and the cleansing bird, which represents a pure realm; the ritual brotherhood of two lakes – the White Lake representing the Buddhist, the Black Lake the shamanic tradition – who have differing roots but are bound through mutual obligations; the abuse of the ‘brotherhood’ and the subsequent curse bringing forth a ‘pure’ and an ‘impure’ lake.

Another lively and descriptive account tells of the Malla king’s motivation for granting the guthi to Karmapa Lama, which led to Buddhist domination on Gosainkund. Karmapa Lama in this story is reminiscent of the long meditation of Milarepa, emphasized by his becoming one with the plants of the cave. It also indicates that the festival at the Gosainkund Lake existed before the arrival of the lama. And finally, we note how vividly the old legends are recounted, as if the narrator himself had personally been present. The story was told by the Buddhist priest from Barkhu inside the large wooden hall of Shing Gompa in 1996:

Karmapa Lama came from Tibet to Chanden Bari (Shing Gompa) to meditate in a cave. From there he went to Gosainkund. During the summertime he used to meditate in Gosainkund and in winter he used to come to a cave near Chanden Bari. When meditating the lama needed no food. All he ate was one diau per day, neither did he drink anything. The lama continuously meditated inside the cave. After a long time his body became hairy like that of a bear, covered by thickets and plants. Through the plants his body became attached to the walls of the cave and he became unmovable. At the time of the Malla reign a very contagious disease (plague?) spread over Nepal (Kathmandu) and many people died.
The king was unable to find any cure, so he started to send his army all over his kingdom, to the east, to the west, to search for a wise man (yogi) or a priest (lama) who would be able to cure the disease. One group of the army reached the lakes on Gosainkund Range and discovered Karmapa Lama meditating inside a cave. They spoke to him. When the Karmapa Lama spoke, he resembled a human being. When he did not speak, he looked like a bear with a dense thicket around his body. The soldiers returned to their king and told him of the priest on Gosainkund, who looked like a human being when he spoke and who looked like a bear when he meditated, and that they were very astonished by this. The king told the soldiers: ‘This lama may possess a cure for the disease in Nepal. More and more people are dying. Go and ask him if he has any cure for the disease.’ The soldiers returned to the lama and told him how more and more people were dying due to the disease, maybe 100 to 200 people every day. If he knew any cure for the disease, he should say so and go to the king to inform him. The lama responded that he did not know if he had any cure or not, that he was attached to the cave, that if he should start to move the rocks would also start to move. ‘If you don’t believe me, watch me.’ And he started to move and the rock moved with him. He explained that he could not go with them, he had to stay in the cave. The soldiers returned to the king and told him that the lama on Gosainkund was attached to the cave and if he moved everything else started to move, that they could not bring him. But the king was convinced that this lama had a cure for the disease and told the soldiers: ‘Go back to him and bring him by force, point your gun at him and he will be afraid and follow you.’ The soldiers went again to Gosainkund and to the lama. They approached him and threatened him, saying that if he did not come, they would shoot him, that they would take some proof to show the king that he had been killed. The lama then answered: ‘All right, you won’t have to kill me. At a certain date, at a certain time of the day, clean one room in the palace and I will come. But don’t tell any other people, don’t bring anybody else and don’t do any unnecessary things. The king and I must be alone. Prepare nine pathi of flour of millet, I will need this, but nothing else.’ The soldiers left, but they were in doubt as to whether they should believe the lama. How could he leave the cave to which he was so attached? They thought that he was scared and so had lied to them. They returned to the king doubtfully and told the king what the lama had said. The king ordered a room in the palace to be cleaned and had the millet flour prepared. On the predicted day and time
the lama appeared in the room. He looked very different, very clean, neith-er old nor young. And he met the king. With the nine pathi of millet flour he started to prepare dough figures (tormo), and all the tormos had the shape of a ghost (Nep. bhut). He made as many bhut as could fill the room. Then he meditated for three days inside the room without using any musical or other religious instruments. On the third day he blew a magic formula (Nep. mantra) onto rice grains and threw these into the room over the tormos. When the tormos were hit by the rice grains they started to move and fly away in all directions. After all the tormos had flown away, the lama told the king not to worry any more, that the disease was over. From then on all the people of Kathmandu were well again. The king was now convinced that the lama was a very good priest, and asked what he would like to have. The lama replied that he wanted nothing. But the king insisted that he had to take a gift. Did he want money, jewels, silver, gold or diamonds? What did he need? The lama again replied that he did not need anything, that he was happy that the disease was over. He started to leave, but the king followed and continued to ask him. They came to the place of today's guthi land. In Dungtanring, Sikharbesi, Mahankali and in one more place (all in Yolmo), the king gave the lama guthi land. The lama accepted this land, but told the king that he should also build a gompa on Gosainkumd. At every full moon in July/August the grain of the guthi land must be offered to the pilgrims who would come. The lama said that he himself did not eat anything, the grain would not be for him. The king then requested the lama to sign the document on which his acceptance of the guthi land was written. The monastery on Gosainkumd was built by the king. The document of the guthi is written on a copper plate that is now with the direct descendants of Karmapa Lama, who live in Gangyul of Yolmo and own this land. At every badaufull moon, this family has to offer food to all the pilgrims of Gosainkund.

We note that it was the king who urged the lama to accept the guthi grant; furthermore, it was the king – albeit at the lama’s request – who built the monastery. According to the lama from Barkhu, the monastery of Gosainkund was difficult to maintain, so a monastery was later built in Chanden Bari. This is Pulung Gompa (later replaced by Shing Gompa), the lama’s winter place of meditation, where Karmapa Lama is said to have spent the rest of his life.
Traditional songs being recorded
Gosainkund, 2003

Tamang cultural organizations are recording the songs in an attempt to preserve their oral traditions.
As early as the nineteen-sixties, Regmi (1976) stated the importance of cultural-religious structures for social, political and cultural life in Nepal. At the beginning of the Nepali kingdom in the late 18th century, the state recognized the customary rights of the ethnic communities as embedded in their religiously-defined worldviews and implemented by communal rituals, in which communal landownership (kipat) and religious land endowments (guthi) played a significant role. It was Burghart (in Fuller and Spencer 1996) who first pointed out the role of ritual in relation to power and territorial claims, where ritual actions reinforced the political and ‘divine’ role of the sovereign. In this sense, analysis of the territorial mountain rituals, as on Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund, reveals the spatial markers of boundaries and the interrelation of various spatial levels: household, village, region and state. The mountain rituals, therein, are markers of an inside/outside division and ritual platforms for the integration of new hierarchies and ideologies (cf. Mader and Gingrich 1996: 235).

Ritual authority over these cults, therefore, was an essential factor for the political powers from the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet in dominating the regions along the important trading arteries connecting the Buddhist holdings of southern Tibet with the former Hindu Malla kingdom. The powers from Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley introduced the ‘greater’ religious traditions – on Sailung and Gosainkund predominantly Buddhism, on Kalingchok Hinduism. The mountain cults today reveal a complex merging of the two religions with local shamanic traditions, in which each tradition maintains a ritual independence, and the dominating religion bestows the final blessing. Among the three cults, Gosainkund demonstrates best the policy of the late Malla kingdom based on religious land donations – combining the Buddhist concept of ‘hidden valleys’ with the Newar guthi association – to obtain local ritual dominance and at the same time sustain their relations with the powers of Buddhist
Tibet. The variations present in the three mountain-cults show clearly the importance of the local context in this Himalayan border region which shaped the differing accommodations of the older into the homogenizing and de-localizing structures of the greater religious traditions. Nature in this religious worldview is a location of power, a place where supernatural forces dwell and the shamans interact with the powerful beings that are fundamental for the well-being of the individual and the community.

The most striking features of the communal cults on Thulo Sailung, Kalinchok and Gosainkund even at present belong to the ancient shamanic tradition, among the Tamangs personified by the bompos. During the main festivals at the summer full-moon nights on the sacred mountains and lakes, they ritually re-enact the first ‘opening’ of the water sources with the lance, ritual knife or trident under the protection of their tutelary deities (Seti Devi and Mahadev) and mediate between the dead, the living and the supernatural beings to procreate new life-force and healing power. The water sources represent the life-sources, which in turn are affiliated to ‘mother deities’ (mabun, ganga, kali amas, Seti Devi). The cults entail a concept of the soul – among the Tamangs divided into seven souls – which remains bound to the realm of the ancestors and is protected by the ‘mother deities’ who have their seats at the water sources and in specific caves. Among the Tamangs, alcohol – beer and rakshi – is considered as the ‘female’ element brewed by women, a necessary element for procreation and fertility, in their Buddhist origin myth it is also explained as the substance with which the rock demoness seduced the monkey to give birth to the first human beings. Similar to the ancient Tibetan tradition, the sacred mountain is seen as the abode of the souls of ancestors, and simultaneously of the fertility deity sibda, who became affiliated to the protector deity of the dominating clan or – as in the local histories on Sailung and Gosainkund – of the clan whose ancestor had ‘opened’ the territory. With the arrival of the Buddhist traditions, the mountain deities merged with the Buddhist protector (Padma Sambhava) and the local societies became dominated by the patriline of the Buddhist priests aligned to monasteries in Tibet and Kathmandu Valley, weakening the local ‘marriage circle.’ With the emergence of the Nepali Hindu kingdom, Mahadev/Shiva was propitiated as the local mountain deity and became an ancestral deity.
of the Tamang bompo.

Nepal's Middle Hill region, until recently so rich in legends, local oral histories, stories interpreting the sacred landscapes, is at present rapidly losing its 'cultural heritage'. Like other rituals, the mountain rituals too have been profoundly challenged by new political, economic, and - above all - global developments. In the present political discourse of the modern state, the great communal rituals, although still celebrated, no longer possess a political role. The communal festivals on Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund have declined to become local fertility rituals and places where pilgrims express their individual wishes. They have lost their political integrative function between the local population and the greater political discourse. For the Tamang ethnic organizations, they have become places of representation, where their 'cultural heritage', like the ancient songs and legends and shamanic practices, can be recorded and preserved. The festivals, too, have become an attraction for tourists and pilgrimage venues for the upcoming Hindu organisations.

Not only the political, but also the economic background has changed the role of these great feasts. Today many of the Tamangs can no longer make a living from their traditional agriculture and pastures. Increasingly, the men are compelled to seek work in Kathmandu or the cities of India, where they are confronted with a new worldview and a lifestyle very different from what they have known. Also in the villages, circumstances are changing rapidly. Development has become a priority. Consumer goods have been introduced. Children attend school, and there they are taught a new knowledge that often contradicts what has been passed on for generations. No longer is it up to the ancient territorial deities to ensure the prosperity and well-being of the local farming population. Many Tamang youths clearly express a break with tradition and a longing for a modern lifestyle. Too often their way of life, so intrinsically linked to the worship of local deities and communal rituals, has been described as backward, superstitious and their material and technical standards as poor, so that they strongly resent not having greater access to the modern world. A growing rejection of their traditions and a search for new values is becoming apparent - and yet many Tamangs still revere the traditions of marriage rules, ritual practice and propitiation of the gods for livelihood. In fact, their attitudes today seem highly ambivalent and confused towards the two
Maoist bard

Doromba, Sailung, 2003

At the rear of the Maoist procession entering the village of Doromba a Maoist dressed in white sings songs of martyrdom.
opposing systems: the traditional and the modern. A fact too often neglected is that such traditions are embedded in old systems of rights and in a tight network of mutual obligations and assistance that provides some security for the individual – a security difficult to obtain and mostly lacking in Nepal’s ‘modern’ life.

Since 2001 in Nepal a Maoist insurgency (Nep. jan yuddha) has intensified and in most districts their cadres have established their ‘base areas’ (Nep. adhar ilaka). In recent years Kalingchok, Sailung and to a lesser extent Gosainkund have come under the influence of this revolutionary movement, whose leaders interpret the world in materialistic and a-religious terms and believe in progress through modern science. They have introduced new cultural elements, like banners with political slogans, the erection of a stage for their rallies on which they give long speeches to the public and perform cultural programs to attract new recruits. In staged parades they publicly demonstrate the upturn of the traditional hierarchical structure, among the Tamangs headed by the Buddhist priest. They place the school children in the forefront, stressing progress and education as their greatest ideals. They are followed by the Maoist cadres, after them the Buddhist priests and the Hindu Tailor-Musicians, a formerly untouchable Hindu caste. At the rear of the parade they replace the shaman with a martyr dressed in white with a red star on a white headband playing his guitar in memory of the martyrs, who “died for Nepal’s history”. Although at the mass meetings held in Tamang areas they may include references to the teachings of Buddha, they defy religiously-defined systems and deride shamanic practices as mere superstition. In fact, many Maoist insurgents – in spite of their proclaimed support for ethnic autonomous regions – speak of a homogenization of humankind and define traditional practices as backward. But – as one of many paradoxes of Nepal – they too acknowledge the importance of the great communal sacred sites for the local population and have developed their own variation of ‘territorial cult’. They have begun to patronise the great festivals on Thulo Sailung and Kalingchok and to ban the consumption of alcohol. And, through the construction of ‘martyrs’ gates’, they transform the sacred sites into places for their commemoration. The promise for individual freedom in the world has become more important than liberation from the world.
Maoist procession entering the village Doromba

Doromba, 2003

The Maoist cadre, holding the Buddhist flag, are followed by the untouchable musicians (damai), the Buddhist priest (lama), and the Maoist cultural union - each playing their respective musical instruments: the trumpet, the cymbal, and the guitar.
On a temporary stage, decorated with banners of slogans, the cultural union of the Maoists performs dances glamorizing their heroic battle for a better world.
Preface

1 According to the Nepal Population Census 2001 the Tamangs number 1,282,304, i.e. 5.6% of Nepal's total population.

2 The field researches, which provide the main data for this book, were conducted between 1992 and 1997. The same sites were revisited until 2004. The research was funded by the Austrian Fund for Scientific Research (FWF) and the Jubilee Fund of the Austrian National Bank.

Chapter 1

1 On guthi and kipat see D.R. Regmi 1966 and M.C. Regmi 1976; on the history of guthi donations of the Malla kingdom in Yolmo see Clarke 1980.

2 So far, the history in Nepal's Middle Hills and Tamang clan history has been little explored.


4 The Tamang kinship term ashyang means 'father-in-law' and 'mother's brother' and is related to the marriage rule to marry the son or daughter of the maternal uncle - in anthropological terms cross-cousin marriage rule - prevalent in Tamang society.

5 On the ancient Tibetan clans see Stein 1961 and Ramble 1997a.

6 The name of the common ancestor of the Tamang's 'brother clans' - meme khor - and the offering ritual to their ancestral deity may differ from region to region. Clan ancestors and the way the offering rituals are performed are a popular topic among the Tamangs.

7 The integration of new groups under the ethnonym Tamang has been noted until the late 20th century. Levine describes the compulsory adoption of the ethnonym Tamang among Tibetans in Western Nepal as a political strategy of the Nepalese government aimed at integrating Tibetan groups within their political domain. See Campbell 1997: 221, citing Levine 1987: 79–80.

8 The old generation among the Tamangs often talk of geographical boundaries for the choice of marriage alliances, thus asserting that until recently the gnyen khor were locally defined.

9 On the ancient Twelve Tibetan Kingdoms compare with Uebach 1987: 20–21 and Petech 1980. In the 10th century the 'Nepal Mandala' of the Kathmandu Valley, too, consisted of twelve districts; see Mary Slusser 1982. Among the Magars in central Nepal (Gulmi district) exist similar classifications, there called Bara Magarant and Athara Magaran; the Bara Magaran, like among the Tamangs, earlier seem to have been associated with twelve princedoms; but among the Magars, too, the divisions twelve and eighteen refer to classifications of twelve and eighteen Magar clans; see Lecomte-Tilouine 1993: 33.

10 On the classification of the bsTan srgng ma bcu gnyis see de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 181–82. According to a Buddhist priest from Risiangku, the twelve Tamang clans stem from these guardian deities; the Yerab yul ha is said to be the head yul ha, Dorje Yudon ma, the greatest of the bsTan srgng ma bcu gnyis. One of them is said to be Ekajati, who has her seat at Chobar, where Manjusri wielded his flaming sword, cutting a gorge and emptying the lake of the Kathmandu Valley.

11 The Tamang informants translated the Tibetan term gyal sa - 'capital' - as 'kingdom'. The 'local kingdoms' or 'princedoms' of the Tamangs usually consisted of one (clan) settlement with little power beyond.

12 On Timal, there exists also another saying which I recorded in Thulo Parsel: Bahra Temal Tehra Pagu - (meaning) thirteen villages in 'Twelve Temal'.
13 Stein, 1961: 10, 13-14, suggests a decomposition of the number twelve into $3 \times 4$ or $(2 \times 3) = 12$ different classes of peoples. Parshuram Tamang (former secretary general of the Nepal Tamang Ghedung and indigenous peoples’ representative from Asia at UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples) suggests that the number twelve goes back to twelve different social status’ related to political and ritual functions (personal communication).

14 Besides the Ruichen Cyopge exist other Tamang cosmogonic texts named Kukpa Khachyoi and Jikten Tamchyoi. Like the Ruichen Cyopge, they often follow Tibetan Buddhist origin myths and include the Eighteen Great Clans. In one particular example, though - the topic in Chapter III - it talks of Five Tamang Ancestors. More on the Tamang text Ruichen Cyopge see Steinmann 1987b: 310 and Macdonald 1980.

15 See Stein op.cit.: 2-22.

16 On recurring Tibetan clan names among Tibeto-Burmese groups in Nepal see Ramble (1997). For more details, see Chapter III.

17 On the Tibetan clan Dong see Stein op.cit.; Ramble op.cit.; and Macdonald op.cit.: 201–202.

18 Recorded in 1996. This origin story is said to be written in a text named Jikten Tamchyoi, to which I had no access.

19 Note, in Helambu there is a village called Gangyul.

20 See Stein op.cit. and Ramble op.cit. Note the similarity with the nine Gurung clans, 'Mina kugi', as cited by Ramble p. 496.

21 In Nuwakot, according to a local narrative, Dong Chenpo, the ancestor of the Dimdung, fled from Uissamye (Tib. dBus bSam-yas) with his close kin after assassinating the evil king Langdarma (Tib. Glang dar ma). See Ramble op. cit. p. 499, citing Holmberg 1989: 53. On the story on the murder of the last Tibetan king see Uebach 1987: 36.

22 According to Jiambyang Lama, of Gole clan, this myth is sung by the tamba and written in the sherab of the bompo; sherab is an oral transmitted text of the Tamang bompo containing the knowledge on the names of ancestors and offering rituals; the myth was recorded in 1996. Stein op. cit., too, cites many examples in which the genealogies of ancient Tibet derive their origin from marriages between humans and gods. Compare also with another Tamang myth described by Holmberg 1989: 51–53, and quoted by Ramble 1997a.

23 The same story is told in detail in Chapter II.

24 Unfortunately he did not have the text with him, but he was certain that he recollected the content correctly. Recorded and translated in Kathmandu, 1996.

25 Number of descendants was not mentioned.

26 In Thagam, a Tamang village in the northern part of Sindhu Palchok district, the main clan is Thing who there refer to themselves as Lhasa Thing! See more in Chapter III.

27 This oral history was recorded from a Tamang man living near the stupa Bodnath in Kathmandu Valley in 1995, where he conducted his own research. He died in 1997.

28 On the provinces named 'four horns' and the organization of military units in ancient Tibet see Uray 1960.

29 Ehrhard 1997: 134, f 17: (citing The Autobiography and Collected Writings of the Third Rig-'dzin Yol-mo-pa sprul-sk'u bsTan-'dzin nor-bu, Dalhousie: Damcho Sangpo, 1977, vol. I, p. 117) in Tibetan texts of the 17th century one finds alongside mang-kar and mang-gar the spelling ma-gar. For the identification of the earlier Magars reigning in Barkhu, in my opinion, could be of interest the ancient Tibetan clan Mang-dkar of the Mang-dkar valley in Upper Tsang (Gtsang stod yul, today in modern Lha-rtse county mentioned by Brandon, unpublished manuscript.)

30 The Ghale consider themselves separate from the Tamangs, although they speak the same language and intermarry with the Tamangs, in Barkhu mainly with the Thokar clan. Höfer 1986, estimates the arrival of the Tamangs in the region of Gosainkund only in the early 18th century.

31 Quoted by Ehrhard op. cit.: 134, f. 18.

32 Some of the Tamang informants explained that the clan name Gole could derive from the Tibetan term go-ba, tax collector and local administrator.. On the role of the former go-ba in the Himalayan border region, see Steinmann 1988.

34 Here I follow the theoretical concept of ‘making a place’ as used by Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 6.

35 Recorded in Sailung in 1996.

36 Oppitz, 1988, has discussed in detail the marriage structure and the three stones of the fireplace in the Magar house representing three patri-lines and marriage rule.

37 Recorded in 1997.

38 In comparison: Höfer, 1981:150, mentions that among the Mamba clan in Dhading district the deities of the fire and fireplace are considered female; they are called Goigar Dolma and Alen Dewa.

39 In ancient Tibetan chthonic tradition, too, a demoness represents the Tibetan land; compare with Gyatso 1989, Diemberger and Hazod 1994: 13.

40 The literal translations are ‘lord of the cultivated earth’ (sibda) and ‘lord of the sacred place’ (neda).

41 See also Höfer, 1997: 133–172; he describes the sibda neda offering ritual of the Tamang village Bhokteni (Dhading district); he compares the male-female configuration in the Tamang fertility ritual to the ancient Tibetan tradition of the sacred male mountain and female lake. He explains the sibda neda deities to inhabit solid elements such as soil, stone, rock and wood. For a detailed description of another sibda neda cult in Chayarsaba (Dolakha district), see Tauchscher 1993.

42 This and the subsequent quotations were recorded in 1997 in the Tamang village Chayarsaba in northwestern Dolakha district.

43 Beautiful examples of the primordial marriage between lu and tsen are given in several variations of Tamang songs sung by the tamba in Timal and translated by Steinmann 1985: 563 - 569.

44 On the ancient Tibetan social concept termed ‘bone and flesh’ see Levin 1981.

45 Golmo Raja and Hunga Raja are often cited ancestor deities among the Tamang bompos.

Golmo Raja and Golmo Rani, too, are invoked by the Indo-Nepalese jankris.

46 For further information on the Deolang festival see Miller 1979; details on the dangur, p. 107, fn. 3.

47 Here I refer to the Tibetan mountain cult in which specific mountains are considered as abodes of the territorial deities and community’s ancestors. In Tibet earlier the festivals for the mountain deities were organised by local federations of four, six or more villages called tsho bviz, tsho druk (‘four tribes’, ‘six tribes’). Some of these federations, who live around their sacred mountain, still exist in Tibet’s bordering regions (e.g. Amdo), but have generally been replaced by Buddhist religious institutions. On the organization of the Tibetan fumigation (bsang) ritual, as a communal mountain ritual, see Karmay 1995: 162 - 207. On the historical-political background of the mountain cult in Tibet, see Karmay 1996: 59 - 75.


51 On the early pilgrimage of the Newar Malla kings to Gosainkund see Vergati 2004.

52 On the history of Yolmo–Dolakha town, see Shrestha 1971.


56 On the history of Dolakha town, see Bajracharya & Shrestha 1974.
57 See Ehrhard 1997a: 130; Clark & Manandhar 1986: 119, f. 9: previously the king of Sankhu has been described as a sovereign ruler who controlled the trade route.
58 See Wright 1958: 128.
59 Cf. Ehrhard 2004 on the incarnation lineage of the Yol-mo-ba sPrul-skus (16th to 18th centuries) and on the renovations of the stupas in the Kathmandu Valley 1990, 1991.
61 On the political aspect of the ‘hidden valleys’ see Ehrhard 1996 and 1997b; and Diemberger 1996b.

Chapter 2

1 The main Buddhist destinations of pilgrimage for the Tamangs are mentioned in a Buddhist text referred to by Steinmann 1987a: 204 and Macdonald 1983b: 159–160, footnotes 84 and 85: herein the primary Buddhist sites as named by the Tamangs are:
- in India (Sarnath and Bodhgaya [Dorjedin, Baranasi, Camjedung]) and in Tibet (the monastery of Bsam-yas [Usiamyie]);
- followed by Carigang (Tib. Ca ri gangs ri) in Monyul, described as belonging to the periphery of ‘Greater Tibet’, belonging to the descendants of the lDong. [In my view, this may also refer to the oldest Tamang gompa Chari Ghyang in the area of Sainlung; see also Chapter 1.] The other sacred place stated is Lapchi Chyukar (Tib.: La phyi chu bar) north of Sainlung;
- in the Kathmandu Valley: Swayambunath, Bodnath, and Namobuddha;
- and last as the Tamang Buddhist site, the chorten of Sainlung. Recorded in Burunga in 1996.
3 For a detailed study on the ritual of the ‘pole of the ancestor’ in Timal, named the Doila (Tib. mdos), see Steinmann 1992: 759.
4 In the Kathmandu Valley are the famous Godavari fountains, where at the same full-moon pilgrims feast. On the meaning of Godavari in Lapchi, see Huber op. cit., p. 251: Godavari was nothing but a district consisting of heaps of rocks and earth before glorious Heruka there subjugated the demon Bhairava.
5 Very similar myths (in 1996) were told regarding the discovery of the sacred caves: as well for the cave near Thulo Sainlung as for the cave of Sanu Sainlung.
6 This and the following quotations were recorded in the Sainlung region in 1996.
7 See Macdonald 1983b: 133.
8 The etymology of Sainlung (sa yi lung) and the rituals for the dead of the Tamang on Thulo Sainlung are reminiscent of the sa-yi-gompa, the entrance to the ‘land of the dead’ on the Oble rock dome in the Gurung area further to the west and described by Mumford 1989: 186–191.
10 Similarly, the cult of the ghzi bdag as the local ‘territorial chief’ with his seat on a mountain, is also present in the Tibetan popular tradition, as on the sacred mountain rMa chen sPom ra of Amdo; see Karmay 1997: 67.
11 The gewa ceremony of the Tamangs resembles the Gurung death ceremony lead by the Ghyabre shaman, where a similar effigy of the deceased person is built. See Mumford op. cit. Both recall the royal death ceremony of the unreformed Bon in ancient Tibet, described in a manuscript found in Tun-huang. See Lalou 1952.
12 See Karmay (2001 [1972]: xxix, fn. 2 where he quotes the text Mila ram gu written by gTsang snyon Heruka.
13 Sadbiu possibly derives from Skt. sadbij.
14 A similar practice is described among the Gurung, perhaps with similar roots: during the death ceremony, a pole (ala) is struck into
the earth in front of the house as a symbol of the cosmic marriage of a Ghale king and an underworldly demoness, Mumford 1989: 182. Note that also here the pole is erected in the name of the deceased. The Ghale king most probably refers to a tradition in Tibet, since Ghale are always considered as Tibetans.

15 Compare with the ‘verbal journey’ as described and explained by Höfer 1999.

16 India has become part of the villagers’ life world, where many today are compelled to go in search of work.

17 A similar name to Chhiriwa is quoted by Höfer 1981: 93, in his study on the Western Tamang. There ciwa is the name of a shamanic ritual and connected to a ‘pole’. In this ‘the golden pole leaned towards the earth when the Mamba and Dimdung clans came down to Serdung country, a village in the upper Anku Khola’.

18 Unfortunately the informant did not know the name of the gompa, but the location indicated, points to the northern part of Sindhu Palchok.

19 Or could the name Brokchan derive from the Tibetan clan name Bro? Interesting is also the fact that the protector deity (phola) and place of origin of the Brokchan clan, as stated in the Kukpa Khachyoi, are the same as for the Bomjan, who in another text, one version of the Ruichen Cyopge, are considered the brother clan (Nep. suage bhai) of the Yonjon.

20 The Gole and Thing, according to local oral history, played an important role in the northern region of Sindhu Palchok during the Malla era; the early settlements of the Rumba by the Tamangs are often placed in the Kathmandu Valley.

21 The clans which form the local ‘brother clans’ may vary from region to region. The present list was recorded in Sailung region and Timal.

22 Another text with the same title Kukpa Khachyoi was described by Macdonald 1983: 134.

23 The text was photographed 1993 in Phasku at the house of Babu Lal (Moktan) Lama and translated by Lama Padan Pakhrin, Kathmandu.

24 Gansum, among the Tamangs are the ‘men of honour’. These are the Buddhist priests, the lamas; the priests for propitiation of the earth divinities, the dhambis; and the ‘bardes’ of the oral tradition, the tambas. See also Steinmann 1987a: 204, fn. 2, and Macdonald 1983b: 134.

25 Tamba singi - the tampa lion (singi means lion): the tampa in the Tamang tradition is the oral historian; tampa singi also refers to chief or political leader. Steinmann, 1987a: 199, writes that the ‘power of speech’ (tam chyoi) of the tampa is identified with the mythical bird Garuda, called mrawai singi.

26 On the Buddhist origin myth see e.g. Kvaerne 1985.

27 Akhe in Tamang language means grandfather and has the same syllable khe. The Thakali, who belong to the same language group, use a similar word (ke) for ancestor; see Vinding 1992. Höfer suggested that khe might derive from the Tibetan word mkhas (pu), scholar, and the khe inga could mean the ‘five scholars’, of the Buddhist doctrine (personal communication).

28 To compare: in the Ruichen Cyopge quoted by Macdonald, 1983b: 138, the clan god of the Bal is named Gyalbo Lahibu Nangsari Mamu.


30 The Yonjon genealogy of two folios is in the possession of Karma Siddhi Lama from Risiangku, Sailung.

31 Erhard, 1993: 81, mentions three teachers who were important for the diffusion of Nyingmapa gterma teachings in northwest Nepal in the 18th–19th century, starting from southern Tibet (Mangyul – Kyirong): Kah-thog Rig’dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755), ‘Karla Phrin-las bdud-joms (1726–1789) and Brag-dkar rta-so sprul-skhu Chos-kyi dbang-phug (1755).

32 On Saipala in Yarlung valley (Tibet) see Hazod 2000.

33 Unfortunately the old gompa Chari Ghyang was destroyed during the earthquake in 1934. It was thereafter rebuilt.

34 Recorded from the Tamang Buddhist priest responsible for Chari Ghyang in 1999.

35 The genealogy (phorab) was photographed in Doromba.

36 The Malla kingdom at that time extended to
Nuwakot in the west and to Dolakha in the east.


38 The Badi are an Indo-Nepalese untouchable caste of musicians, dancers and entertainers; see Gaborieau 1978: 223.

Chapter 3

1 On the history of Dolakha, see Bajracharya & Shrestha 1974, who made a detailed analysis of inscriptions found in the temples of Dolakha.

2 See Erhard 1997a: 130. Clarke and Manandhar 1986: 119, f. 9, wrote that before the Malla kings from Kathmandu Valley expanded to Kuti, the king of Sankhu was the sovereign ruler who controlled the northern trade route. On the expansion of the Malla kingdom in the 16th century see also Wright 1958: 128.

3 For further information on the Newar traders in the Himalayan regions and on Dolakha see also Lewis 1993, Slusser 1982, and Stiller 1973.

According to inscriptions found in Dolakha at the time of the reign of Ujot Dev (around 1516–1534 ad) and Sinha Dev (around 1534–1550 ad), Dolakha had an independent status from the Malla rulers of the Kathmandu Valley when they minted silver coins. The first known silver coins from Kathmandu are the ‘Mahendra Mall’ from the time of Mahendra Malla (1560–1574). See Bajracharya & Shrestha op. cit.

4 On the changes of land policy in Tibet during the rule of the 5th Dalai Lama see Diemberger 1996: 6, 14.

5 Bajracharya & Shrestha op. cit.

6 Bajracharya & Shrestha op. cit.

7 On the Thangmi (Thami) tradition and linguistic affiliations see Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin op. cit.

8 On the ethnic composition in central Nepal see Frank 1974.

9 See previous Chapter II on the ‘Five Ancestors’ (khe nga) of Sailung mentioned in the Buddhist cosmogonic text Kukpa Khachyoi (Tib. ikugs pa kha dpyod), consisting of the five Tamang clans Moktan, Yonjon, Ghising, Brokchan and Bal; see also Tautscher 1996.

10 That the majority of the pilgrims on Kalingchok are Tamangs, was also observed by Miller 1979 and Macdonald 1983a.

11 Miller, op. cit., writes that in 1979 a Newar priest sacrificed the animals. This provoked some tension between himself and the Tamang bompo, which was solved by the Newar priest by using the knife of the bompo to kill the sacrificial animal. When I observed the Kalingchok festival, there were no Newars or Hindu priests.

12 On the religious meaning of the Tibetan bsang ritual see Karmay 1995.

13 The holy water (tui) of the Buddhist Tamangs is said to contain substances of medicine and to be empowered with mantras.

14 On the meaning of the setting up of a luntar see Karmay 1993.

15 Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975: 177, writes: ‘The Tshe ring nched inga are mountain-goddesses, whose residence is the jo mo gangs dkar or La phyi gangs. At the foot of this mountain are supposed to be five glacial lakes with water in different colours, which are consecrated to this group of goddesses. Usually the Tibetan works only mention that the residence of these five goddesses lies on the border of Nepal and Tibet.’ The Himal Gauri Shankar lies east of the Lapchi range and immediately north of the Rolwaling Valley. The Hindu goddess Gauri is the ‘mild’ form of the Shakti of Shiva, the name means ‘the yellow or brilliant’ or ‘the white goddess’. Shankara 39 The Majhi live along the rivers of the Terai and the middle hills; they are fishermen and boatmen; Gaborieau op. cit., p. 87.

40 According to Gaborieau, op. cit., p. 204, the Pahari are an indigenous tribe who live at the fringes of Newar society or have been assimilated by it. Pahare is a denomination often used as ‘mountain people’.

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means 'Auspicious' and is a name of Shiva in his creative aspect or as head of the Rudras. See Dowson 1992, and Eck 1983.

16 In the Rig-Veda, Shiva is known as Rudra, 'the thunderer'. See Vasini, 1992: 29 – 30, describing the meanings of Rudra: 'The word 'Rudra' means the liquidator of misery as also the giver of knowledge. It also means one who makes the sinner weep. [...] The old Aryans saw Rudra who went about howling with the stormy winds (Maruts) who were his sons (Rudryas). [...] In the view of the Vedic Aryans whenever the lightning strikes man or beast, it is the work of Rudra. The arrow of Rudra is maleficent. As a malevolent deity He wields the lightning and holds the thunderbolt in his arms. He causes havoc among children, men, cattle and the horses. His arrows are strong and swift. He is man slaying. He is an Asura of Heaven. He is terrible as a beast, destructive and fierce. [...] Rudra is also known as 'Grisanta', which signifies one who extends happiness to all from his residence in Kailasa or in speech or in rain.'

17 On the Buddha of Rudra see Stein 1995.

18 Compare with the previous Chapter II: also on Sailung the clan Moktan is seen as the clan to whom they trace their origin in that region. See Tautsch 1996.

19 An interesting parallel concerning a rock in a basket by the Na-khi in China is given by Hőfer, 1994: 63, footnote 35, citing Rock 1952, I: 250: "The life god resides in a special basket for each family, and in this basket a black rock the size of a fist [...] represents indestructibility and unchangeableness and [...] the father of the Na-khi (human) race."

20 Recorded near Burunga, Sailung, in 1994.

21 On the Tibetan demoness and her Buddhist subjugation see Gyatso 1989.

Chapter 4

1 The ethnographic data was collected during field research in summer 1996 and 2001. It was financed by the Austrian Fund for Scientific Research (FWF). I thank Ben Campbell and Keith Dowman for a preview of their unpublished materials and for valuable information.

2 See Vergati 2004: 119. Vergati in her article describes a beautiful Newar narrative painting (vilapu) illustrating the royal pilgrimage to Gosainkund.

3 On the Hindu interpretation of the Gosainkund festival at janai purnima and on the merging of Hindu and Buddhist cults at this site see Macdonald 1983 and Vergati op. cit.; on the Buddhist interpretation of Gosainkund see Dowman 1981 and Wylie 1970.


6 See Dowman op. cit.: 184; and Macdonald op. cit.: 301.


8 Macdonald, op. cit., p. 299.

9 The myth is quoted by Macdonald op.cit., p. 300. The same myth is mentioned by Wylie op. cit.: 26-27 and Dowman op. cit.: 229.


11 The importance of the festival of Gosainkund for marriage alliances among the Tamang has been well described by Campbell 1998.

12 The dresses and attributes worn by the hom-po pilgrimizing to Gosainkund Lake are very similar to those of the Tamang hom-po going on Kalingchok and Thulo and Sanu Sailung; see the previous two chapters. Interesting, though, are the variations in the headdresses worn by them; compare with the photographs.

13 The specific colours linked to the seven mothers need to be rechecked. The names of the mothers were told to me by an old Tamang hom-po from Dhunche, Meme Jhankri of the Thokar clan, who combined Nepali and Tibetan names. Compare also with Holmberg 1989: 154 – 155, who conducted
his research in neighbouring Dhading district; he writes that, since children are considered to have no proper life-force (so), a 'life-force tree' (so dungma) is erected. And the children's life-force is in the care of 'mothers' (kale ama) who construct the human body 'as wasps construct mudhives'. The life-forces of the children are supposed to play in all kinds of flowers and the Tamang speak of a child's so mhendo or 'life-force flower'. When children are ill, bombos 'open up' or 'clarify' their so mhendo. The mabun and the flowers in the vases correspond to the so mhendo described by Holmberg.

A similar tradition exists in Tibet: according to Tsering Gyalpo of the Lhasa Academy of Social Science (TASS, personal communication), in Ngari (W.Tibet), as in many other parts of Tibet, a female deity called bamo with her seat on the mountain is considered the protectress of the children but also as one who causes disease. She attacks children, generally at night, causing illness. People say that at night she carries the children on her shoulders up to her mountain. On several occasions fumigation (bsang) offerings are made on this mountain and a life-tree is erected.

14 Clarke 1980, writes that Helambu has had continuous connections with the Kagyüpa and Karmapa lineage since the 11th century, since the time of Milarepa's retreat. The first Buddhist gompas in Helambu, however, according to him were of the Nyingmapa school and were built after the Malla king granted a guthi in the late 17th century. Clarke estimates the first settling of a Karma lama (of Karma Lobsang in Gortsahling) in Helambu to have been in the second half of the 18th century.

15 The descendants of the Karma Lama in Gangyul claim to possess a copperplate, but refuse to show it. Clarke, op. cit., has published similar copperplates regarding guthi land-grants connected to the foundings of the Buddhist gompas in Helambu.

16 Also in the shamanic tradition of the Ghale Gurung a deer is sacrificed to the ancestral spirit. The Gurung's ancestral spirit is called Drong, according to Mumford, 1986: 64, in Tibetan meaning a 'wild form of yak'!

17 In a Tamang Buddhist text on the origin of the Eighteen Great Tamang Clans found in Burunga (11 folio): 'mtho kar (high point) came down (babsa) in tho mthos ri' gyan bshal.' The latter is the name of the 28th king in the Tibetan royal genealogy as well as the name of a hill in the lower Yarlung (the lha 'bab ri), considered to be where the royal ancestor gNa'khri btsan po descended. See Hazod, 2000. Interesting is also the statement made by Campbell, 1998: 174 – 177, quoting Vinding (1993: 25): 'I have so far not traced a Tibetan etymology for the Tokra (Thokar), but Vinding does mention a medieval King Thokarchan ('the king with the white turban') in the region of the Thak Khola.'

18 Lengdisyung (or Lende) is a tributary of Trisuli river near Rasuwa, syung in Tamang language means 'river'.

19 More information on the Tamang Gole see Tautscher 2006: 262 – 263.
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**Tamang Terms and Names**

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