Local Representations of History and the History of Local Representation: Timescapes of theistic agency in the Western Himalayas

Peter Sutherland

> The moment we think of the world as disenchanted…we set limits on the ways the past can be narrated (Chakrabarty 2000: 89)

"Representing local histories," the topic of this volume, suggests at least three propositions. First, a truism: that each place has its past. Second, a comparison: that local histories differ in kind from universal history. Third, a process: that locality and historicity are dialectically produced in relation to each other. But what of representation? Elaborating on Stuart Hall's two-step approach, each proposition suggests a different theory of signification.[1] In the first, which is not an explicit theory, the process of representation is ignored as if the meaning of reality were transparent. In the second, representation is seen as distorting or *re*-presenting a pre-existent meaning by the adoption of a particular perspective. In the third, following Hall's preferred interpretation, representation is understood as constitutive of meaning, which cannot be grasped prior to or independently of mediation. In this view, meaning does not pre-exist representation, which cannot therefore be said to be distort it. If the third proposition is closest to the truth – that locality and historicity are co-produced in and by the process of representation, it follows that the pasts of places and the place of the past, whose Himalayan representations we wish to study, may not be considered independently of each other or outside the discursive regimes, which form them.

To test this hypothesis, this essay complicates the relationship of locality, history, and representation by taking as its object of study not so much the *re*-presentation of local histories in the Himalayas – as if place, time and meaning unproblematically preceded signifying practice, but rather the *local* representation of history as a spatial record of political memory, and the history of local *representation* so defined, in which gods act as political agents.

In using the trope of chiasma above, I play on the double meaning of "representation" in English usage that is clearly distinguished in German as

---

[1] I am following Stuart Hall's constructionist paradigm of representation as explained in his well-known video lecture "Representation and the Media" (1997).

the difference between *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. On the one hand, representation refers to a *semiotic* process of mediating reality (*Darstellung*) as in poetry or painting. On the other hand, it refers to a *political* process of standing in for, or acting on behalf of, another person or group and their interests (*Vertretung*). In *Can the Subaltern Speak?,* Gayatri Spivak (1988) refers to the famous passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, in which Marx uses this double meaning to understand the absence of collective consciousness among the small peasant proprietor class, "which," as Spivak explains quoting Marx's terms, "finds its 'bearer' in a 'representative' [namely Louis Napoleon] who appears to work in another's interest" (1988: 276). The term Marx uses here is *Vertreter*. The small peasant proprietors, in Marx's words:

> cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Their representative must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small peasant proprietors therefore finds its last expression in the executive force subordinating society to itself (1974: 239).

In the absence of a sense of collective class interests, Marx argues, this class without class-consciousness fails to organize itself politically and so to transform itself by pursuing its interests. This "false consciousness" is due to the conflation of Darstellung (representation as self-knowledge) and Vertretung (representation as political substitution). Is this the case for the west Himalayan peasants I examine in this article, whose consciousness of collective identity, interest and power is (politically) represented by gods – gods who in turn are (semiotically) represented as kings?

Marx's description is particularly apt in many respects. The representatives of territorial assemblies of peasant-warriors I describe are indeed conceived of as their masters. As kings they have absolute authority over their subjects and governmental power that protects them from others. As gods they are quite literally understood to send rain and sunshine from above. But in other respects, the universalist assumptions of Marx's description of French peasants in the 18th century are inadequate to explain the political lives of west Himalayan peasants under Hindu kings, indirect British rule, and the modern Indian state between 1935 and 1988 – the period defined by the local history I examine. In the historical *pahāḍī* (lit. mountain) polity I discuss, local peasant communities called *khūnd*s both represent themselves – by local leaders (H. *mahātta,* or Pah. *māta*),[2] *and* are represented by others – local gods construed as kings. But their interests are not represented as a single "class" by a single executive authority subordinating society to itself, but rather as a cluster of locally differentiated

---

[2] To indicate languages referred to in this text, I use A, for Arabic, H. for Hindi, P. for Persian, Pah. for Pahari, and U. for Urdu.

entities of the same "caste" in a regional scale of similar theistic polities embedded in foreign imperial formations. More particularly, in describing the nexus of locality, history and representation so defined, the cultural construction of the Pahari political field escapes the descriptive reach and analytical power of Marxian demystification, which cannot properly address the central questions at issue: 1) can subaltern gods speak on behalf of subalterns? And if so, 2) how do gods act historically as political representatives?

In the west Himalayan region of the Simla Hills, both semiotic and political modes of representation are elided in the signifying practices of "government by deity" (*deotā* or *devatā kā rāj*). This hybrid Hindu institution constitutes the contemporary field of political memory, collective identity and rural diplomacy in remote parts of Himachal Pradesh and neighbouring parts of Uttaranchal to the east. According to its traditional regional idiom, territorial gods (*deotā* or *devatā*) conceptualized as "kings" (*rājā*) not only stand in for, and act on behalf of, local communities as their representatives in the various rituals that both manage ecological conditions and choreograph traditional rural polity; they also produce locality, history and collective political consciousness by their symbols, taxonomies and spatio-temporal practices.

To what extent does this Himalayan "running … together" of Vertretung and Darstellung lead, as Spivak (1988: 276) warns, "to an essentialist, utopian politics"? – "especially [when this is intended] to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*." Spivak's warning was directed at French intellectuals such as Foucault and Deleuze, whose failure to examine the epistemic problems involved in speaking for subaltern others caused them, in her analysis, to essentialize the subaltern subject as a Eurocentric subject, and so render Third World subalterns (especially women) invisible. The situation I describe differs in one important respect. I do not pretend to speak on behalf of west Himalayan peasants as their political representative (*Vertreter*). Instead, I describe their own subaltern idiom of theistic self-representation and use it to problematize Euro-modernist constructions of political agency, history and time from an Indian postcolonial/modern perspective.

In another essay (Sutherland 2003), I describe the festival repertoire of processional practice, by means of which west Himalayan political history is "written" in the landscape by traveling gods. Reproducing the internal units and relations of former west Himalayan Hindu states by routinized movement, the *spatial* agency of contemporary gods is what I have in mind in speaking of the *local* representation of history. Political memory is registered quite literally in the *loci,* or trajectories, of gods on the move. Traveling in procession as kings seated in palanquins, Himalayan gods perform political history in a ritual idiom of patterned movement. In that essay, I isolate three processional geometries that inscribe political memory in the landscape at festival times by 1) circumambulating territories, 2)

exchanging visits with brothers and friends, and 3) assembling at political centers.

In this essay, I focus on the other half of the chiasmic equation – the historical discourse of local *representation* by gods. To do so, I juxtapose two discrepant kinds of knowledge: the empirical "facts" of British colonial gazetteers and my ethnographic evidence of the discursive/narrative constitution of local identity and political location in government by deity, focusing in particular on origin myths and oral histories of temple foundation and feuding.

Unlike modern academic history, whose subject is the nation-state, west Himalayan histories have local gods as their subjects. But does the presence of gods as actors discount the latter as legitimate records of political agency in the past or present? Those who would dismiss religious conceptions of agency as irrational would do well to consider recent critical accounts of the discursive construction of the modern state as a transcendent essence – the "magic of the state" (Taussig 1997), the "state effect" (Mitchell 1999), "the state's own myth of itself" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 17) – that belie the supposed rationality of modern post-Enlightenment political theory. While the political voices of west Himalayan peasants are silent in the elite discourse of British colonial, Indian nationalist *and* postcolonial historiography, any attempt to restore their political subjectivity must face the charge that local gods and their human oracles, through which west Himalayan subaltern collectivities *do* speak to each other, fail to qualify as legitimate political actors in modern Indian political history.

Representing subaltern pasts

I begin with an intriguing glimpse of political representation by a west Himalayan god at the court of the Mughal emperor in Delhi, and the meteorological representation of the god. Recorded in the Punjab District Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States (1910: 6) by British colonial authors, the story is still recounted in Bashahr:

> One of the Mughal Emperors, [it is not stated which] held a great durbar of the hill chieftains, which Raja Kehri Singh [of Bashahr] attended. When he appeared at Delhi, it was observed with some surprise that wherever he went he was sheltered from the sun's rays by a small cloud in the shape of a *chatra* or royal umbrella. The emperor heard of the phenomenon and summoned the Raja to the Diwan-I-Khas. On his attending, the cloud was seen to accompany him into the Imperial presence. The Emperor asked for an explanation, and the Raja naively answered that it was the favour of the gods and goddesses of his country, who wished to protect a hill man from the unaccustomed heat of the plains. The Emperor greatly pleased said: *"O Rājā, āp ko khudā ke ghar se chatra milā huā hai, is liye āp ko Chatrapati khitāb [sic] diyā jātā hai."* (Sir Raja, you have got a chhatra from the house of God and therefore the title of Chatrapati is conferred

upon you), and at the same time bestowed upon him a dress of honour [i.e. *khelāt*].[3]

On several occasions,[4] I heard the same story in Sarahan, the ceremonial capital and summer palace of the former Bashahr kings. In each account, the cloud was identified as the sign of the eponymous Bashahr rain-god, *Basārū* (the pronunciation I heard in Sarahan). The Simla District Gazetteer (1904:38) lists the god's name as "Basheru," and describes his temple "seat" as the village of "Basherāh" in the Tin Kothi territory. The discursive linkage of rain-making and political authority is a common characteristic of Hindu kingship, in general, and of west Himalayan theistic sovereignty, in particular. Rain-making is also the mythic attribute of most "species" (*jātī*) of west Himalayan local gods. While *Nāg*s are the archetypal Hindu rain-making god, other local species including *Nārāyaṇs, Jākhs* and *Mahāsū*s are also believed to control the weather.

The same mythic tropes of rainmaking and a magical cloud reappear below in the oral history of a longstanding feud between two other west Himalayan local gods: Jabali Narayan, ruler of the Jhigaya territory, and his neighbour, Suni Nag of Khabal. In different episodes, as we shall see, Jabali Narayan both summons a rain-cloud with his magical power and represents his territory and people at the court of the Bashahr king. Unlike the case of Basaru, however, in which a hill-god accompanies a hill-raja to a superior court in the form of a cloud, Jabali Narayan combines both roles of god and king, when he appears before the Bashahr Raja as a theistic sovereign in the usual west Himalayan way – objectified in a palanquin carried by bearers and embodied by an oracle (*mālī*) who gives voice to his wishes. How should we interpret such indigenous accounts of theistic representation at the courts of the Mughal emperor and the king of Bashahr? To what extent can we count them as instances of historical political agency?

In both narratives of Basaru and the feuding gods Jabali Narayan and Suni Nag, the juxtaposition of apparently discrepant discourses engages a central problem in subaltern history: the challenge posed to modern secular norms of social explanation by religious conceptions of agency. In seeking to restore the historical presence of peasant political consciousness in India, rendered invisible by British colonial and Indian nationalist historiography, members of the Subaltern Studies collective have struggled to rethink the

---

[3] Bernard Cohn (1990: 635-6) describes the ritual significance of the gift of a *khelāt* as follows: "Under the Mughals and other Indian rulers, these ritual prestations constituted a relationship between the giver and the receiver, and were not understood as simply an exchange of goods and valuables. The khelat was a symbol 'of the idea of continuity or succession...and that continuity rests on a physical basis, depending on the contact of the body of recipient with the body of the donor through the medium of the clothing.' The recipient was incorporated through the medium of the clothing into the body of the donor".

[4] I refer to two visits to the Dasahra festival in 1988 and 1994.

apparent "anachronism" of "supernatural agency" in peasant accounts of anti-British insurgency. Rejecting Hobsbawm's (1978 [1959]: 2-3) characterization of peasant religious beliefs as "prepolitical" or "archaic," Ranajit Guha (1983) insisted on viewing the Indian peasant engaged in nationalist struggle as a true modern citizen and political agent. Thus, peasant beliefs in gods, spirits, and ancestral beings should properly be seen as contemporary with colonial modernity and not as throwbacks to, or survivals from, pre-modernity. Historians, in other words, should conceptualize the modern occurrence of theistic agency in homeochronic and not "allochronic"[5] (Fabian 1983) terms. But how can that be reconciled with the secular logic of historical explanation?

Building on Guha's argument, that "South Asian political modernity brings together two noncommensurable logics of power, both modern," Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 14) argues against the stagist conception of modern nationalist history by proposing a plural model of historical temporality. Instead of "tak[ing for granted] the single, homogeneous, and secular historical time" associated with the dominant paradigm of "transitions to modernity," we must rethink the temporality of the modern in more complex, heterogeneous terms in order to allow "gods and spirits to be existentially coeval with the human" (*ibid*.: 16). To do so, argues Chakrabarty, "the problem of capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological problem of historical transition...but [rather] as a problem of [cultural] translation" (*ibid*.: 17). Thus, analytical history in the Marxian mode of demystification "which tends to evacuate the local by assimilating it to some abstract universal" must be complemented by an "affective history" in the Heideggerian mode of hermeneutics, that pays attention to such humanist issues as "the diversity of life-worlds," "place" and "belonging" (*ibid*.: 18).

This brings us to the heart of the problem – what might be called the chronological imperative in modernist historiography. By this I refer to the so-called "historicist" paradigm for understanding cultural difference according to a Euro-modernist conception of progressive linear time. Although discredited by anthropologists and historians alike, evolutionist conceptions of time linger on in development discourse and modernization theory.[6] The teleological chronology of modernization theory characteristic of global development discourse and Third Word national policy is incompatible with more complex notions of temporality required to theorize the simultaneous coexistence of religious and secular conceptions of agency

---

[5] By "allochrony" Johannes Fabian refers to the common practice of temporal distancing according to which anthropologists in the colonial era conceptualized the objects of their research as existing in a different era.

[6] For a brilliant critique of the linear, stagist, stereotypical and teleological construction of time in modernization theory, ethnographic representations and received postcolonial understandings of urbanization in Southern Africa, see James Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity* (1999).

in the same historical period. Coeval forms of cultural difference such as these violate the purity of linear temporality, are usually classified as *anachronistic* – against, out of, or in the wrong time – and are seen as evidence of "contradiction" or incomplete transitions to modernity. Faced with similar ideologies of progress in Zambia, James Ferguson refers to Stephen Gould (1996) for an alternative paradigm of change. His account of Gould's approach is worth quoting at length.

> Teleological evolutionary narratives always operate through the identification of series of types, with change represented as a 'trend' – a sequence or succession of those typical forms…But what such representations ignore – indeed, conceal – is the continuing diversity of forms, and the actual relationship between those forms, in each of the periods…What Gould calls for as a corrective is an insistence on viewing change not as a sequence defined by 'typical forms' for each period but as a less linear (and less plotlike) set of shifts in the occurrence and distribution of a whole range of differences – the 'full house' of variation that is obscured by teleological narrations and sequences of typical forms. In a world not made up of neat Platonic types but messy spreads of variation, changing realities must be conceptualized not as ladders or trees defined by sequences and phases but as *dense 'bushes' of multitudinous coexisting variations, continually modified in complex and non-linear ways* [my emphasis] (1999: 42).

Building on this important reformulation, I propose a further subjectivist rethinking of change in terms of simultaneity – what one might think of as the horizontal or transverse dimension of change – that is often overlooked as an aspect of time. To understand the transverse temporality of the simultaneous, I propose, requires a *spatial* theory of "temporalization" (Munn 1992) – the practices by which temporal relations are produced among clusters of co-present objects, persons and places in the landscape by embodied forms of movement in action and narration. In such a model, the apparently linear temporality of the moving subject co-exists with another *thick* temporality of multiple rates of change, which the moving subject experiences as it were in the temporal background. These include the objects in the landscape through which the subject moves, other subjects in motion, and memories or narratives of historical events associated with those objects, persons, and places – all of which are experienced *at the same time.*

The spatiality of the simultaneous is something that Foucault already described as characteristic of the present era, but in a manner that renders it anti-temporal, static. His description, I propose, also describes the complex temporality of memory and myth, in which past time is evoked and embodied as another layer of temporal experience in the present.

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in an epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life

developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (Foucault 1986: 22).

In order to overcome the problem of anachronism that simultaneous difference presents to modernist historians, it is necessary to rethink the totalizing temporality of European historiography in spatial terms of multiple "coexisting temporalities." "What this simple but undeniable recognition point[s] to," argues Naoki Sakai (1989: 106), "[is] that history is not only temporal or chronological but also spatial and relational…Whereas [western] monistic history…thought itself autonomous and total, 'world' history conceive[s] itself as the spatial relations of history." In other words, space is inscribed with competing cultural constructions of the past.

Bearing all of the above in mind, my analysis of the local representation of Himalayan history proposes a spatial model of time that allows for *poly*chronicity. By this, I refer to the cultural construction of competing fields of temporal relations in the landscape – local, monarchical, colonial, national – by different t(r)opologies of discourse and action. Rather than using the static textualist image of the palimpsest, I characterize such temporal fields in practical terms as timescapes animated by different modes of movement. The simultaneity of multiple timescapes, that commonly shapes the experience of place, memory and belonging, provides a spatial alternative to "chronistic" paradigms of stagist or developmental history that are usually associated with the triumphalism and teleology of nationalist histories. And so, taking local gods and British colonial authors as my guides, and combining demystification with hermeneutics, I examine the spatial arts of religious performance, by means of which the history of local representation by Himalayan gods is reproduced in the postcolonial present as counternational history.

Icons of political location

On India's west Himalayan border, not far from the southwest corner of Tibet, the tutelary gods of Rohru district ride in ritual vehicles, whose characteristic designs define a regional index of caste-ranked political identities and locations – if we can but read their meaning. The gods of land-owning Khas-Rajput territorial "militias," or *khūnd*s, ride in "palanquins" (*pālgī*), carried on the shoulders of two or more men. Palanquins, in turn, come in three distinct models – "long-haired," (*jhāṁgruvālā),* "box-type" (*sandūkvāla*) and "chair-type" (*kursīvāla*), each associated with a different species of god and place of origin. By contrast, the gods of land-owning Brahman villages, or *bhāṭolī*s, ride in copper "pitchers" (*kalaśa*) carried on the head. The gods of subaltern "Koli hamlets," or *kolwāḍa,* emulate the vehicles of their Rajput or Brahman patrons, and beyond the arena of rural society, the remembered state deities of former kings ride in scaled-down versions of the multi-wheeled "chariots," or *rath,* of the plains, which devotees pull by ropes.

To read the spatial history encoded in these vehicle designs, it is necessary to understand the regional idiom of government by deity and its iconic symbolism for representing political location, identity, power, and agency. By "political," of course, I do not refer to democratic representation in the western sense, but rather to a regional Hindu mode of collective representation by local gods (i.e. deotas or devatas). Exemplifying Guha's and Chakrabarty's point about the persistence of theistic agency in modern times, one Rohru teacher elided religious and secular political idioms in explaining the historical significance of devatas in the former Bashahr state as follows:

> Devatas were just like the MLAs [Members of the Legislative Assembly] we nowadays elect to represent our interests in the Himachal Legislative Assembly in Simla. Previously, "in the era of kings," devatas were our representatives at the court of the Bashahr kings. The traditional territories called *ghori*s, which devatas represent at our festivals today, used to be the local constituencies of the Bashahr kingdom. In Rohru-Bashahr, we call these local rural communities *khūnd*s.[7]

This article examines a remarkable history of the theistic representation of local rural interests at three superior courts – of the Bashahr kingdom, the British Empire, and the Indian nation-state.

In the former territories of the Bashahr kingdom, the term *khūnd* mentioned above draws together three competing conceptions. As well as meaning a Rajput warrior in the singular, the term refers to the local assemblies and militias of the dominant, agro-pastoralist, Khas-Rajput caste in Rohru, and (in Kinnaur) to the seven territories incorporated in the original Bashahr kingdom. According to the idiom of government by deity, each *khūnd* and its so-called *ghori* territory is ruled at home and represented abroad by its local god, whose subjects address him as "*rājā sāhab*" (respected king or ruler).[8] *Khūnd*s also acted as local militias to defend their territories against aggression by neighbours, especially in

---

[7] Indicating its regional importance, the term is used in a number of complementary senses all of which refer to the close relationship between military force, occupied territory, and political community. On the one hand, it refers to a prestigious category of Rajput warrior (as in the caste title Khūnd Kanait); on the other hand, in Kinnaur, *khūnt* refers to the spatial formation of the original seven territories, which were incorporated in the Bashahr kingdom by Parduman Singh. The sense of *khūnd* used in Rohru combines the military and the territorial in the sense of a local political community and its militia.

[8] In his recent regional survey of Pandavlila performances in Garhwal, William Sax (2002) describes similar understandings of the Kaurava deity Karan as the "divine king" of the Singtur territory. Although considerable differences distinguish social and religious life in Garhwal and the Simla Hills, my own observations during two brief periods of fieldwork in the Singtur territory in 1988 and 1994, suggest that a west Himalayan institution of government by deity with characteristic regional variations extends from Chamba and Kullu in the west through the Simla Hills to Garhwal in the east. To what extent other variants exist in western Tibet, Kumaon, and western Nepal remains to be explored.

pastoral conflict over grazing rights in the high altitude pastures. I discuss one such protracted conflict below.

Throughout Himachal Pradesh, local gods provide a conventional idiom for politically representing local rural communities of all three castes *and* their former rulers in mythic discourse and ritual practice. Some of my English-speaking informants affectionately call the regional pantheon so defined "*hamārā pahārī devī-devatā system*" (our mountain system of goddesses and gods). Ronald Inden's (1990:268) concept of "political theology" neatly fits this regional idiom of tutelary representation. But how do we decipher the local histories encoded in this mythico-ritual iconography of collective identity?

Decoding local history in a Gazetteer pantheon

Nowadays, the symbolic persons of local gods stand for traditional, local, caste communities, act on their behalf in oracular modes of collective decision-making, and ritually articulate their external relations – with each other, former ruling elites, remembered empires, and the nation-state. In such ritual practices, the otherwise invisible persons of gods are made palpably present as actors in the human world by a visual/material regime of "signs" (*niśān*) – images, swords, maces, thrones, temples, palanquins. In conjunction with the objectification of theistic power by such material signs, and its mobilization for action in palanquins, human oracles (*mālī)* embody and give voice to deities in temple practices of consultation, in the course of which decisions are made by "dancing" the deity in his palanquin and asking for his advice in all manner of individual and collective issues – medical, marital, agricultural, pastoral, legal, political, and military. In this way, gods are enabled to rule as kings through the choreography of the palanquin – an Indian version of the *deus ex machina* constructed as a governing machine – and the "shaking speech" of the oracle who gives voice to the deity's wishes.

The dance and travel movements of these governing machines and the trance speech of oracles define spatio-temporal relations of action and narration in the landscape, that link the present era of secular democracy to the former era of Hindu kingship in the complex experience of political memory. Rather than interpret the reproduction of Himalayan theistic kingship as anachronism, I view the remembered political history so performed as a "meaningful temporal horizon" (Munn 1992) against which rural communities produce the present and the future in relation to the past in local, and sometimes, counternational terms. Central to such localizations of history are the origin myths of traveling gods, whose movements, encounters and adventures specify networks of particular sites and routes in the landscape, in terms of which communities are meaningfully located in space, time, and the political field. Villagers refer to the regional corpus of theistic knowledge so defined as "history" (*itihās)*. In what follows, I explore

the localizing tropes of west Himalayan theistic history and examine to what extent this ritual t(r)opology intersects with the data of colonial sociology, in particular with respect to such modern criteria for historical evidence as details of place, time, number, cost, actors, and motivation.

As local charters of "government by deity" (*deotā kā rāj*), I shall argue, regional theistic histories are characteristically structured by three *spatial* moments in the constitution of gods as local, sovereign, political actors: 1) the *prelocal* moment of mythic migration, in which gods leave home in search of places to found a "seat" (*kursī*) or kingdom of their own; 2) the *localizing* moment, when the disembodied and initially disordering power (*śakti*) of a god is geographically sited, ritually ordered, architecturally formed and politically located; 3) the *interlocal* moment of projecting newly localized power in peaceful *and* conflictual relations with others.

Local knowledge of theistic history is encoded in the goddesses and gods of the regional pantheon – if we can but discern the significance they convey to local people. Such names as Basaru, Kilbalu, Badrinath of Kamru, Sarahan Bhimakali or Hanoli Mahasu denote not only key ritual actors in the contemporary system of government by deity; according to British colonial evidence, their tutelary categories also define the historical structure of the political field of the former Simla Hill States during the period of indirect British rule. I found the evidence by critically re-reading the gazetteers, glossaries, revenue settlements, decennial censuses, and survey maps of British colonial sociology, produced between 1815 and 1947, against my contemporary ethnographic data.

In one of these texts, the 1904 Simla District Gazetteer, one hundred and forty-three deities are listed as "worshipped in the Simla hills" (SDG 1904: Ch.I, C 36-9). Despite its many shortcomings and lacunae, this gazetteer pantheon acted as my Rosetta Stone during fieldwork. Simply put, it provided the spatial clues that enabled me to decipher the religious practices of government by deity as a register of political history.

Information about the deities listed in the gazetteer pantheon is classified in five columns, headed "Number," "Name of god," "Village or seat of the god," "Territory," and "Remarks." For instance, entry "Number 1" for Bashahr State reads "Name of God: Bhimakali / Village or seat of the god: Sarahan / Territory: the Bashahr State / Remarks: This goddess is worshipped throughout the territory of Bashahr. Also there are other minor gods that are considered under this goddess" (*ibid.*).

In its subsequent listings for lesser deities, the table revealed the systematic correspondence between contemporary religious symbolism and historical political organization in each of the "native states" of the Simla Hill States District – though not without considerable detective work on my part. According to my ethnographic survey of some thirty-five territorial gods listed for Rohru in the gazetteer, all continue to be worshipped in the same locations, and most of the origin myths and rituals described in

colonial texts are not only still remembered, but also actively reproduced in contemporary religious discourse and practice – especially in local festivals. The most notable exceptions are extravagant rites such as the *parnāth* sacrifice of Kamru, Kinnaur, which was once performed at the expense of the Bashahr king, or the perpetual procession of Chalda Mahasu, formerly funded by contributions from local communities and kings, especially the raja of Jubbal. After Indian kings lost their "privy purses" in 1971, the Parnath sacrifice was discontinued, and the regular scheduling of Chalda Mahasu's territorial progress has been delayed and deferred in recent years.[9] What remains throughout the Simla Hills and surrounding region is a peasant political culture of theistic kingship and rural diplomacy – remembered in narrative and reproduced in the dance and travel movements of gods.

Fieldwork revealed the wealth of this local knowledge and its ritual practices, the indigenous meaning of whose categories, forms and distinctions eluded most of the British gazetteer authors. On the one hand, indiscriminate colonial use of the term "territory" turned out to cover a broad scale of political spaces. On the other hand, distinctions of caste among gods and their worshippers are virtually absent from the gazetteer table, although caste is central to the indigenous taxonomy of the regional pantheon of goddesses and gods. The caste-inflected design of ritual vehicles is a vivid example we have just discussed.

The gazetteer follows indigenous territorial conceptions of religion in the Simla Hills as seen in its enumeration of local deities worshipped in each of fifteen hill states. Because each deity represents a finite territorial space, the geographical scale and political complexity of indigenous states is directly proportional to the number of deities in their tutelary pantheons, as seen in the following list:

	Name of state	Size of pantheon
1.	Kothkai and Kotguru	1
2.	Kothguru	8
3.	Kothkhai	10
4.	Kanethi	1
5.	Kumharsain	8
6.	Bashahr	68
7.	Bashahr, Jubbal, & Rawin	1
8.	Balsan	13
9.	Rawin/Keonthal	2
10.	Punnar/Keonthal	2
11.	Sangri	6
12.	Ghond	3
13.	Theog	4
14.	Jubbal	13
15.	Tharoch	3
	Total for all states	143

---

[9] Personal communication by the Raja of Jubbal (1988).

Of course, there is more involved than numbers of gods and size of territory. To understand the historical political life of these Hindu hill-states, it is also necessary to know the different *kinds* of territorial space that deities represent, and how theistic representation was actually practiced in interactions *between* territorial communities and with former kings. In this respect, the gazetteer lists proved disappointingly thin by failing clearly to distinguish the indigenous caste ranking and territorial classification of gods or describe their ritual communication.

The 68 deities listed as worshipped in Bashahr present the researcher with a cryptic and incomplete guide to the administrative and religious geography of the kingdom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In what follows, I focus on the southernmost of the three districts or *tahsīl*s that were formerly incorporated in the Bashahr State, namely Rohru *tahsīl*.[10] Recently reconstituted by the Himachal Pradesh government as Rohru District, the extent of the contemporary administrative territory is virtually identical to its historical antecedent, occupying the upper reaches of the Pabar river and neighbouring Rupin river valleys. Interpreting my fieldwork in light of Sir Herbert Emerson's unpublished *Assessment Report of the Rohru Tehsil* [sic] of 1914 (Emerson n.d.1),[11] I have come to understand that religion, caste society, and politics were linked in monarchical times by the territorial organization of the Bashahr state revenue system, and that gods as well as human subjects were counted as *mālguzā*r or "one paying revenue to (or holding land under) government: tenant; landlord" (McGregor 1993).[12] As such, seven elite local deities were honoured by the Bashahr kings as "holders of rent-free land" (*muāfidār* or *māfidār*: A. *mu'āfā,* P. *māfī* exemption).[13] I examine two of these below, Suni Nag of Khabal and Jabali Narayan, both deities from Rohru *tahsīl*. In

---

[10] In addition to Rohru, the other two *tahsīl*s of the Bashahr state were formerly called Rampur and Chini.

[11] Sir Herbert Emerson retired as Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in the 1930s after an outstanding career in the India Civil Service, for which was knighted. During the first two decades of the 20th century, his unusually long tour of duty as Manager of the Bashahr State made him intimately acquainted with the religion of the area's dominant Kanait agropastoralists. After his retirement Emerson wrote a detailed ethnography of Kanait religion, whose unpublished manuscript is currently housed in the India Office Library in London.

[12] Emerson defines the revenue term *malguzār* as follows in the glossary of his 1914 *Assessment Report of the Rohru Tehsil* (n.d.:.72): "Malguzar – a revenue payer." See also Baden-Powell's glossary (1972[1892]: "Mālguzār (P.= payer of the māl or revenue)." In the Bashahr state, both individual households and temples were classified as payers of revenue, which was assessed on land holdings and collected in kind.

[13] According to all reports I heard during fieldwork, the seven revenue exempt deities of Bashahr were Bhairing Nag of Sangla, the three Maheshvars of Chagang, Tolang, and Sungra, Narayan of Jabal. Suni Nag of Khabal, and Gudaru of Gawas. When speaking with former local officers who served in the Bashahr administration under British indirect rule, the linguistic form of Persian revenue vocabulary reflected an Arabic influence, hence *muāfī* and *muāfidār* rather than *māfī* and *māfidār*.

addition, according to Emerson (*ibid.*: 46), certain temples also enjoyed revenue-free land grants (*muāfī* or *māfī)* from the Bashahr king.

> Such grants were made in former times in return for supposed services by the deity and, as they carried with them the transfer of the obligation of personal service [i.e. *begār*] from the State to the temple, the worshippers raised no objection [...] Instead of giving a month's labour to the State [they] work for a few days for the god.

According to a common Hindu conception of royal power (Burghart 1978), the Bashahr king's political sovereignty was based on his ownership of all land in the royal domain, which he administered in the name of the state goddess, Bhimakali (Emerson n.d.1: 12). According to this constitution, Bhimakali was the true sovereign.

> The Raja was the vice-regent of the national goddess, holding his kingdom from her and on her behalf, and generally acting in accordance with the orders of her oracle. It was therefore incumbent upon him to preserve an intimate connection between religion and the State, and to provide fully for the requirements of all official, as apart from village, temples. The obligation applied with equal force for his subjects, for they also enjoyed what possessions they had by the grace of Kali. Hence a large proportion of the total revenue was expended on the maintenance of the national worship[14] (*ibid.*: 13-14).

Fieldwork revealed the same theistic conception of sovereignty as central to the contemporary institution of government by deity throughout the former Simla Hill States at *all* levels of political organization except the *tahsīl* – from villages and local territories, through the remembered administrative divisions of former Hindu states, to the quasi-imperial formation of the paramount regional deity, Mahasu.

While fieldwork confirmed the accuracy of the names of deities, temple locations, and territories listed in the gazetteer pantheon, it also revealed the incompleteness of colonial knowledge and its biased view of tutelary representation, especially with respect to the caste and spatial status of gods. With the sole exception of four local gods representing Brahman communities in Rampur *tahsīl*, the gazetteer only includes the deities of Bashahr's ruling dynasty and of rural communities of the dominant Kanait caste (now Khas Rajput). No reference is made to the nine Brahman communities of Rohru which worship Parasuram, or of *any* subaltern Koli communities and their gods, of which the latter still form the most numerous, albeit least powerful, category in the Rohru pantheon. It is unlikely that Emerson was ignorant of these other deities, given his interest in low-caste religion, his fourteen-year stay in the area as Manager of Bashahr, and the frequent administrative tours of the localities his work required. Emerson may have been in the district when the 1904 gazetteer

---

[14] Emerson specifies that the Bhimakali temple took a 3% share of the annual 25% land revenue cesses to fund state rituals (1914: 11).

was compiled, but we do not know to what extent he was involved in its production. While the gaps in the list may be explained by colonial ignorance or as a reflection of colonial fiscal and political interests in only recording the gods of the ruling elite and tax-paying landowners, it closely resembles dominant representations of the pantheon still in force today – inscribed in common knowledge and enunciated every winter in the annual oracular prophecy called *bakhān* (lit. statement or report).[15] Emerson had clearly heard one of more *bakhān*s. In his unpublished study of Kanait religion (Emerson n.d. 2), he gives a detailed description of the *bakhān* of the local god, Jakh of Janglik, guardian of the Pabar headwaters. But rather than assume Emerson's involvement in the gazetteer, I prefer to view its partial listing as reflecting colonial reception of the hegemonic form of local knowledge underwritten by dominant caste power.

The categorical structure of political location

To grasp the systematicity of theistic representation that reproduces an historical regional political order, we need to unpack the plural meanings conveyed to local people by the deities of the regional pantheon. It is common knowledge that each tutelary god does representative duty in two cosmological contexts: on the one hand, as the divine representative in the human world of a caste ranked, territorial community in its ritual relations with the gods of peers, clients, and rulers; on the other hand, as the local "watchman" (*caukidār*), "policeman" (*pulis*), and representative on earth of the great gods of heaven, Shiva and Kali. In addition, each tutelary god represents its human community in heaven in the annual battle with demons that determines world-order as reported in *bakhān*.

Thus, the political locations represented by the gods of the regional pantheon are structured by a triple taxonomy of social, spatial, and cosmological positions. By social positions, I refer to the regional scale of caste categories or *jātī*: royal Rajput, rural Khas-Rajput, Brahman, and Koli. By spatial positions, I refer to the scale of territorial "fields" or *kṣetra* that formed the administrative divisions of the former Bashahr state [in descending order of magnitude]: kingdom (*rājwāḍa*), *tahsīl*, *parganā*, *ghori*, *cak* (village revenue circle), and hamlet (caste name + *wāḍa*, as in *kolwāḍa*). By cosmological positions, I refer to local understandings of the three "worlds" or *loka*s and their inhabitants: 1) the underworld (*Jamlok*: lit. "world of Yama") of the ancestral dead, ghosts and spirits (*bhūt-pret*), and demonic beings (*rākas*); 2) the human world (*Prithvī*) of caste society; and 3) the heavenly world of the gods (variously *Svarga, Indralok,* or *Aṣṭakulī*).

---

[15] The term *bakhān* (H. report, statement) refers to an oracular report delivered by each local god in Rohru through the "shaking speech" of his oracle on the results of the annual battle in heaven between local gods and demons for control of the coming year.
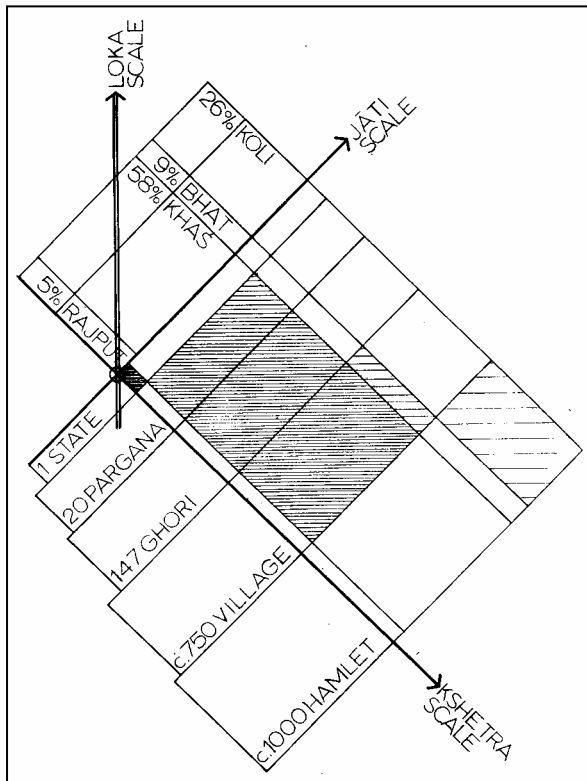
Fig. 1: The political field of the Bashahr state

This triple taxonomy of positions structured the field of political identity and interaction in the former Bashahr state, and is reproduced in present times by the representative practices of government by deity. This triple structure may be visualized as a three dimensional cosmos. The axes of caste and territory define the horizontal dimension comprising the field of political locations. The vertical dimension indicates the cosmological dimension, in terms of which kingship is legitimated by the power of the gods, which triumphs over demons, death, and disorder. This vertical dimension is given everyday material, visual, and verbal form in sacrificial ritual, temple architecture, and oracular discourse, especially in the common geometry of the center and the four cardinal directions that informs *maṇḍala*s (ritual diagrams of the world), temple roofs (*śikha*: lit. summit, peak), and the "eight-sectored" city, Ashtakuli, atop Mount Kailash, where the gods meet every year in heaven. In each case, the center defines the vertical axis along which power circulates through the three worlds embodied by traveling gods and demons.

Some idea of the numbers of gods in each political location can be gained by combining the relative sizes of castes with the number of territorial types. Herbert Emerson's (n.d.1: 30) table of the "Tribal Distribution of Rural Population" gives some idea of caste percentages in Rohru in 1914 as follows:

Brahmans	9%
Rajputs	5%
Kanets [Kanaits]	58%
Lohars	1%
Carpenters	2%
Turis	1%
Kolis	22%
Mohammadans	1%

The numbers for each category of territory in the Bashahr state were as follows:

State	1
Tahsīls	3
Parganas	20
Ghoris	147
Villages	c.750 [estimated]
Hamlets	c 1000 [estimated]

Each of these territorial spaces was represented by a tutelary god in the historical system of government by deity with the exception of *tahsīls* (the largest administrative territories of the state). [16]

There is more to political representation than abstract categories, numbers and spaces, however. To understand the historical cultural forms of discourse and practice, in terms of which theistic categories of political location were implicated in political practice and subjectivity, it is necessary to turn to the expressive record of local narrative. In what follows, I examine the origin myth of two local dominant caste deities, Suni Nag, the god of the Khabal *ghori*, and the history of his on-going conflict with one of his peers, Jabali Narayan, the god of the neighbouring Jhigaya territory. In doing so, we not only see how gods were conceptualized and treated as historical political representatives in the institution of local government by deity; we also chart the changing historical geography of power and territorialization, in terms of which locality was re-conceptualized and re-configured as political location in three different superordinate political contexts: the Hindu kingdom of Bashahr, British indirect rule, and the secular Indian state.

Locality and foreign power

That local government is conceived in opposition to intrusive forms of foreign power might seem to be a foregone and universally applicable conclusion, but in Rohru district the reverse is true. Rather than being based on oppositional understandings of "the outside" as the "ground" against which locality is "figured" – its defining "context" – as Arjun Appadurai (1996:182-8) has convincingly argued, local sovereignty in Rohru originates in a mythic reversal of the disordering intrusion of foreign ower. [17]

---

[16] The significant exception is the largest territorial division of Bashahr, the *tahsīl*. The absence of tutelary deities of the tahsil suggests that the establishment of this Islamic territorial category occurred at a time subsequent to the heyday of theistic conceptions of sovereignty. These emerged under Kashmir-rule in the 8th century C.E. (Inden 2000).

[17] In conceptualizing "locality," Arjun Appadurai argues that "the production of neighborhoods [i.e. the social forms of local consciousness] is always historically grounded and thus contextual" (1996: 182). "Insofar as neighborhoods are imagined, produced, and maintained against some sort of ground (social, material, environmental), they also require and produce contexts against which their own intelligibility takes shape. This context-generative dimension of neighborhoods is an important matter because it

This clearly problematizes universalist constructions of the local and the foreign.

Local gods are central to Pahari constructions of locality, history and political location, at the heart of which is a mythic transformation of the foreign into the local. As symbols of local identity, community, and power, the tutelary persons of local gods are formed by an apparent paradox. Despite their status as icons of locality, all the 35 Pahari gods I studied in Rohru are described in their myths as intrusive *immigrants*, born outside the localities they represent – some just beyond the village in a forest or spring, others from as far away as Tibet or Kashmir. The powers they embody are also conceptualized in exogenous terms as originating outside the settlement, usually in lakes located in the forest (*jaṅgal*) or high mountain wilderness (*parbat*). In this, Pahari thought conforms to a longstanding Hindu textual paradigm of royal power and authority inscribed in the oppositional relationship of social space/village and wilderness/forest that Malamoud (1976) characterizes as *"grāma"* and *"araṇya"* and Sontheimer (1997: 201) as *"kṣetra and vana."*[18] *Grāma* or *kṣetra* is the settled space of human society ordered by a king, Brahmanical law, and sacrificial ritual. But royal sovereignty has its origins in the wilderness of *araṇya* or *vana* – the place of brigands, enemies, and demons, but also of renouncers and gods. For instance, in the Indic imperial rite of the conquest of the quarters, the horse sacrifice, royal power is derived from outside the kingdom by conquest then legitimated as authority on the king's return to his capital by (re)consecration (Inden 1978). It is therefore only those

provides the beginnings of a theoretical angle on the relationship between local and global realities" (*ibid.*: 186).

[18] Malamoud gives a structuralist account of the Vedic concepts of *araṇya* and *grāma* as an opposition that defines the totality of the world. "These two zones, of the forest and the village, are distinguished less by material traits than by the religious and social significance attributed to each" (1976: 4). *Grāma* is defined more by social relations than by spatial limits. "*Araṇya*…is the other of the village" (*ibid.*: 5). Deriving from the term *araṇa* (strange), "its constant characteristic is that of an empty, interstitial space…a hole (*iriṇa*), desert, or in-between (*prāntara*)" (*ibid.*). *Grāma* is the place of the householder and order (*dharma*), where sacrifice is performed. *Araṇya* is the place of gods, the site of the absolute, and the abode of the renunciant (*samnyāsī*) beyond ritual. "*Araṇya* is defined…by a lack: the absence of village" (*ibid.*: 11). But the opposition of *grāma* and *araṇya* is elided in the forest-abode or *vānaprastha* hermitage of the third stage of life, which Malamoud characterizes as "an Indian utopia" (*ibid.*: 18). [My translations]. Taking a more historical approach to "*vana* and *kṣetra* or wilderness and settled space," Sontheimer (1986: 201) avoids "the terms 'nature' and 'culture' since *vana* and *kṣetra* may be co-substantial." "A Brahmanical *kṣetra* with a *purāṇic* deity may relapse again into a locality where pastoral people and 'predatory' people dominate. The deity is forgotten and is superseded by a folk deity attended by a non-Brahmanical caste…The forest with all its implications, e.g., social, mythological, ritual, philosophical and so on, was also…very much a physical reality until the extension of agriculture in modern times. 150 years ago or so Rama still would not have had to go very far from Ayodhya to be in the midst of a forest. *Kṣetra* I would describe, in brief, as a well-ordered space, the riverine agricultural nuclear area which is ideally ordered by the King, and by Brahmans with their *dharmaśāstra*."

powers of the outside, which have not been ritually localized, that constitute the foreign. Such powers include not only the ubiquitous demons, which mark the threshold of every Pahari household or territory, but also former Muslim emperors, British officers, or their contemporary counterparts – government servants, road engineers, and Gurkha migrant workers.

In what follows, I use the local histories of the tutelary gods, Suni Nag of Khabal and Jabali Narayan, to examine the three spatial moments characteristic of the west Himalayan paradigm of political localization. First I chart the local constitution of theistic sovereignty in origin myths and rites of temple foundation. In light of this, I then read the political inscription of space by theistic agency as evidence of the local representation of history in Rohru.

The prelocal moment of local histories

The origin myths of west Himalayan government by deity echo a longstanding Indic imperial discourse involving the foreignness of power and its violent intrusion into everyday life. Power must be wrested from the "forest" (*araṇya*) by a conquering king, then introduced into "settled space" (*grāma*), to be ritually ordered as legitimate authority (Inden 1978). The power of kings, in other words, was not taken for granted as ready-made or given by hereditary ascription. The king had to prove himself capable of acquiring power by successful military action outside the realm. This is one of the lessons of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic. The origin myths of government by deity in Rohru-Bashahr offer a variant of this narrative. Local gods are produced in the image of kings by the disordering intrusion of foreign power and its subsequent re-ordering and localization by temple foundation.[19] Though separated by several centuries, both these theories of sovereignty share theistic conceptions of world-(re)ordering kingship, in which western concepts of politics and religion are elided by Indic practices of rule.

In the Simla Hills, world creation is not the primary subject of Pahari mythology. Instead, local revolutions are described, in which existing political order is transformed. In some narratives, this involves the radical change from government by demon to government by deity; in others, the ouster of an incumbent god by an intruder; in a third group, the establishment of a local god, where none existed before. In Rohru, there are two kinds of local god. Those that originate not far from the place of their adoption, and those that originate outside Rohru. In myths of the former, gods embody the double power of the forest that initially manifests as a violent and destructive curse (*doṣ*) until transformed by ritual into the blessing (*lābh*) of increase. In such myths, the opposition of forest and village is mediated by two complementary vectors: the outward movement of cattle herding or shepherding flocks from settled space to forest or high-

---

[19] See also William Sax's description of the Garhwal local deity Karan (Karna of the Mahabharata epic) as a "divine king" (2002).

altitude pastures; and the reverse movement of wild power, spontaneously materialized in a divine image (*utpati mūrti*) then imported from forest to village.

Those gods that originate outside of Rohru are usually members of divine brotherhoods (*birādarī*). Six different brotherhoods of gods have members in Rohru: the 7 Narayans of Ramni, the 3 Nags of Burua, the 7 Bhairing Nags of Barar Sar, the 3 Nags of Balusan, the 3 Khantus of Mansarovar, and the 7 Mahasus of Kashmir [in order of increasing distance to native place]. These six mythic networks of divine kinship structure competing regional geographies of identity and communication by a common discourse of "roots and routes" (Gilroy 1993), whose tropes evoke an indeterminate and possibly unrecoverable social history of competition for land, lineage fission, migration, and re-settlement.

Suni Nag and Narayan belong to this second group. Both are immigrants from outside Rohru. Both belong to brotherhoods and originate in lakes. Suni Nag and his two brothers come from Balusan, a mountain lake on the Shrikhand ridge. Narayan and his six siblings are associated with a pool just outside Ramni village in Kinnaur, where their mother, a serpent goddess called Sutanang Matting, dwells. Leaving home and traveling in search of unsettled space to found "seats" (*kursī*) of their own, the mythic dispersal of each brotherhood of gods forms a narrative landscape of divine diasporas, in relation to which local caste communities orient themselves in terms of space, time and belonging. Every three years, for instance, Jabali Narayan returns home to visit his mother in Ramni, where his palanquin is laid on its side beside her pool to recharge his energy. In this second corpus of narratives of divine diasporas, the opposition between wilderness and settlement is complicated by a third superordinate category of space ordered by the state (in particular by roads, political territories and communication) – a category of space which is outside the village, but not outside society. This third interlocal space of trade, travel, transhumance, and processions is also the predominant setting for most of the narratives of divine migration I studied.

Rather than adduce the myths of both gods in full, I highlight two characteristic moments in the pre-local history of Suni Nag: 1) his migration journey with its evocation of roads, place names, and political geography, and 2) the disordering intrusion of his foreign power into settled space.
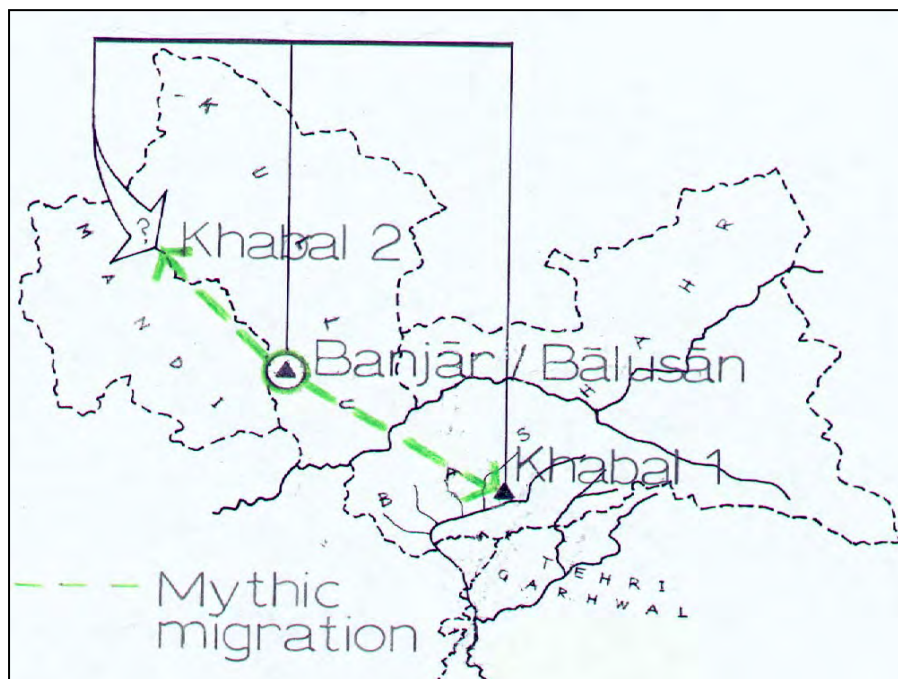
Fig.2: Mythic itinerary of Suni Nag

Suni Nag's divine migration (summary of narrative by Nanda Lal Jitam of Khabal)

Traveling in the guise of a renouncer from his birthplace Balusan to Sorga Sarapa on the Old Tibet Road, Suni Nag takes a local woman as travel companion, then crosses the Sutlej river bridge that leads to Sarahan – ceremonial capital of the Bashahr kingdom. Making his way south through Rampur *tahsīl* to the Nogli river, he next encounters the serpent god Balsru, lying asleep across the road beside the lake where he lives, Bahli Sar. Calling down a hailstorm, Suni Nag nearly kills Balsru who submits to his authority and joins his party. Looking for a place to settle, the three travelers fly through the air to Kyalag pasture, high on the ridge that overlooks the Ransar valley in Rohru *tahsīl*. From above, they sight the Khantu brothers, who are already well established in the area. So they continue on to Jakhnoti, where they find Jakh deota already established. Next they catch sight of the two gods Jabali Narayan and Maudev of Pujiyali dancing at a festival in a forest clearing. So Suni Nag could not settle there. Then Jakh deity joined their party and they traveled on, all three in the guise of renouncers, to Kothi, seat of the Maultiyan chiefs. The next day, not liking the place, they carried on to Gumbhridhadha in the forest, then to Bariya, both above Khabal. Suni Nag sent the woman back to Sorga-Sarapa having given her seven sons, then went into hiding with Balsru.

Suni Nag subsequently reveals his divine power and identity by reversing agricultural work and disrupting political order. Seven pairs of bullocks were ploughing a large field belonging to the oppressive landlord, Mahatta Saund. By evening, there was only a little left to plough. When the workers returned

the next morning, however, they found that all their work of the previous day was undone. The field had somehow become unploughed. The same thing happened for the next seven days: each day's work was undone overnight. On the eighth day, Mahatta Saund came to supervise the ploughing, ordering his servants to complete the work that very day. Around four o'clock as the sun was setting, the bullocks transformed into bears and the ploughshares into serpents. When the ploughmen went to see what had happened, Suni Nag appeared from the ploughshare in serpent-form and raised himself upright. So they put him in a goat-wool basket and hid him back home in Sondari village in a safe place, where no one would see him. Improperly housed in a basket instead of a temple, the power of the god continues to make its presence felt by disturbing the existing political order in the Tikri chiefdom.

At that time, the area surrounding Sondari and Khabal was under the rule of the Tikri *ṭhākur* (chief). One day, the son of the *ṭhākur* came to Sondari and got into a fight with Mahatta Saund. But the chief's son lost the fight and, as a forfeit, his father lost control of the chiefdom. Some time later, a lama came to Tikri and divined that the chief had lost his domain, because of the power of a lineage deity in Sondari. It was Suni Nag and he was the real winner in the fight with Mahatta Saund. After taking the lama's advice and adopting Suni Nag as their lineage deity (*kul kā deotā*), the thakurs of Tikri defeated Mahatta Saund and regained control of the area. Chiefly sovereignty, in other words, requires legitimation by theistic power.

Subsequently, in Khabal, the Jitan lineage of Brahmans became the hereditary priests of Suni Nag and, some time later, the people of Gaziyani made a palanquin for him.

Up to the point he flies over the landscape, Suni Nag's journey follows a long-established trade-route linking Sorga, Sarahan and Bahli, namely the Old Tibet Road, along which salt from Tibet was exchanged for wool from Bashahr and iron from Rohru. In addition to the economic context of trade and roads, Suni Nag's journey also describes the scale of political actors that formerly structured the Bashahr kingdom: 1) the Bashahr state goddess (Bhimakali in Sarahan); 2) two chieftains of Kothi and Tikri; 3) five *ghori* deities (the two Khantus in the Ransar valley; Jakhnoti Jakh, Jabali Narayan and Maudev in the Jighaya tract); and 4) the local landlord, Mahatta Saund. Despite the mythic trope of flying over the landscape looking for unoccupied space in which to settle, there is nothing fanciful about the incumbent deities and places mentioned. All refer to the historical geography of political territories that were listed for Bashahr in the 1904 Simla District Gazetteer pantheon and are still remembered today by the presence of their tutelary gods.

After telling me the origin myth, Nanda Lal went on to describe the foundation of the Khabal temple, the events of which sowed the seeds of future feuding by looting animals from neighbouring communities for sacrificial victims.

The localising moment of temple foundation

After the adoption of Suni Nag as a lineage deity, the next episode in his oral history describes the characteristic moment of localization, in which the disordering intrusion of theistic power is ordered in a temple "seat" (*kursī*) by consecration, then inserted in a network of political relations with neighbouring *khūnds* by its re-projection as military aggression.

In former times, the *kumbharumana*[20] (lit. placing the water-pot) consecration rite of laying the first stone of a temple was associated with two kinds of ritualized violence: blood sacrifice and a raid. Shishi Ram, another official of the Khabal temple, told me how sheep and goats were looted from the flock of the Kotidhar *khūnd* [in the Supin Valley] to get sacrificial victims for the temple-foundation rite. First he sang the "*Ghurī Mahātta*" song that evokes the story, then he explained exactly what happened.

Speaking through his oracle, the *devatā* orders: "Sheep must be looted (lit. eaten)[21] – someone else's sheep." He specifies the sheep of the Khashdhar *khūnd* on the opposite side of the Pabar valley. The temple headman (H. *mahātta;* Pah. *māta*), Ghuri, is reluctant to take them from Khashdhar because his in-laws live there. He argues with the deity and insists on raiding another flock from Kotidhar, promising to do so in the deity's name. While the Khabal *khūnd* is travelling to the Kotidhar pasture on Chamshil ridge, the deity inspires the oracle to warn Ghuri Mahatta once again that he is disobeying the deity's instructions. Finding the Kotidhar flock in a rocky place, the men of Khabal are forced to lead the sheep away in single file. Progress is halted when a ram gets its horns stuck between two boulders. As Ghuri Mahatta is struggling to free the animal, the Kotidhar shepherds arrive and one of their dogs, a bitch, attacks him, fastening her teeth in his leg. Swinging his axe at the animal, he misses and hits himself in the leg. Badly wounded and unable to move, he is left behind by the Khabal *khūnd* as they escape with the stolen sheep, and the Kotidhar shepherds kill him – a fate he brought on himself by disobeying the deity. Back in Khabal, the foundation sacrifice is performed with the stolen sheep and goats and the first stone is laid on top of the blood as an offering to the "earth-goddess" (*bhūmī devī*). According to Shishi Rām, all this happened long ago. "Even our maternal grandfathers' great-grandfathers (*nānā parnānā*) do not know when this temple was built. According to our paternal grandfathers' great-grandfathers (*dādā pardādā*), when it was time to place the final stone on the temple roof, we 'ate' the Jabalis' sheep."

---

[20] The Sanskrit term *kumbha* (water-pot, furnerary urn) is compounded with the Pahāri term *rumana* (to place). I also heard *rumana* used to denote the planting out of rice-seedlings in the monsoon season.

[21] In this story, the verb *khānā* is used in both its literal sense, 'to eat', and its figurative sense, 'to loot' or 'steal'.

Thus, the establishment of a temple-seat is politically construed as an act of conquest. Beginning and completion of temple construction are marked by violent rituals, which bond the newly established tutelary god with the *khūnd* by implicating him in two kinds of political relationship to the local (*ghori*) territory. Internally, the sacrifice of sheep and goats incorporates the deity as co-parcenor in the pastoral community of Khas-Rajput property-owners. Externally, the initial raid on Kotidhar for the foundation sacrifice and the subsequent raid on Jabal for the completion sacrifice position the deity unambiguously on the Khabal side as their representative in relations of enmity with other *khūnd*s.

However, the Khabal people do not have things all their own way in locating their deity in the political field. The deity also asserts his supreme authority over the community by using his curse to punish the temple headman's disobedience. Thus, once the deity's wild *śakti* has been institutionalized, the disordering power of his curse described in the origin myth is inverted as the ordering sanction of political sovereignty.

The Jabal raid was apparently the first act of violence in a longstanding relationship of conflict between Khabal and Jabal. Enmity between the neighbouring *khūnd*s was reignited in 1934 and continued in different forms of conflict during much of the twentieth century in a long lasting feud (*boīr*). Famous throughout the Pabar valley, the feud is memorialized in the much loved "*Jabalī-Khabalī*" and "*Bazīra*" ballads sung by men from both places, when carousing at festival times [see below].

The former inclusion of a military raid in Rohru's rites of temple foundation may be usefully compared with other traditions of ritual raiding among *khūnd*s in district Chaupal to the south. According to Denis Vidal (1982), a human head obtained by raiding the village of a neighbouring *khūnd* was indispensable to the performance of the *śānt yajna* (pacification sacrifice).[22] Such gestures of challenge were basic to the spirit of bravado that still characterizes the remembered warrior culture of *khūnd*s in Rohru. The taking of human heads was also central to feuding among *khūnd*s in neighbouring district Jubbal, but it did not form part of their version of *śant*. Instead, the human victims of former feuding were incorporated in a complementary symbolism of local foundation, which amounted to a form of human sacrifice to Kali. The severed heads of enemy warriors were brought back to the village and buried in the *jagah thaur*, the settlement foundation shrine dedicated to the earth goddess in "communities of *khūnd*s" (*khūndwāḍa*).

---

[22] Here, 'pacification' refers specifically to placating the wild powers of demons and Kali with blood sacrifices (*bali*).

The interlocal moment of feuding between Khabal and Jabal

Local representation by gods, as we have seen, is not confined to friendly relations of reciprocal visiting (*deoālī*, *dewālī*) at festival times (Sutherland 2004). It also extends to warfare and enmity. Rohru is renowned throughout the region for its former culture of violence and feuding. Nowadays this history of feuding is memorialized in the lyrics of songs performed at festival times, when diplomatic relations of brotherhood between *khūnd*s are renewed by the serious political work of drinking. The best-known song throughout Rohru celebrates the infamous feud between Jabal and Khabal that brought longstanding relations of alliance between the two *khūnd*s and their deities, Narayan and Suni Nag, to an end. The contested accounts of the conflict told in each location give a vivid glimpse of the everyday practices of divine agency and warrior culture under indirect British rule. As the saga of the feud unfolds, the shifting locus of conflict charts the passage of the two local gods through different levels of territorial organization in the historical political landscape of India: from local government by deity in Rohru, via the court of the Bashahr king in Rampur, to the British capital of the Punjab Province, Lahore, and finally to the law-courts of post-colonial Simla.

Caused by conflicting grazing rights in the Kalkapatan [also Kalgapatan] pasture, the feud brings shepherds, gods, policemen, kings, and British officials into conflict over competing historical conceptions of legality, property, authority, and land. With the outbreak of hostilities, the alliances formed by the rival gods indicate the political significance of mythic brotherhood and ritual exchange as the Himalayan framework for interlocal alliance in times of conflict. On the one side, Jabali Narayan is assisted by his "blood brothers" (*birādar*) in Gokswari and Ramni villages. On the other side, the Khabal god Suni Nag, is helped by his "adoptive brothers" (*dharmbhai*), the two Jakhs of Janglik and Jakhnoti.

In alternative versions of the history of the feud from Jabal and Khabal, the contrasting discourses employed in representing the rival gods as agents goes beyond Dipesh Chakrabarty's polemical point about rethinking historical temporality in plural terms with a vivid case of what I describe as the thick temporality of simultaneity. While the Jabal narratives use indigenous concepts of magic (*tana mana*), curse, and power (*śakti*) to depict Jabali Narayan as a theistic sovereign, the Khabal accounts of Suni Nag's agency invoke the secular jargon of bureaucracy, policing and jurisprudence.

The Jabal version of the feud (as told by Bahadur Singh [BS] of Jabal)

BS: The affair begins when the Khabal shepherds attack and beat the Jabal shepherds with sticks. The four Jabal shepherds who get beaten return to Jabal and a meeting is held. Now the song begins. [He translates the Pahari lyrics into Hindi].

The temple messenger goes to all the villages of the *ghori* to tell them to assemble at Jabal to fight the Khabalis. The Twelve Score (*bārah bīś*) [members of the *khūnd*] arrive at Jabal and the deota gives them orders and they're happy. Narayan orders them to go to Kalkapatan grazing ground. There they meet the Khabalis and both sides exchange blows with sticks and swords and bows.

And they took [the drums of the deity] with them, the *gūjū* and the *ḍhauṃs*.[23] Each of these signs (*niśan*) conveys and projects Narayan's power. When the *gūjū* and the *ḍhauṃs* speak, the whole earth shakes. They played Narayan's rhythm all the way up to Kalkapatan and, when they reached the ridge, the drummers played [the goddess] Kali's rhythm to give strength to the fighters.

When the earth shook, the people of Shiladesh [on the other side of the valley] were awakened from their sleep by the earthquake and asked, "What's going on?" And the Twelve Score killed seven or eight Khabal shepherds and took their *māl* [goods, here sheep and goats] to Jabal. And the goods were kept above the Mana temple [...] and the temple messenger was posted to guard them.

At this point, Bahadur Singh stopped translating the song and continued the story in his own words.

They left the female goats and sheep in the meadow and took all the males to the temple, where they sacrificed them on the temple roof (*śikha*). The blood flowed down from the roof and filled the courtyard. After cooking some of the meat, they threw the remaining bones and carcasses into the courtyard. It was knee-deep in gore.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the Jabal villagers, the police were on their way up to Jabal [summoned by the Khabalis]. The deity was seated on the temple verandah and his palanquin started to move of its own accord. The villagers wondered why [he was moving]. They took his palanquin into the courtyard and asked the god, and the deity answered [through his oracle], "I suspect the police are coming."

So the deity said he'd do some magic (*tana mana*), and he ordered five cauldrons of water to be brought. At the time, the sky was cloudless. The five cauldrons were emptied into the courtyard and the deity bowed to the earth. Then one single cloud appeared in the clear-blue sky right above the village. And rain fell on the courtyard and washed away the blood and bones, and cleaned the whole place up. And the water flowed on down the hill towards the police, who were in the ravine coming up, and the flood hindered their progress.

Later, when the police reached the village, no evidence was to be seen of the stolen livestock. So the police arrested all the men in the

---

[23] The *gūjū* is a two-headed, barrel-shaped drum (*ḍhol*). The *ḍhauṃs* is a smaller battle-drum with the hour-glass shape of Siva's handheld drum, the *ḍamarū*.

village and put them in the Raja's jail in Rampur. And the women were left alone in the village, so they asked the deity for help. And the deity told them, "Take me to the Raja in Rampur."

When Narayan reached Rampur, the Raja did not come out to greet him but asked from inside the palace, "Who is this deity?" Then Narayan ordered the Raja to leave his throne and come out to meet him. When the Raja came out, the deity bowed towards him and said, "You must listen to what I have to say." The Raja said, "Whatever you say, I will listen. What do you want to say?"And Narayan replied, "Release all my people."

And Raja Padam Singh [last reigning king of Bashahr] pardoned the Jabal men and released them all from jail. But the Raja said that for every male goat and sheep they had killed they should give the Khabalis 50 *paise* (i.e. half a silver rupee). And Narayan said he would order the money to be given. And the Khabalis were also in Rampur and they took the money and the Raja wrote off the case. Then the Raja gave Narayan a male goat and the Jabalis food and sent both Jabalis and Khabalis home.

Then the Khabalis said they wanted to fight again and they made a clay-pot (*tumbrī*) and put Janglik Jakh's magical spell (*tantra mantra*) inside it in order to afflict the Jabalis. And when the [Jabal] astrologer, [Ramni Sukhanand, a brahman of Khantali] discovered they had made a *tumbrī*, he destroyed it from afar by sending a counterspell comprising the collective power of all three Narayan brothers – Jabali, Ramnaltu, and Goksi.

Two years later, the Khabalis went to Kalkapatan pasture in force and a few Jabal shepherds who were up there escaped to the village and gave the alarm. And the Jabal *khūnd* went up to Kalkapatan under cover of darkness. At daybreak, the Khabalis saw the Jabalis advancing and the Khabalis ran up the hill and attacked with sticks and stones from above. And the Jabalis went up and met them and joined battle.

Then Bazir, a man of Khabal, seized a Jabali and the sword of Bharan of Desoti village spoke, "I am going to kill a man today!" Then Bharan saw Bazir attack the Jabali and ran to his aid and saw that Bazir was striking him with a sword. So he struck Bazir who fell forward dead and his long coat fell over his head from behind and hid his face. And the Khabalis came up and saw the body and, thinking it was a Jabali, beat it with sticks. Then the two bands withdrew behind their borders and the Khabalis saw that Bazir was missing. Then they realized they'd been beating [their own man] Bazir and they took his body back to the village.

Then the police came to Jabal and whom did they arrest? The two temple officials, Loberama *kajāncī* (treasurer) and Sundar Singh. And

they beat them with their sticks. And when they started to beat them, the deity began to move spontaneously on the temple verandah. The name of the "station officer" (*thānedār*) was Kishan Chand. When he saw the palanquin move of its own accord, he said that someone must have hidden under its "skirt" (*ghāghā*). So he came to have a look and lifted the deity's skirt. But when he saw there was no one hiding there, he was struck with fear and stopped the beating.

Then the *thānedār* tried to go into the temple to investigate, but the deity does not permit anyone [from outside the Jabal *khūnd*] to enter his temple. Narayan told him that he was not allowed to go inside, but the *thānedār* said, "I am a government servant and you cannot stop me." And when the *thānedār* peeked in through the doorway and looked up into the temple, Narayan made his eyes stop working and he couldn't see and everything became dark. But when he turned around and looked back outside the temple, he could see again. When the *thānedār* came back to the temple verandah he felt afraid and said that he couldn't see anything inside the temple. So he asked Narayan's forgiveness and promised to do whatever the deity required. And our respected deity told him, "You must not beat my temple officers!" So the *thānedār* promised not to beat them, and took them away to Rampur.

The court case was held in Rampur and about five men from different villages in the *ghori* were sent to prison in Chamba [to the west in present-day Himachal]. This is not in the song. Then the wives of the prisoners came to Narayan and complained of their hardship, with children to look after without their menfolk. And the temple committee was summoned and one old man without any family called Kalija of Mkatot offered to go to prison in their place. He would go to the police and say that it was he, not the five, who had committed the killings. And the deity gave him money. And he did seven years in prison.

In the Jabal version, the people of Jabal are portrayed as wronged by the Khabalis who are said to have started the initial violence, and the Raja is viewed as an ally of Jabal. But, two months after I heard the above account, when I made my last visit to Khabal, Shishi Ram told me a substantially different version of the conflict. In addition to insisting that the guilty party was Jabal and that the Bashahr Raja was biased in favour of the Jabalis, his account presented a different narrative voice. While the narratives from Jabal represent the feud in theistic terms of Jabali Narayan's magical power and intervention, the Khabal version I adduce below presents a secular discourse of Urdu administrative terms, bureaucratic protocol, British procedure, and legal decisions. From Shishi Ram's point of view, deities are not so much theistic agents as legal persons, who own property, receive rents and can be sued in court. Deities, of course, are both, but the difference in Shishi Ram's discourse marks the historical influence of

Mughal and British imperium as well as the narrator's more worldly experience of bureaucracy as a temple administrator.

The Khabal version of the feud (as told by Shishi Ram [SR] of Khabal)

In 1934, when the conflict between Jabal and Khabal began, Shishi Ram was a young man in his early twenties. As the son of the priest of the Khabal temple, a post that he later inherited himself, he was privy to an inside view of the affair. At my request, he began his account with the song of the feud most commonly sung in Khabal – *Bazīra*. The following is my own free translation of the song.

> Like savoury pastries boiling in a pot, the two *khūnds* swarmed over Kalgapatan pasture.
>
> Whistling their battle-cries, they spread out like water overflowing.
>
> One man called Bazira from Khabali died, seven from Jighar [Jabal].
>
> Brave Nandala of Khabal split the wooden image of Bhaumda,
>
> the Jighalus' pastoral deity, with his sword – in value more like a Pound Sterling than a Rupee.
>
> On the first or second day of the month of *śāūṇā*, the Khabali drummers beat their gongs, sounding the alarm to go to Kalgapatan.
>
> "We are happy here in the village," the men complained. "Why should we go to Kalgapatan? What do you want with us there?"
>
> Like savoury pastries boiling in a pot, they are swarming over Kalgapatan, whistling for battle. See their horses gallop.
>
> "Young men of Khabal! Hit Hukminanda Pangetu of Jabal! Hit him hard with your shoes!"

In the translation of our conversation that follows, Shishi Ram's alternative view of the feud mixes English and Urdu technical terms with everyday Hindi. English terms are marked with single quotation marks.

SR.: It started like this. In the month of Shravan (*śāūṇā*), when the Jabal sheep and goats (*māl*) went up to the pastures, they assembled in Adalto pasture, which is our domain (*haq*). So legal proceedings (*kānūn kārvāī*) were taken to stop them. Properly announced by a drummer, notices were posted and the drum was beaten in the thirty-two villages of Jabal *ghori*. A musician was brought from Rohru and a peon came from Rampur. The musician received seven rupees for his labour and the peon with him was called Vikramjit, a Kinnauri from Sangla. They visited all thirty [sic] villages and posted notices stating "you may not bring your sheep and goats to the Kalkapatan pasture."

E: Who employed the peon?

SR.: The 'government.' The Rampur Raja had the drums played to stop them, but the Jabal people didn't stop.

E: Did this happen in the very beginning?

SR.: No! This happened later.

E: So how did it all begin?

SR.: The story of the beginning isn't sung; it is spoken (*zabānī hai*) [i.e. it is oral history]. We used to give Jabal *devatā* two rupees for the pasture-land. Then we were allowed to graze our flocks there.

E: So, to whom did the pasture belong?

SR.: The pasture belonged to them. But each party wanted its own rights (*haq-huq*). We were 'under' them. We gave two rupees for the flock to the Jabal temple. Now, there was a Forestry guard here, who had a map, and he asked us, "Why are you giving two rupees to Jabal? This pasture-land belongs to the Khabal people. It says so on the *mehaqmā* [?] forest map."

E: An English or an Indian map?

SR.: It was Indian, from here, from Bahli in Rampur *tahsīl*. From Bahli Dalog. So, when he explained this to us, we stopped paying the two rupee tax (*lagān*), and he gave us boundary signs (*niśān*) to show that from Jakhshadhar, Cigrithach, and Shukrordhar to here is the pasture-land of the Khabal people. Then we stopped giving the two rupees. And when we stopped, the quarreling began – a domestic quarrel (*gharelū jhagaḍā*) [i.e. just between Jabal and Khabal].

E: So who pointed out the boundaries (*oṛā*)?

SR.: First, the *oṛā* was drawn on the 'service sheet', then the 'boundary' was marked with signs by the 'patrol'. Boundary pillars (*ṭhūngā*) were made. The man who made the pillars was from Maila, he was with the 'Survey' people. They explained that on this side is Jabal, and on that side is Khabal. The boundary was fixed at Jakhshadhar. From Jakhshadhar eastwards was Khabal and westwards was Jabal. Then, after that, they looted our sheep.

E: Because you didn't pay the two rupees.

SR.: Yes! Because we didn't pay the two rupees. They looted our sheep. In the month of Shravan, all the men of our four villages – from some houses four, from some houses two, from some houses one – had gone with the *devatā* to Dodra Kwar. That is, to dance and play together at a festival there. First we had invited them here; now they were inviting us there in return. Then, one man from Jabal came to find out our secrets, to find out what was going on in Khabal. Most of our men were away. Some had taken the senior god [Suni Nag] to Dodra Kwar and others has taken the junior one [Pabasi Mahasu] to Janglik. So, in

all the houses, there were only women. Not a single man. Up in the grazing-grounds, there were just two children and four old men with the sheep, old men like me. Six people in all. When the Jabalis came, they took the sheep and goats – about one thousand. They belonged to the four villages of Khabal *ghori*: Denwari, Khabal, Sondari, and Jiltwari. There were none from Tikri. At that time, the Tikri flock was on Chamshil pasture [the pass between the Pabar and Rupin valleys] with the men from Shildesh. So that's when they made their move. Early in the morning at five o'clock, the Jabal men stole the sheep and goats from here. They were seven or eight hundred men at least. From Chirgaon to Hingori, men came from all the thirty-two villages. Then two shepherds returned to the village and made it known that the Jabalis had stolen our sheep. So they sent off two young men from here to Dodra Kwar [to break the news].

They reached Dodra Kwar as we arrived with the *devatā*. And we all split up to eat in different houses in the village. Some were eating and others were not, but all heard about the theft of the sheep. I was there at the time. That night, we sent twelve men to Rohru. One night they set out from Dodra; the next night they reached Rohru. Then they went to the police station. The *thānedār* was Gobind Singh from Hatkoti. His house is a little above Hatkoti. So he too went to Jabal. [Meanwhile] the [stolen] sheep had arrived below the village of Jabal. The stream had become swollen there, so they were throwing the animals over the water to get across the stream. The *thānedār* met them and asked: "Whose goods are these?"

"They belong to Khabal."

"Where are you taking them?"

"I have to take them to Rohru."

"Why?"

"I have to take them to the pound (*phāṭak*) [for missing animals]."

There was a 'government' pound there in the time of the Rajas. If you caused any damage, your animals were put in the pound [as security] and it was necessary to pay a fine to get them back.

"Ah yes! I understand," said the *thānedār* [sarcastically], "so you're taking them to the Rohru pound, are you? Come on, let's go up to Jabal and bring those animals too."

So the *thānedār* gave the animals back [to us]. Then he made an investigation (*tehkikāt*) and found some animal skins and some bones [the remains of the sacrifice on the temple roof]. Having completed his investigation, he counted the [remaining] animals and gave them back. We received [a total of] 1800 rupees for all the animals, which were killed. Those, which were still alive, came with us. 1800 rupees at three rupees a head.

E: Only three rupees?

SR.:   Three rupees each, for small ones and big ones. After that, there was lawsuit after lawsuit. They proved the rent [should be paid]. We proved the pasture [was ours] and were awarded the pasture. They were awarded the two rupee rent. Then they were awarded costs against us. Whereas the rent had originally been two rupees silver, we were now charged five rupees, a five rupee note. So we appealed and the Khaniyara people [from a nearby *ghori*] gave evidence (*śahādat*) against us. On the basis of their evidence, seventeen and a half rupees costs were awarded against us. And what decision did the Raja sahab make? The Raja decided it as "*daftar* (report) number eleven." But he did not prove his case. First he gave his decision and left the proof till later. And so, he came to be known as the "*rājutiketā*" [i.e. raja-adjudicator]. First decision, then proof! So, afterwards, seventeen and a half rupees costs were awarded against us. And we made another appeal, and that was dismissed.

E: Why did the Raja make this decision?

Appeal to the British Political Agent

SR.:   The Raja had one official (*karamcārī*), some secretary (*munśī*) or other. Early in the morning, our attorney (*mukyatār*) was going for his morning walk (*saulān*) [i.e. to defecate] and he met this official on the path, who said, "Hey brother! The Raja really killed you, didn't he?" But it was unjustified, you know. At that time, we had no idea that an appeal was being made against the Raja's decision.

        Then he explained that the appeal was lodged with the [British] 'Political Agent' and it was he who had determined the Raja's decision.

E: In Simla?

SR.:   No! In Lahore [capital of the British Punjab Province]. We appealed against the Raja's decision to the Political Agent in Lahore. Then one of our chaps (*bandā*), Timchu Ram,[24] the father of a former village headman (*pradhān*) called Lila Singh, went to Lahore with his *nānā* (maternal grandfather), Ran Bahadur. They made an appeal to the Political Agent in Lahore. When the Political Agent had received their application (*darkhvāst*) and looked it over, he wrote a reply to the Raja saying that, within a week, he wanted a fourteen-page answer on the matter. Fourteen pages! When the letter reached the Raja, he really found himself in a fix. The Raja summoned every official from Rohru, Rampur, and Chini [*tahsīls*] from *paṭwārī*s (village land

---

[24] The word *tīṃcū* refers to a type of throw in the game of marbles. My assistant suggested that Tīmcū Rām must have been a good player as a boy.

registrars) from *qānūngo*s (*parganā* land-registry officers) to *tahsīldār*s (sub-collectors of revenue). And he said to them, "Look at this!"

And he took them into the palace assembly hall (*baiṭhāk*), all the officials from *paṭwārī* to *tahsīldār*. The Wazīr at that time was Kehar Singh. And he told them,

"Look at this order I have received from the Political Agent down in the plains to give a fourteen-page reply. What is this, "*daftar* number eleven," "*rājutiketā*?" Who knows what to reply? A reply has to be sent, but nothing comes to my mind about what to reply." And nothing came to anyone else's mind either. So the Raja had to give the Political Agent eleven muleloads (*khaccarā*) of silver.

E: As a fine?

SR.:   No! A bribe. So, one pot of gold and eleven muleloads of silver had to be given. Then the Raja got out of trouble. That's the story, sir (*janāb*).

E: So, in the end, was a decision reached?

SR.:   In the end, a decision was reached in three different courts (*adālat*) – in Lahore, in Simla, and in Rampur – that Kalkapatan pasture belongs to Khabal. Then, do you know what decree the Raja made? He wrote that the freeholder (*mulk mālik*) of Kalkapatan pasture is the government, the property (*mālkiyat*) belongs to Jabal devata and Khabal should pay two rupees to Jabal temple.

E: No difference from the beginning.

SR.:   That's the decision the Raja made. After he retired, Bakhshi Sita Ram, a government lawyer from Simla, took our case, and he said in court that if the property belongs to Jabal *devatā*, then in three years the people of Jabal should prove what kinds of crops they have produced there: what things they have sown, what crops they have gathered. And if there are no crops, then whose property is it? Property [i.e. ownership of land] is decided by sowing and cropping. So then it became a question of property. And their case was dismissed. Now the pasture is an empty (*khulā*) 'number' [i.e. common land]. It's not for cultivation; it's for grazing. None of it is [individual] property. None of the pastures in the mountains is individual property.

The fighting began in Sambat year 1991 [= 1934]. Bazir Singh was murdered in Sambat year 2005 [= 1948]. And the lawsuits lasted about 40 years [= 1988]. [Shishi Ram subsequently referred to the final court case being decided in 1986].

E: So that's the whole story? It's somewhat different from what they tell in Jabal. They didn't tell me that you went to Lahore.

SR.:   What did they say?

E: They just said that the Raja decided in their favour.

SR.:   That's a big 'item' to leave out!

Apparently, according to Shishi Ram, the legal decision did not put an end to the feud. Not long after the case was decided, in about 1986, the feud was revived at the performance of *phīr*, the Jabal name for the great "peace" sacrifice of Rohru usually called *śānt* – ironically, a rite intended to put an end to conflict. But that is another story.

Timescapes of theistic agency

In juxtaposing the Simla District Gazetteer pantheon with narratives of Suni Nag and Jabali Narayan, I have sought to trace the theistic idiom of locality, historicity and representation, in terms of which west Himalayan local histories are constructed. In examining three characteristic moments of theistic history mythic origins, temple foundation, and feuding, we have traced the *spatial* discourse of political representation by tutelary gods as it shifts from the *prelocal* moment of disembodied power, through architectural and ritual modes of its *localization* as sovereignty, to its re-deployment in external relations of *interlocal* alliance and conflict. As the competing accounts of the feud unfolded, we also charted an expanding scale of external political contexts – royal, colonial, and national, in relation to which the experience of locality and political location had to be re-imagined, re-configured, and re-territorialized. In this sense, the narrative of the local history we examined was spatially rather than chronologically structured. Moreover, as the record of this history is embodied (not textualized) in the contemporary imagery of palanquins, voices of storytellers, or "shaking speech" of oracles (not examined here), it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the past is *presented* – that is to say, made present in present time in the material forms and performative routines of living memory. Thus, rather than treating the persistence of theistic agency in the Jabal-Khabal feud as evidence of an incomplete transition to modernity, or anachronism, its coevalness with successive British colonial and Indian national secular regimes makes it necessary to rethink modernity in *relational* as opposed to transitional terms. Modernization does not eliminate cultural difference; it gathers cultural alternatives as temporal relations in the landscape.

Engaging Guha's and Chakrabarty's challenge to incorporate religious agency in historical explanation, I have argued for the historicity of theistic agency in western Himalayan political discourse in two ways. On the one hand, focusing on *Vertretung*, I have demystified government by deity by demonstrating the common social and territorial referents of theistic and political representation in the Simla Hill States under British rule. To do so, I linked gazetteer knowledge and contemporary ethnographic evidence in

interpreting the Pahari pantheon as an historical index of identities and locations in the political field of the former Bashahr kingdom. On the other hand, focusing on *Darstellung*, I have traced the simultaneous histories of traditional Pahari government by deity and modern secular governmentality in the colonial and postcolonial Indian state revealed by contested narrative representations of the same feud.

Basaru's cloud at the Mughal court with which we began, which Hobsbawm might have characterized as *pre*-political, may now be understood as a theistic representation of sovereignty – no less political for being theistic. Illustrating what kind of sovereignty this was, the local narratives of Suni Nag and Jabali Narayan offered a privileged view of the everyday practices of theistic agency in military, diplomatic, and legal modes of interaction. To characterize these practices as pre-political assumes a Euro-modern, universalist and teleological conception of the political that excludes the co-existence of alternative political cultures. Modernization does not sweep away difference; it supplements and complicates cultural traditions. To interpret theistic agency as anachronistic fails to grasp its simultaneous articulation with discrepant forms of the state – Hindu kingdom, British empire, and Indian national, which are stereotypically assigned to different ideal stages of political development.

In the expressive texture of the narratives adduced above, we see the tropes, forms, and practices by means of which the otherwise invisible persons of gods are and were conceptualized, materialized, and mobilized as historical political actors. The historical presence of west Himalayan gods so defined involves a triple chain of complementary forms of representation. First, there is a *semiotic* mode of representation by means of which an imaginary being is made present in human society through mythic inscription (in song), materialisation (in a palanquin and other signs), and embodiment (in an oracle). Second, there is a *political* mode of representation, according to which the person of a god so defined is made into a king by the ritual practices, through which local groups are ruled and represented in government by deity. Third, there is a *legal* mode of representation by lawyers and disputants, in which the two gods and the communities they represent pursue their interests as plaintiffs in a series of modern courts of justice.

Particularly striking in the alternative versions of the feud is their divergent accounts of theistic agency. In the narratives of his mythic origins and temple foundation, Suni Nag is depicted as a magical agent: sending down hail, flying over the landscape, undoing the work of ploughing, or punishing his headman by the power of his curse. While the mythology of Narayan was not examined here, the mythic discourse of Suni Nag's theistic agency may be taken as characteristic of other gods such as Jabali Narayan. In Bahadur Singh's account of the feud, Narayan is portrayed in similar terms as a magical agent: shaking the earth with his drums, making rain, spontaneously moving his palanquin, terrifying the *thānedār*, and

commanding the king. But in Shishi Ram's account, Suni Nag is also portrayed as a modern historical agent and legal person inscribed in a secular discourse of revenue payments, strategic analysis, bureaucratic protocols, and jurisprudence with scrupulous attention paid to the material details of names, places, dates, numbers and costs.

The simultaneous representation of Suni Nag as magical agent and legal person vividly illustrates the need for a plural conception of historical temporality. Suni Nag's presence is both "nonmodern and modern" and this shows, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 16), that "historical time is not integral, that it is out of joint with itself", that "the present is noncontemporaneous with itself." This continuity of the past with the present, Chakrabarty argues, is precisely "what allows historians to historicize" because "the medieval or the ancient ... are never completely lost" (*ibid*.: 112). But how exactly can such abstract temporal categories as "ancient," "medieval" and "modern" be said to coexist in the present, if history is conceived in objectivist terms of temporal *sequence* that exclude Gould's full house of variation. Plural temporality requires a subjectivist theory of *simultaneity* predicated on the temporal complexity of embodied experience, which Chakrabarty's paradox of the present's non-contemporaneity, however, fails to permit. In addition to the thin time of before and after (the rational temporality of causation, proof and truth), what we also need is the thick time of here and there (the associative temporality of juxtaposition, memory and feeling). Without the spatial component of simultaneity linking an observer and a plurality of names, objects, and places at the same time, there can be no co-presence of plural temporalities. Simultaneity requires the space of juxtaposition as Foucault maintains. What makes the narratives of Suni Nag and Jabali Narayan historical, I propose, is precisely their "contrapuntal" view (Said 1984: 171-2) of cultural difference that permits the discursive intrusion of theistic sovereignty in the colonial/modern sphere of police work, bureaucracy, and the law courts. The field of west Himalayan peasant agency is simultaneously magical and modern, theistic and secular, and its local history is spatially inscribed in the transverse temporality, or border-time, where subaltern and dominant epistemologies meet and interact in a landscape of memory. In tracing the movement of local gods through discrepant spaces and contested representations, I have argued for rethinking the linear representation of time in modern history in spatial terms of timescapes defined by action and narration. And so, made present as motion in origin myths, oral narratives, songs and palanquins on the move, Pahari memories of theistic agency in a plurality of local, royal, colonial and national timescapes require that we rethink Foucault's static *spatial* model of simultaneity in dynamic terms as a *temporal* network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

References

Appadurai, A. 1996. The production of locality. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Berkemer G. and Frenz, M. (eds). Forthcoming. *Sharing Sovereignty – Royalty on a Small Scale. The little kingdom in South Asia*. Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag.

Burghart, R. 1978. Hierarchical models of the Hindu social system. *Man* n.s. 13: 519-26.

Chakrabarty, D. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Cohn, B. 1990. Representing authority in Victorian India. In *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Cohn, B. 1996. The command of language and the language of command. In *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, edited by B. Cohn, pp. 16-56. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Emerson, H. n.d.1. *Assessment Report of the Rohru Tehsil 1914*. Unpublished Manuscript in the Himachal Pradesh State Secretariat Library, Simla, H.P., India.

Emerson, H. n.d.2. Manuscript no. IOR 32313 MSS Eur E 321 (Untitled and Unpublished Manuscript on Kanait Religion). London: India Office Library.

Fabian, J. 1983. *Time and the Other: How anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Francke, A. H. 1914. *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*. Archaeological Survey of India, New Imperial Series. Vol. xxxviii. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing India.

Foucault, M. 1986. Of other spaces. *Diacritics* 16: 22-27.

Gilroy, P. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gould, S. J. 1996. *Full House: The spread of excellence from Plato to Darwin*. New York: Harmony House.

Guha, R. 1983. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Hansen, T. B. and Stepputat F. (eds). 2001. *States of Imagination: Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial state*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hobsbawm, E.J. 1978 [1959]. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Inden, R. 2000. *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the history of practices in South Asia.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Inden, R. 1978. Ritual, authority and cyclic time in Hindu Kingship. In *Kingship and Authority in South Asia,* edited by J. F. Richards, pp. 28-73. Madison: University of Wisconsin Publication Series.

Malamoud, C. 1976. Village et fôret dans l'ideologie de l'Inde Brahmanique. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 23: 215-38.

Marx, K. 1974. *Surveys from Exile.* Trans. David Fernbach. New York: Vintage Books.

McGregor, R.S. (ed). 1993. *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, T. 1999. Economy and the State Effect. In *State/Culture: State Formation After the Cultural Turn,* edited by George Steinmetz. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Munn, N. 1992. The cultural anthropology of time: A critical essay. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 93-123.

Punjab District Gazetteers: Simla District Gazetteer. 1904. Lahore: Civil and Military Press.

Simla Hill States Gazetteer. 1910. Lahore: Civil and Military Press.

Said, E. 1984. Reflections on exile. *Granta* 13: 159-172.

Sakai, N. 1989. Modernity and its Critique: The problem of universalism and particularism. In *Postmodernism and Japan*, edited by Masao Miyoshi and H.D.Harootunian, pp.93-122. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Sax, W. 2002. *Dancing the Self: Personhood and performance in the Pandav Lila of Garhwal.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Sax, W. 1991. *Mountain Goddess: Gender and politics in a Himalayan pilgrimage.* New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sontheimer, G.-D. 1997. Hinduism: The five components and their interaction. In *Hinduism Reconsidered*, edited by G. Sontheimer & H. Kulke, pp. 197-212. New Delhi: Manohar.

Spivak, G. 1988. "Can the subaltern speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* edited by Carl Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, pp. 271-313. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Sutherland, P. 2003. Very Little Kingdoms: The calendrical order of West Himalayan Hindu polity. In *Sharing Sovereignty - Royalty on a Small*

Scale. The Little Kingdom in South Asia, edited by Georg Berkemer and Margret Frenz, pp. 31-62. Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag.

Taussig, M. 1997. *The Magic of the State*. New York: Routledge.

Vidal, D. 1982. *Le Culte des Divinités Locales dans une Région de l'Himachal Pradesh*. Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative. Université de Paris X.