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Below the Surface of Private Property: Individual rights, common property, and the Nepalese *kipaṭ* system in historical perspective

Werner M. Egli

This article[1] will investigate the following questions: (a) how was it possible for some Kiranti villages in east Nepal—maybe only a tiny minority[2]—to largely maintain their traditional rights in landed property over the course of the last 200 years? (b) what were the macro-sociological conditions which enabled this development? (c) which special characteristics of the groups concerned favoured the survival of traditional rights?

I do not adopt the mainstream perspective on the investigation of the Nepalese *kipaṭ* system of land tenure which was initiated by Caplan (1970), adopted by Sagant (1978), Müller (1984), and others, and continued by Forbes (1999). This focuses on the discontinuity in the historical change from collective rights in land to private property, from tribal to state law, from a clan-based economy to a market economy, or as "a broad shift in local-national political relations, a shift shaped by Nepal's transformation from a kingdom on the edge of the British empire to a nation-state on the edge of an international market economy" (Forbes 1999: 116). Instead, I try to show that the often neglected individual rights belonging to the *kipaṭ* system had a continuity, beneath the surface of private property. In so far as this article is a contribution to recent trends in the discussion of common property resource management systems, it shares the criticism contained in Hardin's neo-classical theory, the 'Tragedy of the Commons' (1968), which shows that "privatisation and government control are not the only mechanisms to affect the use of natural resources. There is a middle way: rules developed at the community level" (Acheson 1989: 358). Its consequences coincide with Neef's conclusion in his recent study of the Djerma and Fulbe in Niger and the Fon and Ayizo in Benin, that a government should not introduce private property rights, or insist on their effective application in instances where they have been introduced already, if special circumstances exist, such as "high social cohesion of the

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[1] This article is based on a talk given at the Blockseminar der Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft in 1998, under the title 'Kollektive und individuelle Eigentumsrechte bei tribalen Gruppen Nepals im Laufe der neueren Geschichte'. For critical remarks on a draft of that talk I am indebted to Dr Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Zurich University.

[2] Even though I think the investigated case is not unique, the proverbial heterogeneity of the Kirantis from village to village (Vansittart 1980: 66f.) must be taken into consideration.

local population, low ethnic and socio-cultural diversity, low conflict potential and institutional pluralism" (Neef 1999: 263).

The Sunuwar: a brief outline of the main ethnographic references

The Sunuwar[3] or Koinch, as they call themselves, live at the foot of the Everest massif. They number approximately 30,000, and they are the original inhabitants of the area into which the well-known Sherpa migrated during the 16th century (Oppitz 1968). Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and together with the Rai, Limbu, Hayu, and the Surel, a Sunuwar subgroup, they form the *kirānti*, who are often considered to be the historical descendants of the legendary *kirāta* mentioned in the Vedas (Singh 1990). The Sunuwar are mainly to be found inhabiting slopes of intermediate altitude in the valleys of the Khimti Khola and the Likhu Khola. In the Khimti region they are very Hinduized, while in the Likhu valley they still live largely in their traditional manner (Fournier 1974, Müller 1984).

As among other Kiranti groups, the main crops of the Sunuwar are millet, maize, and rice. About one third of the cultivated land is irrigated and terraced. Animal husbandry is negligible. Today there are no more land reserves. The main unit of production and consumption is the household, almost always identical with the nuclear family; this contrasts with the Indo-Nepalese household, which is often based on an extended family. The prevalent inheritance rule for land is preferential ultimogeniture, "the transfer or residuum of father's rights after other members of sibling groups have received a share during his lifetime" (Goody 1962: 326),[4] and succession to religious and political offices follows the rule of primogeniture. This regime of inheritance and succession is also typical of other Kiranti groups (Gaenszle 1991: 162ff., McDougal 1979: 59ff.). Landlessness is rare among the Sunuwar and the rate of out-migration is relatively low compared with other groups inhabiting the same region.

The Sunuwar universe of supernatural beings, and Sunuwar ritual practices, are dominated by a strong ancestor ideology which implicates shamanism and forms the frame of the Sunuwar understanding of Hinduism. The main themes of Sunuwar as well as Kiranti mythology are separation and conflict among brothers, and a special trait of Sunuwar and Kiranti culture in general is an indigenous notion of culture called *mukdum* among the Sunuwar.[5]

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[3] The Sunuwar are described as I met them in the early 1990s. Most data were collected at a village on the east bank of the Likhu Khola (Okhaldunga District, former *Mājh Kirāt*, East No.3). For further information on Sunuwar ethnography and history, see Egli (1999).

[4] Women are excluded from land ownership. Only as widows do they have usage rights. Unmarried adult women mostly stay in their parental homes. According to the custom of *sororāt* an unmarried woman is often given in marriage to replace a sterile or deceased sister.

[5] See Gaenszle (1993) for other Kiranti groups.

Sunuwar social organization is characterized by a segmentary lineage system with rules of fission which are exemplarily described by Evans-Pritchard for the Nuer (Gaenszle 1991: 213). Each exogamous patriclan, most of which are named and localized, is subdivided into maximal lineages. These are subdivided into minimal lineages. Each segment has its own ancestor ritual. The minimal lineage is not only a ritual community but also the main unit of institutionalized exchange and permanent cooperation. Cross-cousin marriage, which was probably practised in former times (Gaenszle 1991: 183f.), is nowadays strictly forbidden. It is not the horizontal principle implicated in marriage alliance, but the vertical principle implicated in the descent rules which shapes social organization and the sphere of cultural ideology as well. The position of Sunuwar women, compared with that of Hindu women in Nepal, is relatively comfortable,[6] mainly because the wife-givers retain a certain kind of protective function over the well-being of their 'daughter' after her marriage.[7]

The Sunuwar ancestor ritual of the minimal lineage (*chengu*) is a periodic repetition of the mortuary ritual. It is celebrated twice a year: after the harvest and during the time of food shortage. The celebration of this ritual is the responsibility of the youngest brothers or the principal heirs.[8] Large amounts of millet beer (*shyabu*), the main material contribution the youngest brothers make to the ritual, serve as a symbolic feeding for the ancestor souls. In reality, it benefits the elder brothers and their families, who are politically influential, but, in respect of their material status, disadvantaged.[9] Elsewhere I have shown that the *chengu* ritual creates a paradigm for the exchange of goods and manpower between brothers in Sunuwar society, which helps to compensate for the material differences which are systematically created by the inheritance rules.

In traditional Sunuwar villages the local patriclan still generally holds the supreme ownership of the village or ancestral land (*am batek*) up to the present day. The transmission of landed property, whether by inheritance, gift, or purchase, is almost impossible without the permission of the council of clan elders (*amal*). Similar circumstances are described by Gaenszle for the Mewahang Rai (1991: 150). The Nepalese law providing for private property[10] is hardly ever invoked by a clan member who intends to stay in the village. In particular, the Nepalese law of inheritance, a system of equal partition,[11] is very seldom invoked.[12] The few exceptions are people who have decided to leave the village for ever.

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[6] See Jones (1973) for the position of Limbu women.

[7] See McDougal (1979: 88) for the Kulunge Rai.

[8] According to Cicero's argument in De Legibus (see Goody 1962: 379).

[9] In the village under investigation, the youngest brother is the heir of the parental house in 70% of cases. The youngest sons have about 40% more production than their elder brothers and they own the lion's share of the *khet* land.

[10] Or, more accurately, state property with individual rights of use.

[11] Today this law benefits women as well, but this does not affect my argument.

[12] The same is stated by Vinding (1979: 41) for the Thakali.

The influence of the Sunuwar in the village under investigation, which clearly indicates the survival of the most important trait of the communal land tenure system—*kipat*, i.e. the prohibition on the alienation of land to non-group-members—can be seen in the following figures concerning land disputes, the persons who decide them, and the kind of decisions taken. About 75% of the quarrels recorded are concerned with land and inheritance.[13] Almost all of these quarrels are in a way consequences of the disharmonious rules of the traditional inheritance system. After the death of their parents, elder brothers often demand a share in addition to the land they received around the time of their marriage. Sometimes they threaten to leave the village and to sell their land to anybody who will buy it. But no case is known where this has actually happened, since nobody ever seems to have resorted to the district court at Okhaldunga Bazaar to fight for his rights. This does not seem to be uncommon for Nepal: with reference to a village in the Kathmandu valley, Bennett states, "elder men in the village say they can't remember a single case (out of many threats) where villagers actually went outside" (1983: 8). Land disputes are settled neither above the level of the village panchayat nor among kinsmen. In other cases, influential kinsmen often act as mediators, but in land quarrels they are usually an interested party.

The Sunuwars in the village under investigation occupy almost all of the important offices in the Panchayat: Pradhan Pancha, Upapradhan Pancha, Village Secretary, Mukhiya and Jimmawal,[14] and even the post of Area Member. They all belong to the local clan which founded the village, and which was in former times the official holder of the *kipat*. One main endeavour of these Panchayat functionaries, assisted by the village committee (*amal*), is to prevent the alienation of land to strangers by arranging good deals between kinsmen.[15] In addition, they enforce the norms of traditional inheritance against official Nepalese law. The results of their decisions are evident: 90 percent of the ancestral land is still owned by Sunuwars, 80 percent is owned by members of the local clan, land is still distributed unequally among brothers, and, except for widows, women do not own land.

The Kiranti in Nepalese history and the *kipat* system of land tenure

The history of east Nepal remains obscure up until the formation of the Nepalese state. Most of the Kiranti groups and subgroups were probably incorporated in, or affiliated with, some of the adjacent Hindu principalities, but the historical sources suggest that they had largely disposed of political and cultural autonomy. Even without information on the internal organization of the Kiranti groups, we may assume that they were organized in village communities, where villages were mostly identical with unilineal descent groups with a corporate character and loosely bound together through relations of marriage; they probably also formed temporary alliances against a common enemy (Caplan 1990: 135).

13 This corresponds with data from other places in the Okhaldunga district (FNF 1988: 63).
14 At the time of my research these latter two were still in charge of tax collection.
15 The same praxis is described by Neef (1999: 14) for Niger and Benin.

My assumption is that the former organization of the Kiranti groups does not differ fundamentally from the situation we can observe in many contemporary traditional Kiranti villages.

Even before the Gorkha conquest in the late 18th century, members of the Hindu castes migrated into the Kiranti area, and the different systems of land tenure which were later practised by the Gorkhali were already known. Later decrees by the Gorkhali rulers do not provide evidence for the introduction of new laws and regulations, but seem to be guarantees of rights which were formerly granted (Regmi 1978: 537). Between 1772 and 1774, Gorkha incorporated east Nepal within its actual boundaries, but far-reaching autonomy was given to the original inhabitants of the area (Regmi 1978: 626). This policy of non-intervention was in no way disinterested. Some of the subordinated groups, such as for instance the Limbu, represented serious military potential; to others, such as the Sunuwar, the Gorkhalis felt a debt of gratitude because of their support in the course of the conquest (Stiller 1973: 136).[16]

The basic item of Gorkhali policy of non-intervention in East Nepal was the guarantee of the traditional form of land tenure called *kipat*.[17] Unlike other forms of land tenure, such as *raikar* and its sub-categories,[18] where the state acts as the superior owner and grants titles to its citizens,[19] *kipat* is a form of communal land tenure, where the state signs over the title to a certain territory to a certain group. In practice, this was done by signing over land titles to local headmen in the names of their respective groups (Regmi 1972: 50).[20]

The most important trait of the *kipat* system was the prohibition on the alienation of land to non-group members (Regmi 1978: 535).[21] In his study of the Mewahang Rai, Gaenszle writes: "[p]robably the *kipat* system is due to a tribal customary law based on some kind of religious notion of ancestral land; and the Hindu rulers of the day integrated this law in their administrative order" (1991: 57). As Caplan has pointed out, *kipat* was more than a system of land tenure; it was the basis of identity for the different Kiranti groups (1991: 313).

16 This was mentioned in a document of 1791/92 (Müller 1984: 40).
17 According to Regmi, this right was granted only to c. 4% of the entire Nepalese population (see Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989: 68).
18 *birtā, guṭhī, jāgir,* and *rakam* (Regmi 1978: 17).
19 Regmi has called this "state landlordism" (1978: 864).
20 Sometimes these were lineages, sometimes clans or members of several clans in the same locality.
21 This was made compulsory for the first time in the written law in 1883 (Regmi 1978: 549), but, according to Gaenszle (1991: 57), the prohibition of alienation expresses the "essence" of the *kipat* system, "even if the rule was not observed strictly all the time".

The *kipat* system and individual ownership

While the existing research largely agrees on these points (Regmi 1978: 538, 1972: 49; Burghart 1984: 109), there is no consensus with respect to the question of whether it is possible to speak of 'property' under the *kipat* regime. For Caplan, it is "misleading to speak of 'owning' *kipat* (as one owns *raikar*) since ownership objectifies the thing owned... It is a case of 'owning' the land and 'being owned' by it" (1991: 313). In the same sense, Pfaff-Czarnecka writes, "[t]he allocation of land was managed within the group ('collectively'); de jure it was signed over to entire localized segments of ethnic groups for common usufruct. A representative of the group established contacts with the rulers. Therefore one cannot speak of property in respect of *kipat* "(1989: 68f.). In contrast to this, and together with McDougal (1979: 14), I take the view that it is possible to speak of 'property', i.e. collective as well as individual property.[22] To what extent it is possible does not depend on the special issue of Nepalese history in the first place, but upon the question of the existence and significance of property in tribal society. This is also the perspective taken by Caplan, and I agree with his perspective, but not with his conclusions. I will return to this question later in this discussion.

Another characteristic of the *kipat* system is the special legal authority that is assigned to the local headmen by the state. Local headmen were appointed to allocate the land to the *kipat* co-owners, to collect the taxes and—with the exception of the five cardinal crimes—to administer justice. They were also entitled to levy compulsory labour, fines, and special payments from their *kipatyas* and new settlers in their own favour. In times of sufficient land reserves the *kipatyas* supported the immigration of new settlers, hoping to transfer these burdens to them. At that time the local headmen enjoyed quasi-sovereignty within the feudal order of the Gorkha state and were respected as "younger brothers of the king" (Sagant 1978: 75).

For a long time, the *kipat* system offered political and cultural autonomy to the Kiranti groups and the remembrance of the 'original' *kipat* times is still an important part of Kiranti identity (Jones 1973: 65, Gaenszle 1991: 60, Caplan 1990, 1991). On the other hand the same system contributed, especially through the influential status of local headmen, to the integration of tribal groups into the state. The formal abolition of *kipat*, first for irrigated fields (*khet*), and then in the 1960s for all kinds of fields, merely accompanied a development among a majority of Kiranti groups which had been unleashed mostly by themselves. The state-controlled immigration of Indo-Nepalese (Regmi 1972: 50ff.), at first largely welcomed by the tribal population, went hand in hand with developments whereby *kipat* land was left to Hindu immigrants for usufruct, or the local population, not versed in the use of money, became encumbered with debts and gave land as mortgages to the immigrants. The step to legalize this kind of provisional transfer was not a minor one

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22 For more accurate definitions of common, communal, individual, private, and state property, etc., see Bromley and Cernea (1989: 11-19).

in a state where Hindus were privileged. Or, in another scenario, the land given to the immigrants was immediately registered as *raikar*, i.e. private property. Also, the illegal annexation of land by immigrants, especially of pasture land, is often documented. In the same measure as the local groups lost control over land, the legal competence of local headmen was also restricted, so that in legal matters immigrants could increasingly approach regional courts which generally favoured Hindu applicants. These processes were first investigated by Caplan (1970) for the Limbu and by Müller (1984) for the Sunuwar.

The formal abolition of *kipat* went hand in hand with the immigration of Indo-Nepalese into tribal areas. But where there was no immigration, the formal abolition of *kipat* had few effects in practice, and even today we may find localities where land is *de facto* mainly controlled by those groups which were formerly assigned as *kipat* owners. Even under the conditions of private property, tribal law, on which the *kipat* system was based, is still alive.[23] Such localities are mostly to be found in sites which are disadvantageous for paddy cultivation, a practice preferred by the Indo-Nepalese immigrants. We can take the criterion of 'disadvantageous site' in this respect as an important precondition for the survival of the *kipat* system. In my opinion, the question of which macro-sociological and cultural factors have the same impact depends mainly on one's assumptions about the extent to which it is appropriate to speak of (individual) property in a tribal society. It would be absurd to assume a continuity of traditional property rights if these rights were only of a collective kind. In a short departure here, I wish to clarify for the purposes of this article the question of the coexistence of individual and collective rights in land in tribal society.

The coexistence of individual and collective rights

From Plato to Morgan, property in 'primitive' society was considered to be 'weak' or non-existent, and land in particular was considered to be a collectively owned good. Lowie (1947 [1920]) was one of the first to criticize this view. By recourse to a large variety of ethnographic examples, he not only emphasized the coexistence of individual and collective property rights and the impossibility of understanding history or evolution as a continuous transition from one category to the other, but he also pointed out that common property could be found everywhere. Contemporary researchers agree that collective as well as individual property rights can be found even in hunter and gatherer societies (Barnard and Woodburn 1988: 10); the creation of individual rights is believed to be largely a consequence of individual labour (ibid.: 23ff.).

Roberts' view that people would not develop an intense relationship with land under conditions of swidden agriculture (Roberts 1981: 105), which was formerly also prevalent among the Kiranti, is wrong, as Richards showed for the Bemba of Zambia in the 1930s. As soon as someone is cultivating a parcel of land, he not only possesses this particular parcel or has rights of usufruct in it, but also has full ownership of it , and he may inherit

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23 The survival of the *kipat* system after its official abolition is also considered by McDougal (1979: 30), Gaenszle (1991: 69), and Forbes (1999: 120).

the land (Richards 1939: 10). A general problem with which we are still confronted in hunter and gatherer societies is that "in some instances we cannot divide up sorts of property according to whether they are individually or communally held. The problem is that, often, analytically separate individual and group rights exist in the same item of property" (Barnard and Woodburn 1988: 10).

In the early 1940s Gluckman dealt with this problem in relation to agricultural societies with more intensive methods of cultivation, and his conclusions for his African cases seem to be valid for the Kiranti as well. According to Gluckman, the fact that land is distributed relatively evenly in tribal societies and that each individual has a right to a parcel of land does not mean that land is owned 'communally' by groups (Gluckman 1983: 4, 10). Also, cooperation does not reduce the individual claim (ibid.: 23); it may only create additional collective claims. Among the Barotse the right of the group consists mainly in a prohibition on the alienation of land, but this restriction is not an argument against the existence of individual property. Gluckman also made the point that a criterion for property can be seen in the possibility of inheritance (1969: 59ff.). To facilitate an appropriate comprehension of complex relations of ownership, Gluckman distinguished between "estate of rights of administration" and "estate of production" (ibid.): the first qualifies property in respect of the collective or its representative as a king or local headman, the second qualifies it in respect of individual labour.

As Bromley and Cernea have stated, the term 'common property' "has been largely misunderstood and falsely interpreted for the past two-three decades. Common property regimes are not the free-for-all that they have been described to be, but are structured ownership arrangements" (1989: iii). A widespread confusion of the notions of 'property right', 'right of possession', and 'right of usufruct' in tribal society seems to come from leaving the topic of the continuity of property out of consideration (von Benda-Beckman 1979). We are dealing with property in agriculturally used land. Among peasants, whether tribal or 'modern', land is still acquired largely via inheritance (e.g. Neef 1999: 90). The continuity of property is guaranteed and regulated by rules of inheritance. If it is a commonplace among European jurists that "property without the law of inheritance is unthinkable" (Piotet 1978: 2), and if inheritance law is considered to be "a very clear measure for the significance of property" (Wesel 1985: 107), we cannot doubt for one moment that individual property exists in agrarian societies of all kinds.

Another point of view goes further in so far as it denies the possibility of using 'our' notion of property for tribal cultures. The Bohannans declared that the Tiv do not know property (in land), not only because land is alienable but because "the relationship between people and things, which in English is translatable into a set of 'ownership' ideas, backed by 'property' law and deep regard for the property of others, is seen as a social relationship by Tiv"(1968: 92). The relativism of the Bohannans is based on another widespread misunderstanding. If property is seen as "a relation between a person understood as an absolute control" as Baur interprets the Roman law (1983: 222), there are indeed only two alternatives: either one denies property in tribal society or one accepts

only common property. But property in modern states as well as among the Tiv is *not* a relationship between a person and a thing, but a relationship between persons with reference to that thing (Benda-Beckmann 1979: 42, Bromley and Cernea 1989: 5, Weimer 1997: 3). Property implies a control over things, but it cannot be reduced to this. Relations between persons vary from society to society. They are not the same among the Tiv and the Sunuwar, in tribal societies and in modern nation-states. Therefore, instead of supporting a sharp relativism, we have to take into consideration the relativity of the notion of individual property in general, even if its codification in Roman and modern law suggests its absolute character. In this perspective, taking into account the likelihood that social relations and functions may coincide in certain contexts, it is obvious that forms of property, which are at first sight quite divergent, may coincide in fundamental principle as well.

In 1988, when Caplan returned to the Limbu village he had studied in the 1960s, he was unable to find a vestige of the *kipaṭ* system (1991: 312ff.). He interprets this observation in terms of a substitution of common property in land with private property as prescribed by Nepalese law. Because Caplan assumes that under the conditions of the *kipaṭ* system no individual property was possible, he interprets Limbu history as a transformation from a tribal to a peasant society, basing his argument in addition on Gregory's dualism between two fundamentally distinct kinds of economy:

> (a) 'clan-based' economies, involving primarily non-commodity ('gift') exchange and (b) 'class-based' economies, characterized principally by the transaction of commodities (Gregory 1982: 18). In the former there is no private property, and people do not have alienable rights over things... In the latter, there is private property, implying alienable rights over things, thus requiring a sharp distinction to be drawn between a thing and its owner. (1991: 306)

Although Caplan refuses to assume a conception of linear evolution (1991: 307), Gregory's dualism induces him to reduce the variety of historical changes to one and the same process. In this perspective the question of whether and to what extent the *kipaṭ* system has survived cannot be asked, and to search for conditions within which it has survived seems to be superfluous. If we take Gregory's two kinds of economy as 'ideal types' in the Weberian sense, they may serve as analytical tools; otherwise, they prevent a historical analysis.

Instead of adopting Caplan's dualistic perspective, which denies the possibility of a coexistence of common and individual property, we have to base a historical analysis on the possibility of such a coexistence. This is the criticism formulated by Moore of Caplan's earlier work. Moore also distinguishes between two kinds of property and she proposes a better understanding of the functional distinction between 'estate of rights of administration' and 'estate of production' as introduced by Gluckman (1978: 246). Only from this starting point does it become possible to investigate a heterogeneous variety of historical

developments,[24] and at the same time to discover the survival of the collective and individual rights characteristic of the *kipat* system beneath the surface of the private property of the Nepalese Code.

We have no access to historical sources which would inform us about individuals' rights and their workings within the *kipat* system in former times. But why should *kipat* work fundamentally differently from other tribal ownership systems? We rather have to search for reasons for the neglect of individual rights in these systems. On one hand this was a part of the 'terra nullis argument' used mainly by colonial powers while occupying the land of the locals (Le Bris *et al.* 1991 for Africa). In the case of Nepal it seems to be an adoption of the ideology of Kiranti headmen.[25] Forbes' description of the *kipat* system, taken from a Yamphu-Rai headman, is typical in this respect:

> The most important features of the kipat system included unmarked boundaries around fields and a system of land tenure based on the categorization of people, not land. (Forbes 1999: 116)

> There are no permanent fences... and... boundaries were not recorded. Each winter people build temporary fences around fields, ... but they tear them down again after the crops have been harvested. Stone walls hold up the irrigated rice terraces that have been sculpted onto the landscape, but these walls do not keep things in or out; they simply make the land more level.... Like bargaining over prices in the bazaar, rights to kipat lands depended more on the relationship among users and on the resource in question than they did on any fixed rules of tenure... [P]roperty boundaries were not marked physically or legally... Kipatiya... had the right to claim as much land as they could physically clear and farm... When kipatiya default on their taxes or die heirless, the kipat land reverts to the jimmawal. (Ibid.: 118)[26]

This contrasts sharply with the description offered by another of Forbes' informants: "Everyone already had their land; the fields were already divided, and the jimmawals and their subjects knew which fields belonged to whom" (ibid.:133), and another more realistic

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24 Probably, one will find certain historical developments only in particular localities and among particular ethnic groups.

25 Among anthropologists as well as among locals. In the 1930s and 1940s there was a nativistic Limbu movement, called *satya hāngmā*, committed to the restoration of the *kipat* land that had been lost to Hindu immigrants. But, as Regmi has pointed out (1978: 583), behind the collectivist ideology of that movement there stood the interests of Limbu headmen who wanted to recover their former privileges.

26 This last argument is often used to *deny* the existence of individual rights in tribal systems of land ownership. But the heritage of a person without heirs as determined by the particular law of inheritance also goes back to the community or the state in many modern societies. This practice does not speak against private property.

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statement by Forbes: "Most landowners can recite the owners of their fields back four or five generations, and jimmawals know which fields were part of whose kipat, which fields were acquired in some other way, and who the original owners were" (ibid.: 119). We cannot found our view of the *kipat* system on the views of headmen. Their privileges and their arbitrary behaviour should not be interpreted as evidence for the non-existence of individual rights of the *kipatya*, as many authors seem to imply between the lines.

Factors supporting the survival of *kipat* rights

What are the characteristics of the tribal groups of East Nepal which support the survival of the traditional property system in the localities which are mostly badly sited and largely unaffected by immigration? The importance of landed property increases according to the scarcity of land and the intensity of cultivation, whether this is caused by more effective technologies or the pressure of the state (Goody 1976). In so far as we can assume that the tribal groups of east Nepal were familiar with plough cultivation in terraced and irrigated fields before the Gorkha conquest (Müller 1984: 71), we may conclude that a significant form of individual property existed in land in that era. According to Platteau's 'evolutionary theory of property rights' with the increase of land scarcity more and more fields were "owned and inherited by individuals" (Netting 1982: 471, Acheson 1989: 360).

The significance of property may also have increased because the main economic unit among the Kiranti is not a large kinship group but the household based on the nuclear family. The predominance of this kind of household seems to be a direct consequence of the marriage system and the high position it grants to wife-givers. To avoid conflicts between the newly married woman and her affines, a new household is usually founded. In addition, certain forms of inheritance law do increase the significance of property. Thus, a rule of unigeniture gives higher value to property than a rule of equal partition with its consequence of splitting. This kind of inheritance does not only affect the importance of property but may also contribute to the survival of traditional rights. Even if only 'preferential', a rule of indivisibility seems to be favourable for management as well as for productivity. This is also in the government's interest. These are the reasons why modern states still tolerate exceptional laws of property and inheritance for peasants (Lange and Kuchinke 1989: 1075). It is not by chance that in a decree given to the Sunuwar in 1824 certifying their ancestral rights to land particular mention is made of their traditional rule of inheritance (Fezas 1986: 173).

Preferential ultimogeniture as practised by the Kiranti is also a regulation which hampers social change from within, especially if it is complemented by a principle of primogeniture for succession to political and religious offices, and the additional rule that elder sons, as soon as they are in the position of household head, participate in the political influence exerted by the old. This ensures that the economically favoured principal heirs are excluded from political life on two counts. Although this system is an elegant solution to the problem of the support and care of elderly people, it reduces internal dynamics and their contribution to change.

The survival of ultimogeniture is also favoured by the opportunity of short-term migration for disadvantaged heirs (Goody 1962: 323). Among the Kiranti, service in the British Gurkha regiments is a traditional money-making opportunity which allows co-heirs to stay in the village. I was unable to find a single case of a youngest brother serving in the army in the village under investigation.

A further factor favouring the survival of the inheritance system of the Sunuwar—and I assume for other Kiranti groups as well (Gaenszle 1991: 98)—is the asymmetrical relations of exchange through which the principal heirs systematically compensate the disadvantaged co-heirs. A final factor can be seen in the strong ancestor ideology and its core, the ancestor ritual, which serves as the main instrument creating these kinds of exchange relations, but masks their asymmetrical character at the same time.

Concluding remarks

We know today that the introduction of private property in developing countries did not increase productivity, nor did it prevent the overuse of resources, as Hardin has assumed. This failure was often blamed on a neglect of the former efficiency of common property systems (Feeny *et al.* 1990). Before now staking everything on the common property card, we should reach a better understanding of this notion. In the footsteps of Hardin, common property was often confounded with systems of free access. Individual rights within common property regimes were excluded.

If common property regimes are "structured ownership arrangements" (Bromley and Cernea), this does not mean merely that there are "indigenous mechanisms to allocate use rights to members" (Feeny *et al.* 1990: 10) or, more abstractly, that "tenure systems are embedded in socio-cultural systems" (Platteau 1996: 75), but that they may go hand in hand with systems of individual property with which we are well acquainted from the experience with 'our' private property. Individual rights often differ only in degree from private property, and they may be found as effectively practised individual rights below the surface of private property as it is fixed in legal codes but not applied in practice. Just this discrepancy is a major trait of the legal pluralism that is often described for Africa (e.g. Sow Sidibe 1991). Neef shows the general counter-productivity of government interventions to resolve this discrepancy and the advantage of a laissez-faire policy in cases where traditional systems of ownership work properly without, or below the surface of, modern private property. The conditions determined by Neef for such cases and mentioned in the introduction seem still to exist in certain Kiranti villages of east Nepal.

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Muslim Mobilization and the State in Nepal, 1951-95

Mollica Dastider

The history of Muslim settlement in Nepal dates back to the early 16th century. However, the recognition of Muslims as a separate religious group and, consequently, of their cultural rights as equal citizens was not granted by the Nepalese state until 1962. From the available historical accounts it is evident that from 1768 until the middle of the 19th century Muslims, along with their Christian counterparts, were treated as virtual outcasts (both social and political) by the newly formed state of unified Nepal (Gaborieau 1995: 13-14).[1]

During the entire Rana period, which began in 1846, Nepalese Muslims held an impure and inferior status in a rigidly hierarchical social structure, based on the Hindu fourfold national caste system (Höfer 1979: 40-1, Gaborieau 1972). The revolution of 1950, which brought an end to the autocratic Rana regime, fell short of permanently replacing the absolute rule of the monarchy with a parliamentary form of government. Muslims had shown their solidarity with the anti-Rana movement by associating themselves with the major political organizations, namely the Nepali Congress and the Communists (Ansari 1981: 37-8, Gautam 1989: 9). Their yearning for a democratic system was most evident when, immediately after the overthrow of the Ranas, Muslims tried to organize themselves on a common platform (the 'All Nepal Anjuman Islah') for the overall uplift of their community.[2]

In the following years, when Nepal, after a brief stint with democracy (1959-60), slipped back into absolute monarchical rule, the Muslim community found that the new system presented it with a dual social status. Constitutionally, Muslims gained the status of equal citizens (i.e. equal before the law); in practice, however, they continued to hold a low status in a tradition-bound society, and to be deprived of political and economic benefits (Gaborieau 1972). The Panchayat period thus reaffirmed the marginalized minority character of the community. Consequently, despite religious freedom during the 30 long years of Panchayat rule, the growth of a religious group consciousness among the Nepalese

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[1]   Marc Gaborieau has been studying the Muslim community in Nepal since the 1960s and has numerous works to his credit, most of them written in French.

[2]   The All Nepal Anjuman Islah was established in 1953 for the social and economic uplift of the Muslim community. One Mr Ahmeddin, who later became a king's nominee in the legislative bodies as the representative of Muslims, was its president.

Muslims was more or less chequered. However, during the mid-1970s there began a slow and gradual process of organizing the otherwise passive community by placing an emphasis on their Islamic identity. This politicization of Muslim ethnic identity in post-1950 Nepal will now be examined in detail.

The process of change and Muslim group mobilization

In order to understand conflicts between old and new values it is helpful to relate a country's political culture to the nature of its state structure and its overall level of development. In Nepal, while on the one hand we see that the Panchayat system was drawn from the indigenous Nepali political tradition that had been predominantly feudalistic, on the other we find that during the post-1950 democratic era attempts had been made to inject a new political culture among the people by innovating popular institutions and values (Baral 1989: 317). This conflict of old and new values was also reflected in the pattern of ethnic and minority group mobilizations. The abandonment of parliamentary democracy resulted in a revival of authoritarian trends and institutions, and stalled the process of affirming group identities. Yet at the same time the period of wider political participation (1958-60) and the reintroduction of universal adult suffrage in the 1980s also saw the leadership of underprivileged groups demanding a greater share in societal rewards and goods by means of "affirmative action" (Poudyal 1992: 136-7, Phadnis 1989: 124-5).

This kind of group behaviour was also discernible in the case of the Muslim minorities, though it must be remembered that any mobilization of religious minority groups such as the Muslims would always be restrained in an overarching Hindu state system, irrespective of its experiments with democratic norms and values. Changes in Muslim group behaviour since the end of the Rana autocracy can be categorized as 'identity assertion' and 'identity assimilation': the first took place while the political environment was being liberalized, and the second during the period of the closed Panchayat system.

During the 1950s, against the backdrop of a promise to establish a people's government after the fall of the Ranas, Muslims, along with other peoples from oppressed caste and ethnic groups, engaged themselves in the upliftment of their community. Various Muslim social and religious associations were formed in Kathmandu and the Tarai districts. Prominent among these were the All Nepal Anjuman Islah (in Kathmandu), the Jamitul Muslim (in Rautahat), and the Idare Tamire Millat (in Banke). However, by 1958 all of these organizations had merged into the All Nepal Anjuman Islah. The closeness of its founder, Mr Ahmeddin, to the king and the palace ensured that this organization survived as the sole representative body of the Muslims (ANAI 1980: 2-4). The organization basically represented the Muslims' cause and on many occasions it played an active role in settling disputes with the majority community over issues such as the construction of mosques or the demarcation of lands for graveyards, by taking these up with the local authorities and urging them to be sympathetic to the problems of the minorities. In addition, taking advantage of the liberal political atmosphere of 1958 when Nepal's first democratic constitution was being framed, the Anjuman Islah even tendered a petition to the Department of

Education asking for the inclusion of elementary Urdu and elementary Persian instead of elementary Sanskrit at the SLC level examination for the entire Muslim community in Nepal (Ansari n.d.: 30-2).

Once Panchayat rule had been established, organizations such as the Anjuman Islah restricted themselves to the role of a Muslim religious body, occasionally raising issues that jeopardized the Muslim religious freedom enshrined in the 1962 constitution.[3] Thus the years of Panchayat rule saw the Muslim leadership acting passively: by the 1970s the Anjuman Islah with its royal patronage remained the sole representative body of the Nepalese Muslims. In return for assurances of royal protection against any majority wrath and the occasional nomination of its president to the Rastriya Panchayat (the President of the Anjuman Islah, Mr Ahmeddin, was twice nominated by King Mahendra to the highest legislative body in 1960 and 1963; ANAI 1980: 5), the monarchy ensured that Muslims under the banner of 'Anjuman' remained staunch votaries of the partyless Panchayat system. However, during the late 1970s and 1980s, with the introduction of gradual reforms within the partyless system, a subtle yearning for a separate Muslim identity emerged among a section of the Muslims. Under the banners of the Millat-E-Islamia and the Muslim Sevā Samiti, this section of the community slowly began to emphasize its separate Islamic identity in opposition to the state's drive for Nepalization and Hinduization. Despite these new aspirations, Muslims did not feel secure enough to side with the supporters of a multi-party system in the 1980 referendum, and felt that remaining loyal to the monarch would provide them with the best legal protection, because the strict enforcement of law and order under royal rule was one of the best features of Panchayat system (Ansari n.d.: 33-4). They nevertheless took advantage of the atmosphere of dissent when reforms to the system ushered in an era of political modernization. Besides, this slow change in Muslim group behaviour also reflected the Panchayat government's efforts to establish better ties with the Arab world. In 1981, during an official visit of the Saudi foreign minister to Nepal, the official daily, the *Gorkhāpatra*, reported that there were 1.4 million Muslims residing in Nepal (a figure far in excess of the figures shown in the official census). Further, the government's decision to nominate a Muslim, Mohd. Mohsin, as Nepal's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, gave the Nepalese Muslims an opportunity to feel positive for the first time about their strength in the country.

In 1981 the first ever Rastriya Panchayat elections held through adult franchise saw Muslim candidates contesting from as many as 14 districts (12 from the Tarai region and 2 from the hills). Though only two Muslim members were elected to the national legislature (Ismail Ansari from Mahottari and Sheikh Siraju from Rautahat), Harka Gurung observed that Muslim representation in the 1981 national legislature increased by 1.4% over previous Panchayats, which had been elected indirectly (Gurung 1989: 130-2; see also Shaha 1992: 109).

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[3] Article 14 of the 1962 Constitution stated that "every person may profess his own religion as handed down from ancient times and may practise it having regard to tradition."

Identity assertion in post-1990 democratic Nepal

The restoration of multi-party democracy marked the culmination of a people's movement against the absolutism of the monarch which had continued for 30 years through his partyless Panchayat rule. In fact the slow but steady process of political modernization that was initiated in the 1980s by the Panchayat rulers through their electoral reforms was also coupled with the modernization of communication media and transportation, thereby facilitating the spread of education and an increased awareness of international democratic developments among the Nepalese masses. A corresponding rise in demands for greater political participation and more equitable representation of the various group identities ensured the successful replacement of authoritarianism with a constitutional democracy.

With the defeat of the forces that favoured a monolithic state system, the superficiality of the homogeneous 'Nepalized' character of the state was soon exposed as demands were made by numerous ethnic groups to give due recognition to the pluralist reality of Nepalese society. For their part too, Muslims had contributed to this political development, first by joining hands with the pro-democracy forces[4] and then, inspired by the constitutional provisions and encouraged by Islamic countries in West Asia, by starting to raise their ethnic and religious profile. The formation of a number of Muslim welfare organizations was the first step towards asserting a distinctive Muslim religious identity in an otherwise overwhelmingly Hindu cultural setup. One of the main objectives of these bodies was to establish themselves as Muslim interest groups in democratic Nepal.

The active involvement of the Muslim community in the participatory political process became evident during the first general elections held in post-1990 Nepal, when 31 Muslim candidates contested from the Tarai region. The fact that five of them were elected, representing major national parties like the Nepali Congress, the Nepal Communist Party (UML), and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP),[5] and were even assigned important positions such as Cabinet Minister (Sheikh Idris) and Interim Speaker of the Lower House (Khalil Miya Ansari) after the Nepali Congress ministry was sworn in, indicated the Muslim community's involvement in a participatory political process that had only recently been introduced (see Table 1).

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[4] Muslim leaders from the Muslim-dominated districts of Banke (Muhammad Siddiqui and Meraj Ahmed), Rautahat (Sheikh Idris), and Bara (Salim Ansari) participated in the pro-democracy movement in 1989-90.

[5] In the 1991 elections, the Muslim MPs who were elected to the Lower House of Parliament were Khalil Miya Ansari (NC), Sheikh Idris (NC), Salim Ansari (CPN UML), Mirza Dilshad Beg (NSP), and Sayed Meraj (NC).

Table 1. Ethnic/Caste Representation in the Legislature (by percentage)

Ethnic group	1959	1978	1981*	1991 Lower House	Upper House	Both Houses
A. Hill Group	**78.0**	**85.1**	**79.4**	**79.0**	**84.9**	**80.3**
1. Bahun	27.5	21.3	12.5	36.6	40.0	37.4
2. Chetri	31.2	36.2	36.6	18.5	15.0	17.7
3. Newar	3.7	7.9	8.0	6.8	13.3	8.3
4. Tribal	15.6	18.9	22.3	16.6	13.3	15.8
5. Occupational	-	0.8	-	0.5	3.3	1.1
B. Tarai Group	**22.0**	**15.0**	**20.5**	**21.0**	**15.0**	**19.6**
6. Brahman	3.7	2.3	-	2.4	1.6	2.3
7. Landed caste	10.1	7.0	7.1	5.4	5.0	5.3
8. Trader caste	2.8	1.6	1.8	2.0	3.3	2.3
9. Tribal	3.7	3.2	9.8	8.8	3.3	7.5
10. Muslim	1.8	0.8	1.8	2.4	1.7	2.3
All	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Number of seats	**109**	**127**	**112**	**205**	**60**	**265**

* Excludes nominated members

Adapted from Gurung (1992: 20). The table contains minor arithmetic inconsistences.

The raised profile of the Muslim religious minority is also discernible in the slow but remarkable change in its group behaviour. The incidence of Hindu-Muslim tension in Tulsipur (Dang district) and its fallout on the Muslims of Banke, and later in 1994 and 1995 the Hindu-Muslim conflicts in Nepalganj (Banke), testify to a mobilization of Muslims along ethno-religious lines and the growing intolerance towards such minority assertions on the part of the majority. Since 1995, annual All Nepal Muslim Conferences have been held under the banner of the All Nepal Ettehad Sangh, which bring together Muslim representatives from all the Muslim-populated districts, and pass resolutions on behalf of the entire Nepali Muslim community. Furthermore, the hill Muslims' use of this platform to lodge their strongest protest against being referred to as *churaute* (a derogatory term for hill Muslims who follow the century-old profession of bangle-selling), and not simply as 'Muslims' like their Tarai counterparts, only reiterates the foregoing observations on their new role. But, as we see in the next section, raising its own profile as a distinct religious and political group does not free the Muslim community from cautious state responses, especially from a declared Hindu state and its institutions.

The state response

In its early stages, the political modernization process in Nepal has already provided space for the leaders of various ethnic and religious groups to mobilize their deprived communities through the effective use of symbols of identity. However, the state is still slow to initiate actual reforms to fight the social backwardness and economic impoverishment born of the centuries-old traditional feudal state system. To begin with, the state responded cautiously by not yielding to the demands of the non-Hindu religious groups, and by maintaining its religious character even in the democratic constitution of 1990 (Article 4(1) of the 1990 Constitution). Rishikesh Shaha, President of Nepal's Human Rights Organization of Nepal, points out in this regard that since the position of the Hindu king is safeguarded in Article 27(1), there was no reason for the Constitution to call Nepal a Hindu state in Article 4(1).[6] This provision has therefore not only disappointed Nepal's vast indigenous (*janajāti*) population along with the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian minorities, but also contradicts other constitutional provisions, such as Article 2, which states that the nation is constituted by the Nepali people irrespective of religion, and also Article 11(2), which ensures that the state should not discriminate against any of its citizens on the basis of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe, or ideology.[7]

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[6]　Rishikesh Shaha also points out that the English version of the original Nepali text of Article 4(1) does not reflect the actual meaning. In Nepali, Article 4(1) states: "Nepal is a... Hindu, constitutional monarchical Kingdom". Shaha maintains that the comma after 'Hindu' is significant. The 'unofficial' English version of Article 4(1) states: "Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, sovereign, Hindu monarchical kingdom" (Shaha 1992: 241-2).

[7]　The debate on retaining the Hindu character of the Nepali state became an impassioned argument between proponents of a secular state and proponents of a Hindu state during the drafting of the 1990 Constitution. Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian associations, along with several Mongoloid Janajāti groups, took out a massive demonstration to demand a secular state on June 30, 1990 (Fisher 1993, Hoftun and Raeper 1992: 156-9).

The Hindu character of the constitution has added to the dilemma of Nepalese Muslims too. While the participatory political culture induces them to abandon their compliant political behaviour, the continuance of the Hindu character of the state allows the state to exercise, along with political power, the priestly authority of the dominant religion too. In this regard it is significant that a section of Nepalese Muslims still believe that they should continue to play an acquiescent role in society, because during the Panchayat days this assured them of state protection against majoritarian violence. They also argue that the feeling of security they enjoyed during monarchical rule is preferable to their present status in the democratic system, which, although it allows them to assert their rights, does not give them the assurance that any communal violence will be quelled with the same alacrity and efficiency as it was under authoritarian rule.[8]

In fact, the sudden rise in the number of cases of communal tension after the establishment of multi-party democracy strengthens the common belief among Tarai Muslims that the Nepali state will not be favourably disposed towards Muslims once they start to demand equal opportunities as equal citizens in a democratic society. A chronological study of cases of communal conflict, and the state's response to them, may be useful in analysing a shift in the approach of the Nepali state to such incidents.

Incidents of major Hindu-Muslim conflict and the role of the Nepali state

1958-9 The first recorded major communal clash took place in 1958-59 in Bhawarpur village in the central Tarai district of Mahottari, when the majority community desecrated a mosque and also indulged in arson and looting against the Muslims.[9] The then District Commissioner of Mahottari, Bikram Thapa, cooperated with the President of the Anjuman Islah, Mr Ahmeddin, in defusing the crisis. Later, the Muslims were even paid compensation of Rs 30,000 for the renovation of the mosque. The riot occurred during the transitional period of Nepali politics, when preparations for the first general elections were being made under a caretaker government, and this could possibly be the reason for a deterioration of prevailing Hindu-Muslim tension into acts of vandalism. Earlier, when the monarch was in full control, similar situations were quickly dealt with. For instance, in 1955 simmering tensions between Hindus and Muslims over a Tazia procession were defused by the personal intervention of King Mahendra, who sent a Muslim emissary from Kathmandu to solve the problem before it was aggravated further (ANAI 1980: 3, Ansari 1981: 26-7).

1959-60 During 1959-60, when the Nepali Congress Government was in power, another incident of communal violence took place in Adhyanpur village in Mahottari district. Riots

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[8] These views were expressed by many Muslim villagers in the central Tarai districts of Bara and Parsa during their interaction with the author. Most cited the 1971 Rautahat riot, in which King Mahendra's personal intervention helped to effect a speedy implementation of justice.

[9] The Bulletin of the only prominent Nepalese Muslim organization, the All Nepal Anjuman Islah, which functioned during the period 1955-79, lists cases of Hindu-Muslim clashes and records the organization's role in defusing those crises as a representative body of the Muslims (ANAI 1980: 3).

broke out while a Hindu religious procession was making the rounds of the village. Two people were burned to death and more than 100 houses were set on fire. Though the situation was brought under control by giving adequate compensation to the bereaved side (ANAI 1980: 3), the loss of lives and property could have been avoided if the state administration had acted in time.

1971 The *gāī kāṇḍa* ('cow incident') riot in the central Tarai districts of Rautahat and Bara in 1971 was the first major case of Hindu-Muslim rioting after the return of the direct rule of the monarchy in 1960. This is the bloodiest Hindu-Muslim riot in the history of Nepal to date. The riot was sparked off by a rumour about a cow being killed in Bhusaha in Rautahat.[10] To assess the actual loss of lives and property, a one-man investigation commission was set up by His Majesty's Government, and this reported the loss of 51 lives (27 in Rautahat and 24 in Bara) and the destruction of property worth 6.4 million rupees. It was pointed out that a misinformation campaign, which alleged that His Majesty's Government had sanctioned the looting and violence, further encouraged the looters. The sheer magnitude of the riot indicates that there was a complete breakdown of the ability of the local and zonal Panchayat administration to control the violence.[11] However, a personal visit by King Mahendra to the affected areas (even though it took place a month and a half later), and his assurances to the bereaved families that justice would be speedily implemented and that under his rule no such incidents would be allowed to happen in future, left a deep impact on the minds of the Muslims.[12] It was this apprehensiveness about their physical safety that made a section of the Muslims strong supporters of the partyless Panchayat system, since they felt that only the direct rule of the King could provide them with immunity from majoritarian attacks in future.

1992 The next well-reported case of communal tension was one that took place in Tulsipur (Dang) in October 1992. There, a small fight over some Muslims' use of a microphone for their daily Namaz, in a mosque adjacent to some Hindu celebrations which also used a microphone to play some songs, led to the desecration of the mosque. However the incident took a serious turn when the Muslims of the adjacent Banke district took the issue up with the local administration[13] and their MP and demanded immediate state action against those who had allegedly desecrated the Holy Koran. When they were not offered any official assurance of action against the culprits, the agitated Muslim delegation indulged in violence. This event underlined growing Muslim mobilization along ethno-religious lines for the first time since the ushering in of pluralistic politics in 1990, and also the apathy of the state administration in dealing with such emotive issues in a sensitive manner.[14]

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[10] *The Rising Nepal*, Kathmandu, October 11 1971.

[11] *The Rising Nepal*, Kathmandu, November 30 1971 and December 9 1971.

[12] Ibid. See also Ansari (1981: 28).

[13] See *Nepal Press Report*, Kathmandu, October 29 and November 3 1992.

[14] As narrated to the author by Muslim leaders in Nepalganj. A version of the 1992 incident was also related to the author by the former MP from Nepalganj, Sushil Koirala, on December 17 1996, in Kathmandu.

1994-95 Muslim group assertion has certainly become more visible in Nepalganj over the past few years, and it has also corresponded with a slackening of the state machinery which enforces strict measures in the event of simmering communal tension. Two incidents of communal conflict within a period of 10 months (in December 1994 and October 1995) serve to indicate that trend. In December 1994, a dispute over the construction of a Hindu temple next to a Muslim *musāfirkhānā* (lodge) resulted in a clash between members of fundamentalist Hindu and Muslim organizations.[15] However, the swift action that was taken at the behest of the newly formed Nepal Communist Party (UML) government did not allow this very volatile issue to deteriorate into a major Hindu-Muslim clash. None the less, the October 1995 riots reaffirmed the polarization of Hindu and Muslim interests in this town, and this time the siding of major political party leaders (those of the Nepali Congress and the National Democratic Party) with the majority community and some of the Hindu fundamentalist organizations added to the severity of the riot. A brawl between a Muslim vegetable vendor and his Hindu customer snowballed into a major Hindu-Muslim riot in which Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist organizations were actively involved, and the town saw three continuous days of arson and looting. Property worth 2 million rupees was damaged (many Muslim shops were either looted or destroyed) and 18 people were injured in the clashes.[16] The most significant feature of this communal clash was the indirect involvement of political parties,[17] which was absent in the authoritarian political system of pre-1990 Nepal. The indifferent attitude of the Nepali Congress government of the day and the tardiness of the local administration in firmly dealing with the situation only implied that the state hesitated to take stringent action against mindless acts of vandalism for fear of losing popular support.

Two aspects emerge from a study of the contexts of Hindu-Muslim conflict. These are, firstly, that communal clashes in Nepal remained a rare event as long as the Muslim minorities kept a very subdued and low profile, and did not raise any objection to their low caste status, or the overall deprivation they suffered for professing a religion which was considered inferior to the official one. But, once they began to show signs of assertiveness, either because of their numerical strength in some Tarai areas, or because of democratic aspirations that found expression in post-1991 Nepal, the Hindu majoritarian state and society have always reacted aggressively, pressing home the point that, although religious freedom has been granted by the Constitution, the religious minorities must remem-

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[15] *Nepal Press Report*, Kathmandu, December 13, 1994; and *Kathmandu Post*, December 8, 1994. See also *Janmanch*, January 1995.

[16] The active involvement of Nepali Congress leaders who were also members of the Vishwa Hindu Sangh hinted at the support being provided by the Nepali Congress party for the Hindus in the October 1995 riots. Shiv Sena (Nepal) and Muslim Ekta Sangh leaders were among the list of people arrested for instigating violence. See INSEC 1995, and *Kathmandu Post*, October 28, 30, 1995.

[17] During her interview with the Banke CDO, Thaneshwar Koirala, in December 1996, the author also gained the impression that the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party (UML) were involved with the Hindus and Muslims respectively.

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ber that the Hindu upper-caste groups will always dominate because of the country's declared status as a 'Hindu Kingdom'. In this context, it can be argued that due to Muslims' growing assertion of their identity in the changed political environment, the Ayodhya issue in India is having a more direct bearing on Hindu-Muslim relations in some of the border towns of the Tarai. The proliferation of fundamentalist elements within both the Hindu and Muslim communities (namely, the Shiv Sena, Bajarang Dal, and Muslim Ekta Sangh) in places like Birganj and Nepalganj is a post-Ayodhya (1992) phenomenon. Any mobilization by Hindu militant organizations in support of the Rama Temple in Ayodhya in these towns has encountered open resentment from the Muslim community, in contrast to their subdued behaviour in the past.

Secondly, the entry of political parties in the political system of the country has also heralded the emergence of 'vote-banks'. The attention that the Muslims have received since 1990 from the major national parties is basically guided by electoral considerations. The indirect involvement of the Nepali Congress, the National Democratic Party, and the Communists (UML) in the October 1995 Nepalganj riots, when each was obliquely aligned either with the majority or the minority community, did leave an impact on the electorates of this communally sensitive region.[18]

The formation of All Nepal Muslim bodies with the active support of the two national political parties (the CPN and UML) backed the All Nepal Muslim Ettehad Association, and the NC backed the All Nepal Muslim Samaj Seva Sangh), further confirm a new trend of garnering the support of the Muslim 'vote-bank'.[19] The encouragement for creating a Muslim wing of each party has become all the more apparent since detailed data has been furnished on the main ethnic/caste composition of Nepalese districts. A study revealed that Muslims are in a majority in four of the 19 Tarai districts (Rautahat, Parsa, Kapilbastu, and Banke); in second position in as many as five districts (Bara, Mahottari, Dhanusha, Siraha, and Sunsari); and in third position in two districts (Rupandehi and Sarlahi) (Gurung 1994). Thus the sizeable Muslim population in all these 11 Tarai districts has certainly made the community an attractive electoral proposition for the mainstream political parties. The available voter lists also show that in around 17 constituencies in the Tarai the number of Muslim voters amounts to 15,000 or more,[20] which means that if Muslims voted *en masse* for a particular candidate that candidate would win.

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[18] The fact that Maluna Jabbar, one of the most influential Muslim religious leaders of Nepalganj, joined the Communist Party (UML) in the post 1995 riots pointed to the pro-Muslim stand of the party in the communally sensitive region of Nepalganj.

[19] The Muslim wing of the Nepali Congress party, the Nepal Muslim Samaj Seva Sangh, was established in 1995 in Biratnagar (the constituency of the former N.C. Prime Minister G.P. Koirala). An active member of the Nepali Congress from Biratnagar, Hasan Ansari, was made the President of the Sangh. In its ninth Annual Convention in May 1996, the party also passed a resolution in support of two national holidays for the Islamic festivals of Id and Bakri-Id. See *Report of IXth Convention of Nepali Congress May 10-12 1996*, resolution No.348.

[20] Information provided by a Muslim MP from the Tarai, during an interview with the writer in December 1996.

However, the records of the two past general elections show that in Nepal political elites have not really touched upon the issue of participation by ethnic and tribal communities. Thus it remains to be seen whether the parties will actually field only Muslim candidates in the Muslim majority constituencies in forthcoming elections. The sociology of political parties, especially the composition of their leadership, reveals a combination of upper castes (Bahun, Chetri, and Newar), and does not reflect the pluralistic composition of the society.[21]

Dilemmas of a minority psyche

The dilemmas of the Nepalese Muslims can best be understood by the fact that they do not only share a deprived status with many other low caste and backward groups, but their 'reversed' (*ulto*) religious identity is considered not merely as inferior to the official religion but also as a threat to the Hindu social order. Thus, having maintained such a dismal image in society for a long time, the community is yet to fully absorb its constitutional status of equality with its Hindu counterparts. The fact that in this new political system the vote of a Muslim carries the same weight as that of a Hindu, and that the Muslims can enjoy all the freedoms and rights of equal citizens of the country, has certainly put the community in a psychological dilemma about its future group behaviour. On the one hand, Muslims are being enticed by the participatory political culture and are beginning to demand their rightful share from the democratic state of Nepal. On the other, there also exists a feeling of fear and apprehension about the Hindu state's reaction to their effort to assert themselves as a religious group with a separate religious and cultural history. For most of the Tarai Muslims, safety from bloody communal carnage is also a matter of serious concern, especially when they compare themselves with their more vocal and assertive Muslim brethren on the Indian side of the border, and find them under the threat of majority backlash. Hence the idea of being vocal about their rights is also accompanied by apprehension, as they perceive themselves to be facing the same threat.[22]

Evaluating Muslim group behaviour against the backdrop of an on-going democratization process in Nepal, it can be said that, as far as participation in open electoral politics is concerned, Muslims have shown considerable enthusiasm. In the first multi-party elections in 1991, of the 31 Muslim candidates who contested from various constituencies in the Tarai, 12 candidates represented mainstream parties (NC, UPN, UML, NSP, and RPP), and the rest either contested as independents or on smaller party tickets.[23] In the 1994 elections, although the number of Muslim contestants fell from 31 to 24, 17 were contesting on behalf of major national parties. While indicating the increased interest of the political parties in fielding Muslim candidates, this also spoke of growing political maturity

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[21] In the opinion of Lok Raj Baral, this upper-caste bias in the composition of the leadership of major political parties cannot be wished away easily unless opportunities are made available to the less privileged communities (Baral 1995).

[22] This was the general impression of the author after interacting with the Muslim peasantry residing in villages near to the Indian border.

[23] The list of 31 Muslim contestants has been drawn from Election Commission (1992).

and awareness of voting behaviour on the part of Muslims (Election Commission 1995). In 1991, of the five elected Muslim MPs, three were from the Nepali Congress, but general discontent among the Muslims about the non-performance of these MPs ensured their defeat in 1994. The defeat of the sitting Muslim MP (even from Muslim majority constituencies like Banke-3) suggests that Muslim votes cannot be taken for granted.[24] Another trend that emerges from Muslim electoral behaviour in the 1994 elections is that there has been no en-masse voting by Muslims for Muslim candidates, and that they consider both party and individual while voting. Even in constituencies with around 15,000 Muslim voters, Muslim candidates have lost their security deposits.[25] The four successful Muslim candidates in the 1994 elections represented four different parties (Anis Ansari represented the NSP, Sheikh Idris represented the Nepali Congress, Salim Ansari represented the CPN(UML), and Mirza Dilshad Beg represented the RPP).[26] This also sheds light on the Muslim psyche, and on their common apprehension that aligning with one single party would not be beneficial for the community, because when the party with which the Muslims were aligned was out of power the new party in power would not pay any heed to Muslim causes.[27]

The dilemma of a minority psyche is also apparent among the Muslims of the western hill districts of Syangja, Gorkha, Tanahu, Kaski, etc. Though they are considered the Muslim social group in Nepal which has assimilated the most into the milieu of hill Hinduism, the hill Muslims too have begun to protest strongly against their *churaute* identity. However, although their discontent with their still generally low social status in the hill villages and resentment over administrative discrimination has been gaining ground over the past few years,[28] it has yet to be expressed openly because of the fear that it might incur a majority backlash against them. Nevertheless, the fact that after years of isolation hill Muslims participated in good numbers in the All Nepal Muslim Meet in 1996, does reveal a desire

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[24] In Banke district the Nepali Congress won seats in the 1991 elections, but in the 1994 elections disillusionment with the party among a large group of Muslim voters (for showing scant regard for Muslim sentiments during the communal tension of 1992 and other times) led to defeat, including that of the Muslim candidate, Meraj Ahmed, as the Muslims in the constituency voted against him.

[25] It has been pointed out by Muslim leaders that in Bara constituency 1, where there are around 15,000 Muslims, the Muslim candidate from Rashtriya Prajatantra Party lost by a heavy margin. Similarly, in Parsa constituency 1, in spite of the large number of Muslim voters, the lone Muslim candidate lost his deposit.

[26] Mirza Dilshad Beg, who came from the Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh (India), and was wanted in many criminal cases in India, was elected from Kapilbastu-4 (a Muslim-dominated constituency) in 1991 and 1994. He had confessed to his involvement in cross-border smuggling before he entered political life in Nepal. Mirza Dilshad Beg was assassinated in Kathmandu in early 1998. In the 1999 general elections there was no serious Muslim candidate in Kapilbastu-4, which elected Ajay Pratap Shah, the RPP candidate.

[27] Muslim intellectuals, including Dr Abullaish and Dr Hamid Ansari, believe that Muslims should align with different parties constituency-wise to get maximum service for the community from the various parties.

[28] Muslim villagers of Tanahu and Syangja districts complained to the author about their still

to join the greater Muslim forum which is being floated to communicate the Muslims' demands to the Nepalese state.

A study of the major demands put forward by most of the Muslim bodies to the state reveals that, in spite of their efforts to organize on one single platform (such as the Ettehad Association), there is not much unanimity about the nature of their demands. Like their counterparts in other parts of the subcontinent, Muslims in Nepal are influenced most by the Maulanas (clergy) and Islamic religious bodies in articulating their main demands in relation to the state. Thus, when it comes to uplifting the community from all its backwardness and social evils by asking for support from the state, differences appear between the reformist Muslim leaders and the clergy, who, for instance, would not like to give up their hold over the Islamic religious schools (Madrassas and Maktabs).

The All Nepal Muslim Ettehad Association calls for the constitution of a 'Madrassa Board' by the government, which would recommend the necessary steps to modernize the Islamic religious schools (for example, the introduction of a modern Nepali school curriculum along with the Islamic teachings). This would thereafter ensure that such centres, imparting modern learning as well as Islamic education, received financial aid from the state, like other Nepali primary schools, and were also recognized by the Nepali government (as is the practice in the case of other educational institutions in Nepal).[29] However, this demand does not find enough support among the Maulanas who run the Madrassas, or among the illiterate and ignorant Muslim masses, who believe their religious leaders' advice that any kind of state interference in the functioning of Madrassas would undermine the Islamic character of these places.[30]

The reformists agree that this negative attitude towards modern education keeps the majority of Nepalese Muslims ignorant and backward, and also helps the state to remain indifferent to demands such as (i) recognition of the purely religious education provided in these madrasas; (ii) recruitment and subsequent promotion of Muslims in all levels of state service such as the army, the police, constitutional bodies, the judiciary, and the

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prevailing 'water unacceptable' status in the villages; and also about how they are discriminated against for being Muslims by the officials of the district administration even today. One 24-year-old youth from Dhule Gauda village of Tanahu district claimed that he was harassed by the office of the CDO for a week before receiving his citizenship card (to which he was entitled on the grounds of being a hereditary citizen whose family settled in Tanahu many generations ago), whereas a Hindu friend who had accompanied him, and was also a claimant on the basis of hereditary rules, got his citizenship card on the very first day.

[29] Resolutions passed by the Second National Conference of the Nepal Muslim Ettehad Association, Kathmandu, August 18-19, 1996. Also see 'Strategy in Improving Education among the Muslim Community of Nepal', a working paper presented to the said conference.

[30] Such is the stand maintained by most of the Maulavis of the madrassas in Nepal, especially the prominent ones in Janakpur (Maulavi Jais), Bhutaha, Krishnanagar (Maulana Rauf and Abdullah Madni), and Nepalganj (Maulana Jabbar), because they believe that government funding and supervision would curtail the religious autonomy of their institutions.

diplomatic service. A survey of the ethnic composition of graduates in Nepal shows that Muslims constitute a dismal 0.37 percent of the total. The same study also shows that among the Section Officer level bureaucrats in the country, the representation of the Muslims is only 0.29 percent (Poudyal 1992). Compared to their share of the total population, 0.37 percent representation among graduates and 0.29 percent representation in the administrative machinery—and that too at the lower administrative level of section officer, as there are hardly any Muslims at the Joint Secretary and Secretary levels of the bureaucracy—speaks of the overall backwardness of the community. Hence it corroborates the urgent need for unanimity among the Muslims in reforming their educational system, so that they can press the state to play a more positive role towards the community.

However, there is little difference within the community regarding its demands for public holidays to be declared on three major Islamic festivals (Id, Bakri-id, and Moharram). Interestingly, although the two major national parties, the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) have expressed their support for this demand, neither declared these to be holidays during their term of office.

In essence, the growth of consciousness among the backward ethnic and minority groups is undeniably making nation-building a very challenging task for the state in democratic Nepal. In particular, the integration of non-Hindus into a national mainstream which has Hinduism as the state religion is one of the more serious issues to have emerged from the process of political modernization, and calls for deep introspection on the part of the modern Nepali state. In this respect, it is important to note that in post-1990 Nepal the state has yet to show its resolve in accommodating the cultural demands of the religious minorities or the Janajātis who do not consider themselves to be Hindus. The dominance of Hindu norms and values in public life is instead making the non-Hindus wary of the authenticity of the constitutional position relating to the state's duty to uphold the pluralist character of its society. Though ethnic cleavages in Nepal have yet to become a threat to the national society, it is imperative for the Nepali state to withstand diverse identity assertion by the members of different social groups, and even accommodate their moderate demands—for, if ignored for long, the pulls of such a multicultural society have the potential to lead Nepal into a major crisis of national integration. In the same vein, apathy towards the Muslims and their legitimate grievances, or alarm at the slightest affirmation of Islamic cultural identity, will only alienate the Muslims further from the process of nation-building. On the other hand, by accommodating the moderate demands and cultural aspirations[31] of this minority group, the state would actually help the liberals in their effort to uplift their community from its extreme educational backwardness and subsequently from its deprived economic and social status.

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[31] These aspirations include the constitution by the state of a Madrassa Board to modernize the traditional Islamic schools, and in the process grant recognition to that mode of education; the provision of equal opportunities to Muslims at all levels of state services; the declaration of holidays on the major Islamic festivals. These demands have the support of all the Muslim MPs as well as all the eminent members of the community.

Furthermore, the state's active role in promoting the welfare of Muslims can also keep the forces of Islamic fundamentalism at bay. In the absence of discontent among the members of the community, there would be little support for obscurantism and the neo-fundamentalist school of Islam, which risks making the Muslim minorities suspect in the eyes of the government and its majority population. Thus, with the required political maturity, the democratic state in Nepal can not only instil confidence in the minority psyche of Muslims, but can also reduce the historical disparities which exist between various cultural groups, due to the centuries-old practice of monolithic statecraft, and promote social harmony in this kingdom of great diversity.

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Ethnic Categories and Their Usages in Byans, Far Western Nepal

Katsuo Nawa

1. Introduction

I was inspired to study the Byansis by Professor Dor Bahadur Bista, whom I visited with a Nepali friend in September 1990, while I was in Kathmandu for the first time as a tourist and Master's student in cultural anthropology.[1] At one point during our conversation, Professor Bista criticized Western anthropologists, asking why so many of them went to study people like the Sherpas and the Thakalis. His own answer was that these were very rich and friendly people full of hospitality, and that it was very easy to do fieldwork among them. Then he added, "No foreign anthropologists go to, for example, the *Byansis*." I do not suppose that he referred to the Byansis because he had any special interest in them; it is highly possible that he recalled the name because the friend who was with me had come from Darchula district, where many Byansis live. Thus, he had drawn my attention to the existence of the Byansis and, from 1993 to 1995, I carried out fourteen months of fieldwork in Darchula district among the people called Byansis, to find that they too were "very rich and friendly people full of hospitality".[2]

Byans is located in the northernmost part of Darchula district in far western Nepal, lying north of the Api Himal and adjacent to both India and China. The area is composed of the uppermost valley of the Mahakali (Kali) river which constitutes the India-Nepal border. The main inhabitants of this valley are basically Mongoloid people who speak a distinct Tibeto-Burman language. In addition to agriculture and animal husbandry, many of them have traditionally conducted trans-Himalayan trade. According to the limited amount of previous literature,[3] they have kept their own culture and tradition, while being influenced by both Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyse the meanings and implications of

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[1] Earlier versions of this paper appeared in Japanese (Nawa 1997, 1998c: 30-55). The data used in the second section was analysed from a slightly different perspective in another article (Nawa 1998a: 66-70). Key ethnonyms discussed in this paper are given in italics throughout in deliberate contravention of the usual convention of naming and capitalizing.

[2] My research was supported by the Asian Studies Scholarship Program of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, Government of Japan.

[3] Dahal (1994), Fürer-Haimendorf (1988: 282-84), Manzardo *et al.* (1976), His Majesty's Government of Nepal (1975: 997-98). See also Allen (1975).

several ethnic categories used in and around Byans. Inter-ethnic and inter-caste relations have been one of the main topics of the anthropology of Nepal for more than forty years.[4] In addition, many fascinating studies have elucidated various aspects of the dynamics and institutional backgrounds of ethnic,[5] caste, and national identities.[6] However, the question 'To what language (or languages) does an ethnonym belong, and in what range of contexts is it used?' has seldom been asked. Consequently, an ethnonym in one language has too often been equated with another in a different language, and the entity signified by these ethnonyms has been essentialized and objectified. This is not a trivial point, since, in the studies of Byans and adjacent regions, it has caused much confusion regarding correspondences between the signifier and the signified of each term, and complicated relations between these terms.

I would argue, therefore, that more careful theoretical attention should be paid to the study of ethnonyms. This point has been emphasized in a series of debates on ethnos[7] by some Japanese anthropologists. Motomitsu Uchibori, the most prominent figure in these debates, argues that each ethnos is a middle-range category between everyday interactive communities (or individuals) and the whole society, and that the basis and essence of every ethnos is ultimately its name (Uchibori 1989, see also Nawa 1992). From this point of view, the process of quasi-objectification of each ethnos is possible only in relation to the use of its name (or names) by both (imagined) insiders and outsiders. This is the theoretical premise of this paper, the validity of which will be examined in the discussion below.

Before dealing in detail with the ethnonyms current in Byans, let me quote two sets of utterances reconstructed from my field notes. The first one came from a Byansi who occupied a prominent position in a government corporation, during our second meeting. He was the first Byansi I ever met, and the following statements by him were the first substantial information on the Byansis that I obtained from one of them. The first statement was made partly in English and partly in Nepali:

> There are many stories about the origin of the Byansis. Some people are under Tibetan influence, others under Jumlese influence, others under Indian influence. There are nine villages in Byans, and fourteen others in Chaudans. There is also a valley called Darma. Lots of people live in India,

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[4] Fürer-Haimendorf (1966) and Caplan (1970) are early contributions.

[5] I avoid the term 'ethnicity' in this paper, because the application of the term to a particular situation automatically limits the agenda of discussion. For example, it implies that those under discussion do not compose a nation by themselves.

[6] To give a comprehensive bibliography on this theme is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for instance, Levine (1987), Holmberg (1989: 11-50), and papers in Gellner *et al.* eds. (1997). In addition, Burghart (1996), Höfer (1979), and Onta (1996), among others, identify many aspects of the interrelationship between the state apparatus and national, caste, and ethnic identities in Nepal.

[7] We discuss these issues in Japanese using the word *minzoku*, which connotes both 'nation' and 'ethnic group', and which I tentatively translate as 'ethnos' in this paper.

and every valley has a different language.

Many researches have been done on the Newars, the Magars, the Gurungs, and so on. So we can say "their culture is like this". But nobody knows about the Byansis. Only the local people know about them. So different people have different impressions of them, and some think that they are Buddhists.

In my opinion, the Byansis have a mixed type of culture, partly influenced by Tibet, partly by Hinduism. People who don't know us call the Byansis *bhoṭiyā*. The word *bhoṭiyā* originally means 'Tibetan type', and has a connotation of 'people who eat beef' and 'outcaste of the Hindus'. But the Byansis do not eat beef and buffalo meat, and have a different type of culture...

The second statement, in contrast, is an extract from a conversation in Byansi with big traders from Changru, a village in Nepalese Byans, that took place in Kathmandu a few days before my departure for Japan in 1995:

> A: By the way, you said that you are going to write a book on us in Japan. What is the title going to be?
>
> Nawa: What title do you think is best?
>
> A: *śaukā* would be good. This term is well-known. *byānsī* is also good. The word is related to Byans Rishi.
>
> B: No no. The title must be *rang*. *śaukā* and *byānsī* are names given by others. We are the *rang* in our *rang* language, so the title of the book must be *rang*.
>
> C: That's no good. Readers won't recognize who the *rang* are. It will be all right if you make the title *śaukā* or *byānsī* and add *rang* in brackets.
>
> A: You are not going to write that we are the *pang* after you go back to Japan, I hope?
>
> Nawa: The *rang* are *rang*, not *pang* or *wolan*. Isn't that so?
>
> A: You should write that those who call us *bhoṭiyā* are absolutely wrong. You should write that we are *matwālī chetrīs*.

I quote these remarks here not only to establish my ethnographic authority (Clifford 1986), but to make it clear that many people of Byans told me much about their ethnonyms and the implications of these ethnonyms of their own accord.[8] Indeed, highly educated officers and big traders were not the only ones who discussed their ethnic identity. Many ordinary villagers talked again and again about it, not only to the ethnographer but also to

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[8] See Moerman's scepticism regarding the validity of ethnographic studies on 'ethnicity' (1974).

other outsiders and among themselves. In other words, these narratives are more than just the result of some leading questions on the part of the ethnographer.

2. Ethnonyms

2.1 Naming by others

It has been recorded in English for more than a century that in the Himalayan valleys in far western Nepal, as well as in Kumaun and Garhwal in India, there live groups of people who are neither Tibetan nor South Asian. They have been variously called *byānsī, śaukā,* and *bhoṭiyā*, with much confusion regarding both the applicable range of each ethnonym and the correspondence between each name and ethnographic reality. A good way to start, then, is to inquire into the meanings and connotations of these terms.

Firstly, in the context of Nepal, the main inhabitants of Byans are most often referred to as *byānsī*. This name means 'the inhabitants of Byans' in both Hindi and Nepali, but not in Byansi.[9] In other words, it is basically a term used by their southern neighbours.[10] Secondly, *bhoṭiyā* is a Nepali, Hindi, and Pahari word, which usually connotes Tibetan and Tibetanoid people.[11] Significantly, however, this term was used widely in India during the colonial period by administrators, scholars, and explorers to indicate Mongoloid people in general who lived in the northernmost Himalayan zone in the United Provinces.[12] They found that in Kumaun and Garhwal, as well as in the northernmost part of far western Nepal, there were people who were Mongoloid but not Tibetan, and whose languages and cultures differed from valley to valley. Many of them were trans-Himalayan traders, and the regions they inhabited, from west to east, were Mana, Niti, Johar, Darma, Chaudans, and Byans, a portion of which was in Nepalese territory. Based on this observation, much research was conducted on the social, cultural, and linguistic differences of each valley. Irrespective of these differences, however, the residents of these valleys were generally called *bhoṭiyā*, and a category that corresponds to *byānsī,* for example, was not treated as an independent unit. In other words, *bhoṭiyā* was a general category which included not only residents of Byans but also of some other valleys in the United Provinces. In India, *bhoṭiyā* is currently used in administrative terms as the name of a scheduled tribe.[13] The people of Byans who have Indian nationality, together with other Mongoloid people living in adjacent regions, officially belong to this category, and are entitled to certain legal

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[9] Byans is called *byangkhu* in Byansi.

[10] See Nawa (1998b) for more information. As I have pointed out there, some scholars' usage of the word, in which it connotes only the inhabitants of Nepalese Byans (Manzardo *et al.* 1976) is unacceptable, because the Byans region lies in both Nepalese and Indian territory, and there is no reason to exclude the dwellers of Indian Byans from the category *byānsī*.

[11] The word is variously written, for instance, *bhoṭiyā*, 'Bhotia', and 'Bhootia'. The people of Byans often use *bhoṭiyā* and the Nepali word *bhoṭe* as synonyms.

[12] See, for instance, Atkinson (1996: 83-152), Sherring (1907, 1993), Lall (1911), Pant (1988), and Heim and Gansser (1994). In addition, a Japanese traveller who visited Byans in 1927 called them *Bhootiya* (Hasegawa 1975). Brown (1984: 14-29) gives an historical analysis of the usages of the concept of 'Bhotiya' in the United Provinces.

[13] Scholars who studied these areas after independence also use the name. See for instance Srivastava

rights as members of a scheduled tribe. Finally, according to the people of Byans, *śaukā* is a word which is used to refer to them in the Pahari dialects of far western Nepal and the adjacent regions of India. In other words, it is a name employed by their southern neighbours. Many people of Byans told me that this word originally meant 'the rich'.[14] Unlike *byānsī* and *bhoṭiyā*, it is a category used not in administration but in everyday interaction.

2.2 Naming by themselves

So far, I have introduced three ethnonyms which are used to refer to the main inhabitants of Byans. The range of people which each word connotes differs, and all three are names used by others to refer to them. *Rang* is the ethnonym which they use to refer to themselves in their own mother tongue. This category constitutes one part of a conceptual triad which comprises two other ethnic categories: *pang* and *wolan*. *Pang* means 'Tibetan', whereas *wolan* primarily indicates the South Asian people who speak Indo-European languages such as Pahari. The view that the *rang* are neither *pang* nor *wolan* and have an independent identity is widespread among the inhabitants of Byans.

These three terms are frequently used in daily life in Byans, and when I lived in Byansi villages I seldom spent a day without hearing them. Moreover, the use of these words is not restricted to situations of direct interaction with the *pang* and the *wolan*. For example, when a *rang* child does something which is considered rude by the *rang*, but is frequently done (so they think) by *pang* or *wolan*, he or she is scolded 'What is it, like a *pang*!' or 'What is it, like a *wolan*!' Stereotyped thinking such as 'the *pang* eat beef' and '*wolan* often deceive us' is also widespread. The boundary between *rang* on the one hand and *pang* and *wolan* on the other is confirmed and strengthened in Byansi everyday life.

It should be pointed out that these three categories are related to certain 'objective' factors. Many *rang* traders go to Tibet in the summer from their villages in Byans and adjacent regions, because some have land there and engage in agricultural activities. In winter, when many of their villages are cut off by snow, they move to Darchula and neighbouring hamlets where they have winter houses, and travel to villages and towns in the southern fringe of the Himalayas in far western Nepal and Uttar Pradesh for trade.[15] In the context of this traditional lifestyle, the categories *pang* and *wolan* virtually coincide with the two sorts of people they meet during the two different seasons each year: Mongoloid people who live on the Tibetan plateau, speak Tibetan, and adhere to Tibetan Buddhism on the one hand, and Caucasoid people who live in the southern foothills of the Himalayas, speak Pahari and other Indo-European languages, and practise Hinduism on the other. The language of the *rang* is different from the languages of both the *pang* and the *wolan*, and many cultural differences exist both between the *rang* and the *pang*, and between the *rang* and the *wolan*, ranging from traditional costume to food restrictions, many of which can be easily observed. In other words, if we presuppose the existence of a group of people which coincides with the category *rang*, and if we view the situation from the perspective of its members, we can conclude that the *rang* have had contact with two kinds of different peoples, who are physically, linguistically, and culturally different from each other, and are called *pang* and *wolan* respectively. It is wrong, however, to think that the *rang* as an objective ethnic group moved north and south for years to find two other objective entities. The discovery of the two kinds of distinctions and the formation of the three different ethnic categories are simultaneous processes and the creation of the identity *rang* is possible only through this process of differentiation.

I am not arguing that these 'objective' factors are always clear-cut. Indeed, it is difficult for me to judge to which of the three categories a person belongs (or more precisely, to which a person thinks that he or she belongs, and to which he or she is thought by others to belong) when I meet him or her for the first time. It is impossible to distinguish a *rang* from a *pang* by facial features; even distinction between a *rang* and a *wolan* is sometimes not possible. Nor can language be the decisive criterion, because almost all of the *pang* and many of the *wolan* I met in Byans spoke the language of the *rang* to some extent. Clothing, though it was a valid distinctive feature in the early 20th century, is of little use today because so many people wear jeans, saris, or down coats.[16] Moreover, the penetration of the state apparatus of Nepal has made the situation more complicated, as the following example indicates.[17]

While I walked around Darchula with the chairman of the Byans Village Development Committee, I came across a man who had Mongoloid features.

> Chairman: Guess whether he is a *rang*, a *pang*, or a *wolan*.
>
> Nawa [in Byansi]: Umm... He looks like a *rang*, but...
>
> A Man: Hey! What are you talking about?
>
> Chairman [in Nepali] : I asked him whether you look like a person of our group (*hāmro jāt*).
>
> Nawa: Is he a *rang*, then?
>
> Chairman [in Byansi]: He is a *wolan*, a Rai. He came to Darchula as a policeman.

In this way, the people themselves are able to use these categories freely because they

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(1953, 1966), Raha and Das (1981), Singh (1994), and Hoon (1996). Brown (1984) also uses the term though he is highly critical of it. Many writers of Indian Byans preferred the word *śaukā* (Amtikar 1993, Garbyal 1987, Garbyal n.d., Raypa 1974).

[14] See also Manzardo *et al.* (1976: 111-12). Contrary to Brown's assertion (1984: i), *śaukā* is not an ethnonym in the mother tongue of people in Byans.

[15] The inhabitants of Chaudans and several villages in Darma do not migrate seasonally.

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[16] Tibetan women are exceptions. Many of them wear Tibetan dress, which, as far as I know, no *rang* or *wolan* women wear. On clothes in Byans in the early 20th century, see Sherring (1993: 65-66).

[17] Also see 3.1.1. and 3.2. below.

already actually know who is a *rang*, a *pang*, or a *wolan* through everyday face-to-face interactions. On the other hand, many inhabitants of Byans explain the word *rang* not only in terms of a distinction from *pang* and *wolan*, but also by talking about the connotation of the term itself. The most general and standard explanation is that 'the *rang* are the people who live in three regions: Byans, Chaudans, and Darma.' Secondary criteria, such as cultural similarity and the range of intermarriage, are also frequently added. As far as I know, no *rang* would deny this explanation, and many of them mention it as if it were the formal definition.

Does this explanation based on place of residence really define the membership of the *rang* sufficiently? Detailed ethnographic observation suggests not. Firstly, it is untrue that the *rang* live only in these three areas. Rapla and Sitola, two of the four villages in Nepal where the vast majority of inhabitants are *rang*, are outside these three areas. Moreover, the *rang* are not the only inhabitants of these three areas. People called *ḍam* in Byansi, who live in every *rang* village mainly as blacksmiths and drum players, and who belong to low Hindu castes, are considered by *rang* to be *wolan*. In addition, many Tibetans (*pang*) have settled in *rang* villages. Some of them have lived there for several generations, since before 1959 when many Tibetan refugees came to Byans. Generally they are still considered to be *pang*, irrespective of the length of their stay. On the other hand, there are some *rang* who consider themselves, and are considered by other *rang*, to be descendants of immigrants from Tibet. Therefore, we can not take the above explanation at face value. There is a tacit presupposition of *rang* membership that exists prior to and over and above the place of residence.

How, then, is this presupposition made? In order to examine this, let me shift our focus to everyday interactions within the villages. If a villager encounters a person who looks like a *rang* but whom he or she does not know, he or she asks villagers nearby, 'Who is that person?' In most cases the answer will be something like, 'He is the eldest son of one of Suresh's maternal uncles.' If no one knows who he/she is, one of them will ask the stranger directly 'Whose son/daughter are you?' Through this process, a stranger, if he or she is a *rang*, is placed within the network of kinship relations.

Each adult who thinks him/herself and is thought by others to be a *rang* and lives in a *rang* village knows almost all the *rang* of his or her own village through kinship networks. Hence, the boundary between *rang* and non-*rang* is conceptualized very clearly within a village. Moreover, the *rang* are strongly convinced that the same kind of boundary exists in other villages, and it is the concrete relations of kinship and marriage that guarantee their conviction. The three regions which they consider to be the homeland of the *rang* coincide approximately with areas within which their network of kinship and marriage can be traced. This does not mean, however, that networks of kinship and marriage constitute the *rang* as an ethnic group. For instance, there are some *rang* villages with which the *rang* of Changru prohibit direct affinal relations. Moreover, it is not the case that a *pang* or a *wolan* is immediately and automatically treated as a *rang* after he or she is married to a *rang*. In most cases, a *rang* marries a person who has already been defined as

a *rang* through the network of kinship relations, and as a result the network is maintained and the quasi-objectivity of the *rang* is strengthened.

The discussion above makes it clear that *rang* is taken for granted as a self-evident category by those who call themselves *rang*. To put it another way, *rang* is an imagined community (Anderson 1991) in the sense that all those who think of themselves as *rang* do not doubt the existence of a clear boundary between members and non-members, though none of them knows all the members. Membership in this imagined community is most often explained by the traditional areas of residence, and the network of kinship and marriage is widely used in order to identify a person as a member. However, it would be wrong to think that places of residence or kinship ties in themselves constitute the *rang* as an ethnic group. In this sense, *rang* as a category is not a direct outcome of any objective reality. Rather, the essence of the category *rang* lies in a tautological categorical proposition: 'We (as the *rang*) are the *rang*.' Residential patterns and kinship networks give this proposition some apparent foundation and substance. *pang* and *wolan*, on the other hand, are two names for non-members given to them by those who consider themselves to be *rang*. But actually the category *rang* comes into existence simultaneously with the formulation of the two categories *pang* and *wolan*.[18]

2.3 Coping with names given by others

We have dealt with the ethnonyms used by the main residents of Byans in their own mother tongue. The next step is to examine how they consider the ethnic categories in other languages, i.e. *byānsī*, *śaukā*, and *bhoṭiyā*. This task is indispensable, since they live in a multilingual condition and use these categories frequently, with the name *rang* being used only in their mother tongue.[19]

Firstly, *śaukā*, an ethnonym employed by *wolan*, is most often used by *rang* as an ethnonym for themselves when they speak in Pahari, Nepali, or Hindi. Many *rang* told me that they prefer this word because there is no pejorative connotation to it. Many *rang* explain the relation between *rang* and *śaukā* thus: 'We call the *śaukā* "rang" in the language of the *rang*, and we call the *rang* "śaukā" in the language of the *wolan*.' *Śaukā*, the name used by others to refer to them in the daily course of inter-ethnic relations in winter, has changed into their own ethnonym in their daily multilingual life.

Secondly, the word *byānsī* is less often used by *rang* themselves.[20] This is probably because it is not a suitable word to connote the *rang* in general, because Byans, the place

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[18] In what follows, I use these categories as givens. It is not that these categories perfectly coincide with the objective reality. I do this rather because the discussion is mainly based on the discourse of the people of Byans, and it is inconvenient to add 'according to them...' or 'for those who think of themselves as...' each time.

[19] The following discussion is based mainly on information given by the *rang* who live in Nepal. Therefore I cannot say for certain to what extent my argument is valid for Indian *rang*, who live under different political and administrative conditions.

[20] Manzardo, Dahal, and Rai (1976: 111) also prefer the name *śaukā* to *byānsī*.

where *byānsīs* live, is only one of the three regions where *rang* traditionally live. Logically, then, it follows that Chaudansis and Darmiyas, the inhabitants of Chaudans and Darma respectively, are *rang* but not *byānsī*. This is not to say that the category *byānsī* is of no use for *rang*. Indeed, many *rang* stressed to me that Byans, Chaudans, and Darma are not only geographically separate, but have their own distinctive dialects, traditions, and customs. Being aware of some 'objective' reality in the term *byānsī*, however, they treat them as sub-categories of *rang*. In addition, some *rang* in Nepal do refer to themselves positively as *byānsīs*. This is partly because they know that the name reminds many Hindus of Vyasa Rishi, the legendary writer of the *Mahābhārata*.[21] Interestingly, they use the name *byānsī* almost exclusively when they talk with non-*rang* from the south. So it seems reasonable to suppose that they choose the word *byānsī* on the assumption that the listeners share a knowledge of Hindu mythology.[22]

Lastly, as far as I know, the term *bhoṭiyā* is never used self-referentially in daily conversation.[23] The *rang* do not think that they are *bhoṭiyā*, which is a synonym of *pang* for them. In addition, many *rang* regard the term as highly pejorative, and are offended when addressed as *bhoṭiyā*. Many *wolan*, however, often regard the *rang* as a sort of *bhoṭiyā*, because it is almost impossible to distinguish a *rang* from a Tibetan according to physical traits, and because the customs and tradition of the *rang* are quite different from those of caste Hindus. The crucial fact is that, through this naming, many high-caste Hindus treat the *rang* as their inferiors.

2.4 Recapitulation
The discussion above shows that the category *rang* is privileged as the ethnic category of the people of Byans, in spite of differences in the articulation of their ethnic and social categories at many levels. On the one hand, many linguistic and cultural differences can be observed within the *rang*, at regional, village, and clan levels.[24] Moreover, the *rang* themselves are aware of, and often talk about, these differences. On the other hand, people

[21] See the second quotation in the introduction. Indeed, Vyasa Rishi (or 'Byans Rishi' in local pronunciation) is one of the most important gods in Byans, and according to them his abode is on top of the mountain to the north of Changru. In addition, they have a legend in which Bhima visited Vyasa Rishi, who lived in Byans (Nawa 1998c: 95-111).

[22] In addition, the name *byānsī* may have been widely used in mid-western and far-western Nepal. Fürer-Haimendorf (1988: 284) and Levine (1987) report that there were people who called themselves *byānsī* in Humla. Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (personal communication) told me that there was a shop managed by a '*byānsī*' family in Chainpur, Bajhang.

[23] As I have pointed out elsewhere (Nawa 1998b: 69-70), many Indian *rang* were not content with being termed *bhoṭiyā* by their government.

[24] It has been reported that three dialects or languages of the *rang* exist, i.e. those of Byans, Chaudans, and Darma (Grierson 1967 [1909], Sharma 1989, Trivedi 1991). Actually, Byansi is composed of two slightly different dialects: Yerjungkhu and Pangjungkhu. Moreover, the dialects of two villages in Byans, Tinkar and Kuti, are considerably different from Byansi or any other dialects of *rang* and I was told that most *rang* from other villages do not understand them. Indeed, the majority of basic kinship terms are completely different in Byansi and Tinkari.

resembling *rang* live in some other Himalayan valleys in U.P. (Johar, Niti, and Mana).[25] In spite of this complex situation, they almost always call themselves *rang* in their mother tongue. This term, which constitutes a triad together with two other terms for non-members, *pang* and *wolan*, is the most important category for their self-identification. They use many ethnic terms in other languages according to context in relation to this category.

A question may arise: why is the triad of *rang*, *pang*, and *wolan* privileged among the various levels of differentiation? This question, however, is impossible to answer without giving some historical and other background explanation, because a recognition of ethnic differences in itself relies entirely on ethnic categories through which those differences are articulated. It is this condition that I have described in the expression 'tautological categorical proposition'.

3. The changing connotations of ethnonyms
So far we have seen that *rang*, *pang*, and *wolan* are the most important ethnic categories for those who call themselves *rang* in their own mother tongue. This is not, however, the whole story, because the usage of the word *rang* discussed above is, though common and probably the most authentic, not the only one in Byans. In this section I deal with two ways in which the imagined boundary of *rang* is redefined, that is to say, ways in which the triad of *rang*, *pang*, and *wolan* is re-explained by using the concepts of race and religion, and the category *rang* is juxtaposed with other ethnic groups within a nation-state.

3.1 'Race' and 'religion'
'The *rang* are not Aryan but Mongolian.' 'The *rang* are not Buddhists but Hindus.' In Darchula and Byans I often heard this kind of remark, which is based on two concepts of Western origin: race and religion. Interestingly, these two dichotomies virtually coincide with the *rang/wolan* and *rang/pang* distinctions respectively. In the following, I examine the way in which the connotations of the ethnic categories analysed above have been altered by an overlap with these two relatively new dichotomies.

3.1.1 Aryan/Mongolian

The first dichotomy, 'Aryan' versus 'Mongolian', is based on the quasi-scientific concept of 'race'. These English words are used usually, but not exclusively, by young and/or highly educated *rang* in conversations in English, Hindi, Nepali, and Byansi. The following statements give some idea of what they argue through recourse to these categories. The first statement was made to me during the early stages of my fieldwork by a young *rang* entrepreneur who was a university graduate. Watching a Wimbledon tennis match on television in his house in Darchula, he suddenly asked me, switching from Nepali to English:

[25] Zoller (1983: xxvii) reports that the inhabitants of Mana call themselves *raṅ po*.

Do you think Mongolians are dominated by Aryans all over the world? I ask you this because you are an anthropologist. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, all the great religions were made by Aryans.

In tennis, too, there is no Mongolian in Wimbledon [this sentence in Nepali, all others in English]. Yes, only one! Michael Chang, an American Mongolian... In our country, 70% Mongolians are dominated by 30% Aryans. There has been no Mongolian Prime Minister. In Darchula, all the important officers are Aryan. Our country borders India, and has been influenced by it.

A few days later, I attended a *rang* marriage ceremony in Darchula. Many *rang* there taught many things to the 'Japanese who came here to study the Byansi culture'. One of them told me in Nepali:

Don't you want to know our old culture? In my opinion, there was a single Mongolian culture in ancient times. Language was also the same, I guess. Even now, each Mongolian has the same face. Rang, Tibetans, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Bhutanese. Now their cultures differ because Mongolians have been influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism. You can compare us with other peoples who have been less influenced by these religions. Our culture has been changed by Hinduism, but you can find many things about the past through comparison.

Three points should be noted. Firstly, *rang* classify themselves as 'Mongolians' in the cases above, as well as in all the other cases I know. Secondly, many *rang* criticize the dominance of high-caste Hindus in India and Nepal using the Mongolian/Aryan dichotomy. Thirdly, they think these words are scientific. Not only do they know that a remark can be mystified by using English words; some *rang* regard those words as technical terms in anthropology. In their everyday life, this 'Mongolian'/'Aryan' dichotomy coincides roughly with the distinction between *rang* and *wolan*. It is true that many *rang* classify Mongolian people who are not *rang* or *pang* as *wolan*, as has been suggested earlier. These Mongoloid *wolan* are exceptions, however.[26] In almost all cases, the word *wolan* indicates not these Mongolians but South Asian people whom many inhabitants of Byans classify as 'Aryans'.

The use of these general categories brings new meanings to the triad of *rang, pang,* and *wolan*, because the 'Aryans' include not only those *wolan* whom many *rang* meet in their ordinary life but also the Caucasoid people of Europe and America, while the 'Mongolians' include not only *rang* and *pang* but also Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans. This is significant not only because it enables a direct link between the political situation of Nepal and Wimbledon, or an imagination of the Ur-Mongolian culture. What is important is that the

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[26] Indeed, those Mongoloid people who are neither *rang* nor *pang* are anomalies in the *rang-pang-wolan* triad. I assume they are classified as *wolan* for lack of alternatives, as they are obviously not Tibetans. For another system of categorization, see 3.2.

categories provide *rang* with the means to criticize *wolan*, especially high-caste Hindus, 'scientifically'. They enable them to argue against the hierarchical assertions of the Hindus by saying, for example, 'Japanese and Koreans are also Mongolians.'

The discussion above may remind some readers of the Aryan-versus-Dravidian dichotomy in South India. However, the category of 'Mongolian' in Byans has not become a conceptual basis for any concrete resistance movement. Rather, it functions as a device for challenging value judgements made according to facial features, while accepting the existence of the distinction itself. In other words, the statement that they are all 'Mongolians', while it brings about an imagined solidarity with people living far away, has not functioned much beyond an explanation of their own physical and cultural traits—traits that differ from those of their southern neighbours, but which can be pointed out without negative connotations.[27] Besides, the difference between the *rang* and the *pang*, their most familiar Mongolian neighbours, is frequently stressed using the criterion of religion, as is shown below.

3.1.2 'Religion': Hinduism/Buddhism

While talking with villagers in Byans, I was often asked, 'What is your religion?' or 'Which religion do the Japanese believe in?' These questions presuppose that everyone, and every nation or ethnic group, has his, her, or its own religion. *Dharma*, the term I translate here as 'religion', is a loan word from their southern neighbours, and as far as I know there is no equivalent Byansi word used in daily conversation.[28] It is highly probable that the category 'religion' and the premise that all the people in the world believe in some religion or other, were foreign to the conceptualizations of the *rang* in the past, but are shared by many of them today.

When asked about their religion, the *rang* answer immediately that they are Hindus.[29] What, then, does being Hindu mean to them? This is expressed in the following discussion (in Byansi) of the differences between Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism, with a junior high school teacher from Changru:

Teacher: Every religion is like that. We are Hindus, but our Hinduism is quite different from that of the *wolan*. They don't put up *darchō*, and don't use *dalang* in rituals.[30] There are many ways of doing ritual within a reli-

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[27] I have not heard that Nepalese *rang* have participated in the *janajāti* movement collectively.

[28] As is well known, *dharma*, a word derived from Sanskrit, has much broader connotations than 'religion'. In modern Hindi and Nepali, as well as Byansi, however, it is broadly used as the direct translation of the English word 'religion'. It is to this latter usage that I refer in this section.

[29] The answer of the inhabitants of Tinkar, a village in Nepalese Byans, can be slightly different. As one villager told me, "We worship Hindu deities, but also go to Buddhist *gompas*, because we have two founding ancestors, one of whom came from Tibet while the other cam from Hindu Jumla." However, I know of no Tinkaris who deny their Hindu belief.

[30] A *darchō* is a prayer-pole, usually with a white flag. Unlike in Tibetan *dar-lcog*, Tibetan Bud-

gion.

Nawa: But isn't *darchō* a custom of the *pang*?

Teacher: In a movie I watched, people of Afghanistan put up *darchō*. They
are Musalman, but they put up *darchō*. As we live in a cold area near Tibet,
some of our customs have been influenced by Tibet.

The dialogue above shows one typical way in which the *rang* assert that they are Hindus.
Many of them, especially those who have received middle- or high-level education, begin
by insisting strongly that they are Hindus, and then explain the differences between the
wolan and themselves in terms of cultural contact and diffusion. Here, the difference from
the *pang*, their Buddhist neighbours to the north, is emphasized as intrinsic, whereas the
difference from the *wolan*, while recognized, is treated as secondary and within Hindu-
ism.

Where, then, do the *rang* place themselves within the Hindu caste hierarchy? The people
of Nepalese Byans most commonly claim themselves to be Matwāli Chetrīs.[31] On the
other hand, many Indian *rang*, especially in Chaudans, insist that they are the descendants
of Rājpūts. What is more important, however, is that many of them answer questions
regarding their caste without hesitation. It is clear that they are accustomed to explaining
their *jāt* (or in Hindi, *jāti*) affiliation not in terms of a distinct entity, but within the Hindu
caste hierarchy in the Himalayan foothills.

3.1.3 Rang as Mongolian Hindus

So far, we have seen that many *rang* identify themselves as both Mongolian and Hindu.
The latter assertion, however, is not always accepted by their southern neighbours, since
many *wolan* still regard *rang* as *bhoṭiyās*. In spite of the *rangs*' insistence that they are
Hindus, a considerable proportion of the neighbouring *wolan* have the wrong image of
them as Buddhists who eat beef. *Rang* argue against these stereotypes on the grounds that
they are not Tibetans but Hindus, and that they do not eat beef or yak meat. For example,
see the following remarks (in Nepali) by a young *rang* entrepreneur:

Many years ago, several Nepalese anthropologists came to us for research.
Not coming to Byans, however, they stayed one day in Darchula, took many

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dhist scriptures are not printed, except in Tinkar. *dalang* is a pair of cone-figured offerings made of
small-grain wheat or bitter buckwheat dough. Both are indispensable items for most rituals in Byans
(Sherring 1993: 90-93, Raypa 1974: 119-22, Nawa 1998c).

[31] Manzardo and others (1976: 83) record that, when asked, they answer that they are Bohara
Chetrī (Matwālī Chetrī).

[32] This is the paper written by Manzardo, Dahal, and Rai (1976). I would like to add immediately

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photographs, asked a few questions of several persons, and went back. Later
they sent us a paper,[32] and so we were pleased at first. But, as they wrote
that we ate beef, we got angry and threw it away. We never eat beef.

As far as I know, there is no *rang* who eats beef, yak meat, or buffalo meat, at least in
Byans and Darchula. Moreover, soon after I arrived in Byans for the first time, a young
highly educated *rang* trader warned me, "When you are asked whether Japanese eat beef,
you had better reply that they don't. Many older people don't know the outside world.
They don't know even that Americans eat beef. If they come to know that you eat beef,
they will regard you with displeasure." Indeed, older villagers tend to show a strong feel-
ing of aversion to the rumour that so-and-so ate yak or water buffalo meat in Kathmandu
or elsewhere. It should be noted, however, that the Hindu food taboo is not the only one of
which they are aware. On the contrary, they often talk about food taboos of other peoples,
pointing out, 'It is said that the Chinese eat dogs', 'The Musalmans do not eat pork', and
so on. Indeed, an old man in Changru who had visited America to meet his son there was
asked every day by other villagers, "Which meat is eaten in America?" and he always
answered "In my son's house, they eat chicken." They know that their food taboo is only
one of many different food taboos all over the world.[33] Despite this, they not only observe
but also strongly assert their food taboo which they, as well as other South Asians, think of
as typically Hindu.

So far, I have stressed that, to the best of my knowledge, the *rang* have not eaten beef or
yak meat for many years.[34] This fact constitutes the main reason for their strong rejection
of their categorization as *bhoṭiyā*. However, acknowledging the fact that *rang* do not eat
beef or yak meat does not necessarily mean that they are recognized as Hindus. I took a
rest in a teashop on my first journey to Darchula. Hearing that I was going to Darchula to
study the 'Byansis', two men, both of whom were Parbate Hindus, told me in Nepali:

A: The Byansis offer *raksī* to their gods. They are Buddhists.

B: No. They are not Buddhists. Theirs is not any [well-known] religion.

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that this remark contains a considerable amount of exaggeration. First of all they do not write that
the Byānsī eat beef but that they eat yak meat, though the latter assertion is still problematic. Moreo-
ver, it should be noted that they wrote the article as a preliminary research note (it was a by-product
of a research project on the migration process in far-western Nepal) and they admit to its tentative
nature.

[33] They often use the expression, 'Each people has its own tradition' (*api api thumchālū licchō*).

[34] Many Tibetan refugees in Byans also told me that *rang*, unlike them, and unlike me too (some-
times they pointed this out to me with a wink), do not eat yak meat. Sherring (1907: 102) also
pointed out that no 'Bhotia' in the United Provinces ate beef. But see also Atkinson (1996: 111),
who asserted the opposite.

They cannot be said to be Hindus or Buddhists. They have their own reli-
gion.

This shows that the assertion that the religion of the *rang* is not Hinduism is not necessar-
ily attributable to the ignorance of *wolan*; it has some observable grounds, one of which is
the cultural difference between the *rang* and the *wolan*. Indeed, their oft-repeated criti-
cism of the *wolan*, 'How can those who don't speak the *rang* language know what we are
doing in our ritual?' ironically shows that it is actually very difficult for *wolan* Hindus to
understand their rituals. The difficulty for the *rang* lies, in the end, in their attempt to make
themselves recognized as Hindus of high ritual status, without directly imitating or ab-
sorbing 'orthodox' Hinduism from the south.

In addition, the assertion that *rang* are of 'Mongolian' stock causes a problem. As noted
above, it can function as a counter to the *wolan* claim that they are *bhoṭiyā*s. The applica-
tion of such 'racial' concepts, however, results in a fixation and objectification of the
boundary between *rang* and *wolan*. Despite this, *rang* claim that they are Hindus, and
have in fact adapted some of their myths and rituals accordingly.[35] The contradiction
between their racial and religious affiliations can be solved logically by treating the two
dichotomies as belonging to two completely different spheres. In reality, however, it has
been exceedingly difficult, though not impossible, for the *rang* to make the *wolan* recog-
nize that they are Mongolian Hindus, as many *wolan* regard the spheres as interrelated.

Finally, I would like to point out that, in the re-explanation of the *rang-pang-wolan* triad
by the two dichotomies of religion and race, concepts like 'Hindu' and 'Mongolian' are,
for many *rang*, givens that are already defined quasi-scientifically in the outside world. In
other words, in order to use the terms adequately, they have to learn their proper usage
from some outside authority. Consequently, these concepts, while they articulate and make
their claims comprehensible to others, have the possibility of destroying the self-evident
nature of these ethnic terms, because the boundary may be felt and understood not directly
but through those foreign concepts. It is not accidental that these concepts are mainly
used by highly educated *rang*. Their adoption drives many *rang* into a situation in which
they have to deal with their complicated inter-ethnic or inter-caste relations through re-
course to these concepts of foreign origin.

3.2 The rang *as an ethnic group within a state*
So far, I have indicated that the *rang-pang-wolan* triad has been redefined with some
modification by two sets of 'Western' concepts. Let us turn finally to a different usage of
the category *rang*, keeping in mind that the following discussion is applicable only to the
rang in Nepal. A different project will be required to discuss the situation in India.

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[35] This topic has been discussed by several scholars (Srivastava 1953, 1966, Manzardo *et al.* 1976,
Raha and Das 1981, and Nawa 1998c: 207-313).

When I went to Darchula and met many *rang* for the first time, I explained the object of
my stay by quoting the words of Prof. Bista mentioned above. A few weeks later, I found
that a slightly different story was going around among the villagers: 'A professor of
Tribhuvan University pointed out to him that researches on Sherpas, Thakalis, Gurungs,
Magars, Rais, Limbus, and almost all the *jāt*s in Nepal had been carried out, and that only
the research on *rang* was incomplete. So he came to us to learn about our tradition.' This
shows clearly that the category *rang* is not always used in opposition to *pang* and *wolan*.
Some readers may see it as contradictory that several levels of categories are opposed to
the single category *rang*. Interestingly, however, the boundary of the *rang* is almost iden-
tical in every case despite the differentiation within the non-*rang*. Moreover, the outward
inconsistency is easily overcome in their everyday life by changing the categories which
lie on the same level with the *rang* according to the context. Indeed, the uncertainty or
oscillation of levels of ethnic categories is by no means new in Byans, as several catego-
ries exist which do not fit well into the *rang-pang-wolan* triad, such as Gyami (Chinese)
and Chenpa (the inhabitants of Johar).[36] What is new is that shifts in level occur in rela-
tion to the nation-state of Nepal.

The point I wish to stress is that here the category *rang* appears not in opposition to *pang*
and *wolan*, but as a *jāt* which is a part of the multi-ethnic (*bahujātīya*) state of Nepal.
Consequently, the *rang*, or the *byānsī* as they sometimes call themselves in this kind of
context, are placed alongside other *jāt*s ('castes' and 'ethnic groups') in Nepal, as a rela-
tively unknown section of the nation. Moreover, the culture and tradition of each *jāt* is
imagined as a distinct entity which can be researched and written about by scholars, as the
cases mentioned in the introduction clearly show. Needless to say, this usage is not the
typical or dominant one in Byans, as many *rang* use the word every day in the sense
discussed in the second part of this paper. However, it is noteworthy that the word *rang*,
while its imagined boundary does not change much, regardless of context, has a wide
range of implications, connected on the one hand to their everyday taken-for-granted ha-
bitus within their villages, while associated with the discourse on Nepal as a nation-state
on the other.

4. Conclusion
In this paper I have concentrated on analysing several ethnonyms which are current in
Byans. This should be done before any ethnographic study on the *rang* because it is highly
problematic to write any ethnographic account without clarifying who it is that one is
writing about. I end this paper by recapitulating the ethnographic account given above in
more abstract terms.

First, the investigation of *rang*, an ethnonym used in Byans and some adjacent regions,
confirms the validity of an analysis of ethnic identity through ethnonyms. The main in-
habitants of Byans identify themselves as *rang* in their mother tongue, to distinguish them-

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[36] *Gyami* is originally a loan word from Tibetan. Regarding *Chenpa*s, many *rang* told me that they
were like *rang*, but they have changed their tradition and become *wolan*.

selves from their northern and southern neighbours. The adoption of the name *rang* is accompanied by several processes by which those who consider themselves to be *rang* quasi-objectify themselves as a group of people. Much apparently observable evidence supports the existence of this group, and some of it is often mentioned by *rang* as their distinctive features. However, there is always some inconsistency between their discourse and observable reality, and this indicates that it is not the existence of any objective traits, but the name *rang* which is crucial in their ethnic identification.[37] In other words, the ultimate ground of the membership of the *rang* is no more than the proposition which is seldom mentioned in itself, that they (as *rang*) are the *rang*.

I have also analysed many ethnic terms which denote the inhabitants of Byans, with particular attention to the multilingual situation. The word *rang* is used only among those who understand their language, and three ethnonyms, *byānsī*, *bhoṭiyā*, and *śaukā*, are employed by their southern neighbours to refer to them. It is important to note that the *rang* themselves also use these names selectively, according to the situation they face, the language they speak, and personal preference.

A similar situation was analysed by Moerman in his pioneering article on the usages of various ethnic terms in Ban Ping, Thailand (1965). He, however, turned his attention to the reconstruction of a static folk-taxonomy of ethno-ethnology, which cannot deal with the complicated reality in which, for instance, many *rang* say to Nepalese officers in Nepali, "In our language, *byānsī* is called *rang*", despite the different connotations of each ethnic term. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that ethnic terms at many levels and in many languages compose a single consistent system of ethno-ethnology.

Furthermore, these ethnic terms are in most cases accompanied by many more-or-less fixed stereotyping remarks and expressions, such as '*rang* live in Byans, Chaudans, and Darma', and '*bhoṭiyā*s are Buddhists who eat beef'. Here we cannot assume that there are no contradictions and inconsistencies between the imagined membership of an ethnic group and these remarks. In other words, ethnonyms are always over-determined. Despite these inconsistencies, however, the existence of a particular ethnic group is not doubted in most cases, because the existence of each and every individual is preceded by those ethnic categories and expressions.

In multilingual conditions, in particular, each individual may have a different set of stereotyping remarks on ethnic categories. Recognizing this, the people of Byans sometimes utilize several foreign ethnonyms and other concepts like 'race' and 'religion' to refer to themselves not as *bhoṭiyā*s but as Hindu Mongolians.[38] Here the over-determined nature

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[37] Barth (1969) emphasized similar points by discussing ethnic boundaries rather than ethnonyms.
[38] Here the opposition between primordialist and instrumentalist conceptions of ethnicity is false, because every possibility of utilization of ethnicity lies in the 'primordial' sentiment of the people, which is presupposed by those who try to utilize it, and which is developed through the everyday use of ethnonyms (Nawa 1992). It may be worth pointing out that even Manzardo, in his highly instrumentalist discussion of the impression management and 'cultural chameleonism' of the Thakalis

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of ethnic categories is exploited by them for their own purposes. And their efforts have been partly successful, as many *wolan* have come to know that the inhabitants of Byans are not Buddhists.

It would be untrue, however, to insist that *rang* freely manipulate these ethnic categories and stereotyping remarks. First, each *rang* is anteceded by these categories and remarks. Second, it cannot be assumed that he or she can always select them according to rational calculation. Third, when he or she uses foreign ethnonyms in discussions with *pang* or *wolan*, his or her accounts are judged by the people who know these terms and remarks much better than him/herself. In general, all remarks concerning ethnos are restricted by pre-existing categories and stereotypes, and their success depends on the consent of the listeners. And if a new remark is accepted, it may be recalled in the future and become a part of the corpus of pre-existing remarks. To narrate one's ethnic identity is, therefore, an awkward and circumscribed enterprise.

As I have suggested above, the relationship between the people under study and the anthropologists comprises a part of this enterprise. To put it in another way, all the processes discussed above are a precondition of writing ethnography for both anthropologists and the people represented by them. Not only can academic articles cause certain effects in the field, but also the authority of anthropologists is presupposed and calculated by many *rang*. Those *rang* who discussed the suitable title of my would-be ethnography, and who criticized ethnographic accounts by some anthropologists, clearly recognized the importance of their representation by anthropologists. In other words, for many *rang*, their relationship with an ethnographer is also a part of the serious and difficult practice of talking about and representing their own imagined ethnic group.

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(1978, 1982), simultaneously presupposes a series of 'rituals of identity'. The crucial difficulty of his argument lies, however, in that he does not demonstrate at all that the rituals he observed are really 'rituals of identity' for all the Thakalis. In other words, he is obsessed by the concept of the 'real' Thakalis "behind many masks".

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On the Complexity of Oral Tradition: A reply to Claus Peter Zoller's review essay 'Oral Epic Poetry in the Central Himalayas'

John Leavitt

A few years ago, Claus Peter Zoller published a review essay in these pages on 'Oral Epic Poetry in the Central Himalayas (Kumaon and Garhwal)' (Zoller 1995), discussing publications by Konrad Meissner (1985), Mohan Upreti (n.d., published in 1980), William Sax (1991b), and myself (Leavitt 1988, 1991). Zoller accuses Meissner, Upreti, and me of bias in favour of written Sanskritic models over oral vernacular ones; and he criticizes Sax for seeking to explain oral epics in terms of the cosmologies and cultural categories of those who perform them. While the essay expresses some real divergences in approach between Zoller and the authors he discusses, many of Zoller's criticisms and even his quotations turn out on closer inspection to be misplaced or based on misreadings. At the same time Zoller's style, no doubt due to space limitations, is so condensed that one is often forced to infer his views *intaglio* from his criticisms of those of others. I felt, then, that a reply to his essay had to go over it point by point, sometimes unpacking arguments that are only alluded to in the original text. This is why this reply is almost comically longer than the text that provoked it.

While Zoller's critiques are various, they all seem to come from the same place: he appears to be interested primarily in complete and purely oral epics as autonomous entities, and in tracing their mutual relations and their influence on the lives of their bearers. This kind of approach can be illuminating, and Zoller has published two fascinating articles (1993, 1994) in which he interprets ethnographic data by tracing associations across the subcontinent and from tradition to tradition. But in this review essay, Zoller consistently sounds as if he believes that oral epics exist in a vacuum, somehow uninfluenced either by the daily lives of their bearers or by Sanskritic Hinduism—the latter in spite of the fact that the epics discussed are performed by and for people who identify themselves as Hindus, and who have Hindu names and access to Brahman priests.

Oral poetry and alienation

Zoller opens by noting that oral poetry is often treated as "a special form of literature... generally associated with such expressions as 'anonymous', 'traditional', 'simple', and 'authentic'; many regard it as a precursor to true literature, and thus a survival of something original. This promotes a sort of alienation from this poetic form by treating it as somehow inferior to the printed word." The task of the literate scholar of oral poetry, then, is "to mitigate the alienation thus created". The next sentence presents the subject matter of the essay: "I want here to introduce briefly a few approaches through which oral forms of poetry, in particular oral epics from the Central Himalayas... are made 'intelligible' to outsiders." Zoller seems to be posing an absolute and exaggerated dichotomy between the written and the oral: in fact, oral traditions often continue to exist in societies that use writing, and illiterate oral bards in South Asia are generally well aware of the presence and prestige of books (for a critique of tendencies to absolutize the written/oral distinction, see Finnegan 1977). Central Himalayan oral epics need to be made intelligible to people outside the region primarily because they are in languages most outsiders do not understand, and because they refer constantly to realities of which most outsiders will have no knowledge—not simply because they are oral and so, somehow, inherently unintelligible to an alienated literate audience.

In the second paragraph, Zoller illustrates folklorists' own alienation from orality by citing their failure to use indigenous categories. He says that in spite of the fact that "oral poetry in the Central Himalayas is still a dominant form... the majority of books about [Central Himalayan] oral poetry are modelled either on British folklore studies... or the systematics and terminology of... Sanskrit [poetics]... Thus, both approaches generally do not use indigenous terminology and classification." This is accurate for the work of British and British-educated Indian writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it is unfair to Indian and other scholars who have been publishing on Central Himalayan oral traditions since the 1960s, and this for a number of reasons. First of all, many of these works are in Hindi, and Hindi draws its technical terminology from Sanskrit: it is virtually impossible to write about any kind of poetics in Hindi without using terms from Sanskrit poetics, just as it is virtually impossible to write about poetics in English without using terms from Greek (terms such as 'poetics'). Furthermore, it is not true that Hindi works on Central Himalayan folklore use "the systematics and terminology" of classical Sanskrit poetics: they only use its terminology to translate what for the most part are concepts from "the systematics" of Western folklore studies (Gaborieau 1974: 314). Beyond this, a number of Indian works on Central Himalayan folk literature (e.g. Pandey 1962, Chatak 1973) do in fact give a great deal of information on indigenous terminology and classification, even if this is not the main thrust of their presentation. These studies were drawn on, for instance, in Marc Gaborieau's pathbreaking attempt to classify Central Himalayan sung narratives on the basis, precisely, of "indigenous terminology and classification" (Gaborieau 1974: 320-9).

As an illustration of folklorists' failure to use indigenous categories, Zoller notes the differing labels they have used for the epic *Mālūśāhī*. Oakley and Gairola (1935) put it among the "Legends of Heroes"; the folklorist Govind Chatak (1973: 258) calls it a *pranay gāthā*, which Zoller glosses as 'love song'; Meissner (1985) calls it a ballad. The implication is that if these authors had paid more attention to indigenous classification, their labellings of the epic would have shown more agreement. But there are a number of problems with this argument. Zoller's translation of *pranay gāthā* as 'love song', apparently following Meissner's translation of Chatak's term (Meissner 1985: I, 261-3), is de-

batable. In fact, *gāthā* is used in folklore publications in Hindi to indicate a long narrative usually sung by specialists rather than by members of the public at large (Gaborieau 1974: 314, citing, among others, Chatak 1973: 208); it generally serves as a translation equivalent for the English 'ballad'. So the two contemporary scholars Zoller presents as disagreeing in fact do agree: both call *Mālūśāhī* a ballad. The term *gāthā* for *Mālūśāhī* seems to be universal among scholars writing in Hindi (e.g. Pandey 1962: 159ff., Upadhyay 1979: 146ff., Upadhyay and Pant 1980), while those writing in Western languages use either 'ballad' or 'epic'.

A more important problem with Zoller's critique is that it seems to ignore the specific complexity of Central Himalayan oral tradition, which includes a complex *Gattungslehre*, a set of explicit categories for narrative and non-narrative song and recitation. While there are certainly local and regional differences in this classification, and while different authors' presentations of it differ to some degree, the essentials seem to have been established (e.g. Gaborieau 1974, Leavitt 1985, Bisht 1988). As far as I can judge from the literature and from my own experience, in these indigenous classifications *Mālūśāhī* constitutes a category of its own, as do some other comparable bodies of narrative (e.g. epics about the Ramaul heroes). What the folklorists cited are trying to do is to fit *Mālūśāhī* into the most appropriate rubric they can find in international folklore studies. While Zoller is right in implying that this kind of off-the-rack categorizing is likely to lead to a bad fit, some term is still necessary to give non-Central-Himalayan readers an idea of what *Mālūśāhī* is—not because they are alienated from oral literature as such, but because they are ignorant of Central Himalayan traditions. In fact, every term one uses to categorize a text, oral or written, brings presuppositions and implications along with it. Zoller does not question his own use of 'epic', a word at least as loaded and potentially misleading as 'ballad' or 'hero-tale'. Gaborieau (1974) has proposed the term *récit chanté*, 'sung narrative', for the material that Zoller is calling "oral epic". Where the latter term suggests comparison with Homer (and Gairola calls these "legends... quite Homeric in spirit" in his preface to Oakley and Gairola 1935), Gaborieau's term (borrowed from Zumthor 1972) instead suggests more novel comparisons between Central Himalayan literature and society and those of medieval Europe.

Three named indigenous genres will be of central concern in what follows. One is *Mālūśāhī*, which is narrated in the third person at fairs and at organized festivities in village homes on long winter nights. A second is *jāgar*, stories of the regional divinities narrated in the second person directly to the divinity, in most cases in the body of a possessed medium, in nocturnal ceremonies also called *jāgar*, 'vigil' (see Gaborieau 1975, Quayle 1981, Fanger 1990, Leavitt 1997). The third genre, called *mahābhārat* or *bhārat*, includes stories of gods and heroes also found in the Sanskrit epics and Puranas, narrated in the third person as autonomous performances or at a given moment in the *jāgar* (Gaborieau 1974, 1975, 1977, Leavitt 1991, 1995).

Mālūśāhī

Zoller begins his discussion with a critique of Meissner's 1985 edition of an oral performance of *Mālūśāhī* which includes the Kumaoni transcription with translation, notes, glossary, an interview with the bard, and a cassette recording of extracts from the performance. Zoller calls this a "very laudable project", which is a considerable understatement: as far as I know, Meissner's volumes still represent the only substantial Central Himalayan oral text to have been published with serious contextualization. Zoller accuses Meissner of showing too much deference to "great traditions" and not enough to the bard he is working with, the famous singer Gopi Das; he notes "a number of philologically problematic aspects" to Meissner's edition and cites a review by Georg Buddruss which "has... pointed to (1988: 164) Meissner's classicist treatment of the epic." This last point is quite misleading. Buddruss says that since this edition lacks the linguistic analysis which should have underlain the transcription of an oral text, Meissner seems closer to the traditional philology of written texts than to the linguistically based methodology of the study of oral texts; but he certainly does not accuse Meissner of a more general "classicist" bias. On the contrary, Buddruss goes on to criticize Meissner for failing to distinguish adequately between old Kumaoni words (*tadbhavas*), the many words borrowed from Sanskrit into Kumaoni (*tatsamas*), and words borrowed more recently from Hindi. If Buddruss is accusing Meissner of anything, it is of failing to appreciate the perduring presence and influence of Sanskrit on Kumaoni, that is, the exact opposite of a classicist bias.

Zoller then notes that Meissner speaks of "a 'complete critical edition' (Meissner 1985 I: vii [a misprint for page xvii])" with his commentary serving as a "critical apparatus" giving "the deviating forms of the informants' (Meissner 1985 I: xxvi)." But this only means that Meissner is not claiming personal authority for every point in the text, instead giving the reader all the varying opinions he could gather. Zoller goes on to say that Meissner "is searching for origins—'His [this bard's] narrative seems to be nearest to the original' (1985 I: 20)." Here Zoller is quoting Meissner quoting Upreti in *his* book on *Mālūśāhī*. The quote first comes (1985 I: xvi) in a report of Upreti's comparison of the versions of three bards and his conclusion that of these three, Gopi Das's seems nearest to the original because the other two show greater elaboration of details which Upreti interprets as later accretions. This argument is not convincing: since the work of Parry and Lord (Lord 1960), the baseline assumption about oral epic has to be that 'details' will be developed or simplified by a bard depending on factors such as time available and audience attitude. Meissner's own interest is in fact not in ultimate or classical origins, but in more immediate ones: he wonders whether *Mālūśāhī* might have a source outside Kumaon and proposes points of contact with the epic of Gopi Chand, which is sung throughout North India. He is thus looking not to the classical written tradition but to one widespread oral vernacular tradition as a likely source of a geographically more restricted one (1985 I: xvi-xx). In fact, if Meissner can be accused of presenting Kumaoni language and tradition in terms of something else, this is not Sanskritic written tradition but the Hindi language (as Buddruss notes) and oral traditions of the North Indian plains.

Meissner, Zoller says, is searching "for connections with the classical traditions (he demands to know of his bard whether he is acquainted with the notion of *gadya-padya* [prose and verse] from Sanskrit poetics [Meissner 1985 I: 241])." Here again, when we check the reference we find something quite different. Meissner is interviewing Gopi Das through an interpreter; he puts his questions in English, the interpreter restates them, often quite loosely, in Kumaoni, and the bard replies in Kumaoni. Here Meissner has noticed the difference, noticed by everyone acquainted with Central Himalayan oral epic, between passages of highly rhythmic singing and passages of apparently more prosaic declamation (e.g. Gaborieau 1974: 315, Sax 1991a: 16). Meissner calls the sung and spoken parts "verse" and "prose" respectively and glosses these terms as *padya* and *gadya*. While these terms are borrowed from Sanskrit, they are also the ordinary Hindi and the sophisticated Kumaoni words for verse and prose; in using them, Meissner is not giving Gopi Das an exam in Sanskrit poetics, but trying to give the interpreter a better idea of what he himself means.

Zoller then says that Meissner "displays little confidence in his bard," citing a couple of passages in which Meissner mildly qualifies the bard's statements "with expressions like 'for him...' or 'he thinks...' (1985 I: 213)". It is evident, on the contrary, that Meissner has the greatest admiration for Gopi Das, who was, indeed, revered by many who knew him; Meissner dedicates this work to his memory. In the middle of these supposed examples of attacks by Meissner on Gopi Das's credibility, Zoller gives one that is of great ethnographic interest. Meissner "qualifies important statements made by the bard—e.g. that the performance of the epic is a *jāgar* (1985 I: 219) and that Malushahi and other Katyuri kings became deities after their deaths (1985 I: 213)." As explained above, *Mālūśāhī* and *jāgar* are usually presented as different indigenous genres, performed in different situations with different styles and for different purposes. It is possible that they could overlap: since *jāgar* literally means a vigil, any narration performed at night could conceivably be called a *jāgar*. In both Kumaon and Garhwal the narratives sung to and about the goddess Nanda Devi are also called *jāgar*, and these do not necessarily involve possession (Sax 1991a). And it is true that ancient kings are often understood to have become gods after their deaths, and that some of these kings possess people and dance in *jāgar*s. So an argument could be made that in spite of what we had taken to be clear generic differences between *jāgar*s and *Mālūśāhī*, differences defined in large part by Gopi Das himself, who worked with Gaborieau as well as with Meissner and Upreti, here Gopi Das is saying that these two genres are really one and the same.

But is this what he is saying? Zoller cites two pages of Meissner's book. On page 219, Meissner asks the interpreter to ask the bard if he has sung *Mālūśāhī* mostly around his home or "in many villages and bigger places, at festivals and fairs (*melā*)?" The interpreter transforms this into something I translate as literally as possible as: "Where have you sung *Mālūśāhī*, having been invited by people, in fairs and so forth, here and there in other places?" Gopi Das's answer, again in my translation: "I'll tell the Sahib. Not in fairs and such, never in fairs and such." Indeed, throughout the interview Gopi Das makes

it clear that he sings only on specific invitation. He continues: "Yes, this is my own true work, my occupation, like this: all my own people say: 'Lay on a *jāgar*. For a little while give *Mālūśāhī* "*jāgar lai lagā. zarā der mālūśāhī kaī di hāl*". Perform (*ka* 'speak') now.' In every place, in every place" (my translation). This is what Zoller interprets to mean that Gopi Das is equating *jāgar*s and *Mālūśāhī*. Such an interpretation is easier to make on the basis of Meissner's translation, which has the people saying, "'Sing a 'jāgar'! Sing Malushahi for a little while!'" But what Gopi Das in fact seems to be saying is that he is regularly solicited to do *jāgar*s *and* to do *Mālūśāhī*, not that *Mālūśāhī* is a kind of *jāgar*. Gopi Das himself was famous above all for his performances of *jāgar*s of the regional divinities on the one hand (Gaborieau 1975, 1977), of *Mālūśāhī* on the other (Meissner 1985 I: 212), and it would make sense for him to refer to these two specialties in defending the legitimacy of his vocation.

The second page reference (page 213) is not to the interview, but to a summary of the interview in which Meissner says, "For [Gopi Das] Mālushāhī and the other Katyūr kings have become gods (question 49). In a so-called jāgar... these gods manifest themselves in the person thus possessed (question 51). Gopi Das thinks of himself as a servant ('dās') of the Katyūrs (question 51)." But when we look at this part of the actual interview, we find that Meissner has oversimplified the bard's answers in his summary. In question 49 (p. 239), Meissner asks how Gopi Das would feel if his sons and grandsons did not carry on the tradition. The bard answers: "I would be crying, my throat would get choked, indeed!... For four generations we had it in our family, for four generations! Crying overcomes me, Sahib! My throat gets choked, my throat gets choked. —They are gods, aren't they? At so many places they dance, the Katyūrs, they are gods, after all." Here Gopi Das is giving a religious motive for his grief at the prospect of the disappearance of Malushahi. This may well mean that Malushahi is thought of as a god, as many ancient kings are. But it does not necessarily mean that his epic is a *jāgar*. To say that a royal family dances in *jāgar*s is not to say that *every* member of the family so dances: both in the case of the Katyuri and the Chand dynasties, only a small number of figures actually appear in a *jāgar* (my observation, which tallies with Pandey 1962: 186-7); as far as I know, these figures do not include King Malushahi.

In question 51 Meissner (1985 I: 241) asks whether Gopi Das thinks singing *Mālūśāhī* "will bring him religious merit besides the material reward which he may get." The interpreter puts this more harshly: "When you are singing *Mālūśāhī* do you people only think of money or do you understand it to be like a puja to God or what?" (my translation). Not surprisingly, Gopi Das answers: "I understand them to be real gods. Why? They dance here in Kāṭlī they are in Gīvāṛ. Tell him [i.e., tell Meissner]! They are believed in as gods. The Katyur are in Gīvāṛ, the Katyur dance, they are believed in as gods... If some other person disrespects them, then what can we do? But we believe in the gods. After all, we're a Das. We believe in the gods, in them, the kings of Katyur" (my translation). Gopi Das is insisting on the religious value of his work in order to defend himself against what he quite reasonably takes to be an impugning of his motives as solely financial. Note that

at the end of his performance Gopi Das says, "[N]one of them [the Katyuri kings] was immortal. Immortal are their name and fame" and then, to Meissner himself, the listener, "Tomorrow you will die, Rājā, but your name will remain immortal!" (Meissner 1985 I: 204-5).

Zoller's next paragraph begins the discussion of Upreti's book on *Mālūśāhī*, which includes several tellings of the epic with explanatory essays. Here the accusation is of the elitism of expertise: "[a]ttempts to shift the focus of authority from the bards to the experts are perhaps the rule rather than the exception. Upreti's book on the same epic is even more instructive." Zoller then tells us that Upreti is "'a well-known expert on Kumauni folklore'" (he is quoting Meissner) and so, presumably, not to be trusted, and illustrates this by pointing to Upreti's characterization of *Mālūśāhī* as a "secular" story. What Upreti means by 'secular' is that the story can be performed without marked religious framing, a characteristic, he says, that "demarcates *Mālūśāhī* from other ballads of Kumaon in which the hero or heroine, even though human in origin, gets transformed into a deity" (Upreti n.d.: 8-9, cited by Zoller). To Zoller, this proves that the "expert" Upreti doesn't really understand the tradition he's writing about: "[t]his last sentence bluntly contradicts the statements of Gopi Das (and other bards)." But Upreti's text makes it clear that he is simply distinguishing *Mālūśāhī* from *jāgars*: the example he gives of "ballads... in which the hero or heroine... gets transformed into a deity" is that of Ganganath, one of the best known *jāgar* divinities.

Zoller's next paragraph proposes some thought-provoking connections. He notes the importance in the epic of gurus "whose names all end in Dās, which is a common designation of various yogic orders." He quotes Upreti: "'[Dās] are low caste professional drummers endowed with all kinds of magical powers' (Upreti n.d.: 60)." True enough; but Upreti is talking about their role in oral epics, not necessarily in life, as Zoller's presentation of the quote implies. Upreti, Zoller writes, "goes on to stress that the Katyūrī kings depended heavily on them." Again, this sounds like a statement about Katyuri history, but in fact it is only about what happens within some renditions of the epic: in performances of *Mālūśāhī* by Das drummers, Das drummers are depicted "as superhuman [beings] on whom the Katyuria king is very much dependent." Upreti contrasts these Das tellings with that of a Rajput bard who replaces the Das gurus with a Rajput magician. So all this is not about the historical Katyuri court, but about singers giving members of their own caste starring roles in the epics they sing.

Zoller notes that Upreti finds this relationship between kings and low-caste drummers "rather strange." Zoller answers: "This relationship, however, is basically the same as the one between Gopi Das and his (deified) King Malushahi which, in turn, is a special case of the relation between a so-called *jagaria* and a deity." (The *jagariyā* is what the bard is called when he is running a *jāgar*.) This set of correspondences deserves more than this one sentence. Zoller is saying that there are three situations in which a low-caste drummer, a Das, serves as guru to a being of ostensibly much higher status: the scenes in

Mālūśāhī in which low-caste drummers advise kings; the *jāgar* in which the drummer is the guru of the possessing god and gives the god orders; and the Das drummer's performance of the story of King Malushahi, which Zoller sees as a *jāgar* of the divinized king. While I am not convinced that these relationships are comparable, this kind of correspondence is worth pursuing. It can be compared with Gaborieau's attempt (1975) to construct a model of the relationship between the bard and different levels of divinity, based in part on the interpretations of Gopi Das. For me, the central problem with Zoller's presentation, here as throughout this essay, is the imposition of a single model on a number of different genres. This is an unwarranted simplification of a complex tradition, and one that in this case is not justified by Gopi Das's actual statements.

Mahābhārata in the Central Himalayas

Zoller moves on to the *Mahābhārata*, appropriately lamenting the fact that "no 'complete' oral Mahabharata has been published so far" from the central Himalayas in spite of the epic's great importance in this region. He adds the apparent *non sequitur* that "according to Hiltebeitel, there are 'astonishing parallels and significant variations'" in the ways traditions "'mythologize and ritualize the epic'" in Garhwal in the far north and in Tamil Nadu in the far south, regions "'with nothing to link them geographically or historically but Hinduism'" (Zoller, p. 3, citing Alf Hiltebeitel 1988: 132). What do these parallels between north and south have to do with the matter at hand? Zoller gives us a hint: "Hiltebeitel... asks with regard to the Mahabharata 'whether one should privilege the classics' (1995: 26)." Zoller doesn't tell us that Hiltebeitel, who is quoting this question from Paula Richman (1991: 8-9), does not himself come clearly down on either side. Zoller continues: "[m]oreover, there are not only 'cults' of 'the epic,' but also 'complete' oral regional versions" of the *Mahābhārata* in western Garhwal and Himachal Pradesh. I must infer from this that Zoller himself believes that over the last several thousand years ritualized *Mahābhārata*s of the type found in Garhwal and Tamil Nadu, as well as complete oral versions, have grown up across South Asia without special influence from the recensions of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, which was nevertheless present as a more or less fixed entity throughout the Hindu world. A more subtle way of conceptualizing the relationships among traditions is offered by A.K. Ramanujan in his chapter in Richman's book. "Ramanujan," Richman writes in her introduction, "likens the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition to a pool of signifiers... arguing that each *Rāmāyaṇa* can be seen as a 'crystallization': 'These various texts... relate to each other through this... common pool. Every author... dips into it and brings out a unique crystallization'" (Richman 1991: 8, citing Ramanujan 1991a: 45-46; for the same metaphor applied to the *Mahābhārata*, see Ramanujan 1991b). But do all crystallizations have the same effects? In the sentence following the passage quoted, Ramanujan distinguishes "great texts" and "small ones". "The great texts rework the small ones, 'for lions are made of sheep'... And sheep are made of lions, too... In this sense, no text is original, yet no telling is a mere retelling—and the story has no closure, although it may be enclosed in a text." So Ramanujan is not saying that all tellings are

equal: *sometimes* local tellings can best be understood as deriving from classical ones.

Zoller then turns to two articles of mine that compare four tellings of the story of Bhima and his demon lover: one from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*; one from a book on Kumaoni folklore written in Hindi (Upádhyay 1983; translated *in extenso* in Leavitt 1988: 3-4, retold with translated extracts in Leavitt 1991: 454-6); and two from recordings that I made with the bard Kamal Ram Arya in Kumaoni, once as a paraphrase (translated *in extenso* in Leavitt 1988: 5-11), once in performance-style recitation (retold with translated extracts in Leavitt 1991: 459-68). I maintained in these essays that one cannot generally presume either an independent indigenous origin or a classical derivation for oral epics, but must consider them case by case and genre by genre. The narratives in most Kumaoni oral genres are clearly regional in provenance, featuring characters and incidents that are not to be found in the Sanskritic great tradition nor, as far as I can tell, in other South Asian regional traditions. Yet there is one named genre of oral epic, performed, like the others, in the Kumaoni language by bards who are usually illiterate, which features characters and incidents that are clearly related to those in the Sanskrit epics and Puranas: they tell stories of Ram, Krishna, Shiva, the Great Goddess, the Pandavas, Puranic kings, ascetics, and demons. Narratives of this genre—all of them, not just the stories of the Pandavas— are called *mahābhārat* or *bhārat* (Pandey 1962: 171; Gaborieau 1974: 323-4). In Kumaoni oral tradition, then, the word *mahābhārat* does not mean only material relating to the Pandavas, but names an indigenous genre that only includes material related to classical Hindu myth—material that has also long been available to rural Kumaonis in orthodox tellings by Brahman priests. This appears to be a different situation from that in Garhwal, where an elaborate and distinct ritual tradition, involving possession, has grown up specifically around the Pandavas (Sax 1991b).

Given the close fit in character and incident between all *mahābhārat* narrations and their classical correspondents, and given that Kumaon has been on pilgrimage routes for millennia and that certain strata of Kumaoni society have been bearers of Sanskritic influence at least since the early Middle Ages (Joshi 1988: 78; Pathak 1988), the evident conclusion is that, unlike other genres of Kumaoni oral tradition, Kumaoni *mahābhārat* are derived from classical Sanskritic myth and epic. Since Pandava stories are *mahābhārat* among others, this conclusion holds for them as well. It happened that this genre was the one I was writing about in the articles Zoller discusses, precisely because I was interested in what the relationship might be between very different tellings of a story with a single source. For the same reason, I did not attempt to link the stories I was discussing with oral Pandava epics from elsewhere in the Himalayas. To point out this lacuna in my essays is perfectly fair, and to suggest links along the Himalayan chain is exactly the kind of comparative research that is needed (I attempted to do something like this on modes of possession in Leavitt 1994); but Zoller goes further and accuses me of the general bias toward the Sanskritic great tradition of which he has already accused Meissner and Upreti.

Zoller begins by presenting my essays as attempts to answer Ramanujan's question "What

happens when classical myths are borrowed and retold by folk performers?" (Ramanujan 1986: 64-8). This question presupposes that some folk narratives are in fact borrowed from classical myths. Clearly unhappy with this possibility, Zoller begins: "[Leavitt] starts by bringing together what he regards as three 'versions' of the 'same' story" (p. 4). Zoller's disapproval is marked by the use of scare quotes. In fact, my use of the word 'version' here is that of ordinary English: the folk and classical renditions in question (there are four, not three, of them) have main characters who go through most of the same things and who have names that are different only as would be predicted by the differing pronunciations of borrowed Sanskrit words in the languages in question. Oddly, Zoller permits himself to use 'version' without inverted commas throughout his essay. Ramanujan prefers "the word *tellings* to the usual terms *versions* or *variants* because the latter terms can and typically do imply that there is an invariant, an original or *Ur*-text" (1991a: 24-5). But of course in some cases, as in the ones I was discussing in these essays, an *Ur*-text is exactly what there seems to have been.

Zoller opens a footnote to this sentence (p. 6, n.11) which begins, "Leavitt's concern for what may happen to the classical myths is also expressed orthographically." Here he is referring to my distinguishing the Kumaoni word *mahābhārat*, used as a generic name for all narrative about epic and Puranic characters, from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the epic whose central story is that of the Pandava brothers. I felt it was important to differentiate between the Sanskrit epic and Kumaoni oral epics, for both of which Zoller indiscriminately uses the term Mahabharata. The footnote continues that I seem "to fulfill Meissner's prophecy," cited on page 2, that "soon there will be no more singers alive... all that [will be] left of these wonderful songs will be meagre summaries standing in library shelves." Zoller offers me up as the exemplar of the meagre summary method because in the earlier of my two essays (1988: 5) I did not transcribe an actual performance of the text in question. Zoller does not mention that this essay includes a full translation of a retelling by the same bard from whom I had recorded a sung performance, albeit not in a ritual context; nor does he mention that in my 1991 essay I do include translated extracts from the bard's song, with two pages of Kumaoni-language originals in an appendix. In other papers and publications I have been able to present more extensive bardic texts (Leavitt 1995, 1997), including the complete text and translation of a *jāgar* performance that includes a *mahābhārat* of Lord Shiva (Leavitt 1985, only now, alas, being edited for publication).

The next paragraph sets up Zoller's criticism of my use of Ramanujan's four features of material borrowed from classical to folk traditions: fragmentization, domestication, localization, and contemporization. "Leavitt... tries to show that Ramanujan's four well-known features, which are supposed to characterize the process of borrowing... can be shown in various degrees in his two regional texts." (It's three regional texts, not two.) This makes it sound like I'm using Ramanujan to help prove that the direction of movement is from classical to folk. On the contrary, by the time I get to these criteria (which I cite only in the 1991 article), I feel I've already shown, for the reasons given above, that

these particular texts "seem clearly derived from epic and Puranic models" (1991: 453). I raise Ramanujan's features not to demonstrate what I feel has already been demonstrated, but to categorize some of the divergences that arise through oral vernacular transmission from a classical source and to propose that some of the tellings I was considering had diverged further from this source than others had. Ramanujan recognized that the hypothesis of such transmission was sometimes warranted, and he meant his model to apply to such cases, not to all of South Asian narration. On the contrary, Ramanujan's work as a whole defends a dialectical model of the relationship between folk and classical, particularly against top-down classically based models of South Asian civilization (Leavitt 1992: 39-40).

Zoller's main text continues: "Though [Leavitt] does not assume a straightforward transfer from the classical to the folk level, he nevertheless believes that this is the fundamental direction of movement (thus, he relates the Kumaoni versions to 'their common source')." "Fundamental direction of movement" can mean three different things:

1. If it refers only to the stories I present in these essays, Zoller is correct: I do, indeed, think that these Kumaoni *mahābhārat* have a common source in Sanskritic tradition. New evidence may, of course, change my mind on this.

2. If it refers to the transmission of stories about the Pandavas in general, then each case must be decided on its own merits. Every telling of stories of the Pandavas both incorporates local material and, in most cases, has been influenced by the presence of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, a 'lion' text if there ever was one. If I may cite myself: "Since its crystallization between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D., the [Sanskrit] *Mahābhārata* has provided material for regional and local traditions all over the subcontinent and wherever Hindu civilization has had an influence. Vernacular versions of the epic have generally remained autonomous while developing according to specific cultural dynamics alongside and in interaction with the continuing transmission of the Sanskrit version" (Leavitt 1991: 447). What Zoller seems to be saying in the rest of his essay is that "the Himalayan Mahabharata" is an autonomous indigenous production that has grown up uninfluenced by the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, if indeed it is not the latter's direct source. Again, given the nature of the indigenous genre of which they are part, I don't think this can be the case for the Kumaoni stories I have presented.

3. Saying that Leavitt believes that "this is the fundamental direction of movement" without any further qualification suggests to the reader that I claim that oral epic poetry in South Asia is generally derived from Sanskritic models. That this is Zoller's meaning is strongly suggested in the last sentence of his essay, which attacks the view, presumably mine, that "the Himalayan oral epics are... shadows of classical models" (p. 5). This is not my position, and wasn't in these articles. It is ironic that just after they appeared I published a paper (Leavitt 1992) specifically criticizing 'holist' approaches that derive local and regional traditions from Sanskritic sources—but also criticizing 'separatist' or 'nativist' approaches which try to treat local traditions in South Asia as if they existed in a vacuum

free of Sanskritic influence.[1] We needed, I argued, more complex models, and I attempted to give a more complex picture of the interaction of vernacular and classical traditions in one of the essays under discussion (1991: 444-6). But, given what seem to me to be Zoller's own nativist tendencies, it is not surprising that he should read me as a classicizing holist.[2]

At the end of this paragraph, Zoller says that my putative assumption of unidirectionality is rendered unlikely by the parallels between *Mahābhāratas* in Garhwal and in South India. One must infer that Zoller's general vision is one in which traditions arise and interact throughout South Asia, sometimes coalesce into 'lion' texts, but do not undergo any important influence from these texts once they are constituted. This reminds me of Claude Lévi-Strauss's presentation of pre-Columbian America as "a Middle Ages that had never had its Rome: a complex mass, itself grown out of an ancient syncretism whose own texture was probably quite loose... [A given] group [of myths]... owes its character to the fact that it represents, as it were, a crystallization within an already organized semantic milieu, whose elements have served for all kinds of combinations" (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 16; my translation). In such a world, in which culture areas are constantly swapping stories and symbols, so that each draws on a limited 'pool of signifiers', 'crystallizations' in widely separated regions can show 'astonishing similarities', as indeed Lévi-Strauss (1971) sees between myths in northern California and central Brazil. This, I have the impression, is Zoller's South Asia. But in fact South Asia is far more like medieval Europe as it really was: South Asia did have the equivalent of Roman Empires and of Christianity carrying common influence across a vast region, and part of this influence was that

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[1] The article was summarized in an essay on "Recent Anthropological Research on Garhwal and Kumaon" by Antje Linkenbach and Monika Krengel (1995). In a footnote (1995: 14, n. 12), the authors accuse me of inconsistency: they feel that my arguments have demolished holism to the point that it is "quite amazing" that I should continue to consider holist characterizations of South Asian civilization to be of any validity at all. They ask two rhetorical questions, the first of which is in two parts. Question 1a: "If regional traditions do not fit into the 'general pattern' is it justified to recognize this pattern as 'general'?" My argument was precisely that regional traditions both do and do not fit into the "general pattern"; that "fitting" versus "not fitting" is too simple a dichotomy to be useful in other than rhetorical questions. Question 1b: "If Brahmanical 'sanskritic Hinduism'... has itself to be seen as a result of historical change—is it justified to take this hegemonial and limited pattern as generally valid, transcending time and space?" I don't think that it transcends time and space, but that it has been important over a very large space for a very long time, and that it has given, for instance, a strongly hierarchical and 'context-sensitive' tone to a great deal of South Asian discourse and practice (cf. Ramanujan 1989), particularly when contrasted with the comparatively individualistic and 'context-free' tone of much of modern Western discourse and practice. Question 2: "Cultural holism does necessarily reduce the multidimensionality of cultural interpretations by *constructing* a single one. Why then oppose and compare 'constructs'?" But what else can we oppose and compare but constructs? We are not gods; we have no direct, unconstructed understanding of a complicated world. A portrayal of discourse and practice in one village or in one region is no less a construct than such a portrayal for a whole civilization. The issue is not to abandon constructs but to produce good ones, constructs that fit as much of the data as possible, and

of 'lion texts' such as the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

Zoller's sentence about Garhwal-South India parallels has a footnote attached to it (p. 6, n. 12) which refers back to the beginning of the essay and recalls Paul Zumthor's views on oral poetry and alienation. This time Zoller's target is the Garhwali-born linguist Anoop Chandola. "Zumthor has pointed out the widespread attitude of regarding written poetry as 'one's own' and oral poetry as 'other'. To overcome the apparent paradox of oral poetry being simultaneously 'original' (see above) and 'other,' Chandola has found an elegant solution (1977: 18): 'The development of the *Mahābhārata* tradition from its earliest form to the Garhwali form of today seems to have this pattern: Folk to Classic to Folk.' Here the first 'Folk' is the 'original' and the second the 'other'." Here, as throughout his essay, Zoller is imputing anxiety about orality to scholars who devote their lives to preserving and studying oral traditions. All Chandola is doing in the quote given is proposing a formula for the most reasonable model of *Mahābhārata* transmission, particularly in Garhwal: he is not working through some fancied paradox in his feelings about oral poetry.

The paragraph we are discussing started with my use of Ramanujan's four features. Since Zoller thinks that I am using these features to "prove" my "hypothesis" of such a transmission, he proceeds to take issue with each of them.

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that can be criticized and then superseded by better ones. It is true that the bulk of my article is spent attacking holism. I chose to do this because variants of holism have dominated South Asian studies for the last forty years. But I fear that for this reason Linkenbach and Krengel have mistaken me for an inconsistent separatist, when what I say in the article is that while both holism and separatism have things to offer, neither is an adequate general model of a civilization.

² While the content of holist-separatist debates may differ, their tone is often very familiar. After the romanticism of the early nineteenth century, which saw oral texts as the ancient and authentic voice of the people, early twentieth-century literary studies held that most oral literature was 'high' literature that had percolated down to the masses. Zumthor cites "the extreme theories which... dominated university teaching for the first third of our century: that all of popular art is nothing but 'shipwrecked culture'" (Zumthor 1983: 26, my translation). Closer to home, consider the exchange in these pages between Brigitte Steinmann and András Höfer over Höfer's (1994) way of editing and interpreting western Tamang shamanic texts. Steinmann (1996) says that Höfer exaggerates the separateness of western Tamang language and tradition from (the great tradition of) Tibetan Buddhism. She claims that many of the phrases for which Höfer seeks local western Tamang interpretations are really standard Tibetan Buddhist ritual phrases which Höfer fails to recognize, presumably because of a (separatist) aversion on his part to admitting how Buddhist the Tamang are. Höfer (1996) replies that it is Steinmann who has been misled by assuming that her eastern Tamang informants, who are more heavily influenced by Tibetan Buddhism than are the western Tamang, can give her the true explanations of western Tamang texts. I don't know who's right here, since the substance of this argument is Tamang to me. But I do recognize the tone.

1. Fragmentization

To argue that Himalayan versions of *Mahābhārata* stories have not been fragmented, Zoller refers to his earlier statement about the existence of "complete" oral *Mahābhāratas*. But neither Ramanujan nor I claim that fragmentization is a necessary feature of movement from classical to regional materials, only that it is a common one. And it does not mean that different episodes are unrelated to one another, only that the material is performed in episodes. Zoller further cites a manuscript by Sax proposing that "we 'members of a bibliocentric profession' (Sax) tend to see only the classical Sanskrit text as a physical whole, thereby forgetting that it was or is almost always recited in fragments." But this isn't true of all long Sanskrit texts. The Veda, while it is used in fragments in rituals, is memorized as several enormous wholes. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, in the Sanskrit version as well as in the Awadhi of Tulsi Das, is commonly recited, in Kumaon as elsewhere, in long unbroken sessions. And even if the *Mahābhārata* is usually recited in pieces—as the Bible is usually read and recited in pieces by Christians and Jews—this need not imply that the reciters lack a sense of it as a whole. Ramanujan, to cite him again, showed how different parts of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* echo one another, giving a sense of completion to the text (Ramanujan 1991b). At the same time, the whole of which a text is part may not be a purely narrative one. A great deal of my 1991 paper was devoted to showing how *mahābhārat* narration fits into a ritual whole: it has its place in a *jāgar*, above and beyond its presupposition of earlier and later episodes in the lives of Ram, Krishna, or the Pandavas.

2. Domestication

Ramanujan says that classical stories are often re-situated in familiar household settings when they are retold in the vernacular. I cited the incident of Bhima's urinating on the demons, present only in the tellings that I recorded, as a highly domesticated feature of the oral performance. Zoller contends that according to his Garhwali informants, "Bhima's 'funny' nature is not at all human, but the result of a combination of divine and demonic elements in one person" (p. 4). This sounds correct; it also sounds familiar. In my paper, I wrote that "Bhīma is the most 'demonic' of the Pāṇḍavas, something this marriage [with the demoness] serves to highlight" (1991: 449). Bhima's combination of features is also found in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (as I note on the same page). In spite of all this, however, Bhima does not, as far as I know, urinate on the demons in any recension of the Sanskrit text. Zoller does not mention the other examples of domestication that I give: in the Kumaoni oral epic, the Pandavas live in a village house with their mother, who tells them what to do, very much as small, fierce Kumaoni mothers can be heard ordering their large sons about, and the motives for the action are the domestic concerns of doing *pūjā* and finding food.

3. Localization

Zoller writes, "The notion of localization makes sense only when original geographical structures have been projected onto a secondary plane. But again this does not coincide

with." Even allowing for the misprint, this is not clear. Ramanujan never claimed that all oral vernacular renditions of classical stories were re-set in local geography, only that it was a common feature of such renditions.[3] Zoller then says that the "hypothesis" of localization—it's more of an observation than anything so grand as an hypothesis—"is also up against Berreman's impression that the Pandavas 'may well be indigenous objects of worship in these hills who have been universalized to become part of the literary tradition of Hinduism' (1963: 382)." (Zoller does not mention that I cite this passage from Berreman in both of the essays discussed [Leavitt 1988: 11, 1991: 452].) Scholars generally think that the Sanskrit epics as we have them are the result of the relative fixation in a number of regional 'recensions' of an older mass of oral epic (e.g. Pollock 1986: 37, Dunham 1991, the former cited in Leavitt 1991: 445, n. 3); in some cases, as I am concluding for Kumaoni *mahābhārat*, this relatively fixed Sanskrit text has served in return as a main source for some oral tellings: in these cases, we have Chandola's 'Folk—Classic—Folk' continuum. Given the importance of the Pandavas in the Himalayas, Berreman was speculating that this region may have been the original source of the oral traditions that went to make up the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. This is an attractive idea, but it is only a speculation, not an "impression" that another idea could be "up against".

4. Contemporization

"Even the fourth feature of contemporization is problematic, when we note that many Garhwalis regard the Pandavas as their ancestors!" (pp. 4-5). But contemporization does not mean that a story is supposed to have happened this morning or last week, but that the world in which it takes place is like the world of today. The Pandavas, as far as I know, do not use guns in any recension of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*; they do in the vernacular versions which I report.

"Finally," writes Zoller, "the classical version and the version of Kamal Rām... differ not so much because of 'extravagant local developments' [citing Leavitt 1988: 11], but because the lacquer house episode of the classical text does not correspond to the Himalayan story of the abduction of the Pāṇḍavas, but has parallels with another episode of the Himalayan Mahabharatas." Since this is all Zoller says, I have no idea what to do with it; we await more. As for the extravagance of the developments I present, the reader will have to look at my papers and judge.

Conclusions

The last paragraph of Zoller's essay contrasts three sets of motives for studying Himalayan folk traditions: 1. to show how Himalayan culture is influenced by the Himalayan *Mahābhārata* (good); 2. to show how local *Mahābhāratas* convey local cosmology, or to try to infer this from the texts (questionable); 3. to try to show that local *Mahābhāratas* are derived from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (bad). The good motive is Zoller's own, and

[3] Sax has written that the Garhwali Pandava Lila "localizes" the epic figures of the *Mahābhārata* in exactly the sense I use here (1995: 150, n. 15, citing Ramanujan 1986).

he also attributes it to Sax (although, as we shall see, Sax slips): "Sax's interest in the Himalayan Mahabharata... is guided by different motives" from the bad ones displayed by Leavitt, and perhaps also by Upreti, Meissner, and the footnoted Chandola. Zoller then quotes Sax to illustrate his good motives: "'[The *Mahābhārata*] illuminates social issues, and informs local culture more, perhaps, than any other text' (1991b: 275)." Zoller approves of this; he continues a few lines further down that, "[i]n fact, many aspects of life in Garhwal have been influenced by the local Mahabharatas, for example, agonistic festivals, traditional warfare, or ancestor worship," and for each of these he gives references (two of which are for Himachal Pradesh, not Garhwal) which either repeat the point that some people worship the Pandavas as their ancestors or present agonistic or non-agonistic games in which one side identifies with the Pandavas, the other with the Kauravas.

But we already knew the Pandavas were important in the Himalayas; why detail this now? It's apparently to distinguish Zoller's project of showing how local culture is influenced by "the Himalayan Mahabharata" from the more familiar anthropological one of using ritual and text as sources for inferring a people's cosmology and cultural categories. This is Sax's second set of motives, about which Zoller is not at all convinced. "Thus, [Sax] not only deals with the fact that, '[e]ach village has its own tradition of dance and recitation' (1991[b]: 277)"—this apparently is a good thing—"but also thinks that one can 'infer the folk cosmology of these Uttarakhand peasants from their rituals' (1991[b]: 293-4)"—apparently not so good, judging by the contrast between "deals with the fact that" and "thinks that".

Zoller finishes his essay by writing that "[m]any bards known to me say that the epic 'awakens' in them during performance, and it is not they who perform the epic, but the epic which celebrates itself" (p. 5). Indeed, it is quite possible that bardic tradition has an ideational basis distinct from the culture of the general population; this seems to be the case in west-central Nepal, where Gregory Maskarinec (1995) refers to a distinct "culture of shamans". But it is its penultimate sentence that sums up the essay as a whole: "[a]nd yet the Himalayan oral epics are neither shadows of classical models nor mere encodings of farmers' conceptions of the universe." The first of these clauses sums up Zoller's critique of Meissner, Upreti, and myself, the second that of Sax. I hope that my reply has shown how tendentious this summing up is. Remember that Zoller began his essay by accusing literate scholars and the literate public of exaggerating the simplemindedness of the oral; on the contrary, a glance at the publications reviewed here gives an overpowering sense of the complexity of oral tradition—in the sophistication of local reflections on genre and context, in the variety of sources from which these traditions draw, and in the delicate interactions between pretty coherent old traditions and life today. In contrast, Zoller himself seems to be proposing a simplified oral tradition that is free of contamination from great traditions and which influences daily life but remains untouched by it. His review seems to me to deny the complexity of Central Himalayan oral traditions, a complexity that has been recognized by virtually all 'outsiders' who have worked in the region, Indian and foreign, as well as by 'insiders' who take an interest in bardic craft.

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REPORTS

Sakyadhita Conference In Lumbini

From February 1st to 7th, 2000, the 6th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women was held in the Ven. Dhammavati's convent, Gautami Vihara, in Lumbini, Nepal. The theme of the conference was 'Women as Peacemakers: Self, family, community, and world'. Sakyadhita, headed by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American nun ordained in the Tibetan tradition and based at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii, is an organization whose objective is to connect Buddhist women throughout the world. Previous conferences have been held in Sarnath, Bangkok, Colombo, Leh, and Phnom Penh. Buddhist nuns, laywomen, and academics came from around the world to attend. Nuns from Spiti and Dharamsala in India were joined at Lumbini by nuns from other Asian countries including Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Burma, Korea, China, and Japan, as well as many Western nuns. A particularly large contingent of Gelukpa nuns travelled from Dharamsala.

The Nepalese Minister for Youth, Sport, and Culture, Sharad Singh Bhandari, opened the conference in the presence of many dignitaries. The local CDO, Gyan Kaji Shakya, gave a short speech in which he mentioned that a feasibility study had been completed on whether an international airport could be established near Lumbini. The Ven. Ashvaghosh Mahasthavir spoke in favour of gender equality and full bhikkhuni ordination. The Ven. Dhammavati apologized for the fact that Gautami Vihara was not yet completed, but pointed out that, whereas the other viharas that are complete in Lumbini have been funded at the governmental level, her convent is entirely dependent on the donations that have been made to bhikkhunis in Nepal.

The conference included many academic sessions, chanting according to different Buddhist traditions, meditation, and a cultural show put on by the Nepal Bhasha Misa Khalah. Most important, it provided an opportunity for Buddhists from many countries to meet and exchange ideas, to make new friends and to deepen old friendships.

David N. Gellner and Sarah LeVine

Britain-Nepal Academic Council formed in London

A meeting of British academics and researchers interested in various aspects of Nepal, including art, archaeology, anthropology, language, literature, music, economy, law, politics, and nutrition etc., has decided to establish a Britain-Nepal Academic Council. The meeting was held recently at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and was attended by interested academics and researchers from universities all over the U.K. Michael Hutt of SOAS chaired the meeting.

The objective of the Council is to promote academic and scholarly links between Britain and Nepal through, inter alia, collaborative research, exchange programmes and organisation of annual lectures, and seminars etc. on areas of mutual interests of both the British and Nepalese academics and researchers.

The members appointed to the Council by the meeting include: Dr Michael Hutt of SOAS, University of London, Dr Judith Pettigrew of the University of Cambridge, Dr Rachel Baker of the University of Edinburgh, Professor David Seddon of the University of East Anglia, and Dr David Gellner of Brunel University, London, and Professor Surya Subedi of Hull University (Chair).

Welcoming the participants to the meeting, the Royal Nepalese Ambassador to London, Dr Singha B. Basnyat, said that the establishment of such a Council would further enhance the centuries-old friendly relations subsisting between the two countries. Announcing the formation of the Council to an audience of British well-wishers of Nepal at the Brunei Gallery of SOAS, University of London, Sir Tim Lankester, the Director of SOAS, said that his institution was proud of its record of academic and research activities on Nepal and was delighted to host such a meeting.

The academics, researchers and other distinguished delegates from different walks of British life were entertained later in the same evening by a group of popular classical musicians, Sur Sudha, invited from Nepal. The cultural programme was followed by a dinner of Nepalese cuisine hosted by the Ambassador at the Royal Nepalese Embassy where the academics and researchers had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with Mr Madhav Prasad Ghimire, one of the greatest poets of Nepal and the former Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy.

- Surya Subedi

REVIEWS

Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts by Gregory G. Maskarinec. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 55. Cambridge (Mass): Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1998. Distributed by Harvard University Press. ISBN 0-674-60795-3. xii + 695 pages, English and Nepali indexes.

Reviewed by András Höfer

This sort of study is rather unfashionable among most anthropologists, and not greatly favoured by a number of publishers. Significantly, *Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts,* written by an anthropologist, came out in an orientalist series.

Contrary to what the word 'Nepalese' in the title suggests, this is not an anthology of materials collected in various parts of Nepal, but an edition of over 160 texts of varying length that the author recorded from shamans (referred to as *jhãkri/jhãgrī* or *rammã*) belonging to the Kami caste of blacksmiths in the Jajarkot area of far western Nepal. Typologically, the texts can be subdivided into (a) public recitals that explain the origins of the world, its inhabitants, and their afflictions, and describe the shamanic methods of intervention, and (b) short whispered formulas, called *mantar* (*mantra*), that are couched in a rather esoteric language and serve the purpose of making shamanic intervention efficacious. Their critical edition—the fruit of intensive work over two decades, about eight years of which were spent in the field—fills a gap in our knowledge of the culture of those groups whom past legislation classified as untouchable, and is of considerable methodological and comparative relevance for the study of Himalayan rituals concerning healing, possession, exorcism in general, and shamanism in particular. This is all the more the case since, in the meantime, the Jajarkot tradition of shamanism has turned out to be part of a larger, regional complex that includes Kham Magar shamanism further to the north (well known from the works of M. Oppitz, A. de Sales, and D.E. Watters), and has been shown to have been influenced by the concepts and practices of the Kãnphatã ascetics. In as much as the shamans of Jajarkot have developed a poetically very elaborate idiom and a demanding textual culture, in which 'twelve years of training' (required for mastery of the complete text repertoire to be learnt by rote) is a standard qualifying formula, the book also provides an important source for the linguist and the more theoretically interested student of oral tradition.

Since the conceptual basis of both the institution as such and the rituals in which the texts are performed was the subject of his inspiring earlier monograph *The Rulings of the Night* (Madison, 1995), in his Preface the author contents himself with a rather parsimonious outline of Jajarkot shamanism and concentrates, in the comments and annotations, on the interpretation of the texts. In grouping the material in seven chapters, which are further subdivided into 'sets', he follows thematic criteria, such as 'treating life crises', 'witchcraft', 'stories of mythical heroes used to treat social disorder', etc. The numbered texts are presented synoptically, with the original in Devanagari script on the left and the line-for-line translation on the opposite page. Annotations, of which there are many, contain detailed glosses, comment on problems of exegesis, justify a translation, and include variants of the texts in question. However, they give only sporadic consideration to prosody, textual pragmatics, and performance, and refrain from dealing with the broader comparative context, such as the Indian background or relevant sources on other areas of Nepal. The book concludes with detailed, bilingual indexes.

The use of Devanagari characters, instead of standard transliteration, as well as the organization of the contents, can hardly enhance the book's accessibility to the general reader. The texts are treated without any detailed description of their ritual context or of the manner of their performance. And since not only the annotations, but also the brief introductions to each chapter, are grouped together towards the end of the book in a section comprising a total of 237 pages, working with the volume, which weighs over 2 kg, proves rather cumbersome. For example, the reader who wants to know more about the word *māphī,* which occurs on p.175 but is not given in the Nepali index under *m-*, has to turn far too many pages before he finally finds the gloss on p.435 in an annotation to p.26. The indexes, printed in three indented columns, are somewhat over-organized; a simple alphabetical order of the entries and a fairly exhaustive glossary of the local or text-specific vocabulary would have been more helpful for quick reference.

A glance at the language of the texts reveals how tremendous a task Maskarinec set for himself. First of all, the colloquial language of Jajarkot shows a number of deviations from the word morphology and, it seems, even from the grammar of standard Nepali. There are also words that are unknown in the latter. Besides occasional intrusions from Hindi and Kham Magar, the vocabulary also includes terms that are either lexically meaningless or part of the professional jargon of the shamans, such as *barja mukhã* for 'domestic pig' and the like. Names borrowed from the epic and Puranic traditions and adopted for divinities of the local shamanic pantheon often appear in conspicuous conflations, such as *Gaurã Maiśarã* [< *Gaurã* + *Maheśvara*], 'The Pale All-Skilled One', *Sītā Pãrvatã* [sic] or *Sītā Rãvane* [sic], etc. In addition, the texts abound in specifically shamanic or mantraic permutations. (The question of the extent to which such permutations may derive from caste-specific sociolectal deviations, a kind of 'untouchable talk', as is known in other parts of the country, is not raised by the author.) Obviously, due to an inextricable push-and-pull of esoteric intent and prosodic constraints (conditioned above all by parallelism), a considerable portion of the vocabulary appears 'distorted' in one

way or another: (a) *bancaro* ('axe') > *bancāryā*; *jumrā* ('louse') > *juharā*; *gāgrī* ('water pot') > *gagārī*, etc.; (b) jingle-words become separated by tmesis, or certain words are provided with a second, artificial jingle member to form a compound; (c) place names are 'suffixed' with *-ra*, *-la*, *-rila*, while in other instances suffixes and postpositions are elided; or (d) certain words and phrases of disputed or unknown meaning cannot be derived from local or standard Nepali, and some of them may well have been invented to imitate Sanskrit, as Maskarinec presumes.

Interpretation is further complicated by a considerable number of morphological fluctuations, often within one and the same text and/or in one and the same informant's pronunciation. (Some of these problems with morphology seem to result from the field method. Rather than relying entirely on tape-recordings of spontaneous performance, Maskarinec collected the majority of the texts in dictated form; this quite unusual way of reproducing their texts must have increased the shaman-informants' uncertainty regarding pronunciation and spelling.) One gains the impression that in the constitutio textus with the help of (sometimes rather helpless) informants, it is some kind of 'generic override', namely the autodynamics of the built-in tendency to exploit the potential of phonological and other equivalences, that produces a number of irritating quasi-paronomasic and quasi-paronymic 'variants'. Thus, *māthi* ('up', 'above') in one passage occurs as māthi (= ?) in another. The problem with such 'variants' is that, on the one hand, not all of them can be deemed nonsensical, and, on the other, not all of the nonsensical ones can be brushed aside as spurious simply on the grounds that they do not fit the context at all, or at least not as perfectly as their apparently correct alternatives would. For example, when *sāth*, 'with', is unexpectedly replaced by *sāt*, 'seven', due to its contamination by pāt in the preceding line, it is the adherence to the rules of form (prosody) that lends authenticity to the alteration (cf. pp.5, 412). Nor can authenticity simply be denied to surprising corrections which are proposed by the performers themselves during an interview. This is the case when a sudden insight prompts the informant to revoke what was established in the original transcript and emend, say, *laijāū*, 'take away', to *raijāū* [*rahījāū < rahanu + jānu*], 'remain', possibly under the influence of the first occurrence of the verb rahanu in one of the preceding lines, but in any case in violation of the context (cf., e.g., pp.109, 489). Quite correctly, Maskarinec preserves such 'variants' in his transcript and follows the performer of the text in question in spelling, e.g., Rāmā (< Rāma, the name of the epic hero), even though *rammā*, 'shaman' (a word of Kham Magar origin), would make more sense in the light of the context and also tally with other informants' interpretations (cf. p.412).

The dilemma the ethnographer faces throughout the work of reducing oral enunciation to writing—namely whether one should regard as authoritative what the individual informant spontaneously produced as text or what the informant commented (completed, emended, or left open) on what he had originally produced as text—is intimately linked with the quest for adequate translation. What should the translation render in those cases where the informants are unable to explain a meaning or where their own exegesis is at variance with the context? Is the translator entitled to make a given text more meaningful than it is for

those who perform it and/or listen to it day by day? And how should his rendition come to terms with the specific phraseology, including the numerous permutations, of the text in the source language?

One cannot but agree in principle with Maskarinec when he claims (p.x) that the translation of such texts should respect, as much as possible, certain structural and poetic properties of the original, and that accuracy must not entail an all-too-pedantic rendering. The fact remains, however, that where accuracy ends and pedantry begins depends on the translator's quite individual decision. One can resort to a 'technical', that is, a more textual translation that remains close to the original in order to make its wording transparent, and requires (except for idiomatic expressions) a more literal rendering, along with some unavoidable bracketings and other diagraphs in the text of the translation and additional explanations in the notes. (This method appears to be expedient for texts in little-known languages in general, and for texts with a high frequency of aesthetically conditioned linguistic deviance in particular.) Otherwise, one chooses a more contextual translation which is stylistically smooth and tends to be literary rather than literal, but conceals the problems of interpretation and even the fact that it results from a transfer from one language to another. Maskarinec decided in favour of the latter, and thus certainly to the benefit of the philologically less interested reader. Yet, since he gives so much weight to what he interprets as context, his translation, however carefully thought out, eloquent, or even indeed poetically pleasing, often comes close to paraphrasis or runs the risk of rendering the 'spirit' rather than the 'content' of the texts. A few examples may illustrate the difficulties.

1. The rendition of *kāmna lāgyā* by 'began to be possessed', rather than by 'began to tremble', seems to be too 'flowing' a translation which also results in a loss of imagery (p.176, line 178). First, the verb *kāmnu* ('to tremble', 'to shake', 'to shiver') does not denote a shaking of the body exclusively as a sign of possession; it is also used with reference to shivering with cold or fever. Second, in this reviewer's experience at least, a trembling or shaking of the shaman's body does not necessarily imply full medial possession (which would be *āngmā carhnu*) in all cases.

2. Because the jingle-word *rammā-tammā* (for 'shaman') is dissected in *rammāko laijāū, tammāko laijāū* (p.181, line 312, see also note 656), a 'new meaning' had to be found for the second member, and the phrases are translated as "... come with this shaman, come with this 'he-man'", in order to preserve the rhyme ('shaman' + 'he-man'). While this is an artful solution, whose auxiliary character is rightly stressed by the use of quotation marks, one cannot help wondering, first, why the imperative *laijāū* is rendered here by 'come' and not (correctly) by 'take', as is the case in the next line (313), and, second, whether the twofold insertion of 'this' is absolutely required by the context.

3. The translation of *ana jana sana puna raina kā̃r* [*kā̃r*] as "here there which wherever no where [sic] arrows" (p.521) strikes the reader as an example of artistic bravura, but its philological reliability hinges on the (unanswered) question of how the author succeeded

in finding an approximately adequate interpretation for the first five words, which are otherwise lexically meaningless. Was it suggested by his informant, or did he deduce it from the context via his own hermeneutic efforts?

4. Contextual freedom appears to have been employed even more extensively when one finds

tel ra candan, telauri [sic] *bāt*
āū bhāi kaṁs, viprālīkā sāth
rendered as:

"Oil and sandalwood, oily dissembler,
come, brother demons, with this trembler!" (p.523).

It is obvious that the pairing 'dissembler' + 'this trembler' attempts to render the end rhyme in *bāt* + *sāth*, but less clear what justifies translating *bāt* ('matter', 'thing', 'talk' in standard Nepali at least) as 'dissembler'. Equally puzzling is the translation of *viprālī* as 'trembler'. This word means 'shaman', we are told. It evidently derives from *vipra* which in Nepali and Hindi denotes 'priest', 'Brahman', but does not connote, to this reviewer's knowledge, 'trembling'. Did Maskarinec choose 'trembler' just because shamans usually tremble when in an 'ecstatic' state, or did he find this rendering justifiable in view of the Sanskrit etymon of *vipra*, namely *vip*, 'to tremble', 'to shiver'? The former solution would border on *Nachdichtung*, but would still be acceptable with some reservations, while the latter, as an etymologizing rendition, would be acceptable only if present-day Jajarkot speakers are aware of the etymological meaning, which is presumably not the case. The suspicion that here the author may have 'imported' an alien, artificial meaning into the text in order to complement his informants' exegesis, appears to be substantiated by what he writes about the principles chosen for his translation in a short remark in the Preface (p.xi, second paragraph).

The treatment of numerous verbs creates some confusion, not least because the characteristics of the language of the texts are not sufficiently explained in the Preface. It is only on p.407 that the reader is informed that, in Jajarkot, third person verb forms are also used in the second person, and that the author takes the liberty of substituting the latter for the former whenever he finds this appropriate with regard to the context. Thus, while in one place *khāin* is translated as 'you ate' (p.184, line 403), even though standard Nepali *khāin* is feminine third-person plural (which may also be employed as an honorific for the third-person singular), elsewhere Maskarinec follows the latter standard Nepali rule in rendering such verbs as *kalāin* and *jilāin* (p.97, line 6). Be that as it may, it remains obscure why in several instances not only person, but also mood and tense are treated as interchangeable. For example, while the hortative-permissive in *mai japna pāū̃* is translated, as one would expect, by 'may I recite' at first, in the following lines the same verb form is suddenly rendered in the imperative, thus *bānaū* [*bā̃dhū̃ / bā̃dhaū̃*] becomes 'bind', instead of 'let us bind' or 'may I bind' (p.3, line 57 versus lines 58-69). Peculiar, too, are *mārū̃* (hortative) = 'I kill' (indicative) and the rendering of a number of future tense verbs, such

as *tārū̃lā, pārū̃lā, jāū̃lā* [*jāū̃lā*] etc. either in the imperative or in the hortative mood (p.432, and pp.61, 180-182, 184, respectively). Such substitutions do not always seem to be unavoidably necessitated by the context. At least it is questionable whether *ḍoro deūn* [*diūn*] *paṇḍit*, for example, should not be rendered by 'may the paṇḍit show a path', rather than by "show... a path o paṇḍit" (p.278, line 126).

As some of the shamans are (nowadays) literate, there even exist a few local manuscripts of dictated texts, but Maskarinec does not tell us to what extent he has adopted these shamans' own orthography, and why his spelling does not follow more consistently colloquial forms and local pronunciation. For what reason has the Sanskritic *jñān* been preferred to *gyān*, or have rather archaic spellings such as *lāgyā, sāryā, bhālyāle, jāvas* etc. been selected over *lāge, sāre, bhālele, jāos*? The transliteration renders an unconvincing 'synthesis' of the orthographies of R.L. Turner and the Royal Nepal Academy; moreover, the alternation between *w* and *v*, e.g., in *Bhagawatī* versus *Bāsudev* or in the 'hybrid' *Juvāleswarī* does not appear to be entirely consistent with Turner's method (referred to on p.xi).

Such critical observations should not be permitted to detract from the immense value of this book. Indeed, no other oral ritual tradition of Nepal has so far been recorded in comparable textual detail and studied with comparable empathic competence. Many anthropologists still care little about *how* texts in their entirety say *what* they are to convey, and treat oral material, if collected integrally at all, as something simply to be exploited for short illustrative quotes or for summaries in support of a thesis. Unlike them, Maskarinec did not shy away from responsibility under the comfortable pretext that documents of this kind are 'basically untranslatable' and even resist being suitably edited in a written form. The admirable amount of work invested in this publication has laid a secure foundation for further research.

Célébrer le Pouvoir: Dasaī, une fête royale au Népal edited by Gisèle Krauskopff and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine. Paris: CNRS Editions, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme de Paris, 1996. ISBN 2-271-05321-8, ISBN 2-7351-0701-9. 367 pages, 48 black & white and colour plates, 15 figures (tables, maps, plans). English and French summaries.

Reviewed by András Höfer

Considering that as an event of general renewal, tantamount to a symbolic refounding of the realm, Dasaī constitutes not only the largest, but also the most political festival of the year in the kingdom of Nepal, a comprehensive study like this publication was long overdue. It is the first of its kind to appear in a European language. Eight of the nine contributions on particular areas—including Sallyan, Argha, and Gulmi in Western Nepal; Gorkha, Tanahu, and Patan in the central part of the country; Ilam in East Nepal; and the Nepalese community of Lhasa—benefit from the authors' thorough acquaintance with the local contexts, while the ninth is a synopsis of sporadic reports in the government daily *The Rising Nepal* on the main events in Kathmandu. Apart from the fact that far western Nepal is not dealt with in the book, the selection may be regarded as fairly representative, especially since some of the religious groups and ethnic minorities are given equal consideration. Its scope, and the wealth in new data and new insights it offers (to which this review can hardly do justice) concerning not only the Dasaī ritual as such, but also local social structures and regional history, make this book an indispensable source. It is admirably framed by the editors' Introduction which—concise and exhaustive at the same time—provides a systematic perspective on what is expounded in greater detail, but, of necessity, with less emphasis on the general context, in the individual contributions.

What the book as a whole demonstrates above all is that Dasaī is a multifaceted and utterly complex event, not least because its present forms have resulted from the selective integration of a variety of historically older, local, and pan-Indian elements which have been rooted in, or have grown around, an essentially Vedic core. As a royal ritual in particular, Dasaī can in part be traced back to the ancient Brahmanic *rājabhiṣeka, rājasūya,* or *aśvamedha.* Its general theological background draws mainly on Puranic sources; its symbology is influenced by Tantricism; and both its basic scheduling and 'casting' are referred back to the great epics. Dasaī also embraces local, in part pre-Brahmanic or pre-Hinduistic, cults, as is illustrated for example by the special relationship between the King and Pachali Bhairava. In addition, all these components include and instrumentalize certain universal patterns of symbolism, such as the *axis mundi* and other indications of a characteristically cosmocentric spatial orientation of the site of performance, the motif of hierogamy, the idea of reversal in liminal and order-out-of-chaos sequencings, or the equally

familiar passages and transfers between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres, etc.

Even though traditional Dasaī culminates in the cyclical renewal of the divinely sanctioned authority of the patrimonial ruler as supreme landlord, defender of *dharma,* protector of his subjects, and potential conqueror, it is centred less around the King than around the Goddess, as Toffin points out. One may add that this is also statistically evident, for it is the Goddess, rather than the King, whom the mass of the population worships within a period of 10 or even 14 days in a series of rituals addressed to those of her various aspects or forms which, as special tutelaries, local manifestations, etc., have some particular, vital relevance to the individual, his family, kin group, ethnic or local community. The authors do their best to unravel the multifarious ties and rapprochments among these aspects by demonstrating how apparent diversities come to be bundled into a certain unity, and how an apparent oneness can be interpreted as being diversified into a spectrum of components, as emerges from the different names of the Goddess alone or from the positional identity she may assume at a given time or in a given place. It is impossible to establish one-to-one equations among the variously named manifestations, nor can 'the eight mother goddesses', 'the nine *durgā*s', or 'the seven sisters', etc. be simply 'reduced' to The Goddess. Often, all one can state is the fact of their having been set into relationship with one another through a certain sequence of ritual acts. The relationship can find its expression in terms of complementary opposition, such as, for instance, the opposition between the warlike virgin aspect of the Goddess controlling the periphery and her peaceful mother aspect protecting the centre of the realm. That three goddesses of quite different provenance—namely (a) Maneshvari, a tutelary of the ancient Licchavi kings, (b) Taleju, a tutelary of the mediaeval Malla kings, later adopted by the Shah kings, and (c) Bhagavati (Durga Bhavani), a tutelary of the Shah kings—have been accommodated cumulatively, without losing their names and separate functional identities, into the royal ritual of Dasaī in Patan (Toffin), illustrates the extent to which the multiple 'thusness' of the Goddess can also be conditioned by political interest in establishing continuity for the sake of legitimation.

Several authors contribute substantially to a discussion, from a comparative point of view, of the structural coherence of the liturgy of Dasaī as a whole. The editors even seem to aim to visualize the series of ritual events as some sort of Maussian *fait social total* that involves virtually all units of society and polity through manifold references to a more or less consistent corpus of traditional knowledge relating to cosmology, mythology, history, environment, agricultural cycle, etc. It is demonstrated in detail that, not unlike the Indian Daśaharā or Durgāpūjā, Dasaī in Nepal is focused, above all, on achieving the 'presence' of the Goddess. She 'descends' and is caused to take up her abode in the water jar (*ghaṭa*) on the first day; is invoked into the *bel* tree on the sixth day; is made 'present' in the *phūlpātī,* a bunch of flowers and plants, on the seventh day, and in arms and weapons on the the eighth and ninth days, to be extolled and then dismissed on the tenth day. And, not unlike what we have in India, the first six days are devoted to 'private' rituals in the 'inside' or domestic sphere, such as the establishment of the *dasaī ghar* as temporary

chapels with the *ghaṭa*, or the worship of kin group tutelaries, etc., which also serve as preliminaries to what follows. It is on the seventh day that the public phase and the festival proper begin with the arrival of the *phūlpātī* carried in a procession from the periphery into the capital; it represents the Goddess as the 'bride', who through 'union' with the King imbues the latter with divine 'energy', *śakti*. The eighth and ninth days (Aṣṭamī and Navamī), spent with animal sacrifices and the worshipping of arms and tools, culminate in the nocturnal-liminal hecatomb of Kālarātrī, alluding to the struggle of the Goddess with the forces of evil. The tenth day, Vijayādaśamī, commemorating the Goddess's victory over the buffalo demon (or Rama's victory over the demons of Lanka), serves to reaffirm the bonds that exist between King and subjects, superior and subordinate, patron and client, landlord and tenant, senior and junior, male and female kin, etc.; the King receives the blessing of the Goddess from the Brahman and conveys it, *pars pro toto* or symbolically, in the *ṭīkā* mark to all of his subjects, who in return express their allegiance through prestations and specific gestures of reverence. (The Introduction also contains some clarifying remarks on the famous *pajanī*, the annual screening and appointment of officials during the Rana period.)

The book offers a great deal of new information on the conditions and modal variants of participation, in the central rituals, of those groups that are in a sense 'outside' or 'beyond' Hindu caste society. Muslim bangle-makers, whom traditional legislation classified as a special category within the impure (though not untouchable) castes, participate only as political subjects and as tenants of the King's local representative, but refuse to receive the *ṭīkā* from the latter as a token of their denial of anything which tends to establish the Hindu ruler's authority as sacred (Gaborieau). More complex is the case of the ascetics whose attitude depends on their sect's individual relationship to the Goddess and/or to the ruler. Ideally, as holders of inalienable titles to land and revenue they are not tenants, and as renouncers not subjects either. Yet the Dasnāmī sect's manner of observing Dasaī (members personally kill sacrificial animals; rituals are performed by Newar Brahmans who give *ṭīkā* to the abbot, etc.) reveals that their monasteries are considered to be part of the symbolic unity of the kingdom (Bouillier).

Even more revealing is the role of the Kānphaṭā sect, whose military tradition in India and close association with the ruling dynasty in Nepal are well known. As priests attending the local manifestation of Bhairava in Phalābāṅg (Sallyan), the yogis are also the guardians of the ancient weapons. Without their mediation these symbols of royal authority cannot be transferred by the Brahman priest to the Goddess or 'activated' by the latter for the duration of the main ritual. This is paralleled by local myth and belief which identifies Bhairava and Ratannāth as the providers of that which is indispensable to the king's rule by dint of the Goddess's *śakti*, namely weapons and territory. The reader is tempted to see in this configuration, lucidly presented by Krauskopff, not only a local or a sect-specific elaboration of the different levels of Śiva's identity at work in the act of renewal through the 'union' of the male and female principles, but also partial evidence for what Heesterman expounded as the conundrum of the Indian king's authority. Both Bhairava, the terrify-

ing, bloodthirsty form or aspect of Śiva, and Ratannāth, the non-violent divine Śaiva yogi, appear as the supreme landlords (said to be 'the ancient kings' and treated as *genii loci*) of the territory of the realm. Bhairava, who is associated with both elemental, untamed nature and the worldly power of the *kṣatriya*, is above all master of the originally uninhabited site of Dasaī, that is, the centre (fortress, *koṭ*) from which authority is being exerted over the kingdom. Ratannāth, in contrast, acting by virtue of superhuman 'ascetic energy' (*tapas*), bestows the territory on the future king in the forest—or, more precisely, in an enclave that is free of the violence inherent in politics and civilization, namely in the forest of a 'utopian kingdom', as Malamoud dubbed the topos of the woods where sages peacefully coexist with a flourishing nature that remains undisturbed by cultivation and domestication. Significantly, the forest in which Ratannāth meditates is situated on the summit of a mountain, just like the abode of Śiva and Pārvatī, and the future king is a princely hunter whose arrow becomes sublimated, through contact with the yogi's body, into an attribute of Śiva and the Goddess. The myth doubtless takes up the classic Indian idea which asserts that the ultimate source of the king's power—and also the source of *dharma*, according to one of the *purāṇas*— lies in the wilderness (*vana, araṇya*), outside the cultivated and inhabited area (*kṣetra*). (It might be recalled that reflections of this idea in contemporary cults in Maharashtra have been the subject of sound studies by G.D. Sontheimer and R. Jansen.)

For the Yakthumba (Limbu) ethnic group too, the authority of the chief (*hāṅg*) once derived from the wilderness and was acquired, through the ordeal of a ritual hunt, from a mountain goddess. While at that time, in the tribal past, divine life-force and legitimation for rule could be obtained only by the bravest among the heads of the households in a competition of social equals, now, in the peasant present, the *subbā*'s office is a hereditary monopoly held by his lineal descendants and sanctioned through appointment by the Nepalese state. Sagant's stylistically captivating essay analyzes this qualitative change as representative of ethnic groups undergoing a gradual process of detribalization resulting from their integration into a centralistic polity dominated by ethnic and cultural high-caste 'others'. (It remains unclear, however, how far the author is presenting a *reconstruction* of the tribal past, which supposedly knew neither social heteronomy nor alienation of the individual, and how far he is discussing its *construction* by his informants. In any case, his argumentation betrays a rather deductive *façon de penser*, notwithstanding his profound ethnographic competence.) The degree to which the Yakthumbas have been adopting the Dasaī of these 'others' is convincingly shown to be closely interrelated with the degree to which kinship and other tribal institutions have been 'hollowed out' and/or functionally converted under the long-term pressure of external economic and political factors since the Shah conquest of Eastern Nepal. And the way in which these adoptions have come to be woven into the context(s) of traditional Yakthumba ritual attests to continuous efforts at rendering the results of transformation coherently meaningful, both to one's own group and the others, as part of an ethno-specific configuration of practice and belief. It is, therefore, not enough to state, as Jest does in his otherwise informative contribution, that certain ethnic groups, for instance the Tamangs and Tamus (Gurungs), ignore the doctri-

nal meaning that Dasaī has for the Hindus and observe it only in a rudimentary manner, simply 'following custom'.

Since Nepalese Dasaī was not part of South Asian colonial 'discourse formation', Western accounts of its history are scarce. We learn that the earliest evidence for the celebration of Dasaī stems from fourteenth-century Jumla, but that there is reason to presume that it existed as early as the Licchavi period. Gorkha, in the 17th century, contributed much to the development of those components which constitute the political core of Dasaī and are centred around the Shah King and his family, above all the symbolic renewal of allegiance within the framework of specific prestations and the ceremonies of ṭīkā-giving, which, with certain local deviations, were performed until recently almost nationwide, and not only among Hindus. As the editors emphasize, the integration of the various older, local, or regional traditions of Dasaī by the centralizing Shah and Rana administrations was part of the political integration of the country. One may add that what was imposed on the population in this process was not the ritual as such, but rather what gave it meaning, namely the tenurial system established after 1769 and controlled by what M.C. Regmi called the 'centralized agrarian bureaucracy' of the Nepalese state. This is particularly true of certain ethnic and religious minorities, many of which had no original tradition of Dasaī of their own, and whose members, as new tenants, were required to supply animals for sacrifice and contribute various material accessories to rituals executed either by the landlord, or by headmen and revenue collectors as local agents of the state. And it appears quite logical that the transformations we can now observe in patterns of liturgy and participation set in with the abolition of precisely that tenurial system in the 1950s and 1960s. Since not only the land reforms, but also the transition to election-based political participation have gradually undermined the position of local dignitaries, the resulting status insecurity may well have led to simplifications or even confusion in the public ceremony of ṭīkā-giving; the traditional, strictly hierarchic pattern of ṭīkā-giving survives only where traditional authority is still recognized, namely among one's own kin. The growing importance of the domestic dimension of Dasaī—to the detriment of the public or state ritual proper—is such that in the end, the Goddess is likely to keep her *devotees* but lose her *subjects*, to paraphrase Ramirez (p.237).

One of the most significant developments highlighted in the book is the gradual 'deroyalization' of the ritual. Even in Kathmandu, the King's central position has become somewhat eclipsed by the fact that he is no longer the patrimonial ruler who once personally appointed the officials and assigned revenue. In the capitals of former kingdoms, such as Patan, Arghakot, Isma (Gulmi), or Phalabang, the change is more perceptible. Notwithstanding the remarkable continuity the local schedule of Dasaī has otherwise preserved in these places, the absence of the king's person since the late 18th century has resulted in a blurring of the traditionally radical distinction between the role of the warrior ruler as the patron, donor, and executor of sacrifice (*yajamāna*) on behalf of the realm as a whole and that of the Brahman as the king's plenipotentiary sacerdotal expert who gives effect to the act of sacrifice. In Arghakot, for example, descendants of the former local

dynasty still cooperate, but have ceased to assume the king's function as a mediator between his subjects and the Goddess (Ramirez). In Isma, the Brahman has succeeded in usurping the ancient king's sword, with the result that it is now treated in the ritual as a divinity, rather than as a symbol of royal authority and weapon of conquest (Lecomte-Tilouine).

Over the last decades, especially since the fall of the Panchayat system, Dasaī has also become an issue in the struggle for political and cultural emancipation, characterized by demonstrations of traditionalism, confessional divergence, or open ideological opposition. While, apart from some minor later 'additions' imposed by the Shah administration, the Newars of Patan, Hindus and Buddhists alike, adhere to their own liturgy of Dasaī as it was established under Malla rule in the 17th century and thus emphasize their identity as a separate cultural group living on the territory of their former kingdom (Toffin), the Buddhist Sherpas of Khumbu observe a period of fasting to offset the sin they think the Hindus commit by killing innumerable animals during the festive days (Jest), and radical revivalists among some other non-Hindu ethnic minorities in the hills now plead for an abandonment of the celebration of Dasaī, on the grounds that it is a mere pageant which cements 'Hindu supremacy' (the book contains little information on the latter movement).

Will Dasaī survive, endure the instability entailed by on-going socio-economic change, and resist missionary activity, political agitation, or disenchantment? Considering both the remarkable continuity and the flexibility in its development hitherto, which are so cogently demonstrated in this book, the reader cannot but conclude that it most probably will.

Célébrer le Pouvoir is a particularly fine piece of analytic regional ethnography that rightly takes into account the relevance of diachrony and the larger Indian context as a comparative background. Its methodically pragmatic orientation allows for unbiased, meticulous documentation and leaves little room for generalization above the level of intracultural interpretation. With the exception of Unbescheid's brief reflections on the formation of local traditions and on the dimension of time in ritual, none of the authors broaches the question of the theoretical issues involved or takes notice of the recent literature on ritual. In two respects, the book fails to live up fully to its own programme. First, it tends to overlook the fact that Dasaī is not only Durga*pūjā*, but also Durg*otsava*. Although, in their Introduction, the editors rightly stress that Dasaī does possess the characteristics of a festival (*utsava*) which goes hand in hand with opulence and mirth, in fact all the contributions concentrate on the ritual proper as executed and interpreted by the specialists; they circumvent the sociologically important issue of 'popular participation' in its religious and profane manifestations, including deviations from the official 'libretto'. One would like to know a little more about the recruitment, among laymen, of both active and passive participants in the festivities, and about the way they organize, finance, and experience the latter. Second, not all of the contributors heed the editors' claim which contends that Dasaī is more than just a plain symbolic enactment of power relationships for the sake of their legitimation, and that, instead, one should regard the actor-participants as agents

creating the ritual and creating their own roles, which in turn do have a direct impact on the real relationships of power and authority. Rather than elaborating on the question of what degree of autonomy the ritual may possess as an intrinsic factor, the authors have a tendency to treat the ritual as a reflection of existing or former political and social configurations—even though one of the lessons the reader can draw from their own descriptions is that the 'ritual of politics' and the 'politics of ritual' are often inseparable from one another, and that (as recently stressed by Catherine Bell) ritual is part of those negotiated appropriations, distancings, and conflictual interpretations that make up a given system of sociopolitical relationships.

The analysis of the theological foundations of Dasaĩ may lack the penetrating (albeit somewhat synthetic, omniscience-claiming) argumentation and verbal virtuosity of Östör in his *The Play of the Gods* (Chicago, 1980), yet *Célébrer le Pouvoir* remains convincing precisely because of its openness in confronting problems of interpretation. That some of the authors occasionally show a slight tendency to over-interpretation is no wonder in view of the complexity of the data available. One must concede that, in certain instances at least, when efforts at classifying, deriving, or connecting the facts observed run into difficulty, it proves hard indeed for the student to decide whether he should place the blame on an inherent ambiguity or 'polythetic' coherence of the phenomena, on the momentary inadequacy of the evidence at hand, or simply on the inadequacy of his own method. And if the ambiguities turn out to be inherent, it may be equally hard to determine to what extent they result from conscious *intention* ('invention of tradition') or are the *effect* of an accumulation, side by side, of historically and ideologically different legacies, and whether, in the latter case, the effect is merely contingent or should be imputed to what Kapferer once tried to isolate as the self-structuring of ritual. The issue seems to be closely connected with that of the efficacy of ritual and feast. In any case, it must be borne in mind that the participants themselves, even the specialists among them, have to put up with a number of indeterminacies and disputed alternatives in the meaning of what they are doing, and that this is so does not weaken their motivation in the least.

Apart from some misprints and defective transliterations (a few of them appear repeatedly, such as 'Kālī Yuga', instead of Kali Yuga), the typographical presentation is good. With regard to certain important details, here and there a little more precision would have been welcome. For example, given the relevance of the age and sex of animals as criteria for their eligibility for sacrifice, the reader is left wondering whether *buffle* denotes a male or a female water buffalo (*rãgo* versus *bhaĩsī*), and can only make a guess that what is being called *bufflon* ('buffalo calf', 'young buffalo') may in fact be a young, but sexually mature male buffalo. (As a rule, the male buffaloes one sights in the hills of Nepal are not kept for more than three to four years and thus tend to be smaller in size than fully grown buffalo cows.) The name of the procession or 'war dance', which, on the tenth or eleventh day, celebrates the victory over the demons, namely *sarāē* or *saraya*, also given as *saraĩ*, certainly has nothing to do with the intransitive verb *sarnu*, 'to move' (p.227); rather, the word seems to be a regional variant of *sarāi* or *sarāni*, 'praising', 'extolling', and is in any

case etymologically akin to *sarāunu*, 'to praise' (cf. also Hindi *sarāha, sarāhan*, 'praise', 'eulogy'). If this highly important publication has any major deficiency at all, it is the lack of an index.

On the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste in Nepal by Mary Cameron. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998. 314 pp.

Reviewed by Ben Campbell

The Untouchable communities of Nepal have received comparatively little anthropological attention, and this book puts them centre stage. Focusing on a number of 'artisan' castes living in Bajhang District in the far west of the country, Cameron mixes an accessible ethnographic style with a provocative theoretical examination of caste and gender hierarchies.

Cameron argues that, for Hindu women, gender and caste have separable strategic effects that can produce different kinds of boundaries. Rather than seeing gender as another manifestation of a hierarchizing principle emanating from distinctions between 'pure' and 'impure', she disentangles gender from caste. In order to do this, however, she claims that gender difference is constructed in a way that does correspond to perceptions of castes—but in terms of *jāt* rather than *varṇa*, i.e. as characteristic social types that need not emphasize ritual inequality. She insists most strongly that low-caste women do not share the ideological and practical motivations of high-caste women, in the ways that gender merges with caste in the dowry-circulating processes of domestic cultural prestige among Bahun, Thakuri, and Chetri. The low castes' practices of bride-price and cross-cousin marriage avoid the high castes' obsession with affinal hierarchies and the status implications of the gift of a virgin-bride.

The book then pays particular attention to the ways in which low-caste women's agency can be discerned in arenas of autonomous social practice, which include economic diversification through wage work, freedom to remarry, and even comparative 'marital satisfaction'. Cameron's analysis of intercaste relations explicitly highlights everyday rather than ritual concerns, and offers a significant contrast to approaches which have stressed the hierarchical meanings of gifts that remove auspiciousness down the social scale. She sides with Quigley, Appadurai, and others in arguing that forms of dominance rest in the control of people and resources, not in ritual purity. The title of the book is thus an argument against the privileging of auspiciousness as an explanatory basis for the logic of caste inequality, and yet the low castes' condition of marginality, characterized by both autonomy and subservience, is one that occasionally invokes the auspiciousness of events— weddings, for example—as a counter to the high castes' esteem for textual knowledge.

The ethnographic study concentrates in chapters 2 to 4 on the dilemmas of livelihood facing the various artisan communities who for the most part can no longer rely on their occupational specialisms. These consist of Lohār blacksmiths (the most economically secure), Sunār goldsmiths, Oudh masons, Pārki basket weavers, Damāi tailors, Sārki leather workers (described as the poorest, most malnourished, and uneducated), Okheda ex-palace guards, and Bādī potters and prostitutes. These groups dislike the collective appellation *dom*. The collapse of service patronage under the Bhalara kingdom by the 1960s resulted in a move into economically more diverse occupations, with women much less involved in artisanal production than the men, and more motivated to support their families by taking on agricultural work for high-caste families. The proximity of India has enabled an increase in migrant labour, and also offered low castes an alternative self-perception through processes of caste reform in India.

Cameron claims that in the analysis of Bhalara's social inequalities the concept of class is culturally inappropriate, not being a locally recognized category. This is perhaps one of the least convincing aspects of the book, as she supplies sufficient material to argue the contrary. The appropriation of land by high castes through registration, reinforcing patrilineal control and high-caste gender ideology, is central to her analysis. Untouchables are denied access to the land market through the exclusionary monopolization of high-caste inheritance practices (pp.70-3). The somewhat surprising response to differential land holding is the system of *mātya* tenancy of land, taken as collateral for 'loans' made by low to high castes, funded by the former's agricultural and migrant earnings. Whether some low castes are more involved in migrant labour than others is not discussed. It is not clear if the data generated by Cameron's Time Allocation methodology is amenable to answering this sort of question. On the whole, only sketchy attention is given to many issues of livelihood strategy, given the insistence on the importance of women's efforts to achieve economic autonomy. There is, for instance, little discussion of livestock keeping. One footnote records a high proportion of loans taken for animal purchase, while another footnote discusses one woman's reputation as a good dairy producer, but it is not even made clear whether she is from the low castes.

Perhaps the issue of class and its (mis)recognition would have been better argued if the author had addressed the important studies of rural low castes in central and west Nepal respectively by Hiroshi Ishii (1982) and Inge-Britt Krause (1988). It is surprising that these are overlooked, along with Tom Cox's work on the Bādī community in Jajarkot, in a book that castigates anthropologists for not studying rural untouchability. Their research on the historical conditions of indebtedness and bonded labour would have given this book a firmer comparative basis. Cameron hardly mentions indebtedness, but alludes obliquely to its effects on the system of patronage for artisanal services in her discussion of the way in which Lohār women's contributions to 'reciprocal' work groups controlled by high-caste women is not reciprocated by work, but in the securing of contracts for their further services (p.114). Krause's argument is that class consciousness in Mugu is inhibited by a similar embedding of command over low castes' labour in delayed and diffuse

advances and returns. Furthermore, Cameron's entire rationale for arguing against symbolic interpretations of caste in favour of forms of control over people and resources, stressing transactions of material values between castes rather than ritual gifting denoting status hierarchy (p.49), contains at the very least an implicit theory of class.

This point of difference apart, I must strongly recommend *On the Edge of the Auspicious* as a perceptive treatment of gender that is pertinently located within regional scholarship and contemporary anthropological theory. There are some memorable passages of writing on *jakram* women's dances (p.215), on the sexual imagery of ploughing, on the wit deployed against exploitation, and on the effectiveness of stylized public insult (invoking a variety of possible incestuous relationships, and an eloquent wishing of death on an offending woman's male relatives (p.163)). Cameron creates a vivid sense of her own position and experience within the community of research, and does not hold back from mentioning the sometimes physically 'repulsive conditions' of fieldwork, and the 'loathsome' treatment by high castes of the women and men whose voices speak out from the pages of her book.

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The Thakali: A Himalayan ethnography by Michael Vinding. London: Serindia Publications, 1998. 512 pp., 51 colour plates, maps, glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-90602650-4. £30

Reviewed by Mark Turin

The Thakali are one of very few ethnic groups autochthonous to the Nepali Himalaya who can boast that the academic bibliography pertaining to their culture runs to almost fifteen pages of small print. Michael Vinding's eagerly awaited monograph concludes a good five decades of intense anthropological debate on this famous Tibeto-Burman population of lower Mustang simply by having more information in one place than any previous study. Thankfully, although published in an era marked by navel-gazing anthropology, *The Thakali* shows no sign of having been caught up in such reflexive discussion. Whilst

critics may take issue with the lack of cutting-edge theory, Vinding's curiously traditional yet personal style has much to recommend it.

The structure of the book is pleasingly classic. Vinding writes of the flora, fauna, and topography of the Thak Khola valley, describes his first arrival in the area and offers an in-depth historical analysis of the whole of Mustang. Thereafter, in chapters 4 to 13, Vinding describes the economic strategies of a Thakali household, the kinship system, patrilineal descent groups, Thakali household structure, social stratification within the group and in the area as a whole, marriage, death, and other salient moments in the Thakali life cycle, the political systems of Thak Khola, the different religious influences on the Thakali and their own indigenous belief system, and finally a descriptive analysis of the major Thakali festivals. Chapter 14 deals with the history of Thakali emigration and Thakalis living outside Thak Khola, while chapter 15 offers a careful analysis of continuity and change among the Thakali. Appendix 1 is a collection of historically important documents relating to the Thakali, all culled from the invaluable Regmi Research Series, and Appendix 2 presents a few salient Thakali myths and fables, which are well chosen and thoughtfully translated.

In *The Thakali*, Vinding offers us more of a summary of his own previous writings on the ethnic group than an overview of the previous literature in general. As he writes in his Preface, his monograph was submitted for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae in May 1997, and "no major changes have been undertaken since then." Moreover, his dissertation, and thus also the book, is largely a synthesis of all his earlier articles. Of the fifteen chapters, eleven are based (at least in part) on his twelve previously published articles, many of which appeared in *Kailash* and *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, albeit "...revised and updated to take into account the findings of recent studies" (p.46, footnote 2). Whilst this is standard academic practice, two serious issues relating to content should be raised. The first is that for anyone who has read Vinding's articles, there is little new to learn from reading his 470-page monograph. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Vinding's descriptions of life in Thak Khola are noticeably dated. Chapter 4, for example, entitled 'Making A Living', reads more like a historical document than a contemporary description of Thakali economic strategies. Vinding is clearly aware of this, and takes care to warn us that, although updated, "the chapter presents a picture of mainly the early 1980s" (p.93, footnote 1). Notwithstanding these two issues, there is a lot to be said for having his thoughtfully written articles reworked into book form, thus making them accessible to a wider audience.

The greatest strength of Vinding's work lies in his unflinching attention to detail, which is supported by 25 years of accumulated experience. There are few other Himalayan anthropologists who have invested a quarter of a century in their first full ethnography. Vinding's monograph is both meticulously researched and satisfyingly comprehensive. Some of his asides make for the best reading: for instance, footnote 4 on p.11 reads, "The wind blowing from the south is called *nambar*, while the north wind is known as *phamar*." These details are the backbone of Vinding's monograph as a record of Thakali culture, language,

and society in the latter years of the 20th century. Moreover, it should be added that it is precisely because Vinding is not encumbered by proving or disproving any particular contemporary anthropological theory that he has the space to include such details.

There is, however, a more pedantic side to his thick description, which may not appeal to all readers. In his section on goods and products used by the Thakali, we learn that when it comes to cigarettes, "...most smokers use cheap brands, but some prefer more expensive filter cigarettes" (p.103). The inclusion of such details does make one feel rather as if no fact which Vinding has gathered can escape inclusion in the monograph. Other such comments, whilst being ethnographically valid, are at risk of coming across as rather platitudinous or, at worst, downright odd. In his discussion of what a Thakali man would find attractive in a woman, he informs us that "her bosom...should be neither too big, nor too small" (p.223). Although surprising, the inclusion of such details does have the advantage of livening up a sometimes plodding list of ethnographic facts.

The other high point of Vinding's work is Chapter 2, 'Living Among the Thakali'. Unlike the authors of many traditional ethnographies who are noticeably absent from their own monographs, Vinding quite overtly paints himself into the social fabric he is documenting. He shares with the reader his fears, doubts, and also his initial excitement in a most forthright, at points even disarming, manner: "There exist only general guidelines on how to conduct fieldwork, and in the field the anthropologist has to find his/her own way through trial and error" (p.28). Vinding's decision to describe his *rite de passage* will be of enormous value to students of anthropology. Moreover, his candour comes across as honest and sincere, a most refreshing kind of reflexivity in a climate in which such confessions either dominate a book or are relegated to the position of a disclaimer in a preface. Vinding effortlessly strikes the right balance between personal anecdote and serious ethnography—no small achievement. To my knowledge, there are no other published ethnographies of the Himalaya which deal with the trials and tribulations of fieldwork so candidly, and for this alone, if for no other reason, *The Thakali: A Himalayan Ethnography* should appear at the top of every South Asian anthropology syllabus.

Vinding's highly personal approach may have something to do with the fact that he is no career anthropologist with a tenure-track position to justify. Arriving in Nepal for the first time in 1972, at the age of 21, he has spent a great deal of time in the country since, and is presently based in Bhutan. Save a few related articles, Vinding has concentrated his focus on the Thakali for 27 years, and so it comes as no surprise that at times he comes across as a little possessive of the ethnic group as a whole: "...the Thakali came to be 'my' people" (p.29).

Vinding's explicit purpose is to "present a comprehensive ethnography on the Thakali" (p.4) and in this he succeeds masterfully. We can but hope that he will prepare a South Asian edition, since £30 is rather steep for Indian and Nepali scholars, not to mention the Thakali themselves for whom he hopes his book "may also be of use" (Preface). As minority languages and ethnic cultures are increasingly subsumed into the global whole,

there remains ever less time to document them. Vinding has described a rapidly-changing Himalayan society, and in so doing has made a lasting contribution to anthropology. *The Thakali* is at once refreshingly personal and pleasingly traditional, a truly rare combination in modern ethnography.

Kathmandu Valley Painting—The Jucker Collection by Hugo E. Kreijger. London: Serindia Publications, 1999. 128pp., 97 ills. (84 colour, 13 b&w). Glossary, bibliog., index. ISBN 0906026520.

Reviewed by Julia A.B. Hegewald

This publication is a descriptive and interpretative catalogue of the Newar paintings and drawings in the private ownership of the Swiss collectors Mischa and Angela Jucker. The catalogue contains 39 religious paintings on cloth (*paubhā*s) (32 Buddhist, 7 Hindu), four works on paper, four bookcovers, and seven artists' sketchbooks. Most of the paintings have not been previously published. The main catalogue section is preceded by a short introduction to the geography and cultural history of Nepal, the artistic milieu of the painters, and a brief commentary on the stylistic development and religious context of the paintings in the collection.

Kreijger's book is an especially valuable contribution to our knowledge of the wealth, beauty and development of Newar painting and its relation to the painting traditions of India and Tibet. Despite the current proliferation of illustrated publications on the arts of Tibet and the Himalaya, it is rare for a study to focus on Nepal and in particular on the Newar paintings of the Kathmandu Valley. This publication provides a wide audience with access to an unpublished collection through high quality reproductions. It successfully portrays and describes individual items in the collection, but also provides a solid overview of the pattern of development and change which has taken place in the painting tradition of the Newars over eight centuries.

The paintings are arranged in chronological order with the earliest dating from circa 1200 and the latest from 1912. The individual *paubhā*s are described in minute detail, and with every new picture the reader is invited to consider the paintings closely, following register by register and scene by scene, details which are easily identifiable on the photographs. Kreijger also provides useful and informative interpretations of certain colours, mudras, and symbols specific to the Newar painting repertoire, and narrates many of the stories depicted on the *paubhā*s, thus drawing attention to the important narrative quality of the

paintings. Unfortunately, only two of the many substantial inscriptions incorporated in the paintings and translated by Ian Alsop and Gautamvajra Vajracharya are published in the book.

Whilst Kreijger provides a mass of detailed information on individual works, this does not detract from a comprehensive presentation of Newar painting in general. Of particular interest are those sections in which he traces the development of specific recurrent motifs over the centuries from one painting to another, and in doing so outlines innovations and stylistic developments in the Newar *paubhā* tradition. Examples illustrating such stylistic changes are the roundels containing flying *vidyādhara*s, the garments of the patron and his family, and decorative motifs such as flowers or the shapes of the headdresses worn by certain divine beings. A considerable amount of helpful dating is done through the examination and relative sequencing of such motifs. In this context, Kreijger is also able to show that the collection contains several groups of representations of one and the same deity dating from different periods. The fact that important stylistic developments in the Newar painting tradition can be identified in the paintings contained in this collection without any need to refer to examples elsewhere highlights the comprehensive significance and importance of this private collection.

Particular attention has been paid throughout this monograph to the dates of the scrolls. However, whilst the age of a painting and its location in a secure chronology is both desirable and helpful, the precision implied by dating based on stylistic comparisons alone requires caution. Such 'precise' dating coupled with frequent assurances that many paintings, compositions and subject matters are 'most unusual', 'extremely rare', 'relatively unknown' and 'uncommon', may mislead the reader. Kreijger's understandable eagerness to promote the attributes of the collection occasionally gives the impression of saleroom persuasion—a metier which is familiar to the author. In his preface, Kreijger briefly draws attention to the fact that many pieces are without precedent (p.9), but it might also have been valuable to consider the question of why it is that such a large number of paintings in this collection are unusual in so many respects. On the one hand, the collection might simply reflect the collector's eye for atypical works whose availability confirmed their unorthodoxy. On the other, might the paintings in this collection reflect a previously unrecognized extent of individual expression and interpretation in a very conservative painting tradition? The lack of answers to such questions should not distract from the considerable contribution which this book makes to the study of painting in Nepal.

The catalogue's short introduction might have achieved more without being longer. On the other hand, it is extremely helpful that, where possible, individual paintings of the collection have been directly related to historical periods and developments. In his account of the artistic milieu, the author comments on the "low caste status presently held by the painting profession in Nepal" (p.15). Here, it might have been helpful to have differentiated between the traditional *paubhā* painters of the Chitrakar caste, and painters who have been more experimental in terms of their choice of media, techniques, and subject matter and may be referred to as 'modern painters'. Most of these come from higher

castes, and although they work as painters, have a high position in society. Although the catalogue contains several examples of painting manuals (p.16), the Introduction provides little or no information on such sketchbooks, or on the texts used by painters, such as manuals and guidelines. It would also have been helpful if this section had included some information on the substance of the colours and materials used.

While the stylistic overview of the paintings provides valuable general information on the collection, the opportunity to provide a bold summary and interpretation of Newar painting has not been taken. Kreijger stresses that Newar paintings are noticeably different in style from both the Indian and Tibetan painting traditions, but makes little attempt to identify these differences and to delineate clearly the distinctive features of Newar painting and their development over time. While certain typical Newar characteristics such as representations of a deity's vehicle in pairs (p.42) are pointed out in the catalogue text, more general tendencies could have been outlined to prepare the reader at the beginning of the book. The final section of the Introduction provides a useful commentary on Nepalese religious practice, though there are several passages where useful information has been omitted, such as the identification of the "holy lake where devotees of Shiva bathe" (p.21) as Gosainkund. In addition, the use of broad generalizations occasionally obscures whether a statement refers to specific items in the collection or to the whole genre of Newar painting.

In its totality, this well illustrated and documented catalogue of the previously unpublished Jucker collection provides an extremely valuable and detailed contribution to the study of Newar painting between the 13th and 20th centuries. Kreijger sets out to remedy the lack of material available on the arts of the Kathmandu Valley, to provide a study which is of interest and an aid to all students of Nepalese art, and which serves as an introductory text on the subject. His enthusiasm for the subject will inspire readers both familiar and unfamiliar with the Newar painting tradition.

Earth . Door . Sky . Door: Paintings of Mustang by Robert Powell with an introduction by Roberto Vitali. London : Serindia Publications, 1999. 108 pp., col. ill., maps. ISBN 0906026539.

Reviewed by Clare Harris

In 1992 the Nepalese government allowed a partial opening of the restricted area of Mustang, a decision which enabled a number of Himalayas and Tibet specialists to begin research projects in the region. Among them was the Australian artist Robert Powell. He joined a team of historians, architects and photographers (led by Niels Gutschow) who aimed to study and document the architecture of Mustang. Gutschow made an inspired choice when selecting his colleagues for this project, the results of which can be appreci-

ated in *Earth. Door. Sky. Door*. Although this publication reproduces works displayed by Powell at the Arthur M.Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C., it is not merely an exhibition catalogue. The combination of Powell's images and the text by fellow team member and Tibetologist Roberto Vitali make this an extremely useful contribution to our knowledge of Himalayan architecture in a particularly interesting location.

As a cleft in the Himalayan ranges, the Kali Gandaki valley has been traversed by those wishing to venture from the Tibetan plateau to the plains of India and vice versa for perhaps three millennia. Mustang, in the upper reaches of this valley, is therefore a place where architecture displays a convergence of Tibetan and South Asian influences. Powell's paintings provide ample evidence of this and allow us to observe that, for example, the superstructures of Mustang homes bear close resemblance to those of Central Tibet and Western Tibet, though window fittings are in some cases carved in the style of the Kathmandu valley. However, the style of the Mustang built environment not only reflects a degree of hybridity but asserts some distinctive local variation, particularly in the use of vivid colours for exterior wall painting. Even the Sakyapa architecture of Tibet pales in comparison to the drama of the vertical bands of pigment used in Mustang.

Many of the images in *Earth. Door. Sky. Door* are executed with a realism and accuracy that makes them invaluable to the student of Himalayan architecture. In fact this is a case where the painter has eclipsed the photographer, as Powell includes a cross-section of a cave temple, illustrations of a set of stupas, and an interior which cannot be recorded by the camera. Vitali's captions and introduction provide historic, technical and ethnographic detail which is not available elsewhere, and ensure that the book is underpinned by sound scholarship. However, I suspect that the atmosphere of Powell's images will attract other readers beside Tibetologists. Many of his paintings move beyond the purely descriptive, verging instead towards the surreal and the abstract. An image such as 'House at Tsarang' takes some of the basic ingredients of Tibetan architecture—white painted mud wall, a doorway with black 'horned' architrave, and a thick layer of firewood stored on a flat roof—and transposes them by close cropped framing into a Rothko-like modernist work. When Powell paints yak horns impaled in mud at Drakmar (in a style reminiscent of working drawings by the sculptor Anish Kapoor) they inspire him to create an imagined 'yak horn device', an object that looks like a cross between a torpedo and the crown of an obscure potentate. Thus Powell metamorphoses the local meaning of yak horn, where it functions as a protective votive to the earth spirits, into an icon from a more personal cosmology. Hence I agree with Vitali when he remarks that Powell should not be compared to the Orientalist painters of the monuments of South Asia who "painted an invisible barrier separating their easel from the world around them" (p.11). Powell's sensibility is so thoroughly engaged with his subject that his paintings become what Giuseppe Tucci, the founder of Tibetan art scholarship, would call 'psycho-cosmograms'. Since Tucci used this Jungian terminology to refer to the Tibetan mandala, the comparison is, I think apt, for Powell has clearly used his eye and brush to try to see beyond the physical appearance of Mustang in an attempt to capture something of its essence. To my mind this

inevitably also reveals something of the mentality of the observer—in this case an Australian who has travelled extensively in the Himalayas as part of an emotional intellectual commitment to the cultures of Tibetan Buddhism, and who clearly shares the late twentieth century view that the region can effect what Vitali calls a 'metaphysical transformation' in the visitor. Hence for me there is some tension in these images, for Powell's aestheticisation of the material culture of Mustang is so ravishing that it can surely only inspire many others to beat the same path and to knock on the 'earth door sky door' of Mustang. It is only in this sense that Powell's paintings are similar to the engravings and aquatints of the Orientalists: they will drive the imagination of others and catapult them towards making the 'Grand Tour' of the Himalayas.

Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the lead editor, Michael Hutt. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the 'Harvard' format.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.D.D. 1988. 'A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya' *Kailash* 6(2): 121-83.

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