

Proceedings of an International Seminar on the

# **ANTHROPOLOGY OF NEPAL: Peoples, Problems and Processes**

September 7–14, 1992  
at the Hotel Vajra, Kathmandu, Nepal

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## FOREWORD

Read as a 'Welcome Speech' at the opening ceremony  
7 September 1992

About a year ago the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, in collaboration with the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, made a decision to hold an international conference in Kathmandu on the topic of **The Anthropology of Nepal: Peoples, Problems and Processes**. The primary intent of the conference planners was that by bringing together a distinguished group of anthropologists from many different countries they would thereby promote a better understanding of Nepalese society and culture.

As the Executive Director of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies I am proud to be associated with this conference, though without losing my inherent humility. This is, indeed, one of the few prides that will endure in my memory for a long time to come. The conference is the first of its kind to be held in Nepal, and hence it is also the first time that I have had the privilege to address such an awesome assembly of scholars. However, the sense of my own inferiority cannot prevent me from welcoming you with a heart that is characteristic of a member of a society that is not yet fully modernised. Despite the scientific and other advances made in many parts of the world Nepal is still a traditional, backward-looking, and to some extent, impervious society. I am proud that I am its citizen and I am proud that I mean what I say. Not meaning what you say is one of the cultivated marks of modernisation. The process of growth in my personality—if I have any personality at all—can be a microcosmic case for an anthropological study of Nepalese culture.

The story of what we call anthropology in Nepal is not very old. It began fitfully with the research work of western scholars in the nineteenth century. Kirkpatrick (1811), Hamilton (1819), Hodgson (1874), Oldfield (1880), Vansittart (1894), Lévi (1905), Northey and Morris (1926) and Landon (1928) among others, did work that stretched between history and anthropology. Their publications gave us some bright insights into the nature and structure of Nepalese society and culture, and in so doing provided the nucleus for the coming generations of anthropologists, both Nepalese and foreign.

Anthropological research in the modern sense of the term began with the scholarly work of Professor Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf in 1953. His comprehensive research on the Sherpas is a landmark in the evolution of Nepalese anthropology and it greatly inspired both Nepalese and foreign scholars. Indeed, Haimendorf set a pattern in the anthropology of Nepal and the subsequent rapid growth in research in all branches of the subject can chiefly be attributed to the impact of his pioneering work.

Tribhuvan University woke up to the need to set up a Department of Anthropology/Sociology comparatively late in its history of 32 years. On the recommendation of Professor Ernest Gellner of the London School of Economics, Anthropology/Sociology was introduced as a research subject in the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies in the early 1970s. In consonance with international experience, it became increasingly likeable and popular, with the result that a separate teaching department was opened in 1981 in the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences. The dynamics of employment opportunities coupled with a comfortable passage through the discipline drew more and more students, women far more than men. Compared with the handful of students in 1981, the number of applicants seeking M.A. admission in the Department of Anthropology rose to 900 in 1992! I think the multiplication of young men and women in the Department of Anthropology is a good indication of both the popularity and utility of the subject; it seems to have a bright future in Nepal in the hands of both native and non-native scholars. Research into Nepal's ethnic, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity is the academic need and pleasure of both western and eastern scholars; it may be more need than pleasure for us. And there comes a time when need (economic), without our knowing it, gets either transformed into or mixed with pleasure. The transformation or mixture becomes again an indication of our love for and dedication to the subject of research and teaching.

Nepal is a heterogeneous society that still awaits anthropological exploration. But the heterogeneity is neither so sharp nor schismatic as, for example, in India or some other multi-ethnic or multi-religious nation. Nepal's ethnic pluralism has a unique kind of cohesiveness. The separate ethnic groups have lived for centuries in both social and emotional closeness; they have never quarrelled on linguistic or religious issues. Ethnic harmony has so far been an important part of our national consciousness. However, anthropologists all over the world find, as a rule, greater adventure in tracking the intractable societies. Despite ethnic harmony, Nepal will assuredly not fail to provide such anthropologists with many major and challenging problems. For example, the difficulty in detecting the underlying reasons for backwardness and economic immobility, despite both the will of the people for development and the

scale of foreign economic assistance. I believe that problems of this kind cannot be solved by economists alone. Likewise, the analysis of poverty and development also requires anthropologists who are willing to delve deeply into the psychological, genetic, cultural and political heritage. I would like to take this opportunity to make a suggestion to both the native and non-native anthropologists assembled here this afternoon to work out joint or separate projects in order to embark upon an authentic study of Nepal from a wide anthropological perspective. Most studies done so far have been perfunctory and lacking in imaginative understanding of the relationship between the ideal and the reality that should inform the anthropology of Nepal.

Anthropologists are by their temperament and profession capable of making observation, analysis and judgement in terms of past and modern categories to present a holistic picture of a society in all its dimensions. Objective analysis combined with imaginative penetration into the nature of humans and their institutions by anthropologists of creative power have recently impelled Clifford Geertz and James Clifford to call anthropology a profession of fiction-writers. I believe Nepal provides rich material still to be manipulated by thinkers of genius on an anthropologically creative plane. Anthropology is said to have been born of cultural encounter, and in Nepal there are such encounters at local, national and international levels. From the study of such encounters can come a genuine work of both timebound and timeless nature. If Geertz and Clifford are right it will tend towards timelessness, if the traditional anthropologists prevail it will be limited with topical relevance in both time and space.

As I am an outsider I am not competent to make a choice between anthropology as science and anthropology as art. So far as I understand the needs and potential of Nepal I believe in the co-existence of both. Anthropological discourse can be a multivocal discourse, like a work of fiction, as easily as it can be a univocal discourse in the popular traditional sense of social science research, empirically faithful within its limits.

Nepal has recently been hustled into modernity unawares. The dramatic transition even on the intellectual plane has its own pain—socially and culturally regenerative pain. We are, as it were, in the throes of change. Local culture, national culture, biculture and transculture are idioms in the anthropological dialectic. Owing to the changes that have taken place in human geography and history, modern humanity can hardly belong to a homogeneous or isolated culture. On the contrary, we are bombarded by ideas, images and sounds from all corners of the world. We are in need of developing a global culture not by destroying local cultures, but by strengthening and transcending them through the process of transcultural intercourse. This apparently paradoxical role is to be played by

anthropologists, historians, economists and environmentalists of creative imagination.

Nepal is made up of hills and plains—both equally important for cultural and anthropological richness and variety. The urgent questions at the moment vexing the rulers and planners in Nepal are the questions of poverty, ignorance, widespread corruption and nascent ethnic egotism. Native or foreign investigators, whether in the name of anthropology or some other discipline, should keep in the forefront of their minds a centripetal rather than a centrifugal attitude in investigating an essentially syncretic social system in Nepal.

I hope that this conference is going to play a crucial role by hammering at issues hitherto ignored both at previous conferences and seminars and in the published works of individual scholars. This galaxy of international celebrities will hopefully think out new solutions, new resolutions and new strategies for the exploration and development of Nepal. At the same time the seven days we are going to spend at the Hotel Vajra will, I trust, become a memorable moment of celebration and joy for the participants. Hard, serious, intellectual exercise and the mental state of celebration, when they go together, make an ideal ecology for any conference.

Distinguished friends, once again I welcome you heartfully to Nepal and to this international conference which, I am sure, is going to make important deliberations on the anthropology of Nepal. Being a shy, modest welcomer I myself should not say that Nepal is a beautiful country and Kathmandu a beautiful city with a great cultural heritage. I leave it to you. But I should say that I am proud to welcome you.

**Professor D.P. Bhandari**

**Executive Director, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University.**

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# **Introduction and Acknowledgements**

**Michael Allen and R.J. Fisher**

Over the past sixteen years numerous international anthropology conferences and seminars with a focus on the whole or part of the Himalayan region have been held in various parts of the world. Whilst the published proceedings of these meetings adequately reflect the burgeoning of scholarly interest in the west, they have failed to do so likewise for the rapidly increasing body of research carried out by local scholars. The reason for this is obvious enough; whilst many western scholars could raise the funds necessary to attend meetings held in such expensive locales as Chicago, Paris, Stockholm, Zurich, Oxford etc., only a handful of Nepalis, Tibetans etc. could manage to attend. Accordingly, at the conclusion of the last of such seminars, held in Zurich in 1990, I proposed that the next should be held in Kathmandu. A few months later I visited Kathmandu and held preliminary discussions with interested scholars at the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University. An hour later we had unanimously agreed to hold a conference, that it should focus on the anthropology of Nepal (rather than on the whole of the Himalayas), and that in addition to seeking to attract high quality academic contributions it should also provide adequate scope for that large body of both Nepalese and foreign scholars carrying out research in applied anthropology. Hence the committee's decision to encourage contributors to pay special attention to the kind of contribution that anthropology can make to the understanding of contemporary problems in social living in Nepal.

We also agreed that the two organizing institutions should be the The Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, and the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University. Whilst I undertook the work at the Sydney end, Mr. Nirmal Tuladhar agreed to attend to matters in Kathmandu. I would at this point like to formally acknowledge and thank Nirmal for the cheerful and efficient manner in which he carried out numerous organizational tasks both prior to and during the conference. He did much to contribute to the overall success of the occasion. I would also like to thank Dr. Bhandari, the Director of CNAS, for the alacrity and enthusiasm with which he committed the support both of his institution and of himself personally. Other Nepalese scholars who also made valuable contributions to the organizational success of the conference include

Professor Prayag Raj Sharma, Dr. Ram Chhettri and Ms. Indra Ban. But most of all I would like to thank Ms. Basundhara Dhungel for the enormous support and help she gave in maintaining some order and control over more than 18 months flow of correspondence with participating scholars. Finally, it would have been quite impossible to have mounted the conference without the help of a most generous grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation of New York.

The conference was officially opened at 4.00 pm on Monday the 7th September by the Minister for Education, Culture and Social Welfare Govind Raj Joshi and after further welcoming speeches by Professor D. P. Bhandari and myself, approximately 130 delegates attended a reception at the Hotel Vajra. During the succeeding six days a total of 54 papers were read in sessions focussing on the following topics:

**The Anthropology of Resource Management** (15 papers. Convenors: Dr. R.Chhettri and Dr. R.J. Fisher).

**Medical Anthropology** (6 papers. Convenor: Dr. P. Webster).

**The State and the People** (5 papers. Convenor: Dr. V. Kondos).

**Women and Development** (5 papers. Convenor: Ms. Indra Ban).

**Urbanism in Nepal** (11 papers. Convenors: Mr. A Shrestha and Dr. A. Kondos).

**General Anthropology** (11 papers. Conveno: Professor M. Allen).

Since one of the principal aims of the conference was to encourage the development of anthropology as a critical discipline within Nepal, it was particularly gratifying for the organizers to note that 17 of the papers were read by Nepalese scholars. But what was even more pleasing was the very large number of additional Nepalese scholars, bureaucrats and social workers who attended every session and who collectively made a major contribution to the level of debate and discussion. Of the 130 delegates 73 were from Nepal, 18 the U.S.A., 17 Continental Europe, 10 Australia, 9 the U.K., 1 Canada, 1 New Zealand and 1 Japan.

As is invariably the case at large conferences, the original allocation of papers to sessions has subsequently proved inadequate. Nineteen of the papers presented are not included here, in most cases either because they had been promised elsewhere or were not submitted by their authors. These were as follows:

Dyuti Bharal

Aspects of Urban Development: Migrant  
Women in the Carpet-Weaving Industry.

Bishnu Bhandari

Management of National Heritage Areas.

Graham Clarke	The State, Change and Development in the Himalayas.
David Gellner	Priests, Healers and Mediums: the Context of Possession in Kathmandu Valley
David Gellner	Shared Culture or Oppressed Outcastes? The Position of the Khadgi Dyahla and Others in the Spatial and Social Order of the Cities of Kathmandu Valley.
Sharada Kharel	Women's Participation in Community Forestry: the Nepal-Australia Community Forest Project Experience .
Ramesh Kunwar	A Critical Approach to the Current Situation of Bonded Labour in the Tharu Community of Far-Western Nepal.
Christian McDonough	The Management of a Canal Irrigation System in Dang, South-West Nepal.
Yasodha Shrestha Nee Nakarmi	Socio-Cultural Constraints of Working Women in Nepal.
Gopal S. Nepali	Democracy, Ethnicity and Problems of National Integration.
Al Pach	Gender, Culture and Disordered Experience in a High-Caste Hindu Village.
Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka	The State, Change and Development in Nepal.
W. Denis Pontius	Living on the Edge of the City: Tamang Villagers Perspectives of the Urban Environment.
Declan Quigley	Urban Anthropologies: the Kathmandu Valley in Comparative Perspective.
Rishikeshab Regmi	Dhimal Society in Transition.
Santi Rosario	Birth as a Danger in South Asia: a Bengali Case Study and it's Comparative Implications.
Anne de Sales	The Chantal Claims for Identity: from Integration to Separation.
Geoffrey Samuel	Tibet as Part of Southeast Asia.
Laya Prasad Upretty	Social Consequences of Deforestation in Nepal; Cases from the Tarai and the Hills.

The remaining 34 papers have been regrouped for publication purposes under the following revised headings: **The Anthropology of Resource Management** (10 papers); **Urbanism in Nepal** (6 papers); **Medical**

**Anthropology** (3 papers); **The State and the People** (3 papers); **Women and Power** (5 papers); **The Anthropology of Performance** (5 papers); and **Problems of Identity** (2 papers). The principal changes have been to replace **General Anthropology** with **The Anthropology of Performance** and **Problems of Identity**, and to rename **Women and Development** as **Women and Power**. We will now comment briefly on what we see as some of the distinguishing features, both positive and negative, of the papers presented under each heading.

### **The Anthropology of Resource Management.**

This panel was by far the biggest single grouping of papers (15 presented and 10 published) in the conference. Whilst this was no doubt in part due to the initial intent of the conference organizers to focus specifically on the kind of contribution that anthropology can make to the understanding and perhaps even resolution of problems in social living, it also accurately reflects the very large number of both indigenous and western anthropologists in Nepal engaged either directly or indirectly in applied anthropology.

The papers reflect a variety of concerns, including cooperative labour, the limitations of definitions of poverty based on narrow criteria of income and gender issues in resource management. The dominant concern is, however, around environment and natural resources and especially forestry. Of the ten papers here, seven deal primarily or to a significant extent, with forests. This emphasis is clearly related to the large amount of interest, within development agencies, in Nepal's forests, in environmental degradation, and in Nepal's community forestry policy. As Messerschmidt's paper shows, there are many areas to which anthropologists have contributed to an understanding of forest use and management.

Within the papers there is a close connection between resource anthropology, environmental anthropology and development anthropology. Most of the papers published here deal with development directly or have fairly obvious development implications. Many of the authors are, or have been, actively involved in development.

The strong empirical emphasis noticeable in most of the papers is consistent with widespread trends in development anthropology. Although Messerschmidt's paper points to the potential for development anthropology to contribute to anthropological theory, it is interesting to consider reasons why theoretical concerns have tended to be secondary in practice. Foremost amongst such reasons is assuredly the closeness of the connection between the anthropology of resource management and the development context within which it is generally practiced and funded.

Much of the research embodied in these papers was carried out by anthropologists working with development agencies or projects either in long-term positions or on shorter term consultancies. Such agencies tend to be concerned with empirical data rather than with what are perceived as esoteric theoretical issues. Even the work carried out by anthropologists in academia seems to reflect the concerns established in this 'development context'. This has all lead to some very interesting findings demonstrating the connections between social and cultural factors and resource use and management. Often this work has had useful practical and policy implications.

There are, however, some worrying negative aspects also. One such undesirable consequence (pointed out in Fisher's paper) is that the institutional context within which development takes place (especially the contractual nature of consultant research) may well limit the potential for such research to challenge the economic rationalist assumptions of the major development agencies.

Charsley (1982) made an important distinction between 'applied' anthropology (essentially the involvement of anthropologists as development practitioners or what we would call development anthropology) and the anthropological study of the processes of development (which we will refer to as the anthropology of development). The papers in this collection have something to offer from both of these fields, but there are few attempts to apply an anthropological approach to the study of the institutional context of development. However, the papers by Om Gurung, Fisher and Messerschmidt all identify such study as a need.

As the work of Thompson, Warburton and Hatley (1986) and Ives and Messerli (1989) show, the environmental problems of the Himalayas are as much institutional as anything else. Papers in this collection discuss the institutional context at the local level, but apart from the paper by Om Gurung, there is no study of macro-institutions (at either the national or international level).

The papers show how rich a contribution anthropologists have made to the understanding of local socio-environmental processes. It is likely that the next stage of the anthropology of resource and environmental management in Nepal will be an exploration of the development institutions. The outcome of this may indeed show how much the anthropology of development can contribute theoretically.

### **Urbanism in Nepal**

Urbanism is a rapidly increasing feature of Nepalese social life and in this section six contributors examine some of the key features of both its

traditional and new forms. Whilst five of the papers focus on Kathmandu valley, one (Sharma) shifts attention to the development of very different forms of urbanization found in the emergence of hill-towns in the nineteenth century.

The Kathmandu papers discuss such diverse topics as changing musical genres (Grandin), the semiotics of traffic behaviour (Gray), industrialization and workers political action (Kondos et al) and changing family and household patterns (Maharjan and Mühlich). A common problematic touched on though nowhere fully developed is how to theoretically conceptualize the relationship between traditional and modern forms of urbanization. The three principal cities of Kathmandu valley, Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon, share in common a long history of pre-industrial and non-western forms of highly concentrated and complex forms of urban living. Indeed, as a number of observers have noted, Newar culture is essentially an urban culture—so much so that even the smallest and most isolated of settlements replicate many of the distinguishing features of the big cities. Yet today Kathmandu valley is the scene of massive urbanization of a distinctively modern kind and which draws both its social and cultural inspiration from a great variety of sources in addition to the Newar.

Grandin's paper, focussing on contemporary musical forms in the city of Kathmandu and in nearby Kirtipur town, documents some of the growing complexity and diversity of genres found in both centres, though most especially in Kathmandu. Furthermore, by directly comparing the two communities he is able to point to some of the ways in which modern urbanism differ from the more traditional. He notes in particular a marked move away from 'geographically organised, collectively oriented, community-based life' to a much greater emphasis on individual autonomy and personal networks.

Gray, though focussing on the very different topic of traffic behaviour, is similarly concerned with what such data can tell him about Kathmandu as an urban centre that has recently undergone dramatic transformation. His conclusion, though expressed in a very different theoretical context, is not unlike Grandin's. If traditional Newar cities can be accurately depicted as 'archaic' (see Levy 1990) in the sense that they 'impose[s] a coherent, eternal and immutable moral order', contemporary Kathmandu approximates more closely to Raban's notion of a 'soft city'. The key feature of a soft city is that it constitutes 'a series of discontinuous stages where individuals can shape their selves'. However, Gray's rich and entertaining data makes it abundantly clear that at least one key feature of Levy's archaic city survives in modern Kathmandu traffic behaviour—the importance of hierarchy, even if relative position within the relevant



hierarchy is today much more keenly contested, especially at busy traffic intersections!

Maharjan and Mühlich both examine some of the ways in which modern forms of urbanism result in changing patterns of familial and household relations—Maharjan in a periurban Newar village in Kathmandu valley, and Mühlich by comparing Sherpa households in Solu Khumbu and in Bauddha. Whilst Maharjan contends that modernization and urbanization have wrought fundamental changes in Newar family life, most notably in greatly increased individualism resulting in a far higher incidence of nuclear as against joint families, Mühlich tends to the view that Sherpa households in the semi-urban context of Bauddha are organized on fundamentally similar lines to those found in the traditional rural context of Solu Khumbu.

Sharma's paper stands apart from the others in that he is concerned with neither the modern nor traditional forms of city urbanism but rather with the much smaller urban centres that emerged as hill-towns in nineteenth-century Nepal, in particular Chainpur in Koshi zone. His detailed analysis of both historical and ethnographic data demonstrates in a most interesting way how such Newar towns incorporate both social and architectural features that they share in common with the larger valley-based Newar settlements, and yet other features that derive directly from the unique historical and environmental circumstances of both their initial establishment and subsequent development. His material serves to remind us that urbanism comes in a great variety of forms and guises.

### **Medical Anthropology**

Medical Anthropology has loomed large in recent research in Nepal with scholars, both local and overseas, examining such topics as indigenous systems of diagnosis and healing, the social consequences of the introduction of western medical practices, the relationship between religious belief and bodily health etc. Two of the papers (Acarya and Dhungel) in this section pay particular attention to the politics of competitive health practicers in both rural and urban contexts. Acarya investigated two forms of alternative medicine practiced in Nepal—nature cure and indigenous healing practices. He argued that both of them provide attractive self-help alternatives to the costly and all too frequently ineffective allopathic practices currently favoured by government health officers. Dhungel investigated the availability of health services in the Kavre Palanchok District, their utilization and organization, and factors affecting patients choice. She found that most people preferred fee-charging private dispensers of western medicines to the easily accessible and free health services available at government operated health centres.

The latter were frequently criticised for both their inefficiency and their inability to understand the feelings and needs of local people.

Gaenzle mounts yet another, though somewhat less direct, critique of modern western-oriented health workers. He argues that because Rai healing rituals may be seen as enactments of metaphors deeply rooted in the Rai cultural idiom, the introduction of medical systems with an aetiology of illness that differs quite radically from the Rai raises serious questions concerning the efficacy of such systems. The main body of his paper is an elucidation of the root metaphor of a ritual journey to the place of origin as central to the healing rite discussed.

### **The State and the People**

Contributors to this panel were asked to address theoretical and empirical questions dealing with state–subject relations, such as nationalism, ethnicity, bureaucratic processes, the ‘democratic movement’ and changes impelled by the revolution of 1990. These are all indeed weighty issues and as such they constitute an exciting challenge for anthropology to demonstrate its capacity to illuminate the highly complex social and cultural processes found in modern nation states.

Though five papers were presented at the conference under this heading only three are included here. Nevertheless, these three between them succeed in raising a number of fundamentally important issues concerning state–subject relations.

Kondos et al explore the possibilities that a certain modality of action is becoming widespread and that a new form of identity has emerged with and from the experience of the success of the 1990 revolution. They argue that though the form of identity, a collective form, is new, its intelligibility rests on certain principles of an older form of knowledge. Furthermore, it would seem that the new modality of action (with its orientations, values and procedures) queries the emplaced form of power.

Mikesell examines some of the implications of the new local government law for resource management, environment, the local community and culture. He concludes that that the law will further facilitate the erosion of community control and stewardship of resources and in so doing disempower local organization and initiative. In the second part of his paper he compares the Nepalese local government law with the community organizations, committees, popular councils, and people-based parties in both Chile and Brazil. Needless to say, the Nepalese local government law fares poorly in this comparison.

Pande stands apart from all other contributors to this collection in that he is neither an academic nor an applied anthropologist, but is rather an idealistic politician (a Central Committee member of the United

Marxist–Leninist Party of Nepal) who has devoted a great deal of his time to ethnographic research into social problems in the Karnali zone. In this interesting paper he focuses on the continuing high incidence of a customary hill tradition called *jāri* in which a certain amount of hard cash or chattel is paid as penalty to the preceding husband of a woman by her subsequent husband. In the first part of his paper he describes the practice in some detail, locating it in both a wider historical and social context. But unlike many academic anthropologists he then goes on to directly consider the impact of such a custom on the quality of life of those involved, noting most especially the way in which it has been used by landlords, priests, merchants and money lenders to increase their control over cultivators. He concludes his paper with a number of concrete recommendations designed to ameliorate such problems.

### **Women and Power**

Of the five papers presented under this heading, two (those of Iltis and Thompson) were originally included in the conference session entitled **Women and Development** (convenor Indra Ban), one (Aziz) in the session on the **State and the People**, another (Gurung) in the session on **The Anthropology of Resource Management**, and the fifth (Kunreuther) in the **General Anthropology** session. Because little reference was made to development issues in any of these papers the editorial committee decided to regroup them under the more appropriate heading of **Women and Power**.

Aziz, in a follow-up study to her earlier account of the life of Yogamaya, an early twentieth century Nepalese woman rebel and poet of extraordinary abilities and courage, provides us with a vivid account of yet another remarkable Nepalese woman—Durga Devi, an early activist and dissident in the Arun Valley region. In her paper she recounts some of the key episodes in Durga's long career and considers how she is remembered, and forgotten. That Durga Devi exercised very considerable power during her turbulent life is made abundantly clear in the evidence provided by Aziz. But what is also made clear is the manner in which her achievements and memory have been removed from history. Aziz, in this paper, as in her earlier study of Yogamaya, has done much to rectify this omission.

Gurung's focus is on the gender dimension of resource management in a hill-region and its implications for our understanding of the ecological crisis. In the first part of her paper she systematically documents the nature and extent of women's participation in each of four main areas of resource control and management—agriculture, forestry, livestock and water. Her central contention is that it is women more than men who play a predominant role both in managing such resources and in helping to

maintain a balance between them. Yet despite this both government and non-government rural development models almost wholly ignore women's work, knowledge and potential capacities in sustaining mountain resources. She contends that little effective advance can be made in the design and implementation of rural development plans until this gender bias has been overcome.

Kunreuther turns her attention to the complex and controversial issue of the status and power of Newar women. As in a number of preceding studies (Kirkpatrick, Hamilton, Nepali, Allen, Gellner, Pradhan), she focuses on *ihi* and *bārḥā*, two elaborate rituals performed for pre-pubescent girls. But whereas all preceding studies focussed on what might be described as the orthodox and traditional versions of these rites, Kunreuther pays special attention to recent changes, most notably the replacement of *bārḥā* with a new rite called *risi prabāja* by those Buddhist Newars who have converted to Theravada Buddhism. She contends that *risi prabāja* yet further strengthens the position of widows in Newar society by legitimating their participation in religious rituals as nuns.

Iltis, in focussing on Swasthānī textual and ritual traditions, raises some fundamental issues concerning empowerment and its legitimation in Hindu society and polity. The Swasthānī *vrata* or vow is a popular tradition practiced throughout the Kingdom of Nepal in homes by families or publicly by women. When families perform the ritual it is the women who are the motivators, whilst in the public arena it is again women who go to pilgrimage locations for a whole month. Furthermore, the benefits to be gained from the ritual are equated to those of the consecration for kingship—that is to say, in both rituals divine female powers are first evoked and then imparted to individuals, homes, communities, sacred sites and ultimately the state as well. But such powers are not restricted solely to the traditional context of divine kingship. In her conclusion Iltis noted that during the 1990 revolution, whilst the men debated and demonstrated, 'large groups of women mobilized themselves to perform "vratas for democracy" at the major *places* of power—religious shrines—throughout Nepal'.

Thompson explores how high-caste Hindu women in Kathmandu use their religious activities, such as daily worship, weddings, filial rites, or fasting, as forms of resistance which range from the very overt to the extremely covert. She argues that though these women live socially constrained lives many of them find latitude in their religious activities for expressions of personal resistance which then have effects on their lives. Although they appear to conform to Hindu ideals through their religious activities, these women are actually able to express dissatisfactions, show their resistance and, in essence, not conform.

## The Anthropology of Performance

The five papers presented under this heading, though originally located elsewhere, have as their primary concern the documentation and analysis of performative genres—in two (van den Hoek and Korvald) the focus is on dance in the ritual content, in one (Pettigrew/Tamu) on shamanistic possession and in the remaining two (Tingey and Sharma/Wegner) on music.

van den Hoek and Korvald share not only a common focus on dance, but specifically on Newar dance/rituals of the kind known as *pyākham*—in van den Hoek's case the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* of Kathmandu and in Korvald's the Navadurgā *pyākham* of Bhaktapur. Furthermore, both authors also share Iltis's concern to document the centrality of a specifically female form of transformative power (*śakti*) that is repeatedly evoked in the ritual context to empower the King, the state and society in general. Through analyses such as these we are beginning to lay the firm foundations for a truly sophisticated understanding of the complex interrelations that obtain between ritual, politics and society in the South Asian context.

Pettigrew and Tamu provide convincing evidence that contrary to previous expert opinion Gurung (Tamu) shamanism does indeed include an ecstatic component in which the shaman becomes possessed. They describe in some detail both the rituals and the social context of the Pa-chyu possession tradition (*khhlye khaba*). The detailed descriptive material provided by these authors conclusively locates Tamu shamanism much closer to the classical Inner Asiatic Shamanic tradition than previously believed.

Tingey's aim in her interesting paper is to first describe some of the traditional attributes and features of the *pañcai bājā*—the ubiquitous wedding band of Nepal—and to then note some of the new musical influences that have been incorporated into the repertoire of such bands. She contends that though both the repertoire and the style of the *pañcai bājā* has undergone substantial change, the innovations are being accommodated within a continuing tradition.

Sharma and Wegner close the performative section with a brief though important note on both the antiquity and contemporary ethnography of a Bhaktapur musical group of the kind known as *bājā Guthi*. On the combined evidence of the contemporary musical repertoire of the *Bājā Guthi* of Baḍikhel and of a stone inscription they conclude that 'as early as the seventh century AD *dhimaybājā* had already acquired its function as a ritual drumming ensemble among the Newar'.

### **Problems of Identity**

The two remaining papers share a common interest in what might be described as problems of identity—in Buggeland's case the identity of a community of Santals in a Tarai village, and in Hepburn's case 'tourists' in Nepal.

Buggeland's main concern is to determine whether the Santals of Nepal, like those found in north India, maintain a separate tribal identity whilst at the same time actively participating in the larger context of a caste-structured and Hindu social world. She tackles this interesting and complex issue by focusing specifically on the Santals concept of Kālī. She contends that the Santals understand Kālī differently from caste-Hindus, as they incorporate her into their own cosmology.

Hepburn addresses the issue of how Nepalis seek to represent to themselves a new category of humans known as 'tourists' by recording and analysing the numerous stories that circulated in Nepal in response to the publicity surrounding first the disappearance and then the seemingly miraculous survival of an Australian trekker called James Scott. In an entertaining and insightful paper she raises fundamental issues concerning the processes whereby groups of people are named and presumed to be homogeneous, and how this then serves as a basis for moral evaluation.

**PART 1**

**THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**





# Forms of Cooperation in a Tamang Community

**Ben Campbell**

This is a presentation of some initial reflections on work in progress, and should be treated as a complex of questions about a theme which perhaps deserves more attention in the anthropological agenda in Nepal. Comparative data on agricultural cooperation in Nepal is relatively thin with some notable exceptions such as Messerschmidt (1981), Toffin (1986), and more recently Ishii (1993). Most ethnographic monographs contain a page or so on the subject but this is usually restricted to a few general comments. The underdeveloped interest in cooperation, specifically inter-household production, could be due to: the fact that it usually occurs on an informal, ritually unelaborated basis (March and Taqqu 1986); its often unproblematic appearance in social life; the analytically prejudicial tendency for conceptualising households as bounded units; and inherent problems of doing systematic fieldwork on this issue.

Why is this topic of interest? I suggest that systematic variance in the ways in which inter-household cooperation occurs in the different communities of Nepal is a key to understanding linkages between gender, class and culture. Indeed, Bista in his recent book (1991) identifies a disposition for cooperation as a distinguishing feature of the relatively egalitarian social structures of northern populations of Nepal, in contrast to those more influenced by caste principles. He claims further that 'the benefits of cooperative action can be very vital factors in the successful development of Nepal's inner potential' (ibid:159). On a more abstract level, cooperation is significant in that consideration of the different social bases on which labour can be performed provides us with a powerful line of enquiry to evaluate theories of The Domestic Economy. In this respect studies of inter-household cooperation are a logical complement to the feminist critique of the tendency to represent households as 'natural units'. I hope to offer an experiment in how these two interests, of cooperation as a significant social variable, and as a theoretical springboard, can be combined.

So what is cooperation based on? Can factors of altruism, moral constraint, self-interest, efficiency and exploitation be disentangled? In this paper I explore the idea that different forms of cooperative reciprocity can be understood in terms of diverse idioms and realizations of economic solidarity, that hinge on very different operationalizations of the notion of the household. I suggest that households are far from being unitary

economic entities. In a Tamang-speaking community of Rasuwa District the organisation of the village economy was not explained for me by the usual litany found in peasant studies discourse, that households are the primary units of production. Rather, I found that boundaries of household definition can be alternatively *extensive* or *delimited*, depending on the variable emphasis placed on the social content of mutual interest in productive exchanges.

I shall first describe the range of local categories employed in the classification of labour relationships, then discuss their various political-strategic implications for the ways in which interacting households are mutually articulated, and finally consider some comparisons with examples of cooperation elsewhere in Nepal and further afield.

It has not been possible to include here much of the quantitative data on which this study is based. I have included some indices of the broad statistical parameters pertaining to the types of labour by which the fields of nine selected households were cultivated over one year, and for contrast, over the millet and paddy transplanting season.

### **The research setting**

The village of Tengu is situated at 1,900 metres on the eastern slopes of the upper Trisuli Valley. It is eight km. south of Dhunche, the administrative and commercial centre of Rasuwa District, north-central Nepal. In 1991 Tengu consisted of roughly 44 households and a population of nearly 250 people. The local *jāt* are Ghale and Tamang, with a very few Newar (locally called 'Bei') and Gurung ('Krungr'). All these *jāt* intermarry. Only at the very end of my fieldwork was there a resident family of Kāmi blacksmiths. *Tamang ghet* is the village language, and on this basis, together with the overall socio-cultural homogeneity emphasised in the fact of *jāt* intermarriage (excluding Kāmis), I use the shorthand 'Tamang' to refer to the whole village population for the purposes of this paper.

Village agriculture is based primarily on unirrigated crops; wheat, maize, finger-millet and potatoes, though a 2,000 metre tolerant variety of rice known as *himāli sin* was introduced in 1990. The main livestock are hill cattle and buffalo, with some transhumant sheep and goats. Altitudes covered by the local agro-pastoral economy range from 1,000 metres by the banks of the Trisuli river, to over 4,000 metres around the pastures of Naukunda. Located as it is on the Kyirong trade route through the Himalayan chain, the village economy has historically relied on combining subsistence with various forms of exchange. These included waged portering for Newar merchants of Trisuli Bazaar, and barter of forest produce, especially temperate bamboo, for grain with Bahun-Chetri

villages half-a-day's walk or more to the south (prior to the establishment of the Langtang National Park in the 1970s). Since the opening of the road between Trisuli Bazaar and Dhunche in the mid-1980s, the latter has grown to be a significant local consumer market for the village economy, primarily in the production of milk and alcohol for sale and tourism-related portering. Nearly 20% of households have additional income from state employment, mostly in the Nepal army and postal service.

### **Idioms and contexts of labour cooperation**

The ways in which labour relations are described in the village are numerous and often contain ambiguities for participants, let alone observers. The classification presented here is a condensed simplification. Many practical situations cannot be so easily dismembered as this representation might suggest, and these production relationship categories should be treated as ideal types that conform more or less to locally conceived reality, though particular instances may well combine elements of more than one type. One implication of this is that there is not always that simple, clear distinction on the ground between sectors of generalised and balanced reciprocity which underpins Sahlins' (1965) formulation of the sociology of exchange.

I distinguish five major labour categories; household, kinship, festive, exchange and wage.

Household labour refers to that of the effective residential and commensal groups. The important point to stress though, is the fluidity of membership of such groups. While a husband, wife and their children generally constitute the core of most households, temporary and/or potentially long-term residents, such as children from other partners, daughters-in-law who have not fully moved from their natal home, old or single people, *gothālo* animal herders, and close relatives no longer resident in the village coming for extended visits, add and subtract to fluctuating *de facto* household membership. As Guyer (1981:98) has mentioned in her overview of the concept of the household in African studies, 'this not only makes data collection practically difficult but it makes precise calculations of production and consumption patterns in terms of household labour constraints...problematic'. Local idiomatic correlates of the analytic notion of the household enable relatively open household membership boundaries and their flexible manipulation. This is a feature of Tamang social life used by March (1979) to contrast Tamang and Sherpa communities. It made the definition of units for data collection necessarily somewhat arbitrary, and at the same time prompted the theoretical reflections discussed below.

For the nine selected households, the mean percentage of recorded total annual labour on their own fields performed by household members was 54%, with variation between 26% and 71%. The mean percentage of transplanting labour by household members was 33%, with variation between households from 9% to 57%.

Kinship seems an appropriate label to describe a category of work relationship beyond common household membership, in which stress is given to the valuation of the social relationship between participants rather than the labour performed. Coming across examples of this kind I would enquire as to the basis on which work was being done and be told that no reciprocation would be involved. The Tamang word most frequently used to describe this basis was *oleno* which could be rendered as 'voluntary' in English, lending a hand informally, and often saying the person being helped was seen working alone. There is no expectation of specific return, but a snack might well be shared. In addition to *oleno* the kinship relation of the people would be referred to by way of explanation to me (help was given *ani pangji*, *tewar pangji*, literally, 'saying father's sister', or 'saying husband's younger brother'). There was no obvious preponderance of either cognatic or affinal relatives in this kind of cooperation, though the status of wife-taker (*mha*) carries with it a certain hierarchical expectation to render occasional assistance unilaterally on request. A few hours' work might be freely given, but it was not very common to find a substantial day's work done in this way. Its occurrence was thus probably under-recorded in the survey. The nine households' mean of total annual labour by 'kinship' was a low 2%. The highest recording of a household's transplanting labour by 'kinship' was 11%.

Festive labour or *gohār* (Nepali. 'help, assistance' Turner [1931]) operates on the principle of calling people to work as a request, summons, or tribute. Reciprocation of the day's work may or may not be expected. During the period of my fieldwork its occurrence for regular agricultural work was slight, and the few instances I recorded were mostly as a way of paying interest on a loan. I was informed that *gohār* as tribute used to be given, until recent years, by each household (*thuri khargar*) for work on the fields of village political leaders and the head Lama, which would seem to be continuous with traditional tribute given in Rana times to village *mukhiyā* as supervisors of *rakam* corvée labour. During my fieldwork a handful of villagers did in fact attend a *gohār* request (*gohār ngweppa*) from an old Lama of a neighbouring village. He was left unable to transplant millet without calling for help, after ejecting his adopted son and the latter's wife, following the discovery that some gold jewellery had gone missing.

*Gohār* is more generally used for particular tasks of infrequent occurrence such as house-building or reroofing. I came across one case when an apple and peach orchard was being planted in this way. The idea is that people attending these groups can reasonably expect the caller of a *gohār* they go to to come to their own at some unspecified future time. Two meals, the evening one consisting of rice, liberal quantities of alcohol, and cigarettes or tobacco are provided on the day of the work. I was made aware of the extent to which likelihood of eventual reciprocation, or ongoing obligation as in financial indebtedness is a factor for calculation in attending a *gohār*, after I had gone to the Lama's mentioned above, and on returning in the evening tired and wet from the monsoon rain, was described by a friendly 'sister' as a *gohār lemba* (*lemba* meaning 'cretin'). Even so I would suggest that like the previous 'kinship' category it is the social relationship between participants that is highlighted rather than the labour itself, and carries therefore connotations of generalised reciprocity. Those who value their own labour rather than the relationship do not attend.

The incidence of formally summoned *gohār* in the selected households' agricultural labour profiles was virtually insignificant. The highest recorded value was 0.32 per cent of total annual labour for one household. The fact that the selected households included that of the most important of the ward chairmen indicates the change in the village political economy from the times of labour appropriation through *gohār* mobilisation in the old *mukhiyā* system.

Exchange labour shifts the balance away from the valuation of social relationships to direct calculation of labour. A temporary group (*nangba*) of people from different households is formed whose members work each others' fields day by day in rotation (*nangkhor*). Days of work are accumulated (*pohba*) and then returned (*pābā*). Any odd days of work not paid off at the time of the group's dissolution (*nangba sholba*) are settled by the individuals concerned. The group performs whatever job is required by the host of the day (*sa-i nēbo/nēmo* lit. 'landowner'), who provides snacks and smokes.

The word *nang* occurs in many contexts of the exchange economy, implying return with a short delay, a specific notion of barter. What is returned can be of the same nature or different but equivalent. Operating on the principle that the value of combination can add up to more than the sum of the parts ( $1+1>2$ , an 'economy of scale'), labour is exchanged for labour to generate a group dynamic, or milk is given over for a few days to another household before receiving back the same volume later (*nye-nang*; *nye* = milk), in order to make available worthwhile quantities for butter-making. Or, standard values are exchanged, such as a day's labour for the

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The word *nang* occurs in many contexts of the exchange economy, implying return with a short delay, a specific notion of barter. What is returned can be of the same nature or different but equivalent. Operating on the principle that the value of combination can add up to more than the sum of the parts ( $1+1>2$ , an 'economy of scale'), labour is exchanged for labour to generate a group dynamic, or milk is given over for a few days to another household before receiving back the same volume later (*nye-nang*; *nye* = milk), in order to make available worthwhile quantities for butter-making. Or, standard values are exchanged, such as a day's labour for the

draught power of a single ox (*klap-nang*). Many discussions of exchange labour imply that it is a way of overcoming shortage of labour supply (e.g. Guillet 1980), but a point which is often missed is that, if and as the exchange is balanced out, no additional pairs of hands have been mobilised. Rather, it permits a more efficient management of labour, of self-exploitation, through its collective routinisation. The greater productive efficiency of exchange labour, as compared to the task-flexibility of household labour, is discussed in a study of Tamangs of Salme, Nuwakot District, by Panter-Brick (1983).

Participation in these groups is seen as especially essential for the more labour intensive tasks at the busiest times of year, particularly for all the work involved in transplanting. Only one of the nine selected households did more than 50% of this work by its own labour. This was an exceptional case because the family's time was taken up by preparing for the funeral of a 7 year old boy who died suddenly at the beginning of the monsoon, and it could not participate in *nangba* at the same time. It was the same household that received the highest percentage of 'kinship' labour, which was assistance provided by close kin to alleviate the burden of misfortune.

The explanations offered me for participation in *nangba* were often of a motivational character. For example 'By joining *nangba* it is possible to work the crops. It is not possible alone, one feels miserable'. Or again, 'without doing work by exchange, we cannot manage. Leeches come, it rains, but we can get the work done quickly'. Some households only joined *nangba* for the most intensive jobs of transplanting and weeding, disparaging the quality of the groups' work. One man who was perhaps a more energetic farmer than average held the view that their work was poor, and himself finished his maize weeding well before that of others worked by *nangba*.

Some smaller groups were noticeably composed of people of near equal working ability, occasionally strapping young men, nursing mothers or older women, but for the larger groups formed for the busiest times people perhaps could not be so choosy about who they joined with, and in practice male and female, young and old were equal and substitutable (I recorded ages of same-group membership varying from 11 to 72). Though I was told that if someone was consistently slack they would not get invited to join in. Erasmus refers to the informal sanctions of exchange labour as being nevertheless effective: 'the quantity and quality of work given is the measure of its return' (1956:448).

While the term *nangkhor* specifically denotes rotational exchange, *nangba* can mean more generally any work group irrespective of the remunerative basis for its mobilisation. This fits with the fact that work

groups recruited on the basis of rotational exchange constitute the most important market for wage labour during peak seasonal labour demand. People in need of extra labour would seek out members of *nangba* to persuade them to sell their turn in the rota. The going rate was 10 rupees for each person's seven hour day. This was a significant source of cash, especially for households with below average landholdings and irregular cash income, who continued in the *nangba* after their own fields had been worked. Older villagers asserted this is not simply a recent phenomenon. There is thus no absolute disjuncture between cash remuneration and non-waged reciprocity in terms of idioms and forms of mobilisation. The nine households' mean for total annual labour performed by exchange was 29%, varying between 13% and 41%. The mean for transplanting by exchange was 48%, varying between 29% and 66%.

Wage labour in the sense of agricultural day-labour, rather than the selling of exchange group labour, is known as *mila* and can be for cash or grain. Theoretically a distinction in the rates paid to men and women (4 *mana* of grain for a woman, 6 for a man) occurs in this form in contrast to the equal rates paid for labour contracted through *nangba* groups. Only 10 per cent of the households admitted to doing *mila*, and in each case it was women doing this work. If men needed cash they preferred to work for it outside the agricultural economy, apart from ploughing. *Mila* is considered an indication of hardship and carried slightly demeaning connotations, a phenomenon also referred to among Tamangs by Toffin (1986:93). I was told that 'If you do *mila* people speak badly of you'. It thus represents the extreme end of the labour spectrum with the undisguised commodification of people's labour. This contrasts to the position of the labour of the exclusively male ploughmen which is sold without such connotations. My impression is that at least 60% of the labour entered in the survey as wage consisted of sold *nangba*, indicative of not only the absence of any underemployed day-labourers during agricultural peak intensity, but perhaps also the lower social estimation of day-labour as compared to selling *nangba*. The two households in the survey that showed the largest proportions of bought-in labour did so for reasons of having few workers, more than average landholdings and adequate cash income. Other households with similar income seemed to prefer to spend money on other things than labour if they had sufficient workers.

It is of course possible that if cash-generating alternatives to the use of labour for agriculture became relatively more important for some households, then buying labour could become indicative of structural change in the local political-economy, rather than being correlated to domestic developmental cycles, which at present I have taken it to be. An alternative reading of the situation is that access to cash income is

unevenly distributed across the village population, most notably in state employment and in ownership of milking buffaloes, and that this income qualitatively alters the kinds of constraints households experience in production strategies. The crucial question in this context is whether unequal participation in the increased intensity of commodity production, servicing the growth of the local administrative-bazaar town since the mid-1980s will be socially reproduced over time. The nine households' mean for proportion of total annual labour done by waged work was 15%, ranging from 2% to 42%. The mean proportion of transplanting by wage labour was 16%, ranging from 0% to 49%.

### **Political-strategic dimensions of cooperation**

From the preceding section it emerges that households only perform on average about half the labour necessary to cultivate their own fields. This questions the supposed productive autonomy of the Domestic Economy, and the ways in which socio-economic integration occurs. What then are the consequences of all these kinds of labour for the ways in which households incorporate people and how they define their relations with others? I want to suggest that a tension exists between practices and idioms of households that are *extensive* and those that are *delimited*. The extensive forms depend on structures and strategies that integrate through asymmetrical hierarchy, and the delimited forms operate on the basis of symmetrical mutual equality. In the following I do not want to imply an absolute mapping of institutions and practices with exclusively either the extensive or delimited modes. The opposition is offered here as a way of thinking about a complex reality, that promises some explanatory mileage down the road of enquiry into systematic connections between labour flows, alliances created through marriage, and notions of household unity.

A summary list of the main features of the *extensive* mode would include:

- cultivation of continuous close ties with people who were once of the same household;
- the rhetorical use of language affirming common ancestry, such as 'of one grandfather/grandmother', or 'of one hearth';
- playing the obligated wife-taker card to full advantage, approximating to brideservice;
- marrying children to cross-cousins, polygyny; permanent or temporary adoption;
- calling of *gohār* labour from debtors while stressing personal ties;
- giving land and/or livestock in dowry, including to classificatory *busing* (clan women);

- combined herding of livestock, especially sheep and goats, after partition of land;
- employing *gothālo* livestock herders to swell the domestic labour pool;
- and delayed timing of household fission.

A household that manages to sustain a combination of these possibilities creates an organic hierarchy of social and material dependencies empowered by the flows of 'symbolic capital', to use Bourdieu's (1977) phrase.

Features of the *delimited* mode of household orientation include:

- the balanced reciprocity of exchange labour;
- assertion of the principle of inter-clan bilateral marriageability (*kuṭumba*) over the affinal status inequality between men of different households, created by individual marriages;
- equal partition of inheritance between brothers;
- formalised financial donations from each household at public events, especially funerals (*gewa*);
- the ceremonial division of meat, or rice *tormo* for each household at community rituals;
- and certain informal legal institutions which ensure household property rights, such as that of recompense for damage by stray livestock to standing crops, known as *armol*.

These concepts and practices emphasise a principle of mutually defined structural equality in interactions between independent households, privileging rights and duties of community membership over those of the hierarchical schemas of kinship and affinity.

The contracting of *mit/mitini* relationships of ritual friendship occurs within the community, even between members of the same clan, and can be seen as having an importance in both symmetrical and asymmetrical dimensions.

When local power structures are considered the asymmetric model of extensive domestic relations shares many of the same symbolic forms as community authority, such as the giving of red *tikā* at Dasaī by ward chairmen, just as butter *tikā* (Tamang *mar kyappa*) is given at occasions of paying respect to people of *ashyang* category (father-in-law, or mother's brother). On an economic level the households of truly powerful men can accumulate sufficient capital of dependent social relations to elevate themselves out of the need to cultivate their fields by participating as others do in exchange labour. While no household came into this category in the village where I was based, the sister village to the north was the home of a man who held the position of representative to the district assembly till 1986. His cash loans to villagers were 'reciprocated' by his

appropriation of their labour as *gohār* and their best livestock. Even work done for public projects overseen by members of this family, such as path construction was occasionally not remunerated if personal loans to the people who were recruited were outstanding. The political demise of that family, (the man's youngest brother was unsuccessful in the 1991 election), has removed them from the status of labour aristocrats, and their calls for *gohār* generally go unheeded these days by people from the village where I was based. Sahlins (1974:134) wrote that 'everywhere in the world the indigenous category for exploitation is "reciprocity"'. In this particular corner of the world his sentiment would be appreciated by the financially indebted villagers, who told me their fields used to go unplanted due to having to attend 'the rich man's *gohār*'.

In a recently published paper concerning Melanesia Alfred Gell (1992) proposed a similar contrast to the one made here between extensive and delimited for the conceptualisation of what he calls the Indigenous Service Economy, as opposed to reciprocal exchange. His argument is that Sahlins' notion of generalised reciprocity is mistaken in that intra-household sharing is based on asymmetry of obligation, and not reciprocity. Interlocking domestic role relationships have a systematicity that 'is not sustained by an ethos of the mutual exchange of equivalent sacrifices, i.e. "reciprocity"' (ibid:151). Gell goes on to say that the exchange economy, in which he includes Melanesian reproductive gift exchange,

is to be understood as the means for the reformulation of the basis of human relationships in terms other than those set by the Indigenous Service Economy. 'Exchange' provides an escape route from a social order in which objects are transferred, and services performed, out of moral obligation, substituting for it one in which transfers and services can be conceptualised in terms of the schema of the mutually advantageous exchange of sacrifices (1992:152).

Taking the Tamang into consideration this concept of the Indigenous Service Economy seems rather monolithic, as if obligations are not problematic or negotiable. I can recall instances, for example, of domestic disputes focused around claims of an unfair deal in the distribution of household tasks or in the consumption of special foods. However, contrasting aspects of household, 'kinship' and festive, as compared to exchange labour relations, and the presence of features of bride-service, significantly resemble Gell's dichotomy. Household labour relations are contained within an ascriptive, kinship status hierarchy of indefinite prolongation. Whereas exchange labour relations are characterised by: being acephalous; having non-ascriptive membership; only continuing till the completion of members' obligations; by being sociable events in which

potential sexual partners are likely to meet (a fact whose importance should not be underestimated as Tamang sexuality is 'hot' and public); and the labour of male and female (with the single exception of ploughing), of young and old, is equal and substitutable. This represents a systematic inversion of the internal order of domestic relations, or as Gell puts it 'a reformulation of the basis of human relationships'. From this perspective I disagree entirely with Sahlins' dismissal of the importance of interhousehold cooperation when he says,

production may be organised in diverse social forms, and sometimes at levels higher than the household...But the issue is not the social composition of work. Larger working parties are in the main just so many ways the domestic mode of production realises itself...Cooperation remains for the most part a technical fact, without independent social realisation on the level of economic control (1974:78).

By contrast I would argue that the formalised reciprocity of exchange labour performs a highly significant double-act. On the one hand it establishes a relationship of equality between participating households in contrast to the hierarchical dependence generated by the bride-service component of affinal relations, thus, if anything, actually asserting households' rights to autonomous control of their labour, and on the other hand, the equal basis on which participants in the groups come together constitutes an alternative formulation of sociality to the asymmetry of internal domestic relations.

### Comparisons

This concept of coexisting forms of sociality based on symmetry and asymmetry respectively, brings to mind ethnographic contexts which have been similarly represented by dual models. Leach's *Political systems of Highland Burma* (1954) is one, but I want to consider here the literature on the theme of reciprocity which has permeated Andean social theory. Nearly twenty years ago Alberti and Mayer (1974) summarised the main features of Andean reciprocity as having roots in Inca times, when asymmetrical state production relations interpenetrated symmetrical, communitarian production through the mediation of tribute collecting headmen. In colonial times these headmen distorted the old patterns of reciprocity to build up extensive personal clientage, while the indigenous population, faced with proletarianization, retreated into the safety of symmetrical relations of mutual aid as a survival mechanism. The authors note how both symmetrical reciprocity and aspects of the old redistributive reciprocity that came to be used as ideological tools for systems of domination, continued over several centuries despite totally different socio-

political contexts. They argue that symmetrical relations of mutual exchange by their very nature do not permit accumulation of wealth, which can only come about through asymmetrical redistributive mechanisms. These two forms are, however, not isolated but interdependent, demanding 'a fine discrimination between those processes in which reciprocity is the ultimate refuge of peasant society and those others in which reciprocity is the basic mechanism that feeds relations of domination and dependence' (1974:32, my translation).

Works on the Andes have variously argued that reciprocal labour is persisting and not in contradiction with peripheral capitalism (Guillet 1980), or that it is in decline due to monetization and increased migration (Mitchell 1991). Other approaches have discussed symbolic aspects of forms of cooperation. Gose (1991) explores the tension between the contradictory forms of organization represented by collective production and private appropriation. Recalling aspects of the distinction I have drawn between relations within households and those pertaining to exchange labour he writes, '*ayni* transforms gender complementarity from a principle of individual marriage, household formation, and appropriation into a larger, more fluid, and less domesticated productive force within the community' (ibid:48). It exists in a coherent Andean symbolic complex that includes the ritual kinship of *compadrazgo*, death and the wild, 'that consistently emphasizes a need to transcend the individual domestic group in a more inclusive and anonymous productive effort' (ibid:49).

A survey of some references to reciprocal labour in the literature on Nepal suggests considerable variation in practices, reflecting particular social and economic contexts. Starting closest to home, as it were, Toffin (1986) describes an innovation among the Tamangs of the western flank of the Trisuli Valley. He says that since 1972 a more long term organization of exchange labour into groups called *goremo* emerged, having leaders, lasting right through from June till August, and selling mornings of work to non-Tamang large landowners. Messerschmidt (1981) also noted the practice of selling turns of the groups' work. Macfarlane (personal communication) has observed a marked decline in the incidence of exchange labour in Gurung villages near to Pokhara, where agriculture has declined in importance in the local economy with the influence of rising urban property values.

Hiroshi Ishii (1993) argues that Newar farmers tend to exhibit features of exchange labour that are more comparable to those of Tibeto-Burman groups than the inter-caste exchanges of Parbatīyā dominated communities (specifically, of Dhading district), for whom caste-ethnic difference plays a crucial role in the system of exchange labour in the use of attached labourers. What has struck me, from a cursory survey of relevant



literature, is that a more or less systematic variation seems to occur between culturally homogeneous communities and those of mixed-caste composition. Among the latter, as described for example in Bennet (1983:24), and Sagant (1976:253-255), the exchange labour groups called *parma*, or *pareli* in Nepali are often based on relatively strict distinctions between tasks and gender and age composition, with groups of men, women and teenagers working separately. In these communities agricultural wage labour is more prevalent than in the Tamang community described in this paper, and for women it is furthermore remunerated at half the rate as that for men. (For an idea of the range of socio-economic contexts compatible with exchange and festive labour see Erasmus 1956 and Moore 1975). I would argue that the difference in operation of exchange labour in these cases relates not just to market and demographic conditions, but also to alternative general cultural constructions of labour and gender. Whereas Tamang women are in fact notoriously free from Hindu notions of feminine propriety, and their husbands are if anything constrained by a system of quasi brideservice that is one of the factors contributing to the relative gender equality in Tamang communities, Vivienne Kondos has referred to 'a fundamental kind of subjection' of Parbatiyā women, in that they 'are disadvantaged by the cultural specifications of their natures and the domestic arrangements for living'. (Kondos 1989:165).

The model developed above for considering alternative formulations of sociality to explain the character of exchange labour for Tamangs would need to be reappraised for the case of mixed caste social relations, but its stress on the construction of domestic hierarchy still applies. A distinctive feature in this construction is that affinal status inequality between men is reversed in Parbatiyā society. Among the latter it is the wife-giver who defers to the wife-taker. Moreover, on marriage women are assumed into the *jāt* of the husband, while Tamang women remain of their natal *jāt*. The incorporation of Parbatiyā women into their marital households is thus, in spite of whatever 'danger' they represent therein, more fundamental than for Tamang women. The force of their moral surveillance by the husband's household extends into the extra-household relations of exchange labour, characterised by a division according to age and gender, and the constraints of *laj* public shyness, in contrast to the free expression of unappropriated sexuality often displayed by Tamang women in their mixed-sex working environments. The comparison between Tamang and mixed-caste labour exchanges brings to mind Acharya and Bennet's (1981) discussion of variance among different groups in the dichotomy between the inside and the outside of households as economic units. In their study the Tamang example community emerged as the one exhibiting least

gender polarity in the distribution of work and leisure time (ibid:252). I have argued that for Tamangs the inside/outside dichotomy is structurally significant but not particularly restrictive and easily crossed, whereas in the Parbatiyā case the gender and age components of hierarchy would seem to be common to both sides of the dichotomy.

### Concluding remarks

At the beginning of this paper I claimed that patterns of inter-household cooperation across different communities in Nepal might throw light on linkages between gender, class and culture. Unfortunately this claim has to remain largely hypothetical as sufficiently commensurable data is as yet lacking for definitive conclusions to be made. There are, however, some important different potential interpretations that can be made of agricultural cooperation in the multi-ethnic society of Nepal.

I argued that exchange labour for a Tamang community enabled an extra-household form of productive sociality to occur that obscured the, albeit weak, hierarchies of age and gender existing within households. Now, if it is generally the case that exchange labour in mixed-caste villages is characterised by division into separate groups based on gender and age, what are the class implications? Is it that *parma* groups can produce an economic 'communitas', disguising caste distinctions and emphasising solidary interests among cultivators with similar sized landholdings, while reproducing in public the domestic gender and age hierarchies of the dominant castes? Or, in other cases are class differences compounded by land-rich, participating households sending attached labourers? It would seem that exchange labour in practice is a form of mobilization that is highly adaptable to a variety of socio-economic contexts, and can both reflect and disguise them. Perhaps it is in the possibilities of its multi-functional realizations that exchange labour gains its currency in Nepal's agrarian society? It is based on households' needs, but transcends their organizational limitations. It is compatible with cash remuneration, but suppresses the appearance of commodification. And it can produce both realities and convenient illusions of equality.

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# **Indigenous and Community Forestry Management Systems: Reviewing their Strengths and Weaknesses**

**Ram B. Chhetri**

Rural people's knowledge and modern scientific knowledge are complementary in their strengths and weaknesses. Combined they may achieve what neither would alone. For such combinations, outsider professionals have to step down off their pedestals, and sit down, listen and learn (Chambers 1983:75).

## **Introduction**

There is a popular saying in Nepali which goes '*hariyo ban, Nepālko dhan*'. Literally, it means 'the green forests are the wealth of Nepal'. If one examines the frequent shifts in government policies and strategies in relation to the development and conservation of forests and other natural resources in Nepal, it appears that the value of such resources has certainly not been underestimated by the planners and policy makers. Similarly, it is evident from behaviours, practices and attitudes of the farmers in Nepal (who constitute more than 90% of Nepal's population) that the natural resources, especially forests have been very important for their subsistence. Given this, Nepal's forests, the wealth of the nation, intrigues many. Who has the real claim on this wealth? Who has benefitted so far and who will benefit? Who should be responsible for protecting and managing it? What modalities would benefit both people and government in the long term if these resources are sustained on a yield basis? The questions are plenty without substantive answers.

The current policy and legislative provisions for forestry development in Nepal seem to be progressive and thus may promote rural development (see HMG/NPC 1992, HMGN 1993). For instance, one of the forestry sector's objectives in The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) has been to 'increase income and employment opportunities from the forestry sector for small and marginal families' (HMG/NPC 1992:41). As we can see, one of the beneficiaries of the wealth of the nation (i.e., the forests) has now been duly recognized.

Recently, the forests in Nepal have been classified into two categories on the basis of land ownership, viz., private forest and national forest. The latter has been further divided into five types on the basis of management options, viz., government managed forest, protected forest, community

forest, religious forest and leasehold forest (see HMGN 1993). At present, community forestry, which is defined as the control, protection and management of local forest by communities (known as user groups), has become a major strategy in Nepal's forestry development. However, there is a need to make forestry development programmes more effective so that implementation moves smoothly and at a faster pace.

At this point it should also be noted that the protection and management systems of natural resources, including forests, by local communities in different parts of Nepal without external sponsorship—known as 'indigenous systems' (see Fisher 1991 for a definition)—have existed for generations and are widely distributed in the country today. Some information on indigenous systems from field studies is available now for all five regions of the country (see Chand and Wilson 1987, Chhetri 1993, Chhetri and Pandey 1992 for the Far Western Region; Budhathoki 1987, CEDA 1991 for the Mid-Western Region; Campbell et al 1987, Messerschmidt 1990 for the Western Region; Acharya 1990, Gilmour 1990, Fisher 1989, 1991, Jackson 1990 for the Central Region and Fürer-Haimendorf 1964 for the Eastern Region).

When the community forestry programme was being implemented in the 1970s and early 1980s, the existing indigenous systems and their user groups were overlooked and attempts were made to create 'new' institutions. This oversight was in part due to the fact that most people either did not know that such systems existed in the rural areas or perhaps believed that they had been eliminated by the Private Forest Nationalization Act of 1957. In reality, some indigenous systems persisted and have outlived the Act. Their existence and widespread distribution as well as a need to build upon them while implementing community forestry in the hills of Nepal has now been commonly acknowledged (see Baral and Lamsal 1991, Chhetri 1993, Chhetri and Pandey 1992).

This paper maintains that there are strengths and weaknesses in the spontaneous indigenous systems and the sponsored community forestry projects. By combining the strengths of the two systems, significant improvements can be made in Nepal's community forestry implementation process as well as in regard to forestry development programmes. It is equally pertinent that the relevant behaviours, practices and norms which are prevalent in Nepalese society be identified and concerted efforts made to build upon and learn from them.

For such progressive change the forestry professionals and others in forestry development programmes need to be willing to move down to the level of the farmers where they can understand their plight and begin a two-way communication. As an anthropologist, I also intend to argue that anthropology, as a discipline committed to a comparative approach and

sensitivity to local customs and practices (cultural relativism), can play an important role in highlighting these important features for the benefit of planners, policy makers and the technical experts. In line with Chambers' statement quoted above, I believe that 'people first' forestry can bridge the gap between the rural people and the planners.

### **Sources of information**

This paper is based on my field experiences in Baitadi, Achham, Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok Districts in the middle hills of Nepal. Community forestry has been implemented in all four districts. The information reported here was collected through informal group discussions, interviewing key informants and members of forest-user groups, and by means of observation. Whatever I have learned and experienced as a member of Nepalese society has also been used as a source of information.

A comparative look at the four districts in question with regard to some relevant factors/indicators is deemed important to contextualize the remaining discussion. In each of these four hill districts, the land area under forests and shrublands combined is a little over 50%, while cultivated lands, grass lands and non-cultivated inclusions seem to vary across districts.<sup>1</sup> Although recent data are lacking, the available information indicates that the land area under forest is not very different across the four districts.

Baitadi and Achham Districts are situated in the Far-Western Region of Nepal. Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok are located in the Central Region of Nepal. The Nepal-Australia Community Forestry Project (NACFP), earlier known as Nepal-Australia Forestry Project (NAFP), has been involved in providing support with the implementation of community forestry to these districts. To date, more than 150 user groups have taken over the responsibility of protection and management of community forests.<sup>2</sup> Many of these user groups have had indigenous systems in the past (see Gilmour and Fisher 1991, Chhetri and Nurse 1992). In contrast, some of the user groups in Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok did not have any forest resource left in their proximity when NACFP came to work in the districts (see Chhetri and Jackson 1994). Plantations have been established now and the user groups are getting used to protecting and managing newly established forest resources as community forests.

### **Background: indigenous and community forestry**

FAO defined community forestry as any situation which intimately involves local people in a forestry activity (FAO 1978:1). Given this

definition, community forestry in Nepal has a much longer history than commonly acknowledged. In many places in the hills of Nepal, it is common to come across a *Ban Pāle*<sup>3</sup> or *Pāleko Ban*, *Rāni Ban*, etc., all referring to particular patches of forest or sites (which may still be under forest cover or in some places the land may be under different use now)<sup>4</sup> protected by the people. Moreover, there are numerous forests in Nepal which have been referred to as forests of certain villages or ethnic/caste groups.<sup>5</sup>

External interventions and other factors may have disrupted many of the indigenous systems and in some cases caused their disappearance (see Chhetri 1993; Chhetri and Pandey 1992). In reality, the forests protected under indigenous systems management are the *de-facto* community forests protected by the local users without formal recognition from the Department of Forests. The fact that such systems pre-date external sponsorship has been one of their defining criteria.<sup>6</sup> Such practices reinforce two points. First, that the farmers in the hills have had a longer experience with the conservation of forest resources than is generally acknowledged. Second, that the farmers who use forest products for subsistence are not entirely responsible for deforestation in the country (see Acharya 1990, Bajracharya 1983, Ives and Messerli 1989). The real causes of indiscriminate use and the resulting depletion of forest resources are much more complex (see Metz 1991). If we accept this, it becomes imperative that due attention be given to the existing knowledge, practices and institutional arrangements with regard to the conservation and use of natural resources among local communities.

Community forestry<sup>7</sup> was introduced in Nepal in 1978 for forestry development. It has received priority in the recent policy and legislative statements of His Majesty's Government of Nepal (see HMGN 1988, 1993). The philosophy and practice of community forestry in Nepal entails a handover of forests to communities (defined as user groups) so that the responsibilities of protection and management are transferred from the Department of Forests (Department of Forests) to the people. The handover is formalized through the approval of an operational plan<sup>8</sup> by the Department of Forests. The operational plan in reality is a management agreement between the user group and the Department of Forests.

The number of user groups established and formally recognized (i.e., through the approval of operational plans) by the Department of Forests has been increasing as a result of the implementation of community forestry. From the field experiences, arguments are emerging that community forestry is a viable strategy for rural development in Nepal (Chhetri and Jackson 1994). There have also been some attempts to analyse the problems and thereby discuss the appropriateness of



community forestry as a sustainable strategy for forestry development. (see Bartlett et al 1992, Chhetri and Nurse 1992, Chhetri and Baral 1992, Chhetri et al 1993).

### **Anthropology and resource management**

The community forestry programme being implemented in Nepal is essentially a strategy adopted to bring about socio-economic change and development in rural societies through interventions in regard to the management of forests. The validity of the programme is not open to question now. However, it is crucial that the ensuing process of change neither disregards nor causes the loss of time-honoured indigenous knowledge as well as local cultural norms, values and practices. Anthropologists with their sensitivity to indigenous knowledge, indigenous social structure and adaptive mechanisms used by the local people to adapt to their environment can play a significant role here.<sup>9</sup> How anthropologists can contribute to social change programmes is well summarized by Dove (1988). He writes:

The idea that the villager, the peasant, the tribesman is an expert is old hat to anthropologists, for whom traditional societies have for long been an object of sympathetic study; but it is not old hat to those from other disciplines—particularly development planners—for whom traditional societies have been primarily a subject for planned intervention and change. The problem here is structural. It is difficult for the typical, highly educated, and highly paid development planner to accept that a typical, poorly educated, and poorly paid villager knows far more about his local economy and environment than the expert knows or is likely to learn (Dove 1988:6–7).

Robert Chambers' statement quoted at the beginning of this paper characterizes the attitude of anthropologists towards local people and how outsiders should work among them. The statement by Dove above, on the other hand, alludes to the attitudinal problems of a typical technical expert towards the illiterate farmers.

Anthropologists have made substantial contributions towards a better understanding of traditional and indigenous resource management practices in Nepal (see Chhetri 1993, Chhetri and Pandey 1992, Fisher 1989, 1991, Fürer-Haimendorf 1964, Messerschmidt 1990, Molnar 1981). There have been arguments in favour of building upon or capitalizing on the existing indigenous resource management systems and indigenous knowledge systems while implementing rural development programmes. The role of anthropology in assisting natural resources research and development has been very clearly discussed by an anthropologist who in

the past three decades has spent a number of years in Nepal doing research, teaching at the university and working for various development projects (see Messerschmidt 1992 and in this collection also for comprehensive discussions of the uses of anthropology for forestry and agroforestry research and development).

From the discussion above, it is evident that the role of anthropology in promoting well informed resource management has been important. I would add that the comparative approach, which has been recognized as one of the markers of the discipline, can be crucial for reaching a comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences with regard to various types of resource management strategies.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of indigenous system management and community forestry**

It should also be noted that the forests protected under indigenous system of protection and management and their user groups are not any different than those under community forestry programme (except that the indigenous system user groups may not have a written operational plan). This is why I feel that a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the two systems can be a meaningful exercise.

One of the frequently cited weaknesses of the indigenous systems is the conservativeness among the users in using forest products. However, this should not mean that they use less forest products in comparison to community forestry user groups. Data collected on the product use pattern suggest that the user groups of indigenous systems use other sources, including forest(s) conceived as government forest, to meet their requirements for forest products throughout the year. In other words, such user groups may be protecting their patch of forest at the cost of another forest(s) in the area (See Chhetri and Pandey 1992:72, Table 4). In a study in the Far Western Region of Nepal, it was reported that most of the user groups under study were dependent on government forests to fulfil their timber requirements (see Chhetri and Pandey 1992:71).<sup>10</sup> In the process of handing over forest(s) to a user group under the community forestry programme, attempts are made to ensure that the members meet their requirements of forest products from their own forests. This, of course, raises a question as to how much forest area should be handed over to what size (i.e., number of households) of user group. Although there are no easy answers to such questions, the issue of equity and of handing over sufficient forest area to a user group need to be given due attention by those involved in implementing community forestry programmes at the field level.

Another problem with the indigenous systems seems to be lack of a detailed and systematic management plan. Their management may be limited to enforcing sanctions, opening the forest at certain time intervals for the collection of certain products only. From the technical point of view, there is an absence of silvicultural treatment aimed at achieving certain biophysical goals (i.e., a concern for the protection and production of some favoured or desirable species). The users of indigenous systems generally have no such practices as pruning the branches of trees (to obtain firewood and timber for agricultural implements), thinning, removal of diseased trees (see Chhetri and Pandey 1992), and establishing or maintaining plantations. These practices have been introduced among user groups with community forestry programmes and many of such groups appear to be faring quite well (see Chhetri and Nurse 1992, Chhetri and Baral 1992).

The practice of raising user-group funds through the sale and distribution of forest products and managing such funds is not common under indigenous systems of management (but see Chhetri and Pandey 1992:25 for an exception). In contrast, the user groups of community forestry have not only generated such funds but have also been using the money to complete some locally important projects like the construction of village roads, electrification, etc. (see Chhetri and Nurse 1992). Some forest-user groups have also managed their cash income in the form of a revolving fund to advance loans to their members in rotation and for justifiable needs (see Chhetri n.d.).

Undertaking plantation work, whether new or enrichment, is not necessarily a part of indigenous system practice. In most community forestry projects, this idea has been introduced and in fact, some user groups in Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok are already making their own arrangements for undertaking plantation activities (see Chhetri et al 1993). The undertaking of plantation and related developmental activities by user groups is a positive and perhaps a sustainable practice. This could make the user groups self-reliant which could result in making the work of forestry development more sustainable.

The user groups of indigenous systems generally do not possess a written operational plan.<sup>11</sup> However, there is a strong sense of *hamro ban* ('our forest' i.e., ownership) and users are clearly defined on the basis of locally recognized use rights. Bringing such user groups under the fold of community forestry can give them a legal status and thereby save them from any problems that could otherwise crop up. The advantages of capitalizing on the well defined user and forest boundaries and the idea of *hamro ban* cannot be overstated (see Baral 1991, Chhetri 1993, Chhetri and Pandey 1992).

There are therefore some advantages of indigenous forest management practices which could be useful in effective implementation of community forestry. Identification of user groups becomes easy and correct. For existing natural forests this is fine. However, in handover of plantation forests, the forests near urban areas and the high altitude forests, field workers may need to adopt a different strategy (see Chhetri et al 1993, Pandey et al 1993, Jackson et al 1993).

Some problems have been identified among the community forestry user groups (see Chhetri and Baral 1992; Chhetri et al, 1993). The problems are of a different nature, including those that are related to the operational plan documents. One major problem has been the identification of users. Political boundaries (e.g., wards, VDCs<sup>12</sup>) are often used to define user groups. Perhaps it is the transition through which community forestry went between PF and PPF and the present day community forestry through user groups, that enabled the ward boundaries and VDCs still to be regarded as useful criteria. Notwithstanding their suitability in some instances, it is now commonly agreed that villages, settlements or *tols* are better suited criteria in defining user groups. The field personnel involved in identifying user groups need to bring this into practice.

Some user groups seem to have become dependent on external support for the protection of their forests (see Chhetri et al, 1993). This is of course due to the government's policy to support the protection of plantations until they are three years old. The government's intervention in the form of becoming involved in protection arrangements seems to disrupt the indigenous systems also (see Chhetri and Pandey 1992). It appears that the user groups need to be encouraged to do the work of protection on their own. Supporting some user groups towards protection of their forests and not supporting others will only generate difficulties.

The field personnel of the Department of Forests still have to live with the dual and incompatible roles of policing the forests as well as promoting community forestry. They have to save or protect the forest from the people and also try to foster people's participation in protection and management. A ranger explained how difficult it was to cope with this dual role. He pointed out that in implementing community forestry you need to work with the rural people. For this you need to establish a rapport which may take quite some time. However, if the same ranger has to prosecute some one (for cutting a tree without DFO approval) from a particular locality where he/she has also been working towards implementing community forestry, the ranger's rapport erodes quickly. This could mean that the local people may develop negative feelings towards the philosophy and practice of community forestry itself under such a 'paradoxical situation'.

While the community forestry programme in Nepal may be a progressive approach to rural development, the implementation activities are still heavily dependent on external funding (i.e., from donors). This itself can be a major factor inhibiting an efficient and effective implementation of community forestry in the future. It is about time that the Nepal Government makes its move to sustain the community forestry programme.

Community forestry has the potential to relieve the government of a lot of responsibilities—of protecting and managing the forests by employing forest guards, watchers, etc. This process is under way. More importantly, the local communities (the user groups) will gradually gather funds through the sale and distribution of products. This could be used by them with minimal external support (and perhaps some advice) in some local projects.

### **Sensitivity to cultural and socio-economic realities**

Plurality in terms of ethnic, caste, language, religion and diversity in regional and socio-economic factors is a reality in Nepal. Approaches to development in rural Nepal need to account for all these variables. It is crucial to be sensitive to the needs of various interest groups (including disadvantaged groups like *Kāmis*, *Sārkis* etc.) while not ignoring the fact that various groups of people live together. I believe that people in the hills of Nepal are very sensitive to their own socio-economic and cultural contexts while making any local level management decisions. I will illustrate this with some examples.

Farmers from different parts of Nepal reiterate that there have been changes in their forest product use practices in recent years in response to changes in a number of things around them. One such change in the village context is in the practice of what is known in Nepali as *khaliya* (a stack of firewood). When I was a child, I remember my parents being concerned about the threat of possible firewood shortage for cooking purposes during the summer (i.e., a time when every one is busy with agricultural works) if a nice *khaliya* was not erected during the winter by felling trees in the forest. This practice, which used to be common in the past, is rarely encountered in the hills of Nepal today.

Another important change is in regard to the use of *danda* and *bhātā* (slender poles). These were required to create a support for the thatch roof. To get these poles, very often slender and straight saplings were harvested from the forest. The implications of this for the growth of a natural forest are obvious. Again, the use of *danda* and *bhātā* have declined in the villages. Moreover, in many places, people seem to have switched to using bamboo (which is grown in the villages) instead of *danda* and *bhātā*.

A third notable change has been the decline in *khoriya* farming (a patch of forest or shrubland was cleared and burned for this purpose), which is one of the types of shifting cultivation in practice in Nepal. Under this system the land thus reclaimed was used first as a seed bed and later as a regular farm. Often new *khoriya* were made after a few years. In this process, some of the *khoriya* were perhaps abandoned so that natural vegetation (shrubs or trees) could grow on the land again. However, in many cases, people may have continued to use the land for farming and later registered it as *bāri* (unirrigated farmland).

The changes that I have noted above are recent in that I myself remember how some of the older procedures were in practice until not long ago. These are important responses of the farmers in the villages of Nepal to the more complex socio-economic changes that have been evident.

On the cultural side, there are a number of practices that deserve mention. First of all, when forests are protected and managed by the people (whether under indigenous system arrangements or as community forestry), they would provide products for religious ceremonies like *saptaha* (a *pūjā* that is celebrated over seven days to earn religious merit), and life-cycle ceremonies and rituals. Secondly, they also allow non-members of the user groups to collect Sal (*Shorea robusta*) leaves which are used to make 'clean' leaf bowls and plates (*duna* and *tapara*) needed for making offerings to the deities during rituals and ceremonies. Thirdly, people use religious sites and objects in order to protect forests. Some of such forests may be religious forest while others may not (see Chhetri and Pandey 1992, Ingles 1990). Use of *neja* (pieces of cloth from a temple) or *thāro* (rocks hung over the trees) are commonly seen as examples of religious fencing (Chhetri and Pandey 1992). Fourthly, in some cases there is a restriction put on women to enter the forest while they are menstruating. Finally, there is an interesting concept of *saran lāgnu* which may also be seen as a religio-cultural norm for promoting proper use of forest products like timber. Literally, the term means 'the beginning of protection'. When the *saran* is operative, it is believed that harvesting of timber should be avoided since it may be soft and also vulnerable to attacks by mites.

Farmers in the hills make pragmatic decisions to suit their needs and contexts. They may be conservative in terms of the utilization of forest products but are not to the extent of making their own lives difficult. For instance, user groups favour the idea of allowing the *Kāmis* (blacksmiths) with *ārans* (anvils or workshops) to obtain charcoal from the forest. The rationale is that their services are essential for the rest of the villagers, irrespective of their caste status. If the *Kāmis* do not get charcoal they cannot make or repair the agricultural implements of the farmers. Farmers

think that it may be against their own interest to ban the making of charcoal by the *Kāmis*. For some one who does not have an understanding of the realities of social life in farming villages, such *Kāmis* would only appear as threats to the condition of forests.

Farmers tend to make practical rules and regulations to allow timber harvesting from community forests for making agricultural implements and for house construction. Farmers know what species are useful for fodder, sotter, agricultural implements, etc., and thus have some understanding of when to allow the collection of such products. When farmers make their own arrangements for the protection of local forests, either by employing a watcher or by means of rotational watching, they discontinue watching during the peak farming activities, like planting and harvesting periods. Such an arrangement is based on the argument that no one from the village will have time to go to the forest to collect forest products during those periods and therefore there is a reduced chance of any illicit use.

While making rules about forest management, farmers also seem to be concerned to permit the taking of red soil (used in lieu of paint in the houses), and stones or rocks (used as construction material), and access to water holes (for humans as well as for animals). Finally, farmers also know what should be planted in the community forestry area and what should be grown on private lands. Because of the complexities regarding the distribution of products, they say that fodder trees and fruit trees are difficult to manage in a community forest.

## **Conclusion**

The presence of indigenous forest management systems suggests that local initiatives for development were not lacking in Nepal. Such initiatives may have had limited scope and perhaps were not able to speed up the process of development to keep pace with the changing circumstances. Externally sponsored programmes like community forestry may provide direction, speed, and driving force. However, development can only be sustained if existing indigenous initiatives are recognized, mobilized and made a part of the externally sponsored developmental programmes.

Indigenous systems of forest protection are widely distributed in Nepal and have a much longer history than has been acknowledged in the past. People not only know the importance of forest resources in their farming economy but have had a perception of *hamro ban* (our forest) towards local forests. Community forestry is a viable strategy for forestry development in the hills of Nepal, but it is imperative that proper care be taken in identifying the genuine users of the forest(s) before handing over management control.

The attention of planners, policy makers, scholars and researchers has been drawn to the need for conservation, protection and management or sustainable use of natural resources. However, the need for systematic attention to and understanding of the social and cultural aspects—behaviours and practices, attitudes, knowledge of rural communities in relation to the natural resources at their disposal—has yet to be fully acknowledged. People's participation and understanding of their behaviours and practices are crucial.

Combining the strengths of indigenous and community forestry practices have implications for rural development, promoting community forestry, meeting basic needs, empowering user groups and for sustaining forestry development. Finally, forests have multiple use for farmers. They are not only sources of timber. Social and cultural norms, values and sanctions reflect people's attitude towards conservation of forest resources while forests satisfy people's religious, social and cultural needs. The 'basic needs' of the farmers in Nepal from the forests include all kinds of forest products like grass/fodder, firewood, leaf litter, timber, charcoal, medicinal plants, etc. The community forestry programme should be sensitive to all these and promote a 'people first' forestry to make the programme more effective.

## Notes

1 The total land area in Baitadi, Achham, Kabhre Palanchok and Sindhu Palchok are 144,678 ha, 169,224 ha, 140,485 ha, and 248,097 ha respectively. The percentage distributions by some categories are: Cultivated Lands 21.2%, 23.2%, 25.9% and 16.8%; Non-Cultivated Inclusions 12.8%, 12.2%, 17.9% and 9.0%; Grass Lands 12.9%, 8.9%, 2.7% and 7.8%; Forest Lands 40.9%, 48.8%, 28.2% and 36.6%; Shrub Lands 12.0%, 3.2%, 24.4%, and 14.5%; and Other Lands 0.2%, 3.8%, 0.9% and 15.4% for Baitadi, Achham, Kabhre Palanchok and Sindhu Palchok respectively. If shrub lands are to be accepted as degraded forest lands, Kabhre Palanchok has the highest percentage under this category followed by Sindhu Palchok (both districts are not very far from Kathmandu), and Baitadi.

2 The Forest Act of 1993 has now vested the authority of approving the Operational Plans of the Community Forests on the District Forest Officer. This is done in the belief that the implementation will be speeded up. The Act is yet to come into force.

3 *Ban pāle* literally means a forest guard (*ban*=forest and *pāle*=guard). The term is also used by villagers to refer to forests protected by them.

4 For instance, the forest within the Institute of Forestry (IOF) Campus, Pokhara (Tribhuvan University, Nepal) was known as *Ban Pāle* among the local people including myself (since I also come from that locality). IOF has now chosen to use the name *Hariyo Kharka* (Green Pasture, a name used by the



missionaries for their leprosy hospital nearby) to indicate its location instead of using the locally popular name for the area named after the forest.

5 There are many such forests like Seliko Ban, Kuikako Ban, Pandey Gaunko Ban, Bhatwadako Ban, Karkiko Ban, etc. (see Chhetri and Pandey 1992, Chhetri and Nurse 1992).

6 It is to be noted that the traditional *Kipat* and *Talukdari* systems did have government sponsorship.

7 The enforcement of the Private Forest Nationalization Act of 1957 is said to have resulted in the decline of forest area as well as the forest condition in certain regions of Nepal (for details, see HMG 1990, Bartlett and Malla 1992). Forestry policy was dramatically changed in 1978 with the passing of Panchayat Forest Rules and Panchayat Protected Forest Rules.

8 Soon the user groups will be required to have a written constitution and a handover certificate also (see HMG 1992).

9 An anthropologist who had worked for a Swiss project in Nepal has made a cautionary remark that anthropologists should anticipate 'frequent hostility towards social science and social scientists held by many (but certainly not all) technical personnel such as engineers, agronomists, foresters, and livestock breeders' (Sachrer 1986:253). While Sachrer wrote this more than a decade ago, it is disturbing to note that the feeling of hostility among planners, policy makers and technical experts towards social scientists is yet to disappear.

Whether every one in Nepal today would acknowledge the role of an anthropologist in providing inputs for planning, and implementation of development programmes seems to be questionable. Let me cite some instances to support this. In June 1992, at a seminar on community forestry in the Himalayan Region (Sponsored by ICIMOD) held in Kathmandu, one of the prominent Nepalese foresters warned: 'Save forestry from social scientists!' He of course noted later that this was just a joke. But from what some of the forestry experts have been writing more recently, it appears that not all foresters take such statements as jokes. Some forestry experts in Nepal express apprehension that: 'The technical environment of forestry sector has been badly polluted for over a decade or more...Not only foresters but also forestry technical environment is in threat. In the name of social forestry, for example, any social scientist has become a forester' (Acharya and Ghimire 1994:4). I wonder if any social scientist has claimed to have become a forester thus far?

10 There are community forestry user groups which also tend to do this and therefore are not considered self-sufficient (see Chhetri et al 1993).

11 People are often heard saying that operational plans are bureaucratic requirements and thus may not be necessary for the user groups. In contrast, I look at an operational plan as an essential document which turns the *de facto* ownership of the forest area into a *de jure* ownership for the user groups.

12 Village Development Council (VDC) is the local administrative and political unit which is divided into nine wards.

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# **Poverty or Plenty: A Case Study of the Byansi People of Darchula District of Far Western Nepal**

**Dilli R. Dahal**

## **Introduction**

One indice of development is decrease in poverty. In Nepal, poverty is commonly associated with landholding (NCP:1992). Other indices are the development of infrastructures such as access to roads, communication and availability of basic social service facilities (like school, post office and health post). These indices alone are, however, inadequate to capture the mechanism of rural poverty, particularly in the Himalayan region of Nepal. This paper illustrates that, despite lack of access to sufficient cultivable land and basic infrastructural facilities, the Byansi of Darchula District in the Far Western Development Region are still one of the most prosperous groups in the whole district. This is because the conventional measurement of 'income' is unable to capture diversity of local resources and their cultural modes of exploitation.

This paper is organized into three sections. The first section highlights briefly the physical setting of Darchula District as a whole. The second section introduces Byansi in the context of the Hindu caste structural model. Finally, the last section deals with the Byansis' diverse economic resources and their socioeconomic conditions compared to other Hindu groups living in Darchula District.

## **1. Physical setting**

Of the nine districts located in the Far Western Development Region, Darchula is relatively large occupying a total of 2,322 square kilometres. It is the northernmost district of the Mahakali Zone and one of the western border districts of Nepal. The Mahakali river demarcates the border between the Dharchula sub-division of Pithoragarh District, U.P. in India, and the Darchula District of Nepal. The northern border of the district adjoins with Tibet (Taklakot or Purang), a province of the People's Republic of China. It is one of the least developed districts in terms of basic infrastructural facilities in the Far Western Development Region. It is also remote, as it takes six to seven days to reach Darchula Khalanga (district headquarters) from Kathmandu if one takes a flight up to Dhangarhi or Mahendra Nagar. From India, it takes only two to three days to reach Darchula Khalanga from Nepalganj; but one must obtain a special entry permit from the District Magistrate Office in Pithoragarh, as

the area north of Pithoragarh town is classified as a 'notified area' by the Indian government.

Administratively, the district is divided into forty-one Village Development Committees and four distinct *garkhas* (watershed divisions), Byans, Duhu, Marma and Lekam. The Byans Garkha, the traditional homeland of the Byansi, is located not only in the extreme northern but also the most remote, rugged and mountainous area of the district. Many areas of this *garkha*, including the rivers Tinkari and Nampa, are covered by snow for three to four months during winter (December through March).

The population of the district, which was 42,300 in the 1961 census, had increased to 101,614 by 1991, a growth rate of 2.66% per annum. However, the population growth rate was only 1.2% per annum between the 1981 and 1991 censuses.

## 2. The Byansi

More than 95% of the total population of the district are caste-Hindus, who speak only the Nepali language. Among them, there are three distinct hierarchical groups: high-caste Hindu groups, comprising the Brahmin, Thakuri and Chhetri, the middle-caste Hindu groups, the Matwali Chhetri, and the low-caste Hindu groups or untouchables, such as Lohar, Parki, Sunar, Tamata, Darji, Sarki, Koli and Chunara. The Byansi is another distinct cultural group of the people of Darchula District, whose position, however, is unclear in this Hindu caste hierarchical model.

The Byansi, though they have a physical appearance like the 'Bhote', with a distinct Mongoloid fold in their eyes, and still maintain close socioeconomic interaction with the Tibetan peoples in Taklakot and further east, claim that they are the descendants of a Byans Rishi (a Hindu religious teacher who wrote the Mahabharat) and are thus Hindus (Manzardo et al 1976). The local high-caste Hindu groups still treat them as 'Bhote' and do not accept cooked food such as rice and lentils from them. But the Byansi rank themselves equivalent to the 'Matwali Chhetri' (a Chhetri group which consumes liquors and does not wear the sacred thread) of Far Western Nepal. One of the Byansi clan names is 'Bohora', which is also the popular clan name of the Matwali Chhetri. Animal sacrifice is common in many of their rituals, and they celebrate major Hindu festivals suggesting Hindu beliefs and practices. On the other hand, they also employ Tibetan Lamas during funerals, an indication of Buddhist affiliation.

In India, they are called 'Sauka' and claim Rajput origins for themselves (Raipa 1974). Both Sharma (1964) and Shrivasta (1967) treat the Bhotias of Kumaon hills as Rajputs. Shrivasta further notes that Sauka

Bhotiyas living in the Kumaon hills are not Buddhist in any sense. Actually, the traditional Byans area is divided into two distinct politically demarcated sections by the Mahakali River. Only two villages, Chhangru (altitude 9,000 ft) and Tinkar (11,000 ft) are located in Nepal, whilst seven are in India. Historically, the Mahakali River has not been a barrier to maintenance of close socioeconomic interaction between these two groups of Byansi. The language of the Byansi is distinct Tibeto-Burman, not just a Tibetan dialect. However, most of the Byansi speak four languages fluently: Byansi, Nepali, Hindi and Tibetan.

In Nepal, the Byansi are not only found in Darchula District but also in the Bajhang and Humla Districts. It is not clear whether the Byansi are indigenous to Darchula District. According to Schrader (1988), the Byansi must have come from the south (India) and gradually moved north (to the Byans area) as the southern part of the district was already occupied by the caste-Hindus. It is difficult to estimate the total number of households and population of the Byansi in Nepal. The census has never provided a separate figure for them and thus their number in the Darchula District can only be estimated (table 1).

**Table 1** Estimated Households and Population of Byansi in Darchula District by VDCs, 1991

Village Development Committee	Settlement	Clan names	Est. h'hold	Est. pop.
1. Byans	1. Tinkari	Tinkari	60	372
	2. Chhangru	Aitawal, Bohara, Lala	83	515
2. Situala	1. Situala	Bhujyal	35	217
3. Rapla	2. Dumling and other areas (wards 1,2,3,4 7,8 and 9)	Sungyal, Thimal and others	123	763
<b>Totals</b>			<b>301</b>	<b>1867</b>

Though the Byansi live in three VDCs of Darchula District, only the Byansi of Byans VDC practice transhumance pattern of migration. In summer (April through middle of November), they live in their traditional homeland in Byans VDC. In the winter (middle of November through March), because of the heavy snow fall which makes life difficult, the Byansi with their schools and livestock migrate to Darchula Khalanga, the headquarters of the district. But it is interesting to note that the 'voters list'



prepared by the Election Commission, Kathmandu (1990), listed only two households of Byansi in Darchula Khalanga. But over the last decade or so, sixty to seventy households have been permanently constructed by the Byansi in Darchula Khalanga. Their settlements are popularly known as the Banga Bagar (the Chhangru people) and the Tinkari Kheda (the Tinkari people) areas. The Byansi engaged in a transhumance pattern of migration which still continues today, but some people prefer to stay in Darchula Khalanga throughout the year. Many Byansi must return to their traditional home during the summer, not only to cultivate their fields and worship the traditional deities, but to carry on trade to Taklakot (Purang) after June when the snow in the Lipu Lekh can be traversed. The trade to Taklakot is most vital for the livelihood of Byansi.

In connection with the CNAS research project on 'Development Strategies for the Remote Areas of Nepal' (1991), a detailed household survey of thirty-nine Byansi households was undertaken, twenty-eight in Byans VDC and eleven in Rapla VDC. My findings are based on these household-level data.

### 3. Economy of the Byansi

The Byansi must simultaneously engage in three economic activities to maintain their livelihood: agriculture, animal husbandry and trade.

#### 3.1 Agriculture

In the Byans and Rapla VDCs, the traditional Byansi settlement area, there is no *khet* (irrigated) land at all. According to the records of the Land Treasury Office (Mal), Darchula (1991), the total cultivable *bhit* or *pakho* land in Byans VDC is 2608-13-1 *ropani* (193 ha). It is interesting to note that this land is the fifth or the least productive land category of Nepal (normally only four categories of land *abbal*, *doyam*, *sim*, *char* are found). In Rapla, the cultivable land is the fourth category. But when we visited the area, the land quality was not as poor as had been recorded. The average yield of crop per *ropani* was quite good compared to many areas of Darchula District (see discussion below).

The average landholding per household was only 10.82 *ropanis* (0.55 ha.), with almost half of the land owned by the high-caste Hindu groups (see table 6). The crops grown in the area are limited by ecological factors, as all crops must be grown only during the frost-free season. The principal crops grown in the area are buckwheat (both bitter and sweet varieties), naked barley (*uwa*), small grained wheat (*nappal*) and potato. Vegetables like beans, cabbage, radish and green mustard are also grown.

The cropping calendar (table 2) suggests that the cropping must be done between June and November. Though the snow starts melting by

April, the soil must be warm enough to allow germination. After April ploughing and manuring are undertaken simultaneously.

**Table 2** Cropping Calendar in Byans VDC, 1991

S.N	Crops	Planting month	Harvesting month
1.	Buckwheat ( <i>phapar</i> )	Last week of June	Middle November
2.	Naked barley ( <i>uwa</i> )	First week of June	Late October
3.	Small grain wheat ( <i>nappal</i> )	"	"
4.	Potato	"	"

**Table 3** Average Yield of Crops Per Ropani, 1991

Crops	Average yield per ropani ( in kg.)
Buckwheat	45–50
<i>Uwa</i>	55–60
<i>Nappal</i>	55–60
Potato	200–250

Except in VDCs like Dhap, Lali, Uku, Tapoban, Gokuleswar and Bhrnadev, the yields are comparable to other areas of Darchula District (table 3). The Byansi claim that crops grown can sustain them only for four to five months of the year. In other words, they do not produce sufficient food grain to feed themselves. Even though the Byansi do not grow paddy, their staples are rice and wheat. These grains are always purchased, mostly in Darchula Khalanga, or traded for other commodities in the middle and lower hills of the Far Western Development Region.

### 3.2 Animal husbandry

Livestock raising is integral to the Byansi economic system. The domestic animals raised by the thirty-nine sample households consist of sheep, *chyangra* (goat), *nak or dromu* (female yak), *jhopu* (cross between yak and cow, both male and female), cow, horse, mule and poultry (table 4).

Almost every Byansi household raises a *jhopu* (but not necessarily a yak), 1 horse, 1 mule, 3–4 sheep, 3–4 goats, 2 cows, 1 ox and 1–2 chickens. *Jhopus*, horses, mules, sheep and goats are considered important animals economically, as they carry goods from one place to another. A

mule can carry a load of 80 to 100 kilograms at a time; likewise a *jhopu* and a horse carry 60–80 kilograms; and sheep and goats carry loads of 8 to 12 kilograms, including grains, salt or other goods. But *jhopus* and mules are extensively used to carry goods from Chhangru, Tinkar to Taklakot a distance of a day. When we visited Taklakot in August 1991 a caravan of 50–60 mules and 60–80 *jhopu* passed on the way to Taklakot almost daily.

**Table 4** Type and Number of Livestock in Sample Households, 1991

Types of animal	Number
1. Yak (male)	2
2. <i>Jhopu</i> (male and female)	31
3. Horse	40
4. Mule	44
5. Sheep	107
6. <i>Chhangra</i> (goats)	100
7. Cow	82
8. <i>Nak</i> ( <i>dromu</i> -female)	10
9. Ox	39
10. Poultry	60

Horses are also used to carry people from Tinkar to Lipu Lekh and from Taklakot to Lipu Lekh. Especially the pilgrims who go to Mansarovar prefer to ride horses. The usual charge per person for riding a horse was Rs.500. The Byansi also highly value horses. They use horses for themselves to ride while travelling from Chhangru, Tinkar, Taklakot and other places within Darchula District. We noticed that some horses were valued up to Rs.30,000 in the area. Horses, mules, sheep, goats and *jhopu* are also used in trading expeditions towards the south, particularly to the towns of Mahendranagar and Dhangarhi, and in the mid-hills in the Western Development Region. Sheep and goats are considered useful on smaller trails.

The livestock are managed by the family. The keeping of diverse livestock species indicates an emphasis here on the adaptation and exploitation of positive features of the diversity of available resources and various adaptations to resource fragility. Due to this fragile resource base, transhumance is traditionally practiced as a mode of survival and managing scarce resources.

### 3.3. Trade

The Byansi trading pattern can be discussed in two cycles: summer and winter.

#### 3.3.1 Summer cycle of trade

The summer cycle involves trade from the Byans area to Taklakot, a small market town of west Tibet. The date from when the Byansi became involved in this historical trade is not documented. Fürer-Haimendorf (1975) noted that Purang (Taklakot) was already a trade entrepot in ancient days. Schrader (1988) thinks that by the fourteenth century Purang must have been a commercial centre equally important as today. Taklakot never remained as a market centre for the Byansi alone, but served the populations of the Darchula, Humla and the Bajhang areas of Nepal.

The Byansi of Darchula initiate their trading activities in Taklakot only in the beginning of July. As Lipu Lekh is full of snow up to the end of June, the question of starting the trading activities around April does not arise (Manzardo et al 1976, Schrader 1988). Beginning in July, the Byansi start moving towards Taklakot along with their flocks of sheep, *jhopu* and mules. In Taklakot, the Byansi make small temporary mud-walled, tent-roofed houses, which they call *mandi*. To construct the frame for the tent, they have to carry wood all the way from the Tinkar areas, as wood is the scarcest commodity in Taklakot. We noticed about 100 such houses built by the Byansi in Taklakot.

The volume of trade between Tinkar and Taklakot is difficult to estimate. The Nepalese Customs Office in Tinkar noted fifteen items which were traded in Taklakot (table 5). These Custom figures are misleading. We believe that the flow of goods is fifteen to twenty times more than recorded. In Darchula Khalanga, a variety of Chinese goods obtained directly from Taklakot are available for purchase. The Byansi themselves claim that they bring more than 200 quintals of wool from Taklakot every year. Approximately two to three members of every family, including girls, are involved in trading activities. There is a regular flow of goods and services between Byans and Taklakot. This means fully loaded Byansi mules and *jhopus* are returning from Taklakot to Tinkar and Chhangru every other day. The extent of a Byansi trader's success depends upon his scale of investment, connections with the Chinese officials, and the friendly relationship with the Tibetan traders.

It is difficult to possess Chinese currency locally. One can obtain the currency in two ways, either by exchanging dollars or bartering and selling goods. As dollars are difficult to obtain for the Nepali Byansi, barter is the

**Table 5** Goods Exported/Imported through Tinkar Customs Office, 1990-1991

Items Export	Quantity
1. Unrefined sugar (big piece)	8,580 kg.
2. Unrefined sugar (small piece)	3,200 kg.
3. Ghee	80 kg.
4. Woollen cloth	400 metres
5. Cotton cloth	1,300 metres
6. Coffee	84 kg.
7. Dates ( <i>Chohora</i> )	40 kg.
8. Ox	25
9. Sweets	80
10. Cotton thread	216
11. Incense sticks ( <i>Agarbatti</i> )	480
12. Plastic bangles	144
13. Biscuits	60 kg.
14. Rubber toys	144
15. Artificial ornaments	308
Items Import	Quantity
1. Shoes	50 pairs
2. Jacket	8
3. Sheep/goat	715
4. Cotton cloth	121 metres
5. Wool	1,030 kg.

only means to get Chinese currency. The Byansi traders exchange wool by supplying grains, unrefined sugar, ghee and some Indian cloth. It is interesting to note that except for unrefined sugar and biscuits other items sold by the Byansi in Taklakot are Indian goods. But the Byansi convince the local Chinese authorities that goods sold here are 'Made in Nepal'. Sometimes even animals are bartered. Byansi normally buy Tibetan horses only in Taklakot. But we also noticed that retail sale is always done in the Chinese currency. A lot of Tibetans purchase Indian cloth, biscuits, bangles, artificial ornaments and unrefined sugar from the Byansi with cash. The price fluctuates, but most of the items were expensive. The price of two kilograms of unrefined sugar was ten *yuwan* (about Rs.75) in Taklakot in August 1991. Tons of unrefined sugar are sold in Taklakot, as the unrefined sugar is used in making liquors. Some Byansi also earn money by other means. As many Nepali pilgrims to Mansarovar and Kailash do not possess Chinese currency, they purchase it through the Byansi, paying a slightly higher amount than the official exchange rate.

We were also told that volumes of illegal trade in goods such as bones and hides of tigers and panthers pass via Tinkar to Taklakot. When we were in the field, nearly Rs.600,000 worth of bones and tiger and panther skins were caught heading to Tinkar by the Nepali police. It is said that these items were smuggled all the way from Delhi. Without the mediation of the Byansi, it is difficult to take any goods legal or illegal over the border via Tinkar. So some Byansi may be involved in this type of illegal trade.

In brief, while staying three to four months in Taklakot, each Byansi family earns Rs.5,000 to 200,000, depending upon the scale of investment.

### 3.3.2. Winter cycle of trade

After returning from Taklakot around the middle of October, some Byansi move directly to Darchula Khalanga, staying only a few days in Tinkar or Chhangru. Most of the Byansi engage in two types of trade in Darchula Khalanga. Some Byansi spin wool bought from Taklakot and dye and weave carpets, blankets (*chutka*), shawls, etc. Some bigger Byansi merchants sell wool locally and dispatch shipments of wool to Kathmandu. This is the real 'Tibetan wool' which is sold in Kathmandu. The Byansi claim that previously they sold the Tibetan unprocessed wool at Rs.100 to 125 per kilogram in Kathmandu, which allowed some profit. Now, because tons of the lower quality processed New Zealand wool are pouring into Kathmandu every year, the Byansi are forced to sell the Tibetan wool at a cheaper price of Rs.84 per kilogram.

In the meantime some Byansi have also started trading expeditions towards the south, carrying goods on their caravans of sheep, goats, mules and *jhovu*. They go to Mahendranagar and Dhangarhi, the two big towns of far-western Nepal, bring salt and grains and again exchange them either for cash or in kind in areas of the mid-hills of the Far Western Development Region like Dadeldhura, Bajhang, Baitadi, Doti and Bajura.

In these trading expeditions, the Byansi not only sell Chinese goods (like shoes, clothes, borax, yak tails, wool and livestock), they also provide transportation services for the merchants of the middle hills of Far Western Nepal. The transportation service is paid in cash according to weight (kilogram) and the distance. A Byansi trading group (normally 3–5 members) having 100 sheep and 100 goats earns Rs.10,000–15,000 per month. This business starts from the middle of November and continues to the end of March. Sheep and goats are grazed along the way, which relieves the pressure from their own grazing areas. Transportation services play an important role in the Byansi economy, even today. Along with their traditional business of wool and woollen products, the men who stay

in Darchula Khalanga run small hotels, and the women distill alcohol and sell it in the market areas.

In brief, the Byansi became successful traders in the area for the following reasons:

1. Serious ecological constraints prevent the Byansi from surviving through agriculture only. Diversification of available resources is the best strategy to adapt in this harsh and fragile mountain zone. Thus, along with raising the best livestock which adapt to the Himalayan ecosystem, the Byansi started trading activities (both in the north and the south) suitable to their environment and culture. Most importantly, animal husbandry supports trading activities heavily.

2. The Far Western Development Region has an absolute majority of the caste-Hindu groups, who possess little skill for business. The 'ritual purity' of Hinduism always acted as a crippling restriction for the development of trade (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975). So the Byansi, through their own ingenuity, developed trade which always favoured themselves. This trading pattern is a monopoly of the Byansi in the whole Far Western Region.

3. Unlike other areas of the Himalayan region, the Sino-Indian War (1962) and the 'Khampa Movement' (1974) did not affect their business. After the Sino-Indian War, the Indian Byansi (Sauka) came under close scrutiny in Taklakot from the Chinese officials. The Nepali Byansi also cooperated with the Nepali and the Chinese officials to trap the leader of the Khampa operations. In other words, socioeconomic and political situations have favoured the Nepali Byansi in regional trade over the years.

4. In Taklakot, the Byansi do not behave like Hindus, though they claim to be Hindu in Khalanga. In this area, they are not dissimilar from the local Tibetan people in terms of food, religion, language and culture. In other words, the Byansi use religion for economic maximization, and this 'impression management' strategy is the key factor in becoming successful traders over the years. In brief, the Byansi are similar to the Thakalis of Thak Khola in trading activities (see Messerschmidt 1982, Manzardo 1978).

#### **3.4. Comparative socio-economic position of the Byansi in Darchula District**

In determining the comparative socioeconomic position of Byansi in the Darchula District as a whole (table 6), we believe that 'income' data are

not very accurate. People always underestimate their income from 'trade' and wage labour (either within or outside the village), possibly by as much

**Table 6** Basic Socioeconomic Indicators of the Households Surveyed in Darchula District by Ethnic/Caste Groups, 1991.

Basic socio-economic indicators	High-caste		Low-caste	Total
	Hindu	Byansi		
Households in sample	227	39	20	286
Total population	1,688	242	155	2,085
Av. household size	7.4	6.2	7.7	7.3
Pop. below 15 yrs. (%)	37.4	37.6	45.8	40.3
Literacy rate (total)	56.9	69.8	36.0	59.0
Male literacy rate	79.9	73.6	53.1	81.0
Female literacy rate	32.7	65.7	18.0	36.0
Joint/extended family	76.6	35.6	30.0	68.0
Household dependent on agriculture	80.6	66.7	90.0	79.0
House type (stories)	most 2	2-3	1	-----
Roofing (CGI sheets or slates) in %	35-40	85-90	6-8	40-42
Skills per household	28.6	82.1	70.0	37.8
Av. land ( <i>ropani</i> )	20.47	10.82	4.85	17.0
Av. animals per household	10.8	13.4	4.9	10.0
Av. h'hold income (Rs)	17,337	21,400	8,032	14,311
Per. cap. income (Rs)	2,343	3,452	1,043	1,934
Av. h'hold expenditure	14,621	21,649	12,395	15,535
Per.cap. expenditure (Rs)				
food	811	1,355	767	
cloth	355	426	235	
education	125	690	59	
health	96	149	70	

20-30%. Nevertheless, the table indicates that per capita income of the Byansi is 47.3% higher than that of high-caste Hindus and 230.9% higher than the untouchables. Similarly, the Byansi have two to three storey houses and 85-90% of them have slate roofs. The high-caste Hindus have mostly two-storey houses and only 35-40% have slate roofs. The Byansi raise the largest number of livestock, and if these animals are valued in cash, a Byansi household owns Rs.80,000-150,000 worth of animals. More than 82% of the Byansi possess some type of skill, and 71.8% possess skills in carpet weaving etc. Among the high-caste groups, only



28.6% have some skills and 14% possess skills in weaving carpets, one of the most flourishing trades of the area. The overall literacy rate of the Byansi is better than that of other groups. The Byansi literacy rate is 69.8% compared to 56.9% for the high-caste groups and 36% for the untouchables. The female literacy rate of the Byansi is excellent, i.e., 65.7% as compared to 32.7% for the high-caste Hindu groups and 18% for the untouchables. In other words, the Byansi put serious emphasis on education, particularly of their sons and daughters. Many Byansi children are seen in high school in Darchula Khalanga and some of the Byansi boys and girls are seen in colleges in Pithoragarh (India) and Kathmandu. We also noticed that one boy is currently studying an undergraduate course in anthropology in America. Because of their investment in education, Byansi boys and girls are not only smart in their business but many of them are also employed in government, business and private organisations located in various places in Nepal and India.

Because of their higher income, the per capita expenditure of the Byansi on health, education, food and cloth is also higher than that of the high-caste Hindus and untouchables. It is interesting to note that a Byansi spends Rs.690 on education, Rs.1,355 on food, and Rs.149 on health per annum, compared to only Rs.125, Rs.811 and Rs.96 on education, food and health respectively by high-caste Hindus. In brief, the Byansi are better off than the high-caste Hindu groups and untouchables on basic social and economic indicators.

### **Conclusion**

These comparative data suggest that the Byansi are the most affluent group compared to other groups living in Darchula District. Even though the Byansi not only own minimal but also low-quality land, landholding alone is not a major criterion for assessing the poverty of people. Likewise, simply building infrastructures does not bring changes and socioeconomic development. This study indicates that it is 'income' that eventually leads to a better quality of life. In the case of the Byansi, their prosperity lies in simple economic principles: they sell their productive services where the local ecology and culture play important roles and buy items for consumption, ultimately maximizing a better quality of life. So the best strategy of HMG to alleviate poverty is to explore local resources in relation to peoples' culture, not just land, and utilize the full range of existing resources to generate better income among groups of people.

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# ***Jangal* Resource Use: Adaptive Strategies of Rais and Sherpas in the Upper Arun Valley of Eastern Nepal**

**Ephrosine Daniggelis**

## **Introduction**

Ecological degradation in the Himalayan mountain ecosystem is a matter of grave concern. Reforestation projects concentrate on promoting fast growing fuelwood and fodder trees assuming that the needs of the rural population will be met.<sup>1</sup> This approach does not alleviate the already existing food supply inequalities and seasonal scarcities, but on the contrary, aggravates the situation. For the rural population the forest contains not only trees, but includes many other vital resources, including sources of food, which are often neglected in these projects.

Researchers have given minimal attention to the importance of 'minor' forest resources for the agricultural and pastoral population living in Nepal. Indeed, the frequently used phrase 'minor forest products or resources' sums up well how conventional forestry circles perceive them. 'They tend to be treated as peripheral', of vital importance to local people, 'but not something that is a major concern for the forestry authorities' (FAO 1989b:111).

The first nation-wide health survey which was conducted in Nepal in 1965–1966 found that only eight villages (out of eighteen villages studied) had Vitamin A intakes which were close to the estimated requirements. Seven of these villages were located in the rural hill and mountain region (Worth and Shah 1969). According to a 1987 UNICEF (1987:83) report, the prevalence of xerophthalmia (a symptom of Vitamin A deficiency) was three times higher in the Tarai than in the Western Hills. It stated that no clear explanation for higher prevalence rates in the Tarai is currently available. As a consequence of this, there are two major ongoing Vitamin A projects being conducted in the Tarai. At the National Vitamin A workshop (1992:3–4), it was reported that high prevalence rates of xerophthalmia are also occurring in Jumla, a mountainous district in the Far West. In Jumla, the problem of Vitamin A deficiency has warranted public health interventions. Further investigation is needed of other hill and mountain villages to determine if a similar problem exists.

This paper looks at whether villages in the hill region have more access to wild greens, a source of Vitamin A, iron and plant protein, and other forest foods, fruits (Vitamin C), seeds, nuts, roots and tubers, birds, wild

animals, insects and honey. Even though these forest resources are rich in nutrients, cultural studies of farmers have neglected their importance as food sources, especially regarding household food security issues (Ellen 1986, FAO 1989a and b, Wilson 1974).

Besides their nutritional contribution, these foods provide variety in the diet, are an important seasonal food, and are frequently consumed between meals by children (McElroy and Townsend 1985; Metz 1989 and Piller 1986). Wild foods, which grow naturally in the bush or forest, serve as buffers to seasonal food shortages becoming critical risk management resources for household food security. Community household food security is defined as the 'access by all households at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life' (Velarde 1990:13). The monsoon season when food supplies are low, is also the period for peak agricultural activities. During the monsoon an adequate food intake is of vital importance to meet increased energy demands.

Forest resources are used not only for human food, but also for animal fodder, medicine, building and household materials; are valued as cash and non-cash commodities; and are essential for ritual and ceremonial purposes (Bhattarai 1989, Diemberger 1988, Hoskins 1985, Metz 1989, Rajbhandari 1991).

In my research I am looking at how culture affects a population's interaction with its environment in order to examine nutrition and foraging in subsistence agricultural and pastoral societies as adaptive strategies. Studying behavioural response in risky and uncertain situations, and scheduling decisions among groups living in areas where seasonal and annual resource fluctuation is substantial, and natural hazards often occur, is very important (Cashdan 1990, Vayda, and McCay 1975). Time, space and population are the variables which are being looked at in examining strategic human behaviour. Time is important to account for seasonal and yearly fluctuation in forest resources; space for different environments, (for example, deforested areas); and population which consists of social dimensions (special roles in subsistence) and ethnic differences (Bennett 1976, Ellen 1986, Hardesty 1977, Jerome, Kandel and Pelto 1980, McElroy and Townsend 1985). No single factor is consistently limiting, since duration, seasonal changes, disasters and technology, all have an effect on environmental resources (Hardesty 1977, Plog, Jolly and Bates 1980). Therefore a holistic analysis is essential.

This paper is based on ten months of research in two ethnic communities, the Khumbu Sherpa and Kulung Rai. They are being studied to understand differences in the knowledge, use and management of forest resources, and look at responses to problems of food security. These populations live within the newly established Makalu-Barun National Park

and Conservation Area in northern Sankhuwasabha. Non-timber forest products have been identified as a research priority in The Makalu-Barun National Park and Conservation Area Management Plan (Shrestha, Sherpa, Banskota and Nepali 1990: 58–59). This study will provide baseline data on patterns of forest resource use under present environmental conditions. This is important since development projects invariably lead to social changes that may affect the knowledge, use and management of the forest environment and in so doing are likely to adversely affect the lives of the rural population.

### **Research setting**

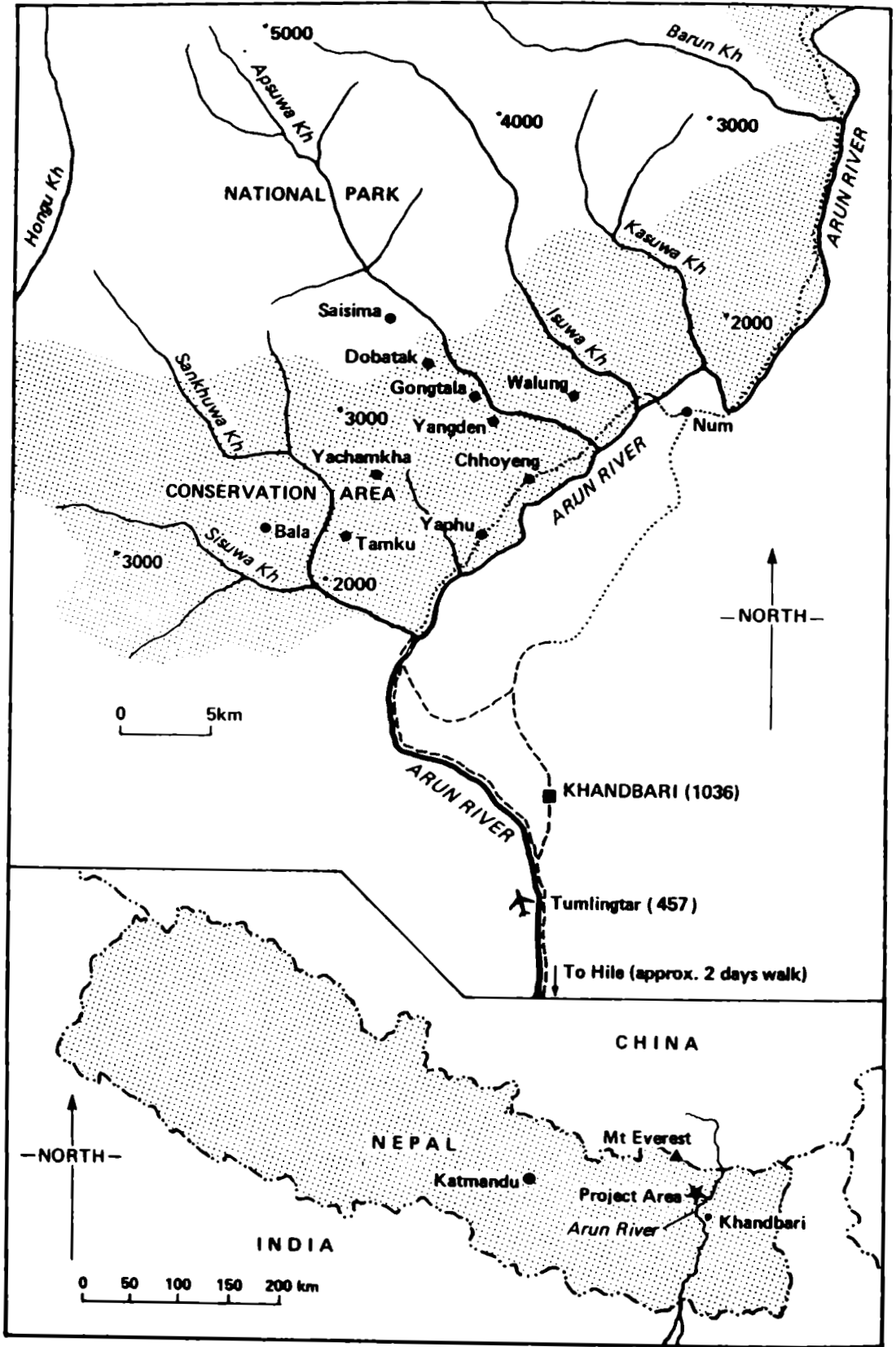
The research setting includes the villages of Gongtala, Dobatak, Saisima and Yangden which are located in the upper Apsuwa valley of northern Sankhuwasabha District (see Figure 1). The population of Gongtala, Dobatak, and Saisima consists of approximately 134 Khumbu Sherpas. Yangden has a population of about 174 Kulung Rais. There is a school in Yangden, grades 1–5, which has an annual enrollment of about 30 students. On several occasions, however, I saw only 3–6 students at the school. For the Sherpas the school's location, harsh weather conditions and household labour demands usually lower the children's attendance. Natural hazards are an ever present problem. Landslides frequently occur during the monsoon season, bridges are unsafe (slippery logs) and rivers become very high, which makes crossing difficult.

The Sherpa/Rai relationship is symbiotic. They interact via bartering and trade, means of reciprocity (mainly food and housing), credit and labour relations, celebrations and a monthly bazaar held between the villages. However, intermarriage between the two groups rarely occurs.

### **Gongtala, Dobatak, and Saisima**

Gongtala is located in the upper region of the Apsuwa valley at approximately 2250 metres. Dobatak is about 1980 metres and a one-hour walk west of Gongtala. Saisima, 2300 metres, is a four-hour walk northwest of Gongtala. Gongtala, Dobatak, and Saisima have 13, 4 and 4 households, respectively. A household is here defined as the basic unit of production, distribution and consumption for the landholding and farming unit, consisting of family members eating from a common hearth. Six houses have stone walls which are expensive to build and are considered 'prestigious'. Other houses are made of various types of bamboo and all roofs are made of *citro* (mats woven from *mālingo*, Himalayan bamboo), except for one which has wood planks.

Khumbu Sherpas are agropastoralists practicing mixed subsistence agriculture of dry highland crops (barley, wheat, potatoes) on steep slopes.



Map showing research area.

They are heavily dependent on animal husbandry to meet food needs. Large amounts of grains are required for making *chhang* (a fermented beverage). *Chhang* can be a source of income, and is also ceremonially used in arranging marriages, settling divorces, resolving disputes, and conducting transactions (Diemberger 1988). Slash-and-burn agriculture is practiced and is most apparent near the villages of Dobatak and Gongtala, as compared to Saisima, where there is a Buddhist monastery. At Saisima, one of the forests, along with the wildlife, is protected by religious sanctions. Hunting, grazing of livestock and the collection of fuelwood and *mālingo* are prohibited.

Goats, sheep, cows, *chauri* (yak-cow hybrid) and other high-altitude animals are important for their dung (fertilizer), milk products, ploughing, wool and are often sold for *pūjās*, funerals or weddings. The number of livestock owned by households ranges from 5–59 animals. Transhumance is important. The high-altitude animals are taken to graze at the *lekhi* (a high ridge that is not perpetually snow covered), located in the uppermost Apsuwa valley, during the monsoon season (end of June–September) and to lower pastures in the winter months (October to May).

The period of *anikāl* (hunger period or inadequate household food stores) averages two-and-a-half months, and is felt most just before the next harvest (pre-monsoon period or mid-March to mid-May). Problems of insufficient food supplies are aggravated by wildlife damage to crops and predation on domestic animals.

The Sherpas follow the Nyingmapa, the oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Their religious belief system has important implications for their interaction with nature and is manifested in their daily lives. All the Sherpa villages have *lāmās* (Buddhist priests) who are responsible for conducting ancestor rites, curing illnesses, and other ritual obligations. The head *lāmā* lives at Saisima where there is also a community of nuns.

## Yangden

Yangden is at a lower altitude, about a one-hour walk east of Gongtala. Yangden consists of thirty-one Kulung Rai households which are spread out, the highest is located at 1,500 metres. Three houses are situated near the Apsuwa Khola river at 1,150 metres. All the houses are made of bamboo and the roof is made of *citro*.

The Kulung Rais are one of the many Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples (McDougal 1979:3). They depend mainly on mixed subsistence agriculture, supplemented with animal husbandry. The lower elevation and warmer climate of Yangden, compared to Gongtala, allows for a greater diversity of cultivated crops. The main crops are corn, millet and barley. Buckwheat, soybeans, chili, cucumber, sugar cane, and *philingi* (a type of

oil seed plant) are grown in Yangden, but are not found in Gongtala. Therefore these crops are an important means of bartering with the Sherpas. Seventeen households have at least one fruit tree, banana and/or peach.

Compared to the Sherpas, the Rais own fewer livestock (ranging from 1 to 29 animals), mainly sheep, goats, cows, oxen and pigs. Sheep, the predominant animal, are taken to the *lekh* during the monsoon period.

*Anikāl* for the Yangden Rais averages six months (the Nepali months of *chait* to *bhadau*, mid-March to mid-August), and varies from household to household with livestock and land-ownership. During this time, the people are heavily dependent on food from the *jaṅgal*. Members of both communities use the term *jaṅgal* to refer to the forest and grassland surrounding their villages which is inclusive of all pasture land (excluding high alpine meadows) up to an elevation of about 4,500 metres. 'Wild' plants that grow in such areas are classified as *jaṅgal* resources. In other words, *jaṅgal* plants, whilst primarily associated with a forest habitat, also include 'wild' plants of forest origin now growing in open fields or on pasture land without forest cover.

The Rais practice an indigenous religion minimally influenced by Hinduism. There are three *dhāmis* (spirit mediums) and eight *pūjāris* (priests) who are the religious practitioners for the village. Both *dhāmis* and *pūjāris* perform rites to ensure the health for all household members and treat illnesses. The *dhāmis*, however, are responsible for conducting the major rites for the village. For example, the *nāgi* is a snake deity associated with water (McDougal 1979:66) and different rites are performed and sacrifices regularly made to this ancestral deity (Gaenzle 1993). One such rite is performed just before *kodo* (millet) and buckwheat are harvested to ensure that the yield will be bountiful. In 1992, in Yangden, twenty chickens were sacrificed for the ancestral deity at the *nāgi*.

### Indigenous knowledge and use of the *jaṅgal*

My information concerning the Sherpa's and Rai's indigenous knowledge, use, and management of *jaṅgal* resources was derived from a household survey, formal and informal interviews, participant observation, a forest species identification list and preservation of samples, a women's health interview, a 24-hour diet recall, a food frequency checklist, and observation of intrafamilial distribution of food.

When I asked the local people, 'What do you collect from the *jaṅgal* besides fuelwood?', they expressed surprise that I was interested in their indigenous *jaṅgal* knowledge. Yet such knowledge, though differing in extent among social, gender and ethnic groups, constituted an important



community resource shared by all members. The scale of the local people's indigenous knowledge is reflected by the more than seventy minor forest resources collected and identified to date. Thirty-four are consumed by the local population, 33 are eaten by livestock, 18 have medicinal value, 5 serve religious and ceremonial purposes, 5 are used as building materials, and 3 are bartered and /or traded. Among Sherpas and Rais, the same species fills a number of different roles depending on which part is used, that is, the flower, leaf, root etc. For example, *toho*, (*arisaema flavum*) is a plant with a yellow tuber found in the *janġal*. The tuber is eaten by bears and wild boars, used to make *raksi*, treat stomach ailments, eaten as bread or added to soup, and even serves as a rain hat!

Besides classifying the plants, I also documented who gathered and used these resources, with what frequency, and during which season. Many medicinal plants are available (eighteen were named), however, only a few are used to treat illnesses. Accessibility to the medicinal roots is important since they are only found at the *lekh*, which is more than 4,500 metres in elevation. Therefore the knowledge and usage of them is intergenerational, held mainly within one Sherpa family which takes its high-altitude animals to the *lekh* every monsoon period. An exception is *chiraito* (*Swertia chirata*), a medicinal plant, which grows near Dobatak. It is frequently used by Rais and Sherpas to treat colds, coughs, fever and stomach ailments. Often bamboo shoots and mushrooms are collected by family members, who stay at the *goth* (cow shelter), and brought to the village when they come for food supplies. The gatherers are usually children ten years and older, or a woman, if the household has only small children.

Issues of food security need to be kept in perspective. The use of *janġal* resources must be related to the acquisition and transformation of other components of the diet. Therefore a seasonal calendar (fig.2) was produced. Data was gathered from the villagers regarding their yearly planting and harvesting schedule and other annual cycles which have a major impact on their lives. The calendar illustrates the major problems which villagers face and how they cope with their situation. For example, it shows that food scarcity presents a major problem for the villagers during the pre-monsoon period (January–June). The traditional practices which they use to respond to the precarious food situation will be discussed in the following sections: subsistence food resources, ingestible plants, outside income sources, and land management practices. The type of adaptation strategies used to cover the period of *anikāl* and why it is longer for the Rais, averaging six months, compared to the Sherpas two-and-a-half months, gives insight into the differences between the two communities.

	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MARCH	
CLIMATE	PRE-MONSOON		MONSOON						SNOW AND COLD				
PLANTING							BARLEY	POTATOES					
							WHEAT				TARO, SOYBEAN		
							UWA				CHAYOTE		
										GARLIC, CORN			
HARVESTING	WHEAT						CORN	TARO	MUSTARD				
	UWA		BEANS				SOYBEAN	MILLET					
	BARLEY		POTATOES										
STORAGE	GRAINS AND POTATOES						CORN, MILLET						
FOOD SCARCITY	LOW FOOD STORE						LESS FOOD			LOW FOOD STORES			
FOOD COLLECTED FROM FOREST	SISNU		BAMBOO SHOOTS, SISNU						JUNGLE TUBERS, SISNU				
FODDER SCARCITY												STALL FED, CORN STALK	
FUELWOOD												FUELWOOD SCARCITY	
NUTRITION	LOW PROTEIN LOW CALORIE						LESS FOOD			LESS MILK PRODUCED LOW PROTEIN			
CROP DAMAGE BY WILDLIFE						BEARS, MONKEYS, WILD PIG			WILD ANIMAL		WILD ANIMALS		
RAT INFESTATION	RATS EAT STORED GRAINS												
INFECTIOUS DISEASES	DIARRHOEA IS VERY HIGH												

Seasonal Calendar for Sankhuwasabha District, Northeastern Nepal (Gongtala and Yangden Villages)

### Subsistence food resources

Historically the Rais settled in the area before the Sherpas who now live in Gongtala, Dobatak and Saisima. The Sherpas migrated about one hundred years ago from the Khumbu area, bought land from the Rais and are now the larger land holders. Rais are more dependent on slash and burn cultivation and are often seen clearing *jaṅgal* land. A large amount of grains are needed in order to make *chhang* or *jhard*. Rais generally have less grain and for this reason their *jhard* is usually of a thinner consistency than the Sherpa's *chhang*. The 24-hour diet recall and the food frequency revealed that the Rais often drink only water between meals. *Jhard* (the Rai's local beverage similar to *chhang*, but usually of a much thinner consistency) or *raksi* (distilled alcohol) is served only for special celebrations. The Sherpas often drink *chhang* daily and *raksi* about three times a week. The Rais or poorer Sherpa households will often work for larger landowners in Gongtala. The type of work is gender differentiated, women usually harvest grain crops, while the men cut trees or break stones. Men's work is considered of greater importance as noted by the difference in food payment, because they receive 1½–2 times the amount of food staples given to women.

Besides inadequate land holdings, another indicator of poverty is the number of livestock owned. The Sherpas have a greater number of livestock per household than the Rais. Usually households experiencing *anikāl* of eight months or greater duration own only one chicken, pig or goat. The ownership of only a few livestock has nutritional implications since less fertilizer is available for crops, and this influences how much is harvested. Fewer milk products are produced which affects the amount of protein and animal fat available in the diet. The Sherpas often sell or barter butter and *serkam* (cheese made from buttermilk). A family which has a surplus of fertilizer will often give it to a family which has no livestock. Then after the field is harvested, one half of the crop will go to the family which gave the animal dung. One Rai man carried a *doko* (a woven bamboo basket carried on the back by a forehead strap) of food up to the *lekh*. In exchange for his labour he was given enough wool to make one *rāri* (blanket). Rai men often take care of the Sherpa's sheep and as payment, are given *chhang* and food, and after one year, a sheep.

### Ingestible plants

The term ingestible plants encompasses both 'food' and 'medicinal' plants in order to study the biocultural adaptations made by the local people to their environment (Etkins and Ross 1991:231). Rais depend more on *jaṅgal* food resources (wild greens, bamboo shoots, mushrooms) than Sherpas, and their *anikāl* is of a longer duration. This finding was

apparent from the 24-hour diet recall taken during the winter months. It showed that *bermang ko sag* (a type of wild green) was eaten by most Rai villagers with *makai ko bhat* (boiled coarsely ground corn) twice a day. In contrast, Sherpas often had *somar* (referred to as rotten cheese) soup, or cultivated radish leaves with either *dhīro* (a paste-like mixture made out of boiled flour), or rice. The high-status Sherpas (those who are well-off) consider *jaṅgal* foods low status and a 'poor person's food', and would apologize whenever I was served *sisnu* (*Himalayan nettle*) or other *jaṅgal* foods. *Jaṅgal* food resources are generally, but not exclusively collected by Rai and Sherpa women. Children are often seen snacking on red berries (Nep. *asari*; Lat. *mussaenda frondosa*) which grow on a bush, and red raspberry (Nep. *ainsele*; Lat. *rubus nurea*).

Some *jaṅgal* food resources require a lot of processing, increasing the women's work burden, but this does not decrease their importance as a food source, especially when food supplies are low. For example, *sisnu* requires a longer cooking period and more fuelwood is needed. *Sisnu* is high in Vitamin A and iron. Leafy green vegetables generally contain 2–7% protein (fresh leaf values) which can significantly contribute to protein intake when eaten on a regular basis (Adikari and Krantz 1989). *Sisnu*, together with potatoes or corn and spices, may be served as a main course stew, or as a soup accompaniment to *dhīro*. Folk beliefs concerning the intrinsic value of *jaṅgal* foods are associated with the post-partum period. Sherpa and Rai women, respectively for fifteen and five days post-partum, restrict *sisnu* and other *jaṅgal* foods, because they are considered 'too tough for the baby'. Avoidance of these foods can considerably reduce the intake of Vitamin A, iron and other nutrients.

In case of illness, the population will let the disease 'cure itself', call in the *dhāmī*, *pūjāri* or *lāmā*, or may use *jaributi* (indigenous medicinal plants). There are no traditional birth attendants and the health post is rarely used, since it is a day's walk away. A visit to the health centre means that at least two days of labour would be lost. Even when a person is very sick, with a fever or skin infection, he or she must still work. Various kinds of *jaributi* are used by the local people to treat illnesses. On one occasion, the Saisima *lāmā* gave a foreigner *shir timber* (*litsea cubeba*) to treat a stomach ailment which was caused from eating too many potatoes and drinking too much *chhang*.

### Income sources

Some of the Sherpas temporarily migrate to Kathmandu for employment in the trekking industry. Last March and April, eight Sherpa men from Gongtala (out of eleven households surveyed), had gone trekking. In addition to their wages, the amount of *baksis* (a tip given by

foreigners) can vary greatly. One Sherpa said that for a twenty-three day trek an old Canadian man gave him 10,000 rupees (about US\$200) in *baksis*. The women and children are thus responsible for all the household subsistence activities while the men are away.

For the Rais, sources of income are minimal. Woven bamboo products, *raksi*, *jhard*, pigs and pig's bristles, and goats, are sold, bartered and/or traded with the Sherpas and other neighboring populations. *Bhakāri* (woven *māliᅅgo* mats) are labour intensive. For this reason it is usually the old Rai men who are seen making them outside their homes. A *bhakāri* sells for only thirty rupees, which is little in comparison to daily trekking wages. Since pressure on the forest for *māliᅅgo* has resulted in scarcity, a few Rais have migrated to Sikkim or other parts of India looking for work.

*Jaᅅgal* products are also gathered. *Chiraito*, *kutki* (*Picrorhiza scrophulariaeflora*), a medicinal root, or *lokta* (*Daphne bholua*), the bark of a plant used to make paper, also provide a source of income. Usually Rais or Tamangs come from neighboring villages and inform the local Sherpas or Rais of the current market price for those products which are in demand in Hile (a market town 4–5 days walk to the south). If it seems profitable, and agricultural demands are low, a family member (whoever is free) will gather these *jaᅅgal* products. They are later traded and taken to the larger market in Hile.

The Rais borrow money from the Sherpas in Gongtala at an interest rate of 25 per cent per annum when there are insufficient cash reserves to buy food. Usually the money cannot be paid back. Frequent collection trips are then made by the Sherpas to the Rai households and for years they may receive salt or grains until the debt is fulfilled.

### **Resource management**

The Sherpas and Rais have their own indigenous management of resources, including those identified as *jaᅅgal*. *Chiraito* grows naturally on *koriya* (slash and burn) fields. When the plants are picked, the seeds will drop and grow again. At the present time, there is no pressure on the resource management of *chiraito*. However, one Sherpa said, 'if the market price becomes high enough, we may consider planting it in large quantities'.

Whenever there is a problem regarding management of the communal *jaᅅgal* and its resources, a meeting is called. A few years ago, *māliᅅgo* became scarce. Because young *māliᅅgo* is also a source of cow fodder, there was a general concensus that all cows must graze elsewhere. Once the *māliᅅgo* became mature enough and was no longer edible the prohibition on the use of the *jaᅅgal* was removed. The Rais, who are very dependent on *māliᅅgo* for making *bhakāri*, were asked not to collect in this

area. A *ban pāle* (forest watchman) was chosen to impose fines on whoever would break the agreement. Only men are in attendance at these meetings.

I observed a form of natural resource conservation when I accompanied the Rais to their summer sheep shelter at the *lekh*. *Pūjās* are held daily by a *pūjāri* once a particular location is reached. The Rais said that many *deutā* (deities) reside in the mountain, forest, river and sky. These *pūjās* are conducted for the *deutā* in order to ensure their sheep's and their own welfare as well. The *pūjā* is a propitiatory ritual for the *deutā*. It also expresses conservation ethics since the *jaṅgal* is very important for the Rai's survival.

### Summary and recommendations

This paper has shown that the *jaṅgal* consists not only of trees, but also is the repository of many 'hidden resources'. The term *jaṅgal* includes resources found not only in the forest, but also in areas consisting only of shrubs with limited or no tree cover. If forestry terminology is not culturally defined for the local population, information flow can be adversely affected. Farmers make decisions regarding the use and management of the *jaṅgal* based on their indigenous knowledge because the *jaṅgal* is vital for their cultural survival. There is a complex interaction between forestry and farming practices, and each community adopts distinctive adaptive strategies. There are gender, social class, and ethnic differences in *jaṅgal* resource knowledge, use and management. A number of variables, including subsistence labour, seasonal outmigration of men, accessibility of the resources, and market demand, account for these differences. For example, the Rais are more dependent on *jaṅgal* resources than are most of the Sherpas, since their *anikāl* is of longer duration. They are thereby economically disadvantaged, which in turn forces them into client-patron relationships with the Sherpas.

Community forestry programs cannot work in isolation but need to link up with other institutions and organizations in areas of health, agriculture, and income-generation. Community forestry initiatives need to incorporate nutritional and household food security concerns into their current programs. The people's use and knowledge of *jaṅgal* resources, along with the relationship between these resources and food security, should be documented. The role of 'minor' *jaṅgal* resources must be recognized in local food systems and their continued use supported, because they constitute a major component for the staple food supply. Because *jaṅgal* foods are often considered low status or famine foods, they should be promoted within the school system and among agricultural extension workers. A seasonal calendar can be prepared by extension workers

together with men and women farmers in order to determine when periods of food scarcity occur, to find out what they currently practice and jointly analyze the situation.

Traditional and western medical systems can work together. Many medicinal plants are available to treat various ailments. This folk medicine knowledge needs to be retained through the generations and not become lost. Women have a vital role regarding forest resources, but usually are not included in any major decision-making outside the household. This matter needs to be addressed by community foresters.

Most important is for foresters and other field workers to work together with the villagers in assessing their needs. This can ensure 'a communication channel in which information about technology and research needs and priorities flows with equal ease in both directions' (Raintree 1986). Only by addressing the social issues identified by the local people themselves and improving their socioeconomic conditions, can conservation projects become self-sustaining.

## Note

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# **Indigenous Forest Management in Nepal: Why Common Property is Not a Problem**

**R. J. Fisher**

## **Introduction**

In recent years there has been extensive discussion within development and forestry circles in Nepal about indigenous systems of forest management. Much of the discussion has been motivated by a recognition of the potential value of an understanding of existing forest management practices to the Government's community forestry programme.<sup>1</sup>

Generally the literature has dealt poorly with organizational and sociological aspects of indigenous forest management. There has been relatively little contribution to an understanding of the way rural populations have reached consensus on resource conservation or of the reasons why people conform to agreements (contradicting the predictions of the theory of the 'tragedy of the commons').

The literature has established an awareness that rural people in Nepal do, in many cases, successfully place restrictions on the use of products from 'common' forests and anthropologists have contributed to this awareness. However, theoretical discussion by anthropologists has been distorted by the failure to address the ideological assumption underlying 'the tragedy of the commons'—that is, the assumption that economic behaviour can be abstracted from social relations and culture.

This paper is an exploration of the implications of the emerging knowledge of indigenous systems of locally-initiated forest management systems to theories about the management of natural resources as common property. I argue that anthropology has a contribution, of theoretical and practical importance, to make. Remembering the concept of *embeddedness*, a fundamental concept of social anthropology, will be a major first step.

## **Nepal's community forestry programme**

Nepal's community forestry programme involves the transfer of responsibility for management of forest resources to local people. As these resources are to be managed collectively by the 'community', the programme can be thought of as being concerned with the establishment of state-sponsored common property regimes. Understanding of the dynamics of existing locally initiated forest management systems is of obvious

practical importance, either in terms of building sponsored institutions around existing ones or in terms of applying the principles behind successful old institutions to building completely new ones.

The community forestry programme has been promoted largely on the basis of two premises:

1. The Forest Department has not been able to control forest depletion in any effective way due to relatively limited manpower in comparison to a large dispersed population and the wide geographical distribution of forest resources.
2. It has been recognised that some level of local responsibility for management is the only way to achieve sustainable use of forests.

The second premise exists in the context of a common view that rural people have been responsible for the perceived environmental crisis in Nepal. Both this perception and the extent and nature of the environmental crisis have been questioned.

Ives and Messerli (1989), in a very important reassessment of the situation, have described the *Theory of Himalayan Degradation*, which links recent population growth in the Himalayas with increased deforestation and flooding in Bangladesh. They argue that the links between the various elements of this grand theory are tenuous and that the issue is more a matter of a variety of local environmental and economic problems (serious for all that) rather than a massive pan-Himalayan crisis. I do not intend to explore the nature of this crisis here, except to note that it has been questioned.

Extensive recent literature on indigenous forest management has shown that rural people have made major contributions to forest conservation and management in many areas in the absence of external support. (For reviews of the literature on indigenous systems of forest management see Fisher 1991 and Tamang 1990.)

Although the key bits of legislation for community forestry were put in place in 1978, effective transfer of management has been very slow. Many reasons have been proposed for this poor rate of transfer (Fisher 1990). Part of the problem has been the poor level of understanding of the organizational basis for collective action. This is evident especially in terms of efforts to initiate local action through inappropriate groups of people, that is, people without a genuine shared interest in the resource. Another problem was the tendency of bureaucratic organizations to confuse formal committees with effective organization. Since the late 1980s there has been a significant increase in the rate of transfer, partly as a result of a focus on forest user groups (groups of people with locally

recognised use-rights) as managers rather than the earlier emphasis on the now abandoned Panchayats. The Panchayats operated on an inappropriate scale, leading to a poor match between forests to be managed and the particular group of people with an interest in seeing them managed properly.

There are concerns within some elements of the Forest Department and the foreign funding agencies that community forestry has been progressing so slowly that it seems that it will never work and there is more and more talk in policy circles about the importance of private forestry and the privatization of forests. The alternate view is that community forestry development, involving as it does a complex social process, will necessarily take time. It is certainly clear that much of the government and project sponsored activity has been very ineffective.

The pro-privatization, anti-community forestry view is reinforced by an almost doctrinaire belief in the notion of the tragedy of the commons. Although the notion has been questioned, it still remains powerful and is obviously consonant with the ideological systems which dominate the major funding agencies. In fact, the whole idea of the tragedy of the commons is something of a 'charter myth' for those whose agenda involves a simplistic notion of privatization as the recipe for all economic progress.

### **'The Tragedy of the Commons'**

Since Hardin published 'The Tragedy of the Commons' in 1968, concern with collective management of natural resources has been a major theme of debate. Essentially Hardin's idea was very simple. He postulated that, in the case of a resource owned in common, individuals using the resource will each tend to exploit it in an uncontrolled way because there is no point in one individual restricting use if others don't do the same. The cumulative result of individuals behaving in this way is a powerful tendency for common property resources to be overexploited. Long term sustainable yields are lost through the pressure on all individuals to maximise their share in the short term. In Hardin's view this tendency is inevitable unless there are strong sanctions enforced to control individual behaviour. Hardin's argument has frequently been used to argue for one of two types of policies in regard to common property. These alternatives are privatization of common property on the one hand, and imposition of strong controls or sanctions on the other.

The theory of the tragedy of the commons is related to the argument that there is an inevitable logic involved in collective action (Olson 1965). The essential support for the argument comes from game theory which allegedly shows that the effect of individuals maximising their gains leads

to decreasing individual returns and a declining resource. Naturally the theory has not gone unchallenged and game theory has also been used to show that, at least in certain circumstances, individuals can actually benefit through cooperative behaviour.

I do not intend to discuss alternative versions of the theory at this point (for a fuller discussion see Ostrom 1990). For the purpose of this discussion the important point is that debate as to the validity of the theory has become an academic industry, largely because there are clear cases where sustainable common property management occurs. Much of the debate has focused on showing how the apparently inevitable logic of the tragedy of the commons can be circumvented in some cases. (As an aside, not, perhaps as gratuitous as it might seem, it could be said that the problem with common property management is that 'it's alright in practice, but it doesn't work in theory').

Underlying the theory of the tragedy of the commons is the assumption that humans behave as self-interested individuals motivated primarily by the desire to maximise economic gain. Given this assumption, the concern with game theory as a means of exploring common property management becomes almost inevitable. There is no doubt that the logic of Hardin is persuasive. The fact that his model persists, despite empirical evidence that common property can be managed sustainably, shows just how strongly it reflects expectations based on a particular view of human behaviour.

One way in which credibility is maintained is through dismissal of contradictory evidence. Bromley and Chapagain (1984:871) make this point strongly:

Observations by anthropologists that Asian villagers do cooperate on resource-use decisions are considered quaint anecdotes of doubtful generality.... Economic theory says that individuals will free ride, and therefore any data to the contrary are immediately suspect.

A more sophisticated response from supporters of the theory confronted by evidence that common property management can exist, has been to develop theoretical explanations (again, often based on game theory) which show that cooperative behaviour can occur in some circumstances where individual gains are also increased. In terms of this approach the fundamental model of humans as profit maximising individuals is not challenged. However, the key question has shifted. Recognition of the existence of cooperative management of common property means that it is no longer adequate to simply ask whether the best response to the tragedy of the commons is privatization or sanctions and control. The key question becomes—in cases where people do cooperate in the management of

common property, what enables this cooperation?

The tragedy of the commons has been criticised for its narrow focus on economic interests as *the* motivating force in human behaviour (Herring 1990, Uphoff 1992). However, even critics of the theory often recognise the importance of its central insight, arguing nevertheless that it presents too narrow a view of human behaviour (Uphoff 1992).

There are a number of other fundamental criticisms of the theory. Herring (1990:91) points to two core assumptions which underly the theory. The first, which I have already mentioned, is the notion of 'material self-interests as the motivating force in individuals' use of natural systems'. The second is an assumed 'incapacity for social learning'. The objection to this point is that individuals are able to discuss issues and to develop rules and collaborative strategies. In other words, if resource use is seen as a game, it is inadequate to ignore the rules of the game.

A number of writers have stressed the importance of social learning and institution building. Bromley (1986) has pointed to the importance of institutional arrangements in providing a framework within which economic behaviour occurs. By an institutional arrangement he means '...a constellation of rights and duties, and privileges and exposures... [which] give rise to patterns of interaction among resource users...' (Bromley 1986:598). In other words, economic behaviour occurs within the context of a set of largely shared expectations and cannot be seen as operating in a vacuum.

One of the major critiques of the theory is Ostrom's (1990) book which argues for the importance of institutional development as a basis for collective action. Ostrom is concerned with 'how a group of principals who are in an interdependent situation can organize and govern themselves to obtain continuing joint benefits when all face temptations to free-ride, shirk, or otherwise act opportunistically' (Ostrom 1990:29). Her concern with interdependence is crucial: 'The key fact of life for coappropriators is that they are tied together in a lattice of interdependence as long as they continue to share a single CPR [Common Property Resource]' (Ostrom 1990:38).

Identifying the role of institutional arrangements has been an important contribution to the common property debate. So, I think, is Ostrom's point about interdependence. Significantly, however, neither the discussions of institutional arrangements (by both Bromley and Ostrom) nor the notion of interdependence presented by Ostrom, challenge the fundamental assumption that material self-interests are the primary motivating force. Ostrom's emphasis in talking about interdependence seems to be primarily in terms of managing the resource. She does not pay attention to the embeddedness of resource management in social relationships as a whole.

People are interdependent in many ways; resource management is just part of this interdependence and cooperation is encouraged not just by relatively narrow economic interdependence but by the overall interdependence between people. I would not necessarily argue that Ostrom does not recognise this point, but it is certainly not a part of her basic argument.

Perhaps the most classic monographic study of the operations of a particular common property management system is Wade's (1988) study of irrigation management systems in Southern India. Wade explores in great detail factors underlying the effectiveness (and ineffectiveness) of collective action in his study area and based on lengthy fieldwork. Although Wade is not an anthropologist, his approach is very much informed by anthropological and ethnographic methods and concepts.

Wade's subtitle is 'Economic conditions for collective action in South India' and this subtitle highlights the theoretical assumptions underlying his analysis. Ultimately his conclusions are in the form of a number of 'variables' which affect 'the likelihood of successful organization'. These variables relate to the size of the 'common-pool resources' (the smaller and more clearly bounded the more likely is effective action); group size; punishments for rule breakers; ease of detecting rule breaking and several others. There is one particularly interesting addition. One variable is the '[e]xtent to which users are bound by mutual obligations: the more concerned people are about their social reputation the better the chances of success' (Wade 1988:216).

Wade certainly shows that collective action does occur. However, the emphasis in his analysis is on identifying some quite specific circumstances which will facilitate such collective action. There is, apart from the more or less passing reference to social reputation, little recognition of wider systems of social relations. There is almost a sense of paradox in showing that something quite impossible (collective action) can occur if certain conditions apply. Cooperation remains, implicitly, something essentially abnormal.

Uphoff, in a recent study of participatory development in Sri Lanka (1992), presents one of the few studies of collective action which rejects the idea that cooperation is abnormal. Uphoff acknowledges the importance of arguments which show 'how individual self-interest can undermine the effectiveness of voluntary organizations or community natural resource management' (1992:327). But he goes on to argue that '[c]ollective action and common property management may not be as illogical or irrational as Olson and Hardin suggest' (p 330).

This review of the discussion on common property management has not been comprehensive. It is clear that common property can be managed

under some circumstances. But it is also clear that the literature which supports the viability of common property (at least in some situations) generally has not challenged the basic assumption that human behaviour regarding resource management is ultimately motivated by a fairly narrow form of economic self-interest. A major theoretical question surrounding common property management is why people conform to collectively agreed practices when these appear to be against their short term economic interests? I believe that the literature on common property as a whole has erred in treating economic behaviour as a matter of game theory. Even approaches which modify the crudest forms of game theory by insisting that the game is played out in an institutional context (that is in the context of agreed rules) tend to treat economic behaviour as being disembedded from the wider context of social relations.

There have been very few anthropological studies of common property which explicitly recognise the importance of looking at embedded social relationships in understanding the commons. Peters' study of common grazing lands in Botswana is one of very few anthropological papers which does so. She stresses that, '[w]ithout a keener sense of the relations in which individual users are embedded, we cannot penetrate the dynamic of a commons, which is necessarily a social system' (Peters 1987:193).

### **Indigenous common property forest management in Nepal**

Beginning with a few unpublished reports written for development agencies (Campbell 1978, Molnar 1981) and some more substantial published accounts (e.g. Messerschmidt 1984), there was an emerging recognition in the 1980s that rural people in many places had developed arrangements for the management of forests and pastures as common property in Nepal. I do not intend to review the literature as a whole here, but I do propose to summarise some of the main features of these systems as taken from earlier papers.<sup>2</sup>

1. The systems were not necessarily old ('traditional'), but were often relatively recent innovations, which developed as dynamic responses to changing situations. A study of forest management in Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchowk Districts (Fisher et al 1990) found that most systems studied were initiated after the end of the Rana Period and often within the 1980s. Evidence of more long-lasting systems has been reported elsewhere in Nepal (see, for example, Baral 1990), but the dynamic nature of responses is important.
2. There is considerable variation in the form of systems. Formal roles (committees, forest watchers) are not always present.
3. All effective systems, whether they have a formal structure or not,



have an institutional base which comprises at least some agreed practices for regulating forest use.

4. Rules with sanctions are sometimes involved, but these are not always applied in practice.
5. There is usually a fairly clear group of users. That is, use rights are clearly specified and recognised.
6. The functions of the systems range from simple protection (limited or no use of products from a designated forest) to rotational harvesting systems.
7. Systems, even when they are present, are not always highly effective in foresters' terms, but they have often led to the regeneration of forests on previously bare land. In other words, local efforts at common property management of forests often work, despite the conventional wisdom.

Generally the literature has been very superficial and anecdotal, with the exception of a few substantial studies such as Acharya's (1990) thesis on Jirel forest management in Dolakha District. There has generally been little concern with organization, decision-making or with equity and the distribution of resources.

The theoretical contribution has been particularly limited. The major theoretical concern in common property management is with the question: Why do people conform to collectively agreed practices (when Hardin's theory suggests they should 'free-ride')? Much of the material on Nepal seems to treat cooperation as if it were unproblematic and largely ignores social heterogeneity and inequality.

According to Hardin, it is the imposition of sanctions which is most important in explaining conformity to collectively agreed practices. Rules imposing sanctions for breaches of agreed usage practices are commonly reported in Nepal. But statements that such rules are rarely used are also very common. In other words, sanctions are not an adequate explanation for why people conform.

Where anthropologists have tried to explain conformity, it has generally been done in quite reductionist ways. The anthropologist Gabriel Campbell, with various colleagues, has made a major contribution to the study of indigenous systems. He has been one of the few people to attempt analysis of the characteristics of forest management systems (as opposed to mere reporting). His work does not always explicitly address the question of why people conform, but there seem to be implicit theories. (It is an interesting comment on the theoretical poverty of the anthropological literature on common property forest management in Nepal that discussion deals with three separate papers by Campbell; this is evidence of how little

analytical work has been done by others.)

Arnold and Campbell (1986:437) identify several 'social means for protecting areas'. These include:

1. The use of forest watchers who are paid in grain or cash.
2. Rotational guarding of forests (i.e. group members take it in turn to protect a forest).
3. Voluntary group action.
4. Making use of herders mandatory (thus stopping uncontrolled grazing from damaging a forest).

Although practices which help to control forest use have been identified, there is no *explicit* explanation of cooperation. In fact, the emphasis on means of guarding or watching forests seems to assume that there is a need to guard against 'free riders'.

Campbell et al (1987), in a report on a survey of management systems from Central Nepal, identify, statistically, the occurrence of factors such as group size, prevalence of committees and the extent to which groups relate to ward and Panchayat boundaries. There is an implication (only partly explicit), that particular characteristics are conducive to management, but there is no attempt to analyse reasons for conformity. The analysis is highly reductionist in identifying features of systems without reference to particular context.

Campbell and Dani (1986:36–38), in a paper which deals with resource management across the Himalayas, present some hypotheses about resource management:

1. The higher the resource value, the more likelihood of investment in future needs.
2. The quicker and more efficient the renewability of the resource, the greater the likelihood of sustainable use.
3. The higher the tenurial security of the resource to the user, the longer the time horizon of local resource management.
4. The more actual users have responsibility for management decisions over resources, the more likely the resource is to be managed for long-term productivity at less cost to supporting agencies.
5. Increased equity in distribution of resource benefits, within the limits of group acceptability, encourages greater participation by user groups.

These hypotheses ring true and represent a much more sophisticated

theory about collective action. But, they do not attempt to address the question of why people conform. The hypotheses might help to explain why people participate in common property forest management, but do not explain why such people might not become free-riders. There is an underlying acceptance of a basically economic rationalist position.

Pandey and Yadama's paper 'Conditions for Local Level Community Forestry Action: A Theoretical Explanation' (1990) represents a sophisticated and explicit attempt to address the conformity question. The study is a case study of indigenous management of a forest (Hattisunde) in Dhading District. The forest is managed by the people of four villages and the system was initiated locally. There are rules regarding forest access and use. These rules include fines for those who breach them.

Pandey and Yadama attempt to explain 'participation' primarily in terms of *Exchange Theory* (Blau 1964), which they describe as 'an attempt to move away from the more narrow exchange perspective that only refers to economic transactions in its discussion of the exchange relations' (Pandey and Yadama 1990:91). The crux of the way Pandey and Yadama use Blau's theory is the importance of 'comparative expectation' (an assessment of the rewards minus the costs of a relationship) and 'mutual trust...in determining if an individual or a group engages in an exchange relationship or not' (p 91). The essence of their analysis is that the people involved in the management of Hattisunde forest 'trusted each other and had faith in the collective decision-making process' (p 92).

The assumption underlying the analysis is that exchange can only take place among individuals or groups who can convince each other that exchange relationships will be rewarding. People will enter an exchange relationship only when rewards are expected and received.

An additional element in the analysis is *Actor-System Dynamics Theory* (Burns et al 1985) which qualifies exchange theory by insisting that exchange must be essentially equal to be meaningful. The implication is that '[s]ocio-economic heterogeneity in local communities is a barrier to effective community forestry actions' (Pandey and Yadama 1990: 93).

Pandey and Yadama give recognition to interdependence as a factor which can 'motivate households to join a collective action' (p 91) and pay some attention to the importance of the overall socio-economic context in facilitating participation. Their analysis represents a very significant advance in the understanding of indigenous forest management systems in Nepal. However, it seems to me that people are still seen as essentially involved as players of a game in which they balance costs and benefits. The innovation lies in expanding our understanding of the conditions under which the game is played. The notion of interdependence (embeddedness) is not given central importance.

### **An alternative approach**

My view is that anthropologists (and others anthropologically-inclined, such as sociologists and geographers) concerned with common property forest management in Nepal, have accepted the premise of economic rationalism: that people act always, unless constrained, in terms of calculated (and fairly narrow) economic interests.

My argument is that the effective management of common property by a 'collective' is not the theoretical problem that it is asserted to be, simply because the theory assumes that economic behaviour is played out as if it were a game disembedded from social relations in general. The reason why people conform to practices which are against their short-term economic interest is that they have other interests besides narrowly defined economic ones, including the desire to maintain social relationships.

I would argue that anthropologists can contribute to a greater understanding of common property by going back, to some extent, to a key concept of their discipline—the notion of *embeddedness*. Malinowski (1926), in a long essay on anthropological jurisprudence, asked why people conform to social rules in the absence of formal and separate legal systems. He objected to the idea that people in 'primitive' societies are dominated by the group. He explained cooperation in terms of reciprocity, which occurs in the context of religious, kinship and other obligations. The relevant point here is that a concept of 'enlightened self-interest' remains, but the context is far more complex than a simplistic extraction of economic activity from its social context.

A standard criticism of Malinowski is that functionalism ignores or understates conflict. I suggest that it is possible to recognise conflict and inequality while utilising the concept of embeddedness.

### **Case study: Mahankal Ban, Sindhu Palchok district**

I would now like to analyse a case study which illustrates the importance of broad social relationships in explaining conformity with collective agreements. The system was studied as part of a research project carried out under the joint auspices of the Nepal Australia Forestry Project and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). The following description is based largely on the published report of that study (Fisher et al 1990).<sup>3</sup>

Mahankal Ban is a mixed broadleaf forest with an area of approximately 14 hectares. Some of the area consists of abandoned agricultural terraces. Informants state that it was in very poor condition in the early 1960s until protection was implemented in 1963. Since that time

the forest regenerated and by the late 1980s a healthy forest existed.

There are a number of villages around the forest, but the principal users come from Archale village which is situated just below the forest. People from the other villages have secondary rights of access. The management system has gone through a number of stages. At first there was no formal organizational structure—that is, there was no committee and there were no forest watchers. Subsequently a formal committee was established and, at one stage a forest watcher was employed with money collected from user group households. The same watcher was later employed with funds provided, through the Forest Department, by the Nepal Australia Forestry Project. The original committee lapsed about this time.

The user group consists of two categories.<sup>4</sup> The residents of Archale village are the primary users. There are about sixty households in the village. All of these households are Dulal Brahmins or Dulal Chhetris. Other people are granted secondary rights. One category of secondary users involves people who live seasonally in *goths* (temporary shelters) near the forest. People permanently resident in two other villages form another major user category with secondary rights. The rights of access to forest products are as follows:

1. Primary users are allowed to collect grass and dry wood from the ground. (They are not allowed to cut green timber or even dry branches still attached to trees.) They are able to collect the fruit of the *Katus* trees when it appears (every two years). This represents a considerable source of income.
2. Secondary users living in *goths* have the same rights as primary users during their period of residence. When living in their normal residences they are not entitled to collect firewood.
3. Other secondary users are also entitled to collect grass and *Katus* fruit, but are never entitled to collect firewood.
4. Grazing is free, but the number of livestock is small because fodder species are not readily available (Fisher et al 1990:44).

The system heavily emphasises protection and regeneration. Usage is very conservative and the permitted uses aim to minimise interference with growth of trees and shrubs. No harvesting of green wood is permitted, though some illicit timber removal does, however, occur (NAFP 1990). This takes place in the form of pruning of branches for firewood. The evidence for this practice is so obvious that it can only be assumed that it is tolerated as a necessary source of firewood for poorer families. Significantly, the pruning itself supports the notion that the value of protecting the forest has been widely accepted: the pruning has been carefully carried out. Branches are cut close to the trunk in such a way

that tree growth is not damaged unduly. Thus, while the necessity of pruning leads to illicit use, the ethic of *sadupayog* (wise use) remains evident.

On closer examination of the situation a rather subtle blend of consensus and conflict becomes evident. It is clear that the members of the primary user group generally subscribe to an ethic of protection for the forest. Nevertheless, there is a level of dissatisfaction and conflict about the very restrictive availability of firewood.

All of the households in the village are members of clans either of Dulal Brahmins or Dulal Chhetris. Thus there are close kinship ties. Nevertheless there are significant differences in wealth and power. Among the Brahmins there are several relatively wealthy and powerful individuals, belonging to one sub-lineage. One of these men was the Ward Chairman at the time of the NAFP/ICIMOD study. These individuals have been and remain the prime movers in the protection of the forest. They have been fairly openly criticised by some other village residents for their unwillingness to allow less restrictive rules about forest use. Presumably this is a problem because many people do not have much in the way of alternative access to forest products from trees on private land.

Given a level of dissatisfaction with the limited utilisation allowed by the rules, why did people essentially conform with the local rules governing forest use? Although there were sanctions (such as fines) contained in the local rules, these do not seem to have been applied regularly, if at all. Overt enforcement, through sanctions, seems not to be the explanation.

My argument is that to explain conformity to the rules we need to look at the social system as a whole, including the elements of economic interdependence and other social relationships which are less overtly economic. Given some conflict and the fact that some element of 'cheating' seems to be tolerated, there is strong evidence that an underlying consensus exists about the value of forest protection. The initiation of protection in 1963, although apparently proposed and fostered by a few individuals, seems to have achieved wide support and people speak proudly of the effects of local efforts in recreating the forest.

The protection of Mahankal Ban has a religious element. The forest is named after a deity and there is a small temple inside the forest. It is very common in Nepal for small groves of forest to be protected around a religious site, but such protection does not always (or often) extend beyond the immediate vicinity. Thus, religious values can hardly be a sufficient explanation for the wider protection, though they contribute to the ethic of protection.

My interpretation is that, given the underlying consensus (perhaps with

an element of tolerance for necessary 'cheating'), people are so deeply enmeshed in webs of social relationships that large-scale cheating would be a very serious (possibly nearly unthinkable) step. Any individual is linked to other village residents by ties of kinship (both descent and marriage), by shared ritual obligations and concerns, and by a complex variety of labour relations (patron-client ties, the need to obtain labour, the need to obtain income). There are also relationships based on personal friendship. In this context any serious breach of local norms has potentially serious social and economic consequences for an individual.

This way of describing the situation might be seen as implying that the individual conforms to rules because threat of social exclusion acts as a sort of an implicit indirect sanction. To some extent this is true, but such an interpretation distorts the situation by assuming that 'cheating' is essentially more rational than conforming. It ignores the possibility that conformity to values (which one shares) is quite a sensible thing to do in such a system of interdependent relationships.

I do not wish to romanticise conformity by resorting to an abstract notion of 'community'. What we have here is a notion of embedded social relationships which is anything but an abstract ideal. There are clearly many places where effective common property resource management does not exist, often, I would suggest, precisely because the combination of shared norms about forest use and a high level of social interdependence is not present.

There is a further sense in which romanticisation could be a risk and this is in underestimating conflict and power. Clearly, in Archale, unequal economic status and power play an important role (Fisher et al 1990). The dominant group of Dulal Brahmins own relatively large areas of land with comparatively large numbers of private trees. The limited access to the forest assists 'them to command cheap labour... by providing forest products from their own land in exchange for labour' (Fisher et al 1990). Three factors have been identified which enable them to encourage conformity:<sup>5</sup>

1. As they are comparatively rich they place others in debt either by providing loans or small gifts.
2. They act as brokers (intermediaries) between villagers and officials/project people etc. To the extent that changes or *bikas* [development] come to the village, it is credited to their power to influence outsiders.
3. Because they are land-wealthy they provide labour opportunities. Employment is implicitly conditional upon adherence to their wishes (Fisher et al 1990:45)

Clearly this analysis shows that the socio-political relationships within the village influence people to conform. Thus, economic decision-making can be seen to be embedded in at least one form of social relations—that is, patron-client ties. Within this interpretation, it would be possible to see the decision of an individual to conform to the rules as being based on a calculation of economic self-interest, but only in a much broader sense than is usually used by the game theorists. This, however, would be a limited view because it ignores the evidence of a strong element of consensus.

I would suggest, therefore, that in addition to the somewhat coercive influences of the patron-client ties which exist in Archale, something else must be at work and that this is the effect of interdependence in ritual, social and economic relationships.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis interprets human behaviour in common property management as an unsurprising outcome of social processes which are well understood by anthropologists. It does so while avoiding heavily functionalist and romanticised theories which ignore the importance of conflict and, at the same time, avoiding the reductionist theories which treat economic behaviour as the sole concern of individuals in an atomistic society.

In arguing, perhaps somewhat dramatically, that common property is not a problem, I do not wish to suggest that common property management is easy to implement. Rather, I am arguing that it is not difficult to understand how it works, unless it is assumed that human beings behave purely on the basis of calculations of narrowly economic self-interest. The problem in understanding common property management lies in abstracting it from its social context.

This argument has some practical and policy implications. Firstly, efforts to set up new common property management systems are more likely to be successful when they build on existing social relationships. Secondly, it is important to recognise the need for external interventions to include a process of consensus building rather than merely concentrating on formation of new organizational structures such as committees.

It is surprising that anthropologists have ignored the importance of interdependence and embeddedness in describing common property forest management systems in Nepal and that they seem to have accepted the premises of the game theorists. Perhaps part of the explanation lies in the nature of anthropological research on forestry in Nepal, where research has been done largely through consultancies. The research agenda has been largely set by the development agencies, which are, of course, dominated



by economists. The embeddedness of anthropological research in the dominant paradigm and institutions of development would be an interesting topic for further research.

## Notes

1 I would like to stress that this paper is only concerned with management of forests by some sort of collective. It does not deal with management of private forests.

2 Much of my account of indigenous systems of forest management arises from work undertaken while I was working for the Nepal Australia Forestry Project from (1987 to 1989) and previously published in a number of papers (Fisher et al 1990, Fisher 1989, 1991).

3 This report was first published in 1989 with a slightly different title. The 1990 version is cited as it is more accessible.

4 In the late 1980s there were attempts (by the Forest Department) to recognise the system under the community forestry legislation. The negotiations led to changes in the original system, including changes to the rules, use rights and organizational features. The description in this paper deals with the period pre-dating this intervention. In the following discussion I will concentrate on the primary users from Archale village (apart from the general description of use rights). The extent to which the secondary users accept the legitimacy of the system is not fully clear; nor is it clear to what extent they conform to the rules. I simply do not have enough data to explore this meaningfully.

5 Hukum Bahadur Singh was primarily responsible for the insights that lead to the analysis of the power relationships and their effect on conformity in Archale. I am grateful to him for his subtle understanding of embeddedness.

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# Historical Dynamics of Resource Degradation in the Nepal Himalayas<sup>1</sup>

**Om Gurung**

## **Introduction**

Natural resources, particularly forests and pastures, have been decreasing and deteriorating in the Nepal Himalayas for decades, resulting in many unintended and unanticipated environmental consequences. The increasing rate of resource deterioration has not only threatened the environmental balance and conservation of valuable natural species, but the basic means of subsistence for the vast majority of the population. Usually, the increasing rate of resource degradation in the Nepal Himalayas is perceived as a result of poverty triggered by rapid population increase (Eckholm 1976, Bishop 1990). In my paper, however, I will examine the multiplicity of economic, political and cultural dynamics at play in resource degradation from an ethno-historical perspective. It is my argument that research on the multiple and complex variables at play over a substantial historical period is essential if effective policy is to be constructed, and few studies of this sort exist on local regions in Nepal. Explanations which focus on the cause-effect relations of population and poverty throughout Nepal and outside of the specific conditions of specific hill/mountain regions in Nepal are likely to lead to ineffective solutions. I will focus particular attention on local cultural systems and socio-political institutions that control resource management in village communities. My research paper will also assess the effects of political centralization in the history of Nepal on a local area. In short, the overall history has been largely one of external disruptions of local control mechanisms. Hence, resource degradation in the Nepal Himalayas should be analyzed and understood in broad historical perspective.

## **Ethnographic and historical context of Nepal**

Nepal is composed of numerous ethnic communities each with its unique cultural system and socio-political institutions. Until recent decades, communities regularly enjoyed relative autonomy and maintained their own modes of life in which cultural systems and socio-political institutions served as adaptive strategies to environmental conditions. For instance, the Rais and Limbus of the Eastern hills of Nepal retained their communal lands for years through the *kupaṭ*<sup>2</sup> system of land tenure. Under this system, natural resources, such as lands and forests, were controlled

communally by clans and distributed in accordance with family requirements (Regmi 1971, Caplan 1970). Because domestic units held only rights to use of lands, not ownership, land alienation to individual households was impossible. This system helped the Rai and Limbu communities maintain and regulate their relations with nature. On the one side, this system guaranteed continuous supplies of natural resources that are essential for the subsistence economy of the local communities; on the other, it constituted a mechanism of social control to protect common resources. Individual exploitation was kept in check and local resources were protected from destruction by individual beneficiaries. This system was not only equitable, but was based on a number of considerations, such as family needs, communal responsibility, respect and welfare (Shrestha 1990). Under this system, each individual family could meet their basic needs of timber, fodder and fuel-wood without destroying or degenerating their resource bases. Communal ownership provided checks and balances to prevent overharvesting by illegal means, such as stealing. It also provided the local people with incentives and motivated them to protect their resources.

More or less similar local control systems are reported still to be in practice among the Gurungs and Magars of mid-west Nepal. These groups of people have been controlling and managing their forest and pasture resources communally through the generations with the help of traditional *riti thiti*<sup>3</sup> systems exercised through the council of village leaders known as *mukhiyās*. *Mukhiyās*, or village leaders, often legitimated through local social structures, were local political authorities who played key roles historically in important domains of public activity. In local systems of authority, village heads or *mukhiyās* were powerful in regard to village activities, including forest and pasture management. On the day of Lohsar (New Year Day) in the case of Gurungs and Śrī Pañcamī (one of the Hindu festivals that falls sometime during mid-February) in the case of Magars, members of each household gathered at the house of the village leader and made important decisions about communal activities, including forest and pasture management. They collectively decided where to graze cattle, where to collect fuelwood and fodder, and when to open and close fences of forest and pasture lands. A few years ago, while I was engaged in *Development Project Evaluation and Resource Management* studies in Sikles<sup>4</sup> and Tara<sup>5</sup> villages of mid-west Nepal, I was told by the village people that for generations they have been managing forests and pastures through various cultural strategies. Communal ownership and collective use of lands and forests on rotational bases were reported as one of the locally preferred management strategies in these communities. These practices are considered effective, enduring and profitable. They protect

natural resources from fragmentation resulting in degradation. According to this strategy, pasture lands are divided into many grazing zones to graze different types of animals on a rotational basis. Thus, buffaloes are relatively slow browsers and less adaptive to steeper areas than cows and they are grazed separately on slope areas. This practice has helped herders provide fresh pasturage to each type of animal as well as prevent deforestation and soil erosion caused by uninterrupted grazing. Similarly, forests are divided into many parcels and used for timber, fuelwood and fodder collection on a rotational basis. Those who violate the customary rule are punished by the village leaders according to the socially approved code of conduct. This type of practice has been historically effective for decades in the management of natural resources at the local level (Gurung 1987).

Before the creation of the modern political nation-state in 1769, Nepal was divided into many autonomous petty states often referred to as *principalities*. With the conquest of Nuwakot in A.D. 1744 and Kathmandu in A.D. 1769, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1722–1775), the King of Gorkha, unified forty-seven of more than eighty autonomous petty states to create what was to become *Greater Nepal* (Stiller 1973). Although legitimated as an historical step in blocking the colonial expansion of British-India toward Nepal, the process of unification intruded upon local systems in significant ways and disrupted local resource management strategies within Nepal. The indigenous patterns of communal life and economy that existed in the hill/mountain regions were subjected to penetration by dominant Hindu castes. On the one hand, the Gorkha rulers promised to guarantee the customary rights and privileges of *kipaṭ* or communal forms of land tenure of many communities, on the other, they confiscated *kipaṭ* or communal lands of fugitive people and granted them to non-local settlers under other various forms of *raikar*, *birtā* and *jāgir*<sup>6</sup> tenure. Moreover, Gorkha rulers encouraged immigration of other communities including people from Tibet and India to reclaim waste lands and uncultivated *kipaṭ* lands in many areas, even exempting taxes for four years to new settlers. Under this policy influential high-caste groups obtained large *birtā* and other forms of land holdings. The exploitative feudal system (Bishop 1990) introduced by Shah rulers was further consolidated by the Rana Prime Ministers beginning in A.D. 1846 with Kunwar Jung Bahadur Rana and effectively continued until 1951. Like their predecessors, the Rana rulers followed the policy of extraction and repression rather than production. They regarded public resources, such as lands and forests as profitable commodities. The commoditization of natural resources, a central element of the great transformation to a market economy, led to a further deterioration of forests as the Rana rulers and

their relatives sold an immeasurable quantity of hard timber to British India for the construction and expansion of railway lines to the Gangetic plains of India.

The process of territorial unification and the formation of the political nation-state benefited primarily high-caste Hindu people, a few mercantile communities of Kathmandu valley, and some local and regional political élites. Since the extraction of taxes to support the ruling families and military expenditures were the major policies of the government, more and more lands of the hill people were converted into *raikar*. Moreover, the government introduced many forms of compulsory labour obligations, such as *hulāk*, *rakam*, *jhara* and *beṭhi* to construct palaces, temples, bridges, roads, irrigation channels, transport military supplies and other materials, reclaim waste land, and process and supply forest products. The extraction of taxes and the introduction of compulsory labour services placed a heavy burden on the hill population, particularly the peasantry, resulting in progressive impoverishment of the local people (Regmi 1971). Historically, when the state began to assume effective control over community resources, local people found it difficult to sustain their original adaptive systems. They suffered demographic upheavals, resource depletion, internal inequality and conflict, and increased pathologies. They were often locked into grossly inequitable and discriminatory economic relationships with the dominant state/society and they were reduced to insecurity and poverty (Pradhan 1990). This created conditions of underdevelopment resulting in poverty, inequality and exploitation that further forced the marginal people to exploit common resources often competitively and uninterruptedly. The environmental degradation in Nepal is related integrally to these historical processes (Blaikie 1985).

The political consolidation of Nepal under a feudal regime through the 19th and early 20th centuries set the stages for other significant changes. Beginning in 1943, an extensive land registration process started. The state encouraged the conversion of waste land to taxable crop lands inhabited by industrious but subsistence people. As a result, the dominant sections of the population were able to acquire fertile agricultural lands and rich forests in their names. This policy substantially aggravated the deteriorating condition of resources. In 1957, remaining unregistered public lands and forests were nationalized (Bajracharya 1983). This process undermined villagers' social obligations, motivation and incentives to protect communal resources. In 1968, all *kipaṭ* lands were legally converted into *raikar*. The government's policy of converting *kipaṭ* lands into *raikar* further accelerated the deteriorating conditions of local resources, as many people in the hills could not register arable lands in their names and they were forced to encroach further on forest areas.

As Regmi has mentioned, even after the political unification of Nepal, local leaders or village headmen were entrusted with important responsibilities until relatively recent times. Although the power of village heads was undermined in the feudal state, they were/are the local judicial authorities in many hill villages and were/are responsible for land allocation and other village activities at local level. Community life continued to be regulated by traditional customs and usages (Regmi 1971). In 1961, when a political system called the Pañcāyat was introduced, the administrative power of traditional village heads was transferred to new local officials known as Pradhān Pañca. This shift of administrative power to Pradhān Pañcas made traditional village heads and traditional systems of control ineffective in important domains of public activity. These traditional headmen, often legitimated through the positions they held in local social structures of clans, lineages, and kin groups and assisted by the members of the local village councils, played key roles in village affairs. They served not only individual or community interests but a wide array of interests of all village members irrespective of clan, lineage, kin and caste. In local systems of authority, village heads were powerful in regard to all village activities including forests and pasture management. The introduction of the Pañcāyat system further eroded villagers' incentive to protect their forests and other local resources. The transformation of authority also undermined the partly democratic local decision-making process with regard to resource use and management. Thus, these transformations created conditions for resource destruction.

### **Theoretical approaches to environmental degradation in Nepal**

There are various theoretical approaches to explain the environmental crisis in Nepal. Many of them share the common myth of population growth resulting in poverty that has exerted pressure on common resources (cf. Caplan 1970, Eckholm 1976, Macfarlane 1976, Reiger 1978/79, Bishop 1990) thereby creating what is known as *the tragedy of the commons* (Hardin 1968). These scholars argue that because of growing population pressure, resources held in common are subject to destruction as individuals maximize individual gain without bearing the cost. However, the conventional theory of Himalayan resource degradation that usually links population growth and poverty with deforestation, soil erosion and landslide has been seriously questioned by P. Blaikie (1985), D. C. Pitt (1988), J. D. Ives and B. Messerli (1990) in recent decades. These researchers have developed different approaches to development and environmental management. They analyze the increasing population in an historical and more socially complex manner than simply invoking aggregate population parameters; for example they argue that family size



reflects rational economic decisions. The cost-benefit ratio of extra children is high for poor families in poor societies or societies where resources are unequally distributed, because children contribute economically in agricultural labour or the informal economy of the household at an early age and continue to do so throughout their lives. The environmental problems have then their origin in structural poverty among the agrarian population (Blaikie 1985). The relationship between population growth and resource destruction is subject to a great deal of uncertainty (Pitt 1988). The point of analysis then should not focus on the correlation between population and poverty, but rather on historical and political economical variables that underlie reproductive choice (Hecht 1989). The economic and social logic of extra children suggests the *tragedy of the commons* model is an oversimplification of complex dynamics. To Ives and Messerli (1990), environmental problems are rooted in a country's socio-economic, particularly political framework. Barry Commoner (1976) shares similar views. He writes that the ecosystem has been disastrously affected by the faulty production technology imposed upon it by an economic system for increased profit rather than environmental compatibility or efficient use of resources.

Further, some scholars argue that environmental problems are caused by the introduction of new technologies that often upset the ecological balance, because they allow for a much more rapid harvest of natural resources (Burton 1986). For example, the introduction of the chain-saw has linked the rural villages to market systems in many ways affecting the stability and viability of local environment and society (Hildyard 1987). For others, energy crisis in rural areas and rural peoples' heavy dependency on forests for fuelwoods have potentially devastated forests resulting in environmental degradation (F.A.O. 1978). Fuelwoods used for cooking, heating, lighting, and running local industries, such as brick-smoking, pottery-making, brewing and baking are conducive to deforestation resulting in soil erosion, landslide, massive siltation, draughts, floods, epidemics, seasonal famines and out-migration. Still, there are others who argue that the deforestation is caused not by fuelwoods but by food production. The clearance and conversion of forests into agricultural lands to meet increasing food demands and pasture lands to supply fodder for animals is the principal cause of deforestation in Nepal (Bajracharya 1983).

Moreover, for the past few decades, the rapid and unplanned growth of tourism has been an additional factor of resource degradation in the Nepal Himalayas. Although tourism is usually analyzed from a market perspective and its economic impacts appears positive most of the time, nevertheless the social and environmental effects of tourism are most

damaging and irreversible (Jefferies 1982, Coburn 1983). The open door policy followed by Nepal after 1951 has attracted an unprecedented number of foreign visitors each year. *Annapurna Conservation Area Project* (ACAP) estimates that more than 25,000 foreign trekkers and mountaineers a year travel in the Annapurna region, one of the most exciting and easily accessible tourist areas in Nepal (Sherpa et al 1989). About the same or even greater number is reported from the Sagarmatha region. Too many hotels have been built and too many safaris have been permitted around the regions beyond their carrying capacities. The construction of too many hotels has placed heavy pressure on forest resources. Tourism has also spoilt the cultural and social environment of the region by introducing new life-styles and wasteful consumption patterns resulting in generation gaps and the breaking down of social harmony. It has also affected traditional occupational structures in rural societies. The social prestige associated with traditional occupations, such as agriculture and animal husbandry is decreasing for the benefit of employment in hotels and tourism sectors. It has commoditized local resources by introducing a market economy. The traditional Gurung and Sherpa hospitality has taken on a commercial dimension. Tourism has provoked inflation of the local economy. As a result, it has been difficult for the local people to cope with an inflated economy. This makes it inevitable for local people to over-exploit forest products for their livelihood <sup>7</sup>.

### **Suggested solutions**

The arguments outlined above indicate multiple problems that demand multiple solutions (Ives and Messerli 1990) to the *tragedy of the commons*. The problems, however, are regarded as separate afflictions, each to be solved in its own terms: the population problem by family planning, deforestation by social forestry and energy crisis by finding new sources of energy. These problems are grossly simplified and poorly understood. Those who focus on a negative correlation between population growth and environmental degradation suggest two solutions (1) control of population growth; and (2) privatization or nationalization of public resources to assure their proper management (Hardin 1968, Eckholm 1976, Vernon 1988). They argue that since resources are infinite and their management has no technical solution, they could be managed efficiently by internalizing costs through making the public aspects of resources private (Runge 1986). With property owned privately, an individual maximizer will rationally manage resources at its best and highest use and thus remain competitive within the market. They further assume that markets are always the best means of allocating public resources and that

competition necessarily leads to appropriate management. Others suggest a variety of measures such as: an effective land-reform programme (Blaikie 1985) to mitigate the accumulative possibilities of the dominant classes, the redesign of the economic system (Commoner 1976), i. e. the production, technology and distribution system, a distribution of lands and forest resources to individual users on a lease basis (Ives and Messerli 1990); social justice and political democracy (Herringg 1990); joint or collective ownership of public resources through property arrangement (Acharya 1990); introduction of appropriate technology and the use of alternate energies (F.A.O. 1978); the provision of sufficient food (Bajracharya 1983), and community-forestry programmes (F.A.O. 1978, Wallace 1983 Messerschmidt 1986, Arnold and Campbell 1986).

These studies provide suggestive information, but none of them adequately addresses the complex social situation in the hills of Nepal. With few exceptions, all these studies deal with macro-level analysis. A population control and privatization of public resources model can neither best serve the local interest nor collective goals. Empirical evidence from several countries suggests that privatization is destructive to ecology since it is driven by profit motives (Runge 1985). This model deprives the disenfranchised and poor people of public resources and forces them to use marginal resources. Such a model also overlooks local cultural systems and social institutions that are closely associated with resource management. In the same fashion, nationalization of forest resources does not necessarily overcome the problem of common property resource management. For instance, alarmed by deforestation, the government of Nepal nationalized all communal forests in 1957 A. D. But the result more closely approximated the creation of *de facto* open access. Villagers whose control of nearby forests had been removed often succumbed to the temptation of possession by capture. The nationalization programme undermined the local systems of authority. Further, it legally mitigated the social obligations of village people for forest management. Deforestation accelerated instead of decelerated. In the face of worsening conditions, the government began to experiment in 1976 with the recreation of communal property rights (Feeny 1990). The suggestions for the redesign of the economic system, land reform, social justice and political democracy appear quite progressive, yet they do not propose concrete methods of implementation. The conservation of nature and the promotion of tourism require that the basic needs of local people be fulfilled first: yet the government is not able to provide by itself such needs without external interference. Moreover, the introduction of appropriate technology and the use of alternative energy sources have not proved successful because they are neither culturally acceptable nor workable economically and

technically at community levels. Though community forestry has been widely reported to be one of the most successful development programmes in Nepal, Blaikie (1985) has convincingly argued that, on the contrary, it has proven politically, culturally, ecologically and legally unsound. Thus, these suggestive measures, such as technological change, substitution of fuelwoods, and ecologically sensitive community forestry have only marginal effects on the deforestation problem.

Apart from technical and economic constraints, Gilmour and Fisher (1991) have identified two major problems associated with the community forestry programme in Nepal; institutional incompatibility and conflicting interests between the political arena and the bureaucracy. Nepal has inherited a legacy of colonial-type administrative structures characterized by a swollen bureaucracy encumbered with formalistic procedures and a capacity to delay rather than expedite both service delivery and programme implementation. The administrative bureaucracy based on a multi-tiered top-down hierarchical model is often referred to as a *machine model structure* (Bryant and White 1982) and concentrates administrative and financial resources at the centre, while the local organizations are entrusted with responsibilities without authority. The blueprint approach followed by Nepalese bureaucracy and its top-down decision-making process often undermines local technical, organizational and managerial skills. This tendency inhibits effective transfer of authority to viable village organizations (Gilmour and Fisher 1991). Also, implementation of community forestry involves decision making at various levels. But at all levels decisions are influenced by political and personal interests according to the participants' caste and class statuses. Additionally, the problem of tenancy rights is associated with community forestry. Because of changing state policies and regulations about forests and forest products, there is no guaranteed assurance of tenancy rights even though people grow trees on their private land. The government sometimes nationalizes the big trees grown on private land, and sometimes even privatizes them. Moreover, the bureaucracy lacks technically and behaviourally skilled manpower. Many employees are often involved in bribes and other types of corrupt action. They are not accountable by reference to their rights and duties. There is a wide range of physical, social and cognitive gaps between the local people and government personnel. Because the latter are status conscious and ethnically prejudiced, they cannot adjust to the local environment. These additional factors have directly contributed to the limited success of community forestry in Nepal.

For the last few years, various development agencies (national, binational, and multinational), such as *Nepal-Australia Forestry Project*, *King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation*, *Annapurna*

*Conservation Area Project, New Zealand Sagarmatha Project*, have been seeking to alleviate the environmental problems of the Nepal Himalayas. Various schemes, such as the creation of national parks,<sup>8</sup> conservation of nature and natural species, training and education programmes on resource conservation and management have been initiated at the national level. Although the initial phases of these programmes have enjoyed a great success, the long-term results are difficult to predict and quantify both conceptually and practically. The first and most important reason for this is that these programmes are initiated, institutionalized, supported and staffed by foreign-donor agencies, such as WWF, FAO, World Bank, and UNDP. Therefore, the implementation of programmes has been entwined in internal political issues at all stages of project design, implementation and evaluation, and as a result, even the foreign advisors and researchers often uncomfortably make positive recommendations for funding agencies for both time extensions and area expansions of development projects. The second reason is that more resources (time, energy and money) are invested in physical infrastructure development and policy framework than in actual development programmes of target groups (Blaikie 1985). Thus, Nepal still remains a *country over-advised and under-nourished* (Hancock 1989).

Possible solutions present severe difficulties (Herringg 1990) in a country like Nepal where there are diverse socio-economic settings. Further, state politics and policies, poverty, population growth, national and international politico/economic systems etc. pose additional problems for those seeking effective solutions. These interrelated dynamics of resource degradation in the Nepal Himalayas are highly complex. It is not an isolated phenomenon. We cannot get anything from a one-to-one relation or correlation between population and poverty; rather what is required is a broader historical perspective in order to provide effective solutions. In short, the whole range of degradation processes should be analyzed and understood at several organizational levels in order to provide effective solutions.

At the primary level, the ecological system that supports human life and activity by providing resources should be analyzed and understood. At the secondary level, the communities or people who make economic use of natural resources, who possess cultural knowledge systems for their use, and whose traditional social and political institutions serve as control mechanisms for resource utilization and management should be empowered for efficient management of resources. We can empower the local communities and their institutions through educating and disseminating environmental knowledge to local people and their leaders, supporting and assisting their programmes, and promoting and

strengthening their institutional capacity (Uphoff 1986). Because the local communities or people are not only a part of the problem, but are also a part of the solution, they should be involved in all stages of planning, decision-making process, benefit sharing, and implementing and evaluating programmes. Local communities should be provided with jural-political forms through which they can continue to control and defend their resources in the context of the wider nation-state. It can be done without destroying or jeopardizing the local authority and the local system of management.

Women and young children are responsible in our cultures for collecting firewood and fodder, but they might not be aware of the kind of irreversible ecological damage that their activities might cause. Environmental information should be disseminated to them through local informal organizations and cooperative groups, such as *āmāṭoli* (mothers' group), *nogar* (labour-exchange cooperative group), and *rodhin* (youth organization). They are indigenous forms of organization which do not invoke powerful hierarchies of authority in order to accomplish their work. Local legitimacy of these institutions derives from a structure which guarantees that each member profits more or less equally from their collective efforts (March and Taqqu 1986). These institutions are based upon non-contractual impersonal obligations, responsibility and relations. They are closer to intended beneficiaries than any other organizations created by outsiders. People have considerable faith in these existing institutions. They are compatible with the local situation and customary relationships. Since these organizations play a major role in many important domains of public life, they can also serve as environmental counsellors in village society.

At the third level, the regional, national and international political, economic and historical processes should be analyzed and understood. This chain of explanations that Blaikie (1985) calls *Bottom-Up Approach* can provide better understanding of resource degradation in the Nepal Himalayas. By studying this entire system we can propose an alternative model that helps development planners and policy makers formulate future plans, policies and facilitate actors to choose alternative courses of action with regard to resource management.

### **Recapitulation**

Let me summarize the main idea that I am trying to convey in this paper. My argument is that the degradation of natural resources in the Nepal Himalayas is a result of historical processes (Bajracharya 1983, Tucker 1987) accelerated by political transformations in recent decades. It is not caused by a single factor, i.e. the population pressure, but by the

interrelated dynamics of complex factors deeply rooted in the country's economic and political history. These factors have undermined the historically effective local management systems that still continue to work, though with reduced efficiency, in village society. Although these locally diverse systems cannot be a universal prescription for resource management problems, nevertheless, if they are analyzed and understood in a broad historical perspective, they may provide better solutions to the problems of resource degradation. Otherwise, every development effort will merely be a futile ideal scheme, and resources will continue to deteriorate until they finally disappear.

## Notes

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2 *Kipaṭ* was communal land enjoyed by the Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Lepcha, Sherpa, Sunwar, Danuwar and Majhi communities of Eastern and Western Nepal on which the state did not levy taxes until recent decades (Regmi 1971).

3 *Riti* and *thiti* are customary rules and regulations that work as moral binding forces. There is a local saying that *ritile bachnu thitile bachaunu*, meaning live and let live by the customary rules and regulations.

4 Sikles is one of the traditional and extremely large (more than 600 households) Gurung villages that lies to the south of Annapurna and Machapuchhre Himals. Gradually the village is loosing its cultural and natural properties due to penetration of national and international forces.

5 Tara is one of the obscured parts of West Nepal. Due to difficult terrain it is not accessible to outsiders. Fortunately, the Magars of Tara still do manage their resources by themselves in their own ways and provide an excellent example of a Community Resources Management System.

6 *Raikar* is land on which the state levies tax. *Birtā* and *jāgir* were lands granted by the state rulers to the members of nobility, civil and military officials, and other select groups in the society on which they depended for the sustenance and continuance of their authority (Regmi 1971).

7 In Solukhumbu, Sherpa people who once heavily depended on a pastoral economy supplemented by trans-Himalayan trade for their livelihood now depend upon the sale of fuelwoods to the hotels for their subsistence (Jefferies 1982).

8 Since 1973, four National Parks (Royal Chitwan National Park, Sagarmatha National Park, Langtang National Park and Rara National Park), three wildlife conserves, and one Conservation Area Project in Annapurna Region have been created in Nepal.

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# **People and Forests, Anthropologists and Foresters: Recent Research at Nepal's Institute of Forestry**

**Donald A. Messerschmidt**

## **The academic and the applied**

Many of us, as anthropologists, have grown up in the age of conventional descriptive and theoretical studies. Some of us still pursue these approaches as 'academics', practicing our professional skills to document and describe the intricacies of one or another ethnic or caste group and to forge new links between the daily realities of local social systems and the grander theoretical domains in which we write and publish our results. What we write can usually be accessed 'on line' by computer through any university library in the developed world. Because it is accessible, it is often quoted and we sometimes find ourselves recognized for some fairly exotic and esoteric investigations.

Others of us have taken a slightly different road into 'applied' anthropology, where we address our insights and apply standard anthropological methods to more immediate and practical, i.e. less academic, ends. What we do is equally descriptive, analytical and creative, and I'll argue that it can be equally theoretical (if we allow it). Our most important audiences are typically far removed from professional colleagues at home. What we write more often appears in project reports, plans and policy statements than in university libraries. It is written mostly for developers and sometimes *for* and more rarely *with* local villagers (there is not enough of the latter). It tends quickly to become part of the so-called 'gray literature', and is easily lost in project files. It is usually accessible only through personal contact with the author or the project office, and then only while the project lasts (usually five years or less), before the files are purged to make room for the next project.

If we need dichotomy, we can overgeneralize by saying that the former—the academic approach—seems to have longer-lasting qualities, although its immediate utility may be limited or questionable; while the latter—the applied—typically has some immediate relevance and utility, but may be ephemeral and inaccessible in the long term. While such dichotomies may be useful, they do not always fit reality very well. Some of us, for example, can claim a stake on both roads.

There are definite trade-offs to both approaches. On the one hand, as academics our insights are often inaccessible or lost to those who most urgently need to know and use them in the host countries and villages of

our sojourns and studies. On the other hand, as consultants and advisers our insights may get put to good use locally and quickly (or not at all, as the case may be!), but appear inaccessible to fellow academic professionals because we tend to have little time to write and publish beyond the development marketplace.

Should we be disappointed, then, to discover that what we take for granted may be quite unknown or uninspiring to our academic colleagues, or that the insights that we have generated, and the contributions to theory and method that we have pioneered, may be unappreciated?

It is my aim in this paper to try to bring about a better understanding between academic and applied anthropologists working in Nepal. More specifically, I describe some aspects of a new double linkage—between the applied and the academic, and between forestry and anthropology. By way of example, I describe some recent research at Tribhuvan University's Institute of Forestry. My main aim is to review some challenging 'new' applications for anthropology in the field of natural resource management and of social forestry in particular.

### **Forestry and natural resource management**

It has taken anthropologists far too long to apply themselves to the study of forestry and natural resources. Yet the range of possible topics, all of them potentially as important to academic as to applied anthropology, is most extensive indeed. The following is a select list that immediately comes to mind:

- forestry, including community (or social) forestry,
- agroforestry, or farm forestry,
- agriculture, including farming systems research,
- livestock husbandry,
- pasture management,
- soil conservation and watershed management,
- irrigation systems management,
- wildlife management, and
- park and protected area management.

This is truly a 'frontier'-like set of opportunities for enterprising and creative anthropologists. Of the topics on this list, anthropologists in Nepal have paid the closest attention to forestry and social forestry. Agricultural anthropology has also attracted a good deal of attention, though not so much in Nepal as elsewhere (in Latin America, for example). In Nepal, some of the more agricultural topics like farming systems research and irrigation system studies tend to attract rural sociologists, agricultural

economists, and political scientists over anthropologists.

The impetus for anthropological forestry in Nepal dates to the late 1970s and 1980s, with the national legislation promoting the 'handover' of local forests to the people as 'community forests'.<sup>1</sup> The decade of the 1980s saw a number of donor agencies assisting His Majesty's Government to develop the slow process of turning national forests into community forests. A more recent impetus for linking social science with forestry has come with the passage of the *Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, Nepal* (Nepal 1989). The *Master Plan* sets the stage for forestry development into the next century. Fully 46% of its budget and energies are focussed on community and private forestry. In one stroke, so to say (albeit in 13 cumbersome volumes), forestry is described as no longer the private professional domain of the technical foresters: there is now room—indeed, a mandate—for *social* foresters, i.e. social scientists, especially anthropologists, to become involved.

Given the impetus for joining anthropology and forestry (under 1978 forestry legislation which established community forestry), in the 1980s a variety of reports were written for development projects and agencies discussing approaches to community forestry and conservation planning. A number of studies focussed on traditional forest management systems and, more recently, on indigenous knowledge of forest ecosystems. A number of anthropological studies covering conservation themes, local knowledge, and traditional systems of resource management have been very recently published, or are being prepared by a new, small flock of 'resource-and-culture'-oriented anthropology researchers. Recently, too, there have been a few studies involving anthropologists in the critique of the Nepalese forest bureaucracy, policies, plans, management styles and needs. (Selected titles are noted in the references at the end of this paper.)

It is interesting that as the appreciation for social forestry has grown, professional foresters have begun to pay more attention to what we anthropologists have to say. Some foresters have even struck out on their own, without much if any training in the social sciences, enlisting our insights and using our methods to enhance their own work with a better understanding of what is going on in the forest, in social and cultural terms.<sup>2</sup> This may imply that there are too few social scientists working in forestry—which is true. There is also a certain insularity among technical foresters, and a reluctance to invite non-biophysical scientists (like cultural anthropologists) to the table. Speaking personally, I have experienced the down-side effects of this trend in my own career.<sup>3</sup> But I have also pointed out some of the positive aspects of this relationship between the disciplines in a piece on social forestry curriculum development in Asia (Messerschmidt 1989).

While the practice of community forestry largely involves sociological strategies and perspectives, it is interesting to note that no social scientists are employed as gazetted officers within the forestry development corps. This fact is clearly recognised in the *Master Plan*, whose authors wrote that:

There are only a few economists, and no anthropologists, sociologists or socio-economists [in the Ministry of Forests]. A few projects have an overseas specialist in one of these fields, but *their total number is grossly inadequate*. The success of community forestry depends on the understanding and cooperation of the rural population... *R&D involving the "social sciences" must be greatly expanded* in support of community forestry fieldwork and, since so little has been done so far, *it is an aspect of forestry research that must have [increased] priority* (Nepal 1989: v.8:21, 'Forestry Research Development Plan'. Emphasis added).

Note that even in the above statement the orientation is towards villagers needing to understand foresters, not about the need for foresters to understand and learn from villagers. The stated research priorities in the plan lack much direction for encouraging sociological inputs.

Community forestry is, by definition, a fundamentally sociological notion that is *inextricably linked* to the biophysical and the technical. It is neither one nor the other, but both. Yet, the forestry establishment is so protective of its turf that the usual first question and main criterion for employment is whether the candidate is a forester or not. Those social scientists who have made some impact on the forestry sector have done so 'through the back door', so to speak, on NGO and donor-funded projects, often at the expatriate agencies' insistence. In other words, community forestry and concern for the people-oriented nature of social forestry development has come to Nepal *despite* government personnel practices, not because of them.

Looking at natural resource studies, especially forestry, from an anthropological perspective, I can identify at least four promising avenues for *both* applied and academic research: <sup>4</sup>

1. people's participation in natural resources development, including gender and minority group issues,
2. forest management policy and practice,
3. indigenous knowledge of natural resources, and
4. traditional systems of organization for resource management.

Each of the four is now discussed highlighting certain anthropological connections, with special attention to Nepal.

1. *People's participation in natural resources development, including gender and minority group issues*, especially in regard to 'user group forestry' and 'community forestry', both of which are part of Nepal's current move towards greater decentralization and the institutionalization of local managerial authority in forestry.

There is a large literature on people's participation generally, and on decentralized planning and management. Some of this literature has anthropological leanings, but most of it is written and professed by development economists, political scientists and management specialists. These are topics that loom large in Nepal, and the opportunities are many for anthropologists to take them on and to produce seminal studies of local participation and the role of user groups, of community management of forest resources, including women and minority involvement and of decentralized planning and action, all within the context of an emerging national democracy. So far, however, these topics have lain virtually untapped by anthropologists.

2. *Forest management policy and practice*, especially in relation to national forest policy and practice, as well as (and perhaps in future, more so) with donor- and NGO-assisted forestry initiatives.

We have only just begun to tackle this topic as a legitimate domain of anthropological forestry (Arnold and Campbell 1987, Burch and Messerschmidt 1990, Campbell et al 1987, Gilmour and Fisher 1991, Gilmour et al 1989). It involves carefully documenting and critically assessing or analyzing the forestry bureaucracy itself, at various levels from the centre (ministry and department levels) down to the regional, district and rangers' beat levels. But, for the most part, we have little access to this bureaucracy.

We have been aided in the study of the bureaucracy, however, by the anthropological insights of several of our colleagues. Bista's treatise (1991) on 'fatalism and development', for example, gives us an insightful overview against which to examine the themes of Nepalese bureaucratic culture (see also Macfarlane 1990, and Chapter 10 in Gilmour and Fisher 1991). To date, however, nobody has attempted to describe and analyze the forest bureaucracy in the same constructively critical way, for example, that the anthropologist Judith Justice (1986) has done in her study of Nepal's health bureaucracy and development.

3. *Indigenous knowledge of natural resources*, especially the critical need

to document and use the rich knowledge that exists about local ecosystems for locally appropriate operational planning and forest management, as well as to district, regional, and national level policy, planning and management. And, because we are not in the business of 'mining' knowledge, it is critically important that we return local knowledge to the people to help enable and empower them to adapt and respond to change.

Ethnoscience, or indigenous knowledge (IK), is one of the most promising fields for anthropological forestry in Nepal, in all regions: the high mountains, mid-hill and mid-montane valleys, in the Mahabharat and Churia hills and forests, and across the entire Tarai and Inner Tarai (Dun Valleys). Yet, it too remains virtually untapped. As well versed as many anthropologists are in ethnoscience, especially indigenous knowledge of botany (ethnobotany), we have tended, so far, to pay scant attention. Only very recently have some studies of this domain come out in the literature; much of it from foresters and social scientists working at the Institute of Forestry (see Messerschmidt and Hammett 1993, Subedi et al 1990 and 1993, Karki et al 1993 and Saul in this volume). Knowledge specific to medicinal forest plants is perhaps the most well developed, by both anthropologists and botanists (see Coburn 1984, DeCoursey n.d., Manandhar 1989, Müller-Böker n.d., Nepal 1982a, 1982b, Pohle 1990, Sacherer 1979, Toba 1975 and Acharya in this volume).

4. *Traditional systems of organization for resource management*, especially as it relates to forests, forest resources and forest products.

Traditional systems of organization (TSO) is a domain of considerable interest, mostly from work conducted in the 1980s. Some of these studies are difficult to find, however, being part of the elusive 'gray literature' of projects long gone by (see Fisher 1989 and 1991 and Tamang 1989 for overviews and critiques of specific titles).

One strong rationale for documenting TSOs in society in relation to natural resources management is the potential payoff that the knowledge and understandings of them have for incorporating local people, and using their familiar social structures in resource management planning. One theory of innovation in socio-cultural change says that where people see something of themselves, their ideas, and their needs incorporated into development and management plans they are more likely to take an active interest in the action and to be accountable for the results (Barnett 1953). The importance of this topic provides one of the strongest rationales for engaging social scientists—especially anthropologists—on development projects. The understanding and incorporation of local systems into



development is one of the basic tenets of people's participation. It is also often paired with the use of indigenous knowledge. Hence, this opportunity and application articulates closely with the other three already discussed.

Given all these (and many other) enterprises at the juncture of anthropology and forestry/natural resources, we come to the question of how to institutionalize it in some sustainable way. Since 1989, faculty and advisers at the Institute of Forestry have attempted to address this critical issue. As anyone who has ever been involved in the linkage of two professional disciplines as disparate as anthropology and forestry will know, the task is not easy. On the one hand, not many anthropologists are familiar enough with the science and jargon of forestry to talk authoritatively and convincingly with foresters. On the other hand, many foresters are openly disdainful (and threatened) by the 'new' and seemingly 'soft' approach of the social sciences. Nonetheless, the professional barriers are gradually breaking down as anthropologists learn more about forestry and as foresters become more acquainted with and convinced about what we do.

At the Institute of Forestry (IOF) the barriers have been broken in the following four ways:

1. By supporting short and long-term *faculty training* at the juncture between the social and the biophysical sciences—to enhance their ability to teach social forestry to future generations of Nepali foresters.
2. By supporting *student training* in social forestry topics, both in the classroom and in field exercises and practicals—in preparation for their future careers in community forestry.
3. By supporting the creation of more appropriate *curriculum development* which places social science and social forestry subjects on a par with silviculture, forest mensuration, extension, dendrology and other such 'pure' forestry subjects—to bring the institution into line with the priorities of the forestry *Master Plan* and the needs of the nation. By necessity, curriculum development also includes library resource development.
4. By supporting the expansion and development of *faculty research* on subjects new to foresters dealing with social and cultural factors in forest management, using equally new methodologies—to better prepare faculty for academic teaching and for innovative forestry applications.

### **Recent social forestry research at the IOF**

There is a strong realization among some forestry faculty at the Institute of Forestry (IOF) that they must become better prepared in appropriate and current methodologies for *doing* community forestry. This requires doing research on relevant social forestry topics, using appropriate and easily transferable methodologies. Many faculty members want to be able to publish professionally, both as academics and as applied foresters, and to teach their students methodologies which are directly relevant, practical, readily adaptable and useful under isolated field conditions.

For these reasons, IOF Project advisers, faculty and consultants from other projects have been working together on the identification of relevant social forestry research topics, appropriate sites for research and training, and easily adaptable methodologies like *rapid and participatory appraisal*. Rapid appraisal is now coming into its own as a process and a set of tools appropriate to social forestry (Bruce 1989, Molnar 1989, Messerschmidt 1991).

To conclude the paper, I describe below four examples of recent and ongoing research activity at the IOF linking anthropologically-oriented methods with practical forestry research. These examples reflect some of the flavour of the changes now taking place in social forestry research and teaching. One is through the use of rapid appraisal methodologies, which are heavily dependent on linking ethnographic methods and perspectives to forestry and natural resource management. Since it is not our intent to turn foresters into anthropologists, rapid appraisal has been used to help create sociological sensitivity and to collect relevant and useful data in the villages and forests of Nepal. We recognize its limitations (it is only a 'starter research', for example), but we also recognize its usefulness in bridging the sciences and in bringing foresters that much closer to anthropology.

### **Examples of social forestry research using rapid appraisal at the IOF**

In the following examples, I have organized the information around several key points: main topic, associated topics, methods, discussion, applications, affiliations, and reports and publications. In the interest of brevity, these points are kept short. Also for reasons of space, the various sponsorships, affiliations and assistance from many international and national agencies operating in Nepal, are not listed, although their importance is acknowledged.

## **No.1: Rural appraisal research training**

### *Main Topic:*

- Training for Institute of Forestry faculty in rapid appraisal (RA) and participatory appraisal (PA) techniques for application to social forestry research and training.

### *Associated Topics:*

- Curriculum development at the IOF.
- Organization of the IOF interdisciplinary 'Social Forestry Systems Study Group', to enhance research and training in community forestry.
- Identification of 'Social Forestry Demonstration Sites' in association with or for use by IOF faculty and students.
- Preparation of ongoing research and development contract and grant proposals to interested funding agencies.

### *Methods:*

- Rapid appraisal (RA) and rapid diagnostic tools (RDTs), incorporating ethnographic and forestry research and methodologies for forestry development fieldwork.

### *Discussion:*

The purpose of this training is to equip forestry researchers of Nepal (and the South and Southeast Asian region) with practical and appropriate tools in support of advanced research in social forestry. One outstanding purpose of the rapid appraisal (RA) training at Khon Kaen University, which several faculty at IOF have attended, is to develop centres of expertise in Asian countries out of which the RA techniques can be applied to policy research and to further training of foresters and natural resource management specialists.

### *Applications:*

- Research and development in social forestry.
- Training, specifically at the pre-service level (at the IOF) and for in-service (within Nepal's Department of Forests and on projects).
- Advising foresters and natural resource managers on innovative methods for application to participatory and user-group oriented development fieldwork.

### *Reports and Publications:*

Rayachhetri et al 1989, Metz 1991, Messerschmidt 1991, Messerschmidt

and Richard 1994, Fisher 1993, Karki et al 1993, Shrestha et al n. d.

## **No.2: A study of wood-energy flows at Pokhara, Nepal**

### *Main Topic:*

- A systems analysis of wood-energy flows in a rural town and its hinterland.

### *Associated Topics:*

- Indigenous knowledge (IK) of natural resources.
- Traditional systems of organization (TSO) for wood-resource extraction and distribution.
- Micro-economics and economic strategies re: wood-energy extraction, distribution (transport) and use.

### *Methods:*

- Rapid appraisal (RA), following the model pioneered by researchers at Khon Kaen University, Thailand, incorporating ethnographic, socio-economic and forestry research methodologies.

### *Applications:*

- Advising forestry authorities on policy and planning issues re: wood-energy extraction patterns, consumer demand and utilization.
- Regional wood energy development policy and planning.
- Curriculum development at the Institute of Forestry.
- Supplementary materials development for in-service training.
- Research methods training and development.

### *Discussion:*

This study was conducted in the Pokhara area (Kaski District, central Nepal) following an intensive six-week training program at Khon Kaen University, Thailand. The IOF faculty team included a forest hydrologist, a general forester, and a statistician, and was assisted for short periods by a forest-management specialist, a resource economist, a botanist, and a rural sociologist (all IOF faculty members), and two senior development anthropologists (professional consultant-trainers). The RA methods followed the Khon Kaen University model (Grandstaff and Messerschmidt n.d., Khon Kaen University 1987, Panya, Lovelace et al 1988).

This study concentrated on (a) the role of local wood-energy *entrepreneurs*, (b) the *acquisition and extraction* of wood (from government forest, commons and private sources), including charcoal as a by-product and the use of commercial and industrial residues, (c) the

*transformation* of wood-energy resources (especially charcoal) into usable products, (d) the *transport and distribution* of wood-energy resources (within and between villages and urban areas, as well as their intra-town and intra-regional distribution), and (e) the *utilization* of wood fuel (for household cooking; commercial, industrial and manufacturing uses; social and ceremonial uses; and others, including adjustments made by users and of stove types).

*Reports and Publications:*

Balla et al 1990, 1991.

**No.3: Studies of tenure on land, trees and forests, Nepal**

*Main Topic:*

- Tree and land tenure in the Tarai and Churia Hills of eastern Nepal (districts of Siraha, Saptari and Udayapur).

*Associated Topics:*

- Traditional systems of organization (TSO) for resource planning, management and utilization.
- Subsistence and survival strategies in the face of poverty, landlessness and treelessness.
- Socio-economic aspects of major and minor (timber and non-timber) forest management, extraction and utilization.

*Methods:*

- Rapid and participatory appraisal, incorporating ethnographic and forestry research techniques.

*Applications:*

- Advising local and regional forestry projects on development planning, training and further research.
- Advising regional and national community forestry and resource management policy, planning and training.
- Advising on improvements to forest and land use policy in general.
- Advising on alternative forest and non-forest product employment and income generating strategies.
- Curriculum materials development for pre-service and in-service training of professional foresters and natural resource managers.
- Research methods training and development, generally.

*Discussion:*

Two research projects are described here. One was contracted to the IOF by FAO and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). Another was contracted through the Nepal-German Churia Forest Development Project (ChFDP) under auspices of GTZ, (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit).

The first of these (Subedi et al 1993) was based mostly in the Tarai districts of Siraha and Saptari, and dealt with tree and land tenure. It examined both the rule of law (*niyam*, Nepali) and local customary practices (*chalan*). Tenure regimes were lumped into three categories (after Bruce 1989): private holdings, commons and government reserve. The latter covers the Churia Forest, while the other two deal with village private and communal lands and landed resources (e.g., private trees, community forests, ponds, etc.).

The second study (Karki et al) was focussed mostly on the Churia Forest of northern Saptari and Siraha Districts, as well as on the Churia Forest of the Inner Tarai (Dun Valley) district of Udayapur. This study augments the first study in several important ways, but principally by more narrowly focussing the research on the forest proper (and not so much on land and tree tenures in villages of the Tarai plains).

Both studies were used to train IOF faculty in rapid appraisal techniques. In the first study, the funding agencies (FAO and SIDA) specifically requested the research team to critique the applicability and usefulness of understanding tree tenure using rapid appraisal techniques developed by John Bruce (1989).

Both studies generated a rich corpus of indigenous knowledge through the collection and preliminary analysis of ethnobotanical data. The findings of both studies are being used in the new community forestry curriculum at the Institute of Forestry.

*Reports and Publications*

Subedi et al 1990, 1993, Karki et al 1993.

**No.4: Research on forest-user groups in rural Nepal**

*Main Topic:*

- Forest user group mobilization and factors in their success or failure.

*Associated Topics:*

- Local user perspectives on user group management.
- Local user perspectives on government, donor agency and NGO involvement.

- The Department of Forests' roles in local user group formation and support.
- Donor agency and NGO approaches to local user group formation and support.
- Indigenous knowledge of forest resources.
- Traditional systems of forest resource management.
- Forest user groups as a venue for participatory democracy in action.

*Methods:*

- Rapid and participatory appraisal, using an interdisciplinary research team consisting of two foresters, a watershed and range management specialist, a rural sociologist/agriculturalist and an anthropologist. The team consisted of one woman and four men.

*Applications:*

- Curriculum materials development focussing on case examples, insights and methodology.
- Advising the Department of Forests officers and rangers on user group development.
- Advising donor agencies, NGO and project field staff on user group development.
- Training IOF faculty in rural appraisal methods.

*Discussion:*

The research team visited over twenty community forest user groups in six districts (Dang and Salyan, in the Mid-Western Development Region; Kaski, Myagdi and Manang, in the Western Development Region; and Dhading in the Central Development Region), augmented by interviews and secondary source materials involving other districts and all regions of Nepal. The research team interviewed the staff of the following forestry development projects, representing the five development regions: Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project, Nepal-Australia Community Forestry Project, Integregated Hills Rural Development Project, Khosi Hills Integrated Rural Development Project, CARE/Nepal's Begnas Tal/Rupa Tal Development Project, and Dang Development Project, Coppice Reforestation Project, Annapurna Conservation Area Project and Lumle Agricultural Center. Interviews were also conducted with Department of Forests' staff, including Regional Forest Officers (RFOs), District Forest Officers (DFOs), rangers and other field workers.

The main objectives of the study were to:

- Visit community forest-user group sites and study procedures and processes of user group mobilization, organization and support.

- Identify indicators of ‘success’ in various contexts.
- Provide findings of fact and recommendations to guide future forest user-group development by government field foresters, project staff and NGOs.
- Provide materials from the studies for curriculum development at the IOF and for in-service training in departments of the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

More specifically, the team sought to identify factors of *cost-effectiveness*, *replicability* and *sustainability* of community forest user groups.

Tentative findings were presented at an international conference on community forestry sponsored by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Kathmandu (ICIMOD 992, Messerschmidt et al 1992), in the form of 22 tentative or working hypotheses about ‘what works and why’. The hypotheses were divided into four types, according to *institutional and legal indicators* (regarding the influence of the outside agencies involved), *technical indicators* (regarding biophysical variables and skilled or scientifically informed management of forests), *social indicators* (regarding community characteristics), and *economic indicators* (regarding market influences and benefit-sharing).

The research findings have a great deal to say about local and sponsor motivation, the role of ‘incentives’ and inside and outside support, the importance of indigenous or pre-existing resource management organization (TSOs), the role of local leadership, the relationship between the ‘maturity’ of the natural resource (forest) and the ‘maturity’ of the user-group itself, and the important roles of women and minority groups in a community of users. Above all, the data indicate a high level of local resolve and ability to manage and utilize community forests effectively.

#### *Reports and publications:*

Messerschmidt et al 1992, Messerschmidt and Richard 1994.

#### **Conclusions**

These four examples of modern forestry research and its application to natural resource development and community forestry training are revealing of the tremendous potential, here realized, of combining a natural science—forestry, with a social science—anthropology. On the forestry side, this innovative work has successfully introduced technical specialists, teachers and students at Nepal's Institute of Forestry (IOF) to the importance of social science perspectives in their work, and forest managers to the importance of understanding indigenous knowledge (IK)



and traditional systems of organization (TSO) in development planning. On the social side, it has allowed anthropologists to apply some of their most powerful research tools and intellectual insights to the study of natural resource management issues in villages, and has opened up new vistas for anthropological theory and practice generally.

The issue is no longer of bridging the (false) dichotomy between the academic and the applied, but of fitting social science theory and practice to the practicalities of forest management and natural resource development. Since these studies were conducted, the IOF faculty has developed an entirely new and expanded curriculum to address community forestry issues integrating social science concepts and methods (Morrison et al 1994, Buffum and Karki 1994). These studies now form part of the case-study materials and experience necessary to assure a more constructive approach to achieving the major challenge of the forestry *Master Plan*, directly addressing some of the principal concerns of Nepal's pioneering community and private forestry initiatives.

## Notes

1 The history of community forestry in Nepal is discussed in several places. See: Arnold and Campbell (1986), Gilmour, King and Hopley (1989) and Gilmour and Fisher (1991).

2 Perhaps the best known of these in Nepal is the District Forest Officer Jagdish Baral, who has published several studies based on his observations of forest management in the hinterland of western Nepal, and advising technical forest development agents how to learn and utilize local indigenous knowledge and traditional systems of forest management to do a better job. See Baral 1991, Baral and Lamsal 1991. In this regard, it is encouraging to note the use of many social science references in articles by Nepalese foresters contributing to the recent Second National Community Forestry Workshop (*Bank Janakari* 1993).

3 For a mild example, see critical forester correspondence in reaction to my article 'What is a Tree?' (Messerschmidt 1990).

4 There is a fifth area to which anthropologists of forestry should also take note— pedagogical approaches to forestry education and training. There is great scope for study and practice here for both applied and education anthropologists, especially in terms of the issues of cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural education, and for the reorientation of conventional foresters to community foresters.

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# **Management of Natural Resources Among the Kulunge Rai of Eastern Nepal**

**Tore Nesheim**

I shall in this paper address the issue of management of common property resources among the Kulunge Rai of eastern Nepal. The Kulunge Rai exploit a wide range of natural resources, through cultivation, animal husbandry and utilization of forest products. The question is, to what extent is this exploitation managed or not. By managed utilization of natural resources I refer to a situation where social units (e.g. households, user groups, villages, etc.) not only harvest nature to satisfy their individual needs or objectives, but they also take action to prevent depletion of these resources, or even to increase the capacity of these resources to satisfy their needs. If a number of households exploit common forest resources independently for their individual objectives, this land is not communally managed. It is then the individual users' objectives that determine the rate of exploitation rather than the overall objectives of the total number of users. This need not constitute any problem as long as the rate of exploitation is less than the rate of regeneration. The critical issues in this context are; a) demographic growth among the number of users; and b) the varieties of objectives satisfied through exploitation of forest products. It is when forest offtake exceeds forest regeneration that resource utilization becomes unsustainable.

Empirically, we know that such unsustainable processes do occur, and it is the conditions which underlie such trends that Hardin tries to capture with the phrase 'Tragedy of the Commons' (Hardin and Baden 1977). As I understand him he does not imply that it is impossible for a collectivity of users to manage common resources, in fact there are many examples of this being possible, e.g. the management of Norwegian common forest. But, as Hardin says, such management cannot be built on individual households assumed responsibility in resource management. This responsibility must be anchored in specific social arrangements with the capacity to enforce restrictions on the individual's utilization of the common resources.

When I first decided to work in Nepal I had two fields of interest: human ecology and development work. Thus I decided to do fieldwork within the area of a development project. CARE, an international development organization is implementing a community development project in Solukhumbu, eastern Nepal. The project assists communities in

forestry, agriculture, community organization, drinking water supply and bridge construction. Here I will only focus on their impact on forest and forest management. I stayed in Bung, one of the Kulunge Rai villages in the area. The Kulunge Rai can be described as occupants of an agro-pastoral niche, but as in the case of most of the hill populations of Nepal we will see that they are also dependent on other income sources. In addition to constraints set by the natural environment their niche is influenced by socio-cultural factors, e.g. rights in different kinds of resources, the politico-economic maintenance of these rights, demographic and market relations, etc.

### **The agro-pastoral adaptation**

The population of Bung is approximately 99% Rai. There are more than 300 households in the village; only two of which are from another ethnic group (or caste), namely Kami (blacksmith). The village is situated on a steep hill-side at an altitude varying from 1400 to 1800 metres. It is five days walking to the nearest motorable road so this is a remote area, even for Nepal.

In Bung the two most important crops are maize and millet. On irrigated land potato and maize are inter-cropped from February, and after harvesting potato in the beginning of the monsoon, rice is transplanted into the maize fields. A similar cropping pattern is used on rain-fed land, but millet is transplanted instead of rice. Common for these two cropping patterns are the large amount of time and hard work spent transplanting rice and millet during the early phase of the monsoon. Management of the work force will be directed towards having as many as possible of the household members in the village at that time. A third cropping pattern is used in the higher areas in the village. Here the most important crops are buckwheat, barley, wheat and potato. They have different seasons, so there is much more flexibility in terms of management of the work-force. Larger animals stay for up to nine months of the year in pasture areas or remote fields outside the village. This means that the households will have to have someone almost permanently engaged in looking after animals.

The forest supplies a number of major resources. Collection of wild foods for human consumption have some importance, and as a source for animal food it is very important. Leaves are used in compost and as fodder, and make up a significant part of the animal diet. There are some privately owned fodder trees growing within the village but far from enough to cover the need, so most of it is collected from the forest. The forest also supplies the village with building materials, and last but not least, with firewood. The basis for the agro-pastoral adaptation depends on the management of these resources.



### **Management of communal resources**

Ever since the last areas of *kipat*<sup>1</sup> land were converted to *raikar* tenure cultivated land has been privately owned. Management of legally and locally acknowledged private property is excluded from my discussion. Pasture and forest are still to a large extent considered common property (as if the *kipat*-system still existed) but as I will show, this is also changing. Regarding rights to communal resources, like forest, it is particularly membership in a clan, and also to some extent membership in a sub-tribe, that is relevant. The Rais are divided into many different tribes (e.g. Kulunge, Thulunge and Bantawa), the tribes are divided into sub-tribes (e.g. Kulunge (proper), Namlunge and Pelmunge), sub-tribes are divided into branches (e.g. Chemsi and Tamsi), and the latter are divided into clans (e.g. Tomocha, Timra and Wadiri).<sup>2</sup> After the introduction of the panchayat-system,<sup>3</sup> membership in a ward could in some cases give use-rights in forests.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I was very confused concerning rights in forest. This, I believe, is because there have for some time been changes in management systems. I did my fieldwork in 1991, after the revolution that abandoned the panchayat system, but before the new political system had been introduced on village level. It was also difficult to obtain reliable information on the use of forest since the villagers' practice very often is not in accordance with Nepalese law. The forests were nationalized in 1957 and since then people have to have permission from the forest office to fell living trees. Subsequent forest legislation has changed the directives of this 1957 Act, e.g. the National Forestry Plan in 1976. The latter and later Acts gave the Panchayats the possibility of converting nationalized forest into 'Panchayat Forest' the use of which should be controlled by the village Panchayats. However, very little forest was in fact converted to 'Panchayat Forest'; in Bung there are no such forests. Plans that involved even more decentralized forest management were developed in the late eighties but were only implemented after the 1990 revolution. But thus far it would seem that the legal aspect has had very little influence on local management practices—possibly because governmental presence is very low in this area and also due to lack of understanding of government legislation. However, I had the opportunity to observe some local reactions to recent legislative changes during a short visit to the village in August 1992. In what follows I will focus on the local conceptualization of forest and forest management.

All of the Kulunge Rai clans have their own forest resources and until no more than a few decades ago clans members controlled access to such resources. This must be what the anthropologist Charles McDougal described after having carried out fieldwork in a neighbouring Kulunge

## Rai village in 1964/65:

The Rais of Kulung have their own indigenous system of forest conservation. The indiscriminate felling of trees is not permitted. Although anyone resident in the locality may collect dry wood for fuel on land held by any local clan group in order to fell a living tree—either for construction timber or to cut and dry for fuel—it is necessary to obtain permission from the headman of the local clan group on whose land the tree stands, and pay a fee of Rs. 2 for each tree (McDougal 1979:49).

Everyone I mentioned the 'McDougal-system' to, including headmen of the local clan groups, denied that this was the present system. Some say that this was how they did it in the past, but that it was only a symbolic act. If one wanted to cut down a tree then one would bring a bottle of liquor to the headman to obtain permission. The headman, or *tālukdār*, would not refuse. It is quite possible that a bottle of liquor was worth two rupees 25 years ago. Today, they say that one is not supposed to cut too many trees, but no one could really say how much too many is, nor how to ensure that people don't cut too much.

I identified several 'types' of forest used by the Kulunge sub-tribe in Bung. Some forests are referred to as *waDā bon* (ward forest<sup>4</sup>). This signifies that only members of that particular geographical unit can use this forest. Once a year a ward meeting was held to decide how to use the forest. All the households in the ward had the right to send a representative to the meeting, but as in most matters there was an informal group of men who made the decisions. Lately this has not been working properly and there is almost no control on the use of these forests. Some villagers said that they stopped paying attention to the meetings years ago, others claim that the problems are more recent and connected with the fall of the Panchayat system.

Is it possible to say that the Panchayat system was a social arrangement which prevented individual exploitation of at least some of the forests? I believe that it was the ward as a territorial unit, more than the ward as a political body, that tried to manage forest utilization, though there is evidence that members found it difficult to enforce their decisions.

In one of the wards there is a forest that originally was registered in the name of three members of the Tomocha clan. A few years after the registration the forest burned. Later, when the forest regenerated, people became interested in the area again. The Tomocha clan tried to keep it for themselves, but other villagers threatened to tell the government about the forest, which is falsely registered as cultivated land. Eight years ago the ward members decided to divide it among their five constituent clans. The forest of each clan was soon further sub-divided into individually managed

household shares. All of the original forest is still officially registered in the name of the same three men, though governmental tax, based on the false assumption that the area is cultivated, is collected from all the households.

When, as in the above case, clan forests are sub-divided into individually managed household shares, clan members can no longer cut trees wherever they want to, but can only use their own individual shares. These patches of forest are treated locally as if they were private, even though legally they are not. All the separate households get equal shares, which means that over time different demographic developments in different households will produce variations in access to forest resources.

The Pelmunge Rai, another sub-tribe in the area, do it differently. Here all the households have equal rights in all the forests and they have meetings twice a year to decide how to use their forest resources. Enforcing the decisions seems to be a problem, and I have contradictory information as to whether or not the decisions of the meeting are respected. As far as I could determine there was no discussion of dividing the forest. One reason for this could be that the Pelmunge Rai own substantially more forest than the Kulunge Rai, so the pressure on forest resources is not very noticeable yet.

Dividing communal forest into individually managed household shares might be considered to be an adaptive response to pressure on resources. The Kulunge Rai's failure to manage their forest resources might be a new phenomenon due to a power vacuum after the revolution, but I believe that it has always been organizationally difficult for them to coordinate the way a multitude of independent households exploit communal forest resources. It is possible that my understanding of the political aspect of forest management would have been different had I done fieldwork during the Panchayat period, but I believe that the village panchayat was never very strong and that the formal nationalization of the forest in 1957 and the subsequent Forest Acts have had almost no impact on management practices. So why is it so difficult to make collective decisions about the use of forest resources?

I found that most aspects of village life are concentrated on the autonomous households. This is reflected in the urge to set up separate households as soon as possible after marriage. Nuclear family households are the norm as well as statistically most frequent. After separating from the father, the son is economically independent. No further co-operation is required even though it is quite common for fathers and sons to be involved in labour exchange. Apart from utilizing common resources I could only see that the clans were important for marriage. The clans are exogamous, but one is free to marry a member of any other clan. A

person's network is individually built and to a very small extent defined by prescribed statuses. One decides for oneself whether or not to co-operate with relatives. Work parties often consist of only neighbours and friends. People participate in each others rituals on the basis of personal relationships.

What about the leaders of the local clan groups, the *tālukdārs*? Charles McDougal claimed that they were traditional leaders who were given the power by the government to collect tax from their clan members. My information indicates that there were no clan leaders before they were given these powers approximately 50 years ago. There might have been leaders with 'Big Man' qualities, but no formal leadership. If this is correct, it would mean that there were no institutions on the clan level to manage clan *kīpaṭ* (i.e. communal clan land). However, now the *tālukdārs* are only tax collectors for the government—apart from that they have no authority. The *tālukdārs* will soon be replaced as tax collectors, possibly after the completion of the coming cadastral survey for Solukhumbu District.

Collective decisions are being made on an 'ad hoc' basis, and it is important to reach consensus. I will give one example. Two clans, Timra and Wadiri, own a forest together. Last year they decided to divide it into two equal shares. They only managed to divide parts of the forest, and this year they wanted to do the rest. A time for a meeting was set, though before the meeting was to take place there were rumours that Wadiri was unsatisfied with last years decision and wanted to redo the division. I attended the meeting but few people came. Thus the meeting was rescheduled, but the same thing happened the second time. The third time more people came, and the discussion started. They decided to redistribute the whole forest again, but this time into household shares. It was important for everyone to agree on this, or else they could not do it. After the meeting some of the younger participants set off into the forest to start the time-consuming task of measuring up the shares. A few days later, before the work was completed, two old men who had not attended the meeting loudly showed their disagreement with the decision. There was no longer any consensus. The whole thing was called off, and they are going to try again next year. All the participants at the meeting had a say in this, even though the words of respected men carried more weight. The *tālukdārs* played no special role.

'The Tragedy of the Commons' is used by Hardin to describe a situation that might occur when people exploit a common resource. One example of a 'PP-CC Game' (Communal Cost-Private Profit) is when it is rational for a herd owner to invest in one extra animal, and let it graze on communal pasture, because he gets the profit from the extra animal, while

the cost of over-grazing is shared by everyone. This can be used to illustrate the situation in Bung. It might be rational for the individual to take as many trees as possible because he gets the profit, while the cost of deforestation is carried by all the users. This is perceived by many of the villagers, but of course articulated in a different manner. Dividing the forest into household shares is their way of trying to solve this problem, i.e. in this case privatization is part of the indigenous knowledge of how to cope with stress.

I will give two examples that will give some idea of how some of the villagers perceive the problems of managing common property. One man told me this story:

If someone goes into the forest and sees someone else felling a tree, he might say: 'Why are you felling that tree? You know you are not allowed to do that.' Then the other one might reply: 'Why are you making so much fuss about it? You are here for the same purpose, aren't you?' And he is right, you know.

The other example is related to the joint Wadiri-Timra forest. I asked a Timra-man why he wanted to divide the forest into household shares, and he told me this story:

Suppose that a Timra-man sees a Wadiri-man felling a tree in our forest he might tell that man that he should not do that. The Wadiri-man could then tell the Timra-man that it is not any of his business because it is a Wadiri-tree. Then suppose the Timra-man sees another Timra-man felling a tree, the other Timra-man could tell him not to worry because it is a Wadiri-tree.

My point is that even though the problem has been identified by the local users they are unable to restrict the quantitative individual exploitation of the common property.

### **Secondary economic activities**

Among the Kulunge Rai all sons have the right to land, and because of this the farms are getting smaller. Today there are few households with sufficient land and most have to have extra income in order to stay economically viable. A common way of solving this problem is sharecropping, which more than half of the households in my survey practice. A lot of the households are engaged in middleman trade between roadheads to the south and remote mountain areas to the north. Some households with very little land may have someone almost continuously engaged in this trade. Note that the agricultural cycle permits part of the

labour force to leave the village most parts of the year, except during the early stages of the monsoon. Half of the households earn extra income this way. Some of the villagers work as porters for tourists. This, as in the case of trading trips, is hard work, but the pay is better. It is difficult to get these jobs, so even though they are preferred only 20% of the households have regular income from portering.

It is also quite common for men and women to leave the valley to work somewhere else for shorter or longer periods. Lately many villagers have been engaged in road building in Bhutan and Sikkim. Some years ago it was more common to work as plantation workers in India. Others try to find work closer to home so as to have the possibility of returning to Bung during the agricultural peak seasons. Salary or pensions from the Indian and British Army are not important in this particular area as the last serviceman to retire was in 1965. Wage-earnings in Bung other than in agriculture are almost nonexistent. More than 60% of the households have at least one of the above mentioned income sources. If we include paid farm labour, almost 90% of the households have income in addition to what they derive from farming and sharecropping.

### **Conclusion**

These extra sources of income have made it possible to sustain a growing population. But for how long? Lack of land for food crops can be compensated by purchase of grain from cash earnings. But an increasing problem is the way the population growth increases the demand for forest products to an extent that harvesting may exceed the rate of regeneration.

Since I finished my fieldwork in 1991 there has been a local election, but a recent visit to the area (August 1992) gave no indication as to the effect this will have on the above-mentioned processes. What is more important is that CARE has become engaged in establishing community forests (under the conditions set by the new Forest Act). Forest can now be claimed by the traditional users if they can provide a management plan that can be accepted by the District Forest Office. That includes planting new patches as well as looking after old forest. The staff in charge of this operation are aware of the local conditions and are consequently capable of forming user groups which correspond with the original users of a certain area, whether use-rights are based on clan or ward membership. CARE, together with the users, makes management plans, with rules and regulations, fees and fines. Some of the rules and regulations are new but most of them are formalizations of old ones.

If CARE had not been present in the area it would have been up to the governmental foresters to make management plans. It is very likely that they would not have had the capacity to make plans adapted to the area.

Governmental foresters do not have time to map the complicated system of clan, co-clan, ward, co-ward use-rights and which patches of forest matches those rights. This is a very remote area where civil servants try to spend as little time as possible. When it comes to making management plans the foresters are not trained to take indigenous knowledge into consideration. They are oriented to the hard sciences (forestry, natural science) and might very well overlook local knowledge since it is non-scientific. There is also a long history of corruption among the civil servants and the traditional users often find that their area, because of bribes, has been registered in someone else's name.

CARE assisting the local people in making community forests is a good short-term solution but the long-term problems are yet to be solved. As it is, the population will continue to grow, and thereby also the number of users of natural resources. Embracing indigenous management practices without modifications gives no certainty of success. If we assume that the population growth in this area is the same as that for Nepal as a whole, the population was half of what it is today in 1964/65 when Charles McDougal did his fieldwork. Thus the problems of managing the common resources must have been much smaller. The indigenous management system (mainly reserving the use of a forest for a certain group of people with some restrictions on seasonal use) might have been sufficient then.

Those of you who are familiar with the 'Tragedy of the Commons' debate might find it interesting to note that the Kulunge Rai tried one of the suggested solutions for the problem of managing commons, namely privatization. CARE has made it possible to try one of the other solutions, namely to fully control the use of the commons by regulations, use charges and fines. To conclude, we could say that CARE has introduced a new dimension in the Kulunge Rai's niche which modifies their present resource management system. The question is whether the changes introduced are sustainable after the international organization withdraws its support.

## Notes

1 *Kipat*: Rights to land were obtained by membership in a kin group. Land could be used by members of other ethnic groups/castes but not sold to them. *Raikar*: Private ownership. Land can be sold to anyone.

2 Partly derived from McDougal(1979).

3 The Panchayat-system was introduced by the King in 1960. It was a political system with councils (panchayats) on four levels from village level to national level (the Parliament). Members were elected on the village level. Higher level representatives were chosen among them and by them. But the real power was held by the King and the Palace Secretariat. The King lost most of his power in

the 1990 revolution and the panchayats were dissolved. A multi-party parliamentary election was held in May 1991, and local elections were held in May 1992. Consequently, there were no formal political bodies working on the local level when I did fieldwork. The Village Panchayats were divided into 9 territorial units (wards) with one representative each in the Village Panchayat (Council).

4 Ward forests are forests that came under the control of the wards rather than the clans. These were most probably forests that originally were not claimed by any clan.

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# **Farming Systems with Degenerating Resources: Experience of a Nepalese Hill Village**

**Tulsi Ram Pandey**

## **Introduction**

A gradual increase in the proportion of the rural population below the poverty line combined with a higher growth of cereal crop production compared to that of population are some seemingly paradoxical features of Nepal's socio-economic structure. In 1977 42.2% of the rural population was below the absolute poverty line (NPC 1983:xiv) which increased to 43.1% in 1984/85 (NRB 1988:xvi). Similarly, during the 1980s cereal crop production increased at an average rate of 4.3% per annum (HMG 1992:24) compared to that of 2.08% for the population (CBS 1991:26). These figures lead one to ask whether the macro information on production growth suggests any improvement in the farming methods of subsistence growers in rural areas. This paper attempts to delve into the issues based on empirical data gathered from a western hill village in 1989.

It is important at the outset to delimit the boundaries of a farming system. While defining a farming system at the level of the family farm, Shaner et al (1982:2) and Uphoff (1986:113–114) ignore the role of macro-national policies in shaping farming conditions at the micro level. Although Little (1985) incorporates national/regional policies within the purview of what constitutes a farming system he nevertheless treats, as do the above authors, the components of such a system as discrete entities, rather than as functionally inter-related elements. Keeping these considerations in mind, for the purposes of this paper I define a farming system as a complex network of inter-relations between the farm-related policies of government, a local community of farming households, and the totality of input, production and output related activities both within and between such households. Within such a system government policies operate by defining the farmer's access to productive resources and his needs and obligations. Within this policy context, the farm household owns or supplies farm inputs, arranges labour for production and harvesting activities, and uses farm products. Farm inputs include natural resources like land, water and forest, together with technical skills embodied both in tools and in power generation for productive purposes. Production activities range from land preparation for cultivation, through weeding and harvesting of crops, to their consumption or other type of use. In organizing the use of resources, labour and products the farm household

may enter into leasing, hiring, sharing and exchange relations with other neighbouring farm households. But the relative balance in the farm's resources, labour and production determines the level of employment opportunities, degree of food self-sufficiency, and pressure on resources—in other words, determines the degree of either productive or degenerative use of resources. While field information will be analysed within this framework, a brief note on the demographic and resource characteristics of the study area is relevant.

### **Demographic and resource characteristics of study village**

The study village comprised 121 households scattered in four caste/ethnic settlements consisting of 41 Bahuns, 39 Damais, 17 Kamis and 24 Magars ranging from valley bottom to the top of a hill in Birgha Archale Village Development Committee (a local level political/territorial unit) of Syanja District. The total population was 808 of which 32% was Bahun, 23% Magar, 35% Damai and 10% Kami. Similarly, 51.5% was male and 48.5% female. In terms of age, 32.1% was below 10 years of age, 64.7% from 10 to 65 years and the remaining 3.2% above 65 years.

Agricultural and grass-lands are the major natural resources used for farming purposes in the area. Some of the agricultural lands in the valley bottom are irrigated by local streams and the rest in all settlements are dry-lands. Like farm-lands, grass-lands are owned by individual households. There is no forest, whether public or private, available for the use of farmers. Forest products like fuelwood, timber and fodder are obtained from trees grown in grass-lands or at the edge of farm-lands.

The dry-lands (*bāri*) are located mainly near homesteads in all settlements. Inter-settlement ownership can also be observed in a number of households. Most of the grass-lands (*kharbāri*) are located between the Magar and Kami settlements at the southern aspect of the hill. Some households also own such lands in other parts of the Village Development Committee (VDC) area. The irrigated lands (*khet*) are scattered at different parts of the valley bottom along the banks of the streams. Part of such lands are irrigable mainly in the monsoons and a part of them are irrigable throughout the year.

### **Characteristics of farm-related policies**

The villagers working under this resource setting are not, however, free from the influence of policies and programmes of the government. Government policies affecting farming practices can be classified into two broad categories. One category consists of those related to land reform, resettlement, forest management, institutional credit and marketing services and the like which determine the farmer's access to farm resources

and opportunities. Another category incorporates policies and programmes related to population change, social service development as in health and education, market network extension and the like which determine the level of pressure upon a farmer's resources and opportunities by conditioning his needs and obligations.

Since the 1950s, both categories of policies and programmes have been implemented in Nepal. The crude death rate of the Nepalese population is estimated to have declined from 36.7 in 1954 to 13.5 in 1981 (CBS 1981:289) with its corresponding growth from 1.6% per year in the 1950s to above 2% per year in all subsequent decades (CBS 1991:26). The growth of educational facilities is also phenomenal. If measured in terms of the number of students, it rose from a total of 10,434 in 1950 (Stiller and Yadav 1979:225) to 2,434,188 in 1986 (CBS 1988:Tables 9.2,3,4,8). Similarly, rural interiors are gradually and increasingly exposed to external market forces through transportation facilities.

While all of these activities have contributed to an increase in the needs and obligations of farmers, government policies and programmes intended to enhance their resources and opportunities have done little to improve matters. Land reform programmes have remained unable to eliminate disparities in landholdings. The 5% of total landholdings which had accounted for about 40 % of cultivated land in 1961/62 still accounted for about 36% in 1981/82 (CBS 1986:Table 3.42).

Resettlement programmes have already found the forest frontier region so densely settled that the size of allotted land has decreased from 33 hectares per family in the Rapti Valley Development programme in 1958 (Poudel 1980:15) to 0.03 per family at present in certain areas (author's personal observation in Nawalparasi district). Nepal Rastra Bank's study in 1977 (adopted in Hamal, Bhattarai and Niraula 1987:4) had discovered that 67% of the credit requirement for the large farmers was covered by institutional sources compared to only 13% for the marginal farm households. Cooperative societies theoretically supposed to provide marketing services are, in practice, engaged in the supply of agricultural fertilizer and, more importantly, in the sale of consumption necessities (Michra and Styal 1981:87). In this context, the stagnation in the improvement of employment opportunities has forced the farm households either to emigrate for subsistence (e.g., Macfarlane 1976, Caplan 1970, Hitchcock 1966, Kansakar 1982), or to reclaim marginal lands creating environmental hazards in rural areas. These macro-national features, as seen below, are observed also in the study area.

**Changes in ownership and use of natural resources and livestock-raising**

The average size of farm land owned by households in the study area was 9.6 *ropani* (20 *ropani* equals 1 hectare), but that figure was 11.8 for Bahuns, 17.8 for Magars, 4.9 for Damais and 3.4 for Kamis (Table 1). Further, while most of the Bahun and Magar households owned both *khet* and *bāri* lands, most of the Damai and all of the Kami owned only *bāri* land.

**Table 1** Number of households by farm size and ethnicity

Farm size ( <i>ropani</i> ) <sup>a</sup>	Total		Bahun		Magar		Damai		Kami	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
no farm	3	2.6	--	--	--	--	2	5.1	1	5.9
1-5	42	34.7	3	7.3	3	12.5	22	56.4	14	82.3
6-10	37	30.6	17	41.5	4	16.7	14	35.9	2	11.6
11-15	22	18.2	16	36.0	5	20.8	1	2.6	--	--
16-20	9	7.4	3	7.3	6	25.0	--	--	--	--
21 plus <sup>b</sup>	8	6.6	2	4.9	6 <sup>c</sup>	25.0	--	--	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>		<b>41</b>		<b>24</b>		<b>39</b>		<b>17</b>	
Mean	9.6		11.8		17.8		4.9		3.4	
SD	9.0		7.5		11.4		2.7		1.6	

a 20 *ropani* equals 1 hectare

b landownership in this interval ranges from 25 to 51 *ropani* among households. Because of this variation, this interval is left open where each of the individual cases is taken into account for the calculation of mean and standard deviation.

c no Magar household owned farm land above 38 *ropani* (or 1.9 hectares).

Such a landownership pattern must have inter-generational variations as there were only 63 parental households of current heads and these heads already have 258 potential male inheritors. Besides family separation, 68 % of the study households (82 households) also noted changes in their farm size and land use pattern through purchase, sale and conversion of one type of land use to another after separation from their parental families. Except four households whose members sold land to buy other land for profit, the rest sold or converted land to pay old debts, to meet the cost of their children's education and/or other contingent problems, or to enlarge the size of inherited farms to meet food requirements. No ethnic variation was observed in this pattern. Further, communally owned grazing lands were also gradually sold to raise funds to run schools

established within the past 30 years. Today, there are virtually no such lands left in the study area.

This shrinkage of *kharbāri* and grazing land has an effect on the inter-generational pattern of livestock raising in the area. The average number of livestock (buffalo, cattle and goat) owned by study households was 3.6, though it was considerably lower than this for the Damai and Kami households. Very few households reported an increase in any type of livestock over the number of animals owned in the previous generation. Rather, 49% noted a decrease in the number of buffalo, 82% in cattle and 90% in goat.

### **Changes in cropping patterns and farming technology**

With such marginal access to farm resources in their locality farmers practise various patterns of cropping on their lands at different elevations. In *khet* with perennial irrigation rice is grown twice a year during the summer and the winter seasons. But in *khet* irrigable only in monsoons farmers follow a sequential cropping pattern—such as summer paddy-wheat or mustard-maize—one crop followed by another throughout the year. Corn, millet and legumes are the major crops grown in unirrigated uplands and lowlands areas. At the onset of monsoons, especially during April in the uplands and after mid-April in the lowlands, farmers broadcast corn seeds. At the same time they also prepare seedbed for millet. About one month later, those willing to grow legumes broadcast a variety of beans, such as cowpea and the like, in the corn fields during the first weeding. Those willing to grow millet transplant it instead of beans in early July during the second weeding of the corn plants. Black gram and soyabeans can be broadcast after the transplantation of millet, either separately or together with corn, millet and beans. In this mixed sequential pattern of cropping, corn is harvested around the beginning of September, with millet and legumes about a month and a half later. After harvesting these monsoon crops *bāri* lands in uplands areas remain fallow until the onset of the next monsoon. But in *bāri* of lowland areas farmers grow wheat if the rains fall after the harvest.

Aside from these major crops, farmers also grow pumpkin in the cornfields as well as legumes, spinach, radish, kidney-beans, cucumber, chilli and other vegetables around their homesteads. A few farmers also have a few jackfruit, mango, peach, papaya and banana trees.

Farming technology for all groups of farmers is very simple as it only entails the use of human labour and animal power. Mechanical farming is completely unknown, chemical fertiliser is rarely used and corn seeds and rice grown during the monsoon season (summer paddy) are of local variety. However, winter paddy cultivated only in perennially irrigated

*khet* land and wheat grown generally in the area are of improved variety. The introduction of winter paddy is a development only within the past 12 years. The reasons for its introduction were the prestige accorded to rice in low irrigable hill areas and the small amount of *khet* land among households, as well as its gradual fragmentation. Similarly, the mixed pattern of maize-bean cultivation in *bāri* land has gradually shifted to the mixed pattern of maize-millet cultivation within the past 19 years due to the higher yield of millet compared to that of beans for the marginalised farmers.

### **Changes in the patterns of labour use and labour relations**

The variations in cropping patterns practised in different fields together with differences in households' access to the types and quantity of natural resources like land requires that farming households arrange the necessary human labour and animal power to meet such variations. To meet seasonal pressure of labour demand, farmers have developed among themselves three major types of labour relations. One type is the patron-client relationship between Bahun and non-Bahun groups of people for the purposes of ploughing as Bahuns do not plough farm-lands, and between Kami and non-Kami groups of people for the preparation and mending of iron tools as iron work is the caste occupation of Kami households. Mutual exchange is another type practised among all households except two Damai and one Kami who own no land of their own. Labour exchange can be of human labour, of human labour with animal power and of animal labour.

Human labour exchange usually occurs among households of the same ethnic group, though some exchange also takes place between Magar and Bahun households. Except for the ploughing needs of the Bahun, this kind of labour exchange is done for all farm activities. Male and female labour can be exchanged with each other. But ploughing, bunding and levelling of *khet* lands and threshing of rice are tasks reserved for men, whilst transplanting paddy and millet is usually women's work.

Hiring is the third type of labour recruitment practised among households to meet their agricultural exigencies. Because of uncertainty of weather and irregularity of rains farmers are compelled to finish farm activities as soon as possible after they have begun. To speed up the work they hire extra hands to the extent that their family labour supply is deficient. This type of labour organization has some caste/ethnic specific features, most notable here being the exclusive hiring-in of labour amongst Bahun households with no hiring-out, and the reverse amongst the Damai and Kami. This was the pattern both because of the differential distribution of land between castes and because of the reluctance of

Bahun, the patrons in labour relations, to themselves engage in wage work, at least in their locality. Aside from the above three basic patterns of labour relations, maintenance of livestock is completely a household business except in *adhiyā* raising (share holding). Maintenance of irrigation canals is done together by all participating partners.

Although the basic patterns of labour relations—patron-client, mutual exchange and hired labour—have remained essentially the same today as in the past, a change in agrarian labour relations can be seen in a decline in the number of Kami households engaged in the construction and mending of agricultural implements (iron tools). Nine out of seventeen Kami households reported having ceased the construction and mending of iron tools, an occupation which either they themselves or their parental families used to perform. The major reasons for such a change were the lack of fuelwood to produce charcoal due to the conversion of communal forests to personal *kharbāri*, as well as a decline in the demand for locally made Kami utensils through the increased availability of imported manufactured implements for sale in local market.

Similarly, where there were only 9 households (7.4%) whose parents engaged in some employment in India, 4 of them together with 52 others (i.e. 56 households or 46.3% altogether) were engaged as such at the time of field research. The kinds of employment most commonly sought included military or public service, watchman, night guard, gate keeper, hotel cleaner and driver. In addition, over the past 18 years 16 households left the village permanently to meet their economic exigencies through the purchase of cheaper land in the Tarai.

### **Changes in the use of farm products**

The shrinkage of lands both through family separation and the household's engagement in marginal areas of economic activity may suggest some further change in the patterns of use of farm products. Such change, however, is not a question of subsistence versus market production. Agricultural production from family farm activities is geared mainly for subsistence purposes. During the twelve months period ending September 1989, only ten of the Bahun/Magar households sold grain which was in excess of the amount allocated for consumption purposes, while a few households also sold ghee (purified butter) and jackfruit to neighbours in the locality. That we are here witnessing an inter-generational decline in such excess production is evident in that 22 households reported that their parental families sold more grain than they do now, whilst the quantity of ghee available for sale was more than double the amount currently sold.

## Conclusions

From the above analysis it can be concluded that if the ecological patterns of the study settlements represent a region, then the farming systems in western hill Nepal are under heavy pressure to support the population and the labour force. The inter-generational increase in household population and the extension of markets and social service activities in recent decades have increased both the needs and the obligations of farmers. But in response to the lack of corresponding improvement in their agrarian resources, technology and employment opportunities, the size of their farm lands has been declining through sale or family separation, grass-lands have been converted to farm fields for cultivation, public grazing-lands have been changed to privately owned grass-lands leading to a decline in animal population, and traditional caste occupations like blacksmithing are dwindling in the face of modern market competition. To meet the economic exigencies engendered by these problems, farm labour from the area is emigrating either permanently to the Tarai region or temporarily to India.

Local possibilities to improve the economic standing of these households through farming are limited and depend either upon a proper utilisation of rain-fed areas through improved irrigation or through extension programmes and extended market facilities for the cultivation of fruit trees. However, the Damai and Kami households also need additional support as they own lands smaller than their Bahun and Magar counterparts.

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# **Indigenous Forest Knowledge: Factors Influencing its Social Distribution<sup>1</sup>**

**Rebecca Saul**

Understanding the indigenous use and management of trees is an important starting point for recognizing the roles rural people can play in forestry development. Through experience and experimentation rural dwellers have developed detailed and sophisticated knowledge about natural resources, including forests and trees. The phrase 'indigenous technical knowledge system' has been used to describe this vast body of information, plus the skills, technology, and practices used to harness the environment (Castro 1990). One of the most condensed but comprehensive definitions of ITK is found in Warren and Cashman (1988:3). They define it as 'the sum of experience and knowledge of a given ethnic group that forms the basis for decision-making in the face of familiar and unfamiliar problems and challenges'.

Using ITK in development goes back to the early works of anthropologists and geographers. More recently, however, ecologists concerned about environmental deterioration and the issue of maintaining environmental balance have expressed renewed interest in traditional technologies and indigenous knowledge (Bartlett 1980). With the emergence of increasing anthropological and agroecological studies from the Third World, growing numbers of analysts and development practitioners have expressed positive or laudatory views of local knowledge and capacities. They usually characterize culture-based knowledge and practices as effective, efficient and functional (Thrupp 1988).

Research and development experiences have shown that the traditional knowledge and resource management practices of rural communities can be an effective basis for conservation and development. 'In forestry as in agriculture, in Nepal as elsewhere in the developing world, experience demonstrates that the prospects of success of innovations brought in from outside will be enhanced if they build upon indigenous knowledge'. (Farrington and Martin 1988, cited in Metz 1991: iv).

Both my own and Tamang's (1990) literature reviews reveal, however, that the documented knowledge about indigenous forest management in Nepal is mostly of a superficial kind. With the exception of several recent publications (Subedi et al 1991, Nepali 1991, Rusten 1989, Balla et al 1990), there is a dearth of published material that focusses specifically on

indigenous knowledge and indigenous management systems in the hills of Nepal. The literature generally ignores differences within communities in terms of what is known and how much is known. In this paper I intend to further explore factors that influence who knows what.

When I first set out for Nepal I conceived of my project as an investigation of the relationship between *women* and the forest. It was not long, however, before it became apparent that in order to understand this gender specific issue I needed to ground it in a broader understanding of the relationship between *people* and the forest, including the full range of socially determined patterns of knowledge concerning forest resources. These patterns are complex, and are not always what one would have predicted. In seeking for explanations which might illuminate the central problem of the relationship between local people and forest management, I began to investigate caste, age, socio-economic and demographic variables and their influence on the indigenous knowledge system.

The site for this investigation was Lahchowk village located some 16 miles north-west of Pokhara in Kaski district. As in the rest of Kaski, agriculture is the main occupation of villagers, with rice, millet, wheat and corn the main crops. The population of Lahchowk in 1990 was 4,143 people resident in 816 households. For the purposes of my research I worked with the members of 93 households, the members of which collectively constitute a distinct community or neighbourhood within Lahchowk.

Most of the neighbourhoods within Lahchowk are defined by the villagers in terms of caste, and only members of that caste live within that neighbourhood. The area I worked in, however, is a multi-caste, multi-ethnic neighbourhood, containing Thakuri, Gurung, Thapa Magar, Newar, Gharti-Chhetri, Sunar, Sarki and Damai households. This allowed for in-depth comparison.

On the most basic level, people know the most about the activities that they do the most. For instance, foresters and development specialists recognize that village women in Nepal have much knowledge about forest resources—such as fuelwood, fodder and medicinal herbs—because women are the main collectors of these products. In other words, the gender-based division of labour is one of the factors that influences indigenous knowledge.

In Lahchowk village men and women exploit different forest areas. Men typically go to lower areas closer to the village for fodder and, for a few weeks of every year, to one or two bamboo (*nigālo*)<sup>2</sup> growing areas further up in the high forest. Women exploit several different forests and numerous areas within these forests. They travel from low hills to high forests as far as six hours walk above the village. Women cover a wide

area on a much more regular, and less seasonal, basis than men. During spring and autumn women go to the lower forests, visiting the higher forests in winter, not only to collect firewood fodder, food and herbs—which are almost solely a woman's responsibility—but also to cut *nigãlo* for the men in the village to work with.

Women come into contact with a greater number of tree and plant species, both spatially and seasonally. In species identification exercises conducted with the villagers, women correctly recognized, named and described 20–50% more forest plants than men. Both men and women agree that women are the experts on the identification, collection, and description of fuelwoods.

Women are also responsible for feeding cattle. Much cattle food in the cold season is a cooked mixture of different flours and grains, prepared mainly by women. Forest fodder is collected by women; in Lahchowk area, however, much of the fodder fed to cattle is collected from around the home by men rather than from the forest. As a result, men know a great deal concerning fodder trees which grow on private land, their properties and the effects that different fodders have on cattle health and milk production.

Apart from the several male shaman-healers, women know most about herbs and their uses, not only because women are the most regular users of the forest, but also because their own health and the health of their families is their paramount concern. Women share knowledge of their home remedies with each other and pass this knowledge down from generation to generation. The medicines that men are familiar with are usually used for both cattle and people, and the number of these are limited.

This research suggests that because women are the most regular users of the forest, they know more in the domains of fuelwood, fodder, and foods and herbs found in the forest than do men. This indigenous knowledge domain includes information about the following: identification of the species; species name; attributes in relation to common uses of the species; and the geographic location, seasonality, and availability of the species.

But a classification of knowledge-holders based on gender alone is far too simplistic. One question which plagued me at the beginning of my research was: why do many old people, who have spent twenty to forty years going to the forest, appear to have forgotten, or lost, much of their indigenous forest knowledge? The answer is that knowledge of this kind is always context specific. When individuals are in a context in which a particular kind of knowledge is irrelevant, they are likely to disclaim possession of such knowledge—and this applies as much to temporal as to spatial contexts. Very old women—and older men—no longer go to the

forest. They are not responsible for forest product collection; the forest is no longer part of their context. The idea of appropriate context concerns not only the context in which the researcher and the villagers are located, or the appropriate moment in which to ask a question, it also concerns the life context of the villager.

As I accumulated interview data, an age pattern began to emerge which suggests that, generally, those who know the most about forests are females between the ages of 10 and 40, and males between the ages of 10 and 25. Maximum IFK correlated with the ages of peak forest exploitation by men and women. This interpretation was corroborated by the villagers, one old woman stating that 'young girls know the most about the forest because they go every day. The old people have forgotten.'

Up to now, gender and age differences have been discussed in isolation from caste factors. But among some castes, gender-based division of labour is less pronounced, and among others, more pronounced. There also exist differences in IFK between castes. I will discuss the caste factor by comparing two groups, the first group being Sunar, Sarki and other occupational castes and the second being the Thakuri and the higher castes.

Sunar men's knowledge of forest resources, although not on a par with Sunar women, lags not far behind. Sunar men can identify as many of the fodder and firewood species as Sunar women can, and 70-80% of the herbal medicines that women identify. They are also more familiar with the properties of different tree species than are men of other castes. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there is less division of labour overall between men and women amongst the Sunar than there is in the higher castes. A work-time allocation study revealed that among the Sunar, men and women share much of the same work. Sunar children go to school less regularly than do children of the higher castes. Sunar boys, therefore, are frequently in the forest with their sisters and mothers. In addition, during the late stages of pregnancy and in the months after a child is born—when women cannot collect firewood—Sunar men regularly go to the forest. The occupational castes have fewer financial resources and smaller landholdings than the higher castes, and collecting firewood themselves is often the only option for men who do not have an active female in their household.

Secondly, Sunar men engage in charcoal making and goldsmithing if they remain in the village. Their work requires a detailed knowledge of the burning properties of different woods and requires them to go to the forest more often in search of these woods. Sunar men can identify the species of a tree from the sight, smell and feel of the residual coals alone.

Sarki men also know more about forests than do their higher caste counterparts. This, as with the Sunar, is partly attributable to traditional occupation. Sarki men work with two kinds of bamboo, the small (*nigālo*) and the large (*bāns*<sup>3</sup>), making baskets and mats that they sell in the village. They are also the caste most often hired for house construction, which requires the cutting and fashioning of timber. Three out of four of the healer-priests in the Thakuri Gaun area of Lahchowk are Sarki. Their role as healers requires an extensive knowledge of herbs and the properties of locally found plants.

Occupational caste women go to the forest all year round and exploit forests close to home. This has two results. Firstly, walking time is reduced because they collect closer to home. Secondly, because these women are in the forest every day they need to gather only enough firewood for one or two days, and the pressure to collect large amounts of heavy wood is reduced. They therefore have more time to investigate different plants along the trail and discuss their knowledge with one another. Occupational caste expeditions involve more socializing than high caste fuelwood expeditions and much time is spent stopping to rest and talk, usually about forest resources. Because occupational caste women go to the forest all year round they are more aware of the seasonal cycles of plants and know about many plants that high caste women do not.

The higher castes adhere more to the traditional Hindu division of labour than do the occupational castes. They see themselves as responsible for upholding Hindu traditions and are more conscious of these rules. Because of their higher caste status, there is more pressure on them from other villagers to behave correctly.

High caste women work in forest, field and home; men work in field and business. Higher caste men are often better educated and work as small businessmen, teachers, on the village committee, or in office jobs in the larger towns and cities. Thakuri and Brahmin men engage less in making baskets and mats, and if they do need *nigālo* products, it is often the women who collect the raw material. The wood resources that high caste men work with—fodder trees, large bamboo and timber—are found mainly in their own fields and only occasionally in the forest. More high caste than occupational caste households own their own fields, and high caste men and women are busy many months of the year working at agricultural labour.

Higher caste women, because they exploit the forest for only five months out of the year (due to the high agricultural labour input into their own farm gardens and fields), must go higher up in the forest to collect fuelwood which is larger, heavier and will last longer. These fuelwood expeditions start out before sunrise and return in the early evening.

Travelling to and from collection areas consumes 60-70% of their time and they must collect wood quickly in order to be home before dark. There is little time to sit, rest, and talk about forest resources.

Higher caste households, who usually have larger incomes than occupational caste households, depend more on alternative sources of fuels. Many high caste families burn residues from their own fields, use sawdust stoves, purchase kerosene or buy their fuelwood from others rather than go to the forest to collect firewood. For occupational caste families, on the other hand—who have a cash shortage but not a labour shortage—alternative fuel sources to firewood do not make economic sense.

In general, occupational caste women and men possess more IFK than higher caste women and men. Higher caste villagers perform more labour in their own fields and generally exploit forest resources for only five to six months of the year, during the agricultural slack season. Occupational caste people seldom own their own fields and, although they work as agricultural wage labourers, they still go to the forest all year round. This conclusion is fully supported by the data collected in Lahchowk. Sunar men and women identified 90-100% of the sample species found in the forest. In contrast, a group of Thakuri men and women were able to identify only 65% of the species identified by the occupational castes. Likewise, my most valuable informants concerning medicinal herbs were an old Sarki woman and a group of young Sunar women and men.

Two general conclusions can be drawn from the above information. Women of the occupational castes know more about forest products—identification, species name, attributes in relation to common uses of the species, location and availability—than do women of the higher castes. And men of the occupational castes know more about medicinal plants and fuelwood resources than do men in the upper castes. This can be attributed to a less strict division of labour between men and women in the lower castes with more boys and men participating in the collection of forest resources; the necessity for all family members in poorer families to contribute labour in the forest; less time devoted to farming due to the fact that poorer castes own little land and, among the Kami and Sunar, the occupational need for men to have more detailed knowledge of wood resources.

Demography seems to have an influence on IFK. The occupational castes in Thakuri Gaun have an average family size of 7.7, whereas the higher castes have only 5.5 members per household. A larger number of children increases a household's need for fuelwood and also enables the household to exploit the labour of so many children in collecting these resources. Consequently, school attendance is low among the occupational

castes. Higher caste families are smaller and economically have more options; they therefore require less fuelwood for cooking and send fewer family members to the forest. High caste children attend school rather than go to the forest. Observations, interviews and identification and description exercises confirm that children of the occupational castes, both boys and girls, generally have much more detailed knowledge of forest products than do their counterparts in the higher castes.

Settlement pattern may also influence IFK. The occupational castes live clustered together with only small home gardens separating one neighbour from another. This facilitates larger groups of women going to the forest together and increased communication and the sharing of knowledge between caste members. This is especially true with the Sunar who live in a close settlement and have much caste solidarity. Higher caste homes are further apart, separated by fields. Neighbours seem to come together to chat less frequently than occupational caste villagers; family groups are more isolated and smaller groups of women go together on fuel-gathering expeditions.

Taking all of the above factors into account, a general statement may be proposed which would aid in the prediction of who in the village are the most knowledgeable concerning forests. Forest knowledge is related to the following characteristics: female gender, adolescence to middle-age, low economic status, low caste status (which includes demographic factors, settlement pattern and limited access to formal education).

We must now address the question that all applied anthropologists ask themselves: how can this information, collected in one village in the Nepal hills, be applied to field research in other areas of Nepal and in other countries? It is well known that different types, or categories, of people possess different kinds and amounts of knowledge depending on their life experience. Most researchers and projects, however, lack the time and the resources to conduct in-depth surveys of IFK in specific communities. But this does not mean that development and forestry workers must enter the research situation cold; there are predictive indicators that can serve as a rough guideline, or a first step to identifying knowledgeable people. The amount and type of an individual's indigenous forest knowledge is not idiosyncratic; it is influenced by gender, age, caste, socio-economic, demographic and residential variables. These are by no means the only factors that influence IFK, but they were the most prominent in my research area. What is important for foresters and development workers to understand is that high caste, influential, elderly or educated villagers are not necessarily the people who know the most about forest resources and management. Talk to these people, certainly, but do not neglect other



groups: women, children, the occupational castes. In Lahchowk community these people know most about forests.

## Notes

- 1 This paper is based on field research undertaken as part of a Master's degree in anthropology. The research period was from Sept 1991 to March 1992.
- 2 *nigālo* is a small species of bamboo which grows widely throughout the middle hills. The scientific name for *nigālo* is *Aundinaria intermedia*.
- 3 *bāns* is the larger variety of bamboo found in the middle hills of Nepal. It is known by the scientific name of *Dendrocalamus strictus*.

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PART 2

**URBANISM IN NEPAL**



# **Driving in a Soft City: Trafficking in Images of Identity and Power on the Roads of Kathmandu**

**John Gray**

While I have spent many glorious, and a few inglorious, days in Kathmandu, this paper is my first foray into urban ethnography. I have lived and done fieldwork mostly in Godavari village about 15 kilometres from Kathmandu. Coming to the city has usually been for business rather than pleasure: to stock up on provisions, renew visas, design and print surveys, meet colleagues, organise the requisites of entering and leaving the field, and, if time permits—as it usually can be made to—for ice cream. All of these entailed travelling around the city so that a significant portion of the time I have spent in Kathmandu has been in its traffic. My experience of Kathmandu traffic since 1973 has been from varying vehicular perspectives: as a driver of motorscooters, motorcycles and cars, as a passenger in buses, trucks, taxis, tempos, and rickshaws, as a bicyclist, and as a pedestrian. Given that traffic is frenetic and that many of the roads are narrow, without footpaths, and bounded by walls, I have wondered why over the years I have never been involved in an accident. At first sight, this may appear to be an issue of merely personal significance. However, no matter how chaotic Kathmandu traffic appears, driving practices are cultural phenomena. Thus in reflecting upon my success in avoiding accidents, I had to come to some understanding of how Nepalese culture meaningfully shapes Kathmandu traffic and how traffic patterns emerge from the driving practices through which Nepalese road users constitute a dimension of their selves. I was motivated by these understandings to write this paper. In Nepal, traffic is also largely an urban phenomenon, shaped by the nature of the city and its streets. I begin, therefore, with the problem of conceptualising Kathmandu.

## **Modern and postmodern approaches to the city**

In his study of Bhaktapur,<sup>1</sup> Levy (1990) constructs a modernist analysis of a city he characterises as 'archaic'. It is a city with an overarching coherence and meaning for its residents that derives from a Hindu moral order expressed in ritual and ceremony. He likens Bhaktapur to a 'clockwork mechanism' (1990:15) and its symbolic enactments to a choreographed ballet (1990:16–7) in which the decor, the spaces and the actors performing on a civic stage are organised into a meaningful whole.

Bhaktapur is 'a mesocosm out of time' (Levy 1990:28), a symbolic ordering 'situated between the individual microcosm and the wider universe' (Levy 1990:32), that imposes a coherent, eternal and immutable moral order amidst an illusory and fragmented everyday world.

Bhaktapur's system of marked symbols, its mesocosm, has been a powerful device for turning accident and history into structure, for trying to escape the contingencies and consequences of history, for trying to capture change, to make change seem illusory within an enduring order (Levy 1990:616).

Levy's study is the first part of a larger project of relating the symbols and structure of urban Bhaktapur to the psychic worlds of the Nepalis who live there. While we must wait for the next volume on the psychic worlds of Bhaktapurians to see how he completes the project, there are in the present work some tantalising hints of his forthcoming insights. I am particularly drawn to a footnote (Levy 1990:689, fn 11) about the problem of self for Bhaktapurians. Levy reports that Newar informants experienced conflicting, fluid and fragmentary definitions of their selves, each dependent on context. One of Levy's informants, through reference to a conversation between Krsna and Arjuna in the Gita, described the experience as follows:

And so, to a great extent, it seems that I am everything also, because whenever I cook, I am a cook; whenever I love some girl, I am a lover; whenever I have a son or a daughter, I am a parent, I am a father; whenever I am with my father, I am a son; whenever I am alone with a friend, I am a friend; whenever I am with foes, I am an enemy (Levy 1990:689).

Levy suggests that this discourse is paradigmatic of how Newars solved the problem of shifting and fragmentary experiences of the self. They related them to the coherent symbolic order of Hinduism '...I am everything also...' Thus, for the people of Bhaktapur, their eternal mesocosm of Hindu temples, deities, priests, purity and public celebrations provides a means of overcoming the potential fluidity, discontinuity and fragmentation of selves in an urban life composed of a variety of distinct, but nested, social domains.<sup>2</sup>

I would like to juxtapose Levy's analysis of Bhaktapur as an archaic city, particularly as it relates to the constitution of self identity, to a postmodernist understanding of Kathmandu as a 'soft city'. The image 'soft city' is taken from Raban's (1974) account of London. Rejecting any notion of an underlying coherency, Raban sees the city as a series of discontinuous stages where individuals can shape their selves 'Personal

identity has been rendered soft, fluid, endlessly open to the exercise of the will and the imagination' (Harvey 1989:5):

For better or worse, [the city] invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a map fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images; they, in turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. In this sense, it seems to me that living in the city is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relation between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living (Raban 1974:1).

Such an image when applied to Kathmandu highlights a different dimension of urban life in contemporary Nepal. The concept of 'archaic city' motivates the people and the ethnographer to transcend the 'contingencies and accidents of history' (Levy 1990:616), the shifting nature of identity (Levy 1990:689), and the illusory nature of external reality (Levy 1990:31) with the 'hard' symbolic and moral order of Hinduism. Alternatively, Raban's trope of the soft city entices us to consider the possibility of discontinuity, ephemerality, and fragmentation in contemporary Kathmandu and to recognise that the imagined can become reality, even if only briefly. Without adopting Raban's soft image for the totality of Kathmandu, it does suggest that the city consists of a variety of stages—household, work, ceremony, market, government office, public building—on which people project a variety of selves as they move through their daily lives in the city. Each stage is a distinct context with a distinct set of culturally understood signifiers—kinship relations, occupation, ritual function, economic resources, official position, *jāt*—which people use in constructing the variety of self-images to which Levy alludes. Contrary to Raban's image of London, identity in these domains is 'hard', less open to the free exercise of the will because it is shaped by these 'traditional' modes of self-definition.

The streets of Kathmandu link these stages and thus themselves are a distinct interstitial stage. They form a context that is 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967) these stages and the selves constituted in them, a context that exists in the crevices of the mesocosm where identity is rendered 'soft'. It is here that Nepali men—for driving is predominantly a male activity—are more 'free to act as, and become, what they please' (Harvey 1989:5). Thus one understanding of traffic in Kathmandu is semiotic: it consists of an innumerable series of encounters in which people driving motorised images define their selves and are confronted by the resistance to those definitions by others engaged in the same play.

### **Traffic in Kathmandu**

The streets of western cities tend to be one-dimensional and functionally-specific places for the efficient and safe movement of people and goods in motorised vehicles. The streets of Kathmandu are often physically narrow but socially rich venues for a pastiche of seemingly discordant activities—transportation, construction, retailing, recreation and defecation. The multi-purpose character of the streets is just one symptom of the interstitial nature of this social context. Another is the relative lack of named streets in the city. Socially, Kathmandu consists of a number of neighbourhoods (*tol*) where residents live, work and worship, where they are emeshed in and their identities are shaped by those sets of relations that characterise Nepali society—household, kinship, *jāt*, and production. A quick look at maps of Kathmandu reveals that neighbourhoods are named but the streets connecting them are not thereby construing the latter collectively as a socially unmarked context in which people experience a softening of the constraints felt in other marked domains of urban life.

Among the variety of street activities, transportation is the most spectacular. Traffic in Kathmandu is a maelstrom of pedestrians and animals, of two- to four-wheel vehicles of all shapes, sizes, and colours, powered by diesel, petrol and pedal, carrying royalty, military officers and soldiers, government ministers, public servants, office workers, school children, shoppers, villagers and tourists. They travel the streets announcing their presence and demanding attention with horns, buzzers, bells and barks, weaving to avoid the slower moving. Within the general parametres of keeping left on the road, obeying mechanical traffic controls and following the one-way street system, as far as I know there are no written 'Rules of the Road' of which drivers must demonstrate knowledge as part of gaining a licence. But there are cultural rules for driving in Kathmandu which have more to do with practising hierarchy than with ensuring safety.

Two aspects of traffic in Kathmandu are central to understanding the cultural Rules of the Road. The first is the constant cacophony of people sounding their vehicles' horns, buzzers, and bells. While I had been aware that this was an ubiquitous feature of Kathmandu traffic, its centrality for Nepalis was not evident to me until my last period of fieldwork in 1991. One morning a 12 year-old boy rode with me from Godavari into Kathmandu. It was one of those times when, rebelling against custom, I did not feel like honking the horn of the car. As we passed through the towns of Badegaun and Thaiba, the boy become increasingly restless in the passenger seat beside me. By the time we had negotiated the narrow road and sharp turn in Harishidhi, the boy was so agitated that he blurted out,



'*horn bajāunus, horn bajāunus!*' He was conveying the rule that I should be honking the horn. He could not conceive of driving without constantly honking at other vehicles and pedestrians so that they take notice of us and move aside.

The second aspect of Kathmandu traffic is people don't look or, more accurately, the determination of everyone to *appear* to be unaware of others using the road. I have rarely seen a car or taxi driver use the rear-view mirror to check what is behind him before stopping, turning, entering an intersection or pulling out from a parked position. Instead, the manoeuvre is just executed, often causing other vehicles to take evasive action to avoid an accident. While driving a car or a motorcycle, I have noticed how rickshaw drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians do not look behind them when pulling out to weave around another person or animal; and when honked at by vehicles wanting to pass, they do not look behind them and are defiantly slow in pulling to the side of the road. The most memorable incident concerned a man named Indra, the older brother of my closest friend in Nepal. One day my wife and I happened to be walking on the road near the T-junction at the Jai Nepal movie house. We watched with a mixture of fascination and horror as we saw him, driving his jeep, with his wife and son as passengers, approach the T-junction honking insistently. Without slowing or looking to the left and right for oncoming traffic, he kept his eyes ahead and he turned left into the road causing oncoming traffic to swerve suddenly to avoid the seemingly inevitable accident.

My paper is a preliminary attempt at interpreting these two characteristic driving practices within a framework of traffic as a semiotic system. This involves three tasks: first, showing how Kathmandu traffic is shaped by the hierarchical ambience of social relations and by the 'soft' nature of the streets; second, describing how Nepalese use modes of transportation as images in a discourse of identity construction and how the meanings of these images are not determined by traditional and immutable criteria of hierarchy in kinship, *jāt* and ritual relations; and third, portraying the streets of Kathmandu as sites where 'personal identity [has] been rendered ... fluid, endlessly open to the exercise of the will' (Harvey 1989:5) and where, as a result, people use these images momentarily to define and resist their hierarchical position.

### Hierarchy in the streets

Hierarchy suffuses social relations in Nepal. This is as true for interactions in the street as it is for *jāt* (caste) interactions in a village, *mānnu parne* (respect) interactions in a household, or *pūjā-prasād* (worship-blessing) interactions with divine beings. However, hierarchical

practice in the streets is not explicitly a part of any meta-narrative of Hinduism, and what happens there 'cannot be understood by appeal to some overarching general theory' (Harvey 1989:45) such as Levy's notion of a mesocosm. Traffic is a set of fleeting encounters in which people attempt to define a hierarchical dimension of their self-identity through a vehicular discourse of images, techniques and tactics. The intelligibility of traffic derives from this intentionality.

Much like the occupational system of contemporary India described by Beteille (1991), hierarchy in traffic is not directly based on the totalising codes of physio-moral purity and pollution. Rather the differentiation and ranking of road users is based on site-specific attributes: the size of the vehicle, and, by implication, the kinetic power needed to propel the vehicles of different sizes.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, trucks and buses are at the top of the hierarchy, followed successively by cars, tempos, motorcycles, motorscooters, rickshaws, bicycles and pedestrians.<sup>4</sup> Traffic interactions consist of negotiating the use of street space. The basic form these interactions take is an encounter between two users wanting to travel along the same area of the street and one 'giving way' to the other so as to avoid an accident. In this light, the explicit issue is how users negotiate who gives way to whom. It is the relative ranking of vehicles by size that determines giving way and that transforms driving into a constitutive act of hierarchy. The general rule is that the road user operating the smaller vehicle—or no vehicle in the case of a pedestrian—gives way to the driver of the larger vehicle and, by doing so, the former accepts subordinate position. Thus cars give way to trucks and buses; tempos give way to cars, buses and trucks; motorcycles give way to three- and four-wheeled vehicles; bicycles give way to motor vehicles, and pedestrians give way to all powered vehicles. One has only to spend some time watching vehicles entering the road through Maharajgunj near Sital Nivas to see how hierarchy controls the traffic encounters at intersections. When a motor car approaches the junction intending to turn left into the road towards the city, the driver surreptitiously looks right to see what type of vehicle is approaching. If it is a bus or truck, the driver gives way and waits until it has passed before making the turn. However, if it is a tempo, bicycle or rickshaw, the driver does not give way. Instead, without apparently looking for oncoming traffic, he turns into the road no matter how close the approaching vehicle is to the junction. The expectation is that the driver of the other vehicle will defer to the manoeuvre by taking evasive action to avoid the accident.

From both observation and sporadic questioning over many years, I believe these cultural rules of the road are widely understood. However, in order for them to work, particularly given the paucity of mechanical traffic

controls, a social relation of mutual and symmetrical seeing must occur. Drivers of vehicles and pedestrians must see each other and size up each other to calculate who is to give way to whom. It is in this context that I interpret the honking that characterises driving in Kathmandu. Vehicles of every kind have some device for making a noise, and each type of vehicle tends to make a distinctive sound, from the loud and piercing blares of trucks, through the honking of cars, the buzzing of motorcycles, and the bells of bicycles and rickshaws. As the lowest in the hierarchy, and thus the road users that give way to all others, pedestrians have little call for such devices. The purpose of making noise is to announce one's presence on the road and to indicate one's intention to travel along a particular area of the road. Thus when approaching a traffic encounter of any kind—an intersection, passing slower moving or stationary vehicles, pedestrians and animals, meeting an oncoming vehicle either on a narrow road or while passing—a driver honks<sup>5</sup> in order to gain the attention of the others using the road. If both parties in the encounter 'see' each other—and know each has seen the other—either face-to-face, by looking in the rear-view mirror or over the shoulder, then a symmetrical relation exists. They mutually size up each other hierarchically and the encounter proceeds normally with the driver of the smaller, lower-ranking vehicle giving way by stopping at the intersection or pulling over so that the higher ranking vehicle can proceed without deviating from its path. For bicyclists and pedestrians, pulling over is not just socially degrading but also physically unpleasant because it often means having to leave the bitumen to travel through mud or puddles in the wet season and dust or ruts in the dry season. Since the streets of Kathmandu are crowded with vehicles and pedestrians, driving involves continual confrontations in which honking, buzzing and ringing are means of negotiating relative hierarchical position and interactional deference. The result is the cacophony of sound that characterises traffic.

### **Trafficking in images of identity**

Like cocks in Bali (Geertz 1973), cars in the west, and latterly in Kathmandu, are signifiers of the self. Vance Packard (1959) suggested that Americans sought, through the car, a status enhancement they might not have or be able to achieve in other domains of social life. The car was pure image, a means of fusing fact and imagination. Standing before their long-long car, [a family] disclosed proudly, 'We're not rich ... we just look it!' (Packard 1959:273).<sup>6</sup> What Packard failed to appreciate, and what Nepalis do appreciate, is the difference between attributional and interactional bases of hierarchy (Marriott 1959). It is one thing to drive a self-image of high rank, it is another to consummate that position through other people practising in traffic interactions the hierarchical claims

inherent in vehicle's attributes of size and power. This is the basis of understanding that other aspect of driving in Kathmandu: the determination of people to appear to be unaware of others on the road. As I described above, this appearance is achieved by a studied refusal of motorists, rickshaw drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians to look behind and around or to use rear-view mirrors. It is a form of interactional resistance to the vehicular attributes that signify hierarchical position.

Just as hierarchy suffuses social relations, so too does the resistance of the subordinated, even if reversals in rank and self-identity are only momentary; like the social consequences of winning and losing cockfights in Bali. Since traffic encounters in the streets are hierarchical events which entail a mutual seeing and sizing up of status attributes, one can resist the interactional consummation of subordination by the tactic of not looking or asymmetrical seeing. This tactic involves the driver of the smaller vehicle ensuring that the driver of the larger vehicle sees him while simultaneously appearing not to see a larger vehicle approaching. The aim of the tactic is to force the larger vehicle to give way in a reversal of the usual pattern of interactional deference. From the perspective of the driver of the smaller vehicle or lower-ranking road user, the tactic can only succeed if the driver can, by insistently honking, buzzing or ringing, get the larger vehicle to see him. At the same time he must, by not looking anywhere but straight ahead, convince the driver of the larger vehicle that, despite the latter's reciprocal honking, his horn has not been heard above the other honking and thus his vehicle has not been seen by the driver of the smaller vehicle, rickshaw, bicyclist, or pedestrian. If the driver of the smaller vehicle is successful in portraying a lack of awareness of the larger vehicle, the latter usually gives way in order to avoid an accident.<sup>7</sup>

This stratagem is employed by most every user of the streets of Kathmandu. Given the variety of vehicles and speeds at which they travel the roads, traffic flow is organised by the slower ones keeping to the left. Normally, when a road user approaches a slower moving user from behind, the driver of the former steers his vehicle to the right towards the centre of the road to overtake. However, since there are usually several different streams of traffic flow—pedestrians the slowest, bicycles and rickshaws moving a bit faster, and motorcycles, cars, trucks and buses moving faster still, as well as vehicles coming head on from the opposite direction—pulling to the right to overtake also potentially results in confrontations with the flow of faster moving or oncoming vehicles with whom giving way and hierarchical position have to be negotiated.

One practice I have often witnessed illustrates the tactic of asymmetrical seeing and hierarchical reversal. In order for a bicycle or rickshaw to pass a pedestrian, the rider usually has to pull right, out into

the flow of the faster-moving vehicles. When making this manoeuvre, the bicyclist or rickshaw driver announces his/her presence to the pedestrian by ringing the bell but does not look behind. The rider may be aware of faster-moving vehicles approaching, honking, and wishing to overtake, but by not looking behind, he appears not to be aware. If he did look behind and thus socially acknowledge the presence of the other vehicle, he would have to give way because, as I described earlier, each driver would symmetrically see and size the other. Instead the bicyclist or rickshaw driver executes the manoeuvre without warning or signaling. This usually causes any faster-moving vehicles approaching from behind to give way, and thus to defer hierarchically, in order to avoid an accident. A variation on this tactic of asymmetrical seeing and honking was the incident I described above involving Indra. As he approached the T-junction, he announced his presence and intention to enter the intersection by honking his horn; and he expected other vehicles to take notice of him and give way, no matter what their rank in the vehicular hierarchy. Simultaneously, by continuing to look straight ahead, he refused to socially acknowledge the presence and hierarchical position of other vehicles—even though they were also honking to announce their presence—so that he would not have to give way should any of them be larger than his jeep. When the other vehicles, some of which were larger than his, did defer by taking evasive action to avoid the accident, Indra momentarily re-defined his relative position in the hierarchy.

### **Trafficking in images of institutional power**

I now use this interpretation to explore more speculatively what may be a further dimension of traffic, particularly within one category of vehicle, the motor car. Over the past decade, Nepal has pursued rapid change through not only increasing the pace and scale of economic development but also transforming the system of government. One consequence is that Nepalese people are witnessing a re-ordering in relations between the institutions affecting their lives. The monarchy, government, military, foreign donor agencies, semi-government corporations, and the commercial sector are all engaged in a process of re-defining their roles in modern Nepal. Two brief examples serve to illustrate this process. Bista (1991) has recently documented the relation between foreign donor agencies and the government of Nepal. He argues that the course and direction of development is a contested arena. Foreign donor agencies, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, may exercise significant power over the development aims and programs designed by the National Planning Commission. He writes:

Poor countries will have to incorporate World Bank prescriptions into their national planning, even though they might not be in the interests of their national development goals ... The World Bank and the IMF serve the interests of the donor countries ... To impose the donor countries' interests, the multilateral aid donor agencies formulate various models, strategies, and policies of development. If countries seeking assistance do not comply with these policies the forthcoming assistance is jeopardised, including commercial loans from private banks (Bista 1991:132-3).

Such criticism of the role of foreign aid donors is increasingly being aired in the local press. A recent article in *The Independent* by Mahesh Pant, entitled 'Foreign Aid: How Necessary?', is typical:

When the role of initiating development is assumed by the government (with support from the donors), the first consequence is that the government tends to be more accountable and loyal towards the [foreign] donors than towards its own people. Secondly, the task of transformation (which is development in real terms) tends to depend on the bureaucrats and the development contractors (i.e. expatriate experts) (1992:2).

Since the pro-democracy demonstrations of 1990, various sectors of Nepalese society have been engaged in a process of re-defining the relation between the Monarchy and the Parliament of Nepal. For example, a major issue in the drafting of the new Constitution concerned the roles of the King and the Prime Minister in relation to the military. The Constitution and elections of 1991 provided only the framework within which the details of this re-definition are to be negotiated for many years to come. Thus in Nepal's international and domestic relations, it is a time of fluidity and of potential discontinuity. It is a time when the traditional political and moral order which had defined the Kingdom is no longer unchallenged in providing an overarching coherence for the various domestic and international institutions with interests in Nepal. It is, to use Raban's metaphor, a time when the identity of the nation state and the relations between its institutions have been rendered 'soft', open to the exercise of power by those attempting to shape the future of Nepal.

If Nepal is going through a period when it is soft, then its capital is the principal stage where the re-definition of the Kingdom's identity is contested. While the jockeying for dominance and dependence in this process is occurring within official circles around the city, it may be open to public view on the streets of Kathmandu in the encounters between the motor cars associated with those institutions primarily involved in planning and implementing the development of the nation. I must emphasize the speculative nature of this idea. It originates in the

conjunction of two observations and my interpretation of traffic. The first is that licence plates are a semiotic system of differentiation and provide another aspect of identity for drivers. Licence plates consist of different combinations of background and letter colours. Each combination identifies the institutional affiliation and/or social category of the owner and thus is another dimension of personal identity portrayed by motor vehicles. The different licence plates and the institutions or categories they signify are as follows:

- A blue background with white letters and numbers denotes the vehicles of the donor agencies of foreign countries who provide the funding and oversee the implementation of development programs so vital to Nepal's improvement in the delivery of basic services to its citizens.
- A red background with gold letters and numbers denotes the vehicles of members of the Royal family who are the primary symbols of the State of Nepal.
- A white background with red letters and numbers denotes government vehicles.
- A yellow background with blue numbers denotes vehicles of semi-government corporations such as Royal Nepal Airlines, Electricity, Water and Sewerage, and Transport who supply basic services.
- A red background with white letters and numbers indicates vehicles owned by ordinary private citizens.
- A black background with white letters and numbers denotes commercial vehicles such as taxis.<sup>8</sup>

The second observation derives from my experience of driving in a section of Kathmandu, including the areas of Bishal Nagar, Gairidhara, Naxal, and Bhat Bhatini, that is characterised by narrow roads with no footpaths and a relatively high concentration of residences of foreign embassy and donor agency personnel as well as senior public servants and government ministers. Not surprisingly, there is also a higher density of cars on the roads with blue/white licence plates of foreign agencies and white/red licence plates of senior government officers. Since the bitumen is often too narrow for two vehicles, when cars approach each other head on, one must pull off the bitumen—in the mud, dust or ruts—to let the other pass. Over a period of several months, I noticed that when the car of a foreign agency (blue background/white letters) encountered a government car (white background/red letters), in most cases it was the latter that gave way to the former.

When placed in the context of my observation and interpretation of Kathmandu traffic, this pattern of interactional deference in encounters between foreign agency and Nepal government cars could not be explained in terms of the size of the vehicles. Yet they took place in precisely those

conditions in which, as I described above, hierarchy provides the vehicular code for who gives way to whom. As a result, licence plates and the institutions they signified become the markers of each driver's—or in the case of a chauffeured car, the passenger's—personal identity. In the present fluid state of Nepal, the significance of an institution largely reflects the power it exercises in determining the nature and direction of development. Thus in hierarchically calculating vehicular deference each driver has the opportunity to express his own or to resist the other's interpretation of the current state of relative power exercised by the institutions signified by the cars and the licence plate they bear. If this is the case then the pattern of giving way I observed in 1991 seems to confirm Bista's (1991) and Pant's (1992) more scholarly and informed analyses of institutional power relations in Nepal.

I end by returning to Raban's description of the soft city. So far in using it as a way of understanding traffic in Kathmandu, I have emphasised its liberating dimensions. Driving in Kathmandu may reflect the greater freedom for personal and political expression unleashed by the new constitution. But given the history of Nepal, I must also draw attention to Raban's realisation that there is another and more sinister side of the soft city.

The city ... is soft, amenable to the dazzling and libidinous variety of lives, dreams, and interpretations. But the very plastic qualities which make the city the great liberator of human identity also cause it to be especially vulnerable to ... totalitarian nightmare (1974:8).

## Notes

1 Bhaktapur is one of the three principal cities of the Kingdom of Nepal which are all located in the Kathmandu Valley.

2 There are two comments I would like to make about Levy's approach to the self of Bhaktapurians. First, he conveys the important insight that personhood in Nepal is constituted by a variety of contextually specific self-definitions—cook, lover, parent, child, friend, enemy. Second, in constructing this multi-self personhood as a *problem for Bhaktapurians*, Levy implicitly assumes a western and individualistic model of personhood in which there is a central self which remains constant throughout the variety of contexts in which people conduct their social lives.

3 The use of size as a criterion of hierarchical position in traffic resonates with the use of size words—*thulo* (big) and *sāno* (small)—for relative hierarchical position among *jāts* and for the relative social importance of individuals usually judged in terms of political and/or economic criteria.



4 The hierarchical system of traffic may not completely escape Dumont's model in which religion in the form of the principle of purity and impurity, personified in the Brahman and the Untouchable, encompasses the rankings. Similarly, the ranking of vehicles by size is encompassed by cows and dogs, the former the personification of the divine female and life, the latter associated with Yama, the god of death.

5 I am using the word 'honk' here in a generic sense of a device on any road vehicle used to make a noise and socially announce the driver's intentions.

6 This is particularly the case in Nepal where the status of the vehicle in terms of size and power may bear little relation to the status of the driver in terms of more traditional criteria or ranking in family, *jāt*, workplace or worship.

7 One reason for this is that when an accident occurs, the witnesses usually side with the smaller vehicle in attributing blame. This can have financial consequences for the driver of the larger vehicle.

8 Trucks, buses, tempos and rickshaws also have this kind of licence plate.

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# Nepalese Urbanism: A Musical Exploration

**Ingemar Grandin**

This paper will explore Nepalese urbanism in the town of Kirtipur and the city of Kathmandu. Kirtipur, one might say, has two faces: the traditional Newar town, and the modernizing Nepalese small town, and both these faces can be seen in its present life (just like those well-known drawings where, depending on the way you look at it, you will see a rabbit or a duck, a beautiful young woman or a wrinkled grandmother). Similarly, Kathmandu has its own two faces, though here transformed to the magnitude of a city rather than a town: it was (and still is) the Newar Great City par excellence, and as the capital of multi-ethnic Nepal it is today the national centre for all sorts of activities: economy, administration, politics, broadcasting, and culture.<sup>1</sup>

## What is urban musical life like?

Kirtipur is a small Newar town, with some 10,000 inhabitants at the time of my fieldwork (1985–88, denoted by the present tense in this paper). Basically, it is a farmer's town where, according to the survey in Herdick (1988:120), 65% of the town's households belong to the farmer's caste. However, due to the loss of nearly half of the farm-land when Tribhuvan University was established, a large number of the inhabitants have been forced to seek new sources of income.

In traditional Kirtipur, musical life is diversified and comprehensive. It has been said by Wegner (1987:471) that in a Newar town 'with the strict exception of the womenfolk—almost everybody seems to be a musician or a dancer'. This applies well in Kirtipur. From a survey which I conducted in one of the town's neighbourhoods, I established that 51% of males over eleven years of age were competent in one form of music or another. This musical competence was mostly devoted to either of two varieties of hymn-singing ensembles, the old *dāphā* (2/3 of these males) and the more recent *bhajan* (1/3), with some stray performers on *dhimay* (the one among the large number of Newar drums which together with pairs of cymbals make up the *dhimaybājā*, the most ubiquitous of all Newar percussion ensembles). These three forms of musical ensemble are important in the town as a whole. Thus, there are seven *dhimaybājās*, ten *dāphākhalahs* (many of them also performing on *bāsuri* flutes), and six *bhajankhalahs*. Though the *bhajan* groups as a rule are of the 'modern' Hindustāni variety, with harmonium and tabla, they often incorporate also

the instruments that, most likely, were used in older types of *bhajan*: the combination of bell and *nagarā* (a kettle drum played with sticks), or *pachimā* (a Nepalese adaptation of the Indian drum called *mṛdaṅga/pakhāvāj*). Then there are also other varieties of percussion ensembles, and three wedding orchestras (more about these later).

These ensembles all contribute to the town's musical life. There is the everyday singing of *dāphā* and *bhajan*; there is music at *jātrās* (festivals); at weddings and *bratabandhas* (initiation ceremonies); at the Sarasvatī *pūjās* conducted by the musical societies; and at other special occasions, such as the all-night Satyanārāyaṇ *pūjā*.

The musical life is organised along the geographical borders of *ṭols* (neighbourhoods), the hierarchical borders of caste (or more accurately conglomerates of castes), and in *guthis* or *guthi*-type societies. Musical learning takes place in organised tuition sessions with a guru. This, of course, is the traditional Newar set-up of musical life.

As I said above, the life of the people of Kirtipur has changed; and so has their musical life. To refer again to my survey, among men aged more than 40, nearly everybody is musically competent—a competence they all gained in their youth by taking part in the tuition sessions given by the various types of ensemble (in fact, the only exception is a man who belongs to a caste of occupational musicians). However, among men aged 26–40 only every other man has gained such musical competence, whereas the others never took part in the tuition sessions. This is a sign that the involvement in music by middle-caste men is less extensive than before.

The musical life of Kirtipur has also incorporated new features during recent decades. The staging of what is referred to as *dabū pyākhami* (film-type dramas, with songs and music, most often locally written and composed and set up with an all-male cast of actors) was a recurrent event about 1958–79. Modern stage programmes (*saṅgīt sammelan*—musical gatherings—and above all *sāṃskṛtik kāryakram*, the mixed cultural programme including songs, dances and drama) have been set up since 1963, and have become increasingly important in the town's musical life. Prominent in these stage programmes are modern songs (*ādhunik gīt*)—the genre of newly written song lyrics and newly composed melodies that has been developed above all at Radio Nepal. However, Newar folk songs—or rather, their melodies with new lyrics—are regular components in stage programmes which may include also, for instance, a performance by a *dāphā* group. From 1979 (which was, of course, an important year in the recent political history of Nepal, see e.g. Kumar 1980, or Shaha 1982), the love songs which had been common in such programmes were replaced with progressive songs.

Moreover, new musical agents and entrepreneurs have entered the town's musical life: drama groups, libraries, stage-programme groups. While in Kirtipur as elsewhere the musical specialists of the traditional occupational castes are giving up music, there is today a new breed of musical specialists who may have started in *dāphā* or *bhajan* but then gone on to stage programmes and modern music. In the modern stage programmes (unlike the traditional musical life as well as the *dabū pyākhamī*) women take part, mainly as singers, dancers and in dramas. Similarly, women take part also in *bhajan* singing, in processions at Buddhajayantī when *gyānmālā* Buddhist hymns are sung. Another break with tradition is that while wedding music traditionally has been furnished by low-caste performers (Jvāgis among the Newars, Damais among the Nepali-speakers), the three wedding orchestras (all of the modern, army-band variety) operating in Kirtipur today are all made up entirely by Maharjans (the farmer caste which is far from low in ritual rank). And finally, with the advent of media, music is even more pervasive than before. At a *jātrā* today, as soon as the music of a procession fades away, the cassettes and radios take over again.

To sum up thus far, in modern Kirtipur many traditional traits are now undergoing change. In the middle castes, everybody making music is giving way to specialists doing so. The strict exclusion of the womenfolk is no longer upheld. Wedding music is no longer provided by low-status occupational musicians on traditional instruments but by middle-caste farmers on western band instruments. And, finally, geographical borders have become decreasingly important in the organisation of the town's musical life. A discussion of the reasons for this change is beyond the scope of this paper (but is given in Grandin, 1989).

Let us go on to Kathmandu. For the purposes of this exploration, it is sufficient to note that the Newar traditional musical life in about the same way as we met it in Kirtipur is still there, though of course, as befits a Newar Great City, in even greater complexity and refinement. As a modern city, Kathmandu has developed a number of musical specialities by providing resources and opportunities which are integral to its position as the capital and national centre. This will be developed in some detail below.

### Urban resources and opportunities and musical life

In traditional Kirtipur, the access to different opportunities, different resources is rather rigidly defined by caste. Middle castes have most opportunities while access to musical opportunities is more restricted both higher and lower in the hierarchy of castes. Modern Kirtipur has added a number of new opportunities. Most of them are *not* distributed in a

constraining fashion. New resources include new musical repertoires (modern songs, non-Newar folk songs), new frames for music-making (stage programmes), and new patrons of music (libraries, stage performance groups). In addition, the media and consumer electronics provide musical opportunities: to hear new music, learn new songs, and the like. Moreover, in modern Kirtipur the pattern of distribution of *traditional* opportunities is also less constrained by either caste or gender. We have already seen instances of this in farmers operating *ben bājās*, and women singing *bhajans*. Another example is that one can today meet a Jvagi musician, not in his traditional role of an ascribed low-status occupational performer, but as an achieved musician performing on tabla, an instrument he has chosen and learnt by his own choice, at a stage programme and with a group of middle-caste friends. Finally, Kirtipur is not far from Kathmandu. The opportunities of the capital are at least physically within easy reach. We will see later what this has implied. In modern Kathmandu, resources and opportunities are so numerous that I will just present a list:

- Institutions and media: Radio Nepal, NTV, *Sāmskṛtik Samasthan*, the Academy, cassette producers, performing troupes. All these provide: job opportunities (musical jobs, administrative but music-related jobs), income opportunities (other than regular jobs), dissemination opportunities, reputation opportunities (to make a name for oneself among relevant people such as paying audiences, musical authorities, decision makers).
- Stages and auditoria provide opportunities to both reach the audience and make a profit from it.
- Advertisement business: composing and performing jingles etc.
- Restaurant business: *gīt/ghazal* programmemes and *śāstriya sangīt* recitals.
- Tourist business: selling instruments as souvenirs, tourist-oriented performances in hotels and at restaurants.

An important resource, not to be forgotten, is *people*. For instance: good performers (for co-performances, to form musical groups with, to make use of for recordings), people to learn from (teachers in various musical traditions and on various instruments), people to teach (by having students there is both money and reputation to be earned), people who are important contacts (in administration, at institutions, among artists). Kathmandu is where the composer can find a good lyricist (and vice versa) and a good singer, where the singer can find good songs and good musicians, and where an artist can make those contacts that can put him in

a studio or on the stage, get him on the air, put his cassettes on the market, or have his songs resounding in a movie hall.

Another urban resource is relative political openness (remember that the 'ethnographic present' in this article actually denotes the *pāncāyat* era). In the voting pattern of the 1980 referendum, it was very clear that the multi-party camp (that is, the opposition) was generally victorious in large towns, and certainly in the Kathmandu Valley (Baral 1983). The reason for this, as one might suspect and as people said, is that it is easier to hide away in the urban labyrinth, *and*—more importantly—that it is harder to take action against people here (because of that same *janā śakti* [peoples' power] that culminated in the 1990 revolution). Thus, in urban locations—including Kirtipur and Kathmandu—there has been a comprehensive grassroots development of intense oppositional political work and organisation throughout the *pāncāyat* years. I will give one musical example to illustrate this point. Whilst the progressive 'opera' *Simmā* was set up in The Academy Hall in Kathmandu, in a small rural bazaar people said they could not even play it from a cassette for fear of trouble from the local authorities.

### Urban musical pathways, urban musical careers

How do people utilize these urban resources? There are rather well-established musical pathways (Finnegan's 1989 well-found metaphor) to follow, but one can also work out one's own career. I will illustrate this by a number of individual cases.

First, let us consider a musical pathway maintained by generations of non-professional middle-caste musicians in traditional Kirtipur. Today, Ram Bahadur Maharjan is about 70 years old. He learned *dāphā* singing at about 20, maybe earlier. Why? 'Because it is part of our culture.' Of course, he learned this from a guru in a tuition session together with other neighbourhood boys. Ram Bahadur has kept on singing *dāphā* since then: in the regular morning/evening performances in the *dāphā*'s resthouse; at the monthly feasts of the *dāphākhalah* by means of which the ensemble financed itself; and at *jātrās* and special occasions. Today, he is himself the *dāphākhalah*'s guru, and has taught the present young men to sing *dāphā*.

However, in traditional Kirtipur not everybody follows the well-trodden musical pathways: some people work out their own careers. Siddhi Man Maharjan, now in his sixties, was born and grew up in Panga, a small town close to Kirtipur. Already in 1947, there was a radio and a record player in his home. As a boy, he used to buy records: with Hindi film songs, songs in Nepali and Newari, *bhajan* and drama. Actually, it was his enthusiasm for drama that first drew him into music. In 1948, he

helped teach a newly set-up *bhajankhalaḥ* in Kirtipur. He moved to Kirtipur in 1966, and is today the song guru of the *bhajankhalaḥ* he helped get established. Throughout his life, he has learnt a number of musical instruments: *bāsuri* flute, *khī* drum, (western) and clarinet (from gurus); *dhimay*, *nāykhī* and tabla drums (by himself). He has also learnt and taught dance. Today, he is still interested in learning new instruments—‘particularly modern ones’, as he put it.

Another Kirtipur example is Hari Maharjan, who is also about 60 years old. Hari has learnt to perform on and has gone on to teach a number of instruments, including (western) band instruments. He is a regular performer in the *bhajankhalaḥ* of the Bagh Bhairav temple. He has helped organise the *bhajan* processions at Buddhajayantī and taught the women to sing the *gyānmālā* Buddhist hymns. He performed also himself in these processions as well as in other *bhajan* processions. Hari has passed on this devotion to music and open attitude towards various kinds of music to his son Dev who was instrumental in establishing the first *ben bājā* (wedding orchestra with western band instruments) by the Maharjans (farmers) of Kirtipur. Dev Maharjan is today the clarinet player and leader of this orchestra (which, by the way, is organised collectively ‘like a *guthi*’ by a number of households, which is totally unlike the Damai *ben bājās* <sup>2</sup>). Moreover, Hari and his son performed on clarinet and trumpet in the *dabū pyākhamī* dramas during the 1960–70s.

Let me go on to a Kathmandu example: the low-caste Gaine occupational singers and *sāraṅgī* (fiddle) performers.<sup>3</sup> Many Gains have come from various villages, most notably Batulecaur in Gandaki region, to Kathmandu to sell *sāraṅgīs* to tourists, but also to seek opportunities at the radio and so on. There are a few success stories. Jhalakman Gandharwa (the name adopted by Batulecaur Gains) drew upon an urban opportunity typical of modern Kathmandu when he first came to the capital to take part in a fourteen zone nation-wide *lok gīt sammelan* (that is, a folk song gathering of people from all over Nepal) held by Radio Nepal. He was ‘discovered’ by an important person (another typical Kathmandu resource)—Dharma Raj Thapa—the folk singer and poet who at that time worked at the radio, and who (according to Dharma Raj Thapa himself) recruited Jhalakman as a staff artist to the radio in 1967. Jhalakman's songs (and even more, his *sāraṅgī*) have appeared many times on the air and on many records and cassettes, and he has also represented Nepal on several tours to foreign countries abroad (Darnal 1981–82). Jhalakman's inclusion in this book of portraits of foremost Nepalese musical personalities is a sign of his success. In the context of Kathmandu opportunities, he was able to make use of his unique abilities as an occupational musician in a significantly new (and more profitable) way.<sup>4</sup>

Another rural-to-urban example. Rayan and Raamesh, both in their middle forties now, grew up in Okhaldhunga (a bazaar in the eastern hills). Inspired by local music as well as the Nepalizing new artists who could be heard from the radio at that time—Dharma Raj Thapa, Nati Kazi, Shiva Shankar, Baccu Kailash—they were musically active already in their youth, and in their late teens they were sent to represent their area in a folk song *sammelan* at Radio Nepal. While this strengthened their dedication to music—they collected folk songs, and wrote and composed new songs of their own—it also made them aware of the differences between their home bazaar (where music was not really a respectable activity) and the rich opportunities of Kathmandu. They moved to Kathmandu, and were indeed within a few years—and in spite of many hardships—able to find a good teacher, to sing at Radio Nepal, and also to be selected among those who were sent to Calcutta to cut discs with Nepali music. Raamesh and Rayan made a name for themselves in relevant urban circles, and found talented people (songwriters, musicians) to work with. They formed, together with other artists, a musical/literary group, *Rālp̄hā*, that toured the country. Today, after nearly three decades of musical career, they are still musically active, each in a group of their own, and they have given numerous stage performances, produced cassettes, printed booklets with song collections, they have co-performed with many artists, helped many young artists shape their own musical careers and inspired still more young musicians. Rayan has produced a successful opera and Raamesh has made a video movie which is promoted by a transnational cultural organisation.<sup>5</sup>

Many other Kathmandu examples could be given. The large number of progressive artists who could work and give programmes in Kathmandu during the *pañcāyat* era, making use of the relative political openness of the urban setting. People from Kathmandu itself—such as Nati Kazi Shrestha and Shiva Shankar Manandhar—who at a young age started singing in the newly set-up Radio Nepal and who have remained there (more or less) ever since—some 40 years by now!—have been instrumental in creating the modern Nepalese song during the process. People—such as Narayan Gopal Guruwacarya and Prem Dhoj Pradhan—who have been able to utilize Kathmandu opportunities to make and disseminate music without getting really stuck in the official media and institutions. And even people from Darjeeling—such as Amber Gurung and Gopal Yonjan—who have moved to Kathmandu to become among the most successful artists in the modern genres.<sup>6</sup>

What today is referred to as *sāstriya saṅgīt* (classical music of North Indian variety) has its own pathway. Here, a person learns from a guru during a very long period and in a close relationship. After some time, he



may start to appear in programmes under the guru's supervision. He goes on to tie contacts and to the building-up of his reputation by taking chances to perform with different artists. He starts to appear in the radio broadcast: first on a free-lance basis, then taking part in Radio Nepal's yearly *sāstriya saṅgīt* competition, and finally—maybe—as a staff artist. He may get recorded—but here the pathway trodden by *sāstriya saṅgīt* artists tends to leave Kathmandu. Further reputation can be gathered by going to India for additional studies and to take part in musical conferences there. And then there is Europe and the USA but only a very few Nepalese artists have taken this last step.

### Urban musical networks

Let me go on to consider specifically the personal side of urban resources and opportunities: the social networks where musicians are involved—together with other people.<sup>7</sup>

In traditional Kirtipur these networks to a large extent move within the pre-defined borders of neighbourhood (*ṭol*) and caste. In modern Kirtipur there are additional networks which are not pre-defined, but rather formed by individuals on a personal basis, and which include musicians as well as other people in other areas of town, in neighbouring small towns, and in the great cities.

Kathmandu harbours wide networks based upon personal recognition and achieved positions rather than pre-defined parameters. These networks comprise persons of different ethnic and caste affiliation and who may have grown up in widely different places in Nepal, and are often based on shared interests such as music, literature or politics.

Let me go on to an example that will illustrate the different types of network found in Kirtipur and Kathmandu, and which will, moreover, show that these various 'levels' of network may be integrated. It is a modern Kirtipur example of a musician who starts from a traditional musical pathway, but then goes on to working out a career—and who maybe also thereby contributes to the making of a new pathway.

This musician, let's call him Bekhamañ Malakar, started his musical career some fifteen years ago in the traditional music of hi *ṭol* and caste: *dāphā* and *bhajan*. First, he learned *dāphā* singing in the usual session with a guru. Some years later, he learned to play tabla in a tuition session organised by his neighbourhood's *bhajan*khalah. However, he also learned *bhajan* singing and harmonium playing informally (without a guru) by participating in the *bhajan* performances, picking up the hymns and the performing skills on the harmonium in the process. Bekhamañ's musical network at this time of his career was largely confined to people within his own neighbourhood and to people belonging to the same conglomerate of

castes as he does himself.

However, he developed a reputation as a musical specialist. People in various parts of the town started to call for Bekhamañ when there was a Satyanāraṇa *pūjā* about (in this all-night *pūjā* there is a need for good and committed performers who can provide the musical worship and entertainment), when a stage programme was to be given, when new songs were to be composed, or when people were to be taught *gyānmālā* hymns. His network at this phase was expanded beyond his own neighbourhood to people from the whole town.

It was especially through his involvement in the stage programme activities, which were expanding at this time, that he started building up contacts with people outside Kirtipur, both neighbouring small-town musicians and Kathmandu artists. Today, Bekhamañ is considered by these Kathmandu artists as a person who is to be reckoned with when there is a programme to be given, whether in Kathmandu, in rural Nepal, or in Delhi. He is a principal local person in a nationwide cultural organisation. Thus, his network in this phase in his career looks very much a Kathmandu one. Still, however, he is a key musical figure in his neighbourhood.

### Urbanism and the social status of musicians

First, let us consider traditional urbanism. I will put the case somewhat incisively: amongst rural Parbatīya occupational musicians—like the other occupational castes—rank very low. The Brahmins, at the other end of the ritual hierarchy, are not supposed to even sing. While music is thus of low repute in rural Nepal, it is not at all that suspect in traditional Newar urbanism. Here, the middle castes maintain a comprehensive and extensive musical life. However, to be a music specialist is still a low-status occupation. What, then, can be said of modern urbanism? I will give a few cases.

1. *Śāstriya sañgīt*. North Indian classical music in Nepal was given a new golden morning when the Ranas, especially Bir Shamsheer, imported prominent Indian teachers (*ustād*) around 1885. These Indian artists had students, both among the Ranas and commoners. Today, *śāstriya sañgīt* performers are found among Brahmins, Chetris, Shresthas and other high-ranking castes and groups. This is an early example of music specialisation moving drastically upwards in status. It is no longer a low-caste affair. In the urban setting, people from high castes obviously have found music a socially profitable investment.

2. Band instruments and wedding performances. This is a more complicated case. Among Parbatīyas, wedding music is traditionally the task of the low-caste Damai occupational musicians. When western-style

band instruments were introduced in the Nepalese army, this opened up new opportunities to the Damais. First, recruitment to the army. Second, to set up *ben bājās* which substitute the traditional *Pañcai bājā* for weddings etc, and which—as Tingey (n.d.) has put it—‘increases the hiring fee considerably’. Third, from their involvement in army music, the Damais were able to further their musical competence, a competence which some have been able to profit from in the Radio etc: as musicians, as arrangers, as composers. While according to Boonzajer Flaes (1991), wedding music because of its low-caste connotations is a safe monopoly for the Damais (and related castes), this as we have seen does not hold in Kirtipur where there are several *ben bājās* operated by middle castes. In this case, then, we find both individuals utilizing modern urban opportunities to move upwards; and a type of music moving upwards in the pre-defined hierarchy of castes.

3. Modern genres (modern songs, radio-type folk songs, and the music in films and *gītināṭak* ‘operas’). This, again, is a clear-cut case. In modern Kirtipur, the musical specialists—and this position is achieved rather than ascribed nowadays—belong to middle and high castes. By contrast, the traditional musical specialists have often given up music. In Kathmandu the composers and singers are mostly Brahmins, Chetris and high-caste Newars. It is clear then that in this modern urban setting, music specialisation is highly respectable. Maybe, the integration of music and literature in modern songs has contributed to this. For here, music has been merged with a highly respectable art-form, upheld, as Hutt (1991:15) has observed, almost exclusively by the Brahmins.

In sum, urbanism seems to be beneficial to the status of musicians. The extensive musical life upheld by the middle castes in traditional Newar urbanism is in sharp distinction to the rural practice of the Parbatiyas. And while both ruralism and traditional urbanism accord low status to musical specialists, the modernizing urban milieu has allowed music as a speciality to move upwards most dramatically on the ladder of social status.

### **Urban sophistication—and what is distinctively urban**

But is there really anything distinctively urban about Kirtipur? Is it not just a large village—a community of farmers singing rustic folk songs? Let us test the musical life of the town against two criteria commonly invoked when differentiating the genuinely urban from the rural, namely: 1. diversification, and 2. artistic sophistication.

Briefly reviewed, musical life in traditional Kirtipur is characterised by:

- Division of musical labour.

- A large number of instruments.
- Numerous types of ensemble.
- Numerous prescribed roles for these ensembles.
- A large number of distinct genres, each with a large repertoire of distinct items: *tuta* hymns, *cacā* hymns, *dāphā* hymns, *bhajan* hymns, instrumental compositions, various forms of secular songs (folk songs, narrative songs, seasonal songs).

These are certainly cases of diversification. But how about artistic sophistication? Let us consider the case of *dāphā* here. This is a form of *śāstriya saṅgīt* with elaborated rules for *rāgas* and *tālas*. Is that not a rather astonishing form of music to be maintained by farmers in each and every neighbourhood of a small town? The distinction between great and little traditions, which under various names are distinctive of the musical culture of the South Asian subcontinent (Babiracki 1991), is upheld *within* a small Newar traditional town such as Kirtipur in the distinction between *dāphā* (and other *śāstriya* genres) and folk songs (see further Grandin 1989:85–6).

So there is indeed urban diversification and sophistication in the musical life of a traditional Newar small-farmer's agro-town such as Kirtipur. However rustic it may be considered by Great City standards, Kirtipur is a genuinely urban locality. And after all, this is hardly surprising: Newar culture is an urban culture where, however, agriculture is an urban activity.<sup>8</sup>

### **The urban contribution to musical life**

The musical diversification and sophistication distinctive of traditional Newar as well as modern Nepalese urbanism is expensive to maintain. Directly and indirectly, it requires a large number of man-hours. As Myrdal has said, in his book on India: 'the fine conversations grow upon surplus produce' (1980:23), and this, I think, can be extended to all cultural sophistications (cf Regmi's book *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces* which in effect works from the same basic assumption). It is not to overstate the point to say that urban Newar civilisation has been able to produce a rather significant amount of surplus. How? The standard explanations are the excellent soil of the Valley and its location as a node in trans-Himalayan trade routes.

But there is, I think, one more cause. Traditional Newar urbanism is not just ritualized space and castes distributed and ranked according to ritual purity (or power). It is also an efficient mode of production. The urban organisation itself, with its diversification and division of labour, is an excellent way of utilizing soil and trade so as to generate surplus. And moreover, it provides ways of making sure that part of this surplus is

devoted to artistic purposes, including music.

This is the urban contribution to music. The surplus generated in the urban set-up has made possible land-endowments to musical *guthis* (of course, what made these endowments into a source of income for performance activities was the farmer working the land and paying part of his produce to the *guthi*). This surplus has made possible that all these man-hours can be spared for musical activity. In modern Kirtipur, some of these man-hours have been redirected from the comprehensive, extensive musical activity of the middle castes to musical specialists from the same castes. And the organisation of social and economic life in modern Kathmandu is able to maintain such man-hour consuming specialities as *sāstriya saṅgīt ustāds*, composers, radio artists etc. Indeed, this surplus has provided the resources and opportunities for the artistically sophisticated and diversified music of the Kathmandu Valley.

### **The musical contribution to urbanism**

In urban life, whether of traditional Kirtipur or modern Kathmandu, many things cannot be properly executed without music. Hymns, *jātrās*, *pūjās*, rites of passage, indeed religion itself, political campaigns and the parade of the election-winner, picnics, stage performances—can you imagine any of these without music? But not only is music an integral part of urban life, it also provides urban artistry and sophistication. Music also helps further other forms of urban artistry. Dances could hardly be conducted without music. But also literature is intimately tied to music. In traditional (or rather, classical) Newar urbanism, music was an important component of drama performances, and, as Malla (1982:90) has put it, ‘it was in the form of “songs” that classical Newari attained an appreciable degree of articulation’. In modern urbanism, music and literature together make up the most important new genre. Modern songs, and music are also inevitable components in many other modern urban forms of expressive culture: films, ‘operas’ (*gīṭināṭak*), mixed stage performances and dance performances. Indeed the music we meet in Kirtipur and Kathmandu is among the things that make these places genuinely urban.

But there is still one more musical contribution to urbanism. Music provides an encapsulation or (though I hesitate to use the term) ‘symbolic representation’ of Nepalese urbanism: the roles of castes, geography and ritual integration in traditional Newar urbanism; the dynamic, more individualistic and achievement-oriented character of modern urbanism. It can clearly be argued that in traditional Newar urbanism (and probably also in modern Nepalese urbanism), music helps maintain the efficient urban organisation of production. For if musical life glorifies the prevailing social order, and if music makes this social order appear as a

natural fact of life, it probably also serves to uphold the diversification and division of labour which are at the base of the mode of production. Thus music helps create the surplus which in its turn is a prerequisite for music itself.

### **Musical urbanism: conclusions**

Both town and city provide a complex and elaborate fabric of resources and opportunities. As people navigate among these resources and opportunities maintaining traditional pathways and making up modern careers, they produce an extensive, diversified and artistically sophisticated musical life. I will now conclude this musical exploration of Nepalese urbanism by elaborating some important points.

The fundamental features of traditional Newar urbanism, in fact, can be ascertained by perusing only musical life: the caste-based division of musical labour demonstrates the elaborated division of labour as manifested in the system of castes; the *ṭol*-based ensembles make visible the importance of organization according to geography (and the geography of castes); the musical societies which collectively operate musical tasks indicate the importance of *guthis* more generally; and finally the ways various ensembles operate at festivals point out how *jātrās* serve to integrate all this well-divided geographical and hierarchical space.

By considering the very different types of network promoted in traditional and modern urbanism, respectively, an important tendency of change in Nepalese urbanism, in the way urban life is carried on, can be discerned. It is a trend *away from*: geographically organised, collectively oriented, community-based life where the individual's identity, status and role is ascribed—all of which are clearly seen in traditional Newar music. And it is a trend *towards*: individuals working out their identities, statuses and roles (which thus become achieved rather than ascribed). Individuals form networks on a *personal* basis, networks that transcend any pre-defined set-up and which indeed incorporate also spaces outside the urban area, as a geographically defined space, in the sphere of urban living. While traditional urban life to a certain extent was safe (since you really had to do something to be expelled out of the ascribed status and pre-defined networks), new urban life is vulnerable. Networks and contacts have to be kept up, entertained. Identities, statuses and roles have to be continuously maintained. There are no guarantees. Failure can have dire consequences.

The musical networks point out another important aspect of modern urbanism: it transcends the urban borders. Kirtipur musicians build themselves into a network of contacts that include their own neighbourhood, the town as a whole, neighbouring towns, Kathmandu and

Nepal. Kathmandu-based artists collect songs and sing in villages. Moreover, they themselves may have come from a village in the first place, and by moving to Kathmandu and drawing upon the resources and opportunities of this city, they have their music disseminated by radio and other media which means that it feeds back into rural (and urban) locations all over Nepal. *Śāstriya saṅgīt* performers go to Banaras to study under new gurus; to various places in India to perform; to Europe and the USA to perform; get recorded and so on. There is always a firm urban base for all this. Musical groups are formed here by people who may have lived in Kathmandu all their lives, or who may have moved here, and from this urban base they then tour rural Nepal or disseminate their music to the whole country. The role of the urban locality as a geographical entity is to be a node, and the very base, for networks that transcend the purely urban and integrate urban and rural.

Finally, let me suggest again that in Nepalese urbanism, traditional and modern, music is intimately connected with the mode of production. The diversification and division of labour both provides surplus labour and directs part of it to musical activities. The organisation of musical life is part of this mode of production and in the end, urban Nepalese music in its artistic sophistication and diversity helps maintain the surplus-generating urban social machinery.

There is indeed much to be learnt about Nepalese urbanism, traditional and modern, from a study of musical life. Music makes key facets of urban living visible.

## Notes

1 The paper draws upon research sponsored by SAREC (the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) and HSFR (the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences), whose financial assistance is gratefully acknowledged. In accordance with the intentions of the paper, the space available has been devoted to a discussion of Nepalese urbanism grounded in my empirical data rather than in the vast literature on urbanism. Still, the presentation of empirical data has been kept short; additional evidence can be found in Grandin (1989).

2 Cf. Boonzajer-Flaes, 1991.

3 On the Gaines, see Helffer (1977).

4 Weisethaunet (in press) presents another Gaine who has adapted successfully to the modern urban conditions, Ram Sharan Nepali.

5 A more exhaustive presentation will be given in my forthcoming article on Nepalese progressive singers under the *pañcayat* era (Grandin, cs).

6 For another example of musical urbanism, a study of Gurung musicians in the urban setting, see Moisala, 1991:335–49.

7 See Hannerz (1990) for a concise review of network theory.

8 The large number of artisan castes, and their high standing, bears further testimony to the diversification and the value laid upon urban sophistication in traditional Newar urbanism.

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# **'For a Better Life': Industrial Workers' Grievances and Collective Actions<sup>1</sup>**

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Several weeks before the overthrow of the Panchayat system (April 9, 1990) and the establishment of a democratic form of government, factory workers of Balaju Industrial District (B.I.D.) presented a list of 31 demands to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, declaring that 'these demands must be granted to all workers of the valley', specifically mentioning those working in hotels, trekking, printing, tanka painting, carpet making and those engaged in the various forms of transport including the rickshaw wallas and trolley pushers. They also warned that 'unless these demands are granted within fifteen days we will go on strike'. The Ministry's response was negative. The workers went on strike. The Panchayat government retaliated with brute force. The police smashed the strike, arresting and imprisoning a number of the factory workers and their leaders.

The B.I.D. event is undoubtedly a particular expression of the nationwide economic and political discontent that had been mounting for many years, but which intensified and fermented during the trade blockade imposed by India (see Shaha 1992:180). It is at the same time an index of the increasing importance of industrialization and of the problem of equity in the field of Nepalese industrial relations.

While industrialization has been on the Nepalese National agenda since the early 1950s, private capital's participation remained minimal until the late 1970s (Kondos 1987a). Prior to this, industrial production was a government monopoly, largely dependent on foreign aid as the various Five Year Plans for the period reveal. Today, the picture is significantly different.

Although Nepal is still predominantly agricultural, within the last fifteen years or so, a significant number of large-scale privately owned mechanised manufacturing enterprises have been established (Kondos, Kondos and Ban 1991). Our recent study shows that this segment of the private industrial sector involves a total of 2.5 billion rupees in fixed capital investment (mainly machinery) concentrated in 150 of the largest factories. The plant of any such factory is estimated as being worth Rs.10 million or more. This enormous investment is owned by about two hundred Nepalese families who obviously would then constitute the core of Nepal's newly established and growing industrial capitalist class. The great majority of its members were born and raised in urban centres, principally Kathmandu. In contrast, many of the thousands of the factory workers

have their origins in village Nepal and have migrated as individuals, rarely as family units. They come to the urban centres in search of 'a better life', as some factory workers are wont to say.

The aim of this paper is twofold: to outline some of the forms industrial relations have taken and are taking shape in Nepal; and to make discernible some of the cultural dimensions of these relations.

### **The Factory and Factory Workers Act, 1959**

If one is to try to comprehend what was going on, some consideration of the Factory and Factory Workers Act of 1959 is warranted. Not only does that Act set the legal parameters of industrial relations in Nepal as obtained under the Panchayat system but also for the first two years after its overthrow. It was not till 1992 that a new act (Nepal Labour Act) was brought down.

Of interest is the fact that certain clauses of the 1959 Act indicate the state's concern with workers' well-being. For example, Section 5, Sub-Section 1 stipulated that ten percent of the owners' profits were to be used to distribute bonuses to the workers as well as provide certain facilities (like transport, housing, the education of workers' children and sports). And the Act also stated that a labour or welfare officer employed by the factory owners and endorsed by the government was to supervise the implementation of these requirements.

Yet there were problems. Even though the welfare officer was being located as a kind of watch-dog of the workers' legal rights, given the unequal position in the worker/employer relationship, the situation was open to manipulation to the detriment of the worker. In short, the Act provided opportunity for corruption.

Similar difficulties were inherent in the implementation of the Act's rulings on the 'provident fund'. On this score, the Act stipulated that factory owners were to organise the fund, add an equal amount to the worker's contribution (i.e. 10% of each worker's wage) and set this aside until the worker retired. While again the state assigned the operation of the fund as the duty of the labour or welfare officer, it provided no machinery for monitoring its proper implementation. It is curious that the state did not assume responsibility for the administration of these monies, but instead, left them in the control of the industrialists, since this provided opportunity for owners to capitalise on the funds through investments, while not providing any comparable possibility for corresponding advantageous spin-offs to the workers. Such arrangements also afforded ample opportunity for abuse.

Comparable difficulties appeared with working conditions. While the Act set out guidelines regarding minimum wages, the duration of paid leave and daily working hours etc., it made no provision as to what should happen in instances of the owners' non-compliance.

Given the inadequacies of the legislation and its amenability to abuse, rulings regarding workers' strike action then became a critical matter. With

regard to such action, Section 52 declared:

In case workers employed in any factory...get no action to get their legitimate demands fulfilled even though they have taken resort to other legal means, and so want to start a strike, they shall furnish information regarding the reasons therefore, as well as their demands to the Labour Department and the director of the concerned factory at least fifteen days in advance.

Therefore, according to this ruling, all strike action had to be approved by the state and could not occur spontaneously. Moreover, according to Sub-Section 3 of this same Section, 'In case it appears likely that the strike started or proposed under sub-section (1) will disturb the nation's economic interests, His Majesty's Government may declare such strike illegal at any time.' It is no wonder that a lot of people have assumed that strikes were illegal during the Panchayat period.

Nor is this the only way that the government set out to control workers' expressions of discontent. Section 52A specified that certain severe penalties would be imposed on workers engaged in 'subversive' actions. And what is subversive, as the above quotation indicates, is what the state judged as antithetical to the economy or the security of the state. While these penalties bearing on the workers were clear enough, including fines, imprisonment and dismissal from their place of employment, yet in the Act there was no stipulation of criteria by which the government determined what exactly was antithetical to the economy or threatened the security of the state.

The state via this Act also accorded the employers the right to dismiss workers on a number of counts after due warning. Under Section 51: Sub-Section 1 of the Act:

Any employee of the factory shall be given a warning for misconduct for the first time. He may be kept in reserve for a week for the second time, or may be dismissed without advance notice or without payment of compensation due in lieu of such notice.

'Misconduct' within the Act covered a number of things; 'Carelessness in work, rioting inside the factory, or any action which violates discipline, or instigation to others to go slow, go on strike or organize a *gherao*.' (Section 51: Sub-Section 2d). If go slow, going on strike or disobedience constituted misconduct then misconduct was being made to equate with certain expressions of discontent that were and are usually acceptable elsewhere. <sup>2</sup>

It is also a peculiar piece of legislation. First as to the possible effects that could have risen through its determinations. It is peculiar because as

far as owners are concerned, the Act provided legality for dismissal of workers on grounds of politicized industrial action, the only caveat being the range of warnings. And so it held the possibility of inhibiting industrial action where workers could express their particular grievances, yet this in turn risks intensifying discontent while the grievance in question remained unaddressed.

Secondly, the Act is peculiar because it allowed for legal strike action but pre-empted the legal manoeuvres by which this could be possible. What we know about strike action is that one way that it becomes possible is through reaching a consensus and a mobilization of numbers; and for this momentum to occur there has to be collective negotiations on the factory floor. However, if the state specifies that such developments constitute grounds for dismissal of individual organizers, it sets up obstacles against a critical way for mobilization etc. to occur. What this amounts to is that the Act's grounds for specifying misconduct and justifying dismissal of individual workers were anomalous in allowing for the possibility of legal strikes. In all of this one may discern that the rulings of the Act had the potential for regulating industrial relations.

Workers' discontent to a large extent revolved around certain consequences of the Act itself as well as with what they saw as the employer's abuse of its provisions. This is evidenced in a range of grievances covered by the demands outlined by the B.I.D. factory workers. The demands however as one might expect go further than this. As far as the general orientation to the legislation is concerned there is little doubt that it was judged as antipathetic to workers—it was called a 'black labour law' in the list of demands. So we turn to a consideration of this. In such circumstances a tripartite committee, representing workers, management and government, was to be formed to resolve matters, yet there was no further guidance as to how this might proceed. This mode has proved ineffectual (Naidu 1990:12).

Perhaps the greatest constraint on manoeuvrability of workers to redress their grievances was the state's ability to intervene. It assumed the right to disqualify the legality of any strike that it deemed threatening to the nation's 'peace, security and economic interest'. Yet, as we saw, nowhere did it provide criteria by which such assessments were to be determined. This gave the government enormous leeway to act, if it so desired, in an arbitrary fashion, pronouncing any industrial negative expression as antithetical to national well-being.

If the state could define strikes as antithetical to the nation's well-being without specifying how or why, it had the legal means for penalizing activists and intimidating would-be strikers. It also provided opportunity for co-operation and collusion between the government officials and the factory owners.

While the laws incorporated such measures for constraining the activist potential of workers, the act appears to have been less diligent in formulating or adopting measures to regulate the conduct of the employers.

Given the possibility of state representation on the factory floor (in the guise of the welfare worker), this provided an opportunity for collusion between these individuals on the matter of the latter's non-compliance with the relevant provisions of the Act. Given that the welfare official was paid out of the factory owner's funds, the arrangements were not geared to foster loyalty to the workers.

Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly what happened in such circumstances, the general opinion according to our study (Kondos, Kondos and Ban 1992) was that collusion occurred in a lot of instances or otherwise the government was indifferent to the matter. Even factory owners recognised the possibility that other factory owners indulged in bribery and corruption, though exempting themselves.<sup>3</sup> Workers however saw this practice as the norm. While both parties acknowledged that in many instances the state simply turned a blind eye to an employer's failure to adhere to the provisions of the Act.

Workers' discontent revolved around certain consequences of the Act itself as well as with what they saw as the employer's abuse of its provisions. This is evidenced in the range and type of grievances covered by the demands outlined by the B.I.D. factory workers.

### **Industrial workers' grievances**

Subsequent to being impelled to recognise the breadth of people's dissatisfaction with the Panchayat system, their determination to fight, and in some cases to die, for the revolutionary cause and the establishment of democracy, the king set up an interim government (April 1990). This comprised representatives from the Nepalese Congress Party, the United Left Front as well as several Independents and King's nominees. At the highest level the Congress Party Acting President was appointed Prime Minister, heading the Cabinet.

It was this composite government that was confronted with a spate of protests and industrial strikes that followed its installation, and which spread like contagion throughout the capital especially, but was in no way confined to it. Many of the same demands were made throughout the kingdom. Most of the demands had already figured in the list drawn up by the B.I.D. factory workers noted at the beginning of the paper. These factory workers in June 1990 resubmitted their list.<sup>4</sup> On this occasion the list was presented to four state bodies: the Prime Minister's Department; the Ministry of Industry; the Labour Department; and the Labour Office. Whereas the previous submission was limited, going only to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. It would seem that the workers concerned not only saw their grievances as constituting a state matter but also warranting the Prime Minister's direct attention. And it was done with an air of optimism: 'Now we have more hope of success, for this in OUR government', as one union leader put it.

The demands all find fault with the Act as it stood—wanting either deletions of some imperatives, or incorporations of new or more

favourable entitlements to the workers. At the top of the list was the demand for the right to establish independent labour unions. The prohibition here came as part and parcel of the Pancha ruling against the formation of free associations of a certain size and became obsolete with the revolution's installation of a party-based political system. Such a right meant that on the factory floor and in open view the workers could effect and operate their own organizations (the unions). And with such an organization at hand there could be the possibility for a more effective pursuit of their interests in whatever guise, including strike action.

Since the desirability of allowing for union formation was now to be a legal practice this matter did not figure prominently in the workers' discussions about their grievances. What workers gave priority to in their elaborations also have prominence in the B.I.D. list of demands.

In both contexts there was the expression of concern with economic factors that have direct bearings on certain conditions of everyday living. Chief among these were the questions of remuneration and of job security. More specifically regarding different kinds of remuneration. One demand of major concern to all workers was the bid for higher wages. Another issue which was frequently raised was their dissatisfaction with the implementation, or more precisely lack of implementation, of the 'dearness' allowance, a remuneration intended to cater to inflationary costs of basics, like food and kerosine. Another focused on the necessity for the employers' adherence to the Act's provisions concerning bonuses, the provident fund, and contributions to workers' housing costs. With regard to the general issue of job security one specific desire was the necessity for employers to reinstate workers dismissed during the previous Panchayat regime and to provide compensation. For the Balaju factory workers in particular this was not some ideal but a pressing matter of immediate import since it explicitly had in mind those Balaju workers dismissed during the March turmoil when the state crushed their strike through the deployment of the police (the incident referred to at the beginning of this paper).

Perhaps the most unusual set on the list of demands are those relating to the death of a worker or a worker's parent. These are:

- a) If a labourer dies employment should go to a family member;
- b) If a labourer dies Rs.10,000 should be given for *Kriyā*;
- c) If a male or female labourer's parents die the owner provide Rs.5,000 toward cost of *Kriyā* and leave permitted.

With regard to the employer's contribution towards a death ritual (the worker's, or the worker's parent), the fact of their figuring on the list indicates that rituals are of import, even though certain workers and union leaders confessed that they were not optimistic about getting these two demands accepted. Even so, their incorporation alongside the more pukka industrial concerns shows that the separation of issues that one expects for

the west does not hold here.

Nor is this the only way that the older expectations figure in industrial culture. According to our research factories were not owned by individuals but mainly by family members and sometimes long established close friends. Further kinship also figures in the workers' factory world: in the advent of vacancies or the creation of new jobs, employees would make bids for the appointment of one of their kin. Therefore it is not surprising to find on the list the demand that a kinsperson of the dead worker should have right of succession, filling that job vacancy. It presupposes the understanding that an employer/employee relationship is to be a long-term one and should involve social units and not just a discrete individual employee. It is not an impersonal ethos, it takes reference from the expectations of the favouritism institution (*nātābad/kripabad*) where 'one of ours' (*āphne-mānche*) is to get the job.

So, what this amounts to is that economic concerns (the possibility for job succession, of access to financial resources for death rites, as well as work leave in the case of a parent's death), touch a cultural consciousness and are given shape by past and very specific cultural practices. Therefore there are certain continuities through the transplanting of these cultural practices and expectations from the external traditional sites to the relatively new site of the factory floor. Further, what this means in effect is the playing out of certain old conventions in the industrial situation where it is usually presumed that that kind of enterprise should heed impersonal principles and follow criteria of efficiency. What such a juxtaposition will propel remains to be seen.

So far we have noticed that certain cultural considerations appear in the field of workers' grievances. An exploration of the ways that industrial workers may bring pressure to bear on their employers as well as the government in order to pave the route 'for a better life' shows further cultural permeability.

### **Collective action—Nepalese style**

In Nepal industrial discontent may be expressed by resorting to a number of techniques that have their bases in traditional culture.

In the industrial context, the deployment of what is known in Nepal as the 'relay hunger strike', is of particular interest here. As performed at Balaju, two workers from each factory took turns at just sitting in a tent for twelve hours, during which time no food was taken. At the end of their twelve hours, another batch would take their place. The affair was not limited to these requirements (i.e. the workers' withdrawal of their labour, and the necessity to fast) but also amalgamated a religious component. Those about to exit were incorporated into a ritual. Women first performed a *pūjā*, and then terminated the affair by putting red powder on the faces of the strikers who had just finished their shift in the tent. The men's strike action continued around the clock. Women workers eventually also participated in the hunger strike but only during daylight hours.



For our purposes two features of this manner of protesting warrant some comment. The first relates to the nature of the protest: it is not simply done through the workers withdrawing from the factory floor, that is an explicitly industrial act, but also necessitated their undergoing a kind of self-sacrifice—not eating. This kind of self-inflicted 'ordeal' figures in other contexts, for example when a person feels that she has been badly treated, she may withdraw to her room and refuse to eat. Therefore it is a means for making known that one has been subjected to something that one feels is unjustified or that one finds intolerable. Protest then is made through self-inflicted hardship. What is interesting is that this social mechanism is being deployed in the industrial context. The second feature refers to the activity's scope. It was treated as being extendable into the religious context. Put differently it was not left in isolation as an explicitly secular affair, but one that was to be ritually demarcated.

Other ways of expressing discontent are geared to harassment of persons whose conduct is assessed as unworthy. We refer to two techniques: shoe-garlanding (*juttāko-mala*) and a procedure known as *gherāo*, where a group of discontents encircle a victim. During the interregnum a spate of shoe-garlandings were undertaken and were met with opprobrium by the establishment (Sharma 1990:21) and continue to erupt. The last, to our knowledge, occurred in late 1992. In the industrial context these are generally deployed against members of management, those assessed as having abused their positions of power, like treating the workers with contempt, behaving in an authoritarian manner, and trying to capitalize on senior status for sexual gain. These may even be imposed on owners, or at least considered as a possibility, as happened where one factory owner in the Tarai, according to the workers, had shown his contempt for their dignity (as with sexual harassment), a cavalier approach to their worker circumstance (by withholding wages long overdue) and so forth.

Both kinds of procedures for expressing industrial discontent draw on the cultural reservoir and have been deployed in other contexts, political and social. It is the practice of shoe-garlanding in particular which draws on Hindu ontological conceptions and possibilities. Now where a garland is usually made of flowers and other auspicious-making things and is welcomed in its honouring gesture, this kind of garland (*mala*) comprises just those things that are antithetical to that purpose. Because of their polluted state and thereby polluting potential, leather shoes and sandals are not to be worn inside temples, shrines and kitchens. So to avoid the possible deleterious effect on person and place, these are left outside. But in a shoe-garlanding the tabooed things aren't avoided but deployed for the same purpose. If the shoe-garlanding procedure requires that a group of men not only throw this thing on the target but also smear his face (with soot) and stuff his mouth with raw meat, then in its possible elaborations it sets out to ontologically contaminate the body, inside and out. The effect as people recognise is not only to 'defile' but also 'defame' the man

concerned. It is 'a great insult' inflicted through ontological contagion (Kondos 1992:218-43).

So, despite the new context (factory production), and despite its unequivocal secular purpose, people in these circumstances resort to drawing on an assortment of old procedures (sometimes religiously based) to express their grievances. Moreover the grievances articulated are not restricted to economic factors but also include questions bearing on the moral pride and integrity of workers. It would seem then that such possibilities now constitute parts of the industrial workers' repertoire of collective action.

### **Reaction to workers' demands and collective action**

It should be recalled that industrial unrest marked the interregnum period of government. The factory owners adamantly rejected the workers' list of demands and vociferously condemned the strikers. The factory owners' views were widely publicised by the media through the unanimous voice of their Chamber of Commerce. First, they drew attention to the mitigating circumstances that necessitated the payment of low wages, and explained their rejection of all workers' demands.

Specifically, they took cover in the difficulties arising from the curtailment of commercial activities propelled by the dispute with India over the renewal of Trade and Transit Treaty; and constantly justified their non-compliance with the demands on the grounds that if they were to yield to them, their enterprises would no longer be commercially viable. As far as we can determine, precise calculations demonstrating non-viability were never presented. Nevertheless, the industrialists' mere threat of the possibility of closing down their factories, brings attention to the worker's dependence on them for employment and access to a monetized wage.

Secondly, and on a much broader front, the owners condemned the strikers not only for jeopardizing factory production and for constantly threatening the dignity of members of management and owners (especially with the *juttāko-mala* procedure), but also for being the play-things of insidious external forces, acting in opposition to public interest.

Government press releases often sided with the industrialists. Editorials, assessing the strikes within the context of the country's economic development, accused the workers of indulging in irresponsible behaviour, constituting a serious threat to the maintenance of law and order. The strikes, according to the government, placed the realization of the immediate and long-term objectives of the democracy movement in grave jeopardy.

To halt the turbulence, however, the government had to respond by taking action rather than simply engaging in rhetoric, supportive of the industrialists' case, especially in the light of its announcement of future plans to establish export processing zones (EPZ). Perhaps in order to be seen as non-partisan, the government set up an 8-member National Committee consisting of 2 members from each of the following

organizations: Ministry of Industry, Labour Department, Workers' representatives and Chamber of Commerce, for the express purpose of considering the workers' demands. However, despite its emplacement of this structure, the government unilaterally then announced that a new basic-wage scale was to apply, and left in abeyance the demand that the sacked workers be reinstated and provided with compensation in the form of back-pay.

Our discussions with workers from a number of factories both in the Valley and outside (in May and June 1990) made clear their anger with the government. From one disillusioned worker: 'At first we thought it was our government. But now we find that they are not interested in the workers'. Some also directly referred to the Ministers from the left whose responsibility they presumed was to protect workers' interests. For example: 'We are disillusioned with them. They are supposed to be our representatives. The whole interim government has failed us. They have done nothing to improve our circumstances'.

On the broader front workers' discussions turned on matters of everyday detail that were immediate and affected them personally, especially in terms of what does and does not constitute a good life. They even complained that factory owners had failed to provide them with such things as uniforms and tiffin. They also talked about the inadequacy of the 'dearness' allowance: 'We just can't cope with what we are getting and our wages are hardly enough to cover the high rents that are being demanded in Kathmandu.' Otherwise, it was the non-realization of dreams that was evoked: 'Fifteen years ago we came to the factory, hoping to save enough and better ourselves. But we are still here doing the same work. Nothing has changed. We are hardly better off than when we first arrived.'

Factory workers' resentment of the government's apparent disinterest was intensified by the way it reacted to another outburst of discontent, this time to the demands of the teaching profession. At the end of 1990-91 in response to an enormous protest by teachers, the government immediately recognized the 'validity' of their demands including the reinstating of all teachers dismissed during the 30 years of Panchayat rule, notwithstanding its constant complaint used in a variety of situations that the state coffers had been depleted by the previous regime. In contrast the interim government did not act decisively on the matter of the dismissed factory workers' re-instatement, even though in this context the empty coffers argument was not applicable, since the cost would have been carried by the factory owners.

While the factory workers were appalled at what they assessed as discriminatory treatment, the orientation of the industrialists was different. Such worker re-instatement, according to the B.I.D. industrialists, would not have been possible, because other workers had been employed to take the places of those dismissed.

Now this line of argument could also have been used in the teachers' case but significantly was not. Of course, in defence of the government it

might be said that since it had immediate jurisdiction over civil servants, it was able to take more definite action whereas this would have been more difficult in the case of private industries. Even so, one might point to the fact that the government does have the power to take initiative and in the new post-revolutionary milieu is expected to give direction to industrial matters. Furthermore, if the government was admonishing workers to behave responsibly and to recognise that economic demands cannot be catered to overnight, yet it did not apply the same requirements to the teachers but instead treated their demands differently, then its conduct becomes highly questionable.

What is of interest for us here is a certain persistence of an old practice revamped and transformed to cater to the changed circumstances. The Nepalese State, whether under the Shaha rulers or the Rana Prime Ministers, used the bureaucracy as its own domain for bestowing privileges—the rulers acting as the patrons to the select. One is reminded of the yearly *pajani*, when bureaucrats were appointed, reappointed or dismissed from office (Levi 1905-8; Kondos 1984; Shaha 1982). And also reminded of the way unions are organized, white collar belonging to a Nepali Congress Party supported union, and blue to a United Left Party supported union. It would seem then that the Congress majority in the interim government was able to use the bureaucratic venue to bestow favours and so win loyalty and support from those who would benefit from its decisions.

Now while the government and the Chamber of Commerce in its public face dismissed the workers' demands, individual employers were more cautious. Certain employers said that the situation was delicate and workers were now conducting themselves in far more assertive ways, and therefore rather than accommodate to the workers' agitations had chosen to close down their factories. In our consideration such cautionary measures were taken mainly by the owners of smaller enterprises. Accordingly it appears that after the revolution, orientations towards factory workers' potential was variable. Some like the Congress Party leaders appeared to take a dismissive orientation. On the other hand certain industrialists assessed the workers as a force to be contended with. Then again many of the large-scale industrialists, perhaps secure in their economic strength and their connections with the government, continued to resist the workers' demands, thus suggesting that they did not perceive the workers as a formidable force. It should also be noted that in the wake of revolutionary euphoria, any work-place disagreement, no matter how minor, would be treated by workers as a cause for strike action. This tendency was so widespread that unions produced a booklet in comic script form to instruct workers about the right and proper contexts requiring strike action.

### **Recent development: state vision and state legislation**

If the government was tardy in addressing the workers' grievances, it was active in the matter of industrial policy. At this juncture it is of

interest to briefly consider some of the implications of two important recent developments initiated by the current government, specifically its industrial policy statement (I.P.S.) and its new legislation on industrial relations, the 'Labor Act 1992'. The concern here is to indicate the general flavour of their contents and isolate those elements which we see as having direct bearing on the conditions of industrial workers.

According to our reading of the new policy, announced in May 1992, there are at least three major features. It identifies the locus of investment for industrial development; the role of the state in that process; and the scope of the envisioned industrial project. The new policy specifies that Nepal's industrialization is henceforth to depend on the efforts of private capital, both domestic and international. The government's role is to be one of facilitator, '...to create an appropriate atmosphere to encourage private sector investment' (I.P.S.:3). This involves making it easy for private capital by providing it with a number of incentives. Such incentives are to be especially available for capitalists' participation in the E.P.Z. scheme i.e. Export Processing Zone of production, elsewhere known as 'world factories', where production is geared to the international market.

The list of incentives the Nepalese government offers private capital is highly seductive. These provide immunity against nationalization, tariff protection and a range of income tax exemptions. No excise duties are to apply. And in addition the state offers special facilities flowing from the so-called 'single window system'. This refers to the establishment of an Industrial Promotion Board charged with the responsibility of '...increasing the pace of industrialization and ensuring coordination among the national level agencies connected with industrial development at the policy and implementation levels' (ibid).

The objective here is to bring all negotiations to one side (the 'single window'). In other words the Board is to short-circuit bureaucratic delays and associated practices of corruption that were so common in the past (Kondos, Kondos and Ban 1991).

The composition of this all powerful Board is somewhat peculiar, given the nature of the policy's objective (to establish an industrial production especially for the international market) and given the span of participation in the envisioned project (capitalists, workers, entrepreneurs). Out of the thirteen members of the board ten are government officials. All of these are of the highest rank, including several Ministers. The three non-government members consist of 'a representative from the Federation of Chambers of Commerce', and 'two reputed persons from the industrial, commercial and tourism sectors'. Obviously there is nobody to represent the workers. In other words, along with political party interests, the interests of private capital are given a direct voice, but those of the workers are not.

In fact, nowhere in the policy statement is there any proposal that is geared to consider or advance the interests and welfare of the workers. While the proposal that wage fixing will be tied to productivity (I.P.S.:5) might be seen as the expression of concern for the workers it is nonetheless

ambiguous. It could be judged as providing a means for workers to maximize their earnings through their work output, but it could also be judged as yet another incentive for private capital because wage fixing is not tied to worker industrial action. Such a proposal moreover risks undermining the legitimacy of collective bargaining through union initiatives and resorting to strike action and thereby engender a politically docile workforce. This would advantage industrial capital. This is not meant to deny recognition of the government's formidable task, to get industrial development going in a land-locked country where one prerequisite is the enticement of international and local capital. But it is to recognise that the plan as it stands could adversely affect the workers if the traditional mode for wage negotiations were dropped. This would apply even to wage fixing by productivity because the monetary measure for output itself is open to dispute.

If the plan for the future causes some unease so does the current Labor Act promulgated by the newly elected government. Strike action according to this 1992 Labor Act is to take an even more circuitous and precarious route than ascribed by the terms of the Factory and Factory Workers Act of 1959. Under Section 74 of the current Labor Act, workers are required first of all to state their grievances to demands in writing. '...have the document signed by at least 51 percent of their total strength, and submit it to the General Manager through their representatives' (Sub-Section 1). Should the matter not be resolved within 21 days through negotiations between the Manager and the workers, Sub-Section 3 stipulates that, '...it shall be settled within a period of 15 days through bilateral talks in the presence of the Labor Officer'.

So according to the Act legal strike action cannot be taken immediately on management's refusal to meet the worker's demands. The Act instructs another bout of negotiations between the parties where the state's Labor Officer acts as a kind of mediator. Nor can a strike be immediately undertaken after that since the law stipulates the necessity to undertake further negotiations in this case to gain the support for a 60% endorsement.

In case workers or employees of any establishment wish to go on strike because of their failure to settle their demands through the procedures mentioned in Sub-Section 3 of Section 74, they may do so after submitting on resolution to that effect passed by 60 percent of their total strength through secret ballot, as well as written notice to that effect, to the General Manager explicitly mentioning their demands or claims, and their justification and forwarding a notice thereof to the Labour Department, the concerned Labour office, and the local administration (Labour Act, 1992, Section 76).

There are a number of features that create unease. First, while only a 51 percent majority is required for the expression of a grievance, a 60

percent majority is needed for strike action to be legally possible. It is not so much that the discrepancy introduces a shift (from the straight out majority principle to that of a solid majority) that could be seen as undemocratic, but that the necessity for two procedures with varying degrees of commitment would make for delays and complications. The policy has the potential for generating a lot of activity that could be fruitless. Perhaps it would have been preferable to demand 60% quota for the expression of discontent so as to be able to act directly and effectively, with no further ado.

This injection of complications also figures in the required procedural steps. The Act demands three phases of negotiation (with the owners; with owners and officers; and back to factory floor with the workers) before the workers are allowed to give notice of their intent to strike. And then there is the further elaboration, the necessity to submit that intention and justification to other bodies.

Moreover, the Act also requires that no less than three state bodies, as well as management, have to be notified by the workers as to their strike intent and give a justification for this. Presumably all three government bodies have to endorse the acceptability of the projected strike. It is not easy to fathom what lay behind such requirements, especially the notification to 'local administration'. What may be surmised is that the local office acquires information that can be added to its records on matters relating to its local population. Perhaps a matter of surveillance?

But whatever else, one may discern the imposition of red tape that directly affects the manner by which workers may engage in attempts to resolve their grievances. Given the 'single window' policy geared to circumvent red tape irritations where the capitalists are concerned, the Labor Act's demands applying to the workers on the other hand appears as an extensive and excessive bureaucratic elaboration.

Given that this legislation is not framed to facilitate one means of redressing workers' grievances, i.e. by striking, it gives pause to wonder. Is one to assume that the government is of the opinion that strike action is the less preferred way of settling disputes, concurring with the policy being formulated by left or right-wing governments in different parts of the world? Whether or not such considerations were relevant to the framing of the legislation is a moot point.

What however can be brought to attention is what the legislation is geared to realise. If the line of directives were to be followed these would disallow immediate action. It effects surveillance. And prevents strikes from erupting in unseen quarters.

State control figures more blatantly in the further proviso that the state may declare a strike illegal. While the Act is clear in specifying the circumstances when this could occur, that is, as long as it '...appears likely that it will create an extraordinary situation and this disturbs the nation's peace and security or that will affect the nation's economic interest'(Section 80). Yet it does not elaborate the criteria for judging what

would constitute a disruption to peace and security and a threat to the country's well being.

The state's reticence here is particularly unfortunate since the attribution of strike illegality has bearings on the determination of worker misconduct. According to the Act misconduct refers to the workers' participation in or the inciting of others to participate in strikes declared illegal or irregular by the state. The penalty to apply after due warning would be the dismissal or fine of the worker(s). In such circumstances the Act accords the owner/manager of an enterprise the right to take such action. What such legislation then permits is the possibility for the owners/managers to rid the place of industrial activists.

What is of interest is the way these provisos of the new 1992 legislation connect with a particular demand made by the B.I.D. strikers in 1990: the demand for the reinstatement of dismissed workers. What the provisos of the new Act amount to, though hidden in the legal verbage, is the state's refusal to recognise the legality of that demand if it defines worker misconduct as participation in or compelling others to participate in strikes judged as illegal and imposes the penalty of dismissal. Under the new Act any reinstatement of a worker dismissed on those grounds would constitute a legal contradiction.

With regard to that demand and what it prefigured in the workers' framework: if they were demanding that those dismissed for misconduct be reinstated, then the workers were contesting the state's definition of what should constitute 'worker misconduct' and with it 'strike illegality'.

If the workers in 1990 were contesting the justifiability and acceptability of such definitions and if in 1992 the new government brings down factory legislation echoing to a large extent the formulations of the old Act, then the new government is turning its back on the workers' desires. It is also endorsing the orientations of the old regime as these pertain to industrial action.

## Notes

1 We wish to thank the Australian Research Council for funding the research upon which this paper is based. The research was conducted during 1990 and 1991. We are grateful also to many factory workers and their union leaders at Balaju and elsewhere who gave freely of their time to discuss a number of industrial matters with us.

2 According to Pant (1990:3), the most frequent acts of misconduct have been 'unauthorised absences', 'repeated lateness', 'easy-goingness' and 'loitering' and he sees these as 'the outcome of the conflict between the deep-rooted rural orientation which the workers bring to the workplace and the industrial culture which demands punctuality'.

3 For detailed accounts of the notion of corruption in Nepal see Caplan (1971) and Kondos (1987b).



4 The list of demands, originally submitted to the then Panchayat government in March 1990 and also submitted to the interim government in June 1990, contained the following items: 1. To be allowed to establish an independent labour union. 2. Dissolve the old black labour law and establish a new one that looks after the interests of the workers. 3. 100% raise on old minimum wage. 4. Those workers who have been working in factory for 180 days should be made permanent automatically and be issued with a certificate to this effect. 5. Sacked workers should be re-instated with full compensation. 6. 5% of profit be kept aside to be utilised for housing. 7. 10% bonus out of owner's profit should be given to workers. 8. Life insurance and accident insurance should be compulsory. 9. Workers who have worked more than 5 years should be paid one month's wage in lump sum when they leave, one and a half months wage for 5–10 years and one to two months for 10 years. 10. Provide a bus for workers' transport to and from work. If not Rs7 daily bus fare. 11. Female workers should be given maternity leave. 12. Wages should be increased by 50% to cater to inflationary costs of living—that is, adjusted as dearness allowance. 13. Leave should be like that of the government employees. 14. 15% of Provident Fund to be taken from wages and matched by owners—both documentations to be given to workers as record. 15. Up to secondary education provided free for workers' children. 16. Provide free medication for workers' families. 17. Sports, library, canteen and room should be provided. 18. Seven hours daily working hours. 19. Working with dangerous machinery etc. should carry Rs20 a day allowance. Seasonal uniforms should be provided. 20. Rs10 to be given as afternoon tea allowance because of current price rise. 21. Contract work should be abolished. 22. Pay for overtime should be doubled. 23. If a worker dies employment should be given to a family member. 24. Stop on the spot clarification. 25. If a worker dies Rs10,000 should be given towards that worker's kriya. 26. If a worker's father or mother dies the owners should provide Rs5,000 toward the cost of kriya and leave permitted. 27. 75% reduction on electricity, water and housing rental for the factory and abolish tax on raw material and reopen closed factories. 28. In case of national industries, the land should be registered in the name of the industrialists' companies. 29. Release all imprisoned workers and other people. Waive warrants for arrests. 30. While classifying workers, right measures should be determined. 31. Trainees of Balaju Mechanical Training Centre demands should be fulfilled and those of other workers.

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# **Effects of Modernization on Periurban Families in Kathmandu Valley**

**Keshav Lall Maharjan**

## **Introduction**

Modernization brings changes in rural, urban and periurban areas in various ways.<sup>1</sup> They range from physical change to economic and social changes. These changes in each of the three areas interact with each other and in turn give a certain direction to the whole process. Of the three areas, the periurban is most liable to be affected by modernization, as it is prone to be affected by changes in the other two areas too.

The modernization of Kathmandu valley has provided various economic opportunities to the people in the periurban area in the form of job opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors, and the creation of markets for farm products. The construction of roads has accelerated the sprawl of factory establishments with people starting to commute from urban areas and in so doing creating bed-towns with increasing commercial activities. More and more people are engaged in non-farm jobs either within the area or in the urban areas where they commute by more and more easily available transportation. Farming, which becomes highly commercial and hard-cash oriented, increasingly uses seasonal migrant labourers from rural areas.

As a result, household income, along with cash income generating household members, have increased in the settlements of this area. People in general have become more economically affluent. Further, this area has become a hub for immigrants working in newly established industries and relay-migrants, looking for opportunities to move to urban settlements. It is most especially in such periurban areas that peoples of diverse ethnic and social background interact with one another, and in so doing broaden both their social experience and values. In this paper I will discuss some of the consequences of both increased affluence and broadened social values.

Siddhi Ganesh development village, a typical periurban village in Bhaktapur district lying between the cities of Kathmandu (New: Yen<sup>2</sup>) and Bhadgaon (New: Khopa) is taken as a survey area for the study purpose. In outlining the principal economic and social changes brought about by modernization in this village, I rely on data gathered through the use of questionnaire and observation surveys, including a census survey of all the households and an economic activity survey of sample households. This material is discussed in the opening sections of my paper. In later sections

I discuss, on the basis of case studies collected amongst Parbate Hindu (New: Khāen) and Newar (New: Newāḥ) informants, changing patterns of family organisation and separation. The relationship between modernization and changes in the Newāḥ family system is summarized in the last section.

### Survey area

Siddhi Ganesh development village lies adjacent to Thimi and Bode, two larger and older traditional Newāḥ settlements. Manohara river, a branch of the Bagmati, runs along the northwest border, while the old Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road on the south side separates the village from Thimi. This village consists of two settlements, Nakadesh (New: Nakadeḥ), a traditional Newāḥ settlement with a highly developed and complicated social structure and Dhuncho, a new Khāen settlement. Terraced paddy fields stretch between these two settlements.

Farmland in the village is not very fertile in the sense that, *dhān awal* (Nep: plain fertile lowland suitable for paddy cultivation) is less than one-fourth of the total farmland. About half is *dhān doyam* and *dhān sim* (Nep: comparatively infertile lowland and terrace land suitable for paddy cultivation). The rest is *pākho* (Nep: infertile terrace and upland not suitable for paddy cultivation) and wasteland. Crops even on *dhān awal* land are destroyed in the monsoon season by flooding of the Manohara river.

There are 3,762 people living in the village, of which 1,941 (51.6%) are male and 1,821 (48.4%) female. The number of households is 641 and the average size of the family (unless mentioned, the terms household and family are used synonymously) is 5.9, almost the same as the national figure (5.8) (CBS:1989). These families are categorized into three types:

i) Nuclear (elementary) family, represented by a couple with or without children. Variations are, single-member family (male or female with a deceased partner or bachelor) and family of widow or widower with offspring(s). There are 355 such families (55%) in the village and their average size is 4.8 persons.

ii) Simple joint family resembling a stem family, consisting of vertical plural couples with only one couple in one generation, often with other offspring in second and third generations. The number of such families in the village is 198 (31%) and the average size, 7.8.

iii) A complicated joint family with membership thoroughly extended to more than two generations. Many of such families include plural couples in at least one generation and often with other offspring in each generation. A variation on this type of family is where one or both members of the first generation couple is deceased. Such families in the village are 88 in

number (13%) and their average size is 11.3, double the average family size of the village. Here, we can observe the obvious fact that the family becomes more complicated as the size becomes bigger.

Among the Newāḥ people, 52% of families are nuclear, 33% simple joint family and 15% complicated joint family. The figures for Jyāpu (Newāḥ farmer) are 53%, 33% and 14%, respectively: whilst for Śeśyaḥ (Newāḥ business man) they are 44%, 37% and 19%. Of the other Newāḥ sub-groups, Nāy (Newāḥ meat seller) have least share of nuclear family, 33% and highest share of complicated joint family, 29%, nearly double the figure for the Newāḥ as a whole. The Jugī (Newāḥ musician and tailor), Kau (Newāḥ ironsmith), and Nau (Newāḥ barber), three of the low-ranking occupational castes, have 64% nuclear family and 21% complicated joint family.

Among the Khāen, Khatri (Brahman turned Kṣatriya) families are 73% nuclear, 23% simple joint and just 4% complicated joint. It should be noted that these figures differ very markedly from those for the Newāḥ families. A similar distributional pattern (73% nuclear, 27% simple joint and no complicated joint) was also found amongst the following three Khāen occupational castes, the Damāi (musician and tailor), Kāmi (ironsmith), and Sārki (cobbler). Sāen family types (Mongoloids from hill areas, such as Tamang, Rai, Limbu and Kirati) have a similar distributional pattern as that found amongst the Newāḥ occupational caste group.

Of the total population in the village, 90% live in Nakadeḥ, and of these 87% are Jyāpu, followed by Śeśyaḥ 5%, Nāy 3% and others, inclusive of Jugī, Kau, Nau, Damāi, Kāmi, Sārki, Sāen and Matśyā (Indo-Aryans from Tarai) 5%. The remaining 10% live in Dhuncho, and of these 95% are Khāen (Khatri) and only 5% Sāen.

### **Modernization in Siddhi Ganesh village**

Until the first Khāen came to settle in Dhuncho Pakho (an area believed by Nakadeḥ Newāḥ to be visited by tigers) from the hills of Kabhre, Nakadeḥ was a traditional and stable Newāḥ settlement. The settling of Khāen in the Dhuncho Pakho, otherwise a barren upland, and located some distance away from Nakadeḥ, had but little initial impact on the daily lives of the Newāḥs, and hence was of small concern to them. Taking advantage of this Newāḥ attitude, many Khāen, relatives and neighbours of the first settlers, poured in and in no time established a substantial and expanding Khāen settlement, i.e., Dhuncho, purchasing and share-cropping farmland in and around the village. Since then, these two settlements have grown together with day-to-day effects on each other economically and culturally.

Khāen buy daily goods from Newāḥ shops, share-crop their land and hire the farm labour. They also sell their labour, milk, vegetables and other farm products to the Newāḥ. Many Khāen also sell organic manure to the Jyāpu farmers. They are impressed by the complicated rules and organizing power, i.e., *guthi* of the Newāḥ, who perform such works as village road and conduit construction in an organized manner. The Khāen are also impressed by the way in which the Newāḥ worship at the Siddhi Ganesh temple in Nakadeḥ. The Newāḥ, on the other hand, are impressed by the seemingly rational, less community bound and freer Khāen lifestyle and try to imitate them whenever possible, as in building lone houses in open spaces, earlier and quicker breaking-up of joint family (will be dealt with in detail later) and to a certain extent, speaking only the Nepali language, even among the Newāḥ and in the family.

The introduction of the Panchayat system in the 1960s, which put these two settlements within the jurisdiction of a single village panchayat, further enhanced the interaction between the two communities politically. This also was the period when these settlements began to be affected by modernization phenomena, especially after the paving of the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road. By the 1980s the impact of modernization was so strong that all the villagers were affected in their daily lives in one way or the other.

In the farming context, a jeepable fair-weather road was constructed and a water conduit for gravitational flow irrigation was dug. Joint and individual wells were dug for smaller-scale irrigation. These infrastructural developments facilitated the adoption of new input materials, such as high-yielding paddy seeds, vegetables (carrot, radish, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, spinach, turnip), chemical fertilizers, power tiller and even a low-lift pump for irrigation by lifting water from the Manohara river. All these innovations helped in increasing both the land-use rate and the degree of flexibility in farming methods by giving rise to various non-traditional cropping patterns, other than paddy-wheat, paddy-potato and maize plus soyabean in upland areas. Crops cultivated in the new cropping patterns are planted in response to demands of the urban markets and include sequences of paddy-potato-potato, paddy-vegetables-vegetables and vegetables-vegetables-vegetables-vegetables. Because new cropping patterns are cash-crop based they are both high-cost and high-yielding, needing much more hard cash for farming but generating large amounts of cash in return. These crops are very labour intensive and require maximum owner labour input, resulting in a big productivity increase. Moreover, these products are directly put into the markets in Yen and Patan (New: Yala) by the farmers themselves, thus creating a new job of vegetable selling.

Due to the engagement of villagers in cash-crop farming and other non-farm jobs, there is a shortage of labourers in the farm peak seasons of paddy planting and harvesting, land preparation and harvesting of both potato and wheat. This shortage is covered by the hiring of seasonal migrant labour, mainly Sāen and some Khāen from adjacent hilly areas of Kabhre.

In non-farm work, there was a substantial increase of salaried men working at various institutions in Yen, especially among Śeśyaḥ, Khāen and some Jyāpu. They found easy access to Yen and Khopa and started to commute to their work places. Frequent trips to towns were made by village businessmen. More people have cash in their hands and engage in various kinds of petty jobs in urban areas and within the village. Cornershops, teashops and *bhatti* (eating shops), mostly run by Jyāpu increased in Nakadeḥ. Even in Dhuncho, some Khāen are running teashops. Poultry farming is also popular, luring in the concerned businessmen to the village. Traditional occupational workers, such as Nāy, Kau, Jugī, Damāi, Sārki and Kāmi are opening their workshop-cum-sales depots in and around the village.

Some carpet-weaving factories have been established in the village by its residents. This has drawn Sāen day-labourers from as far away as Koshi zone. There are also village-based workers employed in nearby food, chemical and textile factories. Besides, there is a school teacher and a Muslim bangle shopkeeper from the Tarai living in the village.

There are also people, mostly Nāy and some Jyāpu, who have migrated from the village to both Pokhara and the inner Tarai, whilst some Śeśyaḥ, Jyāpu and Khāen have settled in Yen. Some young people in Dhuncho have turned to international seasonal labour and are working in South Korea and Japan. The combined impact of all these changes is that the villagers have become more economically affluent. More individuals in each household, including even non-household heads, are earning more than ever before. This has increased the demand for concrete house-construction in the village, creating a boom in brick kiln manufacture. Consumption expenses, especially on food, clothes, medicine and education have increased too, causing a mushrooming of various shops (as mentioned above), kindergartens and private primary schools in the village.

The engagement of villagers in non-farm work in various places necessitates the eating of meals away from home. The household head has no means to assess these expenses or to allot an appropriate budget for them, nor does he have the means to check the amount of income earned. With the increase of hard-cash income from farming, those engaged in farming also tend to have more and more meals away from home, be it a

cup of tea at a teashop or wining and dining at a *bhatti* within and around the village. Here too the household head has no means of checking these incomes and expenses. At times, the household head himself is prone to the habit of eating outside. All of these behaviours are weakening the traditional basic concept of the joint family as a co-resident, commensal and property-owning corporation.

Social interaction between the members of the different ethnic groups, Newāḥ, Khāen, and Sāen has given a new impact to the values of each. It has specially affected the Newāḥ youths. For them eating (earning and spending) and living separately from other family members are no longer regarded as special or unusual arrangements, for they have become accustomed to observing them as regular occurrences amongst the neighbouring Khāen and Sāen. They also take eating outside as a common practice, otherwise regarded as a first serious step to *bāni śenegu* (a loosening of character) by the Newāḥ people. Thus, the Newāḥ youths are consciously and unconsciously giving less value to their traditional joint-family system.

### **Factors affecting family type**

Generally speaking, the joint family is the ideal family type in the Indian subcontinent. The people of this village are not unusual in this respect. However, there are certain factors that effect the maintenance of a joint family. The first is the population factor, with child mortality, birth rate, life expectancy, state of health and hygiene being important related factors. When the child mortality rate is high, the birth rate low, life expectancy short and state of health and hygiene bad, the population does not grow and the families remain small with only a few becoming joint. On the other hand, if the birth rate is high, child mortality rate low, life expectancy long and state of health and hygiene good, population grows and joint families increase both in incidence and in size. Even when child mortality is high, as is the case generally in Nepal, joint families can increase. For there will be a tendency to give birth to more children when mortality rate is high and if a sufficient number survive, the family will become a big joint family. This factor is common to all the groups in the village.

The second and perhaps most important factor is the economic, for eating together and owning land and property together are two important conditions of being a joint family. The nature of the family business, especially whether farming or not, and the ability of the members to eat together, are all relevant issues here. Having a family business or running a retail shop in which many family members are needed and can work together to earn a living, and also in which earned income and property



cannot be divided easily among the members, together facilitate the maintenance of joint-family arrangements. Most of the Śeṣyaḥ and some of both the Jyāpu and Nāy joint families are results of these kinds of economic considerations. Similarly, joint family members are more likely to stay together if their agricultural land is owned and farmed jointly and the products consumed together. Farmers need to stick together to cope with both the labour needs of peak seasons and the difficulties of natural calamities. The joint families of Jyāpu, Sāen and Khatri are much influenced by these considerations.

At times, some families remain joint when both their assets and sources of income are so limited that separation would deteriorate their living standard making them unable to feed themselves. Joint families of Nāy, the occupational castes and migrant Sāen are of this nature. But these joint families are very vulnerable. Families of migrants and occupational castes whose members live on their labour only, perhaps hand to mouth, tend to be nuclear in structure, for there is a limit to their capacity to mutually support one another.

The third factor is the social, with issues such as marriage patterns, educational level, degree of involvement in supra-familial social organizations, and perhaps most importantly of all the kind of status accorded joint families in particular communities, variably affecting the kind of family structure and size most favoured. Early marriage would mean more children leading to large families. Education and schooling tend to raise the marriage age, thereby making people more independent and hence more likely to favour the smaller family and fewer children. Factors such as these are common to all ethnic groups in Nakadeḥ. Obligations to ancestors and supra-familial social organizations, such as the numerous *guthi* amongst the Newāḥ, psychologically inspire for more sons, consequently resulting in larger families, ideally of the joint variety.

A joint family, when it becomes economically successful, gains social status and becomes legitimate if followed by the practice of social and religious services. People with such values jointly try to gain such legitimacy by remaining in their joint families and supervising routine daily matters that might otherwise lead to quarrels and hence result in family separation. This is specially true for the Newāḥ people and is one of the reasons for their larger families. The Newāḥs regard such families as *jjūpim̐ bhinpiṃ manuta* (people with quality and dignity) and ideally hope to be members of such a unit.

### **The Newāḥ ideal family**

In general, the ideal family for Newāḥs is a complicated joint family. For them it has the power to ensure the labour needs of the peak seasons of

farming, family business, calamities and social obligations. It is a resource for assuring social status by economic success and becoming *jyūpim bhinpim*, performing social and religious services.

Single-member families or those with only old couples are rare and only occur for short periods under conditions of severe population decline. Otherwise, such persons are likely to live with their married daughters, or adopt nephews. The aged are not left alone and young bachelors are not forced to live alone. Sons stay with parents even after marriage, together with their children and grand-children. The joint family would not separate as long as both or one of the old couples are living. They may dwell in plural houses if one is not enough to accommodate all the members. But, land and other properties remain joint under the old person. Thus, family separation is slow and usually accompanied before long by the birth of additional children.

The aged males, even after retiring from active participation in economic activities, become advisors of various informal organizations and are respected by all as *thakāli ājus* (aged and experienced). Females, though not of such high status, are also much respected as *thakāli nakim* (aged and experienced) too.

Nakadeḥ people also share this Newāḥ ideal family. They regard children who have not undergone the ceremony of *busākhā* (for boys) and *ihi* (for girls) as infants who symbolically become adults only after *kaetā pūjā* (for boys) and *bārḥā* (for girls). They start to take part in various activities as an adult from their late teens and only become a recognised full adult after marriage, which generally occurs before 25 at the latest. During their 20s males start to support the parental family economically and spiritually and continue to do so through their 30s, even after they themselves have become parents. During their 40s they will start to take part in family decision-making and become *nāyo* (chief decision-maker), i.e., family head by their 50s, allowing their parents to retire. By this time younger brothers start to have their own opinions in various matters which are incorporated as of need in managing the family. After crossing the late 50s, the family head often starts to weaken physically and psychologically, sometimes plagued by diseases such as paratyphoid, typhoid, pneumonia, jaundice, hepatitis, tuberculosis, ulcers and other amoebic and bacterial diseases. Such a person, termed as *jhāḥ womma manu* (person who has crossed the zenith), retires from active participation in family management and devotes much time to looking after the grand and great grand-children, representing their families in various *guthi* and giving opinions on the management of the village as a *thakāli āju*.

In the case of farmers and occupational caste people females come to the houses of their husbands after marriage and support the family by

doing all domestic work and farm and occupational work. They become *hāmā* (chief housewife) in their 50s and make decisions in all domestic affairs including family consumption, guest entertainment, ritual and festival observations, relations with neighbours and other day-to-day affairs. *Hāmā* educate the new brides in their family customs. A lady may remain *hāmā* symbolically even after retiring, holding final say in the important domestic affairs, keeping keys of the vital places to herself and advising the actual *hāmā* and other brides as a *thakāli nākim*.

The old couples start to devote more of their time to religious and social services according to their capacities until they finally pass away. They may well begin to participate in various *guthi* organizations, perform *sorha śrāddha* and *śrāddha* (ancestral worship), *pūjā* (deity worship) regularly, observe yearly festivals, celebrate properly all the rites of passage and contribute to the building of *degah* (temple), *chapāh* (community house), *phalchā* (rest place), roads, etc. in the locality.

### **The Newāh family in reality**

In actual social life, the joint family is liable to become vulnerable to separation at every turning point of the family cycle. Some of the more critical of such moments are when sons start having their own opinions, the changing of *nāyo* and *hāmā*, the *jhāh wonegu* (crossing zenith) of *nāyo*, or the passing away of old couples. When a family does finally separate, there is likely to be considerable tension and even hostility for some time. Such separations become the subject matter of gossip and satire, contrary to the dignity and respect accorded to a successful complicated joint family.

Thus, as mentioned above, less than half of the families of Nakadeh Newāh are joint families, rather few, considering their family ideals. This is most revealing in the Jyāpu families. The reason for this seems to lie beyond the factors mentioned above. Disharmony between *hāmā* and brides and among other family members, the most frequently cited cause of Newāh family separation, is not enough explanation either. This point will be explored further with case studies in the following sections.

### **Changes in family type**

This section will focus on changes in family type in the village through case studies of Khāen and Newāh (Jyāpu) families. The Khāen case study is used to highlight the distinguishing features of Newāh families.

### **Case study of Khāen**

**Case 1:** Informant Mrs. K, 53, lives alone and is the mother of two sons and two daughters. She was married 40 years before but lost her

husband 15 years ago. Two daughters were married away ten years ago, and her sons were married five years ago. They each have their children. The two sons separated from her four years ago soon after their marriages. They partitioned the house into three parts and started to live as three families with different kitchens. All property except land has been divided. Four *ropanis* (1 *ropani* = 0.0509ha) of land is owned by the mother and tenanted-out to the sons. The sons cultivate the land and the produce is divided equally among the three parties. The mother supports herself from her share of the produce plus income from farm labouring. The eldest son is entirely devoted to farming, while the younger is working in South Korea as an international migrant labourer and is planning to build a new house for himself and his nuclear family. They plan to divide the land according to law either after the death of the mother or after she starts to live with one of the sons to spend her final days. The family cycle is simple, one became three in due time and no grudges are held against each other.

**Case 2:** Informant Mrs. S, 70, the mother of seven children, two sons and five daughters is also living alone. Her husband passed away 14 years ago. All children are married and the sons separated from the old couple soon after their marriages when her husband was still alive. The three families are living in harmony. Brides and daughters often come to help the old lady. The sons keep water buffaloes and practice dairy farming in addition to the cultivation of three *ropani* of land each. At the time of separation, the house was partitioned into two for the sons. The old couple lived in the *goth ghar* (Nep. farm house) at that time. The younger son has moved to a new house and the elder is building another for himself. The old lady has returned to live in the old house but separate from the elder son's family.

**Case 3:** Mr. G, 20, is living with his wife and a few months old son. The couple moved in from a remote hill village in the adjacent district of Kabhre, in the hope of getting a job in Kathmandu with the help of relatives in Dhuncho who had migrated earlier. He is hiring a *derā* (Nep. hired-room) for Rs.150 (US\$1 = RS.40) per month. He earns his living by farm labouring, earning Rs.50 a day. He does not plan to settle in Dhuncho, but is staying here to minimize the cost of job hunting, as the expenses are cheaper and transport access good. He does not plan to return to his original village in the hills where he has left behind his parents and a younger brother.

We can deduce from these case studies that in Khāen society, separation of family takes place at an early stage, soon after the marriage of sons. Living, eating and divisible property is differentiated at the very beginning of separation. Separated families do not hold grudges against

each other and the process is simple. They believe such separation contributes to the better use of family labour and independence in family management gives them a better chance to become successful in life. Thus, in Dhuncho, 75% of the families are nuclear.

### Case study of Newāh

**Case 1:** Informant Mr. G, 35, lives with his wife, two sons and one daughter. He was married 13 years ago. He left his parents after having a son about ten years ago since his wife could not get along with his mother. His five sisters and three brothers (two unmarried and one married) are living with his parents. He took nothing from his parents at the time of leaving the house. He spent the first five years living in *bālam* (hired place) within the village and earned his livelihood by selling vegetables at Thimi, Khopa and Yen. He purchases some of these vegetables from farmers in the village and some he produces himself by cultivating a vegetable garden of 13 *ana* (16 *ana* = 1 *ropani*). He makes a net profit of about Rs.50 to Rs.200 from his vegetable business. He built a new house near the vegetable garden five years before and has not finished paying its loan yet. Recently he has started broiler farming in order to make more money and pay back the loan. He claims to be happy after leaving his parents, for he does not have to share his earnings with other family members and can manage things on his own. Besides, he does not have to listen to the grudges of his wife and mother against each other. Except for his share of five *ropani* land, he does not hope to get anything from his parents. He helps his parents during peak seasons of farming.

Mr. G, instead of bearing the grudges of his mother and wife, left his parents without taking his share of family property. This would have been impossible say 20 years earlier for his parents would not have been ready to let him separate so easily, leaving him no choice but to take things patiently. This is possible now because he can support his wife and children producing and selling vegetables.

**Case 2:** Informant Mr. R, 20, lives with his wife, son and a daughter. When he was living with his parents, there were four brothers living together. Two elder brothers left home each after having children. He too left his parents three years before with his wife and son. Three separated brothers are living in a single house but each with a different kitchen, which they jointly built five years before. The unmarried youngest brother lives with the parents in the old house. The reason given for leaving their family is a clash of opinions with their father who is still young, just 48 years old. They did not take any land from their parents, for there is hardly any to share.

Mr. R is tenanting 0.5 *ropani* of land and cultivates vegetables for selling. He also purchases vegetables from other farmers and sells them in Baudha (New. Khāsti) and Yen. His elder brothers do not cultivate any land but sell vegetables like himself. He sells vegetables worth anywhere between Rs.600 to Rs.1,200 a day. He has started to represent his conjugal family in higher social organizations, i.e. *guthi*, separately from his parents and observe festivals on his own. Mr. R and his brothers would have become penniless after separation if it were not for the opportunity to cultivate and sell vegetables on an expanding urban market.

**Case 3:** Informant Mr. A, 64, lost his wife four months before and is living alone now. He has four children, two sons and two daughters, all married. His first son separated ten years before after becoming a father of two children and the second one left five years before after having a son. The reason for separation is said to be disharmony between *hāmā* and the brides. Mr. A himself became *jhāḥ womma manu* five years ago and cannot do farming properly. His younger son left him at this stage. He has divided land to his sons who bring him six *muri* (1 *muri* = 90.9 lt) of paddy each year for his living. He still performs *śrāddha* himself with the help of his sons.

The old man says that ever since commercial vegetable farming became possible in this village and people started to sell them in towns, i.e. during the last 15 years, the young boys talk of leaving home, family separation, even leaving helpless old couples and younger offspring. He thinks these youths do not have any patience and do not care for traditional values, *guthi* and culture as a whole and tend to think that they can live without even society. These youths with hot blood are almost foolish and his sons are no different. Further, the brides have started to be more straightforward and rude too. It is to be seen what they will do when they themselves become a *hāmā*.

**Case 4:** Informant Mr. P, 31, is living with his wife, son and a daughter. He was married 9 years earlier and for some time lived with his parents and a younger brother. But his father passed away five years ago and there was an opinion clash with his mother over who would have final say in family management. He separated from his mother and younger brother two years ago. They live in a new house and Mr. P with his own family lives in the old house.

Neighbours say behind his back that he was rude enough to oust his mother. But Mr. P claims that he was unable to tolerate his mother covering-up for his lazy younger brother who just did not care about the work and he had to do everything to feed the whole family. This was too much for him and he decided to separate, knowing the separation would cause division of the little land they had. He was confident he could

support his family by vegetable farming, even though he is not educated. He has been doing exactly that. He manages four *ropanis* of land and produces only paddy in one *ropani*. Another *ropani* is used in producing dry chilli and the rest for commercial vegetable farming. He sells the produce every morning in vegetable markets in Yen and Yala. In one trip he sells vegetables worth Rs.500 to Rs.600 on average. Whatever remains after seed, fertilizers, irrigation and transportation costs is his profit. His wife and even the children help him in harvesting, cleaning and arranging the vegetables for sale.

Mr. P thinks he did right by separating from his mother, although neighbours and relatives have grudges against him. Now, his younger brother has started to work, who otherwise would not have started yet and his mother and younger brother are also living well on their own. Mr. P thinks it is better for all to separate early so that each family head can manage their families in a way that best suits them, making better use of their land and labour. In this regard he points to the Dhuncho Khāen with admiration and insists the Newāḥ must follow their ways in order to become as successful in getting government jobs and in getting along with other ethnic people. He adds these Khāen came from remote hills without a pice and most of them are living better than the Newāḥ in just 50 years. This is good enough proof that the Khāen system is more rational and pragmatic than that of the Newāḥ, always speaking ill of others and not welcoming reforms. But even so, Mr. P represents the family in *guthi* and other supra-familial social organizations.

Case 5: Informant, Mr. C, 25, is living with his wife and three daughters. He says he was an unimportant second son who was adopted by his mother's parents at the age of six, for they had no other child than his mother. He got married eight years earlier and had a child the following year. But as time passed by, he and his wife did not get along with his grandmother, the *hāmā*. So he returned to his parents family. They did not get along with the new family either and separated four years ago. He produces vegetables from one *ropani* of land and sells them in Yen and Khāsti, transporting them in a minibus owned jointly by himself and two other persons from the village. At day time the minibus is used to transport people as a taxi in a bus route in Kathmandu. He is independent and makes a good living on his own. He cannot imagine going back to joint-family living where he would have to bear so many grudges and constraints on his daily activities.

We went through five case studies of Newāḥ (Jyāpu) families. All of them are far removed from the Newāḥ joint family ideal. The most common reason given for family separation was disharmony between the

family members. But this reason is nothing new and existed since historical times. Family separation was not so quick then, not even just one generation earlier. Factors that contribute to the recent speedy separation of Newāḥ families will be discussed in the next section and conclude this paper.

### **Conclusion**

The recent process of modernization of Nepal has brought big changes in the lifestyles and living environments of people in urban, periurban and rural areas in their natural, economic and social aspects. Those living in periurban areas have undergone the most drastic changes, for they are also affected directly and indirectly by changes in the other two areas, in addition to changes in their own area.

The economic aspects of modernization in the study village of Nakadeḥ in the periurban area of Kathmandu valley are; increase in productivity of paddy, commercialization of vegetable farming, easy access to the urban centres of Yen, Yala and Khopa, more job opportunities in government and private offices, more business opportunities, establishment of various factories in and around the village, and rise in demand of labour causing seasonal migration of farm labourers and long-term migration of factory labourers from Kabhre and other rural hill areas. All of these factors increased the incomes of the villagers. Many members of the family other than the head are earning some hard cash individually. Job engagements and cash incomes in some cases necessitated and in many others lured people to have meals outside, to live away from home, and ultimately to separate from other family members. This loosened the traditional bonds of the joint family among Newāḥ, i.e., Jyāpu. Moreover, the family head no longer had effective control over the family, for the adult members could now earn money individually and spend individually and as a result increasingly wanted to run their family in their own way.

An important social aspect of the changes that have been occurring is the greatly increased interaction between different ethnic groups in various fields, thereby strongly influencing each others cultures. Through interacting in day-to-day affairs with Dhuncho Khāen, some of the Newāḥ Jyāpu in Nakadeḥ have been influenced by Khāen social customs, including their family system. Young Jyāpu value the early family separation and nuclear family pattern of the Khatri in the name of greater independence, pragmatism and superficial rationality on an individual basis. They try to acquire this value themselves and separate early with their families forming nuclear families. They also speak out more often voicing their individual opinions and put more straight-out demands to the



family. This weakens the control of the family head in managing the family and loosens the traditional value of living together.

The traditional value and legitimacy of the Newāḥ joint family is being abandoned, mainly due to loss of patience and inclination to individualism. This individualism is aggravated by economic affluence, economic independence, an increase and diversification in income and expenses, a broadening of values, more access to information and more interaction with peoples who have different values. All of these factors are results of the process of modernization which has caused the loss of patience and made individuals think twice about their traditional values. These Newāḥ tend to build new houses in the middle of farmland like the Khāen, away from congested settlements. Researchers and local scholars claim that recently in Newāḥ settlements in Kathmandu valley, younger people tend to separate from their joint families when they are able to afford a kerosine stove for cooking in *derā*. Thus, this phenomenon is not confined to the Jyāpu of Nakadeḥ only.

This phenomenon, if it prevails on a long-term basis, could effect Newāḥ society, its culture and religion. Even the future of Newāḥ towns could be different. This would greatly effect an important part of the culture of the whole of Nepal.

However, modernization and its effect on family systems like the ones among the Newāḥ, could be a phenomenon seen anywhere, in any ethnic group around the world. It remains to be known how far such phenomena have changed the traditional culture and society. Further, it is yet to be seen whether this phenomenon of family changes and early separation of joint family among the Newāḥ is a long-term one, headed in a constructive direction, or the other way round. Could it be a process of Nepalization in the broad sense? Or is it a strategic process to remain united on a long-term basis, with early amicable separation of family, but consolidation of cooperation at supra-familial levels of social organization, such as *guthi*, *phukī* and *khalah*?

In any case, it is essential to grasp these phenomena as changes in the traditional culture and society of an ethnic group. This ethnic group being Newāḥ makes it all the more important, for they have been mainly living in Kathmandu valley, playing a vital role in cultural, social, political and economic aspects of Nepal from historical times and will continue to do so in the future.

**Notes**

1 In concluding this paper I benefitted from floor comments at the International Conference of Anthropology in Kathmandu and various informal talks with Professor Hiroshi Ishii, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. I also received advice and full cooperation from Tulsi Man Duwal and Krishna Kumar Prajapati, both teachers and social workers in the village in conducting field surveys. It is needless to mention the cooperation of villagers and informants in sparing their time. I was aided by Binod Awale, Santosh Maharjan and Krishna Lal Maharjan in data collection. The field trip was financially supported by Makita Scholarship Foundation, Japan. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all.

2 Newari proper nouns, including the names of places and castes, are indicated as such on first usage and are used, though without italics, wherever they have implications for the villagers that differ from those associated with their Nepali equivalents. Both Newari and Nepali words, other than proper nouns, are in italics with Nepali, though not Newari indicated as such ( i.e. by the abbreviation Nep:)

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# **The Household, the Householder and the Neighbourhood in Sherpa Communities of Bauddha and Solu**

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## **Introduction**

The intention of this paper is to show the relative importance of nuclear and extended households in Sherpa communities. I will present data collected in July and August 1992 on 43 Sherpa households in the community of Bauddhanath in Kathmandu valley. Statistically it might be noted that this number represents about 50% of Bauddhanath's Sherpa households while the total number of Sherpa households in and around Kathmandu is approximately 450 households. The settlement of Sherpas in the Bauddhanath area is a relatively recent phenomenon with the arrival of the first migrants counting back no more than about 20 years. They came here, as the data would indicate, in two waves; the first consisting mostly of migrants arriving from work abroad, especially in Assam, some nine to sixteen years ago, and the second, starting about six years ago and continuing up to the present, has migrated from Solu to engage in trade, the carpet industry or trekking and also office work, education or religious activities.

Bauddhanath is a famous religious centre with a number of huge Buddhist monasteries focussing on the ancient central stupa. Besides that there is rapid growth taking place in the dry lands and rice fields in the surrounding area. The carpet industry and all its requirements, such as transportation facilities, spinning wool, restaurants etc. are foremost amongst the attractions for most of the people who come to Bauddhanath in order to make a living. While there was until recently a steady growth in industry, housing for those who came in search of work or just to live by some other means, such as small-scale businesses, is rather expensive. So is building a house, which for urban workers or those coming from the countryside is almost impossible. It is therefore no surprise to find that Sherpas who come to Bauddha commonly try to find help from their established relatives. Just how this works and is conceptualized amongst the Sherpas will be a primary focus of this paper.

A second important concern of my paper will be to compare Sherpa household and family relationships in Bauddha with those that prevail in the Sherpas' home community in Solu Khumbu. Just as some of the

younger generation in Bauddha can no longer speak the Sherpa language, so too are traditional concepts that define relationships, such as the 'bone' and 'flesh' theory (Levine 1981), giving way to more popular theories couched in terms of 'bone' and 'milk'. But prior to accepting the proposition that fundamental cultural as well as social change is taking place in Bauddha one must first ask whether earlier ethnographic accounts of Sherpa kinship and family relationships in Solu Khumbu have perhaps failed to perceive the historical specificities that may underpin the prominence of the concepts that they recorded there. To be more precise, we might ask whether a statistically noticeable increase in the extended household type in the city environment of Bauddhanath is conceptually different, in the householder's perspective, from the values underlying the situation in Solu.

#### Notes on the categorization of the data

The table as shown in the appendix provides a list of the 43 households of the sample according to two main criteria of the questionnaire used in the survey. These are the 'type of living place' and 'the present family pattern'. Further, they were categorized according to other criteria which cannot be treated here.

As to the first criterion, the type of living place, it should be noted that the period of possession of a private house was found to be not the same as the period of residence in Bauddha. Especially households that spent a long time in Assam (see units demarcated by \* in the table) tended to complete the building of their houses before coming to Bauddha. These householders entrusted the actual construction to one particular Sherpa friend, who performed this job for about 15-20 households (not all listed in the sample). He is known as the 'Sherpa engineer'.

As to the 'present family pattern', only those households that did not take in any kin relations, that is, only those without any siblings of the householders or children of their siblings, were recorded as 'nuclear households'. However, if they took in non-kin (*dharma putra* 'adopted son', *dharma putri* 'adopted daughter' or permanent *kām garne* 'attached labour' <sup>1</sup>), they were recorded as members of the nuclear household.

Listed as nuclear households, then, were those whose members share a 'common hearth', even if some of them were not fully or juridically separated from their parents' households (they had to pay less rent or were not listed separately in communal ceremonial affairs, for example). On the other hand, if the householders said that even though they lived apart from their parents they still shared a lot of meals together, then the household was included with that of the parents under the category of 'extended household'.

Households that took in a sibling's child and cared for it have been listed as 'lineal extended households'. I have also included in this category one household exhibiting a polygynous feature, in that some of the children of the first wife (living in Khumbu) are living together with the household of the second wife in Bauddha.

'Lineal extended households' comprise those households whose members live and eat together with their parents even after the latter's marriage has ended. This category also includes those cases in which parents only live part of the time with their adult children. This seems a reasonable criterion when those households have not yet split up, either juridically (succession) or in terms of property (inheritance). This categorization is also applied when the household's head is already the son but his parents are living permanently with him.

### **Presentation of the data**

All of the nine cases (see appendix) categorized as 'lateral extended households' are either households that can easily be extended, given that they possess a private house (six cases), or are ones that do not have other near relations they can live with (at least not in Bauddha) and are under pressure to establish a common household (as have households nos. 8a, 12 and 37).

All of the eight cases categorized as 'lineal extended households' (8 cases) are either those which will probably at some future time be handed over to a son (nos. 5, 30 and 34) or else those in which offspring, in migrating from Solu to Bauddha, brought their parents with them. Five of these eight cases involve persons who live in their own house or in that of their parents. Another household was established in the house of the parents of the wife—an arrangement whereby the husband is referred to as a *magpa* (a residential son-in-law). In this case, however, he brought his own parents to live with him in Bauddha. In two other cases the extension of the household include siblings' children. Lateral and lineal extended households, even though amounting to just 40% of all households, account for ten out of a total of 22 'private houses'. Thus owners of houses are proportionally somewhat more likely to have extended households.

Of the eight cases of 'nuclear households established in the house of a near relative', three contain no children of their own. For them, inclusion in what we may call a 'house-community' or what the Sherpas might call a *tsali* (metaphorically translated as 'joint family' by them) seems to offer primarily the advantage of being cared for and interacting with others, because households themselves are considered economically independent.

The connectedness of households on a social level is not necessarily correlative with economic ties. Still, some cases might suggest this; within

two of the house-communities, some households are related as shareholders of a carpet business and through side jobs involving wool spinning. Economic or work-related ties, however, are only maintained in work-intensive fields, such as the carpet or trekking businesses. In most cases members of households, whether house-communities or single households, are not involved in the same kind of job or profession. Certainly a concentration of carpet-industry activities may be noted in Baudha, but a more important factor than the maintenance of an economic network in accounting for the endurance of house-communities seems to be the already mentioned aspect of being cared for by and interacting with people of one's own culture. These aspects are important not only for the three rather intensely related house-communities that might regard themselves as 'joint families' (so one householder explicitly stated) or as *tsalis* (the short form for *tsenga tsali*, the bilateral kinship network among the Sherpas), but for all Sherpa households. Even in Sherpa carpet factories it is observable that being cared for in the sense of being offered help in times of illness and involved in ritual affairs is in fact an important aspect of the relation between employer and employee, who nearly always live in the same house.

We come then, to the category of 'nuclear households in their own houses'. Besides this category accounting for family enterprises, the effective economic unit being the nuclear family (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964:39; Ortner 1978:39), one additional feature of this category is that it facilitates the generation of surplus income through renting out flats. Insofar as the house is not the only source of income through rent, the status involved in being able to live in a house of one's own seems to be heightened by taking in permanently a *dharma putra/i* or *kām garne*. On the other hand, for those who can sustain themselves only by letting out flats—this sub-category contains four households, nos. 9, 10, 23 and 24 of the total of twelve cases—there seems to be something restraining them from taking in a *kām garne* or a *dharma putra/i*. People might otherwise say that if they can take in a servant, why don't they take in Sherpas as boarders (for whom, as members of a traditional, redistributive society, the rent would of course be lower). This seems obviously the fact for household no. 10, which is among the most wealthy in the sample. Four other households have given flats to relatives (18, 24, 28, 39). Four households (29, 32, 35, 42) have taken in a *dharma putra/i* or a *kām garne*. Household 22, that of the 'Sherpa engineer' mentioned above, is the only one comprising two houses, the second one given over to flats for relatives and other Sherpas.

The last category of the sample concerns six cases of 'nuclear households in houses of non-relatives'. The members reckon the difference

between relatedness and non-relatedness in terms of the districts they originally came from (East nos. 2,3 and 4). They are thus not necessarily from the same clan and village. One of these households lives in a Tamang's house and is included here for reasons of analysis. One common feature of all those who live in the houses of non-kin is that they belong to the lower scale of income and wealth. In three cases, these are households that manage small hotels or canteens, rented from Sherpas in two cases and from a Tamang in the other. A further common feature of five of the six households is that the members live and cook in one room only; in the case of canteens the members have their beds segregated from the 'hotel' room by a curtain. As soon as a household has a second room, it may be said to have risen in social status. Finally, the claim of five of the six householders that they have no relations in the locality should be assessed in the light of the words of one canteen owner: 'When our relatives become wealthier, they feel shame in talking with us'. It follows that those who are rather less than equal, in Sherpa *nyamchung*, find no place in a closely knit house-community that would call itself a *tsali* or 'joint family'.

### **Reasons for the importance of extended households and 'joint families'**

Now what are the reasons for the importance of extended households in Bauddha? One aspect which comes to the fore lies in the history of the single families. Twelve of the households of the sample have spent a long time in India, especially in Assam. Eight of them have attained some wealth through work there and were able to build houses in Bauddha. Some of their houses were already built before they went to live there. They include one of the nine lateral extended households and three of the eight lineal extended households, including one sixteen-member household. The head of this household says that they have acquired the habits of the Marwaris.<sup>2</sup> From a statistical viewpoint, however, only four of the twelve households coming from Assam are extended households, which preserves the balance with the sample's overall total of seventeen extended households out of 43 households.

A further plausible reason for the relatively high number of extended households is that it results from the urban situation as such. Since living space is expensive, and one has to pay between 600 and 900 rupees per room, the tendency would be to keep up common households as long as possible after the marriage of a child. A further effect of the urban context may be the tendency to offer accommodation to relatives who come to Kathmandu in search of work or education.

The support of family members through the extension of the household as an outgrowth of the urban situation seems to be a feature of all eight cases of lineal extended households. It has to be remembered, however,

that it is customary among Sherpas for the youngest son to stay with his parents even after marriage. The cases of lateral extended households found among the Sherpas may be explained only insufficiently on the basis of emergency situations or alternatively on that of the usual concept of the 'joint family' as being made up of those who are related through a common ancestor and having a 'common hearth'. Only in one of the nine lateral-extended cases are we confronted with the classical situation of a household being kept undivided among the brothers of one father after the latter's death. And only in two further cases do reasons of functional emergency seem supportable, and one of them is not even an extension of a nuclear household but a foundation of a household by three related young men for the purpose of setting up a trekking business.

The remaining six cases, whose common feature is that they include siblings' children and single siblings (or also grandchildren), are significant because there are also two households that exhibit this feature in the lineal extended category. Further, eight of the 26 nuclear households have been accepted into the house of a relative, in only two cases into the house of the husband's parents. However, most of these households consider themselves to be part of the 'joint family' of the house-community.

If we analyze households like those of the Sherpas in urban communities, not in terms of the usual definition of nuclear and joint family, but rather on the basis of the individual conceptualizations formulated by the householders themselves, then in most cases the statistical relation will alter in favor of the extended household. This is so because, from the perspective of the householders, relatedness in terms of caring and interaction seems at least as important as the economic independence of the nuclear household, the latter being quite vulnerable in an economy like Nepal's.

Finally I would like to give some reasons why I believe that the situation in Bauddha is not that much different from the one in Solu.

1. Although in Solu every son (except the youngest normatively) will usually have his own house after marriage, the difference between Bauddha and Solu is only one of scale and not really of kind (even a room is called *khang*, usually meaning 'house' in Tibetan and Sherpa). Where there is plenty of land in Solu, the sons can build their own houses on the land originally belonging to their father (and there form an independent economic unit). In Bauddha children receive a flat of their own, if possible, but not necessarily, in the house of their parents.

2. The household structure in Bauddha is not much different from that of Solu. Even in Solu we find that the household may include a sibling's child



or grandchild—either for *pālne* (Nep. 'rearing', Sh. *soab*), *sambhanda* (Nep. 'keeping up relations', Sh. *trok meche*) or *sevā* (Nep. 'service', Sh. *dalca*) as a form of respect. Despite the importance for the Bauddha Sherpas of the idiomatic change from the traditional concept of *sya* (flesh) to the Nepali concept of *dudh* (milk) to refer to the matrilineal transmission of maternal substance, the newly derived Hindu concept is nevertheless still located in the typically Tibetan context of three inter-related substance codes i.e. 'bone' (*ru*) to refer to paternal substance transmitted patrilineally, 'blood' (*t'ag*) to refer to paternal substance transmitted matrilineally, and now the Hindi 'milk' (*dudh*). Though this idiomatic change almost certainly reflects a decline in the status of women in Bauddha,<sup>3</sup> as regards household composition the retention of the triadic substance code provides ideological support for the co-residence of all three kin categories. These concepts are thus not only a 'model of' society but also a 'model for' ordering social relations (even if applied unconsciously). In Solu, however, we probably do not find cases (as in Bauddha) of a son bringing his parents to live with him in the house of his wife's parents.<sup>4</sup>

3. The house-communities in Bauddha also contain households that are not closely related to the house owner. Here we have to recognize that in well-functioning house-communities criteria like clan and former village membership, or even common district origin, are sufficient for a person to acquire the status of a sister or brother in certain circumstances. These also seem to be the necessary conditions for achieving membership in a 'joint family', which the Sherpas call a *tsali*. In Solu it is at least an impropriety to address someone of one's own neighbourhood by name instead of a kinship term.

4. Last but not least I would like to point out a more abstract aspect. The concept of the 'joint family' was predominantly developed from the Indian context. In India, however, the hearth, because it is a 'vessel' (Srinivas 1952) of the fire, also expresses rather strongly their concept of purity/impurity. This also means that in the context of the household the economically most important unit and the socially most important unit are nearly identical. Thus the 'common hearth' is there of the utmost importance. In the Buddhist context, on the other hand, it is less fire and more water through which the value orientations of the society find positive expression—the water-place connecting different households, for example. It is their orientation towards a morality of generosity, mutual support and reciprocity that lies at the heart of the Sherpa concept of purity and which finds symbolic expression here. For the Sherpa such

values are in many contexts of greater importance than the maintenance of economically self-sufficient relations around the common hearth.

**Appendix: Presentation of the data of the sample's 43 households**

LATERAL EXTENDED HOUSEHOLDS	TOTAL	PERCENT
2 <u>6</u> 8a 12 <u>15*</u> <u>31</u> <u>36</u> 37 <u>41</u>	9	20.9%
LINEAL EXTENDED HOUSEHOLDS		
<u>5*</u> 11 <u>17*</u> 19 <u>20*</u> <u>30</u> 33 <u>34</u>	8	18.6%
NUCLEAR HOUSEHOLDS IN A RELATIVE'S HOUSE		
1 13 14 16 20 21 25* 38*	8	18.6%
NUCLEAR HOUSEHOLDS IN THEIR OWN HOUSE		
<u>9</u> <u>10*</u> ( <u>18*</u> ( <u>22</u> <u>23</u> ( <u>24</u> ( <u>28</u> <u>29</u> <u>32*</u> <u>35</u> ( <u>39*</u> <u>42</u>	12	27.9%
NUCLEAR HOUSEHOLDS IN A NON-RELATIVE'S HOUSE		
3* 4 7 8 27* 40	6	14.0%
	43	100.0%

\* households that came from Assam.

- households in own house.

( nuclear households that took relatives into their own house.

**Notes**

1 The term 'attached labour', as coined by Hiroshi Ishii at the seminar on anthropology in Zürich in 1990, is probably the most reliable translation of Nepalese house work relations, since besides still often accounting for a degrading relation (as told by S. Shah in his talk on domestic workers at the SASON Conference 1992, Kathamndu) it seems that they can easily turn into familiar ones.

2 A valuable study of the 'joint family' system among the Marwaris has been made by Zivetz, 1992.

3 This might be reflected in the greater retreat of women into domestic affairs after marriage, though on the other hand, parents like to spend more on their daughters' education nowadays.

4 It is also noteworthy, with reference to B. Campbell's paper (this volume), that work relations within a house-community may be restricted through the traditional concept of informal labour (Sh. *ngalak*), according to which exchange of labour among those who are related by marriage (Nep. *samdhi*), especially between boys and girls, is a kind of social taboo. Thus informal labour is practically confined to households of the same patri-group, or what the Sherpas call *nangba*.

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# Emergence of a Hill-town: Urban Development in Nepal's Rural Backhills

Prayag Raj Sharma

## What is a hill-town?

In the present paper I propose to conduct some broad enquiries into questions of the origins, typology and processes of administrative growth of hill-towns in Nepal in general, and of Chainpur in particular. All of this, I believe, should shed important light on the development of urbanization in Nepal from the early nineteenth century through to the end of the Rana regime in 1951, and even later.

Chainpur today, cut off and isolated from the nearest roadhead by a two-days walk, is part of the rural milieu of the Sankhuwasabha district in the Koshi zone. Yet it has some distinct features with respect both to its architectural and its socio-cultural ambience, both of which serve to set it apart from the amorphous mass of the rural settlements dominated by the peasantry. However, from a modernistic point of view, Chainpur even now does not have the minimum civic amenities characteristic of a modern urban centre or town. Nevertheless, those who had helped to establish it in the nineteenth century had intended it to function as some sort of a servicing centre, and in building it from scratch they necessarily incorporated some degree of planning. Such a place came to be known as a *bajār* (from the Persian *bāzār*), meaning a market.

How has Chainpur fared in all these decades since its establishment, and how should we view its urban character today? Is it indeed justifiable to refer to it as urban at all? Has it been left behind or by-passed by subsequent events and in so doing lost its former urban characteristics? However, before attempting to answer such questions let me first briefly outline both the history and the physical features of Chainpur.

## Physical features of Chainpur

Chainpur, as we know it today, is a small hill-*bajār* settlement some two days walk north-east of Dhankuta. It is inhabited almost entirely by Newar migrants hailing either directly from Patan and Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu valley, or from Bhojpur-Taksar, west of the Arun. The original settlers, who probably arrived there in the early nineteenth century, began by setting up shops and trading in diverse items of household consumption, including the manufacture and sale of brass and other metal wares in the surrounding rural areas. As such, it may be

identified as one of the many Newar diaspora settlements (Fürer-Haimendorf 1962:27) which dot the hills of Nepal from east to west. Its population today consists of about 1,200 souls divided into about 240 households. Thus, in the manner of its colonization and settlement, most notably in the prominent part played by the mercantile community of Newar craftsmen, Chainpur shares many features in common with other similar settlements elsewhere in the hills of Nepal.

The *bajār* is situated on a ridge-top along a slope at a height of 1,330 metres above sea level. It stretches from west to east for three-quarters of a kilometre, consisting of a single file of houses built along one main road forming its central axis. One offshoot settlement extends north about 200 metres as far as the site of Baktewar Mahadev temple and the recently constructed Bodhisattva vihara, a Buddhist monastic building in the Theravada tradition. In contrast to the rural settlements of the surroundings, Chainpur is a compact habitation with houses mostly built in the typical Newar multi-storeyed terrace-style found in the major urban centres of Kathmandu valley. The road is laid along a gentle gradient and is paved with large flagstones marked by evenly paced intervals. There are also well-built drains to take the run-off water during heavy rain. The natural hollows and depressions of the hill contour along the road are raised on embankments of dry stone masonry to maintain the smoothness of the gradient. The houses lining the street are up to four stories high with white-washed plaster facades surrounding large window frames, projecting wooden balconies and verandahs with shops and workshops on the ground floor facing the street, frequently decorated with flower pots. At the western end of the town there is an open ground called Tundikhel where the weekly market (*hāṭī*) is held on Fridays. Apart from these the settlement is adorned with stucco and brick temples, a Buddhist votive stupa (New. *cibhāh*) and a couple of Buddhist monasteries, all built in the accepted architectural styles of the Hindu and Buddhist canonical texts. Like the houses of the settlements, the religious constructions also follow the Newar building styles seen in Kathmandu valley. At the lower locality (*tol*) of the town there is a double-storeyed public resthouse (*pāṭī* and/or *pauwā*). This building, which is known as the Major Pāṭī, was built in 1867 by the Basnyat descendants of the founder of Chainpur. It is an elaborate structure of polished bricks, tiles, carved window-frames, pillars and wooden beams, and is an exact replica of similar structures to be found in Kathmandu valley. Among the temples dedicated to the Hindu deities, the Gaṇeś and Bhīmsen temples are, as is always the case with Hindu Newars, especially prominent (Sharma, Dahal and Gurung 1991:27–31).

It is, I think, clear from the evidence above that Chainpur not only differs in numerous ways from its surrounding villages, but that most of

such differences point to its close affinity with the major urban centres of Kathmandu valley. Nevertheless, throughout most of its life the town has existed without any tap-water (first installed as late as 1957), electricity, public toilets or a sewerage system. Similarly, its population has never been either as dense or as professionally diverse as is generally the case in either towns or cities. Indeed, in all of these respects Chainpur has not fared any better than the peasant villages in its vicinity. The function, character and status of the *bajār*-settlement derives from a set of historical circumstances that led to its origin, as also to the origins of other similar hill-towns in Nepal. Though these settlements, in my opinion, had initially held the nuclei of potential townships, the fact that they subsequently failed to attain that potential was a consequence of development trends that occurred elsewhere in Nepal in subsequent decades. I will attempt to indicate this in the following paragraphs.

Large-scale Newar migration into the interior hills of Nepal began only after the political expansion that occurred under the Gorkha rulers during the nineteenth century. This new and enlarged political entity sought to consolidate its administrative and military base in the remote hinterlands by setting up such incipient *bajār*-settlements and installing its army garrisons near them. Those people best equipped to establish such *bajār*-towns could be none other than the skilled Newar traders of the Kathmandu valley.

The Nepali-speaking hill-states in the pre-unification period were basically agrarian peasant states ruled by a thin crust of upper-caste Hindus in a landed feudal set-up. In their rugged hilly tracts their subsistence agriculture was less than prosperous, hardly producing any surplus supportive of either trade or craftwork. The strength of these states lay more in refining their military vocation and territorial conquest. The Newars, by contrast, had a more developed sense of economy, and succeeded in building up a rich civilization amidst a web of their social, economic and artistic experience over a long span of time. Gorkha was among the states to recognize at an early date the potential of Newar skill in trade and building and had arranged to settle Newars in its territory from the seventeenth century onwards. If the Gorkha conquest of the Newar states had led to the all too familiar repetition of the political annexation of the vanquished people's territory by the victor, it also underscored the fact that the victor's group acceded to the superiority of much of the artistic heritage of the Newars. Newar skill and expertise was fully acknowledged by the Gorkhas which they used in establishing a system of civil, revenue and land administration in the outlying districts. At the same time the Newars were quick to take advantage of the new political framework of the Gorkha state for building up a trading and

commercial network and for transporting their manufacturing, weaving and other skills to the many newly accessible markets opening up in the interior hills of Nepal. The emergence of hill-towns was therefore a result of a coincidence of fortuitous circumstances. The increase in the rate of Newar migration outside the Kathmandu valley is then easy to understand.

### **The history of Chainpur**

The present area of Chainpur lies in what in native geographical terminology has been called the 'Pallo Kirant' (the far Kirant region), describing the land east of the river Arun. Before, and even for some time after, the unification of Nepal, Chainpur designated not only the town, but also the whole area of the eastern hill tracts extending from the east of Arun to the borders of Sikkim. Culturally and linguistically it was predominantly Limbu country, whilst politically it was defined by a fuzzy frontier over which political claims and counter-claims were made simultaneously by the local Limbu chieftains, by the Sikkimese and even by the Tibetans. Informants at Chainpur recount how the place in former times was called Gola Bajār (Lewis and Shakya 1988:53), signifying its Bhote or Tibetan association. Abhimansingh Basnyat and Partha Bhandari first conquered this area for Gorkha in A.D.1774. However, it would seem that political jurisdiction over the area had not been firmly established by that date. It is said in a document of A.D.1791 that the Tibetans, probably supported by the Sikkimese, incited and backed the Limbus and the Lepchas to revolt against the Gorkhas in Chainpur. But the Gorkhas in a powerful second campaign made a surprise attack at Siddhipur, a little above Chainpur, and succeeded in killing an entire army of some five to seven thousand men (Vajracharya and Nepal 1957: 52-54). The commander of the victorious Gorkha force was Kazi Bakhtabarsingh Basnyat, a man who had also played a prominent part in the initial establishment of Chainpur Bajār. The circumstances of the founding of Chainpur are recorded in detail in an inscription of A.D. 1867, which was commissioned by Bakhtabarsingh Basnyat's sons and is located in front of Major Pati. It proceeds as follows:

In Vikram Samvat 1848 (A.D. 1791) the enemy attacked Pallo Kirant. King Ranabahadur Shah ordered Sardar Keharsingh's son, Kazi Bakhatbarsingh Basnyat, to lead a company of the army, kill the enemy, and reestablish normality there. The king's command was accepted with bowed head for due fulfilment. An army was taken out to fight the enemy at Siddhipur. The battle was won, the enemy killed, and peace and order reestablished. As the Kazi was spending his days in happiness after the event, there was news for him from Kantipur city (Kathmandu) that he had been blessed with the birth of his eldest son,

Prasadsingh Basnyat. Having been made happy, the Kazi made appropriate gifts and grants of titles to Umraos (i.e. officers of the local militia appointed in strategic postings) and local gentry. He feted the Brahmans, ascetics, bards, beggars and other guests and poor people, gave them gifts of grain and cloth, and made them happy. Next, he resolved to donate a more enduring form of charity. So in Chainpur he ordered a *hitī* (Newari term for a water spout, a common sight in Kathmandu) and a garden. He named it Bakhatsundar *hitī* and Manaraji garden. He went to have an audience with the King and described what he had done. Pleased with the acts of the Kazi, the King gave him his approval and conferred on the Kazi's name a land endowment (a *jagera guthi*) for the sustenance of Bakhatsundar *hitī* and Manaraji garden. The endowed land lay in the revenue borders (*ambal*) of Chainpur market and within the four directional limits of Chanhaudiya, Vyasikhola and Rumte. Kazi Bakhatbarsingh Basnyat also appointed Tularam Upadhyay Gotame as custodian of the Bakhatbarsingh *hitī* and Manaraji garden *guthi* (trust, charity) and made him responsible for planting flowers of different kinds and for rendering the garden beautiful. On special days, the Kazi arranged to have *rudri* (recitation of excerpts from the Śuklayājurveda in praise of Śiva) performed, and Brahmans to be fed. Later, Kazi Bakhatbarsingh's eldest son, Kazi Prasadsingh Basnyat, his middle son Kazi Kulmansingh Basnyat, and his youngest son Kazi Hitmansingh Basnyat, ordered the same Brahman *guthi* keeper to build a public rest-house (*pauwā*) and set up an idol (phallic) of Bakhteswar Mahadev (to the memory of their now deceased father) and to perform daily worship of the deity. After that Kazi Kulmansingh Basnyat and Kazi Meghgambhirsingh Basnyat had an inscription installed affixing their seal of approval and detailing in it the mode and items of expenditure on income made from the *guthi* land, such expenses being those incurred on daily worship and recitation of *rudri* to Bakhteswar Mahadev, providing food to Brahmans, donation of gifts in the month of Baisakh (April/May), expenses for the organization of festivals, expenses for lamp oil, chanting of devotional hymns, food expenses for singers at the Bhīmsen temple, repairs and maintenance costs incurred on temples and the public rest-house, payments for sustenance made to masons, carpenters, temple priest, the Brahman *guthi* custodian, rest-house keeper, drum-beaters and *banadar*. (Naraharinath 1965:757-758. Free translation by me)

The detailed citation above helps us to understand the circumstances attending the foundation of the *bajār* of Chainpur at such an early date as A.D.1791. The Basnyat family responsible for laying the *bajār*'s foundation in its present form had probably never been more than absentee landlord there. Similarly, the Brahman *guthi* custodian had probably never stayed within the town limits of Chainpur, but came from one of the



villages outside. Thus, both the planning and initial populating of Chainpur was left entirely to Newars. Although there is no direct mention of the Newars in the above document, one cannot mistake their presence through the use of terms like *hitī*, and reference to masons and carpenters, who undoubtedly must have been members of this community. Today, Chainpur is entirely a Newar settlement consisting of the Hindu Śreṣṭhas and Buddhist Banras (mainly Śākya). The former are merchants, having specialised in general trade, while the latter are mainly manufacturers of brass and metal wares. Therefore, the layout of Chainpur, the constructional style of its houses, cobbled streets, its temples and Buddhist monasteries, and its celebration of such festivals as Gāijātrā, Lakhejātrā etc. clearly identify it as a modified version of a typical Kathmandu valley Newar town.

Chainpur was regarded as having a high strategic and military importance by the Shah rulers. As a military stronghold, an army garrison (*kampani tilinga*) was kept nearby. This meant that a lot of prime land had to be set aside for the garrison's use. In addition, the region needed a revenue and administrative base. The first Newars to go to Chainpur must have been civil and revenue administrators, or caretakers of state-owned and private lands belonging to the large landowners. The development of a *bajār* or market-place was most likely an obvious extension of the trading activities which they most keenly performed. Once established the market must have been perceived as useful by the local inhabitants, as also by the civil and military personnel quartered in its vicinity. The creation of an early servicing centre in this hill-town was a consequential outcome. Newar expertise must have been in high demand for maintaining land records, for income realization from the land in the form of its produce and for selling, accounting and properly crediting it in cash or otherwise to the accounts of the non-resident landowner. No doubt, all this is now a hypothetical, though nonetheless still plausible, reconstruction. A short inscription of A.D.1839 at Kharang, a few kilometres downhill from Chainpur settlement, says that a Newar mint specialist (*taksāri*) Sahebsingh Pradhan, from Bhaktapur Tulacche locality (*fol*) came to Chainpur as a *gumastā* (agent or caretaker of land) of an apparently absentee landowner in Kathmandu (Naraharinath 1965:760).

Chainpur's growth has had its ups and downs in the following decades. While it grew for a while, this process later on slowed down, and even halted, in the administrative reorganizations held by the centre from time to time. An even more important district centre sprang up to the south of it in Dhankuta. It grew rapidly to become more than a district, but rather a regional centre for the entire eastern hills. The north-south trade route from Kimathanka in northern Sankhuwasabha and from Taplejung regions

that formerly passed through Chainpur, enhancing its trading centre, now began to gravitate directly to Dhankuta, by-passing Chainpur completely. Consequently, Dhankuta grew bigger, both in size and importance, than Chainpur. Chainpur existed only as one of the smaller and minor district centres until 1967. In this year, Chainpur suffered yet another stroke of adverse administrative decision-making by the then government under Surya Bahadur Thapa, according to which all but one district government office were to be shifted to a newly designated district headquarters at Khandbari. With this, Chainpur's hopes of physical growth and its elevation to an urban status in modern times, have been dashed to the ground. On the contrary, Khandbari has experienced a measure of growth and development, and has turned from being a small and obscure village into a crowded and expanding government and business centre. Chainpur, on the other hand, has the appearance of an empty and deserted ghost town. Chainpur's case, however, appears to be a little different from other ghost towns of similar circumstances in Nepal. Talking to the inhabitants today they appear determined to overcome whatever difficulties they may have to contend with. There is something close to local patriotism in their attitude towards the town and they seem to be little inclined to move away permanently in search of better places to live. One indication of the truth of this surmise may lie in the way the people have doggedly tried to keep up the brass industry. Their industry and improvisation in metal craft-work has brought Chainpur some recognition and secured for it an export market.

From the 1980s on, eastern Nepal's hills have been opened up to a prospect of new development brought forth by the construction of motorable roads. The first major road to be built in these parts was the British aided Dharan-Dhankuta road, which was completed in 1983. In the following years this road was extended further north to Hile, and from there further on to Basantapur, bringing Chainpur very close to the road-head within one and a half-day's walking distance. Now an access road from Basantapur to the site of the Arun 111 hydroelectric dam construction site in Num has been surveyed and its alignment completed which will put Chainpur on the road map. This has aroused fresh hope in the minds of Chainpur natives for its development, and for making-up its lost opportunities in the past. In the latest political twists in the alignment of the access road to the Arun 111 dam site, one hears, however, that the road plan linking Chainpur with Basantapur has been abandoned, and a more direct route to the dam construction site along the banks of the Arun river down from Hile has been finalised instead.

### The status of Chainpur

What status can the *bajār* of Chainpur be said to enjoy in urban classification at this juncture? Without any road link, without much of a service role to play in the development of the region, and with its diminished role in trade and commerce, Chainpur has suffered a substantial set-back. There has been no growth in it for several decades now, and time hangs virtually still for it. Only the brass work of Chainpur has defied this stagnation, and does try to keep itself alive. In comparison, some other hill-towns which came to be established in similar circumstances have apparently fared better than Chainpur. A striking nearby example is Dhankuta. This rapidly developing town has been fortunate enough to receive administrative support for its uninterrupted growth and for securing for itself urban stature from the beginning to this day. It is linked by one of the best-constructed roads to Dharan in the foothills. Its servicing infrastructure in terms of the number of government district and regional offices, as well as those of other private and semi-private agencies, has considerably expanded. Not surprisingly, its population has gone up. All this has placed Dhankuta in a relatively better situation than Chainpur. But whether all this has been truly helpful for it we will consider a little later.

Notwithstanding everything, Chainpur can be far from equated with a common peasant village. There can be no mistaking the urban urge behind its creation from day one. It was raised from a total wilderness in the hills of the Arun basin, in the making of which one sees many proofs of conscious and unconscious planning effort. Its character, form and architectural elements, its order and overall alignment, all seem to proclaim and affirm its urban character. More importantly, perhaps Chainpur could also be seen as a radical extension of the same urban movement developed in Kathmandu valley over the millenium. Not only in Chainpur, but also elsewhere in other similar hill-towns of Nepal, the basic concepts of architectural planning and building seem to have been extrapolated from the towns of the Kathmandu valley. In many hill-towns, even the localities (*tol*) in several instances are given the same names as those in Kathmandu valley's three towns. In these respects, therefore, the hill-towns might very well be seen as the transplants of a single urban model. As to the location of the hill-towns on ridge-tops, this has probably to do with topography, as also with strategic and climatic considerations about which the new militant rulers might have had a greater say.

The capital cities of the three Newar states in the past—Kantipur (Kathmandu), Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur—the real inspirational sources of these hill-towns most fully represent Nepal's indigenous form of urban evolution. In the whole of Nepal, only these three towns came to

earn the name and distinction of a proper city in the eyes of the people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*tin sahar Nepāl*). They were, however, cities in a pre-modern sense. Before their transformation into the metropolises of the late twentieth century, these three towns had probably neither been nor looked significantly different in their basic elements from the later hill-towns, except in their aims and topography. In the case of Kathmandu and Patan their transformation from pre-modern towns into a modern capital city has been favoured by history and other attending circumstances. This transformation became possible, and these two cities could proceed on their perpetual career of growth and expansion, because of a measure of continuity and economic support they have enjoyed over time. This urban Newar model of Kathmandu valley is indeed the only indigenous urban model available in the hills of Nepal.

### The hill-towns

Caplan, writing about Belaspur Bazaar ( a pseudonym), a hill-town of west Nepal, has made an insightful observation that such towns constitute 'an outgrowth not of any urbanising tendencies within the local peasantry, but of the military and administrative needs of the expanding Gorkha empire' (Caplan 1975:5). The case of Chainpur serves to illustrate this point as much as any other similarly situated town elsewhere.

Of the total number of hill-towns in Nepal, the great majority originated in the aftermath of Gorkha political unification. Some of them, like Banepa, Dhulikhel, Dolakha and Trisuli-Nuwakot were the outgrowths of the Newar political period before Gorkha, being urban centres of the pre-modern type in the late-Malla period itself. The other hill-towns like Gorkha, Tanahun and Kaski (Pokhara) were established by the Chaubisi rulers of these states inviting the Newars of Kathmandu valley to settle in them. All these and subsequent hill-towns which multiplied on the same principle provided an outlet for internal trade and commerce, and a venue for local administration in the district. Coming down to the Rana period, the kingdom of Nepal was divided into a total of 36 districts—an arrangement that lasted until the 1960s when they were replaced by 75 development districts. Out of these older 36 districts, many were located in the eastern and western hills and most contained a town which had initially been established as a district centre. During the Rana period these district centres were ranked into three grades according to size and the presence of district or regional administration located in them, as well as by reference to the importance of their geographical position. The smallest district administrative centre was called a fort (*garhi*). Its very name suggested its location on a hill-top or ridge. Some forts, as at Caplan's Belaspur, were substantial and well-built structures, though the

majority were little more than roughly built and improvised walled enclosures for the use of the army. Most of these are now fallen with scarcely a trace left. Larger than a *garhi*, though also built on ridge-tops, were those centres called *gaunda*. Finally, there were the largest district centres (*goswara*), each with their own substantial pool of offices and enjoying both a greater degree of administrative jurisdiction and a regional treasury function (Agrawal 1976: 78).

In today's context, these hill-towns have enjoyed varying degrees of luck in determining the circumstances of their growth and development. As a result of periodic government reviews some of them have made a successful passage into the municipal towns of today. In such circumstances some district capitals have retained their administrative functions along with their enhanced urban role. But all the erstwhile district capitals have not met with the same fate regarding their sustained development over the years. Chainpur itself is a prominent example of this omission, for its former importance as a local administrative centre has not only shrunk, but had almost ceased to exist by 1967. There are today a total of 36 recognised municipal towns in Nepal. One rule of thumb in the granting of municipal status to a settlement is the size of its population, which should be 10,000 people or more. By this rule, district centres like Ilam, Dhankuta, Dhulikhel-Banepa, Pokhara, Tansen and Silghari-Dipayal, which belonged to the class of our classic hill-towns of yesteryear, have managed to climb to the new elevated urban status. Some other older historical hill-towns, such as Bandipur in Tanahun along with Chainpur, have had to undergo a reverse experience and in so doing have been compelled to stagnate.

New economic trends and new market forces that have developed in Nepal since the 1950's have drastically altered the pattern of urbanization and population movement. This new trend is heralded by the increasing construction of vehicular roads into the hills and in the plains of the Tarai. As more roads are constructed, this trend is gaining force all over Nepal. The economic and marketing trends introduced by the construction of the roads and their implications for development provide the main focus of the book *Nepal in Crisis*, by Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon. They write:

A significant factor in the recent development of a number of entirely new urban centres with no administrative function is the building of major roads. Contemporary reports certainly indicate a striking response, in terms of population movement and migration to the building of roads (Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 1980: 132)

They further write:

There is, however, sufficient evidence to show that the rate of growth of the small, new urban centres on the road is significantly greater than that of centres off the road, of whatever size; there is also a strong indication that larger centres on the road have grown at a greater rate than the larger centres off the road. Many of the larger urban centres, however, not only lie on the road, but have also experienced very considerable expansion of the government offices and facilities located within their boundaries. Some like Damauli (a new roadside district centre of Tanahun district on the Prithwi highway, down at the valley bottom) did not exist before the coming of the roads, but simultaneously experienced a massive influx of official personnel (133).

There are also other pertinent conclusions to be drawn from this book. For instance, the construction of vehicular roads has resulted in the ever-deeper penetration of India's industrial markets inside Nepal. In an increasing confirmation of this trend since the study of Blaikie et.al., Indians in Nepal have been coming in larger and larger numbers in the form of semi-skilled labourers, retail and bulk traders, contractors and transport workers. Many of these immigrants have been settling down in the vicinity of the popular road-side markets. Impromptu tea-stalls spring up on busy junctures, where foot-trails from several directions converge at an early stage in road construction. These hutments gradually tend to grow and multiply and, in time, assume the appearance of straggling shanties of semi-permanent construction, catering primarily to bus travellers and vehicle drivers and road-cleaners. The main items on sale are tea, refreshments, meals and liquor. This has become a common sight on the roads of Nepal, with many such settlements taking the form of slums in their prevailing civic state. In the development jargon, people have called this phenomenon 'strip-development'. Some of these road-side market locations, when helped by favourable circumstances, get a little more prosperous than others with more retail shops and more variety of common consumer goods selling in them, but, above all, serving as convenient shopping centres for the most basic necessary items, such as salt and kerosene, to villagers in the hills. Since the 1950s, with the introduction of the motorable roads and eradication of malaria in the Tarai region, the traditional, age-old 'north-south' pattern of trade has undergone a complete change. The movement of people and goods now takes place mostly in a unilinear direction, that is, it comes in only from the south.

The construction of roads in the hills has been marked by yet another distinct trend. Bigger markets and larger business centres nowadays are increasingly inclined to shift from ridge-tops to valley bottoms, where they can find a flat strip of land, usually along the tableland. Some of the obvious examples of this trend are presented by Trisuli-Nuwakot, which

has now shifted to Bidur; by Bandipur, which moved down to Damauli; and by Silgarhi in Doti, which has descended to Dipayal. If the proximity factor is favourable, such business has shown an even greater tendency to move to the plains of the Tarai or the inner Tarai. Dhankuta's trade shifted considerably to Dharan after this market developed at the foothills early in the century. The decay of Bandipur set in as Newar traders of this place took their business down to Narayanghat in Chitawan valley from the late 1950s. The whole of the Rapti valley where Narayanghat is located was opened for a massive programme of resettlement for the hill population of Nepal with the eradication of malaria in the mid-1950s. Soon the east-west highway of Nepal was conceived which cut through Narayanghat. The same set of factors has had drastically different results for Bandipur at one end, and for Narayanghat at the other. Whilst one has become a ghost town the other has been transformed into a growing and thriving business as well as urban centre. The government has made little attempt to alter this trend, in fact it has given it its full endorsement. It has been more than willing to accede to demands to shift the district administration centres from ridge-tops to the valley bottom. The endorsement has rendered a death blow to the sustainability of the traditional historical hill-towns, which now lie in a state of neglect and inertia. For these hill-towns the stress on road development has proved to be their complete undoing.

In all this development, Dhankuta perhaps presents yet another tragic case. At one time during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it rose to pre-eminence as a regional administrative centre, which in turn led other hill-towns in the region to either decline in importance, or to be totally eclipsed. Even to this day Dhankuta has continued to be an important seat of regional and district administration. It has been made the headquarters of the eastern development region from the 1970s. King Birendra regularly came here to camp in winter and to oversee and evaluate the progress of various regional development projects. Dhankuta has also been fortunate enough to be linked by the Dharan-Dhankuta road since 1983. Yet, despite all this continued development support, Dhankuta today wears a faded look. Its market looks anything but thriving and pulsating with activity. Its elevation to a municipal status has earned it many new civic amenities. But none of this has helped Dhankuta to revive. Where could the reason for this lie? In my opinion, it is primarily a consequence of the autodynamics of the new market forces now operative in Nepal, which everywhere disfavours the hill-towns as new economic and urban centres. The second factor to affect Dhankuta was the extension of the Dharan-Dhankuta road beyond to Hile and further to the north and east to Basantapur. This had the expected result of pushing the retail market for buying basic necessities by the villagers of the interior closer to their

doorsteps. This also enabled the Indian bulk-traders dealing in primary forest products, such as in all kinds of raw Himalayan medicinal herbs, to move up their collecting points. So, as a result of all this, we have got more sparkling and brisker-looking markets developing at Hile and Basantapur. In all this development Dhankuta seems to have unwittingly fallen between the proverbial two stools.

### Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs we tried to sketch out the circumstances in which the hill-towns of Nepal came to be born, enjoy a process of growth and then finally enter a period of decay. For their times in pre-modern days, they could be said to have fulfilled the urbanizing urges in the remote outback hills of Nepal. The image imparted by these urban-like centres in the middle of Nepal's remote hills had consisted of compact settlements, with some evidence of an orderly plan and alignment in their making, their architectural styles and their aesthetics. Furthermore, their religious constructions were of the urban kind that had belonged to the greater tradition of Newar civilization. Trade and manufacturing had played a major part in the making of their economy, and they served as venues for the location of the government district offices. In the slow-paced tenor of life of an earlier epoch they had probably served urban needs in an adequate manner. But, for whatever the reasons—whether climatic, strategic or due to the change in the north-south trade structure typical of Nepal prior to the 1950s, these early hill-towns have become redundant in present-day circumstances. They have been left behind in the new race for development. Even the better patronised of these hill-towns have not done as well as they should have in terms of their growth and expansion. New economic and urbanizing trends that have emerged since Nepal started in the 1950s on the construction of an extensive network of motorable roads throughout the kingdom have had major implications for the future size and status of these traditional hill-towns. Flat-valley bottoms are increasingly preferred to ridge-tops as town sites, as has also the Tarai as against the hills. Nor are motorable roads the sole factor affecting the future of these hill-towns. There will be a natural limit to any programme of urbanization located in the hills, because there will be an inherent shortage of suitable land, their ecosystems will be fragile, and the costs of development are likely to be prohibitively high. One can then, hardly do anything but suggest that such hill-towns should be allowed to have only a restricted rate of growth, and that they should be preserved more for their heritage value as showpieces of period architecture, with their economies linked to the tourist related industry. How ironic changing times can indeed be?



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PART 3

**MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

# Nature Cure and Indigenous Healing Practices in Nepal: A Medical Anthropological Perspective

**Bipin Kumar Acharya**

This paper is a small contribution to the medical anthropology of Nepal and deals with two types of alternative health care practices from both the bio-physical and the socio-cultural points of view. Medical anthropology is still a young discipline in Nepal and so there is little published literature available for review. This gap in study and research is especially notable in respect to indigenous alternatives to modern medicine. In this paper, I limit my enquiries to two forms of alternative medicine practised in Nepal—nature cure and indigenous healing practices.

Human health needs to be understood not only from the bio-physical point of view, but also from the social and cultural. The health of each of us is very much influenced by our life-style, the kind of community we live in, and by our natural environment. It is by examining these and other dimensions of socio-cultural context that anthropology/sociology can make a distinctive contribution to the understanding of health issues (Tuckett 1976:3–36).

There are, however, very few social scientists at present involved in the study of health issues in Nepal. Both the bureaucratic and public sectors of health care are dominated by medical professionals, such as practitioners, trainees and technical specialists—all of them produced and influenced by modern medical science. The fact that social scientists, mainly anthropologists, can contribute to our understanding of health-care issues by engaging in both research and applied activities is either ignored or given very low priority. Such a dual role is, indeed, inherent in the fact that 'health care is both *in* community *by* and community' (Bulmer 1987:37–710).

In the Nepalese context, most of the studies based on a medical anthropology point of view deal with mental health or psychiatry. The great majority concentrate on spirit possession, faith healing and shamanic ecstasy, with comparatively little attention paid to other types of alternative therapies, such as *Āyurveda*, nature cure, or homeopathy. There is also a striking lack of comparative studies that focus on the relative success or failure of these various therapies in attracting community support or rejection.

The more 'western-modern' medicine advances the more we also find that trans-national companies produce chemical drugs and hospital

instruments and the more medical schools produce specialist doctors. The inevitable consequence is that societies like Nepal are in danger of becoming increasingly dependent on the whole package deal. National and international health plans and policies are biased in favour of modern medicine and as a consequence traditional, folk and indigenous health care practices suffer in competition. Yet, keeping in mind that alternative health care practices have been applied by millions of people over a long period of time, nature cure and its relation with other indigenous healing practices should be taken into account in both national and international health planning.

Indigenous healing practices have been culturally accepted during all phases of human cultural and environmental evolution. Thousands of generations have applied their knowledge in the form of inherited cultural and scientific legacies to the maintenance of human well-being, that is, for good health (Weikang 1985:1). Ethnomedicine or folk medicine has its roots deep in human culture. Humoral therapy in Latin America, *Āyurveda* in the Indian sub-continent and Chinese traditional medicine are the best known examples (Foster and Anderson 1978). As Khanna (1982:1-4) notes, folk medicine invariably includes the specification of appropriate food habits, methods and processes during illnesses.

### **Indigenous healing practices prevalent in Nepal**

An ethnic community was observed in order to discover what indigenous healing practices the people employed in response to various health problems. I selected Danuwar village which lies about twenty kilometres from Kathmandu. The village is situated in the southwestern part of Lalitpur district. The information presented in this paper is based on participant observation and both personal and group discussions with selected informants. Two traditional indigenous healers, one a *dhāmi* and the other a *jhākri*, were asked about various aspects of the healing practices that applied in their community. Five households were observed and the members asked about how they kept themselves healthy. Questionnaires were also employed to collect information from both the healers and the five households—mainly concerning their knowledge and understanding of health issues, food habits, nutritional status, sanitation, physical labour, and socio-economic status. An additional 25 respondents were also asked questions, though solely concerning health-related issues. Both the five households and the 25 respondents were selected for interview on the basis of stratified random sampling.

The main finding of my research was that people's health status, health problems and caring practices are all very much influenced by their social and economic status. I also found that an individual's educational

background had major consequences for both health knowledge and health status. A further finding was that the people of Danuwar, like those of other communities studied in Nepal, practise a wide variety of indigenous healing methods—most notably in the use of herbal remedies, dieting, fasting, and faith-healing. The people are also aware of modern allopathic medicine and many of them, especially women motivated by nurses and health workers from CDHP (Community Development and Health Project) and MSR-Centre (a non-government organisation) use contraceptives for family planning. Natural family planning methods are not systematically applied for the people are not informed of such methods by the health workers.

Everyone uses herbs and medicinal plants locally available in the treatment of most diseases and illnesses. Informants, especially the more elderly, were well informed not only as to what herbs and plants to use, but also how to prepare them and at what stages during an illness to use them. By far the most common complaints were diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, fever, as well as lesser afflictions, such as colds, sore throats, asthma, bronchitis, constipation, piles, collitis and ulcers. For all of these diseases patients first sought herbal treatment from traditional healers, and would only resort to either the intermediate health workers, locally called 'compounders', or the hospitals when symptoms became worse. They would also go to folk or indigenous healers when suffering from mental disorders attributed to attacks by supernatural beings—as with cases of *bhut lāgeko* or *duluwā-chhopuwā*.

The following are some of the herbal remedies prescribed by folk healers: guava leaves (*ambāko pāt*) and roots in powdered form, and mountain ebony (*koirālo*) for indigestion; a decoction of ginger (*aduwā*), garlic (*lasun*), turmeric (*besār*) and salt (*nun*) for colds; adhatoda vasica (*asuro*) for fevers and coughs; golden raspberry (*aiselū*) for wounds from cuts; jasmine (*jāī*) for sore throats; barberry (*chutro*) and wildcherry (*paī yū*) for worms; ham (*kāvro*) for ulcers; bitter cucumber (*karelā*) and prickly poppy (*thākal*) for jaundice, and so on and so forth. Sun bath and massage with oil are also applied in orthopaedic cases such as swelling and joint pain.

From the cultural-anthropological point of view these traditional or indigenous healing practices should be regarded as the products of knowledge and experience over a long period of human history. Prior to the introduction of modern medicine in Nepal by the British Mission and the establishment of Bir Hospital about 50 years ago, Nepalese communities practised their own medical and health-care systems. These indigenous healing practices are still contributing to human and environmental health.

In Nepal human health is discussed in considerable detail in the sacred literature of Hinduism, most notably in the *Veda*, *Bhagavadgīta*, *Rāmāyana*, *Manūsmṛiti* and *Upaniṣad*. Discussions on herbal use, dieting, sanitation and various ways of living a better lifestyle can be found there, as well as discussions of both the physical and non-physical aspects of human health. These ancient compendiums of medical knowledge still merit consultation and reinterpretation for contemporary health practices. However, by far the greater part of indigenous healing practice has never been recorded in written form, but is rather handed down verbally from generation to generation. During ancient times *guru kul śikṣā* was prevalent, and even today is still found in some cases. It is a system of personal transmission of medical knowledge and skill from teacher to pupil within a period of time appropriate to their relationship and the attainment of the desired level of skill. From the anthropological point of view it is important to appreciate that both the desired development of the pupil's personality and the successful transmission of knowledge, experience and behaviour from the teacher was thought to be due to the intimate and close relationship between the two.

There are discussions on both dieting and fasting and their importance in the *Veda*, *Upaniṣad*, *Suśruta Samhitā*, *Caraka Samhitā* and *Bhagavadgīta*. As Poddar (1988) noted, they all subscribe to the idea that 'we are what we eat'. In the same books we can also find discussions of the etiology of diseases, the causes and effects of health problems and both preventive and curative methods.

*Āyurveda* is one of the best known indigenous healing practices found in most parts of the Indian sub-continent. It dates back to the Vedic period or even before. In two of the most famous of the *Āyurveda* books, the *Caraka* and the *Suśruta*, we can find discussions of most aspects of healthy living. The contribution of *Āyurveda* to human health care in Nepal is both widespread and deep-rooted, and is applied in both the government and the non-government sectors. According to this medical system health problems are said to be due to imbalances in the three humors (*tridośa*)—gas (*vāta*), bile (*pitta*) and phlegm (*kapha*).

Buddhist tantra and Lamaism also contribute to human health knowledge. Human life-styles, ways of living, health problems and health care are all discussed in the sacred literature as cultural and religious phenomena interwoven in the daily life of the people.

But *Āyurveda*, Buddhist tantra and Lamaism do not exhaust the field of alternative medical practices found in Nepal. Medical anthropologists, sociologists and other scholars with a social science background have, whilst carrying out both theoretical and applied research, succeeded in identifying a variety of other culturally accepted indigenous practices.

Books and reports written by Miller (1979), Stone (1976), Peters (1981), Devkota (1983), Gartoulla (1992), Shrestha and Lediard (1990) are the best examples.

Spirit possession, faith-healing and ecstasy under shamanism (Peters 1981:79-126) are prevalent in Nepalese societies, mostly in the context of mental distress, grief, emotional tension and so on. Shamans, known as *dhāmi-jhākri*, *ojhā bombo*, *jānne* in different communities and also those specialists known as *jyotiṣi*, *gubhāju*, *sudeni* are contributing to health care with their own knowledge and experience. They attend to the sick as a symbol of their faith and in addition to performing their religious role in worshipping the relevant supernatural or divine power, they also help the diseased person by providing herbal remedies with which they are familiar. They often keep their knowledge secret in order to maintain their monopoly in an income-earning profession. A practitioner becomes a *guru*, a teacher, when he selects his *chela* or disciple to whom he will hand on both his knowledge and experience.

As previously noted, the use of herbal remedies in the treatment of disease figures prominently in indigenous healing systems. The use of herbs at home is not only cheaper from an economic point of view, but is also responsible for far fewer side or after-effects than is the case with chemical antibiotics. For instance, an *Āyurvedic* powder called *astachoorna* is made from ingredients used daily in our kitchens and is very useful in all types of digestive disorder. Expansion of knowledge on the use of herbs and medicinal plants for both preventive and curative aspects of health care may contribute a good share to human health. Because it seems easier to go to the drug store for antibiotics than to prepare herbal remedies at home, people are becoming less tolerant during disease and forget how much they have suffered from complicated chronic side-effects resulting from the use of allopathic chemical drugs.

There are some other kinds of treatment for both acute and chronic diseases which are not specifically recorded in written form but are common practice. The use of sheet-packs during acute high fever, hot compresses, various types of massage for joint pain, fasting, rehydration, decoctions prepared with the help of locally available herbs and other ingredients, and the 'Hindu Yogic System of practical Water Cure' (Ramcharaka 1909) are all found in indigenous healing systems. There are also a number of Nepali proverbs concerned with both bodily health and healthy ways of living. The following is a particularly well-known example — *thorāi khāe bal*, *dherai khāe mal*, which means 'light meal produces strength and heavy meal only produces more stool'. It suggests to us how much we should eat to keep alive but not how much to live to



eat. Another example is from the Sanskrit—*rinam kritwa ghritam pivet*, which means 'consume high calory even if you have to take loan or credit'.

A number of religious plants have been preserved and reproduced from ancient times because of their sacred and holy natures. Such ideas and values regarding the plants may be attributed to their dual role in also making a significant contribution to human health. Camphor tree, basil, poplar, sandalwood and eleo carpus seeds (*rudrākṣa*) are the best known examples and in each instance it is their sacred and holy nature that resulted in their preservation and reproduction for good health.

### **Nature cure as a theory**

Nature cure is also known as naturopathy, which is an alternative medical system having its own distinctive healing methods. It is a complete revolution in the art and science of living (Lindlahr 1981:1–11) in which man builds in harmony with the constructive principles of nature on the physical, moral and spiritual planes of living. Nature cure, or 'healing from within' (Jussawalla 1966) deals with the human body as a mechanism which can repair its own broken parts through the air it breathes, the water it drinks and the food it consumes. It is a system of medicine that relies upon the use of only natural substances for the cure and treatment of diseases, rather than drugs (Harrison 1986:273). The principle aim of naturopathy is to inspire and encourage people to take an active interest in their own health and to instruct them in the basic rules for the preservation of health (Gala et.al. 1991:3–38).

The philosophy of nature cure is based on science dealing with natural laws and principles of human life, environment, health problems and health care. The following are some of the basic assumptions of the system: 1. Foreign toxic materials are the root cause of all diseases; 2. The body cures itself; 3. Diseases are not our enemy but they are our friend; 4. There is unity of diseases and unity of cure.

### **Nature cure as a practice**

Since toxic materials are the root cause of diseases, it follows that purification of the body is an essential element in nature cure practice. Because of malnutrition or overnutrition, lack of rest or too much rest, excess use of drugs, mental stress and various other irregularities in our natural life, including even exposure to polluted and imbalanced ecosystems, the regular system of bodily elimination or evacuation of toxic materials fails to function properly and as a result acute disease appears, and if we do not treat it systematically, the condition becomes worse resulting in chronic disease.

Five elements universally found in nature (water, air, soil, sunlight and sky/emptiness) are the resources most used in nature cure's principal healing methods, as in hydrotherapy, mudtherapy, light-therapy, breathing and fasting. Besides these, magnetotherapy, acupuncture, acupressure, meditation and Yoga are used as preventive as well as curative healing methods. The crucial and fundamental principle of this system is that prevention is better than cure. In this sense, nature cure seems to be more humanistic in that it makes us aware of the art of living in a naturalistic and disciplinary manner.

### **Evolution of nature cure**

The evolution of nature cure parallels that of human evolution. This is because man's perception and understanding of his life and his effort to maintain both his physical and mental soundness is related to the natural environment within which he lives. Influence is a two-way process between man and his surroundings, that is, the natural environment. Human life and health can only be expected to improve if the individual can maintain a balanced and horizontal relationship with the natural environment.

The systematic and scientific nature-cure practice was developed in the nineteenth century, though Hippocrates stressed 24 centuries ago that 'Our natures are the physicians to our diseases'. (Modi 1989:11). Vincent Priessnitz, a German Silesian peasant born in Bavaria, is regarded as the pioneer of western scientific naturopathy, whilst Mahatma Karachanda Gandhi was the pioneer naturopath of India. He was very much influenced by the reliability, usefulness and sustainability of nature-cure practices as an art of living. He himself practised naturopathy and wrote a book on it. He lived a natural life, highlighted a humane philosophy and experienced life as inseparable from natural laws. He established a nature-cure clinic in 1946 and there are now hundreds of hospitals and clinics in both urban and rural India. The Gandhi National Academy of Naturopathy in New Delhi is conducting a course of nature cure up to graduate (diploma) level. Thousands of Indian and Nepalese students are studying and practising this health-care system.

### **Nature cure/naturopathy in Nepal**

During my research I have collected some useful information on this topic. First, let me discuss the methodology used for the research work. The desk-research method was used to collect secondary data based on a literature review. Some theoretical and practical knowledge was also acquired during this phase of research. For primary data collection, four clinics operating in Kathmandu valley were visited and observed. Eight naturopaths, including two female, were personally interviewed, whilst two

more were consulted by postal questionnaire. Those interviewed also participated in a number of group discussions.

All of the participants were asked to provide brief *curricula vitae* concerning their personal experience of and contribution to naturopathy. Questions were asked to understand their personal views on human life, society, culture, health care and health problems, traditional and indigenous healing practices, their efforts for the advancement of nature cure, the methods and processes of nature-cure practice, the etiology of diseases, national-health paradigm, organizational context, environmental issues, scope and limitations, doctor-patient relationship, pros and cons of nature-cure philosophy and so on and so forth.

Twenty patients, including six females, who were visiting nature-cure clinics for treatment, were met and interviewed. They were asked several questions concerning such matters as their perception of the level of public awareness of nature-cure methods, of the diseases concerned, of the comparative efficacy of the various medical systems they applied during their health problems, and of the way doctors behave in their dealings with patients.

There are some twenty nature-cure clinics in various parts of Nepal. Some naturopaths are not running clinics because they have other things to do. Those who are running clinics do so on their own account. Two clinics—one of them provides indoor service only—are run by married couples. Other forms of teamwork do not seem to occur. The naturopaths of Nepal received their formal graduate training at Indian Institutes of Nature Cure.

An organizational structure was felt to be necessary for the progress and development of nature cure and as a result the *Nepal Yoga and Nature Cure Association* (NYNCA) was formally registered in February 1984 and the Ministry of Health and National Planning Commission approved its application to conduct its programmes. Its first conference was held in January 1989 in East Nepal. Besides this, the *Alternative Medical Association, Nepal* has been formally organized and is currently in the process of applying for Government registration. It includes all of the contributors to the health sector with the exception of the allopaths, for the association is intended to provide an alternative approach to modern allopathic medicine.

While studying the relationship between doctor and patient it was found to be less hierarchical in nature cure than in modern allopathy. Naturopaths seem more kind-hearted and friendly than practitioners in allopathic clinics and hospitals. Most of the patients who were interviewed agreed that they were provided with more relevant information on health and life-style issues by nature-cure practitioners than they were by either

allopaths or *Kavirajas*. The naturopaths made them aware of the importance of such matters as sanitation, diet, rest, tolerance and self-confidence. Patients also felt that naturopathy would provide them with a proper diagnosis and cure. For example, a patient might be advised to purify his digestive organs with the help of fasting, dieting and other therapeutic treatment methods. For this, the patient is looked after by the naturopath regularly.

### **Relationship between these healing practices**

Regarding the principles and philosophy of nature cure, it seems to have originated from a 'naturalistic' way of looking at human beings, their life-styles, their health status and range of vision as inseparable from the laws of nature. Nature cure views human beings as located within a system of natural and cultural evolution, and as such the two interrelate, interact and depend on one another. Health problems are due to the imbalanced, irregular and vertical relationship that can develop between humans and their environment, both natural and cultural. The most effective solution to human health problems is to create a balanced and horizontal relationship with the natural principles of human life and the ecosystem. Likewise, indigenous healing practices prevalent in many communities are perceived, practised and developed during the course of man's adaptation to his surroundings, that is, the natural environment or the ecosystem. Whatever healing methods are concerned they are, technically speaking, to some extent similar to one another.

Assumptions concerning health problems and their etiology are also similar. For instance, poor sanitation, impurity and wrong food-eating habits are thought to be the root cause of diseases. From the philosophical point of view all indigenous healing practices are committed to human well-being, though the methods and processes of treatment may vary between practices. Nature cure basically uses non-chemical natural substances for treatment and cure, whereas other indigenous healing practices may not do so. For instance, some of the *Āyurvedic* syrups include chemicals amongst their ingredients.

Discussions of both theoretical and practical aspects of health care in nature cure can be found in the literature, whereas in the case of most indigenous healing systems such knowledge is transmitted verbally from one generation to the next. The degree of reliability and sustainability may differ due to management and applicability. Nature cure assumes that all human beings have the capability of being their own 'doctor' by learning the art of living, though this feature may not be found in other healing practices.

## **Conclusion**

From knowledge and information gathered during research I am convinced that both nature cure and indigenous healing practices are able to make people aware of the art of living through harmony with nature and its laws—and in so doing constitute viable alternatives to a mainstream national health service based on modern medicine. Nature cure and indigenous healing practices share a number of features in common and if an integrated effort were made might perform a significant role in health care. Nepalese communities, disadvantaged and under-privileged, are suffering from malnutrition, starvation and deprivation. Rural people, more than 90% of the total population, have no access to modern western medicine facilities. Chemical drugs, check-up and surgery charges are very high and some people are suffering from side- or after-effects of chemicals in concentrated form. If health services were available to the people on a free basis it would be an improvement, but the situation is otherwise. Allopaths, including both registered and unregistered, currently number 1,491 (*Chhalpal Weekly* 2 August 1992: 1) and most of them are urban-based. By contrast, the indigenous folk healer/patient ratio is 1:20 (Shrestha and Lediard 1980). Might it not be a viable approach and strategy to link indigenous healing practices with nature-cure programmes so as to constitute a sustainable self-help health service?

Nature-cure practice would seem to be developing a culture of 'rational naturalism' amongst the people, though at the same time facing many problems. Naturopaths are from time to time in a 'cold-war' like relationship both with allopaths and with trans-national companies which produce chemical drugs. This is because both national and international health plans and policies are predominantly based on modern allopathy.

Nature cure would seem to be creating a new value system concerning human life and ways of living. The more crucial and fundamental philosophy of nature cure seems to centre on the concepts of 'naturalism' and 'humanism'. It sees everyone as his or her own doctor with each practitioner capable of learning the fundamental principles and philosophy, even without formal education. Such an approach to health care must either eliminate or greatly reduce the inter-practitioner rivalry and competition so distinctive of modern allopathy. Nature cure attempts to create and sustain a balanced ecosystem for natural ways of living. It also seeks to eliminate the commercialization of human health. It seeks to foster love, sympathy and kindness between man and nature at a time when the human condition is fraught with war, destruction and violence.

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# **The Qualitative Community Judgement: The Role of Intermediate Health Practitioners in Nepal's Family Health Services**

**Basundhara Dhungel**

## **Introduction**

Human relations and feelings are important factors in determining the success of health services in rural areas of Nepal. Rural people, in particular, place much importance on feeling at 'ease and comfortable' in receiving medical treatment. This paper is based on research carried out in two villages, Dhulikhel and Kavre, in the Kavre Palanchok District to investigate the availability of social services (health and education), their utilization and organization, as well as the opinion of the people who use them and the difficulties they experience in doing so. The study also investigated whether selected socio-economic and physical variables (ethnicity, occupation, education, household size, household income and distance) affected people's utilization of and attitudes to these services. Only the findings relating to health services are extracted and presented in this paper.

This study found that most local people preferred private dispensaries<sup>1</sup>, owned by so-called 'compounders'<sup>2</sup> to the easily accessible, free health services provided by the District Medical Officer (DMO) at the government operated health centre<sup>3</sup>. The reasons most commonly given for preferring private medical practitioners were the quality of service provided and the ability to understand the feelings and needs of local people. Private medical practitioners were known to the people and could get services and medicine at any time and would even visit the patient if necessary. The private medical practitioners or 'compounders' were found to be the most popular and regularly used in the communities studied. There was relatively little variation in the use of private dispensaries according to the selected socio-economic variables. There was however some variation in the use of the government health centre. More Tamang, Brahmin and Thakuri used the government health centre than Newar, Chhetri and occupational castes. There was little variation in the use of private dispensaries in relation to occupation. The reason for not preferring the health centre was the absence or inaccessibility of medicine and unfamiliarity with the medical personnel. The people found this qualitative difference in services a significant reason for consulting the

private medical practitioners, although these were less qualified and patients had to pay for the medical services.

Dhulikhel is a rural and predominately Newar town, business and trade are the main sources of income, both income level and level of education are comparatively high, average household size is large and there is easy access to health services. Kavre, on the other hand, has a lower average household income, mainly from agriculture, a scattered settlement pattern with several ethnic groups (e.g. Brahmin, Newar, Chhetri, Thakuri, Tamang, as well as members of various occupational castes) lower educational standard, and greater distances to travel to reach the health services. The study areas are about 33 kilometres east of Kathmandu and linked by the Arniko Highway which runs to the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China in the north.

The study was based on primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources were sample households, key informants, health-service personnel and researcher observation. The household was taken as the unit of study and the household head was selected as the respondent who answered for the entire household. A simple random-sampling technique was used for selecting household respondents.

### **The need to bridge traditional and modern health services**

Health services are most effective if they are compatible with the expectations and needs of the people, the people feel free to communicate with the personnel providing the services, and they understand the system easily.

Justice (1983:967) found that peons, the lowest ranking workers in the health bureaucracy, are effective in delivering health services at the local level. This is because they understand the feelings and needs of the local people as they are generally from the local area themselves. According to Justice (ibid:969), health services such as dispensing medicines, dressing wounds and even giving injections, were performed by the peons in the absence of trained health workers such as health aids or physicians.

Though the government has made considerable efforts to make health services accessible to rural people in order to improve their standard of basic health care, researchers are concerned with the extent to which the target beneficiaries actually use such services. We need to know more about the peoples attitude towards them and how and to what extent they are helping people to improve their health.

Development of the modern health service in Nepal dates back to the year 1950 (Wake 1980:139–40). Before 1950 three kinds of health services were available to the people; in the tarai plain, homoeopathy; in the hill regions traditional healers like *dhāmis/jhākris*<sup>4</sup>; and in the valley



region, ayurvedic *vaidya*<sup>5</sup> who were trained in both homoeopathic and allopathic medicine at the Indian Universities.

It was in 1956, when Nepal launched its First Five Year Plan (1956-1961), that a health-service programme was first included in the national development programme. Yet by 1980, when the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) was in operation, low priority was still accorded to health-service (Pandey 1980:104-18). Although in absolute terms the health sector outlay rose by more than 14 times between the First and Fifth Plan, the percentage allocated to the health sector actually declined to 6 percent compared with 7.6 percent in the First Plan (Pandey 1980:117-18).

In addition to the government's continued efforts to provide a better health service, people can also obtain health care from traditional medical healers, private medical practitioners and other indigenous sources. Indeed, in rural centres and bazaars around Kathmandu and even in some parts of Kathmandu itself, health services are provided by so-called 'compounders'. These 'compounders' are mostly trained health workers or health inspectors who have retired from or quit government service and established dispensaries in their own houses or in the same locality. Others have worked as assistants to physicians in the city for a long period and gained experience in Western medicine; experience which they then use to establish their own dispensaries and treat the people in their own and surrounding areas. These health personnel, therefore, are referred to throughout this study as private medical practitioners. In general, one or two such health personnel are available in rural bazaars wherever there are dispensaries. For instance, two such health personnel were practicing in Kirtipur<sup>6</sup> bazaar near Kathmandu.

It was found that their services were very much appreciated by the community. They treated mostly water-borne diseases, respiratory diseases and minor injuries. In complicated cases, they refer patients to the district or regional hospital or to the traditional local healers of the area, such as the Newari *dyaḥ mayju*<sup>7</sup> or Parbatya *devi ayeko*<sup>8</sup>, whose treatment is based upon religious and supernatural powers. The private medical practitioners of Kirtipur bazaar remarked that some people, who were influenced by traditional beliefs and superstitions, were convinced that illness could be attributed to fate or to the wrath of the gods, and could thus only be cured by local healers. Therefore, they had to take into consideration the wishes of the patient who preferred traditional local healers. Besides, as the private medical practitioners belong to the same local communities, and some of them to the same kin group, they know each other very well, and hence there is good coordination between traditional local healers and the private medical practitioners. In Kavre and

Dhulikhel, the private medical practitioners usually refer patients whom they cannot treat to Banepa hospital<sup>9</sup> or Kathmandu central hospital.

Various studies in recent years have shown that because of widespread illiteracy and ignorance it is important to integrate traditional local healers and ayurvedic services with government health services. According to Pandey (1980:112), the ayurvedic system is well within the nation's economic capacity and is traditionally accepted by the people, and the need to expand and improve the quality of these ayurvedic services has been recognised by the government. It has been highlighted in the Sixth Five Year Plan's policy (1980–85:122), which emphasises that to develop the ayurvedic system of medicine as an integral part of the health service, the policy will be to lay particular stress on the production of drugs that are based on local herbs and medicinal plants. Stone (1976:77) was confident that when traditional and modern services were available side-by-side, villagers would easily combine Western medicine with traditional practices. Such observations suggest that villagers have little difficulty integrating Western medicine with their own traditions on an ideological level.

Similarly, from the study of Shrestha and Lediard (1980:8) comes the assertion that:

our work has produced conclusive evidence that **dhāmi-jhankris** can play a culturally appreciated and compellingly cost-effective role in Nepal's struggle to come to grips with its population crisis. And as there so many **dhāmi-jhankris**, a well-designed strategy to mobilise them could tap precisely the indigenous network required to reach and affect millions of Nepalis with credible and comprehensible messages about health and family planning.

Since the traditional local healers are quite numerous compared with Western medical practitioners, it is necessary to make a proper study of how the traditional system can be improved and integrated into the primary health-care delivery system. Further, Wake remarks that all of the hill people have always turned to their *dhāmis-jhākris* for most health service needs. Much ethnological study has been done by Westerners in the last twenty years on the forms of ancient shamanistic practices to be found in Nepal. One outstanding feature common to all is their accepted role in their own communities which new health posts find hard to duplicate (Wake 1980:140).

With regard to the role played within the existing health services by private medical practitioners or so-called 'compounders', we need more information on the kind of services they provide, just how and why they are preferred by the community, and how such services might be improved

and incorporated into the government health service. How they might be brought into the main stream of health services could be a matter of concern for the health planners. So far it must be admitted that no full attention has been paid to this relatively small, though useful, group. The role that they could play remains unclear to the government. One reason for this might be that the government does not recognise the usefulness or the need for this group to play a significant role in the health services because of its members limited health education facilities, lack of formal training and lack of equipment. Despite all these shortcomings, this study found that these private medical practitioners were considered preferable and regularly used by the communities.

### **Study findings**

Unlike many rural communities, those in the selected study areas had access to eight types of health service facilities: government health centre, government ayurvedic centre, private medical dispensary, private ayurvedic shop, traditional local healers, a private hospital in the nearby small town of Banepa, and the central government hospital in Kathmandu. People in the study areas were familiar with one or more types of health facility. Treatment was provided free at the government health centre and government hospital at Kathmandu, but not at the hospital in Banepa and by private medical dispensaries. Almost three-quarters of the respondents reported that they use only one type. Among both groups of respondents, the private medical practitioners or 'compounders' were found to be the most popular.

When the reasons were sought for the differences in levels of use of the government health centre and private medical dispensaries, the respondents answered as follows:

1) Private medical practitioners or 'compounders' were local people who were familiar to most of the population, whereas personnel of the government health centre were mostly from outside the areas and not familiar to the people.

2) The procedures in the private medical dispensaries were simple and easy for the local people to understand and follow, while the procedures in the government health centre were not.

3) The private medical dispensaries were well stocked with medicines, while in the government health centre medicine was in short supply and not available when required. Often the medicine had to be collected by the staff of the government health centre from the central office, but no budget was made available for transporting this medicine, and the staff had to pay their own fares. Although the service was free in the government health centre, in many cases patients were compelled to

buy prescribed medicines from the private dispensaries. Respondents were unhappy with this practice and complained that, having attended the government health centre and endured lengthy waiting times, if the medicine prescribed had to be bought in private dispensaries, there was little point in visiting the government health centre in the first place.

4) Health services were available at all times at the private medical dispensaries, and the private medical practitioner would even visit the patient if needed. The service hours in the government health centre remained rigid, even on clinic days. Patients who arrived just a few minutes late after walking for two or three hours were turned away untreated.

5) Although a District Medical Officer (DMO) is appointed to the government health centre, he was usually on leave. Discussions with government health personnel and local leaders have revealed that the DMO was, therefore, very limited in scope. Another reason gleaned from discussion was the frustration felt by the DMO due to the lack of facilities which a young doctor considers essential. They are further frustrated by the difficulties of developing their special medical interests, which require facilities and equipment which are not provided in government health centres. This opinion was also succinctly voiced by Wake when he mentioned that Western trained doctors are frustrated if they cannot have the facilities to put their training to use. A high percentage of doctors are thus to be found in Kathmandu, and many of these act in administrative positions (Wake 1980:142). It is difficult to say in such circumstances how a young ambitious doctor can be expected to serve the rural population properly. In the absence of the DMO, the health centre was run by the senior auxiliary health worker<sup>10</sup> and junior auxiliary health worker.<sup>11</sup>

6) One staff member who had been working since the establishment of the health centre also expressed dissatisfaction with the services it provided. The reasons given by him were:

- a) Medicine supply in the government health centre was insufficient and not available when required;
- b) Absence of the DMO;
- c) Rigid service hours for patients, yet health staff not punctual;

The use of the government health centre and private dispensaries was analysed in relation to the selected variables.

### **Ethnicity**

There was some variation in the use of the government health centre according to ethnic group, compared with the use of private dispensaries. More Tamang, Brahmin and Thakuri used the government health centre

than Newar, Chhetri and occupational castes. There was relatively little variation in use of private dispensaries by the various ethnic groups.

When comparing the number of households using the government health centre and those using private dispensaries, the number using private dispensaries was higher for all ethnic groups. Furthermore, comparing the frequency of use of the government health centre and private dispensaries by specific ethnic groups, use of private dispensaries by Chhetri was high compared with Tamang which represented the highest frequency of use of the government health centre.

### **Occupation**

The largest proportion of users of the government health centre were from farming households. When comparing the number of households which use the government health centre with households using private dispensaries according to the occupations of the householders, it was found that a higher frequency of households used private dispensaries in all categories. The percentage differential of use of the government health centre ranged between 33 and 60 percent, while the differential use of private dispensaries ranged between 68 and 76 percent. The difference in use of private dispensaries in relation to the occupation of the households was negligible.

### **Household size**

The findings show some relationship between use of the government health centre and private dispensaries in relation to household size. The households in the 5–7 and 8–10 member category use the Government health centre and private medical dispensaries more than households with less than five and more than ten members. Comparing the use of private dispensaries with that of the government health centre, private dispensaries are used more by every category.

### **Gross income level**

The highest proportion of those using the government health centre and private dispensaries came from households whose annual gross income ranges from Nepalese Rs.10,000 to Rs.15,000.<sup>12</sup> When comparing the frequency of households using the government health centre and private dispensaries at each level of gross annual income, a higher proportion of those using the government health centre came from households whose gross annual income ranges from less than Rs.5,000 to Rs.15,000, while in the case of private dispensaries the proportion of users had an income ranging from Rs.10,000 to more than Rs.25,000.

**Educated members in the household**

There was some variation in use of the government health centre and private dispensaries according to the number of educated members in the household. More households with one or two educated members use the government health centre and private medical dispensaries than those households without any at all. Indeed, a higher proportion of households use private dispensaries than the government health centre in all categories of household.

**Distance**

The findings reveal that distance plays a vital role in the use of the government health centre. It was not possible to verify this variable for the use of private dispensaries because they do not maintain records. More households situated closer to the government health centre use it than those living further away, except in the case of households located at a distance of 2-3 kms; this was probably due to the mountainous topography of the area. Many studies in different countries have shown that distance is an important factor influencing the use of health facilities (William 1973, Bryant 1975, Roy and Patil 1977, Stone 1980).

**Policy implications**

Nahar (1980:53) in her study of health services in rural areas of Bangladesh, also found that a majority of the people preferred to go to the local allopath or private dispensary rather than to the Thana Health Centre<sup>13</sup> provided by the government, because of the following qualitative differences: non-availability of medicines, absence of physicians and lack of proper care at the government centre. The present study in Nepal<sup>14</sup> confirms her findings.

Despite the availability of DMO and free treatment at the government health centre, people preferred private dispensaries because the service they provide meets their needs and is compatible with their social system; i.e. easy communication, flexible service hours, familiar people from the same communities, and availability of medicine.

The study reveals clearly the preference of the people for Western-type medicine over ayurvedic or other traditional types of treatment. Nahar's study also revealed a similar preference among the rural people of Bangladesh (Nahar 1980:42).

Stone (1980:89) studying the utilization of health services in the western part of rural Nepal found the use of health services was related to the pattern of the recipients trade or occupation, and also partly to their ethnicity or status level. Among the people in one of the villages a particular 'compounder' in the market centre proved popular among

village women returning from selling milk in the market, who would often stop at his shop. Similarly, in another village where most of the inhabitants trade with another market centre, people used the dispensary quite frequently. Hospital facilities were very close to these villages, but the report showed them to be used by only a few households. The people living there were mostly Magars<sup>15</sup> who fear that they lack the social and economic status to be treated well and with respect. In general, the people of these areas are favourably disposed toward modern medicine, but have complaints about service delivery and social discrimination at some modern facilities. The view that medical care, like everything else, is a function of wealth and social status is widespread (Stone 1980:89).

Health planning in the country should take into consideration these preferences and attitudes. The long-term health plan 1975–1990 emphasises the need to expand the technical health services in the country and to use the existing services effectively by providing better incentives. It is obvious that the government is unable at this stage, and will remain so for several more decades, to provide a health service for rural people that would overcome the shortcomings caused by lack of resources and infrastructure. Establishing new hospitals and government health centres would not improve the situation if these facilities continued to be under-used by the people because the quality of service is poor. More thought needs to be given to utilising available traditional and modern health resources more effectively. To this end the health personnel of private medical dispensaries should also be considered as technical resources, as the services they provide meet the needs of the people. Government policy should aim to use them to better effect in the delivery of health care by providing them with the necessary training and orientation to improve their quality of service. With appropriate management, they could communicate and disseminate family health education in order thus to help fulfil the global policy of 'Health for all by the year 2000.' Mobilisation of community participation for primary health care would strengthen the long-term policy of national and international commitment to provide basic health service to everybody.

Some of the shortcomings, for example the absence of a DMO, lack of familiarity with health personnel, rigid service hours, non-availability of medicine when needed, are not related to lack of resources but to lack of motivation. Efforts must be made to provide better incentives for physicians and other government health personnel to take more interest in work in rural areas. Improvement of hospital facilities and living conditions as well as recognition of good service in such areas. Furthermore, personnel from urban areas trained in Western medicine seem to lack the ability to communicate with rural people and gain their

confidence, and therefore need to be trained appropriately in order to be accepted into the community. At the same time, it is also important to make the procedures in rural health service understandable so that rural people will feel at ease when undergoing treatment at the government health centres, hospitals and health posts. The fact that rural people, though poor, are willing to pay in order to receive better medical services shows how it might be possible for the government to harness community resources to improve the services provided. It is obvious that a poor service, even if provided free of charge, does not satisfy the people.

This means that we need a six-pronged approach to improve the health facilities of rural people: improvement of the physical quality of private practitioners; incorporation of such practitioners into the national health system; provision of incentives; organization of training for government health personnel to serve rural people better; make procedures understandable to rural people; and improvement of the availability of medicine and medical equipment.

## Notes

- 1 A private dispensary is a drugstore with Western-type medicines, owned by a private medical practitioner or a 'compounder'.
- 2 A popular term in Nepal for private medical practitioner.
- 3 The government health centre operates at the district level, and provision for such centres came into effect under the Fifth Five Year Plan (1975–1980).
- 4 Traditional healer, who is able to invoke spirits for curing illness.
- 5 Medical practitioners, either private or government, who are trained in combined homeopathic and alleopathic medicine.
- 6 A small Newar settlement, about four miles from Kathmandu.
- 7 Female traditional healer among Newar community; treatment based on spirit possession of the goddess.
- 8 Female traditional healer among Indo-Aryan group; treatment carried out via spirit possession of the goddess.
- 9 Banepa hospital is a private Christian hospital in the small Newar town of Banepa, about 28 kilometres from Kathmandu and was established by the American Seventh Day Adventists in 1962.
- 10 Senior Auxiliary Health Workers are middle level health personnel equivalent to Health Assistants with certificate level of training in public health.
- 11 Junior Auxiliary Health Workers are trained village-level health personnel working at field level.
- 12 US\$1 = Nepalese ruppees 14.6 (June-July 1983).
- 13 Equivalent to district health centre provided by the government; Thana in Bangladesh equivalent to sub-district.



14 See also Dhungel 1983.

15 Magars are an indigenous hill people according to Toni Hagen's classification of Nepalese 'races'. They fall into the Tibeto-Nepalese group, mostly found in the north and east and also in west-central Nepal.

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# **Journey to the Origin: A Root Metaphor in a Mewahang Rai Healing Ritual <sup>1</sup>**

**Martin Gaenszle**

## **Metaphors in Medicine**

In recent works in medical anthropology frequent use has been made of the concept of metaphor as an analytical tool. It has been pointed out that bodily processes, and particularly illnesses, are very often described by metaphorical expressions—not only by lay persons (e.g. in patient-doctor conversations) but also in the discourse of medical experts (e.g. textbooks, scientific literature). Whether these are ‘dead’ metaphors, like when we speak of the body as having a kind of military immunity-system (red blood cells, anti-bodies ‘attacking’ or ‘fighting’ intruding bacteria), or whether these are ‘living’ metaphors, for example when one attempts to describe stress symptoms by comparing the nerves with weak current cables (Sebus/Oderwald 1991:120), in both cases a physiological process is expressed in terms of a more tangible imagery from another (non-physiological) domain.<sup>2</sup>

So if illness is expressed metaphorically, it logically follows that the removal of illness, healing, also is expressed in such terms (i.e. ‘medicine X strengthens the body's defences’, etc.), and, as one expects, the metaphors of healing usually correspond to the metaphors of illness. This is also what the ethnologist observes in traditional societies: the healers diagnose illness in the local idiom—and expel it according to the same logic. It has been a matter of much debate whether such a metaphor of healing is only an **expression** of the intention or wish to heal, or whether such a metaphor is in fact capable of inducing a physiological process. It is not the place to go into this question here, but the following points should be stressed. As Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated in his well-known article on the effectiveness of symbols (1949), it is not possible to dissociate the expressive function of symbolism from its effective function, because the symbolic structure, which is manipulated by both shamans and psychoanalysts, influences the cognitive process of the patient, which in turn has an effect on the body. (It may be mentioned in passing that the case I am presenting here in fact has some similarity with that described by Lévi-Strauss: it also deals with a rite concerned with child-birth, and it also implies a ritual journey. But there are also differences to which I shall come back later.) More recent research has focused on the effect of mental images on experience (e.g. Noll 1985, Fernandez 1986), and on ritual as

performance with an effect on the actors' identities (Turner 1972, 1982, Kapferer 1983). Metaphors, it seems, 'work' on several levels, and they all, to a greater or lesser degree, play a part in the example below.

### 1. Ritual Journey

The phenomenon of ritual journeys is well-known in Himalayan anthropology. It has often been observed that among the ethnic groups in Nepal, particularly the Bodic speakers, the shamanic journey to the deities is a prominent feature of their religion, whereas in the Indian (Indo-European speaker's) folk traditions it is possession, the coming of the deities to man, which predominates (Allen 1974, Höfer 1974).<sup>3</sup> Other than the magical flight to the upper- or under-world in Eliade's concept of shamanism (1964), this journey mostly takes place in the horizontal plane.<sup>4</sup> Two questions arise: what is the purpose of the journeys, and where do they lead to?

One major purpose is the disposal of the soul of a deceased person. Nicholas Allen compares various types of Bodic soul-guidances and comes to the conclusion that the chanted journey of the psychopomp not only has the same basic function as a real mortuary procession but has ultimately evolved from it. Moreover, he tries to show that certain ritual journeys which lead to a reciprocal exchange with a deity (prestation for 'soul') may be derived from a prior scapegoat expulsion ritual. Particularly this latter proposition is difficult to verify in a historical sense. However, there is at least ethnographic evidence that the soul-guidance of the psychopomp is sometimes analogous to—and may have served as a model for—other soul journeys. Among the Gurung, for example, when a client's soul has gone astray, the shamans embark on a search journey which proceeds on the same path as the psychopomp (Mumford 1989:171). Thus the disposal of souls and the retrieval of souls may require a similar journey. But this is certainly not always the case, and generally the search journeys may lead to various different directions.

This brings us to the second question concerning the destination of the journeys. At first glance, there seems to be no privileged direction. The Thulunge examples given by Allen include a journey to the south-west, one to the east, and one to the north of the settlement (Allen 1974:7,8). Among the Mewahang Rai there are journeys to the north and south, but also to the north-east and north-west. Though this seems to indicate that any direction is possible, the journeys can be clearly divided into those leading upstream (associated with north) and those leading downstream (associated with south; cf. Allen 1974:20n.). Moreover, there is strong evidence that some—if not most—of the journeys proceed along ancestral routes. Allen assumes that the final resting place of the Thulunge death

spirits, Kotunje, which lies to the south-west of present-day Thulunge villages, is in fact a place where their ancestors previously lived (Allen 1974:7). He also notes that the neighbouring Rai of Okhaldhunga guide their dead to Halesi (which lies to their south-east), a place to which also the Kulunge to the north of it lead their dead (own inquiries). All this conforms to Rai mythology in which unanimously the ancestors are said to have come from the south (Allen 1976:143 ff., Gaenszle 1991:292 ff.). The Gurung and Tamang, on the other hand, say they came from the north, and in fact, that is the direction where they travel in their ritual journeys (Mumford 1989:186 ff., Höfer 1981:106, 118, 133).

This partly explains why the image of the journey is so prevalent: it evokes the 'history' of the ancestors and expresses an emotional attachment to the territory inhabited by them. Even though many persons have never travelled along the path of the shaman's chant it is a journey through real and still existent villages and localities which the audience generally knows, if not from first hand experience, from stories and events linked with them. But in any case, as has been pointed out by Desjarlais (1989), the landscape traversed in the journey is both symbolical and physical, 'for a symbolic matrix has been graphed on the physical landscape', thus forming a 'healing geography' (Desjarlais 1989:291). By manipulating images which are symbolic of personal experience, the shaman, so Desjarlais asserts, can transform the patient's experience of selfhood (290).

Also the following example deals with a journey along the path of the ancestors' migration. But what makes the Mewahang case particularly interesting is the fact that it is a journey to nothing less than the Place of Origin itself, the place where the ancestors ultimately came into being. Thus the rite combines two common and powerful metaphors: that of movement along ancestral migration routes and that of origin at a particular place. Both metaphors are important in Rai cosmology, and their combination seems of special significance. This is why I call it a root metaphor (I shall return to this point later).

The Mewahang Rai, among whom I have carried out research since 1984, are one of the Eastern subtribes of the Rai. They are settled on the Western bank of the Arun Valley, located in the Sankhuwa Sabha District. The journey which is the object of the following discussion leads down the Arun, and the Place of Origin, which is called *khowalung*, is situated somewhere in the plains south of Rai country, often identified with the pilgrimage place of Barachetra (*varāhakṣetra*) close to the confluence of the Sapta Koshi near Dharan (cf. Hamilton 1986:134, 136f.).

A short remark should be made as to the methodology. The focus of this study is the ritual text, i.e. the chanted words used by the two

officiants.<sup>5</sup> This approach seems justified by the importance which the Rai themselves attach to their oral tradition, the *muddum*, and the heavy emphasis on ritual speech which this concept implies.<sup>6</sup> The term *muddum*, it may have to be explained, includes the body of narratives which recount the origin of the world and man in general, as well as that of the Rai in particular: this mythology begins with the snake deity *nāgi* which caused the origin of the first living being, it recounts how the first marital union, that of Somnima and Paruhang, produced the variety of nature, how the culture hero Khakculukpa introduced various social institutions, and how the ancestors split up and migrated up into the hills (for details see Gaenszle 1991). But the term *muddum* also refers to the ritual performances which partly enact these myths. Thus, the study of ritual texts seems to me to be a particularly apt way to gain an understanding of traditional modes of thought and practice, as these texts have often preserved older layers of language use.

## 2. The rite: *Ma:mangme*

The spirit category of *ma:maksi* (from which the name *Ma:mangme* is derived) is one of the three types of spirits which have resulted from 'inauspicious death'. Its origin is recounted in the creation myth of Somnima and Paruhang, the creator couple mentioned above. Somnima, after being impregnated by Paruhang (without sexual intercourse), gives birth to the variety of natural species. Prominent among these are Tiger and Bear (*jethā* and *mahilā*), who eventually decide to go into the forest and present a kind of gift of gratitude—some meat—to their mother before leaving. Tiger makes it clear to his mother that she should not come near him when picking up the meat: 'When I shout above the path, look for it below, when I shout below the path, then look for it above!' Somnima, however, who is pregnant again at that time, ignores this advice out of maternal love, and when she goes straight to her son, he kills her (Gaenszle 1991:265f.). Thus Somnima's death spirit became the first *ma:maksi*, and ever since the mythic matricide, which occurred down at the Place of Origin, this kind of ghost haunts pregnant women, whom the *ma:maksi* try to lure into a similar fate.

*Ma:mangme*, to whom the rite discussed here is directed, may be regarded as a divinized form of this category, in the sense that she is addressed by the officiants as a superhuman person. A look at the text shows that this 'deity' is not an individual, but rather a set of types: the various forms of maternal deaths result in different kinds of *Ma:mangme* spirits (see below).

The sacrificial rite to the *Ma:mangme* spirits is held when a woman develops problems during pregnancy, such as bleedings, pains in the

womb, general weakness etc. In these cases the complications are attributed to the envious actions of a *Ma:mangme* spirit who has taken away—or ‘stolen’—the free-soul (*lawā*) of the pregnant woman. In fact, rather than being an act of sheer robbery, this ‘taking-away’ is, as will become clear from the text, the result of flattering speech through which the spirit attempts to lure the victim on its side. This, informants explained, it does out of ‘love’ (N. *māyā*) for the living person—a selfish love though, as it tries to assimilate the other.

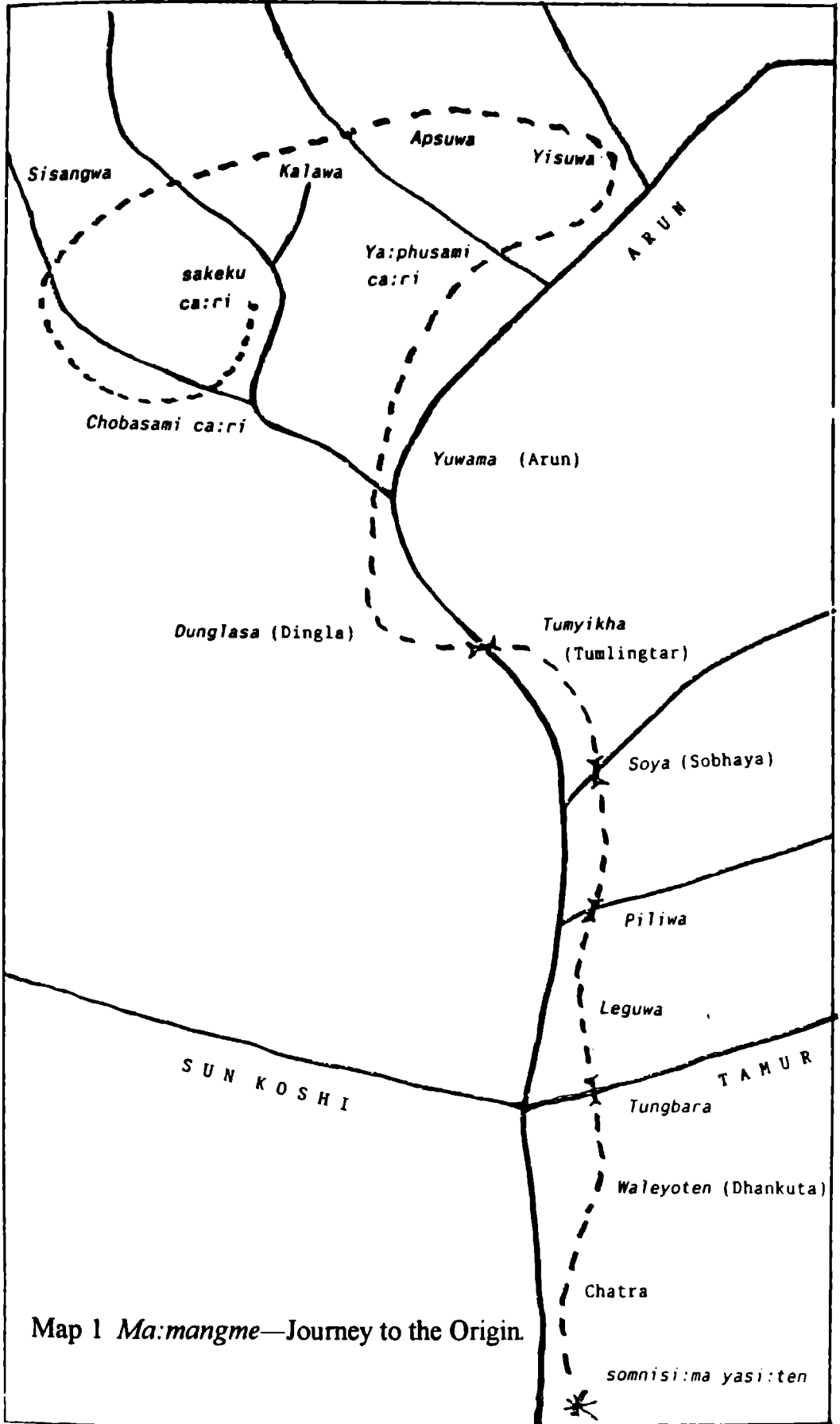
The ritual is unique in that it is one of the few occasions on which a priest (M. *ngo:pa*) travels all the way down to the Place of Origin. However, it is common that a traditional Mewahang shaman (M. *makpa*) embarks on such a journey as part of the ordinary *cintā* (‘nightly session’).<sup>7</sup> He then searches for souls (*lawā*) which have gone astray, thus causing illness. When going on such a journey the shaman is called a *muddummi*, one doing the *muddum*. This perhaps is an indication that this particular journey is an essential feature of the concept of *muddum*.

Moreover, the rite has to be seen in the context of death rituals and perhaps throws some light on this domain, which seems to be somewhat obscured by various historical influences. Today the Mewahang Rai of the Sankhuwa Valley do not have psychopomps to guide away the souls of the ordinary dead to any particular place, as it is done, for example, by the Kulunge and the Thulunge Rai. Instead the place of residence of the ancestors is unspecific: as expressed in the annual invocation to the ancestors, it could be *Kāśī* (Benares), or it could be *vaikunṭha*—one does not know. These terms obviously point to a Hindu influence, and therefore there is reason to suspect that at an earlier stage the Mewahang too may have guided their dead out of the village territory—possibly down to *khowalung*.

### 3. The text and its performance

The rite is performed by two officiants, the *ngo:pa* who takes the lead in the incantation, and the *phekuyang* (assistant) who also sings, echoing the words of the *ngo:pa*.

The text is sung in a steady, almost monotonous rhythm marked by the morpheme ‘*ghoya*’. This morpheme is semantically void and may perhaps be seen as a marker characterizing the chant, because it does not occur in others. The division into verses in the following exemplary passages is thus not reflected in the prosody of the incantation but was done on semantic grounds. Likewise the text can be divided into five sections according to its contents, though in formal terms there is no interruption. These sections may be titled I. Address, II. Searching the Spirit, III.



Map 1 *Ma:mangme*—Journey to the Origin.

Map showing research area.

Journey Down To the Place of Origin, IV. At the Place of Origin, V. Return.

The incantation begins with an address to the spirits by various names, the major name of address being the binomial term *Ma:mangme Cihime*. Though the second limb of this expression (*Cihime*) could not be analysed as semantically distinct, other expressions used in the address refer to different forms of maternal death: *dakbe^me* refers to spirits resulting from the death of a woman who dies from a *ma:mangme* attack during menstruation (as this is a time which particularly attracts these spirits);<sup>8</sup> *chaka:kdumme* is the spirit of a woman who died when her child just began to walk;<sup>9</sup> and *chabuptime* is the spirit of a woman who died when her child was still a baby.<sup>10</sup> The spirits are scolded for not having obeyed ('listened to') their parents when they were still living persons: it was their ignoraning of parental advice during their pregnancy (e.g. not to go out in the twilight etc.) which led to the unfortunate fate of these women.

*pa:kha mayen ghoya ma:kha mayen ghoya*

who do not listen to the words of your father and your mother,

*kha mayeno ghoya du mayeno ghoya*

who do not listen to any words.

In section II. the two officiants embark on the searching journey to look for the captured soul:

*sakekulam ghoya ca:rikulam ghoya chelam lento ghoya langlettiho ghoya*

we embark on the way, the path of our territory.

The spirits are blamed for 'luring' their victim by their flattering 'talk'. So the officiants have to undertake the difficult job of overcoming the spirits' resistance by using their ritual speech to appease them. They ask:

*Ngewamapin ghoya wapikhapyo ghoya*

up on the steep cliffs of Ngewama,

*chobathamma ghoya yatham mu:ku ghoya lukule:ku ghoya*

do you err around (there) like a boar, do you lure (the souls)?

*Dongbuwami ghoya wapikhapyo ghoya yatham mu:ku ghoya*

up on the steep cliffs of Dongbuwa, do you err around (there)?



As they proceed the two officiants name the offerings which they 'carry'.

*damlu khinto ghoya damlu nento ghoya*  
carrying the offerings, presenting the offerings,

*langlettiho ghoya honengaye ghoya*  
we proceed on the way, now.

Thus the two practitioners proceed from one valley to the other, naming particular cliffs and river sources in the upper Sisuwa-Sankhuwa Valley. They continue over the ridge into the Apsuwa Valley through the territory of the Sherpa of Khembalung, down to the village of Yaphu.

It is not entirely clear from the text where exactly the soul was found. But after reaching Yaphu, the journey continues straight downward along the Arun River (section III.). The river is crossed over the 'dream bridge', leading to Tumlingtar, which is the place where a prominent ancestor once held a divination in order to find out who destroyed his sacred gourds (this is alluded to in the text).

*Aruna^ang ghoya chelam hento ghoya delam hento ghoya*  
requesting the Arun to open the path,

*nawalamle ghoya cephalamle ghoya pāri lettin ghoya*  
on the ferry-way we cross over to the other side,

*Tumyikhachong ghoya langlettiho ghoya honengaye ghoya*  
we arrive up in Tumlingtar, now,

*bongbi ce^ma ghoya salulenyē ghoya pupenumho ghoya*  
at the Salulen pond, where the divination was held, we meet you and take you along,

*honengaye ghoya Soyalamnga ghoya sakbathalam ghoya pāri lettin ghoya*  
now, over the Sobhaya River we cross the dream bridge, over to the other side.

After proceeding over the Sobhaya River, one passes through Leguwa *ghāṣ* crosses the Tamur River, continues up to Dhankuta (the territory of the Athpahare), and eventually comes down to Chatra (*varāhakṣetra*).

Down there in the Tarai the journey leads to the Village of Somnima's death (*somnisi:ma yasi:ten*)—the place where the *ma:maksi* originated (section IV.).

*kuyalapho ghoya kucalamle ghoya*  
by the path of the death spirits,

*ma:malamle ghoya langlettimang ghoya*  
by the path of Ma:mangme we arrive,

*somnisi:ma ghoya yasi:tenle ghoya*  
(in) the village where Somnima has died,

*Bajuhoten ghoya Tharuhoten ghoya puppetcoho ghoya honengaye ghoya*  
(in) the village of Bajuhu and Tharuho take (the offerings) and stay, now!

At this point the sacrificial chicken are killed and the offerings are prepared on two winnowing trays: not the meat (which is later consumed by the participants), but the chicken's feet, some down feathers, a certain wild berry (*M. waresù*) and beer. This food unique to *Ma:mangme* is offered and the spirits are asked to partake of it and stay at their proper place.

This invitation is followed by a gesture of expelling the illnesses and complications caused by *Ma:mangme* (piercing pains, birth obstruction, head aches). The return journey then begins, following the same route as before, back up to the home village (section V.). But this time much care is taken to collect various kinds of infant souls (*chalawa* 'children', *hipalawa* 'babies', *sagolawa* 'foetuses') which might have involuntarily followed the officiants (this is due to the luring quality of the ritual chants). It would be disastrous if any of the souls were left down there, and therefore the officiants 'carry' them back up. Moreover, they block the road by destroying the ladder of *Ma:mangme*, thus making it impossible for her and her consorts to follow them back home. The final part of the rite is accompanied by a dance: the two officiants each beat two *bhakimlo* 'swords' to threaten *Ma:mangme* so that she will stay down where she belongs.

The pregnant woman plays no active part in the performance. She mainly sits by the side, watching and listening.

#### 4. Conclusions

This little example is an illustration of the persuasive power attributed to speech in general and ritual speech in particular: just as the spirits have

lured away the soul by 'talk', so the officiants lure them down to their Place of Origin by their ritual incantation. It may be emphasized at this point that Rai ritual language is regarded as the idiom proper for communication with the ancestors. This ritual speech has a special perlocutionary force: it is capable of propelling the addressee and creating facts by the mere act of pronouncement (i.e. travelling).

The reason for the journey seems quite clear: the spirits have trespassed into the domain of the living, and after taking the soul—out of a desire for life—they still roam the wild areas of the wider village territory. So the first part of the journey is a circling, almost a circumambulation, of this territory with the aim of searching the spirit in its fringes, thereby clearing the area of their malevolent presence. The second part of the journey then leads straight down to the Place of Origin: this time the purpose is to dispose of the spirits, to distance them by putting them at their proper place. Thus, in more formal terms, the major journey is a spatial separation of the spirits from the living, and structurally resembles an exorcism (cf. Allen 1974).

But why is it that the spirits are taken to the Place of Origin? Wouldn't it be enough to simply chase them out of the village as is often done in shamanistic rites? Now obviously it is considered safer to take them down to the place where they come from, where they belong and where they can live happily. It is not a matter of destroying them, rather the interaction of the officiants with the spirits is characterized by politeness and empathy: after all these are not simply evil beings but ancestral beings, relatives 'of one's own blood'. And it is precisely for this reason, I should argue, that the metaphor of origin is prominent here: it emphasizes the common origin of man and the *ma:maksi*, i.e. their 'original unity' resulting from Somnima's mythical deeds—and, in fact, from her own body.

But this primordial order of mythic times has undergone a process of differentiation which was mainly due to the migration of the ancestors up into the hills. Thus the distance between the living and the spirits has grown in the course of time—though their origin is the same they 'went different ways'. But the direction of this spatialization of time is reversed, so to say, by the ritual journey, which thus becomes a journey back into the mythic past. (Seen in this perspective the rite appears not only as a distancing of the spirits in terms of space, but also as one in terms of time.) In any case, the order of things is restored by this act of separation, and the officiants take all precautions to prevent the spirits from following back up.

As a study of the full text is not possible here, this account cannot be more than just a sketch (I plan to publish the complete text, its translation and analysis elsewhere.) But I hope to have demonstrated the importance

of understanding basic mythological concepts, such as the origin and migration of the ancestors, in order to comprehend a simple healing ritual. In fact, there is evidence that such a combination of ritual journey with notions of origin is at the base of many Mewahang healing rituals. Why then is this image so powerful?

Other than in Lévi-Strauss's example the mythical geography is not directly linked with the physiological body of the patient—rather the mythical geography, which is very clearly grafted on the physical geography of the Arun Valley basin, is linked with the social, mytho-historical or ethnic self-image of the Mewahang Rai. That this theme of ancestral origin and migration is played on in the context of such a healing rite, indicates the strong emotional qualities of this metaphor. Through the enactment of the journey in a performance of words and gestures (which may even be compared to a pilgrimage) the patient's experience is manipulated by images of the ancestral past which build upon ordinary images of the present. Thus linking the life-world of the living with the world of the ancestors, the journey to the origin contributes to the reconstitution of a spatio-temporal, transgenerational, or 'ethnic' identity, and it is in this sense that it may be called a 'root metaphor'. The fundamental importance of this notion, the grounding nature of myth, is often misunderstood, overlooked or underestimated by outsiders, such as health workers who usually come from different cultural backgrounds.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful for the critical comments from the panelists of the conference and from members of the 'Arbeitskreis Volksreligion' (Heidelberg) with whom I had a chance to discuss the paper. Transcription of the Mewahang Rai language (M.) follows the conventions given in Gaenszle 1991.
- 2 The use of the concept of metaphor is inspired by the work of Lakoff and Johnson 1980.
- 3 N. Allen, concluding his article, goes one step further and suggests that the prominence of the ritual journey may perhaps be a typical trait of the 'ancient East', opposed to the emphasis on sacrificial rites by the 'Indo-European West' (Allen 1974:19)
- 4 There are exceptions: among the Kham Magar, for example, the shamanic journey may lead to the underworld where the lost soul is released and brought back up (de Sales 1991:167-169,172).
- 5 As the text could not be recorded *in situ* the following analysis is based on a version which was chanted for my tape recording.
- 6 M. *muddum* is cognate with the Limbu term *mundhum* which has been rendered as 'kirat ko veda' by I. S. Chemjong (1961) in his translation of a text in Limbu script. Among the Rai, however, there is (except the recent

attempts by scholars and local elites) no written version of the *muddum*, and its transmission is in principle an entirely oral one.

- 7 In the Sankhuwa Valley only very few Mewahang shamans who have had Mewahang *gurus* are left, and Kulunge shamanism, which does not include this journey, clearly dominates. Among the Eastern Mewahang shamans, however, the journey to the Place of Origin is still a regular feature of the seances.
- 8 < M. *dakhe^phu* 'rhododendron'. The red blossom is a metaphorical expression of menstruation.
- 9 < M. *cha* 'child', M. *ka:kma* 'to walk', M. *dumma* 'to follow'.
- 10 < M. *cha* + M. *bupma* 'to gather'. The etymology is not quite clear but the expression is said to refer to the holding of the child in one's arms.

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PART 4

**THE STATE AND THE PEOPLE**





# ***Janā-Śakti* (People Power) and the 1990 Revolution in Nepal: Some Theoretical Considerations<sup>1</sup>**

**Vivienne Kondos**

## **Preamble**

The success of the revolution of 1990 propelled enormous political changes in Nepal. But it seems to me that a transformation just as fundamental occurred in the social domain. This is the emergence of the formation of a collective identity, a populist identity known as *janā-śakti* and which exceeds what is commonly understood in the meaning of 'citizen'. The irony here is that this was not exactly part of the revolutionary objective but crystallised in and through the bloody confrontation. An unintended consequence, so to speak. Yet it holds the potential for affecting relations beyond the political sphere, if this transformation continues to inform consciousness and serves as a basis for action, that is, if this comes to harden into a reality for everyday living.

A consideration of the ways it emerged and what *janā-śakti* may mean are questions that will be explored in this paper. While as I have already said, the field of revolutionary action is pertinent to the problem, I would argue that the domain of knowledge also figures. In fact it seems to me that not only has a discourse on the 1990 revolution entered Nepalese culture but that that discourse resonates the terms of a new mentality. Which is not to say that everything else has fallen apart.

Let me put the problem differently. Subsequent to the revolution's success, conduct has become politicized and taken on polemical tones. There has been a proliferation of associations, like ethnic groups, an intensity of union activity, and movements around non-official languages.<sup>2</sup> Mass demonstrations and strikes have become the order of the day as the means for expressing discontent, and newsprint is burgeoning. All of these have become possible since the lifting of prohibitions against the formation of associations and state censorship on information. But as well, the country has seen an eruption of activities of ambiguous status like *gherāo* (where a hostile ring of people move threateningly around the victim) and *juttāko mala* (a procedure where the victim is garlanded with a string of old, dirty footwear), procedures geared to intimidate and defame the target and which have been condemned by an assortment of notables of authority (Kondos, V.:1992). All of these indicate an assertive orientation on the part of the individuals involved in the group activity. However, I do not think that the assertiveness is limited to such formalized actions but may also figure in conduct at the personal level in instances where a person of authority makes what are assessed as undue demands and treats the subordinate contemptuously. People in unprivileged positions are more given to taking and showing umbrage at what they discern as

infringements of their rights or as violations on their integrity as persons than was the case before.

If what I want to argue is that these kinds of activities are indices of a fundamental change, the emergence of a populist self, the question then is what are its ramifications and implications? Certain commentators (Gaenzle et al 1991:15) discern it as a change from being a mere subject to being a citizen (*prajā* to *nagarik*). While this is true, I do not think it goes far enough. In my consideration the issue extends beyond subject/state relations. In a way, what I want to take up is the problem posed by a Nepalese commentator on the revolution. He says that 'the one and a half months long movement has left a profound mark on the Nepalese psyche.' (Manali cited in Shaha 1990:210).

The direction that the paper will take is not then to chart how the revolution occurred and ended with success, though this story will be traversed, but it is to explore the route for the formation of this new conception of populist self, and in so doing indicate what it might mean. *Janā-śakti* is a compilation of the old words *janā* (people) and *śakti* (energy). *Śakti* is the concept that at its most potent refers to the great feminine principle that underlines the workings of the entire cosmos. It may also be used in the husband/wife relationship when a man refers to his wife as his *śakti*, the one through whom change is generated. But the word is not restricted to such contexts but is also used to denote the specific energy of things—eg., it is the *śakti* potency that works the digestive tract, or provides the force of the motor of jet aeroplanes—and so forth. Therefore when *śakti* is coupled to people, it is defining the nature of people as energy, power, force.

### The betrayals

The danger in exploring the past and reconstituting a story from it is working through hind-sight. One is tempted to identify the initial steps that unfurled the revolution. But at that time plans and protests were not the steps of success, only dreams and hopes, steps in a perilous journey with no guarantee of where it would lead. During this period there were I think two interconnected developments which were relevant to my concern, the emergence of the new subjectivity. First, the epic quest of making democracy a possibility, with its personal dramas of ordeals and trials opened the questions, 'what are we' and 'what are we capable of?' On the other hand, there was another set of goings on in the same series of confrontations, but coming from the other side. Certain unwise manoeuvres, certain inadvertent actions, certain extreme strategies on the Pancha government's part were so startling that they raised fundamental questions, prompted people to ponder on the terms of their relationship with authority and with the rights of the state. These anomalous actions provoked a problematizing of the 'givens'.

It is the latter set that I want to start with. It was not only that the state had engaged in measures to retain its sovereignty but that the measures

adopted were of a kind that totally jettisoned its integrity and proved itself the enemy of the people. It betrayed them through the use of a war machine; it abandoned them through the monarch's initial inaction and reticence; and it deserted its trust to preserve the strength of the people, its young.

There was a betrayal of the usual state/subject relations through the use of what might be called a 'war machine' because of the brutal potency of the equipment used, and because of the kind of personnel deployed (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). When the state authorities ordered police to fire at the people, or it brought in tanks and its military forces against unarmed subjects concerned to express their will, it turned civil relations into a field of war. (See the pictorial depiction in T. Bonk & R. Wagle 1990; T. Bonk [ed.] 1991.)

Even though the state could claim that it was confronting a law and order situation, the unleashing of such strategies turned the indigenous subjects into the enemy. And authorities let things go too far with the deployment of another kind of strategy—the use of ambulances to move the state's forces. It is in war that tactics of deceit and subterfuge are justifiable (as any of the Hindu commentators of statecraft say) not in relations with the people. And dishonour was compounded by cruelty, for in the revolutionary turmoil the state forces prevented certain casualties from getting to hospital. Along with the pain of the wounded, there was the pain of having to watch helplessly.

If the state had betrayed its citizens in certain measures, it also betrayed itself in others. There was also the question of the king's inaction. While the capital was in turmoil, the king was taking a sojourn in Pokara during the critical initial period (Shaha 1990:185-6). Just how widespread was the dissatisfaction with the king's silence is hard to tell. And how intensely this was felt is also a moot point. Nonetheless, for some who had thought about the matter, the inaction at this crucial time was seen as undermining the claim that the king was the protector of the people, mediating between them and the Panchas. Or at least it left room for doubt. And it was after this that the cities expressed acute hostility to royalty in the defamatory graffiti on urban walls.

One of the worst incidents may have been provoked by misadventure. It was with an inadvertent bullet that revolutionary feeling crystallized into an intensity of horror and shock, since the bullet hit a youth who was doing little more than climbing a statue. Indeed a tragedy, as much for the state as the people, for through the youth's death the state had betrayed the traditional trust—to protect the strength (*bala*) of the people, the young, through whom time continues. Not only did the news of this horror spread rapidly but it agitated the public imagination. Amazement moved to outrage.

If the state could bring in a war machine, if the palace could remain disturbingly quiescent when intervention was needed most, if the state could not prevent the martyrdom of the young—the state was then seen as

not only betraying the people but betraying itself to them. And that became imprinted in public consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

### **Corrupting discourses.**

At this time a new discourse emerged. It was new in the sense that its object was about revolutionary activity in its various guises. In some contexts the thematic was the project itself with an envisioned goal, and considerations of how best to deal with these in terms of strategies and timings, as well as reflections backs on achievements and losses so far. One might call this the tactical genre of the emergent discourse and its mode was of necessity clandestine. Simultaneously another genre was put in place. Its mode was public, brazenly so given the contents of its expression.

It is the latter cluster that is more relevant to my purposes here. A refrain about the king and queen was composed and became so widespread that children were repeating it like a nursery rhyme.<sup>4</sup> Graffiti etched out a flow chart not of hierarchy but of corruption, starting with the lowly officials at the bottom and ending at the pinnacle of state. And there were public chants demanding the execution of the then Prime Minister. The most excessive defamatory expression occurred through the use of dogs to represent royalty.<sup>5</sup>

It seems to me that this defamatory genre is complex. To a certain extent it was part of the revolutionary struggle, a way of voicing discontent. For some, certain expressions reflected a widespread disillusion with the government's performance (the flow chart of corruption). Yet with others (like the dog venture), the judgement being expressed did not receive endorsement across the revolutionary spectrum, but in some instances even eliciting disapproval of the idiom used. To what extent the criticism of royalty was endorsed by the populace at large is difficult to tell. But what none could ignore was the fact of its audacity, for the unsayable was being said in public. The rules of decorum, good taste and propriety were being broken in the glaring light of day.

Moreover it seems to me that having the audacity to say the unsayable has important repercussions, has the effect of making others wonder about the potentials of subjecthood. Let me put the point this way. If people recognize that some are capable of defying decorum in the most extreme way possible, they are also witnessing a shift in the way ordinary people usually operate. The shift hardly benefited the revolutionary movement in terms of strategy, if anything it could have jeopardized it, rendering it more precarious by the possibility of provoking more reprisals. In a sense both the defamatory song and the dog venture directed at royalty may be understood less as strategies of the movement and more as means of experiencing the transgressing of limits. One can hardly think of anything worse.

In my opinion, for certain people such conduct was less an attack on royalty and geared more to the thrill of going to the limits, beyond the

threshold. Royalty provides this possibility since it stands at the apex. I draw substance for the argument from the children's conduct. They hardly knew the significance of what they were saying in the song, but they knew they were breaking the rules and they exulted in this. Therefore what counted was the breaking of taboos. So for our purposes what is important is that the discourse against authority offered occasion for the participants to experience doing what was forbidden by being able to say what was ordinarily unsayable. To infringe stringent taboos.

### **Trials of violence**

After the announcement that the king recognized the revolutionary movement's success, the country slid into what might be called an interregnum period. Despite the apparent success or perhaps with the success, agitation accelerated on different fronts. And all involved extreme kinds of action. There was the burning of police stations, certain government offices, as well as attacks on police suspected of being 'mobsters', all extreme acts of violence with real devastating effects (T. Bonk & N. Wagle 1990; T. Bonk [ed.] 1991; Shaha 1990:219-220).

At the same time there was also the revival of several traditional procedures which also worked to effect change but of a more subtle kind. I refer to the procedure known as *gherāo*, where a victim is encircled and thereby becomes a prey hounded by a pack. Another is where the victim is polluted by contact with a string of dirty shoes which are slung onto his body in a corrupting ritual known as 'shoe-garlanding' (*juttāko mala*). A third kind of procedure entails stuffing grass into the mouth of the victim, thus animalizing him.

All of these constitute an assortment of activities which are unlike those of other modalities of action. Before proceeding I will itemize the latter. There is the entrenched modality known as 'favouritism' where one's desires are realized through eventually tapping a source-force after a string of subtle negotiations (that is doing *chakari*) to get the source-force on side in bids to have one's desires fulfilled.<sup>6</sup> It is organized around the principle of 'intercession'. Since it is so widespread one might analytically conceptualize it as the prevailing form of power in Foucault's sense (1982:210-15). Also entrenched, but working imperceptibly because its style is clandestine, is another modality of action that I call 'chicanery' (Kondos, V. 1984). This entails acts of secrecy, of sabotage, prevarications, pretence and a play with illusion. The actor has to be clever, *chalak*, otherwise the whole affair falls apart. Its principle of organization is elusiveness. There is also a 'modality of authority' where conduct is being regulated to a greater or lesser extent. One responds to demands by some sort of accommodation—by obedience, attempts at negotiation. The principle of organization is making do. And finally, protest—a form of action that entails the antithesis of authority since it is geared to challenge the authority itself.

The forms of violent protests that I have referred to are obviously

divergent. Unlike chicanery they engage in a frontal attack, there's nothing secretive about them. Unlike intercession, where the negotiator seeks other's help through a series of diplomatic acts, flattery and gift, the protests seek to do violence in some way: to wound the body of its victim, or take its life, to violate the dignity of the man targeted for attack, or destroy the appurtenances of those in authority, or the sites of their operations, their offices or homes or cars. And in so doing the protests render actual alterations.

Now, according to certain commentaries such endeavours were approached as occasions for people to reveal their outrage at the reprehensible conduct of the notable person or official in question, that they would no longer tolerate indignities, or submissively accept corrupt practices, or let untoward violence, like police brutalities, or counter-insurgency extremes, go unnoticed. For example:

During the night of the 22 April some vigilante groups rounded up and held captive people whom they considered to be acting suspiciously, and next morning excited mobs attacked these people's prisoners. According to R.S.S. five persons were beaten to death in these attacks, and a crowd took a round of the city with two dead bodies and six injured persons on a push cart (Shaha 1990:220-1).

Such action meant accusation and punishment in one hit. But that is the way of popular justice which has no pretence about the desire for revenge, and dares to take the law into its own hands (Foucault in Gordon [ed.] 1980:8-9).

If the occasion is a trial for the accused it is also a trial for the accuser. What is being put in abeyance is one's ordinariness, if factory worker, student, voter, *tol* resident, clerk, or whoever take it upon themselves to preside over these make-shift courts of justice. Such persons are demonstrating to themselves and to others that they are capable of more than the hum-drum, by assuming the roles of accuser/judge/executioner.

But the outbursts were regarded by those in authority, especially the party leaders of the interim government, with suspicion and concern (Shaha 1990:220-4). Even though for some, popular justice was at stake in this interregnum period, but for others it was a case of subjects taking the law into their own hands and therefore to be judged as highly irregular (1990:21).<sup>7</sup> However, what the condemnation ignores is that popular justice does not act in terms of the strictures of the juridico-legal system. Its rationality does not depend on legal principles. Popular justice accuses and judges according to what it perceives as uncalled for behaviour. Some theoretical approaches refer to this kind of irregular conduct as due to a taste of blood, emerging spontaneously from the social turmoil, thus implying that such actions are to be conceptualized as nothing less than mere mob behaviour or acts of personal revenge. And, in Nepal, any disturbance may also be seen as a devious strategy of reactionary forces,

as certain politicians judged the situation at the time. While I would not deny such possibilities, what is significant in the Nepalese context is that many selections were not arbitrary—those targeted for attack were not only those regarded as being *mandale* mobsters but many were men of public stature renowned for 'corruption', or some other offence like encouragement of police brutality. In which cases popular justice was at stake.

The question that then arises is just how popular was popular justice. Analysts of Nepal (and often elsewhere) both local and foreign may attribute such outbursts to the instigation of those in positions of authority (party leaders, union bosses, wealthy men and even opponents set to discredit one's cause). While it would be foolhardy to ignore the possibility of the attractiveness of money in mobilizing paid protestors and also to ignore the possibility of instances of party bosses' authority in garnering certain followers' obedience, yet I think it would also be unwise to constantly portray populist action as nothing more than the carrying out of notables' instructions. Such theses end up conceptualizing the actors as being essentially manipulable, unthinking stooges of those in positions of power and status. Where obedience does in fact occur this may be due to the followers' recognition of the moral and political need to act in that way. Compliance need not arise from the followers' automatic obedience to leaders' demands. And what may also complicate matters is that sometimes those in authority condemn such irregular conduct, assessing it as a counter-productive strategy, incriminating the perpetrators as the violators of the victim's dignity. Such happened with shoe-garlanding where certain union leaders condemned this as an assault on the target's dignity and prohibited its future occurrence. In such instances it was the workers themselves who would vent a desire to express their contempt for the figure of authority. So one has, I think, to allow for variability.

Therefore, as to the question of the configuration of the actors' orientation to the trials of popular justice, whether in the extreme forms of bodily violence, or the cases of violating other's dignity, one recognizes the complexities obtaining. Undoubtedly the situation was heterogeneous. While for some there was the matter of giving vent to the feeling of moral outrage, but for all involved there would have been the experience of effecting a popular form of justice: acting as punisher.

With both experiences the effect was a taste of power. And it is this form of experience which has the potential to disengage other kinds of identifications: of lowliness, inferiority, of dependence, of impotence or being without access to a pukka source-force, and so forth. And if servility is the face of fear, confidence is the face of power.

### **Memories of the ordeals of confrontation.**

It is necessary at this point to back-track to the period before the

announcement of the revolution's success (9th April). Irrespective of what else was going on, there was one kind of activity that I think has come to constitute the revolution—these are the direct confrontations between people and the state. And of these, the show of mass resistance to the government on April 6th has become exemplary. While this occasion was critical to the progress of the revolution, it also afforded an opportunity for an anomalous experience. And this confrontation like the others has provided the ingredients for a new discourse.

In testimony after testimony participants relate how they were carried along by the momentum of motion, how they were aware of the thousands of others pouring in from all directions, and tell how the question of fear didn't enter their minds, and were only aware of excitement, theirs and everybody else's:

All the groups were to meet in front of King Mahendra's statue in Darbar Marg and then move towards the palace. I was walking along the pavement with my friends from college. We saw other friends and asked them to join the procession. Everybody was excited. Even the observers got excited and joined the procession.

When we arrived in front of the cinema hall, the police stopped us. The police were in riot gear and carrying sticks. They told us that we couldn't proceed further and that we had to go back. This discouraged our morale, and the excitement disappeared but when we saw more and more people coming from behind this helped to restore our excitement.

We decided to move forward. We just didn't care about police bashing..... The police inspector was asking the crowd not to proceed further.... We in the crowd didn't know that the army was stationed in Darbar Marg. The people didn't listen to the inspector and pushed the police aside and moved on.

We all met up in front of the Bangalore coffee house, at the corner of Darbar Marg. Two lines of police were deployed there with their sticks. The third line was formed of riot police. The fourth, the army. The police started to stop the crowd. Half of the shops were open and the people in them were cheering the crowd and supporting them openly.

I was in the front line. Despite the police's efforts to stop us we weren't going to be stopped. We were too excited and we weren't scared of the police at all at that moment.

From testimonies such as this one may abstract several features of this kind of action. First, action moved through feelings, at this point in time, in spite of the particular reasons any individual had to join the mass demonstration. Secondly, there was a registering of some kind of contagion, being transmitted by the intensity of feelings surging up from the swarms around. Thirdly, there was a disregard of the usual cautionary measure. One finds this indifference in phrases like 'I just didn't care'. Fourthly, there was no co-ordination in the organization at such moments,



but a case where the mass was following its own momentum.

Now if these are all extremes (intensity in feeling, swarms of people, an acute disregard for caution, acting with a mass momentum), then the kind of experience being engendered by this kind of action could be called 'anomalous', at the edges of the regularities of everyday living (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

Moreover, it is also worth noticing how the possibilities opened up by such confrontations against state force diverge from the possibilities of the chicaning modality of action where effort is also directed at defying the rules. If one is to be clever it is necessary that one not be overwhelmed by intense affects, whereas with the struggle modality such feelings take over. Secondly with chicaning, calculation is a major part of the exercise unlike the confrontation where people at the critical moment just don't care. With *chalak* one seeks to minimise risks, whereas risks didn't enter as a consideration in the turmoil of confrontation. Thirdly, the ingenuity of devising strategies of the *chalak* modality contrast with the self-abandonment in the push to confront the state's war machine head-on. Fourthly, while chicaning involves the individual or group in sectional interests, the confrontational struggle is a venture where the stakes concern the masses.

If there was the thrill of trying to make a revolution happen on that fateful day, the forward push was brought to a halt when the state's troops opened fire. As reports make plain, experience shifted register, going from exhilaration to panic and flight.

The turn of events however, should not foreclose a consideration of the possible way the actors were orienting themselves vis-a-vis each other and vis-a-vis the state before that moment and afterwards. The failure at one point in time does not deny the experience of having been able to push towards the palace, to decry its continuing support of the discredited regime and to dare to try to bring down the Pancha government. In retrospect the individuals concerned focus less on their failure and more on their success in getting so far. They relate their particular exploits and their particular circumstances. I should add here that what is less vocal in the discourse are references from those who hedged their bets and were reluctant to act. But with regard to those who had participated in any of the struggles, if their reflections on their own actions indicate a pride in themselves, even surprise, then they are now judging themselves as capable of extraordinary achievement, as certainly remarkable, of the stuff that makes history.

There are however two caveats that require emphasis. First, one has to be wary of hind-sight and a tendency to read into the goings-on, the precise figurings that were only shaped later. Before the announcement of the revolution's success certain experiences would have started to tear down the pertinences of old definitions bearing on the populace and would have gone some way in a destabilization of the givens. But exactly what this amounted to would have as yet been unformulated. So one cannot say that

a consciousness of a new kind of collective subjectivity had by then become consolidated. The second point of analytic caution relates to the problem of variation. It would be foolhardy not to recognize that actions across the field were diverse. This holds whether one considers the different occasions, the uprising in Patan or the terrible march down the streets of Kathmandu or the smaller skirmishes, or the diversity within any one kind of mobilization that occurred throughout this period. The attempts at generating a revolution did not constitute a unitary phenomenon. However, what links these personal dramas, or so I would argue, is the principle of transgression, that is, the venturing beyond the limits of the known, the familiar and the usual. The field of disparate and diverse actions undertaken by the mass of individuals takes on a regularity.

There was also the matter of sequences. As we know, what followed the turbulent confrontations at Darbar Square in front of the palace was the night of darkness, when the state imposed a curfew and saturated the city with its military. This is one man's response to the affair:

It is terrible. The streets are green, green with the colour of the military. No noises and no movement. We are afraid. We don't know how long it will last...What will happen. And when night comes there will be no lights. The curfew is indefinite.

His tone resonates terror, a terror of the unknown. And in a sense the night of waiting constitutes another kind of ordeal, now framed by the state to determine total inaction on the part of the populace. To have to wait while not knowing even what one was waiting for is I think as terrifying as the confrontational engagements where tension at least finds a momentum in action. Mobilization was of course out of the question. Even the manoeuvres of the modality of favouritism were out of bounds. And for the populace it would have been risky to engage in any cleverness if the streets were green with the military. My point is this: in such circumstances, if the state was forcing the individual subjects to experience the tension of waiting and register a sense of awful impotence during those long/short hours, then it had abandoned its responsibility to uphold the 'happiness' of the subjects as proclaimed in the preamble of the operative Nepalese constitution (1961:1).

However, in this what is important is the paradoxical twist to the proceedings. While the troops and the curfew put the movement in jeopardy, at the same time this black strategy was also confirming the movement's rationale. It made plain that the democratic movement was necessary because the regime was not only demonstrably oppressive, but also indifferent to the masses' desires and demands.

But before long, the message from the king announced the success of the revolution. With this, the ordeal took a new turning. The unknown eventuated as the people's triumph. In this way the announcement recognized the population's capacity to be effective in getting the state to

reform, and establish a party system. And recognition of this potency was articulated in the emergence of a new concept, *janā-śakti*, 'people-power'. The naming moreover gave a concept to frame the assorted experiences of the multitude.

With regard to the question of the emergence of the new conception of the populace as *janā-śakti*, as we know, some have diagnosed it as constituting a shift from being mere subjects to becoming free citizens. Yet this only focuses on one kind of self, real though it is. If we turn to the chorus chanted during the celebrations, this time we find the recognition of another. 'Down with Panchayat system! Hang Marish Man! This is the People's victory! We will save the country! We have won democracy!' (Shaha 1990:211).

If it attributes the just finalized revolutionary victory to the people, and attributes the country's future well-being to the people, it is also articulating a recognition of the people as a force, a force capable of being effective against formidable odds. It was that force which acquired the name of '*janā-śakti*'.

*Janā-śakti* is that kind of capability that is currently operating in the emergent though popular modality of action that one might call interventionist. It includes the assortment of activities mentioned at the outset of the paper, like the various kinds of demonstrations whose object is to make known one's discontent with rules and policy that come from above. It also includes the operation of the procedures of shoe-garlanding etc., where there's a concern to effect popular justice immediately against those who would violate the integrity of subordinates. But in both sets there's a concern with justice. It is unlike the entrenched authority, where the locus of power lies in the advantageous positioning in the hierarchy. It is unlike chicanery where the objective is to subvert the emplaced power through one's cleverness. It is also unlike the favouring scenario where the individual seeks the power of the source-force, to intercede on its behalf. In this new modality the source of power is the people. This is also recognized in the preamble to the 1990 Nepalese Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

But it is not only the people's specific capability that is at issue here. In Nepalese theorizing what one can do is intimately linked to what one is. In other words one cannot have one without the other—a particular being has its commensurate capability. This proposition permeates many everyday practices (like choice of foods regarded as capable of inducing desirable effects; like avoidances to be followed since contact with an impure polluted object is regarded as having the capacity to pollute those who touch it and so forth). At the esoteric level the idea is expressed in the axiom: the effect is existent in the cause. And it figures in explanations about the ways things develop according to the doctrine of *karmaphala*. Therefore we might conclude that not only does the term *janā-śakti* relate to a force that emanates from the Nepalese people, but also to a conception of the nature of this demotic collectivity. If this is so, then a new ontology has emerged.

And it seems to me that *śakti* power manifests in a range of assorted refusals, most notably a refusal to be treated dismissively, or to be submissive. A new recalcitrance is denying the popularity of servility and docility yet to assume that this demotic assertiveness takes reference from the values of 'human rights', part of the discourse of liberal democracy, would I think miss the specificity of the Nepalese experience and the Hindu conceptions that inform it. From the Nepalese perspective rights are understood as emerging from power and are not, as the liberal democrat might put it, the source of power. That is on the broad front, even though certain intellectuals heed humanism's reverberations. *Janā-śakti* is singularly Nepali.

Of course it might be said that the time of exuberance is over and people-power no longer amounts to much. I am not convinced of this argument. To be sure the conventional modalities of action haven't been thrown out but continue to flourish. Yet alongside the older instituted modalities, the assorted strategies of the interventionist are extensively operating, accelerated by the mood of defiance. Furthermore, with regard to conceptions of self, what can't be easily erased are the individual experiences stored through memory, providing the ground for the *janā-śakti* consciousness; nor can the history of the dramas now fixed in texts and photographs, whether at the personal or wider level.

The following comment provides an instance of this new mentality, which will not tolerate what it sees as abuse of power and violation of ordinary people's integrity:

If we can bring democracy, don't you think we can handle this man who has abused his power. He withholds wages and makes us come to his house to collect our pay. And he harasses the women. Democracy came from the actions of ordinary people...*janā-śakti*. We'll show him that we can't be pushed around. We are planning to give him a garland of shoes.

This kind of statement indicates a recognition of the existence of a particular kind of collectivity and a consciousness of its particular potential, where there is an orientation of confidence in that potential. To my mind all of this distinguishes the new ontology from that of the past. Which is not to say that rebellious attitudes were not caught up in the first revolution of 1951; nor to deny the underground efforts that were evoked when king Mahendra imposed the Panchayat system and re-established the institution of absolute monarchical rule. To be sure clandestine strategies and a revolutionary spirit pertained in those quarters. But whatever form of consciousness this took and whatever term was used to identify the spirit of such fragmented groupings, these were not identical with the concept *janā-śakti*, or so I would argue. *Janā-śakti* emerged in the experience of the 1990 revolution and is specific to that.

It was formed out of a number of specific processes of which the following at least were relevant. The first condition of possibility: with the

series of state betrayals there was for the populace the problematization of certain fundamental givens. In violating the inviolable and putting in doubt what should always be able to be taken for granted (ie., that the state is not the enemy of the people, even if governments are corrupt and tyrannical) the effect was to upset the terms of the code bearing on subject/state relations. If the series of betrayals extended the movement beyond the confines of those who had hitherto been committed and hardened the commitment of those already dedicated to the revolutionary cause—an irrevocable scenario of 'us' and 'them'—it also created the possibility of transforming the situation into a people's issue with politico-moral resonances.

If the threshold of tolerance was breached in this context another kind of threshold figured in the assorted expressions of the subversive discourse. The experiments in publicly saying the unsayable, and with this the exultation in transgression, meant new demotic possibilities. With the ordeals of confrontation which sent shudders of violence throughout the kingdom, there came the display of what the masses could do. Dreams, aspirations and hopes transformed into startling realities and possibilities.

By a certain stage however, all that had happened had not as yet consolidated anything. For this stage one may only note what had been let loose from these goings-on: that the state had incriminated any modicum of integrity that might have hitherto remained, and that the opportunity to transgress limits had been taken by some; and others again had been able to destabilize the might of the state.

What assembled these experiences and consolidated them into the new ontological conception? Obviously recognition of the populace's revolutionary success played its part. But this by itself could not have determined the terms of that conception. Here I think certain cultural guide-lines were relevant (and continue to be). It is these which frame the way memory casts its considerations of what one and others had done, of what the people were capable of, and of what was the nature of that collective entity. There, as elsewhere, to be able to do something in particular also means that one has the nature corresponding with that capability.

As for the eruptions of violence after the revolution. When it was the case of putting popular justice into effect and on show and subjecting the notables and state agents to its trials and judgements, these instances may be understood as both a replay of the revolutionary attack on the regime's worst agents as well as an expression of the populace's now installed and recognised potency. Or they may be assessed as constituting a law and order problem—people just going wild. But either way, such extreme activities had been carried along by the momentum of the revolutionary success. It was that which gave the ground for the spate of these wild outbursts. A headiness through success in the use of violence can be contagious.

What is important for the argument is the recognition that certain

thresholds had been crossed. The old threshold of the populace's toleration vis-a-vis certain kinds of conduct by state agents and people of privilege, and the old threshold of the possibilities of demotic action had been breached. Fear and docility were no longer able to maintain the extensive strangleholds they once had.

Whether or not the incumbents of the new democratic regime now emplaced as the lords of the right or left recognise or heed such changes is a moot point. Others, however, are certainly alert to the transformation. As one Nepali commentator assesses the change in populist self-orientation: 'people just won't take things lying down any more'.

## Notes

1 My presence in Kathmandu in 1989, 1990 and 1991 was made possible by an Australian Research Council grant for three years. It was initially earmarked for a project focusing on industrial relations, state legislation bearing on these, the role of cultural knowledges in the factory context, and considerations of the possibility of social change. The timing for this study was opportune since it enabled me to shift attention to examine some aspects of the changes effected by the democratic revolution of 1990. I would like to thank Indra Ban, the research assistant of the project, for her invaluable contribution along many fronts. I would also like to acknowledge my appreciation of the exciting discussions with a number of people, but especially A. Shrestha, P.R. Sharma, J. Sakya, K. Sakya, G. Ban, R. Sharma, O.P. Subedhi and the late K.S. Rana. Needless to add they are not responsible for the argument I outline.

2 That there has been a radical change in the orientations of certain people is borne out by Fisher's current ethnographic work. In a personal communication at the conference he related how members of the once-called 'tribal' or 'ethnic' groups have become highly politicized. They have formed associations known as '*janā-jātis*' which translates as 'nationalities' where objectives are to further their own causes and not take matters of 'discrimination' lying down, as once they did. According to my research carried out before the revolution such groupings were formed in a clandestine manner and meetings took place in secret. One such formation called itself the 'Magurailis' (comprising Magars, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus) and held meetings in Patan above the premises of an international agency, apparently unbeknown to that organization.

3 The list of betrayals is not exhaustive. Nor is it necessary for my argument that such reprehensible conduct occurred but that it was believed so. This would apply to a string of mooted events. For example, the general public was electrified by reports that certain Patan policemen had brutally assaulted women activists. Given that the state not only inscribes rape as a criminal act but also legally allows the woman to kill the attacker to prevent its occurrence, it is understandable that the public was both morally outraged by the accounts and also felt that the state had abandoned care of its principles.

4 A rough translation:

Birendra the thief,  
quit the country.

Pampa Devi—ugh! ugh!

Pampa Devi is the Queen's nickname.

5 Shaha (1990:198) elaborates:

At other times dogs with cardboard crowns tied to the heads were released: a bitch with a large name tag, Aiswarya, was sent into the street first, then several males with Birendra name tags were sent after her.

6 Various aspects of the institution of 'favouritism' have been examined in the literature on the topic. See for example D.B. Bista 1991; Caplan 1971; A. Kondos 1987; V. Kondos 1984. The considerations being taken here for conceptualizing different lines of action have been prompted by the general theoretical guidelines provided by Deleuze & Guattari (1987). For conceptualizing different forms of power I have turned to Foucault. Despite the idiosyncratic style of the co-authors, their approach on this score is comparable to that of Foucault.

7 The question of the variability in people's assessment of populist violence is elaborated in my forthcoming article.

8 With regard to the question of what was happening outside Kathmandu Valley. Shaha's detailed analysis indicates that agitation was erupting throughout the country (1990:190–192). Verbal accounts confirm this. Dr Don Messersmidt, an anthropologist working in Nepal, was outside Kathmandu at the time of the disturbances and only drove back on the fateful day. In a statement at the conference he said that his experiences support the general slant that I am proposing: that in other parts of the country there was a sense of betrayal, a mood of defiance and a determination to fight what people saw as reactionary forces. With regard to the question of the awareness of 'people-power' he concurs that this should not be restricted to the urban population.

9 It states:

Whereas, We are convinced that in the independent and sovereign Nepal, the source of sovereign authority is inherent in the people, and, therefore, We have, from time to time, made known Our desire to conduct the government of the country in consonance with the popular will;  
And whereas, in keeping with the desire of the Nepalese people expressed through the recent people's movement to bring about constitutional changes, We are further inspired by the objective of obtaining to the Nepalese people justice social, political and economic, to be available long into the future.

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# **The New Local Government Law: Diluted Raksi in an Old Bottle**

**Stephen L. Mikesell <sup>1</sup>**

For more than forty years the popular movement . . . fought for enforcement of legal rights, participated in elections, and tried to elect mayors and deputies. . . . The People . . . finally realized that they had been spinning and unravelling, like spiders, for over forty years.

—Salvador Cayetano Carpio  
Salvadoran guerrilla leader, 1982 <sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

Much of the legislation that was implemented in Nepal in the name of state stewardship of resources over the last four decades actually extended bureaucratic structures downwards into the communities, neutralized local organizations and initiatives, and made human and natural community resources more easily accessible to exploitation by powerful, narrow interests, both within and without the community. In the last three decades, the growth of widespread, effective popular initiatives throughout the world—including liberation theology, popular committees and councils, culture circles, Delegates of the Word—and parties which are based on such initiatives—such as the Workers Party of Brazil—that have arisen to confront exploitation and repression have encouraged international donors to rethink their support for bureaucratically implemented plans and introduce initiatives to conceptualize, if not effectively implement, their aid goals in terms of community participation and self management of resources.

Within Nepal, government planners and non-government sectors have not remained ignorant of this shift in the metaphors that hold the key to development aid. The new local government law has appropriated this terminology, showcasing words such as ‘participation’, ‘autonomy’, ‘decentralization’ and ‘development’. However, despite its participatory rhetoric, the local government law was hurriedly introduced and passed late in the spring 1992 parliamentary session, precluding any substantial public airing or discussion. Close analysis of the logic of this new law and the projected form of its implementation shows that the participatory terminology is mere window dressing for a law that devolves no new substantial governmental powers to the people, while reintroducing

institutions that extend bureaucratic control further into the villages. The law gives with one hand but actually takes with the other. Where a mechanism is set up to effect high-sounding objectives in one part of the law, an office or agency is created in another that takes away the power or negates the attempt. The law seems to be driven more by the ulterior motive of extending central control into the villages and urban neighbourhoods and centralizing power than any sort of internal logic of working for the purposes that it expounds. The poorly constructed circular reasoning and false logic needed to effect this end without discarding the metaphors and appearances of democracy make the law obtuse and difficult to understand, particularly for the lay persons who it is supposed to serve. As far as control over resources in particular, the character of the law will ensure that the erosion of local control will not only continue as before, but be further facilitated.

Looking at the law, the local government consists of 'Village and Municipal Development Committees' headed by committee chairmen. The members of the committees are elected by adult suffrage, but they have no governmental powers—neither legislative, executive, administrative, official nor judicial. Though the law exalts participation, its purpose seems to preclude people from participating. The law talks of 'planning', but the plans to be are already drawn up by the Planning Commission and central government. It talks of 'execution', but the execution and control of local administration are carried out by secretaries neither elected nor nominated by elected representatives at the local level; rather, they are appointed by the central government. It talks of 'participation', but the activities are to be carried out by elites and the powerful, not by common citizens. The only thing that committees can do is sell off village properties, which leads to the question of whether this is the true purpose of the law.

If any committee attempts to step from the narrow path set for it by the law and tries to implement the goals rhetorically claimed by it (participation, planning, execution, autonomy, etc.), then that committee becomes liable to dissolution, according to the clause that the central government has the prerogative to suspend or dissolve any committee, for example, for abuse of authority. This clause indeed not only negates any sort of government functions locally, given the restrictions and qualifications of the law, it suppresses political plurality at the local level.

### **Preamble: high-sounding words, false promises**

To start with, the preamble of the new law for local government states that the goal of the village, municipality and district development committees is to 'maximize people's participation'. However, though this is a local government law, the next words are not participation in

government, but 'in development activities'. As clearly evidenced by the logic and mechanisms instituted by the law, these 'development activities' are still to be defined and implemented from above, not from within the communities. 'Participation' will be seen to mean that people accept and go along with this implementation, not decide upon or shape it.

The preambles of the municipality and district laws further specify provision of local autonomy to the people. However, as will be demonstrated, the laws are crafted in order to protect against autonomous action. Further recognizing donor priorities, the village law in particular specifies that it is to usher the development of local level leadership, 'under the naive assumption that one can promote the community by training its leaders—as if it were the parts that promote the whole and not the whole which, in being promoted, promotes the parts' (Freire 1972:112).

### **The Committees: a new form of bureaucracy**

The municipal and village development committees are not governing bodies in which people legislate local laws or control their administration. What constitutes the domain of the activities of the committees is already predetermined. The functions of the village development committees are defined according to a list of the national ministerial portfolios: (1) education and culture, (2) health and population, (3) agriculture and irrigation, (4) forest, environment and energy, (5) drinking water, (6) works and transport, (7) social welfare and (8) miscellany. The functions of the municipalities are similar. Of course the functions of the key ministries—finance, planning, justice, home, defense, foreign and palace—are omitted.

It seems that the development committees are little more than a new level of bureaucracy which has incorporated formal electoral components to extend the various ministerial powers down to the local levels. The law just means that the function of local government is to carry out programs already determined in the ministries, nothing more. This is a repeat of the 'decentralization' under the previous constitution, using even the same term. In contrast, a law aimed at participation would define its function as *enabling participation*, of giving the powers of legislation, planning, administration and execution over to the people. It would encourage people to invent their own solutions according to their needs and capabilities as experienced at the local level. It would not limit the functions just to facilitating plans, policy and legislation imposed by the central government and party in power.

### **Powers that are not powers**

A list of powers in the Village Development Committee Law makes it

seem that the powers of government are being handed over to the people. But these are not 'powers' of governance, they are just procedural rules. Since the local governments have no powers in substance, there is obviously no power in the procedures.

1. 'Power' to make committees: a procedural rule.

The first of these procedural 'powers' is the 'power to form necessary sub-committees'. These committees are specified to consist of 'local intelligentsia, Non-Government Organization (NGO) representatives, and social workers' who will be nominated by the development committee. In other words, now the real meaning of 'participation' is disclosed. Participation means that only local elites and contracting NGOs can participate. If you are not educated, do not belong to an NGO, or are not a social worker, then you cannot participate, make decisions or act for yourself. Furthermore, this participation is controlled through nomination by the committee. This then means that villagers will not be able to participate, especially neither women nor the poor.

2. 'Power' of the Secretary: The Other Hand Takes Back What the First Gave.

The second power, the 'powers and functions of the village development committee secretary', is a real power, but one that has been removed from the elected development committee, not given to it. The section on 'administrative staff and recruitment' (discussed below) determines that the administrative secretary is appointed by the central government. All the powers of execution and implementation are then given over to this secretary, which effectively means that the central government not only determines what the development committee does, as discussed above, but then goes ahead and does it itself.

The extent of the development committee's dependence upon the secretaries has been demonstrated months after the election in the inability of many opposition dominated committees to form due to failure or disinterest of the ruling party in nominating the local secretaries. The government is using this mechanism in opposition-held village development committees to immobilize them and implement its programs from above.

For both the Village Development Committee and the municipality, the various powers of the secretary include, first, the execution of the decisions of the village committee or town development program. Thus the executive function of government goes to someone nominated by the central government. Recall above that decision making was not one of the functions given to the development committee; its role was merely to

execute planning and policy made by the central government. Within the municipality specifically, the mayor's role, in contrast to that of the secretary, is limited to the 'arrangement' of the execution, not execution itself; and furthermore, this 'arrangement' is not of legislation, but of 'development'.

Second, within the village committee, the secretary maintains the records of NGOs and projects implemented. Within the municipalities, he furthermore, third, takes overall responsibility for the internal administration. Within the village committee, the secretary, fourth, investigates complaints filed with the Village Development Committee, and, fifth, records vital statistics on birth, marriage, death and registration.

It is strange that a law that proposes autonomy, participation and decentralization places executive, administrative, investigatory and official functions at the local level into the hands of an official appointed by the central government in the form of the secretary. Since legislative power, policy and planning were also never given to the village and municipal development committees, it is difficult to understand how these committees constitute a local government at all. From the point of view of the citizens, they are merely powerless and insubstantial extensions of the central government into the village level. From the point of view of the ruling party and associated international interests, the committees extend power locally but do not devolve this power, which makes the committees into a tool to further the process of disarming the local level and exposing it to exploitation.

In contrast to the secretaries, the elected chairmen and mayors of the development committees have basically no power. Given the manner in which the *pradhan panchas* abused power in the previous dispensation, it may have been prudent not to give authority to locally elected individuals. But turning over the powers of government to secretaries, who are centrally nominated government officials with the same lack of accountability, neither solves the problem of dismantling the patronage that has continued to plague the post-Rana era and characterize development cum transnational corporate expansion generally, nor does it establish an elected government that represents and is accountable to its constituency. To do this, the powers should reside in the committees themselves, and the committees should be based in community organizations, either formally within the government structures or through democratic initiatives within the parties or communities or both.

### **Plans without planning**

In view of the powerlessness of the local governments and their failure to enfranchise the people in practice, one must ask what meaning planning

can have if people cannot carry out the plans. Indeed, the sections of the law on the formulation and execution of plans are just meaningless formulas and contradictory statements to make it seem that nothing is something.

The law determines that local planning, of both the village and municipal committees, 'must adhere to the instructions given by the government and National Planning Commission in respect to plan formulation and implementation'. The section on 'guidance' says that the village development committee must comply with the National Planning Commission on plan formulation and execution. In other words, if the committees could formulate and execute plans (which they cannot), these must be those of the central government. It is evident that planning means planning by the central government and compliance of the villagers with the central government planning and directives.

Furthermore, though the village committees cannot formulate their own plans, the law states that the plans should give priority to 'income generation, agricultural productivity, indigenous resource utilization and the interest of backward classes and women'. In other words, the priorities and conceptualization of the planning have already been predetermined, as set out by the planning commission and current international funding priorities and jargons. Finally, before selection of the plans (which cannot be formulated anyway), feasibility studies must be undertaken, leading at the very least to a bureaucratic nightmare, and also ensuring that only those who can afford feasibility studies will select plans (nothing is said about implementation) and leaving the possibility for sabotage of any unacceptable plan through interpretations of feasibility. Feasibility studies are artifacts of central planners who have little conception of local level realities; if development were actually being carried out through active local participation and decision making, such feasibility studies should be unnecessary, as the process is on-going and intimately tied to people's daily practice. The statement on 'execution' of the plans merely delimits the sources of resources for 'execution', which as seen above, is actually carried out by the government nominated secretary.

### **'Participation' of bosses, bureaucrats and party sponsors**

Having observed that the plans, as they are, originate from the central government, we also find that they are to be implemented not by the development committees or their constituencies, but by non-government organizations (NGOs). The municipal directive is similar to the village one, as follows:

The Village Development Committee should encourage the non-

governmental organisation to identify, implement and evaluate development activities. The NGOs should undertake the local level activities in coordination with the Village Development Committee. The Village Development Committee can implement local development activities *only* through non-governmental organisation.

If the local governments are supposedly based on popular participation, why do they need to utilize non-government organizations to implement their development activities? Remembering that the village development committee secretary controls registration, he (and through him the central government) controls the official recognition of NGOs. In this way, even though reference to NGOs seems to provide a means of implementation separate from the government, the government hereby exerts its control over identification, implementation and evaluation of development activities. It also defines the form of the NGO organization through the requirements of registration, whereas a popularly based organization will be shaped according to the situation it was created to address. Furthermore, a direct linkage between NGOs, the government and international interests already exists.

To wit, the international agencies, which have been underwriting the expansion of the Nepalese bureaucracy for the last forty years through development loans and aid, have recently discovered that the client bureaucracies which they themselves created take on their own autonomous existences and interests and fail to respond to the needs either of their own people (not the agencies' primary concern) or of the international banking, industrial, commercial and aid bureaucracy interests (which is their concern). The latest agency and donor strategy, therefore, has been to shift aid funds to NGOs through which the international agencies and other interests create, intentionally and unintentionally, an urban client class hopefully directly dependent upon and subservient to themselves and no one else. The rapid and enthusiastic growth of NGOs in the urban areas following the 1990 political realignment provides evidence of this process.

A study under a prominent international institute has found that in Nepal this client class is the same one that controls the top positions in the government and staffs the local offices of the international organizations and agencies.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the heads of the two NGO umbrella associations are brothers of the ministers of Finance and Planning. The policy developed by the finance minister's brother's NGO umbrella group even found its way into the finance minister's speech on NGO policy last year. The inbred group of people controlling the government, the bureaucracy, international offices and the parties, even the leadership of the opposition, have opportunistically utilized this international strategy to extend their

domestic political-economic control. Thus the emphasis on NGOs as the implementing agency in the new local government law is of no surprise, since the same people who wrote and voted on the law will be those who benefit. Placing implementation into the hands of the NGOs has little to do with creating popular participation or empowerment; it has everything to do with extending the ruling class cum international influence and control into the villages in yet another form, with even more destruction of local community institutions and of the resources they control.<sup>4</sup>

(Subsequent to the original presentation of this paper we have found that the government is systematically by-passing opposition controlled elected committees and disbursing government and international donor funds directly to NGOs loyal to the ruling party. As predicted, some truly grassroots NGOs are reporting that they are finding registry difficult—e.g. no action taken on an untouchable sweepers' organization in Bhaktapur).

#### **Development Committee Fund: theft of the community resource**

Since the plans do not originate in the communities, except in a limited and constrained manner, and the people are not designated as the implementing agent, the resources for implementation are going to have to come either from outside or through alienation of existing resources from popular control. The law lists HMG grants (without specifying the manner of allocation), various kinds of taxes including fines, tolls, fees and octrois, proceeds from income generating activities, and most ominously from the perspective of resource stewardship, proceeds from the sale of community and municipal properties.

Given the unrepresentativeness, powerlessness, ersatz participation and lack of accountability of the local governments, it is unlikely that the village and municipal development committees can ensure utilization of funds or sustainability and stewardship of resources in the interest of local communities any better than in the past. Given the commitment of the present government to international interests (FIPD 1992), it can only be worse. There is no mechanism in the local government law to make the committees answerable to or controlled by their constituencies. Putting control of the sale of village or municipal properties into the hands of the development committee means that this group of basically unaccountable people and, to even a greater degree, the powerful elements that gain control of the committees will easily be able to dispossess the community. Soon all the communal resources of the villages and municipalities will be sold away from them, with the rural and urban populations becoming more impoverished and powerless than before. Community forests, water resources, plots of land and so forth will soon become private property, and the development committee members will become rich off of the bribes



and profits on an even worse scale than in previous years, when their power was limited to a greater degree. The destruction of rural society, agriculture, forests and industry will be completed. The development of popular organizations may change all this, of course, but not without a struggle.

### **Administration and staff recruitment**

HMG appoints the village development committee secretary. Given that the secretary controls the functions of the village and municipal development committees, this means that the government and therein the ruling party returns the powers and control of these committees to itself.

### **Judicial powers with no teeth**

What legal recourse do the development committees have over abuse of powers, especially by the various individuals and interests who have monopolized power up to now? The judicial authority of both the village and municipal development committees entails a specific, extremely limited set of jurisdictions.

The village committee figures purely as a conciliator without any bonding jurisdiction; actual jurisdiction belongs to the courts of the central government. The complaints to the village committee are limited to insignificant management problems carried out within communities through consensual processes anyway: (1) encroachment of roads, (2) borderline disputes, (3) farm wages, (4) pond and protection of public property, (5) various use rights, (6) cattle grazing, grass and firewood.

The municipality committee's jurisdiction allows it to punish tax defaulters and those encroaching upon roads, but no crimes beyond these, particularly not those that conflict with ruling class behaviours or interests, for example, embezzlement, bribery, or procedures for making complaints and claims against landowners, contractors, higher offices and authorities, and so forth.

It seemed that the writers of the laws looked hard for things that would have no significance just so the committees would have an appearance of judicial content when they really have none. Basically, by specifying these minor processes, even these are being effectively removed from popular control rather than having something more significant placed back into this control.

### **Ultimate powers mean no powers**

More important than the non-existent judicial power of the development committees is their accountability to their constituencies. As for the panchayats prior to the recent popular initiative and political revisions

(called the 'People's Movement' to designate the revision in terms of the initiative shut down by its settlement), the drafters of this law seem to have assumed that the formal election of committee members provides sufficient accountability. This is untrue, however, as elections have to do rather with legitimacy, that is, establishing acceptance of and at least 'a minimum of voluntary compliance' with a particular order or acquiescence to it (Weber 1978c:212). Elections in themselves do not guarantee accountability, which requires that people can recall officials or countermand their orders and actions. The only accountability imposed on the local governments by the law is accountability to the central government, in terms of the 'right of the government and District Development Committee in relation to the Village Development Committee' to 'suspend and dissolve the committees'. If the members of the local government attempt to depart from the narrow guidelines specified by the law, which have been shown throughout to ensure that the people have no power, then the central government has the authority to suspend the local committees at its pleasure. This does not show a great deal of commitment to the promotion of autonomy specified in the preamble of the law.

**District council and district development committees: illogical indirect representation.**

Now turning from the local level to the district one, essentially everything said here for the local governments can be said as well for the district councils and district development committees, except that the control of the central government at the district level is even more direct. Since many of the district level functions are in the interaction of the district councils and development committees with the village and municipal committees, the district council and executive committee become another means by which centralized control is brought to these levels. The following specific observations may be made.

The members of the District Council are selected from the village and municipal development committees, but as determined by their offices within these committees—i.e., chairman and vice chairman—and not by election from them. The district executive committee is elected, again from the local development committees, but there is no provision for making the members of either the district committee or council accountable to the villages or municipalities, just as there was no provision for making the latter accountable to the citizens. The only accountability is imposed on the committee and council from above, as in the case of the local committees, by the central government. Thus the whole law is merely democracy in form, not in substance.

Furthermore, there is a basic contradiction in that the members of the

District Executive Committee—which submits policy and budgets to the council—are also members of the council. It is difficult to perceive the logic of the entire set-up, except just to create something that seems democratic in form when there is none in substance. If the council was democratic itself, the executive committee—or temporary committees formed for dealing with particular problems—could be selected directly from it by the council members to carry out the actual work, which then could be voted upon. There would be no need for all these various manipulations and complexities.

The initiatives for the District Council all come from the Executive Committee, thus the latter must be analyzed in order to ascertain the substance of the powers of both. The executive committee secretary, like those of the village and municipality, has broad powers, including executive, supervisory, administrative and evaluative powers, and furthermore he is directly linked to the ministries. This again ensures that the central government will be able to exert itself in the workings at the district level as at the local levels. As if there were not enough controls on the village committees, this district secretary also supervises the village committees, lessening their autonomy still further.<sup>5</sup>

It seems like just a bunch of manoeuvres to lend an appearance of representation and divisions of power, as there is no logical basis for the whole structure according to the goals set out in the preamble, of 'providing autonomy to the local people' and 'maximizing people's participation to institutionalize multiparty democracy'. Obviously, the district government does nothing to provide autonomy, except for the personal autonomy of officials and elected representatives—and those who control them—by their lack of real accountability.

## **Conclusion**

The key shortcoming of multi-party democracy is a lack of democracy internally within the parties, so that even the formal democracy of the government institutions is co-opted by the forces represented by the ruling party and shaped according to their needs. Candidates are selected by party bosses (chairman, general secretaries, 'supreme leaders' etc.).<sup>6</sup> The candidates, who are screened through the internal selection processes of the parties, then become the means that offices, contracts, monopolies and other privileges are awarded to the bosses, bureaucrats and sponsors. Since the candidates were selected through the party mechanisms, they have little practical accountability to the people who elect them. Rather than being the representatives of the people, they are their 'chosen masters'. Election promises are purely rhetorical, lacking substance; they are meant to imbue the masses with the notion of the party's power and

confidence of victory and convince them of the leaders' charismatic qualifications and the promise of a politically mediated 'salvation'. The electoral provisions constitute the rules of the game for 'peaceful' contests which underwrite continuing violence (economic, political, police, sexual etc.) against the masses of poor, underprivileged and otherwise 'colonialized' peoples. The party bosses, be they communist or socialist, conservative or liberal, tend to combine against popular claims made against the parties—preferably in the name of democracy—in order to protect their own privileges and positions, the privileges and benefits of their party bureaucrats, and the interests of the parties' rich and powerful sponsors. Unless the constituencies of the parties can exert themselves through popular organizations, multi-party democracy will continue to represent the power of money through a dictatorship by the various interests controlling the party in power.

Peoples' participation, which is neither an essential nor even common feature of multi-party democracy, necessitates that workers, peasants, women, squatters etc. build their own organizations from below in their places of activity: the work place, community, squatter settlements, and urban slums. Such popular organizations are by no means the government-sponsored mass organizations conceived in the previous constitution. They are also not the donor driven NGOs of the present one. They emerge rather from issues, problems, and perspectives experienced at the grassroots level, with their own approaches and ways of addressing problems that extend from the situations of the individuals involved. Historically, among the colonized peoples throughout the world (where colonization is taken in a broad sense, including 'internal colonialization', as found in the American ghettos or amongst European 'guest' workers, the working class, and women as the 'last colony'), community levels of organization arise when avenues to other forms of political expression are closed, as in single-party states, or when people feel that they cannot express themselves through existing multi-party structures—but also where they have begun to build a critical understanding of their situation. These conditions have led to a flourishing of grass-roots organizations in Central and South America, the Philippines, Indonesia, parts of India and Pakistan, and even among some colonialized peoples within the United States and Europe, including guest or migrant workers and immigrants, American Indians (AIM), Afroamericans (Black Panthers), Hispanics, gays and lesbians and feminists.

When people have organized themselves in groups, they become accustomed to dialogue and working together to constructively confront their situation. Such organization consequently has the potential to create a true 'democratic culture' unattainable by internally undemocratic parties

in single or multi-party systems. The Brazilian and Chilean examples contain elements identified by Max Weber (1978b:1127-8) that were found, for example, in early Athenian democracy and the early British House of Commons, which actually made representative democracy democratic in substance and not just in form. These were based on popular assemblies with full participation of the citizens, as described for the Workers' Party of Brazil and the Slum Dwellers Committee of Chile (Alves 1991a-b; Leiva and Petras 1987; see also Mikesell 1992). 'If this principle is radically applied, the elected person is formally the agent and hence the servant of his voters, not their chosen master, just like in a system of direct democracy' (Weber 1978b:1127-8).

Since working together with neighbours and fellow workers necessitates listening to them and respecting their views, people organized in this way tend to respect and recognize others with diverse views or differing needs. They more easily perceive the broader implications and commonality of their situation and struggle. Such movements consequently tend to counter the hatred, sectarianism, intolerance and narrow nationalism that continues to be a tool of power even within multiparty democracy (Alavi 1989). This sense of human solidarity, dialogue and purpose develops across national borders as well, as groups communicate and recognize common conditions and problems. In a world in which production, commerce, finance, recruitment of labour and communication of ideas have become fully global, grass-roots organization and popular participation originating from the community and workplace seem to offer the best potential for bringing people together to deal with social and environmental problems that know no boundaries.

The intention of the top-down government and planning as represented by Nepal's present local government law, whatever its pretensions and rhetoric, is to hinder such democratic development. Without real alternatives from the people, it will open doors to demagoguery and further development of narrow sectarianisms. However, the frustration arising from the old alternatives offered by the parties, and the increasingly broad communication and participation of the Nepalese working class in world markets and a world community, in contrast to the parochial nationalist pretensions and transnational corporate loyalties of the powerful ruling groups, may encourage the oppressed peoples of Nepal to search for new ways of expressing themselves through organization, unity, dialogue, reflection, solidarity and taking action and the future into their own hands.

## Notes

1 See Mikesell (1992) for a different version of this paper which includes comparison with the Brazilian Workers Party described by Alves (1991a–b).

2 Burbach and Flynn (1984).

3 Personal discussion and observation with N. K. Shrestha, who did a study on NGOs under the Winrock Foundation. It might be added that through their positions and influence in international agency offices, these people often shuttle aid funds into their own family NGOs. The foreign staff of these agencies are easily misled in all kinds of situations through their superficial understanding of the whole state of affairs, their tendency to see things according to their own biases and prejudices, to recruit and fund according to English proficiency and western-type criteria, their position as outsiders forcing them to operate in a superficially 'traditional' social and cultural context created for profiting from foreigners, their inability to interact in the villages and work *with* villagers for extended periods rather than *for* them, and their failure to understand all the forms of deception, including *chakari*, glossy but superficial project reports and NGO publications, flattery, dressing up the offices to make them look busy and so forth ad nauseam.

4 According to Gervasi (1991–92:4–9), through the course of the last 30 years, over one-hundred million dollars was spent annually to build such NGOs in the Soviet Union to destroy the possibility of any popular alternative by co-opting the party bureaucrats and bosses and other emergent and ruling class interests and forcing the Soviet Union to open fully to Transnational Corporate and banking interests by making this class into the immediate beneficiaries of such a process. According to minimum figures, in the 1980s the National Endowment for Democracy (also operating in Nepal, Nicaragua, Costa Rica etc.) was spending \$5 million, the CIA \$80 million, and businesses, private organizations and other governments were spending another \$15 million to support pro-'democracy' NGOs in the Soviet Union.

This strategy is summed up by an influential Washington journalist, David Ignatius: 'Preparing the ground for last month's triumph (the fall of the Soviet Union) was a network of overt operatives who during the past 10 years have quietly been changing the rules of international politics. They have been doing in public what the CIA used to do in private—providing money and moral support for pro-democracy groups, training resistance fighters, working to subvert communist rule' (Ignatius 1991).

Presently, USAID is initiating a similar, \$3.5 million 'Democracy Project' in Nepal, to implement initiatives at the local level both directly through the agency and through NGOs. Sklar and Berlet (1991–92:12) report that according to the original secret National Security Decision Directive NSDD 77, 'Project Democracy' is based on the position that 'Public diplomacy . . . is comprised of those actions of the U.S. Government designed to generate support for our national security objectives. . . . When legislation was introduced to authorize Project Democracy in February 1983, administration officials promised Congress that the CIA would not be involved. . . . Actually, CIA footprints are

all over Project Democracy, from NED to the Iran-Contra Operations'.

5 A charity health project introduced with much fanfare by the Colorado, U.S.A. based organization Helping Hands in the Bandipur VDC, Tanahun District, on October 17, 1992, demonstrates how the local VDCs may be bypassed if they are not controlled by the ruling party. The project was opened with a dedication by the Prime Minister, who had come along with the Nepalese founder of Helping Hands in a helicopter for the purpose. All the proceedings were carried out by the district leadership of the Congress Party in concert with large Bandipur businessmen now residing in Narayanghat, Bimal Nagar, Damauli and Kathmandu. This group, furthermore, discussed how it would develop Bandipur into a tourist center, initiate a district-wide literacy and health campaign in order to undermine the opposition influence among the people, and reopen the slate mines. (Three slate mines had been operating in Bandipur in the control of three large absentee business houses—two Congress and one communist. The communist VDC had closed down the former two mines as these were dumping their affluent into the fields of communist farmers. In revenge, the district development committee closed the other mine, leaving a hundred Sarki families and people in many Gurung and Magar villages unemployed just before the Dasai holiday). Neither the present residents of Bandipur, who consist for the most part of Magars, Gurungs and Sarkis, nor the government that they elected were included in the planning and discussion of Bandipur's future. The chairman of the VDC related that since the centrally appointed Congress Secretary controlled all the functions of the local government, it was totally immobilized. Similar experiences have been related to me by the members of other opposition VDCs.

6 Max Weber (1978a-b:1123-33) observed these characteristics in American politics and predicted them in the nascent Soviet Union. Weber described parties as bureaucratic organizations which are controlled by party bosses and bureaucrats. On the one hand, the party bosses (call them 'chairmen', 'general secretaries', 'supreme leaders' etc.) usually make their claim for leadership on the basis of some real or constructed charismatic qualities such as embodied by creation of cults around rhetorical promises of some future utopia, mystification of the party origins, attribution of the source of the present form of government (e.g., Ganesh Man Singh being called the 'Father of Democracy') and so forth. On the other hand, the party and government bureaucrats have a substantial interest in obtaining offices and other opportunities. They justify their positions, privileges and usurpation of governmental functions from the people by reference to their expertise, educational certification, position in the party hierarchy based on past work and promotions, business qualifications and so forth, just as previous rulers made claims based upon purity of lineage and birth. The party bureaucrats control party policies through their systematically maintained relations with ward leaders, cadres and other influential members, and their control over the official operations and functions necessary for running the party machine, such as voters' lists, files and so forth. The candidates are their tools, who award government contracts, tax farming monopolies and other privileges to party sponsors (e.g. businessmen, foreign

agencies etc.), fattening the resources of the party.

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# Serial Marriage Contract Custom (*Jārī*) of Nepal

**Surendra Pande**

## **An introduction to Humla district**

Humla, the second largest district of Nepal, lies in Karnali zone. Thirty-four thousand six hundred and forty people live in an area of 6,131 square miles. The district is on the northwestern boundary of Nepal and is situated at an altitude of 5,000 to 24,064 ft. Humla is one of the remotest districts in Nepal. It has neither road transportation nor telephone service. Up to the ancient period Tibetan kings used to rule over the area, but with the commencement of the medieval era, Khas kings extended their control over the region. Mostly Brahmins, Chhetris, Thakuris, Budha, Bhote and untouchables live in the region.

## **The meaning of *jārī***

We understand *jārī* as a customary tradition in which a certain amount of hard cash or chattel is paid as penalty to the preceding husband of a woman by her subsequent husband, whether the woman marries by choice or arrangement. The subsequent husband is known as the *jār*, and the former husband is called either the husband of the divorcee or simply the former husband (*sādhu*).

This *jārī* custom in Nepal is extremely old. Previously, those who indulged in adulterous unions were punished according to caste rules. Before 1950 a man had a legal right to kill an adulterer, apart from the various kinds of punishments. Such a type of legal right to kill the adulterer was clearly formalized in the Muluki Ain or civil code promulgated by King Surendra Bikram Shah in 1852.

With the political change in 1950–51, which ended the 104 year Rana oligarchy, the legal right to kill the adulterer was brought to an end. While the law of the land has been amended from time to time and it has banned many archaic practices, old adultery customs still exist, particularly in the Karnali Zone and the hilly or mountainous districts of the mid-western and far-western development regions.<sup>1</sup>

## **The marriage system**

Marriages are arranged for boys and girls by the time they are five years old. The marriages are arranged through a matchmaker, who goes to ask for the girl from her parents. If the parents agree to give their daughter, the boy's father takes a castrated goat to the paternal home of the

girl. In addition, he must carry some unleavened bread, a wooden vessel of curd, a silver coin, a black glass bead, and so forth. The matchmaker hands over all these items to the paternal home of the girl. The relatives of the parents of the girl distribute them among themselves and the whole village. The black glass bead is then placed on the neck of the girl. Thereafter the future son-in-law must go to work tilling his future father-in-law's land along with that of his own family.

The relatives of the boy go to the girl's house to arrange the day for the marriage. The marriage must take place within eight or ten to fifteen or twenty years from when the marriage was arranged. The marriage will be concluded within the month of November to December of that year. Otherwise it will be delayed until the next Dasain.

According to the *jārī* system the future son-in-law must work for many years in his future father-in-law's house. Consequently the former has the intention to collect on that investment. The *jārī* system is supported by the social belief that the girl must return the glass bead if she marries another boy after already being engaged. Otherwise, the deity will turn against the family and future generations will perish.

### The *dhāmi* custom

The residents of both the Humla District and the Karnali Zone as a whole worship Maṣṭo, Madāno, Bhavānī (goddess) and Lamaism. The people of Karnali say that originally twelve brothers of Maṣṭo and their nine Bhavānī sisters came into that region. These nine sisters are called Navadurgā Bhavānī. In the same way four brothers of Madāno came into Humla. The brothers of Maṣṭo and Madāno are all seen as founders of sixteen clan-like ritual/religious segments. A person inherits membership in a particular Maṣṭo through his or her father. When a woman marries she moves to the Maṣṭo or Madāno of her husband. In every village there are small temples which belong to one of the Māstos or Madānos. Individuals worship at their corresponding shrine. The worshippers of each Maṣṭo or Madāno include all social classes and castes, including untouchables. Maṣṭo and Bhavānī are accepted by the people of the entire area of the Karnali Zone, whereas the Madāno is only accepted by some of the village people in the Humla, Mugu and Bajura districts. Besides appearing in villages, each Maṣṭo and Madāno has its main temple according to where the founder brother or sister settled. According to Gagan Bahadur Bhandari, who observes the Mahābai deity located in Kālikot District residing in Jumla Kartikswami Pipal Gaun, the names and places of the twelve brother Māstos and nine sister Bhavānīs are as follows:

	<b>Mas̄tos</b>	<b>Location</b>
Eldest	Buḍhu Mas̄to	Buḍhu Gaun, Jumla District
Second	Thārpa Mas̄to	Thārpa Gaun, Mugu District
Third	Kawā Mas̄to	Khatyad Kawa Gaun, Mugu District
Fourth	Ukhāḍi Mas̄to	Ukhāḍi Gaun, Garjyānkot Jumla
Fifth	Luwāchadi Mas̄to	Jumla Dhapa, Jumla District
Sixth	Dāḍhe Mas̄to	Tike Gaun, Kālikot District
Seventh	Sunārgaun Mas̄to	Tātopani, Jumla District
Eighth	Kālasilo Mas̄to	Kurchi Gaun, Achham District
Ninth	Ḍhanḍār Mas̄to	Ḍhanḍār Gaun, Bajura District
Tenth	Kurmi Mas̄to	Sinja Dhāchu Gaun, Jumla District
Eleventh	Dhudhesilo	Thirpu Sunawada, Kālikot District
Twelfth	Bābiri Mas̄to	Tātopani Bābira Gaun, Jumla District

	<b>Bhavānīs</b>	<b>Location</b>
Eldest	Mālika	Bajura Leka
Second	Kālika	Bajura Leka
Third	Thigellī	Kālikot Sipakhana
Fourth	Pugelī	Kālikot Phoigaun
Fifth	Tripurā Sundarī	Dolpa Tripurākot
Sixth	Nadoi Bhagavatī	Tāmti Jumla
Seventh	Chimārā Mālika	Garjyānkot Jumla
Eighth	Bhurchulā Mālika	Hanku Jumla
Ninth	Khesa Mālika	Khatyād Mugu

Although the people are certain of the numbers of ancestral founders, these names cannot be reproduced with complete certainty, because different Mas̄tos and their assistants are found to give various names through conversation and enquiry. The name of Kanaka Sundarī located in Jumla Sinja is not mentioned in the above list of names of the sisters of Bhavānī. But the history of this goddess is found in Bhagavatī temple in the famous Kanaka Sundarī attached to the history of the Khas Kingdom of Sinja.

Among the four brothers of Madāno are the eldest, Guru, the second eldest, Gyaljan, the third eldest, Mekhchand and the youngest, Mānikhchand. Their temples are all located in Launthi and Shree Nagar in Humla District. In addition to Gura (Lama), Kailās (Lama), Mahābai (Lama), Mahādev (Lama), Jalpadevī (Bhavānī), countless Mas̄to, Bhavānī and departed souls are worshipped by all the Khas. The branches and sub-branches extend endlessly.

There are different divisions of labour and branches of Mas̄to, Madāno, departed souls and so forth. For example, if there is a quarrel over land, people used to go to the *dhāmi* of Gura. Each Mas̄to, Madāno and some other kinds of deity have their own *dhāmi*, *dāngri* ('assistants' to the *dhāmi*) and *bāhān* ('guards'), whereas the nine manifestations of the goddess Durgā have only one priest. The work of the *dhāmi* is to be possessed and then give social justice, the *dāngri* to manage the affairs of the *dhāmi*, and the *bāhān* carries out work according to the orders of the *dhāmi*. The *bāhāns* have different *dhāmis* and branches. During possession, the *dhāmis* must show evidence of doing magic, for instance, drinking from boiling oil being poured into the religious bell, making a barley yellow seedling meant for Dasain immediately grow, or putting the fire in the bell which is said to produce *vīta* 'impression'.

The son of the *dāngri* will generally take over his father's responsibilities following the latter's death. If the *dhāmi* or his *bāhān* should die, then the worshippers gather together and begin to become possessed together. The one capable of producing the *vīta* will be installed as the next *dhāmi*. At the ceremony of installation the *dāngri*, after twice dipping a religious bell in a mixture of ground *chāmal* and water, presses it against the new *dhāmi*'s forehead.

If the *dhāmi* is not installed, the *dhāmi* of another brother will go to the more senior *dhāmi* of Kawā or Thārpa for a decision. But the *dhāmi* from Thārpa used to go to the *dhāmi* of Buḍhu. There is a custom to refer to the senior most *dhāmi* of Buḍhu as 'old', of Thārpa as 'king', and of Kawā as 'minister'. It is unnecessary to go more deeply into it here.

People used to look with confidence to the Mas̄to, Madāno, goddesses, departed souls and so forth. The *dhāmis* have an influential and lucrative position to maintain, and they sustain the *jārī* system by promulgating the belief that the whole family and succeeding generations will perish if the instructions and decisions of the Mas̄to, Madāno, goddesses, departed souls and so forth are not abided by.

Historically, the Mas̄to and Bhavānī seem to have purely Khas origins, as those who worship Mas̄to wear the sacred thread, while those who worship the Madāno do not wear it. The Madāno has many elements of Lamaism, which indicates origins prior to Khas entry into Nepal. The second eldest Madāno, named Gyaljan, still speaks the language of the Lama community of Karnali when he becomes possessed, though at other times he speaks Khas (Nepali).

### Girl-frisking custom (*chhoṭṭi khelne prathā*)

To begin with, *chhoṭṭe* is understood to be a young boy and *chhoṭṭi* to be a young girl. The epithalamium (*māgal*), hand-clapping songs

(*chāndcharī*), slanting dance (*deuda*), tambourine dance (*hudkya*), tailors' dance and so forth are the prevailing and famous songs of Humla District. Among them, the slanting dance and song are played through different patterns according to the time and the festival. Much traditional and classical influence is found in the prevalent song and dance. Love, tragedy, satire and the history of genealogy (family tradition) are mainly expressed while performing the slanting dance. Especially young boys and girls previously sang the song by going to the byre at night to be engaged in marriage bondage by commencing love affairs in the old tradition found there. In this way the system of singing a song by gathering boys and girls is called 'girl-frisking'. Girl-frisking activity is not only socially accepted by the father or mother but it has also remained part and parcel of the social tradition. Only recently has there been a decrease in its occurrence. Marriage is no longer arranged for girls in childhood. Young boys and girls today tend to marry as a result of falling in love in the course of girl-frisking. This supports the continuation of the *jārī* custom. The person who gets married in that way must pay the *jārī* compensation.

### **Headman custom (*thalu prathā*)**

The land-management act has been enforced in sixty-three out of seventy-five districts in Nepal. The old custom of revenue farming is still maintained in the other twelve districts due to the failure to implement the land-management act in those districts. This custom remains prevalent in Humla. There is no scientific measurement of land, and the people are victimized along with atrocities of the headmen because of the legal procedures in which those headmen collect the revenue from the people and hand it over to the government. Due to the existence of this headman custom, the *jārī* system also continues to be practised.

### **Educational situation**

The situation of education in Nepal is very poor. Only 32% of the total population is literate. That of Humla is even worse. Nowadays there are only four secondary schools, fifteen lower secondary schools and 54 primary schools in Humla. According to one survey, it was found that by November 1991, only three persons had passed the graduate level, eleven the certificate level and 170 the SLC. This is another reason for the continuation of the *jārī* system.

### **Methodology and findings**

A case-study approach complemented with interviews and literature review was undertaken during the period of August to October 1991, covering *jārī* marriages engaged mostly between 1987 to 1991. Altogether

61 cases of *jārī* marriages were selected for the study from fifteen Village Development Committees (VDCs) out of a total of 26 VDCs of Humla. After processing, only 49 completed questionnaires were analyzed.

The data revealed that the amount of penalty money paid by the *jār* to the previous husband ranged from Rs.2,500 to 60,000. Most of the *jārs* were from the age group of 21 to 30 years. Representing four-fifths of the cases, Chhetris and Thakuris outnumbered other caste groups. Less than one-tenth were among the Brahmins and Tamangs, and very few cases (only 3) were among the occupational castes.

Looking into the issue of who has the authority to fix the amount of *jārī* payments, it was found that for 36 cases (73.5%) the headman (chief of the village and contractual tax collector) and the Pancha (previous elected representative at the district and central levels) had acted as authorities; for seven cases (14.3%) the authority had been the *dhāmi* (traditional religious practitioner); and for five cases (2%) the *dhāmi* and first husband themselves had decided together. Additional investigation showed that in six cases *jārī* money was paid to the promised husband (in pre-arranged marriage situations) by the betrothed's husband. An unusual situation was discovered in a particular case. Under the pretext of causing a woman to run away from her husband, two young men were charged Rs. 6,000 each in the form of *jārī*, and the woman was persuaded to go with another informal husband. In another peculiar case, the beneficiary of the *jārī* system was the father of the wife who received Rs. 20,000 from her husband and took his daughter back.

Several reasons were given by the respondents for their *jārī* marriages. The main reason was simply that having no wife, they contracted a *jārī* marriage. Some men said the reason was due to their first childless marriage, some others to the failure by the first wife to conceive a male child. A previously married man gave no particular reason for contracting a new *jārī* marriage.

Sources of income to pay *jārī* money were also investigated in the study. The majority of men who contracted *jārī* marriages borrowed money from headmen, merchants and moneylenders of the village at 20-25% rates of interest. Some other men pledged their land to the Agricultural Development Bank in order to obtain a loan. It was discovered that the ADB is trying to put some such lands up for auction, due to the debtors' failure to pay back their loans in time.

In order to collect the (sometimes huge) amount of money for the payment of *jārī* marriage, some young men had to give up their land to moneylenders. Now landless they must engage in daily wage labour or portering to earn their living. Amrit Bhandari, aged 36, from Thehe Village Development Committee, had to spend all his income until 1990 to

pay for his *jārī* marriage contracted in 1978. At present he lives in a miserable condition; he is a peon at the District Development Committee office, and he suffers from severe asthma. In order to find out the cause of his illness, he had previously consulted a *dhāmi* who told him that his asthma was a form of punishment by the god for his failure to pay back all the debts to the moneylender. As a reaction, he gave all his salary to the *dhāmi* and moneylender over a long period. He did not seem to be aware that he had been terribly cheated by the *dhāmi*; instead, he was puzzled, and he complained about the god's severe punishment and unwillingness to feel pleased with him.

The study revealed that superstition and innocence among the rural folk created a suitable environment for the *dhāmis*, traditional leaders and politicians to exploit the *jārs*. It was reported that a former Assistant Minister, a former district panchayat chairman and a former district development committee chairman had all been involved in fixing the amounts for the *jārī* payment, and that they had accepted bribe money to do so. *Dhāmis* too received gifts for having played the part of 'judges' in fixing the amount of *jārī* payments, and they played an important role in settling related matters.

In response to the questions 'Why did you pay *jārī* money? Weren't you aware of any court and legal procedures with regard to the *jārī* system?' the respondents answered that although they knew the law, they felt compelled to pay the *jārī* money because they were afraid of the *dhāmi*'s and headmen's reactions should they not do so. Some other men answered that they had no knowledge of the law and the possibility of going to court, while others who did have knowledge replied that they had preferred not to go to court because it would have been too expensive and time-consuming. Only two cases of *jārī* marriage were reported and settled at the police station and in court.<sup>2</sup> In another case, a *jār* was forced to go abroad because he was unable to manage an agreement with the first husband of his wife over the amount of *jārī* he had to pay.

### Recent activism against the *jārī* and results

The People's Movement in 1990 brought an end to the thirty-year partyless Panchayat system. The end of the old polity and restoration of democratic rights brought about a new vigilance in the people throughout the country. In accordance with this condition, the conscious youths in Humla District made a decision to take action against the headmen of the villages, exploitation by the exploiters, and the backward culture. In this regard, a congregation of the youths from four village panchayats in Humla (Shree Nagar, Maila, Lauthi and Jaira) took place in March, 1990. The congregation constituted a '*Jārī* Struggle Committee' (*Jārī* Birodhī



Samiti) of twenty-nine members for the purpose of ending the fine for *jāri* practice in the future and to work against anybody who engaged in such activity or work.

Following the formation of the committee *jāri* incidents stopped temporarily. But after some time, Gauri Shankar Jaishi from Maila-Pālan village eloped with Jayadhan Jaishi's wife. Thereupon a headman of that village and his abettors went to collect the *jāri* payment. In response the committee sent a group of people to prevent the collection of the fine. Again some persons went to collect the fine after 24 days, but they returned empty handed due to the protest of the same committee again. The third time the headman collected Rs.24,000 by sending individuals secretly and threatening the new husband with the supernatural retribution of the *dhāmi*. After having found out about this, forty-five persons went to the new husband's house. But he feigned that he had not paid the *jāri* compensation. After a long cross-examination, he confessed the amount that he had paid. After that, the team reached the house of the former husband by taking away the four persons in favour of the second husband. The former husband immediately handed over the money, and the team returned.

After some days, the headman instigated the former husband to formulate a complaint that he had been looted at the police station. The case was subsequently transferred to the district administrative office in Humla. In addition to the second husband, three youths were summoned by the district administrative office to be present. Some months later the amount was handed over in front of the police after a letter was sent by the district administrative office to the temporary police station in Kawadi, and the anti-*jāri* committee asked them to hand over Rs.24,000 to the second husband. But the case so far has not been decided.

After some time, the former husband, at the instigation of the *dhāmi* went to the deity in front of the Kailash *dhāmi* in Damaiwāda. The *dhāmi* was secretly called to the house of the second husband and given a woollen carpet. The *dhāmi* returned with one woollen carpet and by sending a religious bell and a rosary he sent news along with the fixed date by telling the second husband that he must make immediate payment of *jāri*. Later on, that headman and the *dhāmi* himself compelled the second husband to make a payment of Rs.13,000 to the former husband in compensation, Rs.3,000 to the headman as a gift or prestation, and a woollen carpet to the *dhāmi* in prestation as well.

At the same place again, another man married somebody else's wife in July, 1990. Influenced by the activity of the committee the second husband refused to pay the *jāri* compensation. In retribution, a looting case of Rs.61,000 was instituted against him in the office of the district police in

Humla. The case was shifted to the district court due to an inability to finalize it. The disputing parties, who had reached a stalemate, were required to repeatedly return to the court on fixed dates with the case still pending until as late as November 1991. At last an understanding of a bond of reconciliation of Rs.5,000 was reached through conversation between the two parties of the former and subsequent husbands. This campaign against payment of *jārī* had thus produced some complexities mentioned below.

1. There was no desire for the big headmen to accept stoppage of the *jārī* payment all of a sudden without preparation, publicity and struggle. Furthermore, contradictions were even expressed in a split between the individuals of the old and new generations.
2. In the past, the Panchas, headmen and *dhāmis* on their own and in collusion used to encourage the breakup of marriages. Due to the backward consciousness of the people, their influence continues even now. If the headmen were unable to collect the compensation themselves, they put forward the *dhāmis*.
3. The understanding among different political parties could not be maintained for eradicating the *jārī* custom as a social evil. The indirect assistance provided by members of some parties to the person collecting *jārī* payment has created a serious obstruction in the anti-*jārī* campaign.
4. There was a strong desire among the people to get assistance from the government and concerned bodies after the fall of the Panchayat system and establishment of the democratic one. But contrary to the new spirit, the CDO, police office and so forth helped the *jārī*-collecting side and abused the youths who were against *jārī*. Due to this, the anti-*jārī* campaign did not make a great impact.
5. The headmen instigated the wives of those youths who were engaged in the anti-*jārī* campaign to leave their husbands. Due to this, divisions appeared among the youths. Those whose wives had left them were themselves pleased to demand *jārī* payment from the new husbands.

### Conclusions and suggestions

1. The existing *jārī* payment system has been used by various

landlord groups, *dhāmi* priests, merchants and moneylenders to victimize or get control over the land of the cultivators.

2. The growing desire of youths to marry according to their own choice as against the traditional child-marriage system (arranged by the parents) has contributed to the persistence of the *jārī* system, as the youths are penalized with *jārī* payments.
3. Once marriage is contracted, the husband has to work in his father-in-law's house. If his wife goes with an informal husband, the *jārī* money to be paid by the latter is calculated according to the length of the period the first husband has worked in the father-in-law's house. This arrangement has encouraged the perpetuation of the *jārī* system.
4. Failure by the Panchayat system to engage in constructive activities so as to remove the oppressive conditions of the people, and the Panchas' exploitation of the people by systematically making *jārī* payments their source of income for personal benefit have definitely promoted the *jārī* system.
5. Because of the deprivation from education and communication outside their local areas, the people in Humla District are being prevented from intercourse with other cultures, alternatives and opportunities. Emancipation and social awareness are thus hampered, also encouraging the *jārī* system.
6. The lack of a prudent yet resolute action to eradicate the *jārī* system by the respective law-enforcing agencies and administrations, their negligence in enforcing the existing laws, and their personal exploitation of such a system through the appropriation of *jārī* money with the help of *dhāmis* and headmen all keep the *jārī* system functioning.

The following steps should be taken into consideration for the solution to the *jārī* problem:

1. Strong attempts must be made to remove the superstition found in the people towards the *dhāmi*, departed soul and so forth. For that, a widespread discussion must be launched among the people, and people's consciousness must be raised through a literacy campaign and publishing of books and magazines.

2. Initiation must be taken towards putting different kinds of pressure on the government to provide employment through creation of services such as education and health care.
3. Work must be done which gives first priority to providing the facility of roads and communication.
4. It is necessary to take concrete actions against marriage, religious rites, superstition and bad conduct for increasing social awakening. Pressure must be put on the government and the concerned bodies to legislate against the system of arranged child marriage.
5. The party being victimized by the *jārī* problem must be provided legal service.
6. Activities must be conducted by making a concrete understanding regarding the removal of the *jārī* custom among the different political parties, NGOs, government bodies and local residents.
7. An on the spot survey must be carried out on a wide scale to prepare concrete data of the impact of *jārī* on the people.

### Notes

- 1 Sharma (1982) mentioned that the *jārī* system has prevailed for a relatively long time even in the Karnali Pradesh area.
- 2 These cases were settled according to the following existing law: if there is no legal separation from the first husband, the 'new' husband is prosecutable with a term of imprisonment of up to two months or a fine of Rs. 1,000 to 2,000 or both.

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PART 5

**WOMEN AND POWER**



# **Durga Devi: A Woman's Tale from the Arun River Valley**

**Barbara Nimri Aziz**

The course of my work in Nepal has been rich in research experiences. My first decade of investigations in the country's rural areas, I conducted along the same lines as other men and women students. I considered myself an honorary man; I was privy to male councils; I had male teachers and assistants, male translators and cooks, male professors and supervisors. Years after I was already familiar with Nepal, I had an opportunity to return for further research. By then, my views had changed. I now considered myself a privileged co-woman and I entered my field work with a new respect for women as teachers and companions.

When I arrived in the Arun River Valley in Nepal in 1981, I had already begun to question the gender biases in anthropology which I myself naively imbibed as a student and then applied in my research up to that time. Now, I told myself, there is so much more to be learned through women, and as a woman myself, I had a special opportunity. I resolved to spend more time with women, listen more carefully to them, consider them my teachers, and remember how in the past they were often my best sources, careful in their reports, precise in their details. Realize, I said, that they too are carriers of tradition beyond the hearth and the nursery. If I did not know this from my university training, I saw abundant evidence for it in the lives of women I met in the many communities of Asia where I lived. These women were the farmers, the managers, the protectors, the talkers and often, the opinion makers. I had had good experiences with Buddhist nuns ten years earlier when I worked among Tibetans; much of the insights I gained about their culture, including Buddhism, I learned from these women.

So when I arrived in East Nepal to learn about Hindu places of pilgrimage in the area in 1981, I gladly took up residence at a community of women ascetics on the banks of the great and awesome Arun River. Within minutes, I fell in with the women there and after a few hours I became privy to a history of women that I pursued, under their guidance, with great enthusiasm. I abandoned the plan of documenting the pilgrimage practices of Hindus here. My research on these women became the real pilgrimage.

East Nepal is well known for its political dissidents. In recent times,

compared to the western region, here one saw open political revolt against local Brahman and Kathmandu valley authority. It was most manifest in the Limbu people's rebellions of the first half of this century. Today, it continues in a tradition of opposition politics. People of the eastern regions of Bhojpur and Biratnagar pride themselves in their leadership against the power of the central government. Whether Communist or Congress party followers, inhabitants of the region are at home with dissent. Nepal's first democratically elected Prime-Minister, B. P. Koirala and Communist party leader of the 1980s Madan Bhandari originated in the east. So did earlier dissidents and reformers Shadananda Upadaya, the twins Lakman and Ram, Vishnu Maya Majhini and Yogi Karananda.

The Palace in Kathmandu has never been able to completely win the solid support of eastern populations. Indeed, those in power have at times conducted purges and mercilessly squashed dissent in the area, often accusing local leaders of conspiring with nearby India against Kathmandu.

Where dissent exists, often the entire community—women as well as men—participate. Indeed, women play an active role in politics in the eastern hills and plains of Nepal, as elsewhere across the nation. Within the royal palace, inside party organizations, on university campuses, in the underground press, in poetry and beyond, women's voices are raised. This is acknowledged, but not highlighted. Yes, women are seen as participants; but they are not remembered as leaders. Just as across most of the world, here too, they do not stand out in history. Neither do they appear to contribute anything unique in terms of dissent and reform.

That however, is a myth, as the recent body of excellent reviews of history undertaken by women shows. What we know of Nepal's past may also be a revisionist history, a deliberate misogynist view of women in this nation perpetuated by a generally patriarchal definition of what and who is important in the national consciousness, reinforced by a generally western patriarchal academy which decides how to prioritize the events and people in Nepal's history. This I illustrated in my report (Aziz 1993:19–29) of the historical memory of the rebel and poet, Yogamaya, earlier in the century, a woman of extraordinary abilities and courage, not just a woman leader but a person of exceptional mastery.

Here, I give an account of yet another remarkable Nepali woman. She, like Yogamaya, was a woman of the Arun Valley region of east Nepal. Like her predecessor and many eastern peoples, Durga Devi was also a dissident, a remarkable woman, remembered locally but not in local history. She was an activist but not an historical figure; she was progressive but not part of a movement. This essay is then a further example of what outstanding women Nepal produced in this century and how that same patriarchal process of 'history-making' also tried to



obliterate her from the record.

As this essay celebrates this modern-day thinker and campaigner, it also examines the way culture and history recast her character so that her achievements were not remembered and she did not become a heroine, neither for the coming generation of Nepalis searching their past for courage and promise, nor for women worldwide desperate for examples of what they have achieved and can once again accomplish.

Everywhere and at any time women are strong. We know this. What we often do not know is our vital role in shaping a tradition of dissent. So my purpose in writing about women like Durga Devi is not simply to say, 'we were there too'. For I agree with my Nepalese colleagues who point out that Durga Devi was marginalized and forgotten not just because she was a woman but because she was also a dissident. Her anonymity is a feature of political history in general that depreciated and diminished most of the women and men who challenged central authority. Kathmandu and other urban power centres prevail, reinforced by media and scholarship which tend to ignore or minimize the vitality of any local dissent whether it is led by women or by men.

Durga Devi's story reveals a colourful lady with a social mission and a powerful sense of justice. Her story, as we shall see, also illustrates specific processes in history, that is, the recording of history. First it demonstrates by example that women are in the leadership of articulating opposition. Second, we see in this example precisely how women face a double obstacle in overcoming the prejudice of historians and winning the respect of successive generations. Third, women are dismissed not by their followers, but by the modern academy which is blatantly biased. (This is a kind of cultural imperialism, a European-defined standard of priorities.) Let us face it. Most history is still written according to the 'great man' standard; it is barely more than military history. Fourth, this case shows how a woman warrior like Durga is isolated from other women leaders and how this in turn inhibits the emergence of any tradition of women leaders. Women do not become models of leadership, not even models of dissent, even though most of us personally know women—relatives, teachers, or neighbours—whose lives were not only unconventional but often rebellious and courageous. Whatever we may feel as young admirers, those women warriors however, become characterized in unflattering terms—foolish, eccentric, a bit 'off'. Difficult to explain away otherwise, these women are ridiculed by their own culture, by the grown-ups and teachers on whom the young rely for verification of their heroes and heroines. Outstanding women are often unable to gain legitimization. They die as eccentrics. Whatever fine qualities they may have had die with them. Rarely does their memory endure; their force and appeal do not become part of a tradition.

What influence they may have gained usually ends with their death.

And in the case of political, intellectual leadership, this process of forgetting women heroes augments the strength of patriliney that readily finds space for men. Yet, despite forces working against women like these Nepalese ladies and others like them, traces can often be found. When I moved in with that community of women lodged at a temple on the banks of the Arun River, only a few hours passed before I heard the names of two outstanding local leaders: one was Shakti Yogamaya. The other was Durga Devi.

Durga Devi, I was informed, had purchased this riverside stretch of land and donated it to the temple community. Was Durga Devi an ascetic leader like Yogamaya? Was she a pious local lady who donated her wealth to a diety or teacher to win some blessing? Was she a visionary whose enlightenment came at this site?

In fact, Durga Devi spent very little time at this place. Moreover, she was neither saintly nor pious—in many ways, as we shall see, she was distinctly iconoclastic. She used neither poetry nor scholarship. But she was learned in one field, land-law, and, related to this she was an advocate for peasants' and women's rights. Combined with her legal expertise, Durga Devi was an outspoken critic, and a determined challenger of wrongdoing. This is striking in itself. To find anyone with this skill and energy moving through the villages of east Nepal is exciting.

But ten years later nobody was singing poems dedicated to Durga Devi. No local school teachers devoted a history lesson to this accomplished lady. No one debated her theories. No monument was dedicated to her. Not at all. The opposite was the case. I learned details of her work only after considerable effort overcoming public distaste for the woman and then trying to understand what lay behind the controversy surrounding Durga Devi's name and career. To make sense of all the contradictory fragments of information was not an easy task. My inquiry into her character and my understanding of her achievements faced a host of obstacles.

However, from the beginning I had the good fortune to meet a woman at the temple, MalDidi. For 25 years, as her companion and cook, MalDidi lived with Durga Devi and was thus able to provide for me an intimate perspective on the dissident. It is important to have this alternate information since, so fierce were Durga's challenges to authority and the local power brokers—all of them men—that she generated a lot of enmity. Her behaviour prejudiced people's opinion of her while she was alive, then it coloured their memory of her after she died.

Eventually, however, a clear picture emerges. I intend to include a detailed but not comprehensive biographical sketch of Durga Devi as a chapter of a book I am writing about women of the Arun Valley. This

short article will serve merely to introduce her and discuss issues of the historiography of women, as I see it.

Today in east Nepal, and in the places where she worked, Durga Devi's name is rarely mentioned. When it does come up, there will be embarrassed silence, then some unflattering comments will be muttered. 'She was bold,' people will agree. Most will quickly conclude that she was crazy. Many will chuckle or smirk and some may begin to entertain any gathered listeners with anecdotes of episodes she was involved in. There is a general embarrassment when recalling her; the subject will soon be changed.

I was fortunate enough to learn first-hand about Durga from people who loved her, and who knew her motives and her early history. These are women from the temple community of Manakamana which Durga supported. From MalDidi and other women there and from some of the people Durga helped, an exciting portrait of a remarkable woman emerges.

Durga was born in Palikot village, on the west shore of the Arun River, not far beyond its steep bank. Her father, I was told, was her legal mentor and friend. From early in her life, Durga's character and interests were formed during her close association with this man, although apart from some sketchy anecdotes of their travels together, we do not know much about him and we have few personal details of their bond. His name was Ser Bahadur, who along with his brother Bir Bahadur was a local landlord who accumulated considerable wealth winning court cases, many of which had to do with land claims. Neither men were exemplary figures, and they may have even abused the law. There is no evidence also that they were beneficent men, Robin Hood-type heroes who took from the rich to help the poor, as Durga would.

I learned little about Durga's mother. I heard one story that Ser married her by capture. It is said he became enraptured when he caught sight of her on a trail, and there and then made off with her. To seal his right, it is rumoured he informed her terrified companion that he would pay the fine, and he dutifully sent it to her husband.

Ser and this lady had one son, then Durga Devi, then another daughter. It seems the boy was a sickly child, and his relationship with his father was not strong. Durga was the favourite child of her father, but this was not at the expense of her own fondness for her brother and eventually his widow as well. Later she would defend his land-rights. Indeed, the first account we have of Durga's boldness was a plea for that brother. Although the boy was not with her at the time, Durga's action may have won him his release from jail in her spontaneous confrontation with the then dictator, the Rana Prime Minister. That was in the 1930s, before the ascension of the present Shah dynasty to power. Durga, as the story goes, was visiting

Kathmandu with her parents. In the street, fortuitously, near where the family found themselves one morning, the Prime Minister's horse-drawn entourage approached. Durga, although barely 10 then, lunged at the horses pulling the ruler's carriage, grabbing the harness of one of the big animals: 'My brother,' she yelled towards the cabin, 'free him, he is innocent.' It seems the brother, although young, was implicated in a serious dispute and held in jail in the east. As far as his sister was concerned, he was totally innocent. Perhaps her father Ser was in the capital to plead his son's case, we do not know. After this incident in the street the family was warned they would be fortunate to get away unpunished for this child's impudence. No words were exchanged between the ruler and the startled family, and they departed for their home in the hills. When they reached the Arun Valley weeks later the family found the boy freed! It was the kind of drama and victory that would become characteristic of Durga and we would see comparable episodes later in her active life in the hills.

Some things about Durga's family were very conventional despite these episodes. According to custom, for example, young Durga was married at an early age to a lad, also a child, in Marwa village, north of Khadabari, the present-day capital of Sanqua-Sabha district. Marwa lies across the Arun River valley from Palikot. It was common for children to be married and also not unusual for co-habitation to be delayed until they are in their teens. But Durga's husband died not long after the betrothal. This left her a child-widow; for she had not yet reached nine. In Hindu tradition, a widow is a widow, whatever her age. And, as was then common, high-caste widows (Brahman and Chhetri; Durga was Chhetri) should not remarry. Durga's family observed this convention. However, because dowry had been exchanged she would, as a widow hold rights in her deceased husband's house.

Sometimes young widows do not stay long in their husband's house. They are childless, and, without a son to secure their status and look after them, widowed daughters-in-law find this environment inhospitable. After all it is a house of strangers. Little Durga however had strong bonds with her husband's house from the beginning. Not that her relationship there was trouble-free. Indeed the Marwa house would eventually become the scene of a bitter legal dispute centred around her. That happened after her husband's brothers grew up and received their own wives into the house.

Meanwhile, Durga stayed at her *māitighar* Palikot. During the years following her boy-husband's death, she lived with her mother and father. Some people remember her then, a small figure, astride a horse, en route, with her father and uncle, to the courts. By then she knew how to write, and she learned to read legal papers connected with the two older men's

land-claims and their other business. From a young age, therefore, this girl acted as a kind of assistant to her father accompanying him in his forays and keeping his legal satchel with her.

Through these excursions and her work with her father, courtrooms and judicial procedures became familiar—probably here, she developed her dislike of law officials and her distrust of bureaucrats in general. Her teacher and companion, Ser Bahadur, was not a community notable or a reformer, as his daughter would become. As far as we can tell, he was an ambitious man and seemed to have been frequently engaged at local courts in pursuit of his own interests.

Durga's later court battles were not all selfless either. She began her career as a campaigner fighting for her rights in her husband's land, and many years later, she pursued legal action on behalf of her brother's widow to keep the control of her lands out of the hands of their cousins. How much she modeled these after her father's experience we do not know, but Durga's actions were marked by fierce legal battles and physical confrontations.

These she began in the village of her marriage, Marwa. Durga's father died in Palikhet and after that she left to return to Marwa to live and assert her rights as the eldest son's widow. She was about 16. There she found another ally, her *sāsu*, her mother-in-law. From this obviously exceptional and fair-minded woman Durga may have acquired her strong feminist interest and commitment. *Sāsu* was extraordinary, first of all in her mere embracing of this childless *buāri* (daughter-in-law). In normal circumstances, this relationship between a new bride and her mother-in-law is a strained one. The older woman generally favours her son and only embraces his wife after grandsons are born. Even then, the life of a *buāri* (son's wife) is not an easy one. One often hears unhappy accounts of *sāsus* mistreatment of their sons' wives. This *sāsu*, however, was from the outset fond of her first daughter-in-law. Moreover, it seems she favoured Durga, not only over the other *buāri* who had birthed grandsons into the house, but also over her own sons.

This she declared by a number of unusual acts of solidarity with the younger woman. When her sons attempted to marry Durga off and rid the house of her, the *sāsu* warned her *buāri* of the plan and together they forestalled the plot. Next, she handed over to her widowed daughter-in-law, the deed to her share of the family property. (This allowed the keen-minded Durga, perhaps revengeful over the foiled plot to oust her, to secure her ownership rights through the courts.) The relationship between the older woman and Durga was almost a romance, defying all convention. It demonstrates how, when this solidarity exists, much can be accomplished. The womens' long-lasting bond is worthy of a novel. Durga

and her *sāsu* remained friends and allies until the death of the older woman. Those last days again provided a dramatic and public declaration of their special tie, and a final insult to the woman's sons. For, when her *sāsu* was dying, Durga and not the sons of the house, carried the frail body from Marwa down to the Arun River and performed the *śrāddha* (Hindu funerary rites customarily conducted by the deceased's son) on the banks of the sacred waters.

The court case through which Durga fought to keep her land took many years to complete and was recalled years afterwards because of the physical confrontations between her and her brother-in-law in the streets of Khadbari. There was a knife attack against Durga by her nephew, assault charges, and other outbursts which the local people found shocking as well as embarrassing and funny. Because of the hostility Durga did not live in Marwa during the dispute. She moved to Malta village southeast of Chainpur to be away from the townspeople and their gossip. She regularly visited Chainpur and Khadbari in connection with her court case.

In the village of Malta she occupied herself with the problems of others, whenever she learned of injustices. Villagers, learning about Durga's work, went to her with requests for assistance and intervention in their family and other disputes. In some instances, befriending children, Durga learned about a woman's mistreatment and went to her aid. She seemed to seek out opportunities to act as an advocate for those she felt were wronged. In some cases she helped prepare legal briefs. Often however, she simply confronted the wrongdoer. Stories are recounted how Durga marched straight away to the farm or shop of the culprit, with the plaintiff following, and demanded justice. She used confrontation and public ridicule as a means of winning the rights of her wards. I was told how she would arrive with the sack of adulterated grain at the door of the cheater, displaying the stones in it for all to see, then demand compensation, using the crowd who were by then gathered around as her jury.

Rich people were generally targets of Durga's attacks. And the poor, women as well as men, were her dependents. It was said that on market day in Khadbari town, Durga would pounce on the grain bins of a merchant and grab his measure; if it had a false bottom, as was often the case, she smashed the vessel on the pavement, and called the police to arrest the shopkeeper. As one might expect, these kinds of episodes did not make her popular with shopkeepers. Nor with the police who were never inclined to confront rich merchants, themselves often political bosses.

Durga was also unpopular with government officials for the way she publicly scolded them. Her shouts rolled down the street; her loud admonishments of their bad habits were heard across the town and down the row of government offices. In one instance, she is said to have kicked a

judge. Clerks sought a hiding place when they heard she was approaching. Or they pretended the office was closed.

Naturally some of her enemies also retaliated by trying to harrass her, misplacing her files, demanding additional signatures, and introducing procedural rules—anything to undermine her efforts. In her confrontations with officials, she did not mind humiliating these men. If she left feeling that she and justice had prevailed, she should also hear their churlish, mumbling promises of retaliation. She became the subject of their jokes and ridicule in return. Men with whom I spoke with only remembered Durga Devi as a 'troublesome' person: this was the kindest remark they could offer. Young people who knew her by reputation, knew only unflattering stories about Durga. Laughing, they volunteer that she was 'a crazy woman.' According to reports, she looked 'mad.' They describe her as a tiny person, her head (shaven, as customary for a widow) wrapped in a kind of turban, walking down the road with her *lāṭhi*, or pole, in her fist. They say she also carried in her waistband a *khukri*, which she occasionally brandished at her foes. (This is the curved Nepali knife carried by troops and sometimes unsheathed by brawling men.) And although Durga was short in stature, she possessed, and used, a booming voice.

Older townspeople and villagers, whether or not they liked Durga, cannot deny her sense of righteousness and her selfless efforts on behalf of others. This they do not relay to the young however. Young Nepalese of the area, even though they did not know her, they know the myth and recall Durga with derisive remarks. Generally they do not pursue questions about her work. Regrettably, I think, they find nothing appealing about her. From the controversial remarks they hear, any curiosity is dampened. Indeed, after she died, there was no controversy; she was merely dismissed.

Few if any people speak about Durga's legal accomplishments. Occasionally, someone will privately provide details of Durga's advocacy work on their behalf. She did what they dared not; she knew the law and could guide a complaint through the court. Or she demanded compensation on someone's behalf. Her threats were often effective since as they came to know her tactics, people acquiesced, if for no other reason than to avoid further public recriminations from Durga, or a costly legal case.

When Durga Devi won her property in Marwa, and even though she and her *sāsu* remained close, she could not stay there. For a few years she spent more time in Palikot, at her *māitighar* where her brother's widow lived and would need her help. Oddly enough, this woman, also a widow, also without sons, now found herself being pressured to give up her and her brother's property to their uncle's sons. Ber, the brother of Ser Bahadur

had 6 sons, and they were now demanding equal shares in the combined property of the two brothers.

Durga took up her sister-in-law's defense in what would become another lengthy and bitter dispute. After the nephews physically tried to beat up Durga and her sister-in-law and steal the land deed, they were further charged with assault. The case was filed at Bhojpur district court. Eventually, I was told, the 6 brothers lost their case and in shame, abandoned the area, leaving Durga and her brother's widow in control of an immense amount of property.

Finally we have an even more dramatic episode, an example of Durga's compassion and her solidarity with women. It is a modern-day feminist story. It concerns Durga's defense of a young deaf child in Khadbari. Abandoned by her family, this child, barely 13 years old, lived a beggar's life in the town, fed from the back kitchens of sympathetic householders. One day it was discovered she was pregnant. The town was shocked, but Durga was outraged. She set to work with her own investigation. Eventually she was able to identify the man—a local policeman, it seems—who raped the child. Durga publicly made this known and demanded his arrest. Before the man could be summoned, he had disappeared from Khadbari, posted to a distant part of the country.

Had Durga been younger, she might have gone in pursuit. But she was over 50 by this time. In any case, she turned her attention to the pregnant girl. She paid a local family to take care of her, and when the baby was born, Durga also provided an ample allowance for the mother and child for years to follow. Later, arranged by Durga, the girl was sent to school and still lived in Khadbari with her mother at the time of my visit there in 1983.

In many ways, Durga can be celebrated as a feminist. She built strong alliances with other women. She fought for women's land rights; she insisted that as a woman she should not be prevented from defending herself legally and physically, or for example conducting the funerary rites for her father or mother-in-law, if that was what she determined; she insulted the educated young clerks—almost all of them were men—who became indolent and corrupt in their government positions; she defended the honour of the deaf child. And she supported those ascetic women at Manakamana temple, donating funds so they could buy land and build their community of widows. In general, apart from her father and brother, Durga seemed hostile to men. She publicly expressed her dislike of many men; she spared nothing in her claims against her brothers-in-law. But in her activist work for those who came seeking help, she did not distinguish. There are many cases of men who came to her for assistance whom she



helped.

Durga's example and her achievements are very different from those of Yogamaya. The yogi, Shakti Yogamaya, some 30 or 40 years earlier, was a revolutionary. Whereas Yogamaya sought to overturn society and install a new rule of justice, Durga sought only to have the law as it was encoded, respected. Durga did not assault the law or seek to change it. She fought those who abused the law. Whereas Yogamaya confronted a system as corrupt and inherently unequal, Durga confronted corrupt individuals. Whereas Yogamaya was a poet, Durga was pedantic. She was practical and pragmatic. She sought immediate social action. Whereas Yogamaya defied social conventions by daring to support widow remarriage and intercaste unions, Durga was conservative and followed these rules unquestioningly. Indeed it was said she criticized Yogamaya for those practices and she sought to disassociate herself from Yogamaya's anti-Brahmanical movement when she became the sponsor of the community of women at Manakamana. She did not sing the anti-Brahmanical and anti-regime *hazurbani* poems composed by the rebel yogi either.

And Durga, although she was sought after by besieged peasants, had no group following. She was very much a loner, working and living away from others. She made no attempt to gather people around her or to set up a school or centre to instruct people in matters of their rights. Her manner was another kind of distinction. Her response to injustice was bold and direct. It appears that she was often successful. But there are different kinds of success.

By the time of Durga's death in 1973, she was undisputed victor in several court cases. Her admirers called her Jeta (Victor) Devi. Khadbari merchants were fearful of her and fearing her disclosures and accusations, they may have cheated less when she was nearby. Clerks too grudgingly did their office work while Durga stood over them.

Twenty years have passed since Durga's death. She took her last breath by the lapping waters of the Arun, surrounded by her friends, giving her final orders to her contemptuous enemies, her husband's family whom she had summoned to the riverside. Of her legacy, doubtless those whom she had assisted missed her. Her achievements were considerable. But most people did not mourn her.

What I think is significant in this story is Durga's image as a model of social change and dissent. It is an inglorious one. She has had no chance to inspire the young, or to establish a tradition of leadership because of how she was unremembered. If her tactics were not always wise, and sometimes outright counterproductive, at least her principles were models. Few will argue that the things she sought to change did not cry for reform.

Every socially-minded person in Nepal tries to offer ways to curb corruption. Most women seek the courage to apply their legal land-rights as well. Most women also aspire to become literate.

Durga could be a model for them. Yet she is not.

One reason for this obfuscation lies in her iconoclastic style. Another reason, I would argue, is to be found simply in her gender. The same kind of iconoclasm in a man might be tolerated and even championed. This is the stuff of traditions and myths that later inspire and create social and political movements. Women are seen differently. Women heretics like Durga and Yogamaya before her are dismissed with cruel psychological labels. Hushes or chuckles accompany their memory, further hastening their disappearance, not just from that life, but from history. One wonders how many hundreds and thousands more like them passed through history without a trace.

Meanwhile we can see, I hope, what can still be salvaged from tracings left by the bank of a roaring river. If history books make no mention of them, other women will remember. And perhaps we are learning how to read history conceived and framed by men, to remark on their omissions and biases and find out what lies in them.

Women's studies as a discipline has in the last twenty years entered an exciting period. Many of us grew up in the time when university education was dominated by men, with the major ideas originating in these learned circles passed to us by men. (I am not talking about the early ecclesiastical universities but about modern day campuses in this half of the 20th century.) Finally, over the last two decades, we have begun to break down the system and to build new models.

Thanks to a driven, creative community of women scholars and writers and a large body of new feminist research, we reject the definitions of history we had once uncritically accepted. We are going back to re-examine what and how we were taught. We are finding new documents which have hitherto been excluded from history; we are defining new standards for what is significant; we are looking at our women ancestors and reassessing all those renowned men to see if indeed the celebrity of that man was not derived in large measure from the women around him, or was wrongly attributed to him and not her. Which is not to reject men. Not at all. We are assessing and redefining standards by which importance is assigned to any person or event or process.

Today, rethinking our notions about women as informants and authorities, we stop viewing women's comments as gossip, as emotional, idle talk, and we cease viewing women in simply biological (or family) roles. This is an exciting process for every woman-scholar and reader today; we are participating in remaking our own history, our memories of

the past and also the way history will be determined. We are able to see our very selves and our mothers not simply as individuals but as historical figures in our culture and in our civilization. This happens to any people moving out of cultural subjugation.

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# **Gender Dimension of Eco-crisis and Resource Management in Nepal**

**Sumitra Manandhar Gurung**

## **Introduction**

The ecological crisis in the hill areas of Nepal began in the 1950s and as landslides and soil erosion increased progressively since the 1960s, deforestation was, and still is, most commonly cited by scholars and other environmental experts as the principal cause of the crisis. Other professionals in general tend to separate gender issues from the other components of resource management in order to simplify their work, instead of seeking to understand such issues holistically, inclusive of gender. For example, time as a resource is rarely given much importance. Yet even the most superficial acquaintance with work practices in the hill regions would establish that women invariably work longer hours than men. Furthermore, the greater part of the hill region's cultivated dry terraces, which in recent decades have begun to face severe and chronic soil erosion, are currently and reluctantly being managed by women, a typical phenomenon of hill culture where both caste and gender differences determine variations in work participation and resource management. Yet despite the importance of the gender factor, it has been consistently ignored in the government's approach to the hill region's ecological crisis. Though such a crisis is undoubtedly a consequence of improper management of natural resources, such management is itself a multi-dimensional phenomenon associated with physical, cultural, socio-economic and political aspects—including most importantly gender discrimination in work allocation, access to information, wealth and participation in decision-making processes.

Research in the mountain areas has not attempted to qualify or quantify women's vs. men's efficiency in the use of resources. General observations in the field of agriculture, forestry and livestock, the key elements of subsistence economy, indicate that currently women play a major role. Increasing evidence highlights not only the intensive role that women play in determining how natural resources are used in the home and farm, but also the direct impact on women caused by any loss or degradation of natural resources. Similarly, when women are affected it directly impacts on the sustainability of land and thereby ecological degradation, because women play a significant role in integrating agriculture, forestry, livestock, and maintaining a balance in land and household.

In this paper I aim to focus on the gender dimension of resource management in a hill region and its implications for our understanding of the ecological crisis. The paper stresses the need to understand the on-going processes of local adaptation in the hill areas by responsible authorities in order to reformulate rural development policies and translate them into practical action. I also point out the wrong or inappropriate approaches adopted by the government or other agencies in the management of natural resources, for they have consistently ignored the important gender dimension of the problem.

The material presented here is based on intensive fieldwork in the Kakani area in the middle hills where I investigated the responses of three cultural groups to landslide and erosional hazards (Gurung 1988). I have also incorporated in my discussion additional and wider observations I have made on the region over the four years subsequent to my fieldwork.

### **Context of middle hill region**

The intricate relationship between ecological crisis and resource management from a gender perspective has to be understood from the nature of subsistence farming in the hill region. A cursory look at the facts and figures of Nepal shows that 74 to 79% of the total land has a slope of various degrees (CEDA 1981). Erosional rates show 1–10 tons/ha/year in natural conditions; 20 to 50 tons/ha/year under human use; up to 200 to 500 tons/ha/year in severely eroded and gullied lands and the reasonable erosion is 10 to 20 tons/ha/year (CEDA 1989). Landslides increase by a factor of 1.35 in density and are progressively increasing. Subsistence agriculture is practiced throughout the country irrespective of slope or erosional rates. Ninety-six per cent of women are employed in agriculture (Maskey and Poudyal n.d.) and they carry out 50 to 80% of farm work depending on ecological region. Women's income supplies more than 50% of household needs and hence is crucial for the family's survival.

### **Gender differences in resource management**

**Agriculture.** Land stability is critical to the people. Hence land use in the mountains is varied and based on indigenous knowledge of vegetation, soil micro-systems and crop requirements. Major characteristics of the hill and mountainous region, where there are striking differences in gender-based labour contribution, are the dry and wet-terrace management and land-use patterns. Female labour contributions on dry lands is eight to ten-folds higher than that of men in field preparation and ploughing including crop sowing, clod breaking, weeding, harvesting, manure supply and food processing (Gurung 1988). Women, by virtue of their continuous presence, are regularly involved in seed selection, multiculture soil improvement

through manure supply and harvesting of crops for increased production of biomass for animals and human beings. Time allocation studies have indicated that 70 to 80% of field labour is performed by women (Mies 1986). In the hills of Nepal, the total recorded work time for women is between 150 and 180% to that of men (Kumar and Hochkiss 1988).

Despite women's efforts in maintaining dry terraces through soil improvement and crop management, soil erosion, landslides and floods continue to be major problems for a majority of households (58%). A desirable solution to this problem is to change the land-use pattern to wet terracing in which men and women contribute approximately equal amounts of labour, e.g. in land preparation, irrigation, land maintenance (during the monsoon) and crop-harvest activities (Gurung 1988). Such wet terraces, which have negligible soil loss, are ecologically stable and yield substantially higher production of paddy and wheat. However, lack of collective efforts on the part of men and development programmes, in changing the land-use pattern through supply of water, has left large portions of the hills in poor condition. Instead, changes such as the introduction of cash-crops undermine traditional agricultural knowledge of women and marginalise them, allowing men to enjoy the cash earned through women's hard labour. Classic examples are the negative effects of cash-cropping on women in Himachal Pradesh (ICIMOD 1986, Mies 1986, Lappe and Collins 1986, Bandyopadhyay and Shiva 1986).

**Forestry.** Forests are indispensable as a life-support system of the mountain regions, where agriculture, livestock and vegetation influence the ecology of the area and the lives of the local population. Although use of fuel for cooking varies between regions, households are estimated to consume about 3,198 kg (Molnar 1987) of wood per annum. Research in the Himalayan region shows that women are primarily responsible for the collection of fuel, fodder and water for both the human and animal population. However, over the past thirty years, Himalayan forests have declined by 40 % and the highest deforestation rate is that of Nepal (3.9% per year) (Dankelman and Davidson 1988). Kumar and Hotchkiss' (1988) study of hours spent in collecting a standard load of fuelwood (in an examination of the effects of deforestation of agricultural output, food consumption and nutritional status of children in the hills of Nepal) indicated that women work, in general, for 8–10 hours a day. When access to forest resources decreases by 1.0%, consumption decreases by 0.3%, but total time spent on collection increases by 0.6%. For sites where deforestation is greatest, the time required to collect a standard load of fuelwood is 75% higher than in areas of low deforestation, or—to put it differently, there is a 45% increase in the time spent for fuelwood collection (Kumar and Hotchkiss 1988). As fuelwood becomes scarce,

women ration fuel for cooking, use more crop residues and try to minimize on both time and fuel.

**Livestock.** In the mountainous regions, livestock is kept for many purposes such as dairy and meat products, draft power, source of organic manure and to recycle biomass and kitchen waste for greater productivity of small farms. Livestock acts as a dung-machine by consuming 60% of the digestible protein and 64% of non-protein nitrogen nutrients which would have little value if they were not passed through animals (ILEIA Newsletter 1987). As such, households in the hills keep an average number of five goats and two cows, oxen or buffaloes that require a minimum of two to three loads of fodder daily (Gurung 1988). Seventy-four per cent of livestock activities are done by women. The depletion of resources has proportionally increased women's burden in collecting fodder and leaf litter. Studies indicate that women spend more time in collection activities at sites where deforestation has been severe. For the same amount of cropped area, the time spent on agricultural labour was 40% less (Kumar and Hotchkiss 1988).

The economic situation of farm families worsens with continued deforestation and livestock productivity suffers from decreased consumption of fodder. Mahat's research (1987) estimated a 50% fodder deficit in the hills if the livestock was properly maintained and 20% deficit when accounting for minimal maintenance of livestock. Under such circumstances, farming households are making several changes in order to adjust to the situation. Reducing the number of livestock, changing the types of animals kept by cattle holders by either replacing buffaloes for cows or by replacing them with goats are some examples. Stall tethering of livestock (instead of open grazing), redistribution of livestock for grazing on different plots of land, increase in livestock sheds are some options tried out by different households in the hills. The influencing factors include distance and density of forest and grazing land, amount of fodder and feed available; and most importantly, amount of female labour available to tether the animals. Although the World Bank (1987) notes that the livestock population is greater than needed for Nepal, livestock holdings remain small and management methods vary amongst various cultural groups (Fox 1987, Gurung 1988). Most farmers in the Kakani area believe that without proper government intervention in the local farming system, the only way to substantially improve crop yields from available land to feed the growing population, is to spend more time in manure production and terrace improvements (Gurung 1988). Likewise, in a village around Kakani area, it has become customary to assign each bride a livestock shed (with one or two buffaloes and sometimes oxen) located in one of the family-owned plots away from home. It is then the responsibility of the

women to care and tend to the livestock, as well as the neighboring land. This practice increases the productivity of the land, while reducing women's labour in transporting fodder and manure to and from the shed.

**Water.** Though water collection appears an isolated problem, it is integrally related to the work efficiency of women in mountainous and non-mountainous areas, where women are dependent on water for multifarious tasks, both within and outside the household. Where a potable water supply does not exist and women are left on their own in arranging for needed water, the effect on the overall subsistence system is:

- a high proportion of women's energy is spent on water collection, with consequent high opportunity costs in relation to other activities;
- contamination of drinking water, foods and equipment and a corresponding increase in morbidity and mortality among women, men and particularly infants and children;
- inefficient use of water resources, and low productivity in agriculture and small-scale industries, etc.

Women apply traditionally gained knowledge and skills in deciding upon sources of water for collecting, transporting and storing to meet domestic and farm requirements. Studies show that water sources managed by women themselves are maintained better and are more reliable than development project installed water systems in rural areas (Shrestha 1987, Dankelman and Davidson 1988). Case studies in several parts of the world show that women have managed water from traditional times and how change in water management affects their lives (Dankelman and Davidson 1988).

All of these resources are highly interrelated and any change in one component is certain to affect the others.

### **Relationship between gender and ecological crisis**

It is common knowledge that a greater percentage of hill lands are cultivated as dry terraces or one in which irrigation is not facilitated. In order to irrigate the lands men would have to give up their time from playing cards, gossiping at teashops and being involved in politics which are commonly held practices—especially among high-caste groups such as Brahmin and Chhetri. In the absence of irrigation when lands are cultivated as *bāri* with sloping terraces, surface erosion is the rule and not the exception. Farmers say that about 3 to 4 inches of fertile soil gets washed away during the monsoon when soil is loose from ploughing. It is



then the duty of women to replenish the soil by literally refilling with compost for the next crop. The distribution of parcels of *bāri* land in different directions and various distances severely taxes women's time carrying compost as well as having anything to do with its preparation, especially among the Brahmins and Chhetris. This is always a woman's task, a task which every woman hates to do but finds no alternative. Women in the hill regions invariably admit that they can replenish much less compost than is ideally required to make the land productive because of the distance to the fields and the volume of manure they can produce. The closer fields gets more manure than the ones at a distance. Consequently the stability and productivity of the hill lands would be affected. It not only affects the people's health and well being but also contributes to the ecological crisis.

Viewed from the perspective of livestock and manure production too, Hindu culture has its negative effect on the ecology. High-caste groups such as the Brahmin and Chhetri need cows for their dung to purify their household and kitchen every day. Compared to buffalo, cattle produce less manure and milk but require grazing. Hence for the same amount of time spent by women they get less output from cattle. Besides the fact that the cattle had to be placed next to their households for easy access to dung. This means that women had to spend greater amounts of time in moving the biomass from the forest and the compost to the fields. Other ethnic groups show a greater share of this work by their male members in the family. Besides, the frequency of locating the animal shed closer to their fields also lessens the time put into tethering livestock. Thus more than women of other groups, Hindu women are literally more tied to animals than to their husbands. Perhaps this is why the tethering of livestock is called 'animal husbandry'!

While the Hindu caste women are supposed to provide greater amounts of daily manual labour in the farm, livestock tethering, collecting water and fodder, culturally they are also discriminated against in the provision of nutrition or adequate food. Comparative studies of the health status of Brahmins and Chhetris with that of the members other caste and ethnic groups show that the former have remarkably poorer health conditions. This results in a higher frequency of still births, maternal mortality and other health problems. Further to this, the food habits and diets of Brahmins restrict the intake of animal protein, onions, garlic, to name a few which are essential to a healthy life. The poor health condition of both males and females has its own implication in the efficient management of resources and the land.

Ownership of land is another factor that influences the productivity as well as the stability of land. In spite of the fact that women spend their

lifetime in the fields sacrificing their rights to basic needs, they are not the rightful owners of land. Among other ethnic groups, women are also known to inherit and own land which provides them with the incentive to stabilize the land and use it for intensive farming. Among Brahmins and Chhetris this seemingly happens quite rarely. While privatization and land-to-the-tillers is stressed, access of land to women is yet to be discussed, which could have a significant impact on the ecology and the economy of the household. It need not be stressed that the most effective incentive is to rightfully own what one produces.

These are some examples of gender discrimination among the Hindu castes which have directly or indirectly influenced the hill ecology. Observations in various parts of the hills indicate that many of these issues stated above are less pronounced among other ethnic groups and therefore have less negative impact. This would also need to be established through further research.

### **Wrong approach of government and development programs**

Government as well as the designers of various development programs are more than responsible for strengthening the gender discrimination which has continued to affect the ecology of the hills. This has been done continuously and repeatedly in two different ways:

1. Government plans and policies designed by male architects, national or international, were not aware of the balanced roles of men and women in all spheres of life and thus have crushed the indigenous organisation system where both groups have defined roles in decision-making processes.
2. When new intervention programmes were devised to handle land degradation, better management of watersheds, improving agriculture, breeding more productive livestock and their care, introducing hybrid and ecologically viable fodder plants, inventing new technologies to process food, installing water-supply schemes etc. etc.—the fact that women are as much and at times more involved in these issues than men was absolutely ignored. None of the outreach programmes ever questioned whether they were doing the right thing and if they were happy about the outcome—at least not until very recently when international pressure was generated to do so. In the meantime, women have silently watched as development programmes came and went as they continue to do their work in their own traditional ways, some of which are not as efficient as the modern techniques. Yet it has always been men who have the prerogative to be involved in the programmes

meant to better manage resources.

Indicators of this imbalance are many. Literacy rates are often quoted but the number of women attending training on various programmes useful for their work, ratio of men and women in users committees, development projects, policy-making bodies, etc etc will horrify any observer by their drastic under-representation. Let alone participate in local or national politics, recent figures show that only on 1% of women in the rural areas know their local politician and 91% of women have never participated in village development meetings (local Newspaper, *Jana Manch*, September 3, 1992).

### Conclusion

Clearly, resources in the mountain regions are highly interconnected and interdependent and women, more than men, play a predominant role in managing resources and helping to maintain the balance needed to sustain livelihood. We can learn little if the study of resource management is separated from the gender perspective. The established male-biased model of development has basically neglected women's work, knowledge and potential capacities in sustaining mountain areas. Feminist views on development *for* rather than *of* women show that women's issues have been singled out as 'Women in Development' (as in this conference) and they have been labelled 'ignorant', 'backward', to become objects to which something must be done. When women are especially targeted and treated as a separate problem their real needs are decontextualized and distorted. This creates an artificial separation of women from men. The ecological crisis in Nepal has not yet been analysed from a gender perspective and therefore national or international efforts will prove to be of little use as long as male views and values predominate in development paradigms.

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# Newar Traditions in a Changing Culture: An Analysis of Two Pre-Pubescent Rituals for Girls

Laura Kunreuther

The Newars distinguish themselves from the dominant Brahman-Chhetri culture in the performance of two rituals called *ihī* and *bārḥā*. These rituals address two critical junctures in the lives of women, in particular those which most dramatically involve their sexuality and their relations with men. While *ihī* and *bārḥā* reflect the influence of Hindu patriarchal responses to widowhood and menarche, they also provide a ritual embodiment of a distinctly Newari attitude towards women.

Recent comparisons between Newar and Brahman/Chhetri practices have been under dispute. Newar kinship practices closely resemble the patrilineal 'North Indian Brahmanic system' in which the wife leaves her family for the home of the husband's kin. Despite this common patrilocal tradition, Newar women generally maintain intimate and even vital ties to their natal home (Pradhan 1981). In comparison to Brahman/Chhetri women, Newar women consider themselves less oppressed. The most striking statistical reflection of this is the relatively free position Newar women have in marriage (Pradhan 1981). Bina Pradhan's study of low-caste Newar women from the village of Bulu depicts divorce as a relatively easy practice commonly initiated by the wife (*ibid.*). On the other hand, David Gellner's work with high-caste Newars of Lalitpur suggests that the elevated status of women observed in Pradhan's project may only apply to low-caste Newars. His own observations show that 'high-caste Newar women certainly do suffer considerable stigma, both from widowhood and from divorce' (Gellner 1991:117). It seems likely that social dependency upon Brahman culture and differences in caste level do create marked behavioural variations between village and urban Newar populations (see also Lewis 1988 for Newar migration patterns).

Most Newar girls partake in both *ihī* and *bārḥā* before marriage. *Ihī* is a mock-marriage ceremony, performed when girls are between the ages of five and eight years old. At this time the girls are betrothed to a god in the form of a *bel* fruit. Lynn Bennet (1983) describes the sacred quality of young girls worshipped among high-caste Hindu Nepalis. These groups demand a child bride in accordance with their ideal of pre-menstrual and virginal purity. The Newars conform with these Hindu values in the *ihī*

ceremony in so far as it constitutes a pre-pubescent marriage to an immortal god.

*Bārḥā* occurs a few years after *ihi* and is a modified version of the Brahman/Chhetri menarche ritual. In both cases, the girls are secluded in a dark room for twelve days away from contact with men or the rays of the sun. In contrast to the Brahman/Chhetri ritual, Newars most commonly perform *bārḥā* in groups of three or four girls prior to puberty. Several theorists postulate that this symbolic menarche rite tempers the polluting aspects of menstruation throughout a Newar woman's life (Allen 1982, Pradhan 1981, Levy 1990).

Both *ihi* and *bārḥā* conform to Brahmanic influence and pressure. At the same time, the rituals can be interpreted as sanctioning a freedom for Newari women more typical among other Nepali ethnic group (see also Iltis 1985 for another analysis of Newar women's ritual). These tensions support David Gellner's trichotomous model for studying the Newars in relation to the broader South Asian region (Gellner 1990). According to Gellner's model, Newars occupy a separate category of beliefs which retains its integrity while reacting with the 'Tribal system' common among hill people and the 'Northern Indian Brahmanic system'. *Ihi* and *bārḥā* ritualize these opposing influences. Furthermore, the resolution found in these two Newari rituals is fluid and has undergone some significant developments in recent years. In the account that follows I will first describe some of the key features of *ihi* and *bārḥā* as I observed them in two different populations of Newars, and then proceed to indicate some important changes that have occurred in recent years—most especially changes in the continuing tension between the opposing 'Tribal' and 'Brahmanic' influences.

### *Ihi*—mock-marriage ceremony

All of the diacritical components of a traditional Hindu marriage are properly executed in an *ihi* ceremony. The most significant event in any Hindu marriage, the *kanyādān* ceremony, is also an important part of *ihi*. In the *kanyādān* rite (which literally means 'giving of the virgin'), the father binds together the hands of his daughter with her husband's. The father gains religious merit (*punya*) in the act of *kanyādān*. According to the sacred Hindu text *Brahmapurāna*: 'The father should give his daughter to a handsome husband while she is still a child; there he attains his goal'. (*Brahmapurāna*, cited in Pandey 1969:189). In *ihi*, the girl's hands are bound to the *bel* fruit, representing her union with the deity. In contrast with a 'proper' Brahman/Chhetri marriage, the Newars do not repeat the *kanyādān* rite in her subsequent marriage to her mortal spouse. This difference, expressed as the girl's true union to the god, may serve as

ritual justification for the freer relationship between a Newar wife and her husband (Levy 1990:122).

The *bel* fruit represents both a deity (most commonly Visnu or Kumāra) and a symbol of the girl's future husband. In accordance with Hindu law, the two are interchangeable, as stated in the *Laws of Manu*: '...[T]he virtuous wife should ever worship her lord [husband] as a God' (*Laws of Manu* cited in Pandey 1969:182). Throughout the ceremony, friends and relatives tease the girl that the size and shape of her *bel* fruit will determine the appearance of her future husband: 'However beautiful your *bel* is, that is how beautiful your husband will be,' they cry as the priest presents the girl with her fruit. When I asked what would happen should the *bel* break, one woman replied confidently: 'The *bel* never breaks. Does Visnu God ever die?!' This statement expresses the most important implication of the deity marriage; a ritual insurance against widowhood.

The mythical origin of *ihi* makes the aim of mediating the stigma of widowhood explicit. Traditionally, widows in Hindu society are ostracized to such an extent that they are unable to get remarried, participate in any religious ceremonies, and are condemned to wearing white clothing and no jewellery. A Bhaktapur legend describes how *ihi* was created because of the goddess Pārvatī's pity for the women of Nepal, in particular the widows:

One day as Pārvatī was walking through the Valley she heard an old woman crying. Pārvatī asked her why she was crying. 'My husband is dead. A husband is necessary for a woman; without a husband a woman's life is terrible.' Pārvatī pitied her and asked Śiva for a boon. 'Can you do something for the women of my natal home so that they will not become widows?' Śiva answered, 'Nārāyana and I will arrange it so that there will no longer be any widows in Nepal.' Thus the Newars were given the *Ihi* ceremony. (Levy 1990: 666).

Apparent in this story is the ambivalent nature of the *ihi* ritual. Newar women without husbands are still considered inauspicious. Śiva alleviates the stigma of widowhood through a symbolic marriage which provides Newar women with an eternal husband. *Ihi* also conforms with the Hindu ideal of child marriage because of its performance before puberty. Allen proposes that: '...mock-marriages are performed in order to provide some kind of overt commitment to the orthodox Brahmanical purity ideal prior to the establishment of unorthodox sexual relations' (Allen 1982:196). Practically speaking, the ritual allows Newars to postpone marriage until after adolescence. Furthermore, Newar widows hypothetically should be able to remarry without stigma.

Many Newar women are also ambivalent as to whether or not they should conform with traditional Hindu marital ideals. The twenty-five Newari women I talked with all remained skeptical as to whether they should actualize the hypothetical freedom granted through an *ihī* ceremony. Eighteen of them asserted that the reason why Newars performed *ihī* was to avoid widowhood. These same respondents, however, had difficulty identifying widows they knew who had remarried.

I conducted part of my research in the village of Terathum, where I interviewed some fifteen Hindu Newari villagers, all of them Shresthas and including four unmarried widows who had completed *ihī* as children. All of them agreed that they would upset the Brahmans in the area by remarrying. When I pursued the same issue among both Hindu and Buddhist Newars in Kathmandu, I was faced with nearly the same responses. One widow from Kathmandu stated that a Newar widow does not believe herself to be inauspicious, but at the same time will not remarry because she wants to conform to the established norms of her community. Perhaps much of this ambiguity results from the predominance of Hindu ideals apparent in the laws and regulations of the state of Nepal.

### ***Bārhā tayegu*—the Newari mock-menstrual rite**

*Bārhā*, performed a few years after *ihī*, reiterates many of these same ambivalent messages. There are two forms of the *bārhā* ritual: *bārhā cwa(n)gu* and *bārhā tayegu*. Both rituals require that the girls be secluded for twelve days in a dark room away from contact with men and sunlight. The ritual seclusion counteracts a dangerous contaminating power the girls possess during menstruation, threatening men in particular (Bennett 1978). Both forms of *bārhā* also suggest a transition between virgin girlhood and active sexuality, thus echoing menarche rites in many different societies.

*Bārhā cwa(n)gu* is almost identical to the traditional Hindu rite performed at the actual time of the girl's first menses. This form of *bārhā* is most commonly performed by Brahman Newars in the Kathmandu Valley (Levy 1990). I will focus on *bārhā tayegu*, which is conducted several years prior to menstruation for groups of three or four girls, and has become the more popular version. The explicit connection between polluting menstrual blood and ritual seclusion remains more nebulous in *bārhā tayegu*. The form and important symbols, however, parallel the Brahman/Chhetri rite so that its implications appear to be similar.

Beginning on the fourth day of *bārhā tayegu* (the day menstruating women cleanse themselves), the girls apply a purifying creme (*ko cheka*) which is then removed and formed into a small image representing the god *Ganeśa*. This action copies that of the goddess *Pārvatī* who gave birth to



*Ganeśa* in just this manner. One interpretation of this action may be that the girls play out their future role as procreative mothers.

The other presence in the room is a mysterious ghost called *khyā*. The *khyā* acts as both protector and disciplinarian to the girls, and the ghost is never seen unless angered. Most of the girls I spoke with feared the *khyā*, though some claimed that he was a white Newari god who protected them in a dark room. (It is interesting to note that all of the girls agreed that the *khyā* is male.) According to two of Allen's young female informants the *khyā* may go so far as to '...lie on top of the girls (Allen 1982:193) thus evoking clear sexual implications.<sup>1</sup> Allen interprets the *khyā* as a deflowering agent, symbolizing incipient sexuality.

The twelve days of liminality symbolically transform the girls into sexual and procreative women. On the twelfth day, the girls are brought out of the room under a dark cloth which protects them from the sunlight. Once the cloth is removed, the girls face the sky and their dangerous powers are extinguished through the rays of the sun. A series of purifying *pūjās* and offerings follow this procedure, including the important hair-parting ceremony. Traditionally, this rite concludes a marriage ceremony and may symbolize the beginning of a girl's sexual relations with her husband (Campbell 1976:92). In the rites I observed, the eldest female of the father's family placed a strip of red vermilion (called *sindur*) in the centre part of the girl's hair. The sexual implications of this action in *bārḥā tayegu* are not explicit because a female applies the *sindur* and the girls are pre-adolescent. Nonetheless, Robert Levy asserts that: '...the implication of incipient sexual passions, if not active sexuality, is still there.' (Levy 1990: 672).

*Bārḥā tayegu* redirects the emphasis away from the contaminating powers of menstruating women, because of its performance for pre-pubescent girls who are treated with the utmost respect. In contrast to the negative sentiments of Brahman/Chhetri girls, who at the time of their confinement often feel fear and confusion (Bennett 1978), one Newar girl described her experience to me enthusiastically: 'We have lots of fun (*moja auncha*). Friends come and we play games all day, eat and don't have to do any work.' Although men are considered in danger of the polluting powers of these girls, the women of the household and close friends are exempt and make a point of visiting the girls regularly. The girls are treated royally and given sweet foods and milk to eat. As one woman claimed: 'It is considered bad luck not to give the girls what they want at this time.' As in *ihī*, then, *bārḥā tayegu* can be interpreted as a rite that provides the Newars with a symbolic rather than an actual commitment to orthodox Hindu beliefs concerning female ontology and the status of women.

### Changes in the rituals

I observed changes in both *thi* and *bārḥā* which reflect differences in geographic, economic and religious backgrounds of two separate Newar populations I studied. In the village of Terathum, for instance, I saw the two rituals combined into one short seclusion rite of four days, with the marriage to the *bel* fruit occurring on the fourth day. These Newars introduced a new procedure they called the *kanyādān*, but which more resembled the 'foot washing' ceremony (*goDha dhune*) performed in a traditional Hindu marriage. After coming out of the *bārḥā* room, the relatives washed the feet of these girls in a brass bowl and then tossed them gold coins. Bennett asserts that: 'By participating in the foot washing ceremony [friends and relatives] receive some of the religious merit which the brides' parents get by doing the *kanyādān*' (Bennett 1983:82). This change suggests the influence of Brahmans, who make up a majority of the population in this village. In addition, the alterations were probably due to economic constraints that made it difficult for the daughters to be absent from labour for such a long period of time. 'Four days are the most important. It is very hard for our daughters to stay longer than that in one room,' the father of the girls stated, thus indicating that the change might also relate to the girls own well-being.

One of the most interesting changes I encountered is practiced by a relatively small population of Buddhist Newars who have actually replaced *bārḥā* with a new rite called *riṣi prabāja*. *Riṣi prabāja* presents a striking example of the incipient development of a new gender ideology. One of its major divergences from *bārḥā* is that it remains separate and seemingly unconnected to menstruation. The girls are secluded for twelve days in a Newar Buddhist nunnery. They are not forbidden to see the sun or men. There are severe restrictions on what the girls can eat. They are permitted only one meal of rice before twelve noon, and then only liquids or uncooked foods without milk. The girls wear special maroon robes throughout their stay which strongly resemble the robes given to boys on their initiation rite *bare chuyegu*. In many ways *riṣi prabāja* echoes the concept behind *bare chuyegu*, when Buddhist boys experience the life of an ascetic before passing onto adulthood.

Dharmakirti Nunnery is one of the primary locations where *riṣi prabāja* is practiced. One of the head nuns at Dharmakirti explained to me that *riṣi prabāja* had been implemented when these Newars felt the meaning in *bārḥā* was lost: 'The girls in *bārḥā* play all day and never learn what it means to be restricted.' As the nuns at Dharmakirti assert, *riṣi prabāja*, teaches the girls the virtues of separation and restraint, which they believe to be the primary purpose of *bārḥā*.

*Riṣi prabāja* has been practiced in the Kathmandu area for approximately seventeen years now after a movement of Theravada Buddhism became increasingly influential among a select group of Buddhist Newars. Over 2,000 Newar girls have participated in the rite instead of *bārhā*. The Newars who partake in this new movement reject many of the rituals which have either clear Mahāyāna or Hindu overtones, as is the case with both forms of *bārhā*. In lieu of these rituals, they have created their own rites which emphasize education through Theravada Buddhist doctrine. The invention of *riṣi prabāja* proposes that religious education is fundamental in the development of both boys and girls. The new meanings recognize girls not merely in connection to their bodies, but as individuals who also have a spiritual and educational need.

This new movement has also expanded the boundaries for widows by giving them new opportunities. Many of the widowed women involved in the Theravada changes become nuns, and devote themselves to religious study. As Kloppenberg describes '...their religious activities comprise of meditation, study of the canonical texts, recitation of texts, puja, preaching and teaching' (Kloppenberg 1977:316). One of the major taboos preventing widows from participating in religious *pūjās* is thus eliminated with this newly felt encouragement. At the same time, however, widows are still expected to remain celibate as nuns, therefore conforming with the stigma of widow remarriage.

## Conclusion

It is interesting to note that these same Buddhist Newars who perform *riṣi prabāja* continue with the practice of *ihī*, regardless of the many Hindu implications of the ritual.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to *bārhā*, all the Newars I interviewed considered *ihī* to be the one distinctly Newari ritual. The performance of this mock-marriage ceremony reasserts their identity as Newars.<sup>3</sup> In the wealthier communities of Kathmandu, the emphasis of *ihī* is on the feast (*bhoj*) held at the end of the ceremony. These events could be interpreted as examples of 'conspicuous consumption' when families are willing to go into debt in order to meet the expectations of their peers.

After examining these rituals in detail many questions still remained: are Newar women in fact treated differently than other Nepali women? are they granted more autonomy in their house and their marriage? And if so, how is this freedom recognized? Measuring relative status and degrees of autonomy between culture groups is highly problematic. Previous research and statistical data (Allen 1982, Levy 1990, Pradhan 1981) indicates that Newar women do enjoy relatively more autonomy in comparison to high-caste Hindu women. According to Pradhan's study of the Newar women of Bulu 'Women...can remarry without any social stigma or loss of status,

and in the sample there are three older women who had married four times' (Pradhan 1981:71). Of Pradhan's sample of forty-six low-caste village women, however, there were seven widowed women, none of whom remarried. Throughout my fieldwork I encountered no instance of widow remarriage. Furthermore, I saw no significant difference in the observation of menstrual taboos between Newars and their Brahman/Chhetri contemporaries, as both Pradhan and Allen suggest. Part of this discrepancy may relate to the fact that most of my fieldwork was done in a village highly populated by Brahmans and Chhetris. In Kathmandu, however, where the majority of Newars, both Hindu and Buddhist, reside, my findings were quite similar.

Another hypothesis regarding Newar women's apparent freedom relates to their strong bonds to their natal home. According to recent research conducted in two Tamang villages by Thomas Fricke, William Axinn and Arland Thornton, women's autonomy directly correlates with frequent visits to the natal home (Fricke et al 1993). Newar women also generally maintain a close connection to their natal homes (Pradhan 1981). The Newars tendency to marry later, which is ritually sanctioned in the performance of *ihī* and *bārḥā*, perhaps further strengthens their bonds to their natal home and devalues the importance of the husband and his family. In contrast, however, Gellner's study among the high-caste Newars of Lalitpur maintains that: 'A high-caste woman is not supposed to visit her natal home without being invited, and if she stays the night she should not return to her husband's home without being invited back' (Gellner 1989:116). These differences regarding Newar women's autonomy most probably result from the variations in caste hierarchy and residential locale (village versus urban) among Newar populations.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that my observations of *ihī* and *bārḥā* provide support for Gellner's trichotomous model, especially regarding caste variations within the Newar community. According to this model, the 'Newar system' of beliefs is influenced by, but remains separate from, both the 'Tribal system' and the 'North Indian Brahmanic system', each forming one point of a triangle. One of the most crucial findings of my research is the wide diversity of attitudes and perceptions towards women within different Newar communities. This I attribute to the caste hierarchy as well as economic, geographic and religious differences. For example, the performance of *riṣi prabāja* by Buddhist Newars gives an entirely different meaning to the ritual of *bārḥā*. According to Gellner's model, these Buddhist Newars occupy a space closer to the 'Tribal system' which he describes as compatible with both Hindu and Buddhist ideology. On the other side of the triangle, the village Newars who are highly influenced by the predominant Brahman

population have incorporated the 'foot washing' ceremony to worship the virginal girl. This expresses an important ideal in the 'North Indian Brahmanic system' of beliefs. These variations reflect a complex history of the Newar people who have incorporated aspects of both Hinduism and Buddhism into their ideology, and whose origins still remain an issue of dispute.

## Notes

1 I recently learned about an expression in Newari, *khyākatyaey*, which literally means 'when a *khyā* lies on top of you' (Tuladhar, personal communication). This expression is not used exclusively in the *bārhā* room, but for anyone who awakes from a deep sleep and momentarily experiences a paralysis of the whole body. The state is perhaps more probable in a room which is continually dark, like the *bārhā* room, but also creates doubt for the sexual interpretation of the expression for *bārhā* girls.

2 Dharmakirti nunnery has reportedly instituted a new ritual to replace *ihī*; my future research will investigate this development.

3 There are populations of low-caste, village Newars who do not perform *ihī*. Further research is necessary to determine what ethnic identity markers exist in these Newar populations.

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# Women, Hindu Kings, and Goddesses in Newar Representations of Geopolitical Space

Linda Iltis

Ancient Hindu texts and royal inscriptions seem to tell us little about living traditions, while descriptions of current ceremonies are equally uninformative about historical continuities and deeper meanings. Texts and rituals together, however, provide depth and new insights, as in the case of the annual rituals of state that involve people and goddesses in periodic re-legitimation of the king, and annual women's rituals of individual personal merit, which reassert and redefine the autonomy, self-power, and self-rule of individual people, homes, communities, and ultimately the state as well.

One such ritual, the month-long *vrata* or vow called Swasthānī, is a popular tradition practiced throughout the Kingdom of Nepal, in homes by families or publicly by women. The current 30-chapter-long narrative text recited as the core of the ritual, is based on local religious historical accounts as well as Hindu Purāṇa stories, all of which emphasize the power of the sacred Himalayan landscape and its associated gods and goddesses. The stories also focus on the power and stability of individuals, who are redefined through Swastānī Vrata, which promotes the stability of home, family, and place. The goddess Swasthānī, whose name means 'one's own place' is an abstract goddess of the place of the Himalayas but specifically of the nation/state of Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

Representations of the goddess Swasthānī appearing in the *vrata* text, the Swasthānī Vrata Kathā, include: Mahāmaya, Satī Devī, wife of Mahādeva who dwells in the Himalayas; Pārvatī, the pious daughter of Himālāya Rājā and Gomā, a seven-year-old Nepalese Brahman girl, who becomes the first human being in the world of mortals to perform the Swasthānī Vrata.

In ritual practice, Swasthānī also represented by her physical book or manuscript, and by the syllable 'om' written in the center of an eight-petalled lotus *maṇḍala* containing the Aṣṭa Mātrkā, or eight goddesses who prominently protect, define and demarcate places within the Newar religious world. Sets of surrounding Aṣṭa Mātrkā shrines were established by kings to protect their kingdoms from disasters, and they supported public performances of Swasthānī Vrata for the well-being of the state. Currently the government still provides financial support for the public Vrata, and a blessing from it is still presented to the King.

But royal support notwithstanding, *vratas* cannot happen without voluntary commitment and support from individuals, families and communities. A king could not hire a single Brahman priest to do a Swasthānī *vrata* on his behalf, as he might a fire sacrifice. The merit accrued from a *vrata* comes from the many women who actually do the *vrata* and the fruits go to them, and only secondarily, if they wish, to their designated beneficiary.

Royal patronage of sacred places and their associated gods and goddesses was expected of a good Hindu King. But the agency of the king was almost always effected through human representatives and intermediaries in specific local contexts, which requires an interactive relationship between king, people and places. The Aṣṭa Mātrkā goddess shrines that define and protect communities and kingdom, though occasionally renovated by a king, are regularly sustained, managed and honored by women and men of a local community. Royal patronage is realized only indirectly through a community's or individual's ongoing involvement with sacred places that they are directly in charge of.

The Newars, who are the majority ethnic group in the Kathmandu Valley, are responsible for the spread of popularity of the written text of Swasthānī Vrata Kathā and its associated ritual practice to other non-Newar ethnic groups in Nepal. The current published 400-page editions, in both Newari and Nepali vernaculars, are greatly expanded from the earliest available 8-folio palm-leaf manuscript form, which contained only one locally-based story, the story of Gomā. It is doubtful that there ever was an 'authoritative' version of Swasthānī, as the different editions compete with one another on the basis of their individuality and inclusion of unique material. The earliest available Swasthānī manuscript yet found, among over 600 Swasthānī MSS catalogued, is dated 1573 A.D (NGMPP #B 13/42). The scribe, Śrī Jayantadeva, inscribed the text in Newari script on palm-leaf, and the language is Sanskrit.<sup>2</sup>

This 16th-century version of the narrative verse tells the story about the seven-year-old Brahman girl bride, Gomā Bhaṭṭini. She is cursed by Mahādeva to marry an eighty-year-old man, Śivaśarma, who never returns home from a begging trip. Gomā bears his son, Navarāja. Eventually the son abandons Gomā to search for his father. But Gomā performs Swasthānī Vrata to overcome her own misery and to bring about the return of her son. Through her actions, her son not only returns, but he is also selected as the new king by the god Harihara embodied in an elephant. The *rājābhiśekha* royal consecration of the king is conducted by Gomā herself, who pours the water over her son's head. Gomā's consecration of her son as king is a successful completion of her own Swasthānī Vrata ritual actions. She extends the merit earned from her own actions in her own



place to her own son in his transformed place, and redefines herself as the queen mother.

From the perspective of the new king, his mother's actions have helped to redefine his own sense of place as his personal kingdom. He has wandered in search of his father, the patriarch of his family. But the fruits of the Swasthānī ritual performed by his own mother has expanded his territory, transforming his own home into a kingdom with himself at the centre as sovereign ruler.

But why should a Brahman, a member of the Hindu priest caste, become a king; and why should a presumably 'inauspicious' widow become a queen, capable of performing a consecration ritual?

The symbolism of Swasthānī for Nepali women and their families in the context of a Hindu Kingdom is that each individual can and should gain optimum power of self by worshipping the goddess of own place and by being centred at the focal point of their own microcosmic kingdom. The place of one's own home is the source of strength for realization of that home as a sacred kingdom. Thus, individuals who are religiously motivated can participate in redefining themselves, and their own kingship and place of religious sovereignty.

This symbolic construct suggests that the idea of *virājyamān* or sovereignty in a nation-state kingdom is perhaps ultimately a symbolic projection of sovereignty in the kingdom of the home. The stability of family and home is largely the responsibility of auspicious women, especially young women and wives who are religiously motivated. For a head of a Hindu Kingdom, stability of the state is often defined and sustained through identification with a central protective goddess. The relationship of a kingdom to a king is even characterized by the great Sanskrit poet, Kālidāsa, in *Raghuvamśa*, as that of a *hastagāmini*, a 'goer into the hand of', which is another name for the bride given in marriage, which involves placing the hand of the bride into the hand of the groom, with an unction. The gift of kingdom to king implies a *giver* of still higher rank and authority, which resembles the parent-in-law to son-in-law relationship found in Nepali society. The consensus of the people, regarding *their assessment* of the would-be-king's religious character, is what makes them the givers or endorsers of his position.

In Nepalese society and in Swasthānī, the perfect son-in-law is symbolically identified with the god Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa, and referred to as a Jwain Nārāyaṇa, or son-in-law Nārāyaṇa. The head of a Hindu Kingdom, through elaborate *rājābhiśekha* consecration rituals also becomes a 'walking Nārāyaṇa'. Like a son-in-law, he is indebted to his 'in-laws', the people of the nation, at all times for receiving the gift of the kingdom, and he is responsible to the in-law family (again the people of the

nation) for the care and well-being of that gift. Gerard Toffin, in an important study of the identification of the King of Nepal with Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, has noted the seeming incongruity that the king of Nepal, while said by some to be a form of Viṣṇu, is never actually treated as such.<sup>4</sup> Interpreting the king as the idealized/deified perfect son-in-law Nārāyaṇa who receives the kingdom as his bride, rather than as a literal god incarnate, would seem to resolve this contradiction.

But, what, then, does a son-in-law have to do with the power of place? I would suggest the power of place is accrued through his relationship to a female Śaktī, (goddess and/or wife), who herself is identified with specific places.

Just as a home is not a home without both husband and wife, royal consecration also requires a male/female couple for success. Although King Birendra became the *de facto* ruler of Nepal at his father's death, his consecration and coronation took place only after his marriage. While alliance with an earthly wife is thus necessary for gaining the throne, alliance with a goddess is required for keeping it. The king of Nepal must traditionally be affiliated with the Living Goddess Kumārī of central Kathmandu, who annually relegitimizes the power of the king. The current consensus of Nepalese people is that women and goddesses are directly linked to power and well-being of places, ranging from home to kingdom. Patrilocal and patriarchal ideas aside, husbands or kings, both symbolic Jwain Nārāyaṇas, are powerless without their female śaktī, or symbolic connection to power of place.

Goddesses and wives are symbolically linked to their environmental, physical place, be it a home or a town. In his study of *Kingship* (1927: 99-112) Hocart suggests that a king's marriage is essential for symbolic association with the earth. The royal consecration in Nepal involves a Vedic *mṛttikasnāna* or earth bath, which, according to Nepal's news media as cited by Michael Witzel, was symbolic of the 'king's awareness and affinity with the environment'<sup>3</sup> and also in recognition of 'our attachment to the soil'.<sup>4</sup> The Aṣṭa Mātṛkā goddesses who define the local landscape are worshipped by the king during the coronation. And the king is also referred to as *bhupati* or 'lord/husband of the earth'. But in daily life, most of the ritual links of king and people to the Nepalese environment and soil are actualized through goddess shrines and rituals.

*Pīṭha* shrines of goddesses are honored annually, in rituals celebrating victory, protection and unity and continuity of lineages and communities. The Aṣṭa Mātṛkā goddesses, Kumārī, Taleju, Durgā Bhavānī and Kālī all protect the kingdom and its places. The goddess Bhadrakālī and her counterpart, Pachali Bhairava, in a ritual sword exchange ceremony, called Khaḍgasiddhi, help to renew the śakti and the enlightened wisdom

and power of the king in the form of a personal sword. The sword itself is symbolically embedded in the kingdom's landscape, for it forms the symbolic plan for the urban layout of the capital city of Kathmandu. The points of the sword's shape are marked by the shrines of the territorially significant Aṣṭa Mātṛkā goddesses.<sup>5</sup>

The Swasthānī Vrata Kathā is now recited on Radio and TV during the month of Māgh, and new films such as *Tilhari* claim to be based on Swasthānī stories. But for generations, Swasthānī recitation has been a popular family ritual accessible across caste and ethnic boundaries. We can easily argue that Swasthānī is the most widely-shared religious knowledge base of all the ritual traditions in the nation of Nepal. Whether a family chooses to just recite the text, or a woman vows to complete the full *vrata*, with fasting and bathing, many families are familiar with the stories and the fruits expected to be earned.

But the women of a family are the motivators for doing this ritual. Because the vow of daily fasting and bathing lasts an entire month, it is highly meritorious. In the public *vrata*, Newar women may go to a pilgrimage location for a whole month to Sāli Nadi (in Sānkhu) or elsewhere in Bhaktapur and Dhulikhel.

The benefits to be gained are equated to those of the consecration for kingship (*rajasūya*) and the royal Vedic horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*). Even in the oldest Swasthānī manuscript available the association with these royal rituals is clearly mentioned. 'Rājasūyāśvamedhābhyāṃ yatphalamsamūdāḍṛtāḍṛtām' - ('The fruits of royal consecration and royal horse sacrifice will be bestowed').

For the public Swasthānī Vrata (in Sānkhu and Bhaktapur), young boys carry straw-pierced copper pots called *sahasradhāra* with an image of Nārāyaṇa. This elaborate unction device produces a 1000-water-droplet offering when the women pour sacred river water over it. This *abhiśekha*-like sub-ritual consecrates the territory of pilgrimage towns and communities visited by the Swasthānī Vrata preceptors. M. Witzel (1987: 421, 435), describes a similar 100 water droplet unction with waters from 1001 pitchers that is part of Nepalese royal *abhiśekha* consecration rites.

On the final full moon day of Swasthānī Purn̄e, an *aśvamedha yajñā* fire sacrifice culminates in the pilgrim's realization of goddess Swasthānī through their own power of self and place. This ritual is so named after the ancient Vedic royal horse sacrifice, which allowed a horse to roam freely in order to determine the true boundaries of the kingdom. The pilgrims of Swasthānī also seek to define their own kingdom by undertaking the Swasthānī vow, traveling freely throughout the kingdom, on pilgrimage, and becoming the symbolic successors to the kings who sponsored the horse sacrifice in Vedic times.<sup>6</sup>

**Conclusion:**

In this brief survey of Swasthānī textual and ritual traditions, I have suggested the presence of an implicit model of Hindu Kingship grounded in concepts of the home and family, based on the power of places vitalized by the goddesses who inhabit them, and actualized by the women who transmit that power to home and kingdom alike. I have represented the kingship in interactive terms, rather than as a cold and alien cosmic despotism, and advocated replacing literal interpretations of the king's divinity with the more down-to-earth symbolism of the relationship of in-laws. Parts of the interpretation presented here support the views of Shelly Errington (1989) based on research on Hindu Kingdoms in Southeast Asia, particularly her emphases on the centrality of religious symbolism for understanding royal power, and her stress on personal relationships rather than territorial contiguity as the foundation of the state. We seem to agree that the Hindu Kingdom is an interactive and interpersonal entity in which symbolism plays a powerful role.

The continuing force of symbolic interaction was seen as recently as 1990, when the people of Nepal effected major democratic changes in their government. While men debated and demonstrated, large groups of women mobilized themselves to perform '*vratas* for democracy' at the major *places* of power—religious shrines—throughout Nepal. This alone proved to be a most effective show of non-violent power. No Nepalese citizen can think of ruining a woman's *vrata*. Such large inter-community social movements that are fashioned and symbolically constructed from established ritual networks, may ultimately have more power and political effect than even the king himself.

In suggesting these interpretations, I am not attempting to obscure real oppression of women with matriarchal myth, or to endorse an organic model wherein the parts of society function to harmoniously sustain the central organism. Recent repression in Nepal, to say nothing of studies in other regions, would obviously call such a position into serious question. The idea of the 'body politic' may be reflected in the propaganda edicts of former kings of Nepal, but these do not circumscribe the shifting popular perceptions of kingship and ritual construction of identity and place. The rituals persist and change as do the people who perform them, and their experience reflects outward, injecting renewed vitality into the ongoing reconceptualization and reconstitution of the Hindu state.

Although some scholars would assert that the symbolic meaning and power of the rituals of state have been lost due to increasing separation of polity and economy, I would suggest that the meaning of state rituals for individuals has only deepened with age. Rituals of the king actually are elaborated forms inspired from rituals of person, self, and home.

Regardless of surface appearances, in the minds of individuals and communities, the power and sovereignty of the Hindu king stretched only as far as his community support, which was effected through rituals of interdependence. Autonomy of a community, alienated by a non-religious king, could be expressed symbolically in rituals, wherein the idea of sovereignty is transferable to whomever the ritual actors choose to endorse. No one, not even a deified king, can police such mental reconstructions.

## Notes

1 For a complete translation and description of SwasthānīVrata Kathā and associated rituals see Ittis (1985, in press). For another discussion of kings, power and goddesses, see also Gupta and Gombrich (1986).

2 For a thorough historical overview of Swasthānī manuscript traditions see also Tamot (1991). See also a facsimile of this Newari manuscript with devanagari transliteration published together with a current Sanskrit prose version with Nepali translation by A. Sharma (1992).

3 See Toffin (1986: 75).

4 Kedar Man (K.D.?) Singh, A royal affair on the roof of the world. *The Rising Nepal*, 2/20/75 (from the *Far Eastern Review*) Cited in Michael Witzel, (1987: 426).

5 Ram Raj Poudyal, Long live the King. *The Rising Nepal*, 2/16/75, cited in Witzel (1987: 426).

6 For an illustration and further discussion of this see also Juju and Shrestha (1985: 38-47). For further discussion of ritual dance dramas and their relationship to royalty see Ittis 1987, 1991, 1990a, 1990b, in press.

7 J. Gonda describes the term *svastyayana* in Vedic literature, meaning auspicious progress, and notes its usage in the context of a *vrata* and *aśvamedha yajñā*. (Gonda 1989: 179):

The stanzas ṚV. 6, 54, 9 and 6, 49, 8 are as VS. 34, 41 and 42 used as invitatory and oblatory mantras, when those who are performing a horse sacrifice have to prepare an oblation for Pūṣan. They are appropriate, because the former contains the word *vrata* 'rule of conduct, observance of institutions, customs, holy practices, meritorious acts of devotion etc.', which in ŚB. 13, 4, 1, 15 is explained as *vīrya* 'manly virtue and energy', so that the stanza enables the sacrificer to gain the secure *vīrya*, and other the word *pathan* 'path', by which 'he produced (*karoti*) successful progress (*svastyayana*, in the literal sense of the word) for the horse' that after this sacrifice is led up in order to undertake a year-long wandering.

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# **‘There are Many Words to Describe Their Anger’: Ritual and Resistance Among High-Caste Hindu Women in Kathmandu<sup>1</sup>**

**Julia J. Thompson**

Nepal has been undergoing rapid social change since the collapse of the autocratic and conservative Rana regime in 1951. Some 40 years later, when the ‘people’s revolution’ of 1990 led to the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy, the pace of change yet further accelerated. Global cultural flows are also bringing Nepalese people into increasing contact with the outside world in unprecedented ways (see Appadurai 1990). Yet despite these changes, in Kathmandu many Brahmin and Chhetri women appear to lead traditional lives. Women still smear red powder (*sīdur*) in their hair parting to signify their married status as their foremothers have done for hundreds of years. They wear the expensive and confining saris<sup>2</sup> which demonstrate their adherence to Hindu models of decorum and modesty. They wear traditional coloured glass beads and delicately tinkling bangles to notify others in the household of their quiet presence and of their dedication to their husbands. In addition, late twentieth-century Brahmin and Chhetri, or Parbatya<sup>3</sup> women use ritual as a strategy to resist entrapment in traditional Hindu gender models. The increasing cross-cultural literature on women and resistance demonstrates that these are not isolated incidents; similar phenomena are occurring on world-wide basis. For example, Beduin women use their poetry as forms of resistance to express personal feelings that violate their moral code (Abu-Lughod 1986), female Malaysian factory workers become possessed by spirits on the shop floors of factories in response to the pressures of industrialization (Ong 1987), Somalian women become possessed by spirits to protest against male dominance (Lewis 1971); and Oriental women in Jerusalem oppose the fences erected by authorities which prevent them from lighting candles on the holy ancestral tombs by throwing unlit candles through holes in the fences (Sered 1990). Brahmin and Chhetri women appear to conform to Hindu ideals through their participation in various religious activities, but in their daily worship, weddings, fasting and funerals they are able to express their resistance, demonstrate dissatisfactions, and, in essence, not conform.

I witnessed a woman go to visit her lover on the way to the temple. I heard stories of women refusing to fast for their husbands when they were mistreated. I watched a new bride resist the dominant Hindu symbolism



embedded in her own wedding. And, I saw a woman use her parent's funeral rituals as a form of resistance against traditional gender models and a site for social criticism.<sup>4</sup> To understand the importance of these forms of resistance for high-caste women, we cannot merely examine the specifics that prompt them to resist. We must recognize the personal and social contexts of these acts as constructed in ongoing social relationships, and also pay attention to issues of who the audience is for these resistances and to women's own motivations. I must point out that it is not easy for women to resist, in fact it is extremely difficult and can be very dangerous. Women face threats ranging from criticism and gossip to beatings or worse if they are discovered or disapproved of.

Women's resistances are clearly diagnostic of the power relations in which they are embedded (Abu-Lughod 1990). Nepal remains the only official Hindu kingdom in the world, but as a constitutional monarchy undergoing democratic changes in the political system, the importance of the dominant state ideology which reinforced Hindu traditions has been reduced. These recent changes are beginning to transform the conservative Hindu traditions that regulated society with a corresponding impact on the lives of women, especially in urban centers. These women are among the first to experience new models of gender, morality, and power; and, they are often trying to accommodate these modern models into their traditional belief systems through resistances.

In their research on Parbatya in the Kathmandu Valley Bennett (1976, 1981, 1983), Gray (1982, 1983, 1989, 1991) and Kondos (1982, 1989, 1991) describe traditional high-caste Hindu ideals for women. These ideals dictate that women should be shy, patient, good, sequestered, devoted, faithful, restrained and as the oft quoted book of Manu states, women must always be dependent upon a man, be it her father, husband or son. Bennett sees these models become actualized for women through a series of what she terms 'choices' a high-caste Hindu woman must make in her daily activities; choices between obedience and defiance, duty and self-indulgence, harmony and contentiousness, the good of the joint family and the good of oneself, between purity and pollution, between strict observance of *dharma* and laxness, between sexual restraint and indulgence, and between being a faithful wife and an unfaithful one (Bennett 1983:313). In many ways this 'either/or' dichotomous model is too constraining to allow us to understand the 'multiple, responsive roles' Hindu women may create for themselves within these ideological frameworks (Raheja and Gold 1994:360).

Other researchers have outlined the different structural restraints within Parbatya households and the various legal and social consequences of these structures for women (Kondos 1989). According to Kondos there are six different ways women can manoeuvre around and between the rules 'that

constrain and subjugate them'. These include chicanery, suicide, returning to their parent's home, elopement, divorce or separation, and becoming economically independent (1989:182-184). Except perhaps for chicanery, these are drastic measures that require a woman to leave her husband's home and as a result suffer potentially harsh consequences. Parbatya women say the performance of ritual is an important aspect of their *dharma*; even if they do not have strong religious faith, it is their *dharma* to perform rituals and other religious activities for the benefit of the whole household. Women often have leeway within the structure of rituals to use them for their own purposes despite not having such flexibility in other realms of life. For the Parbatya woman who wants to remain within her home and still somehow manoeuvre around these restraints, religion is one forum in which she can do this and still remain—although questionably—within the bounds of cultural acceptance.

In the academic writing on resistance there is, as Abu-Lughod suggests (1990), a tendency to over-romanticize the term, and not to define what we mean it. At one extreme are the debates about definitions of resistance during the Nazi movement (Craig 1992) which argue that we can only call something resistance when it is large scale and meant to transform society. At the other extreme are those (such as Abu-Lughod 1990, Okely 1991 and Scott 1990) who envision resistance as an individual response to particular situations either momentarily or over the course of a lifetime. Somewhere in between are those who see resistance as an interplay between the public and private, the overt and covert, the personal and the social. For example, Scott conceives of resistance as divided into public and hidden transcripts whose analysis helps us to understand relations between the powerless and the powerful (1990). Comaroff sees resistance as an interplay between subordinate and dominant powers where the subordinate both 'acquiesce yet protest, reproduce yet seek to transform their predicament' (1985:1).

These arguments over definitions and configurations of resistance often fail to take into account the full range of possibilities surrounding these acts. In this paper I use the term resistance to mean something which withstands the actions or effects of others, as a force that opposes another, including protest, defiance and nonconformity. Resistance can be a large-scale, organized and self-aware act intended to achieve broad social change with a large audience of both observers and participants. Or it can be a small personal act with a limited audience where the performer may be unaware of the wider social implications of her/his action. Because of shifting social contexts, self-definitions of resistance are important. Whether organized or personal, unaware or aware, the high-caste Hindu women with whom I worked imbue these acts with meaning and intentionality. I define resistance broadly in order not to detract from or undervalue the difficulty of carrying

out such actions, and to show, like Lepowsky (1990), that calling on tradition can itself be a form of resistance.

As women in Kathmandu told me, there are many Nepalese words to describe their anger and different types of resistance including: *satyāgraha*, *pratikār gārnu*, *śān dekhaunu*, *birodh* and *pratirodh*. *Satyāgraha* is passive resistance of the type Gandhi favoured. It can be a large organized hunger strike, such as those supporting labour reforms. Although not commonly used in this way, I was also told that *satyāgraha* can be applied to situations when a single woman refuses to eat, drink, or even talk for extended periods as a means of exerting pressure on others within her household when she has no other alternatives available to her. This is a very personal form of resistance and not usually related to situations beyond a woman's own household. *Śān dekhaunu* (to show pride) is when a woman demonstrates her superiority over her husband by refusing to do anything for him, including not cooking his meals, caring for his children, or attending to other duties. A woman is said to *śān dekhaunu* when she has had a large dowry and married beneath what she perceives to be her social standing, or when she is not accorded what she perceives to be her proper ranking in her household. The audience for this can include both her husband's household and her parent's. There is a negative connotation associated with this type of resistance; women use *śān dekhaunu* to describe other women, but almost never themselves.

*Pratikār gārnu* means to defy, or to be defiant. Some of the smaller acts of resistance a woman might engage in, such as going to have tea with friends instead of going to a temple or even more serious acts such as refusing to fast for one's husband are considered *pratikār*. For women, these acts are generally more socially conscious than *satyāgraha* or *śān dekhaunu*, and are based on action, while *satyāgraha* and *śān dekhaunu* are based on inaction. Women who *pratikār gārnu* have an audience that extends beyond the household to include friends and those in unrelated households. *Birodh* is opposition, resistance, hostility, or to go against something or someone. It is stronger than *pratikār* and is usually applied to types of resistance that are somewhat public and self aware. Those who perform *birodh* have some possibility of transforming society even if only on a small scale. *Pratirodh* is opposition, resistance, obstruction or defiance. The stories I tell below, of high-caste Hindu women's religious resistances, demonstrate the range of activities which can be defined as resistance and the limits of each type in transforming a woman's life situation.

Besides the large-scale political protests which surrounded the democracy movement, most of the forms of resistance I have witnessed in Kathmandu are embedded within women's religious activities and are used to protest against their personal life situations. Parbatya women are able to gain

latitude, and resist those who constrain their lives in such religious activities as their daily worship. For example, many women have lives which are physically restricted; they are not normally allowed to go outside their houses or compounds without good reason. One way to socialize with friends, which is usually not allowed, is to have the 'good reason' of visiting a temple to get *darśan* (to see the deity and receive a blessing) on the day of the week associated with that deity or to perform a special ritual. Of course, these trips are very rarely made by women alone, and the trip is more socially acceptable if a woman has appropriate companions, often other women, providing the guise for socializing with friends which would not normally be permitted. The women do worship once they reach the temple, but the stronger motivation for many of these outings is wanting to be with friends.

A young woman I call Maya<sup>5</sup> is outgoing, lively and because she works outside her home she enjoys greater freedom to go out alone than most other Parbatya women. As Kondos notes, becoming economically independent is one way a woman may manoeuvre around some of the constraints in her life (1989:184). Maya's activities are still carefully watched by her in-laws though, and often they place phone calls to determine if Maya is where she has said she will be. In spite of this, on Mondays on the way to the holy Hindu temple of Paśupati, Maya often stops to have tea with friends. On Tuesday evenings, on the way home from visiting any of the numerous temples in Kathmandu, she visits her lover, being careful to bring home a blessing from Ganeś to prove her pilgrimage. On some Saturdays, she hires a taxi, picks up her lover and drives out to Dakṣiṇ Kālī, an important sacrificial spot nestled in the jungle, to make offerings and to make love. These are very covert forms of resisting (*pratikār gārnu*), of doing things in direct opposition to what her family, and Hindu tradition, have deemed appropriate for her.

Another woman, Kumari, has been married to Krishna for many years. Kumari lives a very traditional life despite the fact that she, like Maya, also works outside the home. Her marriage is typical of many in Kathmandu in that it was arranged and she lives in Krishna's house in a joint family. Krishna has had many girlfriends throughout their marriage, coming and going as he pleases, and spending the money Kumari earns without consulting her. Kumari told me to use the name Krishna for her husband in my telling of this story to highlight the parallels between her husband's behaviour and that of Krishna, the playful god of love.

Throughout her life, Kumari has observed Tij and Rsi Pancamī, two festivals for women which occur each year in the fall. In Kathmandu, women spend these days fasting, bathing and doing special rituals at home, at Paśupati, and at a confluence of holy rivers to ensure the long life and

prosperity of their husbands and to purify themselves of the sins they may have accrued due to menstrual pollution over the past year.<sup>6</sup> As a young woman, Kumari, like many unmarried women, also went to Paśupati on Tij and celebrated Rsi Pancamī in the hope of accruing enough merit so that the deities would bless her with a good husband.

When Kumari fasts for Krishna on special ritual days or celebrates certain rituals for his benefit, he often buys her jewels, saris, gold, or other gifts to express his pleasure at her religious devotedness to his well-being. Last year, however, while walking home on Tij, Kumari told me that one year she and Krishna had a large argument about his girlfriend and in response to what she perceived to be his ill-treatment of her, she refused to fast for him on Tij. Despite Kumari's own religious beliefs, when faced with the mistreatment she felt she was suffering in her relationship with Krishna, she decided to make a stand against him. Krishna became very angry in response to Kumari's refusal to fast, and to retaliate he gave one of Kumari's saris to his mistress. To give someone a piece of clothing is a symbol of intimacy; a woman should not accept clothing from someone with whom she is not intimate. By giving one of Kumari's saris to his girlfriend Krishna was not only depriving Kumari of something he would have given her under other circumstances, but also signifying his intimacy with his mistress.

The next year Kumari again refused to fast for Krishna because his objectionable behaviour continued. Kumari chose not to fast rather than to protest silently or not to protest at all. In the process, Kumari was able to bring Krishna's unacceptable behaviour to the attention of others in the household. By such means she was then able to widen her potential audience for her complaints about Krishna and gain support from her in-laws, despite this technical violation of her *dharma* as a married woman. Krishna's mother sided with Kumari in all of this, supporting her in her refusal to fast and later on confronting the girlfriend with Kumari to get the disputed sari back. In telling me this story, Kumari's emphasis was on how she stood up to Krishna's behaviour by using his own religious beliefs and desires against him. By couching her resistance to Krishna's treatment of her in terms of the Tij festival, Kumari was able to successfully make her point about his behaviour without going outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour as defined by her in-laws.

Another example involves a marriage I attended. At Hindu weddings there are a series of games which the bride and groom play with each other under the wedding canopy, including a dice game (*pāse*), and one in which the bridal couple compete to see who can be the first to feed the other curd off a brass plate (*māhur khuwāunu*), not unlike the traditional cake feeding and smashing at some western weddings. Many women say that the winner of these games will determine the sex of the couple's first child; if the groom

wins the child will be a girl, if the bride wins then the child will be a boy. In addition, women say that these games are about relations of power and dominance. That is, if the bride wins, she will be the more powerful in their new relationship and be able to dominate him easily, while the groom winning means opposite will occur.

There is some contradiction here. If the bride wins then their first-born child will be a boy which is the social, cultural, and often personal ideal. And, it is expected that the bride will win and is often helped by her friends and relatives to do so. Another ideal is also present: new brides are supposed to be shy and docile and the groom would lose some amount of honour in front of the wedding guests and his family if his wife were to win these games. In addition, weddings are frequently traumatic events for the bride; women often tell me that they remember very little of their own weddings and had to be led around through the different rituals. So, even though the couple may desire a first-born son, and due to the potential trauma of the event, what can direct a bride's behaviour at her wedding is the ideal of the shy and reticent bride while the other potential power struggle between the wife and husband gets played down.

This bride though, who, at her own request I call Parvati, competed heartily with her groom in these wedding games. Parvati had what is termed an 'arranged marriage' to a high-caste elite family which had previously been quite powerful and their wedding was an elaborate affair. She wanted to demonstrate, as she told me, not just to her new in-laws but to the guests as well, that she was not going to be submissive to her new husband. Initially, when it became evident that Parvati was trying to win these wedding games the guests were laughing along with what they interpreted to be her joking. This was also evident during the *māhur khuwāune* which turned into a small throwing match with the curd ending up all over the faces of the wedding couple. This is all very much within the realm of acceptable behaviour at weddings; sometimes if the bride and groom have known each other they make jokes during the wedding and the guests laugh and tease them in return.

Parvati continued and intensified her resistance to her expected submissive position in another portion of the ceremony, when the couple is finally officially married and the bride and groom must switch seats (*thau sarne*). Initially the bride sits on the groom's right-hand side signifying her higher status as an unmarried virgin. Once married though, the bride is considered to be of lower status than the groom and must move to his left-hand side.<sup>7</sup> When the time came for them to switch seats, Parvati would not move from her cushion. Indeed, initially the groom rose and asked her politely to move. She would not. The guests began to laugh along with the bride. Then the groom tried to gently move Parvati to the other cushion by

taking her arm as if to help her up. She still refused to be moved from her position of authority; meanwhile the guests laughed louder and began to make comments about what they thought was the bride's joking. Finally, the groom tried to forcibly move Parvati by picking her up, but she made herself as heavy as possible and it took him several attempts before he finally dragged her to the other cushion. By this time, the crowd's laughter was mixed with a few disgruntled comments leading me to believe that Parvati had carried her 'joking' too far. Of course, the distinctions among acceptable behaviour, joking and resistance is often unclear in these situations. It is normal for women to compete at *pāse* and *māhur khuwāune* during their weddings, and to resist changing to the lower status cushion during *thau sarne*. In this case, I later heard some of the female guests comment that they thought Parvati had gone too far and was being too forward for a bride at her own wedding. In interviews with Parvati both before and after the wedding, she told me she was attempting to make a very public statement about her new relationship with the groom and her position as a new bride in his house through her over-competitiveness and resistance at her wedding.

Just as Parvati resisted the traditional ideals of wife and daughter-in-law at her own wedding, Indira Rana made a very public and pointed statement about her role as a daughter and her position as a woman in Nepalese society at her mother's funeral. Indira is a high level government official whose life and work are linked to efforts to bring about social change. At her wish, I have disguised Indira's identity because of the amount of publicity this incident received in the local press (cf. *Asmitā* 1992, Pandey 1992, *Suruchi* 1992), and because as she says, the story is true. Indira is an exceptional woman by any standards. She has never married despite strong social pressures. She believes that if she had married her career would have suffered because she would have had to make sacrifices for the benefit of her husband and his family. Indira is a lawyer, feminist, member of the Nepal Law Reform Commission, and current Secretary of His Majesty's Government of Nepal's (HMG/N) Judicial Council, the first woman to ever hold this position and the highest-ranking non-elected woman in government. In 1965, Indira was the first woman to join HMG/N as a lawyer and has been with HMG/N in various capacities ever since.

Indira's mother died in November, 1992. As Indira has supported, cared for and lived with her mother throughout her life, she took the virtually unprecedented responsibility of performing the necessary thirteen day funeral rituals and duties (*kāj-kriyā*). Traditionally, a son is essential, as I stated above, not just to support parents in their old age, but also to perform the *kāj-kriyā*.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a man's performance of these rites is closely linked to his inheritance of the family property. The man who does these rites is usually the main inheritor and people tell me of the confusion which

often results when someone other than a son performs the *kāj-kriyā* (cf. *Asmitā* 1992; Bennett 1983:95). The confusion concerns the issue of whether or not this person now has a stake in the inheritance. Women rarely take part in the *kāj-kriyā* except as bystanders. They are not even allowed to go with the funeral procession which takes the body from the house to the cremation ground; they must say goodbye to the deceased from the doorway of their house.

Yet, when her mother died, Indira took it upon herself to walk barefoot from her own house to the funeral grounds (*ghats*) at Paśupati, light the funeral pyre, wear the white unstitched clothes of mourning, and shave her head entirely. In doing these rituals Indira was even more stringent and conservative than many people currently are, demonstrating both her commitment to the memory and well-being of her mother's soul and to the public statement she was making about the role of daughters in Parbatya society.

Indira states that since she has cared for her mother for all these years without the assistance of her brothers, because she is unmarried, and because she built her house on the piece of property which was to be her mother's, she should be entitled to a share of the family's ancestral property. Instead, she says, her elder brother is trying to cheat her out of the piece of property which is legally hers, as he cheated her mother out of hers. In describing this to me, Indira makes the explicit link between her care of her mother, performance of the *kāj-kriyā*, and her rights to the property. Why should her brothers get the property of their parents she asks, when they have not fulfilled their duties to the parents? Indira insisted on performing the *kāj-kriyā* to show people that a daughter is perfectly capable of doing these rituals and as such should also then inherit equally as a son. As local newspapers reported, Indira's performance of her mother's *kāj-kriyā* was one which resisted traditional gender ideals (*Asmitā* 1992, Pandey 1992, *Suruchi* 1992) while conforming to traditional ritual requirements.

This is not the first time that Indira has been vocal about women's position in Nepalese society. As a member of the Nepal Law Reform Commission, and to bring about radical social change for women in the legal reform of women's property rights, Indira has worked very hard to convince the other Commission members that women should have equal property rights. Her efforts included completing a survey, writing reports, and lobbying with other social activists and government officials. Unfortunately, she has been faced with overwhelming opposition in terms of both traditionalism and fatalism in trying to make these constitutional changes (Thompson n.d.), the same forces against which other high-caste women are also resisting. Indira is trying to unify the various factionalized women's groups to pressure the government to make progress on women's rights



before International Women's Day in March, 1993 (cf. Rana 1992). Unfortunately, according to Indira, this has not yet occurred.

In this newly democratic environment through these acts of resistance, Parvati, Indira and other high-caste Hindu women identify themselves in some ways with modern gender models but framed within traditional Hindu rituals. They resist dominant symbols while at the same time they comply with other cultural forces and social pressures. Sometimes the audiences and motivation for resisting are personal and not meant to affect anything beyond the individual woman's life or household, as we saw with Maya's clandestine trips and Kumari's refusals. These forms of resistance are more widespread, but also more hidden, than other acts of resistance which are meant for wider audiences such as when they are displayed at weddings and funerals. Both weddings and funerals are precarious affairs, being in many ways the embodiment of cultural ideals and the arenas where relations of power are expressed through displays of wealth and hierarchy, attendance and the elaboration of the rituals. To exhibit resistant behaviour at one of these rites is a strong statement for those both within and outside the family. In my research, I have found that these larger displays of resistance were not as prevalent prior to the political changes in Nepal which affirmed the idea of the ability of individuals to affect their own life situations. According to both Parvati and Indira they would not have gotten away with such statements before democracy, especially since they both belong to elite families. But after democracy and with the reduction of the power of these elites, they were able to make these public declarations.

Of course, there is not necessarily a relationship between these forms of religious resistance and the consequent lives of these particular women (Lynn Bennett, personal communication, 1992), even though the effect of the resistances may have wide-ranging social consequences. Because a woman does not fast for her husband at Tij does not mean that as a result he will feel compelled to treat her any better, as we saw when Krishna gave his mistress one of Kumari's saris and continued to see his mistress. In the same way, a bride's resistance to standard interpretations of wedding symbolism does not mean she will not have difficulties with issues of domination and power after her marriage. Nor will a woman be assured her share of the ancestral property because she performs the necessary *kāj-kriyā* for her parents.

High-caste Hindu women actively construct their relationships with others in reference to existing power relations and social structures. The women I describe here use forms of resistance which reflect interpersonal relations within families, and between women and men the very same power relationships established by Parbatya traditions which are beginning to be questioned and even challenged as a result of recent social changes. Within

their religious activities women are able to have some control in the contexts in which they find themselves most closely embedded. What some of these women hope is that even if their own lives are not transformed by these resistances, that both their anger and their defiance may have repercussions in wider social spheres and help to make their daughters' lives different.

## Notes

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2 Saris usually consist of eight or nine metres of material and can cost more than a month's salary depending on quality. The sari is 'a symbol of sophistication, education and higher class. The class is distinguished by the quality of the dress material'. In addition, when arranging a sari a woman's range of motion and movement is restricted. One cannot run easily, sit in some positions (such as cross-legged), or perform some activities without a certain amount of difficulty. The graceful wearing of a sari is indeed an art.

3 For a discussion of caste identities and relations in Nepal, see Acharya and Bennett (1981), Bennett (1983), Bista (1987), Doherty (1974), Fisher (1978), Fürer-Haimendorf (1960, 1966, 1971), Kondos (1982), and Levine (1987).

4. I have interviewed over 100 women and have documented many cases of self-defined resistance during my fieldwork. For example, I interviewed a woman who continued to publish a radical Nepali magazine despite the anger of her husband and in-laws. Because she would not stop this work she was thrown out of her husband's house, lost contact with her children, was unable to return to her parent's home, and had her jewelry and property taken from her. This woman felt so strongly about the importance of this magazine that she was willing to lose her social standing and respectability in order to keep the magazine alive. In regard to women taking lovers, despite prevalent beliefs to the contrary, it is common for women in Kathmandu to take lovers either temporarily or on a long-term basis. I must point out that this is done only under the greatest secrecy and with much

risk. I have also documented two other cases of women performing their parents *kāj kriyā*, one which occurred several years before Indira Rana's, and one about six months after ( see *Rising Nepal* 1993:8). There does not appear to be any particular form of resistance which is most widespread. What is widespread is that women often live difficult lives, by their own recockoning, and will try by whatever means available, to ease their burdens.

5 I have changed the names and suitably disguised the identities of these women in order to protect their anonymity. In most cases, I am using names which my informants themselves have asked me to use.

6 Early discussions of *tij* and *rsi pancamī* include Anderson (1971), Bennet (1976, 1983) and Bouillier (1982). For recent work which criticizes the high-caste bias of this earlier work see Ahearn (1991), Skinner (1991) and Skinner et al; (in press).

7 See Bennett (1983) for a detailed description and symbolic analysis of this phenomenon.

8 See Bennett (1983:92-107) for an ideal depiction of the high-caste Hindu funeral rituals.

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PART 6

**THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE**

# The Death of the Divine Dancers: The Conclusion of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* in Kathmandu

Bert van den Hoek

## Introduction

Divine dances (New: *dyaḥ pyākham*) performed by members of the Gathu (Gardeners) caste are staged from four centres in the Kathmandu Valley: Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Theco and Bhaktapur. The dancing groups all go on tour and the areas of their performances, which together cover a large part of the Valley, in some cases overlap. Yet the dances of the four groups take place independently of each other and follow different cycles. The twelve-yearly cycle of the Kirtipur *dyaḥ pyākham* coincides with that of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* in Kathmandu, and only in this case the two groups may, in principle, assist each other. Whether the Gathu dances are performed in a twelve-yearly cycle, or annually—as in Bhaktapur, they have one feature in common: the divine dancers die at the end of their performance. Surviving them are the gurus (teachers), the (six) musicians who accompany and lead the group. The actual performance starts at the concluding day (Vijayā Daśamī) of the great autumn festival Dasain in Sept/Oct and ends at Bhala Bhala Aṣṭamī around the end of June, all depending on the lunar calendar.

Prior to their dances the performers are empowered in several stages, the first of which consists of giving a pledge and ‘lifting the divinities’, (New: *gamam thanegu*), from their permanent seat (*pīṭha*) more than two months before the first performance. A local etymology of the caste-name Gathu is derived from this act *gam* (< Skt. *gaṇa*) + *tham* (static form of the verb ‘to lift’), the lifting of the *gaṇa* of gods in order to incorporate them. The names of the gods are somewhat different in each of the four groups but the *gaṇa* (the divine group) always includes a form of the goddess Kālī and her male counterpart Bhairava as the main divinities, as well as the indispensable and crucial god Gaṇeś and the lion and tiger-faced attendants Simḥinī and Vyāghinī. The rest of the *gaṇa* is made up of the *mātrkās*, the mostly eight goddesses whose seats of power (*pīṭha*) surround Newar towns and villages. In the Gathu *pyākham* of Kathmandu the names of those goddesses are, with some colloquial variations, given as: Mahālakṣmī, Indrāṇī, Bhadrakālī, Vārāhī, Vaiṣṇavī, Kaumārī (mostly pronounced Kumārī), Rudrāṇī and Brahmāṇī. Most often those eight goddesses are, besides being the main divinities of their own *pīṭhas*, also



represented together in each one of those shrines, as a row or demi-circle of stone images on both sides of the main divinity—and so are Gaṇeś, Bhairava and the attendants Simhīnī and Vyāghīnī. The *pīṭha* of Bhadrakālī, which is an open-air shrine south-west of Kathmandu's old city, thus includes stone representations of all the divinities which are lifted from there to be embodied by the Gathu dancers.

One month after their first pledge the dancers receive their *ghaṃgalā*, the jingling bracelets worn below the knees, which are distinct for each of the divinities. From that moment onwards, they are already considered to be divinely empowered or possessed when they practice their dance wearing these *ghaṃgalās*. Yet it will take another six weeks before they receive their most distinctive feature: the masks which show the faces of the gods and which will be worn during all public performances. The masks have also to be empowered before being joined to the dancers who, at least partly, possess the *śakti*, the power of the divinities, already. The junction is made through a fire-sacrifice on the eve, or in real terms, the morning of their first performance as masked dancers. The *homa* or fire-sacrifice is the *jīva nyāsa*, the inserting of life into masks and dancers together. The masks are again central in the final episode when the *śakti* abandons the dancers, that is, when the gods die. The final disjunction is not brought about by a *homa*, but by a cremation in which the masks are burned in a way similar to dead persons.

While the period of the dance performances stretches over eight and a half months, all ceremonies together, starting from the first pledge on the day of Gathā Muḡaḡ, take nearly eleven months of the lunar calendar. Taking the wearing of the *ghaṃgalā* as a starting point, the period of divine empowerment continues for almost ten months. It may therefore seem inappropriate to concentrate upon the very end of it all. Even though it would be quite impossible to include within the scope of one article the full course of life of Kathmandu's divine dancers, it is more obvious to start at the beginning or at the time of the full birth of divinity. For then, through the elaborate fire-sacrifice, the only ceremony which is not performed by the Gathu themselves but by a Buddhist (Vajrācārya) priest, the power is generated which turns thirteen papier-mache masks into representations of the divinities portrayed, and the wearers of the masks—who are all male—into the embodiment of these gods and goddesses. The genesis of the divine dancers must of course be touched upon, for without knowing how their *śakti* is generated, it is not possible to formulate what exactly is relinquished at their death. In the night of their death—whether the term 'death' is fully applicable will be considered further on—a fire will again be lit. This time however it is a funeral pyre on the banks of the Bāgmatī river in which all masks are to be cremated.

The cremation of the masks should follow the death of the gods on Bhala Bhala Aṣṭamī: in 1992 it happened on the 23rd of June or rather in the early morning of the 24th.

The next Bhadrakālī dances will start only 11 years later, but the same society of Gathu will stage the similar Pacalī Bhairava dances (which also follow a twelve-yearly cycle) after eight years. The twelve-yearly cycles of divine dances in Kathmandu resemble the better documented (Gutschow 1987, Levy 1987) annual Navadurgā dances of Bhaktapur, both with regard to the nature and the course of life of the divinities embodied and with regard to the caste of the performers, the Gathu (also called Māli or Malākāra, part of their traditional profession being to make and sell flower garlands for worship). The end of the affair, the cremation of the divine masks, however, is done in secret in Bhaktapur whereas it is a public event in Kathmandu as well as Kirtipur.<sup>1</sup> That is one of the more trivial reasons to concentrate here on the final ceremony. In its highlights, the Gathu *pyākham* of Kirtipur exactly coincides with Kathmandu's Bhadrakālī *pyākham*. As if an epidemic rages through the Valley, all divinities embodied pass away in the night of Bhala Bhala Aṣṭamī, which is always close to *dakṣiṇāyana*, the summer solstice, and to the onset of the monsoon.

Interesting similes already present themselves: the Sun's southward turn marks its journey to the realm of Yama, the god of death. Furthermore, if the first stage of divine empowerment, rather than the actual commencement of the dances, is taken as the point of departure, their whole enactment lasts over nine months, an incubation period as it were, of which the rains appear to be the fruitful consequence. Let us not, however, start the interpretation before having gathered the facts. Death, so much can be said, is as important in the whole sequence as is the genesis of the dancing gods. While the genesis of these gods is a long and complicated process, however, their death and subsequent cremation take place within the spell of one protracted night. In that respect the demise of the dancers sharply contrasts with that of human beings. In the latter case the mortuary rites and their aftermath constitute a process which is more elaborate and complicated than the rituals surrounding birth.

Generally speaking, both the birth and the death of gods contain a mystery. Death is exceptional in the divine realm and birth is more often than not miraculous. The eccentric genesis of Gaṇeś and the generation of Draupadī from the sacrificial fire are popular examples. The Ādityas, the main Vedic gods, are according to the Yajurvedic Maitrāṇī Saṃhitā born from the remnants of a sacrificial porridge (*odana*) eaten by the goddess Aditi. When Aditi reversed the sequence and ate the porridge herself before sacrificing it, Mārtāṇḍa, the progenitor of Yama, was born (M.S.1,6,12).

One might speak in this regard of 'the birth of death' for Yama was the first to die in this world—a fact quite unobtrusively introduced in *Maitrāṇī Saṃhitā* itself. To mitigate the grief of Yami, Yama's twin sister and lover, the gods created night.

By his dying Yama became the ancestor of another race, mankind, without however, losing his divinity. Yama is one of the Vedic gods who, like Indra, is still actively worshipped in Nepal. Under his own name, Yama or Yamarāja, he is especially revered during Svanti (Tihār) at the turn of the lunar year. As Mahākāla or Bhairava he enjoys a pre-eminent position in the religion of Nepal. In Bhaktapur's Gāi *yātrā*, the yearly festival of the dead, a straw effigy of Bhairava is carried along with the effigies for the dead of Taumadhi quarter, to be disposed of at Masān *ghāṭ* along the Hanumante river.

Yet, even though the mortal aspect of Yama can be tracked down to the most ancient texts, and even if the mortality of Bhairava as the god of death can be alluded upon, death remains an exception in the realm of the gods. Gods and men have many things in common and cannot be distinguished from each other in terms of good and evil, superiority and inferiority, not even in terms of power: great sacrificers, ascetics and tantrics among men have been able to match the gods. The distinctive feature of the gods appears to be exactly their immortality, which makes them revered among men, but which at the same time excludes them from the way to salvation that is open to mortals alone—with the exception of the great Gods Śiva and Viṣṇu who came to embody the universe itself. To sum up this bird's-eye view of sources: the death of a god is contrary to the essence of a divine being, yet it occurs. Likewise, immortality is contrary to the very definition of man as a mortal creature, yet it is constantly aspired for and sometimes achieved. The fence between gods and men is not completely closed and it is on the interface of their respective domains that the mystery play of the divine dancers may be situated.

### The social setting

To account for the fact that the Gathu performers can, albeit very temporarily, assume a divine nature and like gods (as it is said) acquire exemption from death pollution, one needs to go one step beyond the performance of the divine dances themselves. The special power of the Gathu primarily derives from the divine sound they produce by the grace of Nāsadyaḥ, the god of music and dance. The Gathu are the only ones who by their music can set into motion the procession image of the reluctant god Pacalī Bhairava (a brass jar heavy with liquor and festive foods) in his nightly *yātrā* from the Pacalī *pīṭha* to the Hanuman Dhoka palace in the centre of town. The Bhadrakālī and Pacalī Bhairava dances,

in both of which Pacalī Bhairava is the main god (New: *mū dyaḥ*) can be considered an extension of the musical performance. All the divine characters of the dances belong to the families of the four principal musicians. Bhairava, Gaṇeś, Rudrānī and Siṃhinī belong to the family of the *nāyo* (eldest) and his brother who is the *nvakū* (second eldest) of the *guthi* (New: socio-religious association). They play a horned drum (*khim*) and horned cymbals (*chusyā*) respectively. The roles of Bhadrakālī, Kumārī, Indrānī and Vyāghinī fall to the family of the player of the smaller cymbals, whilst Vārāhī, Vaiṣṇavī, Brahmānī and Mahālakṣmī are assigned to the family of the musician who plays a special kind of cymbals (*babhu*). Those families may invite somebody of another Gathu family to perform in the dances but, reversely, it is impossible for anybody outside their circle to claim a part in the divine drama.

There are two masks, which do not require additional performers: one is Svet Bhairava, who is considered an aspect of the main Bhairava, and is enacted by the Pacalī Bhairava dancer after an intricate and secret change of masks. The other is Mahālakṣmī who completes the circle of eight goddesses (*aṣṭamātrkā*), but who has a singular appearance as a very small mask that is carried on a stick ahead of the masked dancers.<sup>2</sup> There are also two more musicians, who play the *pvamḡā*, a pipe which is only blown at critical moments and passages. The horn blowers cannot claim roles in the drama, but they are included in the *sī-guthi* (New: death society) of the Gathu performers, which consists of the six musicians, the Bhairava and Bhadrakālī dancers and one additional member. The *sī-guthi* does not coincide with the group of divine performers but its composition appears to be closely related to the authority over and the formation of the dancing team.

The whole team of people engaged in the dances is called *khalaḥ* (New: family), a term which is also applied to individual members of the team when they are spoken about without distinction. The six guru-musicians also constitute the backbone of the *sī-guthi* of the Tarhaṃ Gathu. Another *sī-guthi* of Gathu, called Cīrhaṃ (small as opposed to big) belongs to the area of Kalimātī, south of Kathmandu proper, and is not involved in the dances. The task of the *sī-guthi* in its strictest sense is that of a funeral association which takes care of the cremation of community members who die. In this context the *khim* player and *chusyā* player are the *nāyo* (eldest) and the *nvakū* (second eldest) of the Tarhaṃ Gathu *sī-guthi*, which has, like all *sī-guthis* of the different communities in Kathmandu, a yearly sacrifice and feast (New: *sī kāḥ bhvay*) of its own. Up to 1992 the Tarhaṃ Gathu *sī-guthi* built a temporary shed of wood and straw, a custom which was once common among all *sī-guthis*, but which has been gradually abandoned by most of them. *Sī-guthi* feasts are not accessible to outsiders,

but, as the *nāyo* told, the musicians play on that occasion the very music which accompanies the divine dancers—also in years that the dances are not performed. The power of the musicians does not abandon them until the moment of their physical death. The Bhadrakālī and Bhairava members of the *sī-guthi* fulfill, by serving beer from a *pātra* (bowl) and by doing *pūjā* (worship) of the other *guthi* members, a task which they also have in the context of the masked dances. They do not, however, perform their dance during the *sī-guthi* feast.

In years that either the Bhadrakālī or Pacalī Bhairava *pyākham* is performed, the *khalah* includes, in addition to the six musicians and eleven dancers, a number of other members, all of whom are, confusingly, also called *nāyo*. Among those *nāyo* are three *mū nāyo*, who are the attendants of the three main deities Bhairava, Bhadrakālī and Vārāhī, and who are called *dhampvami*, *dātipvami*, and *mipvami nāyo* respectively (this designation of the order of *nāyos* occurs in the given context only). The remaining *nāyo* include a variable number of children (New: *macā nāyo*, in 1992 only two), *taḥdhimha nāyo* (a ‘big’ *nāyo*, in charge of the *mahāpātra* [drinking bowl]) and the *kṣetrapāla*, the ‘lord of the area’ (a sacrificial stone in sacred sites which is often identified with Bhairava), as well as a variable number of *cīdhimha nāyo* (‘small’ *nāyo*, in 1992 only one). In 1992 the *khalah* had, with 24 members in total, a minimal composition.

Apart from attending to the divinities, those *nāyo* must also be capable of replacing any one of them in case of need: they are fully sanctified, trained and also exempted from death pollution like the dancers are. Likewise exempted from death pollution are five ladies, who carry the essential items of worship to the places where dances and other ceremonies are performed. They are together called Pañcakumārī and belong to the families of the guru-musicians, but they are not considered to be members of the *khalah*. After the final ceremonies the whole team disbands; it is only the *sī-guthi* which remains, thus showing the intrinsic relationship between the dancing family and the death society. Here, as in other cases (Van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992:64–65) the *sī-guthi* proves to be more than a funeral association. In the case of the Gathu the double function of the *sī-guthi* harbours a contradiction. Because the *khalah* as a whole cannot be touched by death pollution, the *sī-guthi*, which consists of the musicians and three central figures in the team, cannot function as a funeral association. Strictly speaking this prohibition extends to the cremation of the divine masks themselves. The dancers are relieved from divine possession shortly after the gods that are in them die, but their sanctity remains until *bicāḥ pūjā*, a last act of worship in the Bhadrakālī temple. It is only then that they ‘return’ the *mohanī* (charm in the form of

a soot mark on the forehead) which they received at the start of their performance. Therefore, the other (Cīrhaṃ) *sī-guthi* should come to build the pyre and watch over the cremation of the masks. In return for this service, the non-dancing Gathu *sī-guthi* is to receive one of the dresses of the divine dancers, to be used as a shroud (New: *devaṃ*) in their funeral services, as well as a ritual meal and feast. The latter aspect of the relationship has been badly maintained, the chief guru (*khim* player) and *nāyo* of the Tarhaṃ *sī-guthi* confessed, and the exchange belongs to the past. In a kind of conflation, the dancers themselves have to build the pyre and to watch over the cremation of their alter-egos nowadays. The only noticeable exchange between the two *guthis* was in the part of the goddess Rudrāṇī, performed by a member of the Cīrhaṃ *guthi*—but he, it was explained, had shifted to Cīrhaṃ from the Tarhaṃ *guthi* to which he originally belonged. There is also, the chief guru noted, a tinge of democracy in the air, by which the ‘small’ *guthi* and even a recently split-off segment (degraded because of a low-caste marriage within their ranks) could eventually be reintegrated into the one Gathu *sī-guthi* which supposedly existed in Kathmandu in days bygone.

### The build-up of divine power

The activities of the Gathu start four days before Gathā Mugaḥ caḥre, the day before the new moon in Śrāvaṇ (Jul/Aug) when, in a spectacular way, the inhabitants of the Valley's towns expel the evil spirits which had been given a temporary refuge there during the rice-planting season. The Gathu do not see a special link between this festival and the start of their activities, except for the fact that it is an auspicious day to start an enterprise like theirs. Four days before Gathā Mugaḥ caḥre they send *gvay dāṃ* consisting of rice, a coin and the *gvay*—betelnut itself) to the king of Nepal to notify him of the advent of the dances. On Gathā Mugaḥ each dancer brings a basket (New: *kalaḥ*) with items for worship (*pūjā*) to the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* and offers this *kalaḥ pūjā* to the divinity whom he is to embody in the dances. The most significant item in the offering is *kisalī*, a plate of husked rice, a coin and betelnut, similar in composition to the *ghay-dāṃ* and commonly indicating a pledge or a bond. Besides the *kisalī*, each of them offers a raw egg and *samai baji* (New: a ritual dish of five ingredients: beaten rice mixed with puffed rice, burnt meat, black soya beans, raw ginger and liquor) and some other customary *pūjā* items like flowers, lights, incense, rice, *ṭikā*-powder. The uncommon thing is that all items offered are then taken back again, and put in cotton bags. The bags are carried by each of the dancers to the place of their instruction (New: *ākhāchem*, a house for practicing music and dance) in Vatu quarter, in the Northern part of Kathmandu. The particular *ākhāchem* is also a godhouse

(New: *dyaḥchem*) of Nāsadyaḥ, the god of music and dance, whose shrines are more often in the open air, also those inside the city itself.

A sacrificial goat together with a brass plate (New: *kotaḥ*) of *pūjā* items is also dedicated to Bhadrakālī and then, with the *kotaḥ pūjā* still intact and the goat still alive, carried to the Nāsadyaḥchem in Vatu. The *kotaḥ pūjā* belongs, as usual, to the whole group of participants, and so does the goat, the sacrifice of which will only be executed in front of Nāsadyaḥ. The first sacrifice thus involves a rare and perhaps unique shift: it is given a consecration (*samkalpa*) in front of Bhadrakālī, the protagonist of the coming dances, but it is executed in front of the god who is thought to bestow the divine grace of music and dance. The question to whom the goat is sacrificed hence gives rise to some uncertainty. The ritual connection is complex. The placing of the offerings for the respective divinities by the dancers who are to embody them, and the goat sacrifice that is consecrated to Bhadrakālī by and for the whole *gaṇa*, are part of the process of 'lifting the gods' and 'drawing the gods along' (New: *dyaḥ thanegu* and *dyaḥ sālegu*). The gods, in other words, are supposed to follow the sacrifice, not automatically, but by the tantric powers of the gurus. They are reduplicated in the Nāsadyaḥchem which, on the south and west-facing walls, has a row of nails from which eventually the divine masks will be hung—but only after the start of the dances.

On Gathā Mugaḥ caḥre itself, each of the dancers hangs his cotton bag with the assembled *kalaḥ pūjā* items from the nail which corresponds to the divinity in the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* to whom he has at first offered the *pūjā*. In this way the gods are transferred to the Nāsadyaḥchem inside town, where they remain in rest for a full month. The dancers will only take their respective bags with *pūjā* remnants from the nails on the day before the next new moon, Pañjādān caḥre. The nails with the bags are, on Gathā Mugaḥ, all sprinkled with the blood of the goat sacrificed in front of Nāsadyaḥ. The significant part of the sacrificed goat, the head, is divided into eight parts (New: *sī*) and distributed among the members of the *sī-guthi* which includes the performers of Bhairava and Ajimā, but not any of the other dancers. By lifting the gods from the *gami* (New: *dyaḥ gamam thanegu*) at the *pīṭha*, and drawing then into the Nāsadyaḥchem, (New: *dyaḥ sālegu*), the goat sacrificed in front of Nāsadyaḥ is in essence sacrificed to the divinities to whom it was first consecrated: Bhadrakālī and her *gaṇa*.

In the month to come the dancers will start exercising in the *ākhāchem* the house of practice, on subsequent Saturdays. The *ākhā*, which already had a permanent shrine of Nāsadyaḥ, has now also been turned into a kind of repository of the divine powers represented in the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*. The dancers themselves do not as yet have any divine attributes or ornaments,

and exercise in their ordinary dress. The musical instruments which accompany them are all duplicates of the real ones that are to be used during the divine dances. The real ones will be brought out, worshipped and taken into use only two days before the start of the actual performance, more than two months later. The build-up of divine power in the dancers proceeds more gradually.

One month after *dyah sālegu* at a ceremony called *ghaṃgalā svanegu* (New) they receive their *ghaṃgalā*, the pieces of cloth set with small bells which are worn around the legs just above the calves, and which produce a jingling sound. *Ghaṃgalā* are a significant attribute of all divine dancers in the Kathmandu Valley: by wearing them the dancers partake in the divinity they embody or who, reversely, possesses them. The *ghaṃgalā* worn by the eleven Gathu dancers in Kathmandu are seen as distinct from each other, signifying the divinity to whom they belong. On the day of Pañjādān they are together worshipped in the shrine of Nāsadyaḥ. For this worship, the dedication of their *ghaṃgalā*, the dancers take the bags with the one-month-old *pūjā* remnants from the respective nails on the wall. The eggs included in the *kalaḥ pūjā* offered at the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* are broken only now and sacrificed before Nāsadyaḥ. Together with these remnants of the *dyah sālegu pūjā*, a buffalo is sacrificed.

After putting on their *ghaṃgalā*, the five main divinities among the dancers, Gaṇeś, Kumārī, Vārāhī, Ajimā and Bhairava drink the blood of the buffalo fresh from the carotid artery. Drinking the blood straight from the vein of a sacrificial victim—buffalo, goat, duck, or cock—is a prominent and often recurring feature of the Gathu *pyākham*. During the performances all dancers partake except Rudrāyaṇī, who, remarkably, is a vegetarian. At the time of *ghaṃgalā svanegu* only the five main gods are allowed to wear their bracelets. The others may take the *ghaṃgalā* with them but they have to wait till the next *caḥre* (New: fourteenth day of a lunar fortnight) before putting them on. Even then, however, they are not sufficiently empowered to drink the blood of a victim. Curiously, the five main dancers appear to be not sufficiently empowered either: on the occasion of *ghaṃgalā svanegu*, as well as on the next occasion that they drink the blood of a buffalo sacrificed, they faint immediately. The main guru, the *nāyo* of the *sī-guthi*, has to sprinkle them with purified water (New: *nilaḥ*) before they can regain consciousness. The *nāyo* himself, after giving it some thought, offered two subsequent but opposite explanations for this phenomenon: firstly, that the dancers faint because the gods are not present in them there and then, secondly, that they are overpowered by the gods taking possession of them. Common to both explanations is that the dancers are not yet fully prepared to take the sacrificial blood in a self-controlled way. They are revived with *nilaḥ* and a piece of raw buffalo



meat in what seems to be a homeopathic treatment. Evidently, the fresh blood possesses a life-power which the piece of raw flesh either has not, or has, but only to a limited extent.

Together with their *ghaṃgalā*, the dancers receive a pair of red trousers which they are to wear during the subsequent rehearsals and during the dances themselves. Their full dress, the robes in the colours of the respective divinities, is, like the divine masks, to be worn only in the real performance. After *ghaṃgalā svanegu*, the members have fortnightly sessions in one of the *sataḥ* (New: pilgrim shelter) which surround the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*. In contrast with their weekly rehearsals in the *ākhā*, the Nāsadyaḥcherṃ in Vatu quarter, they put on their *ghaṃgalā* during those *caḥre* sessions. The next ritual landmark comes more than one month after the *ghaṃgalā svanegu* ceremony, on the seventh of Dasain, Mahāsaptamī.

Nāsadyaḥ, in the form of a *kalaśa*, is generally kept in the *nāyo*'s house but for the time of the dances it is brought to Nāsadyaḥcherṃ and placed in a brass-plated wooden frame. On Mahāsaptamī five dancers of the team go to collect water from five different *tīrthas* to fill the Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa*. Bhadrakālī goes to fetch water from the *tīrtha* which includes the *ghāṭ* where, in the end, the masks of the gods will also be cremated: Kālamocana *tīrtha*. Bhairava goes to Tekudhobhān *tīrtha* at the confluence of the Bāgmatī and Biṣṇumatī rivers (where the divine masks are cremated in the case of the Pacalī Bhairava dances), Vārāhī collects water from Sankhamula *tīrtha* at the confluence of the Bāgmatī and Manoharā. Kumārī and Ganeś collect water from the Rājatīrtha on the Bāgmatī, and from the confluence of Bhacā Khusi and the Biṣṇumatī (Nirmal *tīrtha*) respectively. A clear order of precedence is manifest here, for these *tīrthas* are the principal confluences surrounding Kathmandu, and the deities fetching water there are the principal members of the thirteen-member *gaṇa*. All five *gvampa* (New: small earthen water jars) are emptied into the Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa*, for which a goat is sacrificed the following day, Mahāaṣṭamī, the eighth day of Dasain. Parts of the head of the sacrifice are assigned to the *sī-guthi* members in hierarchical order, while the meat is shared as *prasāda* by the whole team.

Mahānavamī is the crucial day in the build-up of power. After keeping a fast for the whole day the dancers and the Pañcakumārī set out for the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* at night. The seven main dancers walk in sequence carrying the tools and attributes of the gods in the *gaṇa* whereas the Pañcakumārī carry the ingredients for the *pūjā* in the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* that night. This *pūjā* includes the sacrifice of two buffaloes that are slaughtered in front of three pots containing *bau* (food for the departed and the ghosts, which is later strewn around the *pīṭha*). The first buffalo sacrifice is dedicated to the *gaṇa* of gods in the *pīṭha*, the second one to the dancers

representing them. The blood of the latter is drunk by the main gods of the group : Bhairava, Bhadrakālī, Vārāhī, Kaumārī and Gaṇeś, who are still without masks, in the process of becoming divine rather than being fully so. As at *ghaṃgalā svanegu*, the five dancers faint after drinking the buffalo blood and have to be restored to consciousness by the *nāyo*.

Before the masks will finally be collected from the Citrakār's (Painter's) home all dancers go to collect water from Kālamocana, the site which, at the end, this time as well as twelve years ago, is the cremation ground for the masks. Since the ashes of the cremated masks are swept into the river it is tempting to see in this otherwise unexplainable excursion an effort to close the circle, to recover the seed of the last rites (*antyeṣṭi*) for the divinities' rebirth. The power of the divine host, to be sure, is permanently stored in the stones which represent the *gaṇa* in the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*. The trick is, as it were, to loosen that power and turn it from a static disposition into the dynamic *śakti* required by the dancing troupe. The water collected is smashed over the *maṇḍala* stone in front of the entrance to the *pīṭha*.

The masks, on the other hand, which lie ready in a room of the Citrakār's house, do not as yet have any power of their own. They are made from a mixture of pressed paper, jute and starch, which, when it is still kneadable, is put into an earthen mould, from where it is, once stiffened, drawn out again. Then the whole process of fashioning, painting and decorating the masks follows, in which the maker has to work according to precept, but can nevertheless allow himself a limited amount of artistic freedom. As the work is done by one man who uses existing earthen moulds, it is socially and perhaps also symbolically, simpler than the shaping of the Navadurgā masks in Bhaktapur. In the latter case the process followed seems to suggest that all elements together, earth, water, fire and air, are contained by the final products, which thus have a sacred value of their own already and which are, in contrast to those in Kathmandu, exhibited and admired by the citizens before their consecration (Gutschow and Basukala: 140-145).

The Kathmandu dance group comes to collect the masks in the dead of night and performs *pūjā* in the Citrakār's house. The *pūjā* for the masks includes secret mantras, and not even the Citrakār is allowed to witness it. In the Kathmandu *pyākham*, in contrast to that of Bhaktapur, this is one of the rare examples of a secret ceremony. The two other secret occasions will be treated below. After the secret *pūjā* for the masks they are carried to the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* and placed before the corresponding stone figures. The masks have by now acquired their divine power but their consecration by no means marks the end of that night's ceremonies. The multi-faceted procedure may be related to the fact that not one but two entities have to

be empowered before they can be joined to constitute the single body of the divine dancer or the dancing divinity. Such a build-up is confirmed by the last rites in which those powers have to be dissected again.

The remaining ceremony in the on-going sequence takes place in the morning of the concluding day of Dasain, Vijayā Daśamī, when an elaborate *homa* is conducted by a Vajrācārya priest in front of the *pīṭha*. The *homa* (fire sacrifice) has a standard part which consists of oblations of various grains and ghee into the fire. The concluding part is generally of a more esoteric nature, and in this case included the offering of selected parts of the sacrificed buffaloes into the sacrificial fire: pieces of the lungs, the heart, the intestines and the meat.<sup>3</sup> During the first part of the *homa*, the fire needs to be surrounded only by the *nāyo* and the five main divine characters who had just before drunk the blood from the vein of the buffalo sacrificed: Bhairava, Bhadrakālī, Vārāhī, Kaumārī and Gaṇeś, in addition, of course, to the Vajrācārya officiant. In the concluding part of the *homa* and at the distribution of *prasāda* by the Vajrācārya, the whole *gaṇa* of dancers is to surround the *homakuṇḍa*, the temporary fire-pit made of bricks. For, as the *nāyo* explained, it is from the sacrificial fire that the *śakti* is born which enables the dancers to wear the divine masks and thereby to embody the deities themselves. During the last episode the dancers are connected with each other and with the masks in the *pīṭha* by a cotton thread which also passes the *kalāśa* in front of the fire through which the Vajrācārya has evoked and transferred the divinities. As in the case of the brass statues of deities which also have to be empowered by a fire-sacrifice prior to a procession through their realm,<sup>4</sup> the *homa* for the divine dancers can be considered to precede the extended *yātrā* of the deities embodied by them.

To sum up the present section: the power of the divine dancers is built up by water, (to fill the Nāsadyaḥ *kalāśa* and to wet the stone *maṇḍala* in front of the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*), by joining the masks to their *pīṭha* doubles after a secret *pūjā*, and finally by fire sacrifice out of which the *śakti* of the dancing divinities is born. The whole sequence is repeated during Pāhāñcaḥre in March, during the annual festival of Bhadrakālī (and the procession statues of other deities from her *gaṇa*), albeit on a somewhat reduced scale. At that time the Citrakār is asked to fashion the cracks which the masks may have incurred, after which the secret *pūjā* for the masks must be repeated as well as the *homa* that generates the *śakti* for the dancers to wear them. On this intermediate occasion all rituals are carried out inside the Nāsadyaḥchem.

After the masks and the dancers have both been empowered they remain to be joined to each other. This junction is made in half-secrecy, immediately prior to the first appearance of the dancing gods. Full secrecy

is hard to obtain amidst the crowds which by that time surround the open Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*. It has meanwhile become Vijayā Daśamī evening. After the rituals of *navamī* night and, by extension, the *homa* of *daśamī* morning, the dancers could enjoy only little rest before they had to start their first performance.

### The manifestation and exchange of power

To obtain a certain degree of secrecy, a curtain is drawn around the dancers assembled in the *pīṭha* and a smoke-screen is formed by burning a particular smoky kind of incense (New: *gumgu*). Behind the screen the Gaṇeś performer applies to the forehead of the dancers a previously prepared soot mark (New: *mohanī*) which constitutes the final touch before the masks are lifted, handed over, and with the assistance of the other *khalah* members, put on by the dancers. A salient feature is that Bhairava, in addition to his mask, receives (with a *namaskāra*) a metal snake, which was previously attached to the Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa* (also present in the *pīṭha*). Like Bhairava himself the serpent is also called Āju, grandfather or ancestor. The serpent, which—unless killed—is commonly considered immortal, may hold an important clue. Since ancient times (e.g. Pañcavimśa Brāhmaṇa XXV 15,4) serpents are imagined to gain rebirth by creeping out of their old skin without properly dying. The serpent which will adorn Pacalī Bhairava's neck is said to be particularly powerful. A *nāyo* who once tried to replace the old metal snake by a bright new silver one, was subsequently haunted by nightmares. Kathmandu Valley, once a serpent kingdom, is full of serpent symbolism; yet the particular identification in name between the serpent Āju and the god who, so to speak, dies without dying, or is reborn like he was before, is a telling detail in the context of the transient but recurrent manifestation of the divine dancers.

Another striking detail is that, at the moment when all masked dancers set out from the *pīṭha*, Bhadrakālī herself remains seated for a while with her stone double, as if the one is reluctant to go or the other is reluctant to release the *śakti* required. A parallel will again be found during the funeral episode of the divine dancers treated below, in which, reversely, the Bhairava dancer cannot relinquish his *śakti*. It is generally understood that in the twelve-yearly cycle of the Pacalī Bhairava dances, Pacalī is the most important deity, while in the twelve-yearly cycle of Bhadrakālī dances the goddess Bhadrakālī is pre-eminent. This shift in pre-eminence might be contested on numerous grounds, but it is confirmed by the first grand act of the dancers, a meeting with the king of Nepal. In the Pacalī cycle it is the god, commonly called Āju, who exchanges swords with the king, while in the Bhadrakālī cycle it is the goddess, commonly called

Ajimā, who has the honour to exchange swords with the king. Pacalī Āju and Lumarī Ajimā are the two main *pīṭhas* of Kathmandu Kvane, the lower (Southern) part of the city, and it is sometimes said that the two gods are husband and wife. The difference between the Pacalī and the Bhadrakālī dances seems to concern a shift in locality—from an *ākhā* in the Northern part of town to one in the Southern part, and from Kālamocana *ghāṭ* to Teku *ghāṭ*—rather than a change in the dance performance itself.

The Gathu *nāyo*'s records mention Ratna Malla of Bhaktapur, who vanquished the Thakuri kings of Kathmandu in 605 N.S. (1484 A.D.), as the king who established the sword exchange. On the one hand, that date may be too early to account for the present situation, on the other hand, it may be too late to account for the sword exchange as such.<sup>5</sup> It might be that the first Malla kings of Kathmandu wished to sustain relations with the different parts of the city that was internally divided before becoming a kingdom in itself. The shifting pre-eminence of Bhadrakālī and Pacalī Bhairava is accompanied by a shift in the colour of the Bhadrakālī's mask: In the Pacalī dances she is red (the usual colour of Kālī), in the Bhadrakālī dances she is blue, as if she has assumed the colour of her counterpart Bhairava.

Another current explanation has it that blue is the colour of Bhadrakālī in her Vatu *dyahchem* in the Northern part of Kathmandu. The name Vatu is even thought to derive from the colour of the goddess (New: *vacu*, blue). For Bhadrakālī is the only *mātrkā* goddess having two *dyahchems*, the other one being in Tebahāl in the Southern part of the city. The colour contrast would thus reflect the recurrent distinction between the Upper (New: Thane) and the Lower (New: Kvane) part of town. This explanation is in accordance with the fact that the death of the gods occurs in the Northern part of the city in the case of the Bhadrakālī dances and in the Southern part in the case of the Pacalī Bhairava dances. Likewise, the first real dance performance of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* takes place in the Upper part and the first dance of the Pacalī *pyākham* in the Lower part of town. As will be seen below several dress items which remain as *prasāda* of the dances, are given to the Vatu *dyahchem* after the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* and to the Tebahāl *dyahchem*, equally related to the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*—in the case of the Pacalī Bhairava dances. Pacalī Bhairava himself has no permanent *dyahchem*: the residence of his procession image currently shifts among twelve Jyāpu (Farmers) families.

The sword-exchange between Bhadrakālī and the king, as it happens today, need not be elaborated upon here. As a major event it is recorded in books on culture, tourist guides (although it is nowadays very hard to approach the scene), newspaper articles and, more recently, also in Nepal

Television broadcasts. From Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* the masked dancers follow a more or less straight route to Makhan Tol, passing Martyrs Gate, New Road Gate, Pyukhā, Vatu and Indrachowk. The king's sword was brought to Makhan from the other direction, Hanuman Dhoka, by a sword-carrying party (Khaḍga *yātrā*) which goes out every year in the night of Vijayā Daśamī. The king himself arrived and left without any sword: the sword which is ritually exchanged belongs to his predecessors, the Malla kings. Bhadrakālī and the king exchange their swords three times back and forth. It is no exchange in the real sense of the word: each party keeps his own sword. Yet the result of the transaction is, according to the Gathu, that the king is provided with *śakti*, divine power. The king is, to put it in human terms, empowered through his Gardeners in what constitutes a major event in the ritual calendar. After the event is over, the Khaḍga *yātrā* continues its own way while the Gathu return to the Nāsadyaḥchem.

One feature which is most characteristic of the dancers in the whole period to follow is strikingly absent in their first encounter. The Gathu dancers, in their own words, go only where sacrifice awaits them. Yet, when received by the king of Nepal, the divine dancers had to go without sacrifice, a procedure which contrasts to their reception, a few weeks later, by the Thakū Juju, the ritual 'king' and patron of the Pacalī Bhairava festival in South Kathmandu. What makes the difference? The Thakū Juju is entitled to participate in the Khaḍga *yātrā*, but not to carry the king's sword (which is, quite prosaically, carried by a graduated officer) nor to exchange his own or any other sword with Bhadrakālī. A tentative interpretation of the role of the king of Nepal will be given in the concluding section of this article.<sup>6</sup>

The full exploits of the divine host cannot be followed here. Twice more they will visit the area of Hanuman Dhoka, but on those occasions they perform in Nasalchowk, inside the palace compound. In addition, they have thirty more destinations, in the Upper (Thane) and the Lower town (Kvane) of Kathmandu, but also in other parts of the Valley. However, they will only go where they are provided for (i.e. with sacrifice), a condition which led to the dropping of 10 out of the 31 projected destinations. The relationship with the dancing teams of Kirtipur and Bhaktapur is peculiar. If need be, the Gathu dancers of Kirtipur and Kathmandu can assist each other and even exchange dancers. Such a relationship is non-existent with Bhaktapur. The Kathmandu dancers do however visit the court of Bhaktapur, as well as that of Patan. The Kirtipur dancers visit Hanuman Dhoka, but their visit is not returned by the dancers of Kathmandu. The contours of a hierarchy emerge, in which Bhaktapur is most self-contained and in which Kirtipur is subordinate to Kathmandu.

The day after their sword exchange with the king of Nepal, on *ekādaśī*, the dancers make a round of Kathmandu city. They follow the same route as Kumārī does in the celebrated festival of Indra *yātrā*, but differ in that they do not split their tour into a Southern (Kvane) and a Northern (Thane) part. In many respects, the exploits of the Gathu dancers are more supralocal than any other of Kathmandu's *yātrās*. At the same time the Gathu dancers dedicate three of their performances to their inspirator, Nāsadyaḥ alone, in front of his *dyahchem*. The first of these, on the thirteenth day (*trayodaśī*) of Dasain, is also the first dance in the true sense of the word, including as it does the group's dramatic repertoire.<sup>7</sup> The last dance before their demise is similar to this first one and for our present purposes, a short-cut will be made to that last performance before the final dance of death.

### The last waltz (*belākha*)

To describe the repertoire of the last dance, which lasted the whole day and night of Asādh Kṛṣṇa Dvitiyā (June 17th) would require another article. Instead attention will be focussed here on the sacrificial aspects of the performance. Only one dramatic episode will be recounted as an example that compares well with the Bhaktapur Navadurgā and with the Kirtipur *pyākham*, suggesting an original scenario common to all. The repertoire, it should be noted, is to a large extent standardized and the sequence of the solo performances and the dramatic exchanges of the masked dancers do not, in this last dance, differ from the shows which have been given before at other places. Most other performances, however, have a patron who invites the *gaṇa* to perform, such as the Kvane Thakū Juju in the courtyard of his *lāyku* (New: palace). Like the first dance on the thirteenth day of Dasain, the last performance is not sponsored by a patron, but totally dedicated to Nāsadyaḥ and the god himself. For the major evening performance not only the god's *kalaśa* but also the decorated wooden frame will be brought out from the *dyahchem* and placed at the Vatu thoroughfare, facing Southwest, just as it did when standing inside the *dyahchem*. The immobile Nāsadyaḥ, a square space cut in the wall of the *dyahchem* faces South however. The masks themselves are, when they are not worn by the dancers, hung from the two walls of the *dyahchem* which face South and West. There is no prohibition on entering the *dyahchem*, not even when the dancers change their human dresses for the divine ones. Only just before the major performance a curtain is drawn around them, in the same way that it was done at the beginning in the Bhadrakālī *pīṭha*, to allow for a moment of secrecy in which Gaṇeś gives the *mohanī* mark to himself and to the *gaṇa* as a whole.

During the performance the musicians are located in a *pāṭi* opposite the *dyaḥchem* facing North. The dances are enacted between this *pāṭi* and the *dyaḥchem* in full view of the Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa*. Early evening the Pacalī Bhairava dancer worships Nāsadyaḥ and continues doing *pūjā* for the musicians and the other dancers and members of the team. Apart from giving the customary *pūjā* and *ṭikā*, Pacalī serves, left-handedly, an egg to Nāsadyaḥ and all dancers except the vegetarian Rudrānī, who is given some milky paste on the mouth of her mask. The other dancers have to lift their masks a bit to suck their raw eggs. Pacalī himself is served by the *dhvaṃpvami nāyo*, his special attendant.

In a sequence which is standard for other performances as well, a he-goat is subsequently dedicated (*saṃkalpa*) to Nāsadyaḥ and killed with a knife by Pacalī, who passes the corpse on to the other dancers (except, of course, Rudrānī) who suck the blood from its neck, with Pacalī himself taking the last turn. Pacalī appears to be the host or *yajamāna* of the divine troupe. The head of the goat is then severed and put in front of Nāsadyaḥ, while the corpse is carried away inside the *dyaḥchem*. In a grand feast the next day hundreds of invitees will get a tiny piece of the goat's meat as *prasāda*. In addition to the *sī-guthi*, this time three other members of the dancing team partake of the (sub-) divided shares in the head of the sacrifice.

Two more acts of distribution conclude the sacrificial session. Vārāhī throws, again left-handedly, *samai baji* to the bystanders and Bhadrakālī serves rice beer (New: *thom*) to the dancers. A duck, which is unobtrusively brought and placed in the *pāṭi* with the musicians, will play a crucial role later that night. After that the general public is given opportunity to worship the Bhadrakālī *gaṇa*, which they do with offerings of light, incense, *ṭikā* powder, paddy, foods like *samai baji*, sweat bread, bananas and other fruits, as well as with gifts of cloth and money. The programme will later resume in a much lighter form with Siṃhinī and Vyāghinī (New: Simbā and Dhumbā) performing humorous sketches and chasing the children—who enjoy everything except being caught. The musician who plays the *babhu* cymbals recites by heart the accompanying stories.

Meanwhile Bhadrakālī was invited for a private reception in a house nearby. Standing motionless like a statue she first received the welcoming ceremony (New: *lasakusa*) at the gate. Pacalī Bhairava was also privately received in another house. When the night programme was about to start the first great thunderstorm of the monsoon broke out and everybody took refuge in the Nāsadyaḥchem which thereby got the ambiance of an overcrowded bar. Amidst the bustle the small mask of Svet Bhairava, which is covered with a white cloth while attached to the wall, was



inconspicuously lifted and carried away. Sometime later the duck mentioned above was brought in decapitated, and thrown in Nāsadyaḥ's cavity. What had happened in-between was the transformation of Pacalī or Kāla (Black) Bhairava into the peaceful vegetarian form of Svet (White) Bhairava, a procedure so secret that not even the other dancers may attend it. The musicians and foremost the *nāyo* conduct the secret ceremony, which does not take place in Nāsadyaḥchem but in the almost adjoining Bhadrakālīdyāḥchem. Nothing could be heard however, because on this occasion no music but only mantras are uttered. As the *nāyo* explained later, Bhairava in his fierce form as Pacalī bites the neck of the duck in the sanctum of Bhadrakālī, the fenced space in which five brass procession statues of Bhadrakālī are kept.

After he has sucked the duck's blood the transformation of Bhairava starts. He takes off his fierce mask but is not allowed to see for himself the other part of his identity, which is Svet Bhairava, considered to be Mahādeva or more specifically, Paśupatināth. The Svet Bhairava mask is put on his face while it is still covered with cloth, accompanied by mantras which effect the transformation. No explanation could be obtained as to the reasons why Pacalī Bhairava may not see his double or, to cast it into a single image, why Svet Bhairava cannot behold his own self. Here, finally, emerges a secret in the true sense of the word because the mystery cannot be resolved. One may, however, turn it the other way around: the fact that Śiva can have such contrasting aspects as Paśupatināth and Pacalī Bhairava is taken for granted mostly, without acknowledging the conflict present in that double identity. In the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* then, we come across one of the rare cases, archaic or original, in which the problem appears to have been given shape, by hiding the one part of Śiva's identity from the other. Still, one would expect the dramatic expression of it to be just the reverse. Just as Rudrāṇī averts her eyes when a victim is slaughtered, being unable to stand the sight, so one would expect Svet Bhairava to be unable to face his terrible alter-ego. As it is enacted however, the bloodthirsty Pacalī is denied the vision of his own peaceful, transcendental form. That the two masks of the god do indeed share the same identity, and not only the same dancer, will become clear from the dying scene.

Perhaps the vision of his peaceful self would dissolve the very powers that sustain Pacalī and his insatiable thirst for blood. Svet Bhairava, his other self, is also exactly his opposite, which is made very clear by the standard act which he performs. Coming out of Bhadrakālī *dyāḥchem* Svet Bhairava is still veiled with a white cloth, which is torn away by Gaṇeś and Kaumārī. Here and further on in the drama, the superior form of Bhairava is teased and challenged by the other members of the divine host.

After a series of acts with all other members of the *gaṇa*, Indrāyaṇī gives him beer to drink, something Svet Bhairava is not used to, so he gets sick. Indrāyaṇī, then offers to cure him, for she is the doctor of the *gaṇa*. But this time she does not succeed and Svet Bhairava has to vomit, dirtying his clothes, which he then goes to wash in the river. Washing his clothes he catches a fish—thanks to the thunderstorm the fish could be hidden in one of the pools of water in the street and appeared as a real surprise, suddenly floundering in the hands of Svet Bhairava who, unexpectedly, starts to cook it. Not for himself however, but for his teasing companions Simbā and Dhumbā, who came on the stage while Indrāyaṇī retreated. Suddenly he stops, calling: ‘Why should I cook something for you which I do not eat myself?’ (the accompanying words are spoken by the reciter among the musicians).

The scene enacted by the Svet Bhairava of the Navadurgā in Bhaktapur and described by Levy (1987:127) likewise involves the catching of a fish, but gives no indication of the *brahmacārī* character of the god or of the mystery of his double identity. The fish caught by Svet Bhairava also appears in the Kirtipur repertoire, thus pointing to a common source of the three dances—perhaps a textual one. A text on the Bhadrakālī *pyākhaṃ* kept by the Gathu is not accessible to outsiders, and it is not clear whether it contains a detailed screenplay. The scene just described appears to be humorous, yet the *nāyo*, when asked about it, strongly denied that it is a comedy. The serious portent is more important than the fun, the mystery more important than the entertainment.

Svet Bhairava dances only a few times: three times in front of Nāsadyaḥcheṃ, one time in Nasalchowk of Hanuman Dhoka in the presence of the king of Nepal, and one time at Indrachowk at the request of the locality. During the Hanuman Dhoka performance the Bhairava dancer was ill and was therefore replaced by the *nvakū* (second eldest) of the *sī-guthi*, who had himself performed the Bhairava role in the Pacalī dances four years earlier. More interesting and noteworthy is that the transformation of Bhairava and the appearance of Svet Bhairava in the last dance was also performed by the *nvakū*, who is also the *chusyā* musician and who, evidently, has a permanent capacity to fulfill this principal role. The reason why he replaced the present Bhairava dancer is also striking: while only a few spectators (and most of them belonging to the *khalah* itself) were present in the dead of night, the *nvakū* took up this crucial role at the request of the public ! It was certainly a wonderful performance.

The Bhadrakālī and the Navadurgā *pyākhaṃ* have been called ‘fertility cults’ and the deities ‘protective divinities’ on the basis of very little evidence pointing in that direction. When not propitiated with sacrifice, the divine host poses a threat rather than offering a shelter. The borderline

between demonic and divine forces is particularly hard to draw in Nepal, where even the ghosts expelled from the towns at Gathā Mugaḥ are addressed as 'Bhudyah', ghost-god. Yet one may discern in the Bhadrakālī *gaṇa* one definitely benevolent character and one definitely malevolent character. The benevolent Svet Bhairava, who mysteriously springs from the ambivalent Bhairava, can also be consulted with regard to progeny. In principle, every god can be asked for good fortune and progeny, but Svet Bhairava's role is more specific than that. One may privately request Svet Bhairava to come to one's own house or quarter, which he will do only after midnight and going about veiled. On these occasions, four of which occurred during the last Bhadrakālī *pyākham*, Svet Bhairava is accompanied by Gaṇeś and Kumārī, one of whom will, at their destination, draw the veil from Svet Bhairava's mask—as in the drama. If it is Gaṇeś who pulls it off the family will be blessed with the birth of a son, if it is Kumārī a daughter is more likely to be born. Although this act is related to progeny, it rather seems a theatrical way of predicting the sex of an unborn child than a fertility cult.

The features of the malevolent character that will be staged next, ironically (but quite incidentally, it was said) resemble those of Svet Bhairava, especially its curled moustache. The bad character is Daitya, the demon whose sole function it is to be beaten by Bhadrakālī. Daitya is not a mask like the others but a wooden shield with on one side his portrait and on the other side a handle by which Bhadrakālī can grip it. Daitya is placed in front of Nāsadyah. Before Bhadrakālī's turn comes there is a sudden appearance of Pacalī Bhairava, shortly after Svet Bhairava left the stage. Apparently the reverse transformation does not involve the mystery and does not require the sacrifice and secret ceremony necessary for changing Pacalī into Svet Bhairava. The mask of the latter is again covered with the white veil and hung from the wall of Nāsadyah $\dot{c}$ em where it will remain until it is taken for cremation.

Pacalī performs a wild sword dance as if to assert his fierce side again and then sits down to receive *dakṣinā* (i.e. money) and to distribute a five-coloured thread (New: *pasūkā*) as *prasāda*. While Pacalī brandished his sword into the void, Bhadrakālī subsequently pitches into her Daitya enemy quite literally, wildly hewing the wooden image with her sword. Daitya cannot hit back and is, after being beaten, carelessly thrown before Nāsadyah again. Pacalī and Bhadrakālī together make a grand finale, whirling around each other, and then, with Bhadrakālī giving a *namaskāra* towards Nāsadyah, retreating into the *dyah $\dot{c}$ em*. The whole *gaṇa* once more comes out and walks a little westward to announce their departure to the gods around (New: *dyaḥ lhāyegu*), and thereby the performance is finished—it was about three in the morning.

The next day about 600 people enjoyed a feast at Vatu square in which pieces of the goat sacrificed the previous night were included. In addition to the goat a buffalo ought to be sacrificed on the same occasion. The buffalo was indeed sacrificed and its blood sucked by the dancers, but only next day in order to have the meat served fresh at the feast. On the one hand, the dancers say that blood, liquor and food eaten by them in their divine form leaves them as soon as they put off their masks; on the other hand, this particular buffalo was, like the two buffaloes at the start, sacrificed and its blood sucked by the dancers without masks. Hence, divine power can be attributed to both the masks and the consecrated persons wearing them, and the two components of divinity can apparently be separated. Likewise, the mask of Bhairava was in the last dance worn by somebody other than the one thereto designated.

As will be seen in the next section, the complexity of the divine dancers or the dancing divinities' identity is further revealed at death and in the funeral rites. The intricacy notwithstanding, a clear hierarchy can be observed between the two components of divinity in the lifetime of the dancers. The masks, hung from the walls of the Nāsadyaḥchem, can be worshipped without their human embodiments. The consecrated dancers, by contrast, cannot be worshipped without their masks. In the composition of divinity, the masks are the encompassing aspect. The only ones who can be worshipped as they are, without masks, are the musicians – who, as was related above, constitute the very source and origin of the Gathus' power to embody the divinities.

### The death of the gods

The gods are to die at a place tellingly called Jamabahāl— the Cloister of Death. The same *bahāl* is held to be the original site of Seto Matsyendranāth (Manandhar:72) as well as a resting place of the goddess Bhadrakālī at the time of her advent to Kathmandu. The courtyard of Jamabahāl is presently surrounded by office buildings of Tribhuvan University in the quarter which is as a whole called Jamal. The public that turned up to witness the death of the divine dancers was massive, especially when compared to the few spectators at their last dance – but, I was told, nothing compared to the turn-up in Kirtipur where the whole population bade farewell to their divine dancers. Before the dancers set out for Jamal, the public could still worship them in front of Nāsadyaḥchem, and again, at Indrachowk, where the dancers whirled around in their *dyah lhāyegu* to Ākāś Bhairava and then remained seated for a while opposite that temple. From there the dancers went straight to Jamal via Asan and Kamalāchī.

It turned out that a whole sequence of dances was yet to be performed before the moment of dying came. A small retreat in Jamabahāl, where just as in Nāsadyaḥchem, the masks could be attached to the walls, proved to be invaluable in another respect. For, when the performance was about to start, the second great shower of the monsoon broke out, delaying everything but making the natural symbolism in the dancers demise altogether convincing. The setting of the stage with regard to the cardinal directions was equal to that in Vatu: the musicians facing North and Nāsadyaḥ facing West, with the small mask of Mahālakṣmī on a stick to the left of the musicians. The divine dancers all made their last appearance, Gaṇeś to start with. After solo performances of Brahmāṇī, Rudrāṇī and Kaumārī the complete *gaṇa* made a last whirling dance together. At its conclusion Pacalī worshipped Nāsadyaḥ and the musicians, and did *pūjā* of the dancers (with the sacrifice of eggs) such as described above. Then, suddenly, a duck was released from the the second floor of the house of the eldest of Kathmandu's Vajrācāryas. As usual with cocks and ducks, it was caught by Kaumārī who bit its throat, but did not pass it on to the other divinities. Instead, the standard procedure concludes with Vārāhī throwing *samai baji* towards the public in all directions, and Bhadrakālī serving beer to the *gaṇa*.

Then, from the house of the oldest Vajrācārya, the parting meal is brought, *sī jā* in Newari, which literally means the food of death.<sup>8</sup> It consists of flattened rice mixed with yoghurt (*dhau baji*) and granulated sugar added to it. It is said that the same kind of death-meal is served to those under the sentence of death just before their execution. Bhairava, Bhadrakālī and Vārāhī sit together around the tripod on which the ceremonial plate (New: *thāy bhū*) with death-food is placed. The other dancers sit on small banks at a few yards distance. Bhairava, apparently, is the master of death, initiating with the uttering of a mantra the eating of the *sī jā*. Bhairava, Bhadrakālī and Vārāhī, sharing the *sī jā*, throw some of it behind their backs in the direction of the other dancers. Thereupon, all at once, the dancers fall dead and are immediately lifted by the team of assistants. The surprise effect is tremendous. After their elaborate parting dance the death of the divine host occurs in a split second, without any agony. By comparison, the dancers of Kirtipur stumble along for a while after eating their *sī jā* and fall dead one by one.

The stiffened corpses of the Bhadrakālī *gaṇa* are at once carried out of the compound of Jamabahāl. The procession of the dead bodies follows the same route as the one by which the living gods came. Nāy (Butcher) musicians precede the procession but do not yet play their characteristic funeral music. One of the most fascinating aspects is that Pacalī comes back to life thrice. His first resurrection occurs at Asan where Pacalī is

supposed to drink from a red-painted tap which is turned upside down (*akhaḥ hitī*) and which, at least at present, contains no water. Pacalī comes into motion very slowly to the accompaniment of the Gathu musicians, but then, in a crescendo, accelerates his pace to end up in a few moments of ecstatic dance from which he falls stone-dead again. The dance of the dead god which takes hardly more than a minute, is repeated in front of Ākāś Bhairava at Indrachowk and in front of the Nāsadyaḥchem at Vatu. His dramatic resurrections are, it was explained, the result of the fact that Pacalī as the main god of the *gaṇa* is so powerful that his *tyāga*, his abandonment of *śakti*, cannot be effected at once.

Pacalī's double, Svet Bhairava, was left behind at Vatu and thus did not share the *sī jā*. Yet he is supposed to have died at the time of Pacalī's death, exactly because the two of them share the same identity. After Pacalī's final resurrection, the mask of Svet Bhairava was taken from Nāsadyaḥchem and put underneath Pacalī's mask, something which must have been done so furtively that I could not witness it. Likewise the wooden shield representing Daitya is put underneath the mask of, tellingly, his slayer Bhadrakālī. He will also be cremated together with Bhadrakālī and the other gods, something which once again indicates the fusion of good and evil, or more specifically, the fundamental affinity between the goddess and the demon slain by her.

From Vatu the procession proceeds along the same road by which, at their first appearance, the dancers went for their meeting with the king of Nepal. The Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* is this time the terminal point for the dancers in their divine composition. At the gate of the *pīṭha* the masks are separated from the dancers' bodies and placed again in front of their respective stone representations, but now stripped of flowers and other decorations. This is the moment of dissection: after the removal of their masks the faces of the dancers are covered with the white cloth which they first wore as a turban (New: *phetā*) to support their masks. As dead bodies they are carried around the *pīṭha* and then taken into retreat at the second floor of the building adjoining the *pīṭha*. In the room from which they once started their long enterprise the dancers are laid down in a row, their faces covered by the white cloth as a shroud. For a moment it seems as if not the divinities, but the dancers embodying them have died. Shortly after, though, the dancers are brought to life by the *nāyo* with holy water (*nilaḥ*) and accompanying mantras. Those restored to life however are not the same any more as those who died. As divine dancers they died indeed and were hence covered with shrouds. At their revival they take off their decorations and most significantly, the *ghaṃgalā* which marked the divinity of their human bodies. Under the guidance of the *nāyo*, they subsequently worship the other part of their former divine identity, the

masks in the *pīṭha*. In the *pūjā* and goat-sacrifice which follows, the masks definitely relinquish the power that had so long been stored in them to the immobile stones of the *pīṭha*. The decorations are removed from the masks like they were from the dancers but in contrast to the dancers they are not restored to life. It is for the masks that the last rites will be performed. The play with life and death is intricate: the dancers immediately resurrect but in another identity, while the masks cannot be reborn until the cycle of twelve years has passed. But then, unlike the dancers, they will be recreated and revived in the same identity which they, time and time again, relinquish at their death.

### The cremation and its aftermath

The blood of the goat-sacrifice which is part of the final *pūjā* for the masks is sprinkled over both the masks and the stone representations of the gods. Daitya and Svet Bhairava however remain invisible behind the masks of Pacalī and Bhadrakālī, as if both of them share in the identity of the protagonists of the divine host. After a break during which the dancers in their room receive a *ṭikā* and *prasāda* from the *nāyo*, they come out to lift the masks, covering them with the pieces of white cloth that in the preceding episode covered the faces of their own dead bodies—a sublime dramatic reversal. Death, which at first touched the divine dancers in their totality, and which was subsequently split, as it were, between the masks and the bodies of the dancers, is now concentrated in the masks alone, the divine and encompassing component of the entity which passed away. From this moment onwards, the Nāy musicians start their true funeral music. Preceded by the Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa* and the now covered mask of Mahālakṣmī, the dancers carry their veiled masks to Kālamocana *ghāt*, still walking in their usual sequence with Gaṇeś at the tail end. In that sequence the masks will also be deposited on the funeral pyre.<sup>9</sup>

At Kālamocana *ghāt* just beyond the *pīṭha* of Pacalī, discussion arose about where to burn the masks. The ashes of the cremated masks are considered to be particularly powerful and should not fall into the hands of witches. The cremation platform was considered too accessible and therefore too risky a place to burn the masks. It was finally decided to perform the cremation off the Bāgmatī banks, on a tiny island at the confluence with the Tukulā rivulet, just big enough to accommodate the dancers and their retinue. The pyre was built up of seven layers of wood on which the masks were put over each other, with Gaṇeś last. The Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa* could not be burnt of course, but its contents, the waters collected from five *tīrthas*, were released into the Bāgmatī river, as were the flowers and the greenery adorning it. The *kalaśa* which was later casually taken along when the group departed, was hardly recognizable

any more: it seemed just an ordinary metal water vessel, be it small and dented. The cremation itself could not be as solemn as perhaps it should be, because of the splashing and hubbub that accompanied wading through the muddy Bāgmatī and climbing up and down its slippery banks. But it was performed according to rule, that is, apart from the already mentioned fact that the other Gathu *sī-guthi*, which was to build the pyre and to complete the burning after it had been set to fire, did not turn up.

The now unmasked Bhairava, also one of the nine members of the dancers' *sī-guthi*, made, with the burning straw torch in his hand, three rounds of the pyre, which, among the other divine masks, contained two of his former selves. Just as the chief mourner in human cremations often is, he was supported in his circumambulation, in this case by the *dhvampvami nāyo*. After the pyre was lit by him, the dancers sat around it until all masks were reduced to ashes, which took a long time. The divine masks proper burned quickly, but not the solid wooden shield of Daitya. At dawn the dancers were still squatting around the fire, waiting for Daitya to burn to ashes. At last, in full daylight, the ashes of the gods, including the resistant Daitya, could ultimately be swept into the Bāgmatī. After that the group left the tiny island, splashing through the muddy waters, and, being freed from divinity, chattering and laughing like other mortals.

Still four days later, a *bicāḥ pūjā* was performed at Bhadrakālī *pīṭha* to bid a final farewell to the deities of the *gaṇa* there. As the *bicāḥ pūjā* is a customary feature at the conclusion of every *yātrā* and since the Gathu on that occasion were no longer different from ordinary human beings, its description will be left out here. One interesting detail, though, is that by preparing and applying a *mohanī* (soot) *ṭikā* at the conclusion of *bicāḥ pūjā*, the dancers and members of the group, in their own words, return the *mohanī ṭikā* which they took after the *homa* and the *pūjā* initiating the Bhadrakālī *pyākhaṃ*. A few other details of the aftermath of the divine dances are worth mentioning. The cremation as such left no *prasāda*, but *prasāda* of the dances had already been given (*ṭikā*, flowers and a red thread) by the *nāyo* in Nāsadyaḥchem at the great feast the day after *belākḥ*, the last dance. Yet one special *prasāda* could only be given after the completion of the last rites: threads from the garments of the divine dancers were distributed among the public to be used in amulets to avert evil, especially for children. Not all the garments of the gods were torn to pieces. One of them, it was already mentioned, is traditionally given to the Gathu *sī-guthi* who used to complete the cremation of the masks. The most valuable dresses are kept by the dancers' own *sī-guthi* to be used as a *devaṃ*, a shroud with which the deceased is covered just before cremation, but which is not usually burnt with him. When the *nāyo* of the Gathu *sī-guthi* dies, however, the *devaṃ* is to be burnt with him.



The dresses of the gods are the single most expensive item in the Bhadrakālī *pyākham*. Of the total amount of Rs. 380,000 which His Majesty's Government provided for all ingredients, attributes, sacrifices and feasts which the Gathu have to finance by themselves (for which there is no other patron) Rs. 100,000 was spent on garments, which cannot be used for the purpose again. The panther skins worn by Bhairava and Bhadrakālī are directly supplied by the Palace. Bhairava's panther-skin dress will go to the *nāyo* of the dancers, while a panther skin which is used as a seat for the gods in the dances will go to the Bhadrakālī *pāyo* (New: sword carrier at Dasain) of Vatu *dyahchem*; in the case of the alternate Pacalī Bhairava *pyākham* it goes to Bhadrakālī's Southern *dyahchem* in Tebahāl. As a tail end, and not to make the list exhaustive, it may be mentioned that Simbā and Dhumbā are entitled to keep their tails of yak hair themselves. The yak tail from Bhadrakālī's headdress goes to the Dhimay players,<sup>10</sup> who on several occasions head the procession of the Bhadrakālī dancers—the Gathu musicians themselves are always in the rear.

The material remains of the divine host thus dissolve. The dissolution of the divine dancers themselves, to summarize the essence of it, consisted of two parts. The dancers die together with their masks, but are revived in a different quality, as the human beings which they were before their divine life and death took off. The masks, on the other hand, are not revived and will be reborn only twelve years later. The death, cremation and rebirth of the gods shows a fundamental difference from that of men. The cremation itself is similar but the further mortuary rites and the subsequent *śrāddhas* are absent. Most important of all, the gods are reborn in the same identity which they left at their death, something which hardly if ever occurs to men. The gods of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham*, it must be concluded, do indeed die in their earthly manifestations, but their death resembles that of Yama himself, whose secret seems to be that, in dying, he remains essentially the same as he was before. In a distant way it resembles the serpents who vanquished death through their (self)-sacrifice,<sup>11</sup> while, at a closer view, the serpent Āju worn around Bhairava's (Āju's) neck might point to that same feat.

### Conclusion: The Gathu *pyākham* in the ritual structure of Kathmandu

So far little has been said about the separate characters of the divine host, whence they come, who they are and what they pursue. Within the broader network of Kathmandu's divine world, the gods of the *gana* manifest themselves on at least three different levels, one of which has already elaborately been accounted for by Gutschow and Bajracharya (1976) and by Gutschow (1982:120–122). The eight goddesses can be

conceived of as the *aṣṭamātrkā* which, at least ideally, surround the city, the valley and the kingdom of Nepal according to the points of the compass. This static point of view, which is embodied in the shape of a *maṇḍala*, is complete in itself and does not require any action of the sort that is manifested in the Bhadrakālī *pyākham*. The protagonists of the divine drama, Pacalī Bhairava and Bhadrakālī, have their *pīṭhas*, their seats of power, on the outskirts of old Kathmandu, but their origin lies elsewhere.

At the level of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* the imaginary circle surrounding Kathmandu is not closed or static at all. Pacalī Bhairava once was a king of Pharping in the south of the Valley, who fell in love with a Nāy girl in Kathmandu and who, when found out, was forced to go into hiding at the site of his present *pīṭha* at Teku. Bhadrakālī was discovered as a small child by a farmer in Tupiyā, a village north of Kathmandu in the neighbourhood of Budhanilakanṭha. The childless farmer wished to adopt the child found by him, and laid it to rest in the shade while he finished his work. When he returned to the site the baby girl had disappeared however and instead he saw a bright light (*jyoti*) shining from the bushes. There and then he had the true vision (*darśana*) of the Goddess Bhadrakālī who changed into a child again after expressing her wish to be installed in Kathmandu. On the way to Kathmandu the farmer and the Goddess took rest in Jamal, the place where, in the twelve-yearly cycle of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham*, the gods die.

The divine dancers are also obliged to visit Bhadrakālī's place of origin, and proceed from there in a long march to Gokarna and Sankhu. If they fail to do so (as they did in 1992), they should, following their death and the *bicāḥ pūjā* in Kathmandu, visit Tupiya and perform a *kṣamā* (apology) *pūjā* at the modest Bhadrakālī temple which adjoins the paddy field where the farmer once found the godly child. This year they did *kṣama pūjā*, accompanied by a goat sacrifice and followed by a feast, on the fourth of July 1992, barely a month from the next Gathā Mugaḥ caḥre, which marked the beginning of their enterprise the year before. It is the very last ritual of the protracted farewell ceremonies, the climax of which, their collective death and funeral rites, is striking by its shortness.

The external origins attributed to the two main deities of Kathmandu's Gathu *pyākham* already give an indication of the event's supralocal significance, for which, however, more conclusive evidence can be adduced. Let us first look at the second level on which the *gaṇa* of divinities manifests itself. In contrast to the static *maṇḍala* representation in which each of the *mātrkā*s is designated a fixed position, each and every *pīṭha* around Kathmandu in fact harbours the whole *gaṇa*. The *pīṭha* of Pacalī Bhairava, by exception dedicated to a male divinity, nevertheless

contains the demi-circle of stones representing the *aṣṭamātrkāś* in the same way that they are represented in the other *pīṭhas* of Kathmandu. From the dynamic, social point of view, the *pīṭhas* surrounding Kathmandu are not of equal importance. Among them, Pacalī Bhairava has an important *yātrā* during Dasain, but his move through the city remains confined to his own, Southern domain of town (see Gutschow's map, 1982:134). The goddesses of the most prominent *pīṭhas* of the city, however, cover the greatest area of the city in their respective *yātrās*—which are left unrecorded in Gutschow's survey of procession routes. They are Bhadrakālī, more popularly called Lumari Ajimā, and Indrānī, more popularly called Luti Ajimā. Bhadrakālī, as we have seen, has her *pīṭha* Southeast of the city proper, while Indrānī has her seat Northwest of it, on the banks of the Biṣṇumatī. The crossing diagonal from Southwest to Northeast approximately coincides with the ritual division of the city in an Upper (Thane) and a Lower (Kvane) part. Both goddesses, who are considered elder (Bhadrakālī) and younger (Indrānī) sisters, but who are at the same time conceived of as antagonists, ostentatiously cross the dividing line into each others' territories. The image of Kathmandu as a ritualized battlefield and a sacrificial arena is given due attention in another article (van den Hoek 1993).

The exploits of the Gathu dancers, which cover a vaster domain and transcend the Thane-Kvane division of the city itself,<sup>12</sup> express the image of a ritualized war-path. The exchange of swords with the king prepares both sides for the sacrifices to come: the king for the real war-path which he may choose to follow and in which he may be either the victor or the victim, the dancers for their sacrificial march which, as it were, runs parallel to that of the king. Both of them start their move at the time that the harvest is being collected or ripening in the fields—the appropriate time for war and sacrifice—and both have to be back at the onset of the rains. Although the Gathu are said to take sacrifice at random (and this threat extends to human beings) if they are not properly provided for, their battle-field is a symbolic one and their exploits are likewise ritualized. Every sacrifice, however, including that of war itself, delivers its spoils or fruits, and from that point of view the Gathu do indeed have a generative power. The nature of that power, which is born from sacrifice—like the divinities themselves—would however be flattened out by labeling the divine dancers 'protective' or 'fertility' gods. Casting such a stereotype on a most intriguing performance deprives it of its depth and unmistakable suspense.

The passage of the divine dancers through life and death, culminating in what might be termed the sacrifice of their own selves, opens up the fence between gods and men a little bit. The delicate play with life and

death alludes to the secret of the Lord of Death himself who died but yet remained, both in his own divinity and in all mortals alike—for Death is the divinity in Man.

## Notes

Thanks are due to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) which provided me with a grant to attend the International Conference on the Anthropology of Nepal from 7–14 September 1992 in Kathmandu, and to witness the concluding events of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* that were the subject of the paper presented. I could witness only the start and the conclusion of the divine dances, and I am most grateful to my friend and research companion Balgopal Shrestha, who recorded some of the performances in-between. Due to other Dasain obligations we arrived on the spot only after the completion of the *homa* on the initial day (Vijayā Daśamī) of the dances. Information on the build-up of the divine power was collected in interviews with the members of the Gathu group themselves. We are especially grateful to the *nāyo*, Laksmi Narayan Mali, and to the *nvaku*, Prithu Narayan Mali and to the *svakū*, Dhana Bahadur Mali, of the Gathu *sī-guthi*, for sharing their knowledge with us, and thus providing the invaluable background information on the course of the divine drama. We express our heartfelt thanks to Prem Man Citrakar, one of Kathmandu's greatest artists, for inviting us to witness the subsequent stages in his creation of the divine masks. Finally I wish to thank the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies for supporting my research on the ritual structure of Kathmandu by granting me affiliation to the Centre.

1 Surprisingly, death and cremation do not feature in the yearly Theco dances, nor in their twelve-yearly special performance, which is preceded by a yet to be witnessed serpent sacrifice (*sarpa homa*).

2 Cf. the special form of Mahālakṣmī in the Navadurgā dances of Bhaktapur (Gutschow and Basukala 1987: 137)

3 The heads of the buffaloes are not (as they often are, see note 4) committed to the sacrificial fire, but put in front of Bhadrakālī in the *pīṭha*. They are later to be divided as *sī* (shares in the head of the sacrifice) among 18 members of the *dyah pyākham khalah*, which includes the 9 *sī-guthi* members. As a rule, the *sī* of goat sacrifices are distributed only among the *sī-guthi* members, but the goats sacrificed during the *pyākham* provide 12 parts of *sī* (by dividing the nose in two, the tongue in 3 parts) which are served to three members of the dancing team in addition to the *sī-guthi* members.

4 For a general treatment of this and other aspects of fire sacrifice see Van den Hoek 1992.

5 In this regard the paper by Linda Iltis (1988) on the Harasiddhi *pyākham* is most illuminating.

6 For a general view of kingship and divinity in Nepal see van den Hoek 1990.

7 The intermediate performance for Nāsadyaḥchem (the second one) takes place with Pāhāncāḥre after the rejuvenation of the masks and the re-empowerment of the divine dancers.

8 In the cycle of Pacalī Bhairava dances the duck is released in the same way by a Rajopādhāya Brahmin, who also supplies the *sī jā*.

9 The sequence is 1. The Nāsadyaḥ *kalaśa* 2. The Mahālakṣmī mask carried on a stick 3. Simhīnī 4. Vyāghīnī 5. Indrānī 6. Pacalī Bhairava (Āju) 7. Bhadrakālī (Ajimā) 8. Vārāhī 9. Vaiṣṇavī 10. Kaumārī 11. Brahmāṇī 12. Rudrānī 13. Gaṇeś. In Kirtipur Gaṇeś, also the last one in the sequence there, kindles the fire before dying himself. As the eldest son of Bhairava it is his duty to light his father's pyre.

10 Yak tails adorn the long decorated poles (New: *dhunyā munyā*) with which acrobatic feats are performed and which on the way are swayed in front of the Dhimay musicians.

11 See van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992: 60–62, 71.

12 The shifting of residence in keeping with the Bhadrakālī resp. the Pacalī *pyākham* however, indicates an inner spatial distribution, as does the allotment of Bhadrakālī's panther skin to either the Vatu or the Tebahāl *dyaḥchem*. If really pressed to the point, the Gathu may ascribe the Pacalī *pyākham* more to Kvane and the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* more to Thane, without however giving it any more significance than a mere shift of their sojourn. The dances themselves, in their view, transcend local divisions, and do both have the same range and power of action. This view is supported by the fact that Indrānī, the sister and antagonist of Bhadrakālī, who belongs to Thane in the spatial distribution of the city and has a *yātrā* of her own, is, at the level of the Bhadrakālī *pyākham* a member of the *gaṇa* embodied by the dancers.

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# The Dancing Gods of Bhaktapur And Their Audience

Tordis Korvald

This article is about how some Newars from Bhaktapur and nearby villages relate to and express their experience with their town's most famous and celebrated dance-drama the *Navadurgā pyākham*. The material is based on observations of the staged dance-drama and the interacting audience, as well as stories people tell about it.

*Navadurgā pyākham* is a dance-drama that has existed in this form since the 16th century, but it might even be older (Gutschow 1987:137). The name *Navadurgā* refers to the dance-drama's characters. The Hindu goddess Durgā is involved in at least seven of her nine aspects. There are additional characters making a total of 12 dancing roles. The *Navadurgā pyākham* is in part related to the great Hindu tradition, through for instance the Dasaī festival, as well as being a drama with distinct local 'make-up' and content. *Pyākham* is a Newari word meaning a drama, a play and/or dance (Sresthacharya 1981:47). I will continue to refer to it as a dance, drama or dance-drama, as it contains both elements. People's usage of *pyākham* seem to emphasize the dancing and entertaining side. When explaining to me the difference between *Navadurgā pyākham* and other dance-dramas of Bhaktapur, it was stressed that the others were only 'pyākham'. This was explained as meaning that they would not 'pay respect' to the other dance-groups, implying that they would not worship them. The *Navadurgā pyākham*, on the other hand, includes a presence of the divine as the animators are regarded as possessed by the deities they represent. This dance-drama thus has a highly religious aspect.

Bhaktapur is the third in size and population of the three ancient Newar cities of what today is called Kathmandu Valley. According to the 1974 census, 99% of Bhaktapur's population of approximately 40,000 individuals were Newar (Levy 1990:35,75). The Newars constitute a distinct ethnic community whose ancestors are assumed to have lived in the valley for almost 2,000 years, though today many also reside in other towns of Nepal. In religion they are either Buddhist or Hindu, in language they speak Newari, a Tibeto-Burmese language with many loanwords from Sanskrit, whilst in social organisation they are members of an hierarchically structured caste system, not unlike similar systems found throughout north India, though with its own distinct features.

My fieldwork began by focussing on the masks the *Navadurgā pyākham* use, and continued with a gradual deepening relationship with the mask-maker of the Chitrakar *thar* and his family, who, for the last 20

to 30 years, have made the *Navadurgā* masks.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this work is obvious to the Bhaktapurians, as it is the masks that are the main object of worship, either during the dances, or when they are kept in the *Navadurgā* god-house.<sup>2</sup> A Bhaktapurian said, while commenting on the dance-drama, that without the masks nobody would believe in the dancers' dance. As the dances were staged, my fascination grew for the usage of these masks, and generally for the activities surrounding this dance-drama.

The dancers, musicians and organisers of the dances are all recruited from the *Gāthā thar*.<sup>3</sup> The *Gāthās* occupation is gardening, growing, collecting and selling flowers. Both *Gāthā* and *Chitrakar* belong to a group of several low ranking *thar*. According to Levy, there are 10 such endogamous groups in Bhaktapur (Levy 1990:82). In addition to the two mentioned groups, there are several others that have different tasks to fulfill to contribute to a perfect staging of the dance-drama. Of these the *Gāthā* is the group investing most time, effort, attention and money in the dance-drama. The duty to dance is every year redistributed between the *Gāthā* households, according to old rules of inheritance. Of the estimated 70–75 households, some 10–15 families are not included in the dancing any more, a sanction used to exclude people who marry outside the *thar*. All the roles are held by men, except for one. The female role consists of leading the worship of the *Navadurgā* deities.

For those who in this manner are professionally involved, it also means sharing in secret and esoteric knowledge. Though this is not atypical for Hinduism in general, it is especially marked for those practices influenced by the Tantric tradition. The gods in the *Navadurgā* ensemble are considered Tantric gods. In the myths, as well as how people appear to experience them, they are dangerous gods. They require worship that includes 'offering of blood', i.e. animal sacrifice. The *Gāthās* involved in the dancing have to have some Tantric knowledge, as well as having to strictly follow the rules relating to these gods, e.g. food-avoidance at the time of dancing, otherwise the gods could be dangerous, even for the dancers. The dangerous and Tantric aspect is emphasised in the myths about the origin of these dances. According to these, it was only a priest with excellent Tantric skills who could control the *Navadurgā* deities, at the time when they were roaming about in the forest eating anybody passing by.

These secret components set the *Navadurgā pyākham* apart from other dance-dramas in Bhaktapur. In addition to the secret and highly religious aspect, the *Navadurgā pyākham* differs from the other dance-groups in several other matters. The style of dance, masks and costumes are obviously part of the same tradition, while the story and role-list differ. In addition, the number of plays staged is much higher for the *Navadurgā pyākham* than for the other ensembles. There are also differences when it



comes to the social organisation of the recruited dancers. Still, the difference is not total, as all have a strongly entertaining side to them. But, for the audience, in the *Navadurgā pyākham* the entertainment offers elements of fright. The dance-drama is not only for fun, as it has a potentially dangerous side.

The observations of the diverse activities around the *Navadurgā pyākham*, guided me onto the public part of the performances. The audience constitute a large, complex and important participating group. Turning to them I tried to trace some aspects of the meaning this dance-drama has for them. It seems rather apparent that it is also in contact with the audience that the meaning and importance of the drama emerges, both for the dancers and the audience, though the meaning to some extent differs. Even though these dances have very esoteric sides, it is still important for the performers what the audience think and say about the dances as well as do with them. There is an ongoing process of transformation of meaning that is created and recreated in the dancers close contact with the interacting audience.

### The stage, characters, dance and drama

The *Navadurgā pyākham* is staged in an annually repeated sequence, with approximately eight months of dancing and four months without any performances. The fixed performances are staged in 21 different localities of Bhaktapur, and in 12 other Newar towns and villages.<sup>4</sup> The dance-cycle is finished dramatically, the power being withdrawn from the masks before burning them in an esoteric ritual. The mask-maker thus makes a new set of masks every year.

There are several events during the year that could be regarded as the beginning of the dancing season, depending on the focus. I will start with what appears as the public beginning. In the late afternoon of the ninth day of the Dasaī celebration (September/October), the new set of 13 masks used in the *Navadurgā pyākham*, are displayed for the first time for the coming dancing season. They are displayed in the backyard of the mask-maker's house. Many Bhaktapurians now come to worship the *Navadurgā* thus manifested.<sup>5</sup>

In the following and tenth day of Dasaī, the dancers come to 'steal' the masks away. Later in the afternoon, the masks are handed over to the seasons dancers in a public ritual beside the Brahmānī shrine. On this occasion many Bhaktapurians find their way out to this shrine, situated just outside the town. The place is crowded. People are pressing, and pushing, in order to see. The atmosphere is at the same time solemn, as well as filled with excitement, flirting and coy play, particularly among the young. There is music and talk, from all corners. The dancers now wear their particular black mark, *ṭikā*, on their forehead. This signifies that the deities are possessing them again. People say that half of the soul

is the dancer's, and the other half is the god's. With an intensity and fervour, people stretch out their hands to touch the masks, a typical worshipping gesture that shows respect, as if something is thereby transferred from the gods to themselves. As the dancers reach the edge of the town and just before proceeding into the centre again, they perform a masked dance publicly for the first time in the season. Then follows eight days of particular dances and rituals. After this the *Navadurgā pyākham* start their annual round, visiting the various localities of the town in a fixed sequence. For this regular program, the dancers, with the masks, are out of the *Navadurgā* godhouse for a little more than 24 hours. In addition they receive special invitations to come and bestow their blessing in private households. The performances generally include receiving worship and more entertaining dance sequences. For further details I refer to the works of Bāsukala and Gutschow (1987), and Levy (1987). These activities continue until *Bhagasti* (June) which is a day approximately at the onset of the rainy season. The power of the *Navadurgā* is ritually withdrawn and the masks are burnt in an esoteric ritual at *Brahmāṇi Pīṭha*, where the masks initially were handed over to the dancers.

The dance-drama is acted out on street level, in the town's squares and courtyards and usually close to a temple. Towards the east the stage is framed by the palanquin housing the image of Mahālakṣmī. The goddess Mahālakṣmī is sometimes referred to as the lineage-god of the gods in the *Navadurgā* group. Towards the south the three musicians are seated on the ground on straw—one plays a double-headed drum, the second small cymbals, and the third, while reciting some texts, plays on even smaller cymbals.

The dancers and musicians enter the selected locality in an ordered procession. The three to four leaders and other helpers from the same *thar* also join. The female leader worships the *Navadurgā*-masks and instruments before they leave their god-house, herself often staying behind. The dancers, now animated by the gods that are the figures of the dance-drama, are appropriately dressed up. They either wear the masks in front of their faces, or carry them on the side of their heads. Their costumes are in vivid colours of red, black and white, as well as yellow and green. In the night when entering an area, they parade through it, stopping at certain places, dancing short sequences and then sitting down to receive the worship of the neighbourhood's people. After this they settle in a certain square, where the Mahālakṣmī palanquin has arrived beforehand. There is usually a room or veranda in a backyard or by a temple, where they keep their things and where the dancers take a nap, if necessary. They also keep their costumes and masks here, while not engaged in performing a dance or receiving worship. The following night, after the *Navadurgā pyākham* program is over, they all return to

their godhouse, in the same procession as they came in. Sometimes they will be taken to their godhouse by some of the people of the particular area they have been visiting. The audience thus see their guests safely home, bringing light, incense and other worshipping-material, as well as a band of local musicians.

Both in the dances and during worship, some of the dance-drama figures appear to get more attention than others. This is particularly true of Bhairava, Mahākālī and Sveta Bhairava. Both dancers and audience will claim that all of the deities represented in the drama are important. The audience can number anything from virtually none, to 4-500. At some of the late night performances, the audience are only a few, randomly passing by and not lingering. During the day and early evening, the audience tend to come and go. Some just pass by, saluting the gods. Others stay for a while, watching whole dance-sequences, worshipping the gods, chatting with neighbours. Children roam about, playing with each other, talking with the dancers, or watching the *Navadurgā* dances intensely and as close up as they can get.

### **One sequence: *nyā lākegu*: 'to go fishing'**

The most spectacular dance sequence is when Sveta Bhairava 'goes fishing'. It is called *nyā lākegu* in Newari, and people often use this term to refer to the whole afternoon of different dances after this key one is performed. I have picked this one out of several rather different dances, because it seems to draw the most audience. It also serves as a reference to the stories that I eventually will turn to.

When Sveta Bhairava goes fishing, he tries to catch somebody from the audience. It is the older boys and young men who play the part of the fish. They shout and tease Sveta Bhairava, while he is chasing them around in the area. The audience is obviously enjoying this, as they often try to persuade the Sveta Bhairava dancer to do more than the compulsory three rounds. On the other hand, if someone does get caught (which does not always happen), it is regarded as not only inauspicious for the young man, but also for his household. Then the person will be dragged back onto the stage, and have to pay an offering to the image of Mahālakṣmī. The younger 'fish' sometimes cry loudly from fright.

At this point the drama seems to cross a boundary between a godly world and a human, as people get more directly involved. Then, if they get caught, the 'game' gets serious and misfortune threatens. This signifies that this particular drama has a powerful godly aspect. Its theme is also one of disrespect, which is enacted within the drama itself when Sveta Bhairava shows disrespect to the still more powerful goddess Mahākālī. Sveta Bhairava has then to offer several gifts to please Mahākālī

With this dramatic theme in mind, I will now turn to the audience and

the stories they tell of *Navadurgā*, and how ordinary people's failure to show appropriate respect, has, as in the drama itself, severe consequences.

### The stories

The meaning of the drama is not only something self-contained in the performance, it is also something that participants, including the audience, comment upon and take as a reference for the way they interpret events in the world. These comments function on several levels, serving to indoctrinate ideology which regulates daily social life. These aspects of meaning are experienced in stories which connect the drama to events in people's lives. These stories thus constitute an important source that I have drawn upon in order to grasp some aspects of the drama's meaning. I find these narratives valuable also because they serve as a source of information as to how people interpret both their experiences in daily life and their ideas about the *Navadurgā* as representing a supernatural realm. Both the myths and the religious exegeses concerning the *Navadurgā* are interesting enough, but they give only a certain type of insight, showing what a religious specialist, whether as priest or astrologer, might be expected to know, as well as giving a wider context. They give little information, though, about ordinary peoples experience of the *Navadurgā pyākham*. The following stories are accounts of incidents people relate to the presence of *Navadurgā* in their masked and dancing manifestations. By presenting a few of these accounts I will try to demonstrate important socio-cultural themes which are part of the drama's complex of meaning.

A shopkeeper in Bhaktapur was the first person to tell me one of these stories about *Navadurgā pyākham*, explaining their power and greatness. He asked if I had heard of the great fire in Banepa. I had not, so he told his story.

The *Navadurgā pyākham* had been in Banepa, as it had every year. When Sveta Bhairava was dancing his *nyā lākegu*, the young men were teasing his character too much. They went too far, and made Sveta Bhairava furious. He angrily tore his bangles off, throwing them away. A few days later, after *Navadurgā* had returned to Bhaktapur, a fire broke out in Banepa. The shopkeeper visited Banepa right after the fire. There he saw the devastating results of the fire: many of the houses in the old bazaar had burned down. But the strange thing was that in between, some houses had been spared. The ultimate explanation of this was that the fire had been caused by the enraged *Navadurgā* due to the intolerable behaviour of certain young men. The fire had actually only broken out in the houses where these mischievous youths had been living. Later many other people told me similar stories of the fire in Banepa, invariably connecting it with *Navadurgā*. Some of the stories being more elaborate

than this one.

There are also other stories. They consist of several elements that make them related. The *Navadurgā pyākham* are performing their dances and rituals and receiving worship. Then someone is insulting them (either dancers, characters or both). This eventually results in problems for the bad-mannered person, like acute illness, vomiting of blood, fire and/or accidental and sudden death. These events are often related to historical facts, in some way or other. In sum the narratives demonstrate the power of the *Navadurgā* gods. As far as I understand, people relate to these stories, not only as entertaining, but also regard them as a demonstration, even proof, of a godly power that can turn into a dangerous one, boomeranging back onto unfaithful devotees.

The function or effect of these stories is also to give force to the moral proposition that it is better to follow the tradition if you want to succeed. If instead you show disrespect for authorities, like elders or gods, you will harvest misfortune. These stories are thus congruent with the problem of discipline, which can be accentuated when times are changing. The dancers position is, as mentioned, ambiguous, for they are of low worldly rank yet at the same time admired and even feared as the vehicles for powerful deities. Stories such as the above can benefit the dancers in their struggle for awe and authority. They can also help in generally convincing people about the power of the different deities.

There is a related story of disrespect and miracles, dated some 100 years back, when the *Navadurgā* reportedly stopped going to Kathmandu. The event takes place at the time of the Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana. In the story he is described as cruel. This Prime Minister said that these gods (the *Navadurgā*) are 'only drinking and eating gods', an accusation implying greediness, which is rather negative. He told the citizens of Kathmandu that they should feed the *Navadurgā* with as much food and drinks as they could (in order to test their divine capacities). The *Navadurgā* ate and drank, and the people could not believe what they saw: they drank all the beer and liquor of the city, and were just about to empty the river. Jang Bahadur realising his mistake, begged the *Navadurgā* to stop and to go back to Bhaktapur and never to visit Kathmandu again.

The *Navadurgā* stopped going to Kathmandu, and this is the reason given. On the other hand, there is no such story of how they stopped going, for instance, to Gokharna, a Newar village to the north of Kathmandu and north-west of Bhaktapur. The last time they went there seemed to have been in 1987. The dancers themselves explained that they had stopped going because they did not feel welcome there—and they felt that way because the people had failed to arrange the government financed worship that should be offered to the *Navadurgā pyākham* annually.

This leads us to ask how stories like these can develop. In seeking for some understanding I will now refer to an event that occurred in 1991, during my fieldwork. I did not witness it myself, as I entered the scene only the day after the event.

The *Navadurgā* were visiting Nālā, yet another Newar village, about 3 hours walk from Bhaktapur. Here the sweeper community have a tradition of receiving *Navadurgā* with music and dance. They also offer a piglet, which is described as the favourite sacrifice to give to the *Navadurgā*. The dance-drama's myth of origin explained why. There are two ways of presenting this little pig. On this occasion it should be let loose, so that the masked gods will have to catch it. This is great fun, particularly for the participating audience. What they do on such an occasion is to run in between the godly figures, to snatch the piglet from them and thus in this manner prolong the game of hunting. This year, the piglet, by mistake, was handed over directly to the ensemble's leading character, Bhairava. The audience thus lost a very spectacular bit of the entertainment. This grew into a conflict, ending with a big fight, where one man from the sweepers' community was killed.

Already the second day after the incident and before the *Navadurgā* dancers returned to Bhaktapur, I was told the story by a Bhaktapur woman. When I asked, she would not connect it with the *Navadurgā* directly, as in other stories she had told me. Instead she was worried about the now fatherless children. Later on, I was told about the events by some Nālā residents. In their version they especially stressed the importance of obeying the dancing deities. It was not the incorrect giving of the piglet that preoccupied the tellers, but that the person who had died had been advised by the Mahākālī dancer to go home and stay out of trouble. By not obeying Mahākālī, he had been unfortunate and lost his life.

Maybe the above mentioned incident will be related to the *Navadurgā* later on, just like the Banepa-fire. Also here, a real life tragedy is linked with the presence of the *Navadurgā*. Both the violent results and the realistic aspect, make it a very powerful range of stories.

These dramatic and violent results seem congruent with the nature of tantric gods like *Navadurgā*. In Bhaktapur they are not only regarded as beneficial, protective, but also dangerous. In these stories their anger does not seem to be arbitrary. Reasons are always found for their anger. The same theme is treated in the dance itself, when everybody can see how impossibly and rudely Sveta Bhairava is behaving to Mahākālī.

The stories can also be regarded as a part of the *Navadurgā* dancers own struggle to be convincing. Through the dances and rituals they depict gods. Putting on the masks, they are transformed and possessed by the gods, which might be interpreted as contradictory to the fact that the dancers are recruited from a low status group. In Newari Hinduism this is

not any obvious contradiction. Still, I think, the dancers are quite vulnerable to criticism. Here again the audience plays a part. They relate to these dancing gods in many ways, e.g. by telling the mentioned stories and gossiping, by worshipping the gods, by addressing the dancers in polite and honorific terms on these dancing occasions, by presenting offerings accompanied with prayers for help, for instance in getting a son or even for a daughter, for succeeding in their business, or for general well-being, avoiding disease. Still the dancers are often enough criticised, mainly for being greedy. Besides people say they do not dance as they should. They take shortcuts. They talk when they should not. Sometimes people also express their opinions of the dancers more private affairs—that they have so and so much land and money, but just waste it drinking. And so on. But on asking for instance when the changes in the dances started to occur, the answer could be: 'a hundred years ago'. That is, it is a complaint which started not necessarily in their own time, but could be an inherited complaint. All these things, again, are part of an ongoing debate about what the *Navadurgā* are, as well as what the dancers positions are.

### Conclusion

I regard these narratives as an important intake that enables me to understand some of the meaning the dance-drama carries. It seems that most people know about some of the incidents connected to the *Navadurgā pyākham*. That is, people do not need to have any special knowledge about these gods to tell these stories. I found this interesting because often when trying to talk with people about *Navadurgā pyākham*, they were shy, said they did not know, and that I rather ought to talk with the astrologer, the priest or the headmaster of the school, etc. The narratives provide evidence that a certain type of knowledge is widely distributed. For instance, the myths of origin of the *Navadurgā pyākham*, or the stories related to the different sequences in the dances, are forms of knowledge that most people do not have in detail. By contrast, the stories of the kind discussed above are part of a widely distributed oral tradition that is reproduced independently of a formal training. They are not part of the ritual specialists' esoteric knowledge. What seems apparent, is that most people, regardless of their position in society, somehow seem to relate to the events portrayed in the stories. They are more 'egalitarian' in kind, as they seem more evenly distributed throughout the hierarchical social system. Paying attention to these stories I have tried to avoid getting only the specialists well formulated knowledge, in an attempt to try to grasp how people relate to *Navadurgā*.

The *Navadurgā pyākham* is facing a deteriorating economic situation, as funds are withering away. Such a situation can have devastating

effects on the performance. Apart from such problems it seems like the duty to dance is an opportunity to acquire fame, make friends and gather esteem, outside as well as inside the dancers' own community. Playing the part of some of the characters can even result in the earning of a few extra rupees, which is always welcome for this rather poor group in Bhaktapur. What worries me is that the reproduction of such a rich cultural complex of meanings in the large social universe of Kathmandu Valley has to rely mostly on peoples' casual goodwill and their ability to supply the dances and cover the necessary expenses for arranging the dance-drama. Newar cultural traditions will probably be modified in the encounter with a changing global-economic situation and socio-cultural environment, where other values and new lifestyles are impinging on them. As for instance, the growing consumption of mass media products like TV, radio, movies, videos and so on. The people of Bhaktapur are participants in a changing society. The audience as well as the dancers have to relate to these changes and they have to cope with it. This can be symbolically expressed in many ways, e.g. in the *Navadurgā* dances. Although there are strong restrictions on altering the actual performance itself, I think it reasonable to assume that the meanings people derive from these performances are indeed changing.

## Notes

- 1 When I use the term *thar* I refer to the same social units that, for example, G. S. Nepali referred to as 'castes'. For a more precise distinction between these two terms see Levy (1990:73).
- 2 A 'god-house', called *dyahchē* in Newari, functions as both a temple and requisite storehouse.
- 3 The usage of Newari or Nepali names depends on context. It seems common to use Nepali names in the larger Nepali society. In this article I will use the names as mostly done in Bhaktapur. The painter-group was quite consistent in using their Nepali name Chitrakar rather than the Newari name Pū. On the other hand, the gardener *thar* used the Newari name for themselves Gāthā. Their Nepali name is Banmālā. While most Bhaktapurians use these two names in the same manner, the Gāthā insisted on Pū for the painters.
- 4 This number is for the season of 1990–91. The number should in principle not vary, but some of the earlier visited places have lately been omitted. Compare Bāsukala and Gutschow (1987:147).
- 5 The gods and goddesses that are represented with a mask in the *Navadurgā pyākham* are: Mahādev (the only 'blind' mask and it is not worn in front of the face of any dancer); Ganeś, Brahmāṇī, Maheśvarī, Kumārī, Bhadrakālī, Vārāhī, Bālakumārī, Sīha, Bhairava, Duhā, and Sveta Bhairava (usually not participating in the processions). They are listed in the order the masks are displayed in the mask-makers' backyard on the ninth day of Dasaī.



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# Tamu Shamanistic Possession (*Khhlye Khaba*): Some Preliminary Ethnographic Observations

Judith Pettigrew and Yarjung Kromchhain Tamu (Gurung)<sup>1</sup>

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1971:2248), a person who is possessed is 'inhabited and controlled by a demon or spirit'. Jones (1976:1) writing with reference to Nepal suggests that spirit possession can be defined as 'an altered state of consciousness on the part of an individual as a result of what is perceived or believed to be the incorporation of an alien form with vital and spiritual attributes, e.g. the spirit of a superhuman form such as a witch, sorcerer, god, goddess or other religious divinity'. Possession has received considerable attention within the anthropological literature (Crapanzano & Garrison 1977, Bourguignon 1973, Hitchcock and Jones 1976, Lewis 1971, 1986). Debate has centred on such divergent issues as the sociological functions of possession (Lewis 1971); the psychopathology of altered states of consciousness (Devereux 1956); cultural meaning (Obeyesekere 1977); demography and comparison (Bourguignon 1973). Lewis (1971:32) classifies possession into two distinct categories, 'peripheral' and 'central' possession. Peripheral possession is most commonly manifested by women in societies where they are denied access to positions of power and authority. In these circumstances possession provides an outlet for covert manipulation. 'Central' possession reinforces public morality, power and authority and according to Lewis exists primarily in small-scale fluid societies which survive in circumstances of extreme physical hardship or political oppression. 'Central' possession involves possession by either ancestor spirits or deities and is frequently associated with shamanic religions.

Jones (1976:3) suggests that the term 'central' possession is not applicable in a South Asian context where cults which can be classified as being of the 'central' possession type are evident in highly stratified societies. He considers that four types of spirit possession can be identified in Nepal—reincarnate possession, tutelary possession, oracular possession and peripheral possession. On the basis of an article by Messerschmidt (1976:208) Jones suggests that reincarnate possession is present in Gurung society. The classification is based on the inhabitation or possession of the bodies of sacrificial animals by the deceased during the three-day memorial celebration the *pai lava*.<sup>2</sup> Gurung (Tamu) shamanism is

characterized as being devoid of an ecstatic element—Tamu shamans do not become possessed (McHugh 1991:469, Messerschmidt 1976:201, Pignède 1966:293). Although Tamu shamanism clearly incorporates many elements of classic Inner Asian shamanism—ritual paraphernalia, ornithological symbolism, soul travel etc., its lack of an ecstatic tradition was a distinguishing factor. Recent research however, contradicts this premise—there is a tradition of possession in Tamu society both within the shamanistic tradition of the Pa-chyu and within lay society (Macfarlane 1993).<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to undertake a preliminary examination of the nature and form of possession (*khlye khhaba*)<sup>4</sup> as integrated into the Pa-chyu tradition. Tamu religion incorporates two pre-Buddhist indigenous shamanistic traditions—those of the Pa-chyu and the Khhlyepri (also called Lhyauri or Ghyapri) ritual experts. The tradition of the Pa-chyu predates that of the Khhlyepri. While *khlye khhaba* is an important concept within the Pa-chyu tradition, it does not appear to be of significance for the Khhlyepri. A small number of (mostly elderly) Khhlyepri, however, do become possessed. We suggest that the nature of the Khhlyepri (they are primarily death specialists and not healers) is in part responsible for the lack of an ecstatic tradition. More importantly, however, the greater loss of ritual repertoire which is evident amongst the Khhlyepri makes it difficult to make an accurate judgement about the presence or absence of an ecstatic tradition.

Pa-chyu serve their communities as both priests and curers. A learned Pa-chyu will know more than 50 rituals and have an accompanying repertoire of over 100 myths (*pye*). The rituals that a Pa-chyu is called upon to perform are diverse and include such rites as the saying of a *ngo* (mantra) for someone who has a headache; the performing of a 12-hour curing for a chronically ill person; a ritual to protect a house from evil; or the memorial service, the *pai lava*. The Pa-chyu tradition is familial, with sons learning from their fathers or another older male relative. Although the Pa-chyu tradition is male it incorporates many female principles (including items of clothing and the required presence of *chomi rhimai*, 'sisters', at certain dangerous rituals to protect their brother Pa-chyus). Female possession occurs in Tamu society in association with the dance, the *ghadā syeba*; it is not, however within the scope of this paper to discuss this tradition.

During rituals (*thhēmai*) the Pa-chyu confronts and battles with the forces which have caused illness or misfortune such as witches, wizards (*pumi/pumsyo*) ghosts (*inomai*) and the spirits of those who have died accidentally (*bayo*, and *chādra mho*). In his battle against evil the Pa-chyu employs many different forces—including mantras (*ngo*), gods, porcupine

quills (*tōsīmhru*), and bows and arrows (*me thhale lhiba*). For the purposes of this paper only the assistance that the Pa-chyu gets from gods will be discussed. These include an unspecified number of area gods, those gods which inhabit a certain geographical area, Sildo Khhlye, Naldo Khhlye in addition to the main god/goddess Khhlyesondi Phhreysondi.

While these gods are accessed by all Pa-chyu's, the god Pakrain Khhlyesondi Phhreysondi—the name that Khhlyesondi Phhreysondi takes when it is called from the Himalayas during *thhenmai*—only inhabits the bodies of certain people. This is referred to as *khhlye khhaba* which literally means 'the god has caught/captured' the person. The entrance of the god is manifested by extreme shaking throughout the body, a state which is called *th-harava*. A person who is *khhlye khhaba* may be either a Pa-chyu or a lay person, usually a member of a family which has a *phai lu chohn*, a small personal shrine in their home which is inhabited by the gods of their ancestors and the main Tamu god Khhlyesondi Phhreysondi.

*Khhlye khhaba* occurs when a Pa-chyu needs the assistance of the god Pakrain to help him repel a witch attack etc. during a *thhē*. Pakrain is called using a combination of techniques including the recitation of certain *pye* and drumming. When Pakrain enters the body of the Pa-chyu the drum rhythm changes and a special *khhlye khhaba* rhythm is played accompanied by the recitation of particularly powerful *ngo*. A *khhlye khhaba* person in the audience will, if given a drum, automatically join the Pa-chyu in drumming the *khhlye khhaba* rhythm. *Khhlye khhaba* ends when the malevolent has been overcome. During *thhēmai*, *ph-hru-māi* (a mixture of burning herbs) is always present as a pure offering to the god which assists a person leave the state of *th-harava*. Other withdrawal techniques include pouring 'gold water' (*mara kyu*) over heads and hands. *Khhlye khhaba* manifests itself in different forms.

The *khhlye khhaba* of an experienced Pa-chyu is much more controlled than that of a non Pa-chyu. A lay person frequently becomes *khhlye khhaba* at an early stage in the *thhē* which may indicate that they also become possessed by another god, as Pakrain should not enter their body until he/she is specifically called. A lay person may also have difficulty leaving the *khhlye khhaba* state while a Pa-chyu on the other hand becomes *khhlye khhaba* at a certain prescribed time and can exit much more fluently. There is very much a sense of the Pa-chyu being master of his possession and the spectator being mastered by it.

*Khhlye khhaba* can be initiated without the assistance of the drum rhythm and the recitation of the *pye*, for example, in the case of a sudden witch attack. In such an emergency Pakrain is accessed using very powerful *ngo*. *Th-harava* also occurs if a person who becomes *khhlye khhaba* eats buffalo meat or pork<sup>5</sup> and could also occur if a Pa-chyu says

the *pye* which are recited during *thhēmai* to call the god. The prohibition against eating buffalo meat is complex. It may be related to an intrinsic internal conflict between the northern Tamu culture and the buffalo as a representative of a southern culture, a culture with whom the Tamumai out of necessity interact but are culturally at variance with. The reasons for the prohibition against eating pork are less clear but a similar explanation to that given to explain the prohibition against eating buffalo meat appears to be plausible. Wild pig can be eaten.

A Pa-chyu is either *khlye khhaba* or *khlye akhhaba*. A Pa-chyu who is *khlye khhaba* has a considerable advantage over a Pa-chyu who is not *khlye khhaba*, since he has the added protection of a god who actually inhabits his body. This is particularly important in the more dangerous *thhēmai*. Furthermore, a *khlye khhaba* Pa-chyu is better able to see spirits, witches and other supernatural phenomena while he is *th-harava*. *Khhlye khhaba* is primarily evident in the most dangerous *thhens* such as the *phai lu*, the *mhosī tibā*, and in the extremely dangerous *bayo thhē* which would be difficult for a *khlye akhhaba* Pa-chyu to perform.

There is a difference of status between Pa-chyu's who become *khlye khhaba* and those who do not. The question 'do you become *khlye khhaba*?' is a sensitive one. That there should be a distinction is understandable; it is obviously a great honour to have a god enter your body. *Khhlye khhaba* however, is only one factor that distinguishes status—the number of *ngo*, *thhēmai* and *pye* contained within a Pa-chyu's repertoire are also indicators of power and therefore status. A *khlye khhaba* Pa-chyu, however, does command special respect, it is he who at the end of a *thhē* will be given the head of the sacrificed goat and extra rice to take home. Furthermore, a young *khlye khhaba* Pa-chyu will be considered to be of higher status than an older and more experienced *khlye akhhaba* Pa-chyu. In a Pa-chyu family usually only one or two Pa-chyu's in each generation will be *khlye khhaba*. An apprentice Pa-chyu strives to become *khlye khhaba* by studying the *pye*. The test of whether or not a Pa-chyu becomes possessed takes place in the *phai lu*, a ritual held in the home of a family who keep a *phai lu chohn* and have a tradition of *khlye khhaba*.

A person who is *khlye khhaba* usually becomes *th-harava* for the first time during late childhood or early adolescence. At a *phai lu* the sons of the house sit together, which makes the identification of a *th-harava* member easy. When a young boy of a Pa-chyu clan is identified as *khlye khhaba* he is frequently placed under considerable pressure to take up the profession of a Pa-chyu if he has not already done so. Society thus not only recognizes possession but actively supports it.

Having established the presence of possession associated with the Tamu shaman the Pa-chyu, the question then remains as to why anthropologists who have worked closely with the Tamumai in the past were not aware of the presence of an ecstatic tradition. There are several possible reasons. It has been suggested that the inclusion of *khhllye khhaba* in the Pa-chyu's repertoire is a recent innovation borrowed from the *dhāmi jākri* tradition. If one accepts this reason, then it could be expected that only some Pa-chyus would become possessed, yet the tradition is well known throughout Tamu country (the districts of Kaski, Lamjung, Parbat, Tanahun and Syanja). *Khhllye khhaba* appears to have deep cultural embeddedness. It is not exclusively a Pa-chyu tradition but is primarily associated with the keeping of a *phai lu chohn*. Furthermore the legendary Pa-chyu referred to in the myths were *khhllye khhaba*.

Anthropologists may have overlooked *khhllye khhaba* because it occurs relatively infrequently. In the past, apparently, it was a more common phenomenon. A generation ago, according to the second author's father, as many as 12 or 13 *khhllye khhaba* Pa-chyus would be present at a *phai lu*. The rarity of *th-harava* Pa-chyus today can be explained by an overall decrease in the number of practising Pa-chyus, but, most significantly it can be attributed to the loss of ritual repertoire. Many Pa-chyu families have lost their method of calling Pakrain as well as having lost their full compliment of *pye* and *ngo*.

In terms of rituals, *th-harava* in its full-blown sense is really only seen in the *phai lu*. *Phai lus* are relatively rare occurrences, being held in a *phai lu* owner's home only once a year and not at all during the three-year period following a family death. It is therefore quite possible that the anthropologists who worked among the Tamumai in the past did not in the course of their fieldwork encounter a *th-harava* Pa-chyu.

Finally, two methodological issues. Tamu shamanism was first studied by Pignède (1966) who did not identify possession as a component of the Pa-chyu's repertoire. This perspective was confirmed by Macfarlane (1976) whose Pa-chyu informant was a *khhllye khhaba*, and by Messerschmidt (1976) who worked primarily with *Khhlyeprīs*. Thus a general theory evolved which was supported by a substantial body of literature. It was not until 1990 that a chance occurrence suggested that the issue had been prematurely closed and was in need of re-evaluation. A less important methodological issue which nevertheless merits attention is that while information in Tamu society is not necessarily withheld it may not be volunteered as it may not be seen as relevant. It is not difficult to explain why the existence of *khhllye khhaba* was overlooked given the relatively small number of *khhllye khhaba* Pa-chyus, the small number of *thhēmai* that it occurs in, and the denial in the literature of its existence.

To conclude, possession is a significant element of the Tamu shamanic tradition of the Pa-chyu. The identification of an ecstatic tradition in Tamu society is of considerable importance, both culturally and historically. Tamu shamanism is obviously much closer to the classical Inner Asiatic Shamanic tradition than previously believed, the type of tradition which has evolved from the geographical region from which the Tamu claim their origins. Considerable research, historical reconstruction and examination of surviving texts needs to be undertaken before *khlye khhaba* and its interwoven religious, social and cultural links can be fully understood. Further investigation will undoubtedly throw light on other issues which are presently only partly explicable, such as why women in the context of the *ghadā syeba* dance become *th-harava* and do not become possessed within the context of the Pa-chyu's performance and the *phai lu*; why inconsistent food prohibitions exist (one can drink buffalo milk and keep a buffalo but not eat buffalo meat); and why there is a presence of *khlye khhaba* within the Pa-chyu tradition, but apparently not in the Khlyepri.

## Notes

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- 2 Gurung words have been spelt phonetically.
- 3 The presence of possession in Tamu society was first identified by Professor Alan Macfarlane in 1990 while doing collaborative research with the second author who is a practising *khlye khhaba* Pa-chyu.
- 4 The term *khlye khhaba* means the 'god has caught, captured, covered'. It is to be distinguished from the word *khaba* which means 'to come'. When Pakrain Khlyesondi Phhreysondi inhabits the body of a *khlye khhaba* person he/she protects their body by 'covering them like a shadow'.
- 5 According to our observations and the experiences of the second author *th-harava* results following the consumption of buffalo meat or pork regardless of whether the person is conscious of having consumed meat or not.

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# The *Pañcai Bājā*: Reflections on Social Change in Traditional Nepalese Music

Carol Tingey

When Nepal opened her borders in 1950, 'modern time marched in, accompanied by radio and cinemas' (Bake 1959:316), and a tide of cultural change began. My aim in this paper will be to present the *pañcai bājā*—the ubiquitous wedding band of Nepal—as a traditional institution in the throes of such change. The material presented here is the result of fieldwork carried out mainly in Gorkha during 1987–88.

The *pañcai bājā*, a mixed ensemble of wind instruments, drums and cymbals is a common feature of village life throughout much of Nepal. The ensemble is found, with regional variation, across the country from east to west and from the Tarai in the south to the mid-altitude dwellers of the Himalayan foothills, wherever Indo-Nepalese castes have settled. Only amongst the high-altitude dwellers, such as the Sherpas and Tibetan peoples of the northern border, is the ensemble not in use.

*Pañcai bājā* is played exclusively by a caste of professional musicians—the Damāi—whose name is taken from the large kettledrum which characterizes the band, the *damāhā*. Their supplementary caste occupation is tailoring. As one of the Indo-Nepalese artisan castes, the Damāi have an extremely depressed social status, being the outcastes of society, from whom food and water may not be accepted, and contact with whom demands ritual purification. Despite their untouchability, the Damāi are thought to be auspicious (*saguni*) and as both tailors and musicians they provide indispensable ritual services.

The uses of the *pañcai bājā* are diverse. It is a fundamental requirement for all Hindu rites of passage such as weddings and the sacred thread investiture ceremony for young high-caste boys. It plays for the calendrical cycle of festivals and leads processions of all sorts, and serves a very great percentage of the population. Although a large proportion of its repertoire is purely secular entertainment music (e.g. folk-song tunes, film music), the contexts in which the *pañcai bājā* plays are always sacred or semi-sacred in character and the ensemble is fulfilling a ritual duty.

The question of the function of the ensemble is a complex one. Certainly, in all contexts it appears to have an auspicious role (Tingey, in press), but it also acts as a signaller (e.g. to announce the departure of the bride) and as a status symbol—a family's economic standing may be determined by the number of musicians playing for their son's wedding.

Traditionally, the repertoire included a whole range of context-specific items, related to particular seasons, times of the day, or ritual activities (Tingey 1990:120–238). Many of these were in a rhapsodic improvisatory style in which only the structural outline was predetermined, leaving the musician free to develop and embellish the material. However, most of these items are no longer played and the repertoire has become much more ‘popular’ in character.

### New musical influences

With the advent of Radio Nepal in 1950, a new genre of music was introduced to the people that fused Nepali folk-song idioms with Hindi film music elements to produce a type of Nepali national light music which Anderson and Mitchell describe as ‘sufficiently distinctive to serve unequivocally as a symbol of national identity’ (1978:252). The popularity of *adhunik gīt* (modern songs) and radio *lok gīt* (folksongs) is probably due to their simple ‘folksy’ melodies which are accompanied typically by a mixed ensemble of Nepali and Western instruments. The subject matter of *adhunik gīt* and radio *lok gīt* is generally love and other human emotions, and patriotism.<sup>1</sup>

Radio Nepal is the most powerful medium of communication in Nepal, broadcasting for about twelve hours each day and reaching at least 55% of the population, including people in remote villages that may be a week's walk from the nearest town or may be cut off for several months of the winter.<sup>2</sup> The Shaha government capitalized on this to promote national integration and allegiance, presenting in Nepali and, according to the Government statistics for 1986, devoting 63.9% of music broadcasting to Nepalese music, of which only 0.8% was devoted to songs in minority languages. Indian (mostly film) music accounted for another 34% (Grandin 1989:132).<sup>3</sup> New government broadcasting policy may be more liberal with regard to the music of minority groups. In addition, cassette tapes of Nepali light music are available in bazaars across the country, reflecting the spread of the cassette player, and Grandin estimates that as many as 20,000 copies (including pirate copies) of popular tapes are distributed (1989:137). Patrons like to hear modern songs at their weddings, and a *pañcai bājā* must be able to reproduce these in order to remain popular. It is hardly surprising that *adhunik gīt* have been absorbed into the *pañcai bājā* repertoire.

As with the advent of radio, the cinema was a post-Rana introduction to Nepal, but it met with such an enthusiastic response that just six years after the collapse of the Rana regime there were no less than eleven cinemas in Kathmandu and Hindi film music has been a hit ever since. In 1962 Nepalese film production was inaugurated (Grandin 1989:113) with

films based on Indian models and an ample sprinkling of musical numbers. Outside the Valley, cinema itself has not had a direct impact until very recently, but the music of the film industry is carried to people across the country via Radio Nepal. When people of the hills have to go to the Kathmandu Valley or to the Tarai, they often treat themselves to a trip to one of the cinemas whilst they are there and in many places entrepreneurs are presenting hired videos in their homes, using generator power, to eager audiences. With the spread of electricity, this type of presentation could become an increasing trend and the mass culture of the film industry and its music will reach further into the hills. Already, in 1986–88 one of the most popular items in *pañcai bājā* repertoires across the country was the title song of the Nepali film *Kusume rumāl*.

A third source of new musical material for *pañcai bājās* is the army, for which Damāi are the traditional bandsmen. When Damāi army band recruits return home they take with them their experience of formal military musical training and new items inevitably make their appearance in *pañcai bājā* repertoires. These are known popularly as *paṭṭan nayā bākya*, or ‘new army (platoon) tunes’, and they exhibit a typically military-style rhythmic accompaniment (Tingey, in press: Ch.8). *Paṭṭan nayā bākya*, once incorporated, tend to become primary processional music of the *pañcai bājā*.

The ‘modernization’ of the repertoire may be seen as a combination of conscious and unconscious processes on the part of the musicians. For younger musicians, the process is a conscious one—they can win popularity among their peers by demonstrating an ability to play the latest film hits and *adhunik gīt* (modern songs) imitated from Radio Nepal broadcasts. As there is no prestige value attached to knowledge of traditional items of repertoire, there is no incentive to learn them. There is not such a clear-cut distinction to be made with regard to older musicians who know (at least some of) the traditional repertoire. Musicians rely on their memories to recall their store of melodies and they improvise a medley of tunes as items come to mind. Far from being consciously suppressed, it seems more likely that sporadically played traditional items are recalled less readily, as they are crushed out from minds saturated with the latest Radio Nepal numbers.

An unequivocally conscious modernizing process is the adoption of Western band instruments. This desire for a ‘modern’ ensemble is not a recent one, as its precursor was the Westernization of the Nepalese army band by Bhimsen Thapa more than a century ago (Boonzayer 1991). Bands of Western instruments (*ben bājā* and ensemble) were in use in Kathmandu for wedding processions before 1950, but it appears to have been the prerogative of the Ranas, Shahas and military dignitaries

(Grandin 1989:107). However, by the mid-1950s, the *ben bājā* was firmly established in the Valley. During wedding seasons, throughout the Kathmandu Valley, varied combinations of clarinets, trumpets, cornets, horns, trombones, euphoniums, snare and bass drums, cymbals and maraccas, played by uniformed bandmen constitute the marriage bands. This type of band corresponds exactly in instrumentation, performance style, presentation and function with the *āgrezi bāid* (English band) favoured in Uttar Pradesh (Henry 1973:213–19) and found across India. According to Grandin, *ben bājā* made their appearance in Kirtipur about thirty to forty years ago, and gradually supplanted the traditional band. The last wedding to employ the old style (Newar) *pañcai bājā* took place twenty years ago (Grandin 1989:109). The bulk of *ben bājā* repertoire seems to be Nepali and Hindi film hits, and *adhunik gīt* from Radio Nepal, but some Newar songs and *maṅgal dhun* (auspicious tunes for weddings) have been retained.

The *byeṅḍ* (band) or *sarkārko bājā* (government ensemble) was carried to garrison towns all over Nepal during the Rana period, but in the hills communities have been slower in adopting the new-style band. It has not superseded the *pañcai bājā* as it has in the Kathmandu Valley, and it is used mostly as a supplement to, rather than a replacement of, the *pañcai bājā*, the ultimate ostentation. Availability and purchase cost of band instruments are significant factors retarding the adoption of the *byeṅḍ* by rural Damāi and their repair involves not only expense, but a trip to the Kathmandu Valley to a specialist repair shop.

It seems that the *byeṅḍ* does not pose an immediate threat to the continued existence of the *pañcai bājā*. However, as an official ensemble and the superlative of wedding musics, with all its cosmopolitan associations, its desirability may well be in excess of its availability.

### The impact of the economy

New musical influences are not the only contributors to changes in the *pañcai bājā* tradition. Economic factors too, are affecting the tradition. Invariably, socially depressed groups in Nepal have limited access to land, so that ritual low status and poverty have always been closely related (Seddon 1979:77). In Gorkha, Damāi land-holdings are minimal. None of the *damai* households has irrigated land (*khet*) for growing rice, and most do not have dry fields (*bāri*) apart from the small plots immediately surrounding their homes.

Most Damāi rely on the traditional patronage system—*bāli ghar biṣṭa*—for their livelihoods. They work for a number of patrons, making and mending clothes, sometimes engaging in fieldwork and providing *pañcai bājā* music at any life-cycle rites and *pūjās* celebrated by the patron's

household. In return, they receive payment in crops after each harvest. A survey carried out in Gorkha in 1987 (Tingey, in press: Appendix II) showed that the foodstuffs paid to Damāi were seldom sufficient to meet a family's needs and supplementary cash incomes had become essential.

Furthermore, some of the younger generation of Gorkha Damāi expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional system of patronage, thinking it antiquated and insufficient. They are in need of cash with which to purchase all the accoutrements of modern life: radios, stereo cassette players, watches and other consumer goods. Ideally, families would like to have at least one son in the army or police band, or employed by Gorkha Darbar or another temple to play ritual music. The main source of cash income for those working within the traditional system is playing for weddings, when they may expect to receive a fee of Rs.50 to 100, but for young Damāi there are insufficient opportunities and money for them to realize their desires. They are abandoning the patronage system to tailor from small workshops in the *bajārs*, attached to Newar cloth merchants, who pass them trade in return for a levy.

There is an increasing trend for sons to migrate, at least temporarily, to the big towns of the Tarai and Kathmandu Valley, lured by the promise of better rates for their work. When working away from their village environments, these young men usually give up playing music and concentrate exclusively on tailoring, often learning to reproduce the latest Western fashions. In the Tarai towns to the south of Gorkha (e.g. Narayanghat and Hetauda) there is a notable dearth of able musicians. Thus, a groom coming from Narayanghat to marry in Gorkha, and wanting a traditional *pañcai bājā* for his wedding procession had to rely on a band from the bride's locality, which travelled ten kilometres by coach to meet the groom's party and accompany it back to the bride's house.

Thus, the monetization of Nepalese village economy is having a significant impact on the functioning of the *pañcai bājā*. Young Damāi desire cash, and are prepared to move (at least temporarily) to urban centres where they have greater earning power as tailors. Playing music is not as lucrative as the business of tailoring Western-style shirts, suits and children's clothes, and if a young Damāi can earn a satisfactory income from sewing, he may feel disinclined to expend effort in providing music for wedding processions for comparatively small returns.<sup>4</sup>

### Status awareness

An economic strength of the Damāi and Newar *kusle* has always been that they alone could provide the auspicious music essential for certain rituals. Today, this exclusivity seems threatened. Grandin reports that in the Valley town of Kirtipur, the provision of marriage procession music by

new-style bands utilizing Western band instruments (*ben bājā*) is no longer the exclusive domain of the Damāi or Kusle musicians, but has been taken up as a lucrative occupation by mid-caste Newars. Jyāpu (farmers) comprise three of the town's bands, the members of two of which were trained by a resident Damāi musician, who has also instructed Newars from surrounding villages in the technique of playing *ben bājā*. One of these groups was established about thirteen years ago and is run as a co-operative business (Grandin 1989:108–11). Similarly, in the Newar settlements of Panauti and Pyangau, members of the Nāy (butcher) and Jyāpu castes have taken up the profession of playing *ben bājā* (Toffin 1984:410, 136). This implies that the caste restrictions and social stigma associated with playing *pañcai bājā* do not necessarily apply to the playing of Western instruments. In Kirtipur an interesting social situation has developed as most of the traditional musicians have given up their caste profession, and it has been taken up by others, in other words, *ascribed* musicians are being replaced by *achieved* musicians.

Tewari reports that in Uttar Pradesh, Western-style bands are run as commercial enterprises:

often under the direction of an upper caste manager who arranges everything including fees, transportation, uniforms and wages for the musicians. The musicians are usually....the former village folk musicians. They are pleased with the status which comes in playing in such a band. (Tewari 1974:19)

These musicians have exchanged their patron-client relationships for an arrangement in which they are the employees of a business concern. In this way, they have lost their autonomy, but apparently, have gained prestige from participating in a modern-style band.

In urban settings, access to education and a heightened status consciousness amongst young Damāi influence the attitudes towards music making, and some Damāi choose to avoid the social stigma associated with the playing of the *pañcai bājā* instruments. In the Nepalese hills, village Damāi seem to be less concerned with their social standing than are their urbanized counterparts. They may aspire to an enhanced status among their peers by knowing the latest film hits, but do not have great aspirations beyond the bounds of their caste. However, in a limited way, as far as caste restriction allows, education opens doors to other means of livelihood. If a sufficient number of young, urbanized Damāi return to their rural families with a new social awareness, they could well militate against their traditional tailor-musician role, or at least attempt a restructuring of the economic organization of the *pañcai bājā* along commercial lines.

For the higher caste patrons of the band, a primary function of the *pañcai bājā* appears to be to act as a status symbol, the social and economic standing of the patrons being reflected not by the quality of musicianship of a celebrated player or by the appeal or propitiousness of the repertoire, but by the size and type of the bands that play at their sons' weddings. Tewari mentions that in Uttar Pradesh this has become so important that the type of band that will play at the wedding is one of the points for discussion during marriage negotiations (1974:19).

Status symbols are temporary reflections of current fashions. Once popularized, they cease to function as status symbols and some novel replacement succeeds. Hence, modernism is demanded of the *pañcai bājā* in the form of the latest radio hit and Western-style band instruments. In a society in which traditional values are changing, an ensemble like the *pañcai bājā* faces tough competition. The Ratna Recording Company in Kathmandu has produced a cassette of traditional *pañcai bājā* music which they claim to have 'issued as a low-cost alternative to hiring a live orchestra' (Grandin 1989: 135).<sup>5</sup> One might have expected this not to have been a commercial success, bearing in mind the prestige value of a live *pañcai bājā*. However, Nepalis are renowned for their love of consumer goods.<sup>6</sup> The portable stereo cassette player has replaced the wrist watch as a major status symbol so that patrons may not actually 'lose face' by having a cassette tape instead of a band. The cassette does not appear to have replaced the wedding band, but certainly it is in use in other processions such as those of *pañca bāli* and *phūlko ḍoli* offerings.

### Conclusion

From the material presented here it seems that the *pañcai bājā* is undergoing a dramatic transformation. But is this really the case, or does the tradition have the capacity to accommodate the musical and economic changes without undermining the essential nature of the music?

The successful transmission of a musical culture is dependent on three principal determinants:

1. The nature of the music.
2. The expectations (musical and social) of the musicians who are the culture-bearers of the musical tradition.
3. The functional significance of the music—as understood by the musicians and by the society they serve.

An analysis of the data under these three headings may clarify the situation.

### 1. The nature of the music

Regarding the nature of the sound of *pañcai bājā*, two complementary trends can be identified—the absorption of new material and the simplification and popularization of the repertoire. When *filmī* and *adhunik gīt* are assimilated by the *pañcai bājā* they become indistinguishable in style from other items of the popular repertoire—their melodies are simply used as the bases of new pieces played in the traditional way. Quite apart from its popularity as a film hit, the song *Kusume rumāl* has probably retained its central place in the *pañcai bājā* repertoire because its melodic structure lies easily under the fingers of flute (*sahanai*) players. Items taken from the army—the *paṭan nayā bākyas*—are more obtrusive additions to the repertoire, as they retain something of their military flavour, especially in their rhythmic accompaniments.

The assimilation of new, popular material seems to be going hand-in-hand with a simplification of the repertoire. The rhapsodic improvisatory style that is characteristic of the traditional repertoire is infrequently heard from contemporary *sahanai* players. Today, the emphasis is on short, catchy melodies that are strung together in endless series of repetitions, their rhythms coinciding with and reinforcing the rhythmic pulse, rather than evading it or pulling against it as in the melismatic improvisatory style. This implies a standardization or popularization of the musical language. Nettl believes that such processes are typical of musics that have become receptive to new cultural inputs, for ‘standardization and simplification may release energy... (that can be spent on the absorption of new musical ideas)’ (1978:131). Increasingly, music of the popular repertoire is played in place of older, context-related items, and many of these traditional pieces have not entered the repertoires of the younger generation of Damāi. Modern radio and film songs have become more popular with both patrons and musicians than the traditional home-spun *pañcai bājā* repertoire.

### 2. Expectations of musicians

The parochial outlook of rural Damāi has been considerably widened by their changing work patterns involving tailoring in the cities and by the radio which brings Kathmandu culture to village environments. Younger musicians seem to be receptive to modern ideas, both musical and socio-economic. With the monetization of the economy, commercialism is beginning to play a role in the organization of village music.

Together with the other occupational castes, the Damāi represent the bottom of both the economic and the social scales. In their myths of origin, they acknowledge material rewards as compensation for their low social



standing, but today, the remuneration is no longer commensurate. Unless the monetary returns are increased and/or their social status is enhanced, with the alleviation of some of the stigma associated with their caste profession, young Damāi may choose not to become active musically.

### 3. Functional significance of the music

Essentially, the *pañcai bājā* is a processional band that provides auspicious music during ritual journeys. *Pañcai bājā* processions have several functions—they link together through music, areas of ritual significance; they facilitate the auspicious passage of humans and deities from one ritual space to another; they symbolize the transition from one human stage of life to the next. Journeys, whether physical or symbolic, can be dangerous undertakings. The *pañcai bājā* provides an auspicious environment in which ritual subjects may move with confidence.

In the hills of Central Nepal, the *pañcai bājā* still plays in the established contexts and functions in the traditional way, despite the modernization and popularization of the repertoire. If the auspicious basis of the *pañcai bājā* has not been undermined by the loss of much of the traditional context-related repertoire, the question arises of whether new musical items, such as *filmī* and *adhunik gīt*, once incorporated into the *pañcai bājā* repertoire, are invested with an auspicious quality, simply due to their performance context and/or the auspicious musical genre.

The symbolic statements made by *pañcai bājā* music have not changed for the public at large, because people's musical perception is minimal. Patrons were found to have scant knowledge of the band and were ignorant of the existence of an auspicious context-related repertoire. They do not share the musicians' knowledge of particular items being appropriate to certain situations or times, and they do not distinguish between pieces, unless they recognize a popular number from the radio or cinema. Thus for patrons, merely the sound of the *pañcai bājā* fulfills the auspicious requirement.

Whilst bygone generations of musicians had the specialist knowledge that designated items of repertoire were particularly auspicious if played in certain contexts, only a fraction of this expertise has been passed on to the young musicians of today. For young Damāi, as for their patrons, all *pañcai bājā* music is auspicious. The decline in value for musicians of this specialist knowledge is, perhaps, the most significant catalyst in the modernization of the *pañcai bājā* repertoire.

Henry found that in Uttar Pradesh, despite the complete transformation of the traditional wedding band into the *āgrezī bāid*, it was still regarded as auspicious (1973:214). So far, musical change in the *pañcai bājā* tradition seems to equate with other types of cultural innovation—e.g. it

has become customary for the groom to sport sunglasses and a new pair of 'Warrior' training shoes, and in Tarai and Valley towns a car has replaced the traditional litter. These are superficial innovations which have by no means impinged upon the ethos of the wedding. The whole style and repertoire of the Central Nepalese *pañcai bājā* is changing, due to the broader horizons of Nepalese village experience, but innovations are being accommodated within a continuing tradition, the essential nature of which remains unaffected.

## Notes

- 1 See Grandin( 1989: 125–9) for a discussion of modern songs.
- 2 Recent statistics for radio broadcasting and consumption, and the impact of cinema and the other media in Nepal are provided in Grandin( 1989:114ff, 136ff ).
- 3 Statistics for 1986 from a Nepal Government source.
- 4 Similarly, Grandin found that 'performing music is not profitable for the *kusleof* Kirtipur.' (1989:109).
- 5 Ratna cassettes R. C. *Vivaha dhun*.
- 6 Newars joke that whilst they spend all their money on feasting, the Nepalis spend all theirs on material things.

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## The *Bājā Guṭhi* of Baḍikhel

Nutan Dhar Sharma and Gert-Matthias Wegner

In search of ancient sources of Newar music our attention was drawn to the Lele stone inscription of Śivadeva and Aṃsuvarma, dated *samvat* 526 (Licchavi period, ca.604 AD). The stone tablet stands in a little garden south of the main road of Lele's Majha *tol*. The Sanskrit inscription has been published in *Abhilekh Samgraha*, vol.1, pp.29–31 (1961), and translated and commented upon by Jośi (1973), Vajrācārya (1973), and Regmi (1983).

The inscription mentions a *vāditra gauṣṭhikā* (in Nepali *bājā guṭhi* [a group of musicians]), endowed with a land donation of ten *mānikā*. It reads, 'yāh mā 12 vāditra gauṣṭhikā nāmmā 10 . . . rasya mā 40 pradī pagauṣṭhikā nāmmā 8 arccā gauṣṭhikānām' (line 11 from the Lele inscription). According to Vajrācārya (1973:284–89) the Licchavi *gauṣṭhikās* are communal institutions similar to the *guṭhis* of the Malla period, and those of today.

The ancient name of Lele was *Lembaṭi draṅga* (= Lembaṭi fort), indicating the existence of several smaller settlements in the vicinity (ibid.: 218-21). Baḍikhel is a village situated behind a small ridge north of Lele, inhabited by a mixed population of Paharī and Bāhun-Chetrī. According to Ācārya (1978: 12) Paharī are descendants of the Newar (Kirāta) settling in the Kathmandu Valley before the Licchavi conquered it.

During his survey of Baḍikhel, Sharma (unpublished:10) discovered the existence of three unusual *guṭhis* with names similar to those mentioned in the Lele inscription, e.g. *bājā guṭhi*, *Indra guṭhi*, and *patākā* (= flag) *guṭhi*. To our knowledge, *guṭhis* of these names are not found in other places of the Kathmandu Valley. Newar music *guṭhis* are never called *bājā guṭhi* or *Indra guṭhi*, but are named after the type of music they support, e.g. *dāphā khalah dhimay khalah*, *bhajan khalah* etc. This coincidence strongly supports the view that these Baḍikhel *guṭhis* are indeed descended from those mentioned in the Lele inscription.

We visited Baḍikhel and interviewed the members of the *bājā guṭhi*. The leader (*thakāli*) of this music group is Purna Bahādur Paharī. He plays the sacred drum (in Paharī: *guru dhemā*) representing Nāsaḥdyaḥ, the Newar god of music and dance. As there is no Nāsaḥ shrine in Baḍikhel, this drum is worshipped during a Nāsaḥ *pūjā* which includes sacrificing a cock to the music god.

The ensemble consists of five drums (*dhemā*), two pairs of cymbals (*bhuṣyaḥ*), and one bronze disc (*ṭṭiṭi*) which broke recently. The drums are repaired by a drum maker (Kulu) from Sundhāra, Patan, who receives thirteen *pāthi* of rice per year and participates in a ritual feast (*bhvē*) during Caitra full moon. According to Purna Bahādur, during the Rana period the group had in their possession four *ropani* of land at a place called Harramūla, from which they got two *muri* rice per year to cover their expenses. This land was lost during the 1963 land reform.

During the Buddhist processional month (*gūlā*) the group takes a daily round of the ritual village circuit (*pradakṣina*). This happens in the early morning around 6.00 a.m. On the day after new moon the group proceeds to Bungamati to play at the shrines of Buṅgadyaḥ and Bhailadyaḥ. On their return to Baḍikhel the group plays invocations for their village gods before proceeding to the houses of the four spokesmen (*mukhiyā*) who receive musical offerings. During Māsir and Asāḍh there are two ritual offerings (*chemā pūjā*) at the shrines of Gaṇeś and Devī, where the whole village gathers and the *dhemā* group plays.

During Caitra full moon these two gods are carried around the village on the *pradakṣina* route and the musicians precede the gods. The drumming repertoire consists of the following pieces:

1. *Dyaḥlhāygu*, the invocation of the music god, must be played at the beginning and at the end of every music performance. This piece is also used to invoke other gods, for example when an offering has been completed.
2. *Lā dhemā thāyagu* is played while walking from one locality to another.
3. *Calni* is played while staying at a locality for some time, for example when waiting for the completion of an offering.
4. *Dyaḥ cāguligu* is played while circulating around a god
5. *Yāh nyāgiyu* is played exclusively while accompanying the gods Devī and Gaṇeś during their *jātrā*.
6. *Khukkāyhu dhemā thāyagu* is played for special entertainment amidst large gatherings of people.

The following transcription shows:

A slow the Baḍikhel *pucāhāḡgu dyaḡlhāygu*

ghū	nā	tā	ghū	ghū	nā	tā	o	tā	kha	na	tā	kha	na	tā	ghū
								la	tā	kha	la	tā	kha		
ghū	nā	tā	ghū	ghū	nā	tā	o	tā	kha	na	tā	kha	na	tā	o
								la	tā	kha	la	tā	kha		
tā	ghū	tā	tā	ghū	nā	tā	tā	tā	kha	na	tā	ghū	o	o	o
								la	tā	kha					

B fast the *cicāhāḡgu dyaḡlhāygu* of the Bhaktapur *dhimaybājā*<sup>1</sup>

ghū	tā	tā	ghū	ghū	tā	tā	o	tā	khu	nā	tā	khu	tā	tā	ghū
								tā	tā	ku	tā	tā	ku		
ghū	tā	tā	ghū	ghū	tā	tā	o	tā	khu	nā	tā	khu	tā	tā	tā
								tā	tā	khu	tā	tā	ku		
tā	ghū	nā	ta	di	ghū	nā	ta								
			li				li								
				ghū	nā	kha	tā	tā	khu	nā	tā	tā	o	o	o
								tā	tā	kha		jhī			

With the exception of the encircled section the two pieces are almost identical in structure. The tempo, however, differs considerably. The Baḍikhel group plays at about half the speed of most of the Bhaktapur groups. Though only the tailpieces of the two invocations have been transcribed here, the similarities are so striking, that one can say that both the versions must have evolved from the same source. The Bhaktapur version of the complete invocation certainly is more elegant and convincing from the structural point of view. It would be too early to decide which is the older and which is the modified one. Only a comparative study of the *dhimay* repertoire of various Newar settlements could answer this question. At the first glance, the Baḍikhel repertoire appears to be far more archaic than

the Bhaktapur pieces which reveal a richer variety of patterns and more advanced structural forms.

However, if we accept the above conclusions about the origin of the *bājā guthi* of Baḍikhel, we can state that as early as the seventh century AD *dhimaybājā* had already acquired its function as a ritual drumming ensemble among the Newar. No doubt, in those days Lembaṭi *draṅga* must have had a variety of musical traditions, of which the Badikhel *dhimaybājā* is the sole survivor.

## Note

1 See Wegner 1986

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PART 7

**PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY**

# **Kālī Worship Among the Santals of Nepal: Hinduization and Ethnic Boundaries**

**Anne Buggeland**

The Santals<sup>1</sup>, who constitute the largest tribal community in India, belong to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic group. They live in small communities scattered over an enormous area from Orissa to Nepal, from Bihar to the Sylhet district in Bangladesh. They reproduce their distinct cultural features throughout this area, even though they neither have a Santal-wide political nor ritual organization, nor a holy scripture to relate to.

The well known Indian anthropologist Surajit Sinha (1978:125) once asked: 'Why are the Santals so many' ? This question arises from the fact that there are scattered communities of Santals in many places in small pockets among different kinds of majority groups (e.g. Hindus of different kinds, Muslims in Bangladesh). As 'the others' whom the Santals confront are very different, one would expect cultural differentiation to emerge among the Santals. This, of course, also happens, but the striking thing is rather the similarity among Santals in the different pockets (Haaland 1991). I am concerned with *processes* affecting this similarity.

Many tribal groups in India have become caste-Hindus, either through the process of Sanskritization and/or Rajputization. Why haven't the Santals? They have always lived among caste-Hindus and cannot be understood separately, but only in interaction with this tradition. They do have ideas and practices that are exclusively Santal, but they also share a vast amount of ideas, symbols and practices with caste-Hindus and other tribal groups. The Santals' identity maintenance can therefore not be fully explained by either their distinct language or by various cultural or social factors leading to interaction boundaries. I shall try to throw some light on processes involved in the maintenance of Santal identity by some case material related to the worship of Kālī, a goddess worshipped all over South Asia. What does the Santals' Kālī-worship imply? Is it an indication of Hinduization? By exploring the Santals concept of Kālī, I shall argue that Santals understand her differently from caste-Hindus, as they incorporate her into their own cosmology. Instead of weakening the distinct Santal identity, their Kālī worship actually serves to underpin their unique identity. Perhaps the surprising uniformity of Santal culture might be partly understood by this ability to 'translate' symbols and practices of the majority groups into their own cosmology?

The meaning of Kālī is not embedded in Kālī herself. To understand the meaning we have to refer to the persons who employ the symbol and to the context where it is used. To understand Santal Kālī worship I therefore find it necessary to explore Santal-cosmology and see how this is made relevant for the way Santals experience and interpret this goddess. But before this, let me give a short introduction to the Santals in Nepal.

### **Santals of Nepal**

My case refers to the Jhapa district in Nepal where I did fieldwork in a Santal village for eight months in 1991/92. According to the Census report of 1981 there are about 24,000 Santals/Satars living in the eastern Tarai, in Jhapa and Morang districts. There was continuous immigration of Santals into this area from around 1870 until about 1960. Though a few succeeded in buying land, as late-comers to the area the majority of Santals had no choice but to cultivate the land of established owners, such as Rajbansi<sup>2</sup>, hill-dwelling absentee landlords, army men, or Indian businessmen. The Land Reform Act of 1964 secured the rights of these tenants so that they became permanent occupants (Dahal 1983:10). Furthermore, should the tenancy arrangement be terminated the tenants could claim 25% of the land they had cultivated. But when people from the hills, mainly Brahmans, Chhetris, Rais and Limbus, began to settle in this part of the Tarai about 25 years ago, land became scarce. Due to precarious citizenship and the hill people's method of giving 'drink and credit', many Santals lost their own land and also the land they expected to get according to the Land Reform Act.

Today most of them are landless. Their villages are reduced to settlements of less than ten houses, and many have moved to India. Still, in each Santal village there is a Mañjhi (headman), a priest and a messenger. These have their specific assignments in seasonal festivals and life-cycle rituals. They also act as the village representatives in marriage negotiations and inter-village dispute settlements. The hearing of internal disputes and decision-making is done by the village council where all men in the village attend and decisions are made by consensus.

Besides their village organization, their marriage regulations are also a factor strengthening their internal solidarity. They are divided into twelve clans, each differentiated by name: Hembrom, Kisku, Hāsdaḳ, etc. These clans are not territorially based, but because those with the same name are considered 'brothers' and 'sisters' the clans are strictly exogamous. There is also a strong preference for village exogamy. These two forms of exogamy ensure a wide dispersion of Santals through the proliferation of family networks, both within the region and across the border into India. The Santals in Nepal are therefore not an isolated group, but through

family bonds and labour migration they maintain close contact with Santals in India.

Santals live in a world inhabited by all kinds of spirits (*boṅga*). The *boṅga* cosmology is expressed and indoctrinated in a wide set of life-cycle and seasonal rituals. In the middle of the village is a Mañjhi *than*, a shrine for the Mañjhi *haram*, the old headman. Some say it is the spirit of the first headman of the village, others that it is the spirit of the original Santal headman, or even of the first man. But all are agreed that Mañjhi *haram* is now the head of the village *boṅga* community. Just at the outskirts of the village there is a sacred grove, Jaher *than*, where the headman, on behalf of the villagers, sacrifices to the village *boṅga*. These *boṅga*, Jaher era, Marañ Buru and Mōṛēko turuiko are common to all Santals.

Each family worships both its own family and its lineage *boṅga*. The father of the house sacrifices to these *boṅga* alone inside their house at the great harvest festival called Sohrae. The father might also sacrifice to other *boṅga* or Hindu deities.

### **Santals concept of goddess Kālī**

In Hindu iconography Kālī is portrayed with the most frightening appearance. She is black and wears a garland of human heads, earrings of infant corpses, and snakes around her neck. Her tongue is smeared with blood. By her wild and destructive behaviour she threatens cosmic stability, and only Śiva is able to calm her down. Usually she is without a male consort, but when she is, she is the wife of Śiva. She is also sometimes described as the fierce aspect of other goddesses, such as Sītā or Pārvatī (Kinsley 1988:116). Kālī is the most popular goddess in Bengal, and her influence extends to the eastern part of Nepal.

The Santals in Jhapa are aware that Kālī is of Hindu-origin, and many would stress that they actually don't need to give her offerings. When I asked directly who Kālī is, it was also generally recognised that she is the sister of the other Hindu goddesses: Devī (Durgā), Manasā (Bisahari), Lukhi (Lax̄smi) and Saraswatī. One old village priest could give more background information:

Anthropologist: 'Who are Kālī, Devī and Manasā ?'

Santal: 'They came after the fight between Rāma and Rāvaṇa (giant). They are the successors of Rāvaṇa who brought them to India from Lanka to have them worshipped here. They went to *diku*-side (Hindu side) to be worshipped by Hindus. They are in the village where Marañ Buru took them into the *boṅga* community. Marañ Buru is the boss; he can command them. They make disturbances, but Santals don't need to sacrifice to them. But nowadays many Santals give them offerings.'

To Santals Kālī is a *boṅga* like all other *boṅga*. They don't seem to see any significant difference between their Santal specific *boṅga* and the Hindu gods and goddesses, which they also call *boṅga*. They used to say: 'We (Santals and other castes/tribes) have the same *boṅga*, but we worship differently'. The most striking difference in their way of worship is that the Santals don't use images, neither pictures nor statues. They clean a fixed spot on the ground and worship by pouring water or rice beer, smearing vermilion and sacrificing pigeons, hens, or bananas and sweets. The villagers also stressed that they didn't need any other castes, and especially not the Brahmans, to worship. 'We don't need Brahmans, we do the worshipping ourselves'.

In Jhapa very few hill people worship Kālī. Where I stayed it was the Rajbansis who organized the Kālī festival (*mela*) by the Kālī temple once a year, usually in October. Santals would attend the festival, but mostly they would sacrifice at home and not by the temple.

### Kālī *boṅga* cases

Why do Santals sacrifice to Kālī? In the following I will present different explanations given by the villagers.

The villagers have to sacrifice to the *boṅga* who inhabit the area which the villagers own around the village. Kālī may be in this area and so may Devī, but she is usually not in the Santals' area. Just at the outskirts of the village area there may be Jungle-*boṅga*, Tiger-*boṅga* and many others.

The villagers enjoyed telling the story of how they discovered that they had Kālī-*boṅga* in the area. The story says that the wife of a barber once, by accident, defecated in Kālī's place. So naturally Kālī became very angry. The woman's eyes rolled, her tongue came out (like Kālī), and she fell unconscious. The Mañjhi was brought to the place where she fell. He gave offerings and she became well again. After that they placed a stick in the ground where this had happened, as a shrine, and every year when it is time for Kālī worship, the Mañjhi sacrifices to her.

When a *boṅga* is in the area it might be considered to be the real landowner. This part of an interview with the Mañjhi's brother is illustrative:

S: 'If a *boṅga* is a *malik*, owner, of an area and you don't sacrifice to it, then it will become angry. In this area we have to give to Kālī. There is a shrine beside the pond. And the Rajbansis beside the bamboo plantation have Devī (Durgā) as *boṅga*, so they give (sacrifice) in Durgā worship. Once in a neighbouring village there were Santals who cultivated the land of a Paharia (one from the hillside). They asked the Paharia for money to buy pigeons and ducks. The Paharia said: "What will you do?" They replied: "Oh, there is a *boṅga* in the area. We have to satisfy him".

He said: "Where is the *boṅga*? Show me, I want to see it". But where will you show him a *boṅga*? It was during Kālī festival ten years back when there was jungle all around. The Paharia refused to give them money. One day he went on horseback through the jungle to see if his paddy fields were about to ripen. While returning he was caught by a tiger and carried into the jungle. The horse managed to escape and it reached Rajbansitola. There they recognised it and they searched for the Paharia, but they found only his stick.'

A: 'Was it because he didn't give money to buy pigeons?'

S: 'Yes, and from then onwards the Paharias started believing in it. And Santals bought sweets and bananas and sacrificed and prayed "Let nothing happen to us", and so we were saved.'

A: 'How do you worship?'

S: 'We give offerings, like sweets, after washing. Suppose here we are the owner of the land and there is another owner, that is a *boṅga* owner. So it is not just to neglect that *boṅga* owner, and that's why everyone makes sacrifices in their own area. People who cut the jungle also used to fall sick and were not able to fell the trees. So they sacrificed chicken, goat, hen or pig and then they were again able to cut the jungle'.

When there is a Kālī *boṅga* in the area the Mañjhi gives offerings on behalf of the village. 'You take something, or you get something, so naturally you have to give something back'. This transactional relation with the *boṅga* seems to form the basis of much of the seasonal worship connected with the agricultural cycle.

But the *boṅga* are also greedy and can therefore be manipulated. People can order them to harm other people. Below is a part of an interview with the Manasā-guru of the village:

A: 'Can any *boṅga* command other *boṅga*?'

S: 'No, they don't command each other. Yes, if someone asks a *boṅga* to cause harm to others, then the *boṅga* will eat. If the *boṅgas* would eat people by themselves then they would have eaten all the people. Like if we two are enemies, and I know something or I have a *boṅga*. Then I can call the *boṅga* and ask it to cause you harm and then you will fall sick and you may even die. That is how *boṅga* eat people. They don't eat people by themselves. If they would have eaten by themselves then no one would exist.'

A: 'And if you and I have the same *boṅga*, then?'

S: 'Then I'll ask another *boṅga* to cause you harm.'

A: 'Have you tried?'

S: 'Why should I cause harm to people? It's not good to bring harm to people.'

A: 'And if you tell the *boṅga* to cause harm and the *boṅga* refuses?'

S: 'If he gets offerings then surely he will do what I want. Like if you promise to give him a goat or a hen then surely the *boṅga* will do harm

to get offerings.’

This way the *boṅga* can bring illness and misfortune, but the real cause is that someone is manipulating the *boṅga*. This is usually attributed to women as witches.

Kālī can cause illness, but she can just as well be used for protection against sickness caused by other *boṅga*. The Mañjhi had Kālī as his tutelary *boṅga*, not to do harm, but because he had got it from his father. His father had probably once given a promise to Kālī in order to get well from sickness. ‘You make a promise to a *boṅga* that if you get well then you will give him offerings. That *boṅga* will then stop the *boṅga* who is harming you’.

To prevent misfortune occurring I therefore thought it would be smart to have a powerful *boṅga* like Kālī or maybe many *boṅga*. But the problem is that the *boṅga* will expect offerings again. Our neighbour explained: ‘When you are poor, how can you have many *boṅga*? It's time for Kālī worship and you can not afford to sacrifice. Then you fall sick and the *ohja* tells you; ‘that is because you didn't sacrifice’.

Kālī demands blood-sacrifice, like pigeons or a goat, and this is expensive for landless people. Manasā is a smaller *boṅga*, but as she only demands bananas and sweets, she is a popular goddess among the landless.

The Mañjhi used to be a very wealthy man, and maybe being a Kālī worshipper has added to his prestige. Today he is poor, but still he would defend his sacrifices to Kālī: ‘If I don't give to Kālī the whole village will be struck by misfortune’.

Once a year household heads feed their lineage and house *boṅga*. People were reluctant to tell which additional *boṅga* they gave offerings to, but it is my impression that it is not that common to give to Kālī or Manasā.

Though most people did not offer to Kālī, the *ohja* (healer) would generally have either Kālī or Manasā as their personal *boṅga*. In times of sickness (maybe to avoid having another *boṅga* to feed), people would call for an *ohja* to come. Through ritual he can see if and which *boṅga* is causing the illness. Then the ill person has to give the *ohja* what he needs for offerings, like pigeons or hens. The *ohja* then gives offerings to his own *boṅga* so that they will stop the *boṅga* who is causing the illness. The *ohja* therefore need very powerful *boṅga*.

In the neighbouring Santal villages nearly all the old men work as *ohja*. Beside healing they will pass on their sacred knowledge in their own villages. Every year, before the great festival Dasaī, they spend the nights teaching the young men mantras, songs and also some jungle medicine. Santals are known for their great knowledge of plants for medicine, but in

Nepal, unfortunately, much of this knowledge has been lost. To become an *ohja* it is necessary to learn the mantras by heart. But as the mantras don't work alone, the *ohja* also needs the help of a *boṅga*. The usual definition of a mantra is a sacred formula that when recited correctly has an effect in itself. But Santals think differently about it. A *boṅga* does not have to obey the mantra. It's not the mantra-knowing *ohja* that *boṅga* must obey, but the *ohja* acting as a representative of certain *boṅga*. This *boṅga*, whose name is secret, the *ohja* gets from his teacher (*guru*) when he is initiated into his position (Bodding 1925). As well as these secret *boṅga*, the *ohja* use either Kālī or Manasa.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

I suggest that one of the factors underlying the surprising uniformity among the Santals which Sinha referred to has to be sought in the specific ways Santals incorporate symbols and ideas (e.g. Kālī) from other cultural traditions in their *boṅga* cosmology.

Santals worship Hindu deities and attend the great Hindu festivals. I have presented cases to show how they talk of goddess Kālī as a *boṅga* and sacrifice to her the same way and with the same intention as they sacrifice to other *boṅga*. As symbols and activities originating in the Hindu tradition seem to have a different meaning to Santals than to caste-Hindus, the use of these among the Santals should not necessarily be taken to indicate Hinduization, but be considered as a part of the Santal cosmology. So overt similarity in symbolic forms does not necessarily imply shared cultural meaning. The interconnection between little traditions and great tradition is thus complicated. Though elements from the Hindu great tradition are clearly made use of as vehicles of symbolic expression, the content of these vehicles nevertheless are filled with meaning from the Santal-specific tradition.

### Notes

1 Santals are in Nepal known by the name Satar, but in this article I have used the term Santal, because this is the name they are generally known by. Many Santals in Nepal stressed that they are Santals and corrected me if I called them Satars.

2 Tarai ethnographers usually distinguish between three groups; indigenous people, Madesies and Paharias. The Satar/Santals are usually grouped together with Tharus, Dhimal, Meche and Rajbansis in the category of indigenous people. Madesies, which actually means lowlander, refers to immigrants from India. Paharias are the people from the hills who have settled in the Tarai as a result of the Paharization-policy in Nepal.



3 I was surprised to find how similar the Santal communities in Nepal are to Santal communities in India, both those I visited myself (in Bihar) and those I know through literature (see e.g. Orans 1965). For studies of the *bohga* cosmology, see Bodding (1925), and for Kālī worship in Bengal, see Carrin-Bouez (1990–47).

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# **The Case of the Missing Trekker: Moral Geography and Miraculous Survival. And Rodney King <sup>1</sup>**

**Sharon Hepburn**

This story is about identity, so I'll start by clarifying my own. The conference program lists my name along with the note 'USA'. Does that indicate where I'm from, or does it point to what I am; does it indicate that I'm from America, or that I am an American? I did indeed once live in the USA for three years. But the government of that country called me a resident alien, which is all I could be as I have citizenship of Canada, Great Britain, and Ireland. So although it's true that I'm presently attached to an American university, am I 'from America'? Doubtful.

But am I 'American'? Well, maybe I am. As I walk down the street in Kathmandu, I hear children call out 'am-ri-can', and adults often call me this too. In England, also, I'm often called an American, and my objections that I'm Canadian, and even English for Heaven's sake, are dismissed both because of my accent, and because of the belief, commonly held by most people outside Canada, that Canadians and Americans are just the same. So I'm certainly called an American; so maybe I am one. But my American identity doesn't end there. Beyond my resident alien identity, I have another identity: I am a white. Arriving back in Seattle in the USA last summer, on the way to Canada—and consciously feeling very glad to temporarily cast off my am-ri-can identity—I was sitting outside a shop and two male persons 'of colour' came by and said: 'Hey white girl, hey whitey. Bit pale aren't you? Better get out in the sun a bit'. I didn't reply; we peace-loving Canadians know how dangerous Americans can be.

So I'm an am-ri-can here in Nepal, and a whitey American in the USA. Had I been in Los Angeles last spring, because I am this thing that I am called, because I am 'whitey', some people might have felt justified in putting a bullet in me, or might have felt justified in dragging me from a truck and smashing my skull. But I'm getting ahead in my story here. So as for my identity, let's say, O.K., in some contexts I am an American, because that is what I am called.

Having clarified my identity, now on to the other two main characters in this story, Rodney King and James Scott, two people who miraculously survived in two different moral landscapes.

First, Rodney King.

Rodney King lives in Los Angeles. He is identified by many people as a black, or as a person of colour. In 1991, King was brutally beaten—or

justifiably restrained, depending on your point of view—by four policemen, who some people would call whites. This was video taped by a hidden observer and this recording became the main evidence in the eventual trial, in which four policemen were accused of beating and otherwise mistreating King; they were judged by a jury of twelve people called whites. The video showed King being kicked and receiving 56 blows with night-sticks. Some say he struggled; some say he passively submitted. The jury acquitted the police on all counts but one. This verdict prompted amazement, disbelief, and a week of rioting, looting, arson, and violence in Los Angeles and some other American cities.

The third and main character in this story—and now we begin it—is James Scott. He is an Australian tourist who went missing in Helambhu, north of Kathmandu, in December 1992; he was found, 42 days later, alive but almost dead.

The details of Scott's story as he told it, to whom he told it, and for how much money, and the question of whether that version is true or a hoax, are not what I'm going to talk about. While Scott's story as he told it was in the making, people were telling stories about him. During the search they were telling stories about what could have happened to him; later, after the rescue, they told stories about how he actually managed to survive. The story-tellers are people in and from Helambhu, and people living, as I was, in Kathmandu. There will be nothing surprising in these stories. They are stories we all hear everyday, whether we're living in Brisbane, Australia (as Scott is now), in the USA, Europe, or in Nepal. These are stories about difference and morality. They are about drawing lines between different kinds of people; between ourselves and those people we call strangers down the road. And they are about making moral judgments based on these distinctions. What is striking—and not surprising—is that morality is shifting, and is relative to who is speaking and to how they situate themselves with respect to others in the local moral geography. It is also not surprising that the epicenter of morality always seems to be just where the story-teller, ethnically speaking, is standing.

So what did happen to Scott, according to the account he himself gave, which appeared in the international press?<sup>2</sup> Scott and Tim Hooper, another Australian medical student, were waiting to begin a training post in a Kathmandu hospital, and decided to set off on a trek to Helambhu. On the way they met some Germans who told them that the Helambhu trek was a 'grandfather trek', especially compared to where they had come from, which was the Gosainkunda Lakes. Taken by the idea of greater adventure, Scott set off upwards towards Gosainkunda with Mark, another Australian he had met on the trail, while his classmate turned back due to problems with his leg. Scott and his companion walked upwards to

Ghopte, a small cluster of tea houses at the base of the final ascent to the pass. They spent the night there, and woke up to find a dusting of snow on the ground. This gave them pause to consider the sense in continuing, but they decided to keep ascending regardless. Conditions deteriorated, the sky became overcast, snow came down heavily, and visibility was severely reduced. Mark decided to continue, but Scott decided to retreat to safer ground. And that was when his trouble began. The track was now covered with snow and he wandered down the wrong side of a creek. Finally he came upon vegetation and took this as a sign that he had reached lower terrain; full of hope, he continued to bushwhack, eventually descended a gully, climbed a rock face, and repeatedly went forward because he couldn't retreat. Eventually he reached a waterfall he couldn't cross and because there was no means of retreat, he found a rock under which he lived for the next six weeks. That's how he went missing.

How did he survive? According to the newspaper account, the practical steps he took to stay alive were to keep himself dry (thereby warding off hypothermia and frostbite), eat his remaining food (two chocolate bars), and melt snow for water. He eventually lost 56 pounds; nevertheless, because of his high level of fitness, and effort, and hope, he survived.

But I heard quite different accounts in Kathmandu that winter, and then later, in Helambhu, after Scott was found. Many of these are dependent on the story-teller's perception of ethnicity in Helambhu, which I'll now describe. Helambhu is a small area on the southern slopes of the main Himalayan range. The area is divided by ridges and rivers. At the top of the ridges are people who are culturally related to the northerly dwelling people of Nepal and Tibet. Further down the ridges are people—here mostly called Tamang—who, like many people living in the middle-hills throughout Nepal, have varying degrees of affinity to the Tibetan Buddhist north and to the Hindu south; in Helambhu this means, respectively, the Buddhist ridges, and the predominantly Hindu (Brahmin, Chetri, and Newar) valley bottoms and bazaars.

At the top of the ridges people call themselves Sherpa, Helambhu Sherpa, 'pure' Sherpa (claiming a relationship to Solu-Khumbhu Sherpas), Lama, Lama-Tamang, Lama-Sherpa, or Yolmo. People on the slopes below the ridges are more likely to refer to themselves and be called by the name Tamang. However, as Graham Clarke (1980a:26; 1980b) says, in describing the Helambhu of the mid-1970s, 'one group's Tamang is another group's Lama', and he describes the contextuality of these ethnic labels. Clarke also points out that the upper and middle-dwelling peoples ascribe morality according to a combination of 'lamaness', wealth and altitude, such that morality usually resides in your group and all the people who live higher than you. This pattern holds true today, as we shall see.

But there is another pattern of relevance to my story that Clarke doesn't describe, and that requires flipping the whole moral geography upside down and looking at it from the viewpoint of the Brahmin, Chetri and Newar valley dwellers. For them, as we shall see, morality is clearly in the valleys, not up on the ridges.

Around the time Scott went missing, I was planning a fieldtrip to Helambhu and discussing possible itineraries with people in Kathmandu. The subject of James Scott invariably came up and as people talked about what might have happened to him, they punctuated their musings with advice and warnings about where I should and shouldn't go. In almost all cases, the explanations and advice were based on the speaker's perception of the ethnic landscape, and their moral evaluation of the people living in it, whether or not they had actually been to Helambhu. Not surprisingly, that perception had a strong relationship to the ethnicity of the speaker.

Let's start with the people related to those who live at the bottom of the valleys; that is, the Brahmins, Chetris, and Newars. 'Look', they told me, 'don't go to Helambhu. Just a lot of Bhotes<sup>3</sup> up there. Look what happened to that tourist.' 'What happened?' I asked. 'Lots of Bhotes up there; they lie and cheat and probably got him. Lots of thieves up there and they know Tourists<sup>4</sup> have lots of money. Probably someone up there tricked him, maybe a lodge-owner; all lodges are run by Bhotes up there. Those wild men! Maybe they led him off the path; they probably offered to show him a short cut and then out with the knife!!!' Stories from Brahmins, Chetris, and Newars, tended to be of this kind, with very few suggesting anything close to what actually did happen. Very few people warned 'be careful if you go, it's dangerous, you might fall off a cliff, you might lose your way, and you might get lost in the snow like that Australian boy'.

This evaluation by the Brahmins, Chetris, and Newars, of the dangerous nature of the people, as opposed to the dangerous nature of the terrain, carried into friendly advice about the route I should take: 'This side of the Śiva Puri'—a ridge on the northern rim of the Kathmandu Valley, which can be crossed as a route into Helambhu—'is fine, just some Brahmin villages; nothing will happen to you there', they assured me. 'But on the other side, there's Bhotes who come down into the jungle, and many people have been attacked and robbed there. Never walk alone there, and take a good safe guide with you'. We can all guess the caste/ethnicity of the kind of guide these people had in mind. Newar stories tended to be along the same lines as these, with the ammendum that I should watch out in those Brahmin villages as the people there were bound to be sly and cunning (*calākh*).

Moving now to the tops of the ridges, in terms of the ethnic affiliation of the story-teller, the general pattern described by Clarke holds true. From

the point of view of people classifying themselves with the people on the ridges, morality is thick at the top and thins out as you come down the mountain. Although Clarke doesn't include the Hindus in his description, looking from the top of the ridge, morality hits rock bottom at the valley bottom. From the point of view of all the people called some version of Lama-Sherpa-Tamang-Yolmo-Bhote, aside from Śiva Puri—the Brahmin side of Śiva Puri, that is—you're relatively safe in Helambhu. Relatively. And the degree of relative safety depends, again, on who you're talking to. And here the contextuality of identity becomes important. A man from a 'pure' Sherpa village—that is, one who considers that his village is next door kin to Solu-Khumbu Sherpas—suggested that I head straight for his village, because the rest would not be interesting: 'Just a lot of Nepali villages', he said. But in doing so he was pointing on the map to what would usually be called Tamang and Sherpa villages. This man thought that Scott may have been tricked 'by Nepalis'. His moral geography divided his village from Helambhu, and put it in a category with people—morally superior people—to the north, and separated it from what he called 'the Nepalis', which included all the other Helambhu people.

The people who called themselves Helambhu Sherpas, or Lama people, did indeed see themselves as the local repositories of moral value. It was safe for me to walk up on the ridges in Helambhu, they said, because 'nothing will happen to you up there. There's only Sherpas living up there, and Sherpas don't steal and won't hurt you'. And it was story-tellers most closely linked ethnically with the people on the ridges who most often hypothesized about Scott's possible physical misfortune. One man, a lodge owner who called himself Helambhu Sherpa, summed it up after Scott was found: 'How many stories there were! Some said he fell off a cliff; some said he fell in a river; some say he went up over the pass and got lost in the snow'. I never heard anyone up on the ridges or related ethnically to that area suggest that 'those Bhotes probably got him'; neither did they seem to consider the possibility that 'one of us Sherpas might have got him'.

What of the people called Tamang? These people are caught in the middle of both scales of moral value. They are Bhotes to the people down and south, and a morally inferior group to the people up and north. My own quest on this trip was to find Tamang *thangka* (religious scroll) painters and peoples' reactions on hearing my plans clearly show these opposing attitudes towards these people in the middle. Sherpas warned that the Tamang would steal from me and lie to me, and 'where would you stay?!' they asked with concern. 'And besides which,' they pointed out with (mistaken) certainty, 'Tamang can't paint'. People on the Brahmin-Chetri-Newar end of the spectrum mostly had the attitude that 'well, if it's your job, you'll have to do it'. However, when it came to talking about

what happened to Scott, the people called Tamang themselves closed ranks with the people up the hill, considering mostly the possibility of physical misfortune.

What did the Tourists think? Many favoured a kind of explanation in which Scott 'probably got lost and fell off a cliff or something'. Many talked of 'shepherd huts' where he may have been taken or given shelter. Nepalis sometimes suggested this possibility, with varying degrees of confidence in the likelihood of surviving such a fate; this depends, of course, on who was talking, and who else they thought might be in the hut. Most tourists also allowed that Scott may have been robbed or murdered, but not a single person suggested the caste or ethnicity of the possible attacker. If anything, tourists seemed to think that because he was in a 'Tibetan' area, anyone who came across him would surely help him. One even suggested that he might have found a 'Tibetan shaman', and was apprenticing 'like Carlos Castenadas, lucky guy'. Nobody ever suggested that another tourist might have hurt Scott. Maybe, like everyone else in Helambhu, they considered that we tourists are safest among our own people.

How did Scott survive 42 days without food in freezing temperatures? Stories to account for this miraculous survival were often prefaced by a statement of wonder such as 'we would have died', or 'within a day our flesh would be eaten by the ice, or the cold'. Such statements recognize the extraordinariness of the survival; they also—because they are cast in terms of 'us' and 'we', as opposed to 'him'—imply some essential difference between Nepalis and Tourists. The Nepali man who first contacted Scott said 'James Scott, you are a god'. He may have thought Scott was a god. He may have thought Scott had the power and strength of a god. We don't know: however, this posited connection between Scott and anything to do with *dharma*, or religion, or the supernatural, was rare; in fact, such a connection was argued against. For example, some people made an exception to the 'we would have died' maxim, by citing the case of *sadhus* (Hindu ascetics) who regularly walk over the pass in rags, and barefoot, and survive precisely because they are *sadhus*.<sup>4</sup> But they did not in general attribute Scott's survival to anything of the sort: *sadhus* and Tourists are different. One woman did suggest that Scott was divinely strengthened or protected. She told me that he probably was praying to, or rather performing rites for, the god of the Gosainkund range, and so had his protection; furthermore, although she didn't get the facts quite right, she said that Scott had just been over the pass and had performed the appropriate ritual observances and taken *darshan* (the viewing of the deity which brings positive consequences), and so had the protection gained in that way. Her speculation was quickly overridden by a porter who told

her—this woman who had served tourists for 15 years—a few things about Tourists. The porter's principle point was that 'no, Tourists don't go to take *darshan*, they go to take pictures'. 'Just pictures! Why', she asked, 'go all that way, and eat all that *du:kha*(suffering), if not to take *darshan*?' No, they just take pictures', he assured her. An ex-Indian army officer offered that 'maybe he was practicing his own Christian *dharma*, and he described how he'd seen Christian churches in India, of many kinds, where some lit lamps and burnt incense and some did not. 'No lamps', she said scornfully and dismissively, 'what kind of *dharma* is that?' And that was the end of that. No-one else suggested *dharma* as the means of Scott's survival.

A Nepali would probably die in such conditions and if a Nepali did survive it could be attributed to *dharma*, and to supernatural power and protection. A Tourist might survive, but, from the viewpoint of many Nepalis, a Tourist would not have access to divine help.

Whereas a Nepali's special strength might come from *dharma*—which Tourists don't have—where does the Tourists' special strength come from, that might make a Tourist like a god, but which Nepalis don't have access to?

Not surprisingly, given the wide-spread linguistic and cultural preoccupation here in Nepal with people eating and being eaten, our strength comes from special things we eat. While the flesh of both Tourists and Nepalis can be eaten by the snow or eaten by the ice, and both Tourists and Nepalis can 'eat' a whole lot of suffering in such situations, the Tourist can literally, and very effectively, eat back. What we can eat back with are things of *bikās* (development, progress). In common usage, the label 'Tourist' in Nepal does not mean what it does in western countries. There, a tourist is someone who has other primary, more lasting identities, who goes on vacation and temporarily assumes the role 'tourist'. In Nepal, the term 'Tourist' comes closer to identifying a kind of person rather than a role; the term is most commonly used to indicate 'white person from a developed country', and so refers to embassy personnel, aid agency workers, people on vacation, and even anthropologists, and semantically encompasses the notion of *bikās*. Scott also was a special kind of Tourist in that he was, and was widely known to be, a medical student.

The special foods which people thought Scott had with him, that he could eat back with, were associated with *bikās*. They were thought of as things that Tourists usually have access to because they are white people from developed countries; he was also thought to have some specialized things which Tourist doctors have access to. The specialized things many people suggested he had were 'special medicines' and 'special injections',



'because he is a doctor'. But these special doctor-related things were merely more powerful versions of the life sustaining potions we regular Tourists have. These potions fall into three categories. First, the special medicines. 'You all have them', a porter told me, 'for everything. Tourists all have medicines for everything: for diarrhea, muscle pain, cold and for when you have no food'. A tablet for everything; medicated survival. And reference was often made to the bags we carried, with all kinds of medicine, for very different things. As one man said, 'Tourists won't give us medicine and they say it's because they can't tell exactly what kind to use, so there are exact kinds of medicine for everything, including for when there's no food and when there's no heat'. The second category of consumables identified is 'vitamins'. Again, something we're all known to have and true, they do provide nutrients, but their efficacy was greatly exaggerated: 'You can go for weeks without food if you have these', was the consensus. One noted that 'Tourists don't even have to eat *dāl bhāt*', because of the strength of vitamins, a telling statement as *dāl bhāt*—lentils and rice—is the daily food of many Nepalis and the word 'rice' is often synonymous with the word 'food'. Third, many people didn't believe or hadn't heard about Scott's two chocolate bars, and they attribute his survival to his having stocked up on 'trekker's food'. Many seemed to make an association between trekker's food, the qualities of *bikās*, and the power of science; it's another variation on the 'special medicines' theme. Here, the food discussed was meusli: 'Oh, he probably had muesli with him,' suggested one. 'What's that?' asked another. 'They all eat it, they bring it with them, it's like *ciurā* (beaten rice, a popular snack) but has other things in it too, lots of different things, all mixed together. I don't know what they all are. All trekkers eat it'. And, again, that most telling comparison was made, the comparison with Nepali *dāl bhāt*: 'One small bowl is like three mountains of rice. Just on that they can walk.' 'Where can you get it?' 'Just in foreigners' stores, in Kathmandu. They don't sell it in Nepali stores'.

When Nepalis talk about how Scott went missing, his particular characteristics as a kind of person are not important; what is important is the kind of person who's talking and how they relate themselves to, and evaluate, people of other named ethnicities in Nepal. When some Nepalis, particularly those in Helambhu, talk about how Scott survived, it is his characteristics as a kind of person, a *bikāsit* person, a developed person, which are important. Instead of diversely comparing themselves to each other, in this context these Nepalis see themselves as similar, in opposition to something different, that is, to people from the developed world.

The opposition is clear: Nepalis have *dharma*, Tourists don't; Tourists have access to *bikās*, and the products of *bikās*, and Nepalis don't. This

sounds like the dichotomies of the enchanted versus disencharnted world. And I wonder, is there a Nepali translation of Weber circulating in the hills? But the dichotomies don't really hold up here, as they don't in 19th century Europe. Nepalis can easily believe in the power and efficacy of physical substance to overcome misfortune, and Tourists can believe in the power of the 'enchanted' world. Scott, as we know, didn't have any of these special foods or medicines, and he would certainly be as incredulous as you and I regarding the ability of any drug or vitamin alone to nourish him for 42 days. But what he may have had was faith, *dharma*, grace; put it how you wish. I say 'may' because I'm not sure: I haven't spoken to Scott. In the newspaper accounts, he tells how a vision of life he saw in a dream halted his eventual attempt to kill himself by not drinking. He and his sister both claim to have witnessed a miracle. On his return to Patan hospital he asked for a Bible and to have it read to him.<sup>5</sup> At his engagement party, which he describes as a wider celebration of his survival, as also an opportunity to thank all those who helped him, he says there will be ministers to pray, and he thanks people for their prayers because he knows it helps.

Still the dichotomy holds: Nepalis have *dharma* and no *bikās*, Tourists have no *dharma* and lots of *bikās*. An opposition is made; separation and difference. And, yet, this is based on relatively little information, much of it incorrect and misunderstood. How many of these people have talked to Tourists, after all? And, I wonder, how much do the people called Lama know about the people called Brahmin and vice versa? Obviously some things are different, but, to be specific, on what basis or knowledge does someone claim that someone they call Tamang is more likely to kill a Tourist than someone they call a Newar is?

Conceptually separating people, assuming differences between groups and homogeneity within groups, and evaluating those differences in moral terms is ubiquitous world-wide. And, because we move through and to new moral landscapes, what we are called, by people who may never have spoken to us, and how we are judged, changes. Whatever else we might be, we have an identity in what we are called; this identity changes, or is changed for us, without our doing anything, and even sometimes without our knowing it. Just as we actively construct the social-moral geography around us, so we, too, fit into geographies that other people construct.

While in the Helambhu landscape, Scott was, for the people around him, a Tourist. He was something different from them, and a symbol of the perceived characteristics of the developed, modern world. That was the identity they gave to him. But he was found, removed from Helambhu, spent a short time in Patan hospital, and was then moved through Bangkok to Australia. Along the way, as he moved through and to different moral

landscapes, his identity changed from James Scott, 'Tourist' and all that implies, to James Scott, 'brother' and 'survivor', James Scott, 'medical student', James Scott, 'fiance', and even James Scott, 'the iceman'.

One identity, James Scott 'the fraud', emerged while he was a patient in Patan Hospital, and, I believe—based on recent conversations with 'Tourist' informants from Australia—this identity still persists. Nobody believes him, it seems, and here many Nepali and Australians are in concert in thinking about what kind of a person Scott is. While the people in Helambhu were talking about Scott as a Tourist who had access to the things of *bikās*, many Nepalis living in Kathmandu—a place of lots of *bikās*—were talking about Scott as a person who had planned the whole episode in order to make himself a fortune, as a person who cheated the Nepali media of the story, as a person who just wasn't very nice. Furthermore, sometimes I heard that he was a Tourist like all the others, that is, a Tourist who tried to cheat Nepalis: this time he was cheating them out of a story. The author of an item titled 'Scott the Stoic or James the Joker' in the February 19, 1992 edition of *The Rising Nepal* (the government owned daily English language paper), complains that the press wasn't given the story, and that Scott was '...scooted away home...through the backdoor of Patan Hospital...' without giving '...any digestible explanation for this endurance feat...' and neither did his '...frosty spokespersons'. The author facetiously suggests that Scott was found first by a 'svelte, sexy she-yeti', who 'kept him alive with yak meat and snug embrace', and then suggests that Scott might be keeping his tale quiet until he gets '...a hefty cheque from some tabloid Down Under.' As I've said, many people in Australia agree with this last suggestion.

The identity 'James Scott, the Fraud,' which began here by Nepalis feeling cheated by a foreigner, stayed with him as he moved into a different moral landscape, that of Australia. Having reached his homeland, it was no longer only, or even specifically, his characteristics as a resident of a developed country that mark him. Rather, it is the specific identities I've listed—brother, fraud, fiancé, iceman—along with more general identities such as those of class, race, and ethnicity, which mark him in this new moral-social-landscape.

James Scott was an Australian. For my narrative it would have been tidier had he been an American. So let's just pretend for a moment that he was. He could have been, and there are certainly many American tourists who travel through Helambhu. He could have been an American, and after his ordeal, he could have been returning to America last May, and he could have been flying to Los Angeles. And what would he have been then? James Scott...what? Part of your identity is what people who have never spoken to you call you. Scott's father is a professor of biology, his sister is

a veterinarian, he himself is a medical student, and the family owns a farm. And they are white. We can safely say he is a middle (or upper-middle) class, landed, professional white. A whitey, a white boy; maybe he's a bit pale and needs to get out in the sun a bit. And this, for some people in the new moral landscape he was entering, would have been his most important characteristic. As his plane flew into Los Angeles, amid the smoke of fires, no-one around would really be thinking of James Scott as a person who has access to muesli and vitamins. And many people, when he drove out into the night, would not think of him as someone's brother, someone's son, someone's fiancé. They would not think of him as someone who had just struggled to stay alive for 42 days without food, someone who had recently resisted the desire to suicide. Many would not think of him as someone who prayed and hoped for a future. For many he wouldn't have even been a fraud, or 'the iceman', or someone who might have been held in the snug embrace of a she-yeti. He would simply be called white by people who had never spoken to him and who had no knowledge of what else he might be, or what he might do, and who had no knowledge about what he, as a particular white, might think. And as he drove out into the night, simply being a person called white could have been seen by some others as just cause to shoot him, or maybe pull him from his car and smash his skull.

### **Optional ending**

So what was going on in the streets that night, and the next, and still now? Carving categories out of contexts, drawing difference and separation, assuming homogeneity, and evaluation: a moral geography in action.

And is this wisdom, or is this madness, or is this something we just have to do? Maybe we—we people called and/or calling ourselves Sherpa, Tamang, Brahmin, Tourist, American, Black, White, Newar, Madeshi, and even we people called Am-ri-can—should ask 'What are the lines that we are drawing every day, around other people, and are we wise or are we mad?' And, what we might be more motivated to consider, maybe we should ask 'What are the categories that other people are drawing around us every day, and are they wise or are they mad?' And when you all—all you other kinds of people out there—answer these questions, I hope that you are as wise, and as moral, as we Tourists surely would be.

### **Notes**

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2 The story as told by James Scott to Eric Bailey appeared in an British newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, among others. Unless otherwise noted, all details of what actually happened to Scott are taken from *The Daily Telegraph* editions of February 22 and 29, and March 7, 1992.

3 The term 'Bhote' is used both as an ethnic designation, and to imply uncleanness and impurity.

4. Throughout this essay I use 'tourist' when speaking from the western point of view, when the word comes closer to indicating a role. I use 'Tourist' when speaking in terms of the local category, when the word comes closer to indicating an ethnicity.

5 No-one talked about porters in that way, though they too walk over the high passes in rags and barefoot, and carry heavy loads besides.

6 This is the only piece of information about what really happened to Scott, that didn't come from the newspapers: but it is common knowledge among staff members in Patan Hospital.

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