

28

Spring 2005

EBHR

**EUROPEAN BULLETIN
OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH**

European Bulletin of Himalayan Research

The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research (EBHR) was founded by the late Richard Burghart in 1991 and has appeared twice yearly ever since. It is a product of collaboration and edited on a rotating basis between France (CNRS), Germany (South Asia Institute) and the UK (SOAS). Since October 2002 onwards, the German editorship has been run as a collective, presently including William S. Sax (managing editor), Martin Gaenzle, Elvira Graner, András Höfer, Axel Michaels, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Mona Schrempf and Claus Peter Zoller.

We take the Himalayas to mean, the Karakorum, Hindukush, Ladakh, southern Tibet, Kashmir, north-west India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and north-east India. The subjects we cover range from geography and economics to anthropology, sociology, philology, history, art history, and history of religions. In addition to scholarly articles, we publish book reviews, reports on research projects, information on Himalayan archives, news of forthcoming conferences, and funding opportunities. Manuscripts submitted are subject to a process of peer-review.

European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, c/o Dept. of Anthropology
South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330 D-69120 Heidelberg / Germany
e-mail: Hanser-Cole@urz.uni-heidelberg.de; fax: (+49) 6221 54 8898

For subscription details see: <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/ebhr>

Contributing editors:

France:

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, Pascale Dollfus, Anne de Sales
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, UPR 299
7, rue Guy Môquet 94801 Villejuif cedex France
e-mail: mlecomte@pop.vjf.cnrs.fr

Great Britain:

Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Ben Campbell
School of Oriental and African Studies
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square London WC1H 0XG U.K.
e-mail: mh8@soas.ac.uk

Netherlands:

Mark Turin
Himalayan Languages Project, Silodam 355
1013 AW Amsterdam Netherlands
e-mail: mt272@cornell.edu

This issue of the *Bulletin* is published from Kathmandu, in collaboration with
Social Science Baha (<http://www.himalassociation.org/baha>)

EBHR 28 Spring 2005

ARTICLES

- Agency and Resistance in the Thangmi-Newar Ritual Relationship: An analysis of Devikot-Khadga Jatra in Dolakha, Nepal 5
Sara Shneiderman
- Ethnonymy in a Multiethnic Context: A note on Kinnaur 43
Isabelle Riaboff
- Staying in Place: The social actions of Hindu Yoginis 54
Sondra L. Hausner
- The “Descent of the Pandavas”: Ritual and cosmology of the Jad of Garhwal 67
Subhadra Mitra Channa

CORRESPONDENCE, ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS

- The Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP) 90
Martin Gaenszle, Balthasar Bickel, Goma Banjade, Elena Lieven, Netra P. Paudyal, Arjun Rai, Iccha P. Rai, Manoj Rai, Novel K. Rai, Vishnu S. Rai, Narayan P. Sharma, and Sabine Stoll

BOOK REVIEWS

- Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Pascale Dollfus (eds.): Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil: Identities and representations in the Himalayas 100
Sara Shneiderman, Ithaca, NY

Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Vergleichende Hochgebirgsforschung (ed.): Arbeiten aus Nepal. Erwin Schneider zum Gedächtnis	103
<i>Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt, Bangkok</i>	
Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati: A Kingdom under Siege: Nepal's Maoist insurgency, 1996 to 2003	110
<i>Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Bielefeld</i>	
Manjushree Thapa: Forget Kathmandu: An elegy for democracy	113
<i>Elvira Graner</i>	

Editorial

Every three years, the EBHR rotates between Heidelberg, Paris, and London. Number 28 marks the last number of the EBHR to be published from Heidelberg for the time being. It now moves on to Paris, and a new editorial team, which will produce issues 29-34 (Autumn 2005-Spring 2008). Their contact details are:

EBHR
c/o CNRS-Himalaya,
7 rue Guy Môquet,
94801 Villejuif,
France
tel: (+33) 1 49 58 37 31
pramirez@vjf.cnrs.fr

In order to avoid the confusion that has until now resulted from establishing a new website every three years, we have decided to run one central website which is kindly hosted by Digitalhimalaya and managed by Mark Turin. The address is:

<http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/ebhr>

If you log on, you will find downloadable back issues of the *Bulletin*, currently numbers 1-22. If you look through those issues, I think you will find that the quality of the *Bulletin* has steadily increased over the years, so that it is now an indispensable source of scholarly articles, reports, and reviews from the Himalayas. Therefore, we would like to ask you not only to renew your subscription (the form will be included in subscribers' issues, otherwise it is available on the website) but to encourage your friends and colleagues to subscribe as well. The cost is quite reasonable, and goes a long way toward supporting the *Bulletin*, which is self-supporting and receives no subsidies other than the free labour (and love!) of many dedicated people.

In previous editorials I have thanked some of those people, who have worked hard to ensure that the *Bulletin* was published in a timely fashion, and that its standards were maintained; especially Martin Gaenzle and Susanne Kleinmann. I would like to conclude my last editorial by giving a special thanks to András and Sylvia Höfer, who have taken over the lion's share of the burden of producing the *Bulletin*, ever since Martin Gaenzle took up his new duties in Nepal (see his *Research Report*, this issue). We couldn't have produced the last few numbers without their help.

Bo Sax
Managing Editor

Notes on Contributors

Subhadra Mitra Channa teaches Social Anthropology at the University of Delhi. She is interested in the study of marginal groups in Indian society, including those belonging to the dalits, tribes and women as a category. She is the author of two books and editor of two books, and has edited two encyclopedias. She was the President of the Indian Anthropological Association and currently is editor of the *Indian Anthropologist*, the journal of the Association. She is also co-chair of the Commission on the Anthropology of Women, an international body.

Sondra L. Hausner is an anthropologist based in Kathmandu, Nepal. She currently works as the Research Advisor for Save the Children, an international NGO, on projects relating to migration, sexuality, social structure, and religion in South Asia. Her forthcoming book *Wandering in Place: The social world of Hindu renunciation* won the 2004 Joseph W. Elder Prize in the Indian Social Sciences and will be published next year by Indiana University Press.

Isabelle Riaboff specializes in the anthropology of the Tibetan-speaking population groups of the Western Himalayas. Her current research focuses on cultural hybridity and identity construction in the Indo-Tibetan borderland, with particular emphasis on the regions of Paldar and Kinnaur. She is associate member of the Paris-based “Langues et Cultures de l’Aire Tibétaine” project team (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique & Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes).

Sara Shneiderman is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, USA. She has worked in Nepal since 1994, holding a Fulbright Fellowship there in 1999-2000. Her dissertation research ventures across the Nepal border to India (Darjeeling) and China (Tibet) to focus comparatively on the construction of ethnic, religious, and political identity in multiple national contexts for the Thangmi, a marginalized community with populations in all three countries.

Agency and Resistance in the Thangmi-Newar Ritual Relationship: An Analysis of Devikot-Khadga Jatra in Dolakha, Nepal

Sara Shneiderman

Introduction¹

Every year on the tenth day of the autumn Dasain (*Daśai*) festival, a diverse crowd gathers in the courtyard of Devikot (*Devikoṭ*), a temple complex dedicated to the tantric goddess Tripura-Sundari (*Tripurā-Sundarī*) in the historic town of Dolakha (*Dolakhā*), in Nepal's central-eastern district of the same name.² The crowd is here to watch two men go into trance and drink the blood of a live buffalo calf. The blood drinkers are members of the Thangmi ethnic group, a population of approximately 40,000 who speak a Tibeto-Burman language and are marginalized within Nepal's ethnic and caste hierarchies.³ These men's possession, which culminates in a dramatic act of impurity — drinking the blood of an animal which symbolizes the demonic realm — is the visual highlight of a much larger ritual cycle comprised of the two festivals of Devikot Jatra (*Devikoṭ jātrā*) and Khadga

¹ This paper is based on research conducted in 1999-2000, which was funded by a Fulbright Fellowship administered by the United States Education Foundation in Nepal, and in 2001-2005 by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. Additional funds were provided by the Department of Anthropology and the Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University. I thank Bir Bahadur Thami, Ram Bahadur Thami, Sukhbir Thami, and Surya Krishna Shrestha for their help in the field, and Mark Turin, Jane Marie Law, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Martin Gaenszle for their comments on earlier versions of this article. I am indebted to Pushpa Hamal, Prerana Rai, and Suren Thami for their translations of Nepali materials.

² I have included diacritic transliteration at the first instance of indigenous names, except for personal, ethnic and place names for which there are standard English spellings, such as “Thangmi”, “Newar”, “Kathmandu” and “Nepal”. All foreign terms are Nepali, unless otherwise indicated as Thangmi or Newar.

³ “Thangmi” is the indigenous ethnonym used by members of the group to refer to themselves. “Thami” is the Nepali derivative which is used in official documents and most literature on the group. I use “Thangmi” when referring to the group (in accordance with their wishes), but “Thami” when citing ethnic organizations who use the term in their title, or other writings on the group which use this term.

Jatra (*khadga jātrā*).⁴ These are in turn part of the local Dolakha version of the series of Dasain rituals which take place throughout Hindu South Asia during the harvest season.⁵

Taken together, the Devikot and Khadga Jatras are an arena for the negotiation of power relationships between two of the most numerically prominent ethnic communities in the Dolakha region: the Thangmi and the Newar. The Newar community, which in Dolakha is dominated by the Shrestha (*Śreṣṭha*) caste, has historically occupied a position of economic and social dominance in the area. As an important entrepôt on the Kathmandu to Lhasa trade route, Dolakha was an independent principality ruled by Newar kings until the second half of the eighteenth century, when Prithvi Narayan Shah incorporated the principality into his unified kingdom of Nepal.⁶ Inscriptions prove that an ethnic Thangmi population which paid taxes to Newar rulers has existed in Dolakha since at least 1567 AD (Miller 1997: 114). In general terms, the relationship between the Newar and Thangmi communities could be read as that of ruler to subject, dominator to dominated. However, I argue here that the ritual performances of Devikot and Khadga Jatra demonstrate that such a dualistic reading of Newar-Thangmi relationships is too simplistic, as is explaining Thangmi participation in these rituals as a standard narrative of resistance.

To Thangmi participants in the rituals, the act of blood-drinking signifies a state of union with the goddess they call Mahārānī, and thus serves as a source of divine agency and power. To Newar participants, on the other hand, the consumption of animal blood marks the Thangmi as demons and carriers of ritual impurity. Although a natural reading of these ritual acts would be one of Thangmi subjugation as speechless subalterns, who manage everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985), but little else, here I seek a different interpretation. I follow Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's call to recognize the "construction of multiple structures of meaning" (1987: 5) within ritual performance, in order to understand how the apparent process of identity negation embedded in the ritual structure of these festivals in fact generates expressions and actions of agency — albeit ambivalent and uneven ones — which are central to the formation of Thangmi identity.

⁴ *Jātrā* translates as 'festival', but is also related to the term *yātrā*, which conveys a sense of sacred travel or pilgrimage which can be conveyed with the terms 'journey' or 'procession'. *Khadga* means 'sword', and refers to the demon-slaying weapons carried by Khadga Jatra's Newar ritual dancers.

⁵ For an authoritative discussion of Dasain as a ritual of state power practiced throughout Nepal, see Krauskopff and Lecomte-Tilouine (1996).

⁶ In the year 1811 of the Nepali *vikram samvat* calendar [hereafter VS] (1754-55 AD), Prithvi Narayan Shah signed a treaty with the rulers of Dolakha which acknowledged its incorporation into a unified Nepal without a violent struggle (Regmi 1981: 14).

I first became aware of the importance of the Devikot-Khadga Jatra ritual cycle as a site of Thangmi identity production during my broader ethnographic research on Thangmi ethnic identity in 1999-2000. One central question that arises when considering the formation of Thangmi identity is why the numerically substantial and culturally distinctive Thangmi population has remained almost entirely absent from lay, academic, and political discourses on ethnicity in Nepal, particularly in an ethnographic context where other groups with much smaller populations have been extensively “anthropologised”.⁷ The lack of any obvious material culture or large-scale performance tradition that is uniquely Thangmi is a large part of the answer. Without distinctive dance, song or craft customs performed in their own villages, Thangmi individuals emphasize participation in Devikot-Khadga Jatra as an important component of their own identity narratives, and represent the blood-drinking performance in Dolakha bazaar as a key event in creating and maintaining a sense of ethnic pride and communal identity. What appear as rituals of subordination on a superficial level are in fact a fundamental aspect of the production of an agentive Thangmi ethnic consciousness. This is not an anomaly within an otherwise typical identity narrative built upon positive markers of ethnicity such as cultural and religious purity or racial homogeneity. Rather, the ritual performances that I describe here are one component of a broader process of identity production in which the Thangmi community intentionally highlights their *absence* from national ethnicity discourses that focus on purity, and instead emphasize a distinctive identity built around expressions of impurity such as cultural mixture, religious syncretism, and racial hybridity.

Theoretical and comparative frameworks

Absence, agency and resistance

The concept of “absence” builds upon the theory of “negation”, as developed by Ranajit Guha in his classic description of peasant consciousness (1983) and addresses some of the limitations of Guha’s definition of the latter term. Guha argues that domination and resistance exist in a dialectical relationship that can never escape the terms of domination. However, I suggest instead that reading ritual as a polysemic performance that has entirely different effects within multiple, simultaneous phenomenological frameworks may indicate how even an apparent negation of subaltern consciousness — such as the Thangmi role in Devikot-Khadga Jatra — can in fact be understood as a constructive site of agency production. Moreover,

⁷ To offer a contrastive case in point, the 15,000 strong Thakali population of lower Mustang was already the most studied ethnic group for its size in Nepal in 1985, being the subject of over fifty published works by fifteen scholars of various disciplines (Turin 1997: 187).

the intentionality that the concept of negation attributes to dominant forces gives them too much credit. Using the motif of absence to describe a conscious strategy that transcends the conditions of domination acknowledges that indigenous agencies are often produced in unexpected ways on their own terms.

I use this theoretical framework here for two reasons. First, despite the importance of Subaltern Studies within Indian intellectual circles, there has been relatively little reference to this school of theory within Nepal and Himalayan studies to date.⁸ Correcting this oversight may help develop more nuanced perspectives on important social issues in Nepal, and the present material lends itself well to such an analysis. Second, although there has been a backlash against the over-use of the concept of “resistance” within anthropology and other social sciences over the past decade (Brown 1996), I believe that there remain fresh, productive ways that it can be employed, particularly in tandem with a careful understanding of “agency” that recognizes its ambivalence. Given the history of exploitative relationships in many parts of rural Nepal, there remains a clear need for discussions of the specific, culturally constructed channels through which power operates in Nepali contexts. Although Nepal does not share India’s history of direct colonisation, which may be another reason why scholars of Nepal have not fully engaged with the post-colonial emphasis of Subaltern Studies, the politics of Nepal’s “internal colonialism” (Holmberg 2000: 928-929) are equally suited to such analyses.

Laura Ahearn offers a bare-bones definition of “agency” as, “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (2001: 112). Using such a broad definition allows us to move beyond misunderstandings of the term, which have often cast agency as simply a “synonym for resistance” (Ahearn 2001: 115). I follow theorists like Ahearn and Sherry Ortner in arguing for an approach which moves beyond the notion that agency equals resistance. This false equation limits agency to the oppositional politics which oppressed groups employ vis-à-vis their oppressors, rather than contextualising it as a culturally constructed mode of action which various groups and individuals understand and use on their own terms in a wide array of situations that are not necessarily oppositional. As Ortner puts it, “Agency is not an entity that exists apart from cultural construction... Every culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency, its own modes of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what one finds there” (1995: 186). I agree with Ortner’s ensuing analysis that often,

⁸ This may be due in part to an understandable Nepali distaste for outright appropriations of Indian scholarship, which is also reflected in the work of foreign scholars of Nepal. However, it is important to move beyond such knee-jerk reactions in order to determine which insights emerging from this theoretical school might be useful for interpreting Nepali socio-historical contexts.

“resistance studies are thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjectivity — the intentions, desires, fears, projects — of the actors engaged in these dramas” (1995: 190).⁹ Here I attempt to engage with this critique by offering an analysis which focuses especially on Thangmi individuals’ subjective experiences of the cultural and religious forms of agency enacted in their performance at Devikot-Khadga Jatra, and their ensuing representations of these performances in identity discourses.

Power and ritual in Nepal

In making this argument, I follow David Holmberg’s discussion of Chhechu, a key ritual for the Tamang, another ethnic group who speak a Tibeto-Burman language and whose experiences of the Nepali state are in many ways comparable to those of the Thangmi. Holmberg focusses on the production of indigenous Tamang consciousness and power through the annual Chhechu ritual, in which the dominant Hindu hierarchical order is mocked and derided. In one sense this is a perfect example of Guha’s “ritual inversion”, in which subaltern identity is ritually produced in dialectical fashion as a negation of dominant identity. But Guha’s framework is limited by its dualistic structure, embodied in the presumption that rituals operate in a unitary symbolic field to which each individual must relate as either dominant or dominated. Holmberg expands upon this by acknowledging the multiplicity of ritual meanings at work:

The plays of Chhechu are evidence of opposed and continuously differentiating semiological and social order in structures of domination in the state of Nepal ... The ludic plays expose the arbitrariness of orders of domination, and the exorcisms of antisocial beings linked to that political order constitute the symbolic first steps of a metaprocess to produce collective oppositional power ... (2000: 932)

In Holmberg’s formulation, Chhechu is not simply an inversion of structures of dominance, but rather an expression of the multiple “semiological orders” at work in the Nepali context. Within that multiplicity exists a latent Tamang consciousness, which although “not isolable from implicit and explicit affirmations of social values opposed to ... the values of those who dominated them” (Holmberg 2000: 932), is nevertheless premised on a fundamentally different configuration of the symbolic order.

⁹ This critique is aimed at several prominent theorists of resistance, many within the Subaltern Studies school, such as James Scott, Ranajit Guha, Zakiya Pathak and Rajeswari Rajan (Ortner 1995: 188).

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996) takes a similar approach in her description of the annual Dasain ritual at Belkot in far Western Nepal. She demonstrates how local interpretations of the national Dasain cycle serve as an opportunity for ethnic communities to negotiate their relationship with the state and each other. Identifying Dasain as a ritual of “state power”, Pfaff-Czarnecka shows how local elites in different parts of the country use the festival to at once express their loyalty to the central rulers in Kathmandu, and emphasize their local power over others by “linking their prerogatives to symbols related to the central rulers” (1996: 64). In this context, Pfaff-Czarnecka also emphasizes the importance of multiple ritual meanings. Although Dasain is indeed intended as a ritual of state dominance, it contains within it the potential for other agencies:

Power rituals in complex societies pertain to specific sociopolitical orders and to the authority of those in focal political positions within these orders. They not only express and dramatise social realities, but also, more specifically organise social groups by relating them with one another. One important element in relating social groups is the establishment of symbolic means for expressing the supremacy of one group and the subordination of others. However, there always remains a large scope for ambiguity and for disagreement between various participants who may attach multiple meanings to a religious celebration at different ritual levels. (1996: 59)

This analysis points towards one of the most important polysemic aspects of the Devikot-Khadga Jatra complex. On a phenomenological level, the Dasain ritual serves as a source of embodied social and religious power for Thangmi participants within the web of *local* hierarchical relationships, while for Newar participants, it provides a means of asserting political power at the *national* level by deploying central power symbols in a show of domination over local populations such as the Thangmi.

Both Holmberg and Pfaff-Czarnecka conclude their articles by asserting an indigenous Tamang “consciousness of the circumstances of their domination” (Holmberg 2000: 940). In Holmberg’s case this consciousness results in “defiant” rituals such as Chhechu, while in Pfaff-Czarnecka’s case it results in a Tamang boycott of Dasain.¹⁰ Like Holmberg, Pfaff-Czarnecka argues that the Tamang clearly understand their symbolic subjugation and “ritual inferiority within the Hindu hierarchy”, and that they combat it with their own “powerful symbolic means in order to make a forceful political statement” — choosing “to ‘read’ Devighat [Dasain] as a symbol of their oppression within the Hindu realm” (1996: 89).

¹⁰ The idea of boycotting Dasain is not only a local phenomenon in Belkot, but rather a strategy used at the national level by several ethno-political organizations representing different minority groups in recent years.

These insights form the foundation for my own analysis by delinking indigenous consciousness from the terms of its domination and locating a potential space for alternative subjectivities in the polysemic nature of ritual symbol. However, the Thangmi case is different from those discussed above because there is no obvious defiance displayed in their ritual performance, nor any clearly expressed, symbolically powerful statement such as a boycott. Although some younger Thangmi ethno-activists based in Kathmandu have discussed the option of joining such a boycott called by organizations representing more prominent ethnic groups such as the Tamang and Gurung, they have faced extensive resistance to this idea from senior community members in the Thangmi homeland villages, who see Dasain in general, and Devikot-Khadga Jatra in particular, as a quintessentially local Thangmi festival rather than an imported Hindu one. This situation could be read as evidence that, unlike the Tamang ritual actors whom Holmberg and Pfaff-Czarnecka discuss, the Thangmi participants in Devikot-Khadga Jatra remain unconscious of the terms of their domination. I suggest instead that from a Thangmi perspective, enacting their annual ritual role within the Newar-dominated Devikot-Khadga Jatra ritual complex is an agentive act that articulates an indigenous consciousness which challenges the terms of domination by unexpectedly appropriating them as a positive source of identity, and thereby power.

Building upon the earlier discussion of agency as the socioculturally mediated capacity to act, I turn to Judith Butler for a slightly more nuanced understanding of the term. Butler sees agency as a fundamentally ambivalent quality dependent on both power and resistance:

...the act of appropriation may involve an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made that assumption possible. Where conditions of subordination make possible the assumption of power, the power assumed remains tied to those conditions, but in an ambivalent way; in fact, the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination. This conclusion is not to be thought of as (a) a resistance that is *really* a recuperation of power or (b) a recuperation that is *really* a resistance. It is both at once, and this ambivalence forms the bind of agency. (1997: 13)

This notion of “ambivalent agency” is a useful analytical tool for interpreting the superficially contradictory aspects of domination and subordination embedded in the Thangmi roles within the Devikot-Khadga Jatra complex. Butler’s formulation permits contradictions, locating the production of agency itself in the tension between power and resistance. Indigenous Thangmi interpretations of the situation resonate closely with this statement.

Setting the scene

Dolakha Newar history and religion

Dolakha bazaar is located in northeastern Nepal, 140 kilometres away from Kathmandu by road, and about 20 kilometres as the crow flies from the border with China's Tibetan Autonomous Region. It is a provincial, middle hills town that is now secondary in importance to Charikot (*Carikoṭ*), the contemporary Dolakha district headquarters, but was historically a centre of power for the entire central-eastern Himalayas. Slusser suggests that Dolakha most likely began as a Licchavi settlement (1982: 85), and was then an independent principality ruled by the ancestors of today's Dolakha Newar population. The dialect of the Newar language spoken in Dolakha is substantially different from those spoken in the Kathmandu Valley (Genetti 1994), and local Newar cultural practices are similarly distinctive, although many of the overarching ritual forms find parallels in those practiced in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan.

Unfortunately there has been very little social scientific research conducted on Dolakha Newar society or culture to date, and since my own focus is on Thangmi identity and practice, I am not able to do justice to the Newar perspective on events. However, several publications on Dolakha's history provide important clues to the roots of the Newar-Thangmi relationship. The earliest written record from the area dates to 1324 AD, in which the town is mentioned as the refuge destination for a deposed Mithila prince who died en route (Slusser 1982: 259). By 1453 AD, Dolakha was under the control of King Kirti Simha (Regmi 1980: 136).¹¹ He and his descendants used the term *dolakhādipati* to designate themselves as rulers independent from the powers of the Kathmandu Valley. Dolakha's kings depended upon their strategic location — which gave them control over access to a primary Kathmandu-Lhasa trading route — to maintain favourable relations with rulers on both sides of the border. King Indra Simha Deva demonstrated his kingdom's economic power beyond a doubt by minting the first coin within Nepal's borders in approximately 1546 AD (Regmi 1980: 171).

At the religious level, Dolakha's inhabitants were and remain largely Hindu, with a striking absence of the Buddhist *vajrācārya* priests prominent among the Kathmandu Valley's Newar communities. The primary Buddhist influence in Dolakha came from its rulers' direct contact with Tibet through trade, rather than from Kathmandu Buddhist institutions (Regmi 1980: 174). Early on, the deity Bhimsen became the

¹¹ As part of his Regmi Research Series, Mahesh Chandra Regmi translated into English key sections of the authoritative work on Dolakha's history: *Dolakhāko Aitihāsik Rūprekhā* by Dhanavajra Vajracarya and Tek Bahadur Shrestha (Kathmandu: 2031 VS). My citations of the work here refer to Regmi's English translation.

tutelary deity of Dolakha's rulers.¹² In an inscription dated to 1568 AD, King Jita Deva and his co-rulers call themselves "servants of Bhimeswara" (Regmi 1980: 176). A 1611 AD inscription refers to the renovation of the Bhairav, or Bhimsen, temple in the bazaar, so it must have already existed before that date. As Slusser explains:

Bhīmasena's cult is apparently relatively recent in the Kathmandu Valley, and its immediate source is Dolakha, a large Newār settlement in eastern Nepal. Even today in Dolakha, Bhīmasena worship exceeds that of Śiva and Śakti in popularity, and his annual festival is the chief event of the region. (1982: 258)

This emphasis on Bhimsen is central in understanding the Newar-Thangmi ritual relationship, for as we shall see below, the Thangmi believe that he was originally "their" deity, which the Dolakha Newar appropriated. In addition, Tripura-Sundari, the goddess who presides over the Devikot temple where the blood-drinking ceremony occurs, is revered as Bhimsen's mother.

Another aspect of Dolakha Newar social organization that may have been central in shaping their relationship with Thangmi villagers is the lack of a Jyapu (*Jyāpu*) caste. The Jyapu are the low-caste peasants who comprise the bottom rung of Newar caste society in other areas such as the Kathmandu Valley (Gellner 2003) and Nuwakot (Chalier-Visuvalingam 2003). Several authors have commented on the striking absence of this group in Dolakha (Peet 1978: 399, van Driem 2001: 765). As Vajracarya and Shrestha comment, "...most of the Newars of Dolakha are Shresthas, very few of them are Udas or Vajracharya. There are no Jyapu peasants in Dolakha as in Kathmandu Valley" (Regmi 1980: 126). In other Newar communities, Jyapu peasants are often called upon to carry out ritually impure acts within major religious festivals.¹³ With no Jyapu available to perform such ritual roles in Dolakha, Newar ritual officiants may well have

¹² This deity is linked with the pan-South Asian Bhairav, and in Nepal is referred to alternately as Bhimsen and Bhimeswara (*Bhīmeśvara*). As Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam put it, "Bhimsen, whom the Newar explicitly identify with Bhairava, receives blood sacrifices ..." (2004: 125). In Dolakha, Bhimsen is also worshipped as Mahādev (Regmi 1981: 106), and this is often the name preferred in Thangmi prayers to the deity.

¹³ Chalier-Visuvalingam describes the blood-drinking Jyapu *dhāmi* in Nuwakot's Bhairav festival (2003). Marie Lecomte-Tilouine has told me of another ritual devoted to the goddess Varahi (*Vārāhī*) in Tistung, Makwanpur district, during which a person from the most impure group available (as classified in the Muluki Ain), must serve as a "specialist in impurity" for the Newar high caste celebrants (personal communication).

adapted to local conditions by turning to poor Thangmi peasants to fulfil these roles instead.

Thangmi history and religion

The Thangmi are one of the poorest and least known communities on Nepal's official list of over sixty ethnic groups. They live in the rural areas surrounding Dolakha bazaar, with settlements extending up to the Chinese-Tibetan border in the north, and to the eastern edge of Sindhupalchok district to the west. The three Village Development Committees in Dolakha district with majority Thangmi populations are Suspa (*Suspā*), Lapilang (*Lāpilāñ*), and Alampu (*Ālampu*), and several more have substantial minority Thangmi populations. Some Thangmi origin stories claim that they came as an established group from Simraungadh (*Simraūgadh*), an ancient settlement in the Tarai, via Thimi to settle in Dolakha.¹⁴ Other myths trace the migrations of the semi-divine Thangmi forefather and foremother, Yapati Chuku and Sunari Aji, up the Sunkoshi and Tamakoshi rivers to Suspa, where they gave birth to the seven sons and seven daughters who are the primogenitors of all Thangmi people. Still other tales talk of ancient links with Tibet, claiming a northern origin for the group.

All of these stories pose more questions than they answer about Thangmi history. From a linguistic perspective, Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language, with close genetic links to Barām, a nearly extinct language spoken in Nepal's Dhading district, as well as intriguing connections with Early Classical Newar and the Rai-Kiranti languages to the east (Turin 2004). According to Vajracarya and Shrestha, and repeated by Miller (1979) and Slusser (1982), it is possible that there was a link between an early Mithila king, Hari Simha Deva, and the Dolakha region. When his kingdom "straddling the Bihar-Tarai border" (Slusser 1982: 55) was conquered by Muslim forces in 1324-25 AD, King Hari Simha Deva fled towards Dolakha, but died en route. His sons and entourage apparently did reach their destination, but were imprisoned by Dolakha's rulers. One wonders if it was Hari Simha Deva's Tarai principality that the Thangmi refer to as Simraungadh, and if in fact they are descendants of his court.

Even if some Thangmi ancestors did indeed migrate from the Tarai, it seems most likely that they intermarried with other peoples once they reached the Dolakha region. Contemporary Thangmi openly acknowledge their mixed racial heritage. One of the cardinal features of Thangmi religious and cultural practice is its syncretic blending of indigenous shamanism with Hindu and Buddhist elements. Shamans, known as *guru* in Thangmi, are the primary religious practitioners, who conduct all life cycle and calendrical

¹⁴ For details of Simraungadh as an archaeological site, see Ballinger (1973).

rituals.¹⁵ Senior shamans talk openly about the racial and linguistic mixture of their people, often using the Nepali term *thimbar*, which connotes ‘hybridity’ in the biological sense, to describe the nature of their identity.

In general, the Thangmi are regarded as people of low social status in the eyes of both hill Bahun-Chetris and Dolakha Newars. This is due in part to their poverty, but also to the fact that their reliance on cultural and religious mixture keeps them from being categorized clearly in Nepal’s caste hierarchy. Since the Thangmi are not listed in the Muluki Ain, the 1854 legal code which established the classification system which has strongly shaped modern Nepali notions of caste and ethnicity (Höfer 1979), they occupy an uncertain position which leaves members of other groups unsure about how to treat them. This absence from official categorizations of ethnicity is complicated by the fact that *thāmī*, as the term is pronounced in Nepali, can sound like *kāmī*, the untouchable blacksmith caste, often leading people who do not know how to classify the Thangmi to assume that they belong to a Hindu occupational caste. To avoid such confusion, many Thangmi individuals intentionally misrepresent themselves as members of other ethnic groups — such as Tamang, Rai or Gurung — in public inter-ethnic situations, which only perpetuates the cycle of ignorance which created their lack of name recognition in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, it is clear that the Thangmi were already an established population in Dolakha by 1567 AD, when an inscription from the Dolakha Bhimsen temple lists them as one of the area’s three significant groups, along with the Newar and ethnically Tibetan populations (Vajracarya and Shrestha, as cited in Miller 1997: 114).¹⁶ Vajracarya and Shrestha go on to suggest that the Thangmi may have been listed independently due to their poverty (Miller 1997: 114), an intriguing proposition because it suggests that the Thangmi have always been as poor as they are now.

Thangmi stories instead suggest that they were once the holders of large swathes of *kipat* land, ancestral properties understood to be the domain of specific ethnic groups, which they began to lose only over the last 200 years as caste Hindu Nepalis originating from regions further west migrated to Dolakha and appropriated Thangmi holdings. Today, most Thangmi

¹⁵ Thangmi individuals almost never call upon Hindu priests or Buddhist lamas, although many of these religious practitioners live nearby. Thangmi prefer to rely exclusively on their own *guru*, and in this way differentiate themselves from Tamang or other ethnic groups who maintain multiple ritual practitioners representing multiple distinct forms of practice (i.e. shamanism, Hinduism and Buddhism) for multiple purposes.

¹⁶ The inscription refers to the three groups as *prajā sāja thāmi*. According to Vajracharya and Shrestha, *prajā* refers to the Newar, *sāja* to the ethnically Tibetan peoples living along the area’s northern borders, and *thāmi* to the Thangmi.

families own only very small plots that do not provide enough to feed their families for more than six months of the year. To make up the difference, they work as tenant farmers for wealthy Bahun-Chetri landlords.

This imbalance in land ownership appears to have emerged over time as the relationship between Dolakha and the central Nepali state changed. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Dolakha's rulers had maneuvered into a strategically close position with the Malla kings of Kantipur. Although the principality remained nominally independent, Dolakha's villagers came under the jurisdiction of King Jagajjaya Malla's tax collectors. Documents show that several villagers registered complaints of harassment against his tax collecting officials, who were largely from the Khas and Magar ethnic groups (Regmi 1981: 12-13). This may have been the beginning of the process of land exploitation from which the Thangmi suffered. During the same time period, the tradition of awarding military officials and civil servants land tracts as *jāgīr* in lieu of cash payment began.¹⁷ After Prithvi Narayan Shah annexed Dolakha, this process became commonplace, with army officials receiving payments in land that had previously been farmed by Thangmi inhabitants of the area. The redistribution of land apparently accelerated under the rule of prime minister Bhimsen Thapa, when in 1862 VS (1805-1806 AD) he confiscated 82 *khet*, or 8,200 *murī*, of rice land in Dolakha as *jāgīr* for the army (Regmi 1981: 15).¹⁸

Indigenous Thangmi narratives identify the early 20th century as the period when they began to lose land most rapidly to army and state officials. After first settling in the area on such *jāgīr* tracts, many of the less scrupulous new migrants began appropriating further lands by acting as moneylenders to their Thangmi neighbours. Charging high interest rates of 60% per annum or more, such moneylenders made it very difficult for Thangmi farmers to pay back their loans, and when the borrower defaulted, the lender would foreclose on his land. In this way, Thangmi landholdings diminished drastically over the last century. For many Thangmi elders for whom these events are within the realm of remembered history, the experience is particularly painful, while for younger people this exploitation is a source of anger and a feeling of low self-worth.

Newar-Thangmi relationships

Such feelings play an important role in encouraging the continued participation of Thangmi individuals in Devikot-Khadga Jatra. Although the

¹⁷ In contemporary Nepali usage, *jāgīr* refers to a government job itself, but the term originally referred to the piece of land granted as payment to military and civil servants.

¹⁸ *Khet* means simply "wet cultivated field", while *murī* is a specific measurement of a territory's yield, which equals approximately 160 pounds of harvested grain.

current low socio-economic position of the Thangmi appears to be more a factor of exploitation by Bahun-Chetri landlords, rather than a direct result of Newar oppression, this three-way power dynamic shapes the consciousness of Thangmi ritual participants and their desire to perform their ritual roles. In fact, the exploitative practices of caste Hindus have pushed the Thangmi closer to the Dolakha Newar, whom many Thangmi see as less abusive than their Bahun-Chetri counterparts. In general, Thangmi tend to view Dolakha Newar as wealthy relatives who are condescending but not dangerous, while they view Bahun-Chetri as harmful outsiders.

Linguistically speaking, there are a surprising number of lexical correspondences between the Thangmi language and the Dolakha dialect of Newar (Turin 2004). While it remains unclear whether these shared lexical items and grammatical features indicate a close genetic relationship or rather point to intensive borrowing over generations, the linguistic data suggests that the two communities have been in close contact for a very long time. At the level of affective identity, Thangmi feelings of closeness to the Dolakha Newar are also fostered by the fact that a Dolakha Newar king features prominently in a Thangmi myth which describes the origin of the Thangmi clans. In this story, the king's servants find a lone Thangmi woman meditating in a cave, and when they bring her back to Dolakha and present her to the king, he falls in love with her immediately. The king marries the Thangmi woman, and after some months her brothers come to find her in Dolakha and return her to the village. By the time they locate her and smuggle her out of town, she is pregnant with the king's child. The pregnancy results in twins, who are the forefathers of the Thangmi *roimirati* clan – derived from the Thangmi term *roimi*, meaning 'Newar'. Several of the Thangmi participants in Devikot-Khadga Jatra belong to this clan. Many Thangmi maintain a sense of closeness to the Dolakha Newar despite their different socio-economic circumstances. This feeling of shared heritage remains largely unreciprocated by Dolakha Newar, who are anxious to distance themselves from the poor and low status Thangmi. For most Newar participants, Devikot-Khadga Jatra provides an annual opportunity to express their paternalistic dominance over the Thangmi.

Ritual description

Overview

The Devikot and Khadga Jatras take place within the broader context of Dasain, the twelve day Hindu festival which commemorates the victory of the goddess Durga (*Durgā*) over the demon Mahisasura (*Mahiṣāsura*). My description draws upon the three times I witnessed the festival in October 1999, 2000, and 2004, as well as Casper Miller's account from 1974-1975 (1979). Miller's description provides a valuable time depth to the discussion,

and many of the ritual actors that Miller introduces remain the same twenty-five years later.

The Devikot Jatra takes place on Dasami (*daśamī*), the tenth day of Dasain, at the Devikot temple devoted to Tripura-Sundari at the northern end of Dolakha bazaar. In addition to being a manifestation of the great goddess alternately known as *Pārvatī* or *Bhagvatī*, Tripura-Sundari is one of the ten tantric *mahāvidyās*, or great wisdom goddesses, known for their strong associations with death, violence, pollution, and despised marginal social roles. It is therefore not surprising that the Devikot ritual is famous for its gruesome highlight: two Thangmi ritual practitioners, known as *nari* in Thangmi, or *hipathami* in Dolakha Newar, are chosen by the goddess to drink blood from the vein of a live buffalo as it is slowly sacrificed to Bhairav, Tripura-Sundari's son, whose statue stands inside the temple.¹⁹ Newar officiants say that the buffalo embodies the demon Raktabir (*Raktabīr*) and must be killed so that the goddess may prevail. According to various Newar informants, the *nari* are symbolically cast as either attendants to the goddess, or her spies, but in either case their purpose is to drink the demon Raktabir's blood in order to prevent the regeneration of new demons from it. As far as I have been able to ascertain, this festival as a separate ritual entity held on Dasami is unique to Dolakha, although parallel elements may be found as components of other days of the Dasain festival elsewhere in the Newar world (Levy 1990: 537).²⁰

Khadga means 'sword' in Nepali, and refers to the daggers held by the twelve Newar dancers (all Shrestha) who create the backbone of the Khadga Jatra ritual procession. Occurring on Ekadasi (*ekādaśī*), the eleventh day of Dasain, Khadga Jatra can be seen as a continuation of the Devikot Jatra held the day before. However, unlike Devikot Jatra, Khadga Jatra is celebrated in other Newar communities across Nepal (Levy 1990: 551; Gellner 1992: 314). In each area, the ethnic configuration of the ritual participants is different, but it seems that non-Newar groups are often incorporated. For example, Pfaff-Czarnecka describes a "Magar specialist" who carries a sword on the seventh day of the Dasain festivities (1996: 71). All this suggests that Khadga Jatra in particular and Dasain in general may well be standard formats for the negotiation of power relations between Newar populations and the other groups with which they come into contact. However, the Dolakha situation is unusually complex because the Thangmi are so central to the proceedings, and their participation in the ritual is so essential to their own identity formation.

¹⁹ *Hipa* means 'blood' in Dolakha Newar, while *thami* refers to the ethnic group.

²⁰ Chalier-Visuvalingam describes a Newar festival in Nuwakot in which a Jyapu ritual specialist drinks the blood of a buffalo sacrificed to Bhairav, but this occurs during the springtime *ratha-yātrā* rather than during the autumn Dasain (2003).

Before the festival: preparations in Dumkot

The Thangmi involved in the festival come exclusively from Dumkot (*Dumkot*), a largely Thangmi village located in Sundrawati (*Sundravatī*) VDC, about four hour's walk northwest of Dolakha bazaar. Their group includes the following members: four *nari*, who work in two pairs, alternating as blood-drinkers for Devikot Jatra from year to year; two *guru*, or shamans, who act as spiritual guides to the *nari*; four assistants who are often the sons or other close male relatives of the *nari* they serve; two *ṭauke* (Thangmi, derived from the Nepali *ṭāuko*, meaning 'head'), the men who will carry the heads of slaughtered buffaloes on Khadga Jatra; an accountant; a manager who collects offerings and keeps track of the groups' supplies; a person responsible for making and maintaining the shelter, or Dasain *ghar* (house), in which the entire group will stay during their tenure in Dolakha; and a chief porter to organize transport of all the supplies. Although the public parts of the festival in Dolakha begin only on Dasami, all of these participants must begin making preparations at home two weeks before the festival.

The *nari* begin their annual possession on the new moon two weeks before Dasami, when they begin shaking at least twice a day, in the morning and evening, indicating that the goddess is beginning to possess them. During this period, the *nari* must be attentively cared for by their families, since if the shaking begins while they are doing physical labour they can injure themselves, or if when eating they may choke. One family member is usually assigned as an attendant to each *nari*, and this person will spend most of the next few weeks looking after him. Often the attendant is a son or other close young male relative, and this is also an opportunity for him to learn about the *nari*'s role and anticipate himself in it someday.

On Astami (*aṣṭamī*), the eighth day of Dasain, the *nari* and their attendants begin preparing for a ritual that will start at sundown and last all night long at the house of the oldest *nari*. Sukhbir, who currently occupies this position, is 75 years old and has been acting as a *nari* for forty years, since he was 35. Although the evening ritual takes place in his house, the officiants are Dumkot's Thangmi shamans, not Sukhbir himself or the other *nari*. The purpose of the ritual is to propitiate all territorial and tutelary Thangmi deities, make offerings to them, and request their guidance and help in making the following several days of high-profile ritual participation in Dolakha successful. Most importantly, the local deities — Sundrawati (*Sundravatī*), Gatte (*Gaṭṭe*) and Biswakarma (*Biśvakarma*) — are asked to provide security to the *nari* when they are possessed by the goddess so that they are able to accomplish their tasks for her without making any inauspicious moves. After the deities are propitiated, fortunes are told for the *nari*, and finally, as day breaks, a chicken is sacrificed to each deity. The chants used to propitiate the deities on this occasion conform to a standard rhetorical model common to other Thangmi ritual, but the specific requests

made of them differ. An abbreviated version of the same ritual “text” is repeated on the following day in Dolakha, before the *nari* commence their blood-drinking.²¹

Once day breaks and the household ritual is over, two more rituals remain to be conducted before the Thangmi group can begin their journey to Dolakha. The first is a set of goat sacrifices at the Dumkot Bhimsen temple, and the second is a chicken sacrifice at a cave above the village called Sada Apok.²²

At the Dumkot Bhimsen temple, which local Thangmi refer to as “*Dolakhā Bhimsen ko dāi*”, or “Dolakha Bhimsen’s older brother”, twelve goats must be slaughtered as a prelude to the following two days of buffalo sacrifice at the Dolakha Bhimsen. The sacrifice is carried out by two hereditary Thangmi *pujāri*, or temple officiants. According to Thangmi informants, if the Dumkot Bhimsen is not satisfied first, the Dolakha sacrifices cannot be conducted. If anyone tries to preempt this order, Bhimsen will fly into a rage directed at all those who disobey him. This is because the Dumkot Bhimsen is in fact the “original” deity, from which the Dolakha Newar appropriated his image as the centrepiece of their own temple, which they now claim is the primary one. Nonetheless, the Thangmi remain devoted to their own Bhimsen temple in Dumkot. The Thangmi party which travels to Dolakha to perform at Devikot-Khadga Jatra must bear evidence of the completed sacrifices at Dumkot Bhimsen, or else the Dolakha sacrifices cannot begin. They typically carry a piece of the sacrificial animal’s intestine to demonstrate that the ritual has indeed taken place.

The Dumkot Bhimsen sacrifice is conducted simultaneously with another one at Sada Apok, which is carried out by the chief *nari*, Man Bahadur, who doubles as *pujāri* at this temple. Three ritual items which represent different aspects of the deity Biswakarma are kept in a basket at this cave, each with a distinctive Thangmi name: a knife (*nyangsuri*), a sickle (*nyangkatari*) and a Nepali-style *khukurī* knife (*nyangmesa*).²³ These items are reputed to be ancient relics from Simraungadh, and they are only taken out of the cave once every other year on the full moon of the month of *jeth* (May-June) (Miller 1997: 118). On Nawami (*navamī*), the ninth day of

²¹ A summary of this text is included in the Appendix.

²² In Thangmi, *apok* means ‘cave’, while *sadā* is most likely a Nepali loan word meaning ‘sacrificial’.

²³ According to Dumkot *guru* Ram Bahadur Thami, the prefix *nyang-* marks each of these terms as Thangmi ritual lexicon. The vernacular terms for these objects are the same as the ritual language terms but without the *nyang-* prefix, although *nyangkatari* inverts the final two consonants in the colloquial Thangmi word for sickle, *karati*. In vernacular Thangmi *mesa* means ‘buffalo’, and according to the same *guru* the knife known as *nyangmesa* in ritual Thangmi may in fact refer to an animal deity.

Dasain, they are simply worshipped without viewing, and a chicken is sacrificed in the deity's honour. To the Dumkot Thangmi gathered at the cave, these relics are strong symbols of ethnic identity and history, and honouring them before making the trek to Dolakha to participate in the inter-ethnic ritual of Devikot-Khadga Jatra provides a sense of solidarity and confidence in the powers of Thangmi consciousness, even in the presence of dominant others.

Devikot Jatra

Once these rituals have been completed in Dumkot, the *nari* and their supporting group of about twenty people make the four-hour trek to Dolakha on the afternoon of Nawami, carrying all of the supplies they will need for their three to four day stay there. Immediately upon arrival, they begin building the Dasain *ghar* (house), a small thatched-roof shelter in the corner of a courtyard belonging to a wealthy Newar family who provide financial support for the Thangmi ritual work.²⁴ Early the next morning, the two *nari* who will perform this year prepare themselves for the task at hand. They strip down to nothing but loincloths, and begin to shake slightly as the goddess controls them. The *guru* begin propitiating the Thangmi deities, as described above (fig.1). They shake increasingly violently, and after several minutes the *guru* go into trance. The entire group then begins their procession from the Dasain *ghar* to the Bhimsen temple, where the *nari* briskly wash themselves. They proceed quickly downhill to Devikot, followed by a few hundred onlookers of all ethnic groups and ages. The *nari* enter the Devikot temple, the inner sanctum of which contains a representation of the goddess, which no one except the Devikot priest himself may see.²⁵ After offering themselves to the goddess, the *nari* are anointed with oil and daubed with red powder all over their bodies by the Devikot priest (fig. 2). As they reemerge outside, they begin shaking more forcefully, crouching with their backs to the temple, so that the goddess may ride them.

A male buffalo calf is brought into the temple courtyard, and as a large crowd looks on, a man belonging to the Newar butcher caste (*Kasāī*) cuts the main artery in its neck. The *nari* lean forward as they crouch with their backs towards the temple, and thrice drink the squirting blood of the dying buffalo, rinsing their mouths out with water in between. They remain in trance the entire time, and the excess blood is drained into clay pots.

²⁴ See the section on economic issues below for more details.

²⁵ The current head priest, Man Kaji Shrestha, is 73 years old and has been serving in this position since 2053 VS. There are two other assistant priests who work under him, also from the Shrestha caste.



Fig. 1: Thangmi *guru* propitiating deities at the beginning of Devikot Jatra. Dasain *ghar*, Dolakha Bazaar, October 2004.



Fig. 2: Thangmi *nari* anointed with red powder to mark them as demons, shortly before drinking blood. Devikot temple, Dolakha Bazaar, October 2004.

After drinking the blood, the *nari* and their entourage leave the Devikot courtyard quickly and proceed towards Rajkuleswar (*Rājkuḷeśvar*), a small shrine at the eastern edge of the town, followed again by hundreds of onlookers. At Rajkuleswar, the *nari* must swallow flaming wicks, and then beat another buffalo tethered in the courtyard three times.²⁶ Afterwards, this buffalo is also slaughtered. Both its head and that of the buffalo calf sacrificed earlier at Devikot will resurface during Khadga Jatra on the following day. At this point, the *nari* have completed their responsibilities for the day, and they are finally able to bathe and wash off the blood covering their bodies. The assistants who have been with the *nari* all day shake them to bring them out of trance. Finally the entire group returns to the Dasain *ghar* to rest and eat again, since they have been fasting since they left their home in Dumkot a few days before.

Khadga Jatra

The ritual cycle continues on the following day with Khadga Jatra, which commemorates the victory of Tripura-Sundari's son, Bhairav, over the demon Mahisasura. The Thangmi group spends the morning in the Dasain *ghar*, with the *guru* chanting the standard propitiation of deities, as on the previous two days. As the morning progresses, the *guru* become increasingly animated. The Khadga Jatra festivities begin around mid-day, with music wafting up from the procession of nine Newar dancers making its way through the bazaar. The dancers are all men, one from each of nine Shrestha families who participate in the ritual every year. Onlookers touch the *khadga* ceremonial swords to bring good luck for the coming year. In the Dasain *ghar*, the *nari* begin shaking at the knees. Big white flags on long wooden poles are carried past. These precede the procession of dancers to herald the coming of the gods.

By mid-afternoon, the first group of Newar dancers finally approaches the Thangmi. Six dancers in white carry offerings. The *guru* and *nari* are both shaking in earnest. The first group of Newar dancers pass by the Dasain *ghar*, and wait on the main path. A second group of three dancers approaches, followed by a third group of three, and these six stand together. The dancers finally enter the small courtyard where the Thangmi participants are waiting, and salute the Thangmi with their swords. Then, as on the day before, the united group heads off together, behind the Bhimsen

²⁶ Thangmi and Newar interpretations of this ritual element differ. The *nari* and their attendants say that eating the burning wick brings the *nari* out of trance. This is consistent with broader Thangmi practice: in every shamanic ritual, burning wicks are fed to those in trance in order to return them from the invisible to the visible world. A newsletter published by a Dolakha Newar cultural organization claims instead that, "burning lamps are inserted in their [the *nari*] mouths as a symbol of Thami power".

temple and down the hill. The Thangmi lead the way, far ahead of the Newar dancers, who stop to dance in front of crowds at every intersection.

The entire group enters the courtyard of Tripura-Sundari, after circumambulating the building clockwise. The Thangmi immediately ascend the steps to enter the temple, with the *guru* and *nari* making offerings to the goddess inside the Devikot shrine. After about half an hour the first group of Newar dancers arrive. They go inside to make offerings, and the Thangmi participants come and sit outside on the entrance steps while the dancers look on from the windows above.

After another quarter of an hour or so, the senior group of dancers finally arrive. This includes the *dharmarājā*, or 'religious king', who leads the divine army forward to vanquish the demons. They dance outside the temple for some time, and then go inside. Shortly thereafter, the two Thangmi charged with carrying the heads from the buffaloes sacrificed the previous day during Devikot Jatra emerge. The slain heads are perched on these two men's shoulders (fig. 3). The senior *ṭauke*, or head-carrier, is Gopi Lal, a prominent social figure in his sixties who was one of the first Thangmi to become involved with national politics, through the Nepali Congress party. He remains an important local political activist and this role does not appear to be contradictory to his ritual one; since he believes strongly that continued Thangmi participation in Devikot-Khadga Jatra is essential to maintaining a unique Thangmi identity within a modern Nepal. The younger head carrier is Sanuman, in his forties, and both he and Gopi Lal belong to the *roimirati* clan. During one of the years I observed the ritual, Sanuman was on crutches and required help from his wife and son to carry his bloody load. When I asked why someone else couldn't take his place, I was told that the hereditary nature of this responsibility dictates that the current *ṭauke* must play the role until he dies. No exceptions are granted, even for temporary or permanent disabilities.

Finally, the two *ṭauke* come down the main steps and exit the compound, waiting on a small plateau just below. Then the Newar dancers begin to stream out of the temple. The *dharmarājā*, usually portrayed by an older Newar man, is the last to emerge. He wears the intestines of that day's sacrificed buffalo, linked in a long, necklace-like chain, as proof of his successful conquest of the demons. The intestines jiggle as he dances in a wild trance. He requires an assistant on either side to support him, since he seems unable to control himself.

As soon as the *dharmarājā* makes it all the way down the steps and out of the compound to where the Thangmi head-carriers are waiting, the procession starts again. The head carriers lead, and the procession makes its way slowly through the whole town, stopping at each intersection to sing of vanquishing the demons. Finally, the whole entourage ends up at Rajkuleswar temple at the opposite end of town from Devikot. At Rajkuleswar, the demons are banished for the final time when the head-

carrying Thangmi cut off the tails of the dead buffaloes lying there, and stuff the tails in the mouths of the severed heads. The whole festival concludes after the dancers chant verses to scare the demons into dispersing (fig. 4). The heads are then ritually useless and are dragged along the ground carelessly instead of carried proudly on shoulders. They heads are returned to Devikot, where they will be chopped up into small pieces and given as a ritual offering to the Newar participants.



Fig. 3: Thangmi *tauke* carrying the heads of sacrificed buffaloes during Khadga Jatra. Dolakha Bazaar, October 2004.

Upon reaching Devikot again, two *kubhiṇḍo*, large pumpkins, are hacked apart.²⁷ There is a scramble to get a piece of the pumpkin, the meat of which is believed to make infertile cows and other livestock fertile again. The pumpkin pieces retain their power for twelve years, so people take home whatever pieces they can grab, dry them in the sun, and use them little by little as necessary. With this last substitute sacrifice complete, the ritual concludes for the year. The Thangmi participants prepare to return to Dumkot that night.

²⁷ Chalier-Visuvalingam also describes a pumpkin sacrifice in Nuwakot, where she claims the gourds stand in for human heads (1989: 169).



Fig. 4: Newar dancers circling slain buffaloes in front of Rajkuleswar temple during Khadga Jatra. Dolakha Bazaar, October 2004.

Economic issues

The history of the *guthī*, or lands granted to the temples which were used to support the rituals carried out at the Devikot and Bhimsen temples, provides a valuable window through which to view the relationships between the Thangmi, Newar and Bahun-Chetri communities in Dolakha. Documents dating to 1850 VS (1793-1794 AD) show that Rana Bahadur Shah endowed *guthī* lands to the Dolakha Bhimsen temple at that time (Regmi 1981: 14). It is possible that a separate *guthī* was endowed for the Devikot temple at a similar time, but there are no available documents to date the Devikot *guthī* precisely.²⁸ In any case, Thangmi informants claim that the Devikot *guthī* included 268 *murī* of land. According to the *nari* and their families, this was adequate to support the Thangmi participation in the ritual by providing food and grain alcohol during their stay in Dolakha, as well as a small additional “payment” of surplus grain.

²⁸ Miller claims that there was a single *guthī* which supported both the Devikot and Bhimsen temples (1997: 88). Although their management may have been linked, several informants have confirmed that there were indeed two separate tracts of land.

However, problems arose in the management of the *guthī* in the mid-twentieth century, and both temple *guthī* were finally abolished in the early 1990s during a central government effort to measure and reallocate such lands all over Nepal. Miller suggests that difficulties over Thangmi access to the *guthī* lands may have begun as early as 1905 AD (1997: 89), but escalated severely in 2005 VS (1948-1949 AD). This matches with reports from Dumkot Thangmi informants, such as the senior *nari* Sukhbir, who claims that his father led a protest against the abuse of *guthī* lands towards the end of his life term as a *nari*. Since Sukhbir took over the role upon his father's death in 2021 VS (1963-1964 AD), it is likely that his father's protest actions took place in the 1950s.

In any case, both Newar and Thangmi narratives concur that at some point in the last century, the Thangmi participants in Devikot-Khadga Jatra began to have difficulties accessing the *guthī* lands for harvest because Bahun-Chetri families newly established in the area refused to respect the *guthī* charter and claimed those lands as their own. According to Miller, these high caste settlers "took the step of preventing the Thamis from getting the harvest from this land" (1997[1979]: 90). The Newar priests at Devikot did not know what had happened until the Thangmi failed to arrive on Nawami in time for Devikot Jatra. A concerned delegation from Dolakha trekked to Dumkot to inquire, and there learned that since the *nari* and their families had been unable to access the *guthī* lands, they did not have food supplies for their stay in Dolakha and had therefore decided to stay home. Miller suggests that the Newar priest interceded and negotiated on behalf of the Thangmi with the Bahun-Chetri who were blocking access to the *guthī* lands, and that the problem did not recur in the future (1997: 91).

At the time Miller visited Dolakha in 1974-1975, it appears that the *guthī* was still functional, since he writes of the Thangmi entourage being fed several large meals from *guthī* proceeds during the festivals he observed. However, Thangmi participants complained to him about the miserly nature of the meals and suggested that they were unhappy with the arrangement.

By the time I began research in 1999, the *guthī* was no more, and a new system had been improvised to take its place. During the nine months in 1994-1995 when the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) [CPN-UML] formed a majority government in Kathmandu, they had implemented a policy of abolishing certain *guthī* lands across the country. Their rationale was that many temple organizations were becoming wealthy on income derived from the surplus harvest from their large tracts of *guthī* land, which should be made available to common citizens as public land instead. In the Dolakha case, the irony was that the *guthī* had in fact been used to provide for a disadvantaged segment of society — the Thangmi of Dumkot — in exchange for their ritual services.

When the *guthī* disappeared, Laxman Shrestha, a wealthy Dolakha businessman, took it upon himself to provide some support for the Thangmi

ritual participants. Shrestha's forefathers had been involved in managing the Bhimsen *guthi*, and he felt a sense of personal responsibility for ensuring that the Thangmi would continue to participate in Devikot-Khadga Jatra. In 2051 VS (1994-1995 AD), he established a 50,000 rupee bank fund for the *nari*. Since then, he has distributed the annual interest from this investment among the Thangmi ritual participants and their attendants, which amounts to 5000-8000 rupees per year for the entire Thangmi group, depending upon national economic conditions and interest rates. At most, when divided among the approximately twenty-strong Thangmi group, this leaves 200-400 rupees per person, out of which they must pay for all of their food and supplies for their three to four day stay in Dolakha. Although the *nari*, *tauke* and other Thangmi participants are generally grateful to Laxman Shrestha and see him as a thoughtful benefactor, they still complain that the amount they receive is not adequate compensation for their efforts.

Analysis

The power of impurity

So why do the Thangmi keep participating? The answer lies in an understanding of ambivalent agency, which explains the apparent conundrum of devoted Thangmi performance in a ritual that seems to take place entirely outside the world of Thangmi social relations, without any visible social benefit for them, and which is degrading to their social status in the eyes of most observers.

Miller's explanation for ongoing Thangmi participation in these rituals is that the *nari* are compelled to perform their role not by the Newar ritual officiants, whom it appears they are serving, but in fact directly by the goddess Tripura-Sundari, often called Maharani, herself. Such an explanation fits nicely within the paradigm for "multiple structures of meaning as engendered by different readings of ritual performance by different social groups" outlined by Ohnuki-Tierney (1987: 5) in general, and articulated in the Nepal-specific context by Holmberg (2000) and Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996), as discussed above.

In the Hindu story of Bhagawati and Raktabir, which they are going to see re-enacted now, the Newar spectators have a symbol of moral righteousness triumphing over irrational evil; but the non-Hindu tribal Thamis viewing and participating in the scene today contemplate rather an invisible power becoming visible in their midst and satisfying through them its desire for blood-offerings. They call it "Maharani" and no attempt is made to rationalize her appetite for blood; she has chosen the *nari* for this purpose because she wants it so. Because of this double view of the

ceremony, and the double view of the world and reality which it implies, there is a doubling of religious specialists here as well. (Miller 1997: 77)

Indeed, in the Dolakha Newar world view, the Thangmi play the undesirable role of demons-by-association: having drunk the demon's blood, represented by the blood of the buffalo calf, they themselves become demons incarnate. As the *nari* exit the Devikot grounds after drinking the blood, shouts of *rākṣas* — 'demon' — ring out from Newar onlookers jeering at the Thangmi. But for the Thangmi themselves, participation in the ritual is an important form of mediation between the human and the divine. As Miller puts it, "it is a case of the invisible becoming visible in the Thami *nari* and their *jankri* [sic] gurus" (1997: 73).

A Japanese comparison provides further insight into the power dynamics at work in the Devikot-Khadga Jatra situation. To some extent, the Dolakha scenario is structurally similar to the one Ohnuki-Tierney describes for a Japanese monkey ritual: "... the monkey and the special status people have always been assigned the role of keeping the Japanese pure; they did so as mediators by bringing in the pure and creative power of the deities, and they do so as scapegoats by shouldering the impurity of the dominant Japanese" (1987: 151). Like their Japanese counterparts, the Thangmi serve both as mediators between the seen and unseen worlds — an important trope in the Himalayan ritual world just as it is in Japan — and as scapegoats for ritual impurity.

Ohnuki-Tierney claims that despite their social marginality, the "special status people" who performed the monkey ritual were marginal without being "negative in valuation" (1987: 86). In fact, she suggests that elite members of the outcaste groups were often in close literal and metaphorical proximity to centres of sociopolitical power. She therefore argues that impurity in itself is not always a negative value. Instead, in many cultural contexts, "specialists in impurity", in the Dumontian sense, are an absolute social necessity, and carrying with them an unexpectedly positive status (cf. Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 89-91). This inversion also recalls Declan Quigley's argument about the "impure priest", in which the priestly activities of *brāhmaṇs* — who are usually portrayed as the highest Hindu caste — in fact mark them as a particular kind of untouchable (1993: 81). By the same token, Miller reports that the Dolakha Newar he initially interviewed about the Thangmi blood drinkers described the *nari* as "like Brahmins" (1997: 65).²⁹ Within this framework, we can begin to understand how Thangmi

²⁹ Thangmi participants themselves do not necessarily see being "like Brahmins" as a positive attribute, since they have had largely negative experiences with members of that caste group, and associate Brahmins with exploitation and dishonesty. However, what is important here is that Miller's Dolakha Newar informants

marginality and impurity, as asserted in their ritual role, is not necessarily “negative in valuation”, but may instead afford the Thangmi a modicum of socio-political power vis-à-vis the Dolakha Newar.

Ohnuki-Tierney’s “special status people” attain power only through their proximity to its centre, not by asserting it on their own terms. This formulation is rather similar to Guha’s “ritual inversion” argument (1983), since in both contexts the power attained remains subject to the terms of domination. As outlined earlier, such a framework is not entirely adequate to address the Thangmi situation. There is an important difference between the Japanese monkey ritual and the Nepali Devikot-Khadga Jatra situations. In the former, the “special status people” perform the monkey ritual as a means of gaining power within the dominant system and see themselves as subordinated in a dualistic relationship with those who dominate them; whereas in the latter, the Thangmi mediation between the seen and unseen worlds is effected primarily for indigenous Thangmi soteriological purposes, according to the terms of Thangmi consciousness, rather than to satisfy Newar requirements.

Ritual reiteration

This is not to suggest that the Thangmi participants remain unaware of the pragmatic social power gained through serving as specialists in impurity for the Newar. In fact, the *nari* themselves, as well as many members of the broader Thangmi community are very conscious of this aspect of their performance and speak about it frequently in a variety of contexts. However, the social power gained in relation to the Newar community is seen as an added bonus resulting from the ritual, rather than its primary aim. For this reason, Miller’s assertion that a dualistic “double view” of the world governs Thangmi and Newar participation in Devikot-Khadga Jatra is too simplistic, although on the right track. I would revise Miller’s interpretation by suggesting that the Thangmi are fully conscious of both views, not just their own. Both structures of meaning operate simultaneously and are dependent upon each other, so accepting one inherently entails accepting the other. Like the Tamang described by Holmberg and Pfaff-Czarnecka, the Thangmi *nari* and their extended communities recognize the terms of their domination, but in a manner that does not necessarily result in a resistance structured by those same terms, as Ohnuki-Tierney or Guha would have us believe. Instead, the Thangmi participation in Devikot-Khadga Jatra results in an ambivalent agency, which appropriates power from the source of domination, but in the process of its restructuring according to indigenous terms, effects a shift in consciousness from that of subordination to that of positive identity construction.

recognized the Thangmi *nari* as ritual specialists carrying out sacred duties, not just demons to be derided.

Butler articulates this type of dynamic by posing a set of questions:

A significant and potentially enabling reversal occurs when power shifts from its status as a condition of agency to the subject's 'own' agency ... How are we to assess that becoming? Is it an enabling break, a bad break? How is it that the power upon which the subject depends for existence and which the subject is compelled to reiterate turns against itself in the course of that reiteration? How might we think resistance within the terms of reiteration? (Butler 1997: 12)

Devikot-Khadga Jatra is a clear ethnographic example of a situation in which the power "which the subject is compelled to reiterate turns against itself in the course of that reiteration" (Butler 1997: 12). As a calendrical ritual, Devikot-Khadga Jatra is annually reiterated, providing within itself the constant promise of resistance. The ritual framework in which the Thangmi perform is indeed structured by the dominant Newar need for socio-religious scapegoats, but the power which the Thangmi generate through their ritual performance rejects and in fact alters the terms of domination by appropriating it as a fundamental aspect of Thangmi identity itself. The power accrued by individual Thangmi *nari* through the ritual performance takes on a life of its own beyond the ritual, becoming a foundation for identity construction within the realm of Thangmi social relations. Yet this appropriation of ritual power is not detached from an awareness of the source of that power, as Miller's "double view" formulation would suggest. Instead, by acknowledging that ritual power is an important source of Thangmi agency, Thangmi identity at once reiterates and resists it.

Individual and collective consciousness

Understanding how Thangmi ambivalent agency works requires one more turn, which is to examine more closely the individual identities of the Thangmi participating in the ritual, and how are they chosen. These men embody the link between the ritual power of Devikot-Khadga Jatra and everyday Thangmi ethnic identity. The *nari* positions are semi-hereditary and held for a lifetime, with a new *nari* chosen by the goddess among the immediate male family members of a recently deceased *nari*. Within the Thangmi community, it is considered an honour to be chosen by the goddess, although on a practical level it is obviously a burden as well. It is important to note that *nari* are not equivalent to *guru*: the *nari* perform no other shamanic functions for their community. They are only expected to go into trance once a year during Devikot-Khadga Jatra, in order to carry out their clearly delimited ritual role. After these annual responsibilities are over, they return to lay life as farmers and labourers, without any expectation that they will take on further ritual duties or maintain special abilities to communicate with the divine world. Although the *nari* are well

aware of these limitations at the internal level of consciousness, the external image of them as demons sticks. Dolakha Newar individuals often refer to members of the Thangmi ethnic group as “demons” in casual conversations, long after the rituals have been completed for that year.

The sharp distinction between Thangmi *guru* and *nari* limits the ritual pollution accrued in the performance by limiting it to two common individuals. In contrast to the Thangmi *guru*, these men are otherwise uninvolved with the maintenance of collective Thangmi identity through ritual. Distinguishing the powers of the *nari* during Devikot-Khadga Jatra from other modes of Thangmi-internal shamanic power highlights the importance of the power appropriated through the Devikot-Khadga Jatra performance for constructing Thangmi identity within the broader socio-political world. The fact that the *nari* are common people makes it much easier for a broad range of Thangmi individuals to appropriate the power these men embody during Devikot-Khadga Jatra as part of their own process of identity construction at the psychological level, since Thangmi shamans are already set apart from lay people by their access to the unseen world of deities. In this sense, the *nari* allow their individual consciousness — and pride — to be effaced in their performance as demons in order to produce a collective Thangmi consciousness through that act. At the same time, their individual sense of self is formed within the collective framework of power and identity that their actions as *nari*, as well as the actions of those who came before them in this role, create.

Ethno-politics

Examining how Devikot-Khadga Jatra has been treated by Thangmi ethnopolitical organizations in both Nepal and Darjeeling in recent years demonstrates how participation in these rituals is a widely shared keystone of self-identification for a broad range of Thangmi individuals, including those who have never witnessed or participated in the events.³⁰ At the Second National Convention of the *Nepāl Thāmī Samāj* (NTS), held in Kathmandu in May 2005, I was asked to provide a set of photos from Devikot-Khadga Jatra for prominent display in the entranceway of the conference hall so that non-Thangmi members of the general public and media who attended would see these images. Several Thangmi speakers at the convention’s opening session then referred to the photos and eulogized the *nari* as key figures in the Thangmi community who were committed to

³⁰ There is a substantial Thangmi population of approximately 8,000 in Darjeeling district, West Bengal, India. Migrations from Nepal began in the mid-nineteenth century as Thangmi began to seek employment in the British Raj, and seasonal labour migration continues today. The relationships between Thangmi communities in Nepal and India and their divergent views on ethnic and religious identity are the focus of my current doctoral research.

maintaining Thangmi identity through their performances in the face of encroaching Hinduization and other pressures. One of the keynote speakers was Gopi Lal, the chief *tauke*, or head carrier, mentioned above. The master of ceremonies introduced him as such, in addition to mentioning his political role as a former Nepali Congress district committee member. Gopi Lal exhorted younger members of the Thangmi community, particularly those living in Kathmandu or elsewhere away from Dolakha, to return to their homeland area at Dasain time in order to witness the rituals and thereby better understand their Thangmi heritage. His speech was received with thunderous applause. Several NTS members also mentioned to me privately that they were pleased that Gopi Lal had recently written an essay about the rituals in a collection published by the organization, so that even those Thangmi who might never attend the rituals could learn about them through reading his article.³¹

This publication had also travelled to Darjeeling by the time I conducted fieldwork there in 2004, and many members of the Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association (BTWA) there were intrigued by Gopi Lal's article. Since few of them had ever travelled to Nepal and none had ever attended Devikot-Khadga Jatra, they eagerly requested to see my photos of the rituals. I was repeatedly asked to give my view on the issue of Thangmi participation, and pass judgement on whether the practice should be encouraged to continue as a hallmark of Thangmi identity, or discouraged as a marker of Thangmi oppression.³² It soon became clear that for most of the culturally active Darjeeling Thangmi, this was a challenging paradox: their gut instinct was to feel revulsion at the sight of their Nepali Thangmi counterparts drinking blood, but their political instincts told them that these ritual roles were a unique aspect of Thangmi cultural practice which could be appropriated for their own campaign to gain Scheduled Tribe status from the Government of India. This is a broader topic than I can do justice to here, but suffice it to say that most Darjeeling Thangmi no longer speak the Thangmi language or maintain Thangmi shamans as their primary ritual practitioners. Yet they are engaged in a process of cultural manipulation aimed at producing a "unique" and "indigenous" version of Thangmi culture that can be presented to the government in order to claim Scheduled Tribe status within the Indian reservations system.³³ This statute would secure them certain financial and educational benefits, as well as increased social prominence within the Darjeeling Nepali community.

³¹ *Thāmī samudāya-ko aītihāsik cinārī ra sāsikār sāsikriti* [sic] (Kathmandu: Janajati Pratisthan, 2058 VS).

³² I did my best to encourage critical discussions on this issue and refrain from making value judgements myself.

³³ I have addressed these issues in detail in a conference paper (Shneiderman 2005).

For these reasons, the BTWA appears to be shifting from an earlier position, which criticized the Thangmi ritual roles on the grounds that such actions perpetuated their low status in relation to the Newar and caste Hindu populations in Dolakha, to a position which valorizes Thangmi participation in Devikot-Khadga Jatra as an essential feature of Thangmi identity. Their reasons for viewing the situation positively are different from those of the Nepali Thangmi community, since most Darjeeling Thangmi have little understanding of the psychological process through which participation in the performances generates Thangmi agency at the local level in Dolakha. However, the traces of agency are clearly visible to the Darjeeling Thangmi despite their distance from the source of its production — although the nuances of its ambivalence remain confusing to them.

Conclusion: The threat of refusal

Unlike the Tamang in Pfaff-Czarnecka's case, for whom boycotting Dasain constitutes resistance on a political level, for the Thangmi to refuse participation in Devikot-Khadga Jatra would be to undermine the very basis of Thangmi identity on a psychological level. But it is unclear that the Thangmi choice to continue participating is any less an act of resistance than the Tamang boycott. Rather than situating themselves in opposition to the ritual by boycotting it, the Thangmi are committed to reiterating it in order to continue appropriating the ritual's power for their own purposes, thereby transforming its terms in the process.

At the same time, there are certainly symbolic plays on the theme of refusal, which provide opportunities for the Thangmi to clearly assert their power in a manner comprehensible to their Dolakha Newar neighbours. The Newar festival cannot proceed without the involvement of the Thangmi, so at a fundamental level the Thangmi participants have control over the ritual's efficacy. Threatening refusal is an obvious way for the Thangmi to refigure the ritual on their terms and claim power in relation to the socio-economically dominant Newar. For this reason, the threat of refusal itself has become embedded as part of the performance. As described above, Miller relates an apocryphal tale about a year in which the Thangmi refused to come to Dolakha because of a land dispute that affected their compensation for ritual duties (1997: 89-91). When the Thangmi failed to appear, the goddess possessed the entire Dolakha Newar population instead and drove them all the way to Dumkot. They found the *nari* shaking wildly under the goddess's influence, and although the broader Thangmi community urged them to stay away from Dolakha for political reasons, the *nari* could not refuse the goddess and so followed the Newar contingent back to Dolakha of their own accord.

This is only one of many possible forms the threat of refusal may take. According to Thangmi informants and my own observations, every year there is some conflict or other which causes the Thangmi group to threaten

that they will not return the following year. The Newar are always duly frightened, and so give in to the Thangmi demands. In 1999, the lunar calendar inserted an extra day between Navami (ninth day of Dasain) and Dasami (tenth day of Dasain), of which the Thangmi were not aware. So the Thangmi group arrived in Dolakha one day early, and the Devikot priests asked them to wait an additional day to perform the ritual. The Thangmi refused, since the *nari* must fast from the moment they leave their homes, and they did not want to go hungry for an additional day. They repeatedly threatened to leave Dolakha, forfeiting their ritual role, and several times began walking back up the path towards Dumkot. The Newar priests called them back each time, and eventually gave in, agreeing to hold the entire ritual a day ahead of schedule. Dolakha Newar onlookers were very upset about this turn of events, as the Thangmi refusal required them to perform the ritual on an inauspicious and calendrically incorrect day. But they knew they had no choice, and the ritual proceeded with a fraction of the usual crowds in attendance.

In 2004, a dispute took place inside the Devikot temple, shortly before the sacrifice was to be made. The Devikot priests are supposed to anoint the *nari* with *sindūr*, a dry red powder used in Hindu rituals, all over their bodies in order to mark them as demons. This year, the priests were apparently in a rush and had not purchased a new stock of *sindūr*. With only a little bit of the red powder at their disposal, they painted a few barely visible marks on the *nari* and then tried to push them outside to get on with the blood-drinking. The attendants to the *nari* became very angry with the priests for doing this in such a half-hearted manner, and shouted that it was unfair to the *nari* if they were not properly marked as demons, for if they went through the ritual without first being transformed they would be tainted with impurity in their daily lives rather than simply during the clearly demarcated ritual context. Demanding that the Newar priests procure additional *sindūr* to complete the job properly, the Thangmi group threatened to leave without completing the ritual. The priests shoved the *nari* roughly, shouting that they didn't understand the problem, but the *nari* held their ground. Finally it became clear that they would not exit the temple in order to drink the sacrificial blood outside unless the priests complied, and several minutes later a new packet of *sindūr* was delivered and the ritual continued.

These examples demonstrate how the annual threat of refusal asserts Thangmi power, unsettling the Newar assumption of dominance which remains unquestioned for the rest of the year. However, the Thangmi have never followed through on the threat. In the end, they always participate, for the threat of refusal is not nearly as powerful as the performance of the ritual itself. The performance itself constitutes Thangmi agency, while the threat of refusal which always precedes it lays bare the ambivalence at its core.

In conclusion, I turn to a final quotation from Butler which lucidly articulates this paradox:

Agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled. One might say that the purposes of power are not always the purposes of agency. To the extent that the latter diverge from the former, agency is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belong. This is, as it were, the ambivalent scene of agency, constrained by no teleological necessity. (Butler 1997: 15)

In their yearly ritual performance, then, the *nari* reiterate an indigenous, collective Thangmi agency. Although always ambivalent, this agency is in part an unintended consequence of attempted domination by the Dolakha Newar, caste Hindus, and the Nepali state. The ritual relationships embedded in Devikot-Khadga Jatra shape the expression of Thangmi agency and identity, and by appropriating the power generated through these relationships for their own purposes, Thangmi participation transcends the structure of domination.

Appendix

[Here I provide a free English translation of the core verses chanted repeatedly by the Thangmi *guru* throughout the Devikot-Khadga Jatra cycle. Ellipses indicate repetitions of earlier verses, which I have removed here due to space considerations.]

Move the unmoved deity

Oh god, since you are of this place, oh god,

Without treachery, without deceiving the deities, oh god,

In the abode of this deity, move the unmoved, oh god,

Because you are of this place, oh god, because you are of this place.

Since you are of Dolakhā, the origin of Arjun of the five Pāṇḍu, respected Bhimvalī
Bhimsen, oh god, since you are of this place

Since you are from here, since you are of Devikoṭ, Tripurā Sundarī

To the great Māhārānī, joining ten fingers, I supplicate

Come to us without getting angry, without causing havoc, without defiling, oh god,

since you are of this place, oh god.

As this small demon [the *nari*] journeys to the place of the large demons, oh god,
 Since you are of this place, oh god, Syusyu Rājā has made it such [this ritual],
 Golmā Rājā has made it such, Pāṇḍu Rājā has made it such, oh god,
 From this place, oh god, having spoken with a rude voice like the echo in a clay pot,
 Having spoken with a voice like driving rain, having spoken with a white voice,
 Without treachery, without deceiving us,
 Oh god, Syusyu Rājā has made it such, Pāṇḍu Rājā has made it such
 Golmā Rājā has made it such, Golmā Rānī has made it such
 Oh god, because you are of this place, oh god.
 Without destroying, without turning the world upside down oh god,
 Being of this place, may whoever has the intention have victory.

...

Oh god, since you are of this place, oh god,
 Having brought breads from all villages of the world, having brought round filled
 breads from the unseen villages on the other side of the hill
 Having brought breads from above
 Beer is distilled from the hands of the beer straining deity.

The deity that causes the beer to ferment has fermented it,
 This has now been done, oh god,
 The deity that strains the beer at the final stage has strained it.
 Oh god, the beer has been placed in the pot, the beer has been offered.
 Being of this place, oh god,
Ahai salo, we supplicate the divine mothers and fathers, hoping that we
 insignificant boys and girls may not experience any hardship.

Oh god, being of this place, not just for this one time,
 Not only for one era, but for all time, for many lives,
 Please, saying this, may no hardship come upon the knowledge that we have stored
 inside, may no hardship come while we make offerings
 Oh god, may no adversity come to us children of the wealthy-bodied gods
 May the wild jungle spirit, the deer spirit, and other animal spirits not suffer any
 harm.
 Oh god, speaking with a rude voice, a windy voice, a black voice
 In this way Syusyu Rājā has made it such, Golmā Rājā has made it such

Pāṇḍu Rājā has made it such, oh god, since you are of this place
Not just for this time, not just one era, but for all lifetimes, may the knowledge that
we have stored inside us not suffer adversity, while making offerings may we face
no adversity.

Having put a large stick in front and a large umbrella behind us [to mark ritual
space], may our senior sister's and brother-in-law's families be protected for all
time.

Having said this at the place where the shaman is sitting by the large beam
[supporting the Dasain *ghar*], come,
Oh god, come, with a light shining like the moon and sun, having said this,
Oh god, while walking one stumbles, while sitting one's hair falls out.
Let none of these things happen.

Whoever's soul is satisfied, to those four directions and four corners, having called
the gods to witness, having made the god of each place a witness, whoever's soul is
satisfied, May he be victorious, oh god,

Being of this place, we are children of the wealthy-bodied god
Without being treacherous, without deceiving us,
Treat us young and inexperienced people well, oh venerable Bhimeśvar.

...

Now that you have come to listen, you know that we are unknowledgeable and
foolish beasts
Instead of eating fodder we eat grain, oh god,
Clear like water, becoming pure like yogurt, oh god,
May the love of our own mothers be forthcoming like these things, having said
this, oh god, *ahai salo*.

...

Give us security oh god, not just for one time, not just for one era.
With light like the morning moon, light like the sun,
Perhaps having said this, oh god, with this voice like the wind's voice, a black voice,
a rude voice
Look at us! Without being destructive, treacherous or deceptive
Oh god, come like the light of the sun and moon.

Having said this, oh god, come into our hair-like nerves, our skull, our 32 teeth,
 our cheeks and gullet, come, having said this,
 Come into our hands, palms and nails, having said this
 Into these 53 joints, come, having said this,
 Into our liver, intestines, lungs, waist, pelvis and hips, into all of these come
 From here, having said this, come into the soles of our feet, our heels and
 fingertips, come, having said this

...

Oh god, come into our marrow, having said this
 Into our skull, our 32 teeth, come, having said this, into our cheeks and gullet
 Into the hands, palms, fingertips and nails of the *nari*
 Into the 53 joints, come like the moon light, like the sun light
 having said this, oh god, come into these ears, heart, liver, intestines and lungs.

...

Since you are of this place, oh god, without bewitching us,
 Without becoming treacherous, deceitful or destructive,
 Since you are of this place, oh god, while we journey to the demon king, give us
 security.
 While Khāṇḍu Rājā travels on the river road, without deceiving
 Without treachery, being of this place, oh god ...
 Oh god, being of this place, Golmā Rājā, Golmā Rānī
 When going to meet these powerful deities, when going to supplicate to Pāṇḍu
 Rājā and Pāṇḍu Rānī,
 When journeying to the powerful abode of Syusyu Rājā, Syusyu Rānī, being of this
 place
 When meeting the deities more powerful than Hāi Hāi Rājā and Hui Hui Rānī,
 when going to the abode of Golmā Rājā, Golmā Rānī, being of this place, when
 going to the power place of demons, oh god, being of this place,
 Having marked out ritual space with a stick and umbrella, we supplicate, oh god.
 While walking one stumbles, while sitting, one's hair falls out
 Being of this place, these deities must be propitiated
 Beer must be made, now the beer has been offered, *ahai salo*.

References

- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 109-137.
- Ballinger, Thomas O. 1973. Simraongarh revisited: A report on some observations made at the ruins of the former capital of Mithila in the Terai of Nepal. *Kailash* 1 (3): 180-184.
- Brown, Michael F. 1996. On resisting resistance. *American Anthropologist* 98(4): 729-735.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Chalier-Visuvalingam, Elizabeth. 1989. Bharava's royal Brahmanicide: the problem of the Māhābrahmaṇa. In *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the guardians of popular Hinduism*, edited by Alf Hiltebeitel, pp. 157-230. Albany: State University of New York.
- Chalier-Visuvalingam, Elizabeth. 2003. *Bhairava: terreur et protection. Mythes, rites et fêtes à Bénarès et à Katmandou*. Bruxelles: P.I.E. - Peter Lang.
- van Driem, George. 2001. *Languages of the Himalayas: An ethnolinguistic handbook of the greater Himalayan region, containing an introduction to the symbiotic theory of language*. Leiden: Brill.
- Gellner, David N. 1992. *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its hierarchy of ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gellner, David N. 2003. From cultural hierarchies to a hierarchy of multiculturalisms: The case of the Newars of Nepal. In *Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil in the Himalayas*, edited by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Pascale Dolfuss, pp. 73-131. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Genetti, Carol. 1994. *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Dolakha Newari Dialect*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.
- Guha, Ranajit. 1999 [1983]. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Höfer, András. 1979. *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner.
- Holmberg, David. 2000. Derision, exorcism, and the ritual production of power. *American Ethnologist*. 27 (4): 927-949.
- Krauskopff, Gisèle and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, eds. 1996. *Célébrer le Pouvoir: Dasain, un rituel royal au Népal*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, Éditions de la MSH.

- Levy, Robert I. 1990. *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city in Nepal*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Miller, Casper J. 1997 [1979]. *Faith-Healers in the Himalaya*. Delhi: Book Faith India.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. 1987. *The Monkey as Mirror: Symbolic transformations in Japanese history and ritual*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Peet, Robert Creighton. 1978. *Migration, Culture and Community: A case study from rural Nepal*. Columbia University, unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Pfaff-Czarnecka, Joanna. 1996. A battle of meanings: Commemorating the goddess Durga's victory over the demon Mahisa as a political act. *Kailash*: 18 (3-4): 57-92.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1995. Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37 (1): 173-193.
- Quigley, Declan. 1993. *The Interpretation of Caste*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Regmi, Mahesh Chandra. 1980. *Regmi Research Series Cumulative Index for 1980*. Kathmandu: Regmi Research Series.
- Regmi, Mahesh Chandra. 1981. *Regmi Research Series Cumulative Index for 1981*. Kathmandu: Regmi Research Series.
- Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shneiderman, Sara. 2005. Ethnic (p)reservations: Comparing Thangmi ethnic activism in Nepal and India. Paper presented at a workshop on *Activism and Civil Society in South Asia*, Oxford University, June 2005.
- Slusser, Mary Shepherd. 1982. *Nepal Mandala: A cultural history of the Kathmandu Valley*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Turin, Mark. 1997. Too many stars and not enough sky: Language and ethnicity among the Thakali of Nepal. *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 24 (2): 187-199.
- Turin, Mark. 2004. Newar-Thangmi lexical correspondences and the linguistic classification of Thangmi. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 68: 97-120.
- Vajracarya, Dhanavajra and Tek Bahadur Shrestha. 2031 VS [1974-1975 AD]. *Dolakhāko Aitihāsik Rūprekhā* [A Historical Review of Dolakha]. Kathmandu: Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies.

Visuvalingam, Sunthar and Elizabeth Chaliar-Visuvalingam. 2004. A paradigm of Hindu-Buddhist relations: Pachali Bhairava of Kathmandu. *EVAM: Forum on Indian Representations* 3 (1-2): 106-176.

Ethnonymy in a Multiethnic Context: A Note on Kinnaur

Isabelle Riaboff

Lying in the western recesses of the Himalayas, Kinnaur District constitutes a fringe area which has hitherto remained largely unknown to anthropologists. Questionable though they may be, accounts of the region (narratives of travellers¹ and administrative reports, for the most part) testify to its cultural complexity. Yet they are full of puzzling assertions which contradict each other. In this paper, which is based on first-hand ethnographic data,² my main aim is to give an overall picture of the Kinnaurese multiethnic situation. To this end, I shall discuss the colloquial ethnonyms which are in use among villagers. For, as James A. Matisoff (1986: 6) suggests, ethnonyms (both autoethnonyms and exoethnonyms) provide “clues to the inter-ethnic pecking-order in a certain region”.

The setting

Kinnaur District is located in the eastern part of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, to the south of Lahul and Spiti. On its southern side, it borders Garhwal (in the newly-founded Uttaranchal State), and on its eastern side, Tibet.³ Its population amounts to more than 80,000 people.⁴ Out of the 77 official villages (called “revenue villages”) of Kinnaur, the Kanauri language is spoken in sixty localities.⁵ According to linguistic studies, it belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and has some possible links

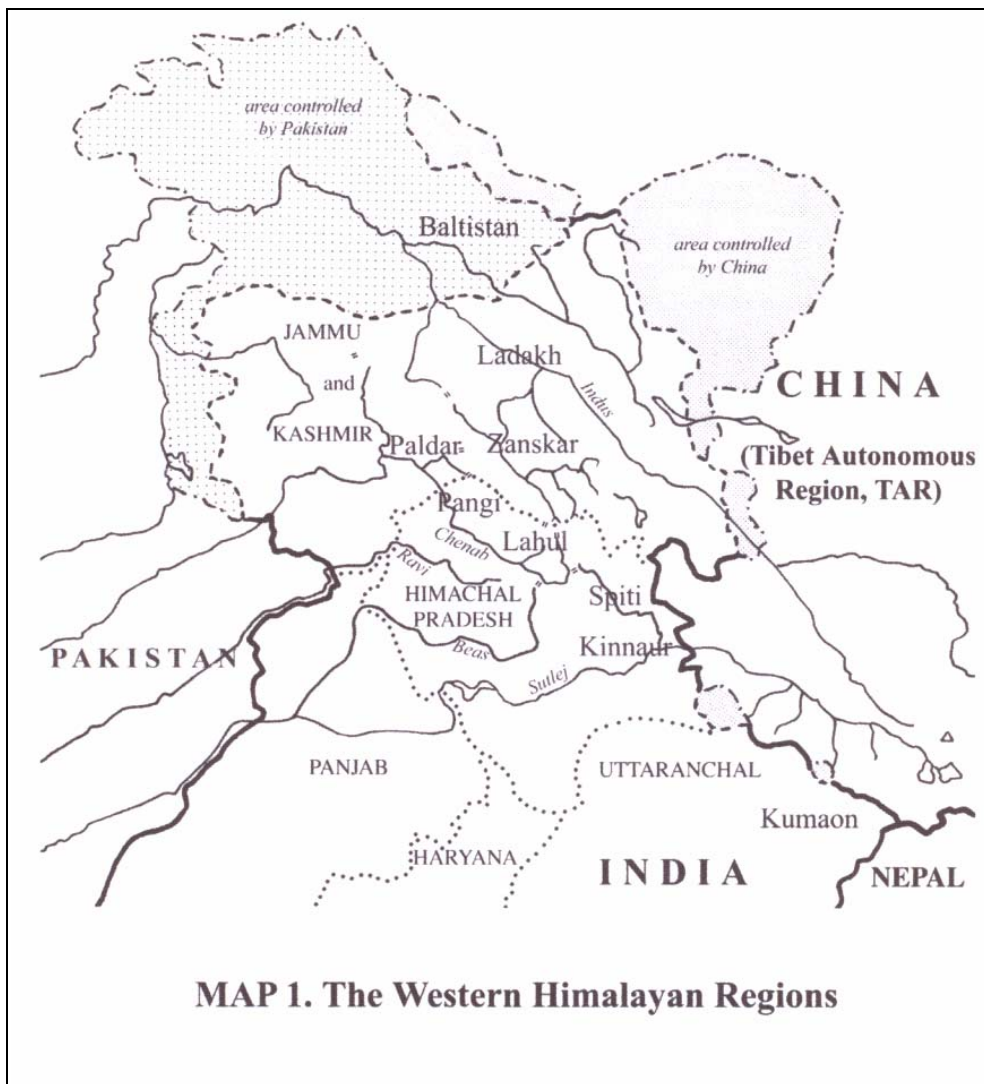
¹ From the beginning of the 19th century onwards, a number of Westerners – in particular Britons – travelled through Kinnaur, heading either for Tibet or Spiti.

² Research in Kinnaur was conducted during the winter of 2001-2002 (from October to March). It would not have been possible without the financial support received from the Frederick Williamson Memorial Fund, Cambridge.

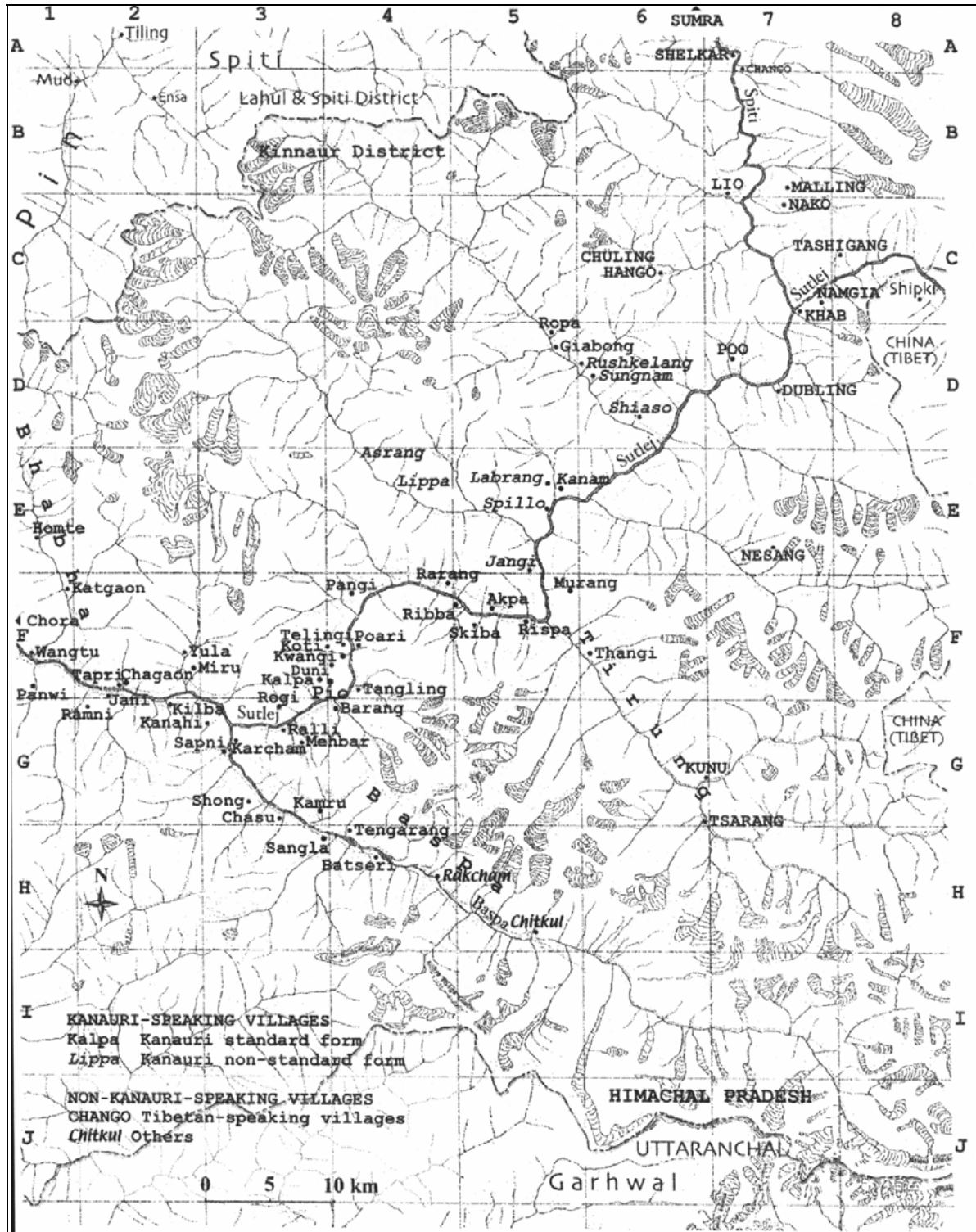
³ See map 1.

⁴ Considering that Kinnaur population has regularly increased by 20% or so per decade since 1961 (see *Census of India 1961*, *Census of India 1971* and *Census of India 1981*), and that it amounted to 71,270 in 1991 (see *The Encyclopaedic District Gazetteers of India. Vol. III, Northern Zone.* 1997), one can assume that the total population must be about 85,000 at present.

⁵ These villages are indicated in lower-case letters on map 2. See also legend for map 2.



with the former Zhangzhung language. Besides its standard form, spoken by a majority of persons, Kanauri has several dialectal variants, some of which are specific to quite tiny groups of people; the most striking example is that of the dialect solely spoken in the medium-sized locality of Sunnam [D6] (see map 2). Despite this highly localised variability, all Kanauri-speakers can understand each other quite well. As for the remaining localities, their populations speak a Tibetan dialect that does not vary much from one village to the next (notwithstanding what the speakers themselves often assert) and that is akin to the dialect spoken in neighbouring Spiti. Tibetan-speaking villages are mostly confined within a small radius: these



MAP 2. Kinnaur: a linguistic map

are 15 official villages in total, namely Kunu [G6], Tsarang [G6], Nesang [E7], and the uppermost villages lying between Poo [D7] and Sumra [A6].⁶ While Tibetan dialects are rarely known by Kanauri-speakers,⁷ most of the Tibetan-speakers are able to understand some Kanauri. During the festive gatherings, they often sing as many Kanauri songs as Tibetan ones.⁸

Throughout Kinnaur, both the Kanauri-speaking and Tibetan-speaking populations are divided into the same castes, called *jāt* (from the Hindi *jāti*, ‘caste’). In descending order, these hereditary and endogamous castes are as follows: (1) the Khoshia (K.) or Chayang (T.),⁹ who constitute the largest group;¹⁰ (2) the carpenters (K. Ores; T. Shingzowa [*Shing bzo ba*]) together with the blacksmiths (K. Domang; T. Zo [*Bzo*]), who live in a few localities and occasionally move from one place to another, depending on the demand for their services as craftsmen; and (3) the weavers (K. Chamang; T. Zilao), second in terms of the number of people.¹¹ A point worthy of note is that in Kanauri-speaking places, carpenters, blacksmiths and weavers do not speak

⁶ Tibetan-speaking localities are indicated in capital letters on map 2. Between 1951 and 1981, Tibetan-speakers made up about 11% of the total population of Kinnaur District. Taking the population increase into account, it can be estimated that the Tibetan-speakers who live in Kinnaur are now more than 8,000 in number.

⁷ Except for monks and nuns: by necessity, Buddhist religious specialists, who are present all over the district, all know written Tibetan, and quite a number of them also learnt some spoken Tibetan while staying with religious masters either in Kinnaur or elsewhere in India and formerly in Tibet.

⁸ It should be added that a specific language is spoken by the inhabitants of Chitkul [H5] and Rakcham [H4] (some 1,500 people) in the upper Baspa valley. Unintelligible for Kanauri-speakers, this language is often regarded by the latter as a Tibetan dialect, but I can definitely confirm that it is not. More trustworthy (though yet to be verified) is the local idea that the Chitkul dialect is related to the dialects of Garhwal.

⁹ Unless they are common to all speakers, vernacular terms are marked by “K.” for Kanauri terms or by “T.” for terms belonging to a Tibetan dialect. As far as possible, I give for phonetic forms (in Tibetan or Hindi) the corresponding literary forms in italicised transliteration.

¹⁰ In the 1930s, the king of Bashahr enacted a decree which allowed all his subjects, except for the low castes, to call themselves Rajput.

¹¹ Soon after the Indian independence, because of its remoteness, Kinnaur was registered as a Tribal Area. Regardless of their ethnic and linguistic affiliations, the Khoshia were declared Scheduled Tribe (ST), and carpenters, blacksmiths and weavers Scheduled Castes (SC). These temporary statuses are still in force.

Kanauri when they are amongst themselves, their own mother tongue being a form of Pahari.¹²

Given that the Brahman caste is totally absent from Kinnaur, Buddhist lamas (monks and lay ritual specialists) and nuns are the main religious specialists throughout the district; in particular, monks invariably conduct the most crucial rituals of all, namely the funerals.¹³ In the Kanauri-speaking places, the cults devoted to the local gods (at least one per locality) are another important part of religious life. The gods, represented by copper vases and in some cases by richly adorned palanquins, are carried outside their temples on a great number of ritual occasions where mediums play a very important role in forecasting events and prescribing how their followers are to behave in certain situations. By contrast, in the Tibetan-speaking villages, local deities are rather insignificant. They have no palanquins at all, nor in most cases have they temples or altars at the village level. Consequently, they are fully identified with their mediums, so much so that when a medium dies and has no successor, the god is said to be dead. Nowadays, such cases are not uncommon – a fact which reveals a strong lack of interest by the Tibetan-speakers in local cults.

The ethnonyms in current use among Kanauri-speakers

In Kalpa [F3], the inhabitants regard themselves, together with all the villagers who live between Chora [F1] and Pangri [F4], as Kanauraga.¹⁴ The people settling beyond Pangri are known as Nyam,¹⁵ irrespective of their language, although Nyam is often given as an equivalent to the Hindi Tibti (*tibbatī*), ‘Tibetan’. How is it that the village of Pangri, high uphill, is understood in Kalpa as the eastern limit of Kanauring, the country of the Kanauraga? To understand this, one should bear in mind that until 1962 (when a National Highway was constructed along the Sutlej River), Pangri lay on the so-called Hindustan-Tibet Road: going eastwards, the next village to be crossed was Lippa, whose Kanauri dialect is radically different from standard Kanauri spoken up to Pangri.¹⁶

¹² The Hindi term *pahāḍī*, literally ‘of the mountains’, designates a very large cultural and linguistic group living in the Indian lower Himalayan mountains, from Kumaon in the east to Paldar in the west.

¹³ Lamas and nuns belong either to the Geluk (T. *Dge lugs*), Drukpa Kagyü (T. *‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud*) or Nyingma (T. *Rnying ma*) orders.

¹⁴ In Kalpa we have: Kanaura, msg (= masculine singular); Kanauraga, mpl (= masculine plural); Kanauri, fsg (= feminine singular); and Kanauriga, fpl (= feminine plural).

¹⁵ Nyam, msg; Nyama, mpl; Nyamets, fsg; Nyametsa, fpl.

¹⁶ At the end of the 19th century, Pangri was described by E. Atkinson (1973: 30) as a key place, “a debatable ground common to Hindus and Buddhists”.

The Kanauri-speakers who live in Kanam (labelled as Nyam in Kalpa) repeatedly assert that by their traditional definition, the Kanauring country extends from Chora to Shiaso [D6]. Yet, Pangi remains an important cultural boundary in their eyes. To the east of it is Upper Kanauring or Tö, and to the west Lower Kanauring or Yö. As is to be expected, the inhabitants of Kanam (the Kanampapang)¹⁷ particularly stress the difference between the dialects spoken in Yö and Tö. As for the Tibetan-speaking localities which are situated between Poo and Sumra, they lay outside of Kanauring as it is defined in Kanam; this is certainly not surprising since these localities were part of Guge until the 1680s when the king of Bashahr, who already ruled the rest of present-day Kinnaur, received them in compensation for the military support he had given to Tibet against Ladakh.¹⁸ Nowadays, the Kanampapang call those who live between Poo and Sumra Loktumipang ('those from uphill'), or Khawapang ('those of the snow'). They also employ the term Khawapang for the inhabitants of Spiti and Tibet. Interestingly enough, I heard several times in Kanam that the Khawapang differ from the Kanaurapang insofar as their languages and traditional dresses are entirely different. Language and dress thus turn out to be equally important as markers of identity. Indeed, the inhabitants of Kunu-Tsarang and Nesang, who speak Tibetan dialects while wearing the same clothes as the people in Kanam, are regarded either as Khawapang or Kanaurapang by the Kanampapang.

The terms Nyam in Kalpa, and Khawa in Kanam, both explicitly linked to Tibetanness, are clearly derogatory. The Nyam and Khawa are often criticized for their extensive consumption of meat, which is supposed to result in a violent temperament. Above all, their identity is generally reduced to one unacceptable feature, namely the eating of cow-meat, and so it often happens that the terms Nyam and Khawa are simply translated as 'beef-eater'. Conspicuously, however, everybody in Kinnaur, from west to east, denies eating any bovine meat. Indeed, most of the people, although not all of them, claim that the Nyam or Khawa do not eat any cow-meat, but also admit that their ancestors did, which, in their eyes, makes them impure and inferior.¹⁹ Thus, a local legend which I collected in Kalpa says that

¹⁷ In Kanam, -pang is a plural ending.

¹⁸ See Petech 1947.

¹⁹ All over Kinnaur – both among Kanauri-speaking and Tibetan-speaking groups – the forefathers of the weavers, the lowest among the low castes, are also denounced for eating bovine meat and chicken, another prohibited meat. A popular song tells of a girl (native of a village close to Kalpa) who had to go into exile in the past because she had eaten chicken in the company of Westerners (most probably missionaries). Just as they define others as eaters of prohibited meat, the inhabitants of Kalpa claim to be bird-eaters. If we go by what two of them told me, this habit of theirs is stigmatized in the eyes of their eastern neighbours who would never partake of bird-meat, regarding birds as eaters of

human sacrifices to the goddess Durga came to an end when a family, anxious to avoid the death of any of its members, offered a Nyam: the goddess refused because, as I was told, Nyam flesh is impure.

The ethnonyms in current use among Tibetan-speakers²⁰

In Dubling, the limit between Shiaso and Poo is again understood as a watershed in terms of language and dress. The area from Chora to Shiaso is referred to as Khunu (T. *Khu nu*); the Khunuwa (T. *Khun nu ba*)²¹ are its inhabitants, whose customs are called Khunu ki luksol (T. *Khu nu gyi lugs gsol*) and whose language is known as Khunu kat (T. *Khu nu skad*). Khunuwa are reckoned as members of a larger generic group, the Monpa (T. *Mon pa*), which also comprises the inhabitants of Shimla District farther west. The term Mon is quite common in the Tibetan world, and Françoise Pommaret, who reviews its uses, concludes that for the Tibetans it is often “associated with the notion of being non-Buddhist, and therefore non-cultured, even if in the course of history these populations became Buddhist” (1994: 47). In Dubling, the circumlocution Mon ni cho (T. *Mon gyi chos*), ‘the religion of the Monpa’, is indeed given as an equivalent for Hinduism. It is true that Kanauri-speakers frequently claim to be Hindu: they emphasise that some of their local gods are Hindu²² and that, once a cremation is completed, a piece of bone left intact from the corpse is taken away to Haridwar to be immersed in the Ganges. Additionally, to justify their being reliant on Buddhist religious specialists, Kanauri-speakers point to the fact that lamas and nuns act as substitutes for pandits: “They do what the pandits would do if only they lived in Kinnaur” is a common assertion which I even once heard from a lama.²³ Yet, the claim to be Hindu is not specific to Kanauri-speakers. Tibetan-speakers also usually profess to be Hindu on grounds of their national identity. As they like to recall: “Isn’t India, Hindustan, the place of the Hindu people by definition?” Therefore, in their own eyes, they are Hindu merely by virtue of being citizens of

human flesh inasmuch as they (vultures in particular) devour the corpses that are dismembered and abandoned to them, as required by the well-known Tibetan custom of disposing of the dead. “Tell me who you are, and I’ll tell you which meat you eat”, could well be a Kinnaurese saying!

²⁰ To date, my inquiries have been confined to the Chayang caste.

²¹ In Dubling we have: Khunuwa, msg and mpl; Khunuma, fsg and fpl.

²² Indeed, their protective deities are often assimilated to Hindu gods, but, simultaneously, many of them are explicitly considered to be devotees of the Buddhist faith.

²³ Apart from Buddhism and Hinduism, there are several religious movements sporadically present in Kinnaur, such as Protestantism and the Sant Nirankari Mission.

India.²⁴ Thus, for want of a clear delimitation between Hinduism and Buddhism in Kinnaur, the Dublingpa (i.e. the inhabitants of Dubling) emphasise that they themselves “believe in the lamas rather than in the gods”, contrary to the Khunuwa/Monpa whose preferences are, they say, the reverse.

Now, what do the Dublingpa call themselves? The ethnonym Bodpa (T. *Bod pa*), ‘Tibetans’, which they sometimes use for themselves, is vague. The villagers variously define the Bodpa as (1) their Tibet and Spiti neighbours; (2) the Tibetan-speakers who live in Kunu-Tsarang and Nesang, as well as those who live along the lower Spiti valley in the so-called Hangrang sub-tehsil of Kinnaur, a few kilometres away from Dubling; and (3) themselves. The Dublingpa recognise their language as a Bod dialect (Bod kat [T. *Bod skad*]) and their lineages as Bod lineages (Bod rik [T. *Bod rigs*]). The founders of Dubling are remembered as Tibetans. A villager fond of tales and sayings related to me the mythical story of the monkey and the demoness, the well-known ancestors of the Tibetan people, adding the following personal comments: “Like all Tibetan people, and unlike the Monpa, we are beardless, and this proves that we descended from that monkey, since monkeys’ naked faces contrast with their hairy bodies. Furthermore, our liking for meat is the legacy of the ancestral demoness.” Thus, this story-teller identified the appetite for meat as a specifically Tibetan cultural feature. Likewise, many Dublingpa acknowledge the fact that their own distant ancestors might have been beef-eaters. Nevertheless, it is commonplace among them to mock this habit, denouncing the unpleasant body smell of the contemporary beef-eaters in Spiti and elsewhere. Two men from Poo (a large village opposite Dubling) spontaneously told me that there is much brutality among the Bodpa of Spiti “maybe because of their eating cow-meat”. In Dubling, the term Bodpa is never given explicitly as a synonym for beef-eater, though it even bears the same deprecatory connotation as the Kanauri ethnonyms Nyam and Khawa (see above). In other words, following the example of the Kanauri-speakers, the Dublingpa tend to look down on Tibetanness. Does this mean that, in admitting their descent from Tibetan beef-eaters, the Dublingpa are also acknowledging their inferiority to Kanauri-speakers? Not at all if we go by what they say: all of them maintain that they and the Kanauri-speakers are equals. Certainly, the Dublingpa do admit that this was not the case in the past. But if they concede that they have been denigrated by the Kanauri-speakers, they add that, vice versa, they themselves used to consider the Kanauri-speakers rik thuwa (T. *rigs thu ba*), ‘bad rank’. In sum, according to the Dublingpa, they and the Kanauri-speakers used to look down on each other in the past, but they now consider each other to be equals. To prove it,

²⁴ This orientation might be seen as a result of their early integration into the Hindu kingdom of Bashahr. It may be noted in passing that as a rule speakers of Tibetan in the Indian Himalayas do not claim to be Indians or to belong to India.

some Dublingpa highlight the fact that formerly they did not marry the Monpa, whereas nowadays they do. Thanks to better means of communication and because of the increasing number of love marriages, intermarriage has become common all over the district, so much so that people currently assert that “in modern Kinnaur, everyone marries everyone” (provided that marriage does not contravene caste endogamy). As a matter of fact though, unions with Kanauri-speakers remain unusual in Dubling.

The situation in Tsarang is radically different. Together with the inhabitants of the adjoining hamlet of Kunu, the Tsarangpa live far away from the rest of Kinnaur Tibetan-speakers. Their closest neighbours, a day’s walk away, are the inhabitants of Thangi. That is probably the reason why the Tsarangpa have adopted a number of cultural features which are not present in the Dubling area: among other things, they wear the same traditional dress as in Kanauri-speaking places, and they follow the same rules regarding intercaste relations (while the Dublingpa have got a garment of their own, and discriminate less against low castes). Moreover, and contrary to the Dublingpa, the Tsarangpa establish strong family ties with Kanauri-speakers through intermarriage. Apart from local marriages between Kunu and Tsarang, the villagers contract very few marriages with other Tibetan-speakers; I was able to list only five of them. By comparison, the unions between Tsarangpa and Kanauri-speakers, which numbered 29 in a quick survey of mine, appear to be numerous. It is worth noting that these unions are not well-balanced, since there are twice as many Kanauri-speaking girls married in Tsarang as Tsarang girls married in Kanauri-speaking localities. When asked about this imbalance, an old woman of Tsarang told me that the villages of the Kanauri-speakers, such as Thangi, were unpleasant villages, and thus the people of Tsarang did not want to send their daughters there. The former headman of Dubling explained the Tsarang imbalance more convincingly by drawing upon a Tibetan proverb which goes as follows: “Bring your daughters-in-law from the top of the glacier / Send your daughters to the bottom of the ocean.”²⁵ In other words, in his reckoning, the Tsarangpa do not care much about the status of their sons-in-law and do not marry too many of their daughters to Kanauri-speakers, whereas they look for “highborn” daughters-in-law and bring many of them from Kanauri-speaking places. In so saying, the headman suggests that the Tsarangpa do consider the Kanauri-speakers their superiors.

Conclusions

²⁵ *Mna’ ma gangs ri rtse nas lon / Bu mo rgya mtsho gting la thong.*

The ethnonyms discussed in this paper reflect several lines of division within Kinnaur in terms of language distribution (Kanauri / Tibetan; East Kanauri / West Kanauri), customs (dress), former political divisions (Bashahr / Guge) and religion (Hinduism / Buddhism / local cults). But today much of this is subject to change. Hindi is becoming a lingua franca, which could supplant local dialects in the future. In Pio [F4], the biggest market town, many parents already speak exclusively Hindi at home in order to facilitate their children's education at school. Indian-style garments are adopted by many girls. Last, but by no means least, the political boundaries of Kinnaur District tend to predominate over the more limited definitions of Kanauring/Khunu. It is significant that in Dabling, when explicitly asked about geography, men sometimes maintain (to the great amazement of women, who are less aware of the details of the district administration) that the eastern limit of Khunu is Sumra (the district boundary) rather than Shiaso (the "traditional" boundary). In their view, the Shiaso-Poo line marks a divide between Lower Khunu (Khunu Mat) and Upper Khunu (Khunu Töt), which implies that they themselves are Khunuwa, just as are the Kanauri-speakers. In sum, standardization of behaviour and political unification could well lead to the decline of the ethnic spaces described above, unless ethnic groups find new markers of identity of religious adherence. Thus, newly-born Buddhist associations declare that they are devoting themselves to the denunciation of Hinduism, a fact which seems to announce a radicalisation of religious claims, quite in tune with the rise of Hindu and Muslim communalisms on the national level.

References

- Atkinson, Edwin T. 1973 [1882]. *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, Delhi: Cosmo publications.
- Census of India 1961. Himachal Pradesh. District Handbook 6. Kinnaur District*. Simla: Government of India Press 1965.
- Census of India 1971. Himachal Pradesh. Parts X-A & B, Full Count Census Tables. District Census Handbook. Kinnaur District*. Simla: Government of India Press.
- Census of India 1981. Himachal Pradesh. District Census Handbook. Kinnaur District*. Simla: Government of India Press.
- The Encyclopaedic District Gazetteers of India. Vol. III, Northern Zone*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House 1997.

- Matisoff, James Alan. 1986. The languages and dialects of Tibeto-Burman: An alphabetic/genetic listing, with some prefatory remarks on ethnonymic and glossonymic complications. *Contributions to Sino-Tibetan Studies*, edited by John McCoy and Timothy Light. Leiden: Brill: pp. 3-75.
- Petech, Luciano. 1947. The Tibetan-Ladakhi-Moghul war of 1681-1683. *Indian Historical Quarterly* 23: 169-199.
- Pommaret, Françoise. 1994. "Entrance-keepers of a Hidden Country": Preliminary notes on the Monpa of south-central Bhutan. *The Tibet Journal* 19 (3): 46-62.

Staying in Place: The Social Actions of Hindu *Yoginīs*

Sondra L. Hausner

Yogīs in South Asia are known as wanderers who live in no fixed location. Wandering is supposed to loosen ties with the material world, and cultivate detachment and religious knowledge in Hindu renouncers. In both religious text and popular legend, *yogīs* are supposed to wander through the countryside for all but the four rainy months of the year, spending no more than one night in a place and eating what food is given. They should possess only a blanket, a water-pot, and a staff to ward off wild animals.¹

During my fieldwork, however, I found that most renouncers do actually base themselves in particular places.² On occasion, they depart to visit a pilgrimage destination or to attend a religious festival, but when they do, they leave a base behind, sometimes with a padlock on the door, signifying eventual but certain return. The words for “home” in Hindi and Nepali are certainly shunned by renouncers, who speak, instead, of their “seats” (*āsan*), or their “places” (*sthān*). But *yogīs* and *yoginīs* use their seats as home bases, and they interact with members of local communities as long-term and active residents.

In this paper, I look at the lives of women *yogīs*, or *yoginīs*, in the lower Himalayan region of North India and Nepal. I argue that contrary to popular legend, women renouncers do not wander perpetually between holy sites, but tend to settle in communities, and when they do, they often contribute to their new local communities in ways reminiscent of householder women. Although *yoginīs* consciously leave behind normative householder social structures, they still feed people, protect children, and teach religious values in their new roles as renouncers.

Being a woman renouncer, therefore, both reflects and defies women’s roles in householder communities. Women renouncers do not necessarily

¹ See Doniger (1991) and Olivelle (1992) for good examples of textual requirements for renouncers. This imagery occurs throughout classical Indian philosophy and literature.

² My fieldwork with contemporary Hindu *yogīs* and *yoginīs* was conducted in Nepal and India between 1997 and 2001. I worked closely with three individual renouncers, two women and one man, at their bases in Kathmandu, Hardwar, and Allahabad. In addition, I spoke with hundreds of renouncers over the course of my travels to multiple Himalayan pilgrimage sites and important festival occasions.

wander to accrue religious power, but they do leave their natal and marital homes and find new places to settle as full-time religious practitioners. And in their new communities, women renouncers use their sedentary seats as bases from which to care for people. They do not reject the world but immerse themselves in it, using the religious power with which they are bestowed for the benefit of others.

One premise of my paper is that *yoginīs* use renunciation as a way to move out of stifling home communities. Once they have moved into new locations as renouncers, they support and are supported by the lay Hindu communities that are now their own. But in a new place, and with the new status (ambivalent though it may be) of renouncer, the caring, feeding work of women has a very different resonance. In their new locations, women renouncers do the things that women are supposed to do, but they do them as *yoginīs*, rather than as wives.

In the four sections that follow, I try to show how renunciation is simultaneously about departure and stasis, for different social reasons and with different social results. First, I describe Rādhā Giri, a fiercely independent and staunchly sedentary *yoginī* I met during fieldwork. Rādhā Giri's story clearly shows how staying in place can be translated into social activism for women renouncers. Second, I review the reasons *sādhus* are supposed to wander and, by contrast, I describe the sedentary choices made by the renouncers with whom I worked. Third, I look at the ways renouncers use staying in place to be active in their communities. And finally, I look at how *yoginīs* depart from their householder roles – literally and metaphorically – and recreate them in new settings.

Fierce, sedentary Rādhā Giri

I met Rādhā Giri at the 1998 Kumbh Melā, a massive Hindu religious festival, in Hardwar, Uttar Pradesh, and I visited her often when I returned to Hardwar in 2000.³ A fiercely independent *sādhvī*, or woman *sādhu*, she was rumoured to have magical powers, and she brooked no disrespect towards or disobedience of the rules she had established around her small quarters on the riverbank.⁴ Rādhā Māī, or Mātājī, as she was more commonly known, had lived in a tent on a small island in the Ganges River for almost twenty-five years. Hardwar is one of the most popular pilgrimage

³ The two northernmost regions of Uttar Pradesh, Garhwal and Kumaon, together became the new state of Uttaranchal on November 9, 2000.

⁴ See Lamb (2000) on the powers of women who fall outside of householder norms. Also see Lochtefeld (1992) for another account of Rādhā Giri's charisma.

places in South Asia,⁵ and pilgrim traffic is heavy along the river, which passes directly in front of Rādhā Māī's place.

Rādhā Māī was well known for her feisty temper – I heard she was a witch – and also for the unforgiving manner with which she ruled her small stretch of Ganges riverbank. She was a well-respected figure among members of the Hardwar renouncer community (including the men), and among members of the poor local community, who made their living selling trinkets to visiting pilgrims. A steady flow of both Hardwar residents and local and travelling renouncers passed through her place, and I used my visits to her tent as a way to meet other *yogīs*, hear the pilgrimage stories that both *sādhus* and lay Hindus were eager to tell, and watch pilgrims pay their respects to Rādhā Giri's place and to the river.

Mātājī was neither particularly interested in my interview questions nor particularly verbal, but she was welcoming. I soon learned, however, that when people acted in ways she found inappropriate or disrespectful, she would become enraged, and lecture them in a tirade on how to behave properly in the future. On one occasion, I watched her shout at pilgrims who were treating a child unkindly – she dashed out of her tent with her arms flailing, screaming that such behaviour was patently unreligious and that the perpetrators should never come near her place again. I learned quickly to follow her instructions, and closely adhere to the code of proper behaviour she demanded at her place on the riverbank.

Rādhā Giri was reticent about her background, a tendency that was quite common in my conversations with renouncers. But over time I did learn that she had been raised and married in the Himalayan area of Kumaon. She had left her marriage – I wondered if her fiery character had contributed to her unwillingness to play the part of subordinate wife – and followed a guru to Hardwar, where she had lived on the riverbank ever since. She was clearly motivated by religious duty, for she unfailingly paid her daily homage to the river and meticulously maintained the altars around the trees under which she lived, although her tent was rather scruffy.

Rādhā Māī's sedentary quarters were an early indication to me that *yogīs* do not necessarily spend all their time wandering. Māī's style also showed me what staying in place affords renouncers, and how they use the religious power accorded them by local communities for the benefit of those communities. Mātājī sat guard over her island, and she used her power as a local *yoginī* to make sure that people whom she saw as powerless were properly treated. Living in one place was the way Rādhā Giri consolidated her power in and for the local riverbank community. Her social protections

⁵ See Bhardwaj (1973) for an informative breakdown of pilgrimage statistics. Hardwar is popular in part because it is the entry point for the *Cār Dhām*, the four Himalayan sites that are the sources of the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers.

efforts were usually directed to women, children, and dogs – creatures in the most need of defence. She mothered the children of the neighbourhood, scolding them gently when they misbehaved. She provided work and meals to a madwoman from the area. And she provided shelter for most of the neighbourhood dogs, who slept in or near her tent. In one instance, a young man from the area playfully pulled a leaf off the *pīpal* tree under which she lived. Mātājī, as protector of place, sternly but patiently explained that he must never disrespect a holy tree, especially in the presence of Mother Ganges. And on more than one occasion, she wrathfully drove away men whom she felt were questioning me too eagerly, telling them that unless they came for reasons of religion, they were not to come at all.

Most notably, since about 1996, Rādhā Giri has reared a small girl child, whom she named Gaṅgā Giri. The story goes that she found the newborn baby floating down the Ganges in a banana-leaf basket, and saved her life. The mythical rendering of how she came to raise the abandoned child deliberately refers to the river that flows in front of her place. The child arrived in her domain, buoyed by the sacred waters of the Ganges, and Rādhā Māi had no choice but to take her in. She refused to hand the child over to state authorities who wanted to take Gaṅgā to an orphanage – the baby had arrived in front of her doorstep, or tentflap as the case may be, and she would care for it.

Māi was a highly unusual mother figure, to be sure, closer to the age of the child's grandmother than its mother, and more concerned with the bare survival of the child than with any kind of long-term planning for school or for marriage. Feeding the child and tending to her medical needs seemed to be all Māi could afford or cope with. But as a woman, she told me, she felt responsible for the people around her, and all those powerless creatures who found their way to her tent, be they lost anthropologists or helpless infants.

Rādhā Giri was fiercely sedentary, as she was fierce in most of her actions. Her seat in the small tent was by a sacred fire, or *dhūnī*, beneath two large trees and across from the sacred river. Since the time she took over this spot from a different renouncer who had vacated it – thereby becoming the resident *yoginī* of the area – she had not lived away from the island. She refused to leave even during the massive Kumbh Melā festivals in Hardwar, when state authorities had asked her to move into the *sādhu* camps in the city proper, with the other women renouncers. “Once,” Māi defiantly told me, “I moved upriver.” But that was for two weeks only, and apart from that single occasion, the place between the two trees was her seat, and she would not budge.

Moving through space and staying in place

Renouncers who live in one place disrupt one of the most popular images of asceticism. The *Samṇyāsa Upaniṣads* propose strict guidelines for the real ascetic: no more than one night must be spent in a village, no more than three in a town, and no more than five in a city.⁶ These rules seem carefully calibrated to population size: they demand a very low ratio of nights per place in order to prohibit extended social contact, which might lead a renouncer to become attached to the people who live in a particular place. Place is one of the primary ways people become attached to one another, the texts suggest, and wandering is designed precisely to remove the threads of social connection.

The image of the wandering renouncer is powerful because it implies that *yogīs* leave places where householders live in illusion-filled homes. The symbolic act of wandering insists that *sādhus* have broken free from the spatial constraints of social life. Since they have no place in which they are rooted, and no location through which they are governed or socialized, wanderers live outside the social fray.⁷ Wandering has always been part of *sādhu* life: the excitement and freedom of travel is one of the prerogatives of what for many is an otherwise difficult life choice.

Real-life renouncers are different from textual ideals in many ways, but the ideal of the wandering *sādhu* has had a particularly firm grasp in the public imagination. Even authors who have been instrumental in pointing out how renunciation does not fit into textual models – like Kirin Narayan, who eloquently deconstructs even that famed opposition between renunciation and caste society (1989) – emphasize the idea that householders are sedentary and renouncers are not.⁸ But almost all renouncers I met – both men and women – were sedentary, and many told me that moving around was plainly counterproductive, since it distracted them from regular religious practice.

The circumstances of sedentariness varied among the renouncers I met. Some, like Rādhā Giri, moved to the places where their gurus had lived. Others found an ashram in a holy place, where they felt protected from the very difficult householder lives they had left behind. Some renouncers lived in a particular temple; some lived in a small room or *kuṭī*, which was affiliated with a temple or an ashram; many lived at a *dhūnī*, or sacred fire-

⁶ See Olivelle (1992) for the details of *saṃnyāsī* sleeping requirements, and the way they shift over time in the classical literature.

⁷ See Freitag (1985) on how wandering renouncers may have frustrated British colonial officers, who could not govern people unrooted in space.

⁸ Gross is the only ethnographer who emphasizes that many *sādhus* “are part-time itinerant wanderers having some sort of semi-permanent residence from which they make a number of pilgrimages throughout the year” (1992: 126).

pit. Traditionally, I was told, a *sādhu* should sleep under a tree or in a temple, but the *yogī* seats that I saw varied widely: caves, ashrams, *dhūnīs*, hotel rooms, apartments, tea shops, riverbanks, huts, tents, or *kuṭīs* in residential courtyards or temple complexes, made of stone, concrete, straw, brick, or wood, all served as bases for *sādhus* I knew. Most renouncer seats waved the small triangular red flag that also flies from temples, a public symbol of religious activity.

A *yogī*'s place is certainly not a *ghar*, however, which is an exclusively householder term for 'house' or 'home' in both Hindi and Nepali. My informants used the word *āsan* to refer to the specific places where they lived. From the Sanskrit verb *ās-*, 'to sit', 'to stay', or 'to live', *āsan* means seat. Renouncers' seats – sometimes literally marked by a small portable rug or deerskin – are the places they stay unless they are travelling to festivals or moving on pilgrimage. *Āsan* refers to both an external seat and to the internal seat or balance of the body. (Physical yoga postures are called *āsanas*, because *yogīs* are instructed to use their bodies to maintain the steadiness of a pose.) Through this language, renouncers differentiate their bases and places from those of householders: their dwellings are not homes, but mobile places of meditation.

Many renouncers choose to live in pilgrimage places, since these are holy locations infused with both a history of powerful religious practice and an infrastructure that will provide material sustenance, given a steady flow of pilgrims ready to support religious practitioners. Any place holy and convenient could be a *sādhu* seat, and sometimes a good spot recently vacated would be quickly re-occupied by another *sādhu*. When I asked Rādhā Giri why she had chosen to live in Hardwar, she thought it was a ridiculous question. "Where do you want me to live?" she retorted. "The railroad station?" The idea that a *yogī* should be transient rather than live within a community (or that a renouncer would choose a particular place, rather than accept her karmic destiny) seemed absurd in her view. Transience ran counter to her core ideas about the purpose of renunciation.

Meditation through action

Despite the popular image of the wandering *yogī*, there is a long-standing tradition of respect for renouncers who stay in one place. Staying put means *yogīs* can do their religious practice (*sāadhanā*) and publicly receive and bless pilgrims. The places where renowned saints live usually take on religious significance. Two renouncers with whom I lived in the Ganges Valley for a few days told me with pride how their Rishikesh-based guru never left his ashram – or even his cave – while he was alive, even to cross the bridge into the main town. Certainly pilgrims who visited Rādhā Giri's

small island paid homage to the altars under her trees without fail. One local man offered incense to the river and to Māī's altar every evening.

Some of the sedentary women renouncers I met wished for isolation, wanting to do their religious practice undisturbed. But for others, staying in place meant that rather than detach from society, they became active, vigorous participants in it, on their own terms and in their own ways. Popular legends about *yogīs* explicitly refer to their community participation – renouncers are known as healers, religious story-tellers, and compassionate ritualists. As Narayan writes, “Ironically, the act of renunciation may in fact push an ascetic into more extensive social involvement than if he or she remained a layperson” (1989: 74).

In Rādhā Giri's interactions with the local community, we see exactly the kind of social engagement that the texts caution against: relationships, emotional involvements, parenthood, and an ongoing system of exchange between a renouncer and the residents of a particular place. A Hindu renouncer's religious practice is supposed to focus on liberating the Self, not improving society. *Yogīs* are supposed to be socially detached, not socially engaged. But Rādhā Giri interpreted her religious practice as a kind of community activism. Her fiery judgements of both pilgrim and resident behaviour were a way of protecting people – particularly the downtrodden – in her area. Shouting at householder men – an action that might be written off as *yogī* madness – was, for Rādhā Giri, a way to protect a woman or child who was treated badly.

In turn, Māī was accepted by the local community, and was allowed and encouraged to remain sedentary. (By contrast, one *yogī* I knew was run out of town for improperly treating local women in the community in which he lived.) Rādhā Giri's *dhūnī* was treated as a safe and holy place, where children came to play and neighbourhood residents came to offer incense and receive blessings during the evening rituals. By supporting the community through her protective behaviour, she was entrusted with religious power, which she in turn used to make sure people were treated well. Her social efforts were place-specific, even though as a renouncer she was precisely supposed to avoid staying in place. She held her place in the community by actively participating in it.

Rādhā Giri was a rather unique *yoginī*, but the way she cared for people in a single location was reflected by many other *yoginīs* I met or heard about. A *sādhvī* named Tapovan Mā abandoned her solitary ascetic practices at the 14,000-foot base camp of the mountain Shiv Ling when her health started to fail, and doctors encouraged her to live at a lower and warmer altitude. She moved to a town a few hours' drive down the mountain valley, and changed her severe, isolated *tapas*, or yogic discipline, into a practice of feeding people daily. A Western renouncer I met used her ashram home-base to feed the entire local community of renouncers each evening. Another

raised funds to create an ashram high in the mountains where renunciators who needed a place of respite could continue their religious practice and study. (This woman was actually concerned that by creating an ashram and living a sedentary life, she was going back on renouncer ideals.) A close informant in Kathmandu was reared on the grounds of the Pashupatinath temple by her *yoginī* grandmother, who had refused to let the baby granddaughter go uncared for when her mother died.

All these renunciators used their power as respected local *sādhus* to make sure people were treated well. Over the course of my fieldwork, many renunciators described religious practice to me as something that had to be done completely alone. But community involvement seemed to fulfil a different kind of religious mandate. These sorts of actions were referred to as *kriyā yoga*, ‘meditation through action’, and were clearly seen as an appropriate *sādhana* for sedentary *sādhus*. Both pilgrims and *yogīs* explained to me that a genuine concern for the social good reflects a religious character, and that active social participation proves a *yogī*’s capacity in a way different from, but equivalent to, solitary ritual practice.

New places, old actions

The *yoginīs* I worked with were ascetics who had left their home communities. But they continued to act out women’s roles by devoting themselves to caring for others. In their new locations, however, and in their new stances as renunciators, womanly actions were transformed. Caring for children and feeding families no longer took place in the context of subordinate and required behaviour, but as the voluntary practice of powerful community women. The actions of care became part of a religious practice, not part of an unquestioned social role.

More than twenty years ago, A.K. Ramanujan wrote about how a maternal nature is seen as contributing to saintliness (1982). Recently, Meena Khandelwal has written on how *yoginīs* fulfil the roles of ideal mothers, by both gently scolding and heartily feeding their disciples and visitors (1997). This construction means that women have an added advantage as renunciators, in a sense: feminine qualities naturally provide the loving kindness and caring nature expected of a saint. The holy Ganges River is *Gaṅgā Mā*; the revered land of India is *Bhārat Mā*: through their nurturing qualities, the earth and the water become mother figures. And in these constructions, being a mother is the most sacred thing you can be.

Male renunciators also feed people on occasion, and in doing so, they too project the motherly qualities of a highly realized, compassionate being (Ramanujan 1982; Narayan 1989). One man with whom I worked took care of the children of the temple area in which he lived, giving them small amounts of money for completing little tasks. Both *yogīs* and *yoginīs* earn

the respect of local communities when they help out, and mitigate negative images of the mad and isolated renouncer.

Rādhā Giri became the literal “Mātājī” when she began to raise the girl Gaṅgā Giri. And yet as a loud and opinionated woman who smokes hashish, Māi defied the images of both traditional mother and beatific saint. She was unruly and impetuous, and she was widely credited with having real spiritual power, even by those Hardwar residents who told me that most *sādhus* were nothing more than money-hungry louts. Rādhā Giri was highly respected because she combined the most powerful qualities of a *yoginī*: she was both strong and forceful and, at the same time, she was maternal and caring. She was at once ready to challenge the stereotypes of womanly behaviour and ready to fulfil a woman’s roles.

The final point I want to make about women renunciators’ community participation is that even though their efforts are specifically local, they do not occur in *yoginīs*’ “native” places. Women renunciators engage in womanly activities – even having left householder society – precisely because they are not in their home places. A woman’s place, for Hindu *yoginīs*, is in somebody else’s home. Every single woman renouncer I met had left the place where she was born or where she was married.

For *yoginīs*, choosing to become a renouncer allows departure. Rādhā Giri’s reticence on the topics of her girlhood and marriage was typical of renunciators, but the women I spoke with strongly implied that they became *yoginīs* as a way to leave their natal or marital homes. They became *sādhvīs* because they wanted to live religious lives, to be sure, but also because they did not want to marry, or because they were unhappily married, or because they were widows and did not know where to turn.⁹ The wandering that renunciators are supposed to do means that women who become renunciators can physically leave unhappy domestic situations. As *yoginīs*, they can leave home, and create a new place elsewhere. And they use their experiences as women who have suffered to preach detachment, and to protect householder women who have not been able to leave unhappy domesticity.

Householders and renunciators: A concluding comment

The distinction between householder life and renouncer life is central to the identity of the *yoginīs* with whom I worked. But scholars who have tried to find a precise, pan-South Asian category with which to distinguish householders from renunciators have failed: each possible theoretical distinction breaks down when faced with the range of actual, lived experiences among *sādhus*. Some renouncer sects do pay attention to caste.

⁹ See Arthvale (1930) for a historical account of Hindu widowhood, and Wadley (1995) and Lamb (2000) for contemporary ethnographies.

Some ascetics are married, and some do raise children. Most *yogīs* are sedentary. There is no one bar on social engagement in renouncers' lives.

Here we have the fluid subjectivity of renunciation at work. What I mean by this is that different parts of a *yoginī*'s identity come to the fore in the context of different oppositions. The way a *yoginī* demonstrates her status as a renouncer – someone who has departed from householder life – depends on her circumstances and varies by context. For the renouncers I met, teaching detachment was important when faced with the petty intrigues of local gossip, while serving food was important when faced with a community's hunger. Sometimes being a *yoginī* means behaving like a mother, rather than accept a child's suffering, while at other times being a *yoginī* means behaving like a tyrant, rather than accept a woman's ill treatment.

Nonetheless, I argue that the opposition between being a householder and being a renouncer remains a critical component of *yogīs*' lives.¹⁰ No matter how that opposition is articulated, being able to renounce the place and the status of wife or widow is a driving force for women who become *yoginīs*. Renunciation allows women to leave circumstances in which they are not happy, and to break free from so-called traditional women's roles.¹¹ *Yoginīs* do make use of those roles – by feeding people, caring for children, and teaching religious values – in their interpretation of religious practice. But renunciation allows for the break, even if it encourages women to do womanly things in new places and new contexts.

Women renouncers use tradition – both traditional women's activities and traditional paths of renunciation – in their religious lives. And yet they simultaneously use renunciation as a way to break free from those overly-strict and structured categories, in the ways they leave oppressive situations and choose to participate in new communities. It is really a rather radical act to leave the oppression of widowhood and become a “traditional” *yoginī*, or to leave the structure of marriage and raise someone else's child twenty years later. This is social engagement of the highest order, conducted through a practice renowned for its isolation. Women renouncers can stop

¹⁰ With this argument, I reinsert Dumont's opposition into the renouncer/householder debates (1980), countering Heesterman's arguments that renunciation developed as the logical extreme of Brahmanical Hinduism (1964; 1982). But while I argue that fieldwork supports Dumont's fundamental opposition between householders and renouncers, I agree with the many scholarly criticisms that Dumont's system is overly static (cf. Das 1982; Gellner 2001) and that his emphasis on the renouncer as “individual” is misplaced (cf. Mines 1994).

¹¹ See my AAA paper (2002b) on how a caste critique for renunciation is too limited. Renunciation clearly contains a feminist critique as well, in that women can leave abusive domestic situations.

being widows, or unhappy or unwilling wives, and start fulfilling women's roles in contexts where they are respected and thanked.

What about the social attachments that renunciators are supposed to avoid at all costs – the reasons that *yogīs* are supposed to wander? This was a real problem for the *yoginīs* I spoke with, who told me in the same breath that renouncer life was both completely blissful and terribly, painfully hard. Rādhā Giri sighed deeply when she answered this question. I had asked her about the difference between men and women renunciators and she responded by referring to the problem of attachment. “For men, it's easy not to get attached,” she said. “They have girlfriends, they act how they want to, and there's no problem. But we women, we want to care for the people around us. We start to love them, and then we feel responsible.” Later I realized she was probably referring to the circumstances of Gaṅgā's birth, and to the ironic fact that she ended up caring for a child that was not hers. But she had obviously made a choice: attachment would be the cost of staying in one place as a *yoginī*, and she would try to transform that attachment to offer what she could – in her hot, brash, not-so-saintly way – to the beings that came to her door.

References

- Arthvale, Parvati. 1930. *My Story: The autobiography of a Hindu widow*, translated by Justin E. Abbott. New York: Putnam.
- Bhardwaj, Surinder M. 1973. *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A study in cultural geography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burghart, Richard. 1983a. Renunciation in the religious traditions of South Asia. *Man* (n.s.) 18: 635-653.
- Burghart, Richard. 1983b. Wandering ascetics of the Ramanandi Sect. *History of Religions* 22: 361-380.
- Das, Veena. 1974. On the categorization of space in Hindu ritual. In *Text and Context: The social anthropology of tradition*, edited by Ravindra K. Jain, pp. 9-27. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Das, Veena. 1982 [1977]. *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu caste and ritual*. 2nd edition. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Denton, Lynn T. 1991. Varieties of Hindu female asceticism. In *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, edited by J. Leslie, pp. 211-231. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh, Dickinson University Press.

- Doniger, Wendy, with Brian K. Smith. 1991. *The Laws of Manu*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Dumont, Louis. 1980 [1966]. *Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1995 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press.
- Freitag, Sandra B. 1985. Collective crime and authority in North India. In *Crime and Criminality in British India*, edited by A.A. Yang, pp. 140-163. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Gellner, David N. 2001. *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian themes*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ghurye, G.S. 1995 [1953]. *Indian Sādhus*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 1988. *Fruitful Journeys: The ways of Rajasthani pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 1992. *A Carnival of Parting: The tales of King Gopi Chand and King Bharthari as sung and told by Madhu Natisar Nath of Ghatiyali, Rajasthan, India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gross, Robert Lewis. 1992. *The Sādhus of India: A study of Hindu asceticism*. Jaipur, New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Hausner, Sondra L. 2002a. *Wandering in Place: Body, space, and time for Hindu renouncers*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Cornell University.
- Hausner, Sondra L. 2002b. Hindu renouncers and the question of caste. Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting. November, New Orleans, LA.
- Heesterman, J.C. 1964. Brahman, ritual, and renouncer. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 8: 1-31.
- Heesterman, J.C. 1982. Householder and Wanderer. In *Way of Life: King, householder and renouncer (Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont)*, edited by T.N. Madan, pp. 251-271. New Delhi: Vikas.
- Khandelwal, Meena. 1997. Ungendered Atma, masculine virility and feminine compassion: Ambiguities in renunciant discourses on gender. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 31 (1): 79-101.
- Khandelwal, Meena. 2001. Marriage, sexuality, and female agency at the site of sannyasa. Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting. November, Washington DC.
- Khandelwal, Meena. 2004. *Women in Ochre Robes: Gendering Hindu renunciation*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Lamb, Sarah. 2000. *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, gender, and body in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lochtefeld, James G. 1992. Haridwar, Haradwara, Gangadwara: The construction of identity and meaning in a Hindu pilgrimage place. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Religion, Columbia University.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mines, Mattison. 1994. *Public Faces, Private Voices: Community and individuality in South India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Narayan, Kirin. 1989. *Storyteller, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk narrative in Hindu religious teaching*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ojha, Catherine. 1988. Outside the norms: Women ascetics in Hindu society. *Economic and Political Weekly*, (April) 30: 34-36.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1992. *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads: Hindu scriptures on asceticism and renunciation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1995. Ascetic withdrawal or social engagement. In *Religions of India in Practice*, edited by D.S. Lopez Jr., pp. 533-546. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Raheja, Gloria Goodwin and Ann Grodzins Gold. 1994. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining gender and kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ramanujan, A.K. 1982. On woman saints. In *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the goddesses of India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley & Donna Marie Wulff, pp. 316-324. Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series.
- Thapar, Romila. 1979. *Ancient Indian Social History: Some interpretations*. Chapter "Renunciation: The making of a counter-culture?" Delhi: Orient Longmans.
- Van der Veer, Peter. 1988. *Gods on Earth: The management of religious experience and identity in a North Indian pilgrimage centre*. London: Athlone Press.
- Wadley, Susan. 1995. No longer a wife: Widows in rural North India. In *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on gender, religion, and culture*, edited by Lindsey Harlan and Paul B. Courtright, pp. 92-118. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1958 [1920]. *The Religion of India: The sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, edited and translated by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: Free Press.

The “Descent of the Pandavas”: Ritual and Cosmology of the Jads of Garhwal

Subhadra Mitra Channa

The Jads exist, as they say, at the “borders”, by which they mean, spatially at the borders of India and Tibet (now under Chinese occupation) in District Uttarkashi in the North Indian state of Uttaranchal, and culturally at the borders of Buddhist Tibet and Hindu India.¹ The Jads are not legally recognized as having a separate identity, and in official records as well as in much popular discourse they are simply called “Bhotiya”. The Bhotiyas are one of the major groups of the Central Himalayan region, along with Hindu Paharis (Berreman 1983), and the nomadic, Muslim buffalo-herders called Gujjars about whom little ethnographic or historical research has been done. In fact, there are numerous so-called Bhotiya groups inhabiting the high river valleys in this region, most or all of whom reject the generic label “Bhotiya”, which they associate with Tibetan ethnicity and the Buddhist religion, and preferring to be called by their specific names, which they feel more clearly reflect their Indian, Hindu identity. In the Almora and Pithoragarh Districts bordering Nepal, four groups corresponding to the four valleys are found: the Johari, the Byansi, the Chaudansi and the Darmi. The generic name Shauka is used for the Bhotiyas of Pithoragarh and Almora (Nawa 2000). In Chamoli District the Marccha inhabit the Mana valley, while the Tolcha occupy the Niti valley except for Bampa, Gamsali and Niti villages which are inhabited by the Marpha. Although most works refer to these Bhotiya groups as endogamous (Sastri 1995: 134, Srivastava 1966), my fieldwork shows sustained inter-marriage between the Jads of Uttarkashi and residents of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh and Chamoli District in Uttaranchal. The Kinnauris of Himachal had historical links with Tibet and were historically a part of Bushahr state (Khosa 1992, Raha and Mahato 1985), and the Jads still refer to them as Bushahri. The Kinnauri Rajputs are also known as *khas* and are quite similar to the Jads with whom they intermarry.

While most of the other Bhotiyas were subject during the colonial period to the dual authority of both the British government and of Ngari in Western

¹ I am deeply indebted to Prof. William Sax for his multiple readings of this paper and invaluable suggestions that has made all the difference to make the paper presentable. Any errors are of course my own.

Tibet (Brown 1994: 235), the area in which the Jads reside never came under direct British rule. Therefore in the past the Jads regarded themselves as subjects of the Raja of Tehri. They traded with the people of Western Tibet, who were little influenced by Lhasa. They have often been falsely identified as Buddhists, largely because of their physical features and their economic and cultural links with Tibetans. The myth that they are Buddhists is strengthened by the presence of Buddhist monasteries in their villages built by H.H. the Dalai Lama in 1965. Buddhist monks from nearby centres such as Dehra Dun visit the villages for short periods and perform rituals of a mostly magical nature, such as warding off the evil eye and also birth and death rituals. The Jads celebrate the Buddhist New Year Losar and hang prayer flags atop their houses, but at the same time they profess faith in many Hindu deities and rituals, and insist that they are ethnically distinct from Tibetans. However, like most mountain dwellers of this region they have little knowledge of any textual religion, Buddhist or Hindu, and live by their own categories of the supernatural (Krengel 1997: 201). They lived under the shadow of two literate civilizations, but as a pastoral group situated on the margins of both, they were never really converted to any mainstream religion or to strongly hierarchic social values. As a border people, they are influenced by the political and economic relationships between the countries on whose borders they exist. Before certain transformations took place in their lives that brought them into close contact with mainstream cultures, they practiced and believed not in any prophetic or textual religion but rather in a cosmology that is a product of the historical and ecological dimensions of their existence.

The Bhotiyas incorporate elements of both Hindu and Buddhist religions, a phenomenon common in the Himalayan region (Macfarlane 1981: 127; Kar 1986: 81). Gellner has pointed out that this type of religious eclecticism is a common feature in South Asia (2001: 70). Exposure to the two universal religions of Hinduism and Buddhism has come into Bhotiyas' lives in the form of trading partners, neighbours, pilgrims, and by the fact that they reside in one of the most sacred geographical regions of the Hindus. Their acceptance of Hindu beliefs and practices is influenced not only by cultural contact but also by their social and economic organization. The Jads practice transhumance, moving from a low altitude in winter to a high altitude in summer,² and I have found that they become far more

² "The Upper valleys of the 'Bhote' represent an interface between two main ecological and subsistence zones; on the one hand, a zone conducive to traditional terrace agriculture – in some ways even an extension of the ecological belt of the humid flatlands of India – and on the other, a zone beyond the lofty Himadri passes in which little can grow, but which in days past produced its own brand of resources. The existence of these two zones provided the people straddling both, the Bhotiyas, with a unique opportunity: the possibility to trade in the products which each zone in turn required" (Brown 1994: 218)

Hinduized in the lower altitude village where they live in close proximity to the pilgrim centre of Uttarkashi. No doubt Jad culture contains many elements common with other Bhotiya groups, but they also have a distinct identity and belief system that is a historical derivative of their locality and environment.

Jad identity and beliefs

The Jads' pastoral economy and life style plays a definitive role in shaping their beliefs, and it would not be amiss to refer to them as an "ecological ethnicity" (Apffel-Marglin and Parajuli 2000: 296). For example, they say that they do not believe in an earth mother like cultivators, but rather in the sun mother, *āmā nyāmā*. Here it would be relevant to mention that sun worship has long been associated with pastoral communities and even the ancient Aryans were sun-worshippers, a practice that dwindled with their transition to agriculture (Dwivedi 2000: 9).

In emphasizing that they are sun-worshippers, the Jads are comparing themselves in a general way with cultivators in order to distinguish themselves from them. The local Garhwalis believe in cults of the *khetrapāl*, *bhūmyāl* and other earth related deities, and practice a ritual called *bhūmihār pūjan* to ensure good crops, but their belief in the earth as sacred is somewhat less marked than in the plains. In Northern India people reverentially touch the earth in a gesture of *praṇām* (salutation) as they get up in the morning, asking forgiveness for having to put their feet on its breast. She is worshipped as Prithvi (earth) and is recognized for her qualities of patience and sacrifice (Moor 1999: 292). The Jads associate the sun with their survival as they believe that she causes the snow to melt and clouds to form, which brings rain that in turn forms the snow that makes the rich pastures of the higher reaches of the mountains possible. Without the sun, whose warmth is also essential for the lives of their animals, the cycle of nature would be incomplete, and so would the pastoral cycle that is the basis of their livelihood. Thus

the regenerative cycles of nature are the collective actions of the beings that make up the non-human world and ecological ethnicities do not place themselves in a dimension radically separate from these (Apffel-Marglin and Parajuli 2000: 302).

The Jads' identity is closely associated with the village deity Meparang, who stands at the entrance of their high altitude village of Bhagori near Harsil, a tiny town about five miles from the better-known pilgrimage centre of Gangotri. The symbolic significance of Meparang is immense for the Jads,

who are not a self-reproducing group, since their marriage relations extend beyond their own community. Meparang alone is seen as common to all Jads, who are otherwise quite fragmented in their beliefs in various supernatural beings. This fragmentation is because they come from different groups (although most belong to one of the various Bhotiya communities), from various places in the mountains and are integrated into the village through marriage. Thus a person may have a divinity that belongs to his/her native village or to the native village of their parents or even grandparents. But since these in-marrying groups are fundamentally similar in being pastoral mountain dwellers, dwelling in similar habitats, belonging to the same cultural region and sharing a common geographical and historical background, many of the Jads' beliefs are quite similar to those that have been documented by other scholars working in this region (Sax 2002, Mazumdar 1998). In the rest of this paper when I refer to the Jads, it is with this understanding of an internal differentiation held together by overarching similarities of shared beliefs and practices engendered by the pastoral economy, mountain habitat and *pahāḍī* culture, and situated in a life lived in the same villages and sharing the same pastures (Channa 1998). The communities with whom the Jads have sustained relations of kinship are the upper Kinnauris, sometimes also referred to as Jads, as well as the Tolcha and Marccha from Niti and Mana valleys. With these people they also share pastures in the lower altitudes. Marriages may also take place with Garhwali Rajputs, Nepalis, and occasionally with other communities, however there are sustained kin relations only with those with whom the Jads share pastures and who are recognized as part of the larger kindred group, although no specific term is used for them. Those born in the Jad village always have a sense of superiority with regard to those coming from outside, and joking terms like *kunnubā* and *nitāli* are often used to refer to them. Internally the Jads are divided into the Chiang or high caste which lays claim to *kṣatriya* (Rajput) status, and the Phiba who are considered untouchable. Numerically the Chiang form three-fourths of the population. Similar divisions are found among all the groups with whom they marry and the divisions are strictly maintained for purposes of marriage. In the rest of the paper when I talk of the Rajput identity of the Jads it is only with reference to the Chiang. Since the *pāṇḍav līlā* discussed below is performed only by the *kṣatriyas*, the Phiba join in only as spectators. The Phiba, however, share all beliefs including having their own *kuldevtās*.

The Jads have their own pantheon of supernatural beings that may either be in the form of *glāh* (gods) or natural objects like trees, streams etc. While some gods are viewed as an inherent part of the environment, others are seen as having arrived in their village as guests and then stayed on. This includes gods on pilgrimage to the sacred Hindu centre at Gangotri, who opted to stay in Bhagori, "because they liked the immense beauty and purity of the environment". The gods also enter the village as *kuldevtā* of the in-

marrying *magpa*³ husbands who marry local women and settle down to become Jads. The *kuldevtā* of the lineage of in-marrying men become a part of the village. The Pandava brothers and their common wife Draupadi are also said to be the *kuldevtās* of men who married into the Jads, who have now attained the status of village deities.

This aspect of inclusion must be understood against the backdrop of the Jad world-view. Incorporation by marriage is to the Jads a legitimate enterprise, a means through which they have reproduced their identity over the generations. Both humans and gods are incorporated into Jad society through marriage. Thus men marry in from kindred Bhotiya groups and in so doing they bring in their *kuldevtās* to become a part of the Jad world. This is also the reason why any supernatural incorporation is always as a *kuldevtā*, just like any human incorporation has to be as a spouse.⁴ In-marrying women also retain their social attachment to their *mait* (natal village) and clan deities. This is often manifested in the woman becoming a medium for the descent of a deity that belongs to her own “place” and in future assuring that the deity is incorporated into the local pantheon, at least marginally. Some of these deities, however, play no important role in village affairs.

The Pandava-Lila and Jad identity

The Central and Western Himalayas are associated with worship of the five Pandava brothers, protagonists of India’s great epic *Mahābhārata*. Sax (1995: 131) writes that *pāṇḍav līlā* is found only in the Garhwal region and not in other parts of the sub-Himalayan foot hills, but I have been told by students doing fieldwork in the contiguous region of Himachal Pradesh that such performances are also found there. As already mentioned, the

³ The term *magpa* and the institution are both Tibetan in origin. Amongst Tibetans on the border of Uttaranchal, a couple with daughters but no son marry their daughter to a man who stays on with them and inherits their property. Among the Hindus, a similar institution is called *ghar javāīm* and is relatively uncommon. Amongst the Jads, however, it is more common and the *magpa* son-in-law performs the death rituals of his wife’s parents as well as inherits their property. Among the Hindus such an act would be unthinkable since, theoretically, only an agnatically-related male – preferably the son – can perform the death ritual. (There are, however, ritual and other techniques for getting round this problem.) Amongst the Jads I found that women often maintained full control over their father’s property, in spite of the formal recognition of the husband as owner, relegating the *magpa* husband to an often-humiliating marginal position within the household.

⁴ Women also enter the village regularly as brides, as the Jads are both virilocal and patrilineal. The status of women born in the village however varies significantly from women who enter it as brides, a fact that I have discussed elsewhere.

Pandavas are considered as the *kuldevtās* or lineage deities of many households in the village.

In this part of the Himalayas, the performance of the *pāṇḍav līlā* is linked to a *kṣatriya* (high caste) identity and for the Jads it may be an effort to identify with a larger *kṣatriya* and caste Hindu identity. But such claims are limited to the local context and not necessarily valid outside of it, since plains Hindus tend to look down on *pahāḍī* Hindus in any case. I believe that the performance of the *pāṇḍav līlā* reflects power relations between the Hindus of the plains and those of the mountains, an issue that also lies behind some major political movements in this area, including the movement for statehood. Thus the Jads can aspire only to local acceptance as a high Hindu caste but not to wider acceptance in India, even when they perform the *pānoh* or Pandava ritual.

Most plains Hindus explain the hill people's worship of the Pandavas by the myth that the Pandavas lived in this region during the exile period, the most obvious illustration of such influence being the prevalence of polyandry among certain local tribal populations, although not among the caste Hindus. But those communities among whom polyandry is found, such as the Khasas, Jaunsaris and Kinnauris, call themselves *kṣatriya*. Since the Pandavas were *kṣatriyas*, such self-identification lays claim to a form of kinship with the Pandavas and it is implied that these polyandrous tribal communities were in fact in some ways descendants of the Pandavas, a claim not acceptable to high-caste Hindus elsewhere. The indigenous Rajputs or *khasa* also claim descent from the Pandavas but they, too, have been seen as inferior to those local Rajputs who claim descent from immigrants (Sax 1995: 138).

The Jads are recognized as Rajputs in only a limited manner and certainly not by the mainstream Hindus, the pilgrims and the urban populations of Uttarkashi. Thus we have actually four kinds of *kṣatriyas*: those who come directly from the plains, those claiming descent from earlier immigrants, indigenous *khasa* Hindus, and finally the tribes claiming to be *kṣatriya*, like the Jads and the Kinnauris. The dynamics of identity formation is towards striving for a higher status for larger political gains. However the search is not only for a higher identity within the Hindu system but also a claim to equality with others within India's modern political democracy.

The period of my fieldwork coincided with the height of the Uttarakhand movement for statehood, which involved the unification of the hill people as opposed to those from the plains. At this point in time, there seemed a greater willingness on the part of the *pahāḍīs* to accept the Jads' claims for *kṣatriya* status. The fracturing of identity between the plains and the mountains was reaching a climax, nurtured by the feelings of resentment by even the high caste *pahāḍīs*, of the contempt exhibited towards them by the

plains Hindus. The evolution of Jad identity can thus be understood with reference to the changing political climate. This was thus an appropriate time for the Jads to push for their Hindu identity, and their version of the *pāṇḍav līlā*, the *pānoh*, is one of the means they adopted to do so.

To understand the performance of the *pāṇḍav līlā* by the Jads, we have to understand performance itself in a theoretical perspective that prioritizes the aspect of identity formation and creation of “self” and its relationship to others (Sax 1995: 133, 2002: 5). Sax is emphatic that rituals do not only reflect cultural conditions, but also change them. This would be particularly true of a group such as the Jads, who are in the process of both creating new concepts of self as well as using them as a political vehicle to push for a wider acceptability in Hindu society.

It is also important here to mention another phenomenon, that of the recognition or rather the promotion of the Pandavas from family deities to village deities. Such a transition is itself a political act (cf. Galey 1994: 199). At some point of time the Jads began enacting the *pāṇḍav līlā* whereby the Pandavas became deities recognized by the entire village.⁵ The entire village joins the enactment, although only those persons with Pandavas as *kuldevtās* can be mediums, and only such households can cook and host the feast during *pānoh* (descent of Pandava). But the power of the Pandavas lies in the recognition and participation of the entire village in the enactment. This power is significant, since a large number of households claim the Pandava as their *kuldevtās*. This could be a consequence of the political process of Hinduization, whereby kinship with the Pandavas would be claimed by many.

The enactment of the *pāṇḍav līlā* by the Jads is a comparatively recent phenomenon and is an outcome of a shift in their identity as well as in their relationship to mainstream Hindu populations. By the seventies definite changes had begun in the identity of the Jads because of the loss of contact and trade with the Tibetan populations across the border, the presence of the Indian army in their environment as a result of the 1962 border war with China, and the strengthening of communication with the Indian mainland via roads and telecommunication. There has occurred a perceptible shift in their identity, from *Rongpa* (literally ‘down there’, a term that was formerly used by their Tibetan trade partners for them), to Hindu *kṣatriya*.

The social and political integration with the Hindus of the plains is also because of a physical shift and integration into the Indian democracy through affirmative action taken by the government of India in giving them various benefits as members of a “Scheduled Tribe”. Jad youth (below thirty) are enrolled in schools and colleges (some in professional medical

⁵ The earliest evidence is on the basis of eye-witness accounts of fieldworkers who visited this area in the early seventies.

and engineering schools) and are far more urban than the previous generation. They have changed their names to Garhwali Rajput clan names like Negi, Rawat and Bhandari. First names are also changed to more “modern” ones like Sanjit, Ranjita and Simran (often copied from Hindi movies). Men and women have started wearing clothing similar to urban North Indian women (*salwār kamīz* and trousers). Every child, boy or girl, goes to school and is literate at the present time.

This shift in identity becomes even more pronounced when they move down to their winter village, Dunda near Uttarkashi, a fairly urban pilgrim town. Here they adopt the ways of the local people with whom they have closer interaction. The marriages and rituals celebrated here are far more Hinduized than in the higher summer village at Bhagori. The people say, “in Bhagori we are ‘ourselves’. This is where we belong”. In Uttarkashi, they undergo a seasonal shift in identity, becoming more urban and Hindu.

The Hindu identity is, however, only superficial, for deep down they remain Jads, a pastoral people whose social life is reflected in their pantheon of supernatural beings. Their celebration of *pāṇḍav līlā* or *pānoh* amply demonstrates this tension between their Hindu and their primal identities. They accept the Pandavas as part of Hindu Rajput Garhwali tradition, and they perform the *pāṇḍav līlā*. But the beliefs surrounding the performance, as well as the enactment itself, reflect the paradox of identity faced by the contemporary Jads. On the one hand, they remain true to their traditional pastoral sentiments and world-view. On the other, they pay lip-service to being Hindus and Rajputs in order to find greater acceptance in larger Indian society with whom they have forged new political and economic relationships. They are engaged in active trade with plains people, with whom they need to mingle when they go for studies and jobs to the cities and attempt to find their place in the Indian democracy.

The Pandavas: Jad myths and beliefs

The Pandavas are known in this region because they are believed to have ascended to heaven by this route, the mountains beyond Gomukh near Gangotri being regarded as the mythical Mount Kailasha, the abode of the great Hindu god Shiva. The Jads believe that somewhere on their way to heaven, the Pandavas actually stayed back and are now forever a part of their sacred landscape. The myth of *pānoh* mixes the Sanskrit version of *Mahābhārata* and its local interpretation in the pastoral world-view of the Jads. It centers on the third Pandava brother Bhim, known for his superhuman strength. In her work on the village of Purnath in Garhwal, Mazumdar (1998: 136) has also observed that Bhim is always the most eulogized out of the five brothers. The myth that is enacted is the marriage of Bhim to a forest dwelling woman, Hidimba, whose children are pastoralists. The identity with Hidimba as a hill woman and her children is

stressed, and little attempt is made to trace descent directly from the Pandavas, as do other *kṣatriyas* in the hills. Thus the Jads identify as affines of the Pandavas by asserting the latter's incorporation into the Jad community through marriage rather than by descent, a pattern that is perfectly compatible with the Jad social mechanism of incorporation by marriage described above, and also with the fact that the Pandavas are viewed as *kuldevtās*, the category of supernatural legitimately assimilated by marriage. In any marriage among the Jads that involves a *magpa* husband, the children of the union are considered as fully Jad. In this case also, the progeny of Hidimba⁶ (a local *pahāḍī* woman) and Bhim (a *magpa* husband) are Jads. The meaning and interpretation of *pāṇḍav līlā* for the Jads is definitely different from that of the *pahāḍī* Hindus.⁷ Sax has identified the five major performative elements of a *pāṇḍav līlā* as drumming, dance, weapons, re-citation, and feasting and hospitality (2002: 53-54). In the Jads' performance, at least two of these are missing: the weapons and the recitation. Interestingly these two aspects are the most Hinduized as compared with the other elements. In standard *pahāḍī* performances, weapons are carefully-guarded sacred relics which act as important symbols of identity. In fact, as Sax points out, a person assumes the divine identity only when he or she dances with the sacred weapons. Secondly, the role of the bard is essential in linking the ritual to the local oral traditions. In fact the recitation of the bard often takes on the form of a contest in which they challenge each other on the accuracy of their knowledge of the mythology.⁸ The Jads' performance on the other hand is done with cheap, toy-like imitation weapons made of cardboard and tinsel that are not seen as having any significance except to identify a particular costume. Although the performance is expressive of changing identity such that the identity of *kṣatriya* commingles with the pastoral identity of the Jads, it is also true that their system of meaning is significantly different from mainstream Hinduism.

The entire performance is a dance pantomime, accompanied by drumming, gestures and certain paralinguistic exclamations; however, no words are spoken or recited. A simple reason for this may be that the Jads do not have strong oral traditions like Hindus. They are historically

⁶ Hidimba is also an established goddess in some nearby Himalayan regions, for example in the Kullu valley.

⁷ For example, an interesting dance performed by the Garhwali Hindus is the dance of Nakula, which is mentioned by Sax as "among the most popular dances of *pāṇḍav līlā*" (Sax 2002: 63) depicting the daily routine of a farmer. Not only does the Jad *pāṇḍav līlā* have no such depiction, the characters of Nakula and Sahdev are weak and have a very marginal position in the enactment. Nakula embodies the sentiments of an agricultural community totally missing among the Jads.

⁸ In fact, Sax believes that in demonstrating their bardic knowledge, Garhwal Rajputs lay claim to quasi-Brahmanical status (2002: 121).

recognized as the speakers of a Tibeto-Burman language while Hindi, by means of which they access the *Mahābhārata*, has most likely been adopted by them at a later time. The lack of any elaborate rendering of the *Mahābhārata* as depicted in the accounts by Sax, most likely has to do with both these factors: a relatively weak oral tradition and a relatively late adoption of the Hindi language. I could not, however, confirm these hypotheses for the simple reason that no description of older Jad rituals exist and the people themselves were extremely reluctant to put any kind of date or time on their performance. For them, it has been going on since the time of the Pandavas. However, a few old people, including my very good friend Kaushalya, hinted that the number of local gods has considerably increased since the Jads shifted from Nelang to the lower altitude village at Bhagori.

The five Pandavas and their co-wife Draupadi are treated as a single unit, and worshiped accordingly. The god Krishna, who for Hindus elsewhere is the key figure of the *Mahābhārata*, is totally ignored. In fact the Jads show almost total ignorance of Krishna and the only way they celebrate Janamashtami, the birthday of Krishna, is by taking their village deity Meparang for a bath to the river Ganga at Gangotri. This is in tune with the similar performances by other *pahāḍī* Hindu villages where the village deity is taken for a similar bath on Janamashtami (e.g. Mazumdar 1998: 209).

The performance is not considered by the Jads to be a play or a *līlā*, and in fact this particular Hindu concept is absent in their vocabulary. Instead, they refer to it as *pāṇḍav uttarnā* or the ‘descent of the Pandavas’. The main enactment takes the form of a possession ritual in which the Pandavas descend into the body of their human mediums, who become for all practical purposes these gods. The Jads view the descent of deities differently from other kinds of possession. It is for example distinguished from *pakaḍnā* (catching) or *caḍhnā* (ascending), the grabbing of a body or its invasion by a bad or unwanted spirit. In other words, for a lesser being like an evil spirit or ghost, illegal invasion is an ascent into a higher being, the human. In case of a divinity, however, it is a descent from higher realms into a lower, human body.

The story upon which this ritual is based is the story of the *gaiṇḍā* or rhinoceros that is killed by the Pandavas. A comparison must be made with the “hunting of the rhinoceros” documented by Sax (2002: 64-92), as an important episode in *pāṇḍav līlā* in Garhwal. However, the Jads’ version of this story varies significantly from the one narrated by Sax, in that the rhinoceros is not linked to the performance of a death ritual for Pandu, nor to the *śamī* tree. The Jads do not interpret this story as exemplifying the bravery of the Pandavas, but rather their cruelty, their “going out of control”. The second part of the enactment therefore takes the form of a “cooling” or pacification (*śānt karnā*) of the “enraged” Pandavas.

In the more common version of *Mahābhārata*, the Pandavas undergo a period of exile in which they roam the jungles as commoners. During this time Bhim is supposed to have married a demoness named Hidimba. After his marriage to her he moves on together with his brothers, for they are forbidden to remain in one place. In the original myth, Hidimba gives birth to a son named Ghatotkach, who grows up strong and brave like his father and towards the end of the epic, during the Great War, comes to assist his father and dies a hero's death.

In the myth of *pānoh*, however, Bhim has two children, Babika and Babiki, by his demon wife.⁹ These children, one boy and one girl, were grazing their *gainḍā* (rhinoceros) in the forest. The Pandavas come across these animals and do not know that they belong to the children of Bhim. They want to kill them but the children intervene, saying "Do not kill them, do not kill them!" However the Pandavas insist upon killing them, as they are in a mood for hunting. Here it must be mentioned that hunting as sport is seen primarily as a *kṣatriya* prerogative. Hunting as sport is distinguished from hunting as a livelihood, the latter being relegated to the low castes and tribals. For the pastoral children of Hidimba this blood sport is abhorrent. In the hunt, it is Arjun who first hits the animal with his arrow, then Bhim strikes it with his *gadā* (mace), and finally all of them fall upon the animals and kill them. All this time Babika and Babiki keep protesting and finally when the animals are killed they weep bitterly. During the ritual, the persons who play Babika and Babiki shed real tears, and the audience sympathizes, many onlookers even weeping along with them. Later, Bhim comes to know that they are his own children and he is very repentant and feels sorry to have killed the animals.

The myth indicates some interesting sentiments of a pastoral people. Firstly, in a pastoral community grazing animals in the forest is a commonplace activity that one would expect children to perform. The animal chosen is a rhinoceros, for demon children would not be grazing a small animal like a sheep and it is also an interesting assimilation of a similar and popular myth of this region. While enactment of the myth elsewhere emphasizes the strength and bravery of the Pandavas, the Jads emphasize the weeping of the children and the repentance of the killers. We see the pastoral peoples' cultural abhorrence of shedding the blood of animals unnecessarily. Most importantly, the story indicates that the Jads identify with the pastoral children Babika and Babiki, and not with the warlike Pandavas. In his analysis of the Pahari version of this story and its accompanying ritual, Sax (2002: 64) emphasizes the motif of the separation of father and son and their subsequent confrontation, both in Oedipal terms

⁹ Sax (2002: 101) refers to Bhim's son Babrik in one version. Also, in some versions two children, one boy and one girl, instead of only one boy, are mentioned (ibid.: 89).

as well as in terms of local social organization. With reference to the Jads, one might note that for a pastoral people, the absence of the father for a long period of time is an actual social reality.

The ritual

Pānoh occurs during the Jad *Navrātrī* (festival of nine nights) in the month of *Asur* (Hindi *asāḍh*), which normally falls in September, just before the Jads descend to their lower altitude village at Dunda. The spatial location is in the high altitude village, for according to the Jads the gods are found only on the higher reaches which are *sangma* or pure. The major festival celebrated by them in their lower altitude village at Dunda is Losar, the Tibetan New Year that is performed by the household head and does not involve any gods or possession rituals. For the first five days there is much feasting, drinking and dancing. The main purpose of these five days is to instil “life” into the two large pumpkins selected to represent the *gainḍā* or rhinoceros. Two large, clean pumpkins are selected from the fields. One should be round to represent a female (*mon*) and the other should be long to represent a male (*phoh*). These are then decorated to look like animals. Small wooden legs are inserted to make them stand, and eyes are carved out. The pumpkins are decorated with flowers and garlands, and kept in the clearing in the centre of the village where the *pānoh* will take place. The first five days’ festivities consist of eating, drinking, dancing and drumming to “awaken” the animals. It is important to note that full five days are spent on bringing to life the “animals”, thereby indicating the centrality of animals in this pastoral ritual. Later they light bonfires and dance all night. They say that “the eyes of the pumpkins shine like that of real animals at night”, and on *ṣaṣṭhī*, the sixth day of Navratri, the Pandava descend on to their mediums. The Pandava then dance around the now “living” animals and try to kill them. On the eighth day (*aṣṭamī*), they finally succeed. First Arjun hits a rhinoceros with his arrow, then Bhim hits it with his mace, and then everyone falls on them and they are cut up into small pieces, after which people dance around with the pieces. All this time Babika and Babiki shed copious tears. After the pumpkins are “killed”, a goat is sacrificed; it is symbolic of the main enemy of the Pandavas, their half-brother Duryodhana. When the goat is sacrificed, the Pandavas hold a blanket around it to form a kind of tent and hold their weapons over it. The goat is killed by a person of low caste, either Jhumariya or Koli. It is sacrificed by slitting its throat, and the Jads shuddered at the thought of it, saying, “Our men do not have the stomach to slit the throat of a live animal. They never do it. We call a person of low caste to do this abhorrent task.” After the goat is killed, a peculiar performance takes place. The woman who embodies Draupadi goes into the temporary tent and later emerges with her lips smeared in blood. She has “drunk the blood” of the goat representing

Duryodhana.¹⁰ This again is a sign that the woman is truly “possessed”, for in Jad world-view women and blood are totally opposed. According to their values, a woman is not associated with any act of bloodshed. The sight of a woman with blood-smearred lips creates a situation of great awe and most people feel that the goddess Draupadi has actually descended. Here again there is a divergence from the popular Hindu version where Draupadi is said to have kept her hair open after being publicly insulted by Duhshasana, the brother of Duryodhana, vowing that she would braid her hair again only with his blood. In the epic war, Bhim kills Duhshasana and takes his blood to Draupadi who braids her hair with it. When asked, my informants said that they were aware of the differences in their version and the written text. Many said that they knew the written version was different, but said that this was the way they understood it, and how they had always done things.

After the goat is killed, the Pandavas go into frenzy and dance around quite violently, and it is felt that it is time for them to be “cooled”. Some men who have the Pandavas as their *kuldevtās* form a deer in order to “cool” them. The tallest and broadest man stands in front and the next tallest behind him and so on till they form a slope like the back of a deer. A costume with the face of deer and a similar body shape is put on in such a way that the first person wears the head of the deer and the others get into the body. The Pandavas, who had been whirling around, then start jumping over the deer. At first Arjun jumps and he sits over it and becomes “cooled”, then Bhim, and then the others follow. Once they sit quietly over the deer the deities depart and their mediums become human again. Thus contact with an animal that is viewed as calm and peaceful, and also one that is never killed by the Jads, is pacifying.

Once the possession ritual is over, the person who has sacrificed the goat cuts it into pieces. He is called the *Lava*. He receives the head and the four legs. The rest of the persons who have the Pandava as their *kuldevtās* each get small pieces. These are not eaten by the participants but thrown away for the crows to eat. This probably indicates that the Jads separate themselves from the violent act of the killing of the goat (Duryodhana) and eating its flesh, which might appear to them as an act of cannibalism. The small pieces given to the crow to eat might also be viewed as symbolic of the Hindu act of *śrāddha* or death ceremony or *piṇḍa dāna*.¹¹

¹⁰ This ritual is not specific to the Jads and has been mentioned by Sax (2002: 141) as found in some versions of the Garhwali *pāṇḍav līlā*.

¹¹ Sax has described the “hunting of the rhinoceros” as associated with the death ritual of King Pandu, but no such story or sentiment is even remotely associated with the Jad version. The throwing away of the pieces of meat can be associated with the general aversion to the goat that is not a sacrifice but a symbol of impurity as it is also killed by a low caste. The touch of the untouchable may have rendered it impure. Or it could be that it is symbolic of Duryodhana who is a negative rather

For the *pānoh*, a large amount of food is cooked. It is first given to those who had been the mediums of the various deities, but only after they have become *sānt* (calm). After all the mediums have eaten, the people belonging to the households who have cooked the food eat it and it is also distributed among all the spectators. One large vessel of food is given to the *Lava*, to be sufficient to last him and his family for a whole day.

The last two days of the *Navrātrī* are spent dancing and merry making. In this way *pānoh* can be seen as a Jad version of *pāṇḍav līlā*. However, both the part of Draupadi and her symbolic blood drinking are more like what Hildebeitel (1995) has described as Draupadi cult. Elsewhere, Mazumdar (1998: 177) mentions blood sacrifice being made to Draupadi during the *pāṇḍav nṛtya*. In many ways this part of the enactment is both aesthetically and emotionally quite contradictory to Jad values and sentiments. In its extraordinary reversal of all that stands for femininity in Jad culture, it is also the most awe-inspiring, and the point at which the ritual attains the peak of its esoteric meaning and assumes a most sacred significance.

Women and violence (bloodletting) are opposed phenomena in the Jad world-view. Women do not even break a coconut as it appears to them to be an act of violence (the coconut being a substitute for a sacrificial animal). A woman with blood on her lips is the ultimate expression of the supernatural. At this moment the enactment ceases to be mere “theatre” and becomes a *līlā* in the cosmic sense, with all its emotional intensity and its transcendental character. The mediums are seen as real gods and goddesses and the audience participates in an “atmosphere of imaginative evocation of religious moods and sentiments” (Hildebeitel 1995: 205).

There are further similarities between *pānoh* and the Draupadi cult described by Hildebeitel (1995): the converging of the entire *līlā* of Draupadi on the death of Duryodhana, and the parallel one may draw between the blood-smearred Draupadi and the goddess Kali. The death of Duryodhana is all the more remarkable, for it has nothing to do with the first part of the enactment, namely the hunting of the rhinoceros. Its incorporation into the play is only to demonstrate the divinity of Draupadi, and one may recall that Hildebeitel has made clear the affinity of Draupadi with Kali “whose ‘form’ (*Kālīrūpa*) she takes in her most violent and impure aspect” (ibid.: 207). Sax also clearly states that Draupadi is identified with Kali in the *pāṇḍav līlā* (2002: 136).

The Jads are not particularly conscious of the parallel of Draupadi with Kali, but are familiar with a non-specific form of *devī* as part of the *śakti* cult that pre-dominates the mountain areas.

than a positive category. The goat is certainly not to be viewed as a sacrificial offering.

The living gods

There are other, minor rituals featuring the descent of the Pandavas and other deities, including the village god Meparang, but these do not have the emotional intensity of the *pānoh*. At several such enactments that I saw, usually organized by individuals as their private divination rituals, the spectators have an attitude of watching an entertainment rather than participating in a serious ritual. This, however, does not mean that Jads regard these minor rituals as a sham; rather, it suggests that these descents are regarded as minor for the gods. Thus the gods may be in playful mood or not particularly “serious” about them. In this way a sense of true play is evoked. To the Jads, the gods are always present. On an important ritual occasion like *pānoh* and at *Navrātrī*, they participate more seriously in the on-going rituals, just as the humans do. During minor rituals the gods participate more lightheartedly and it is often only one of them who consents to actually speak or answer questions, which is the purpose of the ritual in the first place. Thus while one god, usually a goddess, actually becomes serious enough to answer the questions put to it by the person who has organized the ritual, the others pay a lighthearted visit, stay for short periods, and then go away. It is like dropping in to say “hello”. Sax describes something similar for Garhwali villages: “Along with other deities the Pandavas are invited to attend the festival, dance, and accept offerings” (1995: 135).

Thus the gods and the humans share in the same world-view and have an identical understanding of the situation. This is quite in tune with the larger world-view which does not split the human and the superhuman or divine worlds and beings. The gods are like humans: they are jealous, they get angry, they become pleased, and, most importantly, they enjoy themselves. The Jads do not know the word *līlā* but they do describe the rituals as the *khel* (play) of the gods. Some informants told me the gods entertain themselves in this way. And when the gods enjoy, can the humans be far behind? So for most Jads, the occasions of *devtā uttarnā* (divine descent) are occasions when both gods and humans eat, drink and are merry, and are liberated from the “burden of everyday existence” (Bäumer 1995: 47). This also indicates the apparent indifference of the Jads to the actual story line of the enactment, even of the *pānoh*. It does not matter what is said in the *Mahābhārata*, and most Jads know nothing about it. What is cognitively important is that certain gods exist and they play at certain times. What they play at is not relevant and is set up by tradition. Thus the answer to the question “Why this story?” is always that it is “tradition”. To the Hindu spectators, if any, such apparently non-reverential attitudes demonstrate that the Jads are “tribal”, *jaṅgalī*, and not truly cognizant of spiritual values. They do not possess the true reverence that religiosity should evoke. This in fact was the opinion of the Brahmin *paṇḍit* who came in to officiate at one marriage and who belongs to the lineage of

paṇḍits who officiate at the temples at Gangotri. Most caste Hindus like the teachers at the local school had similar opinions.

But the Jads' understanding is consistent with their gods. They understand them as well as they understand themselves. They need to play, make merry, have good food, and dance. They "descend" to enjoy themselves in the company of men. As Sax (1995: 137) puts it, "*pāṇḍav līlā* is fun" but the Jads believe it is fun not only for the humans but also for the gods. It is in the higher village, where the air is pure, where there is cleanliness and, most importantly, where the impact of outsiders is minimal, that one can really enjoy, be one's self and where the gods can "descend". As the Jads emphatically told me, no gods live below their high altitude village. In the plains, they become idols in temples but here in the mountains they roam at will and play at will too. It is here that they *live*.

The critical dimension of the possession ritual lies in the "descent" or appearance of gods in the human bodies. This appearance is only to enable the god to perform, and not for them to make a transition, like in the Hindu rituals of *gājan* described by Östör (1985), where it is believed that the higher gods like Shiva temporarily invade the human body. For the Jads, the gods are not making a transition from one world to another, but are always there. However they need a human body to only make this presence apparent. In this way the act of possession for the Jads, and for many other hill people, especially in relation to their ever-present and active *kuldevtā*, is different from the way other Hindus view possession. Possession is not related to any acts of merit or devotion on the part of the medium, and it accords no special social or ritual status. The medium is simply chosen by the deity for his or her "descent". This is a "subjective" or "wilful" act on the part of the divinity, and the medium is merely an object.

This explains why the Jads show no particular reverence for certain acts of possession or "descent". It is not just the appearance of the divinity that is of importance but the acts in which the divinity engages, that makes an occasion of significance. If the divinity is participating in a higher ritual occasion like *pānoh*, then the occasion calls for solemn participation on the part of every one, human and divine. On the other hand if the divinity is participating in a minor ritual, then no one need be serious about it. Humans and gods exist in the same world, the only difference is that the divine prefers to exist only in a world that is *sangma* and the humans, though they would also like to do the same, must descend to the dirty and polluted world of the lower altitudes.

Conclusion

Let us now try to tie all the threads together. The Pandavas are a living part of the Jad community but they are not a primordial part of the Jads' environment, like Meparang and the *mātriyāl* (forest spirits); they are incorporated in the only way known to the Jads, by marriage. Thus Bhim married a woman of the forest, presumably a Jad woman, for her children graze animals. In fact, anyone who inhabits a Jad village has to be born of a Jad man or woman and is therefore a pastoralist. Since the Pandavas are neither pastoralists nor Jad, they can become part of the Jads only through marriage, and hence they are regarded as *kuldevtās*, the category of supernatural assimilated through marriage. This is also consistent with the ideology of marrying similar persons, and since both the Pandavas and the Chiang are regarded as *kṣatriyas*, there is no contradiction here. That only the Pandavas and their wife Draupadi are included in their enactment can be related to the fact that it is only the Pandavas who are *pahāḍīs*, believed to have been born in Pandukeshwar, between Joshimath and Badrinath. Thus they fulfil the basic Jad criteria of marriage within like communities, being of the mountains and also polyandrous. It is not out of context to mention that the place of their birth is not far from the villages of the Tolccha and Marccha communities with whom the Jads have marriage relationships, and that many members of the Jad village originated in this area. Thus the four concepts of incorporation, marriage, *kuldevtās* and supernatural are reflected in this myth and its enactment in ways that make sense within the Jads' cosmology. Although to outsiders, the *pānoh* may appear to be borrowed from the Hindus, its incorporation into the Jads' world is unique. This also takes us back to the beginning of this article, where I argued that the Jads' religion is uniquely Jad, although it partakes of fragments from other world-views. The *pānoh* illustrates this very well.

However, the most important dimension of the performance can only be answered when we try to answer the question "Why should the *pānoh* be performed at all?" Most eyewitness accounts before the sixties mention no such performance. The assumption of a *kṣatriya* identity by the Jads is related to the historical circumstances by which they have been pushed towards the Hindu identity.

The data on which this paper is based was gathered during fieldwork conducted in the period from 1997 to 2000. This time was one in which the Jads had already begun to adopt a mainstream Hindu identity or at least had begun to view themselves as members of a larger Indian, and predominantly Hindu, nation. Radical changes had taken place in their lives as a result of the 1962 Indo-China war, the closure of the Indo-Tibet border, the collapse of the salt trade with Tibet, and the occupation by the Indian army of their environment. Significant transformation in their lives was also brought about by their relocation to Bhagori as their only high altitude

village, whereas prior to 1962, they had two more villages, Nelang and Jadung near the Indo-Tibet frontier. Their economy, based on trans-border trade and rearing of transport animals for the mountainous region, had also been transformed so that it now focused on the trade of wool-based items such as sweaters and carpets and the selling of sheep, dogs, and minor forest produce. The trade partners, who prior to 1962 had been Tibetan, have become Hindu shopkeepers and traders from the plains of India, both Garhwali and non-Garhwali. Not only the Jads but their entire environment has transformed over the years.

The Jads have also recently begun to insist upon their Rajput identity, and this is linked to their efforts towards assimilation into the mainstream Hindu population. This effort is actually part of the larger effort by all hill people to find an identity and status equal to that of the Hindu mainstream populations of the plains who continue to resist such claims. The plains Hindus, including local government officials in Uttarkashi, schoolteachers in Bhagori, and army personnel, regard the Jads as either Tibetans or as “Bhotiya” tribals who are either Buddhists or have a tribal religion. An earlier Census of Uttarkashi district (Rizvi 1979) even calls them Buddhists, and has greatly helped to consolidate the myth that the Jads are Buddhist. This fiction is further supported by the presence of Buddhist monasteries in both their villages at Bhagori as well as at Uttarkashi. The Garhwali Hindus who live in the close vicinity of the Jads, and who have close social interaction with them, are ready to concede high caste Rajput status to them, awed by their comparative affluence and light skin, which is regarded as a mark of beauty. This recognition by the Garhwalis is also to be evaluated in terms of an overarching *pahāḍī* identity that is evolving in the hills. Thus the efforts of the Jads towards a Rajput identity are part of the construction of a *pahāḍī* as against a *deśī* identity that has been encouraged by the creation of the separate hill state of Uttaranchal. The conceding of high Rajput status to them by the local population may also be seen as a political statement of an empathy between all who live in the hills. In the same way, the reluctance of the plains people to accept this identity is integral to the larger fracturing of relations between the hills and the plains.

In retrospect we can find three levels at which the *pānoh* plays a role in relocating identities, namely the level of the village, the level of the state, and the level of the Indian mainstream. At the level of the village, the establishment of the Pandavas as village deities gives leverage to those households, numerically predominant, who claim the Pandava as their *kuldevtās*. At the state level, the enactment supports their claim to be *khas* Rajputs, and at the national level, it reaffirms their Hindu identity and also their efforts to merge with the mainstream population. The last claim is, however, still rather shaky.

References

- Apffel-Marglin, Frédérique and Pramod Parajuli. 2000. Sacred grove and ecology: Ritual and science. In *Hinduism and Ecology: The intersection of earth, sky and water*, edited by Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, pp. 291-316. Harvard Divinity School.
- Bäumer, Bettina. 1995. The play of the three worlds: The Trika concept of Lila. In *The Gods at Play: Lilā in South Asia*, edited by William S. Sax, pp. 35-50. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Charles V. 1994. Salt, barley, pasmina and tincal-contexts of being Bhotiya in Traill's Kumaon. In *Himalaya: Past and present*, edited by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allan C. Fonger and Charles W. Brown, pp. 218-237. Shree Almora Book Depot (ASH: Association of Studies on Himalayas, Publication Series No. 5).
- Berreman, Gerald. 1972 (reprint). *Hindus of the Himalayas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Berreman, Gerald. 1983. The U.P. Himalaya: Culture, cultures and regionalism. In *The Himalaya: Nature, man and culture*, edited by O.P. Singh, pp. 227-266. New Delhi: Rajesh Publications.
- Channa, Subhadra Mitra. 1998. Rethinking anthropological concept of tribe. *Eastern Anthropologist* 51 (2): 121-37.
- Channa, Subhadra Mitra. 2002. Changing altitudes, attitudes and gender relations among the pastoral Bhotiyas of Garhwal Himalayas. *The Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* 37 (1): 41-50.
- Channa, Subhadra Mitra. 2002. The life-history of a Jad woman of the Garhwal Himalayas. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 22: 61-81.
- Dwivedi, O.P. 2000. Dharmic ecology. In *Hinduism and Ecology: The intersection of earth, sky and water*, edited by Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, pp. 3-22. Harvard Divinity School.
- Eck, Diane L. 1998. The imagined landscape: Patterns in construction of Hindu sacred geography. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.) 32 (2): 165-88.
- Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph von. 1981. Introduction. In *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, pp. i-xii. New Delhi: Sterling.
- Galey, Jean-Claude. 1994. Hindu kingship in its ritual realm: The Garhwali configuration. In *Himalaya: Past and present*, edited by M.P. Joshi, Allan C. Fonger and Charles W. Brown, pp. 173-237: Shree Almora Book Depot.

- Gellner, David N. 2001. *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian themes*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. 1995. Draupadī cult līlās. In *The Gods at Play: Līlā in South Asia*, edited by William S. Sax, pp. 204-25. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kar, Jasobanta. 1986. Cultural encounter and change in the eastern Himalayas. In *Himalayan Frontier in Historical Perspective*, edited by N.R. Roy, pp. 76-88. Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies.
- Khosa, Sunil. 1992. *Antiquities of Western Himalayas*, Vol. I. Delhi: Sandeep Prakashan.
- Krengel, Monika. 1997. Migration and the danger of loss: Some aspects of cultural identity in Kumaon/Indian Himalayas. In *Perspectives on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindu Kush and Himalaya*, edited by Irmtraud Stellrecht and Matthias Winiger, pp. 171-88. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Macfarlane, Alan. 1981. Death, disease and curing in a Himalayan village. In *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, pp. 79-130. New Delhi: Sterling.
- Mazumdar, Lipika. 1998. *Sacred Confluence, Worship, History and the Politics of Change in a Himalayan Village*. University of Pittsburgh. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.
- Moor, Edward. 2002. (reprint) *The Hindu Pantheon: The court of all Hindu gods*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
- Naithani, S.P. 1986. Ancient Garhwal in historical perspective. In *Himalayan Frontier in Historical Perspective*, edited by N.R. Roy, pp. 175-84. Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies.
- Nawa, Katsuo. 2000. Ethnic categories and their usages in Byans, Far Western Nepal. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 18: 36-57.
- Östör, Ákos. 1980. *The Play of the Gods: Locality, ideology, structure and time in the festivals of a Bengali town*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Raha, Manas Kumar and Mahato, Satya Narain. 1985. *The Kinnauries of the Himalayas*. A.S.I. Department of Culture: Govt. of India.
- Rizvi, Saiyed Ali Akhtar. 1979. *Uttarkashi*. Uttarpradesh District Gazetteer: Govt. of Uttarpradesh.
- Sastry, S.S. 1995. Transhumant population of Central Himalayas. In *The People of the Himalayas*, edited by M.K. Raha, pp. 125-43. A.S.I. Ministry of Human Resource Development: Govt. of India.

- Sax, William S. 1991. Ritual and performance in the *Pāṇḍavalīlā* of Uttarakhand. In *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, edited by Arvind Sharma, pp. 274-95. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Sax, William S. 1995. Who's who in the pāṇḍav līlā. In *Gods at Play: Līlā in South Asia*, edited by William S. Sax, pp. 131-56. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sax, William S. 2002. *Dancing the Self: Personhood and performance in the pāṇḍav līlā of Garhwal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Srivastava, Ram P. 1966. Tribe-caste mobility in India and the case of the Kumaon Bhotiyas. In *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon: Anthropological studies in Hindu-Buddhist contact zones*, edited by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, pp. 161-212. New Delhi: Sterling.

**CORRESPONDENCE,
ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS**

Research Report

The Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP)

By Martin Gaenszle¹, Balthasar Bickel¹, Goma Banjade², Elena Lieven³, Netra P. Paudyal², Arjun Rai², Iccha P. Rai², Manoj Rai², Novel K. Rai², Vishnu S. Rai², Narayan P. Sharma², and Sabine Stoll³

¹University of Leipzig; ²Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur; ³Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig

Project Description

The aim of this 3-year project (2004-2006) is to provide a rich linguistic and ethnographic documentation of two highly endangered but almost totally undocumented languages in eastern Nepal, Chintang and Puma. These languages belong to the Kiranti family of Tibeto-Burman. The Kiranti groups are known to have a rich and in many areas still highly active oral tradition, which has only sporadically been documented so far (Gaenszle 2002) and not at all for Chintang and Puma.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal (2001), 98 languages are spoken in Nepal, but more realistic estimates go well beyond 100. The majority of languages spoken in Nepal are “tribal” languages belonging to Tibeto-Burman. The Kiranti subgroup has more than twenty, perhaps as many as thirty different languages and many more dialects (van Driem 2001, Ebert 2003). Chintang belongs to Eastern Kiranti (such as Limbu and Yakkha) and is spoken in Chintang VDC (Village Development Committee) of Dhankuta district. Puma, which can perhaps be classified as part of Central Kiranti (along with Bantawa Rai, Camling Rai and others), is spoken in the area in and around the Ruwa Khola, to the south of the Khotang bazar in Khotang district.

Both languages are highly endangered and are being supplanted by Bantawa, one of the major Kiranti languages (Rai 1985). In a rapidly increasing number of cases, however, speakers entirely give up their native language or Bantawa and switch to Nepali, the national *lingua franca*. It is likely that Chintang and Puma will no longer be spoken within one or two generations.

The constitution of Nepal guarantees the right of its citizens to receive their primary education in their mother tongues, and some of the indigenous languages (e.g. Tamang, Limbu, Bantawa) have been introduced in schools, while some (e.g. Camling, Gurung) are soon to be introduced in primary education as optional subjects in some regions. It has been possible

to do so because these languages had already been documented linguistically. A proper documentation of these languages, including the various speech genres, will therefore help not only to preserve them, but also help in the preparation of educational materials in the future.

The core objective of the project is to record language practices in context, following the methodology of the “ethnography of speaking”, and to provide the transcripts with rich linguistic and ethnographic annotations. In the case of Chintang, the project also includes a detailed study of language acquisition over the period of two years. This will help us understand the micro-process of language endangerment, the role of bilingualism and trilingualism in this process, and the social and psychological mechanisms that lead to language death.

In line with this interdisciplinary aim, the project team includes linguists (Balthasar Bickel, Novel Kishor Rai, Vishnu S. Rai) as well as an anthropologist (Martin Gaenszle) and psycholinguists specialized in child language (Elena Lieven, Sabine Stoll). The team thus involves scholars from both Nepal and Germany. In addition, the project employs six research assistants (RA), with M.A. degrees in linguistics from Tribhuvan University: Goma Banjade, Netra Paudyal, Arjun Rai, Iccha Rai, Manoj Rai, and Narayan P. Sharma.

The ultimate objective of the project is to make the materials accessible in a digital archive, which is based at the Max-Planck-Institute in Nijmegen. The project is sponsored by the Special Program for the Documentation of Endangered Languages (DOBES) of the Volkswagen Foundation, Germany, and is administered through the Department of Linguistics at the University of Leipzig (Germany) in collaboration with the Central Department of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. The project is also part of the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LINSUN) research program, a large-scale initiative for documenting endangered languages of Nepal that was launched in Summer 2002 by the Central Department of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University. It is supported by an international advisory board and aims at coordinating research efforts, developing local archives and sponsoring fieldwork training. The Chintang and Puma Documentation Project is one of the first to aim at realizing these goals in substantial depth.

First results of the Chintang project

Language situation

It became evident early on that the number of Chintang speakers is much higher than the census data suggested (officially there were only 8 speakers!). Our latest estimates suggest that there are around 3500 first-language speakers of Chintang and more than 3000 who speak it as a second or third language. In fact, it turned out that within Chintang VDC

most residents speak Chintang either as their first language or as an additional language. Only very few speak nothing but Nepali .

So far the data collected indicate:

- that most speakers in Chintang are multilingual;
- that there are three categories of Chintang speakers:
 - a. ethnic Chintang who speak Chintang as mother tongue,
 - b. ethnic non-Chintang (mostly other Rai) who speak Chintang as their mother tongue;
 - c. ethnic non-Chintang (including non-Rai) who speak Chintang as second or third language;
- that Nepali is spoken by practically everyone as a *lingua franca*.

Study of social organization and settlement structure

Data on the distribution of clans and marriage patterns were collected for the ethnographic part of our (ongoing) survey. Besides the 12 genuine Chintang clans, there are no less than 37 other Rai clans or quasi-clans (such as Dumi or Kulung, which are actually different Rai groups but are treated like clans) in Chintang VDC. This is a surprising variety of clans and testifies to the complex migration history of the area, since these non-Chintang Rai have apparently settled there in more recent times. The survey also indicates that marriage alliances mainly take place within the village VDC or else with members in neighbouring VDC.

Recordings

A considerable number of recordings (ca. 280 hours) could be completed during the first one and a half years, of which most have been cut into “sessions” (altogether 609 so far). While the large majority of these recordings are part of the Child Language Acquisition subproject (see below), a valuable corpus of oral traditions has been recorded, including myths, legends, folk stories, songs, and above all rituals. Moreover, ordinary language has been documented in the form of life stories, descriptive accounts, interviews, conversations.

The narrative tradition of the Chintang is different from that of the central Kiranti groups and does not seem to contain the well-known episodes of the creator couple or the orphan story. Nevertheless, there is a rich tradition of folk tales, historical legends and origin stories, which usually show considerable Hindu influence.

In the first year most of the major rituals and festivals of the annual cycle could be documented: the full moon festival in Baisakh, the fertility rituals in spring (*yupun*), the *nuwāgi* ritual cycle in autumn, as well as the six day *Wadhanmi* festival, the most important celebration of the Chintang

community. Further a number of life-cycle rituals (rice-feeding ceremony, marriages, funeral, etc.) and shamanic seances have been recorded.

The songs recorded so far are mainly creations of young Chintang speakers who were proud to have these recorded. It is not yet clear in what respect one can speak of a genuine Chintang tradition of songs, as there is a lot of influence across ethnic and linguistic boundaries in this field.

Linguistic analysis

Several dozen verbal paradigms have been collected and analysed. We have performed a complete morphological analysis of the affixal system and the stem structure (compound and bipartite stems). The Chintang verb inflects non-periphrastically for tense (past vs. nonpast), aspect (perfective/simple vs. perfect vs. imperfective), polarity (affirmative vs. negative), mood (indicative vs. subjunctive), and agrees in various alignment patterns with the single argument of intransitives (S) and with both the A (actor) and P (primary object) arguments of transitives. The system is supplemented by a rich array of clitics (enclitics and endoclitics) and (both derivational and inflectional) stem compounds. The most surprising discoveries are (a) free prefix ordering (Bickel et al. 2005a), (b) triplication that is demonstrably not based on recursively applied reduplication, and (c) the marking one kind of imperfective aspect as the last morpheme in a suffix string. All three findings violate universal expectations and play a key role in the second year of the project.

Along with morphological analysis, we have recorded and analysed the phonology. Special attention was given to minimal pair collection and to determining syllable and word structure. The minimal word is CV, where the onset is supplied by a glottal stop if there is no underlying consonant present. Grammatical words are regularly composed of several smaller phonological units that play a key role in the distribution of affixes.

Child Language Acquisition Study

We have been recording six children over a period of eighteen months. Two children were two years old at the beginning of recording, two were three years old, and in addition we recorded two babies aged six months at the beginning of the study. The babies were added to the study in order to get an impression of speech directed to prelinguistic infants, the socio-cognitive development of the children, and the general environment of their growing-up. This will give us the social contexts of when language is used to prelinguistic infants, what languages the child is exposed to, and how much child-directed speech there is. The children were chosen by our research assistant and then recorded on a monthly basis with video. The two- and three-year-olds were recorded once a month for approximately four hours.

The babies were recorded for two hours every two months. The recordings within a monthly cycle were not necessarily consecutive, but the most important factor for recording was a natural environment with the mother being partly present and the child being active. The criterion was that the recordings of one cycle took place within the same week. The children were recorded in their typical daily activities with family, other children and other adults present. After the babies complete their first birthday, they are recorded only every three months. The data is collected by our research assistant with the support of local assistants, who are familiar with the families and their daily life.

In addition to the transcriptions, translations, and glossing, we coded three cycles of the babies, the two-year-olds and the three-year-olds in order to assess the environment in which language acquisition takes place. We coded for all the utterances of the child and all the utterances addressed to the child, pointing for the child and by the child, showing of objects to the child and by the child, and any kind of teaching the child was involved in. This will allow us to analyse the recordings systematically.

First results of the Puma project

Language situation

According to our preliminary survey, the Puma language is spoken mainly in Diplung, Mauwabhote, Pauwasera, Chisapani and Devasthan VDC. In these VDCs the Puma as an ethnic group are clearly in the majority. Most Puma above 30 still have some knowledge of the Puma language, but competence varies considerably. There are quite a few elders who possess cultural knowledge but no longer speak Puma, while there are younger people with little cultural knowledge but do. Language competence appears to vary from family to family. Especially the villages along the Beltar-Khotang trail (which is a major supply route for the Majh Kirat region) have fewer speakers, while the villages off such trails are more conservative. Clearly, the VDC of Mauwabhote falls in the latter category: here even smaller children speak the language fluently. Besides the core area of the above mentioned 4 VDCs, Puma is spoken by emigrant Puma in Beltar, Siddhipur, and Madibas, as well as in a number of other villages. Careful estimates roughly confirm the official number of Puma speakers to be ca. 4000. However, many Puma speakers feel that their language is of little value, and thus retention tends to be very low.

Study of social organization and settlement structure

Our preliminary survey covers about half of the above-mentioned core area. The average number of households per ward is around 35-40 and thus much lower than in the case of Chintang VDC (where the average is around 100).

Thus the fact that the core area extends over 5 VDCs has to be seen against this background: as a group, the Puma are not much bigger than the Chintang. The survey of clans also confirms this. The number of Puma clans is usually given as twelve: these are divided into two groups, the *sāt pāchā* ('seven clans') who descend from Dabalung, and the *pāñc pāchā* ('five clans') who descend from Palung. Both groups are said to derive from one and the same ancestor, as Dabalung is seen as the elder brother of Palung. While this division may look like a moiety system, the duality does not have any implications for marriage: as long as the principle of clan exogamy is observed, marriage alliances are possible both within and across the two proto-clans. In any case, it is clear that the "senior" proto-clan is much larger and, in fact, many of the clans have already subdivided into sub-clans through a practice of sanctioned fission which is possible after seven generations in the patriline. The wards in the Puma core area are generally dominated by the Puma, numerous hamlets being exclusively inhabited by them. As compared to the Chintang situation, there are relatively few outside immigrants. However, there are a significant number of Chetri (mainly of the Khadka clan), and there are also several households of Bantawa, Camling (other Rai groups), Kami and Sarki (Nepali speaking occupational castes). Interestingly, the immigrant Rai usually adopted the local Puma language as their mother tongue.

Recordings

In the first one and a half years a total of 210 sessions were recorded. As among the Chintang, a collection of ordinary conversations, life stories, and descriptive accounts constitutes a corpus for the study of everyday language use. A major round of recordings, done during our stay in the core area in autumn 2004, provided a broad variety of genres, including elaborate myths, ritual invocations, recitations and songs.

The Puma narrative tradition (unlike the Chintang tradition) is clearly a variant of those central Rai traditions which have a closely related body of episodes ranging from creation through a divine couple, the orphan culture hero, to a history of migration and first settlement. As among various other Rai groups, the divine couple is known as Sunnima and Paruhang, whereas the orphan culture hero is known as Hetchakupka (similarly as among the Chamling).

Most of the seasonal rituals could be recorded, mainly in collaboration with an elder who is a ritual specialist (*ṅapon*): *samkha*, *phagu*, and *candi nāc*, the fertility rites celebrated in April/May, and the harvest rituals, *nuwāgi*, in September. Further, two ancestral blood sacrifices (*khaliphenma*), one rice-feeding ceremony, and one marriage ritual were recorded, as well as shamanic seances.

As in Chintang, Puma youths are enthusiastic song-writers. Many young males and females have asked us to record their newly created songs, many of which deplore the loss of their mother tongue and ancestral language. But there is also a rich heritage of more traditional songs which could be documented (e.g. *dohori*).

Linguistics

Analysis of Puma verb forms brought out an unexpectedly complex conjugation system, manifesting itself through both categorical and lexical factors on stem alternations (ablaut, various gemination patterns) and affix allomorphy. We recorded over 100 intransitive verb paradigms in the past and non-past affirmative and negative, plus around 30 transitive verb paradigms in the same tense and polarity categories. A complete analysis of the system is now available as an MA thesis (Stutz 2005). One important discovery was the regular use of a prefix *kha-* to mark generic-patient (antipassive) forms with about two dozen verb stems. In other Kiranti languages (including Chintang), generic-patient forms are formed by intransitive inflection of transitive verbs, resembling noun incorporation (Weidert & Subba 1985, Angdembe 1998, Bickel 2004). The same prefix *kha-* has also made its way into the agreement paradigm, where it marks forms with a first person nonsingular patient (Bickel et al. 2005b). This has been reported for other Kiranti languages (Ebert 1991), but the Puma data now reveal the origin of this prefix as a generic-patient marker that became obligatory with first person nonsingular patients (perhaps as a face-saving strategy, since it avoids specific mentioning of ‘us’ as patients).

Project website: <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~ff/cpdp>

References

- Angdembe, Tej Man. 1998. Antipassive via noun incorporation: Future of the Limbu object agreement. *Journal of Nepalese Studies* 2: 17 - 25.
- Bickel, Balthasar. 2004. Hidden syntax in Belhare. In *Himalayan languages: Past and present*, edited by Anju Saxena, pp. 141 – 190. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bickel, Balthasar, Goma Banjade, Martin Gaenszle, Elena Lieven, Netra P. Paudyal, Iccha Rai, Manoj Rai, Novel K. Rai & Sabine Stoll 2005a. News from the Himalayas: Languages with free affix ordering. Ms., U. Leipzig, available at www.uni-leipzig.de/~bickel/research/papers.

- Bickel, Balthasar, Martin Gaenszle, Narayan P. Gautam, Arjun Rai & Vishnu S. Rai 2005b. Antipassives in Puma and other Kiranti languages. Ms., University of Leipzig, soon available at <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~bickel/research/papers>.
- Driem, George v. 2001. *Languages of the Himalayas: An ethnolinguistic handbook of the Greater Himalayan Region, containing an introduction to the symbiotic theory of language*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ebert, Karen H. 1991. Inverse and pseudo-inverse prefixes in Kiranti languages: Evidence from Belhare, Athpahare and Dungmali. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 14, 73 - 92.
- Ebert, Karen H. 2003. Kiranti languages: An overview. In *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, edited by Graham Thurgood & Randy LaPolla, pp. 505 – 517. London: Routledge.
- Gaenszle, Martin 2002. *Ancestral Voices: Oral ritual texts and their social contexts among the Mewahang Rai in east Nepal*. Münster, Hamburg, London: LIT Verlag.
- Rai, Novel K. 1985. *A Descriptive Study of Bantawa*. PhD thesis, Deccan College.
- Stutz, Kathy 2005. *An Analysis of the Puma Conjugation System*. MA thesis, University of Leipzig.
- Weidert, Alfons & Bikram Subba 1985. *Concise Limbu Grammar and Dictionary*. Amsterdam: Lobster Publications.

BOOK REVIEWS

***Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil: Identities and representations in the Himalayas*, edited by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Pascale Dollfus. New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2003. 341 pages. ISBN 0 19 565592 3.**

Reviewed by Sara Shneiderman, Ithaca, NY

This volume serves as the proceedings of a conference held in France in 1998, entitled *Representation of the Self, Representation of the Other in the Himalayas: Space, history, culture*. With such a widely defined theme, the essays are expectedly diverse in both subject and theoretical approach, and vary equally widely in quality.

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine's introduction positions the volume as a follow-up to the seminal 1997 publication *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The politics of culture in contemporary Nepal* (ed. by Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton). This was the first thorough compendium of essays to situate multiple aspects of the Nepal-specific debates on ethnicity within contemporary theoretical discussions on these issues in academic anthropology and cultural studies. With many of the same contributors, and the added value of a wider geographical remit that includes Himalayan areas of northern India and Pakistan, the present volume includes several important individual essays. Taken as a whole, however, it does not live up to its introductory promise and is unlikely to become a reference text in the same manner.

Many of the best papers – especially those by Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Gil Daryn, Ben Campbell, Joanne Moller and Martijn van Beek – present interesting new textual and ethnographic materials that help develop the discussion about identity in the Himalayas in important ways. These authors take up the challenge offered by the original conference title – *Representation of the Self, Representation of the Other* – by exploring issues of self-representation in psychological and performative terms, rather than limiting themselves to the more obvious political aspects of ethnicity. Their essays broaden the definition of identity at the conceptual level by focusing on the multiple layers of identity: semiotic (Hutt on the Sunnima text), symbolic (Pfaff-Czarnecka on Magar ritual), environmental (Campbell on Tamang indigenous knowledge), caste (Gellner on Newar internal caste differences and Moller on Kumaoni high caste discourse), group (Daryn on Nepali Bahuns' lack of group identification) and regional (van Beek on Ladakhi representation) – instead of over-emphasizing ethnic identity alone, as anthropologists often tend to do. The authors' ability to

bring out the complexity of these issues and make the links between ritual, representation and identity politics explicit is one of the strongest features of the book. One wonders then why the original conference title – which noticeably does not even mention the term “ethnicity” – was not kept as the title of the book, since it represents the content therein much more accurately.

The editors' desire to broaden the geographical range of discussion to “the Himalayas” is commendable and necessary. For a variety of historical reasons, all too often Nepal is taken to represent the whole of “the Himalayas” in academic studies. In the contemporary context, ethnicity and identity issues must be addressed within broader regional comparative frameworks, but much scholarly work remains artificially bounded by national borders. By including two articles on northern Indian Himalayan areas and one on Pakistan (Sökefeld on Gilgit), the editors have succeeded in initiating an important cross-border scholarly dialogue. However, the other eight of the eleven contributions still focus exclusively on Nepal, and the introductory remarks by Lecomte-Tilouine and concluding remarks by Steve Brown are crafted in Nepal-specific terms. (Brown speaks of “the uses of cultural nationalism in Nepal” and “the evidently conflictual nature of contemporary Nepalese societies”, p. 340.) Had the editors done more to draw out thematic issues for regional comparison, this would have added a sense of coherence to the volume and made an important step forward at the theoretical level.

One of the most important issues addressed at various points in the book is the role of foreign anthropologists within highly politicized ethnic contexts. Lecomte-Tilouine makes a point of refuting in advance Nepali anthropologist and activist Krishna Bhattachan's expected critique (based upon his critique of earlier works), which she summarizes as follows: “... most of the authors are Europeans; the groups included in the study do not adequately represent the diverse features and aspirations of Nepalese society; the book should be made accessible to the indigenous people, by translating it into Nepali and even into the different mother tongues spoken in Nepal” (p. 11). Anne de Sales also makes a plea for anthropologists to avoid being co-opted by militant ethno-political agendas (p. 240). Lecomte-Tilouine is right that demands to make each scholarly book representative of the whole of Nepali society and to translate such texts into indigenous languages are unrealistic, and de Sales is correct that scholars must carefully consider their relationships with ethno-political activist communities. However, one does wonder why no Himalayan scholars were invited to contribute to the present volume (even if it was difficult to invite them to the original conference in France), and whether it is necessary or even possible to maintain such a strict separation between anthropology and activism.

In an attempt to replicate the back-and-forth debate of the conference, Lecomte-Tilouine and Dollfus have chosen to present the papers in their

original form with little editing, followed by the discussants' comments. This approach meets with mixed success; in some cases the discussants' comments help illuminate the paper at hand, but for the most part they either repeat the ideas already laid out by the author, or read like reviewer's comments for revision. Some of the authors are apparently uncomfortable with this approach; for example Martijn van Beek finds it necessary to mention in a footnote that his contribution can only be considered a working paper due to the restrictions on revision imposed by the editors (p. 295). This reviewer found van Beek's unease justified, since being subjected to a strong critique immediately following the original paper makes for an awkward reading experience. Perhaps the authors could have been given the opportunity to integrate the discussants' comments into their own texts.

One also wonders whether it was only the contributors who were instructed not to edit their pieces, or if the editors also took their own advice to heart, since the text has a surprisingly high number of typographical and grammatical errors. In addition, each article appears to have a different bibliographical system: many have all references contained in the footnotes, while others use parenthetical citation and provide a full list of cited works at the end of the article. These issues may well be the responsibility of Oxford University Press as the publisher, and we can only hope that they might be corrected in a second edition.

All in all, *Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil* is a mixed bag. Many of the articles will be valuable to researchers working on related topics or in the same geographical regions, and some offer fresh insights on the theoretical frameworks used to discuss ethnicity in the Himalayas. In this, it is a standard conference proceedings volume that is more likely to be valued for some of its component parts than as a whole.

***Arbeiten aus Nepal. Erwin Schneider zum Gedächtnis*, edited by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Vergleichende Hochgebirgsforschung. [Series] *Hochgebirgsforschung (High Mountain Research)*, vol. 9. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner 2004. ISBN 3-7030-0390-1. 180 pp., 27 maps and figures, 18 plates, 3 fold-out figures, 8 tables and 5 map supplements.**

Reviewed by Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt, Bangkok

Eighteen years after his death in 1987, a few months after his 81st birthday, the Austrian mountaineer and mapmaker Erwin Schneider emerges as a figure of almost mythical proportions in the lore of Himalayan exploration. His portrait on p. 8 of the book shows a facescape as stern and craggy as the terrain that he loved to roam and made his life mission to survey. Those who knew him personally or collaborated with him remember him as a strong, resourceful, but unassuming personality. (The present reviewer had unfortunately only one encounter with him in Kathmandu in 1982.)

The Munich-based Association of Comparative Alpine Research brought out this book to commemorate the man and his contribution to research on Nepal. It is a collection of articles focusing not only on Schneider's life and work, but also on the investigations that have benefited from his maps and aerial photographs. Most chapters are to a greater or lesser extent based on previously published material. The authors – anthropologists, geographers and cartographers from Austria, Germany and France, and most of them members of the Association of Comparative Alpine Research – belong to a circle of scientists who closely collaborated with Schneider, especially during the last decade of his life.

Robert Kostka, who assisted Schneider since 1981 and now carries on his legacy, certainly maintained the closest ties. He has contributed two chapters to this book: a biographical essay and a paper on the photogrammetric method used and further developed by Schneider. Both are excellent reading, not only because of Kostka's competence due to his professional training and intimate association with Schneider, but also thanks to the author's considerable stylistic abilities and wry Austrian humour. We learn that Schneider's life and work were determined by his unconventional lifestyle and abhorrence of any level terrain. Born in 1906 in what is today the Czech Republic but was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Schneider developed an early passion for mountaineering, which was so consuming that his father sent him to Berlin to study mining – far away from mountains and the distraction they might offer. However, he underestimated the iron will of his son – one of his defining characteristics

according to those who worked with him – and was, moreover, ignorant of the existence of the Academic Alpine Association of Berlin, of which Schneider immediately became a member. As a member of this organization Schneider participated, while still a student, in three major international mountaineering expeditions, and developed three main characteristics of his approach to mountaineering: his preference for extreme mountaineering, the combination of mountaineering with scientific activities, notably surveying and mapping, and the global sweep of his alpine pursuits. As a cosmopolitan mountaineer who loved to experience the extremes of terrain difficulty and endurance, Schneider climbed peaks in the Alps, the Himalayas and other mountain complexes of Central Asia, the Andes and East Africa. Many of them were in the 7000 m altitude range, and this earned him the nickname “Schneider of the seven-thousand meter peaks”.

His career as a mountaineer came to a sudden end in 1939 when he lost all ten toes to frostbite. He was, however, in no way subdued by this handicap, and launched with a vengeance on his career as surveyor and cartographer of extreme mountain landscapes and extreme altitudes. His interest had further been kindled by his association with the famous cartographer Richard Finsterwalder who introduced him to the method of terrestrial photogrammetry during the Alai-Pamir expedition of 1928. Schneider pursued a brief academic career as assistant professor at the Institute of Geodesy in Hannover and at the Institute of Photogrammetry in Berlin, but soon embarked on his career as a freelance surveyor and cartographer, hiring his services out to a variety of contractors, most importantly to the Austrian and German Alpine Associations. Contact with the Austrian Alpine Association led to his participation in the International Himalaya Expedition of 1955 under N.G. Dyrhenfurth and the production of the 1:25,000 Mount Everest map. This map immediately made him renowned as a specialist for mapping in the 8000 m region, and laid the seed for the production of the well-known Schneider Maps of East Nepal under the umbrella of the Nepal Himalaya Research Scheme directed by W. Hellmich from 1960 onwards. Participants in this enterprise, including Schneider, founded, in 1967, the Association of Comparative Alpine Research for the promotion of interdisciplinary research in mountains all over the globe.

Nepal, which Schneider had visited for the first time in 1930 as a participant in the Kangchenjunga expedition led by G. O. Dyhrenfurth, remained the focus of his work until his death, but he also carried out mapping in other parts of the world, e.g., on Mount Kenya and in the Andes. Terrestrial photogrammetry was increasingly supplemented and eventually replaced by aerial photogrammetry. Aerial photographs were utilized by Schneider for the first time in the production of the 1:50,000 Khumbu Himal map of 1965, and became a major data source for his map-making from 1971 onwards, when he shot the aerial photographs for his set of

1:10,000 maps of the Kathmandu Valley. In the years following the Kathmandu Valley flights, Schneider developed his own system of surveying – the famous “Schneider System” – which involved the simultaneous use of Hasselblad cameras for vertical and oblique photography, and was applied intensively from 1981 onwards. Another special feature of this system was the use of colour film, which provides a much better basis for the interpretation of aerial photographs. In this last period of his career, Schneider worked for the multidisciplinary Nepal Research Programme of the German Research Council, producing large-scale study maps and surveying cultural sites, such as the stupas of Swayambhunath and Bodhnath in the Kathmandu Valley.

Three contributions to this book are by members of the team of the geographer Willibald Haffner who cooperated very closely with Schneider under the aegis of the Nepal Research Programme, namely Willibald Haffner himself, Ulrike Müller-Böker and Perdita Pohle.

Haffner’s article deals with Schneider’s cartographic legacy. He explains the specific qualities that set Schneider maps apart from other products, and gives valuable information on the enormous physical and analytical effort that went into producing them. He also discusses why accurate maps are such a crucial element for research on geomorphology, vegetation cover, settlement patterns, etc. To this list, one should add research on land use change, such as that carried out by Johannes Ries (1994) in the context of his studies on soil erosion in the Sherpa village of Bhandar. Ries devoted himself to comparing land use at the time of his own earlier fieldwork with the land use pattern of 1965, which had been recorded on a Schneider base map by W. Limberg. In elucidating the significance of the Schneider maps for research in Nepal, Haffner raises the intriguing question of the influence that these maps had on the choice of sites for research. He provides evidence that in many cases, site selection was guided by the availability of the highly accurate Schneider maps, most significantly in the Mt. Everest region, which is one of the most intensively researched areas in Nepal. A table on p. 32 lists the researchers and authors who have relied on the two Schneider maps of this region for their own work. Seen in this light, Schneider’s contribution to research in and on Nepal has been much more than just providing maps that could then be used by scientists. It also consists in guiding or “luring” research to areas for which his maps were available, thereby contributing to the emergence of regional research foci. Later in his life, as a member of the Nepal Research Programme, Schneider assumed a different and more auxiliary role by supplying large-scale maps of pre-selected study sites.

Perdita Pohle’s focus is on the potential and value of the aerial photographs taken and left to posterity by Schneider. This is done in the context of a broader discussion of the role of air photo interpretation for geographical research in high mountain areas in an age where satellite imagery provides the bulk of remote sensing data. She comes to the

conclusion that the value of air photos lies in the fact that they still provide more detail and precision in the large-scale range, especially in mountainous terrain, where the oblique photographs by Schneider to supplement vertical photography are capable of recording features that other devices cannot capture. Her discussion of Schneider's survey techniques repeats some of Kostka's elaborations, but adds a valuable list of Schneider's survey flights in Nepal. The second part of her paper contains exemplary interpretations of three aerial photographs – both vertical and oblique, but of different locations – based on research for the author's doctoral thesis (which, however, does not appear in the reference list) on the adaptation of people in Manang district to the conditions of a high mountain environment. Her interpretation of the aerial photographs, which are juxtaposed on the same page and completed by beautifully executed interpretation sketches, is rich in detail obtained through field research and from secondary sources, albeit somewhat descriptive and static. Instead of presenting the reader with a fully prepared set of image content, a more interesting alternative could have been to let the reader partake in how the mind of a geographer, who is confronted with such images, actually works: how structure and pattern lead to recognition or speculation, and eventually to ground verification. It would have been especially interesting to set side by side oblique and vertical photographs of the same location in order to highlight how these complementary elements of the much-praised "Schneider System" actually complement each other. To sum up, a rather process- than content-oriented approach to air photo interpretation would have made the case study component of this otherwise well-prepared contribution more instructive.

From among the members of the Haffner team, it is Ulrike Müller-Böker who has worked with Schneider maps and photographs most extensively. Her article provides a summary of the many ways in which her work has benefited from, or contributed to, work by Schneider. It begins with her studies of Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley, which utilized the layout plans of settlements from the 1:10,000 Kathmandu Valley map; continues with her work based on the large-scale Gorkha-Sirdi Khola study map – the first of a series of study maps that provided the basis for various mapping exercises, such as the recording and mapping of place names or the mapping of the distribution of ethnic groups and castes; and concludes with an analysis of aerial photographs supplied by Schneider to the author in 1983 and 1984 for her study of the ethnoecology of the Tharu people in Chitwan. In contrast to most other contributions to this book, Müller-Böker's article allows for an occasional surfacing of the human qualities of Schneider, e.g., his habit of signing his letters with the motto "forget me". This captivating detail is reminiscent of another self-effacing Austrian mountaineer/cartographer, Peter Aufschnaiter, who preferred to blend in, rather than stand out from, the setting of Central Asia, and who (misrepresented in the Hollywood movie "Seven Years in Tibet", by the way)

acquired fame beyond the inner circle of alpinists only due to his being associated with Heinrich Harrer. It should be added that Aufschnaiter's early attempt at mapping the Langtang Himal area was taken up and brought to conclusion by Schneider and his successors (see below).

The value of aerial photographs documenting large-scale objects and their particular importance, once taken in a time series and interpreted for an understanding of dynamics and change, is beautifully demonstrated by Corneille Jest's contribution on settlement development around the stupa of Bodhnath. Based on Schneider's aerial photographs of 1971 and 1986 and on Jest's intimate familiarity with this place, which supplements observations up to the year 2002, the article paints a picture of chaotic growth generated by the religious significance of the place, the influx of Tibetan refugees from the 1950s onwards and their economic success, as well as by the basically unregulated nature of urban development in the Kathmandu Valley as a whole. Jest's short essay is like the tantalizing sketch of an expert draughtsman, that begs to be executed in more detail by a thorough study.

Several contributions refer to the problem of recording place names and rendering them correctly in a map. In particular, the articles by those members of the Haffner team who had been actively engaged in such work, and the article by the co-authors of the Langtang Himal map discuss the difficulty posed by those names which are collected in a multilingual – and even multiscriptural – setting. This is also the topic of the paper by András Höfer who collaborated for many years in the preparation of Schneider maps. He pleads for a uniform system of transliteration of place names on the basis of the Devanagari script and with the help of local informants. The procedure proposed by Höfer appears complicated and time-consuming; the practicability of his suggestions, however, has in the meantime been confirmed by the new series of Nepalese maps of the Eastern Nepal Topographic Mapping Project, which have adopted a system of transliteration very close to the one advocated by Höfer.

Georg Miehe's annotated vegetation map of the Khumbu Himal highlights the importance of an accurate base map for vegetation research. A famous precedent is Carl Troll's vegetation map of Nanga Parbat, which had been drafted onto the 1:50,000 map by Richard Finsterwalder and provided the model and inspiration for Ulrich Schweinfurth's vegetation map of the Himalaya. Miehe's vegetation map is superimposed on Schneider's 1:50,000 Khumbu Himal map, and was compiled on the basis of field research over two and a half months in 1982. The shortcomings of a vegetation map based – as far as visual documentation is concerned – on slides instead of air photos, satellite imagery or photogrammetric vegetation records is readily conceded by the author. However, this is more than compensated for by the extremely detailed description of vegetation types recorded on the map, and the competent analysis of their distribution and structure in the accompanying text. All this betrays the unparalleled field-experience of the

author not only in this region, but over many years in various locations of the Nepal-Himalaya and adjacent parts of Central Asia. It is to be regretted that the meticulous descriptions are not supported by photographs. A novel element is the representation of the distribution of lichen cover on a vegetation map, which reflects the author's interest in the indicator value of lichen, more fully elaborated in his book on the vegetation of the Langtang Valley (Miehe 1990).

Erwin Schneider was that rare phenomenon: a man on the threshold of technology change, who knew how to make the best of both worlds and act as a link between the ages of terrestrial and aerial surveying, combining in this process the prowess of the mountaineer with the sophistication of what in his time was high technology. Schneider was also on the threshold between the ages of mountain exploration and mountain research for development and conservation. Complex and physically challenging landscapes for the explorer or researcher, such as mountains where the third dimension plays an overwhelming role (as was fully recognized and systematically explored by C. Troll and his students), require a multidimensional approach in order to be perceived and comprehended. Schneider, who combined mountaineering and science as well as terrestrial and aerial photogrammetry and also recognized the importance of the fourth dimension by laying the foundation for multi-temporal studies through repeat photography, is a perfect example of this approach. His achievement was to create a combination of old and new technologies that was appropriate for the challenges of extreme terrain and the capacities of an underdeveloped country.

The combinatory character of Schneider's work, which has persisted beyond his death, is epitomized by the 1:50,000 Langtang Himal map. An initial survey had been carried out by Schneider in 1968, and the map was completed by his collaborators and successors in 1990. Kostka, Moser and Patzelt contribute a short article on this project and expound the difficulty of producing a map from non-homogeneous data from a border area. The map is based on photogrammetric measurements from the years 1970 and 1971 and Schneider's aerial photographs of 1974 and 1975, as well as on material compiled by those who stepped in when Schneider handed the map project over to the German and Austrian Alpine Associations. His successors added data from other photogrammetric surveys, official maps of Nepal and China, and space photographs from the NASA-Skylab 4 Mission of 1973. The work of integrating data from such diverse sources, a procedure that spans and incorporates three technology changes, was truly in the spirit of Schneider. Yet it proved so difficult and time-consuming that the authors feel prompted to describe their endeavour as a "horror without ending", in adopting one of Schneider's favourite sayings.

The book is lavishly endowed with maps and illustrations. Five maps (only four maps are listed on the cover page) have been added as a

supplement, namely the Langtang Himal map, Georg Miehe's vegetation map of the Khumbu Himal, two maps based on the first of the large-scale study maps (Gorkha-Sirdi Khola) produced in the last phase of Schneider's career, and finally a map of caste distribution in Newar settlements of the Kathmandu Valley. The most captivating illustrations in the text are, of course, the beautifully reproduced aerial photographs by Schneider himself.

A personality and career as unique and unconventional as that of Schneider deserved to be commemorated by a book with a more captivating title. "*Arbeiten aus Nepal: Erwin Schneider zum Gedächtnis*" is bland and only informative for the insider. Except for those already familiar with Schneider and his work, anyone chancing upon this title in a catalogue will get no clue as to who Schneider was or about the nature of his work in Nepal. He would quite probably pass it over. The book's preface expressly states that its aim is to publicize Schneider, his life and accomplishments for a wider circle of readers, directly defying his aversion to publicity. This aim has been well served by the excellent overall quality of this book, but may be imperilled by the choice of a title that is as unassuming as Schneider himself was throughout his life.

References

- Miehe, G. 1990: *Langtang Himal: Flora und Vegetation als Klimazeiger und -zeugen im Himalaya*. Dissertationes Botanicae, vol. 158. Berlin, Stuttgart: J. Cramer.
- Ries, J.B. 1994: *Bodenerosion in der Hochgebirgsregion des östlichen Zentral-Himalaya, untersucht am Beispiel Bamti/Bhandar/Surma, Nepal*. Freiburger Geographische Hefte 42. Freiburg: Institut für Physische Geographie der Universität Freiburg.

***A Kingdom under Siege: Nepal's Maoist insurgency, 1996 to 2003*, edited by Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati. Kathmandu: The Printhouse 2003. xv + 234 pages. ISBN 99933 59 07 6 (pb).**

Reviewed by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Bielefeld

This is one of the very first books analysing the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Since its publication, a number of new studies, written both in Nepali and in English, have provided the readers with more comprehensive and more up-to-date accounts.¹ Still, *A Kingdom under Siege* is an important foundation to the more recent endeavours to capture the causes, the dynamics and the consequences of the Maoist movement that started under this name in 1996 and proved to be more successful – as the authors claim – than the Maoist leaders have ever dared to expect. Containing a number of annexes, tables, figures and boxes listing chronologies of events, the Maoists' demands, as well as charts depicting the spread of the Maoist movement in the Nepalese districts, this book is informative and rich in content.

Besides thought-provoking analyses, the authors also manage to convey an idea of the Nepali people's sufferings when caught between the Maoists and the state forces. Such intense images are painted in the first chapter, and they are taken up again when the costs of this conflict are discussed in chapter six. The authors seek to give a balanced picture, describing incidents of police torture, followed by accounts of atrocities instigated by Maoist leaders and their followers. The authors manage to depict an atmosphere of fear, mistrust and persisting hardships that villagers in many parts of Nepal have to cope with every day. These passages frame an important background to the factual accounts and analyses forming the major part of the book.

The second chapter is, over-ambitiously perhaps, dedicated to a historical account of the Nepalese polity between 1768 and 1996. The first two centuries are squeezed into a few pages, whereas the last decades are dealt with in more detail. Against the background of well-known facts concerning the political changes of 1951, the decade of instability (1951-1960), the panchayat era, and the "second coming of democracy" in the year 1990, the sections describing the negotiations, compromises and conflicts between political parties and their major exponents provide an insightful reading of events. The authors allot sufficient space to the genesis and the formative years of the Communist Party of Nepal. The internal tensions and

¹ However, the book has recently been updated: *A Kingdom under Siege: Nepal's Maoist insurgency, 1996 to 2004*. London: Zed Books 2004. ISBN 1 84277 571 5 (pb), 1 84277 570 7 (hb).

fissions are interwoven with accounts on this Party's positioning vis-à-vis the Nepali Congress since the former came into existence in 1949. The internal dissent between those forces in favour of joining the mainstream politics at the time of the Delhi compromise (1951) and during the parliamentary election in 1959 on the one hand, and those rejecting participation in the general elections and calling for radicalisation on the other, is a *leitmotif* that re-emerges in post-1990 party politics. The dynamics of realignments of the Communist Party of Nepal culminate in the separation of the CPN (Maoist) in 1995, with the well-known consequences discussed throughout the book.

In the third chapter the authors identify the reasons why the “people's war” started and gained momentum. These are examined against the backdrop of the 40-point charter of Maoist demands presented in 1996, especially those sections dedicated to the slow pace of economic growth, regional disparities, lack of opportunities, marginalisation, as well as the very low standard of social services. The authors see most of the demands as justified, given the lack of opportunities, social injustice and lack of political will to counter-balance these clear-cut tendencies. The growing disappointment with the state's and the large political parties' performance and the latter's inefficiency at the local level are identified as the major reasons why the movement gained large popular support. Impoverished and divided by caste and ethnicity, large numbers of the Nepalese population, particularly the villagers in the western hill districts, were ready to support the movement and join the Maoist efforts to create an alternative political, economic, social and cultural system.

Chapters four and five discuss the growth and expansion of the Maoist movement and the government's failure to respond adequately. The authors describe the Maoist planning and procedure in “six sub-phases” or “tactical stages” geared at establishing a firm base in dozens of Nepalese districts, eventually including the Kathmandu Valley. The second national conference of CPN (Maoist) held in early 2001 is identified as a crucial milestone. This conference gave rise to the “Prachanda Path” and the emergence of the notion of an “interim government” – a step the authors identify as a precondition leading to the first round of negotiations between the Maoist leaders and the government in mid-2001 that eventually failed, resulting in the imposition of the state of emergency.

This useful account of the movement's progress according to the designed logistics is accompanied by a narrative of the subsequent governments' inability to respond to its escalation. The readers are given the opportunity to follow a series of failures on the side of the government to adequately grasp the challenge at an early stage of the movement. The authors use rather harsh words for some of the politicians. They denounce “the kind of politicking that went on in Kathmandu [and] bolstered the Maoists' argument that parliamentary democracy was a sham that could not

work for the benefit of the people” (p. 87), and they argue that “the seed of instability and unprincipled opportunism were sown early on when Girija Prasad Koirala became prime minister in 1991, and the subsequent infighting that broke out within the Nepali Congress over government appointments” (ibid.).

The two final chapters tackle the consequences of the movement as they could be perceived by mid-2003 when the book was ready for publication. In the macro-dimension, the economic costs are assessed. These are striking indeed, given the severely decreased pace of economic growth and the decline in investments, as well as the general shift in allotting a growing share of public expenditure for security purposes. Another crucial dimension is the deteriorating human rights conditions with the security forces being held responsible for the larger share of the killings and torture of persons in police custody. Some critical remarks are addressed to the civil society and its public sphere: during the initial years of the movement, human rights organisations and the mass media have generally kept silent regarding the numerous human rights abuses while uncritically supporting the government’s fight against the rebels.

Writing a review some 18 months after this book’s going into print, it is easy to point to some of its weaknesses. For instance, at present we know significantly more about the military strength and about the strategic aspects of the Maoist movement. More accounts are available today on the personal losses due to the conflict, even if detailed reports from areas under the Maoist control and from those regions caught in-between the fronts are still lacking. Nevertheless, the diverse experiences with the *jana sarkār* (Maoist government) as well as the exposed position of the teachers in rural Nepal would round up the picture provided in *A Kingdom under Siege*. Three further issues should have received more attention.

First, the Maoists’ nationalist orientation. Having drawn the readers’ attention to the 40-point charter of demands presented by the Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4th February 1996, the authors fail to discuss the powerful nationalist discourse that Maoists have embraced (chapter 3, points 1 to 9).

Second, the Maoist stance vis-à-vis the ethnic groups. While the authors introduce ethnicity and inherent inequalities when discussing the causes for the movement’s gaining momentum, little space is given to the plans for dividing Nepal’s territory into autonomous regions. Also, the highly contradictory policies embraced by the Maoists regarding ethnic customs, such as worship, drinking and food habits as well as performing rituals should have been discussed in more detail.

Third, the authors fail to grasp the dynamic character of the movement. As is the case with all prolonged conflicts, new dynamics and new rationalities have come into play in the course of time. While chapter 3

attempts to analyse the initial impetus of the “people’s war”, seeing its causes in the dismay generated by socio-economic and political conditions, insufficient space is devoted to the internal conflicts and fissions within the movement caused by its individual leaders’ strategies at the later stages. The authors fail to perceive the vested interests inducing the movements’ exponents to carry on their battle. One is tempted to add that the Maoist movement in Nepal has been beneficial to a significantly larger number of actors, including those outside the movement, than it has been acknowledged so far – an issue not addressed in this publication.

Despite these omissions, Thapa’s and Sijapati’s is a very useful and readable book. It provides us with crucial insights into the complexities of the current Nepalese society and its polity, and above all, it indicates the horrendous costs women, men and children in Nepal have had to bear so far.

***Forget Kathmandu: An elegy for democracy* by Manjushree Thapa. New Delhi: Penguin 2005. 260 pages. ISBN 0-67-005812-2.**

Reviewed by Elvira Graner, Heidelberg

Manjushree Thapa has taken up a courageous enterprise by publishing her “private search” (p. 6) about “what has gone wrong” in Nepal. In doing so, she voices her deep concerns about “floundering democracy” and “bad politics” (p. 6) and presents a vigorous, enlightening and at the same time highly-sensitive piece on the current political situation in the country. By adding one more voice to what she calls the “cacophony of public discourse” (p. 5) she has further established her reputation. Not only is she one of the few English-writing Nepalese novelists, but in the present work she also provides evidence for her skill at social and political analyses. Her style is innovative in this book, which she calls “a mongrel of historiography, reportage, travel writing and journal writing”.

The first chapter, on “the coup that did not happen,” is a lively and rather personal account of how she and her friends in Kathmandu experienced the “royal massacre” of June 1st, 2001. By recollecting the scene on the streets during the first days and weeks along with the rumours, lack

of reliable information and conspiracy theories, she provides a vivid picture of a memorable period. The chapter progresses by recalling details of the “investigation committee” set up by the new king in order to shed some light upon the massacre. However, even the final report of that committee raised more questions than it provided answers. Thapa’s final comment is simple but telling: “... when trying to take a position – a reasonable position, one that we can defend in our most dispassionate moments – most Nepalis will conclude that we just do not know what happened” (p. 47).

The second chapter concentrates on Nepal's history and recapitulates how the nation came into being during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Inspired by the notion that “much knowledge is incomplete in Nepal, that truth has been lost many times to speculation” (p. 51), Thapa engages in re-narrating “old and discredited histories“. Following her account of Prithvi Narayan Shah (“the great unifier unifies himself a nation”) she introduces the second chapter (“the age of the recent queens”) by pinpointing that “Nepal was ruled for the next 70 years by kings who were either underage, inept, insane or all three” (p. 58). This claim is further elaborated by details of intrigues and power games, padded with more or less obvious Shakespearean features. Although this is not a new attempt at re-interpreting history, the argumentation is nevertheless convincing.

The third chapter, “The wind, the haze”, is a fascinating and condensed history of the emergence of the political party landscape of Nepal, particularly the phases of the fight for democracy during the late 1940s (“the haze”) and its rapid end (“the monarch takes a stab at democracy”) in 1960. This is followed by an account of the more recent period of “postmodern” democracy, culminating in a description of the nineteenth working session of what still was, at least in name, a parliament (p. 143). These sessions strikingly brought home the messy state of parliamentary politics, with the chanting of slogans against the prime minister and the occasional fistfight. Some of these parliamentary sessions lasted five minutes, others even less (ibid.). Yet this chapter comprises much more than mere descriptions of failed parliamentary sessions. It is a vivid documentation of the “creeping anxieties on the perils of bad politics” (p. 136).

The following chapter, “The massacre to come”, is again a rather personal account by the author. It takes up nearly a third of the book and is possibly meant as its climax. It is a detailed (and lengthy) description of the author's trek with an American companion through the country's Maoist districts during a ceasefire. While looking out for Maoist women she tries to obtain some first hand information about, and understanding of, their involvement in the movement. The personal narration and the frequent use of a dialogical form add to the authenticity of the account. Yet this chapter is weaker than the others, reminding the reader of Thapa's first and less advanced novella, *Mustang Bhot in Fragments*. It also reveals the distance between the local population and the author, who is a member of what she

herself frequently terms “the bourgeoisie”. In spite of this shortcoming the book is a good read and highly recommendable for a diverse readership.

This piece of “uncensored discourse” (p. 4) was published in New Delhi and launched only a few days before what was to be officially termed the “royal proclamation”, when King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah seized power on February 1st, 2005. In the wake of this royal take-over the book gradually disappeared from bookshelves in the Kathmandu Valley. While some book shops claimed that the book was banned, others said it was in high demand and thus no longer available. Both stories could be true. The state of emergency was characterised by an unprecedented type of censorship. It seemed that the state had returned to the old days of panchayat rule, simply banning all types of news and information that were not in line with the ideas and interpretations of “their nation state”. Emergency has now been lifted for some time, and thus there is no legal provision for censorship. The book is not particularly flattering to the current political system, but a “modern monarchy” needs to provide room for such a book and its author. Thapa’s concluding words in the introduction are programmatic: “... there will come a time, I hope, when no such book about Nepal will be necessary. This is an elegy for democracy, yes, but one written while awaiting resurrection” (p. 6).

Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the managing editor, Prof. William Sax. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

We would prefer that you send us both “hard” and electronic copy of your contribution, formatted in Microsoft Word. Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the “Harvard” format.

In the body of your text:

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

In the bibliography:

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

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

Smith, B.C. 1992. Looking for ostriches. In *Research Methodologies for the Himalayas*, edited by J. Pande, pp. 110-145. Shimla: Mountain Publishers.

Use of quotation marks:

Use **double quotation marks** (“ ”) for quotations of any kind, and for so-called “epistemological distancing”.

Use **single quotation marks** (‘ ’) for quotations within quotations and semantic glosses, including literal renderings of indigenous terms.

We welcome information on upcoming conferences and publications. For advertising rates please contact the editors.

EBHR c/o William S. Sax
Ruprecht-Karls-Universität
South Asia Institute
Department of Anthropology
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330
D-69120 Heidelberg
Germany
e-mail: william.sax@urz.uni-heidelberg.de
Tel. +49-(0)6221-548836/8931
Fax +49-(0)6221-548898

EBHR

SOAS · LONDON

CNRS · PARIS

SAI · HEIDELBERG

ISSN 0943 8254

EBHR 28

ARTICLES

Agency and Resistance in the Thangmi-Newar Ritual Relationship: An analysis of Devikot-Khadga Jatra in Dolakha, Nepal 5

Sara Shneiderman

Ethnonymy in a Multiethnic Context: A note on Kinnaur 43

Isabelle Riaboff

Staying in Place: The social actions of Hindu Yoginis 54

Sondra L. Hausner

The 'Descent of the Pandavas': Ritual and cosmology of the Jad of Garhwal 67

Subhadra Mitra Channa

CORRESPONDENCE, ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS

The Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP) 90

Martin Gaenszle, Balthasar Bickel, Goma Banjade, Elena Lieven, Netra P. Paudyal, Arjun Rai, Iccha P. Rai, Manoj Rai, Novel K. Rai, Vishnu S. Rai, Narayan P. Sharma, and Sabine Stoll

BOOK REVIEWS 100

Spring 2005

published from Kathmandu, in collaboration with Social Science Baha