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ARTICLES

- NGOs as *the kādārs* or *sevaks*? Identity crisis in Nepal's non-governmental sector**  
Celayne Heaton Shrestha 5
- The Management of Natural Resource Conflict: Case studies from Nepal**  
Bishnu Raj Upreti 37
- The Life History of a Jad Woman of the Garhwal Himalayas**  
Subhadra Channa 61
- Ancient Dialogue Amidst a Modern Cacophony: Gurung religious pluralism and the founding of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Pokhara valley**  
Ben Tamblin 81

CORRESPONDENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT

- Gurkha crossfire** 102
- Paris workshop** 104

## REVIEWS

- Manjushree Thapa *The Tutor of History and Samrat Upadhyay Arresting God in Kathmandu*  
Sarah LeVine 108
- Tomek Lehnert *Rogues in Robes: An inside chronicle of a recent Chinese-Tibetan intrigue in the Karma Kagyu lineage of Diamond Way Buddhism*  
David N. Gellner 112
- Gyurme Dorje *Tibetan Elemental Divination Paintings: Illuminated manuscripts from the White Beryl of Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho with the Moonbeams treatise of Lo-chen DharmaSri*  
Martin Boord 113
- Vasant K. Saberwal *Pastoral Politics: Shepherds, bureaucrats, and conservation in the western Himalaya*  
Ben Campbell 116
- Karl-Heinz Krämer *Ethnizität und Nationale Integration in Nepal: Eine Untersuchung zur Politisierung der Ethnischen Gruppen im Modernen Nepali*  
David N. Gellner 119

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## NGOs as *thekādārs* or *sevak*s?

### Identity crisis in Nepal's non-governmental sector

Celayne Heaton Shrestha

#### Yogis and stomachs<sup>1</sup>

It's staff meeting day in the field office of BEACON, a national NGO. Around 12 p.m. staff drift into a small square room, with chairs and benches scavenged from other parts of the cement office. The office head, Dharma, opens the proceedings: "You, Ram Chandra, take the minutes" and to staff, some sitting two to a chair, caps bearing the NGO's logo, others sitting on a mat in the centre of the room, he says: "We'll go on until 3.30 p.m. Say anything you want inside this room and time, but tomorrow do not go and say something else outside. What's the agenda today? What will we discuss?"

"I have one, sir: Budget and programme?" says Kiran. Dharma writes on his notepad. (There is no board in the room.)

"I also have something, sir, it's for example—"

"Don't explain it now!" Dharma interrupts him.

"Ticket" corrects the first.

Dharma writes the word 'ticket' down. "*Aru* (anything else)?"

Another member of staff suggests:

"*bhāt* (cooked rice)."

"What do you mean, *bhāt*?"

"Say DA (daily allowance)," a third person urges the first.

"When one comes to the meeting one has to eat, one needs DA," the first explains.

Dharma jots down 'DA'.

"And in relation to trainings, sir."

"And communications."

"Torch batteries."

"Cycle repairs!"

<sup>1</sup> A *yogi* or *jogi* generally refers to an ascetic, a religious mendicant. This passage, as all narratives of the field in this paper, is based on my fieldnotes. All details are as recorded at the time of fieldwork (October 1996–December 1997) and verbal exchanges are verbatim. A list of acronyms used appears on pp. 32-3.

"And sleeping bags!"

Dharma lifts his head from the notepad:

"Are we going to spend half an hour on agenda-making too?"

Pell-mell, staff call out their items: staff evaluations, the date for the next staff meeting, trainer allowances, Non-Formal Education (NFE) class fees, division of labour, and wages. The meeting roller-coasters along, with staff bickering and late arrivals, until eventually the sticky matter of bills and transport is broached.

"When we go to areas where our community is, we can get food [for free] but bus and lodging can add up to 500 rupees per field trip," says Dhruva.

"There is no policy of reimbursing staff when coming to staff meetings," Dharma responds to an earlier query. "They must come at their own expense."

"The budget given is not sufficient," says Madhu. "You do not realize how expensive travelling is, how much is expended on going to the field, because you always travel in the donor's car..."

"We do realize the cost of field trips." Dharma is interrupted by another wave of staff protestation:

"The budget is not sufficient," says Charan. "We also have kids, a stomach; we don't want to make our kids *kamaiyā*<sup>2</sup> by doing social service!"

"Backward, backward, it's the staff who are backward here!"<sup>3</sup> says Ashok.

"It's the staff who are oppressed!" says Hridaya.

Dharma finally breaks through the laughter. "You have all only talked about facilities; only one or two have brought issues related to the programme!... We are social servants (*samāj sevak*); we are *yogis* too."

In a more sober tone, Mani states: "We must make a request for a budget because it costs 100 rupees to go to area D."

"Well, let's propose this at the policy review meeting. Next point?"

"Training," proposes Mahanta.

"Yes, we don't get training" says Charan. "We field staff just run the field and cannot [for lack of training] explain to villagers when they ask particular questions. Training is only for senior staff; when will we junior staff get any?"

"We have taken so many trainings; but have you been able to use them?" Sita, from the top of the room, responds to the field supervisor from area D.

<sup>2</sup> A bonded labourer; the statement was meant as an ironical one as the *kamaiyā* were in fact among the NGO's beneficiary groups.

<sup>3</sup> Again, an ironical statement: the NGO defined its target group as 'backward people'.

"People on training also get allowance; that's the organization's money," says Charan. "They get this allowance [DA] on top of their wage. This money could, rather, be used elsewhere, why give an allowance when it's staff's duty to go on training?"

"You will all get a chance to go on training," says Dharma. "The reason why area A has had more opportunities is that information about the training is received at just a day's notice, so we cannot inform and get people from area D..."

"Still, *bhattā* (allowance) could be better spent..." argues Charan.

"Just say [what you mean] direct!" says Dhruva.

"I heard that in some training some people had eaten 4000 to 5000 rupees, when the money could have been used for such things as waterproof bags. I was caught in the rain and all my files got wet!" says Charan.

"When a member of staff goes on training, it's out of his home, he has to eat, and stay out; allowance is provided for in the budget, it's policy," says Madhu.

"Yeah; the allowance should be given but then shared with staff in that area," says Bhuvan.

"Why should it be shared?" says Madhu. "The trainee is the one who has done hard work in the training, so he should get the allowance!"

"Allowance is a facility not a right," argues Dharma.

Ram Chandra lifts his head up from the meeting record book and asks:

"Er, so what's the decision here?"

No decision was settled that day. The meeting went on to issues of budget decentralization, diary keeping, a joint bank account for all staff in this office and in sub-offices. Before the meeting broke up at around 6 p.m., Dharma had a last word for his staff. Pointing to the photos of the project beneficiaries displayed on the wall, he reminded them: "We must look there and remember them and work, it's for them that we do it!"

### Introduction

With the restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1990, and the restitution of fundamental rights such as the right to organize, there was an immediate change in attitudes towards organizations. As early as September 1990, a mere four months after the successful outcome of the

Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), a task force was created with the specific objective of drawing up guidelines for the non-governmental sector. Co-operation with NGOs was prioritized and made government policy; legislation was introduced to create an environment conducive to their full participation; and the government drew up specific areas and sectors in which NGOs could contribute most effectively. The change in government attitudes towards the third sector was so marked that

There are today few countries in the world in which a government has given so prominent a place in development and where NGOs are allowed to operate so freely (following far from cumbersome registration procedures) than Nepal. (Ridell 1994: 8)

The NGO sector boomed: numbering less than 250 in 1989, by 1993 1,210 NGOs could be counted, and there were an estimated 1,800 by 1994. By late 1997, the number of NGOs registered with the Social Work Council (SWC)<sup>4</sup> totalled 5,978, and the figure for NGOs in the entire country was reported to range between 20,000 and 30,000. In 2001, the number of SWC-affiliated NGOs stood at 12,600.

The phenomenal growth of non-governmental organizations worldwide has been hailed in international development circles as the rebirth of civil society and as holding the promise of democratization.<sup>5</sup> In Nepal, however, public attitudes towards NGOs were already less than celebratory in the mid-1990s. Commentators report that NGOs were widely suspected and often publicly accused of narrow self-interest, lack of concern for the poor, and corruption (Mikesell 1992, 1993; Aryal 1992; Shrestha 1994; Lohani 1994; Ridell 1994; Rademacher and Tamang 1993). The images of NGOs as 'family businesses' (i.e. closed off access, but also nepotistic, corrupt) and 'dollar farmers' (or again 'begging bowls' stretched out to or handmaidens of international organizations) were commonly used to denigrate these organizations. There were reports of government officials cashing in on donor enthusiasm for NGOs worldwide by instructing 'their nephews' to 'open an NGO' whenever new funding opportunities for the NGO sector arose; of unscrupulous politicians setting up their own NGO to garner votes; of 'ghost' and one-(wo)man operations with fancy reports and

<sup>4</sup> The Social Welfare Council is a semi-governmental body with representation from the NGO sector. Affiliation with the SWC is only compulsory for NGOs seeking foreign financial support, optional for all others. SWC affiliation also allows for tax exemption on equipment imported for projects, visas for foreign nationals to work with the NGO, government funding for NGO projects, and training in subjects such as project formulation, account keeping, orientation on NGO formation, and management.

<sup>5</sup> See Clark (1991) for an early statement on the subject; Fisher (1997) for a review of the literature on NGOs; Van Rooy (1998) for details of understandings of, and policies towards, 'civil society' in the international development circuit.

letterheads, but no projects. But if NGOs were viewed with suspicion in many quarters, it was also because of the confusion surrounding the very meaning of the term 'NGO'. NGOs were facing not just a credibility crisis, but also what Yogi (1996) terms an 'identity crisis'. In a recent interview (Pokharel 2001), the member-secretary of the SWC argued that the 'confusion' that still prevails concerning the nature and purpose of NGOs is due to the 'double registration system' that applies to non-governmental organizations, and to inconsistencies in SWC and DAO (District Administration Office) criteria for registration.<sup>6</sup> This definitional uncertainty is also a testimony to the relative novelty of the 'NGO concept' in Nepal.

This paper brings an anthropological perspective to the crisis. I attend to the confused and contradictory understandings and representations of 'NGO' on the ground.<sup>7</sup> I contrast what is locally known as 'NGO' (*en-ji-o*) with other kinds of non-governmental organizations, and try to bring out the specificity of this form of organization. The case for paying attention to such understandings is well made by Abramson (1999). Drawing on his fieldwork in Uzbekistan, he shows how conceptual ambiguities surrounding the terms of civil society and non-profit organizations can lead to the corruption of entire aid projects, as processes of cultural (mis)translation generate new forms of knowledge and practice, and new alignments and interests. It is the aim of this paper to describe some of the forms that these new kinds of knowledge and practice have taken in Nepal. This paper is primarily intended as a contribution to the ethnographic record, as there is still relatively little work by anthropologists on NGOs (Fisher 1997, Lewis 1999, Markowitz 2001). The work that has been done, moreover, has focused very much on 'front stage' practices and official 'NGO culture'—whether documenting the history or activities of NGOs or agency-beneficiary relationships (e.g. Hinton 1996)—and has left questions about the meaning of the NGO itself largely unexplored.

The paper is based on research carried out for a doctoral dissertation (Heaton 2001). The aim of this study was to investigate the various ways in

<sup>6</sup> NGOs are required by law to register with the District Administration Office in the district in which their central office is based.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the present paper falls squarely within the agenda that Lewis (1999) sketches out for anthropologists with regard to 'third sector' research. Existing and potential contributions are listed as "reveal[ing] more of the sector by providing detailed micro-accounts", "widen[ing] the scope of third sector research by throwing light on the diversity of organizational life and challenging Western bias and ethnocentricity", and "deepen[ing] the analysis of third sector research through its distinctive use of an actor-centered, processual analysis of highly complex issues such as organisational culture, and values" (1999: 73).

which members of 'elite NGOs',<sup>8</sup> drawn predominantly from the upper echelons of Nepali society, dealt in everyday life with the considerable social distance that separated them from their intended beneficiaries. Developments in the non-governmental sector were, in the 1990s, beginning to intensify these distinctive social groups' engagement with each other, and this was exacerbating questions of meaning of identities and opening up new avenues for the expression, exploration, and even exploitation of perceived social and economic differences.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, questions about the nature and purpose of NGOs featured centrally in the everyday exchanges and negotiations between these various parties. In this paper, I have chosen to highlight representations of organizational, rather than personal, identity. The representations of the NGO described in this paper are those of staff, beneficiaries, persons involved with the NGO on a day-to-day basis, and as they occurred in everyday life. These representations are informed by, and in turn inform, representations of NGOs in the national press, but media representations do not constitute a primary source for the data presented here.

The research for this project was carried out over the course of 15 months (October 1996 to December 1997), and took me to the offices of over 30 Nepali NGOs, both national and local and spanning Nepal's hills and lowlands, but predominantly in the mid- and far-western districts of Nepal. The core of the study consisted of intense fieldwork in the headquarters and field sites of two large, donor-funded, development NGOs. I refer to these as BEACON and CART in the text.<sup>10</sup>

### **Situating NGOs conceptually: a historical overview of non-state organizations in Nepal**

#### **A very complex sector**

The first challenge to my intention to conduct research among the staff of Nepali NGOs was the fact that there was, despite the efforts by bodies such as the NFN<sup>11</sup> to give NGOs conceptual clarity, considerable disagreement as

<sup>8</sup> Also called 'power NGOs', a term used by Frederick (1998) to refer to high-profile, Kathmandu-based NGOs which monopolize international funds and eclipse smaller, rural NGOs.

<sup>9</sup> See Gellner *et al.* (1997) on cultural politics in the wake of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy.

<sup>10</sup> These are fictitious names.

<sup>11</sup> The NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN) is one of the larger NGO networks in Nepal. According to the NFN any organization claiming the label 'NGO' should not be involved in party politics, personal benefit or proselytization; should give priority to people-centred sustainable development, improve the capacity of poor and marginal groups to meet their basic needs and aim at self-reliance, encourage pluralism and be democratic in

to what the label 'NGO' should include. Commentators agonized—in newspapers, in seminar rooms—over the meanings of 'national', as opposed to 'regional'; whether all non-governmental endeavours—professional associations, youth clubs, and the like—qualified or not; whether the term 'NGO' should be reserved for organizations involved in social and economic development alone (NGDOs) or not. They worried, too, about the voluntary (i.e. unpaid) component of the non-governmental sector, the extent of which was still largely undocumented, as against its remunerated component, and so on. In practice, remarked an eminent NGO activist, almost any organization could call itself an NGO without being challenged (Chand 1991), provided it possessed the 'right connections' at local governmental or international levels.

Today the non-governmental sector still presents a complex profile, in terms of social composition, the size of organizations (from pocket offices to large multi-sited organizations employing hundreds of workers), funding and support systems (from local fundraising at festival times to funding by international government and non-government agencies), working styles (from occasional voluntary inputs to full-time professionals), and ideologies. There is, indeed, no single school of thought nor even an identifiable political orientation, as displayed, for instance, by Thailand's non-governmental sector.<sup>12</sup>

And yet, in spite of this professed uncertainty, there was, and still is, a sense in which an 'NGO' was a distinct kind of organization, still in search of an identity. Before I turn to the main features which dominated popular and managerial representations of the NGO, I give a brief account of formal organized life in the 30 or so years that preceded the NGO explosion of the 1990s.

form and function; should have transparency in formation, criteria for community selection, income, and expenditure, financial management rules, annual audit report, experience of successes and failures, evaluation reports and process criteria, and a number of general members; should encourage people's involvement and decision-making in needs assessment, prioritization, action plans, group selection, selection of group leaders, resource generation and allocation, implementation and evaluation; should build coalitions to safeguard autonomy and facilitate image-building; should resolve mutual problems and promote mutual welfare; should monitor relationships with people, government, and donors; and should share experiences as a mutual learning process (NFN Newsletter, *Proaction* issue 1, September 1993).

<sup>12</sup> See Nartsupha (1991) for a description of Thailand's Community Culture school of thought, to which most local NGOs subscribe.

### Historical antecedents

During the thirty years preceding the 1990 MRD, non-governmental activity in Nepal had been relatively muted, a function, primarily, of the strict control the Panchayat regime sought to exercise over public life. Under this system of 'guided democracy', introduced by King Mahendra in 1960, all political parties were banned, and any formal organization was regarded with suspicion by the authorities.<sup>13</sup> With the Organization and Associations (Control) Act of 1962, the state sought to ensure that no organization would be set up without the prior authorization of the government. The Act principally targeted political parties, but also resulted in the dissolution of all organizations capable of competing with official organizations, and organizations with objectives that could be regarded as political, such as peasant and workers' unions and non-governmental students' and women's associations. In 1977, with the establishment of the Social Service National Coordination Council (SSNCC), non-governmental activity was dealt a further blow. Rather than a means to 'coordinate' and facilitate the social service of private Nepali citizens, its lengthy registration and registration-renewal procedures meant that the SSNCC operated as a further obstacle to such initiatives. Activists today feel that the SSNCC was little more than a controlling mechanism instituted to quell opposition to the Panchayat regime and a means for the queen to distribute patronage (Rademacher and Tamang 1993).

In order to allow for the expression of individual interests, the state set up a number of 'class organizations' representing, respectively, peasants, labourers, women, students, youth, children, ex-servicemen, and, after 1975, 'adults' for professions such as medicine and law. But these official organizations proved to have little popular appeal beyond their central, Kathmandu-based committees, where they were perceived and utilized by budding politicians as a platform to access the National Assembly or Rastriya Panchayat (Sharan 1983).

The only operational, non-state organizations that survived this period were organizations characterized as 'private', in the sense of 'self-interested',<sup>14</sup> organizations whose members were also its beneficiaries. These included,

<sup>13</sup> Under this system, all powers of government were vested in the king, and the national assembly, the Rastriya Panchayat, possessed only advisory powers. A main feature of Panchayat democracy was a ban on all political parties. The lifting of this ban was the basic goal of the 1990 Movement for the Restoration of Democracy or MRD (Hoftun 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Burghart (1994) points out that, under the Panchayat regime, the state did not aim to control people's minds, but rather the public expression of 'private', 'particularistic' interests; and it was only when non-state elements attempted to enter the public realm—whether by setting up organizations or through the activities of the private newspapers—that their efforts were met with repression.

for instance, the numerous forms of indigenous self-help documented by anthropologists doing research during this period: the *guthi* associations of the Newars of the Kathmandu valley (Vergati 1995, Toffin 1984); the rotating credit association found among Thakalis, the *dhikur* or *dhikuti* (e.g. Messerschmidt 1978, 1981, van der Heide 1988, Chhetri 1995); and the many forms of labour exchange such as *parma* found among both caste and non-caste groups, or the more elaborate *nogar* arrangement of the Gurung (Messerschmidt 1981). The 1960s and '70s also saw the establishment of a number of profession-based welfare associations,<sup>15</sup> but their functions were severely limited as they received little support from authorities in the face of pressure from powerful vested interests in the private sector. Several government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) were set up by the government during this period, partly to generate employment opportunities for the elites who supported the political system of the day. These GONGOs included the Nepal Family Planning Association (NFPA) in 1959, Nepal Red Cross Society in 1960, Nepal Children's Organization in 1964. Shrestha and Farrington (1993) also report that a number of PDROs (Professional Development and Research Organizations) were set up during the 1970s to absorb skilled labour that could not or could no longer find employment in the public sector. This concerned, principally, the growing middle class and well-educated government officials displaced by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) measures of the late 1980s and the growing problem of chronic underemployment in the bureaucracy (Shrestha 1990). PDROs were registered as private companies under the Department of Industry, rather than social service or social welfare agencies. They focused on the preparation and implementation of action oriented projects catering for the poor, and were primarily motivated by profit (CECI 1992).

Organizations with a more public agenda, i.e. those that sought to engage with the state on matters of public concern, only started to emerge in the late 1980s. As opposition to the Panchayat regime was gathering momentum and repression was becoming more severe, a number of human rights organizations were established, notably HURON (Human Rights Organization of Nepal) and INSEC (Informal Service Sector Center), both of which still exist today. During the MRD, they monitored human rights abuses, and mobilized national and international opinion and media coverage of the movement. They played a key role, too, in the drafting of the new constitution, ensuring the inclusion of internationally recognized human rights; and they mobilized staff and resources to ensure that the first general elections of 1991 would be free and fair, organizing voter education

<sup>15</sup> E.g. the Transport Workers' Welfare fund, set up in west-central Nepal in 1974, or the Rickshaw Pullers' Association of Bhairawa, founded in the early 1970s.

prior to the event and acting as observers during it.

While these organizations display features of what are termed Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)—in that they serve to ‘keep the state in check’ and seek to ensure the accountability of government officials to the general public—today these are not recognized as ‘NGOs’, but are popularly known by the title ‘human rights organizations’.<sup>16</sup> In contrast with human rights organizations, today’s NGOs strive towards political neutrality. The NGO sector in Nepal characteristically seeks to avoid overt identification with one or the other political ideology, and its relations with central government are publicly accommodating rather than oppositional in tone. NGOs are, moreover, appropriating idioms and functions formerly monopolized by the state, as we will see.<sup>17</sup>

#### ‘Serving outsiders’

The dominant form of organization during the Panchayat years was the Membership Support Organization (MSO), whose members were also its principal beneficiaries. In contrast, the typical post-1990 NGO is a Grassroots Support Organization (GSO), a service organization whose beneficiaries are not its members.<sup>18</sup>

#### NGO work as *sevā*

A remarkable feature of the Panchayat regime was the fact that the state claimed a monopoly on the ‘legitimate expression of public service’, or *sevā* (Burghart 1994),<sup>19</sup> and it was on this terrain that opposition to the partyless regime was often expressed. During this period, ‘public’ services or goods, in the sense of ‘something to which all people had right of access’, were referred to as *sarkārī*, literally ‘governmental’. Public and governmental on the one hand, and non-governmental and private on the other, were conflated. *Sevā*, moreover, has a long history in governmental discourse where it has been associated with the idea of ‘nation-building’, of *deshprem* or ‘love of the country’ (Adhikari 1996). In this case, *sevā* was envisaged as charitable actions carried out by individual citizens, while political and other interest groups were not seen as having a legitimate part

<sup>16</sup> In the literature they are known as ‘human rights NGOs’ but staff I encountered in the field were keen to emphasize that they were *not* an NGO.

<sup>17</sup> No attempt is made here to discuss the institutional articulation of NGOs and the state. On this subject, see Shrestha and Farrington (1993) and Dahal (1995).

<sup>18</sup> ‘GSO’ and ‘MSO’ are terms coined by Carroll (1992).

<sup>19</sup> *Sevā* is rendered as ‘service’ in English, and is used in Nepali in the context of government service (civil service), but also service to a deity, and service to society (*samāj sevā*).

to play in the process (Burghart 1996).

Today, *sevā* also forms part of official definitions of NGOs in Nepal. The Samāj Kalyān Ain (Social Welfare Act) of 1992, which regulates NGOs, places much emphasis on *sevā* in its definition of the kinds of activities (*samāj kalyān kārya*) it regulates. At the time of research, the NFN was lobbying government for an act specifically to set up a *samāj bikās* (‘social development’), rather than *samāj sevā* (‘social service’), organization (*sansthā*)—yet *sevā* was still presented as a motivation and description of NGO activity, including those of NGO members of the NFN. During the course of a seminar, the search for Nepali language alternatives to NGO (*en-ji-o*) led a prominent NGO activist to coin the phrase ‘*samāj sevā garne sansthā*’, literally, ‘organization doing service for society’.

NGO members would highlight the *sevā* aspect of their work in various ways. Official NGO discourse identified the *swayamsevak* (persons doing *sevā* voluntarily, volunteers) with the NGO, while other categories of workers were pushed into the background. In managerial speech, staff were ‘mere implementers... instruments’, and the names of volunteer board members, not those of staff, adorned brochures, newsletters, and occasionally the posters on the walls of NGO offices. In the field, staff would remind beneficiaries ‘it’s for you that we have come’, while NGO staff and management were dismissive of suggestions that they themselves might have received any benefit from the work of the NGO. And when describing their work or the rewards they had gained from it, NGO staff would avoid using words with an explicit connection to profit, in favour of the euphemistic *subidhā* (‘facilities’), *sahayog* (‘help’), or the ambiguous *sevā*.

*Sevā* distinguishes NGOs from *thekādārs*, the licensed middlemen who are generally attracted to infrastructural government projects, and today to NGO construction projects. Staff in CART reported that several local *thekādārs* had made repeated requests to them: ‘Give us the project, it’s difficult for you, it’ll be easier if we do it.’ Despite the pressure applied on the NGO, it had stood firm in its resolve not to utilize contractors. Locally powerful individuals, *thekādārs*, were infamous for making profits by paying labourers as little as possible and saving on materials. The likening of NGOs to *thekādārs* was not flattering and NGOs sought to avoid the comparison. Staff would point out that they did ‘awareness *ko kām*’ (the work of awareness): ‘we bring light’, they stressed, while *thekādārs* did not.

But NGOs are not *sevaks* in the conventional understanding of the term. That the notion of *sevā* was ill-suited to the task of representing NGO praxis was evident in the way *sevā* was used by different members of the NGO to refer to their own practices. The speaker always made clear that *sevā* was used metaphorically: their work was 'like' or 'ought to be like' *sevā*, rather than literally being *sevā*. As Mayer (1981) and Parry (1989) found elsewhere, it was expected of *sevā* acts that they be carried out by individuals, rather than by an organization, and out of public sight. There was also, among informants, a general view that the proper recipient of *sevā*, when carried out by non-state actors, was the kin or ethnic group.<sup>20</sup>

#### NGO social profiles

While legal definitions of NGOs<sup>21</sup> and NFN definitions do not state that they should serve 'outside their community', these do stress the service of 'others'—'the weak', 'the helpless', and 'socially backward groups'—and refuse affiliation to 'caste development' organizations. Traditional organizations and forms of self-help, moreover, are disqualified from the label 'NGO' by their 'membership' status, the fact that they serve their 'own' community or *sampradāya*, a term that is often taken to signify 'caste group' (*jāt*). Contra Shrestha and Farrington (1993), many NGO activists in Nepal today do not consider these organizations to be precursors of the current NGO movement. Rather, they inscribe themselves in a tradition of pre-1960 social movements associated with the struggle for democracy in Nepal and claim links with the Arya Samaj in India and Gandhi's work.

The idea that NGOs may be 'closed' or exclusive is a sore point with many activists and members of staff, and they are keen to rebuff public suggestions that they serve primarily 'their own', whether this group is defined in terms of kinship or ethnicity/caste, *āphno mānche* relations or *jāt*.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the NGOs in the study, management recognized only two criteria for membership and mobility within the NGO social space: qualification and competence. Management would strongly deny that any other consideration had influenced staff recruitment and they were quick to point out that some members of staff were from one or another ethnic group and that the numerical predominance of one ethnic group was an accident of which management had not been aware.

<sup>20</sup> In this *sevā* differs from ideas of disinterested action reported among Himalayan people. Fürer-Haimendorf (1967), for instance, noted that among the Sherpa merit flowed from activities benefiting the general public, even complete strangers.

<sup>21</sup> Social Welfare Act 1992, section 2(ka).

<sup>22</sup> *Āphno mānche* means literally 'one's own people', and refers to the close circle of kith and kin which regularly exchanges favours and information. See Bista (1991), Kondos (1987), and Adams (1998) for descriptions of the institution of *āphno mānche*. *Jāt* means, literally, 'species' or 'kind' and is rendered in English as both 'caste' and 'ethnic group'.

A number of scholars have expressed the view that Nepali society is characterized by an ethos of 'amoral familism' (e.g. Bista 1991) and that the notion of the public good is alien to Nepal (Macfarlane 1994, Burghart 1994). The cynicism with which NGO claims to altruism were received in many quarters suggested that, for local observers too, the NGO project of serving outsiders, through organized effort and in a non-partisan manner, was challenging and unprecedented. A look at the sociological profile of NGOs, their staff and their beneficiaries, requires that the views that NGOs are a 'closed shop' on the one hand, and a totally open organization, on the other, be revised.

Like the GONGOs and PDROs of the previous era,<sup>23</sup> the bulk of today's NGOs' founders and senior staff, and a number of fieldworkers, are drawn from the urban middle classes. The more senior NGO staff, NGO founders and directors in CART and many other elite NGOs, had in fact undergone their early professional training among the corps of 'modern bureaucrats' that emerged during the years of Panchayat democracy. But NGOs are not sociologically homogeneous, and they are providing new opportunities for a whole range of persons who cannot access government employment. These include: the young (post-SLC);<sup>24</sup> students not yet sufficiently qualified to enter government service; recent graduates; those qualified in 'modern subjects' like zoology, microbiology, or environmental science, who would find few outlets in the government sector, as it privileges qualifications in subjects such as commerce or administration; persons entering the job market without the several years of experience in remote areas required before settling in semi-urban work. Most members of staff in the NGO case studies were between twenty and thirty years old; only senior staff (including managers) exceeded forty years of age. CART staff had entered the NGO either straight after finishing their studies or while studying part-time, or had worked in both government and non-governmental organizations, international and national, often as consultants in the case of senior staff or as fieldworkers in the case of junior staff. CART core staff had come from families with a history of government work or were former *jamindār* (landlords) in Nepal's Tarai districts. Many members of the field office staff had practised agriculture, although none had done so as their primary occupation. Rather, field office staff who had

<sup>23</sup> A study by PACT in 1988 (quoted in CECI 1992) found that the staff of 'service type NGOs' and nationally registered organizations were highly educated (65% with tertiary education) and predominantly 'middle class'.

<sup>24</sup> The school leaving certificate or SLC is obtained by means of an examination at the end of 10th grade in secondary school and is the rough equivalent of GCSE level.

not been able to secure work in government organizations or NGO projects in their home area, nor migrated in search of work had, for the most part, held teaching jobs in local private or state schools.

The second NGO case study revealed a similarly varied sociological profile, and many members of staff, like many in CART, would not have been able to access government employment. In BEACON, few members of staff had ever held a post in government or other non-governmental organizations, whether national or international. Many had practised agriculture as their main occupation, a few had sufficient land to rent out and worked as 'managers' of that land. A very large number of staff had also worked as local teachers, one as a school headmaster, several more as NFE teachers in INGO, government, or NGO projects, including those of BEACON. As in CART, a number had come straight from school or 'campus'. BEACON senior staff and founders, on the other hand, formed part of a 'local gentry'. Drawn from the most influential (and often economically most secure) members of local society, they included sons and daughters of village notables such as former *pradhān panchas*, and were informal leaders in their own right as local teachers and social workers. What is true for occupational history also applies to the ethnicity of NGO members. While it was the case that the larger, donor-funded NGOs were run and staffed, at the central office level, by members of high castes and the Newar *jāt*,<sup>25</sup> at the field-office level, 'local' or 'ethnic' staff were given preference. The same logic applied to the regional identity of NGO members: most of the central office staff were Kathmandu residents, while field office staff came from very different areas, mostly rural, from the Tarai to the far-western hills or the eastern mountain zone. While it would be incorrect to claim that *āphno mānche* considerations played no role in the staffing of NGOs, at least initially in the search for suitable candidates, NGOs do seem to recruit their members from a sociologically broader pool of potential employees than the governmental sector.

NGOs are also seeking to expand, socially, the reach of their programmes: they seek to serve 'outsiders'. In these two case studies, as in many NGOs in the research, the social distance between staff and beneficiaries, gauged principally with reference to the notions of *jāt* and *āphno mānche*, was considerable. NGO projects targeted an 'area', and within given localities, criteria such as educational level ('the illiterate'), economic status ('the poor'), and gender ('women') were used to whittle down the group that qualified as 'beneficiaries'. No organization—with the exception of the Dalit

<sup>25</sup> There were notable exceptions: FEDO (Federation of Dalit Organizations) or BASE (Backward Society Education) are examples of highly esteemed NGOs run by, respectively, untouchables and Tharu people.

organizations—defined their target group officially in terms of *jāt*,<sup>26</sup> nor on the grounds that the target population included *āphno mānche* to established members of the organization. This focus on the geographical area in defining their target group led, both in CART and in BEACON, to an over-representation of low castes among project beneficiaries. And instances of kin or *āphno mānche* relations between staff and beneficiaries were very few and more likely than not to be fortuitous. Senior project staff, co-ordinators and 'technical' staff or 'specialists' were generally outsiders to the project district. In the NGOs considered in this study the majority of field staff was not recruited 'locally', i.e. from the district in which the project was implemented. Moreover, where 'local staff' such as junior staff, NFE supervisors, 'peons',<sup>27</sup> and lady staff, were recruited by the project, these persons generally did not work within 'commuting' distance of their home village. This meant that even 'local staff' had to take up rented accommodation (*derā*), returning home at weekends.<sup>28</sup> Only the organization's 'paid volunteers' (women Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) in health/family planning projects, or NFE facilitators, either male or female) worked in their home village and area.

In adopting the language of public service to speak of their own activities, and redefining their target group as 'the public', NGOs were, therefore, taking on functions formerly monopolized by the state. At the same time, NGOs were trying to distinguish themselves from the state, from its work culture, and from its approach to development.

#### Developing a unique work culture

Senior members of NGOs have brought with them to the NGO sector the experience of government and INGO sectors, and these have informed their vision of the NGO and their own work practices.

<sup>26</sup> This can open an NGO to accusations of 'communalism'. The exception were the Dalit organizations. There are several Dalit organizations in Nepal (FEDO, Women's Dalit Organization) and numerous INGOs as well as governmental organizations worked with the Dalits. Besides the 'special case' that untouchables represent, working for the Dalit to the exclusion of other *jātis* was felt to have been made acceptable by 'national and international frameworks' that legitimized concern with the issue of untouchability.

<sup>27</sup> The Hobson-Jobson defines 'peon' as a Portuguese word meaning 'footman, foot soldier' and, by extension, 'orderly or messenger'.

<sup>28</sup> This pattern is consistent with the governmental recruitment practice that has been in force in Nepal since Rana times (see Caplan 1975 for a description of Rana and Panchayat era practice). A similar pattern prevails today: top officials such as the Chief District Officer, Local Development Officer, District Forest Officer, Chief of Police, and the various semi-governmental corporations are outsiders to the district, being assigned to their posts by the Public Service Commission in Kathmandu, but recruit menial staff themselves locally.

### NGOs as 'international organizations'

The beginning of direct and close relations with international development organizations and charities was another novel development for the non-governmental sector in the post-1990 setting. This was a reflection of both the changed legislative and policy environments in Nepal and the increased interest on the part of donors and governments worldwide in working with these organizations. Whereas during the Panchayat years donors were required to deposit development funds with the SSNCC, which then redistributed the funds as it saw fit, today funding details are settled between the INGO and the NGO and funds deposited directly into an NGO bank account. The role of the SWC in the relationship between INGO and NGO is limited to the assignment of an NGO 'counterpart' to INGOs (from a list of NGOs included in the INGO project proposal) to implement approved projects. The financial contribution of foreign donors to Nepali NGOs is considerable: in 1997, it was estimated that the total funds channelled through NGOs amounted to US\$150 million, while the total official development assistance to Nepal totalled US\$391.8 million (*The Rising Nepal Friday Supplement* November 7 1997). Despite the absence of 'hard data', most NGO specialists agree that the vast majority of Nepali NGOs are financed almost wholly by INGOs. Ridell in a 1994 report placed the percentage of foreign funds in the overall NGO budget at 88 percent, and the contributions from local and governmental sources at 8 and 4 percent respectively.<sup>29</sup>

A cartoon published in the national daily *The Kathmandu Post* (November 1997 vol. 5, N<sup>o</sup> 274) depicted the reception area of a five star hotel, crowded by scores of Nepali men in suits carrying briefcases. One man turns to another standing expectantly next to him and asks: "Heard that there's a millionaire from abroad and I've come here to solicit some donation for my pet NGO. Are you all guys for [sic] the same mission?"

<sup>29</sup> This applies mostly to 'elite' NGOs. Local non-governmental organizations such as youth clubs, on the other hand, have long been raising funds locally through organizing games or 'lucky draws' during the main festive season (*bhailo māgne*), giving private tuition to high school students, or in one case running a small shop in the bazaar and putting the profits into the organization's fund. Some NGOs generate resources through general assembly membership fees or donations or money saved from regular project grants by keeping 'overhead costs' (mostly salaries) low. The projects implemented with these locally raised funds, I was told, were necessarily less ambitious than INGO funded schemes. Typically they would consist of literacy or other kinds of educational programmes, as, for instance, environmental awareness campaigns in local primary and secondary schools. In the case of one wealthier NGO, internally generated resources were routinely used to carry out surveys or small pilot projects in order to appear attractive to donors. The NGOs in the study received funds from a variety of sources, both bilateral and non-governmental.

The briefcases all bear the letters 'N-G-O'.

Comments such as these, on the common cultural style of NGO and INGO, were a leitmotiv of lay discourse on NGOs. In the project area INGO patronage was perceived by staff to be central to the identity and the standing of their organization. Kishor, an NGO fieldworker, explained: "Look, if a donor gives money, the community has the misguided belief that we have made progress; and if the donor stops funding, the community may think we [the NGO] are done for (*khatam*)."<sup>30</sup> The director of another organization, which had successfully established itself without donor support, expressed the view that "[Not having a donor] is difficult for management and from identity point of view. People from NGO say we're not an NGO because we don't take money from donors, and government say we are a business." His organization, significantly, did not label itself an NGO but presented itself in its own literature as a 'Social Development Organization'.

Generally, and as the commentators above indicate, NGOs and INGOs were noted for what they shared, rather than for their differences. They shared, first of all, a common language: English. Rarely used in office conversation, English was the language of NGO writing culture. NGOs' written material was almost wholly scripted in English, except for documents destined for HMG consumption, such as NGO constitutions. Administrative rules and regulations, contracts, newsletters, brochures, project proposals and reports—many of which were produced for the NGO or INGO public—were all in English. Very few NGOs had a written culture that did not produce the majority of its texts in English. Some INGOs had begun accepting proposals in Nepali and have considered developing 'partnership manuals' for their NGO counterparts in Nepali, so as not to disadvantage grassroots organizations. Generally, however, status was still attached to English-writing organizations, as it indicated a highly qualified workforce and the promise of competently implemented projects. Many NGOs would seek out and recruit at least one English graduate to polish their reports.

INGO-NGO similarity was also explicit in the timetabling of the office day. The NGO working day would begin, as in INGOs, at an early 9 a.m. to 9.30 a.m., well before government organization staff had finished their morning meal (the latter would then make their way to their office for a 10.30 a.m. to 11 a.m. start). NGO staff often would forgo the large 'morning meal' of *dāl*, *bhāt*, *tarkārī*, opting for an earlier, smaller meal at home and 'tiffin' during a 'lunch hour'. 'Tiffin' would consist either of a larger meal at a nearby restaurant or of some items bought from a local

*bekari*: cakes, pastries, or chocolate-chip cookies. "I have got used to eating lunch," Samriti once told me: "When I was at St Mary's, there we'd have toast for breakfast and a proper meal at lunch time."<sup>30</sup>

NGO/INGO material resemblance was even more striking when contrasted with HMG offices: the whitewashed walls, grey carpets, green plants, and wicker chairs, the jeep or Hero Honda motorbike parked outside modern, cement 'villas' which housed INGOs and NGOs, contrasted sharply with the large Rana buildings of government ministries, their long corridors, and austere décor. The local government office shared with these grander departments a taste for armchairs and cushions clad in white, locally stitched cotton covers, which were all but absent in NGO offices. In NGO offices INGO-compatible software and computers with 'qwerty' keyboards, faxes, and photocopiers, replaced the manual typewriters, one set with roman lettering and another with devanagari, found in HMG offices. The *topi*<sup>31</sup> was remarkably absent in NGO premises, while the place was replete with fashionable 'jean pants', 'sweaters', or shirts, and, on rare occasions, suits; females would wear fashionable women's clothing, either recognizably Western or Indian (*suruwāl kurtā*), and saris on occasions which called for a more formal outfit. In the field 'baseball caps' with backpacks in some synthetic material were the norm.

The main distinction between GO<sup>32</sup> and NGO material culture is that, while GOs stressed the 'local', 'hand-made', and 'traditional', NGOs used modern, machine-made materials. Where NGOs did have recourse to 'traditional' materials and designs, this was generally in less public areas of their organizational life. In BEACON, an organization that placed much emphasis on its 'grassroots orientation', only the less accessible offices were made with local labour, materials, and design. Unlike NGOs from Thailand's Community Culture school of thought, or non-governmental organizations working to promote the culture of one or the other ethnic group in Nepal ('cultural associations'), NGOs did not generally seek 'more authentic ways of life' in the rural or the traditional. Their resemblance to their INGO patrons was perhaps less a product of their desire to flatter their donors through mimicry than a means to distance themselves from the 'traditional' image of governmental praxis.

INGO-NGO similarity was not perceived, by NGO members, as a product of the imitation of ways of being and doing that were the property of foreign organizations. English, in particular, was not seen as the exclusive

<sup>30</sup> One of the most popular girls' schools in the country, located in Kathmandu and run by Jesuit missionaries.

<sup>31</sup> The traditional Nepali hat, worn by men; it suggests a 'formal' dress.

<sup>32</sup> Abbreviation for 'government organization'.

property of INGOs and their staff, but a *lingua franca* of the world of development agencies. Rather, these persons saw INGOs and NGOs sharing a common, transnational, and progressive 'cultural style'.<sup>33</sup> The element within Nepal's non-governmental sector that was explicitly opposed to foreign funding and denounced INGOs as hegemonic was not very pronounced. For some members of BEACON and field staff in CART, one of the prime benefits of becoming an NGO worker was the opportunity this offered for meeting Westerners and practising English. At the same time, NGO members would seek to distance themselves from INGOs, disclaiming too much familiarity with INGO languages and ways. One session of an INGO-organized INGO-NGO conference I was privileged to attend happened to be facilitated by a member of a private, Nepali, management consultancy organization. Concluding the first exercise through which he had just guided participants using both English and Nepali, he commented: "There is a need to contextualize—conshextualize," he giggled, as he sought to play down his all-too-correct English usage. "It's my second language, *testai cha*,"<sup>34</sup> he added. NGO members pointed to differences in the scale of their respective practices: while NGOs organized their infamous 'talk-fests' in five star hotels, INGO staff would eat there on a daily basis;<sup>35</sup> INGOs were housed in large cement villas in the more upmarket areas of Kathmandu or Lalitpur (Baluwatar, Kopundole), NGOs in smaller cement houses clustered in desirable but less sought-after quarters of these cities (e.g. Naya Baneshwore, Babar Mahal); NGO office-workers made do with a single jeep, INGOs had a fleet of vehicles to ferry their staff to and fro; INGOs paid their staff higher wages; and whereas NGOs provided a chance to study locally or in neighbouring countries, INGOs were known to sponsor 'study abroad', by which was meant rich countries of the West.

#### NGOs as field organizations

For many NGO workers NGO work was as different from GO work as it was close to that of INGOs. Most expressed a dislike for the proceduralism of government jobs; the practice of promotion via political connections; the paucity of opportunities for training, compounded by a general 'disinterest in learning'. NGO members would draw attention to their work ethic: "Look, everybody here is busy; if you go into HMG offices, you will find no one is working; they will be chatting, drinking tea." In the NGO there was no room nor time for chat; a stroll through the office would find staff

<sup>33</sup> This expression is used by Gupta and Ferguson (1997) to point to a logic of surface practices without necessarily mapping such practices onto a 'total way of life' encompassing values, beliefs, attitudes, etc. as in the usual concept of culture.

<sup>34</sup> 'That's the way it is'.

<sup>35</sup> This is the case for (some) expatriate staff, not the INGO's Nepali staff.

bent over their desks, sitting at a computer, answering business phone calls or running out of one meeting to another. Directors' exhortations to staff during meetings emphasized 'good time management'—meeting deadlines, beginning and finishing meetings at a set time—and diligence: working long hours, keeping busy at all times, reading the literature on a given development subject during slack periods. For these persons, government work, whether they had experienced it as an employee or as the consumer of public services, was plagued by 'hypocrisy', 'a sense of wasting your time', 'no discipline'.

At any point in time, NGOs tried not to run programmes in the same places as either government organizations or other NGOs, but in practice avoiding duplication was made difficult by GOs' and NGOs' preference for 'responsive populations'. This meant that, to a great extent, non-governmental and governmental development activities overlapped in physical space. But NGOs and GOs did not frequent these same spaces in the same manner. NGO staff reputedly spent more time in individual sites, had more contact with beneficiaries, including those frequently by-passed by government projects, namely low-caste and non-caste groups. Government workers, I was told, would either remain in their office or call beneficiaries to a location nearby the office. "*Rājāko kām*," said one fieldworker, explaining the attitude of government workers, "*kahile jālā ghām?*"<sup>36</sup>

For many in the NGO sector, what distinguished NGO organizational culture from GO culture above all else was the NGO attitude towards the rural or 'the field'. NGO development work distinguished itself from past development efforts through this increased attention to the *gāun*, or rather, the *phild* ('field'), which they travelled on foot, rather than on horseback like erstwhile Panchayati officials, or in an air-conditioned 4x4, like many INGO employees. The NGO was first and foremost a field organization. In official NGO discourse, the mastery of the *phild* constituted an NGO's principal challenge, but also a seal of its authenticity and worthiness as an NGO. The *phild* and its challenges were the focus of an NGO's investment in its staff: the value placed on the *phild* is further stressed by the fact that many of the recipients of field training were not, in fact, fieldworkers, but higher status staff who were not required, according to their job descriptions, to spend much time in the *phild*. Training given to staff in the NGO concerned almost exclusively 'fieldwork skills' (PRA training, gender-in-development training) while lacunae in staff's accounting or management skills were expected to be made good 'on the job'. After 'donor time', the time of the *phild* was the most significant means through which NGO work

<sup>36</sup> A proverb: literally, 'the work of the king, when will the sun go down?' The reference was to government work involving little more than whiling away the hours until the end of the day.

was organized. "We fit our time around theirs [field staff]," I was told by CART's director; I was encouraged to schedule my own research according to the same principle. In the field the exact date and time for monthly meetings were set by beneficiaries, and working hours had to be modified in accordance with beneficiaries' agricultural calendar and the weather. In everyday exchanges, moreover, social hierarchies were to some extent reversed. NGO staff and beneficiaries were very aware of the relative social distance separating them. In an earlier period of development work, this distance would have been accompanied by specific patterns of deference. There was still, on the part of senior NGO fieldworkers, an expectation that they should be 'respected' by project beneficiaries. While in government service, Mahesh, a field-worker, told me, beneficiaries would kill a chicken and cook it for the field worker: "They would call you *hajur* ('sir') and offer you rice beer with both hands," he reminisced.<sup>37</sup> The younger fieldworkers had no such experiences to recall and the considerations of status and behaviour befitting the different statuses of beneficiary and benefactor that concerned Mahesh were alien to them. Some did complain of a lack of 'respect' on the part of beneficiaries, and were irked by the fact that beneficiaries 'always want[ed] to bargain for more'. Yet, many would have been as embarrassed by shows of deference as Mahesh would have been pleased, and did not expect beneficiaries to behave in this way.

The idea of grassroots participation in development is not new to Nepal. Panchayat democracy itself was officially defined as a 'grassroots' or 'village' democracy; Nepal's Small Farmers' Development Programme (SFDP), a governmental programme that has been hailed as one of the best models in participatory rural development in Asia, was launched in 1976; and the language of 'mass participation' in development activities featured prominently in the 6th Five Year Plan (1981-1985). NGO and government development practices differ not so much in terms of the premises of the ideology of development to which each subscribe, but in terms of the intensity of their adherence to this ideology. A more thorough adherence to ideals of participatory development and the value of the grassroots was evident, for instance, from the way in which NGO activists extolled fieldwork and fieldworkers—frequently and emphatically—while such enthusiasm is lacking from the accounts of participants in government-run programmes.<sup>38</sup> Through this more intense commitment to field practice,

<sup>37</sup> *Hajur* is the highest honorific form of the personal pronoun 'you'; offering an item with two hands rather than one is also a mark of respect.

<sup>38</sup> See Pigg (1992) for an account of the negative values associated with the *gaun*, Brown (1996: 47) on the failure of the Back to the Village National Campaign launched in 1967 by King Mahendra, and Dhungel (1986) on the unpopularity of Tribhuvan University's National Development Service scheme, under which students at TU were sent to villages for one academic year and required to teach and engage in various

NGOs are further distinguishing themselves from past development praxis and are developing a culture which, NGO members claim, is unique to the NGO.

### NGOs as development resource

Like Ridell in 1994, I found that it was difficult to gauge the contribution of NGO project activities to their beneficiaries for lack of sufficiently conclusive data: NGO members were remarkably upbeat about the very positive changes they had seen in beneficiary communities since the beginning of the programme, while members of beneficiary communities would, again and again, play down the contribution of the NGO to these changes. A large farmer was already producing the crops the NGO claimed to have introduced prior to the NGO's arrival; a beneficiary village had already been operating a village-wide fund-raising and credit scheme, prior to the onset of the NGO's SCO (savings and credit organization) project. On the other hand, NGOs in the research were prized as a source of employment and cash as well as a number of services, including transport and communications, which were hard to come by in the areas in which they implemented their projects.

### Income generation

I have two friends who are now working for the World Bank; they say they don't know what the WB has done to alleviate poverty but it has alleviated their own poverty very well!

Mr Bista, NGO director

The director's remark captures the essence of popular conceptions of NGO work. On the whole, NGO wages were higher than government wages. Field supervisors in one NGO obtained a monthly salary of Rs 1,200, a peon in the central office, Rs 1,600. A technical staff member in the same organization received a monthly wage of Rs 6,000; a technician in another NGO could earn up to Rs 8,000 a month, a project manager over Rs 20,000, while in a third NGO salaries ranged from Rs 3,000 to Rs 10,000 per month. In contrast, an officer in an HMG office could expect no more than Rs 3,400 to Rs 5,000 per month.

Besides their regular staff, NGOs also relied on a number of 'casual workers'. An NFE facilitator working on the NGO's project could get from Rs 400 to Rs 450, a 'child development' class facilitator Rs 800 per month, in one NGO. Another NGO would pay its NFE facilitators Rs 600 per month. Beneficiaries providing voluntary labour for NGO projects (*shram*

development activities in the village.

*dān*) were paid for some, but not all, tasks (e.g. carrying cement was remunerated, getting stones was not; the rate was between Rs 40 and Rs 45 per bag carried).

For both staff and beneficiaries the TA/DA or *bhattā* (travel and daily allowance) given out by the NGO to its staff and beneficiaries when they were required to travel for work-related purposes and on the occasion of office-based (rather than village-based) trainings, represented another valued source of cash. In one training in CART's project area, two men almost came to blows when it was realized that one of them would not get a *bhattā*; both men had come from the same users' group when the NGO had specified that each user group should send only one representative. A local school teacher explained: "Women feel '*hāmilāi ke pāine ho?*' (what is there for us to get?) about NFE. If we say it's education, they will not be interested, but if we give each woman Rs 5, they'll come in great numbers." Again, levels of TA/DA varied, from around Rs 200 for staff, and Rs 80 for beneficiaries. During group meetings called by the NGO and village-based trainings, a 'snack' (*khājā*), often a packet of biscuits, was provided to each of the participants.

The provision of financial rewards to staff was not seen as 'profiteering' but as a means to sustain the high quality of NGO staff's work, which ultimately benefited not staff, but the project beneficiaries. Management claimed high wages were necessary in order to attract competent, qualified staff and preventing them from looking for 'other opportunities' to make ends meet while carrying out the NGO's work. Government staff, infamously, were frequently forced by their low wages to take other opportunities, e.g. consultancies while on leave from their government job, or in their spare time, as university teachers were known to do; or to take bribes. Several members of project staff were actually working with the NGO while on 'unpaid leave' from their permanent government post elsewhere in the country. NGOs in the study were relatively untouched by the absenteeism that plagued the governmental sector.

### Service provision

In addition to good salaries and international patronage, NGOs are, in the general public's view, synonymous with a plush working environment. It is, in fact, part of the appeal of NGOs to prospective employees. This distinguishes them from 'indigenous' or 'grassroots' organizations. A senior staff member of BEACON recalled how its transition from social movement to NGO was marked by the acquisition of 'facilities':

We used to work 24 hours; we didn't know where to eat, where we'd stay; we'd forget anything other than the community; wherever we went they would welcome us and cut a chicken. Nowadays we have become big (*thulo*) and do not go everywhere. If people get *subidhā* ('facilities'), they want more *subidhā*... Then we were totally 'volunteer'; we didn't go by bus because we didn't have any money, but we walked everywhere. Nowadays I don't go if there is no bus... I myself say I won't go if I don't have a sleeping bag. I need *bhattā* to eat, a sleeping bag, a motorcycle... Today expectations are a bit high. We say BEACON *aphīm khāyo* ('it has eaten opium'). It has taken money from the donor and now it can't live without it—like heroin.

NGOs are bringing to rural areas material goods and facilities of different sorts, which are often not available locally, either in the bazaar or in government offices. In the cases of CART and BEACON, these facilities included the office's transportation facilities, its 4x4 or motorcycle; the office's fax, phone, photocopier, or computer; office and project stationery, notebooks with or without the NGO's logo, good-quality pens; shoulder bags, trainers, caps, sleeping bags earmarked for field staff; sewing machines, rickshaws (reputedly), broom grass rhizomes, pipes or cement destined for one or the other project activity; kerosene to light up night NFE classes. Beneficiaries and staff did not have equal access to these material goods. Beneficiaries were rarely able to acquire much more than NGO stationery, and only beneficiaries who happened to be related or a neighbour of a member of staff would be able to access facilities such as the office's photocopier or a ride in the NGO's 4x4. Beneficiary access to project resources was also more limited in time than staff's access to these resources. In CART, stationery was given to user groups without charge for the first year of the project; thereafter, groups were expected to purchase their own.

NGOs had to protect such riches from pilfering, whether by staff, friends, or beneficiaries. Receipts were issued with each item of stationery handed out to staff or beneficiary. The same applied to the NFE classes, which were supplied with a blackboard, chalk, and record books. The NGO's storekeeper was remarkably attentive to staff's stationery use, and at least on one occasion thwarted some staff member's plan to offer his cousins new office fountain pens on his return home. BEACON resorted to painting serial numbers and the name of the NGO on office furniture to guard against the accidental 'borrowing' and 'loss' of any item of furniture. Faxes were put under lock and key, phones had their 'long distance calls' facility removed; and people wandering in from the bazaar in search of a photocopier that worked would be told that ours had, unfortunately, just

broken down. Always on the look out for possible beneficiary misappropriation of project 'goodies', staff in BEACON redoubled their vigilance after it was discovered that one water tank had been built with hardly any of the cement given by the NGO. Under the cement plastered surface of the tank lay almost dry stone walls, while the cement economized in the process had all but vanished. It was presumed sold.

### Training

NGOs are also a source of specific and valued kinds of knowledge. New technologies of fieldwork being developed in various institutions around the world were being made available to Nepali NGOs, principally through their connection with donors and international networks. The financial outlay required to access trainings, publications or WWW sites dealing with cutting edge development debates and training in field methods (RRA, PRA, Focus Groups, Gender Training)—and develop one's own training materials—meant that they were available to few organizations other than donor-funded NGOs.

Opportunities for formal training were regarded by various *karmāchārīs* from governmental as well as non-governmental offices as one of the principal features distinguishing NGO and GO work environments. Local government officials in the CART project area welcomed the occasional GO-NGO workshops organized by the NGO, and were keen for CART to provide more regular opportunities for acquiring new skills and knowledge. Such opportunities were few in GOs, while it seemed, during field research, that I spent most of my time sitting in trainings of various kinds; staff training and beneficiary training succeeded each other with clockwork predictability. The most telling illustration of the significance of trainings in NGOs was a CV showed to me by a friend and INGO staff member. His personal details, work experience, and education, which occupied a tightly packed two pages, were dwarfed by the 'trainings taken' section of the CV, a five-page listing of training after training. NGOs brought to development work not just expanded opportunities for learning, but a real training culture, and this fact had pushed many NGO staff into NGO rather than GO work. Being staff meant not only that one would 'learn many things', but also acquire a taste for learning itself, as Surya, an assistant to an NGO accountant, pointed out:

I have learnt a lot since being staff... I've learnt how to write what paper in what way and how to speak in which place and how to do what type of 'motivation' with which type of person; what kind of education will be of benefit in what place. These things can be learnt in organizations, with members, with *aguwā mānche* ('leader

people'). The benefit I've gained is the notion that one must study, one must do a job, or do some business. One cannot raise one's family by depending on agriculture and I can show this to others in my village.

#### Accessing middle-classness

Field staff often stated that the financial benefits they gained from the NGO were negligible, insufficient to affect their material lives back home in significant ways. Their choice of schooling, clothing, however did change; as did the facilities to which they had access. In BEACON *kāryakartā* would point to changes in the clothes and lifestyle of central office staff: their wives discarding the traditional dress in favour of more costly saris (a garment associated with higher castes and sophisticated urban dwellers); their children's recent enrolment in private, English-medium schools ('boarding schools'). These choices and the use of (modern, high-status) office facilities allowed staff to enhance their standing, locally, through the performance of everyday tasks such as writing letters or travelling short distances. Liechty (1994) defines middle-classness as an attitude towards education, and many in rural areas who aspire to urban middle-classness pay for private education for their children. The specific work and learning culture of the NGO meant that staff, particularly those members without a history of salaried employment, as they entered this sector of activity also gained access to many of the trappings and values of middle-class Nepal. NGOs, it seems, are acting as an alternative to the educating, in private or state schools, of the next generation: they are providing a fast lane to modern, 'developed' (*bikāsīt*), middle-class lifestyles, for members of rural society. For many in rural areas, the path to development lay not so much in the NGO drinking-water projects, the modest sums available through NGO SCO activities, but in accessing the various resources and facilities that NGOs brought to rural areas.

#### Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have sought to describe the many and differing understandings of 'NGO'. I described the themes that dominated representations of the NGO, and how NGOs both resemble and differ from other kinds of organizations, past and present. Using both etic and emic criteria, I have shown how NGOs distinguish themselves from these organizations in function, ideology, and membership, and also through their 'modern' material life, their field-orientation, and their 'training culture'. I have suggested, too, that NGOs are struggling to create a unique identity for themselves, and it is with this purpose in mind that I recounted the staff meeting in BEACON's field office. As Dharma, the field coordinator, and

his staff, battle it out over whether staff are yogi or employees motivated by self-interest and profit, whether NGOs are *sevaks* or *thekādārs*, it becomes clear that the confusion as to the nature and purpose of NGOs goes right to the heart of the NGO itself.

This state of confusion has profound consequences for NGO activity. It encourages suspicion of these ill-defined organizations and their ill-defined—hence suspect, ulterior, because undisclosed—motives; this, in turn, saps the morale of activists and hampers staff's attempts to establish good working relations with their beneficiaries. It also provides a rich ground for the playing out of the various rivalries that plague the sector as well as its relations with government organizations. As such, it is clear that NGOs are ill-fitted to play the 'civilizing' role—the building of trust and cooperation between members of society—that CSOs are expected to play by the international community. It is telling in this respect that many in the INGO sector in Nepal were loath to apply the label 'civil society' to the NGOs with which they dealt. If these organizations were seen by donors to play a vital role in the development of civil society in Nepal, it was principally in their capacity as intermediaries: NGOs were charged with the task of strengthening grassroots organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), indigenous organizations, co-operatives of various kinds, so that these could develop classic 'civil society' functions, such as enforcing greater accountability, on the part of local government bodies, to the local population and ensuring transparency in the latter's operations.

I noted also that, in the late 1990s, there was no clearly spelt-out alternative to the models of development agents as either private businesses (*thekādār*, 'licensed middlemen'), one or the other branch of the public services, or individual 'social servants' (*sevak*), unattached to any organization and involved in social service for their own community. And yet, there was a sense in which NGOs were unlike other kinds of organizations. Many younger 'core' staff saw NGOs as a real alternative to GO employment and could not conceive of themselves working in a sector that they considered old-fashioned and corrupt. The NGO, distinguished principally by its material and work cultures, was fast becoming the heart of the identity of a newer generation of job-seekers. The most senior NGO members, founders, and board members, stated explicitly that, for them, the NGO represented a means to distance themselves from governmental practice and the traditional, state elite. For these persons, the NGO was an important institutional as well as ideological resource as they sought to re-situate themselves in the fast changing political landscape of the 1990s. Evidence suggests that the sociological impact of the 'NGO phenomenon' may be greater still. I have pointed out that NGOs in the study were providing

opportunities for social as well as economic accumulation for persons who would not have made it into the government or INGO sector. I suggest that this is likely to continue as NGOs are generating a demand for new skills, aptitudes, attitudes—the ability, for instance, to move with ease between the world of five-star establishments and the field, or, as I showed elsewhere, the ability to ‘bracket’ social and cultural differences.<sup>39</sup> It is early days yet for the NGO sector in Nepal, and recent political developments may radically alter the character and evolution of the sector; but in the mid and late 1990s it was certainly the case that NGOs, rather than “reinforc[ing] caste and class distinctions” (Mikesell 1992: 3), were paving the way for a new set of actors to make a mark on public life in Nepal.

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#### Appendix: Acronyms used in the text

CBO	community-based organization
CHV	community health volunteer
CSO	civil society organization
DA/TA	daily allowance/travel allowance
DAO	district administration office
GO	government organization
GONGO	government-organized NGO
GSO	grassroots- support organization
INGO	international NGO
MRD	movement for the restoration of democracy
MSO	membership support organization
NFE	non-formal education
NFN	NGO federation of Nepal

<sup>39</sup> See Heaton (2001) for discussion of the notion and practice of ‘bracketing’.

NGDO	non-governmental development organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
PDRO	professional development and research organization
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
RRA	rapid rural appraisal
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SCO	savings and credit organization
SFDP	Small Farmers’ Development Programme
SSNCC	Social Service National Coordination Council
SWC	Social Welfare Council

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## The Management of Natural Resource Conflict: Case studies from Nepal

Bishnu Raj Upreti

### 1 Introduction

Population pressure and poverty are said to be the main causes of natural resource degradation (NPC 1998) and the main accelerators of competition and conflict in Nepal (Upreti 2002). Natural resource management practices in Nepal are rapidly changing, alongside social and political changes, advances in technology, increased information flow, and market liberalization. These changes are posing new challenges to existing policies, plans, institutional arrangements, and legal provisions related to natural resources, and are becoming a source of conflict (Kaplan 1995). In addition, natural resource conflicts are exacerbated by contradictions and inconsistencies in the application of formal legal procedures and customary practices, by diversities in local norms and beliefs, and by management differences (Oli 1998). Despite the fact that the government and donors invest much effort, time and money in natural resource management, and despite the fact that natural resources-related offices are instituted in all districts, conflict is increasing (Khadka 1997). Land, water, and forests are the three most important resources for the survival of the vast majority of the Nepalese population (NPC 1998). The recent vehement opposition to, as well as strong support for, the government's land reform initiatives clearly indicate the importance of land reform in Nepal. Therefore, conflict over these three resources is the main focus of this paper.

'Conflict' in this paper covers clashes of interest, disagreements, public protests, physical assaults, and the filing of cases in courts. Conflict occurs at different levels (between individuals, between individuals and a group, and between groups) for different reasons. Feelings of suspicion, injustice, anger, and mistrust help to inflame conflict (Martinelli and Almeida 1998). This paper explores natural resource conflicts caused by these factors and attempts to explain how such conflicts are managed in daily practice in rural Nepal. While analysing conflict, I will consider discrepancies between

rules and behaviour, social relations, and the incompatibility of goals, actions and interactions framed in their specific context and time. Two key concepts, negotiation<sup>1</sup> and mediation,<sup>2</sup> are employed in an analysis of conflict management practices.

## 2 Setting the scene: background and context

Nepal's economy depends largely on the use of the natural resources base (NPC 1998). The historical context is a strong determining factor in the present governance of natural resources and management of associated conflicts. Prior to 1734, when present-day Nepal was a fragmented group of petty states, people were encouraged to cultivate as much forest and pasture land as possible. In turn, they had to pay a certain portion of the returns to the state (Malla 1997, Regmi 1978). In this way, the state had begun to regulate the available natural resources. This led to the establishment of control mechanisms: various departments and regional offices, policies, acts, rules and regulations were established to systematically control the use of available natural resources.

Up until 1950 the state granted tax-free land to officials, religious organizations, and individual favourites of the kings or rulers (Malla 1997). Traditionally, land was considered as the property of the state and this land is called *raikar*.<sup>3</sup> Only the state had the right to alienate land through sale, mortgage, or bequest. Thus the state granted state-owned *raikar* lands to individuals in various forms.<sup>4</sup> Almost one third of Nepal's agricultural and

<sup>1</sup> 'Negotiation' is a voluntary process, which includes any instance in which two or more people meet face to face and communicate in order to reach a mutually acceptable solution of the conflict issue (Kaplan 1995). Negotiation helps to discover mutually acceptable outcomes through interaction, persuasion, or inducement. In the case of resource-use conflict, negotiation produces distributive and integrative solutions (Buckles 1999).

<sup>2</sup> 'Mediation' is an intervention by an acceptable, impartial, and neutral third party. The third party has no decision-making authority but assists contending parties to negotiate an acceptable settlement (Bush and Folger 1994). The mediator's neutral role as facilitator involves assisting parties, privately or collectively, to identify the issues in conflict and develop proposals to resolve disputes.

<sup>3</sup> See Regmi (1978). The meaning of *raikar* land has changed since 1951, from crown-land to land owned by individuals. *Raikar* land ownership denotes ultimate state ownership of lands which were actually cultivated by individuals as direct tenants of the state. The usufructory assignment of *raikar* land to individuals and institutions was a deliberate means of rewarding and ensuring their loyalty, paying them for services rendered, and promoting social and religious activities.

<sup>4</sup> These were *birtā*, *jāgir*, *serā*, *rakam*, *rājya*, *guthi*, and *kīpat*. A *birtā* grant was given to a noble as a reward for a service rendered to the state. It had no time limits and it could be rented out or inherited until confiscated or recalled by the state. *Birtā* owners

forest lands had been granted to individuals by 1950, and the remainder belonged to the Ranas themselves (Malla 1997). Local functionaries, all favourites of the Ranas, implemented the land-grant policy in the villages and were able to ensure the greatest benefit for themselves. They obtained a great deal of land from the state through *jāgir* and *birtā* grants, and rented these lands to peasant farmers under tenancy arrangements. In this way, local functionaries turned into landlords. Gradually, to ensure their rent, landlords introduced the *kut* (contract) system in which only those tenants who were able to pay high rents could get a contract (Ghimire 1992). After 1951 the government nationalized all the forest in Nepal to release land from *birtā* holders, especially from Rana familiars (Regmi 1978).

The history of land-tenure systems in Nepal shows that the mode of production and distribution of natural resources was very feudalistic in nature. Therefore, conflict was ubiquitous, not only between landlords and the landless but also between the state and the poor, and between the state and landlords (Ghimire 1992). Government-initiated land reform measures had only negligible success (*ibid.*). Nepal has a highly unequal society in terms of land distribution, mainly due to its feudalistic socio-political structure. The execution of stable land rights granted by the Land Act is weak, and customary land rights are heavily slanted in favour of the elite and restricted to maintaining patron-client relationships. The private appropriation and sale of lands which were traditionally under communal control by powerful politicians and privileged local landlords only exacerbates conflict (Upreti 2001). The strong opposition of the landlords to the

usually had full rights to possess, occupy, sell, lease, subdivide, and bequeath their lands. Most *birtā* lands were not taxable. *Birtā* has become the foundation of the modern, private, land-tenure arrangement. *Jāgir* landholding was more conditional and subtle and often granted to government servants rather than to members of the ruling elite. A *jāgir* assessment was usually an assignment of the income from *raikar* lands in lieu of a salary, and it could not be sold. *Jāgir* rights lapsed together with the termination of employment, or at the discretion of the government. *Serā* was a form of land tenure explicitly used by the royal palace to meet food-grain and other land-related requirements. *Rakam* is a form of land tenure where cultivators have compulsorily to provide unpaid labourers to the government as carpenters, masons, and postmen. *Rājya* was a modified form of land tenure granted to members and relatives of royal families. This land-granting practice was common up until the end of the Rana regime. These forms of land were abolished in 1959, with the enacting of the *Birtā* Abolition Act, and converted to *raikar* land (New Era 1988: 28-31). *Kīpat* was an ancient type of communal land tenure in which an ethnic community was granted land by its king in recognition of traditional communal tenure. Headmen had the authority to grant individuals the right to cultivate certain areas and collect forest products from other areas. In the *guthi* land tenure system, land is granted to charitable or religious organizations. The *guthi* land tenure system also included the endowment of private lands (obtained from the state) by individual landlords for religious purposes (Regmi 1978).

government's recently initiated land reform programme is a clear indication of deep-seated landlordism in Nepal.

### 2.1 The study area: Dolakha district

Dolakha District is situated in the central mountain region, 133 km north-east of Kathmandu. The total population of the district was 191,073 in 1998, with 39,554 households and a population density of 87.2 persons per square km (Dolakha District Development Committee 1999). The population is made up of Chetri, Brahmin, Damai, Kami, Sarki, Tamang, Sherpa, Jirel, Surel, Newar, etc. The majority of the population is Chetri (34.2%) followed by Tamang (16%), Brahmin (11.4%), and others (38.4%). The Brahmin, Chetri, Newar, and Tamang are socio-economically and politically dominant in the study district.

### 2.2 The case study sites

The case study sites were situated in the Pawoti and Sailungeshwor VDCs. First, all conflicts were recorded in a reconnaissance survey in order to select specific cases for in-depth study. Before 1982, Pawoti and Sailungeshwor were both under one village panchayat, but then, for political reasons, they became two village panchayats. The demographic setting and socio-cultural characteristics of both VDCs are similar. The total population of the study site is 8,825, with 1,738 households and an average family size of 5.08. The major caste and ethnic groups are Brahmin, Chetri, Tamang, Damai, Kami, Sarki, and Newar. Although the Brahmin caste is not a majority of the population, it dominates almost all social and developmental activity.

The socio-political history of this area over the past 300 years has had a great effect on the present management of natural resources (especially land and forests). Three hundred years ago, a Brahmin family came from the Kumaon area of India via western Nepal and settled in the study site. Gradually this family enlarged and expanded to a larger area (currently 400 households). Later, during the Rana regime, one member of this family was employed in the post of *subbā* to work in the Rana administration. He received many favours from the Rana regime and emerged as a local functionary to rule the region. He also received a lot of *birtā* land. In this way his extended family became very powerful. The sons and grandsons continued to serve the Rana regime until 1951. Even after 1951, these families maintained a stronghold on the village because they were the *mukhiyās* and feudal landlords. Likewise, another Brahmin family (called Koirala) came from Dumja (Sindhuli district) to settle in this area. It has since grown to 50 households and expanded its influence. The Koirala family became powerful when the *subbā* nominated the head of this family as the *Mukhiyā* of the village. He also received some *birtā* lands from the

Rana family. These two families emerged as a strong power centre in the study area. They were rich local landlords with good access to higher authorities. They were educated and resourceful, compared to the general public. They accumulated a large proportion of the land and controlled most of the forests. In short, the descendants of the two immigrant families dominate the study sites. Now the size of the landholdings, wealth, and education are major factors explaining social variation in the study area. Land is the single most important resource for survival, and a symbol of social prestige. The land distribution patterns in the study site show that less than 10% of people own more than 60% of the cultivated land. About 40% of 'middle-level' people own 30% of land and the remaining 50% of the population own less than 10% (Upreti 2001).

Power relations and social organization at the research site changed dramatically after 1990. The powerful elite and landlords were marginalized, and the earlier respect and obedience disappeared. With the collapse of the traditional power structure there was a drastic shift from a rigid feudal social organization to a more fluid power relationship based on political ideology (Upreti 2001).

### 3 Methodology

A good conflict research methodology has to facilitate an analysis of the behavioural patterns, interactions, strategies, manoeuvres, discourses, and struggles of the conflicting parties. To collect such information qualitative research methods are more suitable (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) and therefore they were used in this study. First, all common conflicts over Nepalese natural resources were traced out. Then, based on information collected at national level, the Dolakha district was selected for the study of natural resources conflict. The most common natural resources conflicts occurring in the Dolakha district were documented, and the five most prevalent issues were identified. These were related to irrigation, drinking water, community forests, land ownership, and development intervention. These five categories of conflict were all found in the Pawoti and Sailungeshwor VDCs, and therefore the case studies were conducted there. The in-depth study was conducted through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, life histories, informal discussions, archival study, and observation. Semi-structured interviews with politicians, bureaucrats, and key people involved in conflict were conducted. Secondary data were collected from various documents and reports. A total of 56 focus group discussions (6-10 people per group), 55 key informant interviews, 15 life histories, 150 general informal discussions, and 200 semi-structured interviews were conducted during the 25 months of fieldwork. Most of our

informants and respondents were local villagers. The other respondents included staff from the District Administration Office, the court, and offices related to land, forest and water; political leaders; lawyers, police personnel, workers of NGOs and trade unions, researchers, INGO staff, senior bureaucrats, social workers, and members of users committees, Village Development Committees (VDC), and the District Development Committee (DDC). The findings of the in-depth study were compared with eleven reference groups from other districts of Nepal.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4 Synopsis of main social conflicts in the study area

Several social conflicts were observed in the study area. These included transaction-related conflicts over issues such as lending and borrowing,<sup>6</sup> the forging of documents, wage payments, and the sharing of livestock and crops, etc. Transaction-related conflicts were also connected with land mortgages, or the terms of access to water sources during periods of water shortage, etc. Protests against caste-based injustices, such as untouchability and prohibitions on entering temples and other religious or public places, also led to conflict. These conflicts were also linked to restrictions on access by certain groups to forests or bodies of water around religious places. Polygamy, child marriage, inter-caste marriage, fraudulent marriage, separation, alimony, divorce, and the partition of parental properties were other major issues leading to conflict. Marriage-related conflict has a direct link with natural resources conflict. For example, landlords used to marry several wives in order to maintain their farms, but later their sons would quarrel over the best land. Elite men also see a woman with land resources (e.g. in cases where there is no other heir to her father's or her husband's land) as a potential second wife. Therefore, land is often the cause of family conflict. Theft, looting, physical assault, damage of property, character defamation, drug and girl trafficking, prostitution, sexual abuse (harassment, rape, and molestation), religious

<sup>5</sup> These are groups organized in villages by community members to accomplish functions such as management of forests, irrigation, pasture land, trails and bridges, seed production, etc. About 15-25 households are organized into each group. NGOs, donor-funded projects, and government agencies support many such groups. Among the 11 groups consulted, two were from Kanchanpur district (Mahendranagar Municipality and Jhalari VDC), two from Banke district (Kohalpur and Bageshwori VDCs), two from Chitwan district (Bhandara and Piple VDCs), two from Kaski district (Arbavijaya and Bharatpokhari VDCs), one from Ramechhap district (Ramechhap VDC) and two from Dolakha district (Bhimeshwor Municipality and Kavre VDC).

<sup>6</sup> Village moneylenders charge up to 60% interest rate (5% per month). If borrowers fail to pay the principal amount and/or the interest within the agreed time frame, they confiscate property (land, goats, animals, or other valuable materials) from the house of the borrower, which leads to severe conflict.

tension (between Christians and Hindus), and witch-hunts were other sources of conflict reported in the study area. Similarly, development interventions had introduced numerous conflicts, which were later linked with natural resources. Crop failures and damage to fruits caused by insects or hailstorms were often linked with witch-hunts. Conflicts created by development interventions were not only obstructing the successful implementation of natural resource management projects, but also creating misunderstanding and tension in society (Pradhan *et al.* 2000).

#### 5 Overview of the most common natural resource conflicts in the study area

##### 5.1 Land-related conflicts

Land-related conflicts were the most serious in terms of their intensity and social effects. The main land-related conflicts documented in the study area were related to boundary demarcation, changes of ownership, looting of and damage to crops, tenancy rights and evictions, the alignment of new canals, roads, paths, or drinking-water systems on particular lands, obstruction of existing paths, land encroachment, mortgages, the use and control of *guthi* land and its revenues, determining land quality, and the sale, reclamation, inheriting, partition, and gifting of land. As a part of the land reform programme the government carried out a land measurement programme (*nāpī*). However, this single project created more than 5,000 conflicts in the study district.

To begin *nāpī*, the Survey Office requested the relevant documents from the Land Reform Office (LRO or *Mālpot Addā*). The LRO provided the documents and instructed the Mukhiyās of the research sites to make their records available to the surveyors. The land measurement started with the establishment of a benchmark in the field. The landowner was meant to receive compensation for this, but this did not happen. Notice of the impending survey had to be given to both VDCs. Notice had also to be posted in designated public places to inform all those concerned. The aim of such notices was to ensure that land owners and tenants who claimed ownership of or some other rights on particular lands (e.g. communal grazing) had a chance to make their claims known to the surveyors within the period stated in the notice. The posting of such a notice and the presentation of claims are extremely important, because the survey regulation states that if claims are not presented within the given time, unclaimed land will be recognized as *ailānī jaggā* (land owned by the government). But it was reported that the general public did not see such notices, and they were not able to make claims to their own lands, or public ownership of pasture and forest lands, in time. Consequently, those people

who were clever and aware of these rules claimed public lands and the lands of weak people by offering bribes to the surveyors. The surveyors had deliberately omitted parts of more than 50 people's lands in order to bargain for bribes. Even when people noticed that their land was omitted, or recorded under someone else's name, a simple objection and counter claim were not sufficient. Claimants had to present evidence such as the testimony of neighbours, tax payment receipts obtained from Mukhiyās, and the traditional record kept by Mukhiyās, in support of their claims. Here again manipulation could occur, because party politics could influence neighbours' testimony and the Mukhiyās manipulated/falsified many records and receipts. The survey teams, who were supposed to investigate the validity of various claims and conflicts, were intimately involved in bribery. The surveyors, authorized to grant land ownership rights to people on behalf of the government, enforced their authority over the disputed lands to meet their personal interests.<sup>7</sup> After completion of the survey, the Survey Office distributed ownership certificates popularly known as *lāl purjā* (red seals). A *lāl purjā* contains information on the identity and residence of the owner, the plot number, location and size, and the identity of its tenants, if any (New Era 1988). The respondents explained that several of them paid bribes to receive *lāl purjā* and tenancy certificates. Otherwise, it would take weeks and months to receive these certificates. Paying a bribe was cheaper for the villagers than travelling to the expensive district headquarters and waiting to obtain a *lāl purjā* without paying a bribe.

### 5.2 Forest-related conflicts

The most common forest-related conflicts documented in the study area were concerned with ownership, identification of users, access to forest products, royalty payments, illegal use of non-timber forest products, and the hunting and poaching of wild animals and animal products from forests. Other conflicts were related to encroachment, collection of firewood, use of forest trees to build bridges, use of wood for cremations, and leadership (people interested in active politics used forest user group (FUG) leadership as a stepping stone). Poor and especially low-caste people were excluded from community FUGs. Conflict was frequently observed when licensed traders from outside the community collected medicinal plants in higher altitude forests that were managed and used by villagers. Recently, a conflict erupted between the Federation of Forest Users and the government's forest department, due to the government's decision to

<sup>7</sup> There is a provision which allows a case to be brought to court within 35 days if one of the parties is not satisfied with the decision of the surveyors. However, the decision of the court is based on legal evidence, which is mainly the available documents, prepared by the district LRO, Mukhiyās, and surveyors, and obviously favouring the surveyors.

change the provisions of the Forest Act on the rights and responsibilities of community forest users.

### 5.3 Water-related conflicts

Major conflicts over water reported in the study area included source disputes, conflicts around the sharing of water for different purposes (drinking water, irrigation, power generation), and conflict over the payment of compensation for damage caused by the construction of water-related projects. Other conflicts were related to contributions to the maintenance of irrigation and drinking water systems, the ambiguous roles and responsibilities of water user associations, government technicians and officials, and the payment of watchmen.

### 5.4 Case studies

Based on the documentation of common conflicts in the study area, the following five cases were studied to examine the causes of conflict and the measures taken to resolve them.

#### *Case one: Conflict between head-end and tail-end farmers in an irrigation system*

A deep conflict arose from the extension of a 1.5 km farmer-managed irrigation system built 67 years ago. The canal was extended in 1984 with a financial grant from the Dolakha District Panchayat. Originally, 150 households of mixed caste and ethnic composition were using this canal with the following rules and regulations:

- When water scarcity occurred farmers had to share the water on a rotational basis.
- Before every rice transplanting season, it was compulsory for all users to repair the canal.
- The *Kulo Rekhdekh Samiti* (Canal Maintenance Committee) had to monitor the canal on a regular basis.
- A *sāncho* (wooden water gate) was used to distribute water in periods of scarcity.
- Users paid four *pāthī* (approximately 14kg) of rice per hectare of ricefield to pay for the caretaker.
- If conflict arose among the users, it was reported first to the *Kulo Rekhdekh Samiti*. It would be referred to a formal authority only if the *Kulo Rekhdekh Samiti* failed to resolve the conflict.
- If someone violated these rules for the first time (s)he had to pay a fine decided by the *Kulo Rekhdekh Samiti*. In case of repeated violation of the rules, (s)he would not be allowed to take water from the canal.

These rules and regulations were ignored after the canal had been extended (2 km were added to serve an additional 100 hectares of lands). Local political leaders (the descendants of the Subba and Koirala families) extended the canal mainly to secure votes in the local election, and for financial gain. As a result, there was not only a scarcity of water during the peak agricultural season but also increased tension between the farmers of the head-end and the extended section of the canal. Before this political intervention the Kulo Rekhdekh Samiti had resolved all irrigation conflicts. Water sharing and maintenance of the canal had also been very effective. After the intervention, people were unhappy with the misuse of money received from the government. Particularly, farmers from the head section felt ignored, because the canal had been extended without consulting them. So they stopped sharing water with the tail-end farmers, and the conflict became very serious. The tail-end farmers approached the local authority and the district administration to settle the conflict. This was unsuccessful and eventually the canal was almost ruined after the extension. The government apparatus was unable to resolve the conflict.

*Case two: Conflict between village elites and local people over forest and grazing land*

The control of a community-managed forest and pastureland was the main cause of this conflict. In 1970, the local elite and powerbrokers started to terrace the forest and pastureland, which had been under communal use and management for centuries. The land invaders were powerful local politicians of high socio-economic status (the descendants of the Subba and Koirala families discussed above) with strong links to the bureaucracy. They encroached on the forest and pasture land, undermining the symbolic and economic value the local community had traditionally attached to it. Though the local people respected the status of the invaders, they strongly opposed this invasion, and had made every effort for four years to reclaim the invaded land. However, the invaders were not ready to compromise, and the conflict became more intense. Eventually, the protesters filed a case with the government's Mobile Officer (*sarbasampanna daudāhā*<sup>8</sup>), who ruled in favour of the community. However, the invaders did not leave the land. Again, the community members made an appeal to implement the decision. But the appeal turned into a negotiation. It was decided that the invaders would not encroach further on the forest and pasture land, but the invaded parts of the land would not be returned to the community. The legal procedures were too complicated and expensive for the community members to proceed, and

<sup>8</sup> This was a very powerful post created by the government to make field visits, inspect cases on the spot, and decide immediately.

they sought no further legal remedy. Thus they had to sacrifice a part of the land which they had been using for centuries.

*Case three: Conflict between two villages over a spring water source*

The sharing of a source of drinking water lay at the core of a conflict between two villages. The households of both villages were of similar socio-economic condition and the same Brahmin/Chetri caste group. The existing users were not ready to share the water source with the people of the next village (the potential users), arguing that there would not be enough water left for them to irrigate their fields. The potential users wanted to share the water source, because they suffered from a severe lack of drinking water. Several protests, oppositions, and complaints were filed with the local administration, but these authorities were not eager to resolve the conflict. They avoided taking sides and therefore the conflict continued. However, this 8-year active conflict between the two villages was settled in a mutually beneficial way due to the constant efforts of community members, a local NGO, a local priest, and a woman leader. Eventually, the following conditions were worked out to negotiate the conflict:

1. The existing users would either sell the source to the potential users, on the condition that the source would be accessible for both groups of users, or
2. The existing users would allow water appropriation on the following conditions:
  - The potential users would construct a reservoir tank close to the source to collect water.
  - Water would be collected in the reservoir tank, mainly at night time.
  - If a case of water shortage arose during rice-transplanting, water would not be collected in the reservoir tank during that time.
  - The potential users would take responsibility for the conservation of the source.
  - The existing users would inform the potential users and the Mediation Group before releasing water for rice transplanting.
  - Both groups would apologise for the past conflict.
  - If misunderstandings emerged, both groups would discuss and seek to resolve them locally, and seek other options only if they were unable to resolve them at local level.

This proposal was thoroughly discussed in a succession of meetings between the existing users, staff of the NGO, other villagers, and the potential users. In the end, both groups of users accepted the second option. In this way, a serious conflict was solved at local level.

*Case four: Conflict between developers and local people in a donor-funded irrigation development project*

A severe and long lasting conflict erupted when the District Irrigation Office constructed an Asian Development Bank loan-funded irrigation project in the Sailungeshwor and Pawoti VDCs in 1991, without any consultation with local people. A handful of political workers from the ruling party and irrigation technicians decided on the alignment, source, and coverage of the canal and started to construct it. Later, when the Heads of these two VDCs came to know about the large amount of money associated with this project they became very eager to become involved, but the proponents were not interested in including them. Thereafter, villagers found out about this project and they asked for details and raised several questions. However, the proponents were not ready to answer these questions, or address the concerns raised by the general public. As a consequence, the villagers became suspicious of the proponents' intentions and started to oppose the project. The two VDC heads backed the opposition. The disgruntled villagers went as a delegation to the District Administration Office to oppose the development, and filed a case. The Chief District Officer called a meeting, inviting all concerned people, and finally gave his verdict, which included some compromises and adjustments. Accordingly, the user committee formed by the proponents was reorganized and the heads of both VDCs and other political leaders (even non-users) were included in the committee. Nevertheless, local people were not satisfied with the decision. As a consequence, two groups (i.e. supporters and opponents of the project) emerged. The former included government officials (irrigation office, CDO), VDC heads and local elites involved in the project, and the latter included disgruntled local people and the political opponents of the VDC heads. Local people were unhappy mainly because their fundamental concern about the 'inappropriate place for the intake in the source and the alignment of the canal' had not been taken into account. They were also excluded from the user committee and the project management system. Furthermore, the newly reorganized user committee divided the construction work and the total amount of money available for the project between its members, which led to more serious conflict because of the misuse of money and materials. Villagers registered a corruption complaint with the 'Special Police', who rejected it, ruling that the work done by the user committee had been legal. None the less, opponents did not agree with the verdict and continued their protests. The District Irrigation Office, which was responsible for the effective implementation of the project, supported the user committee. So the conflict remained unresolved, and local society remained quite divided on this issue. The legal process was expensive, complicated, influence-driven, and opaque to local people.

*Case five: Conflict between landlords and tenants on Guthi land*

A deep-seated conflict was resolved after 39 years when tenants strongly organised to defend their rights over *guthi* land. Fifty landowners (from the Koirala family discussed above) had constituted the ruling elite in the village for several generations. They kept part of their land as private *guthi* (religious land trust) for the maintenance of a temple, and they gave their *guthi* lands to tenants for cultivation. However, they were not ready to grant the tenancy rights claimed by 120 tenant farmers, who had mobilized local priests and relatives of the landlords, and approached the landowners. Finally they decided to buy the rented land and they paid a nominal price to the landowners twice, but still the landlords did not transfer the land. The tenants discussed this problem several times and consulted knowledgeable people on their legal options. But, due to the complicated nature of legal procedures, expensive fees, and their fear of the legal decision going against them due to the influence of power and money, they did not take this further. Instead, they stopped paying the rent. Then the landlords opted for a legal solution and filed the case in the Guthi Sansthān (the governmental organization dealing with *guthi* matters) and the Land Reform Office. Both offices ruled in favour of the landlords. Nevertheless, the tenants did not accept the decision and continued their demand to transfer ownership rights. The tenants were strongly organized, they had learnt from past mistakes while dealing with landowners, they had discussed their problems with other people in the village, and they were able to win the support of all villagers. Their determination to establish ownership rights to the *guthi* land finally won over the biased legal verdict. The legal solution could not evict them from the tenanted land. If they were evicted they would be landless and could create a severe problem for the Pawoti VDC, politicians, and the government. Realising this complexity, the landowners finally transferred the ownership rights to 120 tenants and the tenants paid Rs 100,000 in return.

## 6 Major factors affecting conflict over natural resources

The issues discussed in section 5 indicate that legislation, policies, and strategies, as well as changing power structures and social relations together with political changes, have provided fertile ground for natural resource conflict. Competition over access and control, the ineffective jurisdictional roles of the government agencies, and political and commercial interests have encouraged the growth of conflict. The major portion of the natural resources-related conflict cases were, in one way or another, related to the appropriation, use, and control of natural resources. Numerous land- and forest-related conflicts were created, due mainly to the unsystematic and incomplete land registration and record-keeping process.

The major factors in natural resource conflict are discussed under three sub-headings.

### 6.1 Power structures, social relations, and conflict

The power relationships in a community are one of the main determinants of natural resource conflict. The outcome of a conflict situation can be determined by the efforts of a few actors, contrary to the interests of the majority (Ghimire 1992). When power is mobilised in conflict resolution the result is mostly win-lose (Khadka 1997). The case studies clearly indicate that the use of power has often created an unfavourable situation, full of resentment and fear. The social and legal confrontation over the control of natural resources is determined by the relative strengths of the parties involved. Nevertheless, interdependence between conflicting parties is common in community-level natural resource conflicts. In the case of the landlord-tenant conflict described above, a variety of economic and political changes over a 39-year period had led to a fundamental transformation in power relationships. Local landlords would be less likely to negotiate with ordinary villagers if social relations remained unaltered.

The protesters' struggle for the forest and pasture land undoubtedly changed group relationships. All of these cases also indicate the 'accommodative', 'interdependent', and 'tolerant' behaviour of the disputants. Although the disputants were entangled in conflict, their social relationships were not brought to an end: working relations were maintained. Such interdependence helped to bring them to a negotiated settlement. Despite widespread conflict, a certain sense of accommodation and social harmony was still prevalent in the village. However, the generally tolerant and accommodative behaviour of community members gave the powerful elite room to exploit them (Upreti 2001).

Corruption is becoming an increasingly important factor in the resolution of conflict in Nepal (cf. Kaplan 1995). The use of bribes and the mobilization of *āphno mānche* networks to win conflict cases is clearly indicated in four of the five cases discussed above. Some exclusionary social institutions in the study area were fostering unequal social relationships and the partitioning of specific cultural, economic, and political processes in relation to particular social groups. The empirical evidence indicates a strong connection between government staff and powerful people, and between the local elite and politicians. The farmer-managed irrigation system, forest-pasture land, the ADB-funded irrigation development project, and the *guthi* land conflict cases indicate that such relations strongly influence the nature of negotiated outcomes. Poor people have less access to government bureaucracy, and power brokers are advantaged in that situation. Some groups benefit in a conflict situation from using

political relations, *āphno mānche* networks, economic power (bribery), geographical proximity, and knowledge networks.

### 6.2 Contradictions between formal laws and local practices

Laws and regulations govern the management of natural resources. The presence or absence of rules and their effective execution are major issues in natural resources conflict (Oli 1998). The natural resources traditionally used for one particular purpose are now allocated to different purposes according to new regulations (Khadka 1997). The state is inducing changes in traditional use patterns through various acts. For example, the Water Resources Act 1992, the Forest Act 1993, the Land Reform Act 1964, and the Local Self Governance Act 1999 contradict several traditional resource management practices. As indicated in the case studies, these changes affect or alter access and control patterns, as well as ownership rights.

### 6.3 External development interventions and conflicts

External natural-resource management interventions have introduced several conflicts in the study area. Several erupted simply because of technocratic, top-down development interventions (cf. Kaplan 1995). Most of these were designed to fulfil the vested interests of a circle of technocrats, bureaucrats, and politicians (Upreti 2001, 2002). As observed in the ADB-funded irrigation case, the most commonly reported conflicts arising from development interventions in the study area were related to the misuse of money and materials, and abuses of authority. External development projects funded by donors and government departments had created several conflicts, mainly due to their ignorance of local dynamics. Citing the land measurement and registration programme of the government, Kaplan (1995) argues that when outsider organizations enter a village setting, the incidence of conflict increases enormously. Various research findings have also independently demonstrated that conflict increases as a consequence of interventions by external development organizations which lack a proper understanding of local systems (Upreti 2001, Pradhan *et al.* 2000). The first and fourth cases represent examples of such conflicts.

## 7 Common conflict management practices

The following section will discuss the conflict management practices that prevailed in the study area. They are categorized into practices adopted by formal organizations and informal practices. Formal practices are those which involve official procedures, guided by the government's rules, regulations, and laws. Informal practices are those which are adopted by the local community. Informal practices do not usually work within the government's legal framework. Disputants' choice of a particular category

of practice to resolve conflict depends mainly upon their knowledge and interests and the resources at their disposal, as well as the availability of such forums in the specific context. However, sometimes the formal and informal methods are combined.

### 7.1 Informal conflict management practices

In the study area most conflicts were resolved locally in informal ways. It was observed that elderly people often worked as mediators. Though they lacked any legal status, villagers commonly accepted their judgements (Upreti 1999). Such informal conflict management practices are a blend of local customs, a sense of justice, and religious feeling, rather than official procedures. Written record keeping is not common in informal conflict management practices. Elderly and socially respected people, traditional landlords, teachers, *jhānkri* (shamans), priests (*purohit*), and *mukhiyās* are principal players in the resolution of a wide range of local conflicts. These people do not only mediate conflict as neutral third parties but also generally decide on the terms and conditions for the negotiation (Khadka 1997). The majority of local negotiators did not charge a fee for their services, but they often expected some contribution of physical labour from the negotiating parties in return. Some negotiating parties also voluntarily gave them payments in kind, such as ghee, chickens, vegetables, fruit, etc. In all the above cases, informal conflict management practices were used to settle conflict. However, these were mixed with formal practices too. Local people reported that an enormous number of conflicts were resolved through local practices.

It was found that people involved in community conflict management had acquired negotiation skills through practice. They had the time, credibility, temperament, willingness, and interest to become involved in community-level conflict management. Generally they listened carefully to both parties. They also inspected the place of conflict (if relevant), assessed the past track records of the conflicting parties, and consulted neighbours if appropriate. They called meetings in public places if necessary to get the opinion of neighbours. Then, on the basis of their assessment, they made their decision (cf. Khadka 1997). The conflicting parties in most instances accepted such decisions. They used many cultural, religious, and political proverbs (which highlight the importance of resolving conflict locally rather than resorting to formal processes) to convince conflicting parties. According to the context and situation, they also threatened, harassed, and sometimes even beat offenders to reveal the truth or to force them to accept the prescribed settlement. Occasionally, they also integrated their resolution measures with a formal process (for example, sometimes the police were invited to execute the decision if the proven offender did not abide by it).

The main reasons people gave for their preference for informal mechanisms were their trust of local mediators, the maintenance of social harmony, and a lack of the resources (money, knowledge, and time) they would need if they were to opt for a formal conflict resolution process. Nevertheless, the credibility of such informal conflict management mechanisms is being eroded by social and political changes (Khadka 1997), particularly after 1990. Now, many people affiliated to political parties do not trust these local negotiators/mediators/arbitrators. They question their fairness, due to their potential bias towards supporters of one particular political party or another.

In informal conflict management practices, although men are the dominant decision-makers, women play an important role at household level. The role of women was crucial to the successful resolution of the springwater source conflict. Women exert pressure on male members of their family to reach a compromise (Upreti 2001). In some cases, women acted as mediators between husbands or other family members who fell into a conflict with neighbours. It was also found that men used women as a means of getting the sympathy and favour of villagers. Women were sent to the elderly people or local leaders to report the case in the hope that this would make their case stronger.<sup>9</sup> When people get into conflict, each party tries to win the support of neighbouring villagers. In several cases, husbands were in deep-seated conflict, while their wives had maintained normal relationships. It was also observed that men brought conflict cases to the formal process of resolution more frequently than women. The reasons expressed were socio-cultural restrictions, fear of defamation, and a lack of decision-making authority and resources among women. Several conflict management activities carried out at local level are based on traditional values and customs (*rīti-thiti*). Nevertheless, not all customs were effective in terms of equity and justice, and some promoted unequal power relations in the community.

### 7.2 Some examples of local systems of conflict resolution in Nepal

#### *Dharma bhakāune* (sacred test)

This method is based on the principle of an 'oath of innocence'. It is commonly used when there is a lack of other evidence. During the process of conflict resolution the negotiators perform activities such as taking contending parties to the local temples and asking them to undergo a test, and asking conflicting parties to take an oath of innocence while touching sacred materials such as *shāligrām* (a sacred stone), copper, sacred plants such as peepal, basil, and *dub* grass, or sacred books. Sometimes

<sup>9</sup> It is commonly believed in the study area that women do not come out to report a problem unless they are seriously victimized.

conflicting parties are asked to hold their children while performing such vows (Khadka 1997). These tests are undergone in the presence of villagers, negotiators, and the conflicting parties. A sense that it would be sinful if the matter were falsified plays a strong role in this method. This method is also sometimes used in formal conflict management practices.

*Jhānkrī rākhne (exploration by shamans)*

This method is based on the belief that shamans have received supernatural powers from a god to control particular problems, and is applied most commonly to cases of witch allegation. In this method the shaman treats culprits mostly inhumanly (setting fire to hair, pouring hot water onto the body, severely beating, etc.). It is generally women who are accused of being witches, whereas shamans are always men. This was the crudest method of conflict resolution in the study area. The *jhānkrī* also acts as a local doctor to treat several diseases and problems related to villagers in general and children in particular. In natural resource management *jhānkrīs* are used to forecast rainfall, to control or prevent forest fires and landslides, to cure crops affected by different diseases and insects, etc.

*Pānī kātne (ostracism)*

This is a traditional conflict resolution method grounded in the orthodox Hindu caste system. Though this is not applied in natural resource conflict, it is still a common village way of dealing with sexual conflicts. In this practice, the offender and his/her family are declared as outcasts and no one maintains social interactions or any relationship with them. People stop visiting and eating in their houses and refuse to invite them to their homes. This is a strong public sanction and it is common in cases of molestation and illegal and immoral sexual relationships between unilateral kin groups, based on either matrilineal or patrilineal descent. Nepalese law prohibits such punishments but in reality they are still common practice in rural areas. Local people say that the threat of ostracism maintains social harmony and prevents sexual offences.

*Sagun garne (reconciliation)*

In this very common method, a gift is exchanged between disputants in the presence of villagers. This exchange function is performed after discussing the matter in a meeting attended by villagers, negotiators and the conflicting parties. When a settlement is reached they start *sagun garne* (reconciliation). The conflict is declared to have been settled when a gift has been accepted by both parties, and this is followed by a small celebration where all people drink *jād* (a type of fermented liquor). However, there are no written documents of such settlements: the evidence is the witness of villagers present at the *sagun garne* ceremony. This practice is most common among Matwalis and Tibeto-Burman ethnic

groups. The gifts are usually liquor, eggs, meat, etc. (Khadka 1997, Upreti 2001).

*Jarimānā and kshatipūrti bharāune (fine and payment of compensation)*

In this method, negotiators call both parties and villagers to a public place to discuss the issue. The negotiators hear the opinions of both parties and also seek the opinions of villagers. Based on the hearing, they decide the level of *jarimānā* and *kshatipūrti*. This practice involves a reimbursement of loss (usually in cash, sometimes in kind) by those deemed guilty, and some extra punishment in the form of a fine. This is very common in cases of conflict related to damage to crops, canals, drinking water lines, and public paths, etc. If the community realizes that one party has borne a considerable loss in property or sustained an injury, the wrongdoer has to bear the cost of the losses, other associated costs, and the cost of medical treatment, if needed. The fine is generally paid to a temple, school, or *guthi*, or to repair a public facility.

*Māphī māgne (public apology)*

As in other local methods, negotiators invite villagers and disputants to discuss the conflict issue and decide to make a public apology. Public apology by a guilty party was a common method in the study area. The guilty party, in the presence of villagers and the local elite, begs for pardon and swears not to repeat such offences. This is sometimes also combined with an additional fine or other punishment. This method is also widely used in formal conflict resolution processes.

*Mit lāune (tie of special friendship)*

*Mit lāune* is a unique mode of development of a special relationship between two people. In most cases *mit lāune* happens for one of two reasons. First, due to certain interests, beliefs, and traditions, someone wants to develop a special relation with particular person. Second, it is a form of reconciliation or a means of negotiation if and when two individuals/groups are in low intensity conflict. In the *mit lāune* process, the two individuals exchange money, flowers, clothes, or some other special gift in the presence of an audience, with or sometimes without a simple religious process. Some people hang curtains between the *mit* candidates for the exchange of gifts. Some even join hands and exchange *namaste*. *Mit lāune* symbolizes an accommodative way of negotiation, and results in a win-win situation.

## 7.2 Formal conflict management practices

Organizations that adopt formal conflict management practices fall into two main categories. The first includes the court system and the second includes the VDC, the government's natural resources-related offices, the police,

and the District Administration Office. These all work within the government's regulatory framework. The District Administration Office and the police have a mandatory responsibility to address all types of conflict issue. Large numbers of conflicts were settled by the second category of organization: only those conflict cases which could not be solved there went to court.

The Nepalese organizations dealing with formal conflict management practices are ineffective and heavily clogged with unsettled litigation. The respondents pointed out that some of them had waited for up to seven years to settle simple disputes in court (cf. Oli 1998). It was also observed that lawyers and solicitors deliberately worked at an unhurried pace in order to maintain a continuous income. There is no evidence of the persons responsible for delaying court proceedings being punished or made to pay compensation to their clients. It was found that wealthy and educated people more easily obtained justice from the formal system. A frequent and widening gap between rhetoric (rules, laws, policies) and real practice, along with the effects of differential legal knowledge, the high cost of obtaining justice, and the suspicion of unfairness were common problems in the formal legal system (cf. Oli 1998, Khadka 1997, Kaplan 1995). Therefore, the legal service was not easily available to poor people.

Several formalities and technicalities in judicial administration have to be fulfilled in government organizations. Furthermore, personnel working in these organizations lacked the required (technical) knowledge and information related to natural resource conflicts, which undermined the credibility of their verdicts. To obtain *tok-ādesh* (order-directive) to get things done it was necessary to mobilize 'source force' and *āphno mānche*. It was also observed that a person who is in authority knows that there is no way to move things forward other than extracting an order (*ādesh*) from them or paying them a bribe. I was standing in the District Land Revenue Office, close to a *subbā* (a non-gazetted administrative staff member). He was shouting at one customer (a rural man of about 55): *ādesh khoi? māthiko tok ādesh chāhincha, hākim sāb-le tok lāumu parcha, aile hundaina, bholi āunū* ("Where is the order? We need an order and directive from the boss, it is not possible to do it today, come tomorrow"). This was the starting point to bargain for the bribe. There was some facial symbolic gesture between the customer and the *subbā*, and the *subbā* accomplished everything within 20 minutes. But if there had not been a bribe he would have lingered over the task for several days (as he did for several others who were not able to pay a bribe). It was observed that the disputants often used illegal means to win conflict cases. The most common was the combination of bribe and the mobilization of political power and *āphno*

*mānche*, especially in complicated cases. The respondents expressed the following reasons for the poor performance of the formal system:

- Excessive influence of money (bribes and kickbacks)
- The exercise of power and 'source-force'
- Elite domination
- High fees of attorney
- Low levels of legal knowledge
- Complexity of judicial administration
- Faulty policies and procedures of government
- Lack of transparency in the litigation process
- Ambiguous and contradictory laws, regulations and tasks of government officials/ politicization

## 8 Conclusion

In general it can be concluded that fairness, ethics, and the rule of law play only a minor role in the resolution of natural resources conflicts in Nepal. It may indeed be suggested that the existing socio-political system, more than anything else, determines the outcome of conflict resolution. There is no assurance whatsoever that the legal system will produce fair resolutions of natural resources conflict. The broader socio-political system, power dynamics, and local politics affect conflict over natural resources tremendously. All in all, there appears to be little evidence of effectiveness in the existing linear top-down approach of government-instituted organizations to resolve natural resources conflicts. In the current system, only powerful people and the elite are benefiting. The existing conflict management system in Nepal is not responsive enough to address growing conflict, and deserves prompt action aimed at reformation.

Specifically, women play a crucial role in local-level conflict resolution but their ability or potential is constrained by socio-cultural factors. Some effective indigenous conflict management practices are either sidelined or politicized, while formal systems remain inaccessible. This creates a vacuum in the community and fuels the further escalation of conflict.

In reality, social relations play a vital role in the emergence, escalation, and resolution of conflict at local level. The accommodative and tolerant behaviour of the weaker groups in society are often used by strong groups as an opportunity to resolve conflict in their favour or to maintain the exploitative relations which have existed in the community for generations. A certain degree of accommodative behaviour, influenced by the need for

social harmony, maintains unequal social relations within communities irrespective of the power structure, which most often helps to negotiate conflict, but only by indirectly exploiting weaker sections of society. This is one of the main weaknesses of local conflict resolution practice.

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## The Life History of a Jad Woman of the Garhwal Himalayas

Subhadra Channa

### Introduction: The creation of this document

This life history was collected by me using the fieldwork method in the village of Bhagori, in the upper Himalayas on the Indian side of the Indo-Tibet border.<sup>1</sup> Bhagori, situated at a height of 2620 metres above sea level, is the summer village of the transhumant Jads, a pastoral group and one of the many Bhotiya communities which traditionally carried on trans-border trade with Tibet (Füerer-Haimendorf 1975, 1981). They are bilingual, speaking Hindi fluently as well as having their own language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group. They call themselves Rongpas in their own language, but all the literature about them, including Census reports, refers to them as Jads (Rizvi 1979, Bhandari 1981, Naithani 1986, Bisht 1994); they are also often, especially in the local official registers, categorized simply as Bhotiyas. I spent two summers at their high-altitude village and other times at their winter village and low-altitude camp. Most of the life history was collected at the summer village, where these people feel most at home and relaxed.

The Jads move seasonally between their summer village at Bhagori and their winter village at Dunda, near the sacred town of Uttarkashi. Some also go down to the winter camp at Chor-Pani near Hrishikesh, where they trade their goods with people from the plains. Like all mountain people, they consider the

<sup>1</sup> The district of Uttarkashi shares its northern border with Tibet and the Indian district of Kinnaur; to the east lies the border of Tibet and the district of Chamoli; in the south it is bound by Chamoli and Tehri Garhwal; and in the west lie the districts of Mahasu and Dehradun. The district is divided into three sub-divisions (*tehsil*): Bhatwari, Dunda, and Purolia. The Jads are located in Bhatwari and Dunda, having a permanent village in each of these places. Bhatwari, where their main village, Bhagori, is located, is also the district headquarters. Conceptually the people regard Bhatwari and Dunda to be Uttarkashi. The latter term is used for this entire region although it also refers to the main town of Uttarkashi, which is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites of the Hindus.

higher altitudes to be their real domain.<sup>2</sup> Their identity is closely tied to their high-altitude village and they feel a sense of belonging to it, an emotion not expressed for the low-altitude village. Most old people aspire to die at Bhagori and thus would like to spend more and more time there. They believe that if they are cremated on a pyre of Deodar wood near the river Ganga that flows through their village they will attain heaven. The Jads are a true border people. Spatially, they inhabit a territory that lies between India and Tibet, but their history of economic and social interactions with the Tibetans has produced a culture made up of influences from both Tibetan and Hindu cultures. Yet the Jads are neither Buddhist nor Hindu but share in both belief systems along with their own distinctive primal beliefs.

This life history was the product of my interaction with a seventy-eight-year-old Jad woman named Kaushalya, a Hindu mythological name quite common among the Jads, who inhabit a landscape sacred in Hindu cosmology, from the Gangotri to Hrishikesh. The first time I met Kaushalya, she was sitting outside her ornate house with elaborately carved wooden pillars (made by craftsmen from the nearby region of Himachal, with whom they frequently intermarry). She was enjoying the sun in the company of her grandchildren. One year I found her in the company of her son and daughter-in-law and their small children and another year her married daughter and two grand-daughters accompanied her. In both cases she was staying in the same house which belonged to her, having been the house of her husband. Both the married son and married daughter, in different years, were staying with her as her guests. Kaushalya told me that if any year she was forced to stay behind in Dunda in the summer, she was acutely unhappy. "I enjoy this mountain climate and environment," she told me. "This is where I belong and this is where I want to die."

The life history was collected as a narration, but not continuously. I would sit around and chat with Kaushalya as she had tea or played with her grandchildren (sometimes her son's children, sometimes her daughter's). At times she would be oiling her hair or just sitting idle and wrapped in her blanket, 'snug' (*timu*), as she would say in her own language. She was a very articulate and reflective woman, who at the age of seventy-eight (in 1999) had seen a lot of life. My interaction with her began as with a friend, since she was interested in me and would invite me to sit with her on her verandah and talk

<sup>2</sup> The association of altitude with sacredness and purity is not only a feature of the pastoralists of this region, as mentioned by Rao (1998), but also of the Hindus, who regard the top of the Himalayas as Mount Kailash or the heavens, and legend has it that the route from Gangotri upwards is the pathway to heaven.

to her. Jad women have considerable freedom of movement and frequently travel on their own, so two females (my research assistant Ms Anamika Verma accompanied me on most of my trips) making it on their own to a mountain village was not at all surprising to them. This meant that rapport was established more quickly than would be usual in a place where women are not seen as having much freedom of movement. "In this place we women walk on our own feet, we go everywhere on our own, like to the doctor or to the market," they would tell me. Kaushalya was one of the first local people I became friendly with and she continued to be one to whom I remained close.

Thus the life history, as a document, was the product of an interaction (Freeman 1978: 86). It was not that we were always alone; such privacy is rare in an Indian village, where life is based on close personal interactions and community living. Sometimes other persons—her daughters, grand-children, daughters-in-law, or even neighbours—would be present either sitting with us or passing by. (The Jads live in houses with open verandahs, which is where most of the daytime living is carried out. The rooms are windowless and dark and used only for sleeping at night. Nearly everyone, unless very ill, spends their time sitting either outside their houses or beside the road.)

Since Kaushalya was too old to be doing much productive work, her time was mostly spent sitting in the sun gossiping and looking after her grandchildren, and drinking numerous cups of butter tea (*chacha*) out of a lovely flask which she said came from China. (The Jad men are active traders and in Jad houses one has evidence of goods coming from various places that fall within the range of their trading activities, such as Nepal, China, and even Burma.) At times the narrative would include reference to other people, like her son or grandchild who might come within her vision, thus triggering off an observation or a bit of memory. We spoke in Hindi, both of us being fluent in the language, although after some time I had also picked up a little of their language and was also tutored by Kaushalya herself. The reason why she spoke intensively to me was that, as an old woman, she had little work to do. I provided a ready and eager audience, and she probably entertained herself in the process, taking it as a good way of passing the time. She was pleased at my eagerness to learn about her and would often ask me why I had chosen this particular place to work in. I told her quite truthfully that I was in love with the stunning beauty of the surroundings and that I was also very interested to study a pastoral people with their shifting lifestyle. Also I knew nothing about them and neither did anyone else. It would be a good thing if I wrote about them and a lot more people came to know them. To this she agreed, saying that many tourists did pass this way but no one stayed on in the village or

showed as much interest in them as I did. In this way the interaction was on an equal footing and often Kaushalya, as the older and in this case more informed person, would take the role of a tutor. At other times she would ask advice, for example about a slight indisposition or stomach upset. In this way my approach differed considerably from that of Freeman, for whom the anthropologist assumed the role of a patron or employer. In no way did I make Kaushalya or any one else feel that I was on a higher social or political rung than them. At times they would sympathize with me, that for the sake of my work I had to travel many miles and climb such altitudes, leaving my family behind. Sometimes she would feel the fabric of my dress and comment that it was good-quality wool. Sometimes I would be reprimanded for not wearing the right colours. "We never wear red and yellow in the mountains. They attract the jealousy of the *mātriyal* (spirits of the forest)." Although she and her daughters and grand-daughters did occasionally accept a few small gifts from me, these were given and taken in a spirit of affection rather than of payment. In fact she would often feed me with tea and snacks while we talked.

Tonkin (1992) has referred to the temporality of the occasion of narration itself, which brings together at a particular point of time the narrator and the listener, both with their own histories. This life history is born out of a two-way interaction between two women, one old and belonging to the place where the interview took place, and the other middle-aged and not really belonging but nevertheless an acceptable part of the community. Our histories were very different but nevertheless converged: I was interested to know about her both from an academic and from a personal point of view, since many of her experiences overlapped with mine.

Although I cannot speak for Kaushalya, I can guess that she was motivated by curiosity and a certain bond between us, including a similar social standing based on kinship identity, we were both mothers and mothers-in-law, and both either actually or potentially grandmothers. Our age and sex gave us a common platform on which to share thoughts and feelings. As an example I cite an instance when I was playing with her grandson, a rather hyper-active child of about three years of age. Kaushalya, quite exhausted in her attempts to control him, said: "You like children? That is because you have only two of your own. I had nine children and they were enough for me. Now these grandchildren are a bit too much for me to handle."

During the interviews, Kaushalya would often ask me why I had chosen to come so high up, and why was I so interested to know what, to them, were minute and worthless details. She compared me to the government officials

who just took some data in an off-hand manner and left. Our interaction was always even-sided, even though she may have been the only person talking. I am sure Kaushalya sized me up in her own eyes and decided what she thought should be contained in her narrative. The convincing aspect of my work was that I was going to write a book, which seemed legitimate enough for her (although she was disappointed that I was not going to do a television programme instead).

While recording the life history I was also aware that she was not talking in the first person at all times; often she contextualized and collectivized certain events. Tonkin quotes Schrage, who says: "Far from dealing only with ourselves when we tell about the past, we incorporate the experience of a multitude of others along with our own, they appear in what we say" (Tonkin 1992: 41). Thus what Kaushalya did unconsciously, I had to do consciously; that is, I had to cast the individual in the perspective of the collective. She was often referring to the community or the world at large and I had to make sense of the community and infer the world at large in her words.

Thus her life history can be better understood as a series of episodes that illustrate or are significant for the understanding of larger events, historically contextualized. The life history of Kaushalya is woven into the matrix of the history of the Jad people, their displacements and relocations as a result of the entry of markets and national politics into their lives. As an anthropological document the life history makes sense in integrating a larger reality into a specific experience.

### The life history

We are a people of the forest and the mountains. Our forefathers may not even have had a village for we are, as you know, people of the jungle (*jangli*). We are different from the people who till the soil and who stay at one place, we wander here and there, and it is quite likely that some of our forefathers may have got tired of wandering and settled down at Neilang, which was the place where I was born. This was way up on the mountains [pointing upwards], it was quite different from here. We came to this village, Bhagori, only after the 1962 war with China, when the army came and evacuated us, shifting us down to this village. Earlier, Neilang was the largest of our summer villages. Then there was Jadung, a small village adjacent to Neilang. As children we had no schooling. We would wander around and sit on the roadside and

watch the pilgrims pass by. A large number of pilgrims used to pass this way on their way to Gangotri [the glacier that is the source of the river Ganga]. The rich men (*seths*) would be carried on the back of the local people; they would be paid for it. We were amused by the stream of people passing by and would beg them for small things like *bindis* [small dots worn on the forehead by Hindu women].

Here in Bhagori, there were only a few *mavasā* (households)—not more than ten—of the Jads.<sup>3</sup> When we were displaced we grabbed the land of the *zamindār* (landlord) of Jhala [the nearest village], to whom most of the land belonged. Even now he has a little land in the village. See that large apple orchard, it belongs to him. No one said anything to us. The government was on our side. They had to find land for us so they just settled us all here.

Up there, there was a lot of land. It was flat, not hilly like here. We used to plough the fields with yaks and oxen. We had a variety of cows called *chorgai*, which came from Tibet. You still see a few of them around. They are small and hairy and give rich milk that produces a lot of butter, yellow in colour and very thick. Up there we used to produce maize and a variety of millet called *soh*. It was called 'naked millet' because it did not have any outer covering. The women did all the agricultural work like sowing and harvesting and the men traded and grazed sheep. They traded with the Tibetans across the border. We had families with whom we traded and the men would go and stay with those families for a couple of months, eat and sleep like family members, and then come back with the goods. The Tibetans would come also and stay with us. They made cups for us to drink tea in. These would be made of silver on the inside and have a wooden covering on the outside. Whenever anyone got married at least two cups would be given as gifts by the girl's parents to the newly-weds. The Tibetans were like our family members. But ever since the [1962] war, relations have broken down.

<sup>3</sup> As I have written elsewhere (Channa 1998), Jad identity is closely linked to birth in a Jad village. Children born to Jads, both men and women, are considered as Jads irrespective of whether their mothers or fathers were originally Jads. Thus, although the name is inherited in the male line, Jad identity is not. A Jad woman like the daughter of Kaushalya, who is married to a non-Jad husband living in Dunda, a Jad village, was going to bring up her children as Jads. This absorption of children of outside fathers and Jad mothers within the Jad village had led to a proliferation of lineage names and also lineage gods. Kaushalya expressed this by saying that the number of gods (*devtā*) is steadily increasing. In this case, the children inherit the name of the father and the identity of the mother.

This part of the narrative illustrates the changing relationship of the Jads with the Tibetans. Actually it indicates a change in their social world that was originally shaped by a close interaction with the high-altitude Tibetans and is now influenced more by the plains Indians. The shift from high to low is bringing about changes in their worldview, but the process is as yet incipient and they still think of themselves as a high-altitude people distinct from the Garhwali cultivators who surround them.

We are the *bhed charānewāle* (sheep herders). We have no attachment to the soil like the *zamindārs* (cultivators). The *zamindārs* look down upon us. They would marry our daughters but not give us theirs. If they find a girl to be very beautiful, they would take her, like two of my daughters are married to Garhwali men. They asked for them in marriage. We do not like to give our daughters to the cultivators because they eat the money of their daughters. They take money from the bridegroom. We Jads, we do not take or give money in our marriages.

Until this time the Jads were a mountain people who had only marginal contact with the mainstream populations of the plains of India. "Sitting on the roadside to watch the pilgrims go by" is a graphic description of the nature of interaction at that time with the Hindu majority. The Jads, however, derived a large part of their income from the pilgrims by providing them with transport by way of the animals they raised and also by acting as guides and porters. They prefer not to marry with the cultivators because they are considered 'not like us'. The marriage culture of the Jads is distinct both from that of the surrounding Hindus and from the Tibetans as well:

When I was married nothing was given or taken. The parents and the relatives put together some vessels for daily use. The marriage gifts at my wedding consisted of one brass plate (*thāli*), one ladle (*karchi*), two saucepans (*degchi*)—one for making *sāg* (vegetables) and one for making rice—, one mattress and one quilt, one blanket, about 10 gms of gold and about one kg. of silver. We also received 8-10 sheep to start our own flock. My husband's family gave a nose ring. When I got married there was no ceremony. We were just made to wear new clothes and everyone got together and ate and drank and we were told that we were married. In those days most people did not perform any other ritual to get married. It was just a way of announcing, by eating and drinking together, that the boy and girl were married. In those times the boys and girls were married very young, even before they knew

what was happening to them. When they grew up they would find out that they did not like each other. Then the fights would start. At that time more than one third of the couples separated and got married again. Someone would marry someone else's wife and someone would marry someone else's husband. Nowadays such things do not happen, because the boys and girls marry at late ages. They now marry according to their own choice. The boy must come and ask for the girl among us. We do not have the custom of a man marrying more than one wife like among the *zamindars*. Some of the women had more than one husband; like my daughter-in-law here had two fathers, they were brothers. But this was also rare among us. This custom was more prevalent in Kinnaur.

We were just small children, my husband and me. I was fourteen years old and he was just a little older, around sixteen. He was the son of my father's sister. We consider it right for a girl to marry her father's sister's son but we would never marry the son of the mother's brother. That is a sin. It is like marrying your own brother. My own brother is the one born of my parents but the sons of my mother's sister and my father's brother are also my own brothers, we make no difference between them. But I personally think that one should not marry any one as close as the father's sister's son. If you do that then you get sick children as I did.

Two of my sons were born weak in the head. One of them was put in a hospital and died last year. The other one you see wandering around. He is not quite right in the head. He does not know what he is doing. But sometimes he is very cunning. That day he was telling me that I should not talk to you for you might give me up to the police. I told him that I have nothing to fear from the police for I have done nothing wrong. He became like that because of addiction to *bangi* (*bhang* or *cannabis indica*).

To a great extent I am to blame for his addiction. I smoke *bidis*. When he was very young, he would pick up the stubs that I had smoked and thrown away and smoke them. Gradually he learn to smoke *bhang*. That ruined him. Now he just wanders around and comes home when he is hungry.

Every one in our community smokes *bidis*, it is seen as perfectly normal. Earlier we all learnt to smoke when we were just 8 or 9 years old. We would pick up the stubs smoked by the adults and smoke them. It was just a game with us and no one said anything about it. Nowadays the modern doctors tell us that there is something wrong with smoking

but we never thought so. It is only bad to smoke *bangi*, that is bad because it takes away your reason.

When I was small I would pick up stubs left by older people and smoke them. We used to just roam about like wild children. I would roam in the jungles near our village and pick berries and eat them. We never went to school. In our village there has been a school for a long time now. Earlier only some children used to study, only those who wanted to. Our parents did not think it necessary to educate children. They saw no benefit in education for all that we had to do, like grazing sheep and working in the fields. Everyone goes to school nowadays because they want to become *bābus* (white-collar workers). I sent all my children, boys as well as girls, to school. They are all educated and can read and write, unlike me. One of my sons is a schoolmaster, the other is also working in a job. None of them herd sheep.

At a personal level, Kaushalya is not without regret for the earlier way of life, especially for the masculinity of the men like her husband who were strong and braved the hazards of the shepherd's life like true men. It was not without a sigh that she narrated:

They [her sons] are not like their father, my husband, who was a strong man and could manage to keep a large herd of sheep single-handed.

If you are not strong, the wild animals will eat your sheep. Also in the jungles there are no comforts of home and hearth. A man who likes the comfort of a soft bed cannot sleep on the hard bed of the forest. These boys are incapable of such hard work and could not survive the rough life of the jungles.

Life was hard but it was good. My husband would go away for months to herd sheep and to trade. My husband and I were happy together. He had about 3-400 sheep. We were very fond of travelling. Almost every year we would go somewhere as pilgrims. I have seen a lot of places in my life. We even went to far off places like Nepal and Tibet. There were beautiful monasteries and temples in those places.

My husband was one of three brothers, all of them herded sheep. That was the only work we knew. We traded with the Tibetans across the border. We would get salt from them, and wool and horses, dogs, blankets, yaks, and cows. In return we would give them brass utensils, rice, and sugar.

The wool from Tibet was long and silky, it was very warm. Their dogs had silky fur like pashmina, the horses were of extremely good quality. They could carry you up the steepest mountains. They would

keep going no matter how steep and difficult the terrain, but would stop as soon as they came across a gorge. Ever since trade with Tibet stopped we can no longer get all those fine goods. Nowadays we get more things from the plains. In earlier times we never went down beyond Sukhi [a village about 100 kms below them, a journey of roughly half an hour by jeep]. There were no roads. The bridges have all been built after the army entered this region. Before that, people used to cut a tree trunk and throw it across, to cross over a deep gorge. These were temporary and would disappear after some time. The animals raised by us provided for all the transport requirements of this region. Ever since the roads have been built and wheeled vehicles have started plying we have lost a major source of our income.

The establishment of communication links with the plains and participation in the market network of the Hindu lowlands has brought considerable changes to the Jad way of life and to their meaning system. The absorption of this region into Indian democracy has made them aware of a larger social participation than before. For people like Kaushalya, who straddles the two worlds, the transition is not easy. Earlier the plainspeople were 'Other', to be contacted only for necessary trading. They were not part of the discourse that shaped their lives:

We did not grow rice ourselves but got it from the plains of Hrishikesh in exchange for our wool and Tibetan salt. I remember we used to come up from Hrishikesh laden with goods on our backs like pack animals. We did a lot of direct exchange in those days. We had hardly any money to spend. In those days no one did jobs that paid you money. We had our goods, either grown or made ourselves like our wool and shawls, and we exchanged them for other things we needed. We would buy clothes and utensils from the market with the money we got from the sale of sheep and wool. But most other things we got through exchange like most of the Tibetan goods. They had their own money, but we exchanged goods for goods.

The Jads are transhumant and move between their winter and summer village and a camp at Chorpani, a place in the forests near Hrishikesh, the holy town in the foothills of the Himalayas. This is the lowest point to which the Jads descend:

Our life in the early days was too hard. We would go down to Chor-Pani in winter and graze our mules and horses in the jungles there. The

men took the sheep to their pastures in the plains. Sometimes my husband and I would take the larger animals to Chor-Pani and let the servants take the sheep for grazing. Sometimes my husband would go and look after the sheep while I would stay in the camp and look after the horses, cows, and mules. At that time every one had cows for milk. At Neilang and Jadung there was enough space to graze the larger animals in summer, and in winter we would come down to Chor-Pani. Even when I was a child I remember going to Chor-Pani with my parents. We make shelters there which are temporary. As a child I enjoyed going to Chor-Pani and would wonder how the water came gushing out of the stones there. It is a place where the water remains hidden in the rocks and comes out suddenly when you go looking for it. Whole families go to Chor-Pani, all women and children.

Nowadays people keep fewer animals. That is because there is little place to graze them at Bhagori in the summer. A very few families go to Chor-Pani now. Very few households have pack animals as even the use for them is diminishing. At Hrishikesh we would buy a lot of things with the money we got in exchange for all our stuff. We would buy clothes for the whole year and brass vessels, sugar, tobacco, and jaggery. When we came up we were loaded with goods.

At Chor-Pani I always felt scared. We would hide in the deep jungles and go out only in groups. We were afraid of the people of the towns who came to Hrishikesh. They were all so different from us. When we had to come up we would start in the night itself. We would get up in the middle of the night and start walking, because our animals do not like the heat of the plains and cannot walk in the bright hot sun. They get tired, and so do we. Moreover, we did not like to move during the day and get in the way of the townspeople. I remember feeling shy and strange in front of the people from the plains. We never wanted to interact with them much. Only when they wanted to trade with us. One very popular item of trade is our dogs. When we were going to Tibet we got these dogs. All that you see around this place are the descendants of the Tibetan dogs. They make very good watchdogs and many people want them.<sup>4</sup>

We would start off in the middle of the night. There was no fixed time. Whenever any one would get up they would start loading the animals and the others would get up also. It could be two or three a.m. We kept close to each other while we were in the lower altitudes. We used to feel so scared that we might be attacked or that thieves might

<sup>4</sup> During the course of my fieldwork I also met people from the cities who wanted to know whether they could meet Jads who were selling Bhotiya dogs.

steal our things. However, once we came up to Uttarkashi we felt much relieved. After reaching Dunda we would take rest and then break up into smaller groups. Then the journey became a pleasure. We would take our own time, staying on at the homes of our friends and relatives. From Uttarkashi onwards it was our own domain. We were no longer afraid because we were with our own friends and relatives. The journey from Hrishikesh to Uttarkashi took about fifteen days, but from Uttarkashi to Neilang we took two to three months, staying on with our people and enjoying ourselves. We would exchange gifts and eat and drink and spend some time in leisure before we went back to our own village in the summer; then the agricultural work would start again.

In this part of the narrative it becomes clear that the lower altitudes were regarded as unfamiliar and dangerous. The Jads would move through as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible, hiding in the darkness before dawn. But as soon as they reached higher altitudes, they would relax, slow down, move at their own pace, and interact socially with the people they considered as 'themselves'. We are also informed about the nature of traditional trade, mostly barter.

The men would go up to the highest altitudes at Purunsumdu, at the border of Tibet, with the sheep, and we would stay in the village and work in the fields and do other household work. The men say that the grass at those high altitude pastures is like ghee: it is soft and pure. In the month of Bhadon the sheep become so fat after grazing on this grass for three months that if they sleep too much at night they die and do not wake up because of the excess fat in their stomachs.

I have never been to those pastures, as women never go up to the *danda*, the faraway pastures; I have only heard my husband and other men like his brothers talk about those places. We women never go the pastures: that is a man's job. In my family now no one keeps sheep. Even my sons-in-law are working in jobs. So you do not see my daughters or daughters-in-law knitting or beating wool, as other women do.

A most significant change that is coming in the lives of the people is demographic. Earlier, due to lack of medical facilities, a large number of children would die. Moreover it seems the Jads were, even to begin with, a small settlement of pastoral people, who could only reproduce by marrying into other communities similar to themselves. Most persons marrying them, both males and females, were absorbed into the Jad identity. This is more of

an identity based on common resource use and residence, than on a rule of endogamy (Channa 1999). The life experiences of the women kept them away from the pastures and none of them, even today, had ever seen those places, though they travel a lot otherwise.

At that time [about sixty years back] there were only twenty to twenty-five households at Neilang, which we considered as our base village. At Jadung and at Bhagori there were only about ten households each. When we were shifted to Bhagori all the persons of our Rongpas became part of the same village. We are now three villages here. In the present time the number of households has increased to about three hundred.<sup>5</sup>

The Jads are not a uniform community of people. All who are known as Jads were not necessarily so even a generation back. Many are in-marrying sons-in-law, a custom held in common with Tibet. With increasing Hindu influence the customs of polyandry and the residential son-in-law are falling into disuse. Migration from other regions is also in decline as the village grows in size and young people can easily find a mate near at hand:

Not all people who are in this village were born here. Many persons came here from Chamoli, from Kinnaur, and from the Niti Mana valleys near Joshi Math. My paternal grandfather came from Kinnaur to settle here after marrying my *dādi* (paternal grandmother) as a *magpa* (resident son-in-law). Many men in those days used to come from Kinnaur to settle here, because there they used to have one wife between several brothers. Sometimes a man would want to have his own wife, like my *dādā* (paternal grandfather), and they would run away to this place and get a girl to marry them and become a part of the village. Then their children would become Jads. A man may be very poor and have no land or sheep and then he would come here and become a *magpa* to a girl who had no brother. Then he would have land and sheep and his children would inherit the property of their grandparents. Sometimes a young man may have some differences with

<sup>5</sup> Jad households usually consist of only one married couple because sons separate after getting married. But the households usually contain other relatives and even resident servants. They often also include children whose parents may not be present in the village, or old people who cannot take care of themselves. Kaushalya always came to live in a house which had belonged to her and her husband. Her older sons had separate dwellings in the village and although she visited them often she stayed in her own house. This also belonged notionally to her younger son who would inherit it by the rule of ultimogeniture.

his family and say, 'I am going away, I do not want to see your faces.' He may wander here and settle down with a girl of the village. We have people from other pastoral communities within us. Many young men came from Kinnaur primarily because of the custom of sharing a wife between several brothers. In that place people have a lot of agriculture and they do not want the land to be fragmented, so they marry all the brothers to a single girl. I know my paternal grandfather came away for this very reason. My maternal grandfather also came from some place in Himachal. He was very poor and just wandered into this place. My grandmothers were both from this village and so was my mother.

A part of the narrative recounts the common experience of being a Jad woman. Although some of it is specific to the speaker, a large part is shared with other women of her times and her community.

I had nine children. We never did anything to stop the children from coming. Nowadays I hear that there are injections and medicines to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy. We never made use of anything to prevent the children from coming and we never did get anything to get rid of a child. The children are like gifts of God and anyway we lost many children. We were only too happy to get as many as possible.

My children were born quite easily. I did all the work when I was pregnant. I would climb up the hills and walk long distances. Among us a woman would sometimes give birth on the roadside, if her time came while we were on the move. She would simply go behind the nearest bush and give birth. We used the knife with which we cut bushes and shrubs for firewood to cut the umbilical cord. A woman always cut her own cord. She would go to the nearest stream and bathe herself and clean the baby and throw the afterbirth and umbilical cord in the running stream. We do not bury them. The mother does all the things herself and, unless she is having a very difficult birth, is not assisted by anyone. Some of her female relatives may sit around, but they do not touch her unless absolutely necessary. Either the woman's mother or her mother-in-law assists her in childbirth. Some other relative or woman may also help. But this is done when it is absolutely required. Most of the time, if she can, the mother herself takes care of everything.

As soon as the baby is born, a spoonful of warm ghee is poured into the mother's mouth and she keeps her mouth closed for a while so that her teeth do not become weak.

I never had any trouble with the birth of my children. But I lost several of my children. One daughter died when she was just nine

months old. I do not know why, she just fell ill and died. One of my sons died when he was only thirteen years old. I took him to the hospital and the doctors said that he had pneumonia. All the rest of my children grew up. But I lost two sons in recent years. One of them was not alright mentally, so we put him in a hospital in Benaras, and he died there last year. Another son died after falling from a cliff. I do not think he died naturally. I think that he was pushed into the gorge during a drunken brawl. He was a heavy drinker. Often people die here after falling from cliffs. They may be drunk or may be pushed, who knows? Even about ten years back many children used to die. When we were at Neilang during the rainy season most children below the age of one would die of loose motions and vomiting (*jonka*). They would just wither up and die. We did not do anything to prevent this. It was only an act of God. I would go to the lama to get the evil eye off my children and tie amulets around their necks and arms but when they have to die then nothing can prevent it.

I see a lot of changes all around me. The dresses have changed, the names have changed. Even the names by which people call their relatives have changed.

#### In the course of a life...

As Tonkin has pointed out for similar cases, Kaushalya's life incorporates a collective experience and we go through a kind of ethno-history where the changing world of the Jads and the historical transformations to which they have been subjected emerges from the narration. It shows how a small group of people may have their lives changed by the changing political and economic relations between countries. The Jads reflect the true dilemmas of a border people, who not only inhabit the borders between two states but also the borders between two cultures. The push from the Tibetan to the Indian side has had far-reaching effects on the Jads, and a single life mirrors many of these changes. This life history shows the interdependence of what Maynard (1994: 15) quoting Brah (1991, 1992) calls the distinction between the "the everyday of lived experience and the experience as a social relation." Thus, through the everyday lived experience of Kaushalya, we get a glimpse of the larger relationships of the community as well as the even larger political relationships within which they are situated.

This life history is an example of the specific reflecting the general. At the individual level, Kaushalya is a typical pastoralist woman, moulded by a life

experience specific to the economy, lifestyle, and landscape of the Jads. She was in the last phase of her life-cycle, a time of leisure, after going through periods of hard labour, child-bearing, and productivity. The old among the Jads are treated with care and contribute significantly towards childrearing, which remains their primary task as long as they are able. When they become too old and infirm, they spend their time sitting in the sun and are taken care of by family members. The Jad women have a position of independence that is influenced more by the Tibetan worldview than by mainstream Hindu Indian society; they conform to the picture of "strong and independent Tibetan women" (Diemberger 1993: 98). The women of Kaushalya's generation ate and drank like the men, they smoked and consumed alcohol. When the men were away grazing and trading, they looked after the fields and crops and also traded and exchanged goods. Thus the women went with the men to Chor-Pani, and as Kaushalya has described, would come up from the plains laden with rice and other goods, "like mules". They worked hard and had their independence, and they would travel with their husbands and even on their own. Kaushalya, as we have seen, is a widely travelled person and listed "travelling" as one of her main pleasures in life. She had admired her shepherd husband as "strong" and "brave". She had many children and lost several of them due to ignorance and lack of proper medical care. She maintained equal and symmetrical ties with her son and daughter, reflecting the bilaterality of Jad kinship relations, and their emphasis on filiality rather than descent.

Since the women work and contribute to the making of the house, it is believed that the house belongs as much to the wife as to the husband. At the death of the husband the wife is seen as the owner of the house, as Kaushalya was seen of hers. As Kaushalya's genealogical links indicate, many of the present-day Jads are people married into the community from places such as Kinnaur and Chamoli. The important condition for forming alliances is sharing a common economy and way of life, as well as shared pastures. When a Jad woman marries a non-Jad, as in the case of Kaushalya's daughter, the children become Jads.

The changes that are taking place in kinship and marriage institutions and in the position of the women are somewhat informed by the stronger influence of universal religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, both of which have become more influential than before. Thus many of the changes that have taken place in Kaushalya's own life and that of her daughters and sons, and also of the Jads as a whole, cannot be understood without referring to the local changes that have taken place over the past four decades.

The landmark event that the Jads identify as the turning point in their lives is the closure of the Indo-Tibet border after the Indo-China war of 1962, and the relocation of their two border villages, Neilang and Jadung, at the lower altitude of Bhagori. With this relocation they also came into close contact with the army and the Indian plains. The bulk of their trade was with the Tibetan borderland people, who were culturally similar to them. With the closure of the border and the increased communication channels, opened mainly by the army's own transportation needs, they came into closer economic and social interaction with the people of the Indian plains. Most of their trading activities were now concentrated on the Indian side of the border, and they soon started specializing in goods of greater value to the people in Hrishikesh and those who came up as pilgrims and even tourists. Thus making and trading shawls, woolen goods, carpets, and now apple farming, were started by the Jads in a big way. The women turned more towards wool-processing as the agricultural work they were doing in Neilang was stopped. Population pressure at Bhagori has made agriculture purely marginal, limited to growing red beans and potatoes on a small scale. Earlier, most of the trade was barter and done by the men on their journeys. Nowadays the women exchange the goods they make directly for cash in the local markets.

When the Dalai Lama came to India, Tibetan monks came with him in large numbers. They built many monasteries, including one at Bhagori. The religion that they had been in contact with from their Tibetan partners was a folk system of beliefs like their own. The lamas brought universal Buddhism and its influence is visible on the younger generation, to the extent that several young women and one young man stunned their elders by wanting to become Buddhist monastics. Hinduism is also becoming more dominant as interaction with the Hindus from the plains is increasing on a personal level, through participation in educational, political, and economic activities. Kaushalya, for example, would always pester her literate daughter to read to her from Hindu scriptures because she "liked the stories". She also pointed out the increased religiosity pervading the life of the Jads by saying, "In Neilang we had no use for so much religion as I see around now."

Education is playing an important role in changing the lives of the Jads. The sons and daughters of Kaushalya are all educated and none is herding sheep. Her daughter's husband is a schoolmaster and a Garhwali Hindu. The lives of women whose husbands are not shepherds is different, for they are becoming more like Hindu housewives. The number of such families is still small but it is increasing slowly, as more and more young persons are opting for education and jobs. In this they are encouraged by the Indian government

which gives them positive discrimination in the form of reservations in jobs and professional institutions as they fall under the category of 'scheduled tribes'. With the establishment of an army base, they receive proper medical care and are better connected with the urban centres due to the building of roads.

Demographic changes have had a big impact on Jad identity. There has been a drop in infant mortality and the Jad population has been concentrated in one village instead of three. The larger population makes it possible for more and more young people to find a match within the village, and the village is becoming a focus of their identity. As a larger number of children survive and grow up, they will in a generation grow to be numerous enough for the village to become endogamous. But the village, in becoming integrated into the Indian democracy, is changing its character. The Jads are now also realizing that they have a political identity, a concept unknown before the introduction of adult franchise and the recent village self-rule in the form of Panchayati Raj. Having lost their erstwhile Tibetan trading partners, they are trying to reform similar relationships with the people on this side of the border. The influence of the market network is also making itself manifest. One potent form of this is the change-over from a barter to a cash economy.

The high-altitude village of the Jads at Bhagori is still more or less cut off from the influence of modern technology. But their low-altitude winter village at Uttarkashi has all the trappings of an urban place. They have television and movies, two of the primary sources of entertainment for common people all over the world. Since the Hindi movies that they see propagate mainstream Hindu ideals of family and kinship, changes are slowly coming about in their values. The simple marriage ritual described by Kaushalya is no longer favoured by the Jads. In one marriage I attended, a Hindu *pandit* (Brahmin priest) was brought in, although he performed no rituals. Kaushalya was apologetic about the Jad custom of cross-cousin marriage that does not exist in northern India. She mouthed the opinion of high-caste north Indians, who shudder at such marriages, that this custom was responsible for her sons "not being quite right in the head". She also blamed her smoking habit. She would often refer to herself as *jangli* ('uncivilized'), again an influence of urban society. The dress pattern of her daughter conformed far more closely to that of urban Indian women, although Kaushalya still wore the traditional dress and cap of the mountain women. The important change was that Jads a generation younger than Kaushalya did not visualize the plains as the 'Other'. They demonstrated far greater assimilative tendencies with mainstream Indian culture and regarded the older generation, heavily influenced by Tibetan

culture, as strange. The younger generation of Jad women, like Kaushalya's grand-daughters, were shy and some even professed vegetarianism. They considered drinking alcohol, smoking, and 'multiple marriages' as 'wrong'. Even the institution of *magpa* marriages is falling into disuse. It is paradoxical that global technology is actually leading to a moral conservatism that may spell doom for self-assertive and independent Jad women like Kaushalya in the future.

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## Ancient Dialogue Amidst a Modern Cacophony: Gurung religious pluralism and the founding of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Pokhara valley

Ben Tamblin

### Introduction

This paper looks at the monastic demography and religio-political issues surrounding the emergence, in the last thirty years, of nine Buddhist institutions in the Pokhara valley. The data contained in this article were collected during a five-month period of fieldwork from March to August 2000. In its original presentation, as a somewhat lengthy undergraduate dissertation, the information was used to analyse the current religious climate, and illuminate certain unique features of ethnicity amongst local Gurungs and Tibetans in the Pokhara valley. Before the 1950s, there was little more to Pokhara than a small Newar bazaar, yet since that time the town has experienced prolific urban development and a population explosion. A significant proportion of this development has been due to a huge mountaineering and trekking tourist industry in Pokhara, which, until recently, made a significant contribution to Nepal's economy.<sup>1</sup> Pokhara also hosts the second-largest concentration of Buddhist institutions in Nepal, second only to Kathmandu where during the same thirty-year period (and for many of the same reasons) sixteen Buddhist monasteries have been founded around Baudha, mainly of the Kagyu and Nyingma schools (Helffer 1993). In Pokhara the monastic developments have been due almost entirely to the large-scale migration of Gurungs and Tibetans into the area. Both groups began arriving and settling in the Pokhara valley from the 1960s onwards—most Gurungs since the 1980s. The Tibetans arrived as part of a mass of refugees fleeing the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and

<sup>1</sup> Due to the Maoist 'People's War', and the Nepali government's declaration of a national State of Emergency in November 2001, the tourist industry in Pokhara is currently far from booming. Some estimates suggest that trade is currently down as much as 80 percent. None the less, the tourist industry has been a major reason for the valley's prolific development in recent decades.

those who stayed in the Pokhara valley settled on four plots of land allocated by the Nepali government, three of which are within the immediate vicinity of Pokhara town. From the 1970s onwards the Gurungs, rather than returning to their traditional hill villages to the north of Pokhara, began settling in the town after retiring from British and Indian military service (Pettigrew 2000).

As I began to see patterns in what was initially (to my untrained eye) a random system of recruitment and development amongst the local Buddhist institutions, it dawned on me how much that is new in this valley is a continuation of an age-old religio-political 'Himalayan dialogue' (Mumford 1989). Stanley Royal Mumford's ethnographic research in Gyasumdo, to the far north of Pokhara, identifies the same two ethnic groups dominating Buddhist institutional developments. I found that in Pokhara the Gurungs and Tibetans have again been thrown into the mix and the majority remain attached to polarized yet interdependent religious traditions, which perpetuate fundamental elements of the dialogue Mumford recorded in Gyasumdo. This positioning of local Buddhist institutional developments on an historical continuum (here manifesting itself, as it did in Gyasumdo, as a relationship between local Gurungs and Tibetans) reveals some interesting aspects of the contemporary form of an ancient relationship between shamanism and Buddhism. Amongst the local Gurung population shamanism is alive and well, despite being continually challenged by orthodox Tibetan Buddhism, which is now also heavily affiliated with certain Gurung communities. In light of this, the term 'dialogue' should be considered rather too simple a term in the Pokhara valley; here the juxtaposed yet interwoven religions of the two ethnic groups in the north have mutated, fused, and been further subsumed within a powerful concoction of modernity, and Hinduism.

Religious behaviour amongst the Gurungs in Pokhara is considerably more dynamic than in Gyasumdo as there is no longer a single dominant archetypal model of religious behaviour behind which the Gurungs unite—primarily (but far from exclusively) due to their loss of political influence. Unfortunately discussion of all the factors influencing religious orientations amongst the major Buddhist communities in the Pokhara valley falls way beyond the remit of this article. Consequently, I have focused on the demography of local Buddhist monastic institutions and used it to explore the ongoing relationship between Buddhism and shamanism—a discussion that invariably brings one to the Gurungs.<sup>2</sup> I will proceed by providing a breakdown of the monastic orders

<sup>2</sup> Before continuing, it should be noted that Gurung affiliations with Buddhist lineages are closely associated with issues of clanship. However I have avoided the issue in this article due to considerations both practical (lack of space) and political (its highly contentious

present in the valley and their relative size and then, having charted the development of all these new Buddhist monasteries and depicted the extent of the Gurungs' involvement, I will go on to discuss the latest chapter in the 'Himalayan dialogue', namely the founding of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (TPLS). This new Gurung shamanic temple, founded in 1990, suggests that a straightforward prediction of the demise of shamanism due to a 'Buddhist takeover' of Gurung culture in the Pokhara valley may be premature. I conclude with a discussion of this shamanic resurgence and emphasize how, despite the Gurungs' increasing range of affiliations to other religious traditions, a strong shamanic orientation not only persists but, in fact, could be precisely why the Gurungs are able to embrace such extensive religious pluralism.

### The monasteries

As shown in Table 1, the only sect of Tibetan Buddhism not represented in Pokhara is the Sakya sect; the three other sects of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism all have monasteries in the valley. The Kagyu sect has the largest number of monks and rinpoches,<sup>3</sup> closely followed by the generally smaller, but extremely well-supported, Nyingma monasteries, and finally by the two Gelug monasteries. There is also an old Theravada monastery serving the Newar community. Exact dates of the founding of the monasteries are very hard to pin down and do not always represent the beginnings of Buddhist practice in that vicinity. For example, there have been monks, senior lamas, and in some cases rinpoches, present within the four refugee camps in the Pokhara valley since their establishment, in one case as early as 1959, even though there was no monastery established until several years later. In the Paljor Ling Tibetan Refugee Settlement, for example, there was, for several years, a small group of elderly, learned monks including a rinpoche living in a hut in the compound. Although this was not officially a monastery, it served as a temporary base from which they performed rites for the local Tibetan laity until sufficient funds were raised to build what is now the SGCL.

nature). During my time in Pokhara I was perplexed by the complexity of local Gurung clanship systems and as I visited the various monasteries of Pokhara and attended Gurung death rites, I was constantly warned against investigating them. Avoiding these clanship debates does little, in my opinion, to detract from the validity of issues discussed in this paper. However, I am aware that further in-depth discussion of some of the questions raised here could not proceed further without facing that issue.

<sup>3</sup> 'Rinpoche' was the term by which my informants always referred to reincarnate lamas.

In Table 1 the different sects, the approximate numbers of monks and dates of each monastery's founding have been recorded. In Table 2 I give the ethnic percentages found amongst the monastic communities of each sect. Following these overviews, I have elaborated, sect by sect, certain demographic features and points of interest for each of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Pokhara valley.

**Table 1. Data summary of monasteries in the Pokhara valley**

Name of monastery	Current sect <sup>a</sup>	Date founded	No. Monks	No. Nuns
Dharmashila Buddha Vihar <sup>b</sup> (DBV)	Theravada	1942	3	1
Vikrama Shilla Buddhist Institute (VSBI)	Kagyü	1961/2	100 <sup>c</sup>	0
Karma Dhubgyu Chokhorling Nyeshang Korti (KDCNK)	Kagyü	1971/2	60	0
Bouddha Arghoun Sadan (BAS)	Kagyü	1980	17	0
Dhe Chhen Ling Buddha (DCLB)	Nyingma	1981	5	23
Shree Ghaden Dargay Ling (SGDL)	Gelug	1986	22	0
Shang Ghaden Choekor Ling (SGCL)	Gelug	1987	50	0
Nyah Gayur Sannagh Chhyoeling (NGSC)	Nyingma	1994	9	0
Karma Tashi Chyoling (KTC)	Nyingma	1994	10	0

**Notes**

- I have written 'current sect' because some of the monasteries in Pokhara have changed since their founding. This table represents their allegiance during the first six months of 2000.
- I have followed the monasteries' own anglicized orthography.
- Due to its teaching facilities, contacts, and general prestige, the monastic population of the VSBI is subject to particularly strong fluctuations and ethnic variance. The number of monks in residence could, at a different time, be double what is recorded here.

**Table 2. Ethnic percentages represented in each sect in Pokhara**

Ethnicity	Gelug (n=72)	Kagyü (n=177)	Nyingma (n=47)	Theravada (n=4)
Gurung	0%	37%	85%	0%
Tibetan	100%	16%	0%	0%
Thakali	0%	10%	13%	0%
Tamang	0%	12%	2%	0%
Other	0%	25%	0%	100%

**Gelug:** The Shang Ghaden Choekor Ling (SGCL) monastery is the larger of two Gelug monasteries in Pokhara. It houses some 50 monks, including one rinpoche and five senior monks. The number of monks in residence tends to vary considerably. Of the 50 associated with this monastery, 18 are currently in Sera in southern India studying Buddhist philosophy. The 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama established the original monastery in Tibet in 1642 and by 1959 it housed well over a thousand monks (Samuel 1993). The 'mother monastery', as the monks call it, was completely destroyed in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution. Of those who managed to escape, several senior lamas and a rinpoche settled in Paljor Ling Tibetan Refugee Settlement. Eventually, sufficient funds were raised to begin building a monastery; money came from international charities, local donations, and the monks conducting household *pūjās* amongst the rapidly growing, predominantly Gurung, Buddhist community. This is significant because it represents the first instance of infiltration of Gelug Mahayana Buddhism into the religio-political arena of Pokhara. The SGCL, as it is today, began to be built in 1987. In the first of four stages a prayer hall, kitchen, and five apartments were completed. Through the three subsequent building stages, an extra two floors of accommodation have been added, as well as prayer-rooms, storerooms, a 'dharma-wheel' room, and now, directly above it, they are adding a small clinic for the storage and dispensing of Tibetan medicine. A 'mani-wall' has also been erected around the perimeter of the monastery.

The second Gelug monastery, Shree Ghaden Dargay Ling monastery (SGDL) is in the Tashi Ling Tibetan Refugee Settlement. The monastery was founded in 1986, mainly from local and international donations. Although not particularly profitable, the SGDL also has a bookshop located on the second floor above the entrance gate. Like all the monasteries here in Pokhara, monks performing *pūjās* in local households tend to be the other main source of income. There are twenty-two monks in residence here, including a sixty-one-year-old rinpoche who is the seventh reincarnation of Dorje Loben. He escaped to Nepal from Tibet during the Cultural Revolution and has been in Tashi Ling ever since. There are also four other senior monks in residence at Shree Ghaden Dargay Ling; they all escaped together from the same monastery in Tibet. The seniority of these monks has lent considerable prestige to the monastery, as does the fact that the SGDL constantly has a resident teacher from the Guedo Tantric University in Assam, India. The teacher usually stays for one year, until his replacement turns up and relieves him of his post.

**Kagyū:** There are three Kagyū monasteries in Pokhara town. Firstly, there is the Bouddha Arghoun Sadan (BAS). When it was built in the early 1980s the monks practised Nyingma Mahayana Buddhism and cooperated with local paju and gyabré (*paju* and *gyābre*, Gurung shamanic priests) at death ceremonies and other rituals. The entire monastic population here is Gurung, consisting of roughly 17 monks, including five senior lamas, and the numbers often swell to as many as 50. During the early 1990s the BAS converted to Kagyū Mahayana Buddhism, and since then no shamans have been allowed to practise here, although local Gurung non-celibate Nyingma lamas are still allowed to use the grounds for death rites, so long as they practise alone (i.e. without Gurung shamans). This is a classic example of the way in which Nyingma village lamas have become increasingly assimilated to a more orthodox Buddhism that consistently rejects the previous amalgamation of lamaism and shamanism. It is an issue at the heart of understanding the religio-political dynamics in local Gurung culture and the modern religious environment of Pokhara.

The BAS is a particularly important monastery in Pokhara because it is the only Buddhist monastery in Pokhara with a funeral pyre (Np. *ghāt*). As the monastery is right next to the Gandaki Hospital, the monks are often called upon to perform ceremonies for families who cannot, for various reasons, have the ceremony conducted at home. The opportunity to cremate next to a river attracts a wide range of families from strongly contrasting religious backgrounds and thus a very public expression of the intimate relationship between Buddhism and death is constantly being propagated.

The second Kagyū establishment is the Karma Dhubgyu Chlokhoring Nyeshang Korti (KDCNK), which started as a very humble building up on the hill overlooking the hospital district. It is commonly known as the 'Mati Pani Gompa', as it overlooks this predominantly Gurung district of Pokhara. The KDCNK was founded in the late 1960s, by a lineage of Kagyūpas from the Manang area, hence the 'Nyeshang' in the monastery's official title, which means Manang. Today however, the lingua franca is Nepali; there is no longer a Manangi majority in residence and the title can only be seen to reflect the monastery's origins. In fact, the KDCNK has the most multi-ethnic monastic community of any monastery in Pokhara. Now extremely well established, this monastery houses some 60 monks of a variety of different ethnicities including Gurung, Tibetan, Thakali, Tamang, and Sherpa. There are presently four senior lamas and a rinpoche in residence at the KDCNK. The four senior lamas at this monastery are all from Manang: one is Gurung and the other three are Tibetan. The monastery has grown rapidly over the last thirty years,

with a new prayer hall and stupa having been completed just four years ago. At the moment a large accommodation block is being erected just down the hill from the main prayer hall. Most of its considerable financial support comes from close ties with the Kagyū sect in Southeast Asia, particularly an affluent monastery in Malaysia, which is frequently visited by the resident rinpoche.

The third Kagyū monastery is the very large and prestigious Vikrama Shilla Buddhist Institute (VSBI) in the grounds of Tashi Palkiel Tibetan Refugee Settlement. The monastery is famous for its 1,000 golden Buddhas, which fill display cabinets from floor to ceiling in the enormous main prayer hall. There are approximately 100 monks here including roughly 15 senior lamas and 3 rinpoches, all originally from Tibet. The monastery, as it stands today, was completed just ten years ago, although as with the other refugee communities in Pokhara, there has been a small religious community at the camp since its founding in the 1960s. Additional premises have been added whenever sufficient funds have become available, and there is now a large dormitory building behind the main temple, which houses the monks. The camp is also building new sleeping quarters and a dining hall to accommodate guests of the rinpoches. Most of the finances for these enterprises come from affluent Kagyū monasteries and private sponsors in Singapore. The head rinpoche was in Singapore during all of my visits to this settlement. As well as the substantial sponsorship that this monastery is receiving from Singapore, they also have a shop selling incense, books, and other religious paraphernalia. All of the profits go back into the monastery where they are used to pay teachers and buy food.

VSBI is now such a well-established monastery that monks come to study here from many parts of Nepal and India. It is particularly renowned for its teachings on Buddhist philosophy, as well as offering courses in Tibetan grammar, English, and Nepali. Because of its situation within the Tibetan settlement the majority of monks in the monastery are ethnically Tibetan. However, during my fieldwork there were also seven Gurungs, four Thakalis, and one Newar monk in residence. Again, this incorporation of diverse ethnic groups into the new monastic schools of Tibetan Buddhism helps explain the current proliferation of orthodox ideology amongst the wider population in Pokhara. Quite simply, with the recruitment of a new monk, the monastery also acquires a new affiliation with a local family.

**Nyingma:** There are three Nyingma Buddhist monasteries in Pokhara, the oldest of which is Dhe Chhen Ling Buddha monastery (DCLB). This

monastery is in the Dhip district and has been built by the local inhabitants, who are predominantly Gurungs and Thakalis. Although additional features have been added at different times, the main building was finished in 1981 and now houses approximately 23 celibate nuns and five non-celibate monks. All Nyingma nuns are expected to remain celibate, whilst most Nyingma monks at this monastery will abandon celibacy and marry at some point.

The DCLB provides a classic example of the fascinating relationship between Gurungs, Buddhism and military service. Behind the monastery there is a small military compound and a large house formerly owned and occupied by Captain Ganesh Gurung MC of the British Gurkhas. Captain Ganesh Gurung was a close friend of Lobsang Temba Rinpoche, who died in 1989, and donated the plot of land that the main temple structure is now built on. During their time in Pokhara, Captain Gurung's wife had a daughter who eventually married a Gurkha soldier and was subsequently posted to Hong Kong. Whilst in Hong Kong with her husband, the captain's daughter gave birth to a boy, Thuwang Tenzin. As the story is told, by the age of two Thuwang Tenzin had begun to speak about a monastery in Pokhara where he believed he was the Lama. So convinced of this was the little boy, that his parents felt they had no choice but to return him to Nepal where he could be verified as the reincarnation of Lobsang Temba Lama. Upon his return the boy appeared to recognize many features of the monastery, including some of the monks, and was eventually officially recognized as Thuwang Tenzin Rinpoche. He is now 12 years old and currently in Kathmandu receiving instruction under a senior Kagyupa lama.

In 1994 a Gurung Lama lineage built the Nyah Gayur Sannagh Chhyoeling monastery (NGSC). This Gurung family has been in Pokhara for the last 20 years. The head of the lineage, Khadka Lama, settled after retirement from military service, at which point he returned to his lamaist traditions, being well read in the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures and a skilled Tibetan medicinal and palmistry practitioner. Initially Khadka practised Nyingma Buddhism from the family home; now they live in the new monastery which was completed recently. Being a family affair, I met the majority of Khadka's children and in-laws who are either monks themselves or help out at the monastery. Sunita Lama, Khadka's eldest daughter, tells me her younger brother, Rudra, is also a learned monk, currently in Hong Kong. I met Rudra's wife, Laxmi, at the monastery and she told me their son would also become a monk after he has finished his primary education in Pokhara. The NGSC is a privately sponsored Gurung monastery; the family raised the money for the founding of the monastery through military service and subsequent work in Hong Kong and

elsewhere abroad. Amongst the immediate family members whom I met during my visits here, a number of different languages are spoken including Nepali, Gurung, Tibetan, Malay, Hindi, and English. I will return to a discussion of this family later.

Also built in 1994, the Karma Tashi Chyoling monastery (KTC) is a relatively small monastery on the road leading to the Gandaki Hospital, not far from the BAS. As with the NGSC, the monastery is sponsored, run, and used almost exclusively by Gurungs. The head of the monastery is a 40-year-old monk called Gopal Lama. Gopal Lama has taken in some young boys from poor homes in Pokhara and the monastery now houses 10 monks in total, all of whom are Gurungs. Interestingly, unlike the NGSC, all the monks apart from Gopal are celibate. The monastery maintains strong connections with Malaysia, where Gopal was schooled and received funds for the founding of the monastery.

Gopal is a well-respected practitioner of Tibetan medicine; his family has a strong tradition of practising Tibetan medicine in their home. It should also be noted that Gopal Lama's uncle is Khadka Lama from the NGSC. These two closely related Gurung families are the only two monastic orders in Pokhara practising Tibetan medicine (although it appears the SGCL is soon to offer such a facility) and for this reason both monasteries are regularly visited by monks and laity from the Tibetan refugee settlements. Gopal Lama founded the monastery in Pokhara after the old one in Ghandrung "fell down due to old age". There has been a long history of lamaism in Gopal Lama's family (referring to the same lineage, Khadka says it can be traced back through fourteen generations); he says his father was a Nyingma priest who taught him much about Tibetan medicine. He says one of his predecessors once travelled to Tibet to learn the art of medicine and since then the knowledge has been passed on from one generation to the next. Other rites and ceremonies practised by Gopal were learned partly from his father and partly from an incarnate lama in Malaysia.

**Theravada:** The Dharmashila Buddha Vihar monastery (DBV) is in Nadipur, on the way to Bugar. It is a Newar Buddhist monastery and, although construction dates are a little tentative, my informants tell me it was built in 1942, making it the oldest monastery in Pokhara. There are three elderly monks in residence at the monastery, the oldest of whom is a 95-year-old man, Brahman by birth, who only fully committed himself to a Buddhist monastic lifestyle at the age of 75. The other two residents at the monastery are both Newars, one a 60-year-old monk, the other a 60-year-old nun. It

remains to be seen what will happen to the monastery after these monks and nuns have passed away.

Several points of interest arise from this summary of monastic developments. Firstly, we can see that all Gelug monks in Pokhara are Tibetan. I would argue this is primarily because the two Gelug monasteries in Pokhara are both situated inside Tibetan refugee camps and have been built by the local Tibetan population primarily for their own use.

Secondly, the Kagyu sect is by far the most ethnically mixed of the monastic orders in Pokhara. This may be partly explained by their long history in the Manang area, where it has coexisted amongst the mixed Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups (along with the Nyingma sect) for generations. Furthermore, when the KDCNK monastery was built there was no choice of monastery for local families who felt an allegiance to Buddhism and who wished to send a son to a monastery. Their sons either went to the Kagyu monastery, or not at all. As a result of this, as mentioned earlier, some families from ethnic groups with no previous affiliation to the Kagyu order inadvertently became lay followers of Kagyu Buddhism.

It is also interesting that there is not a single ethnically Tibetan Nyingma monk in Pokhara. The only explanation I can think of for this is that the relatively smaller population of Tibetans being recruited into the monasteries is completely catered for by the refugee settlement monasteries, where nearly all the Tibetans live.

#### **Buddhism versus shamanism in Pokhara: a new chapter of ancient history**

Above I have outlined the development of Buddhist monasteries in Pokhara and highlighted the founding role of the local Gurungs and Tibetans. The religio-political climate behind these recent institutional developments is a manifestation of local Gurung and Tibetan religious orientations, which, as Mumford suggests, have been in a state of interdependent, yet conflictual, evolution for generations. Referring to the origins of the religio-political dialogue between these two ethnic groups in Gyasumdo, Mumford writes:

The recent migration of Tibetans from Kyirong and Nupri [into Manang] over the last century has instigated a contemporary clash between Buddhist lamas and Gurung shamans on the Nepal side of the

border. The older, shamanic layer is still being challenged by Tibetan Lamaism, in a manner analogous to the confrontation that must have occurred again and again in rural Tibet in the past. (Mumford 1989: 7)

During the early stages of their migration into Gyasumdo the Tibetan people were forced to conform to shamanic religious ceremonies because of the local Gurung Ghale clan's political and economic dominance. Although Buddhism remained a central part of the local Tibetan identity, it experienced a considerable suspension of orthodoxy due to weak institutional leadership and their subservience to the Ghale lords. Thus the Gyasumdo region was a bastion of Himalayan shamanism that until the middle of the twentieth century remained relatively unchallenged. Before describing the revolutionary events that then led the Tibetans to abandon most of their adopted shamanic practices, it should be noted that elsewhere in Gurung territory Buddhism was being adopted alongside shamanism by various Gurung families, predominantly from the Charjat clans, who in turn began non-celibate lineages of 'village lamaism'. Of this history of Buddhism amongst the Gurungs, Pettigrew writes:

On the basis of the oral texts, Tamu and Tamu (1993: 484) write that after the Tamumai [Gurung people] had left the ancestral village of Khola and moved down into their present homeland "some of the Kwonma clan went from Siklis to Nar in Mustang to learn Lamaism from recently-arrived Tibetan Lamas". It is difficult to suggest dates but the period they refer to is likely to have been hundreds of years ago.

(Pettigrew 1995: 144)

And so it came to be that in most of the Gurung territory to the south the Gurungs' affiliation with Buddhism was gradually solidifying. Interestingly, the greatest resistance to Buddhism remained in the northern area of Gyasumdo, where there was the strongest concentration of Tibetans—and therefore Buddhism; a feature also clearly the case in the Pokhara valley today. Importantly, however, it is both these polarized examples of the Gurungs' relationship to Buddhism that explain the development of Buddhist institutions in Pokhara and the contemporary religio-political climate. Gurungs with strong affiliations to only Buddhism, Buddhism and shamanism, and only shamanism all co-exist in Pokhara—not to mention those with Christian and Hindu affiliations. Further discussion of this multitude of faiths will follow shortly.

Returning to the story in Gyasumdo, Mumford argues that interplay between shamanism and Buddhism passed an important milestone earlier this century

with the mass exodus of Tibetans into Nepal due to the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Amongst the fleeing refugees were prestigious reincarnate lamas who stayed in the Tibetan villages as they passed through northern Nepal on their way to Kathmandu and India. Chog Lingpa Rinpoche was one such lama who effectively acted as the catalyst for a revolution amongst the Tibetan laity in Gyasumdo, whom he condemned for colluding in local shamanic 'red offerings' (animal sacrifices):

Lama Chog Lingpa... was shocked to find that although the Gyasumdo Tibetans had lamas of the Nyingma sect in every village, had built monasteries (tib. Gompas), and had followed the Tibetan ritual cycle, they had nevertheless, compromised with the Gurung custom that is most critical: the red offering of animal sacrifice. Outraged, Lama Chog Lingpa thundered condemnation in sermons as he gathered the Tibetans to receive his initiations. Tibetan lay leaders in every village [of the Manang area] except Thang-jet threw out the yearly spring communal sacrifice they had practiced for generations under the domination of the Ghale [Gurung] lords... (Mumford 1989: 80)

Chog Lingpa's presence also influenced Buddhist practitioners in neighbouring districts irrespective of ethnicity. According to Mumford, "the break with the sacrificial custom...required a charismatic lama presence that would replicate the taming and oath binding performed by Padmasambhava in Tibet" (Mumford 1989: 83). This reference to an ancient mythical Buddhist victory over shamanism again emphasizes the history of the conflict between shamanism and Buddhism.<sup>4</sup> The essential point is that today in Pokhara there are a considerable number of rinpoches and learned monks *permanently in residence* amongst the local monastic population, a population more strongly constituted of ethnically Gurung monks than ever before. These monasteries have created an unprecedented concentration of orthodox Buddhism amongst the Gurung community that is loaded with orthodox, reformatory ideology: in fact, the presence of so many Gelug and Kagyu rinpoches and celibate, high-ranking monks in Pokhara has persuaded nearly all local Nyingma Gurung village lamas to stop cooperating with shamans. In Pokhara, no Nyingma lamas (celibate or otherwise) are willing to work with a paju or gyabré if a sacrifice is involved; in fact I found no celibate monastic Nyingma who would work with them at all. Thus it would appear that Chog Lingpa Rinpoche's condemnations continue to echo through the Pokhara valley, only now within

<sup>4</sup> Although most Tibetan Buddhist monks can recite this story without hesitation, it should be noted that many shamans and lay Gurungs are equally familiar with another version that represents the encounter, far from being a defeat, as the birth of a proud oral tradition.

and amongst many Gurung communities, as opposed to the now orthodox Buddhist Tibetan population.

A classic example of the reform of Gurung village lamaism comes from the NGSC monastery and its resident lineage. Although there are many Gurungs who would contest such a statement, Sunita Lama told me with great pride how her family is capable of providing for all the needs of the local Gurung community and how the monastery is now widely respected. On my last visit, she was quick to point out that a famous Gelug rinpoche was here just a few days previously for advice about Tibetan medicine and to tell her father about his recent visit to America. Once their monastery was founded, it appears there was quite a profound change in status, as being perceived as a monastic order conveys much more religious authority than being a mere village lama. As if to substantiate this authority, several years ago Khadka's eldest son left to study Buddhist scripture in Mustang, which is unusual for a Gurung lama lineage as knowledge is most often passed on patrilineally. Not only did Khadka's son study the ancient Buddhist scriptures at Muktinath, he also underwent the prestigious three-year-three-month-three-day retreat, which, upon his return, very effectively set a seal upon the elevation of his family's status. Sunita Lama tells me that her brother gave teachings to the young Rinpoche from the DCLB monastery when he first returned from Hong Kong.

The essential point about this family is the effect that their vastly improved religious education, which is at the heart of the process of reform, has had on their attitude concerning animal sacrifice and consequently on Gurungs who use shamans. Sunita told me that in previous generations, priests from their family's lineage collaborated with the paju and gyabré during various rites that involved animal sacrifice. Today, she speaks adamantly about how animal sacrifice is wrong. She tells me her father and her brother "understand the Tibetan language; Buddha said cutting no good" (by "cutting" she means animal sacrifice). Khadka Lama believes there is a growing divide in Gurung society: "If understanding is complete, then the Gurungs do not use paju and gyabré. If understanding is not complete, then Gurungs use paju, gyabré, and lama as tradition dictates."<sup>5</sup> Ironically, then, with the deepening of Buddhist education comes a broadening of discriminatory attitudes within Gurung society towards their own traditions. Such Gurung Lama lineages wish to be taken seriously as monastic institutions and hence are actively trying to disassociate themselves from their shamanic brethren. Consequently, Gurung

<sup>5</sup> Again it should be stressed that many local shamanists are passionately opposed to the use of lamas for death rituals (*pwe*). They believe they do have a full understanding of the implications of animal sacrifice, which is precisely why they continue to do it.

Lama monastic lineages in Pokhara have a greater interest in the rejection of animal sacrifice than anyone else. Through its rejection they express both their purity as Buddhists and the extent of their education. They are Gurungs, but, more importantly, they are educated, successful (both spiritually and materially) Buddhist Gurungs. The role of image and the means by which it is maintained are critical issues in understanding ethnic identity amongst the Buddhist population in Pokhara, particularly the Gurungs. Animal sacrifice is not just an ethical issue; it is also an identity issue. Pettigrew's discussion of this issue of image maintenance amongst Gurung communities in Pokhara suggests the critical importance of 'doing the right things' in order to be perceived as educated and upwardly mobile. For example, being unable to speak the Gurung language is seen as a public expression of status and success for young urban-dwelling Gurung laity and their families (Pettigrew 2000: 12). In the same manner, rejection of animal sacrifice gains the Gurung lamas respectability and status amongst the Buddhist monastic community (and many Gurungs), whilst maintenance of sacrificial rites amongst local Gurung shamanists is passionately argued to be doing the right thing by the ancestors and to be equally in accordance with the Gurung worldview.

The story of the NGSC epitomizes the impossible task of defining the archetypal Gurung Lama lineage as they continue to evolve and change over generations. Despite the NGSC and KTC being the only two 'traditional' Gurung Lama lineages in Pokhara, there are several other nearby monasteries that are locally referred to as 'Gurung monasteries', including the KDCNK and most importantly the BAS. In the case of the BAS what is meant by 'Gurung monastery' is that it was built using financial donations from local Gurungs and is populated by ethnically Gurung monks. However, the BAS is not run by a Gurung Lama lineage and when I discussed this matter with an informant, he scoffed at the idea that all the BAS monks were Gurungs. Amongst the Gurung community in Pokhara there is considerable contention as to who is really a Gurung. I was told that many of the monks at the BAS are what are known locally as 'Manangis', i.e. from the northern periphery of the Gandaki zone. I was told they speak a dialect closer to Tibetan (probably Thakali) than Gurung and are 'not real Gurungs'.<sup>6</sup>

Another interesting feature about the BAS monastery is that when it was first founded, as a Nyingma Buddhist institution, the local paju and gyabré used to

<sup>6</sup> At this point in the paper I find myself closest to the issue of Gurung clanship. Clarification of who is and who isn't a 'real Gurung' can only be achieved through investigating people's linguistic orientation and clan affiliation claims, which my informant, a local Gurung, seemed able to assess quite spontaneously.

perform rites with the monks there. More recently, however, like many of the monasteries in the hills to the north of Pokhara, the BAS has converted to Kagyu Buddhism. Since its conversion, the monastery has refused to allow Gurung shamans to practise on its grounds or with its monks. The process of conversion may have been helped by a strong presence of 'Manangi' monks at the BAS. In an interview with one of the senior lamas at the KDCNK, another monastery with a substantial number of Gurung monks, I was told that over the last 16-17 years there has been a thorough conversion to Kagyu Buddhism of monasteries in the Manang area. A powerful Kagyupa lama called Sherab Gyaltzen Rinpoche had been 'spreading his dharma' throughout the area and converting the Nyingma monasteries. This story suggests a continuation of the Chog Lingpa scenario in Gyasumdo, as described by Mumford, and further helps to explain not only the rise of orthodoxy amongst Pokhara's Buddhist institutions, but also the predominance of certain Buddhist sects over others. The senior monks and the rinpoche currently in residence at the BAS allow local non-celibate Gurung Nyingma village lamas to use their facilities for ceremonies, but they will not condone the animal sacrifices of the paju and gyabré, so the Gurung Nyingma lamas invariably officiate alone.

### The valley of priests

Throughout most of their traditional homelands, the Gurungs gradually experienced contact with priests other than the paju and gyabré and began developing localized traditions (Pignède 1993). Although the influence of Buddhism and the rise of village lama lineages were fairly widespread, it should be emphasized that in many areas the Gurungs also began to rely on Hindu Brahmans. Hinduism has infiltrated Gurung culture in numerous different ways, but rarely to the same depth as Buddhism, yet despite their more superficial involvement, Pignède describes an important role for local Brahmans settling on the periphery of Mohoriya and other Gurung villages. They became a part of Gurung customs by providing astrological readings and

**Table 3: Gurung household priest affiliations**

	Paju	Gyabré	Nyingma Lama	Other Lama	Hindu	Christian
<b>Households (n=40)</b>	32	31	13	12	11	5

Note: Affiliation was defined in terms of having called on the services of the priest within the last year.

house protection rites (Np. *satya nārāyan pūjā*) alongside the traditional paju and gyabré shamans. Today in Pokhara this is more the case than ever before, with local Gurungs choosing to use Brahmans, lamas, and shamans alike. In Table 3 I have summarized details of priest affiliations from a small census I conducted amongst the local Gurung laity.

The rite at the heart of Gurung society that encapsulates most profoundly their cosmological orientation is the death ritual, the *pwé laba* (Pettigrew 2000), and it is the lama's ability to manipulate these ancient cosmological understandings that explains why Buddhism, rather than Hinduism, became so deeply accepted within many Gurung villages (Mumford 1989). The Gurungs in Pokhara are from different villages spread throughout Gurung territory and so have brought a variety of localized customs with them. I found that 27.5 percent of Gurung households in my survey used a local Brahman for some kind of religious rite, most commonly the *satya nārāyan pūjā*, and many of the Gurung laity use Brahmans for astrological consultations and house protection rites as readily as they will use paju and gyabré. It should be noted, however, that despite the fact that the number of rites being performed by the local Brahmans often vastly outnumbered the rites performed by the Gurung lamas, they were generally considered of much less religious significance.

As became evident from my survey, the Gurungs are involved with many different religions in Pokhara and my findings remain somewhat contrary to the informal estimations proposed by Pettigrew's informants (2000: 31). A substantial number of Gurung households surveyed claimed to use more than one kind of priest. For example, 12.5 percent used paju, gyabré, lama and Brahman for religious rites and duties. Of a majority of Gurungs who use paju and gyabré, I found 40.5 percent of them also used Buddhist lamas, which would suggest that apart from the small Gurung Christian community (a total of five families in the whole of Pokhara to the best of my knowledge), every other Gurung family in Pokhara remains actively involved with two or more different kinds of priest.

### Discussion

Arguably, the story so far depicts a rather dire situation for local Gurung shamanists. Indeed, it is a perspective shared by many educated Gurungs in Pokhara, who today see their shamanic traditions being lost to alternative lifestyles and religions and feel deeply concerned about the fate of their cultural traditions. They are worried about future generations of Gurungs

growing up in a modern urban environment where their ethnic origins and unique cultural heritage are subsumed beneath a purely Buddhist and/or westernized identity (Pettigrew 2000). However, far from being oppressed—or even intimidated—by the sweep of modernity and contemporary orthodox Buddhism, a collective of successful, well-educated local Gurungs came together in 1990 and organized the founding of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (TPLS), which has very effectively created an institutionalized shamanic counter-culture in Pokhara.<sup>7</sup> In fact, since the initial founding of the temple and cultural centre, a shamanic secondary school was completed in 2002. The TPLS provides a focus for local Gurungs, with a cultural museum of artefacts, costumes, and information comprehensively representing early Gurung religious and lay practices. The TPLS also serves as a centre for the performance of shamanic rites (as noted above, they are no longer possible in any Buddhist monastery in Pokhara), and is now also capable of facilitating the training of a new generation of both paju and gyabré priests. Significantly, the TPLS is the only religious institution in Pokhara, other than the BAS, with a funeral pyre and today expresses a reasserted shamanic religious orthodoxy that parallels the development of Buddhist institutions in Pokhara. Ironically, two of the institutions at the heart of the fervent religio-political contention amongst the local Gurung community, the BAS and the TPLS, stand on opposite sides of a gorge, facing each other. Despite being populated entirely by Gurungs, who have converted from the Nyingma Buddhism of its early days and abandoned the initial intention of cooperating with the local paju and gyabré shamans, the BAS now finds itself directly opposite an institution embodying the very practices and people from whom it disassociated itself—a geographical juxtaposition that appears deeply symbolic of the resilient nature of shamanism.

There is an educated core of Gurungs at the TPLS who remain dedicated to the traditional means of worshipping their ancestors and ensuring the safe passage of the dead to the Afterworld, and for these Gurungs sacrifice is an essential part of their religious practice. Despite the calls from local Buddhist institutions and certain Gurung lama lineages that 'cutting is no good'—calls that reflect prejudices embedded in many sectors of today's 'modern' society—many Gurungs are now bravely uniting behind their shamanic scholars. In doing so, the TPLS is becoming an increasingly fascinating institution, for it simultaneously represents the ancient and the modern:

<sup>7</sup> The TPLS is part of a network of Gurung shamanic temples/cultural centres. There is even a TPLS, complete with extremely efficient fund raising committee, in Brunei. I am grateful to Judith Pettigrew for this and other information on the TPLS.

It is undeniable that considerable cultural repertoire has been lost, and that more will undoubtedly be lost in the future. For many people there will continue to be much to lament. It could be argued, however, that through their actions much has also been gained. There are new ways of doing things based in part on the 'old' ways and knowledge; there are new ways of doing things based on *habitus*; and there are new ways of doing things based on new ways of knowing. Thus 'culture' will be 'saved' not, however, as the 'old' ways but as a 'new' way, shaped by the political and social contexts of today. (Pettigrew 1995: 95)

With the founding of the TPLS, traditional Gurung shamanic practices were publicly affirmed and given a place in Pokhara society. This formalization of shamanic cosmology empowered many local Gurungs who now feel capable of standing up against the might of orthodox Buddhism, and feel increasingly justified in maintaining their practices of animal sacrifice. However, the limitations of the TPLS' ability to reimpose shamanic cosmology onto the local religious scene remain significant, for orthodox Tibetan Buddhist institutions are part of a whole range of contemporary social, political and religious phenomena that have swept through the Pokhara valley, as they have done in many other rapidly modernizing regions of Nepal. Amongst these phenomena, the orthodoxy of local Tibetan Buddhist institutions represents probably the most concentrated and potentially detrimental challenge to shamanism and the Gurungs' traditional way of life. However, it is far from being the only challenge and the extent of many Gurung families' involvement with Buddhism suggests that some will be sensing anything but an allegiance to the TPLS. Despite rare reports of coordinated Buddhist-shamanic religious practices continuing in outlying Gurung villages, it is fair to say that Gurung lamaism in Pokhara has been totally revolutionized, yet without the same fate befalling the local paju and gyabré. But maybe those Gurungs who continue to venture further and further afield in their religious affiliations are not so far from their shamanic roots after all. Mumford describes how it is that, embedded within the shamanic worldview, there is an understanding of change that could be seen to apply also to the contemporary religious pluralism of Pokhara:

History is moving us into a period of reciprocal illumination. When cultural identities become decentered by the perspective of others, the way is forward, plunging ever more deeply into the interpenetration...[the shamans of Gyasumdo] do not draw a boundary around their identity of mutual collaboration. They embrace the

interpenetration of different wills, allowing spirits from the periphery and from previous eras to enter their own being. They enter alien realms on behalf of the community. They admit their complicity in the transgression of their sacrifice, which expresses indebtedness to all realms. Because of this self-image the Paju and Gyabré are able to view their own motives and images as unbounded, incomplete and historically changing. Their legends refer to influences from other traditions, including that of the lamas. They view their own truths as partial and in need of further elaboration from other sources.

(Mumford 1989: 246)

Such prophetic spiritual conceptualizations of the world are at the core of Gurung shamanism and shine an optimistic light over the fate of Gurung culture and religious practices. The metaphorical tales and legends of the paju and gyabré are in a constant state of flux, always incorporating, rejecting, and reincorporating new influences in a manner that cannot but profoundly influence the Gurung laity's worldview and may help to account for their perplexing ability to engage in so many different religious practices. It may be then that, despite embracing other religious practices and lifestyles (often simultaneously), the majority of Gurungs remain grounded in a shamanic worldview. The Gurungs' shamanic foundations prepare them well for modern, pluralistic environments. As Mumford rightly suggests, shamanism has a funny habit of thriving on such stony ground—like the eternal underdog—and despite substantial opposition from the literary traditions of modernity, Buddhism, and Hinduism in the Pokhara valley, shamanism has not only survived, but is engaged in a lively counter-culture. A conflictual religio-political dialogue between shamanism and Buddhism is thus alive and well in Pokhara, yet unlike the Himalayan dialogue of previous epochs, this dialogue is now just one element of a broader discourse: a 'Himalayan cacophony' if you like. A new degree of religious pluralism is unfolding in the Pokhara valley, one that challenges the boundaries of ethnic identity amongst many local communities, although none more so than the local Gurungs.

**Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank Indra Bahadur Gurung (a.k.a. 'IB') for being so generous with his time and contacts and for inviting me to various Gurung ceremonies that fueled my interest. Secondly, many thanks to Raju Gurung who accompanied me on my journeys to local monasteries and Gurung villages, patiently translating from both Gurung and Nepali when I needed him to. Raju became a good friend. I would also like to thank David Gellner for his constant encouragement, both while in the field and since my return, and Judith Pettigrew for her substantial feedback whilst I was preparing this paper. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife, Jamie, for so effortlessly being there for me, wherever I am.

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**CORRESPONDENCE  
AND  
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## Crossfire!

Following the publication of EBHR 19, the editors received a communication from Lt.-Col. (retired) J.P. Cross which took issue with certain aspects of Judith Pettigrew's article "Gurkhas" in the Town: Migration, language, and healing'. We reproduce the objections raised by Lt.-Col. Cross, and Judith Pettigrew's responses.

### *John Cross writes:*

The monthly pension of Rs 7,881.60 (see fn. 5, p. 9) actually represents an excellent wage in Nepal where the average yearly income is less than US\$200 a year and where a teacher earns, on average, Rs 2-3,000 a month. Of course, the new and equitable pension rates, welcomed by His Majesty's Government of Nepal, reflect the tenets of the Tripartite Agreement between the United Kingdom, India, and Nepal. As to pay and salaries, serving Gurkha soldiers receive exactly the same take-home pay (and death-in-service benefits) as their British counterparts.

No British or Gurkha soldier gets a pension after 3 years' service (see fn. 5, p. 9). The current arrangements for British soldiers are that they receive a full pension gained after 22 years' service. A deferred pension is paid, at the age of 60, to those who have served over 12 years in the Army. But a Gurkha gets an immediate and index-linked pension after the completion of 15 years' service. This reflects the different terms and conditions of service accepted when each enlist.

But pensions should not be viewed in isolation and cognizance should be taken of the outstanding work done by the Gurkha Welfare Scheme in Nepal to assist further our retired soldiers. This ranges, for example, from community aid (such as the construction of eight schools a year) to individual aid (an extensive medical aid package and education bursaries for pensioners). The GWS budget for the last financial year was £5.5 million. In short, there is an unequivocal commitment to our retired *Gurkha soldiers*.

### *Judith Pettigrew replies:*

While it is accurate that Gurkha pensions are considerably above the average yearly income in Nepal, I do not feel that a comparison with other earners such as teachers is appropriate. By joining the British Army, young men and their immediate family members join an elite group of people whose lifestyles, expectations, and patterns of consumption are those of an urban, sophisticated, cosmopolitan, consumerist world. It is an upwardly mobile urban environment that is pervaded with social pressures and expectations as well as extensive financial responsibilities. Because of this unique set of circumstances, socio-economic comparisons with other sectors of Nepali society are inappropriate.

Retired British soldiers get the same pension regardless of which country they live in. I suggest that the same should hold for Gurkhas, not all of whom live in Nepal following retirement. That pensions are inadequate is clearly demonstrated by the fact that almost all ex-Gurkhas must re-migrate for work, which results in ongoing and long-term separation of men from their families.

I acknowledge that take-home pay is equal: lines 5 and 6 of footnote number five read: "... the pay and salaries of Nepali citizens and British citizens in the Gurkhas were unequal until recently."

John Cross is quite correct: no British or Gurkha soldier gets a pension after three years. A Gurkha who read a draft of the article pointed out this error to me. That the correction was omitted in the final version is entirely my mistake, for which I take full responsibility.

## Nature and Culture in the Himalayas: A workshop planned for February 2004

organized by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

A workshop is planned for February 2004 on the theme of nature and culture as conceptualized by and within the different groups inhabiting the Himalayan region. The region is characterized by enormous cultural diversity, whether viewed from a linguistic, religious, or occupational point of view: Indo-European and Tibeto-Burman languages; Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and shamanic religions; hunters and gatherers, nomadic pastoralists, sedentary agro-pastoralists, rice-agriculturalists, and artisans, all living side by side within the same area.

The workshop will have English as its lingua franca. It will aim to bring together specialists on different representative groups of this heterogeneous region in order to initiate discussion and general consideration both of the preconditions and of the consequences of the coexistence, within a shared social or political framework, of highly diverse cosmologies, and especially differing conceptions of nature and culture. These concepts are of particular interest for anthropological discussion, since they were once deployed far more widely and their relevance has recently been the object of extensive critiques.

Following the doubts expressed about the existence of the categories of nature and culture in the specific context of Indian groups of Amazonia, there has been a sort of universalization of such scepticism. One example of this can be seen in the response to the creation of national parks in the Nepalese part of the Himalayas, a process which some have interpreted as a Westernized urban elite imposing on local people a set of concepts of which they have no knowledge. However, it must be said that at least the majority group of Nepal has an opposition in its own language which is very much a part of current usage and which is used to label a wide variety of phenomena and processes, namely the distinction between the *prākṛitik* and the *sāmskritik*, the 'natural' and the 'cultural'. This does not mean that the opposition is to be understood with exactly those associations which we would make. But what this short example does show is that the great complexity of the Himalayan region,

whose peoples find themselves at the crossroads of at least four Great Traditions, cannot be fully grasped by, or reduced to, the simple confrontation of the anthropologist with 'her' or 'his' ethnic group and the misunderstandings to which this gives rise. Frequent migrations, the creation and disappearance of diverse political and religious structures, borrowings from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam (and from numerous different traditions within these), as well as from polymorphous shamanic practices—all these immediately place the researcher in front of a tangled web of which the researcher's own ideas also form a part.

Thus it is proposed in first place, as a prelude to the presentation of case studies and as a framework for them, to include some more general contributions on the notions of nature and culture in the textual traditions of Hinduism, Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, and Islam, and in the shamanic religions.

The workshop will then consider the manner in which local populations conceive of their relationship to the world and how far that world is seen as wild, modeled by gods or by men. We shall examine what ideas these groups have of their interventions in the world, both today and in the past, including the mythic past; the definitions and limits of the different spheres of nature (in particular the place of animals and spirits in the definition of humans); metaphors of and between nature and society; ideas about the wild and the domesticated; and the role of ritual in the conceptualization of these categories.

It is also proposed to attempt to understand and compare the means by which cultural models are projected on to the environment in the process of making use of it and dividing it up, and to consider the countervailing possibility that the features of a specific environment may affect in specific ways particular cultural models.

The workshop aims to bring together specialists from various European countries whose research is represented by the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*.

Those interested should write to <Marie.Lecomte-Tilouine@vjf.cnrs.fr>.

**BOOK REVIEWS**

*The Tutor of History* by Manjushree Thapa. Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2001. 442pp.

*Arresting God in Kathmandu* by Samrat Upadhyay. Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Mariner Original, 2001. 191pp.

Reviewed by Sarah LeVine

In her acknowledgements Manjushree Thapa assures us that although Khaireni Tar, a town on the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway in western Nepal and the setting of her first novel, *The Tutor of History*, actually exists, the community she portrays is "entirely fictional". Be that as it may, Ms Thapa describes the town and the people who live there with such skill, so charmingly, and in such minutely observed detail that her fictional universe rapidly becomes our reality. The focus of the novel is a parliamentary election campaign conducted by the People's Party of Nepal, a "small inconsequential party of disgruntled intellectuals" whose modest goal is to be included in a national coalition government. Rishi Parajuli, the tutor of history of the title, is a native of Khaireni Tar who, as a student before the revolution of 1990, belonged to an underground communist party and was once jailed for participating in a pro-democracy demonstration. Now, with his activist days only a distant memory, he "flounders" in Kathmandu where, by tutoring recalcitrant adolescents for their School Leaving Certificate exams, "he earns what he can in a city that begrudges opportunities to migrants like him." He is aware that "in his birth village he had a fuller identity—he was so-and-so's grandson, son-and-so's son, a member of a select caste and class—but in Kathmandu he [is] anonymous, a slip of a man like all the others, a shadow moving against a wall and disappearing when the sky [clouds] over." After an absence of twelve years, he sometimes thinks about returning to Khaireni Tar, a "good place" in which "each house has an archeology of its own". But, knowing he would have to face "the accusation of his father and reproach of his mother, the tenacious orthodoxy of village society, he [can] neither move backward nor...spring forward." Then one evening in the diner where he customarily takes his meals, he encounters the schoolmaster who, many years earlier, led him, as an idealistic schoolboy, into underground politics. Recruited by his old mentor as an "undercover agent" for the United Marxist-Leninist Party, Rishi goes back to his home district to work on the People's Party campaign. His mandate is to "split the vote", that is, to secure the defeat of the National Congress Party, the UML's principal adversary, by creating an illusion of popular grassroots support and thereby pulling NC voters away to the People's Party.

But although Ms Thapa offers a powerful critique of grass-roots electoral politics in Nepal, for her, this is a side issue. Her main concern is with personal transformation. In Khaireni Tar, the headquarters of Tanahun District, "a rich humanity" awaits us. "In fact there [is] so much humanity it [is] a challenge to attend to each individual life." Ms Thapa faces this challenge most successfully. She has us engage with half-a-dozen major and dozens of minor characters many of whose lives are changed irrevocably by the election campaign of Nayan Raj Dahal, the People's Party candidate. As a star of the 1970s silver screen, Nayan Raj Dahal once portrayed the revolutionary hero of the hit movie *Ma Mānche Hun*; in the 1990s he retains his movie-star looks—including his jet-black hair—and is at once grandiloquent, reassuringly self-controlled, reflective, and compassionate. For the duration of the campaign he lodges with his sister-in-law, Binita, the widow of his brother, a professor, with whom, as a seventeen-year-old college student, Binita eloped. Rejected by her natal family and, following his death in an accident, ignored by her husband's, she is "a lone woman, still young... a woman unloosened from the custody of men" who has "tried to ward off critical voices by subduing herself." Until the advent of Nayan Raj, she has been running a teashop and living a threadbare life with her little daughter Tripti and orphaned teenage cousin sister, the lovely Sani. Giridhar Adhikari, district chairman of the People's Party, ex-bank manager and drunkard, feels "weighted down by his lurid materiality, the crusty dried saliva of his self". For him, the advent of Nayan Raj provides—at least for a while—a redemption. His closest friend, Om Gurung, former Rifleman of the British Gurkha's Second Regiment whose "face [is] wide and radiant and always poised for laughter", returned from Hong Kong determined to better his own town; now, having poured his life savings into the English-medium Pure Hearts Boarding School which he envisioned as having "standards as high as any school in Kathmandu", he divides his time between attending to his financially disastrous investment and, to his wife's despair, responding generously to claims on his attention and resources made by all and sundry in Khaireni Tar. Jummawal-baaje, former revenue collector, founding member of the People's Party, husband of two, father of many; Chiranjibi Joshi, highly successful building contractor of anti-capitalistic persuasions; Shankar, blind shopkeeper and conspirator; Phool Devi, Binita's intrusive neighbour; Harsha Khadka, Sani's rejected suitor, with his "look of distressed rapture"—these and many other deftly drawn characters, from every social level from rich Bahun to Dalit sharecropper entangled in debt, crowd into Ms Thapa's tale.

Inevitably, Ms Thapa's Khaireni Tar and her *Tutor of History* bring R.K. Narayan's Malgudi and his *Painter of Signs* to mind. Both authors are entranced by 'their' towns and, with humour, affection, and marvelously discriminating detail, succeed in entrancing their readers. Both, having

drawn us into these circumscribed worlds, manage to convince us that we know the attachments, ambitions, and shifting moods of everyone in the community almost as well as they do. We become intimately familiar with the houses their characters live in, the gardens and fields they cultivate, the market stalls where they buy their vegetables, the trees in whose shade they rest, the views of distant hills they see as they walk down the streets and through the lanes. And both authors are unusually wise. But whereas R.K. Narayan was middle-aged when his Malgudi stories were first published and, for all the acclaim he received, remained an Indian writer with traditional concerns and sensibilities, Manjushree Thapa, who is still a young woman, combines a deep knowledge of her culture with an entirely modern perspective. Again, although English is not her first language, her deep pleasure in it is fully evident. Given this triumph, what will she write next?

From a paragraph on the back cover of *Arresting God in Kathmandu* we learn that Samrat Upadhyay, the author of this collection of stories, was born and raised in Nepal and came to the United States at the age of twenty-one. The move, at such a young age, may have been his loss if not his undoing. In any event, he seems to have lost touch with his native land; or perhaps, he left it before ever getting to know it very well. Although the stories are peppered with references to well-known spots in Kathmandu—temples, palaces, ponds, parks—he seems to place them strategically, as a non-Nepalese would do, in order to provide ‘context’, to persuade the reader that he’s ‘grounded’ and knows whereof he speaks. Of these nine stories, an illicit sexual relationship provides the focus of all but one. A married man loses his accountancy job and, as he idles away his time in a city park, encounters a female house servant, also married, with whom he has a loveless affair. A self-absorbed business consultant whose artist wife has left him, has an affair (loveless on his part, passionate on hers) with his efficient but strikingly unattractive secretary. Physically impaired Rukmini, rejected by her new hard-drinking husband, engineers a sexual encounter with her widower father-in-law. A pregnant college student hides from prying eyes in her parents’ home and, after her son is born, marries a retarded homeless man with whom, to her mother’s shock and envy, she finds full sexual satisfaction. The brazen young wife of an ailing guru parades her lovers through her husband’s house, thereby arousing the shameful desire of his faithful servant. Aditya, who has stopped making love to Shobha, the wife whom his dying mother insisted he marry, becomes obsessed with a gay actor. Kanti, a single woman, has a flagrantly public affair with Jaya, an aristocratic playboy, also single, whom she first met in America when she was getting her Master’s degree in economics at New York University. When he loses interest in her, she is initially crushed but then, emancipated as she is, returns to America to get a PhD at Duke

University. As her plane takes off from Kathmandu, she imagines herself in North Carolina, “cupping snow in her palm and crunching it to feel its texture, or walking across the campus with new friends and professors, or looking into a mirror and seeing new shadows on her face”, back in complaisant control of her destiny.

The implication in all these stories is that rapid social change consumes everyone with *angst* and expressing *angst* through illicit or at least irregular sexual encounters has become normative in urban Nepal, just as it is in the Western world which Mr Upadhyay has inhabited his entire adult life. In one story we learn how the protagonist first fell in love with his American wife: he “found her charming, although she was like many of the Nepal-crazy foreigners he knew, people who lived in the country in a romantic haze, love-struck by the mountain beauty and simple charms of the people, but grossly naïve about their suffering.” One wonders whether Mr Upadhyay too, might be “grossly naïve” about his countrymen’s suffering. Understandably, as a fiction writer, he may have decided that problems of poverty and corruption at every level, a totally inept government, and a widespread and enduring guerilla war, lie outside his range. Instead, he will focus on personal issues. But why is his focus so narrowly defined? Nepalese domestic life, like domestic life anywhere, provides a wealth of material even a little of which would have filled out these stories to good effect. As it is, there are few references to the characters’ caste, education, or even their families. We have only the sketchiest notion of where they come from and are given little reason to care where they might go. They often act impulsively and if the author has insight into their dynamics, he doesn’t share it with us. Why does Bandana-ji disappear in ‘Deepak Misra’s Secretary’? Only because the story has gone on long enough? Why, in ‘The Limping Bride’, does Rukmani sexually service her father-in-law? Only because the author wants to surprise the reader? If his intentions are more complex he does not give us the wherewithal to grasp them. Perhaps he supplies so few details out of a fear that they would bore the Western reader; or perhaps, having lived so long outside his native land, he can no longer bring them to mind.

*Rogues in Robes: An Inside Chronicle of a Recent Chinese-Tibetan Intrigue in the Karma Kagyu Lineage of Diamond Way Buddhism* by Tomek Lehnert. Nevada: Blue Dolphin, 1998. ISBN 1-57733-026-9. 305 pp., 13 plates, 35 facsimile documents, glossary.

Reviewed by David N. Gellner

In 1981 the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, the leader of the Kagyu order of Tibetan Buddhism, died. In 1992, a full eleven years later, a reincarnation was finally identified and enthroned in Tsurphu, Tibet, with the active cooperation of the Communist Chinese regime. Two of the leading Kagyu rinpoches supported the reincarnation, as did the Dalai Lama; but another, the second-most prominent rinpoche after the Karmapa himself according to this account, did not accept the validity of the procedures by which this reincarnation had identified. His preferred candidate was smuggled out of Tibet and revealed to the world in 1994, leaving the Kagyu order with two opposed leaders, one in China and one in India. After *Rogues in Robes* was published, in 2001, the China-based Karmapa also succeeded in fleeing to India.

As the sub-title suggests, this book is an inside account of the conflict this generated within Kagyu Buddhism. It is written by someone who is evidently a close disciple of Ole Nydahl, an influential Western teacher of Karma Kagyu Buddhism. Nydahl is apparently known in Western Buddhist circles as 'Holy Ole'—though one would never learn that from the po-faced, 'goodies versus baddies' style, innocent of any sociology, adopted by *Rogues in Robes*. There is no intentional humour, unless one counts heavy sarcasm, or the incident when Nydahl's followers conducted a mass campaign by writing their replies to a letter they didn't like on toilet paper. Opponents of Nydahl's position are all malicious or misled. Western Kagyu centres which do not accept Nydahl's line have teachers who are "dull" and "traditional" (or alternatively are mired in sexual scandals); the centres themselves are "pious" and "resemble a Catholic church". Nydahl's centres are presented as the opposite of this: his aim was to introduce the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism "clean of its ethnic and monastic baggage" (p. 26).

Individual Westerners who oppose Nydahl get described with the crudest national stereotypes (e.g. p. 140: "his Sicilian mentality had apparently caught up with him"). Supporters of Nydahl are brave seekers after truth, defenders of the authentic transmission against rogues, as well as against ordinary Tibetans who have "rustic, country bumpkin minds". The irony of Western Buddhists as the defenders of authentic Tibetan Buddhist practice,

and the irony of insisting on scientific testing of the authenticity of a letter which their opponents claimed had been written by the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa while at the same time believing in 'correct methods' of ascertaining reincarnation, are lost on the author. When Nydahl reacts to events with aggression this is ascribed to his past life as a Tibetan general; when others do so, they reveal their own ignorance and delusion.

Despite this partiality in the way it is written, the story is a fascinating one, and told with much convincing detail. The inner workings of the Kagyu order are revealed, in particular the jealousies and manoeuvres of the leading rinpoches. The drama of the narrative—forged letters, pitched battles over relics, Chinese Communist plots, religious rivalries—is undeniable. Just how reliable this version is will have to await the judgements of historians; but regardless of these details, the book paints a vivid picture of a global religious network and the politics it gives rise to. It also demonstrates once again how a unified Buddhist monastic order requires a strong political authority (normally from outside the Sangha, but in Tibet the Sangha was the political authority) to support and maintain it. If there could be three Popes at one time in medieval Europe, it should come as no surprise that there can be contending candidates for the leadership of Kagyu Buddhism. The book gives some idea of what may be in store when the position of Dalai Lama becomes vacant.

*Tibetan Elemental Divination Paintings: Illuminated manuscripts from the White Beryl of Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho with the Moonbeams treatise of Lo-chen DharmaSri.* Commentary and translations by Gyurme Dorje. London: John Eskenazi in association with Sam Fogg, 2001. ISBN 0953994104. 424 pp., indices, numerous illustrations.

Reviewed by Martin Boord

This most remarkable book, enormous in size, scope, and price, deals with the ancient Tibetan system of elemental divination ('*byung rtsis*) which has both Chinese Buddhist and Taoist antecedents, for which reason it is often known as Chinese divination (*nag rtsis*) when contrasted with the practice of classical Indian astrology (*dkar rtsis/skar rtsis*).

The origins of its methodology are generally attributed in Chinese historical works to the legendary emperor Fu Hsi (Tb. sPa-hu 'shi-dhi) who is believed to have lived from 2853-2738 BCE, although the Buddhist

tradition attributes the original teaching to the *bodhisattva* Mañjuḥośa on Mount Wu Tai Shan.

After more than 3,000 years of development in its homeland, the texts of elemental divination began to be translated into Tibetan at the time of the Yarlung dynasty (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century). This early, tightly regulated, system of elemental divination (*rgya rtsis rnying ma*) should not be confused with the later innovatory techniques of divination and astrology introduced after the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century (*rgya rtsis gsar ma*).

The Chinese system was subsequently integrated inside Tibet with that of Indian astrology and a Nepalese system of martial conquest (*gYul rgyal*) deriving from the Indian Saivite *Yuddhajayanāma-tantrarājasvarodaya* (Tb. *dByangs 'chi*) and Tibetan masters also came up with numerous treatises in the form of treasures (*gter ma*). This is the transmission which eventually fell to the Dalai Lama's regent Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho (1653-1705).

The unique manuscript of intriguing illuminations reproduced in the present volume came out of Tibet only recently. Painted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mainly at Sa-skya by the master artist bSod-nams dpal-'byor of rTse-gdong some 60 years after the death of Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho, it once depicted the zodiac (*go la*) of Indian astrology, the *cakra* diagrams of martial conquest, and the elaborate hidden points (*gab tshé*) of Chinese elemental divination. Unfortunately, it now lacks the zodiac charts, and only six folios of the section of martial conquest survive. It remains, however, the finest and most detailed illuminated manuscript known illustrating the intricate tabular calculations of elemental divination described in Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho's monumental treatise and this publication is sure to remain the definitive work for the foreseeable future, although a more user-friendly edition is a serious desideratum.

The *White Beryl* in its Lhasa and sDe-dge editions comprises 35 chapters dealing with all aspects of astrology and divination as presented in the system of Phug-pa lHun-grub rGya-mtsho. Chapters XX-XXXII deal specifically with the subject of elemental divination and the present volume, corresponding to these chapters, offers us access to this mysterious knowledge in the form of a veritable feast of scholastic and artistic excellence. Discussing in fine detail legends concerning the origin and historical transmission of elemental divination in ancient China and Tibet, the text goes on to explain the symbolism of the turtle divination chart, geomantic observations and such other topics as are of traditional concern to prognosticators.

Although the charts depicted in this beautiful volume would once have functioned as table-top grids upon which black, white or neutral divinatory pebbles could be directly placed, they have more generally been utilized as model wall-charts, while a schematic grid is actually utilized for specific divinations, the white pebbles being indicated by noughts and the black by crosses. The Mother relationship of the elements, for example, deemed to be the most excellent, is symbolized by three noughts and the most inauspicious Enemy relationship by two crosses. The elements upon which the divinatory relationships are based are depicted symbolically here in accordance with the 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese (sPor-thang) scrolls of princess Wen Cheng: wood is green and depicted as a tree or bush, fire is red and depicted as a triangular flame, and so on. In accordance with the esoteric rules of this system, the diviner calculates the forces of: (1. *srog*) the life-sustaining vital force resident in the heart, (2. *bla*) a luminous essential spirit that migrates around the human body in harmony with the waxing and waning of the moon, the mother of the life force, (3. *dbang thang*) the 'element of destiny', personal power, charisma, strength, (4. *lus*) the 'body element', health, the energy of physical well-being and (5. *klung rta*) the 'luck aspect' which is the capacity to unite the other four and ensure their optimum advantage. For example, in determining the energy of the life force (*srog*), he reads in the text: "The life force of the animals resides in the elements of the directions. The life force of the tiger and the hare in the east is wood. That of the horse and the snake in the south is fire. The life force of the monkey and the bird in the west is metal. That of the rat and the pig in the north is water. As for the ox, the sheep, the dog and the dragon, all four have the *srog* of the earth element which governs the intermediate directions." After tallying the pebbles or symbolic noughts and crosses in the context of a given chart, the diviner may then calculate the pebbles of conclusive analysis (*btang gcod rde'u*) and consult the *White Beryl* commentary in order to determine his prognosis.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this entire divinatory system is the detailed and arcane science of geomancy, said to be based on a survey of the locations of many hundred spirit lords of the soil (*bhūmipati, sa bdag*). Since the opportune pathways of the years, months, days, or hours are deemed to be those not occupied by such spirits, activities coinciding with their presence in a specific location may only be undertaken if counteracting rituals are performed.

In antiquity, when the *bodhisattva* Mañjuḥośa emanated the reliquary turtle (*ring sel gyi rus sbal*) and incised it with his sword of contemplation, these spirit lords of the soil are said to have emerged from the turtle's subtle vapour (*rdul gyi rlang pa*) with their king, The-se, emerging at the turtle's crown and his minister, Tsang-kun, at the heart, and so on.

According to *The Gathering of all Precious Elements* ('Byung ba rin chen kun 'dus), which is the primary source enumerating the spirit lords of the soil, their most detailed enumeration comprises 1,000. However, when these are subdivided according to elements, spatial locations and their outer, inner, secret, and most secret aspects, their number is said to be infinite. In general, there are said to be 102 spirit lords who are ever-present, without reference to temporal fluctuations, and a further 474 directly associated with the years, months, days, and hours.

There are also other categories such as the "deities moving through the days of the month" (*tshes rgyu ba'i lha*) which determine the "greater black days" (*nyi ma nag chen*). One of these is the so-called "nine black omens occurring together" (*ngan pa dgu 'dzoms*) on the seventh day of the first spring month provoked by Rāhu circuiting mount Sumeru in an anti-clockwise direction. At that juncture, descending and ascending winds are reversed, horizontal winds are disturbed, the five elements are agitated, and the sunshine resembles aconite.

The movements of all these spirits is detailed in the *White Beryl*, together with a summary of the results of infringing their personal space and ritual remedies for such infringements. Fascinating stuff.

*Pastoral Politics: Shepherds, Bureaucrats, and Conservation in the Western Himalaya* by Vasant K. Saberwal. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-19-564308-9. 246 pp., maps, tables, index.

Reviewed by Ben Campbell

This fine Himalayan contribution to OUP's series on Social Ecology and Environmental History offers a well-researched investigation of conservation policy and its impact on Gaddi herders of Himachal Pradesh. Saberwal's aim is to demonstrate the interplay between scientific ecological discourse, institutional politics, and the effect of policy on communities and their livelihood practice. At the heart of his argument is the institutional rationale for the Forest Department's alarmist rhetoric of environmental degradation caused by overgrazing. Unlike studies of environmental history and politics, which project a monolithic view of the state, Saberwal manages to convey the insecurities of the Forestry Department in its historical relations of rivalry with the Revenue Department. He suggests that this rivalry accounts for the tone of alarm since the Forestry Department's establishment in 1865. He is at pains to

indicate that he is not in denial about ecological threats to the Himalayan landscape, but insists that the causes of degradation are poorly understood, that the evidence for pastoralists' blameworthiness is not convincing, and that a series of cultural stereotypes accompany the official distribution of ecological blame.

Chapter two introduces the herders and their problems of negotiating pasture over the yearly cycle of transhumance with sheep and goats from alpine grasslands down to winter forests. Saberwal spent several months of fieldwork mostly with villagers of Bara Bangahal in Kangra District, H.P. The ethnographic information on the herders is, however, scanty. Consideration is not given to the status of the category 'Gaddi', and it seems that other group terms prevail in local usage. The villagers are spoken of as belonging to a geographically restricted ethnic group called Kanet, who think of themselves as Rajputs. Nor is there any analysis of the highly gendered division of labour, for it seems that the women remain in villages while their menfolk attend to the animals. The reader is not given a view of Gaddi life in the round, and many aspects of this community's relationship to their environment are not discussed, such as knowledge of plants, domestic socialization into herding practices, extra-economic understandings of the landscape, etc, which would have been valuable to the book's questions about sustainability. The chapter concentrates instead on value-maximizing strategies of herding practice, which Saberwal argues have less to do with *de jure* rights to high and low pastures than with patterns of access dependent on a flexibility of kinship networks, labour availability, alliances with cultivator communities, and the ability to circumvent state regulation of foraging. The Gaddis are presented as successfully maintaining flocks that provide a reasonable income of around Rs 20,000 per year from an average number of one hundred animals. That they are able to do this is attributed to their mobilization of political support, and exploiting conflict between state departments.

This dimension is then explored in the remaining chapters of the book. Chapter three looks at the inception of the Forest Department, with its goal of protecting timber supply and preventing soil erosion. The Department expanded the area of forests under its control within the Punjab administration of the day in 1893 and again in 1906, competing against the Revenue Department's territories of influence. Correspondences from the time nicely illustrate the rivalries and jostlings over administrative hierarchies of command. Canal irrigation later led to a decrease of Forest Department holdings in the plains, while it maintained forests tracts in the mountainous regions of Eastern Punjab, including contemporary Himachal Pradesh, where the case for protecting soil and water sources was made.

Chapter four is entitled 'Circumvention and Negotiation', and gives an account of the methods and conditioning factors by which Himachali herders manage to avoid effectively most of the constraints on their activities entailed by forest regulation. They have according to Saberwal both under- and over-stated the numbers of their livestock to avoid taxes and to claim compensation respectively. Their facility in making local officialdom and political representatives operate in their interests leads Saberwal to suggest that Himachal's shepherds do not belong in the general characterization of pastoralists as marginal to structures of state power, though he admits his analysis has not explored the issue from an internal class perspective among the shepherds.

Saberwal takes issue with the influential thesis of Richard Grove, in his book *Green Imperialism*, that recognizably environmentalist concerns prompted the colonial Indian state's protection of forests. In chapter five records from the Forest Department are discussed to show the primarily economic justification for conservancy, fearful of reduced sources of fuel and timber. The specific case of the eroded condition of the Hoshiapur Siwaliks at the end of the nineteenth century was, Saberwal argues, strategically used by the Forest Department to extend arguments for the prevention of soil erosion elsewhere, but primarily on grounds of the commercial value of the timber rather than from conservationist concern.

A valuable contextualization of Indian forest policy within international debates on dessication is made in chapter six. The influence of American scientists on Indian foresters from the 1920s is presented, many of whom were deeply critical of theories suggesting tree cover acted as a sponge, preventing siltation of river courses. But by the 1930s, Saberwal argues, an alarmist rhetoric on the negative effects of deforestation had gained the ascendancy among foresters in India, who unlike in the USA, were not challenged by other scientists to prove the dessicationist case through adopting quantitative studies. Scientific uncertainty is further explored in an historical case study of the forestry records of the Uhl Valley in chapter seven. An explanatory model of erosion derived from conditions pertaining in the Siwaliks is shown to have been transplanted to the main Himalayan range, in order to justify exclusion of sheep and goats from the Uhl Valley in the 1940s, with the purpose of controlling water flow to the hydro-electric plant downstream.

Saberwal uses important arguments from international research on strategies of livestock management in chapter eight to expose the cultural underpinnings of forest policy attitudes to pastoralists in general. He quotes from reports on grazing issues in Himachal in the 1950s to demonstrate the persistence of nineteenth century evolutionist prejudices against all forms

of subsistence except intensive settled agriculture. He argues that in the evaluation of 'degradation', inappropriate scientific models based on maximized production within ranching conditions have been used to assess Himalayan livestock raising. When multiple users and management objectives are involved, any one-dimensional criteria for reckoning degradation or carrying capacity become problematic.

The theoretical and concluding chapters attempt to go beyond analysis of peasant resistance to state resource control in terms of simple class opposition, and offer a view of the state as composed of competing institutional agendas of resource exploitation and conservation. Within these conflicting mandates the Himachali shepherds have managed successfully to negotiate room for continuing their livelihoods, using relationships of kinship, patronage, and financial payment to ensure *de facto* access to grazing. Saberwal stresses the institutional pressure for the Forest Department to stick with a version of land-user causality in environmental degradation that has not acknowledged the uncertainty of the science it selectively uses.

*Pastoral Politics* is a consistently well-argued and valuable engagement with the increasingly sophisticated debates on Himalayan environmental history. Its primary perspective is, though, the identification of partial uses of scientific theory by strategically embattled, and culturally embedded, state institutions. The possibility that Gaddi herders may have valuable longitudinal knowledge of ecological system dynamics that could feed in to scientific research is raised at the end of the book, but unfortunately not demonstrated. Their local knowledge and perception of their role in shaping the Himalayan environment remain in the realm of uncertainty.

*Ethnizität und Nationale Integration in Nepal: Eine Untersuchung zur Politisierung der Ethnischen Gruppen im Modernen Nepal*, by Karl-Heinz Krämer. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, Südasiens-Institut, Universität Heidelberg), 1996. ISBN 3-515-06937-2, 474 pp., 7 appendices, glossary, index, bibliography, summary in English.

Reviewed by David N. Gellner

If all books are the product of their time, this one, it is now clear, is very much the product of the early 1990s. The new constitution promulgated at the end of 1990 gave a wholly unprecedented degree of recognition to ethnic

groups as valid elements of civil society within Nepal. As is well known, Nepal is defined therein as "multi-ethnic" and "multilingual", two terms that are in direct contradiction of the ideology which sustained the state during the immediately preceding Panchayat period. The new freedoms and the new attitude towards ethnic claims in the public sphere led to a veritable outpouring of new ethnic organizations and movements, which are the subject of Karl-Heinz Krämer's book. Were such a book to be researched and written today, it would be overshadowed by the tragedy of the Maoist People's War which has grown steadily more bloody and all-encompassing since its inception in 1996, culminating in the State of Emergency declared at the end of 2001. That threat was barely anticipated in the early 1990s: Prachanda rates a mere two mentions, and Baburam Bhattarai one, in this lengthy and data-rich tome.

Krämer's book begins by analysing the Rana state and the way in which ethnic identities evolved within a unified Nepal. He goes on to look at the search for a new national identity between 1951 and 1960, at the way in which the Panchayat regime handled ethnic issues, and at the new situation post 1990. Subsequent chapters look at the varieties of ethnicist discourse and the reactions to them. He also looks in detail at the effect of Nepal's proximity to India, and at the position of Nepal's in Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan.

Krämer is well aware of the theoretical literature on ethnicity and the numerous discussions which cast doubt on the usefulness, or universality, of concepts such as 'tribe' and 'ethnic group'. He is of course also well aware (and discusses many examples here) of the way in which particular ethnic identities in Nepal have changed, emerged, expanded, or contracted over time. Yet he goes on to treat ethnic groups as unproblematic units of analysis. Furthermore, since he is describing history in the Rana and Panchayat periods from the perspective of his *janajāti* informants in the present, he underplays the extent to which elite (and even non-elite) members of many ethnic groups cooperated enthusiastically and without coercion with the Hinduization policies of the time. He does not hide where his sympathies lie, dedicating the book to the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh and "to the people who feel themselves to be represented by it". (He hopes that the demands of these moderate activists will be met so as to neutralize the appeal of the more extreme ethnic nationalists.)

Although Krämer does not claim as much, the focus of his book might lead one to suppose that it was primarily ethnic dissatisfactions which led to the 1990 revolution against the Panchayat regime, which is surely not true. Voting patterns since 1990 have generally not followed ethnic lines. The causes of the revolution have to be sought rather in the international

situation, which was favourable to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes, in the unwillingness of the King to see much bloodshed, in the growth of a considerable middle class, in insufficient economic development, and in mass education.

Despite these disagreements of interpretation and emphasis, *Ethnizität und Nationale Integration in Nepal* is a major work of synthetic scholarship, which has achieved a certain renown in Kathmandu: I was told in 1997, in a hushed voice, that there is a German book that describes the entire ethnic movement. Despite the fact that the political context in Nepal is now very changed, the book remains an important synthesis, a fundamental work of documentation, which brings together an unrivalled amount of first- and second-hand material on the ethnic question. It contains the most detailed analysis anywhere of the ideology of Gopal Gurung, and much else on the ethnic issue. The analyses of the Rana and Panchayat regimes are substantial. Most of the sources used are in English (with some in Nepali) and many of the citations from interviews or from books and articles are in English. (Newspaper articles in English or Nepali are translated into German.) All those who are likely to be interested in the content of the book read English, but few read German. It is therefore not merely the parochialism of a dilatory reviewer, but a sincere public-spiritedness and a desire for Krämer to have the wide readership he deserves, which lead me to urge him to make the book available in a form more accessible to the scholarly community which this journal aims to serve.

### 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.L. 1988. 'A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya' *Kailash* 6 (2): 121-83.

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