

WHEN FOLK CULTURE MET PRINT CULTURE: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE COMMERCIALISATION, TRANSFORMATION AND PROPAGATION OF TRADITIONAL GENRES IN NEPALI'

Rhoderick Chalmers

Introduction

At first glance, print culture may appear to be the antithesis of folk culture. After all, print culture depends on industrial and economic structures far removed from the simple village culture which the term 'folk' tends to invoke. But perhaps the disjunction between folk and print is not as great as it first seems. Perhaps, more pertinently, any perceived gap is conditioned by our understanding of English concepts which do not necessarily equate to local cultural understandings.

This article examines some of the dynamics of the interaction between folk culture and early Nepali print culture, primarily as the latter rapidly developed in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. It proposes we should start such a study by comparing 'folk' to its widely adopted Sanskrit-origin counterpart *lok*. It is often assumed that the translation of, say, 'folk culture' as *lok-saṃskṛti* is an unproblematic process representing conceptual equivalence. But it seems to me highly problematic: *lok* bears a very different range of connotations to 'folk', and our interpretation of *lok-saṃskṛti*, *lok-sāhitya*, etc. should be informed by an awareness of these connotations.

The first section of this article therefore examines in some detail the origin and meanings of *lok*, and the importance of its various significations for re-examining local patterns of cultural categorisation. The second section investigates Nepali folk culture as an object of study and as a commodity: it traces the origins of the self-conscious study of folk traditions by Nepali writers, and then analyses the influence of print on the interpretation, presentation and marketing of folk culture from an early stage. The third section looks at the same processes from the reverse angle: the influence of folk culture on shaping the wider world of Nepali print in its formative

decades. This study of the collision of folk traditions with the technology and commercial practices of modern print-capitalism is centred on Banaras, the birthplace of the Nepali publishing industry.²

The article demonstrates that, as one might expect, folk culture was transformed when it was rendered into printed format for commercial purposes. More interestingly, it suggests that folk traditions exerted significant influence on the way the economics of the Nepali literary system were moulded. The article concludes that print culture should not be seen as the antithesis of folk culture: in many ways it was, in fact, the apotheosis of *lok-sumskṛti*.

Folk and lok: rethinking cultural categories

Although *lok* is the universally adopted translation for 'folk' in Nepali, as well as most other New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages, its range of meanings are quite distinct and worthy of consideration. Without such consideration we run the risk of assuming that *lok* culture in Nepal is understood and valorised in the same way as folk culture is in the English-speaking world. This would be a serious misunderstanding, as the discussion below illustrates. Equating *lok* with folk also leads to problems in the interpretation of the relationship between Nepali folk culture and print culture, the meeting of which forms the main subject of this article.

The suggestion that 'folk' and *lok* should not be seen as precise equivalents is hardly novel: Cūḍā Maṇi Bandhu opens his major recent survey *Nepālī loksāhitya* (2001/02) with a lengthy discussion of the contrasts between 'folklore' and *loksāhitya*. However, while his analysis will not offer surprises to a thoughtful researcher familiar with both English and Nepali, the folk/*lok* disjunction has perhaps not received as much attention in writing in English on Nepali as it deserves.

Let us start by reminding ourselves of the main sense of 'folk'. While its primary meaning is 'people in general', the definition—as a modifier—most relevant to the academic study of folk traditions is 'originating from the beliefs and customs of ordinary people'. Similarly 'folklore' is 'the traditional beliefs and customs of a community, passed on by word of mouth' and a 'folk tale' is 'a traditional story originally transmitted orally' (Pearsall 1999: 550-51). The word 'folk' itself has a folk origin inasmuch as it is of Germanic origin and made its way into Old English (as *folc*) at an early stage, as also did 'lore' (OE *lār*). In this respect, we may observe that both of these terms are more deeply embedded in common English than the more recent, Latinate 'culture' and 'literature'.

The central essence of 'folk', we may conclude, is that—in contradistinction to 'high' culture—its origins lie in the beliefs and customs

of 'ordinary people' and folklore or folk culture is normally transmitted orally. What then of the origins of *lok*? The different heritage of this term is obvious from the moment we consider its source: as an established part of the vocabulary of classical Sanskrit, its usage has historically been associated with high culture and sophisticated written traditions from a much earlier stage than 'folk'.³ In the *Vedas* the basic sense of *lok* (correctly *lok*, but let us use a transliteration that represents its current pronunciation) was 'free or open space, room, place, scope, free motion'. However, it then gained more specific and enduring meaning as 'world' (in the *Atharvaveda*, certain *Brāhmaṇas* and onwards). Classical texts generally enumerate three worlds: heaven, earth, and the atmosphere or lower regions, among which sometimes only the first two are mentioned; a fuller classification gives seven worlds (Monier-Williams 1899).

By the time of the composition of the *Mahābhārata*, *lok* had acquired the key connotations which remain pertinent to its deployment today: as 'the earth or world of human beings', 'the inhabitants of the world, mankind, folk, people (sometimes opposed to 'king')', and more generally as 'ordinary life, worldly affairs, common practice or usage'. Thus the Sanskrit locative case *lok* came to be used as 'in ordinary life', 'in worldly matters', or 'in common language, in popular speech'. Here—and this, for us, offers the first clear pointer as to the distinction within Indian tradition between *lok* culture and its 'high culture' counterparts—*loke* stands in contrast to either *vede* 'in *vedu*' or *chandasi* 'in [metric] verse', which could refer to incantation-hymns in general or to the *Vedas*, especially the *Atharvaveda*.

In other words, even at an early stage of the development of classical Sanskrit literature, there was a reasonably clear understanding of the separate sphere of *lok* culture. In particular, we may conveniently focus on the sense of 'worldliness' that underlies all of the central meanings of *lok* in classical Sanskrit. Just as in English, this 'worldliness' implied a direct link to the temporal rather than the spiritual: what took place in the *lok* was the affairs of human beings within their own communities rather than the affairs of gods; discourse that took place in *lok* language was divorced from that conducted in the *devavān* of Sanskrit. These themes are echoed in current Nepali usage of *lok*. Certain compound words developed in classical Sanskrit are also indicative of the areas which would later overlap with the usage of *lok* as an equivalent for 'folk': *lokakathā* 'a popular legend or fable', *lokagāthā* 'a verse or song (handed down orally) among men', *lokapravāda* 'popular talk, common saying, commonly used expression'.

So far, we can see that while the traditional connotations of *lok* overlap at certain points with 'folk', its reference tends to be both much wider than the English term and also generally lacking in the pejorative associations that

colour English phrases such as 'folk etymology', where 'folk' is reduced to the opposite of 'scientific' or 'rational'.³ What then of the changing significations of *lok* within modern languages? Can we trace the development of new patterns of meaning built on top of this Sanskrit base? We may start with some continuities: insofar as many NIA languages use *lok* as a *tatsama* (unchanged) Sanskrit loanword, its primary sense of 'world' or 'people' is retained. In this sense, and in this form, it is used in current Bengali as the standard word for 'people'. The *log* of Hindi demonstrates in two ways its deep embeddedness in modern language: both in its ubiquity (without *log* it would be impossible to make the plural pronoun forms *tum log* and *āp log*) and in the fact that its current form in -g indicates its continuous heritage from Sanskrit through Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa to the present day. In these languages, the wider connotation of *lok* is retained in its very general application to 'people' at large.

Nepali presents a slightly different case in that *lok* on its own is not a common feature of everyday vocabulary. It is, however, the basis for several well-known compounds which helpfully illustrate its contemporary range of meaning. The sense of *lok* standing for society at large is evident in *lokpriya* 'popular', while it stands as an official equivalent to 'public' in the civil service *Lok Sevā Āyog* 'Public Service Commission'. Similarly, *loktantra* stands alongside *prajātantra* as a translation of 'democracy' (a sense even more prominent in India, where the *Lok Sabhā* is the lower house of parliament, and where *lok-nirmāṇ* can describe public works in governmental language). More broadly, *lok-mat* can be used for 'public opinion' and *lok-hit* for 'general well-being' or 'the public good'. In all of these instances we can see that *lok* could *not* be represented in English by 'folk', and here the continuing disjunction between the terms should be most apparent.

It is only with reference to particular forms of folk culture that the folk/*lok* equivalence can be maintained, and this may be largely attributed to the way in which *lok* became the bearer for a new signification that was introduced into South Asian thought and languages from the English 'folk'.⁴ The next section examines how, in the case of Nepali, the conscious study of popular traditions as 'folk' may have taken root, and how folk culture then became both an object of study for researchers and a commodity to be traded in the print market. The fourth section then investigates aspects of the emergence of a Nepali form of print-capitalism and asks if it can be read as a development of *lok-saṃskṛti* in the sense of 'popular culture' which the Nepali term most naturally suggests.

Folk culture as an object of study and as a commodity

संसारको प्रत्येक जातिमा आफ्नो रीति धर्म, सामाजिक र सानयिक प्रथा सम्बन्धी दन्तकथाहरू हुन्छन् । हाम्रो समाजमा पनि यसता गल्म कथाहरू अनेक छन् । बङ्गाली समाजमा प्रचलित भएका यसता कथाहरूको संग्रह गरी लाल बिहारी देले *Folk Tales of Bengal* लेखे । अङ्गरेजीमा स्काट आदि गल्म लेखकहरूले यसता अनेक पुस्तक लेखेका छन् । लेपचा भाषामा पनि यसता गल्मको यौटा पुस्तक तैयार गरी बङ्गाल एसियाटिक सोसाइटीले छापि प्रकाश गरेको छ । आदर्शका प्रेमी पाठकहरूले आफूले जानेका वा सुनेका यसता कथाहरू नेपाली भाषामा लेखेर हाम्रो अफिसमा पठाउने कृपा गर्नु भए समयमा यसता कथाहरूको संग्रह गरी यौटा असल लाभदायक पुस्तक प्रकाश गर्ने चेष्टा गर्ने छौं ।

Every jāti in the world has its own oral stories about its customs and manners, social and periodic institutions (sāmājik ra sāmāyik prathā sambandhī). In our society there are many such stories. Having collected such stories current in Bengali society Lāl Bihārī De wrote Folk Tales of Bengal. In English, story-writers such as Scott have written many such books. The Bengal Asiatic Society has also prepared a book of such stories in the Lepcha language and published it. If the loving readers of Ādarśa would be kind enough to write in Nepali such stories that they know or have heard and send them to our office we shall try in time to make a collection of such stories and publish a good and worthwhile book.

Editorial comment, *Ādarśa* 1(3): 38, 1930

At first glance, it may appear that a conscious Nepali interest in folk tales, and in folk culture at large, dates to no earlier than the 1930s. Certainly, Kalimpong-based *Ādarśa* editor Śeṣ Maṇi Pradhān's note cited above is the first explicit call to make folk culture the object of concerted study and recording of which I am aware. Similarly, Bandhu (2001/02) identifies the *Dantyakathā* compiled by Bodhvikram Adhikārī in 1939/40 as the first true collection of folk tales, which he specifies as 'folk stories that are current in popular usage (*lokvyavahārmā pracalit lokkathāharū*)'. Adhikārī's work appeared only shortly before the publication of the most extensive—and probably best remembered—early effort towards investigating and compiling Nepali sayings and popular usage, Puṣkar Śamśer's two-volume encyclopaedia *Nepālī ukhān, ṭukkā, vākyāṃśa, vākyapaddhati, ityādiko koṣ* (1941/42).

However, an active interest in what would later be termed 'folk' traditions, can be traced to a much earlier period. Starting with Motīrām Bhaṭṭa (1866-1896), some writers had researched Nepali proverbs, demonstrating the links between folk inspiration and printable literature.

Bhaṭṭa, who remains best known as the biographer and publisher of Nepali's *ādikavi* ('first poet') Bhānubhakta Ācārya, compiled a collection of proverbs entitled *Ukhānko bakhān*, which was published in Banaras by Rām Kṛṣṇa Khatrī at the end of 1894. The official statements of publications from India's United Provinces (into which the principal Nepali publishing centre Banaras fell) also record the publication of a book entitled *Muhā okhān bakhān* in 1897. This was attributed to a certain Bādri Nārāyaṇ and published by Banaras's Hitacintak Press, which was responsible for the production of many early Nepali books. It is not clear if any copies of Bādri Nārāyaṇ's book have survived but the title suggests that it could be a version of Motīrām's *Ukhānko bakhān*. Such a suggestion also reflects the commercial environment of early Nepali publishing: successful works were frequently copied without permission by other authors and publishers, and it would not be surprising if an unscrupulous rival had taken the opportunity of Motīrām's untimely death to bring out an unauthorised version of his work. In any case, the appearance of these two books within three years of each other surely indicates that there existed a market for this type of 'folk' tradition compilation: both titles had print runs of 1,000.⁵

Meanwhile, the interest in proverbs and their reflection of colloquial expression had spread to Darjeeling, where the pioneering publisher Gaṅgāprasād Pradhān was also infected with an enthusiasm for collecting folk sayings. Gaṅgāprasād, the son of a former palace gatekeeper in Kathmandu who had run away from his new home on a Darjeeling tea estate to have himself baptised a Christian in Allahabad, became the first ordained Nepali priest and the proprietor of the Gorkha Press. From 1901 to 1930 he produced the *Gorkhe Khabar Kāgat*, by far the longest-lived Nepali periodical in pre-Independence India. His own compilation of 1,438 sayings was published in 1908; although they represented the mixed heritage of Darjeeling's population, the vast majority of whom had migrated there within the last couple of generations, he described them as 'pure Nepali proverbs' (Pradhan 1908). Very few copies of this book—which Gaṅgāprasād researched, printed and published himself—have survived but Salon Kārthak's recent biography of Gaṅgāprasād reproduces one sample proverb for each letter of the alphabet (2001: 100-04; in the original work the proverbs were arranged alphabetically by first letter).⁶ Less than a decade later, Kājī Mahāvīr Siṃh Garataulā Kṣatrī contributed a slimmer and less well organised collection of popular sayings (*Ukhān bakhānko pravāha*, 1917) which, despite claiming to be author-published, was produced in 500 copies by one of the leading Nepali publishing houses in Banaras, that of Viśvarāj and Harihar Śarmā.

The purpose of presenting these details is to demonstrate that even if the explicit recognition of folk culture *per se* as a topic worthy of study by Nepali

writers may not be seen until 1930 or thereabouts, in practice elements of folk expression were evident from the earliest stages of the development of Nepali print. And while the collection of proverbs is the clearest indication of a deliberate *research* approach to folk issues, I would suggest that their centrality to the emergence of Nepali *narrative* forms in print is of much greater significance. Narrative, in fact, was the primary concern of the essay by Rūpnārāyaṅ Siṃh that prompted Pradhān's comments in *Ādarśa*. Siṃh was one of the most talented and creative Nepalis of his generation, and even now is well remembered as the author of one of the most important early Nepali novels, *Bhramar*. In 1930 he had graduated with a BA and was based in Calcutta; he would go on to become a senior lawyer and a leading light of Calcutta high society, famed for his dashing good looks and the womanising which formed the semi-autobiographical background to *Bhramar* ('The Bumble-bee'; the title alluding to the metaphor of a bee which feeds on many flowers, flying from one to another and never settling). The aim of his article in *Ādarśa* was to highlight the paucity of inventive narratives in Nepali, in either the novel or short story genres. In his consideration of the latter, his choice of word, *galpa*, indicates that he was considerably influenced by the achievements of Bengali literature (1930: 38): 'There is an absence in Nepali literature of both novels and stories. There is not a single noteworthy novel. As for the word *galpa*, it is still hardly heard or understood in the vernacular.'

But again, we should be cautious in taking his insistence on the 'absence' of narrative genres at face value: for example, Bandhu (2001/02: 294) dates the highly influential and much reproduced prose narrative *Vīrsikkā* to 1889/90 and includes it among works that are related to folk stories. We may rather interpret Siṃh's statement as specifically bemoaning the lack of tales that had clearly moved beyond those of folk origins. For there had been a flourishing market for Nepali novels, stories and poetry for more than three decades: in fact, as the next section aims to illustrate, it was reworked folk formats such as *Vīrsikkā* that provided the main platform for the Nepali publishing business, which in turn enabled the production and distribution of more refined literature through the infrastructure thus established.

How, then, did the advent of print as a technology and business influence folk culture? The foregoing paragraphs have already hinted at the change in the *interpretation* of folk formats as they came to be consciously distinguished as 'folk' or *lok* and contrasted to an implicit 'non-folk' modernity. Let us now look at a couple of examples of how print brought changes to the *presentation* of folk genres, and how this consequently spurred new styles of writing (and, of course, reading). By presentation, I have in mind all the steps required to bring folk formats into printed format, including composition, distribution and marketing.

First, we may note that the relationship between folk culture and high culture was a complex one even before the arrival of print. To take a prominent example, the *Rāmāyana* was, as a Sanskrit epic poem with many written recensions, distinctly representative of sophisticated literary culture. Yet it also spawned numerous folk interpretations, both within Nepal and throughout South and South-east Asia (cf. Richman 1991). The fame of Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* throughout north India rested on the ready intelligibility of his Avadhī language and his adoption of the popular *dohā* and *caupāī* verse formats. Similarly in Nepali, episodes from the *Rāmāyana* had, long before Bhānubhakta's fuller literary rendition, been rendered into the form of *bāluns*, a form of folk drama popular among Brāhmaṇs and Chetrīs of Nepal's central hills. Such dramas would have been performed relatively informally at the village level but with the arrival of print they both took on a permanent form—what at that time Hindi literary critics would describe as *sthāyī*—and gained a potentially much wider audience than the original dramas themselves. For example, Pūrṇānanda Upādhyāya's *Rāmāyanako bālun* (published in Banaras in 1912 by Viśvarāj Harihar) gave print-permanence to one particular version of the *Rāmāyana* tale.⁷ Other *bāluns* that were transformed into print in the early twentieth century included parts of the *Mahābhārata* and tales of the incarnations of Viṣṇu.

While Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyana* (which was a great commercial as well as literary success) may have promoted a relatively homogeneous devotional culture, the simultaneous circulation of a variety of divergent folk traditions must have acted as a reminder of the heterogeneity of cultural forms within Nepal. As such works reached new audiences they also enabled a form of print-mediated communication between different experiences and traditions.

Thus, from a starting point quite far removed from the religious narratives of the epics as they were translated into *bāluns*, the *savāī* form of popular verse developed into a versatile print medium for the recitation of tales from distant battlefronts, of historical characters or events. Like most popular genres, *savāīs* have not received much scholarly attention: while Bandhu praises many *savāī* poems for their liveliness (2001/02: 215) he observes that 'as published *savāīs* ... were confined to the little educated, the assessment of Nepali *savāī* literature can for now be only based on estimation.' *Savāīs*, which may be most conveniently glossed as narrative folk-poetry, entered the printed market themselves and then, perhaps more significantly, offered many writers who would otherwise never have had the opportunity to produce printable works an entry to the burgeoning Nepali literary bazaar.

This genre was produced commercially in Banaras but, probably more than any other type of literature, drew in a wide range of authors and readers: this ethnic and geographic diversity certainly owed much to the medium's

popularity among soldiers.⁸ Early contributions from India's north-east included Tulācan Ale's *Mañipurko savāī* (1896); Dhanvīr Bhaṅḍārī's *Abbar pahāḍko savāī* (1894); and *Bhuiṃcāloko savāī* (1897). Ḍākṃān Thuluṅ Rāī's *savāī* account of the 1899 Darjeeling landslide (Pradhān 1982: 100) probably made him the first Kirat writer in Nepali to be widely read. Yet this genre managed to embrace more subjects than the historical or martial. The collection *Savāī pacīsā* (1914), published in Banaras by Viśvarāj Harihar, merited a print run of 1,000 copies despite its potentially prohibitive cost of two-and-a-half rupees.

Works such as this indicate the ease with which a popular format was adopted and commercialised by Banaras publishers. As with *savāīs* of the Shillong earthquake, Viśvarāj Harihar's main rival Padmaprasād Upādhyāya also added Jaṅgābīr's (1916) description of the 1899 Darjeeling landslide to his catalogue. That this tale of the heroism of Gurkha soldiers in their rescue efforts should become a vehicle for the profit of a mercenary entrepreneur is indicative of the ambivalent relations that characterised the emergent Nepali print-capitalism. The publishing infrastructure developed in Banaras offered new outlets for *savāī* literature and promised to bring these verses to a wide audience in a convenient, and generally affordable format. In doing this they also elevated folk-style rhyming tales to a form of *sthāyī* printed literature. The composer of a successful *savāī* could hope for some fame and increased literary respectability; yet for a publisher such as Padmaprasād, the most important verses were surely the rhyming couplets on the back cover that he hoped would carry the message of his wondrous Mahakali oil and other products to new markets. Meanwhile, we can observe with the commercialisation of this genre an interesting tension: members of historically non-Nepali-speaking, working/soldiering classes were being offered entry into an arena that had previously been closed to them; nevertheless, the major beneficiaries remained confined to a small circle of Banaras-based Brāhmins.

The patterns that can be observed in the adaptation of *savāī* verse to book format are echoed in other genres. A further tension in the deployment of folk formats in print came into focus with the development of Nepali literary criticism. For example, the most widespread early use of the immensely popular *jhyāure* folksong rhythm was in mildly erotic *śrīṅār* poetry. The flavour given by the *jhyāure* rhythm surely contributed to the remarkable success of cheap romantic works in this genre: they sold in the tens of thousands and seemingly appealed to a very diverse audience. Books such as these made publishing in Nepali commercially viable but they also incurred critical disdain and moral censure. Such attitudes were no doubt largely informed by the growing consensus among the self-appointed guardians of

high class literature that writing had to be socially useful and preferably morally improving, a viewpoint common among Hindi critics which had become well entrenched by the time it was institutionalised in Rāmcandra Śukla's seminal *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* (1940). It was when *jhyāure* was exploited to help convey an approved message, such as in Mahānanda Sāpkoṭā's reformist *Mun-laharī* (1923), that it was most appreciated by contemporary and subsequent critics.

We may conclude that the decades around the turn of the twentieth century witnessed both the birth of the modern Nepali publishing industry and the extensive remoulding of traditional folk forms into new printed books. The few specific illustrations presented above offer only a glimpse of the mass of works which drew on folk genres and contributed to their reformulation. By the later part of the period examined, writers had started to treat 'folk' or *lok* culture consciously as an object of study in its own right but it is clear that the interest in investigating and representing folk traditions dates back to near the beginning of Nepali print culture. We have seen that the use of folk was not entirely unproblematic but rather reflected various tensions inherent in the nascent literary system: between creativity and profit, the local and the universal, and between popular success and critical esteem.

Print culture as *lok* culture

The foregoing section has aimed primarily to sketch some of the ways in which the process of transfer of folk genres from local, oral traditions to printed and widely distributed formats affected their form and their role in society. But how can we assess the influence of folk culture on shaping the wider world of Nepali print? The collision of Nepali folk traditions with the technology and commercial practices of modern print-capitalism, centred on Banaras, had a double-edged impact on both elements in the equation. Folk may have been transformed as it was remoulded into printed output but it also exerted a major influence in shaping the economics of the modern Nepali literary system as a whole. In short, without folk literature as a base to draw on and from which to revise and improvise, it would have been difficult for the Nepali literary system as a whole to establish itself as a viable print business.

In the early decades of Nepali publishing, perhaps even the majority of titles (excluding widely-circulating textbooks) had their origins in popular and folk genres. Certainly the volume of 'high' literature—such as, say, Lekhnāth Paḍyāl's *Rtu vicār* (published in Nepal by Kulcandra Gautam in 1917) or Dharaṇīdhar Koirālā's *Naivedya* (published in Banaras by Maṇi Siṃh Gurūn in 1920)—was remarkably small in comparison to popular styles such as the *bāluns* and *savāīs* discussed above. Were it not for the commercial success of

such works, there would have been neither the developed infrastructure to publish more sophisticated creations nor the means to distribute them, nor indeed such a sizeable market for them. Yet folk traditions have often been neglected by mainstream literary historians, except when they have directly influenced written styles. Tārānāth Śarmā's influential *Nepālī sāhityako itihās* (1994/95), for example, gives no space to folk traditions. The influence of popular song is acknowledged when its rhythms enter mainstream poetry but its intrinsic value is downplayed. Thus Lakṣmīprasād Devkoṭā's use of *jhyāure* in *Munā-Mudan* has generally received rapturous critical applause but many of the earlier published *jhyāure* verses have slipped into obscurity, despite the fact that they surely entertained thousands of people and played a crucial role in the spread of the Nepali language (cf. Bandhu 1989).

Here we can see the convenience of thinking in terms of *lok* rather than 'folk'. For whatever the folk origins of much of the material that bulked out Nepali publishers' catalogues and filled up their balance sheets, it was their *laukik* (worldly) functions that guaranteed their place at the heart of the new industry. Unlike the traditions of, say, the oral transmission of the *vedas* within priestly lineages or the *samasyāpūrti* competitions at *kavi sammelan* gatherings, print technology was fundamentally implicated in the worldly matters that are bound up in the term *lok* itself. Moreover, it was the fact that print offered a new means of reaching out to the 'world at large', to communities of Nepalis of various backgrounds and classes spread out across Nepal, India and beyond, that enabled it to reformulate local 'folk' traditions into books that catered to the much wider *lok* of all literate Nepalis. Indeed, print culture was not even confined to the reading public, because in many areas it provided new materials for storytelling and recitation that bridged the gap between textual and oral transmission.

The temporal force of *lok* is also evident in the way that popular publishing brought access to hitherto restricted religious knowledge into the public domain. With the translation of texts from the *devavānī* of Sanskrit and their presentation to people in the *lokbhāṣā* (vernacular) they understood age-old barriers around esoteric knowledge started to erode. The outpouring of tales from the *purāṇas*, the epics and even some of the *vedas* may have contributed to the propagation of normative religious values but they also brought about a minor revolution comparable to that occasioned in Europe by the translation of the Bible. The medium of print also became a powerful channel for the dissemination of reformist messages, from the radical poets of the Josmanī Sant tradition in eastern Nepal and the Ārya Ṣamājī doctrine promoted by Mādhavrāj Joṣī and Śukrarāj Śāstrī to the later Theravāda Buddhist revival which was intimately connected to the elaboration of a modern Newar social and cultural consciousness. Many of these significant

developments were at most only tangentially related to folk traditions but were very much *lok*-related.

The most lasting legacy of the early period of Nepali print culture is, finally, the most emphatically *lok*-centred. It was only as the wider public came to be identified with a cohesive sense of *jāti* belonging that the *lok-samskṛti* of print began speaking to a proto-nationalist Nepali community. The awareness of a potential supra-ethnic Nepali *jātiyatā* (loosely speaking, nationhood) and concerted efforts towards its definition and development were inalienably linked to the new communicative technology of print and the wide discursive potential it enabled. *Jāti* consciousness was at the heart of much Nepali writing of the early twentieth century and lay at the heart of the rhetorical and practical commitments to *unnati* (progress, advancement) which preoccupied almost all social thinkers, writers and activists. Insofar as the audience for popular publications thus came to overlap with the nascent 'Nepali *jāti*', the new *lok* represented 'the people', in a way comparable to the German *Volk*, or the Russian equation of folk culture with *narodnaia* ('national') culture.

The cultural aspects of folk culture formed the basis for the elaboration of *jātiyatā* in both literary terms and as a practical means for reaching out to disparate members of an undeniably heterogeneous population. It was to folk culture that influential writers such as Sūryavikram looked when seeking to define the essence of that which was specifically Nepali. Introducing his new edition of Motīrām's renowned biography of Bhānubhakta, Sūryavikram devoted a full page (Bhaṭṭa 1927: 3-4) to the need to revive and make use of Nepali's *jātiya chanda* (national/ethnic metres), especially *savārī*. He praised Dharaṇīdhar Koirālā for his devotion to producing natural Nepali poetry but urged other poets to work hard to revive the *jātiya chandas*. Sūryavikram believed that a distinctive Nepaliness could be found in *jāti* heritage but the role of modern litterateurs was to refine it.

In this way, the folk resources of Nepali proverbs, local verse formats and song styles were welded to a much wider proto-nationalist project in which the symbolic value of their nativeness was used to support an emerging *jāti* identity. This project was in a certain sense the summation of *lok* culture, for it deployed lengthy folk traditions within the new framework of print technology to create a modern concept of shared popular culture and common *jāti* belonging. When thought of in English, the meeting of folk with print seems to be a clash of cultures. The formative Nepali experience suggests, however, that both were essential to the birth of a novel type of *lok samskṛti* whose impact is still felt today.

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the 2nd International Folklore Congress, Kathmandu, May 30 - June 1, 2003. I am grateful to Tulsī Diwas and Professor Chura Mani Bandhu for their invitation to present a paper at this congress, and also to the participants who offered comments and suggestions.
2. Many of the materials drawn on for this brief article are presented at more length in Chalmers (2002), which also provides a more thorough analysis of the development of Nepali print-capitalism in general. The wider historical analysis within which this study of folk and print may be located—broadly speaking, the emergence and development of Nepali social consciousness within the public sphere of the early twentieth century—is the subject of Chalmers (2003).
3. The Sanskrit verbal root *lok* 'to see, behold, perceive' is included in the Dhātupāṭha (iv, 2) but the noun *lok* took some time to settle into its current form: 'connected with *roka*; in the oldest texts *loka* is generally preceded by *u*, which according to the Padap.= the particle 3. *u*; but *u* may be a prefixed vowel and *ulok* a collateral dialectic form of *loka*; according to others *u-loka* is abridged from *uru-* or *ava-loka*' (Monier-Williams 1899: 906).
4. In fact, the English usage of 'folk' has had a wide influence in other European languages, and the English term itself has often been loaned to offer the specific sense implied in 'folklore', etc. While German and Dutch make use of the cognate *Volk/volk* (thus German *Volkstanz* 'folk dance' or *Volkssage* 'folk tale', Dutch *volkslied* 'folk song'), French has adopted *folk* as both a noun and an adjective (thus *chanson folk* 'folk song'), as well as the terms *le folklore* and *folklorique*. Russian has similarly loaned *fol'klor* and *fol'klorist* but uses *narodnyi* 'national' as the modifier: *narodnaia muzyka* 'folk/national music', *narodnaia pesnia* 'folk/national song'. (It seems that the artificial European language Esperanto tends towards the wider sense of 'folk' as people at large, hence *popolo* 'folk', *popolkanto*, 'folk song'.)
5. I have only been able to have a brief glance at one surviving copy of Gaṅgā prasad's collection of proverbs held in a private collection in Darjeeling.
6. While Parājulī (2001/02: 15-16), probably the most authoritative recent writer on Nepali proverbs, cites the work of Motīrām, Gaṅgāprasād and Gartaulā, he makes no mention of Badrī Nārāyaṇ.
7. Bandhu (2001/02b: 278-80) provides an interesting description of *bālun* performance but does not discuss published versions.
8. The *savāī* remains a popular format. Kamal Dixit recently published retired soldier Puṅyabahādur Thāpākṣetrī's 328-verse *Srṣṭiko savāī* (2001/02) with an enthusiastic preface.

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256 CNAS Journal, Vol. 31, No. 2 (July 2004)

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