

Epigraphy and Society in Ancient Nepal
A Critique of Regmi, 1983

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Cultural influence from the south must have (had) limited influence... The court and the upper strata of society must have been vulnerable to its approaches. But... the mass of humanity at the lower reaches... remained by and large animist.

Even today some aspects of the life of a section of the old settlers betray signs of animistic practices.

D.R.Regmi, *Ancient Nepal*, 1969:82

Dilli Raman Regmi (b. 1913) has been in the field of Nepalese history for some four decades. In 1942, he published a short paper on "Sources for a History of Nepal 880-1680," (*Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, Vol 28, pp. 31-36). In July 1983, the 3-volume *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal* was published. In between he had published *A Century of Family Autocracy in Nepal* (1950), *Ancient and Medieval Nepal* (1952), *Ancient Nepal* (1960), *Medieval Nepal Vols I-III* (1965), and *Medieval Nepal Vol IV* (1966), *Ancient Nepal* (1969), *Modern Nepal Vol I* (1975), and *Modern Nepal Vol II* (1975). By any standard, Regmi's corpus of published works is quite impressive, and the span of his coverage, extensive. Because he is almost alone among Nepali historians to publish in English he is rather like the 19th-century chronicle edited by Residency-Surgeon Daniel Wright--the only one familiar to the scholarly world outside Nepal. Even otherwise Regmi's achievements seem staggering in the volume of work accomplished, particularly because, as his publisher puts it, he has been "half in politics and half in scholarship". Had he devoted himself fully to the world of scholarship----"so much deeply rooted" as it is "in his genius", it would have been somewhat difficult to guess the volume of its output in the last 40 years.

Regmi's work as well as his reputation is imposing, covering all the three fields of Nepalese historiography--ancient, medieval, and modern Nepal. In the last 30 years, Regmi's work on ancient Nepal in particular has undergone three revisions. We have the 1952, the 1960, the 1969, and the latest 1983 version. One secure way to approach Regmi's work would seem to be to assess his latest, i.e., the most finished, product. At the same time, in the words of the publisher, his *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal* is "the latest attempt at compiling and editing of inscriptional source materials"--the most important source for the history of ancient Nepal.

Thus it is with some trepidation as well as unalloyed hope of unearthing the vintage Regmi that we have, in this detailed review article, decided to analyse his latest publication. As only three out of the projected four volumes have actually been published--the promised volume "exclusively devoted to socio-economic conditions of ancient Nepal" is not yet in sight even two and a half years later--the work remains hypothetically incomplete. We can, however, guess the shape of the things to come on the basis of the available three volumes.

Comentators on ancient inscriptions of Nepal have offered confusing interpretations reading much of their own meaning into the text of the inscriptions. A wholesome feature of this book is the stance Regmi has taken in his analysis and interpretation of certain inscriptions. For example, he refuses to identify the literal meaning of an inscription with its historical meaning:

I am not explaining the significance of the passages in terms of their literal meaning, which could be misleading from a historical point of view.
(Regmi, 1983:35)

The best examples of Regmi's critical stance are his analysis and interpretation of the panegyrics of Mānadeva I and Jayadeva II (Inscription Nos. I and CXLII). The analysis of Jayadeva II's panegyric, particularly its poetry, is a noteworthy example of the historian at his desk-work. Regmi comments

The inscription is so exaggerated that it amounts to gross falsification of historical truth (i.e., the offer of a silver lotus with eight petals to Paśupati by Jayadeva's mother Vatsadevi--KPM.).
(Regmi, 1983:237)

In course of the analysis of both the panegyrics, Regmi raises a number of important questions which are relevant to the study of the political history of ancient Nepal. The fact that a certain detail occurs in an inscription does not necessarily insure its historicity. Inscriptions are somewhat like the editorials in the *Gorkhāpatra*: they are *commissioned* to fulfil certain persuasive-communicative functions. They are the ancient versions of the presentday media. Regmi, therefore, attempts to verify every detail and refuses to take the claims of the composers of the inscriptions at their face value. At times he takes his approach to an *ad absurdum* limits, resulting in such embarrassingly naive commentary as the following:

Our inscriptions shower praise upon praise on Mānadeva for his munificence, his fatherly attitude to his subjects, his desire to serve the people with mercy and high sense of polity. But we do not know if Mānadeva or any other king could have abandoned autocratic feudal habits and behaviour to earn these epithets. By the very nature of institution the monarch becomes a dictator.
(Regmi, 1983: 35; 39:)

Regmi's contribution in this work lies in his attempt to study ancient inscriptions of Nepal in the light of Indian texts--contemporary Indian inscriptions in general and Indian classical *dharmasāstra* texts in particular. This is at once the strength as well as the major weakness of the work. In his discussion of the broad features of the inscriptions (pp. 2-6), he clearly brings out the common features among the Licchavi inscriptions of Nepal and the Indian inscriptions issued by the Guptas. Not only the script (later Brāhmī or Gupta), the language (classical Sanskrit), the idiom and diction (pious, florid and high-flown), but also several conventions and 'technical terminology' are common. Regmi also singles out some local features of Nepalese inscriptions (e.g., the absence of elaborate royal genealogies). Neither Vajrācārya's edition (1973) nor Joshi's edition (1974) brings out the broad general features of the inscriptions into such clear relief against the Indian context.

Regmi's backdrop of Indian epigraphy and classical texts is also one of the most misleading components of the work. The Nepalese historian of necessity needs to refer to these sources primarily for two purposes: 1. to trace the sources of the terms and concepts; 2. to define as precisely as possible the semantics of these items of epigraphic vocabulary. More often than not, Regmi is carried away by the course of his learned references to Indian epigraphy or classical texts. Topics which could have been briefly and precisely dealt with or defined in a one-sentence glossary or one passage commentary, preoccupies Regmi for five tightly printed quarto pages. Numerous so-called "technical terms" can be relegated to a concise glossary with a one-line definition. The greatest disappointment in this verbose and pedantic exercise of Regmi's tends to come when, after 5 pages of long-winded digression into Indian inscriptions and texts he does not add much to our understanding of the meaning or function of the particular term or terms in the Nepalese context. He finds himself a little helpless whenever he is faced with "technical terms" not available in the corpus of Indian epigraphy, and unfortunately there are dozens of such words in Nepalese epigraphy whose precise historical meaning is always debatable even though they are Sanskrit (e.g., *trikara*, *hiraṇya*, *bhūmi*, *mānika*, *draṅga*, *aṣṭādaśaprakṛti*).

We must, nevertheless, be grateful to Regmi for the facsimile plates of the inscriptions which have come out so clearly for the first time. Some of the plates are admirable in the quality of reproduction and legibility, whereas others are not as good, particularly because of the ratio of reduction in size. At any rate, the plates are decidedly better than Raniero Gnoli's *Nepalese Inscriptions in Gupta Characters* (Rome, 1956), or Hari Ram Joshi's edition (1974) in which few plates are usable. Regmi's plates clearly show two preponderant physical features of ancient inscriptions of Nepal. Most of the inscriptions are badly damaged--some deliberate acts and others due to wear and tear of time. Secondly, nearly half of the extant inscriptions are mere short and fragmentary pious deeds of grant. The remaining 70-80 inscriptions are, unfortunately, not evenly distributed in time. Because of their damaged and ill-preserved condition, the surviving inscriptions are not read uniformly by epigraphists. To give one brilliant example, take Regmi's inscription No CLX (Vol I: p.162). Gnoli read the date as 172 and the name of the

as Śivadeva; Vajrācārya read the date as 271 and the name of the king as Baladeva; Joshi merely copied Gnoli; Mohan Khanal (1984) reads the date as 172, but the name of the king as Śaṅkaradeva; Regmi reads the date as 271 but the name of the king as Baradeva !

Regmi has listed some of the variant readings from Bhagawānlāl Indrājī (1880), Cecil Bendall (1886), Sylvain Lévi (1908), Gnoli (1956), Vajrācārya (1973) and Joshi (1974). He repeatedly claims that he has improved upon the readings, commentary and translation by Vajrācārya. This claim needs to be verified by more competent authorities than this reviewer, particularly by epigraphists and Sanskritists who have been in the field for some time. But even a casual scrutiny of the first 17 inscriptions has revealed that Regmi's Sanskrit texts are studded with glaring errors, particularly in word-compounding and numerals and that his "Corrigenda and Addenda to Vol I" (pp. 187-190) represents just about 10% of the actual errors in the Devanāgarī transcription of Sanskrit text of the 17 inscriptions. Reviewing the book recently in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, a young Nepali scholar has commented that there are more than fifty mistakes in Regmi's transcription of Mānadeva I's Cāṅgu Inscription in Vol I, and that his English translation in Vol II does not appear to be from the original Sanskrit version. (G. Vajrācārya, 1985: 652-653).

Exactitude is a hallmark of sound scholarship, but unfortunately not of Regmi's so far. In a six-page Preface (p. v-x), he has given six publication-dates and details of the most well-known publications on ancient Nepalese history, and all of them are wrong. For example,

<u>Publication</u>	<u>Date according to Regmi</u>	<u>Correct Date</u>
Bhagawānlāl Indrājī	1888	1880
Lévi, Vol. III	1902	1908
Shastri Vol II	1906	1916
Gnoli	1958	1956
No. of Inscriptions in Gnoli	92	89
Vajrācārya	1977	1973

Regmi's documentation is a perfect mess so that with the help his "References" or "Bibliography" it is impossible to trace anything. Apart from the 4-page "Corrigenda and Addenda" to Vol I, 5-page "Corrigenda and Addenda" to Vol II, and 1-page "Addenda" to Vol III, there are white paints and pasted strips used on page 273 (Vol III). What finally shattered this reviewer is the four-page mimeographed "Supplement to the Vol III: Errata and Addenda," dated July 1, 1983, which begins with the following disclaimer:

The printing of the 3rd volume was handled throughout solely by the publisher and his proof reader in Delhi. Therefore, it is natural that some mistakes should occur here and there in the circumstances.

The supplement ends with

I have not gone through the book deeply and minutely...
But there might be many more errors.

Notwithstanding the alleged breakdown of communication between the author and the publisher, we must admire Regmi's intellectual stamina as well as his moral courage to publish a work such as *this* after forty years' devotion to the field of Nepalese history.

Regmi's Model and Approach

The errors of fact, style, idiom, and syntax are so extensive in the book that it would be a meaningless exercise (for anyone but Regmi) to discuss them here. The review will, therefore, ignore these trivialities and focus on Regmi's approach to epigraphic data. It is almost clear from his mimeographed "Supplement" that Regmi's work does not seem to have any conceptual framework other than the most rudimentary one of political chronology (i.e., the Age of X followed by the Age of Y, and the Restoration of Z, etc.). Consequently, Regmi--in his inscription-by-inscription analysis and interpretation of the total corpus of ancient Nepalese epigraphy--fails to see the wood for the trees. He follows the Vajrācārya (1973) model so closely that he takes the same or similar approach to the epigraphic data. As a result, no complete picture of the social, cultural, economic, and political system emerges; we see no trace of a society or culture in evolution or in the process of growth or change for four hundred years. No society or culture stays static for four centuries; at least, Licchavi records show that their's did not.

Regmi focuses on political history. In Licchavi records, it is not a fruitful focus because not much really happens in terms of war, conquest, or dynastic power struggles. What little political history of the Licchavi period we know is based on the Chinese and Tibetan sources. In the whole corpus of some 190 odd Sanskrit inscriptions there is not one single detail comparable to the notices on Nepal recorded in the T'ang Annals. In the directness of the representation of the datum of political history, there is nothing in Sanskrit inscriptions of Nepal which can compare with the following single line entry in the Tun-huang Annals for the year A.D. 641: (Bacot et al., 1946: 13)

bal po yu sna kug ti bkum na ri ba ba rgyal phor bchug

Nepal's Viṣṇugupta was killed [in the battle by]
Narendradeva [who was] proclaimed/chosen the King.

Or the following notices in the T'ang Annals about Narendradeva:

The father of Naling-ti-po was deposed (put to death-New T'ang Annals) by his younger brother (rebellious usurper-- New T'ang Annals); Naling-ti-po had to escape from his uncle. Tu'fan (Tibet) gave him refuge and re-established him on his throne; he became in consequence its vassal.

(Lévi, 1905:I:164-165)

Regmi follows the Vajrācārya-model so closely that even the sum-total of the sub-headings of the two books shows disturbing family resemblances. Yet Regmi's relations with Vajrācārya's work is one of "love-hate". He questions and criticises several elements of Vajrācārya's interpretation. A number of them are quite valid (e.g., on *aṣṭādaśaprakṛti*, on Aṃśuvarmā-Gupta relations). However, too often Regmi merely adopts polemical postures--referring to Vajrācārya as "one (*sic*) writer"--raising inconsequential questions. In his efforts to outdo Vajrācārya, Regmi goes on to refer to more Indian inscriptions or more Indian classical texts than Vajrācārya has done, trying to show relentlessly that Regmi is more learned in the Indian lore than Vajrācārya. The net result of this pursuit to outbid Vajrācārya in his own game, is that Regmi has produced an interpretation of ancient Nepalese society and culture which is more Hinduised, more Brahminical, more Sanskritic than any Brahminical history of the Āryāvarta itself ! Regmi's reading of Nepalese inscriptions is so India-centric that one often wonders whether he even remembers that he is reading Nepalese--and not Indian--inscriptions. The historian appears to forget the fundamental facts of Nepal's social history, i.e., even after the two millennia of Hindu penetration into the Himalayas, the foundations of Nepalese society are at least 27% tribal. Such a mistake can easily be committed by any scholar who is so thoroughly soaked in the Indian classical texts--as Regmi obviously seems to be. Or it can be made by those scholars who--by accident or by design--ignore current research on anthropology, sociology, and above all, on non-Indo-Aryan comparative linguistics. No one who is even remotely familiar with some of the work done on Nepal in the above fields would have ignored, as Regmi has done in this work, the social, cultural, and economic context of the epigraphic texts.

In this paper we focus on some of *the key issues* in the interpretation of the epigraphic data. To begin with, we would like to give a few preliminary details concerning the data as such. The total corpus of ancient Nepalese epigraphy consists of some 189 inscriptions in Sanskrit in Gupta characters--almost all inscribed on stone. They fall into five main categories: 1. Royal Eddicts--total 85, nearly half of them belonging to 31 years of Śivadeva-Aṃśuvarmā period (A.D. 590-621); 2. Short Inscriptions, consecrating cult-objects, water-conduits, wells and tanks--total 65; 3. Short Inscriptions with dates and/or names of the donors--total 34; 4. Verses in praise of given Hindu-Buddhist sects by their votaries--total 8; and 5. Panegyrics--total 2. Geographically, the inscriptions are concentrated in Kathmandu (44), Patan (19), Thānkoṭ-Balambū (19), Sānkhū (7), Bhaktapur (3), Tistūṅ-Citlāṅg (5), Pharpīṅg (3), Gorkhā (2), and one each in the following settlements outside the Valley: Lele, Nuwākoṭ, Kewalpur, Sāṅgā, Nālā, Banepā, Khopāsī, Palāñcoka, and Dumjā.

Chronology: Limited Data and Multiple Variables

Of the several issues of interpretation of the epigraphic data, the very first one is that of chronology - an issue which Regmi takes up in confusing sections on "the Astronomical Data in the Inscriptions" (pp. 22-23; pp. 265-270). To formulate the debatable issues in brief, there

are two sets of dates used in the inscriptions: the first set begins from an *unnamed* era year 386 and ends with 535. The second set begins from another *unnamed* era year 29 and ends with 301. By the general consensus of knowledgeable opinions the first set is assigned to Śaka Era (founded in A.D. 78) and the second set to Mānadeva Era (founded in A.D. 576). The problems of chronology are complicated by two main factors:

1. Limited nature of the data: out of the total 56 dated inscriptions in the Śaka era-set there are only 7 inscriptions with intercalated dates but none with the day of the week. Out of the total 54 dated inscriptions in the Mānadeva era-set there are only 3 inscriptions with intercalated dates, only two of them with the day of the week.
2. The intercalated months in all the 10 inscriptions are either Āṣāḍha or Pauṣa. In Hindu calendar there is a difference of more than 10 days between a solar year and a lunar year so that every 3 years there are 33 days' difference between the lunar and solar years. Intercalation is adding an extra month in the lunar year to adjust with the solar year so that seasonal festivals fall in appropriate seasons. However, there are at least 5 variables involved in the intercalated dates:
 - a. Whether the year began in the month of Caitra or in the month of Kārttika;--
 - b. Whether the lunar month began with the full moon (*āmānta*), or with the new moon (*pūrṇimānta*);
 - c. Whether the intercalated months were computed according to Sūrya Siddhānta, (revealed by Sūrya to Asura Māyā in Romaka (!) ca. AD 505 ?), or Brahma Siddhānta, (founded in AD 628), or Ārya Siddhānta (founded in AD 499).
 - d. If the Sūrya Siddhānta was the one in use, whether the calculations were according to the true (*spaṣṭa*), or the mean (*madhyama*) motions of the sun and the moon;
 - e. Whether the Nārada system or the Bhāradvāja system was followed; for Nārada the half years begin with the equinoxes and for Bhāradvāja with the solstices.

As far as current research has been able to determine, the calendar followed in ancient Nepal was *Kārttikādi āmānta*, i.e., the calendar year began with the month of Kārttika (ca. last week of October-first week of November), and the months ended with the new moon. Only two months were intercalated: Āṣāḍha and Pauṣa. According to Petech's [1984:13-20] latest findings based on meticulous computation of 45 intercalated dates from NS 132-574, the medieval calendar works neither with Nārada nor with Bhāradvāja system, but with a year beginning with *Mārgaśīrṣa*. Reckoning with *Agrahāyaṇa* for the purposes of intercalation is *not* followed in any of the historical eras current in India. Nepal has preferred to use local

eras at least twice--the Mānadeva Era and the Nepāla Era (founded on October 20, 879). There is so far no convincing cultural or political argument why Nepal's ruling elite should have used the pan-Indian Śaka Era in the first set of inscriptions.

The only *firm* dates of ancient Nepalese chronology are the three dates recorded in the Chinese sources. Without them the Licchavi chronology would have been somewhat like a ship with no anchor. In 641, the Tibetans helped Narendradeva to overthrow the usurper Viṣṇugupta, restoring the Licchavis to the Nepalese throne. In A.D. 648 the Tibetans sought and obtained Nepalese collaboration in their support for the imperial ambassador Wang Hsüan-tsê, who had been robbed and whose escort had been massacred in Tirhut. The Chinese notices on Nepal close with the mission despatched by Narendradeva to the Chinese court in A.D. 651 as a diplomatic gesture. The available dates for Narendradeva in Nepalese inscriptions range from the year 67-103 whereas those of Viṣṇugupta extend up to 65 Phālguna Śukla Dvitiyā. So any time during the gap of 22 months between this date and 67 Pauṣa Śukla Pañcamī, the usurper Viṣṇugupta must have been overthrown by Narendradeva. Working with an epoch era beginning from October 20, 576 scholars calculate the chronology of the inscriptions dated between the year 29 to 301. However, recently the Japanese Tibetologist Yamaguchi, working on the Tibetan materials, found that the epoch era began in A.D. 572, not in A.D. 576-- adding one further complication of a 4-year variable (Yamaguchi, 1978:29-57).

Thus the chronology of ancient Nepal is complicated because the available data are limited and the variables involved in the calculations are several. The possible permutations and combinations of the variables to interpret only 3 available dates with the day of the week for a time span of more than four centuries using two unnamed epoch eras, are simply unimaginable. For the time being, we are compelled to take the conventional solution for granted and work by assigning the first set of inscriptions (year 386-535) to Kārttikādi āmānta Śaka era; the second set of inscriptions (year 29-301) to Kārttikādi āmānta Mānadeva era, founded on October 20, 576.

Regmi's treatment of the problems of chronology is, not only confusing, but also inconclusive. His final words are memorably desperate:

In the ultimate analysis it is to be admitted that the problem of verification [of the dates-KPM] falling within the epoch of the Śaka era defies solution.
[Regmi, 1983:276]

The subject of verification is so intricate that there is nothing final to come to satisfactory conclusion in this respect.
[Regmi, 1983:269]

What are the Inscriptions About ?

This paper is based on the hypothesis that the ancient inscriptions of Nepal are about land and income from land, either in the form of grant (royal or philanthropic) or in the form of exemptions and concessions granted by the King in favour of a given settlement or institution--concession in tax, revenue, customs etc. Of the five types of inscriptions, at least the first two comprising some 150 inscriptions are *directly* related to income from land. As Regmi and, for that matter, most Nepalese historians, have ignored the relationship between land and political power, or between culture and income from the land, we would like to investigate how both power and piety of the ruling elite of ancient Nepal were rooted in the surplus income they appropriated from land.

Land was almost invariably owned on communal basis in the tribal societies in Nepal. This mode of landownership persisted during the Shah-Rana period, in fact, right upto 1968 when the communal ownership over land was finally abolished by legal action. In the words of M.C. Regmi,

the Kipat system (communal ownership over land-KPM) in its present form is a relic of the customary land tenure that the Mongolian communities established in the areas occupied by them prior to Indo-Aryan penetration. The politically dominant Indo-Aryans tended to prefer such statutory tenure forms as Birta, as the conflict between these tenure forms and the customary Kipat tenure must inevitably have been decided to the detriment of the latter. It can hardly be an accident that the Kipat system is presently confined to the hill districts of the country, mainly East Nos 1-4, Dhankuta, and Ilam in Eastern Nepal and Palpa, Gulmi, Doti, Dailekh, West No. 1 and West No. 2 in Western Nepal. Moreover, the scope of this system appears to have been much more extensive formerly, for there were Kipat holdings at one time even in Kathmandu Valley.

(M.C. Regmi, 1978:538-539)

Among the Limbūs, Chepāṅgs, Hāyūs, Danuwārs, Putwārs, Thāmīs, Kumhāles, Murrīs, as well as in several pockets of the Nepal Valley communal ownership of land persisted. More than 4% of the total available land in Nepal still belonged to the communal ownership in 1950. A recent paradigm of alienation of tribal land by Hindu immigrants in Limbūwān is investigated and lucidly documented by Caplan (1970). A more or less similar process of slow but steady alienation of communally owned land appears to have taken place in ancient Nepalese society soon after the Licchavis came to power in the Nepal Valley. According to the Hindu traditions as laid down, for example, in classical texts such as Kauṭalya's *Arthaśāstra*, the King or State owned all land, not the tribe or the clan, nor the community customarily occupying a territory. The tribal concept of land as territory (not property) held in common by the tribe (temporally symbolised by the chief or headman) was replaced by the Hindu theory that all land belonged to the King who allotted statutory tenure rights to individuals or institutions or communities.

Regmi's treatment of the land system in ancient Nepal is disappointing (pp. 28-30). He does not even bother to ask a number of fundamental questions on landownership, let alone answer them. The fundamental question is: who owned land in ancient Nepal? Apart from the crown lands (*sītā*), royal fields, farms, orchards, and forests owned by the King and his family, there were at least three distinct land-owning classes--the priests (religious and holy men), the members of the nobility, and the trading community. On a close scrutiny of the inscriptions, it is clear that apart from the reigning King, it is the members of these land-holding classes who donated land or income from land for maintaining religious, cultural and philanthropic activities. The King granted land to institutions and religious foundations which were tax-free and administratively autonomous. The King also granted land, instead of salary, to state functionaries (*vṛttibhujāḥ*), probably in the form of conditional land-rights which may have been alienable once the functionary ceases to be on service, more or less like modern *khāngī*. The first cultivator who reclaimed waste land or forests also enjoyed tenure-rights (*bhūmichidra-nyāyā*).

Statutory tenure-rights in land through state grants in favour of the nobility, the priests, the courtiers, the holy men, the army and the royal clan were the cornerstone of social, economic and political framework of a Hindu State in all ages and climes. Income from land constituted the primary source of wealth and political power. Therefore, state control over land and private modes of landownership would have had profound significance in organising the foundations of the Licchavi state, society, and culture. Those who owned land also owned the political power, perhaps, more appropriately, *vice versa*. Except in the case of the direct tillers (i.e., those who tilled, ploughed, harrowed, sowed, weeded and harvested their own land), all cultivated land in ancient Nepal had tenants (*kutumbin-s*). Thus the structure of property relations in land was fundamentally feudal in nature. The tenants paid rent (*piṇḍaka*), be it to the King, his kinsmen, the nobility, the functionaries of the State, the priests or the religious-cultural foundations. Thus the next key question is: what was the *ratio* of the rent to the actual harvest? It seems that the ratios varied from land to land depending upon its fertility and location. If the land is owned by the King, the accepted ratio, at least in classical texts, is one-sixth to one-twelfth--the so-called *ṣaḍbhāga* or simply *bhāga*. If the land is owned by others the rent varied from 40% to 75% of the actual harvest. This structure of property in land is the basic key to ancient Nepalese society and culture, and the ideology underlying both. These inscriptions are the most significant documents to test this hypothesis because they are, in the last analysis, about the royal share, rent and tax--about the righteousness of 'the three just and proper taxes' (*smucitstrikara*). It was the income from land which sustained, not only the religious-cultural institutions and cult objects and rituals, or philanthropic work such as wells, water-tanks, and conduits, but also the political institutions such as the monarchy and the nobility who lived on the toil of the direct producers.

There are a couple of passages in the Chinese notices on Nepal which depicted the pomp, glamour, and high life-style of Nepalese court, repre-

senting the acme of the golden age of Nepalese culture. The economic foundations of Narendradeva's Seat of Lions were none other than the surplus from land, appropriated by the State in the form of revenue, royal share of crops (*bhāga*), periodic supplies (*bhoga*), tax (*kara*), tax in cash (*hiraṇya*), sales tax, and customs (*śulka*). In addition to these, the State and its officials asked the villagers to do forced portering in the form of corvée for specified purposes. So the King of Kings, Licchavi Narendradeva's betowered palace and Seat of Lions was erected on the toil and surplus of the direct producers who probably lived in the closed and unpretentious villages in much the same way as the presentday Newar peasants in settlements such as Pāṅgā, Khokanā, Sunākoṭhī, Sāṅgā, Nālā, and Boḍe. At least, in this respect, the ancient inscriptions of Nepal are quite candid: it was because the peasantry was so heavily taxed and burdened that inscription after inscription the royalty considered it a great favour (*prasāda*) to a given village community to grant tax concessions and yet to remind its temporal and spiritual leaders "to continue to pay *samucitstrikara* (the three just and proper taxes--the royal share of crops, the periodic supplies to the palace, and the taxes in cash and kind).

What has Regmi to comment on this fundamental question? All that he has to say on the land system in ancient Nepal is focussed on the meaning of three words:

As we look into the land grants three words come before us in this connection, and all these three words are the only indications of land measure and a contribution to be paid by the cultivators. These three words are *mānikā*, or *mā*, the grain measure, *bhūmi*, the land measure, and *paṇḍakam*, contribution in paddy or grains... The land system of ancient Nepal is not yet an established fact. The land measure remains unknown and so is the grain measure. The word *piṇḍaka* might be a tax or rent, but it has got to be ascertained.

(Regmi, 1983:28-30)

Obviously, Regmi has built an unshakable confidence on the possibilities of a historical interpretation of the land system of ancient Nepal only when the *quantitative meaning* of the three key words--*bhūmi*, *mānikā*, and *piṇḍaka*-- are finally unlocked by Indian epigraphic glosses. There is nothing more vacuous than this preoccupation with the words.

The Village Community

The 85 inscriptions which are royal charters are almost always addressed to a *specific village community*. So there is some justice in focussing our attention on the village community. It was the fundamentally basic unit of Licchavi social structure and its polity. Nearly 80 years ago, on the basis of his critical analysis of a handful of ancient

inscriptions from Nepal, Lévi had made a perceptive observation in this regard:

In the face of the King and the Court, exposed to the vicissitudes of revolutions which sweep at a time a dynasty and its supporters, the population retains an immutable organisation in its traditional temper. Whether the Thakurīs supercede the Licchavis or the Mallas ascend the throne, whether the sovereign power is in the hands of an emperor or is dispersed among the rival chiefs, the village community (*grāma*) remains always in the eyes of the people the real and only political unit in Nepal as well as in India.
(Lévi, I: 1905:281)

The village community had two main heads: the headman (*pradhāna*), who was a temporal head, and the village priest (*brāhmaṇa*) who was its spiritual head. The headman was in all likelihood, a survival of the tribal chief whereas the village priest may well have been "the tribal priest who borrowed the Brahman's way of life" (Weber, 1958:10). The priest-astrologer determined the periods of cultivation--auspicious and inauspicious days. The keeper of irrigation regulated the supply of water between the village farms. Assisted by a few other "specialists" such as the potter, the carpenter, and the blacksmith, the village community consisted almost entirely of the farming families (*kṣetrin-s*) or (*kutumbin-s*). Economically, each village community was a self-sufficient or self-contained unit. The community produced, as most Newar villages until recently did, nearly everything it needed. Whatever it did not produce locally, such as salt, metals, cotton or oil, were exchanged for grains or money. The surplus produce surrendered either to the lord or to the State was in the main all that entered the market for sale. Immediate disputes in the village were settled by the council of elders (*pāñcālī*). Cultural activities and institutions were maintained by corporate bodies (*goṣṭhi*). The community looked after its temples, their rituals, annual festivals, public works, water-tanks, conduits, irrigation-canal, wells, roads, farms, and orchards. Water--both drinking and irrigating--was looked after most seriously; disputes over the management and distribution of irrigation water between villages were taken up directly by the King's private court (*paramāsana*). The village community paid taxes in cash and kind; some on production, others on sale of a wide range of goods such as garlic, onion, vegetables, oil, cloth, fish, chicken, sheep, pigs and pottery. Entertainment taxes were levied on bull-fight. Customs were levied on the export of iron, fly-whisk, musk, copper-utensils and mustard-seeds. Apart from the royal share of crops on crown lands, the village community paid rent in kind to the landowners, which amounted to anything from 40% to 75% of the crops. The villagers were required to do unpaid labour and portage for the lord or the State or both. The King and his officials or police interfered with the village community either for the levy of revenue/taxes (*karasādhana*), or for handing over official/statutory landgrants and tax concessions (*lekhyadāna*), or for the administration of justice, particularly against five great crimes (*pāñcāparadha*). Otherwise, the

village community was, for all intents and purposes, a self-governing social, cultural, economic, and political unit. Even when the traditional customs of a village community were against the grain of the Hindu social norms, as in the loose morality of the women referred to in Inscription No. 107, the Licchavi administration let the village community have its own way.

The Village and the Palace

The main links between the village community and the palace were the palace offices and officers, on the one hand, and the village headman, on the other. The most important link-figures were the *brahmuñ* who was later replaced by the *dauvārika* (the ancient version of the modern *dvāre*) who was the chief judicial authority in a village. The *dauvārika* was linked with the doorkeeper at the palace in charge of a particular village (*pratihāra*). The King sent his messenger (*duṭaka*), often his main feudatory or hier-apparent to execute his deeds and interpret his charter to the village community. Mostly, however, it was the tax-collectors (*chāṭa-bhaṭa*) or the representatives (*adhikṛta*) of the tax-collecting, revenue administration and judicial offices (*adhikaraṇa-s*) which made the royal presence felt. More than 80% of the royal charters, therefore, prohibited these officers and constable from entering a given village as an act of royal favour (*viśiṣṭa-prasāda*).

The King lived in style and pomp, surrounded by the bureaucracy-- though a rudimentary one--stationed in the several wings of the Royal Chancery or palace. In the beginning, we hear mainly of the four offices--Liṅgval, Śolla, Māpcoḥ, and Kūthera. None of these names is in Sanskrit. They were probably the relics of the tribal toll-collection posts, inherited intact by the Licchavi rulers. The *kūthera* collected taxes due the royal treasury and controlled landed property. The *śolla* had jurisdiction over the five great crimes which included theft, murder, adultery, and treason. The *Liṅgval* looked after irrigation and water-supply. The *Māpcoḥ* administered civil affairs, especially marriage, divorce and other related disputes. Later on, these offices receded into the background, to be replaced or taken over by cardinal offices--Pūrvādhikaraṇa, Paścimādhikaraṇa etc., since the days of Aṃśuvarmā (A.D. 594-621). These offices were probably named after the four or five palace gates. The most important palaces mentioned by name in the Licchavi inscriptions at different times were: Mānagṛha (A.D. 505-641), Kailāsakūṭa Bhavana (A.D. 606-659; A.D. 695-733), Bhadrādhivāsa (A.D. 671-679), Salambū Rājavāsa (A.D. 705), Puṇḍri Rājakula (ca. 594), Dakṣiṇarājakula (ca. 594, 613, ca. 733). Some scholars have identified the last one with Guṇpo or Hanumān Dhokā, (G. Vajrācārya, 1975) whereas the location of the rest are still a matter of conjecture. The most important of royal officers were *Mahāpratihāra* (Minister in charge of Palace Affairs), *Sarvadaṇḍanāyaka* (Chief Minister), and the *Balādhyakṣya* or *Mahābalādhyakṣya* (Commander). The *Viṣayapati* (head of regional administration), *Śaut-kika* (head of the customs department), and *Gaulmika* (officer in charge of a post), and *Tāpanādhikṛta* (tax officer) almost exhaust the list of bureaucracy or the state servants (*aṣṭādaśaprakṛti*) who are traditionally considered to be 18 in number. Some picture of the Licchavi palace

establishment can be pieced together from Aṃśuvarṃā's Hāriḡaon Inscription (No. 69), dated 30/A.D. 606

The Tribal Sub-Stratum of the Village Community

The ancient inscriptions of Nepal are the elite or Establishment version of social, cultural, and political values because they are the pious deeds and panegyrics of the ruling elites. These documents represent Hindu social and cultural veneer at the top of a tribal society.

Even after the 2500 years of Hindu or Brahmin penetration in the Himalayas, 27% of Nepal's total population are still tribal. In the Nepal Himalaya, the Valley of Nepal was the earliest contact-zone between the Hindus and the tribals. Probably, the earliest contacts of the Valley with the Indo-Aryans went back to the early centuries B.C.--inaugurated by the long-distance traders in woollen goods and exotic herbs, to be followed by the missionaries of India's great apostolic religions. We do not know exactly *when* or *how* the Indo-Aryans who claimed to be Licchavis came to Nepal. The chronicles such as the 14th-century *Gopālarājavamśāvalī* indicate that the Licchavis came to power in Nepal by conquest over the tribal populations (*kirāta*). Some purāṇic texts such as *Paśupati Purāṇa* (compiled in the 16th century?), on the other hand, indicate that the Licchavis conquered the Kirātas by "outmanoeuvring them with superior skill with words and power of inducing trust". (XVII: 12-15) No matter when or how the Indo-Aryans claiming Licchavi descent came to power in the Nepal Valley, the tribal occupation of the Valley prior to the Indo-Aryan migrations is irrefutable. In the words of a noted scholar of Licchavi culture and history,

The Licchavi inscriptions tell (us) of a society consisting of migrant people from India. About the position of the aboriginal people these inscriptions are almost silent.

(J.C. Regmi, 1978:8)

Notwithstanding the information blackout on the aboriginal populations of the valley, the Licchavi inscriptions are replete with unintended data on the tribal substrata of contemporary society. For example, the expression *kirātavarṣadhara* (a Kirāta attendant?, see Monier-Williams, 1899:927) is attested in an inscription, paleographically datable to Aṃśuvarṃā's time (A.D. 594-621). There are at least a few personal names such as Sindrira, Rogamāca, Kedumbāṭa, and Gecchimdhāka which are non-Indo-Aryan, if not Tibeto-Burman. We have analysed and discussed the Tibeto-Burman features of some 200 nominals encountered in the running Sanskrit texts of Licchavi inscriptions, including 35 hydronyms and 16 hillock names (Malla, 1981, Malla 1983a, and Malla, 1985). The fact that the data are linguistic does not mean that their relevance is confined to language. Because Regmi's treatment of the so-called "Kirāta Problem" is misleading we will first quote him in full before commenting on it:

There is no reliable evidence to support the Kirāta domination in the Valley...If Newari was a popular

language in those days the Mongoloid influence is indelible but this is confined only to the dialect spoken. In no other cultural spheres the Kirātas are in evidence. So any hypothesis in that connection might be ruled out at his stage (p. 155). The trace of Kirāta culture is invisible due to non-identity as well as non-availability of data identified with the complex (p. 191). Who were the original settlers of the Valley ? Perhaps, they were the Austroids or Mediterraneanian people-- the common ancestors of the Santals, Savaras, Kolis, and Bhils (p. 192). The Kirātas, whatever the time they migrated, came to dominate the Nepal Valley so as to impose their language on the inscriptions... .. The Kirātas as primitive people had migrated to overwhelm the local population because their number was larger than that of any other migrant section and there is no doubt that the latter absorbed them but in return accepted their language though everything worked under the dominant Sanscritic influence (192)... .. Whether the non-Sanskritic names are of the Mongolian family of languages or they belonged to a different family... What is the standard by which to judge their character ? One must judge them by the structural pattern and meaning of the linguistic form concerned. But here none of the words we have mentioned show characteristics of Mongoloid strain by structure or meaning. (p. 265)

We do not quite know why, in the first place, the historian, who for the last 40 years has been grimly adhering to his bold but worn-out hypothesis of the "original Austroid or Dravidian or Mediterraneanian settlers in the Valley" without ever producing a single piece of convincing evidence, thinks that there is no reliable evidence for the Kirāta domination in other cultural domains than language. Except for his hypothesis of "original Austroid settlers in the Valley" there is almost no consistency in Regmi's views if we trace them from his 1948-paper entitled "The Antiquity of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley" to his 1960, 1969, and 1983 versions of ancient Nepal. In the latest 1983 version, Regmi is sadly confused because he is writing on a field with which he is not familiar. In the first place, he is confused between the two English words *Mongolian* (of Mongolia, a country in Asia) and *Mongoloid* a conceptual abstraction in physical anthropology referring to a racial type). Secondly, he is confused between Mongolian-Mongoloid family of languages (which does not exist) and the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Thirdly, he is confused between Mongoloid (race) and Tibeto-Burman (language). Finally, he does not care to clarify what exactly does he mean by "the structural pattern and meaning of the linguistic form concerned" (which one, please, out of more than 200 nominals ?).

Regmi believes that the Kirāta influence on Licchavi society and culture is confined to language. This is no longer tenable a view of

the available data. On the contrary, the linguistic data show that the Kirātas had left a most pervasive influence on Licchavi society, culture, administration in general and material culture in particular. For example, the Licchavis inherited and then assimilated the tax-administration evolved by the Kirātas. The Licchavis gave Hindu legitimacy to the tribal chiefs, priests, village council of elders, mutual help trusts by giving them a royal sanction and a Sanskrit name. Numerous cultural establishments such as -Guṃ-vihāra, Bhumbhukkikā-Jalaśayana, Mātiñ-Devakula, Tegval-Nārāyaṇa, Mīrmelīti-Śaṅkara-nārāyaṇa, Thaṃsaṃpriṃ-deva, Valaśokṣi-Devamandira, Prcchibrū-dakṣiṇeśvara, Kharjurikā-vihāra, Viñvocā-Manḍapī, Poṇḍi-Manḍapī, Pañ-kuṭī, Chūma-kuṭī, Ripsiñ (canal), Salambū-Rājavāsaka etc., are indelible reminders of the tribal-Hindu ethnic contacts. The numerous names of taxes, tax-offices, and corvée are non-Sanskrit. It is almost certain that the Licchavis promoted the wet rice culture sustained by means of artificial irrigation which they inherited from the tribals. At least, that much is clear from the survival of the Tibeto-Burman word *tilamaka* in the running Sanskrit texts of Licchavi epigraphy. More than 16 hillock names, some 35 names of rivers and water-sources, and above all, nearly 145 names of villages and settlements are all non-Sanskrit. Place-names, unlike personal names or surnames, have a high tenacity rate, and they do not change so easily. If we consider a place-name like *Khopa* (Newari name of Bhaktapur), we find that it goes back to some 1500 years--surviving all the social, cultural, and political vicissitudes of a millennium and a half. The linguistic evidence of these toponyms cannot be dismissed so summarily as Regmi does. They almost irrefutably prove that the Licchavi society consists of a pyramid of tribal settlements and populations with a Hindu elite and the veneer of Sanskritic culture at the top.

As a practising historian, surely, Regmi knows that the clue of single word has enabled archaeologists and historians and comparative linguists, not only to reconstruct, but actually to dig up whole lost cultures and civilisations. What puzzles us, therefore, is Regmi's belaboured efforts to deny the palpable linguistic evidence of the tribal occupation of the Valley. It would be, of course, senseless to censure Regmi for not being a linguist or an anthropologist or an interdisciplinary historian: he never claimed to be anyone of them.

Tribal Survival Amongst the Hinduised Newars: Post Facto Evidence

Students of contemporary Newar society, particularly those who have a keen eye for "living prehistory", have observed some interrelated aspects of Newar cultural and social system. Notable among these observations and findings are:

- a. the edifice of Newar civilization is erected on the ancient tribal substrata (Mary Slusser, 1982:9-11; G rard Toffin, 1984:587)
- b. the Newars were Indianised by succeeding ruling dynasties (Slusser, 1982: 9-14), assimilating different ethnic elements into the fold of the caste system (Toffin, 1984).

- c. "the Newar society of today is ultimately a descendant of the historical Licchavi society" (Sharma, 1983:55).
- d. "The Kirāta, metamorphosed by millennia of miscegenation and acculturation, form the matrix of the Kathmandu Valley population, which in contemporary Nepal is designated Newar." (Slusser, 1982:11).

In Newar society, the tribal substrata have, fortunately not yet been completely submerged under the two millennia of Hindu superstrata deposited by the course of Nepalese social, political, and cultural history. The Newari language, for instance, still retains 22% cognates with Tibetan, 28% with Chepang, and 24% with Tamang in the 100-word basic vocabulary. If we exclude the Deobhājus (Rājopādhyāya), the Shresthas are the most Hinduised of the Newar castes. Yet among the Shresthas of Bhaktapur or Dhulikhel or Banepā there are numerous totemic clan names. Among the Bhaktapur Jyāpūs, the survival of totemism is strongest. Among tribal populations, social groups are distinguished on the analogy of natural species used as totemic name for such groups. Hypothetically, each group is responsible for the control of a species of plant or animal which it uses as its totem. The mark of tribal social organisation is strongest among the Jyāpūs where the traces of transition from totemic clan exogamy to caste endogamy are distinctly visible. The detribalisation of the Newars has been going on for the last 2000 years, yet today in Bhaktapur--the most Hinduised of Newar settlements--there are some 400 totemic names used as caste labels, not only by the Jyāpūs, but also by the Shresthas.

Not only the Newari language and society, but also Newar forms of worship still retain strong tribal traits. Mostly, members of a Newar lineage have a common lineage or clan deity. Its annual worship is followed by a lineage feast. More often than not, what actually receives the worship are the numinous stones in aniconic shapes, mostly located in outskirts, fields, riversides, and cremation grounds. (Vergati Stahl, 1979; Toffin, 1984). As an art-historian puts it,

The shapes in which the Newars venerated their own divinities, which had preceded the gods of Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepal, sharply differed from the forms of the latter. Stones were venerated in their natural shapes, whether singly, piled in heaps under trees, raised on altars, or still in the ground below the surface of the earth... The numinous stones are formless and timeless.

(Kramrisch, 1964:16)

Not only were these stones *formless* and timeless: they were also *nameless* village- or river-gods until the arrival of the Hindu ideologues who never failed to invent names and legends to assimilate the pre-Hindu forms of worship into the fold of Hinduism.

The farmers (*gyāpūs*) comprise nearly 45% of the population of the village settlements in the Nepal Valley. Until recent years they used the *gubhāju* (*vajrācārya*) as their healers-cum-priests to perform life-cycle rites and preside over the village festivals which were originally purely animistic--though increasingly influenced by formal religions. To the villagers at large, the most powerful priest-cum-healer has always been the *gubhāju*.

Diffusion Pattern of Hinduism

According to Weber, the propagation of Hinduism occurs in approximately the following way:

The ruling stratum of an "animistic" or tribal territory begins to imitate specific Hindu customs...
 ... abstention from meat, particularly beef; the absolute refusal to butcher cows; total abstinence from intoxicating drinks, gives up marriage practices that may deviate from Hindu custom and organises itself into exogamous sibs, forbidding marriage of their daughters to men of socially inferior strata... .. Some castes maintaining high standards have survivals of totemic organisation ... The assumption of additional Hindu customs follows rapidly: restrictions are placed upon contact and table community; widows are forced into celibacy; daughters are given into marriage before puberty without being asked; the dead are cremated rather than buried; ancestral death sacrifices (*śraddha*) are arranged; and the native deities are rebaptized with the names of Hindu gods and goddesses. Finally, tribal priests are eliminated and some Brahman is requested to provide and take charge of ritual concerns and thereby also to convince himself and provide testimony of the fact that they--the rulers of the tribe--were of ancient, only temporarily forgotten, knightly (*kshatriya*) blood. Or, under favourable circumstances, the tribal priests borrow the Brahman's way of life, acquire some knowledge of the Vedas, and maintain that they are themselves Brahmins of some Veda school and members of an ancient well-known Brahman sib (*gotra*) going back to such and such sage (*rshi*). ... Pedigree, and the required origin-myth, possibly going back to epic or pre-epic times, are borrowed or simply invented, documented, and witnessed, permitting the claim to the rank of Rajput (royal relationship, the presentday term for *kshatriya*).
 (Weber, 1958:9-10)

The Licchavis promoted Hinduism (*varṇāśramadharmā*) as the ideological basis for the organisation of society. The promotion of Hindu ethos is ultimately related to the economic differences in society and in particular to landed property. As Weber puts it, "legitimation by a recognized religion has always been decisive for an alliance of polit-

ically and socially dominant classes and the priesthood" (Weber, 1958: 16). This is probably where the social, ideological, and political functions of inscriptions come. What else is Mānadeva I's Cāngu panegyric or Jayadeva II's Paśupati panegyric if not the Hindu testimonial of "the fact that they--the rulers of the tribe--were of ancient, only temporarily forgotten, knightly (*kshatriya*) blood"? These inscriptions are "pedigree, (with) required origin-myth, possibly going back to epic or pre-epic times,... invented, documented, and witnessed, permitting the claim to the rank of *Kshatriya*." The inscriptions are the best testimonials of the values, beliefs, cults, pantheon, rituals, and above all, ideology and institutions which were being promoted by the monarchy, the landed aristocracy, the trading community, and the priesthood with economic support (land grant, rent in cash or in kind for temple rituals, maintenance of cult objects, and tax concessions), and a certain amount of self-government to the village community. The inscriptions promoted Hindu ideology, i.e., the ideology of the ruling classes which tried to legitimise themselves in terms of Hindu concept of a benevolent monarch of divine origin or charisma. What deserves a good deal of critical thought are the ideology of the inscriptions and the economics of the inscriptions.

The King was theoretically the owner of all land. He was the lord of all land (*bhubhuja*). He gave or granted land to his clients in return for their loyalty or service--moral, military or administrative. Private ownership over land had been in vogue in Licchavi Nepal for quite some time. Without private ownership of land there could have been no private donations or land grants for temple rituals, maintenance of cult objects or philanthropic establishments. Inscription Nos. 2,8,9,10,11,14,17,19, 28,30,33,34,36,45,47,48,90,112,118,120,130,131, and 141 show that the big land-holders in ancient Nepal were the Brahmins, the members of the ruling nobility, and the merchants. Cult objects such as *liṅgas*, pious deeds such as water-tanks or water-conduits were backed by income from land in cash or kind. The King also granted land to institutions (*agrahāra*), mainly to temples and monasteries, as well as to holy men such as *Pāśu-patācāryas*, or to offices (*adhikaraṇas*), or for the maintenance of temples, their rituals, and annual festivities. Above all, the King granted land to his kinsmen. Vasantadeva granted the village Jayapallikā to his sister Jayasundarī (Inscription No. 20). The grant entitled the princess, not only the income in royal share of crops, tax on agricultural goods, and supplies, but also judicial and administrative control over the village community.

The nature of relationship between the Licchavi monarchy and its clientele landholding classes, on the one hand, and their promotion of Hindu ethos to legitimise this alliance culturally, on the other, are the fundamental clues to a historical interpretation of the ancient inscriptions of Nepal. Income from land and property relations in land were not the only economic bases of the diffusion and promotion of Hindu religion and culture. The King and his clientele also gave other economic incentives, particularly tax exemptions, creating rent or tax-free or privileged village communities (*Koṭṭamaryādā*) where the tax-collecting offices (*adhikaraṇas*), officers (*adhikṛtas*) and the ubiquitous footloose *cāṭa* and

bhaṭa were prohibited from entering the given village. Such grants became the style of the royal favour since Gaṇadeva (A.D. 560-565) and a universal practice since Śivadeva-Amṣuvarṃā (A.D. 590-621) when the Hinduisation of the tribal populations became a matter of conscious state policy. In addition to these economic concessions, more and more powers and authority were devolved upon the village community--leaving the villagers undisturbed with their customary practices. The transition from the tribal village councils with their headmen or chiefs to the Hindu norms and structures such as *pradhāna*, *pratihāra*, *dauvārika*, *pāñcālī* and *goṣṭhīs* may have been less painful because of such a "liberal" policy at the grassroots. Thus, the assimilation of the tribals into the Hindu fold was facilitated by the policy of social, economic, and administrative incentives and concessions.

Hindu Ideology and Social Stratification

"The entire course of Indian history," according to Kosambi, "shows tribal elements being fused into a general society. This phenomenon, which lies at the very foundation of the most striking Indian social feature, namely caste, is also the great basic fact of ancient Indian history. The different methods whereby the tribal elements were formed into a society or absorbed into preexisting society are prime ethnic material for any real historian" (Kosambi, 1975:27). In inscription after inscription, the ruling monarchs of ancient Nepal--from Mānadeva I to Jayadeva II--are seen championing, not only the Hindu cults and rituals, but also the Hindu caste system. For example, Mānadeva I is described by a donor of a water-conduit in Kela Tole, Kathmandu as "the protector of the earth, one who loves his subjects like the father, and rules according to the tenets of the Vedas and scriptures". The King describes himself as "the one who had received the baptism of the *Ṛṣatriya* in the practice of battles." His grandson, Vasantadeva uses *paramadaivata* (great god) as a royal title. Similarly, Anuparam's Hymn to Veda Vyāsa (Inscription No. 27) shows the vehemence of feelings against the opponents of Vedic Hinduism (i.e., the caste system), and calls the Buddhists *kutārkkikaiḥ* (atheists or ill-intentioned logicians). While right from the beginning of the Licchavi records all the pious deeds of the big land-holding classes--brahmins, *Ṛṣatriyas*, and *sārthavāhas*--appear to show the increasing hold of Hindu cultural norms and religious ideals, since Gaṇadeva (A.D. 560-565) the King appears to adopt a conscious policy of economic incentives to bring outlying tribal village communities into the general fold of Hindu social and political order. (See Inscriptions 38-43). Śivadeva I and more so Amṣuvarṃā follow on Gaṇadeva's footsteps. The largest number of royal charters come from Śivadeva I (6), Śivadeva-Amṣuvarṃā (12), and Amṣuvarṃā (24). Some are marvellously well-preserved (Nos. 63, 64 and 65). To the economic incentives of tax reduction, Amṣuvarṃā adds the policy of increasing self-government to village councils and encouragement of long-distance trade through excise and customs exemption, and stimulus for livestock farming through tax reduction. The net result of these policies had been a shift in the economy, of which there are numerous traces in the inscriptions of the Śivadeva-Amṣuvarṃā age. One of these is the rise of the urban nuclei or marts as a result of the consolidation of pre-existing

villages and scattered settlements. The word *draṅga* (if it really means a township, rather than a mere watch-post or customs-collection post) occurs in an inscription of Śivadeva (No. 49) for the first time. Secondly, the inscriptions begin to mention tax and grant figures in monetary units. These economic changes seemed to indicate diversification of economic activities and occupations and consequent social changes. The most important of the indicators is the reference to *dharmasāṅkara* i.e., changing one's ascribed profession or occupation at will. The pursuit of one's ascribed occupation was regarded by Hindu lawgivers such as Manu, Kauṭalya or Śukrācārya as the bedrock of the caste system. So abandoning one's ascribed profession was strictly prohibited, and the cases of *dharmasāṅkara* or change of profession were looked into directly by the King. By Aṃśuvarṃ's time there was already a kind of religious court of the learned brahmins (*bhaṭṭādhikaraṇa*) to look into such cases of violations of caste norms. No wonder that Aṃśuvarṃ styles himself as "the high feudatory Aṃśuvarṃ, with his fame spread all over the world like a bridge of the unviolated Aryan propriety (*āryamaryādā*)" i.e., the caste system. This phraseology, of course, is not unfamiliar to students of Indian epigraphy where the most distinguished rulers of the Gupta period claimed to be "employed in settling the system of castes and orders" and "in keeping the castes confined to their respective spheres of duty" (Majumdar, Raychudhuri, and Dutta, 1978:188). A graphic example of the ancient social stratification, expressed in terms of status symbols, comes from an inscription (No. 108), issued by Bhīmārjunadeva (Licchavi) and Viṣṇugupta (Ābhīra) in A.D. 640. Being pleased at the portage services rendered to the King by the Kolīs (low caste peasants) of the Southern Kolīgrāma (Southern Kathmandu), the King permits the inhabitants of the village, as an additional royal favour, to wear all ornaments *other than* anklets and bracelets, presumably used only by the privileged castes.

If we scrutinise the names of deities worshipped and patronised by the royalty or the landed classes we find them mainly Hindu (Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta), and Buddhist (No. 74). Almost all the rituals (*yātrās, padma pūjā, varṣavardhana, kāraṇa pūjā* or *naimittaka pūjā*) are Hindu; almost all cult-objects (*liṅgas, icons, sculptures, bronze or repoussé works*) are Hindu, with a few Buddhist exceptions. Almost all pious deeds (construction, maintenance, and repair of water-tanks, wells, and water-conduits) are inspired by Hindu religious ideals of *puṇya* (virtue/merit), which are all invariably sponsored by the big landowners, no matter whether they are Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, or Sārthavāhas. During the rule of Narendradeva (No. 129), we come across a minister in charge of religious affairs (*dhārmārājikāmātya*). Śivadeva II's inscriptions (Nos. 133 and 136), dated A.D. 697 and A.D. 705, claim that King was "the banner of the Licchavi dynasty who thoroughly imposed the caste system". The alliance of politically and socially dominant classes who owned landed property is legitimised by the priesthood with the aid of a recognised religion. Hindu ideology i.e., the caste system, was an eloquent expression of "the ideas of dominance" of the classes with landed property.

The Licchavi Clan-Charisma

Not long ago, the Khas-Magars who came to political power after the Kot Massacre of 1846 laid a claim to Kṣatriya descent. The Brahmans invented pedigree and genealogy connecting Jang Bahādur Kūwar's ancestors with the Rāṇās of Udayapur, and Jang's family succeeded in marrying into the Ṭhakurī ruling family. Since then, all the tribals have been making social claims to Kṣatriya descent. The Gurungs in the 1920s made similar claims but did not succeed; the Thakālīs continue to make such claims, particularly the affluent ones (Haimendorf, 1956); the Limbūs make the same claims (Limbū, 1954; Chemjong, 1967); the Rāis have recently made similar claims (Kirāteśvarasandēśa, 1985). The Chepāngs and the Thārus have origin-myths connecting these tribes with Hindu epics. These social aspirations of the tribal populations of Nepal are so many indicators of growing penetration and diffusion of Hindu norms and ideology. Students of South Asian societies have tried to analyse this social-cultural process within the theoretical paradigm of "Sanskritisation" or "Hinduisation", or similar terms. The fundamental facts of the process are: 1. claims of the ruling elite of the tribe to noble descent; 2. adoption of Hindu caste norms and rituals as well as Hindu pantheon and forms of worship by the tribal elites, and 3 subsequent de-tribalisation of the social structure and culture.

The fundamental weakness in Regmi's approach to Nepal's ancient epigraphic data lies in his failure to analyse and interpret the data in the light of the socio-cultural process of Hinduisation of what was basically a tribal society. Between "Licchavi"--the eponymic founder of the ruling dyansty of ancient Nepal and the first historical king, Vṛṣadeva (ca. A.D. 350-390), there were allegedly 50 kings, and even in the official genealogy of Jayadeva II, 48 of them were unnamed. Even by conservative estimate, between Licchavi and Vṛṣadeva there may be a gap of nearly a millennium. This is too long a gap for any surviving human group to preserve the memory of its ancestral founder. Regmi thinks that Śivadeva I (A.D. 590-604) was the first one who "suddenly appears with the epithet "banner of the Licchavi family" and "this might arouse suspicion":

No king had yet called themselves *Licchavikulaketu*...an epithet which came to be adopted by kings after him. Thus Udayadeva, Dhruvadeva, and Udayadeva's son (Narendra-deva) and grandson (Jayadeva II) called themselves the banner of the Licchavi family.

(Regmi, 1983:101)

Mānadeva I's daughter, Vijayāvati, born of Queen Bhoginī, calls her late father "the full moon in the firmament of the Licchavi family" (Inscription No. 18). Though neither Mānadeva I nor any of his successors upto Śivadeva I claims Licchavi descent, Regmi has asked the right question in a wrong wording when he writes:

Why Mānadeva's daughter betrayed her anxiety to connect Mānadeva with the Licchavi dynasty is certainly a puzzle in this background.

(Regmi, 1983:39)

The question is more complicated than the personal anxiety of a princess who should not, ordinarily, have bothered about such questions of social history. The time-distance between Mānadeva I's great-grandfather, Vṛṣadeva, and the eponymic founder of the Licchavi dynasty is at least 1000 years. In between only 2 kings, Supuṣpa and Jayadeva I, are remembered by name. All this might "arouse suspicion"--as Regmi puts it. Undercutting the poetic camouflage, Jayadeva II's Paśupati panegyric betrays what might have been a historical fact. In the inscription there is nothing about the emigration of the Licchavis from Vaiśālī (after its annexation by Ajātaśatru), nor is there anything about the emigration or conquest of Nepal by the Licchavis (after the rise of the Guptas in Magadha). Jayadeva II's genealogy does not connect his family with the Licchavis of Vaiśālī or Magadha; nor does it contain a word about the migration to or conquest of Nepal by the Licchavis. On the contrary, all that the genealogy claims is to equate the eponym *Licchavi* with the *Solar dynasty*. Unfortunately, Regmi's translation of verse 6 of the inscription fails to bring out this equation eloquently:

Like a mark on the forehead of the globe, trusted by his people, *belonging to the famous and great solar dynasty*, enjoying great influence and worthy of respect even by great Gods, he bears the pure name *Licchavi*, giving rise to a new dynasty, white like the beautiful moon, and similar to Ganga's flood, majestic in appearance and charming.

(Regmi, 1983, Vol II, p.91)

Various historical dynasties of South Asian monarchies had resorted to the origin-myth of solar descent, but the question is: why did Jayadeva II or his ancestors resort to the Licchavi name? The ruling elites in Nepal have almost invariably imitated, not only the political style and idiom of their Indian contemporaries, but also their assumed family name or surname: the Licchavis were influenced by the Guptas; the Thakurīs, by the Vardhanas, the Varmans, and the Pāla-Senas; the Mallas, by the Karṇāṭas and Cālukyās of Kalyāṇa; the Shāha-Rānās by the Moghuls and the Delhi Sultanate. In the 4th-6th century India, the Imperial Guptas were in the height of their power. Candragupta I (ca. 320-340) issued a unique coin-type with the royal couple standing on the obverse, the Queen, Kumaradevī (a Licchavi princess), to the King's right, with names of the royal couple inscribed, and the reverse bearing the legend *licchavayaḥ* (the Licchavis, in plural), possibly to celebrate the important political benefits of the Gupta-Licchavi entente. Instead of the name of any king, the Licchavis were mentioned in plural. This may give some ground to believe that although Ajātaśatru annexed Vaiśālī to the Magadhan Kingdom (in ca. 481 B.C.), the Licchavis continued to remain a republican people right upto the days of Candragupta I.

Candragupta I married a daughter of Licchavi, named Kumaradevī, who gave birth to Samudragupta (341-380). Samudragupta proudly claimed to be *Licchavi-dauhitra* (son of the daughter of the Licchavi). That Samudragupta should have used the mother's patrilineage or matronymic *Licchavi-dauhitra*, in defiance of Manu's (X: 22) classification of the Licchavis

as *vrātyas* (the fallen ones), is indicative of the fact that in the 4th-century Magadha, *Licchavi* was a name *more* esteemed by society than the name *Gupta*. The Guptas acquired great social prestige by matrimonial relation with the ancient Kṣatriya clan of the Licchavis, and naturally they proclaimed the fact in all royal deeds. Samudragupta's posthumous Allahabad pillar panegyric (composed by the court-poet Hariṣeṇa) lists the contemporary king of Nepal (Vṛṣadeva?) among one of the five border rulers who "paid tribute to the Emperor and came to prostrate before him at his command". It is, *therefore*, highly unlikely that the King of Nepal in A.D. 341-380 was a Licchavi. The Gupta Emperor who took such pride in claiming to be the grandson of Licchavi would not have mentioned that the King of Nepal "came to prostrate before him at his command," had the Nepalese King or feudatory been a Licchavi himself. Once they had consolidated political power in the Nepal Valley the kinsmen of Mānadeva I or Jayadeva II may have used the term *Licchavi* to stake the usual claim to solar descent. During the height of the Gupta Empire, the Nepalese ruling elites were clearly feudatories bordering the Empire. After Skandagupta's death in A.D. 467, the Empire begins to decline until it broke down under the onslaught of the Huṇas. The feudatories in Nepal began to project themselves in larger social, political, and cultural profile soon after the death of Skandagupta. Once again, Regmi's treatment of "the Licchavi problem" is at best unilluminating:

If the Gupta Emperors take pride in their relations with the Licchavis, the latter must have been really a distinguished royal family or race. But we are not told as to where they lived. It is possible that about the time of Candragupta I the ruling family had migrated to Nepal. For we do not hear anything about them in Indian records since then.

(Regmi, 1983:192)

The crux of the Licchavi question in ancient Nepalese history is: *why* did such a distinguished or illustrious royal family, race or clan, have to migrate from the heartland of contemporary Indian civilization and culture to the Nepal Valley--a tribal periphery and hideout? Regmi's answer is:

The Vṛjjikas, probably a collective name for the Licchavis and others in the area, might have migrated in times of stress being under attack by outside elements.

(Regmi, 1983:191)

On this question, Nepali historians are unilluminating. Jha wrote that

Under the leadership of Supuṣpa the Licchavis migrated to Nepal only after the Guptas occupied the throne of Magadha, (mainly because of the dreadful betrayal of Candragupta).

(Jha, 1970:107)

However, he did not produce any evidence for his speculation. J.C. Regmi argued that the Licchavis of Nepal were the surviving members of the ancient Vṛjī republic of Vaiśālī and that they emigrated to Nepal soon after Ajātaśatru absorbed the republic of Vaiśālī in the Magadhan Empire in 481 B.C. (J.C. Regmi, 1978:30-31). He is not alone to hold this view. Mishra (1962:261-262) and Basham, too, are of the same view:

(After the betrayal of Vaiśālī by the Sage Kulavālaya,) Ceḍaga (the leader of the the Licchavis) committed suicide by drowning and the Licchavis emigrated to Nepal.

(Basham, 1951:69)

None of the sources used or referred to by J.C. Regmi, Mishra, and Basham mentions the emigration of the Licchavis to Nepal. The Pali canonical texts of Jainism such as *Āvaśyaka-sūtra*, referred to by the above authorities, have *nothing* on the migration of the Licchavis to Nepal. Nor has *Mahāparinirvaṇa sūtra* of the *Dīghanikāya*, a text which had already been translated into Chinese by A.D. 306. The Pali Buddhist canonical text, together with Buddhaghoṣa's [A.D. 420] commentary, *Sumaṅgalavilāśinī*, narrates in detail the campaign of Ajātaśatru against the Licchavis. In none of these texts is there even a remote reference to migration of the Licchavis to Nepal. There are, therefore, two possibilities:

1. Once they were secure in power, the Indo-Aryan immigrants who came to the Nepal Valley in the early centuries A.D. started to claim "Licchavi" descent. As Regmi puts it, "Nepal received a large scale migration from the Tarai belt in the south and this migration was mainly responsible for the creation of a degree of culture that was in evidence from the 4th-10th centuries A.D." (Regmi, 1983:191), or
2. The tribal chieftians of Nepal were inventing "testimony of the fact that they--the rulers of the tribe--were of ancient, only temporarily forgotten, knightly (*kshatriya*) blood", and the term Licchavi, like Malla, Shāha, or Rāṇā, was a convenient contemporary synonym of such noble descent and clan-charisma.

These hypotheses assume some relevance if we remember that no ruling Nepalese monarch following Jayadeva II (A.D. 733) claims to have been a Licchavi. The name obviously had lost its political relevance since the fall of the later Guptas, particularly since the receding of the successors of Ādityasena (A.D. 673), whose grand-daughter (*dauhitrī*) was Jayadeva II's mother, Vatsadevī.

Settlements

The Licchavis were elevated chieftians ruling over clusters of sparsely populated farming villages with irrigated fields--slowly nucleating as urban settlements over centuries. These peasant villages, some 140 or so are known by non-Sanskrit names, drew sustenance from wet rice cultivation and animal husbandry (rearing sheep, buffalo, poultry,

and pigs, among other animals). The material growth of these settlements was boosted by entrepôt trade, particularly with the opening of the Kuti and Kyi-rong passes in the ca. 7th century A.D. Thānkoṭ, Tistuṅg, Pharpīṅg, and Lele were on the trade route to India; the settlements of Nuwākōṭ, Kewalpur, and Gorkhā were on the route to the Kyi-roṅg pass; Sāṅgā, Nālā, Banepā, Khopāsī, Palāñcok, and Dumjā were on the route to the Kuti pass. The major spill-over of the settlements outside of the Valley began only with the growth of the entrepôt trade.

The inscriptions invariably refer to the settlements as *grāma* or *grāmapradeśa*. Only since Śivadeva I in ca. A.D. 596, we hear of *draṅga*, a word which has been variously interpreted by the authorities. For instance, Maity defines it as a township; Monier-Williams, as a city; Sircar, as "a station for revenue collection, a watch station or a town". On scrutinising Nepalese inscriptions, one is inclined to call a *draṅga* merely "the marketplace with a customs house" rather than a full-fledged township, or town, let alone a city. (See Vajrācārya, 1973:218-222; Regmi, 1983: 100). In all Licchavi records we know only nine of them by name. The area from Naxāl to Devpātan--the main artery of India-Tibet entrepôt trade-route--already developed into a cluster of urban trade-marts by the 8th century A.D. The townships of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur were "formed by the assemblage of several villages, progressively enlarged and brought closer to one another until they mingled into one another." (Lévi, II, 1905:185-186). "The rise of actual towns and of urban life was a late development. It was due, as suggested by Lévi, to a shift in the economy of Nepal from a purely agricultural to a mixed one, in which trade and crafts played an increasing role." (Petech, 1984:184).

The Rise of the Merchants

In a study of the material bases of the transition from prehistory to history, a century ago Engels wrote:

The stage of commodity production with which civilization begins is distinguished economically by the introduction of 1) metal money, and with it money capital, interest and usury; 2) merchants as a class of intermediaries between producers; 3) private ownership of land and the mortgage system; 4) slave labour as a dominant form of production.

(Engels, 1884:172)

Though slaves were used in temples and households, the ancient inscriptions of Nepal do not lend any conclusive evidence in support of the use of slave labour in economic production. But the evidences for the other three economic innovations, leading to the advent of civilization, are not only abundant but palpable. As soon as we begin to have historical documents we have almost simultaneously all three of them at work to revolutionise the whole hitherto existing tribal society. It is perhaps no accident that like other historical evidence, metal coinage begins in ancient Nepal with Mānadeva I. Nor is it likely to be an accident that we hear of big landowning leaders of the caravans of long-distance traders

(*sārthavāha*) donating enormous landed property to Śaiva cult objects or Sun god (Inscriptions Nos. 8,9 and 10). The two aspects of these donations are remarkable: a. the size and number of land-holdings which were donated;; b. their locations. The size differs from 30 to 600 land-measurement units; whereas the locations of the holdings of *Sārthavāha Ratnasaṅgha*, for example, are spread from *Praṅpriṅ* (Pharpiṅ), *Sītātīkā* (*Sitāpāilā*), *Yūpagrāma* (*Pāṭan*), *Khinaṣpu* (*Khandpu*), to *Khopriṅ* (*Bhaktapur*). Without a shade of doubt, *Ratnasaṅgha* belonged to the new aristocracy of wealth, visible mainly in the form of private property in land. He belonged to a new intermediary class of merchants which made its fortune out of the long-distance trans-Himalayan entrepôt trade.

Although we have documentary evidence of these long-distance traders only since A.D. 477-480, the Nepal Valley had been long in the trade-map of the Indian classics as early as the 4th century B.C. Among the objects worth collecting in the royal stock, *Kauṭalya* mentions the black woollen blanket named *bhiṅgisī* (cf. Newari *bhiṅgu* = excellent, of good quality; *si*=textile, fabric, cloth) and *apasārikā* (II. 11.29), which were made in Nepal. In an early Buddhist *vinaya*-text, the caravan leaders from *Śravastī* go to Nepal to bring back with them wool, orpiment, wood in large quantities "loaded in their carts" (*Lévi*, III, 1908:183). *Hsüan Tsang* (A.D. 636) notes that Nepal is "favourable for the production of grains and abounds in flowers and fruits, also copper, yaks and birds named *ming-ming* (*jīvamjīva*). In commerce, copper coin is used". (*Beal*, II: 81; *Watters* II: 84). The Old T'ang Annals relates that

The merchants there, moving and stationary, are numerous; cultivators rare. They have coins of copper which bear on one side a figure of man and on the reverse a horse (New T'ang Annals--on the reverse a horse and a bull, and which has no hole in the middle). They do not pierce the noses of their bulls (New T'ang Annals--they do not know how to plough the earth with the bulls).

(*Lévi*, II, 1905:164-165)

The internal evidence of the inscriptions also shows that Nepal exported copper-utensils, deer-skin, musk, yak-tails, iron--among several other things (Ins. Nos 70 and 71). Some of the herbs, vegetables, and minerals are so closely associated with the name of Nepal and its people that they are known in the Indian texts as *Naipāla*, *Nepālikam*, and *Kirātātikta* etc. We have also epigraphic evidence for the fact that villagers of south Kathmandu were required to do compulsory proterage for the State or private lords or merchants trading with Tibet (*bhoṭṭaviṣṭi*) (Ins. No 132). The small treacle of men and materials through the Himalayan passes engaged in barter trade of salt and grains may have suddenly undergone a sea-change once the *Banepā-Kuti* route to Tibet was discovered by the Chinese Buddhist monk *Hsüan Chao* in A.D. 639. Thus, already by A.D. 641-651, merchants--both moving and stationary--were numerous. At home, the feudal lords exchanged the surplus grains and goods they appropriated as rent for luxuries or for the goods and services of the craftsmen they patronised. It was the confluence of the economic interests and

activities of the merchants, the feudal lords living close to the court, and the craftsmen which laid the foundations for the growth of urban nuclei in the Valley. Once the class of merchants emerges, a fundamental cleavage takes place in a society--the cleavage between production and consumption -- between production for home and production for market. With this "breach at the heart of society"

the merchant took care to make it plain that all commodities, and hence all commodity producers, must grovel in the dust before money. In his hands the cult of money was safe... Never again has the power of money revealed itself with such primitive crudity and violence as it did in this period of its youth.

(Engels, 1884:163)

The Implications of Metal Money

The circulation of metal money is of fundamental significance for the study of the social history of ancient Nepal. Minted coins appear in ancient Nepal simultaneously with other historical evidence such as inscriptions and art-objects. There is no explicit discussion in the literature on the technology of making coins in ancient Nepal. However, on a close study of the embossed area, shapes, and sizes in the available Licchavi coins in private collections, including mine, there is hardly any doubt that the ancient copper coins were made with the help of embossing dies used manually, somewhat like modern post-marks on molten pieces or sheets of copper. There are eight main types of coins in circulation at various times in ancient Nepal. They vary a great deal in size, weight-standard, style, iconography, and workmanship in particular. However, the astonishing quality of finish and realism of the embossed animal-symbols of the winged lion in Mānāṅka, the cow in Vaiśravaṇa, the elephant in Guṇāṅka, and above all the horse in Jiṅṣugupta's coins can compare with the finest specimens of coins in India. The following are the summarised details of the ancient coins, their 8 main types and nearly 60 sub-varieties, issued between A.D. 464- ca.A.D. 879:

Type	No of Sub-varieties	Size	Weight
Mānāṅka/Śrī Bhoginī	10	2.35-2.80 cm.	12.64-14.46 gms.
Vaiśravaṇa/Kāmadohī	2	2.55	12.43-12.82
Śryamaṅsu/ Kāmadohī	9	2.35-2.55	10.62-11.85
Mahārājādhirājasya/ Śryamaṅsoḥ	1	2.54	13.48-16.28
Jiṅṣuguptasya	2	2.45	10.56-10.73
Guṇāṅka	9	2.20-2.40	a. 10.95-12.65 b. 9.90- 7.90
Paśupati	20	2.15-2.35	3.00- 9.90
Vṛṣa	6	1.35-1.60	2.00- 3.00

Experts are undecided in their opinions as to whether the Licchavi coins are modelled on the Kuṣāṇa or the Gupta or the Yaudhēya tribal coins. There are several problems unattended relating to the coinage in ancient

Nepal. In the first place, there is the problem of chronology and attribution of Vaiśravaṇa, Guṇāṅka, Paśupati, and Vṛṣa coin-types. To establish their authorship and chronology, they have no infallible clue other than iconography, palaeography, and the statistical average of weight-size standards. Secondly, there is the problem of fractional coin: were there coins of different fractions, or was there only one denomination copper (*tāmrika*) *paṇa*? The inscriptions refer to *paṇa*, *kārṣapaṇa*, [=16 *paṇa*] *purāṇa* and *paṇapurāṇa*, with no indications as to weight, value or mutual ratios. Thirdly, was the standard monometallic (copper only), or was it bimetallic (silver *purāṇa* and copper *paṇa*)? No ancient silver coin has so far been found in Nepal; nor do the Chinese notices refer to the existence of any silver coins in Nepal. Fourthly, why do the average weight-standards vary from type to type, or between sub-varieties of a type? The drastic weight variations are certainly not the effect of circulation alone. Fifthly, are the sub-varieties only iconographic or denominational/fractional as well?

If we subscribe to MacDowell's (1959) hypothesis that the earlier the coin the greater is its weight, we have only one anomaly, i.e., *Mahārādhirājasya/Śryamśoh*, with the highest metal content of 14-16 gms. The coin may have been a coronation commemorative issue. The differences in average weight between two groups of the Guṇāṅka coins are "far too heavy to be a fractional denomination and is clearly a result of a deliberate reduction in the weight standard. Coins with the name of Paśupati range from 3.10 gms; but even in this group all coins seem to have been intended as a single denomination, and not as fractional" (MacDowell, 1959:39). What may have been, then, the reason for these "deliberate reductions in weight standards?" Some scholars argue, most plausibly, that these reductions in the weight of metal content was "to adjust the trade and commerce relations" (T.P. Varma, 1973:XIX, in the Introduction to the Indian reprint of Walsh, 1908). However, there is no doubt that the bulk of ancient Nepalese coin-types belongs to the eventful century between Aṃśuvarṃā and Narendradeva (A.D. 604-679).

What coins we have are a great asset to the study of ancient Nepalese society, particularly in view of the general paucity of coins in our history, and a near complete scarcity of coinage between Paśupati coins and Śivadeva III (A.D. 1098-1126), or between Śivadeva III and Mahendra Malla (A.D. 1560-1574). Despite the fact that coinage is a fundamentally important source of ancient Nepalese social and economic history, historians such as Regmi have given little attention to its scientific study; and there is no publication by any Nepali other than Hari Ram Joshi's (1976) unevenly written and documented Nepali publication. To keep referring to the dated papers and publications of the 1890s and 1910s when there are numerous private collections of ancient coins in Nepal, right at the historian's door-step--as it were, is a typical instance of our unwillingness to study the historical evidence at first hand.

If during the period of its youth the cult of money was marked by "primitive crudity and violence", could it be an accident that among the symbols used in the coins of ancient Nepal we have Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth, Kuvera/Vaiśravaṇa, the god of wealth, and Kāmadohī, the cow of plenty, yielding all human desires?

Slavery

Slavery in ancient India was less severe and exploitative, and more patriarchal and proximate to hired labour and men "working off" fines or debts. The evidence for slavery in ancient Nepalese society is disputable. Vajrācārya (1973:3-4) thinks that the only evidence available refers to temple maids and attendants. Elsewhere the reference to slavery is merely allegorical. He believes that slavery existed in ancient society in a mild form, mainly in the form of compulsory labour. Regmi disputes the contention that "slavery had become a part of the society" and calls Vajrācārya's view "a hypothetical observation". Then he goes on, in his usual fashion, to refer to the Hindu *dharmasāstra* literature (Yājñavalkya, Manu, Nārada, and Kauṭalya) on the classification, status and duties of the slaves, but says nothing on whether they played any role in ancient Nepalese society, particularly in economic production as they did in classical antiquity. Regmi denies the existence of slaves in ancient Nepal, because not only does he misread a crucial piece of evidence, but mutilates its social content by misleading translation. All this will be obvious if we compare the following with what Regmi wrote in his Vol I:126 and Vol II: 78:

6. ..cāṭabhaṭanāmapraveśyena śarīrakoṭṭamāryādopannaḥ śarīrasarvakaranīyapra(ti)
7. muktaḥ kutumbīḥbahiradeśagamanādisarvaviṣṭirahito...
(Vajrācārya, 1973:496)

The village is granted the status and dignity of a fortified (i.e., privileged) settlement, exempted from the entry of the tax-collectors, and the heads of the farming families are exempted from corporal services including all compulsory portage to accompany (the lords) on their journey abroad.

(My Translation)

Regmi believes that the exempted corporal services are "only a form of forced labour arising out of the obligation to keep the dignity of the strong fort" (Regmi, 1983, Vol III:214). On the contrary, Sharma suggests that "like corvée, slavery too was part and parcel of the Licchavi land-based society, although we are unable to discover all its forms." (Sharma, 1983:38). So the question for future research is not whether slavery existed, but what *role* the slaves played in the economy and society of Licchavi Nepal.

The Illusion of the Epoch

The social relations of commodity production--the emergence of metal money, the merchant class, slavery, and private ownership of land--were slowly impinging upon the consciousness of the ruling elites in ancient Nepal. We have some evidence in extant inscriptions. Here are three eloquent ones:

In the deep darkness wholly engrossed by evil thoughts, different kinds of evil spirits cross the hell, but people are not devoted to you (Śiva) and they do not pray, and they are to undergo ever and ever the suffering arising out of birth, death, and disease and other serious calamities. King Mānadeva prays that the merits obtained through the act of setting up your sacred *liṅga* would ultimately go to uproot the sorrows and maladies of all the world including mine own.

(Inscription No. 6)

Here is a Buddhist lady donating land to feed the members of the Saṅgha and to worship the Buddha:

I perform this meritorious duty with a feeling of distress at my being born a woman and to be released from womanhood to become a male. My desire today being that I will have no longer to bear the sufferings of a woman.

(Inscription No. 12)

Finally, here is a Vaiṣṇava pundit, Anuparam, offering high-flown praise to Dvaipāyana (Veda Vyāsa)--the mythical composer of the Vedas, the Mahābhārata, and the purāṇas, now repudiated by those "with bad thought, bad conduct, and false logicians, and the disciples of the Sugata (the Buddha)":

Smṛtis, coming out of Śṛutis are no more checked in this world today. This was the method adopted (in the past); but today it is destroyed; (Verse 36)

Men revolve on the sea of life; they are chased by passions; and they fall in deep illusion; ... the path of salvation you have shown them in this earth... you have also dealt with the crooked distorters in this world.. For the good of the world you have exposed to view [Mahā] Bhārata, oh, doer of good, all the learning of this world. (Verses 45-52)

(Inscription No. 27)

Lévi remarked that "this hymn addressed to Dvaipāyana towards the end of the VI century in the bosom of the Himalayas surprises one by its singular character" because "the Nepalese poet, or at least the client who pays for his services, does not address Dvaipāyana in disinterested homage. It is a son who desires the success of his father and who asks to this effect the efficacious protection of the epic bard... We shall never know what kind of help was expected of the sage Vyāsa for the success of Anuparam's father." (Lévi, 1908:30). The unique character of this hymn lies precisely in the *ambiguity* of its worldly content whereas the intensity of its transcendental feelings is quite *transparent*.

There are different plausible and tempting interpretations of the hymn, particularly to treat it as a mere literary *tour de force*. One can

read here the conventional filial piety of a son for his parents, not too different from Mānadeva's for his mother or Jayadeva II's for his. Several contemporary inscriptions attest to such transfer of merit to the donor's kith and kin. What is striking here is that Anuparam has not offered anything material (no icon, no land endowment) other than the verbal artefact. It may, therefore, not be a commonplace offering out of filial piety, and Anuparam was no commoner. As Anuparam's family--the Guptas--had a chequered political career starting with the rise of Ravigupta in A.D. 513 to the death of Viṣṇugupta in A.D. 641, one may be tempted to read a remote echo of the changing political fortunes of the family in Anuparam's hymn to Dvaipāyana.

Anuparam (died ca. A.D. 540) belonged to a most distinguished family of the Guptas which supplied the chief executives of the country for more than a century. Paramābhimānī/Ravigupta A.D. 513-532 (?) was his father; Bhaumagupta (A.D. 557-590) was his son; Jiṣṇugupta (A.D. 624-633) was his great-grand son, and Viṣṇugupta (634-641), his great grandson's son. Regmi reads Anuparam merely as an orthodox Hindu revivalist "invocation to Vyāsa for deliverance to counteract the growing influence of Buddhism" (Regmi, 1983:71-72). The fling against Buddhism is understandable, not only because the Buddha preached against the caste system (in *Ambaṭṭha sutta*), against animal sacrifice (in *Kutadanta sutta*) and against the Vedas (in *Jevijja sutta*), but also because Buddhism as a religion had been patronised either by unorthodox kings or by the rising merchant class. Vṛṣadeva, a Nepalese king who may have ruled two centuries before Anuparam, was described even in an official genealogy as "a partisan of the rule of the Sugata," i.e., the Buddha.

In all likelihood, Anuparam was a brilliant representative, an ancient instance of the active ideologists who made the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief occupation. The mystification of social realities begins when ideologues start removing from social beings and things the reality that belongs to them and confer upon abstractions. As a true representative of his class, Anuparam may be imposing on the world the categories of thought and feeling derived from his social position. The Vaiṣṇava poet's lament at the decline of the precepts and norms enjoined by the Hindu scriptures would thus be ultimately the mental reflex of a society in transition--already under the grip of the cult of money, gradually undermining the traditional landed aristocracy.

When men invented money, they did not realise that they were again creating a new social power, the one general power before which the whole society must bow. And it was this new power, suddenly sprung to life without the knowledge or will of its creators, which now, in the full brutality of its youth, gave (the Athenians) the first taste of its might.

[Engels, 1884:111]

It is worth remembering that some ideologues in each phase of man's history tend to regard the established order as a product, not of history, but of an eternal scheme of things. In the idiom of their age, King

Mānadeva I, the Buddhist lady unwilling to be re-born a woman, and the Vaiṣṇava poet Anuparam were each merely sharing the fundamental illusion of their epoch--the epoch of the advent of metal money, the merchant class, private ownership of land and slaves.

In order to understand the ancient inscriptions of Nepal the first step is to penetrate the textual surface and verbal artefact, inlaid with the mystification of social and economic realities--which is not possible if our focus is only on words--as Regmi's obviously is--rather than on the social content and relations. We do not yet know enough about ancient Nepalese society to be too categorical about its structure and foundations. What we know are mainly from the inscriptions, supplemented by the coins, a few dozen sculptures, sundry archaeological remains and the Chinese notices. The recent works of Slusser (1982) and Toffin (1984) have added much to our limited knowledge of the culture, religion and social structure of the Valley, with insights gained from different social sciences. Some of the recent examples of how the study of urban space and rituals (Gutschow & Kölver, 1975), or the study of rituals and festivals (Kölver, 1980; Michaels, 1984) can illuminate the past and supplement the study of written sources, are provided by the work of the unorthodox German "Indologists"--unbelievably willing to go beyond the written texts and observe living history at first hand. If history is a hypothetical reconstruction of the past on the basis of inherently limited materials--written or otherwise--without going *beyond* the written texts, interpretation of their *context* is rarely possible. The inscriptions of ancient Nepal, which number less than two hundred to cover a time-span some four centuries, are by their very nature a partial source of information. So every interpretation of epigraphic data is fallible--including the one presented in this paper--and falsifiable with the help of fresh insights and materials.

However, neither the scepticism which is the historian's privilege nor the critical-comparative perspective of the interdisciplinary social scientist, appears to find a room in Regmi's analyses of the lexicon of the ancient inscriptions of Nepal. His attention is grimly focussed on *words*. Nearly all his learned commentary is confined to *isolated words* and *phrases*, on the so-called "technical terms" used in the inscriptions. Consequently, Regmi misses the content of the inscriptions, i.e., the economic, the political, the social, and above all, the ideological content of the inscriptions. Evidently, Regmi is well-versed in Indology --in the Sanskrit language, Indian classical texts and inscriptions, Nepalese paleography, and Hindu astronomy. The fact that after devoting four decades to research on Nepalese history Regmi successfully missed the historical import of the ancient inscriptions of Nepal shows that there is a valid distinction between pedantry and historiography. We can only hope that Regmi will address to these critical issues in the forthcoming Volume IV: *Ancient Nepal* "exclusively devoted to socio-economic conditions, as revealed by the inscriptions" (p. X; p. 8; p. 20; p 137; p. Addenda, and *passim.*), and give us, the non-specialists, the distilled essence of four decades of research in Nepalese history and Indology.

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