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Spring-Summer 2011

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. It is the result of a partnership between France (CNRS), Germany (South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg) and the United Kingdom (School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS]). From 2010 to 2014, the Editorial Board is based in the UK and comprises Michael Hutt (SOAS, Managing Editor), Ben Campbell (University of Durham), Ian Harper (University of Edinburgh), Sondra Hausner (University of Oxford), Sara Shneiderman (University of Cambridge) and Mark Turin (University of Cambridge, book reviews editor).

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For subscription details and back issues (>3 years)
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The *EBHR* is published from Kathmandu in collaboration with
Social Science Baha (http://www.soscbaha.org)

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to EBHR no. 38, which is a little late off the press but we hope not unforgivably so. We are happy to present our readers with another eclectic mixture of articles, and also to note that three of them are by scholars at an early stage of their academic careers.

In the first article, Bimbika Sijapati Basnett introduces us to the ground level realities of community forestry policy in Nepal and the ways in which its implementation is complicated by issues of gender, caste and migration in two very different hill communities. This is a fine example of an article that has the potential to influence the debate on development in Nepal. For the second article, David Gellner has delved into his filing cabinet and pulled out an essay about democracy and hybridity in Nepal that was presented in Kathmandu some eight years ago but never published. He has kindly added a postscript about the strong reactions it provoked at the time: this is another illustration of the impact of scholarly research. Third, Piers Locke introduces us to an aspect of Nepal that will be new to many of us: the tradition of elephant keeping in the Tarai, especially among the Tharu. Finally, Mélanie Vandenhelksen sheds rare and valuable light upon the moulding and assertion of new political and cultural identities in Sikkim.

The Editorial Committee is always pleased to receive offers of articles, reports, interviews and, when the sad occasion arises, obituaries of Himalayan scholars. For this issue, we are grateful to Mark Turin for his enlightening interview with Kesar Lall, to Michael Oppitz for enabling us to honour the passing of Romano Mastromattei, and to Naresh Koirala and Paul Bird for introducing us to the important work of the Nepal Library Foundation.

—Michael Hutt
July 2011

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Bimbika Sijapati Basnett holds a PhD in Development Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She has been conducting a wide range of commissioned and independent research projects on gender and social inclusion and natural resource governance in Nepal and the South Pacific since 2001.

David N. Gellner is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford and has been carrying out research on various aspects of Nepali society since 1981. Among his books are *Varieties of Activist Experience: Civil society in South Asia* (Sage, 2010), *Ethnic Activism and Civil Society in South Asia* (Sage, 2009), and (with Sarah LeVine) *Rebuilding Buddhism: The Theravada movement in twentieth-century Nepal* (Harvard, 2005; Social Science Press, 2008).

Piers Locke is Lecturer in Anthropology in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. His doctoral research concerns apprenticeship learning, communities of practice, and human-animal relations amongst the elephant handlers of Chitwan, Nepal. More recently, his Nepal research has focused on development interventions in government elephant stables and the rise of nature tourism in and around the Chitwan National Park. His film 'Servants of Ganesh' concerns the training of a young elephant at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center. He is currently writing a book, also titled *Servants of Ganesh*.

Mélanie Vandenhelsken is an anthropologist and researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. She is engaged in a research project on modes of construction of ethnicity in Sikkim, directed by Dr. Guntram Hazod. This has a particular focus on the influences of the state (Indian and Sikkimese) on the construction of ethnic 'mapping,' ethnic identity and difference, but also takes into account globalisation and trans-border networks. Her doctoral thesis, submitted in France in 2002, was a study of rituals and Buddhist monasticism in Sikkim. Her publications include 'Les spécialistes de rituels bouddhiques *nyingmapa* de Pemayangtse' in *Moines et moniales de par*

le monde. La vie monastique au miroir de la parenté. Vers une comparaison des différentes formes de vie monastique, edited by A. Herrou and G. Krauskopff, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009) and several articles in the *Bulletin of Tibetology* (2003, 2006 and 2008).

Linkages Between Gender, Migration and Forest Governance: Re-thinking community forestry policies in Nepal

Bimbika Sijapati Basnett

Introduction[1]

The policy literature surrounding the governance of community forests in the middle hills of Nepal has been undergoing tremendous changes. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the focus was primarily on promoting the effective participation of local communities in the sustainable management of forests. But recently, and increasingly, informed and influenced by the growing body of development research and practice as well as national level political changes in Nepal, a multitude of development concerns such as social exclusion, poverty reduction, decentralisation and climate change have percolated through to the academic and policy literature on community forestry. Gender-related concerns have been occupying an equally prominent space within these changes.[2]

Community forestry was first introduced in Nepal in 1978 through the coalescing of two interrelated development paradigms: Himalayan degradation theory and participatory development. Scholars and policy makers were concerned with what was perceived as rapid deforestation and soil degradation in the middle hills, and the inability of the nationalisation of forests (state monopoly over the governance of forests) to curb environmental decline effectively. At the same time, frustrated with top-down approaches to development, others were calling for participatory approaches in order to achieve the sustainable management

1 The field research for this paper was carried out as part of my Ph.D in Development Studies at the Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, between 2003 and 2006. I spent approximately four months in each of the field research sites and in Kathmandu, and employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, discussions with key informants and household surveys. This paper was first presented at the Nepal Study Day organised by the Britain Nepal Academic Council in Edinburgh in 2009. I am very grateful to Ben Campbell and Michael Hutt for their constructive comments and feedback on an earlier draft. I accept sole responsibility for any mistakes in the paper.

2 Community forestry continues to be one of the most well-documented and studied fields in Nepal. Publications include academic books and journals, donor and NGO reports, and think-tank policy studies.

of forests and address the basic forestry needs of local people. Therefore, the underlying rationale behind community forestry was that the local communities who live closest to the forests were best placed to protect, manage and sustainably utilise them, in partnership with the government. The government, in turn, became an extension agent, providing advice and support to local communities (Gilmour and Fisher 1991, Graner 1997, Pokharel 1997, Campbell 2002).

Increasingly, community forestry policies are questioning the undifferentiated view of local communities and the role of gender and social relations in the efficient and equitable governance of community forests. The major actors involved in the governance of community forestry—the government, donors, and civil society organisations—have been making concerted efforts to mainstream 'gender and social equity' in community forestry policies and institutions. Moreover, such a focus must be understood against the backdrop of the Maoist movement, the civil conflict in Nepal, the increasing demands relating to ethnic and caste-based inequalities, and the inclusion of gender and social equity issues in the wider national development agenda.

While these are important and commendable developments and reflect the growing momentum for inclusive change in Nepal, 'gender', 'caste', and 'ethnicity' are often regarded by community forestry policies and practices as static social relations, and women, Dalits and ethnic minorities as uniformly marginalised. Moreover, individuals and communities in rural areas are still assumed to be spatially bounded and their relationship to forest products remains unproblematised. The latter is of concern in the light of the importance of migration, both historically and in the recent past, for rural livelihoods throughout the country.

This paper questions the assumptions about gender relations and rural livelihoods that underpin community forestry policies and practices in the middle hills of Nepal. Drawing on field research carried out amongst community forestry user groups led by Dalits[3] (Biswa-Karma) and an ethnic

3 In this paper, I use the terms 'Dalit' and 'low-caste' interchangeably and the terms 'high-caste' and 'low-caste' without scare quotes. This is not to privilege the perspective of one particular, parochial group of hierarchists but to refer to the hierarchy that undoubtedly exists in the village political economy where I conducted this research, and at the national level too. Furthermore, the terms *tallo jat* (low caste) and *thulo jat* (high caste) formed a part of the everyday language used by Podyals, KCs and Biswa-Karmas in Gharmi. While the Poudyals and KCs employed them to reinforce pre-existing hierarchies, Biswa-Karmas

minority (Tamang) between 2004 and 2006, the paper argues that such assumptions remain divorced from the increasing multi-locality of rural livelihoods in Nepal, which is changing men and women's relationships with each other and with the governance of forest resources. The paper provides an overview of gender and migration-based inclusions and exclusions in community forestry policies, followed by a discussion of the two case studies.

Gender- and migration-based inclusions and exclusions in community forestry policies

Although the National Forestry Plan of 1976 and subsequent legislation marked the beginning of 'people centred' forest and land use policies in Nepal, gender issues were not explicitly mentioned in community forestry policies until the Master Plan for Forestry in 1987. The major objective of the National Forestry Plan of 1976 was to formally recognise the rights of local communities to manage their own forests, with technical assistance being provided by the government. However, as Harper and Tarnowski (2003) point out, in spite of its populist rhetoric the emphasis of the National Forestry Plan was on the protection, production and proper utilisation of forests in accordance with the government's desire to halt forest degradation and ensure that forests contributed to the development of the national economy. Furthermore, it was assumed that handing over forests to village Panchayats would trickle benefits down to those who depended most on forests for their livelihoods.[4]

By the mid-1980s, many reports evaluating the performance of the forestry sector had concluded that the condition of the forests that had been handed over to the local Panchayats had not improved, and that the local people who were most dependent on the forests were rarely involved in forest management (Britt 2002, Pokharel 1997). Consequently, the Master Plan for Forestry 1988 and its amendment in 1990 stated that forests should be handed over directly to their 'users' and not to the Panchayats; that user

used them to shed light on their historical disadvantage and draw attention to their caste-based struggle.

4 The Panchayat system in Nepal (1960 to 1990) was a pyramidical structure progressing from village level assemblies to the Rastriya Panchayat (national parliament). The system enshrined the absolute power of the monarchy and kept the king as the head of state with sole authority over all government institutions.

groups should be allowed to reap all the benefits of sustainably managing their forests; and that 'women' and 'the poor' should be involved in the management of forests (HMG/N 1990). However, gender was interpreted as 'women's issues' and women were implicated in forest degradation because of the nature of the sexual division of labour. It was therefore assumed that by incorporating women in forest management the causes of environmental degradation would be addressed. Furthermore, the Master Plan was devoted primarily to handing over usufruct rights in government forests to local users. 'Women's issues' were mentioned in the Plan but were rarely operationalised in practice.

Since the national conference to celebrate the 25th year of community forestry in 2003, however, gender issues have become a prominent feature of community forestry policies, and are raised in rights-based terms. The conference launched the 'second generation issues of community forestry'; recognised 'good governance'; 'sustainable management' and 'livelihoods' as three mandates of community forestry; and stated that 'gender and social equity' was an overarching theme that should be integrated into every facet of community forestry governance. Since the workshop, consolidated efforts have been underway at the national level, through initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation as well as donors, to mainstream gender and social equity in community forestry policies (Sijapati 2008). For instance, the Guidelines for Community Forestry Programmes (Revised) 2009, which serve as the policy framework for intervention at the local level, highlight the importance of including women, ethnic minorities and Dalits as equal partners throughout the formation and functioning of community forestry user groups. Under the guidelines for facilitating the formation of community forestry user committees, the document states the following: 'Proportionate representation of all categories of users such as poor, women, Dalit, indigenous people and ethnic groups should be ensured'. It further stipulates that 'there should be mandatory provision of at least 50 percent women representatives in the committee representing poor, Dalit, indigenous people and ethnic groups... Either the chairperson or the secretary of the committee should be a woman' (CFD 2009, pp.8).

Such concerns over gender and social inclusion in community forestry policies must be situated in the context of growing donor concern over 'gender and social equity' mainstreaming in community forestry on the

one hand, and the increasing politicisation of and demands for gender and social-based inclusion in Nepali politics on the other. Historically, donors have played a key role in the forestry sector in general, and community forestry in particular. For instance, AusAID advocated handing over community forests directly to users instead of the Village Panchayats in Kavrepalanchowk and Sindhupalchowk districts in the 1970s and was instrumental in introducing the current, user-oriented concept of community forestry in Nepal. More recently, the World Bank has been assisting the government of Nepal, and its community forestry sector in particular, to prepare for the possibility of a system of payment for environmental services emerging from the Kyoto Protocol, to ensure that local communities have the right incentive to and/or are adequately compensated for managing their forests and curbing forest degradation and deforestation. The major donors operating in Nepal, such as DfID, USAID, DANIDA and GTZ, continue to work in community forestry, focusing on gender and social equity issues in lending and programming. Furthermore, the major policies guiding the implementation of community forestry have largely been funded by the donors, who therefore command significant leverage over the content of these policies. My interviews with various government officials, ranging from senior officials framing community forestry policies at the national level to those implementing them at the local level, confirmed the role of donors in pushing for gendered reform.

Melissa Leach (2007) has traced the history of gender concerns in natural resource governance policies in developing countries like Nepal. She finds that there have been fundamental shifts over the past three decades in the ways in which 'women' are represented and gender-based issues are integrated into donor and NGO policy documents and reports. During the 1980s, the emphasis was on rationalising women's inclusion in natural resource governance processes. Consequently, simplistic discourses over women's close relationship with nature promoted by Ecofeminism and Women, Environment and Development perspectives were readily received and employed to strategically negotiate greater space for women's participation. Recently (as is evident in the context of Nepal), influenced by the growing critique by feminist scholars and development practitioners alike, donors and NGOs are recasting older concerns with women and environment in terms of rights and relations

in access and control over property. For instance, instead of assuming that rural women in many developing countries are in charge of firewood collection because women's environmental interests are synonymous or synergistic, the emphasis is on understanding women's access to alternative sources of energy, as influenced by power relations within and outside the household.

Furthermore, Nepal has been experiencing an explosion in the number of ethnic and caste-based political parties and social movements. Some of the most prominent, splinter and emerging organisations of particular interest to this study include the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, the Mangol National Organisation, the Chettri Samaj Nepal, the National Brahmin Association of Nepal, the Feminist Dalit Organisation, the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organisation, the Nepal Tamang Ghedung, and the Sunuwar Sewa Samaj. While some would argue that such political changes are a product of the ethnic and caste-based political mobilisation championed by the Maoist party to garner support for and wage their class-based struggle against the state (DeSales 2000, Hutt 2003, Thapa and Sijapati 2003), others suggest that the current political volatility has engendered a political vacuum which provides perfect conditions for these organisations and their demands to flourish (Hangen 2010). Nevertheless, the effect has been greater awareness of and demands for social inclusion in the Nepali state and society alike. National women's advocacy groups, with support from donors such as UNIFEM, have also exploited the opportunity to demand greater women's representation in the polity, and gender-based reform in property rights, citizenship and more. For instance, prominent women's advocacy groups were at the forefront in successfully lobbying for and securing 33% seats for women in the Constituent Assembly elected in 2008. Gender unequal laws, such as inheritance and citizenship rights which severely restricted women's claims to parental property and relegated them to the status of second-class citizens, have been successfully challenged and reformed. Gender-based reservations have been demanded in every arena of Nepali politics, including environmental governance.

The extent to which these changes will lead to a more inclusive Nepal or one which is further fractured along caste, ethnic and gender divisions is not yet clear. The trajectories, thus far, suggest that the discourse on 'caste', 'ethnicity' and 'gender' has created and reinforced identities, and

pitted one group against another. Moreover, gender and social equity have been re-interpreted as greater recognition of and access to state resources for the following categories: 'women', 'low castes' and 'ethnic minorities'.[5] Neither the historical complexities behind caste and ethnic relations and positioning nor the context-specific ways in which gender cuts across these relations to situate men and women differently in the diverse socio-economic, political and geographic landscapes of the country have been discussed or articulated. As Seira Tamang (2009) points out, donors, major political parties and women's organisations have all contributed to the production of an homogenous Nepali woman, subjugated uniformly throughout the country, irrespective of her position in the caste, class and ethnic hierarchies.

Donor reports on the implications of the civil conflict on gender and social equity aspects of community forestry serve to illustrate such compartmentalised understandings of gender, caste and ethnic relations. A study carried out by the Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project, for instance, points out that '...despite difficult conflict situation, Community Forestry User Groups, are practicing inclusive democracy, in which there is increased participation and representation of women and socially marginalized group' (Pokharel, Poudyal and Gurung 2005, pp.1). Andrea Nightingale (2002: 18) rightly argues that both the government and the donors have failed to adequately consider 'locally defined differences between people (men and women, different castes and ethnicities) and the ways in which these differences give people uneven access to resources and control over the community forestry management process'.

As Rigg (2005), Ashley and Maxwell (2001) and Razavi (2003) amongst others have shown, rural livelihoods in the global south are increasingly becoming multi-local and no longer confined to farming and land. This is particularly evident in the case of Nepal where seasonal out-migration, both within the country and to India have historically been a prominent strategy adopted by rural households seeking to escape state policies and agrarian changes, diversify their incomes, offset capital constraints and, increasingly, respond to the growing economic insecurity resulting from the political conflict in the country and fulfil aspirations of participation

5 Some of the most iconic research on the intersections between gender and wider social relations in Nepal include Bennett (2002), Cameron (1998), Kondos (2004) and Gray (1995).

in 'modern life' (Caplan 1990, Regmi 1978, Gill 2003, Sharma 2009). Open border policies between India and Nepal have meant that an estimated 1.3 million Nepali migrants are working in India, of whom about 90% are likely to be men (Sharma 2009). Furthermore, globalisation and the expansion of markets have given added impetus to the growing mobility of Nepali workers in search of circular migration for international contractual work in the Gulf and South East Asia (Seddon, Adhikari and Gurung 2001). To illustrate the growing importance of labour mobility, according to the latest figures published by the Department of Foreign Employment there has been a six-fold increase in the number of Nepali citizens migrating abroad for employment purposes (from 35,543 in 2000 to 214,164 in 2009), the vast majority of whom are going to India and the Gulf countries. In 2009, 78% went to the Gulf: 38% to Qatar alone, and 40% to other Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain etc. These are documented figures, i.e. they enumerate those who sought and were granted approval to work abroad by the Department of Foreign Employment. The Department estimates that in 2009 alone an additional 40% of the total number of documented workers (approximately 85,665) was undocumented (Basnett, forthcoming).

Despite the importance of migration for contemporary Nepal, the question of how seasonal and transnational migrations are affecting the governance of community forests remains unaddressed in both community forestry policies and the growing policy-oriented scholarship in this field. Community forestry policies define user households as those living in close proximity to forests who are most dependent on forest products for their livelihoods. Although households are viewed as increasingly differentiated along gender, ethnic, caste and class lines, such views pigeonhole households into discrete social and spatial categories and are symptomatic of authoritative discourses of development in Nepal. As Jeevan Sharma (2009) points out, because of the centrality of agriculture in international aid and development policies in Nepal since the 1950s, donor and government reports and policies portray rural Nepal as immobile and dependent on agriculture and natural resources. Out-migration is viewed as an undesirable economic choice compared to working on the land.

The academic scholarship on migration and natural resource governance in developing countries suggests that migration fundamentally alters the

relationship between humans and the environment, notwithstanding the debates surrounding specific impacts. Some (e.g. Katz (2000) and Ostrom (2000)) argue that migration leads to the breakdown of the social bonds of reciprocity and trust that are perceived as critical for collective action in natural resource governance. Sunderlin and Pokman (2002) argue that a slow-down in rural-urban migration can increase the population of villages, thereby increasing pressure on environmental commons such as forests. Curran and Agardy (2002) suggest that remittances generated as a result of migration provide alternatives to unsustainable resource extraction. Others have argued that the impact of migration cannot be pre-determined, and that much depends upon how well local communities and individuals re-design institutions to manage the flow and reap the potential benefits of migration (Agrawal and Yadama 1997).

Notwithstanding the many and complex facets of the vast and growing research on gender and migration, scholars have long argued that migration is an inherently gendered process (Chant 1992, Chant and Radcliff 1992). Key areas of research inquiry include differences in engagement of men and women in the processes of migration, the role of intra-household relations and labour market segmentation in the sex and class selectivity of migration flows, the gendered dynamics between migrants and those who are left behind, and continuities and changes in gender relations as a consequence of migration. Some are optimistic that opportunities to migrate and/or the absence of men from the household as a consequence of migration alters gender ideologies and enables unprecedented 'voice' and 'choice' for women (Chant 1998, Hadi 2001). Others (Resurreccion and Van Khanh (2007) and Elhmirts (2007)) point to the complex, gendered negotiations that take place between those who migrate and the ones who are left behind and the reproduction of gendered identities, roles and obligations that occurs in spite of migration. In a rare insight into the gender dynamics of migration from the middle hills of Nepal to the cities of India, Jeevan Sharma (2008) demonstrates that the act of migration and its outcomes are often interpreted as a transition from boyhood to manhood for young migrants and their families. By enabling young men to secure their sense of material obligation towards their families, migration reproduces local idioms of masculinity and reinforces a male dominated hierarchy in the household.

Seasonal out-migration and the feminisation of community forestry

among the Tamangs of Bhatpole

> We are more dependent on men than men are on us. We depend on them for work and money. But we have learnt that by cooperating amongst ourselves we can help each other out.
>
> (Middle-aged Tamang woman, Bhatpole Village, Feb. 2005)

'Bhatpole' is a village located in Jaisithok Village Development Committee (henceforth VDC) in the Kavrepalanchok District of Central Nepal. The VDC is inhabited by the following major ethnic/caste groups in order of population size: Jaisi-Bahun, Tamang, Magar, Chetri, Thakuri, Bhujel, Gharti, Newar, and Kami. Tamangs are the second largest ethnic group in the VDC, and mainly concentrated in Bhatpole. The District Forest Office-Kavrepalanchok (henceforth DFO-Kavre) handed over the usufruct rights to two community forests located in Bhatpole (Birawtapakha and Koldanda) to the Tamangs in 1997 and in 2003. Tamangs are of Tibeto-Burman origin and are generally located in the central districts of Nepal. According to Andras Höfer's ([1979]2004) landmark study on state-society relations in Nepal, 'Tamangs' did not exist as an ethnic group in official records until 1932. The category was used to incorporate a diverse group of people with distinct socio-cultural and linguistic practices into the state classificatory machinery. Nevertheless, the state-making process helped forge a sense of common 'Tamang' identity. Tamangs are one of Nepal's largest ethnic minorities and are considered one of the most economically and socially marginalised.

Tamang households depend upon agriculture and non-agricultural livelihoods within and outside the village. Because of the dearth of good agricultural land, most households relied on seasonal out-migration to Kathmandu and neighbouring towns and cities to supplement shortfalls in household income. Tamang men and women between the ages of 16 and 35 gave similar reasons for preferring to migrate seasonally, and identified a lack of steady and well-paying employment opportunities as the major push factor and the possibilities of finding stable and lucrative employment opportunities as the major 'pull factor'. Migrating seasonally allowed them to return to the villages during peak agricultural seasons to help out with family farm production and engage in daily wage agricultural work for the rich landlords in their own and neighbouring VDCs. In spite of such

commonalities in responses from men and women alike, seasonal migrants were predominantly male.

In Bhatpole, the male-led pattern of seasonal out-migration was not due to gender imbalances at the intra-Tamang level, but rather to the gendered segmentation of the markets for Tamang labour as well as the inability of Tamang migrant networks to tap into gender inclusive markets. For instance, Tamang women had previous experience of migrating to Kathmandu to work in the carpet factories. Nearly all the former male and female carpet factory workers in the village during the time of the field study said in interviews that their families had encouraged them to work in the carpet factories but had left the final decision to them. In this respect, the 'ideology of controlling women' (which was predominant amongst the Biswa-Karmas of Gharmi, as I will discuss below) was virtually absent amongst the Tamangs of Bhatpole. Former carpet factory workers spoke of the difficulties of working in the factories, such as severe abdominal pain caused by the dust from the wool entering the body via the mouth. Although the management did very little to improve health and safety standards at work, workers were subjugated to very little gender-based discrimination. Both men and women interviewees said there were only minimal gender-based variations in the duties assigned to them (weaving carpets, rolling wool etc.) and the wages they were paid, which were based on output.

After the carpet industry collapsed, due to declining export volumes and reduced rates of return in the late 1990s (Graner 2001), much of the informal and or casual labour demand in towns and cities was specifically for male labour. Furthermore, both men and women interviewees said that being a part of a network of migrant workers was critical in receiving updates on employment opportunities, accessing emotional and financial support as and when needed, adapting to new working and living environments, amongst other benefits. But these networks had little access to employment opportunities that were able to absorb both male and female workers, outside of the carpet industry. Consequently, most of the women carpet workers had to return to Bhatpole while men continued to find casual employment elsewhere.[6] As a Tamang male who was a former carpet factory worker explained during the field research,

6 These findings are in line with Elivira Graner's (2001) study of workers in the carpet factories in the Kathmandu valley.

'We Tamangs are illiterate and do not have the skills required for skilled work. We rely on widely available, semi-skilled jobs such as construction related work, portering, working in restaurants as waiters and kitchen helpers, that specifically seek to hire young men who are willing and able to put in long hours'.[7]

The gender biases embedded in the markets for Tamang labour were being transmitted in turn at the intra-household level and were evident in women's disproportionate dependence on men for material, labour and extra-local interlocution. The allocation of responsibilities for family farm production and domestic work such as the collection of firewood and fodder was defined by 'availability to work' rather than gender *per se*. However, women interviewees from households where male members were seasonal migrants pointed to the marked differences in their work burden (i.e. the time allocated for various types of work) when the men were present, compared with when the men were away.

However, rather than being passive spectators, women were also capitalising on the spaces existing within Tamang socio-cultural practices and investing in greater cooperation and collaboration amongst one another in order to mitigate the gender-based constraints they faced in their everyday lives. For instance, Tamang women participated in exchange labour of various kinds in family farm production and domestic work to reduce the labour vacuum created by male absences. Women interviewees suggested that it was common constraints as well as the collective will to address these constraints that explained the widespread cooperation amongst women. While labour exchange arrangements had been commonplace throughout the history of the village and were carried out by both men and women, women interviewees explained that men's arrangements were not calculated, monitored, and reciprocated in the same way that women's were.[8] For instance, as a Tamang woman in her

7 Ben Campbell's (1997) research on the Tamang-speaking communities of Rasuwa district helps explain the confinement of 'Tamangs' to semi-skilled work in the hinterlands of Kathmandu, such as in Bhatpole. Campbell demonstrates that the high illiteracy rates, differential access to the institutions of state and a legacy of state-sponsored coercive labour arrangements have created structural barriers of opportunity between Tamangs and recent migrants and excluded the Tamang-speaking communities from the fruits of economic progress.

8 Ben Campbell's study of forms of cooperation in a Tamang community in the upper Trisuli valley resonates with the findings from my research. Campbell points out that

mid-twenties whose husband seasonally migrated to Kathmandu pointed out, 'Our employers won't let us work if we bring our small children along. Those of us with small children and husbands who are away have come up with a system to take turns to share care-taking responsibilities. Today it is my turn, tomorrow I will go to work [as a daily wage agricultural labourer for one of the Jaisi-Bahun landowners] and another friend will take over.'

It was this context of common, gendered constraints faced by women in the absence of males as well as women's collective strategies for mitigating these constraints that served as the underlying impetus for community forestry to be conceptualised as a women-led initiative, with women at the forefront of promoting and supporting it. Community forestry was viewed as a way of addressing the lack of secure and steady access to forest products commonly faced by Tamang women in the absence of men. Collaborating for community forestry became a part of and intertwined with ongoing forms of collective effort. This was reflected in the ways in which women drew on pre-existing forms of collaboration to discuss and decide on the institutions that should govern community forests prior to seeking their formal handover, as well as to define men's role in the community forestry process. Interviews with women users revealed how they painstakingly discussed and decided on rules (user eligibility criteria, means of forest protection, penalties and so on) during exchange labour work, borrowing from the rules that governed a neighbouring community forestry user group where they had secondary (limited) usufruct rights.[9]

Tamangs typically engage in the following five major categories of labour: household, kinship, festive, exchange and wage. Conceptually speaking, these arrangements are either 'delimited' and/or 'extensive'. 'The extensive forms depend on structures and strategies that integrate through asymmetrical hierarchy, and the delimited forms operate on the basis of symmetrical mutual equality' (Campbell 1994: 10). For instance, calls on 'kinship' and 'festive' labour were often made on the grounds of pre-existing social relationships and hierarchies (such as through discourses of common ancestry and obligations conferred through cross-cousin marriages) and did not have to be reciprocated. In comparison, 'exchange labour shifts the balance away from the valuation of social relationships to direct calculation of labour…what is returned can be of the same nature of different but equivalent' (ibid.: 7).

9 As Bina Agarwal (2010) points out, governmental policies for handing over forests to local communities in Nepal are more flexible than those in India. Unlike in India, even forests in good condition spanning more than one administrative (or VDC) boundary can be handed over to local communities. Users are also allowed to hold multiple memberships in different community forests. The extent to which these policies are flexible in reality is debatable. Nevertheless, the Tamangs of Bhatpole had usufruct rights to 'Thuli Ban',

Women feared that involving men, the vast majority of whom migrated seasonally, as equal partners in the community forestry process would significantly increase the costs of participation, would entail broadening the scope of community forestry to meet men's interests and priorities, and could jeopardise the basis for collective action for community forestry governance. At the same time, women also sought men's support during the initial stages of community forestry in order to help them establish working relationships with government officials and comply with governmental rules and regulations. Women conceptualised their life spaces as separate from but simultaneously linked to those of men. Their spaces were limited to the local (the village, local market, neighbouring villages) whereas men operated in both local and extra-local spaces. Women perceived men who seasonally migrated outside the village (to extra-local spaces) as better able to understand, interact and bargain with extra-local actors such as DFO officials. As Bina Agarwal (2010) argues in her recent book on 'gender and Green governance', community forestry policies, though implemented at the level local, are framed at the national level and beyond. Women involved in governing community forests in South Asia, including those in Nepal, often lack the experience and networks required to forge extra-local links and influence institutions at higher levels. Furthermore, as Andrea Nightingale (2005) points out, in spite of the participatory nature of community forestry policies, the support provided by the Department of Forestry in the formation of user groups assumes that local people have little knowledge about how to manage community forests and must be taught modern siviculture: 'The development of written management plans, the need for careful accounting records and the promotion of siviculturally based management strategies by the District forest officers (re)inscribe differences between users based on education and literacy' (Nightingale 2005: 581). In the context of Bhatpole, this 'professionalisation'

a forest located in Panchkaal VDC, approximately 5 km from Bhatpole village. Because of the sheer size of 'Thuli Ban' (Big Forest), the user group was divided into primary and secondary users, depending on the proximity of their homestead to the forest. As secondary users, the Tamangs of Bhatpole had minimal access to fodder and fuelwood and did not have a voice in community forestry decision-making mechanisms. Nevertheless, because Thuli Ban was considered to be one of the most successful instances of community-led forest management by both the District Forest Officials as well as the local users, the Tamang women of Bhatpole drew operational clues from Thuli Ban and borrowed some of its formal and informal institutions for governing community forests in Bhatpole.

of community forestry led Tamang women to depend on male counterparts with literacy skills and extra-local experiences to interlocute between the District Forest Officials and Tamang women users during the formation of community forestry.

Tamang men generally agreed to play a limited, albeit supporting, role in the community forestry process because they would benefit alongside the women from secure access to forest products, but would not have to contribute their time and labour to community forestry governance in the same way. But as Arun Agrawal (2005) reminds us in his celebrated work on the making of environmental subjects, without direct involvement in the monitoring and enforcement of forest rules, men did not share the same sense of ownership and stake in the community forestry process governance as women did. The following is a typical explanation provided by Tamang male interviewees for the observed gender differences in involvement in community forestry: 'I could not commit to community forest because I was rarely in the village. Having secure access to forest products was more important for my wife... I only had to face the hardship of finding sufficient forest products when I returned to the village... I supported her decision [to be a part of the community forestry establishment process] because it was her time and her effort, she could do as she pleases with it'.

In summary, migrants from Bhatpole were predominantly male because of the gendered segmentation of markets for Tamang labour, and the inability of Tamang networks to tap into gender inclusive markets. Consequently, the gender division of labour at the household level was such that men mostly migrated in search of employment and women were left responsible for family farm production and domestic work including the collection of forest products. Male out-migration amongst the Tamangs of Bhatpole led to the 'feminisation of community forestry'. Women took the lead in governing community forestry whereas men's roles and responsibilities were defined as supporting women.

Remittances, class and the invisibilisation of women among the Dalits of Gharmi

> The familial pressure to migrate, earn sufficient income, and re-invest in the village so as to end the shackles of poverty and caste oppression is much stronger for a man than a woman.

(Biswa-Karma male, aspiring migrant to Qatar, May 2005)

> My husband fought and was beaten in struggle to get our forests from the Poudyals and KCs. But I also fought. We were like back stage and front stage actors in a natak [theatre play]. I provided the necessary support, and my husband represented both of us in the struggle.
>
> (Biswa-Karma female, married with children, March 2005)

The village of 'Gharmi' is located in Lamachaur VDC, Kaski District, Western Nepal. High-caste Poudyals (Bahuns) and Khatri-Chetris[10] (Chetris, henceforth 'KCs) and 'low-caste' Biswa-Karmas inhabit the village, with each group occupying its own settlement hamlet. The primary sources of livelihood for the Dalits were sharecropping and remittances from male out-migration. The District Forest Office-Kaski handed over the Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest in Gharmi to the Biswa-Karmas in 1997, after three years of fierce fighting between the 'high' and 'low' castes over usufruct rights to the forests. The caste system was conceptualised and implemented by the Nepali ruling elite with Chetris/Brahmins (such as the KCs and Poudyals of Gharmi) at the apex of the state-sponsored caste hierarchy and the Dalits (such as the Biswa-Karmas of Gharmi) relegated to the bottom (Höfer 1994, Bista 1991). Nevertheless, there exists considerable fluidity in caste-based relations and practices at the local level. For instance, in Gharmi the Biswa-Karmas considered themselves to be at the top of the low-caste/Dalit hierarchy and subjugated those below to the same social and cultural inequalities that they themselves faced at the hands of their Brahmin/Chetri patrons (Höfer [1979]2004). Furthermore, many of the Dalit socio-cultural practices (such as those related to the treatment of women, as will be demonstrated below) mirrored high-caste practices, and were strictly enforced not for the purposes of 'sanskritising' (i.e. moving up the caste hierarchy) but for cementing caste-based divisions vis-à-vis other Dalits.

According to the oral history of the village, three lineages of low castes were brought to the village by high castes in the late 19th century to work as agricultural sharecroppers. They were settled in close clusters and were

10 According to key informants in the KC community, K.C. stands for 'Khatri-Chetri'. Khatri-Chetris are descendants of Brahmans who married outside their caste, to Chetris.

granted barely enough land for building a house and an adjoining kitchen garden. The patron-client relationship between the castes was based on mutual interdependence. The high castes depended on the low castes as a source of cheap labour and the low castes on the high castes for their livelihood. Furthermore, caste-based practices of untouchability defined every day social interactions between high and low castes.

Although the majority of Biswa-Karma households continued to rely on various forms of patron-client relationship for their livelihood, this had also undergone dramatic changes through the monetisation of the rural economy, improved infrastructure and greater linkages to markets. Such changes had created new forms of inequality between the high and low castes in terms of differential access to education and formal employment. Nevertheless, the changes had also allowed Dalit men to migrate seasonally to the Tarai to take advantage of the different agricultural seasons and to India to find non-agricultural work, thereby establishing seasonal outmigration as an important feature of Dalit livelihood.

As Gill (2003) reports, many rural livelihoods are dependent on the same type of seasonal out-migration amidst a lack of changes in the demand for these labourers. In other words, supply has outstripped demand for low-skilled labour in the Tarai and in India. This meant that in Gharmi only a handful of households were able to accumulate an adequate or sustained income through migration. At the time of the field research, these households were increasingly sending young men to the Gulf countries, and to Qatar in particular. Although the remittances from the Gulf were higher than from India, the costs incurred while migrating to the Gulf for employment purposes were also significantly higher. In this regard, inter-generational migration was differentiating the Dalit community along class lines and cementing these divisions. The 'remittance class' re-invested in the village in the form of land and productive resources, and lowered their economic dependence on caste-based patron-client relations. Furthermore, those who had migrated to India were also influenced by the Dalit struggle taking place in India, and were instrumental in mobilising support against caste-based discrimination upon their return to Gharmi.[11]

11 This is broadly similar to what Mary Cameron (1998) observed regarding the impact of male out-migration on caste-based relations in her study of far-western Nepal. However, the effect of male out-migration on gender relations and local environmental governance is beyond the scope of her study.

Even though it was widely believed that seasonal out-migration was the only viable option for reducing household vulnerability and increasing the social and economic standing of individuals in the village political economy, migration was not an option for women. Caste-based ideologies such as 'women's honour' and a strict enforcement of gender division of labour served to control women's mobility.[12] Furthermore, 'women' were far from being a homogenous group and were complicit in the reproduction of these inequalities in different ways, as will be discussed further in the context of the governance of community forestry.

The motivation behind the Dalits' request for the handover of community forest was to gain secure access to forest products, reduce women's work burden in collecting forest products, and preserve women's honour (*ijjat*). Biswa-Karma households required secure access to forest products such as firewood for cooking, fodder for livestock, organic manure for agricultural production and timber for construction purposes. Collecting forest products, and firewood and fodder in particular, was associated with locally defined conceptions of femininity and was therefore considered women's responsibility. These demarcations were strictly observed and any transgressions severely reprimanded. For instance, men often took offence at the author's inquiries over the household consumption of firewood during the fieldwork process. As one put it, 'Why are you asking us? You should ask those who are responsible for cooking.'

Nevertheless, women's dependence on forest products was mediated by the economic wellbeing of their households and life-cycle processes. Women with access to remittances and private land were less dependent than those without. Furthermore, collecting forest products was considered the most difficult and time-consuming work, which the senior women often delegated to junior ones at the intra-household level. The majority of women from medium and poorer households, with limited access to remittances, relied on illegally extracting forest products from high-caste-controlled communal and private forests. These women would form small groups of four and five and steal in the late hours of the night to minimise their chances of being caught. Women informants said the high castes used verbal and physical threats of 'dishonouring' women to discourage them

12 These are generally considered to be high-caste practices in the ethnographic literature on gender and caste in Nepal. See Bennett ([1983] 2002) and Cameron (1998).

from entering the high-caste forests. 'Honour' was associated with local idioms of sexuality, defining what constituted 'appropriate' behaviour for women, and was crucial for maintaining women's (and especially junior women's) restricted position in the household and community.

Many high caste Poudyals were against the community forestry being handed over to the Biswa-Karmas because their lineage deity (*kul deota*) was located in the forest. According to locally defined and sanctioned practices of untouchability, Biswa-Karmas were barred from even entering the 'sacred' forest, let alone making a claim on it. But for the majority of Poudyals and KCs, relinquishing rights to what was perceived as high-caste property would pave the way for greater demands for caste-based equality in other domains and undermine their power and privilege in the political economy of the village.

When the high castes filed a counter claim for the forests with the District Forest Office-Kaski, the senior and powerful men within the Biswa-Karma community, who were also least dependent economically on caste-based patron-client relationships, employed community forestry as a vehicle and a platform for a caste-based struggle. Discourses of 'equality', 'rights' and 'citizenship' were employed to mobilise support for the movement. For instance, as one of the senior men recalled in an interview: 'According to the Forest Act 1993 and the Forest Regulation 1995, handover of forests is prioritised for those communities living closest to the forests. Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge adjoins our settlement and is more accessible for us than for either Poudyals or KCs. We had more rights over the forests than they did'. In addition, the mobilisation of support did not just exist at the discursive level. The community leaders (who were also members of the remittance class) went to great lengths to portray a 'unified Biswa-Karma community' voice against the high castes, and put considerable social pressure on the poorest segments and women of the Biswa-Karma community to ensure that they participated in the struggle too.

Both men and women interviewees spoke at length about the various ways in which they took part in the struggle over community forests. However, there were significant differences in their responses along gender lines. A key, female informant used the analogy of 'backstage' and 'front stage' actors in a *natak* or play to represent gender differences in roles and responsibilities in the struggle over the forests. Similarly, male interviewees spoke of their trips to the District Forest Office-Kaski and

to the police to make complaints against the high castes; of how the high castes had the police in their pocket and had them arrested several times; of how they led and/or participated in the labour strike against the high castes; of how they had got into verbal and physical confrontations with the high castes amongst others. Women, by contrast, mentioned how they had participated in the labour strike, increased the number of times they went to steal in the forests, suffered increases in verbal abuse at the hands of the high castes, mustered the courage to yell back at the forest guards, and so on. Women could not participate in the same way that men could because of the restrictions imposed by domestic gender norms and the need to abide by gendered codes of conduct and interactions with men outside their community.

By the time community forestry was handed over to the Biswa-Karmas in 1997, the struggle over community forests had far-reaching extra-local consequences. Numerous external actors, such as the police and senior officials in the DFO-Kaski were involved in mediating the struggle. The story of the 'struggle of the powerless, Dalit community for their rights to access forests' had made headlines throughout the district. Consequently, the governance of community forestry was not merely about securing access to forest products, but had transformed into a village-wide public affair determining extra-local recognition and the flow of development aid. The senior and most powerful members had a vested interest in maintaining control over the community forestry process. The major positions within the community forestry committee, such as those of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary, were reserved for the senior men of the Biswa-Karma community.

The primary criterion for individuals to be nominated for and occupy the other committee seats became the 'visibility' of their contribution to the struggle for community forestry. One of the committee members, a leading member of the Biswa-Karma community, suggested in an interview that this was to prevent 'free riders' from participating in the community forestry process. However, the effect was that women's contribution to the community forestry process was rendered invisible and women were absent from the major decision-making body in charge of formulating and implementing institutions to govern community forests. The 'elected' committee members made all such decisions.

Women's lack of formal and informal representation in the community

forestry decision-making process meant that many of the rules that were established not only disregarded women's gender-specific concerns (with regard to forest opening and closing times, the availability of forest products, amongst others), but also ignored women as 'users' in the community forestry process. For instance, the first Constitution[13] of the community forestry user's committee stated that there can only be one member per household and outlined the roles, responsibilities and obligations of being a user. The end of the document listed the names of the recognised users, who were mostly men. However, women, as members of user households, still had to volunteer their labour for community forestry activities such as plantation, guarding etc. In effect, women were responsible for community forestry without any accompanying rights or voice in the community forestry decision-making and benefit-sharing processes. Although women were well aware of these gender-based institutional exclusions, they refrained from openly contesting them for fear of jeopardising the authority and influence of senior male household and community members. In many respects, the fate of community forestry governance in Gharmi village reflects the inevitability of 'elite capture' that Tarnowski (2002) refers to in his study of the politics of community forestry governance in Nepal. Elites in locales where forest user groups are being set up, such as the remittance class in Gharmi, find spaces for manipulating the discourses of social inclusion and democracy that are increasingly used to justify the flow of development aid in local environmental governance and question the emancipatory aims of community forestry policies.

In summary, male out-migration was differentiating the Dalit community along class lines and creating a 'remittance class'. Those who benefited from higher and sustained levels of remittance income were able to re-invest in land and other productive resources, whereas others remained dependent on caste-based, patron-client relations. The 'remittance class'

13 The Government of Nepal requires all user groups to have a government-approved constitution and operational plan before being considered for the handover of community forests. According to the Guidelines for Community Forestry (Revised) 2009, a constitution is 'a compilation of rules and regulations prepared on the basis of general consensus by the forest user group to manage the group and its activities'. An Operational Plan is 'a plan prepared by the forest user group and approved by the District Forest Officer for the protection and management of community forests as well as for the utilization, sale and distribution of forest products to improve the livelihood of users maintaining environmental balance at the same time'.

was also using remittances and migration experiences to wage a caste-based struggle, and community forestry served as a platform. Though women were more dependent on forest products than men, these dynamics removed women from view, along with their gender-specific needs in the process. In this regard, migration and remittances were playing a critical role in further entrenching gender inequalities and shaping the gendered landscape of community forestry governance.

Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that the current academic and policy literature on community forestry governance in Nepal does not adequately reflect the changing landscape of rural livelihoods and gender dynamics. While 'gender and social equity mainstreaming' as a policy approach figures prominently in national policies on community forestry, the definition of 'gender' is limited to women's participation, and women are assumed to be a homogenous group that is equally marginalised. In this paper I have highlighted how gender interacts with wider social relations, the increasing multi-locality of rural livelihoods, and their implications for women and men's entry into and influence over the governance of community forests.

In the case of Bhatpole, I have demonstrated the ways in which the predominance of male out-migration shaped intra-household gender dynamics and contributed to the feminisation of community forestry governance. By contrast, in the case of Gharmi, male migration contributed to the creation of a 'remittance class', which used community forestry as a platform on which it waged a caste-based struggle, thereby further entrenching inequalities along lines of gender, class and seniority.

For far too long, community forestry policies have operated on the assumption of the physical and social boundedness of rural communities. In this paper, I have attempted to draw attention to the importance of studying migration (internal and external) as one of the factors shaping social change, and of questioning the present approach to the governance of community forests.

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Preconditions of Democracy: An outsider's reflections and their reception in Nepal

David N. Gellner

Early in 2003, as the second ceasefire that punctuated the Nepal Civil War (1996-2006) took hold, the Social Science Baha of Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, invited foreign and local scholars to a conference on Inclusive Democracy to be held in Kathmandu. Over three days in late April 2003, 36 papers were presented in what was in those days called the Birendra International Conference Centre (today it houses the Constituent Assembly). I presented my paper, entitled at that time 'Inclusion, Hybridity, Social Order: Preconditions of Democracy', on Friday 25 April 2003.[1] The publicity and reception that the paper received immediately following the conference is recounted below and seems to have given me some renown as the scholar who emphasises hybridity in the Nepali context.

The idea that motivated the conference—that a new form of more inclusive democracy would be required to overcome the conflict—is today very widely accepted, but the question of how far to go in the direction of ethnic federalism is as controversial as ever (the very suggestion of federalism was radical at that time). Most of those who presented papers in 2003 have re-worked their ideas or published versions of them elsewhere. It seems unlikely that a collective publication of them now would serve much purpose. However, several people drew my attention to specific elements of this particular paper that they found valuable. Furthermore, the way in which it was received in Nepal is also, I hope, of more than passing interest.

The main body of the paper—though dated, particularly in its discussion of the Maoists' ideas about democracy, which undoubtedly have evolved considerably since that time—is presented here as it was at the time, i.e. as I revised it in November 2003 and April 2004. It reflects the times in which

1 See http://www.soscbaha.org/activities/conferences-and-workshops/161-the-agenda-of-transformation.html. A short Nepali summary of my paper, which I checked for accuracy, was published in 2004 along with summaries of other papers, in M. Mainali (ed.) *Samaveshi Loktantraka Adharharu* [The Conditions of Inclusive Democracy] (Gellner 2004). For comments I would like to thank D.P. Martinez, J. Whelpton, M. Hutt, and the members of seminars in Kathmandu and Hiroshima.

it was written, both the optimism of the ceasefire and the pessimism of the severe conflict and political polarisation after the renewal of hostilities, as well as the limited accessibility of the Maoists' writings.

Definitions of democracy and remarks on method

What is democracy? Putting aside classical roots, there is an enormous literature, and many long debates on this subject, starting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe and the European-settled parts of the Americas, spreading in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries throughout the globe. The very terms in which one frames the debate will, of course, have an impact on the conclusion one comes to. One need only look as far as the different terms by which 'democracy' has been translated into Nepali as an illustration of this point: *prajātantra* ('democracy', literally rule by the subjects [of a king]) vs. *ganatantra* (more common in Hindi, 'rule by the people', understood to mean republicanism as in India) vs. *janatantra* ('rule by the people') or *janbād* (lit. 'people-ism').

Reduced to its most basic elements, 'democracy' would appear to mean (1) government *in the name of the people* where (2) the presumption is that the individuals who make up 'the people' *are intrinsically equal*. What is not included in this definition is the particular constitutional, electoral, or other means by which this is put into practice;[2] nor does it presuppose that parliamentary, multi-party democracy is the only or the best form of democracy—an assumption that might be warranted as corresponding to the intuitions of the vast majority in western Europe, for example, but would not be so warranted in Nepal. Despite this, I shall not attempt to delineate common Nepali understandings of democracy in this paper, because my purpose here is not to produce an anthropological account *describing* how Nepalis perceive democracy (very valuable though such an exercise would be), but rather to distinguish, however briefly and sketchily, various concepts of democracy, to assess their adequacy, and to make some suggestions as to small but practicable steps that could be taken so that inclusive democracy might, in the long run, be achieved in Nepal. In other words, the paper is both analytical and *prescriptive*.

In signalling the distinction between *description* and *prescription*, I invoke

2 For a highly informative survey on the actual history of the *mechanisms* of democracy (i.e. constitutions, secret ballots, universal suffrage, etc.), see Markoff (1999).

a key methodological precept. There is (or, as I shall argue, there ought to be) a fundamental difference between a descriptive account or explanatory model (which attempts to describe how a particular system works) and, on the other hand, a prescriptive model or template which attempts to provide an ideal towards which actual arrangements should be made, so far as is possible, to conform and in terms of which actual arrangements may be judged. In a classic essay Geertz (1973) pointed out that religions tend to combine, and indeed run together, both kinds of statement: they are both 'models of' (positing how things are) and simultaneously 'models for' (providing ideals of how things should be). It is a matter of empirical observation that Nepali intellectuals (as many elsewhere also) do not often observe a strict separation in these two different modes of analysis, or an awareness that there is a distinction to be made.[3] No doubt the active engagement of Nepali intellectuals in the problems of their country (a good thing), and their consequent frequent employment as development consultants (an empirical and unavoidable fact), mean that they are highly used to making recommendations, and indeed finishing any piece of writing with a list of them. Making prescriptive recommendations is certainly unavoidable, and the present essay is no exception.

Furthermore, sophisticated theorists will argue that the fact/value distinction is in fact a chimaera, that even the most supposedly value-free investigation inevitably bears the marks of its creator's position and presuppositions. Many apparently empirical sociological investigations are driven by their authors' evaluative positions and ideological interests. All this may be true, but, even so, *as an ideal*, as an *idea that can guide the organisation of analysis*, the fact/value distinction is one that all analysts should keep constantly in mind. Empirical and descriptive analyses are the more powerful when the author's preferences or suggestions do not repeatedly intrude.

One of the most famous definitions of democracy is Lincoln's (implicit) definition in his 1863 Gettysburg address, when he spoke of democracy

3 That Nepalis have no monopoly when it comes to ignoring the fact/value or description/prescription distinction could be shown by any number of examples. I cite only one by an American journalist with a deep knowledge of Japan: Patrick Smith's *Japan: A Reinterpretation* is in many ways a fine piece of work but it is marred by too much preaching (i.e. too much prescriptive pleading to fellow Americans) and an insufficiently comparative framework.

as government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This is certainly fine rhetoric, but as clear analysis it elides the description/prescription distinction, begs many questions, and leaves us as confused as before (Lincoln, being a canny lawyer and politician, probably knew exactly what he was doing):

- **'by the people'**: all government is 'by people' and the question is to know how representative those in power are and what degree of involvement 'the people' should have in actually making decisions;
- **'of the people'**: this phrase likewise begs the question: who are 'the people'? All men owning property (a common criterion in nineteenth-century Europe and in earlier ages)? All men? All men and women? One way of making sense of this definition is to understand it in terms of the nationalist principle: government should be *by the people of the nation* and not by foreigners. But of course that only pushes the issue of definition back on to the question of how membership in 'the nation' can or should be defined.
- **'for the people'**: this final part of the Gettysburg definition may be translated as 'in the name of the people'. But on its own it is not enough to define democracy, because monarchies, authoritarian regimes, etc. all claim to be governing 'for the people'. The Panchayat system claimed to be governing 'for the people' and some would say, even now, that its claims were not wholly preposterous.

What Lincoln's formulation confused and ran together was the distinction between two radically different models of democracy:

I. democracy as *participation*: in this Rousseau-ian, republican vision, democracy only works in so far as people make the decisions themselves; politicians are not representatives with freedom of action, but delegates of the people;
II. democracy as *representation*: in this liberal vision the nation-state is made up of individuals who aggregate their preferences; politicians mediate between the people and the state.

For the most part, these two models of democracy have been in tension. On a small scale, in Swiss cantons or Israeli kibbutzim for example, the

participatory model has been shown to work, but on a larger scale it tends to lead to dictatorship. A complication for both models is raised by the ethnic or minority question, which is central to discussions of inclusion in the South Asian context: how far should ethnic or caste groups have rights, as groups? And should their members have rights, as individuals, that are not shared necessarily by all other groups or individuals? These questions raise important issues, which I will touch on below.

Participatory democracy: the Marxist variant

Currently in Nepal two broad models are actually in play. One could say that there are three models, if the Panchayat model of guided partlyless democracy, which was significantly different from the other two, is also included. However, almost no one today is openly advocating a return to the indirect democracy of the Panchayat era, and the bankruptcy of that model has surely been demonstrated by the drift and illegitimacy of governments since 4th October 2002. The two broad models are, of course, liberal democracy and Marxist democracy. The liberal democratic model presupposes that there should be competing parties, a free market, private property, and an independent judiciary. According to the Marxist model, which is still very popular on the left in Nepali politics and by no means confined to the Maoists, such institutions are inevitably captured by the bourgeoisie, so that they become a mere front for middle-class interests. In the Marxist model democracy consists in the rule of the working class, the majority, as represented by vanguard parties. Their task is to prevent the exploitation and inequality that occurs under other forms of rule. Whatever their rhetoric, most Nepali political forces appear to have come to accept, whether in principle or because of pragmatic considerations, the liberal democratic model. It was Madan Bhandari's great achievement to give the UML a language in which they could do this. Even the Maoist leaders gave statements to the press in March 2003 which seemed to imply that they might be able to bring themselves to do the same, though the Marxist doctrine of dialectics can be used to justify any amount of temporary doctrinal inconsistency and more recent statements suggest that classical Marxist and Maoist thinking continues to be their main guide to action.

One modern theorist who attempted to be even-handed in his description of the actual application of the term 'democracy' and who was optimistic about the possibilities for participatory democracy was

C.B. Macpherson. Writing at the time of the Cold War, he argued that at least three models of democracy actually existed: he recognised liberal and non-liberal democracies, and within the latter both communist and underdeveloped variants. He argued that developing countries had often rejected liberal means, but shared with liberal democracy 'the ultimate ideal of a life of freedom and dignity and moral worth for every member of society' (Macpherson 1966: 30). Developing countries could not afford 'the politics of extreme choice' (ibid.: 34) of developed liberal societies. But this did not mean that 'in the broader sense' they were undemocratic. By these criteria, Macpherson would surely have had to allow the Panchayat regime's claim, not to mention those of many other authoritarian, right-leaning Asian regimes of the period, to be called democratic as well.

Even-handed and empirical though Macpherson's position would appear to be, it is questionable whether unliberal regimes really do anything to provide a life of 'freedom and dignity and moral worth'—we have the advantage over Macpherson of many more years of experience of such regimes. Thus the question remains, whether one should give any credence at all to the Maoist claim to represent true 'people's democracy'. In the most recent issue of *The Worker*, the two top leaders of the Nepali Maoists, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai, address this question explicitly (Prachanda 2004, Bhattarai 2004). What is remarkable, given the political ferment and constitutional discussion within the country as a whole, is that both of them—succinctly in Prachanda's case, more discursively in Bhattarai's—stick rigidly within the bounds of classical Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, citing well-known Marxist sources at great length and coming to classic Marxist and Maoist conclusions. Their thought runs strictly on Marxist lines, and discussion of rights, of ethnic or national questions and of gender are added or alluded to only as an after-thought; Dalits are not even mentioned—all of which goes to suggest that the Maoist adoption of these causes is indeed a short-term tactic, as is frequently alleged.

Both Prachanda and Bhattarai dismiss parliamentary democracy as a facade, and both see the new state they will establish as, by definition, non-coercive and democratic:

> Whenever the state exists there cannot be anything like a 'democracy for all', 'the full democracy' or 'a free people's state'. When a situation in which the entire society acquires democracy develops, then the need

> of democracy itself vanishes... In fact, the state is democracy and the democracy is the state. It can also be understood in other words—the state is dictatorship and the democracy is dictatorship... Democracy for the entire people is nothing other than the hypocrisy of the bourgeois class to confuse the working masses... (Prachanda 2004). [I]t is a bitter truth that in the past the proletarian state powers instead of serving the masses and acting as instruments of continuous revolution turned into masters of the people and instruments of counter-revolution, and rather than moving in the direction of withering away transformed into huge totalitarian bureaucracies and instruments of repression. The present day revolutionaries should draw appropriate lessons from this and should strive to lay proper foundations for the new type of state from the very beginning ... first ... GPCR [Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution] or continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat ... Secondly, to transfer the state power that had become master of the people in the past... methods of ensuring participation of the wider masses in the state or expanding greater democracy in society should be institutionalized... Withering away is, therefore, neither the abolition of the state... nor is it first developing in a bureaucratic form... Withering away means cessation of only the 'political' function of the state as a means of coercion... [I]t is a great paradox of history that whereas the proletarian state with an essence of dictatorship over the limited exploiting classes and that of democracy for a majority of exploited classes has been denounced as 'dictatorial', the bourgeois democracy with an essence of democracy for a handful of exploiting classes and that of dictatorship over the majority of the working classes is hailed as an ideal model of universal and eternal democracy... (B. Bhattarai 2004)

What Bhattarai dismisses as a 'great paradox of history' is simply the judgement of historical experience. Bhattarai himself is concerned above all to prevent the emergence of a rigid communist ruling class as has always happened after a socialist revolution. His solution—permanent revolution on the lines of the Cultural Revolution—is a chilling reminder that the Maoists have learned very little from history. In effect, it advocates endless participatory democracy, in which the voice of the loudest wins out, ensuring that all intermediate organisations below the top echelons of

the Party remain in fear of those who claim to be 'the people'.[4] Ignorance of Russian, East European, Chinese, and South-East Asian history on the part of the semi-educated youth who make up the Maoists' cadres is excusable; that of their leaders is wilful and culpable.

Scalapino's forty-year-old analysis of the actual practice of 'democratic centralism' retains its validity:

> [P]arty structure, established at the outset and modeled almost precisely after the Soviet party, is permanent... The very structure of the communist party—and the ideology that underlines that structure—are conducive to a struggle for supremacy that must culminate in the victory of one man. The absence of any tradition of minority rights, and of any mechanism for a peaceful alternation in power, makes every contest for power a final one. Hence the struggle must be ruthless, with no holds barred. Rivals are castigated in absolute terms: 'false Marxist-Leninists,' 'opportunists,' and 'traitors.' When the battle is decided, purges almost inevitably follow. In the end, one man tends to emerge as the supreme leader, without a serious competitor... It is not uncommon, however, for an element of oligarchy to persist, with the supreme leader sharing his power more or less voluntarily with two or three trusted colleagues who will never challenge his final authority... (Scalapino 1965: 18)

In short, for democracy actually to mean anything in practice it has to be combined with liberty and security. Without the freedom to associate, without a minimum of security, the 'rule of the people' is nothing more than a slogan. As long as the Maoists arrogate to themselves the right to designate any opponent a 'class enemy' and to 'cleanse', i.e. torture and/or kill, them, no real democracy can exist. Needless to say, the Maoists' claim to possess a scientific ideology is as bogus as their claim to be democratic.[5]

4 There are many personal memoirs attesting to the suffering of the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution (e.g. Wong 1997, Gao 2001). See also Dittmer (1975), Weisner (1986), White (1991), MacFarquhar (1997), and Spence (1999).

5 The classic attack on Marxist pretensions to scientific status, by the greatest philosopher of science of the twentieth century, is Popper (1945).

Representative democracy: The liberal variant

Discussions within political philosophy have all too often been carried on in terms of ideal models which bear little resemblance to 'actually existing' democracy. It is worth introducing briefly two theorists who attempted to base their theories on *actually existing practice of democracy*, rather than on some ideal model of how we would like things to be. In his classic book *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter argued that democracy consisted in political arrangements that allowed 'the people' to choose between competing sets of rulers in periodic elections; in other words, to remove existing leaders on a regular basis and peaceably:

> ...democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms 'people' and 'rule.' Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them...[by means of] free competition among would-be leaders for the vote of the electorate... [D]emocracy is the rule of the politician. (Schumpeter 1970 [1943]: 284-5)

Schumpeter thought that it was positively harmful to entertain any misty-eyed Rousseau-ian or Marxist notion that 'the people' could be involved on a day-to-day basis in the difficult questions that confronted rulers under the conditions of complex, advanced industrial society. The idea that politicians can come together to represent the 'General Will' of 'the people' is an illusion: 'just as firms compete for business in market systems, would-be political leaders compete for votes' (Shapiro & Hacker-Cordón 1999: 4).

In Schumpeter's view there were five conditions for democracy—understood as the competition of elites voted in and out by 'the people'—to function well. There needed to be:

1. politicians 'of sufficiently high quality';
2. consensus among politicians and parties on the overall framework within which they compete;
3. a well-trained and efficient bureaucracy 'of good standing and tradition, endowed with a strong sense of duty and a no less strong *esprit de corps*';
4. 'Democratic Self-control', i.e. acceptance of the outcomes of the legislative procedure, and restraint of criticism and action against the system: 'electorates and parliaments must be on an intellectual and

moral level high enough to be proof against the offerings of the crook and the crank...';

5. an overall culture of tolerance of criticism and of differences of opinion (Schumpeter 1970: 290-5).

In outlining these conditions Schumpeter was evidently thinking of the collapse of liberal democracy before fascism in many countries of central Europe, and its survival in Britain and north America.

Hardheaded and cynical it might appear, but Schumpeter's theory also had the consequence of legitimating liberal democracies and delegitimising one-party states. Under his theory, one-party states, whatever they might say about governing for the people, could not be democratic. Schumpeter was clearly against the idea of introducing more and more democracy into the arrangements of government and local life, as has become a truism of contemporary political discourse, whether in Nepal or the West. In Varshney's terms (2000: 15), democracy is a 'continuous variable', something one can have more or less of, not a 'discontinuous variable', something one has or does not have, as in the Marxist view. One need not agree with Schumpeter's view that democracy should be restricted to an elite, to see the merits of his theory in capturing the difference between liberal democracies (in which politicians can be voted out of office) and regimes which merely claim to act for the people (where they cannot). What Nepal has experienced in the 1990s is something approaching the Schumpeterian model: a circulation of elites, voted out at each election by the people. In the glaring absence of several of the conditions Schumpeter thought necessary, the system has not worked well and has failed to gain the allegiance of many Nepalis.

A second political theorist who claimed to be taking as his starting point democracy as it is actually practised was Robert A. Dahl. In contrast to those, like Schumpeter, who saw democracies as dominated by elites, Dahl, along with other pluralist theorists, emphasised the numerous different interest groups and minorities which influenced policy outcomes, within a framework that was set by majority interests. He stressed that for democracy actually to work there had to be both *inclusiveness* (i.e. equal rights for all) and *freedom to contest* (i.e. people had to be able to bring their concerns to the public sphere without fear). Regimes that fulfilled these criteria he called polyarchies (since he felt that no society on earth

was fully democratic) (Dahl 1971). He produced a long list of factors which influenced the chances of a polyarchy surviving or functioning well: these included having a predisposing culture of pluralism, not having too low a per capita income, not having too much cultural diversity, and so on. He stated plainly that the different 'variables' could not be quantified and that any attempt to quantify and weigh them would be spurious and dishonest (ibid.: 206-7).

It has been argued (Lukes & Duncan 1977) that no amount of empirical data about the way in which various democratic polities work can, of itself, refute classical ideal models. In particular, just because currently existing liberal democracy functions with low levels of participation by most adults in most developed Western countries, that does not show that models positing high levels of participation are 'false' or 'irrelevant'. That is because ideal models are not theories to be refuted. They can only be refuted as practicable ideals if it is shown that the assumptions which underlie them are contradictory or otherwise impossible. As mentioned above, participatory democracy has in fact been shown to be possible, in small, more or less face-to-face contexts. It is thus certainly not the case that all participatory democracy is tainted by the experience of China's Cultural Revolution. However, the historical record has yet to show a Leninist or Maoist regime which was not oppressive and which managed to be democratic in more than name. This being the case, despite the manifold failings of actual liberal democracies, including Nepali liberal democracy from 1990 to 2002, my suggestions below focus on small steps that might possibly enhance it.

Democracy as global trend?

The collapse of the Soviet Union and processes of liberalisation in other authoritarian societies led to widespread anticipation that liberal democracy would eventually triumph everywhere, in Fukuyama's phrase that 'history' had 'ended'. The fall of the Panchayat regime in Nepal was part of that global trend. Previously full procedural democracy had been seen as a luxury that few developing countries could afford. In so far as development organisations supported democracy, it was of the formal and liberal sort. Now, suddenly, democratisation, full participatory democracy, at all levels, was seen as part of what development was about. Partly this was a welcome change from seeing development purely in terms of health,

education, and income indicators. But it was also the outcome of disillusion and disappointment with the failure of earlier models of development. Where before participation had meant the contribution of villagers' labour, now there was an attempt—within strictly managed (and some would say de-politicised) limits—to accept the political nature of development and to involve the beneficiaries in the decision-making.[6]

The kind of development that donor countries were pushing thus changed quite considerably. 'Empowerment' of the poor and disadvantaged segments of society (women, tribals—now called Janajatis–and the low castes—now Dalit) was a top priority, where previously local 'user groups' were sufficient. The same problems with the whole development process remained, namely, that control of the budget and parameters for spending it came from the centre. None the less, there was a marked evolution of the discourse and vocabulary in which development objectives were couched.

Given the present trajectory of Nepal, one could well imagine some observers doubting whether the heavy emphasis on empowerment and democratisation by NGOs and international donors was in fact supportive of democracy. Did it perhaps undermine it, by making the gap between what was supposed to be happening and what villagers were actually receiving—how little they were in fact being empowered—only too obvious? In short, were the NGOs who taught empowerment actually preparing the ground for the Maoists and their insurgency?[7]

There can be no doubt that, in material and psychological terms, Nepal has gone backwards since 1996. Without a minimum of peace and security, simple survival—let alone development activities—cannot be ensured. It is doubtful whether democracy is valued by the majority of the Nepali population for its own sake, regardless of its relationship to development. So it is worth asking whether the conditions exist in Nepal for democracy and development to advance hand or hand, to reinforce each other. In a recent survey of different views of the relationship between development and democracy, Gordon White concluded that democracy and development

6 For descriptions and critiques of this in the Nepali context, see the contributions by Harper and Tarnowski and by Campbell in Gellner (ed.) 2003, and also Shah (2002). For a useful survey of the ways in which politics was first kept out of development and then brought in as 'good governance', see Leftwich (2000). See also Jenkins (2001) for a critique of USAID's use of the concept 'civil society'.

7 There is anecdotal evidence and much speculation; but nothing that I know of that would settle the issue.

had the best chances of proceeding together under the following conditions:

- *socio-economic system*: in societies at a higher level of socio-economic development, with a relatively homogeneous population, a relatively strong sense of national identity, a relatively cohesive social structure, and a lack of gross inequalities of condition.
- *civil society*: not just whether or not civil societies are 'vibrant', but also the extent to which the forces of civil society can forge broad developmental coalitions to strengthen the strategic capacity of the state and tackle problems of poverty and insecurity. The nature and impact of political coalitions is a crucial determinant of the trajectories of different forms of democratic governance.
- *political society*: where party systems are relatively well developed, concentrated rather than fragmented, broadly based, and organised along programmatic rather than personalistic or narrowly sectional lines.
- *state institutions*: in societies where political power is organised to allow a concentration of executive authority, whether this be within the institutional integument of a presidential, parliamentary, or hybrid system, and where the state apparatus is staffed by professional civil servants.
- *international environment*: in societies where the autonomy of national elites is not so undermined by external political or economic dependence as to reduce significantly their capacity to rule and the principle of democratic accountability (White 1998: 45-6).

White goes on to suggest that the kinds of societies which might come close to fulfilling these demanding criteria would be 'South Africa and possibly Ghana in Africa; Chile, Costa Rica, and Venezuela in Latin America; Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in Eastern Europe; certain states within India in South Asia; and Taiwan in East Asia' (ibid.). Once again, it would seem that the cards are stacked against Nepal. More specifically, in the South Asian context, the obvious contrast is with India, which has had sixty years (longer if you include the independence struggle) for democracy to become embedded in society. Despite autocratic tendencies by various rulers, none has been able to last, and all, with the exception of Nehru, have been voted out of office.

Requirements in the Nepali case

1. Public order

It is evident that for many ordinary Nepalis the experience of democracy since 1990 has been a massive disappointment. That has partly fuelled the Maoist insurgency. But the insurgency itself has demonstrated a massive failure of the democratic regime and has generated further disappointment, both with democracy and with the Maoists. It should be evident that without a secure public space in which to come forward there cannot be genuine or democratic participation. Unfortunately, with the exception of John Whelpton and Saubhagya Shah, the participants in the conference at which this paper was first presented do not appear to have addressed this issue at all, sharing as they mostly do the leftist presupposition that oppression and the state are problems, but security and public order are ideological demands of a feudal and/or bourgeois establishment.

The decline of the authority and the power of the Nepalese state in the years between 1980 and 2003 is a complex issue, a compound of many trends. One of those has been the rise of private, non-state, market-led provision in health and education, so that state institutions in these fields have steadily lost resources. Development functions have also been increasingly contracted out to NGOs—partly a response to failures of government institutions, but also contributing to their increased decline. Squeezed by World Bank and donor demands, the Nepalese state has itself attempted to reduce the number of its employees. And, since 1990, there has been a process of privatisation of state enterprises, supported by both the Congress and the UML.

At the same time there has been a gradual politicisation of ordinary voters, advancing most rapidly after, and as a consequence of, the collapse of the Panchayat regime in 1990. This has meant that 'traditional' authority, expressed through multi-faceted allegiance to dominant lineages, has markedly declined.[8] At the same time many arms of the state were de-legitimised by the actual process of the revolution of 1990: this applied in particular to the police, whose low pay made them liable to abuse their authority, which made them even more unpopular in rural areas. The actual

8 The best description of this process is Philippe Ramirez's political anthropology of Argha Khanchi (Ramirez 2000).

political process since 1990, whereby appointments were made subject to the demands of political parties, meant that the state was even less able to appear as any kind of arbiter or neutral guarantor of rights or goods than it had been before 1990. Local party political leaders came to play many roles that had previously been carried out by lineage elders or rich men.[9] The Maoist insurgency, which has decimated political activists in the villages, and forced those who have survived to flee to district headquarters or to the cities, has undermined even this source of authority at the local level. The parties have been still further undermined by the king's dismissal of Sher Bahadur Deuba and his government on October 4th 2002, and his refusal to cooperate with them since then.

For all these reasons, and no doubt others, there has been a rise of gangsterism at the local level. Shah (2002: 155) refers to the 'hyper-fragmentation of society'. In the terms of Stepan and Linz (2001), Nepal is not yet a 'consolidated democracy': democracy is not secure from attempts at overthrow (even though the attempts to overthrow it are always in the name of democracy).

2. Inclusion

It has been widely recognised, on all sides of the political spectrum, that more inclusiveness is required. It is perhaps also recognised that when the 1990 constitution was drawn up, despite the large changes from previous constitutions, and the many suggestions which the committee received, sufficient time was not allowed for various groups to mobilise and come forward in the new, much freer atmosphere. Had more time elapsed between the collapse of the old regime and the promulgation of a new constitution, the drafting might have been more suited to the new system as it actually began to develop. Taking that consideration into account, it is perhaps appropriate for reform of the constitution, if not actual re-drafting, to be undertaken.

There are several symbolic gestures that could be taken to improve the feeling of inclusion on the part of ethnic and religious activists. Much was made of the insertion of a comma in the final draft of Article 4 of the Constitution, which, it is argued, had the effect of making Nepal a Hindu

9 See Hachhethu (2002; also 2003).

kingdom, where before it was only the King who had to be Hindu.[10] If the removal of a comma can cause so much happiness, why not remove it? In a similar vein, some further steps could be taken to enact *dharma-nirapeksatā*: this is usually translated as religious secularism, but it means something like 'not being dependent on (one) religion'. Public holidays could be declared on at least some of the Muslim and Christian holy days as well, to recognise the significant number of Nepalis who follow those religions. (Buddha Jayanti has had such recognition since 1951.)

A more procedural step would be to introduce some kind of federal system, or at least some degree of federalism, i.e. much greater powers than currently exist for devolved units of government. This would surely necessitate the creation of administrative units larger than the present districts, but smaller than the current zones, which would be able to support greater responsibilities. Harka Gurung (2002) has already suggested a reduction of the number of districts from 77 to 25 on the grounds of efficiency. Such units would need to be given substantial local responsibilities, as well as possibly limited tax raising powers, thereby also enabling a long-term goal, never properly achieved, of decentralisation. If such reforms also enabled certain regionally concentrated ethnic groups to have an administrative unit within which they formed a majority, as was done for the Sikhs in India with the creation of the state of Panjab, some of the aims of the ethnic activists would also be met (the desire for autonomy), without the need for ethnically designated voting rights.[11] Any system which depended on defining all members of the population as belonging either to one or other ethnic group would cause even more problems than it solved, given both the considerations about hybridity (see below), and the fact that all populations in Nepal inhabit highly mixed areas. Nepal has no ethnically pure enclaves.

Should there be reservations in higher education, government employment, and political representative bodies for disadvantaged social groups as there are in India? Whether and how exactly to institutionalise

10 Where previously the draft had read *samvaidhānik hindu-rājtantrik rājya*, it became *samvaidhānik hindu, rājtantrik rājya*. For a recent discussion which argues that 'it is quite redundant on the part of the Constitution to characterise the kingdom as "Hindu"'—i.e. that the position of the King would not be affected if the offending word was removed—see Sharma (2002: 36).

11 For examinations of the claims of ethnic activists, see Bhattachan (2000) and Krämer (2003).

such reservations is one of the more difficult issues facing Nepali politicians today. In the rapidly changing situation at the centre, Prime Minister Chand acceded to the principle in 2003, and some initial steps were taken in educational institutions (e.g. some reserved seats for Janajatis in the Teaching Hospital). If the aim is inclusiveness, there is a strong argument to be made that those groups which have suffered under the stigma of Untouchability deserve special consideration in this regard.

A final suggestion concerns the voting system: the current Westminster or majoritarian system of 'first past the post' or 'winner takes all' single-member constituencies encourages national coalitions to win elections, but it leaves large numbers of people disenfranchised. Of all the voting systems used in liberal democracies, it is the least democratic in the sense of providing representation in proportion to the support in the electorate. Unlike in India, there are no reservations to counterbalance this, to ensure the representation of disadvantaged groups. A simple way of getting more inclusiveness and having more people feeling that their representative is in Parliament, would be to have much larger, multi-member constituencies. Whether with a single vote, or a single transferable vote, it would have the effect of giving more people a voice.[12]

3. Hybridity (or: Giving up the myth of purity)

It is something of an irony that Western academics and intellectuals have discovered the idea of hybridity just as many activists are taking up the notion of 'pure', primordial ethnic groups.[13] But it cannot be gainsaid that, in actual practice, ethnic boundaries are flexible, contextual, and liable to change over time. The practice of censuses and other kinds of classification beloved of states and bureaucracies tends to hide this. Everyone must be counted, and no one must be counted twice. Furthermore, as Baumann has incisively shown in his pathbreaking theoretical ethnography, *Contesting Culture* (1996), there are good political reasons why essentialised cultural identities survive and are propagated even by those who know full well that the social reality on the ground is fluid and far more complex.

In Nepal before 1990, census data on castes and ethnic groups were not published, and we had to wait for the results of the 1991 census to

12 The considerations here are extremely technical (see, for example, Lijphart 1994) and I leave discussion of them to experts.

13 See Werbner & Modood (1997) for a representative collection of essays on hybridity.

discover exactly what proportion of the country the Bahuns, Chetris, Tamangs, and Tharus were. The figures are interesting but, as with all such figures, deceptive. What they do not reveal is how many people might have belonged to more than one category. What they impose is a 'one and only one category per person' uniformity. The traditional ethnic and caste situation was, in fact, far more fluid with identities being adopted, changed, and combined strategically.[14] A particularly striking example of such changing identities comes from the Rana family itself: Jang Bahadur raised the Ranas from Chetris to Thakuris, a status which no one denies them today. There was evidently also considerable fluidity across the Magar-Chetri boundary in the eighteenth, and possibly well into the early nineteenth century. Even the royal family very likely has some Magar ancestors, hence Whelpton's conclusion that 'it is surely time for the House of Gorkha to reclaim its Magar heritage' (Whelpton 1997: 73). In short, as Prayag Raj Sharma pointed out long ago, 'the Chhetri caste in Nepal has been one of the most open-ended in its making, and represents the greatest instance of cultural-biological admixture in Nepal' (Sharma 1977: 288; cf. Sharma 1978).

The point of this excursus is to say that there has in fact been—contrary to the ideology of the caste system—an enormous amount of ethnic and caste intermixing in Nepal's history. It would be ironic now if, as an artifact of modernity, ethnic groups and castes were to acquire a rigidity and a purity that they never possessed in the past. Those who want to 'build the nation' as well as to protect and preserve ethnic cultures (and the vast majority of ethnic activists do so claim) would surely welcome that these heritages should 'belong to' the nation as a whole, and not just to a few purists.

My suggestion is that in future the census should acknowledge this hybridity by allowing, and perhaps even encouraging, people to tick more than one box in the ethnicity/caste question. (An alternative, less satisfactory in my opinion, would be to introduce numerous 'mixed' categories as is done in the USA census; or a single 'mixed race' category as was done in the last UK census.) Today's computer-aided statistical techniques would surely be adequate to analysing the results so collected.

14 The classic statement of this social fact in the African context is the essay 'The Illusion of Tribe' by Aidan Southall (1969). The theme has been explored for Nepal by various authors (see Levine 1987, Holmberg 1989, Whelpton 1997, Gellner 2001, 2003a, Fisher 2001).

This argument can also be extended from ethnicity to religion, though such a step would doubtless run into vociferous objections from religious activists. Numerous observers, both Nepali and foreign, have noticed that the actual practice of religion in Nepal very rarely falls neatly into boxes labelled 'Hinduism' or 'Buddhism'.[15] The story has often been told of the foreigner who asks a Newar, 'Are you Buddhist or Hindu?' and receives the answer 'Yes'. The foreigner, ethnocentrically, assumes that the Newar is confused. In fact the Newar has answered truthfully, and it was the exclusive use of the word 'or' that was at fault. It would be far more accurate, and would demonstrate the much-vaunted 'religious tolerance' (*dhārmik sahishnutā*) of Nepal (at least as between Hinduism and Buddhism), if Nepalis were able to tick both boxes.

Activists have deeply internalised the idea that they must be *either* Hindu *or* Buddhist, and have rejected as domination by subordinate inclusion the attempt of the Panchayat regime to view Buddhism as a part of Hinduism. Fierce fights (Fisher 2001) and several social movements (Lecomte-Tilouine 2003, LeVine & Gellner 2005) have been based on the presupposition that one must be one or the other.

The advantage of encouraging this recording of hybridity is that it will work against the countervailing tendency to separation. The granting of rights to minority groups, as is likely and certainly needed, could be combined with discourses of 'unity in hybridity and equality' (as opposed to the unity in hierarchy that was envisaged under earlier regimes). A functioning federalism would be another context in which Nepali people would be able to have politically what they have long had and managed socially, namely nested, contextually activated, and multiple identities.

Conclusions

I have made a number of descriptive claims and normative suggestions:

- **democracy cannot function without peace and security**, i.e. public order (this is, I hope, a factual truism);
- **there needs to be greater inclusiveness** (this also is truistic: it is a prescriptive statement, but not one anyone is likely to oppose today);

15 Many ethnographies have demonstrated this: for example, my own doctoral research on Newar Buddhism (Gellner 1992); recently Fisher found the same for Thakali religion (Fisher 2001).

- **greater inclusivity can be had both by symbolic steps and by greater decentralisation, i.e. the introduction of some degree of federalism** (this is a factual statement, which presupposes agreement on the value of inclusivity);
- **this will probably have to be accompanied by specific rights for disadvantaged groups** (this too is a descriptive statement aimed at those who may be opposed to positive discrimination);
- furthermore **there is a great deal of hybridity in Nepal** (a fact), and that **this needs to be both recorded and celebrated** (a prescription);
- **doing so may be one way in which greater minority rights can coexist satisfactorily with greater national unity** (a factual prediction and suggestion).

Now all of these steps may help democracy in the liberal, procedural sense to function better. Many of them may also help to advance democracy in the more Rousseau-ian, participatory sense as well—but, desirable though this might be, this should not, for sceptical Schumpeterian reasons alluded to above, be made the main aim or criterion for reform.

I do not claim that these suggestions would, on their own, lead to a healthy, functional liberal democracy. There are, of course, many other factors—such as the 'good quality' politicians and strong bureaucracy cited above by Schumpeter, and the vibrant civil society, strong political parties, and international support cited by White—which are highly important too.

Furthermore, the suggestions I have made are only sketched in the briefest possible way. An enormous amount of work would need to be done by those more competent than me—specifically by political scientists, by legal experts, and by practising Nepali politicians. I agree with Alfred Stepan (2001: 18) that 'it is of the highest priority to think about how federalism, democracy, and multinationalism can cohere'—not just in general, but specifically in the Nepali case as well.

Postscript: what happened after

Four days after I presented the above paper, on Tuesday 29th April 2003, a report by Sagun S. Lawoti appeared on the front page of the *Himalayan Times* under the headline 'Oxford scholar urges Nepalis to come terms with "hybrid past"'. About half way through, the article correctly reported that I had said that acknowledgement of hybridity could begin at the top,

with the King adopting the surname Bir Bikram Shah Magar Dev. I did not immediately notice that the article slipped into its penultimate paragraph the sentence 'The implied inference of accepting hybridity means there should no mobilisation based on caste or ethnicity'—thus claiming, contrary to the tenor of my talk and with no evidence from anything that I had said, that I was speaking against positive discrimination (affirmative action) for Janajatis and Dalits. The article concluded by reporting (entirely correctly) that Dr Harka Gurung had pointed out that 'hybrid' translates in Nepali as *khachhar* (mule), which is a highly derogatory term, and that furthermore mules are infertile.

In the week that followed I was astonished (because I took myself to be attacking high-caste pretensions to purity) to be the butt of fierce attacks in the *Himalayan Times* letter columns from Karma Tamang (1/5/03), B.K. Rana (6/5/03), and Krishna K. Limboo (7/5/03); there were also one supportive letter from Prem Gyan Thakuri (6/5/03) and two even-handed editorials (24/4/03 and 6/5/03). This was not what I had expected, and it was a relief to discover on the internet an article by M.R. Josse, widely alleged to be a royalist commentator, in which he attacked me for stating obvious facts that every Nepali knows and simultaneously for being dangerously inflammatory and impertinent:

> I don't know if you have noticed it, but these days one is constantly hearing or reading about how this or that foreign scholar or expert has offered spectacular, if unsolicited, advice to us simple folks from how to grow rice to how to understand ourselves, including our past!... Could the 'Oxford scholar's' hidden agenda be to transform Nepal from a tolerant Hindu kingdom where inter-communal harmony is the norm into an intolerant secular state, a la India, where racial riots are all too frequent? Most obnoxious about this Johnny's advice is that the King should call himself Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Magar Dev! Even accepting that there may be some Magar blood in the royal lineage, isn't it the height of interference or sheer impropriety for him to make such a public suggestion right in Kathmandu at this particularly volatile time?... (Josse 2003)

What Josse and the Janajati letter-writers agreed upon was that Nepalis do not need foreigners to tell them what to think (in Limboo's words: 'We,

Janajatis, oppressed socially and economically for centuries, are the ones who know best how to deal with our own problems. We do not want a white university lecturer to dictate terms to us'). This is a sentiment with which I have much sympathy, and I hope that the tenor of the paper (which none of my interlocutors had either seen or heard before penning their attacks, so far as I know) reassures them on that score: no one is 'dictating terms' here.

What the Janajati letter-writers had divined—correctly—is that an emphasis on hybridity could possibly undermine what might be called the 'strong Janajati programme'. In Karma Tamang's words:

> What we propose is to look at the last three centuries as a period of colonial rule of the invading Indo-Aryan tribes. So, in effect, post-colonial Nepal will be administered by the janjatis. We will not hybridise, we will organise—on community lines.

Or in B.K. Rana's terms: 'Hybridity offers no meaning when you are seeking to establish your fundamental rights.' As far as this goes, the letter-writers were quite right to attack me, despite the unfortunate *ad hominem* way in which they did it. I would not support 'ethnic cleansing' of Janajati areas or the restriction of civic rights only to those who were 'pure-bred' Janajatis. This would substitute one outdated form of hierarchical inequality with another and, very likely, racist alternative; the recent history of Israel/Palestine ought surely to act as a warning against going down that route.

I think that the hybrid facts of Nepal's history are there in the historical record. My suggestions were indeed meant to enable positive discrimination to co-exist with a new multi-culturalist sense of Nepali national unity, one which recognises diversity while simultaneously emphasising equality and shared cultural heritages. If Nepalis find my suggestion on hybridity at all plausible, there should be no problem responding to Harka Gurung's objection by substituting some high-flown neologism in place of the derogatory *khachhar*. Time for a new slogan perhaps: *shuddha? ko shuddha? sammishrit bhaera haami nepaali sabai garv maanchaun.*

About a week after the letters had stopped appearing in the *Himalayan Times*, and the day before I was to leave Nepal, I was sitting in a friend's shop in Lalitpur (Patan). My friend popped out to talk to someone and came back, saying: 'David, why didn't you tell me? Everyone in the bazaar is talking about it. Apparently you said that the king was a Gurung!'

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The Tharu, the Tarai and the History of the Nepali Hattisar[1]

Piers Locke

The Nepali *hattisar* or elephant stable is an institution traditionally staffed by the Tharu, an ethnic group indigenous to the Tarai region (see Guneratne 2007). Historically, government elephant stables were found throughout the previously forested lowlands of Nepal, but today they are restricted to the national parks and wildlife reserves of the Tarai. The *hattisar* became an increasingly formalised institution with state funded staff, facilities and resources, and was the location for organising the capture, training and keeping of elephants.

The elephants that roamed the Tarai were highly prized royal property, infused with both divine and politico-economic significance, and the rulers of Nepal generously rewarded the overseers of elephant capture operations. While captured elephants represented a valuable commodity for trade and tribute in the 18th and 19th centuries, they were also kept for transport, haulage and agriculture. Later in the 19th century, during the rule of the Ranas, elephants became important for royal hunting expeditions (*rastriya shikar*), during which tigers, leopards, rhinos and bears were killed as trophies.

It is due to these various activities involving elephant catching and keeping that a tradition of expertise emerged that is now crucial for the management of Nepal's lowland national parks and protected areas. Elephant handling skills and knowledge have been passed down generations of Tharu men, who were recruited to work in the *hattisar* through networks of kinship and community. The social worlds of these elephant handlers were configured by the broader socio-economic context of the land tenure relations distinctive to the Tarai. This historical experience is also essential for an ethnographic understanding of the contemporary Nepali elephant stable. However, this relatively recent history is predicated on much older practices of captive elephant management in Nepal and throughout South Asia.

1 I am grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK for funding my doctoral research on Nepali captive elephant management.

Fragments for an early history of elephant keeping in Nepal

It would seem that from at least the 6th century CE state-sponsored captive elephant management was established in territories that would be later subsumed by Prithvi Narayan Shah's Gorkhali kingdom. This is suggested by a report commissioned by the (former) Nepali Royal Palace that mentions the Licchavi King Manadeva (521-562 *bikram samvat*) building a bridge across the Gandaki River in order for him to transport hundreds of war elephants (Shrestha *et al* 1985). From its origins as a weapon of war in ancient times (see Kistler 2005), the elephant became a symbol of regal power, and the architectural edifices of the Malla dynasty, which superseded the Licchavis in the Kathmandu Valley, testify to the enduring significance of the elephant in this respect. Exemplifying this ceremonial significance, albeit from much later, is the 17th century stone sculpture of King Pratap Malla seated upon an elephant in Patan (an image of which is reproduced in WWF 2003: 22).

Indeed, the regal status of the elephant has persisted in Nepali culture, evident for example in the coronation of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya Shah in 1975, when they processed on the back of a caparisoned elephant called Prem Prasad (WWF 2003:iii). The significance of elephants is further evident in their use as ritual payments (*dakshina*) to compensate priests performing highly polluting royal funeral rites. On the occasions of the deaths of King Tribhuvan in 1955, King Mahendra in 1972, and King Birendra and his son Dipendra in 2001, the performance of the *katto grahana* rite, 'the acceptance of disgraced food', required its Brahman practitioners to face banishment, leaving the Kathmandu valley on elephants (see Kropf 2002). In the most recent instance, I am told that the priest subsequently returned the elephant in exchange for a cash payment because the state could no longer spare one of its precious captive elephants.

The connection between elephants and the state is given further credence by the influence in Nepal of the *Gaja Shastra.* This genre of Sanskrit literature is concerned with the anatomy, behaviour and husbandry of elephants, and is typically associated with the treatises on statecraft known as *Artha Shastra*. Both the content and rhetorical forms one finds in texts like Nilakantha's *Matanga-Lila* and Palakapya's *Gaja Shastram* are evident in a Nepali veterinary treatise from the early 20th century (see Locke 2008). This expert literature on elephant keeping, found throughout South Asia in various redactions, at least partially represented a codification of low

caste elephant handlers' practical knowledge (an argument first made by Franklin Edgerton in 1931), and is indicative of state involvement in the care of captive elephants (Locke 2008).

Regarding this relationship between elephants and the state, there is also evidence of their use as exchange items in tenurial relations between the Mughal Empire and the primarily hill-based polities that held jurisdiction over the Tarai (Ojha 1983: 21). Reconstructing the gruelling journey from Peking to Agra made by the Jesuit missionaries John Grueber and Albert D'Orville in the 17th century, Wessels notes a reference by the French Orientalist Melchisédech Thévenot to the effect that the Kingdom of Morang in the eastern Tarai was supplying seven elephants for the Mughal captive elephant apparatus on an annual basis (Wessels 1924: 165). This tributary arrangement was later replicated by the British, who negotiated the same annual gift of captured elephants in exchange for returning Tarai lands to the new, expanded Gorkha state established by Prithvi Narayan Shah (Shrestha *et al* 1985).

As Dhriti Lahiri-Choudhary remarks: 'When the British took over from the Mughals, they accepted the place of the elephant in state pomp, the army, and the civil administration' (1989: 304). The British understood that the number and quality of elephants kept by the kingdom of Nepal, by Indian princes, and by the land-holding gentry was an important means of signifying high status. Learning from their imperial subjects, the British also adopted the elephant as a symbol of political display. By the early 20th century, British dignitaries had even begun to participate in royal elephant back hunts in Nepal as honoured guests of the Ranas.

However, it is important that we appreciate that elephants were not just used as prestigious vehicles or given in obeisance, but were also traded, generating significant revenue for Nepal as an export commodity. During the mid-nineteenth century, captured elephants were valued at 300 rupees each, and according to Kirkpatrick (1811: 17) about two to three hundred a year were being captured at the end of the eighteenth century. Similarly, Cavenagh reports the capture of a total of two hundred elephants in 1850 (1851: 72), which Egerton (1852: 249) tells us were inspected by Jang Bahadur Rana, who established his own hereditary premiership after displacing the direct rule of the Shah dynasty in the wake of the Kot Massacre of 1846 (Stiller 1993: 79-81, Whelpton 2005: 46-47, Vaidya 2000). Those elephants that were deemed to be of inferior quality and of no use to the state were

to be sold in order to generate revenue (apparently they were evaluated with regard to the tufts of their tails). Arjun Guneratne notes that this export business was unsustainable because it left Nepal without adequate elephant resources, and that in 1892/3 the Nepali state sought permission from the British to carry out a *khor kheda* (an elephant hunt by the stockade method) in their former territory of Kumaon (now part of the Indian state of Uttarakhand) (Guneratne 2002: 30). This was to the west of Nepal, and had reverted to British control under the Treaty of Sagauli of 1816, a peace deal brokered after the Anglo-Gorkha war, a time when the Tarai itself was disputed territory (see Whelpton 2005: 42, Michael 2008). Guneratne further tells us that the British allowed the Nepalese the first 25 elephants free of royalties, and charged them 100 rupees for every additional captured elephant (2002: 30).

The Panjiar documents and the Tharu as the elephant handlers of the Tarai

We can be certain that in Nepal almost all of the elephants involved in these transactions would have been captured by the Tharu, the largest *janajati* or ethnic group of the Tarai, who to this day remain very closely (but no longer exclusively) associated with Nepali elephant keeping. Thévenot's remark about tribute paid to the Mughals by the kingdom of Morang indirectly supports Giselle Krauskopff's claim that the Tharu have been involved with the capture, taming and keeping of elephants for at least 300 years (Krauskopff 2000: 42). The collection of royal documents gathered by Tej Narayan Panjiar over a period of 20 years represents one of the most important resources for constructing a history of captive elephant management in Nepal, albeit from a top-down perspective. Collated, translated and presented by Giselle Krauskopff, Pamela Meyer and Tek Bahadur Shrestha, the Panjiar documents provide a richer source of information than mere estimations of the 19th century elephant trade given by the likes of Kirkpatrick, Cavenagh and Egerton.

The Panjiar documents were all recovered from Tharu families, and are now held at the office of the Tharu Welfare Society in Kathmandu. They provide valuable material for reconstructing the relationship between the Nepali state and the Tarai-dwelling Tharu, revealing them to be pioneer cultivators and animal domesticators rather than savage inhabitants of primeval forest, as they have often been derisively characterised (Krauskopff

2000: 35). The collection is remarkable not only for the long term dedication of Tej Narayan Panjiar, but also because the documents, the oldest of which was issued by the King of Makwanpur in 1726 CE, have remained intact despite the humid, tropical climate of the Tarai. Of a total of 50 documents, seven pertain to matters of elephant management, revealing elephants as royal property, indicating that the state generously rewarded the capture of elephants with land grants, that some elephants were especially prized, that the local population was obliged to assist with elephant hunts, and that the *hattisar* functioned as an institution of the state.

The other documents in this collection are concerned mainly with land grants and other state ordained privileges such as rights to timber, the import of settlers from and the flight of peasants to India, then known by the derogatory term *Muglan* (Burghart 1995: 134). These official decrees also deal with taxes, pensions and legal issues such as fines, pardons and the adjudication of traditional rights. The elephant-related documents were recovered from the Tarai districts of Saptari, Mahottari, Bara, and Nawalparasi, localities in which *sarkari hattisar*s (government stables) can no longer be found, but which still supply recruits for the remaining stables at Sauraha and Khorsor in Chitwan, Amlekhgunj in Parsa, Koshi Tappu on the Saptari/Sunsari border, Shivapur in Bardia, and Piparia in Kanchanpur.

Elephants as royal property

The oldest of the elephant-related Panjiar documents is concerned with elephants as royal property, and dates to 1783 CE. This was shortly after Prithvi Narayan Shah founded the state of Nepal in 1769, which he ruled from Kathmandu and Nuvakot (see Burghart 1984: 111). In this early document from the district of Saptari, issued by the court of King Rana Bahadur Shah, a baby elephant captured in 1782 by Madhuram Chaudhari, the son of one Hem Chaudhari, was granted to the father to train and ride. This reminds us that all elephants captured in Nepal were the property of the king, and that the capture, training and use of these elephants was subject to state regulation. It indicates that elephants were utilised to meet the needs of locals as well as the state, and perhaps also that elephants could be kept in homesteads—a situation we still find among a few wealthy Tharu families (who acquired their privately owned elephants from India) in the districts of Parsa, Bara and Sarlahi, as well as in contemporary Karnataka in South India, where Lynette Hart reports village elephant keeping traditions

(Hart & Locke 2007: 510-515). Furthermore, Shrestha and Krauskopff claim that the gift of an elephant was probably not an uncommon form of compensation for services rendered (*jagir*) (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 121). Bearing the *thar,* or family name of Chaudhari, it is likely that these elephant capturers were also leaders of the local community who collected taxes on behalf of the state, a role within Tharu society that will be discussed later.

Prized elephants and rewards to their captors

Other Panjiar documents tell us about the significance of elephant capture operations. Two documents from Bara, issued in 1820 and 1827 CE, are addressed to the father and son Daya and Kokil Raut. In the first of these documents, King Rajendra Bikram Shah bestows upon Daya Raut the land previously given to one Bandhu Raut, and a turban of honour (*pagari)* in reward for his service to the state in capturing and training elephants. The *pagari* was a headdress, most usually a turban adorned with silver ornaments, worn by high officials. Even if it was made of simple cloth this represented the receipt of royal favour. Daya Raut is urged to continue capture operations by both the *jaghiya* and *khor kheda* methods (the former entails a wild elephant being chased, lassoed and then tethered, whilst the latter entails herding multiple elephants into a prepared enclosure), to obey the instructions of the elephant stable manager (*daroga*), and to continue to enjoy the customary taxes and income from performing the elephant training function (*sidhali rautai*) (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 149).

In the 1827 document, issued to Daya's son Kokil Raut, we learn that Daya Raut was given Babhani village in Cherwant *praganna*. This gift was a *jagir*, giving him revenue-collecting privileges, a reward specifically for his presentation of an *ekdanta hatti,* or one-tusked elephant, to King Rajendra Bikram Shah during a royal visit to Hariharpur (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 150). A one-tusked elephant (which can only be male because female Asian elephants do not grow true tusks) was significant for its relevance to the lore of Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu deity. Renowned for his gluttony, it is told that Ganesh tripped over a log and split open his gut, spilling his internal organs, which he tied together, using a snake for a belt. Amused by his clumsy misfortune, Chandra, the moon, laughed at Ganesh, who snapped off one of his tusks in anger and hurled it at him (see Grimes

1995). This explains why Ganesh is typically depicted with only one tusk. The auspicious similarity between such an elephant and the revered Hindu god would signify a creature particularly suffused with divine substance.

The significance of the one-tusked elephant is also attested in the aforementioned Nepali veterinarian treatise (and the *Gaja Shastra* texts from which it borrows), where it is listed as the greatest of eight types (or castes) of elephant:

> The one-tusked elephant is called the king of all the elephants... The heart of the king is fascinated by the sight of such an elephant. There is no other elephant equal to this one in this world. All problems will disappear in the presence of such an animal. Wherever the one-tusked elephant stays there will always be pleasure and prosperity.[2]

Shrestha and Krauskopff also tell us that in his renowned *Dibya Upadesh,* Prithvi Narayan Shah mentioned his desire to procure a one-tusked elephant from Digbhandan Sen, ruler of the kingdom of Makwanpur (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 150). The wild elephant that Daya Raut later caught, and for which he was awarded the turban of honour *(pagari),* was given the name Jala Prasad and was captured by means of a famous trained elephant called Sri Prasad. This elephant even warrants mention in Pandit Sundarananda's *Triratna Saundarya Gatha* (Vajracharya 1962). Said to command great respect, he was praised as one who could trap freely walking elephants as easily as Rahu (the eclipse) traps the moon and the sun (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 150).

In the course of my ethnographic research, I found that valued male elephants can still acquire a considerable reputation throughout the community of *hattisares* (elephant handlers) in the contemporary era, and that to be associated with a celebrated individual elephant as a part of its working team can confer a modicum of prestige upon a handler. Furthermore, Nepal's current elephant section officer (*adhikrit subba*) Rameshwor Chaudhary tells me that in his early career he always sought the challenge of working with difficult male elephants. This is because he knew that success in handling males, who can be particularly violent and

2 I am grateful to Geeta Manandhar for translating this untitled veterinary treatise believed to date to sometime in the 1920s, portions of which are probably very similar to Indra Bahadur Karki's *Gaja Bibaran Sangrah* of 1923.

unpredictable when in a state of 'musth' (*mada* in Nepali), would enhance his prospects of promotion.

Whilst Daya Raut had the good fortune to capture a one-tusked elephant, for which he was generously rewarded, Kokil Raut also benefited from his (presumably) inherited role as an overseer of elephant capture and training. In the same document that reminds him of the rewards his father received, he too is given an area of land toward the nearby village of Naraulkos, on land registered as recently as 1813/4. Kokil Raut's *jagir* was part of the reward given to his father, and this indicates the prestigious value accorded by the state to the capture of such a special elephant.

A third, related document further confirms this pattern of reward. Issued later in 1884, by which time the Shah kings' sovereignty was largely symbolic, this decree was issued on behalf of the Rana Prime Minister Ranodip Singh by King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, then only nine years old. It concerns Anup Raut, quite possibly a descendent of Daya and Kokil Raut, since he too is linked with Cherwant *praganna* in Bara district. In this document Anup Raut is given the title deeds to the village of Thaksaul in Cherwant *praganna* after capturing an elephant named Ranagambhir Gajahatti whilst participating in a royal elephant hunt at Khurahariya camp, Chitwan District, hosted by Ranodip Singh. Rather than the mere usufruct of *jagir* as land to manage for the state, this was a *birta* land grant, meaning that it was given by the state to an individual, usually on a tax-free and heritable basis, and could be subdivided, sold or mortgaged (Shrestha and Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 151).

Two key conclusions may be drawn from these documents. First, they hint at the pattern of land settlement that the state incentivised its revenue collectors to encourage (discussed below). Second, even if the hard work of capturing, driving and caring for elephants performed by the junior ranks of cleaner (*mahut*), grass-cutter (*pachuwa*) and capturer (*phanet*) was apparently of low status, even sometimes requiring forced labour (*jhara*), evidence suggests that the higher positions of *raut* and surely also *daroga* and *subba* were quite different. These personages received royal recognition and favour, and more importantly were able to establish themselves as landlords (either as holders of *jagir* or *birta* tenure, with the incentive to attract peasant cultivators). It is also significant that Daya and Kokil Raut are addressed by the name of the function they perform—the term for the overseer of elephant capture operations seems to serve as their *thar*, or family name.

Local obligations to provide labour for elephant hunts

Another document from the collection, dated 1828 CE and from the district of Nawalparasi, suggests what elephant hunting activity meant to local people who did not have land-holding privileges. In this document, the court of King Rajendra Bikram Shah issues a response to a plea made by the *chaudhari* (the head of an administrative district with tax-collecting duties), the *kanugoye* (a functionary who maintained cadastral maps of the extent, value and ownership of land), and the subjects of Nawalpur. When a *hatti kheda* or elephant hunt occurred the local people were obliged to provide their labour (*jhara*), but if in any one year a hunt did not take place they were instead obliged to pay 600 rupees in tax. This led to some villagers fleeing to Latthepar and to Ramnagar in British controlled India. With fewer people working the land, government revenue was reduced and therefore also the income of the *chaudhari* and the *kanugoye.* In response, the royal court agreed to an exemption of the tax in return for bringing subjects back to cultivate the land and thereby raise taxable revenue (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 167).

According to Shrestha and Krauskopff, this was the latest in a succession of complaints by headmen and tenants about excessive tax. Considering the abundance of land and the scarcity of labour, the government had to be mindful of peasants fleeing. The logic behind taxing them in non-hunt years was that they would be free to use the elephants for their own needs (as a means of transport and for agricultural activities), but clearly this privilege was insufficient and the taxation strategy resulted only in unbearable hardship. The loss of revenue to the Nepali government was enough for it to cancel this tax obligation (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 167).

The freedom for locals to utilise elephants when they were not required for royal hunts implies a degree of mutuality between the *hattisar* and local villages that is no longer found today. During my field research in 2001 and 2003-4 I was told of prior times when elephants were used to plough fields, but by the time of my first visit to Chitwan in 2001, only buffalo or motorised tractors were used for these tasks. Similarly, I was told of elephants hauling timber from the forests in the days before the national parks. Nowadays villagers in the Chitwan area still live in fairly close proximity to elephants, but they tend to be only indirectly dependent on them, as instruments for protected area management and as a key attraction for the touristic desire to view jungle wildlife, which

fuels the local nature tourism economy in and around the national park.

The 1828 document also illustrates the hardships to which Tharu farmers were subject. However, there was always the option of fleeing elsewhere and re-establishing livelihoods by clearing forest for cultivation. In the 20th century, with available land becoming scarce, in-migration increasing and government restrictions on freedom of movement, the economic condition of the Tharu worsened. The condition of poverty, especially for those without tenancy rights (*bahariya*), whose only other option was to work as day labourers, continued to provide Tharu men with the incentive to become elephant handlers, although joining the elephant stable was also a popular option for boys from wealthy families who wanted to rebel against the expectations of family and school. With this job came a monthly salary, and rights to a half-salary pension (*nivrttibharan* or *pensan*) upon retirement at 58, a form of guaranteed employment known as *sthayai*. After 1999 however, *hattisare*s were employed on *asthayai* terms, i.e. on a contractual basis without long-term guarantees, specifically that of a pension (see Locke 2007: 143-144).

The role of elephants in the social and economic life of people in the Nepal Tarai, as suggested by the Panjiar documents, contrasts sharply with the elephant catching operations of Mughal and British India in the Bengal-Assam hinterland. In the Nepal Tarai the local populace generally seemed willing to bear their labour obligations to support *shikar* events, but not the tax obligations in the absence of these royal hunts. However, in the weakly controlled Bengali frontier districts, the imposition of compulsory labour on hill tribes like the Hajong to catch wild elephants sometimes resulted in revolt against the imperial administration (Schendel 1985, Bhadra 1983). Of course, in the Tharu case, compulsory labour (*jhara*) was in service to royal elephant-back hunts, which were events of pomp and circumstance affording opportunities for tips *(baksis)*, whilst in the latter locals were forced into dangerous activities from which they benefited very little.

The hattisar as an institution of the state

The final Panjiar documents under consideration are from the era of Rana rule and come from Mahottari in 1867 and 1877 CE. The latter document seems to be a replication of the earlier document, but this time it is addressed to a stable manager by name; Subba Dewal (where *subba* generically indicates a managerial role, similar to that of the rather more

hattisar-specific designation *daroga*). Here the state acknowledges its concern about serious reports of financial mismanagement at the *hattisar.*

Fraud is implied, since the letter claims that despite the *hattisar* presumably receiving its annual dispensation of state funds, the elephants had not been properly fed, which resulted in them starving, eating earth and becoming sick. This implies the existence of a system of financial provision by which a *subba* would be responsible for purchasing food and resources. In the contemporary elephant stable we find a similar system, in which the Elephant Section Officer is responsible for employing a *thekadar* (contractor) who supplies the supplementary diet of salt, molasses and unhusked rice for the elephants as well as rations for the men. In addition, the stable employees had not received their wages, which in the contemporary *sarkari hattisar* are often dispensed by a *khardar*, or administrative officer, typically a literate non-Tharu. To prevent further incidents of financial mismanagement, the document stipulates that the Military and Audit Offices should check all future receipts and issue salaries, thereby curtailing the administrative autonomy of the *hattisar.* This might also be taken to indicate the state's unwillingness to place its trust in exclusively Tharu institutions (as the *hattisar* and elephant capturing operations seemed to be), preferring instead to administer through an additional bureaucratic level of accountability, staffed by intermediaries of a caste and ethnicity whose interests were less likely to diverge from its own. For the Tharu were low status subjects on the periphery of the kingdom, and if tax demands were too high they could migrate elsewhere and begin agricultural production anew.

Although records do attest to the use of occasional forced labour for elephant management in the Tarai (Narharinath 1966: 433 & 494, Regmi 1984: 198-199 and Krausskopf & Meyer [eds] 2000: 144), the 1877 document also indicates that stables were now generally staffed by paid employees, a situation that became more systematically regularised over time. Captive elephants played an important role in the local economy, facilitating regal hunting expeditions and the capture of wild elephants, as well as providing a source of transport and haulage. Again, this is quite a contrast to the case of elephants in Bengal and Assam under Mughal and British rule, where the locals' role was to provide compulsory labour for the capture and trade in elephants, but not for their long-term care, since stables were maintained elsewhere, in imperial centres rather than in the hinterlands where they were captured (see Schendel 1985, Bhadra 1983).

Nonetheless, as already indicated, along with timber, the elephant was also a lucrative export commodity in the Nepal Tarai (see also Olyphant 1852: 52). With the assistance of captive elephants, wild elephants were captured from the jungle by the professional capturers and trainers, the *phanets* (called *phandi* in India), under the supervision of the *raut,* the overseer of these operations. Once caught and subjected to training at the stable, managed by the *subba* and the *daroga* (the latter an inferior rank in the contemporary *sarkari hattisar*), they could serve as gifts of royal largesse for the kings and courtiers of neighbouring kingdoms, as well as compensation for the services of loyal subjects, or even exchanged for horses from India (Shrestha and Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000: 144). Thus these records also provide insights into the origin and development of the system of ranks and roles that organise labour in the contemporary *sarkari hattisar* (see Locke 2007: 113-157).

Environment and land tenure in the 19th century Tarai

The Panjiar documents indicate how practices of captive elephant management were regulated within the broader context of relations between the Tharu, land, and the state. Evolving land tenure regimes and their organising political structures help to account for the socio-economic and environmental situation in which Nepali captive elephant management developed. By the latter half of the 19th century, an era characterised by malaria, extensive forestation and low population density in the Tarai, districts like Chitwan, which were favoured by the Ranas as hunting reserves, were divided into five revenue collecting sections or *praganna*, each further divided into a number of *mauja*, each consisting of one or more villages and hamlets. The *praganna* was under the authority of a revenue-collecting functionary called a *jimidar*, usually a Tharu, who took the title *chaudhari*. In addition to juridical and revenue-collecting functions, a *jimidar* in Chitwan was also very much involved in the rituals of community life (Guneratne 1996, Guneratne 2002: 107).

In Dang, by contrast, most *jimidar* were high-caste non-Tharus. This situation of ethnic domination would provide the conditions for the emergence of BASE (Backwards Society Education), a contemporary organisation dedicated to the uplift of disadvantaged groups like the Tharu (see Krauskopff 2007). Historically, the Tharu were legally subservient to the twice-born Bahun and Chhetri castes. This was a result of their

designation as impure *masine matwali,* or 'enslaveable alcohol drinkers' in the Muluki Ain of 1854, the legal document which outlined a state-decreed caste system (see Höfer 1979, Guneratne 1999). Not repealed until 1964, this system of ordering social groups (*jat*) into ranked categories left lasting legacies of social, political and economic inequality, with consequences for relations between contemporary Tharu *hattisares* and the higher status vets and wardens of the national parks.

The Rana state had introduced the *jimidari* system in 1861, effectively grafting it on to the pre-existing hierarchy of authority, as represented by the *chautariya,* or village head; the *mahato*, or head of a *mauja;* and most significantly the *chaudhari* or head of a *praganna,* to which the post of *jimidar* was analogous. So initially, in a region where high caste outsiders from the hills rarely ventured, this middleman between the state and civil society was a part of the autochthonous social hierarchy. However, because it was a position with the in-built opportunity to garner wealth, it soon attracted hardy, profiteering outsiders, paticularly in Dang, where the incidence of malaria was less rampant (Muller-Böker 1999: 35). In further consolidating its control of elites in peripheral zones, the Rana regime intended the *jimidar* to serve as much as an agricultural entrepreneur as a revenue-collector, responsible for recruiting settlers or tenants (known as *raiti*) to cultivate the land and thereby produce agricultural surplus for state revenues. To do this, he had the power not only to grant subsidies in the form of temporary suspensions of revenue commitments whilst the land was converted to agricultural production, but also to supply seeds for planting (Dahal 1983: 2). Just as the state encouraged agricultural activity through the entrepreneurial proxy of the *jimidar,* so it stimulated the elephant capturing business through the figure of the *raut.* Taken together, these functionaries may be seen as complementary actors in an effort by the regime to maximise the economic benefits of the Tarai region.

The *jimidari* initiative built upon the concerted attempt at reclamation and settlement of the Tarai that the Shah kings had previously pursued between the period of unification and the Anglo-Gorkha war (i.e. 1769-1815), when the Tarai additionally served a strategic role as a forested and malarial barrier to territorial incursion by the British (see Locke 2007: 81-83 and Michael 2008). The settlement imperative is evident in a 1798 decree issued by King Rana Bahadur Shah to send people to cultivate Tarai land in the districts of Saptari, Mahottari, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat and Morang (Dahal 1983: 2). However, after

the relative failure of such programmes of compulsion, the Shah kings and their Rana usurpers pursued an alternative policy of incentivisation. The state began to issue dispensations to civil and military officials, members of the nobility, chieftains of vanquished principalities and, as we have seen, even the overseers of elephant capture operations. Issued with legal rights to their own land (*birta* proprietary tenure) or to manage land on behalf of the state in lieu of salary (*jagir* service tenure), they would attract settlers to cultivate wasteland and virgin forests, from which both the state and its agents would derive revenue (Ojha 1983: 24). The outbreak of famine in the area of the modern states of Bengal and Bihar during 1769 and 1770 had forced many subsistence cultivators to become refugees. This helped to ameliorate the Tarai's manpower shortage, making it easier for elephant capturers like Anup Raut to attract settlers (Dahal 1983: 2).

The *jimidar,* as the new functionary of the Ranas, had greater powers to advance their economic ambitions than his *chaudhari* predecessor. He had the additional authority to extend credit to settlers who had to expend labour on clearing land before they could reap a harvest. However, in the inner-Tarai district of Chitwan, sheltered by the Churiya Hills and known for its particularly high degree of malarial contagion, an especially low population density and a lack of immigration precluded the formation of new *mauja*, thereby limiting the entrepreneurial function of the *jimidar* (Guneratne 2002: 107). None the less, we must not ignore the enticing privileges available to the *jimidar.* He was allowed to retain a percentage of taxes in compensation for his revenue collecting activities, and he had his own dispensation of land (*jirayat*), on which he could summon all able-bodied persons to work during planting and harvesting. This compulsory or corvée labour was called *begari,* although in the local vernacular of the Chitwan Tharu it was referred to as *jharahi saghauni,* or 'to be forced to help' since one could not work on one's own fields until work on the *jimidar's* had been completed (Muller-Böker 1999: 36).

Captive elephants and royal hunting in the Tarai

Remaining sparsely populated until fairly recently, the Tarai, and Chitwan in particular, was highly prized as a hunting reserve for ruling elites (Guneratne 2002: 107). In this regard a key resource for a history of captive elephant management in Nepal is Evelyn Arthur Smythies' *Big Game Shooting in Nepal* 1942). Smythies was Chief Conservator of Forests for the

area of British India that would later become Uttar Pradesh and also served as a forest advisor to the government of Nepal. His book is primarily a hagiographic account of the hunting exploits of the Nepali ruler of the time, Sri Tin Maharaja Juddha Shamshere Jung Bahadur Rana, as he honorifically addresses him, who is claimed to have killed over 550 tigers during a period of 33 years (Smythies 1942: 38).

Smythies recounts the hunting trip attended by King George V of Britain in 1911, for which an incredible 600 elephants were assembled, roads built, and a special camp constructed at Kasara (which now serves as the headquarters of the Chitwan National Park, and a stable for quarantined elephants infected with tuberculosis, a case of zoonotic disease transmission posing serious problems for elephants throughout South Asia).[3] During this trip 39 tigers, 18 rhinos, two bears and several leopards were reportedly shot over the course of 11 days. The Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VIII of Britain) was hosted in 1921, and the preparations for his visit entailed the construction of 36 miles of motorable road from Bhikna Thori at the Indian border (the site of a Newar trading post), the installation of 32 miles of telephone line, and the assembling of 428 elephants (Raj 1995: 3). However, the tally of prey for the hunt of 1938, at which the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, was the guest of honour, was perhaps the greatest: 120 tigers, 38 rhinos, 27 leopards, and 15 bears were reportedly shot, the majority of them from elephant back (Muller-Böker 1999: 37). On this latter occasion a wild tusker persistently caused trouble until he was eventually captured and presumably subjected to training (Smythies 1942: 94).

Smythies' book is particularly notable for its descriptions of the ring technique of hunting, which is considered unique to Nepal, and which was most likely inspired by the *khor kheda* elephant capturing method in which elephants would be herded into specially prepared enclosures. In the ring method, the enclosure was substituted by an almost impenetrable circle of about 300 elephants, thereby providing a space within which to fix and shoot prey from the back of an elephant chosen for its fearlessness. Whilst this ring technique was subsequently adapted for the purposes of the Chitwan rhino translocations between 1986 and 2003 (see Dinerstein 2003,

3 A pioneer elephant tuberculosis programme is currently underway in Nepal, managed by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) in conjunction with Elephant Care International (ECI). See: http://www.elephantcare.org/tbshort.htm.

and Dugas & Locke 2007), far fewer elephants must have been used owing to the decreasing numbers of available captive elephants in Nepal.[4]

The last hattisare from the age of shikar

So far, this attempt at reconstructing a history of Nepali captive elephant management (*hatti vyavasthapan*) has relied on documentary materials, but during field research I encountered a man who represented a living connection to both this age of *shikar*, and to the times when elephant handlers could receive generous royal rewards. As the last of the *hattisare*s to benefit from land grants and royal largesse, it was a privilege for me to meet Bhagu Tharu in his later years. Generally known as Bhagu Subba or even 'the King's mahout', this venerable informant was famous for saving King Mahendra from attack by a tiger that lunged at him while he was riding on the back of an elephant driven by Bhagu. This event secured a legendary reputation for Bhagu. It is rumoured that the King asked Bhagu what he would like in reward, and that besides requesting a beautiful, fair-skinned *pahari* wife from the hills, as he jovially told me, others claim he also asked for Bharatpur airport! Whilst this audacious request was not granted, I am told that he did receive a sizeable reward of land.

Bhagu was also a participant in the *rastriya shikar* hosted by King Mahendra for Queen Elizabeth II of Britain in 1960, an event he fondly remembered for the generous tips (*baksis*) he received. Bhagu claimed that for this occasion a grand total of 335 elephants was assembled (for more on big game hunting in Chitwan, see Oldfield 1974[1880]: 201, Kinloch 1885, Landon 1976[1928] II: 150, Shaha 1970: 2). He also recalled a further innovation in the ring hunting developed by the Ranas. This was the application of white cloths to further secure the perimeter of the elephant ring, a technique later used in the project that translocated rhinos from Chitwan to Suklaphanta and Bardia in the western Tarai, which can be seen in photographs in the visitor centre of the Biodiversity Conservation Center in Sauraha. In Bhagu's remarkable career, he climbed the ranks from a lowly *mahut* all the way to *adhikrit subba*, the chief elephant officer, the nominal head of all of Nepal's *sarkari hattisar*s. As a retired handler (*bhupu hattisare*) and after his *adhikrit* successor Rameshwor Chaudhary helped

4 WWF-Nepal recently reported 85 government-owned elephants and 89 privately-owned elephants (2003: 11), although at the time of writing this total has now risen to 236.

submit an account of his achievements to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Bhagu was given the honorific title of *aajivan subba,* or 'subba for life', a position which ensured him a full salary until his death in 2006.

Subsequent developments and the importance of elephants

We have seen that the elephant represents a significant figure in relations between the Tharu and the state. Prized as both valued commodity and sacred creature, the elephant was emblematic of the Tarai regions, and during the 19th century captive elephant management became a key component in the political economy of the Tarai. The Tharu were not just a source of agricultural revenue. They became expert guardians of a very special kind of royal property, wild and captive alike, providing gifts of fealty by which Nepal mediated relations with its imperial neighbours to the south, and an export commodity for generating foreign revenue. In addition, the Tharu provided the human resources for regal events utilising elephants, engaging in activities that for the higher ranking, favoured few could bring great prestige and material reward.

In the latter half of the 20th century, after the Ranas were deposed and King Tribhuvan Shah reinstated (see Whelpton 2005: 68-72), the patrimonial kingdom began to give way to the modern state, now opened to the wider world and tentatively embracing ideologies of democracy and development (see Bista 1991). In this context, under the rule of Tribhuvan's son Mahendra, what we might call 'the age of conservation' emerged. In this era, which will in due course form the subject of another historical essay, malaria eradication, road building, in-migration and deforestation transformed the Tarai, and a system of protected forest areas emerged (see Locke 2007: 86-89). A consequence of the shift from *shikar* to conservation was that the honorary rewards of elephant handling granted by kings and enjoyed by the likes of Bhagu declined, and were replaced by purely salaried relations with the state as the *sarkari hattisar* became an adjunct of the new Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC).

As hunting reserves made the transition to conservation areas, King Mahendra also gave permission for the establishment of the first safari resort, which offered tourists elephant-back jungle expeditions to view Chitwan's megafauna. Tiger Tops, founded by the hunter John Coapman in 1963, was the first of several resorts with their own elephant stables

to be granted a license to operate in what became the Chitwan National Park. Then, in 1974 a few elephants were acquired for the Smithsonian Institute's Tiger Ecology Project. At the conclusion of this project, the elephants remained to facilitate conservation research in the *hattisar* at what became the Biodiversity Conservation Centre (BCC). After 1975 the Nepal government no longer permitted the capture of wild elephants due to its obligations as a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). However, it still needed to maintain its captive elephant population, and in 1986 Nepal initiated a bold experiment in captive breeding. This was the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center, which Bhagu Subba helped build, and which successfully bred elephants under the management of his successor, Rameshwor Chaudhary.

Khorsor became the largest *sarkari hattisar*, and the last decade has seen extensive infrastructure improvements there, including a visitor centre. Popular with tourists keen to see baby elephants, this has helped consolidate its role in the tourist economy of Sauraha. In 2009 Khorsor made the news around the world for the very rare birth of twin elephants born to Devi Kali, which were named Ram and Laxman. In addition to the *sarkari hattisar* in Chitwan, smaller hotels in Sauraha also began to keep or lease an increasing number of elephants from India, operating outside the park in the community-controlled forests of the Buffer Zone, leading to a parallel tradition of elephant keeping practices quite unlike those of the larger and distinctly Nepali *sarkari hattisar*.

Clearly, government support has been crucial for the professionalisation of elephant keeping in the Tarai and the development of the *hattisar* as a regimented institution. A system of clearly defined ranks and roles developed with its own chain of command, elephant care specialists, and associated administrative and service functionaries. By virtue of its role in facilitating royal hunting events and elephant capture operations a total institution was forged with a distinctive occupational sub-culture in which human lives revolve around the care of ritually venerated elephants. This was an institution that was easily redeployed for the new imperatives of protected area management and nature tourism, although the private sector plays the dominant role in this latter regard. In the 21st century the *hattisar* has also become subject to the attentions of INGOs concerned with the health and welfare of captive elephants.

However, the history of the Tharu, the Tarai and the *hattisar* makes

no sense without some appreciation of the status of the elephant as a ceremonial animal associated with political power, as a very large mammal with which humans develop intimate relations of companionship, and as a being representing the instantiation of divinity. In other words, elephants must be understood not only as animals, but also as persons and as gods. Much more can be said about the complex cultural meanings of and relations with the elephant in Nepal, but that too is the subject of another essay.

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The Enactment of Tribal Unity at the Periphery of India: The political role of a new form of the Panglhabsol Buddhist ritual in Sikkim

Mélanie Vandenhelsken

Since the 1990s, the rituals of the various Sikkimese ethnic groups have received growing media coverage.[1] This formerly independent Buddhist kingdom, annexed by or 'merged' with India[2] in 1975, is at the northeastern edge of the Indian republic, between Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. It is home to about twenty ethnic groups[3], who are generally depicted as belonging to one of three categories: Bhotia, a linguistically and culturally Tibetan group, to which the Sikkimese kings belonged; Lepcha, the original inhabitants of the area; and 'Nepalese,' a label which emphasises their foreign origin. The terms 'Nepalese' and 'Bhotia' will be discussed in more detail below. These categories are constructed within several thematic fields, including the interpretation of history. This article is an attempt to highlight the instrumental role of the state of Sikkim in this process of constructing ethnic categories by using and reshaping an ancient ritual[4]

1 This paper was first presented at the conference 'Néo-ritualisations and construction of collective identifications' held on October 2–3, 2008, and organised by the CERCE (Centre of Studies and Comparative Research in Ethnology, Montpellier III University, EA 3532) with the support of MSH Montpellier-Méditerranée and the Institut Universitaire de France. The enquiry was carried on in the frame of a research project for the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, between 2006 and 2008. I am grateful to Michael Hutt and Sara Shneiderman for their comments and suggestions on this text.

2 The question of whether the Sikkim merger was an annexation is debated. See for instance Das 1983 and Datta-Ray 1980 who each support a different point of view, i.e. repectively that the integration of Sikkim within the Indian Union was the result of a democratic referendum, or of an Indian military intervention. However, the statement in Parliament in 1978 by the Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai that 'the manner in which Sikkim's merger with India was carried out was a wrong step' is taken as an admission to the annexation of Sikkim. My thanks to Pema Wangchuk for having brought this to my notice.

3 See Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation: 59.

4 It is not implied here that ethnicity and identity are only and always determined by nation states; transnational influences are also instrumental in this regard (for this area of study see Shneiderman 2009) as well as global ones, but these will not be discussed here.

in order to reposition Sikkim as an integral part of the State of India[5] despite its peripheral position at the geographical border of the Indian nation-state.

The focus on certain rituals is largely legitimated by referring to 'ancient' traditions. For example, a newspaper article of 14 August 2008 began with the statement 'Tendong Lho Rum Faat is one of the oldest festivals of indigenous Lepchas,' and continued, 'Realizing its importance and need to preserve this age-old coveted tradition and culture of the indigenous Lepchas, the Sikkim Democratic Front government declared the 8th August of Almanac calendar a state holiday since 1997.'[6] The current Sikkim government invests particular attention in the ritual that will be examined here: the Panglhabsol (Tib. *dpang lha gsol*)[7] as celebrated in Ravangla, a small town in the centre of Sikkim, and a two-hour drive from Gangtok, the state capital. Here, Buddhist masked ritual dances similar to those staged in many Tibetan monasteries are combined with sports tournaments, the sale of products chosen to represent various ethnic groups of Sikkim, and speeches by government representatives. Panglhabsol has been celebrated close to the town centre of Ravangla since 1984, but under the Sikkimese monarchy it was the most important state ritual, celebrated every year in the royal chapel (Balikci 2008). It was banned shortly after the annexation of Sikkim because the Indian government saw it as a display of royalist and nationalist sentiments (Pommaret 1996), but it was resumed later in the 1970s. In the 1980s, however, its celebration was finally stopped for religious reasons by the prince-heir of Sikkim (Balikci 2008: 336). In 1993, the ritual was 'revitalised' by the royal priests of Pemayangtse 'monastery' (*gompa*)[8] who in the past had been in charge of its celebration in the palace. This

5 For clarity's sake, 'state' with a lower-case 's' will be used hereafter to denote the Sikkimese state, and 'State' with an upper case 'S' to denote the Indian State.

6 *Now!* 2008.

7 Terms preceded by 'Tib.' are Tibetan language terms transliterated in the Wylie system. The transliteration is given at the first occurrence of the term; the following instances are transcribed in a simplified way (the letter ö is pronounced as 'eu' in French).

8 The Tibetan term '*gompa*' (Tib. *dgon pa*), which literally means 'isolated place', is generally translated as 'monastery.' But in Sikkim, most of the users of these places are not monks but householder ritual specialists, who go to a *gompa* for temporary periods as children to study at the *gompa*'s Buddhist school, and as adults to practise rituals as well as to meditate. The term *gompa* will thus be used here instead of 'monastery,' and understood as a place of worship for non-celibate ritual specialists and lay practitioners.

time, it took the form of an open protest against India's annexation of Sikkim (Vandenhelsken 2006).

I argue here that the 'neo-Panglhabsol'[9] of Ravangla has been appropriated by the modern Sikkimese state. On one hand, the state uses it to monopolise the political legitimacy of the ancient regime, re-establishing the link between the mountain cult and political power that is widespread in the Tibetan cultural area (see Blondeau 1996 and Blondeau and Steinkellner 1998) but was severed in Sikkim with the fall of the monarchy (Steinmann 1998). On the other hand, the myth linked to the ritual has been reinterpreted, transforming it into a new foundational narrative that unifies all the people of Sikkim, concealing interethnic competition. The 'politics of tribalisation',[10] within which all the ethnic groups living in the state aim to acquire the status of Scheduled Tribe (ST) from the Indian government, is the real object of the 'neo-ritual', and lies at the core of its ambivalence. The 'neo-Panglhabsol' thus proves to be a space for an enactment of politics that remodels ethnic boundaries, and aims at repositioning Sikkim within the Indian Union.

The Panglhabsol of Ravangla does not challenge the Indian central government, but rather aims at a political centralisation of the state of Sikkim that was never really achieved before the state was incorporated into India. This centralisation is effected by transforming the myth of the foundation of the Bhotia kingdom into a myth of the Sikkimese nation within the Indian nation.[11] This implies the need to rewrite the history of Sikkim, to redefine the claimed status of the state's historical leaders, and to create a cultural boundary between Sikkim and other Indian states. All of these endeavours have become sources of new tensions between Sikkim's various ethnic groups.

The takeover of Panglhabsol by the modern state

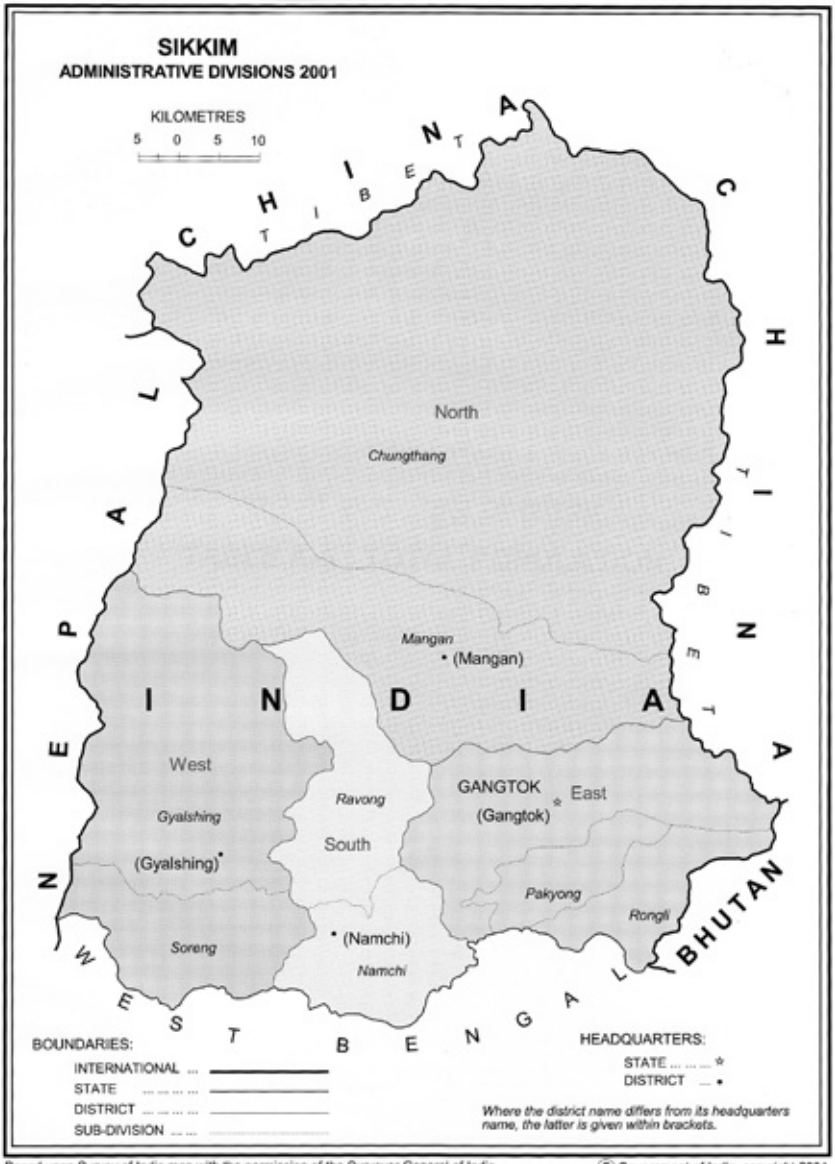
Ravangla[12] is located in an enclave of Sikkim's South district, at the intersection of the East district, where the capital Gangtok is located, and the West district. The population of the town, about 45,000 inhabitants, is predominantly Hindu, with roughly the same proportion of Hindus to

9 In reference to Galinier and Molinié (2006).

10 In reference to Sinha (2006).

11 See in this respect, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Babadzan (2001).

12 Also called 'Ravang', 'Rabang', 'Ravong' or 'Rabong.'



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Buddhists as seen at the state level. The Buddhist *gompa* of Ralang, located a few kilometres north of the town, is one of the most important *gompa*s in the state. It is one of the few Sikkimese *gompa*s that holds the right to collect taxes from the lay households in its vicinity as well as on products sold at certain shops in Ravangla. Founded in 1730 by the king of Sikkim, it is one of about twenty Sikkimese *gompa* belonging to the *kagyupa* (Tib. *bka' brgyud pa*) Tibetan school of Buddhism, whereas in the state as a whole there are mainly *nyingmapa* (Tib. *rnying ma pa*) *gompa*s.

In the last few years, the celebration of Panglhabsol in Ravangla has become one of the most important annual events in Sikkim, as is evident both from the number of visitors and its coverage in the media. During the celebration, Buddhist ritual dances are performed in front of a Buddhist 'temple' (*mani lhakhang*) located at a separate site, like a *gompa* but nearer the city centre. Volleyball matches are organised behind this temple in the same compound. On either side of the temple and the sports field, culinary specialities of different ethnic groups are sold at stands, and various achievements of the government are presented. Speeches by members of the government, usually including the Chief Minister (head of the state government) of Sikkim, are interspersed between the dances and matches. In the evening, dances are organised in the city in the same place that the Buddhist ritual dances were performed earlier in the day. These dances are described as traditional to the various local ethnic groups, but are generally performed to popular Hindi music, and as on other occasions, this transformation into 'Bollywood-style number[s] [...] carr[ies] the weight of 'culture' in the generic South Asian sense' (Shneiderman 2011: 203). Thus, the ingredients of the Ravangla Panglhabsol include an assemblage of the sacred and the secular, as well as an omnipresent display of the local state and of ethnic tradition depicted as adapted to the modern world. It is an event that attracts not only pilgrims, but also tourists and the curious.

On 15 September 2008, the Panglhabsol of Ravangla celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its creation with unparalleled splendour. This 'Silver Jubilee of Pang Lhabsol' at Ravangla was accorded the status of a Sikkim state function. The Sikkim government was represented by its Chief Minister, the Ministers of Sport and of the Urban Development and Housing Department (UD&HD) and a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Ravangla. This date also saw the official unveiling of a new *gompa*, built between the temple and the sports field.

The foundation of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' and political careers

A group of men native to Ravangla, who were all members of the then ruling party (the Sikkim Pradesh Congress[I]), organised the 'neo-Panglhabsol' for the first time in the autumn of 1984.[13] The initiators of the ritual whom I interviewed[14] claimed that Panglhabsol was no longer celebrated in the royal chapel at that time and thus they wanted to fill the gap. However, its celebration had only been interrupted by the prince at the end of the 1980s (Balikci 2008: 336). The ritual was thus simultaneously performed in both places for a few years. These men had therefore other motives.

In 1984, a simple fair (*mela* in Nepali[15]) was organised, with street peddlers and farmers from the vicinity selling their products. It was linked to Panglhabsol by its date: the fifteenth day of the seventh Tibetan month (August-September). One of the people who initiated this celebration and was interviewed for this study is Mr. Dorje, a Bhotia originally from the vicinity of Ravangla.[16] He was around 60 years old at the time of the interview, and was a member of the Sikkim government. Mr. Dorje defines himself as a villager. His family owns a small area of land, of which part is leased to tenants. He can thus be considered to belong to the rural middle-class. Mr. Dorje was a civil servant until 1975, when he resigned. He explains his decision as being due to the excessively heavy control that the royal government exercised over the population at that time, thus giving credence to the accusation of authoritarianism levelled at the Sikkimese kings by their opponents.[17] This ideological position—midway between the more common pro-Indian antimonarchism and the royalism opposed to Sikkim's merger with India—represents a group of ideas that gave birth to the 'neo-Panglhabsol' of Ravangla, and that most likely helped Dorje to become a member of the government.

Another founder of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' of Ravangla is Mr. Sharma, a few years younger than Mr. Dorje, and a member of the high-status Indo-

13 This party later joined the Indian Congress party (Kazi 1993: 73).

14 I interviewed four of the twelve founders of the 'new Panglhabsol' for this study in 2007 and 2008.

15 Nepali is the lingua franca of Sikkim. My Bhotia interlocutors, for instance, use Nepali more spontaneously than the Bhotia dialect (called Lhoke, Tib. lho skad or Denjongke, Tib. 'bras ljong skad).

16 All the names used in this article are pseudonyms, except for those of public figures such as Ganju Lama and the heads of the Sikkim state.

17 However, Mr. Dorje did not participate in the anti-monarchy movements of 1973-74.

Nepalese caste Chetri. In 1984, when he was a civil servant, he resigned in order to join the then ruling party and stand for the elections. In 1985 he was elected as MLA of one of the constituencies of Ravangla. He remained a close associate of the government then formed by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad. In 1993, one year before the elections, Mr. Sharma as well as all the founders of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' of Ravangla joined the rising Sikkim Democratic Front; the latter won the 1994 elections and is still ruling today.

Other founding members were not interviewed, such as Ganju Lama, who passed away in 2000. He is famous in Sikkim because he was decorated with the Victoria Cross as a soldier in the British Gurkha battalions. Two local elected representatives (members of *panchayat*, i.e. bodies representing the smallest administrative divisions in India) were also part of the group: a Chetri and a Rai. Finally, four other Bhotias were involved. One was also a building contractor, and another a Ravangla hotelkeeper.

On the Panglhabsol day in September 1984, a Hindu ritual was organised to worship the mountain Kailash, located in southwest Tibet, which is a Buddhist sacred mountain and considered by Hindus to be the residence of Shiva. In 1985 Panglhabsol Buddhist ritual dances were introduced into the celebration under instructions from the sub-division magistrate, who had just been appointed in Ravangla, and the deputy. Both officials were Bhotias. Panglhabsol was staged in the Ravangla town centre. A ritual specialist from Ralang was requested to teach the dances to a dozen young men from the town. As Panglhabsol continued to be performed in Ralang *gompa*, it indeed became necessary to train new dancers for the 'neo-Panglhabsol' staged in Ravangla at the same time. In the first years, the dancers' accessories were made of common things such as saucepan lids for shields, pieces of bamboo for swords, and so forth.

The same year, the building of the Buddhist temple in Ravangla began on a piece of land located not too far from the town's shopping area. The government had given this plot to Ganju Lama, the most famous of the founding members. The temple was financed entirely by Mr. Dorje from his personal funds. Gradually, various lay elements were added to the celebration, such as volleyball matches, the 'traditional' dances of various ethnic groups, which together were called the 'cultural programme,' and the market stands. The 'neo-ritual' was soon institutionalised through the creation of an official organising committee, the Panglhabsol Celebration

Committee (PLCC). It is composed of seven members, with the sub-division magistrate serving as its chairman. In 1994, Mr. Dorje was elected MLA of one of the constituencies of Ravangla, and acquired a public subsidy for the PLCC. During this mandate, in 1996, the ground floor of the temple was completed, and subsequently all of the elements of the 'neo-ritual' were moved to its site. Hereafter, the celebration became a three-day event instead of merely one day. In 1999, as one of the founding members joined the government, an annual grant of 100,000 rupees was granted by the Ministry of Culture to the PLCC. Since 2000, all of the members of the Panglhabsol organising committee have also become members of the Ravangla Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC). Thus the 'neo-ritual' gained in importance, attracting leading government officials to participate and the public to attend.

Common to all of the founders of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' is their involvement or desire for involvement in politics in a society in which participation in collective activities—generally called 'social work'—determines the recognition of political leaders as much as the vote of the local population.

The reframing of the ritual or the takeover of religion by politics

The Panglhabsol ritual originally celebrated the Buddhist mountain god Dzönga (Tib. *mdzod lnga*). In the guise of one of its identities, Dzönga is a protective deity of the kingdom, 'thus linking and uniting the person, the lineage, the village and the State together under the Chogyal [i.e. the king]' (Balikci 2008: 27; see also Balikci 2002). Thus, the ritual is closely linked to political power, as the mountain cults in Tibet often are,[18] and to the kingdom. As mentioned above, it is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar (August-September), which marks the end of the monsoon season and the beginning of harvest time. It is one of the yearly occasions on which masked ritual dances are staged in the wealthier Buddhist monasteries. As on other occasions, it is composed of several rituals aiming in turn at protection and exorcism. The most important of these is the ritual of 'propitiation of the holy place' (Nesol, Tib. *gnas gsol*), which is the 'ritual of the soil *par excellence*,' a celebration of Sikkim

18 See Blondeau (1996) and Blondeau and Steinkellner (1998), and in the latter, in particular Karmay (1998).

as a Buddhist holy site (Balikci 2008: 108). In the royal chapel in the past, only Pemayangtse ritual specialists performed Panglhabsol masked dances; these specialists were formerly royal priests and are members of the clans that share a common ancestor with the royal family (Vandenhelsken 2006, 2009). The masked dances alternate with non-masked dances, called *pangtö* (Tib. *dpang bstod*, i.e. 'worship of the witness-deities;' a term which will be explained further below), performed by noble laymen. They perform as warriors of the mountain god and celebrate the subjugation of his enemies. As Balikci explains,

> In this case, the meaning of enemy was particularly intended as the enemy of the Dharma and the monasteries, and consequently, the enemies of the Buddhist kingdom and its monarchy. Indeed, it is mentioned in the Nesol (f.55-58), that Jigme Pawo [a religious man close to the third king of Sikkim, who choreographed the *pangtö* dances in the 18th century] reminded Dzönga of his oath taken before Guru Rinpoche that he would prevent enemies from entering Sikkim, particularly anyone who came here with the intention of changing the structure of the administration as it had been established by the three lamas who consecrated the first Chogyal [i.e. king] at Yuksam in 1642 and set the borders of the new kingdom (Balikci 2008: 108).

Moreover, when it was celebrated in the royal chapel Panglhabsol was the occasion for the royal family, as well as the lay and religious members of the government, to renew their vows to serve the kingdom in front of the protective deities of Sikkim (*ibid*: 316).

When the first 'neo-Panglhabsol' was organised in Ravangla in 1984, it was not held at the *gompa* of Ralang, located several kilometres outside the city, but in the town centre. Mr. Dorje explains that this was because Ralang *gompa* was too far away. Moreover, when discussing the addition of the Buddhist ritual dances the following year, he added, 'people were not used to seeing this type of dance.' This statement refers to the geographical isolation of the *gompa* of Ralang and to the fact that in the past it was mainly the Bhotias who attended Buddhist ritual dances. In the 'neo-ritual,' these dances were extracted from the monastic environment of Ralang and brought to a larger, multi-ethnic audience. But there were critics among the general population, as well as within the Ralang religious community,

of ritual dances being performed at a market place. There were two aspects to their critique: they highlighted the paradox of accumulating merit while also accumulating profit, and the tension between the pure and the impure. The geographical isolation of the *gompa*s is perceived by Buddhist practitioners to represent and enable a distancing from the accumulation of wealth, as well as from all of the 'poisons' of secular life that stand in the way of spiritual progress.

This criticism was not misplaced: the fundamental motive for bringing Panglhabsol to the town centre was to put the dances on the market, in the literal as well as the figurative sense. This is very clear from the Chief Minister's inauguration speech in 2008: 'Sikkim has a very high potential in the tourism industry; thus, we have to combine our customs, traditions, culture and food habits with tourism and take this festival and our culture and traditions to the world market.'[19]

However, the relationship between the 'neo-Panglhabsol' and the Ralang religious authority was not completely severed. First, both the 'neo-Panglhabsol' founding members and Ralang ritual specialists claim that Ralang celebrated Panglhabsol in the past, and this reference to antiquity thus justifies the present celebration of the ritual in Ravangla. Moreover, the ritual specialist from Ralang who trained new dancers in 1985 is today the spiritual leader of the Ralang religious community.[20] However, in Ralang, servants of the monastery performed the *pangtö* dances, not men from the nobility as had been done in the royal chapel; these dances were even called 'servant dances,' (Lk. *kecham*).[21] However, the founders of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' did not call on Ralang's servants, but rather on a ritual specialist. The latter's social status and his influential position within the religious community most probably made him the choice of the founders of the 'neo-ritual.'

Soon after 1984, Mr. Dorje began building the temple where the dances take place today. It was located closer to the town than Ralang, but not

19 Daily newspaper Sikkim Reporter, 17 September 2008.

20 He carries the title *dorje lopon* (Tib. *rdo rje slob dpon*), literally 'Dorje master,' which is the highest function in the hierarchical organisation of the Buddhist religious communities in Sikkim.

21 'Lk.' indicates words in Lhoke, the Tibetan dialect spoken by Bhotias in Sikkim. Kecham is most probably derived from Tib. khyep 'cham, the Lhoke word khyep being equivalent to the Tibetan word khol po, meaning 'servant' or 'slave' (Stein 1981: 71 and 101, and Das 1989: 193).

directly in the shopping area. Mr. Dorje explains that he decided to build this temple to respond to the criticism of organising the ritual in a market place. The new temple was linked to Ralang *gompa* because a Buddhist school was attached to it, with a teacher and students who came from Ralang. Although Mr. Dorje placed the ritual dances into a religious framework by having them performed in front of the new temple, he nevertheless insisted that there was a difference between a temple (*mani lhakhang*) and a *gompa*: 'I built a temple, and you should not mix up *gompa* and *mani lhakhang*,' he explained to me, 'a *mani lhakhang* is used by old women who come to recite mantras.' This understanding of the 'old women's' religious practices is a simplification, since it does not take into account the fasting (Tib. *bsnyen gnas*) performed by these practitioners, who abstain from meat, fresh vegetables, alcohol and speaking for periods that can last up to sixteen days. Here, Mr. Dorje stresses the difference in status between the temple and the *gompa*, and in this way implicitly tells us that by installing the 'neo-ritual' in a *mani lhakhang*, he was not competing with the Ralang *gompa*.

However, in 2008 Mr. Dorje built a *gompa* next to the temple, thanks to funding from the Indian central government. Since the principle of secularism is inscribed in the Indian Constitution, in order to receive financing the *gompa* had to be classified as a museum (musical instruments and other traditional objects are indeed displayed in an alcove on the ground floor). In 2008 Mr. Dorje had become a member of the government. Did he wait until acquiring this powerful social position before taking it upon himself to compete with the *gompa* of Ralang? The fact remains that the ritual dances were taken from the Ralang *gompa*, provided with legitimacy by keeping a minimal link to Ralang, and, after a detour through the market place, were again installed in a religious site, albeit one that is controlled by the state.

Extracting Panglhabsol from the *gompa* also allowed the addition of new elements. It would have been difficult to add elements such as sports matches and ethnic dances to the Panglhabsol if it had remained in Ralang. Indeed, the Bhotia nobility criticised the addition of elements that had not been part of Panglhabsol in the past. As one of my interviewees explained: 'When a single ethnic group has a ritual, it is tradition, but when everything is blended, it is tourism.' However, during the masked ritual dances in Pemayangtse, which the critics of the Ravangla Panglhabsol generally take as an example of authenticity, small shops are installed within the *gompa*

compound, but only in a restricted and limited space. This practice, as well as the critics of the blended 'neo-ritual,' appears to be in tune with Buddhist philosophy—of which Pemayangtse is considered the main guardian in Sikkim—which maintains the interdependence and separation between the religious and temporal domains (Ruegg 1995).

Therefore, the problem caused by the 'neo-Panglhabsol' is less the adding of elements to the Panglhabsol 'that do not refer to the beyond and the sacred' (Caillet and Jamous 2001: 68), than the fact that these elements are not confined to the secular plane, and are therefore not adequately differentiated from the Buddhist ritual dances. The change of location thus did not lead to the sacred character of the ritual dances being removed, but permitted the elements chosen to represent culture to be sacralised: the move of the ritual made the 'sacralisation of culture' possible (Babadzan 1999: 7-8).

Thus, the 'neo-Panglhabsol' is not the fruit of a process of secularisation which involves the privatisation of the religious domain, nor is it the removal of areas of society and culture from the authority of religious institutions and symbols (Madan 1987, Berger 1973: 113, quoted by Madan *ibid*: 748, Hervieu-Léger 1986: 208). It rather allows the relationship between the religious and temporal domains to be transformed: the religious domain is brought under the control of the state, and under the control of the market in the service of the state. Assayag's analysis of Hindu nationalist processions can be borrowed to describe this relationship within the framework of the 'neo-Panglhabsol': 'It was about reconfiguring the religious on the political field, or politics on the religious, by inscribing them in a double register simultaneously nostalgic and utopian, monastic and monarchical' (2003: 388).

Moreover, placing religious practices on the same level as sport and commercial activities permits the social and historical positions of the various ethnic groups of the state to be equalised, thus neutralising the predominant position of the Bhotias within Sikkimese society and history. The 'neo-ritual' thus has the same aim as the reinterpretation of the myths to which it is linked. In order to further examine this relationship, let us consider the political mechanisms through which ethnicity is constructed in Sikkim.

The construction of ethnicity by the state in Sikkimese history

Ethnicity, homeland and secularism in Sikkim

How can this 'staging' of culture, identified with ritual, be interpreted? Are we seeing a situation in which 'enchanted religious forms undoubtedly do not want to die, preventing the nation-state from being created by disenchantment of the world' (Assayag 2002: 182)?[22] In other words, does this 'staging' of culture express the secessionist desires of ethnic groups, desires that are supported by the Sikkim state? And does it question the incorporation of Sikkim into the Indian nation-State by rejecting the principle of secularism as inscribed in the Indian Constitution? Analysing the situation in this way might draw inspiration from the Gellnerian 'modernist' view of nationalism, which links nationalism to the secularisation of society and cultural homogeneity. According to this concept, the growth of secularism is necessarily accompanied by nationalism and, simultaneously, cultural homogenisation is one of the prerequisites for the emergence of the nation-state (Gellner 1981, 1999; Assayag 2002). Other concepts of nationalism can be included in this paradigm of modernisation, which, linked to the emergence of industrial societies, marks the passage from the organisation of traditional communities to the state society (Assayag 2001: 25 and chapter 1).

Anthropologists have questioned this model for several reasons, in particular for its 'Euro-centrism.' The role it allocates to secularism is also open to discussion because, as in Europe, 'the religious reification of culture played a determining role in the definition of nature and of the territorial borders of nations' (Assayag 2001: 26 and 1997). Reviewer, the history and anthropology of India provide noteworthy examples of religious symbols and practices being used by Hindu nationalist movements (Assayag 1997, 2001, Jaffrelot 1991 and 2005).

Critics of the modernist paradigm argue that the relationship between communities and nations is a reciprocal one. Nationalism produces distinct identities; exalting 'reinvented ethnicities' has often accompanied the formation of nation-states, either by supporting them or not.[23] In addition,

22 My translation of Assayag: '[chez les sociétés traditionnelles] les formes religieuses enchantées ne veulent décidément pas mourir, empêchant l'État-nation de naître par désenchantement du monde!'

23 This is my translation of 'ethnicité fictives' in the sentence: 'Le passé n'est pas moins un

groups often resort to old forms of patriotism in response to homogenisation and standardisation. Hindu nationalism, to use the same example again, reveals links between nationalism, 'communalism' (as ethnic tensions are called in India) and religion. Jaffrelot (1988) has shown that the birth of Hindu nationalism was concomitant with that of communalism.

In line with these theses, I argue that the ritual presented here is part of a process that is producing a nationalist or, at least now, a patriotic form of identity.[24] The reshaping of this ritual aims at re-drawing the ethnic map and the ethnic boundaries of Sikkim, underlining ethnic belonging and differences[25] that are not opposed to the nation and providing an example of ethnicity being politically constructed. I will show that the religious sphere—which was paramount in what was, until recently, a Buddhist kingdom—is instrumental in this process, with the Sikkim state placing the ritual under its control and 'the enchantment of the world'[26] entering the service of the homeland. The 'neo-Panglhabsol' thus reveals particular referents and forms of nationalism in Sikkim, and becomes a scheme of action for constructing a state nationalism for Sikkim through a reshaping of ethnicity.

The framework for the emergence of the 'neo-Panglhabsol'

In Sikkim today, what is popularly referred to as the 'reservation system' largely fixes ethnic boundaries. This system of 'compensatory

pays étranger que familier, notamment parce qu'il renvoie fréquemment à une « ethnicité fictive » s'auto-représentant comme « peuple élu », c'est-à-dire une communauté instituée par ou contre un État national' (Assayag 2002: 184).

24 According to Assayag (2001: 31), patriotism is based on the principle of residence, while nationalism is based on the principles of descent and ancestry. Sikkimese collective identity as constructed by the state is based on the principle of residence, and therefore falls within patriotism rather than nationalism. Nevertheless, the construction of the first seems to lead to the second.

25 Rejecting a primordialist understanding, I here comprehend 'ethnicity' as a representation by the social actors of divisions and social inequality, as well as differentiation in terms of belonging to an 'ethnic group' (Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart 1995: 21-33). 'Ethnic group' is also a problematic expression, and is also not understood in the primordialist sense of groups made up of unchanging and superimposed natural and cultural features. It is rather broadly speaking considered a dynamic entity, continuously shaped according to relations to others, and definition by others, to ideological and material needs and assertions, local and global politics, history, etc. (On the problems raised by the notions of ethnic groups and tribes, and particularly in the South Asian context, see for instance Gaenszle (2000: 19-24) and Gellner (1997: 15-16)).

26 I refer here to Max Weber's concept of the 'disenchantment of the world.'

discrimination' (Galanter 1991) is implemented everywhere in India: it guarantees minimum representation in public employment, higher education, and political institutions for those social groups described as 'backward.' Quotas are reserved for four categories: Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and women (Tawa-Lama 2005: 9-10).

Of the speakers of the approximately 90 languages registered as residing in Sikkim (Census of India 1991), who are also divided for official enumeration purposes into twenty-one ethnic communities[27] and six religions,[28] only the Bhotia, Lepcha, Limbu and Tamang have been granted the status of ST. The Kami, Rai, Majhi and Sarkhi, which are Nepalese castes of lower social status, belong to the category of SC. The identification of OBC is more complicated, since the Indian central government and the state of Sikkim do not use the same definition. In 1994, the Delhi government acknowledged the Bhujel, Gurung, Limbu, Mangar, Rai, Sunuwar, Tamang, Thami, and Jogi as OBC,[29] but in 2001, the government of Sikkim included most of these groups in the category of Most Backward Classes (hereafter MBC), and included groups that had previously been considered as having a high social status in the OBC category.[30]

In addition to quotas in education, employment and political representation, allocated in a variable manner according to the membership category, twelve of the thirty-two seats in the legislative assembly of Sikkim are reserved for the category 'Bhotia-Lepcha' and one seat is reserved for a representative of the Buddhist religious community of the state (the Sangha). The nineteen remaining seats, called 'general', are not reserved. That is to say, they are open to all candidates, regardless of ethnic belonging. This organisation of the legislative assembly has triggered numerous debates. It is also an issue in current Sikkimese politics, of which the Panglhabsol ritual is a component.

The boundaries of this 'ethnic map' draw on 'metanarrations' (Gingrich 1998), or various 'thematic skylines,' as found in colonial, missionary and

27 Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation (2006).

28 Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikh, Jain, Christian and Muslim.

29 There was already a disagreement with Gangtok, since the Sikkimese government included the Dewan in this category.

30 All of the laws mentioned here are part of the Sikkim Code, published in 6 volumes by the Law Department, Government of Sikkim.

anthropological literature (Steinmann 1996). Tourist guidebooks, for instance, present the population of Sikkim as being composed of three 'ethnic groups': Bhotia, Lepcha and Nepalese.[31] All of these categories combine subgroups of various origins, dialects, and social status under singular labels. There are also variations in understanding amongst ethnic group members, and between them and the state and national administrations, leading us to question the notion of 'ethnic group' (see Amselle 1985). In this regard, the labels 'Bhotia' and 'Nepalese' are problematic.

The following table summarises this situation and its evolution:

Table 1: Ethnic categories in Sikkim

Key:
(1) As declared by the Indian central government
(2) As declared by the Sikkim government

	1978	1994	2001	2003
SC	Kami, Damai Majhi and Sarkhi (1)			
OBC		Limbu, Tamang, Bhujel, Gurung, Mangar, Rai, Sunuwar, Thami, Jogi and Dewan (1, except Dewan)	Bahun, Chetri, Newar, Sanyasi (2)	
MBC			Bhujel, Gurung, Mangar, Kirat Rai, Sunuwar, Thami, Jogi, Dewan (2)	
ST	Bhotia and Lepcha (1)			Limbu and Tamang (1)

The former Sikkimese kings' ethnic group used several names for

31 Of numerous examples, see the text entitled 'Sikkim. Ultimate Eco-destination' published by the Sikkim Tourism Department, Government of Sikkim.

themselves, including *Lho po* (as *lho* means 'south' in Tibetan, this name was most probably given by Tibetans to refer to southern populations) and *Denzongpa* (Tib.*'bras ljongs pa*) which refers to the kingdom and to Sikkim as a Buddhist holy place. But the Scheduled Tribes order of 1978 included in the category of 'Bhotia' groups that were not considered as part of their group by the Sikkimese 'Bhotias,' only by the colonial administrators and ethnologists.

As for the term 'Nepalese,' its usage for people living in India has been discussed in several scholarly contexts (see Hutt 1997: 106, Subba 1992, especially: 67-74, Shneiderman 2009: 15-20). It is problematic if it is used to mean 'speakers of languages spoken primarily in Nepal', to indicate people of Nepalese origin (Hutt 1997: 106), or to suggest a cohesive community with a unitary identity and common language (Chalmers 2003). In India, the groups classified as 'Nepalis' have long searched for a term that indicates their Indian nationality, while also highlighting their distinct identity (see Subba 1992: 67-68, Hutt 1997, Sinha 2006). In Darjeeling, several political groups have debated the use of the term over time (Hutt, 1997: 108, 117; Subba 1992: 68 and 71). In Sikkim, the term 'Nepalese' is preferred to 'Nepali,'[32] and it is used as an ethnonym rather than referring to people who speak the Nepali language.[33] But it is nevertheless contrasted to Bhotia and Lepcha, and the recent attempt by the Sikkimese administration to replace it with 'Sikkimese Nepalese,' to stress the conception of the category as a 'quasi ethnic group'[34] highlights even more its quality of foreignness. However, many of the groups classified as 'Nepalese' are not of recent origin in Sikkim. For instance, the term imputes a foreign origin to groups like the Limbu, who have lived in Sikkim as long as the Bhotia and Lepcha.[35]

Finally, in Sikkim more than in Darjeeling, although common cultural practices can be found among all the ethnic groups classified as 'Nepalese,' and a common sense of belonging to the 'Nepalese group' has been claimed by

32 In the scholarly debate, A. C. Sinha has recently proposed to use the term 'Nepamul' as an abbreviation of the Nepali translation of 'Indians of Nepalese Origin' (2003: 11-12).

33 My thanks to Mark Turin for having brought to my notice the terms of this debate on 'Nepalese-Nepali.' In this regard, see also T.B. Subba (1992: 71-72, and 2003: 56).

34 This expression is used by Hutt (1997: 102).

35 Regarding the ancient settlement of Limbus and other 'non Bhotia-Lepcha' ethnic groups in Sikkim, see Arora (2007: 200), Hutt (1997: 103 and 131), Sinha (1981: 191), Steinmann (1996: 118), and Subba (1989: Introduction).

its members on several occasions in the past,[36] the groups labelled as such do not have as many common 'cultural traits' as they have different languages, religious practices, and forms of social organisation.[37] Additionally, the particular historical and political situation of Sikkim has led each group to recently claim a distinct identity, with a particular language, religion, costume and so forth, a phenomenon that can be linked to the political programme of the present government, which I will discuss below. However, in Sikkim the division of the population into autochthonous inhabitants and immigrants is generally super-imposed on that between Buddhists (27% of the total population) and Hindus (68 %).[38] This dual division of the population is a historical construction; but the superimposition of classification criteria upon the inhabitants of Sikkim is too simplistic. It can be traced back to a combination of the Sikkimese elite's relations with others and early ethnological and colonial thought that created a representation of the population of Sikkim as being divided into a Hindu majority and an autochthonous minority. Since then, the term 'Nepalese' has been used to describe anyone who is neither Bhotia nor Lepcha, regardless of his or her language, religion, social organisation, or even origin.[39]

The twofold division of the Sikkimese population determined policies related to the various ethnic groups. First, it became part of the administrative management of the population. Moreover, in the first half of the 20th century, several laws made official the different treatment of the Bhotias and Lepchas on the one hand and the 'Nepalese' on the other, in favour of the former. Thus the differences between the 'indigenous' Bhotia-Lepcha and the 'Nepalese' immigrants were constructed and institutionalised (see Arora 2007: 202 and 204-205, Sinha 2006: 6-7). Finally, the royal government of Sikkim established the controversial 'parity system' in 1950–51 that reflected the binary division of the Sikkim population. Here, six seats of the royal Council were reserved for Bhotias and Lepchas, and six for the 'Nepalese' (six were nominated by the ruler).[40] The 'parity' between Bhotia-Lepcha (B-L) and 'Nepalese' was maintained

36 Regarding the inclusion of sub-groups such as Rai, Limbu, and Gurung into the larger 'Nepali' group, see Hutt (1997: 117, 119).

37 In this regard, see also Arora (2007: 197).

38 These figures are presented by the Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Government of Sikkim, 2006.

39 In this regard, see also Arora (2007: 202).

40 Sinha (2006: 7), see also Hutt (1997: 131-132) and Sinha (1981) on this subject.

for almost thirty years with a few modifications, the most important of which was the conversion of this Council into a thirty-two-seat legislative assembly after the integration of Sikkim into the Indian Union.

The twofold division of the population was also reinforced by events leading up to the incorporation of Sikkim into India. This historical event was seen by the ruling elite, the media, as well as common people as a confrontation between the 'Nepalese', who opposed the monarchy (and were manipulated by India), and the Bhotia-Lepcha.[41] A referendum in 1974 resulted in 96% of the votes being cast in favour of abrogating the monarchy and Sikkim being incorporated into India.

A series of policy measures connected to these events is still at the core of current politics, and constitutes the framework in which the 'neo-Panglhabsol' ritual in Ravangla was founded in 1984. Among them is what is often called the 'special provision' for the Bhotia-Lepcha, that is to say, a group of policy measures specific to these groups. Notably, article 371F of the Indian constitution, added just after the annexation of Sikkim, guarantees the validity of the old laws of Sikkim. Among them is the Land Revenue Order n°1 of 1917 that 'forbids Bhotia and Lepcha to sell their land to any other ethnic groups without the sanction of the Palace.'[42] The attribution of the ST status to the Bhotias and Lepchas (*Scheduled Tribes Order*, 1978) created a unique situation in India, in which groups including traditional ruling elites (although both the Bhotia and Lepcha groups are internally differentiated along class lines) were classified as 'tribes,' despite being of a higher social status than the Indian and Indo-Nepali castes.[43]

The 'Representation of People Act' enacted by the Indian central government in 1979 confirmed the reservation of 12 seats for the Bhotias in the legislative assembly. But the act also annulled the parity system in Sikkim, which resulted in the reserved 'Nepalese' seats falling into the 'General' category. Those who opposed this measure declared that reserving seats for the 'B-L' was anti-constitutional, because it was not proportional to the population (Kazi 1993, Bentley 2007).[44] The Bhotias and Lepchas, who represent about 20% of the state's total population, indeed held 37.5% of

41 In this regard, see Hutt (1997: 131-133).

42 Sikkim Code, volume 2, part 1: 4. On this subject, see also Arora (2007: 204).

43 This situation can also be found in northeast India, but it is different from that found in the 'tribal belt' in the centre of the country. See Carrin (1996).

44 On this subject, see also Arora (2006: 4065 and n. 16).

the seats of the legislative assembly.[45] However, the winner of the 1979 elections, N. B. Bhandari, did not debate the reservation of seats for Bhotia and Lepcha, although he contested the cancellation of the 'Nepalese seats.'

Another important event in the run-up to the establishment of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' was the release of the report that presented the recommendations of the second 'Backward Classes Commission' (also known as the 'Mandal Commission'), which reopened the debate on reservations across India at the end of 1980.[46] The Mandal Commission Report recommended attributing the status of 'backward classes' to several ethnic groups that had previously been classified as 'Nepalese' by the state of Sikkim: Bhujel, Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Rai, Sunuwar, Tamang, Thami, Jogi and Dewan. Bhandari opposed this proposition firmly because it would divide the 'Nepalese' group.[47] He did not implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission during his mandate, and thus created enemies in most of these groups. But he initiated a 'son of the soil' policy, a policy designed to enhance the regional identity of Sikkim. A well known Sikkimese journalist explained Bhandari's policy in the following terms:

> The issue which concerned us most [...] was the preservation of the distinct regional identity of the State. Sikkim had been taken over by India and it was now pointless making it an issue. However, we could still preserve what was left and what was permissible under the Constitution. This we felt could only be achieved through unity of the three ethnic communities of Sikkim – the Lepchas, Bhutias, and the 'Sikkimese Nepalese.' Only if the people were united and conscious of their rights could they come together and organise themselves to keep a constant check on the government, irrespective of whichever party may be in power (Kazi 1993: 72).

45 According to the census 2001. At the beginning of 2003, Limbu and Tamang were included in the category of 'Scheduled Tribes,' but they do not share the Bhotia-Lepcha seats in the legislative assembly, in spite of having requested this.

46 This commission was appointed by the Indian government to determine suitable criteria for identifying 'economically and socially backward classes,' and to consider, among other things, the question of reservations for this category of citizens (Ramaiah 1992). The expression 'backward classes' dates back to the colonial era and first designated groups suffering from lack of education who were underrepresented in the administration, trade and industry (Jaffrelot 2005: 239, 248).

47 Bhandari himself belongs to the high-status Indo-Nepali Chetri caste.

These words reveal the metamorphosis of the protest against the annexation of Sikkim into an appeal for the defence of a Sikkimese cultural identity. It is this attitude that is enacted by the celebration of Panglhabsol in Ravangla.

In May 1984, Bhandari's Finance Minister accused him of corruption and the governor dismissed the government. This occurred after Bhandari had become allied with the Congress Party in 1981, which earned him the loss of Bhotia support, because most of the Bhotias blamed Congress for the merger with India. The Minister of Finance became head of government but remained in power for only thirteen days before a state of emergency was declared. New elections were organised in November of the same year, and Bhandari won 31 of the 32 seats of the legislative assembly. It was between May and November 1984 that Bhandari's party members organised the first celebration of Panglhabsol in Ravangla. The choice of a Bhotia ritual with strong symbolic contents was not accidental in a context in which lost Bhotia votes had to be recovered.

The reinterpretation of Panglhabsol in the service of the 'politics of tribalisation'

The recycling of Sikkimese nationalism

From the first year of the 'neo-Panglhabsol,' its founders attempted to make the ritual a celebration of the unity of the three ethnic groups of Sikkim: the Lepchas, the Bhotias and the 'Nepalese.' This echoes another Panglhabsol ritual organised by a minister at the 'Statue of Unity' in Gangtok. This is located next to the main shopping street of the city, and represents the Sikkimese king's Tibetan ancestor kneeling before the autochthonous Lepcha chief. The association of Panglhabsol with the unity of Sikkim's ethnic communities is indeed drawn from one of the myths of the ritual's origin. There are at least two such myths. The first is known primarily to Buddhist ritual specialists. It links the origin of the ritual to the advent of the Tibetan religious practitioner who introduced Buddhism to Sikkim and thus made the reign of the Bhotia kings possible.[48] The second version is also part of the Sikkimese kingdom's foundational

48 See Balikci (2008, among others: 70, n. 44), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 217), Rock (1953), Steinmann (1998), Thutob Namgyal and Yeshe Dolma (1908).

myth. It tells, among other things, how an ancestor of the aristocratic Bhotia clans named Khye Bumsa came from Tibet to Sikkim and took an oath of friendship with a Lepcha chief and wizard, Thekong Tek. Khye Bumsa had settled in the Chumbi valley but could not have any children, and thus had come to meet Thekong Tek to benefit from his magical powers. Not only did Thekong Tek's blessing enable Khye Bumsa to have three sons, but the Lepcha chief also predicted that one of them would become the first king of Sikkim. The two men then enacted a ritual sealing of their friendship, for which animals were sacrificed (the ritual is thus called 'blood-brotherhood pact'), and the mountain god Dzönga and other local deities were called as witnesses. One of the interpretations of the name 'Panglhabsol' (if spelled in Tib., *dpang lha gsol*) is 'celebration of the witnessing deities.'[49] The 'statue of unity' in Gangtok represents the latter myth. The founders of the Panglhabsol of Ravangla express the same idea as the minister who founded the Panglhabsol in Gangtok: 'It is not only Khye Bumsa and Thekong Tek who undertook the blood brotherhood pact here, what Pang Lhabsol signifies is the unification of all Sikkimese people' (*Now!* 2006).

This notion of ethnic unity is reminiscent of the famous Indian slogan 'unity in diversity' which generally supports the concept of federalism. In addition to this reference to the Indian nation, one of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' founders refers to an element of Hindu nationalism: 'I wanted our Panglhabsol to be as popular as Ramlila.' Ramlila is the popular dramatic performance surrounding Rama, the divine monarch and hero of the *Ramayana* (Assayag 2003: 376). These rituals, and more generally the God Rama, are some of the symbols that were used by Hindu nationalists during demonstrations at the end of the 1980s that claimed the site of the Ayodhya mosque to be Rama's birthplace (Assayag 2003).

The founding of the Sikkimese nation was already part of the myth of Panglhabsol, which at the end relates how the autochthonous population allowed Tibetans to reign in Sikkim.[50] Yap Sonam Yongda, the former captain of the king's guard, also affirms this interpretation of the myth. His

49 For historical background, interpretation and analyses of this myth see Balikci (2002, especially: 19-20), Mullard (2003), Steinmann (2003-2004: 152-153), and Wangchuk and Zulca (2007).

50 This also affirms the indigeneity of the Bhotias and Lepchas, according to Arora (2007: 211).

opposition to the annexation of Sikkim caused his imprisonment, during which, according to some, he was tortured. He writes in a newspaper article:

> I am of the view that it would be more appropriate that events like 'Pang-Lhab-sol' be evaluated as Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo's [the Tibetan religious man who introduced Buddhism in Sikkim, and here considered as the founder of Panglhabsol] endeavours—theoretical as well as practical— to expedite the formation of Sikkim as a Nation-State. [...] This meeting [between Khye Bumsa and Thekong Tek] established the political legitimacy of Sikkim as a Nation-State based on religious nationalism [...] In this context Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo made another important formulation: the most essential factor of people for the nation to develop was to make people more patriotic. This he sought to do by observing Pang Lhabsol as the 'national day.' [...] The pangtye [*pangtö*] *cham* [masked ritual dances] was a reminder to the people at large of their role to defend their country from foreign aggression. And, in the view of the present-day misuse of such unique Sikkimese Buddhist tradition by those who claim to be the champions of culture and tradition but have turned our rich tradition into cheap *nautanki*, it is the duty of those who respect our ancient heritage to attempt an objective assessment (Sonam Yongda 2006).

The old form of Panglhabsol is here linked to nationalism, recalling for instance Tibetan mountain cults described at the end of the 1990s by Karmay, which 'ha[d] the effect of re-animating the national consciousness' (1996: 70). However, today in Sikkim the actual ruling power takes possession of the cult. It retains the nationalist aspects presented by Yap Sonam Yongda but introduces the 'Nepalese' into this paradigm by means of the mountain cult. Connecting the Hindu cult of Kailash to the Panglhabsol when it was first performed in Ravangla, Mr. Sharma explained to me:

> Panglhabsol is a prayer to the Buddhist mountain god Dzönga, and the Nepalese worship Kailash, which is also a mountain. We [the founders] saw Panglhabsol as an instrument around which the Bhotia and Nepalese could be unified. At that time [when the 'neo-ritual' was founded], we had a problem to make this idea understood; only people in Ravangla understood.

Here one sees a desire to create a cultural entity that does not only include the Bhotia and Lepcha, but also the 'Nepalese,' and this cultural unit is conceived as establishing a political unit: a Sikkimese nation.

The syncretic character of mountains cults in other parts of the Himalaya (see for instance Toffin 1988 for Mount Kailash, and Tautscher 1998 for Tamang mountain cults in Nepal) is exploited in order to represent and reach Hindus as well as Buddhists, and finally to establish the 'people' of Sikkim as a unitary entity. This remodelling of ethnic boundaries implied the rewriting of history. Both the founders of the 'neo-Panglhabsol' and the Sikkim state reduced the multiplicity of narrations upon which the ritual was based, and chose just one for reinterpretation, leading to the levelling of the historical and social status claimed by the Bhotias.

Let us remember that at the time that the 'neo-ritual' was established the reservation of 'Nepalese' seats in the legislative assembly had just been annulled, and the reservation of seats for the Bhotias was being questioned. The official political discourse, which the 'neo-Panglhabsol' founders were supporting, argued that only a political alliance between the Bhotias and the 'Nepalese' would lead to the interests of each group being preserved. But the tensions between the two communities surrounding the merger of Sikkim with India were still quite recent, and thus this alliance had to be constructed.

The 'neo-Panglhabsol' finally appears as a present time form of asserting a new religious authority and political power by absorbing the cult of a local deity. This process has been described for conquests of new territories in the Himalayas through the settlement of a new god, or the conversion of local gods to Buddhism.[51] The creation of a new social space is aimed at in Sikkim through the 'neo-Panglhabsol,' and in particular the construction of what can be called 'tribalisation.' This concept is at the core of the current government's political programme.

The enactment of unity as 'tribalism'

In his speech at the Panglhabsol in Ravangla in 2008, the Sikkimese Chief Minister declared:

51 See Buffetrille (1998) and the two volumes on mountain cults in the Tibetan cultural area and the Himalayas edited by A.M. Blondeau (and by E. Steinkellner for the second one), and in particular the articles of Karmay, Hazod, and Ramble in the 1996 volume, and of Schicklgruber and Steinmann in the 1998 one. I am grateful to Sara Shneiderman for her suggestions on this point.

> Pang Lhabsol is the identity of Sikkim and the Sikkimese people. It reflects the rich culture and traditions of the people of this state. It is the festival of our state, bringing all the various ethnic peoples to a single platform in order to conserve the traditions and culture of Sikkim; this festival is related to the worship of Nature and conveys the message that the Sikkimese people have always been worshippers of Mother Nature. The people of Sikkim have, on this day, worshipped our Guardian deity Mt. Kantchendzonga since the time of the Namgyal [the Sikkimese kings] Dynasty.[52]

The reference to the monarchy seems to be meant not only for the Bhotias, but also to be intent on demonstrating the antiquity of the mountain cult, as based on nature worship. The latter is one of the characteristics of the 'tribe' in Indian representations. On the one hand, this recalls Hindi language concepts related to the idea of tribe: *adivasi*, that is to say 'aboriginal,' *vanyapati*, 'masters of forests,' *pahari*, 'inhabitants of the hills' and, in Sanskrit, *dasa* (as opposed to *arya*), which implies the idea of descendants of the original inhabitants.[53] On the other hand, it refers to the cultural criteria that a group needs to meet in order to be categorised as a Scheduled Tribe, a point to which I will return.

Since its first elections in 1993, and especially since the 2000s, the Sikkimese government has developed what the sociologist and anthropologist A.C. Sinha (2006) calls a 'process of tribalisation', which I would term a 'politics of tribalisation.' The author describes this as follows:

> Sikkim has joined the North Eastern Council (NEC) for the purpose of developing the administration. There are a number of states within the NEC that are known as 'tribal states' because more than half of their population is recognized by the Union Government as Scheduled Tribes. Taking a cue from the above practice, the government of Sikkim decided to approach the Union Government to accord the status of Scheduled Tribe to the communities listed in the State as the MBCs or Most Backward Communities. Already 38 percent of the Sikkim population is recognized as Scheduled Tribes and another 5.93 percent as Scheduled

52 Sikkim Reporter (2008).
53 Herrenschmidt (1978: 123).

> Castes. The present ruling party – the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) – is committed to bringing all of the *Nepamul* Sikkimese under special constitutional categories like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and MBCs. They do not hide their efforts and their desire to see that the communities listed among the MBCs in the State are accorded the status of Scheduled Tribe. Once this is achieved, apart from the social engineering of uplifting the 'educationally and economically backward communities', another 22.4 percent of population will be added to the total, creating a genuine claim of being a tribal state, which will have its own advantages in terms of the liberal allotment of funds. (2006: 10)[54]

These politics are evident in the regular shifts of ethnic groups from one category to another (see Table 1). For instance, the Limbu and Tamang were part of the 'Nepalese' category until 1979, then became Other Backward Classes from 1994, and finally acquired the status of Scheduled Tribe at both state and national level in 2003. In 2001, other groups who had acquired the status of OBC in 1994 were declared Most Backward Classes by the government of Sikkim (this decision has not been ratified by the central government). The same year, the Indo-Nepalese high caste groups of Chetri and Bahun, as well as Newar and Sanyasi, were declared OBC. As far as can be ascertained, this situation is an exception in India, and it has not been validated by the central government. In 2005, the government of Sikkim approved a resolution accepting the request of the Lepcha to be recognised as an Indigenous Primitive Tribe, but the central government has not yet examined the application.

The ethnic groups applying for inclusion in one or another of these categories have to prove to the government that they meet the criteria. The Indian reservation system contains a number of paradoxes, since it defines groups according to cultural criteria while aiming to compensate for economic disadvantage (Shneiderman and Middleton 2008). The first 'Backward Classes Commission' of independent India (the Kalelkar Commission, 1955-56) adopted, as a criterion for inclusion in the category of Scheduled Tribes, 'a separate excluded existence, not fully assimilated in the main body of the people' (Roy Burman, 2008: ii). It thus ruled out the concept

54 See also the online article 'Chamling seeks tribal status for Sikkimese people': http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Chamling+seeks+tribal+status+for+Sikkimese+people.-a0216452086

of primitive traits and backwardness used by the colonial administration to establish the list of Scheduled Tribes in 1931 and of 'Backward Tribes' in 1935. However, these criteria were reintroduced in 1964 by the Lokur Committee as part of a review of the list of Scheduled Tribes (*ibid*). The commission retained primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the rest of the population, and backwardness as criteria for inclusion on the list (*ibid*).[55] Faced with strong protests, this legal act was withdrawn, but the criteria were not replaced. However, in July of 2006 'the Ministry of Tribal Affairs came out with a Policy statement which discarded an earlier Policy announcement indicating primitive traits and backwardness along with cultural distinctiveness as criteria for recognition of ST. In the new Policy statement community consciousness, harmonisation with nature, and distinctive culture have been associated with tribal social formation. Distinctive culture as a relevant trait has never been disputed by anyone though there may be difference of opinion about the components of distinctive culture' (Roy Burman, *ibid*: viii).

The worship of nature that the Sikkimese Chief Minister mentioned in the above quotation thus has become a resource for inclusion in the category of Scheduled Tribe within the framework of the 'politics of tribalisation.' Finally, as a mountain ritual, 'neo-Panglhabsol' is a staging of the Sikkim government's politics. The ritual also conceals the discord that existed prior to this political moment, as well as tensions triggered in the race for reservations.

Indeed, the reservation system creates several problems. Although primitive traits and 'backwardness' are officially no longer taken into account, the worship of nature has remained a 'positive' criterion for tribal status, the institutionalisation of which produces an 'objectification' of cultural traits (see Cohn 1987, Amselle and M'Bokolo 1985) as well as their transformation into commodities and a resource to be captured (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). The speech of the Chief Minister suggests his desire to meet this criterion. 'Tribalism' is at the same time a resource for the current government's political agenda (both in terms of its internal affairs, and in its relationship with the Indian central government), and for the collective identity strategies of the ethnic groups. The Mandal Commission

55 See also Shneiderman and Middleton (2008), and http://tribal.gov.in/searchdetail.asp?lid=738&skey=policy).

Report triggered what Lardinois (1985) called a 'struggle for classification.' After 1990, implementing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission first led to the old ethnic categories being divided up. Next, it opened the way to create concrete benefits for ST, SC and OBC, launching a competition between the ethnic groups for access to these categories (Shneiderman and Turin 2006: 55). Then the various groups began to compete for the same resources, as has occurred in other systems of positive discrimination (Hobsbawn 1999). The result was a process analogous to that observed in the neighbouring region of Darjeeling:

> For the first time, being a member of a Scheduled Tribe or Caste could actually alter one's educational or professional chances for the better. The race had begun. For many Darjeeling residents of Nepali ancestry [...] the search for classification as a Scheduled Tribe presented an alternative option for demanding benefits from New Delhi (Shneiderman and Turin 2006: 55).[56]

In Sikkim, the 'politics of tribalisation' is opposed not only by some of the Bhotia nobility, of which for instance Yap Sonam Yongda is a member, but also by a relatively new political organisation, the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC), founded in 1999. This organisation questions the incorporation of new groups into the ST category, and opposes the request of the Limbu and Tamang to share the seats reserved for the B-L in the legislative assembly.[57] In response to the increasing influence of SIBLAC, the Sikkim Gorkha Apex Committee (GAC), strongly opposed to SIBLAC, was created in 2003.

Conclusion

The new form of the Panglhabsol ritual presented in Ravangla displays a remodelling of ethnicity by the Sikkim state through the agency of the neo-ritual's founding members who, in this situation, and in the frame of their own political strategies, conveyed the rulers' representations of the

56 The 'tribes' of Sikkim are more influential that those in Darjeeling, since they hold nearly half of the seats in the legislative assembly. In addition, Sikkim exercises a stronger power of influence on the Indian central government than Darjeeling because it is a separate state and not merely a district.

57 See this organisation's internet site: www.siblac.com.

population. Here, the process of dividing the population into ethnic groups and creating a worldview based on ethnic difference is supported by the state. This goes hand in hand with the reservation system, which reifies ethnic boundaries and conceals their porosity. Instead of opposing the state, this worldview is given the task of providing the state with a more stable foundation than it held in the past. In addition, the politics of the state largely determine collective identity: it must be 'tribal,' as this term is understood today in India.

This understanding of 'tribalism' is the result of interactions between Sikkim and the Indian government, both ideological and political, and not the result of a hypothetical isolation of Sikkim from the rest of India.[58] The understanding of 'tribe' has been borrowed from the Indian administration; the 'identity' allocated by the central State is then claimed as Sikkim's own. Furthermore, the new Sikkimese identity is today promoted by the state; and the new 'people of Sikkim' that has been created by the 'politics of tribalisation,' attempting to include the former 'Nepalese' into the category of indigenous Sikkimese, is presented as a way for Sikkim to 'preserve what was left' despite the merger (see again Kazi's quotation above), and thus as a condition for Sikkim to be part of India. This politics is, finally, a project for constructing a Sikkimese nation that can be integrated into the Indian nation through the strategic deployment of ethnic difference.

The exclusion of 'plainsmen' from the Sikkimese nation is not inconsistent here: any creation of identity implies exclusion, and the incorporation of Sikkim into India is achieved by distinguishing the 'Nepalese' from the Hindus in the rest of India in order to prove the former's indigeneity. The promotion of tribalism upholds the exclusion of these Indian Hindus, allowing the 'Sikkimese Nepalese' to undertake more tribal practices than more orthodox Hinduism would allow. The practices of the Bhotias, which are Buddhist and thus more perceptibly close to nature, according to a common understanding of the Indian tribal policy, are then monopolised as representative of the Sikkimese national identity, an identity that now encompasses the 'Nepalese.'

The Ravangla Panglhabsol ritual is a 'neo-Panglhabsol' because it retains the ancient elements of the ritual but allocates them a new role. The ritual is no longer concerned with enhancing the well being of the country as

58 As for example stated in Arora (2006).

a politico-religious unit by worshipping the mountain gods through the intermediaries of the king and his priests, but is instead intended to stage the tribalism of its practitioners and the ethnic unity of Sikkim, ultimately enacting the politics of the Sikkim government. Indeed, it does not merely aim at expressing tribalism and unity, but also at enacting these concepts, at bringing them to life. This analysis thus supports Shneiderman's argument that 'ethnicity emerges in a process of ritualization' (2009: 3). The ritual is a space constructing representations rather than expressing them (in this respect, see also Moore and Myerhoff 1977), a space that gives life to the main aim of the actual government: it creates a new 'people of Sikkim', joined in tribalism and integrated into India.

The 'neo-Panglhabsol' converts the discourse of interethnic divisions and the contested integration of Sikkim into India into one of the unity of the people of Sikkim within the Indian nation. It thus enacts the government's politics by disguising the imperfections of the reservation system and representing them as advantages, thereby accomplishing the Indian dream of incorporating its periphery into the nation. This process relies upon references to the divine, and is therefore more efficient than lay celebrations as an enactment of government politics; but sports tournaments and the sale of so-called cultural objects are additional endeavours intended to convince Sikkim's inhabitants of the government's success in providing wealth and protecting Sikkim's cultural identity, by placing the state in the market economy and developing tourism.

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REPORTS

Library Development in Nepal: Problems and prospects

Introduction

The Nepal Library Foundation (NLF) was registered as a charity with the Government of Canada in 2005. The organisation's stated mission is to enhance educational opportunities in Nepal through the medium of public libraries and to support their systemic development. In 2007, the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA), an international affiliation of people of Nepali origin living outside Nepal, appointed the NLF as its agent to carry out its Public Libraries project (NRNA, Kathmandu Declaration). By the end of 2010, the NLF, in a partial fulfillment of this mandate, had provided books and computers to twenty six schools and community libraries in Nepal. It was expected that these new resources would be used by schools and the communities to enhance their knowledge base and develop critical thinking and decision making skills. NLF's work has also included advising communities in library development, training teachers in the basic use of computers, digital content development and advocacy for national policy supported by enabling legislation on government support for rural libraries. The NLF collaborates with other Nepali and international organisations dedicated to library development and the enhancement of education to fulfill its mission. The NLF has targeted communities with existing libraries requiring upgrading and also those seeking to re-establish ones that have become dormant.

In November 2009 the NLF completed a limited audit of some of the libraries it has supported. The purpose of the audit was to assess whether the use of computers in these libraries met NLF's expectations and also to assess the overall management and long term sustainability of the audited libraries. This paper presents the findings from the audit with a brief description of the history of library development and the status of existing libraries in Nepal. It concludes with recommendations which we believe could be usefully applied in whole or in part to library development in Nepal.

History of Library Development

The UNESCO Human Development Report (2004[1]) states categorically that literacy 'is the foundation for social, economic, and environmental progress

1 http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2004_measuringliteracy.pdf

in developing countries.' Any long term vision for the development of Nepal needs therefore to include literacy as a priority. The current lack of government support for libraries in Nepal reflects a lack of recognition of the part that libraries can play in promoting literacy. This situation, however, needs to be seen within the historical development and support of literacy in Nepal.

Nepal was ruled from 1846 to 1950 by an oligarchic dictatorship of the Rana clan, which sought to maintain its monopoly on power and actively discouraged public education. A British Army surgeon in the Kathmandu Residency stated in 1877 that '... to find schools and colleges in Nepal is like finding snakes in Ireland' (quoted by Parajuli, 2009). Visiting Nepal in 1890, Sylvain Levi commented that 'there were a few learned scholars here and there, but the torch of ancient knowledge was dying out' (quoted from Uprety, 1962). The first college for tertiary education in Nepal, Trichandra College, was opened in 1918. Its primary purpose was to provide English education to the Rana clan. Prior to the opening of the college, the Ranas had opened a few schools but there was no system of universal education. At this time (except for some minor local instances outside Kathmandu) public libraries were largely unknown. With the gradual opening of educational institutions, a growing awareness of the value of libraries developed, an enthusiasm not shared by the government. In 1930 a group of young students applied to the Rana Government for permission to start a public library (the Sarawasti Public Library) in Kathmandu. They were charged with sedition; some were jailed, some were released after paying huge fines and others released after signing an undertaking to eschew any social activism for the ensuing twelve years.

In 1950, the Rana oligarchy was replaced by a democratic political system. This led to a tide of enthusiasm through the nation for public education and the founding of public libraries. Between 1950 and 1960 several public libraries were established throughout the country through community initiatives, but there was no formal state recognition of libraries as institutions at this time, a situation which has continued to this day.

In 1960 the king dismissed Nepal's first popularly elected government and started ruling the country as an absolute monarch. Public libraries were again discouraged and the libraries established in the fifties began to close. This was possibly hastened by the lack of dedicated financial

support, as well as it being to the benefit of the government to limit access to information. The interest in public libraries blossomed again after 1990 when absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional form of democratic government. This is evident from the re-opening of a number of rural community libraries which were closed during the king's authoritarian rule and the number of requests for support for community libraries being received by INGOs such as Room to Read, Read Nepal and the NLF. The number of libraries in Nepal increased from about 400 in 1990 to about 800 in 2003 (Shrestha 2009). In 2004, for the first time a significant urban community library run by Nepali people, the Society for Kathmandu Valley Public Library, was established in Kathmandu.

Library development started to suffer after 1994 when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN–M) started the self-styled 'People's War' and the whole country became engulfed in the resulting insurgency. Such an environment diminished any enthusiasm to allocate funds for supporting any but basic educational needs. Although most community-based libraries escaped unharmed during this time, at least one long established community library (in Beni) was destroyed in a battle between the CPN-M and government forces. In 2006, the insurgency ceased and the issue of education and literacy has since come to the forefront politically, with efforts being made to enshrine education and free access to information in the new constitution.

The current status of literacy and public libraries In the last 20 years, the adult literacy rate in Nepal has grown from around 30 percent to 49 percent (UNICEF 2008) and the demand for libraries has grown in tandem. The growth in libraries since 1990 has occurred because of community initiatives and financial and technical support from international non-government organisations (INGOs). The two most prominent amongst these INGOs are Rural Education and Development (READ) and Room to Read. Both of these INGOs are based in the US and operate locally from offices in Kathmandu. Room to Read states that it has established over 2,800 libraries of different kinds and has built many schools in Nepal (2011)[2]. READ Nepal has helped create 45 community libraries which are often multi-functional and all of which have a self-sustaining component (2011)[3].

2 http://www.roomtoread.org/page.aspx?pid=311
3 http://www.readglobal.org/our-work/read-nepal

As previously stated, to date Nepal does not have any legislation concerning libraries and the government has no national library policy. Consequently, there are no national library standards. A draft Library Act has been pending review by the Ministry of Education for a while. As a result, the growth of libraries has occurred without a clear understanding of the roles libraries play and without articulated classification and management standards. The classification of libraries in Nepal is thus at best informal.

Shrestha (2009) provides one such classification. Libraries are classified into five categories: governmental, children's, academic, community and 'foreign mission' libraries. According to Shrestha, the academic libraries include libraries in schools and private specialist libraries. Community libraries include a uniquely Nepali experiment in rural mobile libraries: the books are carried between villages and delivered to homes in *dokos*, a cane basket used to carry goods and infirm people in the hills. The foreign mission libraries are run by foreign embassies in Kathmandu e.g. the American Library, British Council Learning Centre, Bharat Sanskritic Kendra. Most libraries except foreign mission libraries in Nepal suffer from a very limited budget because of the lack of formal recognition of libraries in law and the subsequent lack of funding through a legally established tax base. The lack of appropriate legislation has resulted in a general lack of trained librarians and information technology experts. Very few libraries have lending services.

The UNESCO/IFLA Public/Community Library Manifesto (1994)[4] defines a public or community library as 'the local gateway to knowledge, [which] provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups'. Based on this definition, Shrestha reports that 'The survey report *(of 2003)* shows a very poor picture about public (*community*) libraries. More than 90 percent of the public libraries were not in a position to support specific needs [and] the small collection of books and newspapers is insufficient to provide library services to the community'. Audit findings and discussion Over the last five years, the NLF has provided over 80 computers and thousands of books to various school and community libraries in Kathmandu and the mid-western hill districts of Nepal. In 2009, NLF formally audited three

4 http://www.ifla.org/publications/iflaunesco-public-library-manifesto-1994

school libraries in Nagi, Reema and Tikot villages in Myagdi District of Western Nepal and a children's library in Kaski which does not as yet have computers. The NLF team also completed assessment visits to two other libraries which had requested NLF support. The auditing consisted of interviewing the headmaster and 'computer teacher', visits to book holding sections and interviews with librarians. The audit questions were designed to determine whether the computers were being used for retrieving new information and for learning; to assess the library management system and the long term sustainability program of each audited library. As a policy, NLF usually does not support libraries which do not have a long-term sustainability program and a strategy for community involvement and, where appropriate, school involvement in the library management. The audit revealed a number of problems in respect of the use of computers as a resource for knowledge acquisition; in the management of library holdings (books) and sustainability of the libraries. It also identified prospects for future growth of rural libraries in Nepal. These problems and prospects are discussed below.

Problems

In all the schools we audited a number of computers were out of commission due to fairly minor issues with either hardware or software. The community or the school lacked a maintenance budget and the basic skills necessary to carry out the repairs or software reconfiguration. Due to the cost of Microsoft operating systems the NLF had recommended use of an Open Source Linux version for an operating system. This took the form of Nepalinux 3.0 as a standard workstation operating system, Linux server software for networking of workstations and Linux Terminal Server Project (LTSP) software to serve pilot thin client networks. In a thin client network, a number of terminals draw their computational capacity from a single server, thus offsetting the need for computers of full computing capability at each work station. The thin client networks provide easily managed and maintained and highly cost-effective computer labs with the potential for reduced power consumption, an issue of critical importance in a country with a serious shortage of electricity. The thin client installations proved to be very successful and have demonstrated the potential for this technology to provide low cost, lower power consuming, and relatively easily maintained computer networks in rural areas. However the Nepalinux

installations did not prove to be popular due in part to the unfamiliarity of the interface. In one school the Linux server and workstation software had been replaced with a more familiar and freely available pirated commercial product. There are also more economical and more easily managed shared computing software products now available that would preclude the use of thin client systems.

NLF had hoped that the computers would be used in educational contexts as discussed above. However, this was not happening. We found that outside the computer class where the students learned simple computing skills, the computers in libraries were being used almost exclusively for e-mail and social networking. The low band width, the teachers' limited experience of the use of digital information resources as teaching and learning aids, a lack of proficiency in the English language and the lack of Nepali content together discouraged the use of computers as a source of new information. The lack of relevant content was a major factor in the limited use of computers, but poor or non-existent training was also a major factor. This was also noted by Thapa and Saebo (2011) who studied 'the multidimensional challenges and perspectives of ICT4D project in the mountainous regions of Nepal' and concluded that to make maximum socio–economic impact by the use of ICT 'it is critical to develop on-line content based on the Nepalese Language.' Thapa and Saebo carried out their study in schools in Nagi and Tikot, two of the schools NLF had audited.

The other significant finding from the audit was that very little thought had been given to sustainability issues, e.g the limited life of computers and the resources required for their efficient use. It is perhaps a reflection of the difficulty of keeping the computers running once they have been installed that Room to Read, by far the largest provider of library resources in Nepal, has suspended its 'Computer Room Redesign' program, citing lack of reliable infrastructure (e.g. electricity), lack of sustainability, and low skill levels.

As a condition of its support, NLF required the recipients of NLF donations (books and computers) to maintain a record of the library use before and after the support was provided and assess the benefits accrued from the support. Unfortunately this was not done. We were, however, advised by the authorities in all libraries we audited that the library usage had increased considerably since the receipt of the donations. Unfortunately there was no data to confirm this.

Prospects

Wherever we went, in villages or urban areas, we found communities, and particularly young people, anxious to learn and willing to contribute to have a functioning library in their schools and villages. Unfortunately, because of the lack of exposure and training they had little knowledge of how to use a library as a learning resource. On the advice of NLF, one of the libraries started a book club where members of the club meet every two weeks and critique a book they read over a period of one month. The members of this book club had also taken up the task of cleaning the village on a regular basis. They are also planning to start children's book reading sessions in their library soon. Thus the basic pre-condition for the future growth of libraries is already there. There are other indicators of reasonable prospects for future growth, but much work by the community and the major players in library development is required.

Nepal's National Planning Commission Three Year Interim Plan (2007/8-2009/10) includes the following statement: 'Libraries will gradually be established in community schools. Programs will be implemented to encourage local bodies and organizations to open and run libraries in different educational institutes in the backward regions.' This is a step in the right direction, but much robust action is required. Sadly, there is little evidence to show that even this programme has been implemented.

The Ministry of Education of the Government of Nepal is beginning to show an interest in enhancing the quality of education in Nepali schools through the use of Information and Communication technology. The vision is to provide an e-library in every high school in Nepal. About one million US dollars have been allocated for the current fiscal year to start a pilot programme. Pending the implementation of this programme on a national scale to serve the many communities demonstrating a strong willingness to support libraries, a policy might be developed to encourage local funding initiatives such as those that have worked well in the libraries developed by READ Nepal. A fund-matching program from the central or local government could build on these initiatives and give local ownership to community libraries. It could also be used to encourage best practices, support the standardisation of training and technology, promote cost savings through bulk purchases of equipment, and encourage the mobilisation of libraries to support educational reform. The issue of financial sustainability is paramount and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by local

and central governments, library promoters and communities seeking assistance to create libraries. Without sustainability, any work completed to date towards developing libraries is almost certain to be of little use in the long term.

The need and demand for libraries in Nepal is far too big to be met by individual community initiatives and the efforts of INGOs alone. These demands are unlikely to be satisfied unless the Nepal government develops a national library policy enshrined in either legislation or the new constitution. The Government seems to have recognised this and has started taking an interest in this development. The INGOs and NGOs, and the community at large that is already involved in this field, could assist the government in a number of ways. For example, the training of librarians and teachers currently provided independently by INGOs (including Room to Read and Read Nepal) and local NGOS (including Help Nepal Net, Society for Kathmandu Valley Public Libraries, and NLF) could be combined to develop training modules for specific skill development and cost-effectively enhance the quality of training. The training programme could be standardised and offered within a framework leading to certification and scheduled to run in centres across the country. After our audit, NLF met all the major INGOs and NGOs involved in library development. There was a willingness expressed by all parties concerned to participate in a combined training programme. The consolidated training programme, when developed, could be a model for the government to adopt.

Considering the demand for computers and digital libraries and the government's interest in developing ICT based education and community digital information access, it will be critical to address problems such as the appropriateness of hardware and software and content development for favourable future growth in libraries. The issues of software and hardware are given little attention by library developers in Nepal, including the government. The hardware used in libraries is often unsuited to the conditions and power sources available. In one village we saw computers which had sat unused for over a year because of a lack of reliable power. Systems with minimal power consumption are needed that can operate on uninterrupted power sources (UPS) which can be charged either by alternative energy sources or when the grid is up and running. The use of commercial operating systems (OS) exposes any internet connected

computer to virus attack unless it is protected and updated regularly with protective software. Since the number of legal copies of any OS in Nepal is from our own observations very low, the updating provided to owners of legal copies of an OS to correct security flaws is unavailable, creating further risks of disruption.

Efforts to produce a native language Open Source OS have not as yet been realised despite significant investment by aid agencies. Although 'free' software is an attractive proposition, the reality of constant maintenance and updates comes at a cost. In the case of the Nepali native language Linux version, Nepalinux, the business model for its development did not accommodate the costs of the development cycle once the initial funding had run out in 2008. When pirated software is freely available, the question of whether the Nepali computer-using community is willing to support the costs of development and adopt a new product is moot. This question is perhaps answered by the fact that we were unable to locate any other installations of Nepalinux in an institutional setting apart from the ones we supported. However a coordinated effort to make use of the existing localised resources within a sustainable context is currently underway (April 2011) with significant government interest being shown.

Thus a set of standards needs to be generated to guide the installation of computers in libraries. This might include the development of low power-consuming, shared computing networks which are virtually maintenance free and largely immune to virus attacks. Lacking dependency on work station hard drive and operating system, a shared computing workstation or 'seat' offers full interactive functionality of a conventional OS (such as Windows) driven workstation. These are institutional solutions to a common problem. If a standard could be developed for libraries and schools by government and NGOs, it would go a long way towards addressing the many issues of hardware deployment. We suggest that a dedicated non-profit organisation providing a for-fee service should be created to address this. In order for this to work, a significant commitment would have to be made to create a viable market. Sustainability plans are of paramount importance in any deployment, however. These should include hardware replacement and continual training programmes to ensure that there is sufficient locally-based knowledge to run and maintain the resources. We would suggest that a national strategy is developed, in collaboration with government and NGOs, to ensure a degree of standardisation which allows

for economies of scale in purchasing, coordinated training and content development.

Nepal already has a highly competent NGO, the Open Learning Exchange, Nepal (OLE), involved in digital content development. The NLF has been working with OLE and has supported it in developing an e-library (electronic library) with Nepali language content which is now available on line. This work needs to be continued and expanded. Local server-based educationally relevant digital content is now also available at a moderate cost to any library with basic computers but without internet access.

Conclusions

The development of libraries in Nepal is in its infancy. In the last twenty years, some library development work has been done by community initiatives and by international agencies such as the NLF. These include opening of new community/school libraries in rural areas and the provision of children's books to hundreds of elementary schools. The NLF recently completed an audit of a number of libraries it has supported. The purpose of the audit was to assess whether the libraries contributed to the learning needs of the community and whether the libraries were sustainable in the long term. The audit identified a number of problems. These include consistent definition of the purpose, scope, kind and level of service a library is expected to provide; lack of training in library management; lack of government legislation to support libraries; lack of reliable long term financial support; undeveloped reading habits in the country; lack of understanding of the workings of a computer and absence of contents in the Nepali language.

The audit team also considered the prospects for the future growth of libraries in the country. Despite the disappointing audit findings there were a number of indicators which seem to suggest that the growth of libraries will probably accelerate, provided the government of Nepal and other players in library development recognise the problems identified in this paper and collectively take steps to address them. It was evident from the audit that for long-term sustainability, besides the provision of books and ITC resources, Nepal needs a coordinated approach towards teacher and librarian training; classification of libraries; and a clear commitment from the government, supported by appropriate legislation, to support libraries across the nation and provide long term funding. The most hopeful sign for

future growth is that the government has started to show an interest in the development of libraries across the nation and in ICT based education. It has already allocated money to commence a pilot programme in the current Nepali fiscal year (2010-2011). The players in the library movement in Nepal recognise the benefits of working collectively and wish to participate in such a programme. This needs to be coordinated and put into action.

Given the history of popular access to books it is hardly surprising that Nepal does not have a culture of reading for pleasure and learning. Books are a rare and expensive resource. To remedy this, libraries need to be designed and marketed to meet local needs, and teachers need to be shown how a library can be used to support classroom learning. Outreach programmes need to be instituted to canvass people on the resources they want and to show how a library can be of benefit to them. They must also serve the needs of the pre-literate, offering means by which the non-reader can access information and gain access to full literacy.

Naresh Koirala and *Paul Bird*

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Report on the 9th BNAC Nepal Study Day, April 2011, University of Cambridge

The 2011 Britain-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) Nepal Study Day was the largest and longest in the event's nine-year history. Held at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge, with additional support from the Centre of South Asian Studies and the Kosciuszko Trust, the two-day event on 20-21 April 2011 provided a platform for over 30 researchers and as many participants to present and discuss their work in Nepal.

Thanks to the momentum generated at previous Nepal Study Days held at Durham, Edinburgh, SOAS, UCL and Oxford, we received an unusually high number of excellent abstracts, most of which we were able to accommodate in a packed schedule. As convenors, we were particularly pleased by the large number of UK-based Nepali students and scholars who participated, and by the level of interest shown by colleagues in neighbouring European countries who attended.

Presentations ranged across the social sciences, natural sciences, humanities and professional fields such as development studies and public health. There were contributions from researchers at all levels, including Masters and PhD students, post-docs, teaching faculty and practitioners. By asking presenters to stick to a strict time schedule of 20-minute presentations, we were able to allow 10 minutes for discussion after each paper. The regular coffee and tea breaks, along with lunches, a conference dinner and a convivial reception hosted by the Centre of South Asian Studies provided further opportunities for relaxed discussion, and enabled students to meet with senior researchers in an informal manner and discuss their projects.

Themes of shared concern emerged across disciplines, with participants finding exciting points of connection with each other's work. A number of the papers in some way addressed Nepal's ten-year civil conflict and its aftermath, with presentations focusing on the experiences of child soldiers, widows and the families of the disappeared, as well as a concluding paper on conflict literature. Another set of presentations converged around the theme of the mobility and the growing Nepali 'Diaspora', not only in neighbouring India, but now in Europe and the UK as well. Other presenters focused on specific notions of politics, development, secularism, social work, public

health and education through case studies across Nepal, and their relevance for regional and trans-regional debates. The localisation of appropriate information technology for good governance and information dissemination was another new research focus. Papers on modern historical themes that explored the development of music, social science journals, radio, nursing and political movements over the last half-century were complemented by an archaeological report on pre-modern trans-Himalayan movements.

These diverse presentations demonstrated that Nepal Studies is a dynamic and growing field of research, engaged in many issues of concern to broader scholarly and policy communities. It was also clear that such empirical research in Nepal has much to contribute to larger disciplinary and area studies debates. At the same time, in the course of the two days, it became evident that this Nepal-focused forum provided an opportunity for deep discussion around shared experiences of a particular place at a transformative moment in its political history, underscoring once again the importance of fostering knowledge grounded in regional expertise—an increasingly endangered agenda in Western academic contexts.

The smooth running of the Cambridge Nepal Study Day owes a great deal to the energy and effort of Claire Wheeler and Ruth Rushworth, both based at CRASSH, and to the financial support provided by the Kosciuszko Trust, which enabled the convenors to provide travel bursaries to all student presenters. We were particularly pleased that bringing so many researchers interested in Nepal to Cambridge has helped to create a positive and lasting impression of our field among our University colleagues. As an administrator at the Centre of South Asian Studies noted in an email after the fact, 'It was clear from the first moment that this is an amazing group that really all get on with each other very well and share a genuine common interest... Normally we have the odd awkward silence and need to push people into talking, but not at all with your group—it seems that you are developing a real and dynamic academic community.' With that, we pass the baton to our colleagues at the Centre for Nepal Studies UK, who have generously offered to host the next Nepal Study Day in Reading and we look forward to an enjoyable, diverse and lively event.

For more information about the programme and a full list of abstracts, please visit the following website: <www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/ 1580/>.

Sara Shneiderman and *Mark Turin*

INTERVIEW

Interview with Kesar Lall

Mark Turin

This short contribution is based on a much longer interview with Kesar Lall conducted by Mark Turin on Wednesday, 11 July, 2001. Recorded at Kesar Lall's residence at Sallaghari, Bansbari, Kathmandu, Nepal, the full two-hour interview was transcribed by Nirdesh and Sandesh Tuladhar, and subsequently edited by Hannah Turin and Claire Wheeler. The interviewer and interviewee remain grateful to all those who have assisted with the process over the years. This short article continues *EBHR*'s established tradition of publishing interviews with scholars and public intellectuals from the Himalayan region.

Much has changed in Nepal in the decade since Kesar Lall was interviewed on videotape in 2001, not least politically. Although often remarkably prescient, sections of the conversation that related to contemporary political events at the time of recording (the royal massacre and the Maoists' response, for example) have been edited out to avoid anachronistic references to past events. In this synopsis, the focus is rather on Kesar Lall's enduring intellectual and literary contributions.

Born in Kathmandu in 1927, Kesar Lall (Shrestha) is one of Nepal's best-known folklorists and most widely published writers. Using English as his primary medium, he has over 50 books of stories and translations to his name, alongside significant collections of poetry and journalism in Nepali, Newari (Nepal Bhasa) as well as English. In 2004, Corneille Jest, Tej Ratna Kansakar and Mark Turin edited a privately published volume on the occasion of Kesar Lall's *Buraa Janko* (Kathmandu: Marina Paper, ISBN 99933-890-7-2, 104 pages) that can be downloaded for free as a PDF from here <http://bit.ly/KesarLall>.

In the excerpts that follow below, interviewer questions are indicated by 'MT' and interviewee responses by 'KL'.

MT: I have noticed that you don't use the name Shrestha very often in your writings. Can you explain why?

KL: I started out by using an Indian sounding name, Ashok Paul, because Ashok is a pleasant name and Paul sounded Indian. That was in the period

1945 to 1950, when I was writing for the Indian papers. I like names of just two words: Ruskin Bond, Bernard Shaw. So I started to write just Kesar Lall. It wasn't a rejection of my caste or of the name Shrestha—simply that in those days, people didn't have to use their last names, their caste names, unless they were writing a legal document or an application. Everyone was just known by their first name.

MT: How did you settle on the pen name Ashok Paul?
KL: I thought that I needed an Indian-sounding name so that I would not draw the attention of the police. It was dangerous to write at that time. Many people were interned for writing in Nepali, such as the poet Chittadhar. He was in jail for seven years simply on account of his writing, although he had nothing to do with politics.

Before 1950, I only published in India. Even there I had an unpleasant experience when my first book came out in 1962. I think I spent about Rs. 4,000 on that book. For the second printing, I sent some Nepali rice paper, but I never had any response from the printing press in Nagpur. I contacted some students and one of them wrote to tell me that the police in Nagpur had seized all the books, paper and everything, and had told the printer to do no more printing. In total, I lost about Rs. 1,000 worth of Nepalese paper.

MT: How did you start working with B.P. Koirala?
KL: In 1951, soon after the revolution, B.P. Koirala, who was then Home Minister and already a household name, was looking for someone to work for him. A friend of my father asked my father whether he should look into getting me a job. I ended up working for B.P. as a typist for about eight months.

When Koirala was out of office, I had to find another job. I had a friend who worked in *USAID*, which was called *USOM* then, the United States Operations Mission. This was in 1955. So I went there, and was accepted because I had a good recommendation from the former Prime Minister. I was a Senior Clerk (General) in the office of the Director. My job was 'to compose communications, translate and interpret in Nepali for the Director, type, file and perform any other duties as may be from time to time assigned'. In a year or so, the Director recommended to Delhi that I be promoted.

MT: Were you able to travel during this time?
KL: Yes, King Tribhuvan was so kind as to send a Nepalese delegation to

Japan. I was helping the monk Amritananda, who spoke no English. He asked me to help him with English, translating, interpreting and publishing a booklet on Nepal and Buddhism. It was a good opportunity for me to see Japan, otherwise I would never have got there. I was there as a member of an official delegation for about two weeks, and then after that I visited some places. My impression was that the Japanese are very hard working. They are like Newars in many ways, even in the sound of their language, and they are very polite. Of course, I knew a little about Japan already, since my father's guru had been to Japan and had a great admiration for the Japanese, so I didn't feel as if I was in a strange land when in Japan. One evening I was in a temple, and I walked out into the garden and heard some people reciting their prayers. It was not in Sanskrit, it was in Japanese, but I felt that it was just like listening to *sutras* here in Nepal.

MT: An early source of employment for you, and an important step in your career, was working at the American Embassy. How did that start?
KL: When the American Embassy in India was opened in Kathmandu in August 1959, the First Secretary came to open it, a man by the name of Mr. Heck. Thinking that the Embassy might be a better place to work than USAID, I asked whether I might come and work for him. I was transferred from USAID to the Embassy in 1959, a couple of months after the opening, and worked there until 1985—a total of 30 years of service for the American government.

MT: Can you talk a little about the different tasks that you had in the Embassy?
KL: When the Embassy started, the first thing they wanted me to do was to issue visas and passports. I received some training—someone came from Delhi to instruct me—and I learned to use the Consular Services. Then they thought I would be more useful somewhere else, in the Political and Commercial Office, so I continued to work there and became the Political Specialist. My work was mostly reading the Nepali newspapers and preparing translations, and then arranging for people from the Embassy to meet various officials in government. I would arrange such meetings by appointment and often accompany them, or when they wanted to go outside of Kathmandu, I would go with them. On occasion, I dealt with commercial information and details for and from Washington. I often found myself interpreting for people, counselling, helping them with their domestic problems too, with their staff, and

translating legal documents, for example, purchases of property.

MT: Were your colleagues at the American Embassy supportive of your literary interests and efforts?
KL: Oh yes, and while I was at USAID, the women's organisation there used to have a little magazine called *Mountain Peeks*, to which I contributed once in a while about some local festival or other.

My work at the Embassy—translating newspapers, stories and articles—gave me a lot of practice in writing English. It pleased me that when I showed some of my writing to my first boss, the Vice Consul in the Consular Office, he remarked that my English was much influenced by my reading of newspapers, which was true. And then he and his wife helped me a little bit with editing, making corrections to my English and suggesting things, and assisted with getting my first book published.

MT: A great deal of your career has involved language and translation. May I ask how you learned English?
KL: I learned a little bit from my father and after that, I continued on my own. I kept on reading newspapers and books, learning all the time. When I was about three years old, I remember speaking in English for the first time. At that time, a Chinese monk and his assistant had come to Kathmandu, and they appeared in our courtyard. My father asked me to say, 'Please come up,' so I said, 'Please come up!' The monk smiled and came up. These were the first words of English that I had ever spoken. I knew nothing about him, not even that he was accompanying the abbot of a temple in Peking as his interpreter. Many years later, in 1995, my wife and I were in Lumbini for a visit. There, we saw a visitors' book in which I found Chinese characters translated into English by the same man I had spoken to. Since I like to write about such things, I wrote a story entitled *A Little-Known Chinese Pilgrim*.

MT: Have you always written in English?
KL: Yes, but I also wrote a series of articles about Japan in Newari in the period 1953-1954. And I wrote a small piece for *Gorkhapatra* (in Nepali). Later on, in 1965, I wrote a story about my visit to Gosainkund for a Nepali magazine. After that, I wrote a couple of stories in English and a friend translated them into Nepali and published them. But this is the limit of my writing in other languages.

MT: How did you end up feeling so comfortable speaking and writing in English?
KL: I don't know, but it just feels natural. But I am still learning all the time, and there are specific things that I have learned from different people. When Edmund Hillary was here, the Prime Minister asked me to prepare a draft letter to him, so I began with, 'My dear Sir Hillary.' Mr. Koirala said, 'No, in English it should be Sir Edmund.' These are the little things that I remember, and they do matter. I would use my dictionary every day, it was always with me.

I like to write as simply as I can. I write about my travels, treks, and I learned a great deal by writing for the daily newspaper, *The Motherland*. Precisely because they said to me that they would publish whatever I wrote, unedited and as it was, I became very careful of how and what I write.

MT: Did your family help to shape your interest in language and literature?
KL: I have heard that my grandfather was interested in drama and that he used to organise little plays, but he died too young for my father to know much about it. My father was helped by his teacher, Jagat Sunder Malla, who taught him English and helped him on his way in life. Jagat Sunder Malla's brother, Padma Sunder Malla, translated *Aesop's Fables*— the first ever book published in Newari in Kathmandu, in Nepal Sambat 1035 (1915 AD).

MT: What gave you the impetus to start your career as a writer?
KL: My mother and grandmother used to tell me stories around the winter fire. I was inspired to write them down in an attempt to learn to write. From the very beginning, when I started reading my first book in English, I was never satisfied with what was written. I always wanted to change a noun or alter the tense of a verb to make it my own. I just love to write.

MT: When I read Nepal Off The Beaten Path*, I was interested that many of the metaphors you used and much of the imagery is very American oriented—you mention Hollywood, motels, Robert Frost—do you have any thoughts about that?*
KL: I have always been very influenced by what I have read, Irving, Kipling, of course, Sherlock Holmes, all these old books. This may have something to do with my choices. And I read the *Reader's Digest* and *National Geographic*. For the last 20 years, Ruskin Bond has been my guru. I wish that I could write like him. I see my writing as basically influenced by the way that he writes, and I told Ruskin Bond this. His writing is so simple, it comes

from the heart. And his sympathy with the people of India, that's the most important thing, I think, the way that you actually view people. Empathy. He is on the same wavelength as the poorest villager in India.

MT: Please tell me a little bit more about Ruskin Bond and about your relationship with him?
KL: Well I found a little piece of his in a newspaper about a little boy whom he found trying to sleep in a little corner of a bazaar in Mussoorie. He was walking back home late at night and this boy was shivering and he had nothing but a cotton shawl. And he asked this boy, 'Would you come with me? I can give you a shelter.' So he took him home and let him stay with him for some while. Then he wrote about a boy called Prem Singh, someone who came to work for him. He wrote about Prem Singh, his wife and his children so often and so much that I almost got to know the family. When I went to see him in 1995, there was a little girl with him. He said to me, 'The girl's mother has gone out. Otherwise, I could have given you some tea. So I will give you a glass of water instead.' He fetched a glass of water for me. I asked him, 'Is this Prem Singh's daughter?' He said, 'No this is Prem Singh's grand daughter.' So he wrote little things about a little boy and the place where he stopped for tea. He has a very humane way of describing people, animals, and flowers in a kindly and humorous manner. I very much like the way he writes.

MT: Does your documentation of folk literature ever have a political dimension?
KL: No, not at all. My first collection consisted of stories told by my mother and grandmother, and stories that I had heard from friends. Story telling was very common in those days. Whenever I went on a trek, I would ask people for stories. Sometimes I would succeed, sometimes I wouldn't. I found that one good way to encourage people to share their stories was to tell my own stories, Japanese stories, Newar stories, whatever. Gradually while I was talking to them and telling them my stories, they would remember their own stories and start telling me.

Sometimes you hear conflicting versions of the same story. For example, there is the story of the Indian juggler, which I collected in Kathmandu, and then I found the same story in Sankhu but there the man from Sankhu was the victor. Later on I learned of the same story in Patan with a different ending, with the Patan man claiming victory. In this way, there are

interesting variations of the same story, from a Tibetan or a Chinese source for example.

MT: Do you ever record the stories on tape?
KL: I tried that in Helambu, but people were more interested in talking to the tape recorder and then hearing themselves afterwards than in the storytelling itself, so I don't do that. Instead, I listen to them and make notes—if I can, I write down the whole story. Sometimes the stories are quite simple, but others can be very involved and much more complicated. There was one story I recorded in Bigu, Dolakha district, from a Sherpa man, that simply went on and on, from nine in the evening until midnight. I didn't get anything out of that. Sometimes, if it's necessary, I can go back to check the details afterwards.

MT: Is it a struggle to provide adequate context when translating oral history?
KL: I have problems translating stories from Newari. Writers have a habit of muddling up the order and tenses, so sometimes I have to do quite a lot of editing, or cut something down to explain it in a better way. Translating from Newari is really difficult, whereas I find translating from Nepali to be easier.

MT: Do you ever offer people payment for the stories that they have told you?
KL: No, never. One way to avoid payment is to share stories, I tell one and then they tell one. Sometimes I offer some food or *raksi*, which can help the stories to come out. Alcohol can help loosen the tongue, after all.

MT: When collecting such folk tales, do you think of yourself as a field anthropologist?
KL: I have learned from anthropologists that it is better never to say that something is wrong, because what is wrong here will very probably be quite right somewhere else. For example, in one African society, if a man murders someone, the murderer has to pay back the widow by living with her until he has given her a child. Well, from my perspective, this is amazing, and of course it couldn't happen here in Nepal. It simply wouldn't be acceptable. That's something that I learned from anthropology.

MT: When will your work be done?
KL: I'm thinking in about two years' time [circa 2003]. At what we call *buraa*

janko. When a Newar man reaches 77 years, 7 months, 7 days, 7 hours, and 7 minutes, there is a ceremony to recognize that he is really old. So at least I must work very hard, if I can, until I am 77.

MT: Could I ask you to read a poem? This poem links to your feelings on anthropology and not judging another's way of life as being wrong.
KL: I wrote *A Tragic Tale* about Bernei, a Peace core Volunteer in the 1st group in 1962. He was my houseguest for a few days when he came for a reunion 30 years later. He told me about the following experience. He was in the wrong place and with the wrong people, teaching in a school. The teacher with whom he worked was very polite and treated him with respect. One day Bernei told him about his humble craft and the teacher was quite shocked, so to say. From then on, Bernei was looked down upon and treated with scant respect. I was very sorry to hear this. So I thought what would have happened if he had been teaching in a place where craftsmen, particularly those who work in wood, are appreciated and honoured. In such a situation, the craftsmen would have been happy and would have respected him.

A Tragic Tale

Bernei has the skills I wish I had.
He could turn a tree into a table
Better still, take a piece of wood
And make it a work of art
That would have earned him the admiration
In this kingdom of intricate carvings
In pillars, doors and windows
In the dwellings of both gods and men;
But best still, he could lend his eyes
And his hands to those who need
The skill to make a useful thing or two.
Bernei went to teach in the Tarai instead
At two and twenty. He stayed to learn
A lesson vastly different from what he knew.
From a friend he made,
Also a teacher, whom he took for a kindred soul,

But who boasted an ancestry rooted deep in scriptures.
When Bernei told the teacher he came from a stock
Who worked with his hands not the head,
Thunderstruck, he said to Bernei
Not in so many words but in different ways
That he who works with his hands
Is lower in the human scale than he
Who works with his head.
And for ever there is a world apart
Between the head and the hand
As between a master and a slave.
Bernei's efforts to teach in the Tarai
Were efforts made in vain, and he returned
With a heavy heart, but wiser in the ways of men.

OBITUARY

Romano Mastromattei (1936-2010)

Michael Oppitz

Romano Mastromattei died on 23 October 2010 in a hospital in Montevarchi, Tuscany, Italy, following injuries sustained in a traffic accident several months earlier. A fine scholar, a tireless researcher of ecstatic cults, a stimulating teacher, a supportive colleague and a warm-hearted friend, he will be missed by an international community of anthropologists, specialists in comparative religious studies, and lovers of the arts.

Born on 2 February 1936 in Bolzano at the peak of the Fascist era, throughout his adult life Mastromattei remained sceptical of the ominous political developments in his own country and abroad, and in his last years he observed the moral and cultural decline of Italy with sadness. Privately, he was a content man, even when his academic career did not always take the turns he might have wished for. He studied philosophy at the Sapienza University in Rome and completed his thesis under Angelo Brelich, a renowned historian of religion. Early contacts with scholars such as Ernesto de Martino, Vittorio Lanternari, Elémire Zolla and Ugo Marazzi in Italy and later with Ioan Lewis in England and Vladimir Basilov in Russia confirmed his interests in both the phenomenology and politics of religion.

In the sixties, he travelled extensively in the United States and between 1963 and 1967 taught at several universities, including Cincinnati, Delaware and Pennsylvania State. His first book on the ties between military power and the university system (1976) was prompted by these experiences. His first lectureship in Italy was a post in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Urbino, which he took up in 1973. He stayed there until his transfer in 1988 to Perugia University, where he was appointed to a professorship in Ethnology in the Faculty of Political Science. His final move in academia was

to become Chair of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, the position he occupied from 1995 onwards. in Italy, Although his discipline was not prominent in Italy, the various teaching posts he held in that country nevertheless brought a good number of talented students to him, particularly as he was one of the few who advocated fieldwork as the basis of anthropological experience. The attraction that the younger generation felt towards him was partly due to his untiring support, and partly to his soft, non-hierarchical nature. Easy to exploit as he was, this also brought him a few disappointments.

Romano's ethnographic interests were originally aligned with ecstatic cults in West Africa, and he paid several visits to that region before he shifted his focus towards Asia, in particular Nepal, Siberia and Mongolia. According to his testimony, this change in regional orientation was stimulated by my own three-hour film about Magar shamans, *Shamans of the Blind Country*, which he saw at a screening in Aix-en-Provence in 1983. Less than a year later, he undertook his first exploratory visit to Nepal, which was followed by many others in the decades to come. In Nepal, Mastromattei was immediately attracted by the rituals of the local faith healers, in particular those of the Tamang, Yölmo, Chetri, Dhimal and Chepang communities. With these healers, he started to produce an irreplaceable series of documentary videos, all of which consisted of valuable raw archival material. This was because Mastromattei did not plan to make artistic movies, but to produce more or less uncut life ritual sequences and interviews with local shamans. He formed especially close ties of friendship with the famous shamaness of Bodhnath, Budhi Maya Lama (Ama Bombo) and Sete Rumba of Purandi village, a well-versed Tamang healer. The lives and religious activities of both these people were documented in many hours of footage.

One characteristic of Mastromattei's work was that he enjoyed company and collaboration on his many field trips. His Greek excursions to the Anastenaria fire walkers were undertaken in the company of Marazzi and Lanternari; his earliest Tamang encounters were documented with the help of Maurizio Romano, Francesco Giannattasio, Giorgio Villa and Angelo de Vincenzo; his more extended ones with Martino Nicoletti, who later became an ethnographer of the Kulung Rai; his videos among the healers (*pande*) of the Chepang were completed mainly with Diana Riboli, who later wrote an important book on these; his visit to the Naxi of Yunnan was made with Cristina Sani; his Siberian trips to Buryatia and

Gornaya Shoria were accomplished in the company of Basilov, Valerio Calisse, Lubov Arbachakova (a Shor philologist, poetess and artist), and the Russian ethnomusicologist Galina Sytchenko, his wife and now widow; his Mongolian ones with Stefano Baggiora, ethnographer of the Saora in Orissa, Davide Torri, who studied the Lepcha of Sikkim, Buriat scholar Liubov Abaeva and Sytchenko; and the later Nepalese journeys were undertaken with Sytchenko, Torri, Françoise Farano and Sylvia Salvatore. Mastromattei's books *La terra reale* (1988) and *Tremore e potere* (1995) included contributions by some of the aforementioned travel companions. His other books include *Shamanic Cosmos* (1999) and *The Middle World* (2008). Two works have yet to be published: *La fame e la spada: la guerra civile in Nepal* and *The King's Salt*. The former is a study of the Maoist movement, on which he had been working intensively almost since the time the red flags first appeared in the Himalayan hills in 1990. With this book, Romano has returned to his beginnings as a commentator on political currents; it may come to be his magnum opus. The latter work is a novel, about which he has kept silent. We remain curious.

One of his publications is a catalogue, again a collaborative work: *Rta. Sciamani in Eurasia. Il rito che sopravvive* (2006), which came out when Mastromattei exhibited his private collection of shamanic artefacts in the Villa Mondragone, a huge estate in Tusculum used as a Papal summer residence in the late 16th century. The exhibition introduced Mastromattei to the public as a collector and connoisseur of Himalayan tribal art. This was indeed one of his secret affairs: strolling to the various dealers in the streets of Kathmandu and finding some unusual objects—small wooden sculptures made in the mountains, ritual daggers, drums, masks, feather headgear or shamanic armour—physical testimonies to the ancient practices of a religion without books. The love he felt for these objects created by unnamed artists was perhaps as strong as the aesthetic delight he felt for the ritual performances during which they were used. The eye he had for this rough art of the hills clearly indicated his aesthetic inclinations. And so it was no surprise that Romano also felt attracted to some trends in the contemporary art of the West, such as conceptual art, land art and performance art. He expressed his affinities to artists such as Jannis Kounellis, Lothar Baumgarten, Richard Long and above all to Joseph Beuys. In his vivid taste—such a rare thing among academics—he assuredly bridged art and anthropology.

Alongside visual art (Romano was a fairly good draughtsman and a superb doodler), music was also on the front page of his aesthetic agenda. Performed music and music in religious action were cultural practices that he savoured and documented in his anthropological oeuvre. For this reason it will perhaps be mainly his collection of objects and his video and acoustic archive that can best keep his memory alive by preserving some of the traditions that once were the pride of those small societies, now slowly disappearing.

BOOK REVIEWS

Pashmina: The Kashmir shawl and beyond

by Janet Rizvi with Monisha Ahmed.
Mumbai: Mārg Publications, 2009, pp. 324, incl. numerous illustrations (chiefly in colour), maps, glossary, bibliography; index; 32 cm
ISBN 9788185026909

Reviewed by Pascale Dollfus[1]

No handcrafted item has ever been at the centre of such high-power politics, business, romance and fashion as the Kashmir shawl woven from the soft fleece of goats herded on the high altitude plateaus of Inner Asia. While much has been written about its trade in Europe and the role played by Napoleon Bonaparte and Empress Josephine in spreading the fashion of wearing such a shawl, less is known about the textile itself, its history and its place in the lives of people around the world, in both the East and the West.[2] This lacuna has now been filled with *Pashmina: The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond* written by Janet Rizvi in collaboration with Monisha Ahmed. Both authors have some experience of living in the Himalayan region and have previously contributed essays on textile production to several authoritative reference works.

Indeed, with this book, Janet Rizvi completes her study of trades and traders in Ladakh, which began with *Transhimalayan Caravans: Merchant Princes and Peasant Traders in Ladakh* (2000), a book combining historical documentation with interviews with eighty informants who were themselves active traders. Monisha Ahmed, who spent many months living among a nomadic community in Eastern Ladakh researching their lifestyle with particular reference to their textiles, contributed Chapter 2 'Changra and Changpa: The Goats and Their Herders', as well as several subsections dealing with the situation of pashmina today.

This lavishly illustrated book—appropriate visuals are placed alongside the text on every page—follows the shawl's journey from the windswept plateaus of Tibet and Ladakh where the fibre is produced to shawl dealers' establishments in places as far apart as Delhi, New York and Paris, and charts

1 I would like to thank Bernadette Sellers for checking the English.

2 See, among others, Frank Ames, John Irwin and Monique Lévi-Strauss.

its course from the Mughal courts to the global markets of the twenty-first century. The volume is divided into five parts, organized around 14 chapters, and includes maps, photographs, appendices, notes, references, a bibliography, a glossary and an index.

The first part of the book, entitled 'The Fibre', introduces the reader to the raw material of Kashmir shawls: the *pashm*. This originally Farsi but now Urdu word refers to the soft fleece that grows under the hairy coat of animals, especially goats, which helps them to survive freezing temperatures. The most sought after *pashm* belongs to the Tibetan antelope and is known as *toosh* or *shahtoosh* ('royal *toosh*') because it delivers the warmest and finest textile. However, as Janet Rizvi clearly points out, thus destroying a myth. The wool for this fleece is not harvested from bushes, thorns and rocks, as is often said, but can only be obtained by killing the animal. Only since 2001-2002, when judicial and legislative decisions made all trade in Tibetan antelope derivatives illegal in Jammu and Kashmir, have large-scale commercial hunts ceased, thus helping to save the endangered Tibetan antelope from extinction. After this section, Monisha Ahmed discusses the goats and their herders. Taking as an example the case of the nomadic pastoralists of Rupshu in Eastern Ladakh, where she lived for many months, she provides a brief sketch of the daily life of these people as they follow their herds, and offers an overview of the gathering of the fibre which starts in June as the weather turns warmer. It is interesting to note that while nomads weave sheep wool and yak fleece as well as the hair of goats and yaks, and use these materials to make clothes, blankets, saddlebags and black tents, they have never processed *pashm* but have rather always sold it on as raw material to traders. This trade from nomad encampments to the markets and Kashmiri wholesalers is described in Chapter 3. It was traditionally conducted on the basis of a relationship established over generations, but it changed radically in the 1950s after the complete closure of the border between China and India following the Aksai-Chin conflict in 1962.

Comprising two chapters (4 and 5), the second part of the volume, 'The Textile', is entirely devoted to the transformation of this 'unpromising material' into one of the world's most delicate fabrics. Janet Rizvi shares with the reader her deep admiration for the gifted people of Kashmir who are endowed with 'magic in the fingers.' She argues that the highly refined

technique of making the *kani* shawl, a unique 2:2 twill tapestry,[3] is rooted in ancient skills and was most probably invented in Kashmir. She describes in great detail the process of manufacturing shawls that has changed very little since it was first documented by William Moorcroft in 1823. Every step of dehairing, removing grease and other impurities, spinning, dyeing, making the warp, weaving, embroidering and even remodelling and recycling old shawls is duly illustrated with photographs, and with miniature paintings when it concerns Mughal times.

Special attention is devoted to the multifloral *buta* (or *boteh*), the dominant motif known in English as paisley,[4] and 'his small cousin', the *buti*, a single flower, which is sometimes so simplified as to be abstract. The influence of Iran is identified as a factor in the adoption of this classic flower motif and its later development into a floral cypress that flourished on the four main types of shawl: shoulder-mantles, sashes, square shawls and garment-pieces. As in the previous chapter, this particularly long (60 pages) and somewhat technical chapter on designers and designs is accompanied by welcome visuals and illustrations.

In the third part of the book, which is devoted to history, Rizvi examines the various sources available on the Kashmir pashmina industry and points out that only in the late 17th century did pictorial documentation correlate with historical records to prove its existence. Indeed, miniature paintings show that shoulder-mantles had already been in vogue earlier. Yet the drape and the bulk of the material depicted by the artists, as well as the sober colours of the shawls, suggest that the material was pashmina rather than silk or cotton. But, as the author jokes, 'none of them, unfortunately, [is] labelled "purest pashmina-made in Kashmir".' She then gives a thorough and comprehensive account of the Kashmir shawl business in the 19th century, principally drawn from Moorcroft's notebooks of his six-year journey (preserved in the British Library in London) and

3 The twill-tapestry technique consists of weaving the weft threads, which form the pattern, around the warps only where each particular colour is required by the design. The weft is passed alternately over two and under two warps. It never seems to have been widespread anywhere in the world, with the sole exception of the *termeh* of Iran — described in Chapter 8 —which is the only textile that bears a resemblance to the Kashmir shawl.

4 The name comes from Paisley, a town in southwest Scotland where machine-woven imitations of Kashmir shawls were produced at a very low cost to meet the 19th century demand for such pieces of fabric from women.

Jacquemont's books. This exploitative system, which from the very beginning practically turned workers into serfs, was 'a commercial, export-oriented operation, organized and run by men, women having only a small (though essentia) role in the manufacturing process.' The complexity of the process, combined with the great number of specialist workers involved in pashmina production, required a high level of organization, portrayed here in excruciating detail. Indeed, the reader is sometimes overwhelmed, becoming lost in translations between *daroga, phukari, wafurosh, alwan, rafugar, ustad, shal baf* and so on. There are many vernacular terms which, although explained when they first occur in the text and most of which appear in the Index, are unfortunately absent from the Glossary.

The fourth part of the book, 'By Land and Sea', tells of the odyssey of this fabulous textile that was for centuries an indispensable item for the nobility and the rich merchant class in India and abroad. Because of its beauty, and even more because of its high price, the shawl served as a sign of wealth and position. It made its way into every Indian court, as far as South India, through middlemen who conducted their business all over the country and beyond. Kashmir shawl goods reached their apotheosis during the rule of Ranjit Singh (r. 1801-1839), who conquered Kashmir in 1819, during which time they became one of the main sources of income for the Sikh ruler's kingdom. They also made up a major part of Indian exports to Central and Western Asia, to Egypt and as far away as Europe and North America. In France, though a few Kashmir shawls were seen before Napoleon's military expedition to Egypt in 1798, the fashion of wearing a *doshala*—two shawls stitched back to back so that the wrong side is not visible—only took off when a number of French officers presented them to their wives and lady friends. As a sign of its success, the Kashmir shawl was copied, and manufactured Western shawls 'imitating cashmere' were produced at lower prices in France and in Scotland—in particular in the town of Paisley—to meet the insatiable demand. Soon Western manufacturers started looking for regular supplies of goat-fleece at better prices, first for machine-woven shawls and then for knitted outdoor clothes or 'Cashmere', from Russia, Central Asia, Mongolia and China. Meanwhile, back in the Kashmir valley in India, the twill-tapestry technique survived the 19th century recession. While to this day, women spin and weavers weave, the structure of the industry, which now produces mainly embroidered shawls, as well as the working conditions—thankfully for the workers—have radically changed.

To conclude, *Pashmina: The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond* is a major contribution to the study of this amazing aspect of India's material culture that conquered the world. Easy to read, it is an extremely useful compilation of information on the history of the Kashmir shawl spanning four centuries, extending from the Tibetan plateau to the United States. The book has much to offer textile scholars and those interested in the pre-modern economy. Once again, I must emphasise the careful analysis of the pictorial and documentary evidence as well as the high quality of the illustrations and layout. My only regret when closing this book was that this magnificent epic, seen here on paper, has not been made available to a wider audience in the form of an exhibition.

Kings of the Forest: The cultural resilience of Himalayan hunter-gatherers

by Jana Fortier
University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 2009, pp. 215, ISBN 978-0-8248-3356-5

Reviewed by Andrea Nightingale

Kings of the Forest is an ethnography in the classic tradition that seeks to outline the everyday life and structure of a band of hunter-gatherers, the Raute, in the western hills of the Nepal. The book walks us through the author's journey with the Raute from her initial attempts to gain access to the group, to some of her encounters with them—not all of which were smooth. The outcome is the result of some very challenging field work and provides an interesting counter narrative to the prevailing view of the 'settled subsistence agriculturist' that is assumed by development projects operating in Nepal. Overall, the book paints a sympathetic picture of the Raute and presents some compelling arguments about their need and desire to remain 'outside' of settled agriculture and the global capitalist economy—and thus, development.

The book begins by situating the Rautes within Nepalese society and within what is known of hunter-gatherer groups across South Asia, in both the past and the present. This positioning lays the foundation for understanding the Raute as *outside* Nepalese society and as a group intent on maintaining their distinctive identity and way of life. The forest is central to their livelihoods, but more importantly, to their sense of self. The Raute often represent themselves as the 'kings of the forest', invoking their socio-ecological context in producing their distinctiveness and placing claims on their 'royal' ancestry.

The Rautes are a small band of hunter-gatherers who live in northwestern Nepal and migrate over large areas of the Karnali zone over the course of roughly 25 years. Their livelihood strategies are focused on forest foraging and hunting, and they are distinguished by their hunting of monkeys (exclusively), a species considered sacred to other Nepalis. They thus exist in contrast to many of the practices and values of 'settled' Nepalis and the Raute are keen to justify and maintain this distinctive way of life. Fortier does a comprehensive job of giving the reader a sense of

their current livelihood strategies and what is known of historical change in those strategies. We are left with a picture of a people who live very much in the present and seek to preserve their society and culture in the face of pressures to conform to the goals of development and state building.

Each chapter takes us through a different aspect of Raute life and, consistent with their livelihood strategies, many of them overlap. We learn early on about their spiritual and practical reasons for hunting monkeys and in the concluding chapter, it becomes clear that their foraging strategies are also an important part of 'cultural resilience' and of keeping conflicts with settled communities to a minimum. Similarly, the chapter on exchange highlights the importance of wooden bowls to subsistence requirements because the bowls are the main product exchanged for grain. In another chapter, we are told more about how bowl making fits within the larger gender division of labour and foraging strategies.

The book draws on some of the theoretical literature in anthropology and related fields to make sense of gift exchange (Chapter 5); forager communities and their integration into the larger political economy of their areas (Chapter 6); and cultural resilience (Chapter 9), among other issues. These forays into theory are very helpful where they appear, but they are still very much in the background compared to the telling of the tale of the author's encounter with the Raute. As such, the book appears to be targeted at an introductory undergraduate audience, rather than seeking to use the Raute case to make cogent interventions in current anthropological debates.

Egalitarianism emerges as an important theme in the book, although no single chapter is devoted to a discussion of inter-group dynamics based on gender, age or class. Rather, Fortier's insistence that the Raute are an egalitarian society appears to blind her to some rather major hints in the data that all may not be as egalitarian as it appears. At the beginning of the book, we are told that the Raute asked the author for shoes in exchange for information, but the man made it clear that only he and other male family members needed shoes, and that his wife was fine without them. In other places, we learn that few women are skilled bowl makers, meaning their ability to barter independently with other Nepalis is significantly less than that of men. A discussion of what 'egalitarian' means in this context and some justification for reiterating the claim that they are egalitarian when

women are clearly not considered equal with men would have nuanced and greatly enhanced the analysis.

Similarly, while there are some compelling spatial arguments for casting the Raute as outside 'dominant' Nepalese society, the binary presented in the book is not well substantiated by the empirical details of the ethnography. The book contains many examples of Raute encounters with 'settled' Nepalis, yet the ways in which location is key to people's identities is not well analysed, despite a chapter devoted to 'Forests as home' (Chapter 4). As both Rautes and other Nepalis move between villages and forests on an almost daily basis, quite how the forest is complicit in constructing Raute identity could have been more fully explored in the book. As it stands, this discussion is more implicit than explicit, and the notion that the Raute 'live' in the forest is taken for granted because that is what they say they do. Yet the ethnography seems to indicate more of a moving between and through different village and forest spaces. In some senses, one could argue that the Raute live in 'villages' in the forest, rather than in the 'camps' that Fortier suggests. How this is fundamentally different from the practices of other Nepalis who move between village and forest spaces, not to mention the larger migration circuits of many Nepalis moving around for work and education, needs to be addressed more acutely. Such an exploration would provide a more convincing argument about the 'uniqueness' of Raute life.

Finally, the book raises important questions about doing research among remote and marginalised groups. Fortier has clearly resolved some of the ethical and methodological tensions by presenting the Raute as they would like to represent themselves. Yet the book could have made a more significant contribution to debates on fieldwork and ethics if it had tackled head on the problems of simply repeating this image and the more complex problems of essentialising identities and natures, so that the Raute become 'naturalised in their place' of the forest. The issue of gender relations is one element of the complex problem of Raute identity, but it extends far beyond issues of subjectivity, and raises questions about how nature and place are implicated in the political construction of subjects and claims to 'separate' identities in a multi-cultural society like Nepal. Fortier's analysis thus leaves us hoping she will publish more journal articles from the material that engage with these intriguing questions.

Les réfugiés tibétains en Inde. Nationalisme et exil

by Anne-Sophie Bentz
Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010, pp. 280
ISBN 978-2-13058-580-0

Reviewed by Thomas Kauffmann

Les réfugiés tibétains en Inde. Nationalisme et exil is—as indicated by its title—about the relationship between exile and nationalism among the Tibetan refugees in India. The author proposes that Tibetan nationalism is a construction of this exile, and studies how this nationalism was constructed and negotiated by the Tibetans and their leaders in working towards two main goals: regaining their lost country, and safeguarding their culture in exile. Although the subject has previously been studied by various researchers working within the fields of Tibetology and anthropology,[1] *Les réfugiés tibétains en Inde* offers a broad analysis of the development of Tibetan nationalism since the exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959. The book comprises four parts: the first is a history of the Tibetan nation; the second depicts the construction of the nation by Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama; the third is on the refugees' relationship with their nation; and the fourth is about the relationship between India and Tibetan nationalism.

In the first part of the book, Bentz depicts the history of the Tibetan nation—which she differentiates from the history of Tibet—as it was written by historians or journalists. She places these secondary historical sources in two categories: Tibetan and Chinese. This classification does not relate to the nationality of their authors, but rather to the historian's agenda concerning the contentious issue of the Tibetan nation and its independence. Indeed, there are some Western historians who also fall into these categories, just as there are Tibetans living in Tibet who support the Chinese agenda. Thereafter, from the perspective of these two categories, the author describes the Tibetan myths of origin, the emergence of the Tibetan Empire, the 'patron-priest' relationship between the Tibetans

1 The author lists the works of Anand, Dreyfus, Kolas and Korom, but others could be added, including Calkowski (1993; 1997), Cantwell (1994), De Voe (1983), Frechette (2002), Klieger (1991; 2002), Smith (1996), Ström (1994; 1997) and Yeh (2002), all of whom deal directly or indirectly with the issue.

and foreign powers, the emergence of the Dalai Lamas, and finally the emergence of the nation.

Bentz concludes this section by suggesting that, contrary to the claims of Tibetan historians, the Tibetan nation—that is, the theoretical existence of the nation consubstantial with an independent state—is not taken for granted, and was not so even before the Chinese invasion. For the author, it was only with exile and the reality of 'Chinese Tibet' that nationalism materialised. At this point in the book, the reader may get the impression that the debate about nationalism—as analysed in the introduction—remains unanswered. If nationalism is to be understood as a modern and Western concept, it is indeed very difficult to apply it to foreign contexts, and the view posited in this book may be disputed.

The second part of the book centres on the 14th Dalai Lama as the embodiment of the Tibetan nation in exile. Bentz rightly recognises that the institution of the Dalai Lama was constructed *a posterior* as a symbol of the Tibetan nation, and that Tenzin Gyatso was the creator and builder of nationalism in exile. The 14th Dalai Lama indeed created and developed most of the symbols of the modern nation in exile. These symbols address the two challenges of exile: maintaining identity, and, on the political side, regaining independence.

Thus, the author describes not only the preservation of Tibetan arts and culture in exile, but also the preservation of religion, the introduction of democracy into the exile Tibetan political system, the creation of a modern education system and of a more or less independent media, and the establishment of the Tibetan language as a national symbol. The author rightly remarks that all of these processes are constrained by the need to please Westerners, the refugees' principal patrons, who guarantee the survival of the Tibetan community in exile and who sometimes have contradictory aspirations, such as respect for both tradition *and* modernity. While analysing the different images that Tenzin Gyatso is able to maintain in the West and in China, Bentz shows the tensions between his religious and political status. This is an argument that could have been further developed in the book: the popularity of Tenzin Gyatso in the West is mostly explained by his religious charisma, and it is the transformation of this religion—commodified in exile for the global market (see Prost 2006 or McLagan 1996)—that has given international status to the Tibetans and their nation.

The third part of the book offers the opposite approach to the previous one: a 'bottom-up' perspective, based on Tibetan refugees themselves. The author describes how the refugees' geographical exile was successfully overcome. Having been deterritorialised, they reterritorialised in different settlements in India. From there, they created a successful economic and cultural life, which is described by the author. Bentz then analyses the way in which the refugees used religion to overcome psychological exile, a fact that is unanimously recognised by authors writing on this topic. Here again, as written above, religion is central to understanding the context of Tibetan exile.

For the author, the successful re-settlement explains the emergence of nationalism amongst Tibetan refugees. She studies the negative consequences of exile: many highly educated youngsters in the settlements are jobless and are slowly losing their nationalist engagement with the Tibetan cause. In parallel, the political engagement of the entire community is beginning to crumble, a fact recognised by a number of Tibetan intellectuals. To conclude this section of the book, Bentz describes the political disengagement of Tenzin Gyatso in preparing for his future absence, along with the difficulties of the process. Once again, the author could have gone further in her analysis of the true nature of Tenzin Gyatso's powers—namely an interdependence of religion and politics (according to the Tibetan traditional mode of governance called *chos srid zung 'brel* or 'politics and religion combined').

In the last part of the book, the author analyses the history of the relationship between India and the Tibetan refugees. The emergence of vast support for the refugees from both the Indian government and the Indian population is described. If such an analysis is important for understanding how Tibetan nationalism was built in exile, the book would benefit from an extension of this analysis to Western influences—recognised by the author but not analysed as deeply—and also Chinese influences. The impression given by this last part is that the issue of foreign influence on Tibetan nationalism in exile is not addressed in sufficient depth.

In her conclusion, the author remarks that during the last 50 years of exile, the 'flame' of exile has become weaker and could now even be dying. For her, this is due to the actions of India to limit the political claims of Tibetans so as to prevent trouble with China. It is also due to China itself, which threatens the refugees so as to make them cease any attempts at

negotiation, even tentative ones, on the issue of Tibetan sovereignty or independence. It should be added that the weakness of contemporary Tibetan nationalism is also due to the refugees themselves, who are nowadays leaving their Asian settlements for better lives in the West, thus causing a disintegration of exile society. Moreover, the social composition of the community itself—which is now seeing greater tensions between the youngsters born in exile, their parents, newcomers from Tibet, and the non-refugee ethnically Tibetan populations who today represent the majority in exile monasteries and are increasingly present in Tibetan schools—is certainly the biggest internal threat to Tibetan nationalism. This is, however, not addressed in the book and is one of its shortcomings.

The book is based on the author's thesis, which won her the Institute Prize for the Best Thesis in History and International Policies in 2010. Although the analysis could be extended in places, it is an excellent overview of Tibetan nationalism, and for those interested in the issue—especially if not expert in the area—it is a worthwhile read.

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History as Mindscapes: A memory of the peasants' movement of Nepal

by Yogesh Raj
Kathmandu: Martin Chautari/Chautari Book Series, 2010, pp. xiii +336
ISBN 978-9937-8194-8-0

Reviewed by Gérard Toffin, CNRS

The lifestyle and economic conditions of the Newar peasants of the Kathmandu valley have drastically changed over the last sixty years. Today, only very elderly persons can remember the old days of the mid-twentieth century and therefore measure the transformations over the last decades. To understand what the life of the Jyapus (Newar agriculturists) was like just before and immediately after the fall of the Ranas (February 1951), it is important to revisit this recent past through topical sources. This is precisely what Yogesh Raj has undertaken in this book published by Martin Chautari. The author is assistant professor at the Nepal Engineering College (located in Bhaktapur) and is presently based at Imperial College, London, engaged in research on the history of production and distribution of everyday commodities in the early nineteenth century. His work, *History as Mindscapes*, presents the autobiography and the memories of a peasant leader, Krishnabhakta Caguthi (born in 1928), a Newar native from Bhaktapur and member of the Jyapu community. Caguthi was once a powerful district-level political figure. While marginalized over the years, he remained active in the 1980-1990s in mobilizing the townspeople for public renovation work and is still a well-known personality in Bhaktapur.

The narratives contained in *History as Mindscapes* were recorded in Newari and translated first into Nepali, then into English. The author-cum-editor has also used occasional passages written by Caguthi himself in Nepali with the help of friends (Caguthi is nearly illiterate). These passages were merged with the type-recorded version to establish what Yogesh Raj calls the "Nepali Master Copy". It is the translation into English of this Master Copy that is reviewed here. The whole work is of an excellent academic standard and the author is to be wholeheartedly congratulated.

The memories recorded in *History as Mindscapes* span roughly 35 years and begin in the early 1940s. The monograph thus covers the last years of

the Ranas, the first democratic decade of the post-Rana period (1951-1960) and the beginning of the Panchayat era, under the rule of King Mahendra. It gives a rich account of social and agrarian relations of the period, with a number of accurate details, as well as valuable observations concerning the local peasant movements in mid-twentieth century Nepal. The data on material culture, agrarian relations and daily life are of exceptional interest. They are as good as, and perhaps even better than, the narrator's memories of peasant movements in Nepal. Personally, I consider this first series of documents the most remarkable and comprehensive part of the book. I regret not having read this autobiography at the time I was working on the Newar peasant community of Pyangaon (Lalitpur) and on the 32 Jyapu neighbourhoods, *tols*, of Kathmandu. It would have been of considerable help in putting my data in a comparative context. The narrative section is divided into 27 short chapters, with no title. Below, I group together some observations on a limited number of subjects, providing extracts to highlight the quality and the diversity of the facts related.

The dreadful earthquake that struck Nepal on 15 January 1934 (1990 V.S.) is narrated in the first chapter. Caguthi was 5 years old: "The city streets had turned into rubble mounds. The earth shook every now and then. Even those whose houses stood upright chose to spend the night along the riverbank...The back walls of the houses belonging to Asmadu Makaju and Bikulal Bhaila had fallen to the ground. Our own house was half flattened, with all the people in terrace plunging down along with the bricks...These were the days of the Ranas. Thus, the rescue operation was immediate and effective [what will happen if such an earthquake takes place now?]...The quake kept recurring with gradually decreasing effects for ten days afterwards."

Other events in recent Nepalese history are merely mentioned in passing: the return of King Tribhuvan from Delhi at Gaucar Airport, "waving his right hand", on February 15, 1951 (2007 V.S.) (p. 38); the Coronation of King Mahendra in 1956 (2013 V.S.), and so on. The introduction of *candrabatti* ("the light of Candra", or the moonlight, the Nepali term for electricity) lighting the nights of the Valley is described in detail. "It occurs after Candra Shamser ascended to power...The power station was in Pharping" (Chapter 3). However *bijuli* (electricity), Caguthi adds, reached Bhaktapur only at the time of Juddha Shamser. The first aeroplane (*havajaj* in Nepali), seen in the skies of the Kathmandu Valley in 1949 (2006 V.S.), is vividly

recalled: "The figure looked like a fish carrying a cross-bar. We, the children of the locality, ran and jumped from terrace to terrace to follow it" (Chapter 3). The heavy snowfall in 1944 (in the month of *pus* 2001 V.S.), so unusual in the Valley, is also remembered.

As scholars interested in the farming techniques that once prevailed in this region will know, the extraction of *kâmcâ* (Nepali *kalimati*), clay soil fertilizer, below the sand and dark soil layers of the earth, was an outstanding feature of, and a necessary component in, the ancient form of agriculture of the Kathmandu Valley. It was a vital, but also much feared, activity, because of the numerous fatal accidents occurring when digging these tunnels and pits, sometimes a hundred feet (30 metres) below the earth: "Peasants were killed every year in those pits. Even in Kathmandu and Patan" (p. 142). Chapter 19 contains unique information about mines of this high-quality *kamca* clay soil: "These pits could not be vertical as it would have not been possible to remove the dug out materials. So generally, these pits appeared as tunnels which slopes downwards as one entered deeper...[when the soil clay is of good quality] fifty backloads of that *kamca* is sufficient to fertilize a *ropani* of land (...), for the same piece of land a hundred and fifty backloads is sometimes necessary, when the *kamca* is of poor quality...One has to work for three months ahead of the plantation season to dig up the required amount of clay". One of the reasons why peasants were drawn to the use of chemical fertilizers was the danger to their lives when mining in the pits. The narrator dates the mass introduction of foreign fertilizers to 1964 (2021 V.S.)

Buffaloes were an important element of economic life, as attested to by many references to these animals. As far as food is concerned, rice was rare in Caguthi's Jyapu family. "To put it simply, a mouthful of rice was a distant dream for us...Instead rice, our daily food consisted of a pot full of boiling water with two handful of wheat flour, a pinch of salt and turmeric. If somebody asked us if we had rice, we would nod and would reply that we had" (Chapter 2). At lunch time: "Green leaves of *sakeca* [colocasia], carrot, and pea were our staple diet. And of course, a full pot of water. We could not ever see *roti*, forget eating it" (p. 111).[1] However, meat, rice beer and alcohol were fully available in local shops. The lamas were regularly called upon to eliminate the risk of hailstorms, especially the ones provoked by the

1 Beaten rice was also used for tiffin.

"threatening clouds *pomsu* which keep on making *garagara garagara* noise" (p. 182). This procedure (by chanting mantras) was called *phalca svayegu* in Newari. Caguthi also vividly lists the variety of dresses worn in those early days and how they were weaved locally (Chapter 6). "Tattooing [he says further on] was very common. Women would consider it their birth right. They believed that they could feed themselves by selling these ornaments during the long journey after their deaths. They tattooed themselves. First, they would draw the design and then prick along the lines with coloured needle tips on their hands or on their calves. The most popular designs were of a peacock and clove" (p. 54).

Money was rather scarce. "The wage he [Caguthi's father] earned by carrying shoulder loads for a shopkeeper was the only source of money for us (...). I learned that he used to get 20 *paisa* for the full cargo load" (Chapter 4). "Money was still considered the latest innovation in those days. We would barter meat with rice grains. We used to pay the land revenue office with paddy as well. Money rose to its prominence only after Tribhuvan declared monetary salaries to the government instead of the produce of land [1952]. That year, we had to pay thirty-seven and a half *pathi* as an annual tax for a *ropani*. When we were asked to pay money instead of paddy, we paid at the rate of one rupee for five *pathi*s" (Chapter 6). "In those days [1945-48], the wage for agricultural labour was only eight *annas*. I can still recall the days when the daily wage was only four *annas*. If I tell this to anyone, they will look at me as if I have turned into a relic" (p. 64). However, Caguthi mentions on page 55 that as of 1951, "the daily wage for mining the clay soil has already become five *annas*". In Chapter 6, he asserts that within the Jyapu community, "We did not use to pay wages for labour. We did not receive that either. We used to pay labour by labour, especially among ourselves, in activities such as mining the clay soil, tilling the land, or carpentry and bricklaying works...People used to repay the debt to each of them by contributing my labour for the same number of days" [*bvala khayegu/pulegu*]...Money was very expensive compared to labour" (*idem*) (p. 52).

"No one had a clock" (p. 59). Time was mainly estimated by natural events, light intensity and animal life, such as the crowing of the rooster in the early morning. The solar days were divided into eight *pahar*[2] (Newari: *phah*), an important notion for these agriculturists. Some elementary

2 R. L. Turner's dictionary translates *pahar* as "watch, space of three hours" (p. 371).

astronomical observations were also used to identify seasons and critical moments in the agricultural calendar. "The parents would see the *suli-nau* [translated here as Venus] and estimate the season for wheat harvesting. Back then, people used to say that *suli-nau* stars were the real power sources of peasants. We could go to a farm and cut the wheat stalks till the *suli-nau* shined in the sky. The day *suli-nau* stopped appearing we would feel very weak and an insatiable thirst would start to engulf us. Similarly, the wheat would also get burnt within a couple of days...If we plant paddy samplings after *suli-nau* stars appear, the yield will be drastically lesser. Our parents used to wake us up when the *suli-nau* was at its zenith. If I got up by the time *khu-nau* [translated by Ursa Minor] was just setting behind the mountains, Mother would call me lazy" (p. 59). All these details are particularly fascinating.

Krishnabhakta Caguthi's family was very poor and mainly tilled land owned by landlords. In some cases, the harvest had to be carried to the owner's house from Bhaktapur all the way to Kathmandu. The food was just enough to live on. Caguthi also mentions some land they bought and they cultivated by working directly on it (Chapter 2), as well as land that they were cultivating as secondary tillers (Chapter 2). A conflict over land tilled for a Buddhist *baha* is mentioned on pp. 82-83. As a rule, the general conditions of Bhaktapurian peasantry were dramatic and horrifying. Interestingly enough, Caguthi reports a widely shared theory among local peasantry according to which the native indigenous people of the Kathmandu Valley formerly owned all the land. It was they who cleared the forests and made the land arable, not the landowners. Only then did they sell the fields to newcomers in exchange for gold coins. Afterwards they started to till these lands for the immigrants. Gathamugah, presented here as a sort of Jyapu indigenous hero, complained but to no avail (p. 187). The festival named in honour of this person and still performed during the rainy season is seen, from this point of view, as a manifestation of the old Jyapu culture fighting against the land-greedy newcomers. According to one version, the newcomers represented an indigenous Jyapu, whose name was Gathamugah and who protested against the selling of land, with a demon effigy. These people, called *birtaval*s, created the Gathamugah festival during which this effigy "is taken away from the city and burnt to death" (pp. 87-88). For Jyapus, the claim to landownership is thus "a natural right" (p. 187).

Relations between the tiller and the landowner were extremely hierarchical and duplicated the pure/impure hierarchy of the caste order of society. Jyapu tillers were compelled "to smear the house of their landowners, to massage the female members of their family with oil, to chaperone their married-off daughters on their return to their in-laws, to wash their clothes, even the undergarments of the ladies, they had to distil wine or beer, slaughter, then clean, cut and roast the male buffaloes and prepare vegetables for their feasts" (Chapter 2). Upon the death of their family members they also had to ferry all the edibles and utensils of their landowners to temples and summon all the relatives (*idem*, p. 34). "When a family member died in the land-owner's household, the tillers had to protect the corpse until it was taken away to the cremation ground, manage everything for the ten post-mortuary rites, accompany the pyre-lighting member in his daily rounds to the rivers, prepare the tobacco hookah for their relatives during their visits to console the bereaved family on the fourth day, and also to hop and bring seven logs of wood for the seventh Day ritual" (*idem*, p. 34). All these obligations were felt to be an unbearable burden and a form of extortion, of forced labour. In communist booklets, these landlords were called "feudal leeches" (p. 140). Peasants were practically servants bound to their owners' families. The narrator does not deny the existence of a caste system (for the most part he stresses its overall decline in contemporary times), but he simply subsumes it under class hierarchy and implicitly dismisses it as an epiphenomenon or as a relic of feudalism.

The beginnings of the "All Nepal Peasant Organization", *Akhil Nepal Kisan Samgh* (ANKS), shortly after the fall of the Ranas, are recounted. Caguthi was 16 years old at that time. The ANKS aimed at defending peasants and at protesting against unjustified taxes (hay taxes for instance, p. 71) and old *rakami* obligations laid down by the Ranas. The *Kisan Samgh* claimed lands for the landless, campaigned for the annual tenancy rent receipt delivered by landowners, etc. It strove to display its banner as well as to protect fields against thieves and wandering cattle at night. "We had to spend nights in the open, battling against mosquitoes and sleep just in case a cow might appear from somewhere to destroy the paddy plants" (p. 153). Their members helped peasants obtain compensation from cow-owners when their cattle were seized while plundering the crops in the fields. It seems that the *Sangh* also acted like an arbitrator and judge for social (familial

and personal) disputes (p. 83). The Land Reform was a crucial moment and a large success for the *Kisan Sangh* peasant organization. Launched by the Nepali Congress during the first years of the post-Rana period, it introduced considerable improvements and a form of security for the peasantry. The rent to be paid on tilled lands was fixed at 23 *pathi*, only payable on the main crop (p. 127). This considerably reduced the amount of grain to be paid to landlords. Landowners became very irate because of these reforms: "the situation has come to blows" (p. 127).

The whole book is a virulent attack on, and critical account of, the methods used by the local communist party: the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP), a radical hard-line organization founded in 1975 by Narayan Man Bijukchhe (alias Comrade Rohit), who was born in 1940 and was one of Caguthi's comrades-in-arms. Ideologically, this party has doctrinal links with the Maoists though it enjoys stronger relations with communist North Korea. In 2006, it was a member of the Seven Party Alliance which overthrew King Gyanendra. In Caguthi's narratives the NWPP is compared to a gang, using peasants for Bijukchhe's personal ends, maintaining close relations with "goondas" (ruffians), trying to keep control of all local affairs and using the worst methods to eliminate his opponents. In 1969 (Shravan 2025 V.S.), a dramatic event illustrating the internal conflicts of the peasant political movement took place in the life of Krishnabhakta Caguthi. It is related in his own words (Chapter 21). He and some of his friends were charged with corruption and self–interest in the management of a Cooperative which distributed chemical fertilizers to the local Bhaktapur peasant community. A large crowd of peasants assembled one day in front of the central Cooperative office and complained that this office did not supply fertilizers on time. They demanded the immediate reimbursement of their deposits and to see the Cooperative's latest accounts. The mob then started to punch Caguthi in the face, to physically assault and beat him and his friends. Caguthi was ridiculed, a cap placed backwards on his head. He was dragged along and paraded naked and bleeding throughout the city. The narrator contends that the peasants were manipulated by a handful of activists closely linked to Naramamca (Narayan Man Bijukchhe's nickname, alias Comrade Rohit) and the author's rivals. He totally rejects the accusation of corruption and accuses Naramamca's communist friends of taking revenge through this mischievous deed. According to him, it was a conspiracy to politically assassinate him. Yogesh Raj provides two

appendices directly related to this affair. The first one (Appendix A, pp. 148-150) supports Caguthi's version and defends his honesty. The second (Appendix C, pp. 168-169) is in favour of Rohit and maintains the accusation of corruption. Whatever the truth may be, this event marks the decline of Caguthi's dominant role as a local political leader and the rise of the future NWPP in Bhaktapur.

The life of the Jyapu peasants portrayed in these narratives is characterised by extreme poverty and harsh conditions. They were pitiful, with recurrent shortages of money, food, and even seed during periods of sowing and planting. "By the onset of the paddy planting season many peasantry households would reach the brink of famine. They were even forced to borrow seeds. And even grains to feed themselves" (p. 135). People used to wake up early in the morning, sometime before dawn, to carry out the various activities required of them. The work undertaken all day long was hard and used up a considerable amount of energy. Caguthi's father "could never see the face of happiness" (p. 43), Caguthi's mother "was not fond of any particular food item...Likes and dislikes are only for those who can afford to choose" (p. 47). "We, the children would remember *dasaim* and *biska* [festivals] as the two occasions for receiving new clothes. Our desires could not be realized every year though" (p. 53). Peasants used to wear torn clothes nearly all year long. Houses were always in a state of filth: "Our houses smelled foul. We collected our shit and filth underneath the staircase. We slept on floors or a layer of hay mattress" (p. 197). My own observations in Pyangaon village (1970-1972) closely correspond to this description, except that people ate better food.

By and large, in the mid-twentieth century during the Rana period, Bhaktapurian peasants appeared to be totally wretched, destitute and almost pathetic. Nobody among the *Kisan Sangh* could recite the alphabet or knew how to read (p. 138). Such grim realities are reminiscent of the miserable life of the Russian *moujik* peasantry described by Russian novelists and authors at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, before the Communist Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. People in their everyday lives seemed totally absorbed in agricultural work, tilling land, carrying loads, carpentry and household chores. Curiously enough, Caguthi does not say anything about musical performances, theatre, *pyakhan,* or festivals which are so important in the Newar and Jyapu vernacular culture. He narrates only the dark and harsh side of life; nothing is said of joyful,

happy moments. Such deliberate 'miserabilism' strikes the reader. It looks like a bias, a tendentious reconstruction of the past, an exaggerated pitiful view of life to suit the narrator's communist ideology. Whatever the case may be, I must say that the painful and extremely difficult situation the Jyapus of Bhaktapur lived in, as portrayed here, closely parallels what I recorded during my research in the 1990s on the recent past of the Jyapus in Kathmandu city. By contrast, the state of village-dwelling Jyapu communities, where peasants were less dominated by upper castes and owned more private fields, seems better than the situation described here, with of course some exceptions.

Alongside Krishnabhakta Caguthi's own account, the book is made up of additional documents: parallel autobiographical texts published in Nepali, various published or unpublished narratives, contemporary public records, *Akhil Nepal Kisan Samgh* documents and official government records. These documents are printed on the right margin of the page, in a smaller font, in juxtaposition to the main text. They supplement the data discussed by Caguthi and interpose his narratives in a useful way. More importantly, they more or less eliminate the risk of overstatement and exaggeration on the part of the author, and contribute to establishing the worthiness of his personal account. The book also includes a number of facsimiles of primary documents as well as a Newari-Nepali-English glossary. The overall result is a window opening on what Yogesh Raj calls a "mindscape", a mental horizon where social facts are contextualised. The social past is reconstituted, "both revived and relieved" (p. ix-xi).

This autobiography, the parallel narratives and the supplementary documents regrouped in this book are of first-rate interest and constitute a valuable, detailed corpus. Admittedly, some difficulties affect the presentation. For instance, shifting from the Vikram Sambat [V.S.] era used in the main text to the Western Gregorian calendar, mostly referred to in texts in the margins, is rather clumsy. The Land Reform, the complexities of the rent system and the *guthi* type of tenure[3] would also have been more readable had an account of this reform been given in the Introduction. As it is formulated in the book, the passage about rents on *guthi* land is barely understandable by non-specialists of these topics. Yet, these are minor

3 For instance, the *chvayam bali* commission system, mentioned on p. 179 in connection with *guthi* land, is obscure. It seems that even King Birendra, to whom Caguthi tried to explain it, also had some difficulty in understanding it.

flaws. The editing work has been done in a very meticulous way, though the translation of the narrative is in poor English and indeed contains numerous errors. The emphasis here is on empirical research in its noblest form. It is replete with useful economic data from material life—data often denigrated by more theoretically oriented scholars.

From a more general viewpoint, *History as Mindscapes* shifts the focus from collective identities, so prominent in the Nepalese social science landscape over the last two decades, to singular figures and to the self. Individual narratives and life stories are presented here as a valuable line of research, just as important as more homogenising discourses on ethnic groups, to study the impact of global forces on the individual and vice versa. This is a new trend, even if some foreign scholars (and admittedly some Nepalese as well) have already concentrated their analysis on life stories of Nepalese personalities. What is more, the book can be considered as one of the first accounts of 'Subaltern Studies' in Nepal, bringing the peripheral to the centre. The book will thus attract a wide audience among scholars engaged in Nepalese studies, especially historians, political scientists, social anthropologists and sociologists. Unfortunately, since it is not a literary work (it has not been conceptualised in this manner), there is little chance that it will go beyond this restricted audience.

Krishnabhakta Caguthi is considered by his opponents to be a political opportunist, shifting allegiances between various political parties throughout his life. However, in his narrative, the peasant leader presents himself as extremely defiant towards politics and politicians. He was once a member of the Communist Party founded in 1949, but he rapidly took his distance from all political organizations, whether *Kamgresis*, communists or *panchayatis.* To be more precise, Caguthi states that before 1953 (2010 V.S.) "political activists and workers were generally honest" (p. 197), but that things worsened after this initial period. His tone of voice becomes particularly bitter when he speaks about this subject: "Politics has become a vocation for witches who keep on perpetually fooling the people" (p. 199). Even if he shares most of his class-based political ideas and his view of history with the communists, the latter are particularly criticised for their lies and ability to abuse the naivety and the innocence of the people. "They are a thankless lot. They are devoid of history. They do not seem to remember the past...Their worst character trait is that they consider themselves eternally pure and everyone else as revisionists and betrayers"

(p. 109). Despite this, Caguthi rightly recognises (at least as far as Bhaktapur is concerned) that Congress activists "belonged to the landowners and the lenders" (p. 197). When *Kamgresis* favoured peasantry, they had "romantic and unrealistic ideas" about us (p. 197). As in Kathmandu's old city, the peasants of Bhaktapur were (and still are) communist orientated and they backed the Communist Party which at that time was mostly an underground organization. Moreover, our peasant activist does not hesitate to talk about Nepal's two neighbours: "Hindusthan is not our friend. But China is. China wanted the Nepalis to work for themselves and be self-reliant" (p. 194). In the early 1950s, he says, India had wanted to *Sikkimize* Nepal (p. 106).

Caguthi's bitterness encompasses the present situation of the Jyapus: "Sadly, today, when our children hear someone calling them Jyapu, they frown and feel ashamed. When we speak of our spent lives, they run away and avoid us. They are not proud of being the sons and daughters of peasants like us. Instead they dress up like the petty bourgeois and enjoy the bourgeois implements while forgetting all the tools we have been using to till the land" (p. 199). Nowadays, "agricultural lands have disappeared and turned into suburbs" (p. 167). As a matter of fact, contemporary city-dwelling peasants have sold most of their land (which has been used to build houses), fewer and fewer cultivate fields, they become richer, educated and have turned to more respectable activities in the tertiary (service) sector of the economy. Today, they dismiss the days of their fathers and forefathers and have turned towards the modern world.

One more thing has to be stressed. Caguthi's memories only deal with peasants in the Kathmandu Valley. At that time, the Bhaktapur branch of Kisan Sangh conducted a number of joint actions with the Jyapus of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, yet the peasantry outside the Valley is totally ignored. There is therefore a meaningful ethnic component in these recordings, and even a single caste-delimited scope (Jyapu),[4] or, to use the author's term, "mindscape". Even within the Jyapu community of the Valley, some friction exists between the peasants from one town and another, despite joint rallies and a unified front to make demands of the government. Caguthi relates, for instance, how his Bhaktapur's friends were not at ease when taking a meal with Jyapus from Kathmandu and Patan. They criticized the peasants from these two towns for not respecting purity

4 Though other peasant groups in the Valley, such as the Duims, are sometime referred to.

and impurity rules during meals taken together (p. 83). Some Bhaktapurian Jyapus even envisaged taking a purifying dip at Pashupati or performing *gaudan* (gift of a cow to a Brahman priest) after these joint meals. In relation to this, we must recall that the Jyapus from Bhaktapur mostly call upon Brahman priests for their rituals, whereas in Patan and Kathmandu, they summon Vajracharya Buddhists priests. Thus, the united front displayed in political actions conceals profound differences in the social and religious sphere, as well as in status. Similarly, the parochial dimension of the NWPP communist party and its exclusive link to the Bhaktapur area in opposition to the communist universalistic view of social class comes to mind. Unfortunately, the present autobiography does not provide any clues to explain such a singular situation.

Reading this book is so refreshing that I would suggest, by way of a conclusion, that a Nepalese publisher launch a series focusing on such subaltern narratives written by Nepalese people. We need to hear such personal, lively voices from the periphery of society, narratives from below, exemplifying the geographical, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the country, without the bias of political parties. Such books, based on both unique and sufficiently general data, would give substance to more macro-historical investigations. They would considerably help our understanding of the country's recent history and of the socio-economic transformations endured by its people in the twentieth century. They would also contribute by placing major political events that Nepal has faced over the last decade into perspective. As so rightly put by Yogesh Raj, this genre "gives to history and memory an equal weight; both the biases of class and superstructure orientations are balanced" (p. xi). Moreover, such a series of subaltern narratives would obviously temper the Western view of Nepal, expressed mostly by social anthropologists, Indologists or linguists, which stresses for instance the religious and caste system, and would contribute by providing another image of the country's society and culture. For all these reasons, this book is a landmark in establishing a scientific historiography of Nepal.

Ethnic Activism and Civil Society in South Asia (Governance, conflict, and civic action: volume 2)

edited by David N. Gellner
New Delhi &c: Sage, 2009, 372 pages, ISBN 978-81-32-1008-6

Varieties of Activist Experience: Civil society in South Asia (Governance, conflict, and civic action: volume 3)

edited by David N. Gellner
New Delhi &c: Sage, 2010, 299 pages, ISBN 978-81-321-0450-6

Reviewed by Ingemar Grandin (Linköpings universitet, Sweden)

These two books are the products of the same conference that was held in Oxford in 2005 as part of a larger collaborative project drawing together academic institutes in Bielefeld (Germany), Kathmandu (Nepal), Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Oxford (UK), but also including participants from outside these institutions and countries. And besides the two books under review here, it is planned that this project will result in some four other volumes in the series *Governance, Conflict and Civic Action*.

The key terms in the titles of the two volumes taken together with the words in the name of the series clearly indicate the intended readership. If the terms conflict, governance, activism, civil society, ethnicity, or South Asia appeal, you are likely to find the books useful. Hence, these volumes will be of interest to scholars of the Himalayan area (many of the chapters are on Nepal) as well as to South Asianists more generally.

But these books also deserve a more general readership as they are, in many ways, an example of contemporary social science at its best. Motivated by the importance of the issues under consideration (rather than by, say, the desire to hoist theoretical flags or methodological banners), the volumes offer the reader in-depth ethnographic understandings of the areas and the communities that they have researched. And the contributing authors ground these understandings in their own—often extensive—fieldwork, as well as in comprehensive reading. There are some important qualifications to the last statement to which I will return at the end of this review.

The books cover a wide range of topics and areas. In the second volume, two chapters address Hindu nationalism as ethnic activism: as it filters into

youth-led organisations for new religious performances in Rajasthan, India, on the one hand (Minoru Mio); and as violence-espousing uncivil society that, nevertheless, is engaged in social work in Central India on the other (Peggy Froerer). Two chapters consider translocal and transnational topics: diasporic returnees as development experts and cultural brokers in Jaffna, Sri Lanka (Eva Gerharz); and the processes by which varied and inconsistent ethnic practices in Nepal are distilled into 'authentic' ethnic culture and politically motivated discourse in India (Sara Shneiderman). Dalit activism is the subject of three chapters: how it in fact reinforces caste-based structures in Tamil Nadu, India (Hugo Gorringe); how it counters caste-divisions maintained in the ostensibly non-caste and universal Catholic Church, also in Tamil Nadu (David Mosse); and how it relates to the state, to political parties, to underground Maoists and to NGOs in Nepal (Laurie Ann Vasily). The final three contributions to the second volume scrutinize ethnic or *janajati* 'indigenous nationality' activism in Nepal: how activists devise ethnic identities that are new but yet appear old, by combining Buddhist universalism with particularist emphases on origin, birth and heritage (Gisèle Krauskopff); how activists (local intellectuals, writers of history and so on) establish a particular territory as the ancient and original homeland for an ethnic group (Mukta S. Tamang); and how, today, the Brahmanic purism associated with Sanskritization and identities based on caste are being replaced by a purism on ethnic (*janajati*) grounds and identities based on geography (Marie Lecomte-Tilouine).

In Volume 3, the two opening chapters portray activists from the political left in Nepal: how universalist communist ideology and particularist ethnic identity are combined in the life of one political veteran (Anne de Sales); and how the rural success of the Nepali Maoists had in fact been prepared for by an earlier generation of leftist activists (Sara Shneiderman, again). Other contributions consider the role of marginal and disadvantaged but educated youth in politics and conflict in Sri Lanka (Siripala Hettige); and how women in rural, local government in India have to stand up to locally entrenched male bureaucrats, restrictive gender norms such as *purdah*, and male political patrons, but also to urban women activists who try to bypass them (Stefanie Strulik). A chapter on why and how activists in Nepal should be investigated offers insights into research as practical work as well as into the motivations of activists, where 'opposition to social evils' is prominent (David N. Gellner and Mrigendra Bahadur Karki). The final

three empirical contributions in Volume 3 consider the donor-connected issues of civil society and 'good governance' as they were played out in state-NGO relations in Bangladesh (David Lewis); the NGO sector in Nepal and its connections as well as boundaries with the State (Celayne Heaton Shrestha); and colonial expatriates, indigenous elites, and the present-day urban middle class as bearers of environmental activism in Sri Lanka (Arjun Guneratne).Throughout, the contributions highlight and portray individual activists—sometimes sketchily, sometimes in great detail. For reasons of space, I cannot go further into the individual chapters, but one more general comment might be appropriate; it is striking how prominent two kinds of cultural work are in the very varied, social and political activism described in these volumes. First, we have culture as content: 'awareness' (of social ills, of ethnic heritage, and so on) is a recurrent theme in both books, as is how activists manipulate this by means of 'awareness-raising' activities, teaching, research, the writing of history and the like. Seen in this light, the public sphere of civil society appears to be something formed by magazines, seminars and conferences, but also by awareness-raising songs. And second, there is culture as form: songs (again), food, costume, ritual, cultural programs, performances, festivals and so on consistently appear in the activists' arsenal as ethnic 'stuff' to be drawn upon, as a 'cover' for political activities, and as a public sphere—an arena for civil society—in its own right.

Introductory chapters to both volumes by the editor (David N. Gellner) and a final chapter in the third volume (by William F. Fisher) provide a theoretical frame and anchor to the empirical contributions. These bookends are devoted to more general discussions of the central notions, with civil society as a principal concept. In a brief but illuminating exposition of the heavily used but tricky notion of civil society, the introduction to Volume 2 arrives at a working definition. To comment briefly on this, the paradigmatic cases of civil society are seen to be those forms of voluntary, associational life that 'are engaged in the pursuit of a moral or public good' (Froerer, Volume 2, p. 74) or campaigns 'to re-make the world' (Gellner, Volume 2, p. 1), that is, overt, political and social activism. I would argue that another 'paradigm case' of civil society is what we find in Finnegan (1989): amateur classical orchestras, rock and jazz groups, choirs, brass bands, pubs and clubs as venues for musical performance, and the like. As we have seen above, 'activism' for such cultural ends can also be very

socially and politically important—as the editor repeatedly emphasizes, 'politics is everywhere' (Gellner, Volume 3, p. 6; cf. Gellner Volume 2, p. 7).

While the contributions to these volumes are well grounded, not only in field research but also in the relevant literature, there are nevertheless some striking gaps. First, many chapters—particularly those on Dalit movements—would have benefited from taking into account Weisethaunet's (1998) important contribution to the study of Dalit consciousness and strategies. Second, Krämer's (1996) work on national integration and ethnic mobilization in Nepal remains strangely uncited by any contributor to these two volumes. While the first omission may have something to do with the social/political rather than cultural point of entry, the latter is in line with a general rule that applies to all but two contributions in these two books. According to this rule, authors only cite works in their own language, or in their own language plus English. Of course, this is not unique to these volumes but a much wider pattern in social science. But when it comes to scholarship of the Himalayan area, there is an important qualification to this rule: many of the contributors to these volumes do cite works in local languages (principally Nepali).

To conclude, these two volumes have convinced me, despite my being a little hesitant at the outset, that there is research value in the concept of civil society, and that as a 'guiding metaphor' for research (Gellner, Volume 2, p. 10), civil society is quite fruitful. And if we can live with the ambiguous, complex and contested concept of 'culture'—an idea that has proved essential to research in the social sciences and the humanities—we can certainly live with 'civil society'.

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The Identity Card of an Unemployed Youth

by Rajendra Bhandari

Name:	Dhanbahadur
Father's name:	Ranbahadur
Mother's name:	Birkhamaya
Address:	Where Kanchanjunga can be seen and if you walk a little you will find the plains, where the streams sing folk songs, where people mumble songs of grief.
Mailing address:	Any cardamom garden, rice field, tea garden, cow pasture, hill meadow, bamboo thicket.
Age:	As much as fire flows in my arms, as much as dreams flower in my eyes.

Attach a passport photo: here.
The photo should be like this:
your two ears should be visible,
one to listen to speeches in the bazaar,
the other to hear the laments of your home.

Your legs should not be seen
because you have nowhere to go.

Your chest should be seen, but the stomach should be left out.
Your photo, without a stomach but with a chest,
should be verified by some gazetted officer
with only a stomach and no chest.

That's it, your identity card is ready.
Bearing this,
you can go anywhere without fear,
from Siachen to Kanyakumari,
from Chambal to Dimapur.

Go looking for a peg on which to hang your mind,
go looking for a plate to appease your hunger.

From *Shabdaharuko Punarvas* (Gangtok: Shri Bhim Dhungel, 2010). Translated by Michael Hutt.

Rajendra Bhandari is a Reader in the Nepali Department of the Sikkim Government College at Tadong in Gangtok. He has published four collections of poems in Nepali, the first of which appeared in 1979.

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Diacritical marks may be employed for the transliteration of terms from Himalayan languages, but should be used correctly and consistently. Personal and place names should not take diacritical marks.

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When listing references at the end of articles, give the surname of the author followed by initials, e.g. 'Malla, K.P.' not 'Malla, Kamal Prakash'. Give the main title of a book with capital letters, but use lower case in the sub-title after an initial capital. Use lower case after an initial capital for the title of an article or book chapter.

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ISSN 0943 8254

EBHR 38

ARTICLES

Spring-Summer 2011

published by the EBHR Editorial Committee
in conjunction with Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, Nepal