

40

Spring-Summer 2012

EBHR

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EBHR 40 Spring-Summer 2012

ARTICLES

- Himalayan Flutes, Sprites and Mountainous Geographies 9
Andrew Alter
- The Monarch's Gift: Critical notes on the constitutional
process in Bhutan 27
Winnie Bothe
- From Sentries to Skilled Migrants: The transitory residence of
the Nepali community in Singapore 59
Hema Kiruppalini
- On the Historiography of Nepal: The 'Wright' Chronicle reconsidered 83
Manik Bajracharya and Axel Michaels

WORKSHOP REPORTS

- Authoritative Speech in the Himalayan Region 100
Anne de Sales
- The 10th BNAC Nepal Study Day 104
Krishna Adhikari
- The Creation of Public Meaning during Nepal's Democratic
Transition: report on two workshops 107
Michael Hutt and Pratyoush Onta
- The State of Religion in a Non-Religious State: Discourses and
practices in the secular republic of Nepal 110
Chiara Letizia
- Nepalis in Diaspora 115
David Gellner
- OBITUARY
- Augusto Gansser 1910-2012 118
Roger Croston

BOOK REVIEWS

- Tilak Ranjan Bera: *Ladakh: A glimpse of the roof of the world* 126
John Bray
- Todd T. Lewis & Subarna Man Tuladhar: *Sugata Saurabha: An epic poem from Nepal on the life of the Buddha by Chittadhar Hṛdaya.* 128
Ingemar Grandin
- Gwendolyn Hyslop, Stephen Morey and Mark W. Post (eds.): 134
North East Indian Linguistics: Volume 3.
Nathan Hill
- John Bray & Elena de Rossi Filibeck (eds.): *Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques: Recent research on Ladakh and the Western Himalaya.* 139
Patrick Kaplanian
- William S. Sax: *God of Justice: Ritual healing and social justice in the Central Himalayas* 144
Arik Moran
- J. Mark Baker: *The Kuhls of Kangra: Community-managed irrigation in the Western Himalaya.* 151
Charu Singh
- ENDPIECE
- From *Karnali Blues* by Buddhisagar Chapain 156

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the fortieth edition of the *EBHR*, which marks twenty years of this journal's existence.

This edition of the Bulletin contains yet another eclectic mix of articles. It is good to bring Andrew Alter's discussion of Garhwali folklore and the cultural significance of the flute to a readership that extends beyond the purely musicological, and the comparative aspect of this article seems to me to raise interesting questions for further research. Much further east along the mountain chain, Winnie Bothe takes a very clear-eyed view of the recent political changes in Bhutan, drawing upon the doctoral thesis she submitted at the University of Copenhagen in 2011. I think it is probably true to say that the majority of scholarly research on the Himalayan region relates to Nepal. There is always a danger that work relating to other parts of the Himalayan region is under-represented in a journal such as this. I am therefore very pleased that we have had the opportunity to publish work on other parts of the Himalaya in recent issues, and that this trend is continuing.

Hema Kiruppalini's interesting ethnographic article continues the *EBHR* tradition, established in the special issue dedicated to 'Nepalese migrations' [*EBHR* 35-36], of exploring the rapidly expanding Nepali diaspora. Indeed, as you will see from David Gellner's workshop report, this is a field in which a great deal of research is currently ongoing. In the final article, Manik Bajracharya and Axel Michaels make a very important return visit to one of the early cornerstones of Western understandings of the history of Nepal, and we look forward to seeing their edition of this crucial text supersede that produced for Daniel Wright.

I would like to record my thanks to everyone who contributed reports, reviews and the obituary to this issue, and particularly to Mark Turin for his contribution as book reviews editor since the UK editorial team took charge. Mark now has to step down from this position because of new commitments following his move to Yale. I would also like to thank the colleagues who served as peer reviewers for the articles published here.

You will recall that the Endpiece of *EBHR* 39 was a chapter from Jhamak Ghimire's autobiography. I am happy to inform you that this book has

now appeared in an English translation by Nagendra Sharma and Safal Sharma under the title *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns*, published by Oriental Publications House Pvt. Ltd. Kathmandu.

Michael Hutt

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Manik Bajracharya is currently a visiting scholar at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg. He wrote his Ph.D thesis at the Aichi Gakuin University, Japan on the *Saptavidhānuttarapūjā*, a widely practised Newar Buddhist ritual dedicated generally to the deity Tārā. He has experiences of working at the Lotus Research Centre and teaching at the Lotus Academic College in Lalitpur, Nepal. Together with Axel Michaels he is currently working in a research project to prepare an *editio princeps* as well as a new annotated translation of the nineteenth century Buddhist *vaṃśāvalī* otherwise known as the ‘Wright Chronicle’.

Winnie Bothe is currently undertaking a postdoctoral study at the Department of Political Science at Lund University. The research focuses on how processes of state formation impact on local processes of constructing the locals in their roles as citizens, comparing two Himalayan neighbours: Sikkim and Bhutan. Her research interests are focused on the relation between state formation, nationalism, power and citizenship. She was a member of the board of the Danish organization ‘Projektrådgivningen’ for two years, an organization that provide counselling to Danish NGO’s. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Bhutan, Benin and India, and has spent a year at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

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Himalayan Flutes, Sprites and Mountainous Geographies

Andrew Alter

The folk epic¹ of Jitū Bagaḍwāl is well known in many parts of Garhwal. In the central episode of the story, Jitu plays his flute (*muralī*)² on a high mountain pasture and thereby attracts the mountain sprites who ultimately cause his downfall. The sound of the flute is thereby linked to the dangerous supernatural world of sprites and to the sonic realm of a mountainous geography.³

Over the past twenty years, I have worked with numerous musicians and other informants in Garhwal and almost all were aware of the Jitu Bagaḍwāl story. A number of recording artists have released commercially available audio tapes of the story, including Uma Shankar Satish (1987) and Hukam Singh Yadav (n.d.). Though it is primarily a Garhwali story, 'Jitū Bagaḍwāl' is also known in parts of Kumaon. The story has become somewhat iconic for the hill regions of Uttarakhand and is frequently interpreted through various artistic mediums including shorter songs, drama and dance. For instance, the 2010 *Uttarākhaṇḍ Mahotsava* held in Delhi (April 4) included a dance version of the story. A film version has also been released in VCD format.

In addition, a number of published versions of the story exist. Govind Chatak includes the story in his *Garhwālī Lok Gāthāeṅ*, originally published in 1958 with a revised edition in 1996. The story is also presented by Haridatt Bhatt 'Shailesh' in his *Garhwālī Bhāshā aur uskā Sāhitya* (1976). Bhatt's version is particularly concise and therefore worth translating here as a starting point for this paper:

Jitu and Shobhanu were the children of Gariba. Sumera was their

-
- 1 I use the term 'epic' here to refer to a variety of lengthy sung narratives. The term encompasses genres referred to by other authors variously as *pawārā* and/or *gāthā*.
 - 2 *Bāṅsurī*, *algojā*, *joṅiyā muralī* and sometimes *rāmsur* are also used as names to refer to flutes in the Uttarakhand region. Petshali (2002: 114) also mentions *baisī*, *pāwā*, *kolālu*, *kulāvī* and *kuzhal*.
 - 3 The Hindi word *apasarā* and Garhwali/Kumaoni *ācharī* could potentially be translated as 'sprite', 'nymph', or 'fairy'. I have chosen to translate both words as 'sprite', linking the term to the more malevolent connotations of a sprite.

mother and Phyunli Jaunsu their grandmother. Kunja was their grandfather and Shobhani their sister. Raja Manshaha had given them fertile fields of grain at Bagudi and it is from this that their name became Bagadwal. Jitu Bagadwal was a frivolous man who roamed freely looking for entertainment everywhere. Like a bee he would fly this way and that.

Once as the monsoon arrived he was reminded of the need to transplant the rice in his fields. Jitu sent his brother Shobhanu to consult with their *paṇḍit*. The *paṇḍit* said that, according to his astrological reading, it is their sister, Shobhani (who is married and lives with her in-laws), who must work in the fields. Shobhanu returns and tells his family everything. Their mother wants to send Shobhanu to collect Shobhani but Jitu himself wants to go. 'My brother does not understand things properly, it is I who must go'. At that moment Jitu's goat sneezes. His mother recognises this as an ominous sign and tries to stop him from going. However, Jitu tells her, 'The sixth day of the month of *Asāḍh* has been set down by the *paṇḍit* for transplanting the rice. Whatever it takes, I must bring my sister'.

Jitu gets ready to go. His wife also complains, saying, 'I know what you are really trying to do. You are just going to have a good time with your in-laws'. But Jitu listens to no one. He packs up his flute and heads off.

As he travels through the hot midday sun he reaches Rainthal where, after taking a short rest, he begins to play his nine-note flute. Hearing the sweet sounds of his flute, the nine sprites of Khair come to him and sit on his hands, nose, ears and eyes where they begin to drink his blood. Jitu calls on his house deity, Bhairav, for help. The sprites agree to leave Jitu after making him promise to return.

Jitu reaches his sister Shobhani and meets his in-laws and has a great time. Jitu tells his in-laws that he doesn't know whether he will meet them again.

He returns to his house with his sister. The day for planting arrives and preparations are made. Jitu takes his oxen and reaches the fields. As he takes the second turn with his oxen the sprites land on his nose, ears and eyes and drink all his blood. He falls down and is swallowed into the earth (Bhatt 1976: 181-188).

The progression of the narrative in Chatak's version of the story largely conforms to Bhatt's version as presented here. Some extra detail, particularly related to the history of the Bagadwal family's land grant from the king, as well as the details of the landscape and forest where the sprites meet Jitu, are included. In addition, in Chatak's version, Jitu takes out his flute to play it again while driving his oxen in the fields and this is why the sprites return. However, in both versions, the central episode of the story remains that of the sprites hearing Bagadwal's flute, catching him, and then eventually killing him so that he is swallowed up into the earth.

Elsewhere (Alter 2008: 71-72) I have mentioned this story as well as the paradoxical *imaging* of flutes as instruments 'of the hills' even though they are rarely played in Garhwal at present. Nautiyal (1981: 464) suggests that parents in the hills discourage their children from playing the flute because the flute's sound might attract dangerous sprites just as in the story of Jitu Bagadwal. Petshali (2002: 123) also mentions the present-day limited existence of the flute—more specifically the double flute called the *algojā* (or *joñyā muralī*)—in the hills and, like Nautiyal, suggests that a prevalent attitude linking flutes with dangerous sprites could be a reason for a dearth of such instruments in the hills today. Significantly, as Petshali's (ibid.) research suggests, flutes in the Uttarakhand region, while extremely limited in number, are all end-blown types.

Thus, there appears to be a broader imaging of the flute amongst Garhwalis and other hill residents that portrays the instrument as dangerous and therefore best avoided. To me such an attitude is curious and at odds with the broader Indian perception of flutes being played in the mountains. Most people reading this article will agree that the Indian film industry enhances this connection by regularly using flute melodies as sonic backdrops to dance scenes in alpine meadows. At the very least, the situation needs closer investigation to provide more detailed comments about the imaging of the flute in the Himalayas. Does the flute appear in other stories from the region? What are the social meanings attached to the instrument as well as its sound? Does the acoustic environment of mountainous regions have anything at all to do with this?

To begin answering these questions I first turn to the broader folklore sources that I have come across while researching music in the area. Significantly, the epic of Jitu Bagadwal is not alone in mentioning

flutes. A more comprehensive examination of other stories from the region provides a more nuanced perspective on how the instrument is more broadly imagined. Thereafter, an example of flute performance from Nepal is worth mentioning for the different attitude that clearly prevails amongst the Newars of the Kathmandu valley.⁴ A final comment on the flute and its association with Krishna ends this article, because the imagery of Krishna playing the flute is clearly a conventional Hindu imaging of the instrument.

Other examples of flutes in epic tales

In his book, *Garhwālī Lok Gāthāeṅ*, Chatak (1996: 288-460) lists fifteen *pawārās* (heroic tales) as well as a number of other folk epics and stories classified into different genres. 'Jitū Bagaḍwāl' is one of these *pawārās*. Two others also mention flute playing to some extent as part of their stories and these are 'Garhū Summyāl' and 'Sūraj Nāg (Kuñwar)'.⁵ In addition, the story of Kālū Bhaṇḍārī briefly mentions sprites but not in association with flutes. Bhatt (1976: 180-262) gives the stories of ten *pawārās*, amongst which 'Jitū Bagaḍwāl',⁶ 'Garhū Sumyāl' and 'Surjū Kuñwar (Sūraj Nāg)' all refer to flutes somewhere in their stories. Elsewhere, in a segment on ghost and demon stories, Bhatt (1976: 329-330) mentions a short story linking shepherds with sprites, but no flutes are mentioned in this particular story.

Gairola (Oakley and Gairola [1935] 1988: 33-165) presents approximately 28 epic tales in an abbreviated English translation, amongst which two mention flutes: 'Surju Kunwar' and 'Kunji Pal and Kirti Pal'. In addition, the story of 'Brahma Deo and Birma Dotiali' includes a wedding scene in which the hero 'went round dancing and playing on his musical instrument' making the bridegroom's party 'unconscious by means of his magical incantations' (ibid.: 140). In the latter half of the book, Oakley (ibid.: 292-294) relates what he refers to as the story of 'The Prince and the Celestial Flowers', in which a magical flute plays a prominent part.

4 An investigation of flute performance in Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir would of course also be interesting for comparison. However, because of the sources I have at hand, the discussion here is limited to the areas of Uttarakhand and Nepal.

5 Sung by Mangat Das of Tyunkhar and Rudi of Tilpara. See footnote 11 for an explanation of the connection between the family names of Nag, Kunwar, Kanwal and Ramola.

6 No singer given.

Oakley and Gairola's publication includes no mention of the story of Jitū Bagadwāl.⁷

The story of Malushahi and Rajula is particularly well known in Kumaon. Meissner's three volume set titled *Malushahi and Rajula: A ballad from Kumaon (India) as sung by Gopi Das* is perhaps the most in-depth study. In addition, Upreti (n.d.) provides a shorter summary of the epic and gives three versions sung by different singers.⁸ The first version, sung by Mohan Singh, includes a scene in which the Ramola family plays their 'flute and drum', thus attracting sprites to dance (Upreti *ibid.*: 14). Chatak and Bhatt both also provide versions of the story of Malushahi and Rajula but neither includes a scene with flutes. Similarly, Gairola (Oakley and Gairola [1935] 1988: 92-94) provides a version of the same epic but no mention of flutes is made.

Amongst my own field recordings of singers from the Garhwal region the epic of Kirthipal and Kunjpal, sung by Bhag Chand, is the only story in which flutes play a part. The version of the same story presented by Gairola does not include a mention of flutes.

Prayag Joshi has published at least three volumes of compilations of folk epics from Kumaon under the title *Kumāonī Lok Gāthāeñ*. While I have been unable to consult all of these volumes, flutes certainly play a part in the particular stories I have read. His publications tend to give more lengthy versions of the stories than publications by authors such as Gairola, Bhatt, Chatak and Upreti. For instance, in Part 2 of his third volume he relates the epic associated with the Ramaol family. Various Garhwali epics include references to the Ramaol family but naturally they use the Garhwali pronunciation—*Ramolā*. In addition, the Kanwal family, who are the in-laws of the Ramaols, feature prominently in the 'Ramaol' epic. The Kanwals too appear in various Garhwali epics but again with the Garhwali pronunciation—*Kuñwar*. However, in spite of the dual provenance of the family names in Kumaon and Garhwal, the epic is clearly a Kumaoni epic and Joshi simply titles it 'Ramaol'. Joshi's presentation of the epic (1994: Pt. 2, 1-130) includes four somewhat distinct segments. Within these, the

7 The fact that Oakley and Gairola's sources are largely from Kumaon or Eastern Garhwal seems to explain this absence.

8 The second version provided by Upreti is by a singer named Gopi Das who may well be the same singer recorded by Meissner. However, Upreti's publication does not make this clear. Upreti's third version is sung by Jogaram.

segments titled 'Dūdh Kañwal', 'Himānt Jātrā', 'Barmī Kañwal', and 'Sūraj Kañwal' all include scenes with flutes.⁹

This brief summary of folk epics from the state of Uttarakhand is by no means comprehensive. Undoubtedly there are other songs, ballads and epics that portray the flute in ways similar or slightly different to the sources mentioned here. However, at the very least, the list given here provides a snapshot of a number of different collections of epics, and examines a variety of references to flutes within a broad section of the folklore of the region.

Orality and the construction of stories

Before proceeding further, it is essential to reiterate a long-standing problem that influences any study of folklore such as this. Texts that are created for the purposes of publication, even if they purport to be transcriptions of original oral renditions, are very distant from their original sources. In this context it is important to note that Chatak, Upreti, and Joshi all provide the names of their informants. Hence the footnotes in the present article provide the names of these oral sources. Nonetheless, the exact processes involved in the transcription, abbreviation, and translation (between Garhwali, Kumaoni, Hindi and English) of the stories mentioned are exceedingly complex and undoubtedly influence aspects of what I discuss below. Perhaps of most significance here is an acknowledgement that these stories originally existed (and in some cases still exist) as oral renditions. The extensive theoretical literature surrounding the study of oral traditions such as these warns us to understand texts not only as constructed by literate researchers but also influenced by processes of oral construction.

While the literature surrounding the study of orality and oral traditions is too extensive to be meaningfully cited here, one particular aspect deserves attention. The exact nature of a story and what constitutes the boundaries for any particular story are not exact. Aspects such as scenes, themes, common collocations of words and emphatic verbal gestures may emerge again and again in a variety of stories, either as performative techniques or as structural aids. Numerous examples of such devices could be provided from the stories mentioned above, including flying

9 All segments are sung by Kaluram of Masrari in Pithoragarh District.

horses, message-carrying bees, disguised jogis, oaths between mothers during coincident pregnancies, and hiding people's souls in parrots. 'Sweet sounding flutes' may well be a trans-epic theme that at least partially results from processes of oral rendition. The appearance in several different stories of flutes in association with sprites, shepherds and dancing could well result from an oral tradition in which these links are regularly made as performance devices. However, I believe the issue is more complex than this.

The imaging of flutes in other epics

When flutes are mentioned in other stories they are almost always associated with magic powers that involve either special forms of communication or murderous intentions. When flutes are played forest sprites frequently appear, and such scenes are always set in high mountain geographies. A summary of episodes that incorporate flutes is of value here to illustrate the ways in which the instrument is described consistently across many different stories from the Uttarakhand region.

Garhū Summyāl

Garhu is an accomplished flute player. He takes his nine-note flute into the forest while looking for his uncle's buffaloes. There he takes out his flute and begins to play, and its sound spreads throughout the forest. Saru Kumen, a stunningly beautiful woman, lives in Gangoli Hat near the forest. She hears the sound of Garhu's flute and goes off in search of the flute player. She tells her girlfriends to keep her disappearance secret, and to tell her mother that she has either drowned in a river or fallen off a cliff. When she meets Garhu she sees that he is indeed a strong and handsome man. He takes her home to introduce her to his mother and then marries her.

Sūraj Nāg (Kuñwar)

With great difficulty and the help of Guru Gorakhnath, Suraj Nag manages to escape from a witches' circle. Climbing a mountain ridge of Khaint, he reaches the top where he sits down to take a rest. There he takes out his nine-note flute and plays it, filling the mountain peaks with its sound. The snow mountains reverberate with the sound of his flute. It also reaches the ears of the sprites who live in that area. 'Who is making this haunting

melody on the flute?’ they ask themselves and race to find out. Suraj remains a prisoner of the sprites for nine days and nine nights. Then he comes to his senses and tells the sprites, ‘I must go to the land of Bhot to collect my wife. Don’t worry, I will return to you after I do this’.

Gairola’s version of the ‘Surju Kunwar’ story is clearly related to Bhatt’s and Chatak’s ‘Sūraj Nāg’, although it is not exactly the same. However, even in Gairola’s (ibid.: 45) version, a flute is used to call and capture the sprites of Khaint.

Kirthipāl and Kunjepāl

Elsewhere (Alter 2008: 175) I have related the story of Kirthipal and Kunjepal, in which Kunjepal’s son, Khetrapal, dressed like a *sādhu*, arrives with his flute at a wedding party. The groom’s party is preparing to marry Lilawati (who was betrothed to Khetrapal earlier in the story). Khetrapal takes out his flute and makes the wedding party dance. He makes the bread and even the stove on which it was cooked dance. Eventually he kills the bridegroom’s party by making them dance.

Malushahi and Rajula

Mohan Singh’s version of ‘Malushahi and Rajula’ as presented by Upreti (ibid.: 14) makes only one brief reference to flutes. The father of Rajula travels to Bairath to do some trading, and on the way he meets the Ramolas. At night the Ramolas hold a celebration at which they play their flute and drum. Hearing the flute and drum, the sprites ‘came down from the Court of Indra to dance to their music’ (ibid.). In Upreti’s translation, nothing particularly ominous happens, though the flute is used to make the sprites dance.

The Prince and the Celestial Flowers

In this story as related by Oakley (Oakley and Gairola ibid.: 288-295), a servant of the king is sent to collect celestial flowers (*parijat*). A dervish tells him that there is a certain place where fairies ‘dance to the tune of a flute’ and ‘whenever the flute is blown the fairies dance and the celestial flowers fall down on them’ (ibid.: 292). He manages to see the event and collects the flute when they finish their dancing in the morning. The flute is clearly magical and is desired by many of the people he meets on the way home. When he finally returns to the king’s court he takes out the flute

and plays it. The fairies ‘danced so bewitchingly that the celestial flowers poured down on them in the presence of the king and his courtiers’ (ibid.: 294). Thus the servant, who actually turns out to be a prince, gains what he desires.

Ramaol

The more lengthy segments of the epic ‘Ramaol’ presented by Joshi (1994, vol. 3, pt. 2: 1-130)¹⁰ seem to have a number of indirect links to some of the stories mentioned above. First, the name ‘Ramaol’, which Joshi gives to the overall set of stories, provides a link to the episode in ‘Malushahi and Rajula’ sung by Mohan Singh, in which the Ramolas (Ramaols) also feature. Second, the Kanwals (Garhwali: *Kuñwar*) and the Ramaols are related. As Joshi (1994: ii) mentions, the Ramaols are the in-laws of the Kanwals and therefore the segments within the epic carry the names of many Kanwals. In particular, the fourth segment of Joshi’s version is given the subtitle ‘Sūraj Kañwal’ which, as a title/name, is linked to the ‘Sūraj Nāg (Kuñwar)’ stories given by Gairola, Bhatt and Chatak.¹¹ However, Joshi’s version is significantly different to the Garhwali versions and is also much more lengthy. The length and style of Joshi’s presentation may in some ways account for the considerable differences between the Garhwali and Kumaoni versions. For the purposes of the present discussion, the individual listing of segments of the story as presented by Joshi makes it easier to refer to episodes within the story.

Ramaol: Dūdh Kañwal

The story of Dūdh Kañwal contains three separate instances of flute playing. In the first (Joshi ibid.: 20-21) Dudh Kanwal dreams of a beautiful woman from Hundesh (Tibet), named Hyunkali Kumari. The dream astounds him so much that he wakes in the middle of the night feeling very confused. He takes out his golden flute and breaks the silence with his notes. His first phrase goes to the underworld. His second phrase goes to the heavenly abode of Indra and wakes the sprites of Indra. The third

10 In this publication, Joshi divides the book into two parts and begins the pagination again from number 1 in the second part.

11 The Kanwals are related to the Nag caste through their mother’s lineage. *Kuñwar* is the Garhwali pronunciation of the Kumaoni *Kañwal*. Therefore some authors treat *Nāg*, *Kañwal* and *Kuñwar* synonymously. The Kunwars and the Ramolas are in-laws.

phrase goes to the nine regions of the Earth. His flute eventually wakes his mother, who asks him what is going on.

In the second episode that incorporates a flute, Dudh Kanwal is on his way to Hundesh. In the high mountains, where the trees are covered with dew from the clouds, he stops to rest. He takes out his sweet sounding flute and fills the land of Hundesh with his meaningful sound (*shabd-nād*). The women of Hundesh are spinning rope from the grass of the high mountains. They hear his flute and stop their spinning to come to see who has arrived in their midst.

The last episode in this segment of the story in which the flute is referenced is part of a more lengthy scene involving music making of various kinds (Joshi *ibid.*: 32-33). The sound of the flute makes the people of Hundesh aware of Dudh Kanwal's imminent arrival. Later he and his entourage disguise themselves as lamas and use their drums (*ḍamru*) to mesmerise the Huniyas and make them dance.

Ramaol: Himānt Jātrā

The second segment of Joshi's 'Ramaol' is titled 'Himānt Jātrā' and in it there is an episode in which Sidwa and Bidwa Ramaol use their flutes and whistles to call and collect a flock of sheep together.¹²

Ramaol: Barmī Kañwal

The third segment of the Ramaol epic is largely centred around the protagonist Bhrām Kanwal (Barmi Kanwal). After the story has proceeded for some time, Bhrām Kanwal sees the beautiful Hyunlawati of Hundesh in a dream. He wakes up and is inspired to play his flute. This wakes his mother, who asks him why he has played his flute in the middle of the night. At this moment in the story, nothing particularly magical or ominous is associated with the flute's sound.

Later in the story, Bhrām Kanwal and his brother-in-law Vikhyat Ramaol are travelling near Khaint Khal (*ibid.*: 90-91).¹³ Ramaol grabs his many-coloured flute and fills the alpine meadows with its sound before

12 In the story that Gairola (*ibid.*:92) titles 'Gangu Ramola' the story's main protagonists, Sidwa and Bidwa Ramola (Ramaol), are the sons of Gangu Ramola. Sidwa and Bidwa appear again in Joshi's 'Sūraj Kañwal' story.

13 The reference to Khaint Khal is reminiscent of 'Jitū Bagaḍwāl'. Most people who speak about the Bagaḍwal story suggest that it is on Khaint mountain that Jitū plays his flute.

leaving to ask for alms somewhere far away. In the mean time Bhram Kanwal falls asleep.

There are sixteen hundred sprites of Khaint who live amongst the many branches of the trees surrounding the meadow. They are attracted by the pathos of the flute's sound and begin looking for the person who played it. Vikhyat Ramaol's drum is also lying there. When the sprites arrive, they think that perhaps someone has died and left his drum out in the open. The narrator of the story tells the sprites: 'Don't cause any trouble here—go back to your mountain peaks'. They all go back except for the very last one, named Padma. She sees Bhram Kanwal and steals away his soul to Indra's heavenly abode. Vikhyat Ramaol returns from seeking alms and starts searching for Bhram Kanwal. 'Say something my brother-in-law. Speak!', he calls out. But how can someone without a soul speak? Another member of the Ramaol family, Sidwa Ramaol, plays his flute and its sound goes to the mountain peaks. The sixteen hundred sprites come down to speak, saying, 'We are your sisters, Ramaol'. Vikhyat Ramaol does not greet them but blames them for taking the life of his brother-in-law, Bhram Kanwal.

Later, at the end of the story, Vikhyat Ramaol goes to Hundesh and marries Hyunlawati. She helps him find his brother-in-law's body and they get the sprites to bring him back to life, though in this case no flute is used.

Ramaol: Sūraj Kaiwal

In the land of the Ramaols there is a great drought. The Ramaols take out their flutes and their unfortunate circumstances are forgotten as they play (ibid.: 116). They take out their drums and the sound of their music reaches the heavenly abode of Indra and Shiva where there are 22 sprite sisters. 21 sprites fly back to Indraoti, leaving one behind. The last sprite sucks out the life of Bidwa Kanwal, leaving his brother Sidwa behind. Sidwa goes in search of his brother.

Cultural imagination and the flute

The brief excerpts of scenes with flutes provided here demonstrate several things about the way the instrument is perceived in the region of Uttarakhand. First, its appearance in many different stories and epics seems to suggest a broader cultural imagination for the instrument that

goes beyond a mere prop or an interesting episode. Second, its association with supernatural beings seems to indicate a general acceptance that the instrument's sound may well hold spiritual power of some kind. Third, the instrument is much more frequently associated with high altitude, alpine locations than with lower altitudes or valleys.

This is what the stories and epics tell us. By contrast, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, I have only rarely come across flute players in the rural regions of Garhwal where I have undertaken research. People whom I have asked about the fact suggest that high mountain shepherds sometimes play the instrument, though I have never been sure if this kind of response is based on actual observation or on stories such as those mentioned above. Other researchers in the Garhwal area with whom I have spoken have admitted that their experience is similar to mine. While not totally absent, the flute's presence is certainly minimal. The citations of Nautiyal and Petshali given earlier in this paper confirm a situation of limited flute performance practice in the hills.

The distinction between rural and urban locations is important to mention here. In Uttarakhand, urban centres with populations of more than 100,000 exist only on the plains and the situation regarding the performance of flutes in these larger urban centres is very different to those associated with the stories given above. The imaging of flutes as dangerous and/or magical is undoubtedly a part of rural societies and not so strongly associated with urban locations. What is described above for Uttarakhand, therefore, may well hold true for other rural communities in other parts of the Himalaya, including Nepal. However, the musical practices of urbanised Newar communities in the Kathmandu valley are remarkably different to those described above.

Newar flutes in the Kathmandu valley

Greene (2003) presents an extended description of the way in which flutes play a significant role in daily pilgrimages carried out by Buddhist Newars during the summer month of Gunla. He describes his particular research undertaken with the Maharjan farmer caste of Newars who form musical ensembles containing many flutes and percussion instruments. Before the month of Gunla, groups begin to gather together to rehearse for the pilgrimage in which specific repertoire items are associated with specific stupas and temples along the route.

As music and procession were used to pay homage to the Buddha at his cremation, so Mahārjans play music and conduct processions to pay homage to the chaityas and stūpas that mark key places on the landscape of northwestern Kathmandu....Worshipful activity, particularly evident in flute and drum pilgrimage, is how the Buddhist marg is enacted by Mahārjans (Greene 2003: 211).

In other areas of Nepal too, the flute seems to be more prominent than in Uttarakhand. Tingey (1994: 64) describes the use of one or two *muralī* by musician caste group ensembles in Gorkha. Though the instrument is not the main instrument of the ensemble, it is clearly used regularly for ritual purposes and for weddings. Elsewhere, Henderson (1996: 442) mentions the inclusion of flutes in devotional ensembles in Kathmandu. Nonetheless, there appears to be less stigma attached to flute playing in urban locations in Nepal than in the Indian Himalaya of Uttarakhand.

Krishna's flute: magic and the seduction of *gopis*

Any examination of the flute and its associated meanings and images in South Asia must consider the image of Krishna. The ubiquitous image of Krishna playing a transverse flute in bucolic scenes surrounded by cows is well known to almost everyone. As Wade suggests:

In ancient Indian sculpture and painting, flutes are horizontal, not vertical. Such sources frequently show women playing them in accompaniment to dancing; however, from the bhakti period of North Indian religious history (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), the Indian transverse flute emerged as a male-gendered instrument, a sacred and sexual icon seen as the enticing instrument of the sometimes mischievous deity Krishna, whose playing attracted women's devotion (Wade 2000: 306).

Where does Krishna reside in the Garhwali/Kumaoni context? The *Pañḍavalilā* of Garhwal is one place. As Sax (2002) and I (Alter *ibid.*: 93-134) have both documented, the *Pañḍavalilā* is a significant ritual in the higher regions of Garhwal in which the stories of the Pandavas from the *Mahābhārata* are dramatised and danced. Krishna plays a key role in the story as a mentor and ally of the Pandavas. His assistance during various

actions, which includes a fair degree of deceit, helps the Pandavas prevail in their war against the Kauravas (for example, see Sax 2002: 98-105). However, the image of Krishna in the Garhwali *Paiṇḍavalīlā* is a different image to that of the Bhakti traditions. In the Garhwali rituals I observed, he was never shown with a flute. Sax's description of the *Paiṇḍavalīlā* also never mentions Krishna as a flute-playing cowherd. It therefore seems that, for most rural Garhwalis, the image of Krishna is not one that incorporates flute playing.

Other references to Krishna do exist in Kumaon in relation to the story of the Ramaols. In Gairola's story of Gangu Ramaol, Gangu begins as a heretic and a bad ruler. Krishna wants to chastise him and therefore puts him through many adversities. Eventually Gangu is persuaded to consult the Brahmans to try to ascertain why his kingdom is undergoing so many hardships. They tell him his misfortune is due 'to the wrath of his family God Krishna and that he should go on a pilgrimage to Dwarka and appease the God's wrath' (Oakley and Gairola [1935] 1988: 98-99). Gangu does as he is told and then builds a number of temples in honour of Krishna.

The Ramaols' devotion to Krishna is also mentioned by Joshi (1994, vol. 3, Pt 2: 53). In his story of the Himānt Jātrā he refers to Sidwa and Bidwa Ramaol as devotees of Krishna. Significantly, however, in these stories too, Krishna is not portrayed as a flute-playing cowherd.

The beguiling nature of the flute's sound

Clearly, the flute and its sound hold different symbolic meanings for different people in different parts of the Himalaya. The image of the flute revealed in the epics of Uttarakhand is not one that includes stories associated with the Krishna Bhakti traditions of the plains. However, the magical aspects of the flute's sound—particularly the way the instrument has the ability to entrance those who listen to it—would suggest that ideologies surrounding flutes in South Asia may not be as disparate as these examples suggest.

A summary of the flute's imaging within the Uttarakhand epics discussed in this paper may help clarify the situation. The first thing to note is that, in spite of 'Jītū Bagaḍwāl's' popularity and iconicity within the Garhwal region, flutes appear in quite a few other stories. In particular, the 'Ramaol' epic(s) as presented by Joshi (1994) include(s) a plethora of episodes in which music plays a part, and in many of these the

flute is present. While Nautiyal (1981) and Petshali (2002) suggest that ‘Jitū Bagadwāl’ is to blame for the stigma attached to the instrument, there are numerous other stories that could equally shoulder the blame. Flutes are frequently associated with sprites and always have the power to make people and/or sprites dance. In most cases this dancing is in a possessed state and can—as in the story of Kirthipal and Kunjpal—lead to death.

Sprites and flutes are linked in almost all the stories given above. Death at the hands of sprites who are summoned by the sound of the flute is clearly a potential danger. Jitu Bagadwal, Suraj Nag (Kunwar), Bhrām Kanwal and Bidwa Kanwal are all bewitched by the sprites. In other cases the sprites are clearly attracted by the sound of the flute even if they do not cause any immediate harm. In the epic of Malushahi and Rajula the Ramolas’ flute and drum attract the sprites to dance. Dudh Kanwal’s flute also wakes the sprites of Indra. In ‘The Prince and the Celestial Flowers’ the prince’s flute attracts the fairies who dance and bring the celestial flowers to the king.

Flutes and alpine geographies are also always linked. In this sense it is important to remember that low altitude (roughly 800-1500 metre) forests in the Himalaya are less thick than higher altitude forests (roughly 1500-3500 metres). Higher forests are made up of much larger and more densely organised trees. Consequently, in the mountains, forests are associated more closely with higher altitudes than with lower valleys. Flutes played in forests are, by definition, being played at higher altitudes. Those played on alpine meadows are also, by definition, played at high altitudes. This is where sprites live and this is where shepherds tend their flocks. It should surprise no one that Sidwa and Bidwa Ramola use their whistles and flutes to gather their sheep together.

If references to flutes are made in stories, they frequently are said to have nine notes, and to be colourful, golden and/or sweet sounding. Consequently, if a flute carries an adjective that describes it, it will be one of these. The reference to nine notes is particularly interesting. No stories mention a flute with a different number of notes. Single pipe flutes do not normally have nine holes but, through over blowing, they can sound many more notes than just nine. The double pipe end-blown flute, referred to as either *algojā*, *rāmsur*, or *joṇyā muralī* can, however, have nine ‘holes’: six finger holes on one pipe and three on the second pipe.

This may be what the ‘nine-note *muralī*’ collocation is referring to.

However, I think the significance of the number nine is more cosmological than real. Nine is a significant number that surfaces throughout Hindu practice in different forms. The nine nights of the *Navrātri* festival and the nine planetary gods are two instances in which nine is believed to be significant. Like the flute in the Garhwali and Kumaoni stories mentioned here, other things are described using the number nine: the nine *maund naqārā*, the nine *lākh* warriors, the nine sisters and more. Nine is significant and anything with nine is not just ordinary.

In all the stories referenced here, the extra-ordinary power of the flute is evident. Its ability to communicate across long distances and through disjunctures of space and time is acknowledged. In one sense, this is a recognition of the physical capabilities of the instrument. Anyone who has actually heard a flute being played in the mountains will know that the sound does indeed travel far. The existence of a flute is confirmed by sound before it is located physically. Furthermore, its melody implies pathos. The phrases mean something and indicate a state of mind in the player. Mothers know there is something on their sons' minds. Sprites know there is an emotional tension at the source of the sound. Garhu Summyal's flute mesmerises Saru Kumen and she understands his intentions. In this way the sound of the flute is packed with emotion and meaning that is teleological: it is transported across space and requires a response.

At this level, Krishna's flute is not so different. He uses it to beguile the *gopis*, sending his seductive message through the forest. Like Garhu Sumyal he secures his desires. The *gopis*, like forest sprites, are attracted by the sound of his flute.

Amongst the Newars, the sound of the flute during the month of Gunla is tied to specific locations and creates a sacred geography through which devotees traverse and seek *punya*, religious merit. The situation, and the attitude towards flutes, is therefore *not* like that in Uttarakhand. Nonetheless, with or without potential danger, the flute's sound holds spiritual power. In Nepal this spiritual power is used to gain *punya* while in Garhwal it may result in death and destruction. Krishna's flute, by contrast, is somewhere in between. On the one hand, it is a tool of seduction not unlike the dangerous flutes of Uttarakhand. On the other hand, the result of such seduction is not destructive. Instead, succumbing to such seduction hints at the attainment of a divine love. In none of the three cases does the flute simply produce a sweet melody that acts as a

backdrop to dancing, processing or seduction. Its sound actively provokes those in the vicinity, including supernatural beings, to sit up and take note of who is playing the instrument/s and where they are being played. In hills and forests, the physical experience of a flute is undoubtedly aural before it is visual. We hear it before we see it and are drawn to action by its sound before knowing exactly who the performer/s might be.

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The Monarch's Gift: Critical notes on the constitutional process in Bhutan

Winnie Bothe

In 2001 the Bhutanese state took an important step in its process of state formation, as the country embarked on a journey that would turn it into a constitutional monarchy in 2008. This process is typically described by academics and the international media as one in which the King gave the constitution as a 'gift' to the people. However, there are some puzzling issues connected to this representation. It is widely argued that the new constitution was a gift which the people of Bhutan did not want. Moreover, the King himself did not view it as a gift as such. The idea of the constitution as a 'gift' therefore needs to be deconstructed. In so doing, this article analyses how the idea of the constitution being a gift relates to its birth process, and which strategic purposes this discourse serves. It shows how this idea serves to reproduce former discourses on authority, whilst relegating the citizens to the role of subjects. The article is a novel contribution to the debate on Bhutan's transition. It views this historic moment in the process of Bhutanese state formation as a highly symbolic event and examines it against the background of detailed ethnographic material.

The idea of the constitution as a gift

The Bhutanese discourse on the constitution generally presents it as a 'gift' from the King, as is indicated here by a member of the Constitutional Committee, interviewed prior to the distribution of the first draft:

Unlike other countries we did not request for the constitution. We even requested not to approve the constitution, but the King gifted this to the people (Chair of DYT, central Bhutan, June 2005).

This perspective is mirrored in the academic discourse on Bhutan, as is somewhat ironically noted by Whitecross:

...to date 'peoples power' in Bhutan has been highly absent. Rather, democratization is, in fact, the King's Gift (Whitecross, forthcoming).

Such views reflect the general argument in which the constitution is seen as not being claimed, taken or even wanted by the 'people', but being 'gifted' to them by their benevolent and visionary King. Normally, a gift is something that the 'giver' intends to give as a gift, and something the 'giftee' equally wants to receive. In a Bhutanese context, however, the general view is that the 'people' did not want this gift. This is exemplified by the view of the Speaker in the National Assembly ('The Constitution: a grave responsibility', *Kuensel*, 22 June 2005): 'In Bhutan the sacred command came even as the people pleaded with His Majesty not to devolve his power'. More curiously, even the King himself did not perceive the constitution as a gift:

The Constitution is not a gift from the King to the people but it is the responsibility of all sections of the Bhutanese people to draft a Constitution which will be relevant and beneficial for Bhutan ('Draft Constitution to be distributed to all Bhutanese', *Kuensel*, 23 March 2005).

Thus, even if the King accepts the premise that he has conceived the constitution, he now believes that it is possible to promote ownership through popular debate between the monarchy and the 'people'. This raises questions about the effect of this kind of top-down discussion on processes of constructing citizenship in a cultural context so distinctively different from a western social imaginary (as described by Taylor (2004)). The principal argument of this article is that the process of 'gifting' the constitution serves to reproduce earlier understandings of authority by emphasising the relationship between the citizens and the state as one that is characterised by loyalty, divinity and unequal worth. As a consequence, it runs the risk of promoting processes of subjugation rather than deliberation. This raises the principal question of how the debates construct the role of the Bhutanese as citizens. Do they effectively construct them as participants in and carriers of a culture of political engagement, or do they have the perverse effect of constructing them as subjects of state authorities?

The article deconstructs the idea of the constitution as a gift in the following ways. First, it places the process in the historical context of state formation. Next, it scrutinises the implicit strategic purpose of the

debates, and, as an extension of this, the effect that the discourse of 'gifting' the constitution has on the way in which the locals are constructed as citizens. Finally, it places the process within the context of the hierarchies of the field.

The state as a symbolic apparatus

It goes without saying that the Bhutanese decision to adopt a western style constitution is an important step in redefining the relationship between the Bhutanese state and its citizens. The academic literature on the Bhutanese constitutional process generally views it as a process of transferring sovereign power from the monarchy to the 'people', metaphorically expressed in the idea of the constitution as 'the King's Gift' (Whitecross, forthcoming; Mathou 2008; Sinpeng 2007).

Although this formalistic perspective is not necessarily wrong, it has limited analytical scope. By contrast, I suggest that much stands to be gained by adopting Bourdieu's perspective on the state as being both a physical and symbolic apparatus (1972: 59). The inception of the constitution can thus be understood against the background of larger trajectories of state formation. These are seen as not simply contestations over the formal issue of rights, but equally, or even more so, as contestations over the language in which the state can be imagined. Seen from this viewpoint, the production and reproduction of languages of authority are formative in the development of the relationship between the state and its citizens. Moreover, these languages are enmeshed in the material, cultural as well as symbolic hierarchies of the field.

From this perspective, the constitutional process is much more than just the enactment of a written document. It is equally a process of constructing the future citizen role, because it represents a discursive meeting that frames the future relationship between the state and its citizens. This presents a view of citizenship as constructed, rather than as simply constituted through historic processes of expanding formal citizen rights, as is most famously presented by T.S. Marshall (1950). It reflects a contrasting move in development research, from a view of citizenship as a formal and static attribute to a more processual view of citizenship as a set of practices that are constantly negotiated (see Gaventa and Jones 2002). This perspective, however, tends to ignore how the citizenship role is equally constructed by larger discourses on authority. In order

to compensate for this, I apply Barbara Cruikshank's understanding of citizenship as a socially constructed role, as opposed to a natural category into which the individual is born. As she eloquently puts it, 'Citizens are not born; they are made' (1999: 1-2). Inspired by her analytical approach, I place my main emphasis on the ways in which discourses on authority impact upon the process of constructing the citizen role. In order to pursue this perspective, I draw on Somers' narrative methodology (1994). Somers' approach is useful as a way of understanding how meta-narratives, or what Foucault terms 'discourse', are translated into public narratives that cover Bhutanese society in its entirety, and how these eventually form the 'social imaginary' of the actors; i.e. the shared cognitive map held by the agents of the field (Taylor 2004: 19).

This article bases itself on participant observation of a ceremony in the western part of Bhutan in which the constitution was handed over to the people. It also draws upon *Kuensel's* account of the constitutional debates, with a particular focus on the debate in Thimphu.¹ But most importantly, it is rooted in a thorough ethnographic understanding of Bhutanese social relations, derived from interviews with 160 citizens at the rural site and 37 elite interviews conducted nation wide. In order to keep my promises and to ensure the safety of my respondents, personal and place names have been removed from the published version of this article.

Trajectories of state formation

Lamas from the Drukpa Kargypa lineage of Buddhism consolidated the Bhutanese state in its present form in the 17th century. Led by their charismatic abbot, best known as the Zhabdrung, the Drukpa lamas established their dominant position as governors over state and society in competition with other Buddhist lineages. When the theocracy was replaced by a monarchy at the beginning of the 20th century, this elite maintained its dominant position under the leadership of the Wangchuck dynasty. Bhutan's main defence during the early phases of the monarchy was a passive and introvert policy of invisibility through isolation.

Until the end of the 1950s, the country remained little affected by outside discourses. After 1960, however, its approach to state formation

1 *Kuensel* was a government controlled newspaper, and Bhutan's only newspaper, at the time.

became thoroughly entangled with two meta-narratives originating in the enlightenment period: first the modernity narrative, and later the essentialist narrative. The underlying motive can be ascribed to a perceived need to defend Bhutan's vulnerable position as a small state, located with its tiny population between the two most populous countries in the world. Until the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Bhutan shared a number of similarities with that country. Both were Buddhist states organised around a feudalistic relationship between local power holders and their subjects, often with lamas in the role as feudal lords (Aris 1994a: 53). When Mao occupied Tibet militarily in 1959, he used the ideological rationalisation that his mission was to free the Tibetans from an oppressive and feudal system. In light of the fact that the Chinese had never abandoned their historical view of Bhutan as a part of the territories of the 'Kingdom in the Middle' (Aris, 1994a: 99, Mathou 1994: 52), Bhutan's previous policy of 'invisibility through isolation' provided a poor defence and it was left with little choice but to turn towards India. Along with this shift it adopted the modernity narrative as its principal guideline for state formation, albeit tailored to fit a Bhutanese context. As a consequence, Bhutanese citizens were increasingly defined as bearers of social rights to development and political rights to representation.

However, this narrative lost its credibility as a means of ensuring national sovereignty after India's absorption of Sikkim, where demands for political change spearheaded by the Nepali population were instrumental in the downfall of the monarchy. These events produced an escalating fear that the Bhutanese monarchy might suffer a similar fate, particularly in light of the growing economic power of the Nepali (Lhotshampa) population inside Bhutan. With the succession of the fourth King, conservative forces gained in influence, and the response to this real or perceived threat meant that the understanding of the state as an engine of modernisation was gradually replaced by an essentialist approach. This brought with it new ways of understanding sovereignty. The basic 'truth' that was adopted from the essentialist narrative was the argument that the ability of small states to project a shared and unique cultural tradition ensures their national survival. Such a view is evident from the argument of the fourth King:

The emergence of Bhutan as a nation-state has been dependent

upon the articulation of a distinct Bhutanese identity, founded upon our Buddhist beliefs and values, and the promotion of a common language. These have been defining elements in our history and they have made it possible to unify the country and to achieve national homogeneity and cohesion among various linguistic and ethnic groups (RGoB 1999: 18).

This discourse advanced an essentialist understanding of citizenship in terms of 'oneness'. The question of identity, in a country that held several, was interpreted in terms of a Drukpa Kargyupa Buddhist identity (Hutt 2003, chapter 11). According to Aris, culture was deliberately promoted in order to ensure the cultural unification and homogenisation of the country, and to foster a sense of loyalty towards the state (1994b: 17-18). The citizens were 'nationalised' and made to adopt a set of practices under the cultural umbrella of Driglam Namzha. The most visible part of these elaborate practices was the dress code, but they actually covered a whole range of areas, most significantly the display of a properly respectful behaviour towards state officials. However, this culture is associated with the followers of the Drukpa Kargyupa religion, who represent but one of the three largest minorities of the country. In reaction to this perceived 'drukpanisation' of the state, the Lhotshampas, the majority of whom are Hindus, and the Sharchops, who are mostly followers of Nyingmapa Buddhism, rebelled. Towards the end of the 1980s the Lhotshampas demonstrated for cultural and political rights, whilst Gomchens (religious practitioners) spearheaded Sharchop protests for social, political and religious rights at the beginning of the 1990s (Hutt 2003, Sinha 2001).

These protests were perceived as betrayals of the monarchy and the state. As a counter move, an ethnic nationalism was aroused under the nationalist trinity of *tsawasum*, connoting a bond of loyalty between King, Country and People. In the subsequent escalation of events, ethnic groups were set against each other, the army was used against the rebels, and the political stability of the country was shattered. The flight of a seventh of the population (approximately 100,000 Lhotshampas and a smaller number of Sharchops) testifies to the devastating effect of the conflict. These events have been more thoroughly described elsewhere (*ibid*). What is interesting for the purposes of this article is how the response to these protests generated a change in the normative relation between the

state and its citizens. This makes it imperative that we understand the semantic change in ways of understanding authority in the aftermath of the conflict.

Traditionalising authority

The principal argument of this article is that the debates on the constitution need to be analysed against the background of the turn towards an essentialist understanding of statehood. This change is highlighted by Aris, who points at the emerging tension between the primary teachings of Buddhism and the militant aspects of the institutionalised Drukpa Kargyupa school as a root cause (Aris 1994b: 11). Behind this change lay the belief that Bhutan could only defend its *raison d'être* by projecting an image of its cultural tradition as unique. Whilst this worldview would appear to be the main underlying cause of the conflict, it was somewhat ironically reified by it. It led to a state-centric understanding of culture which lay behind the policy of freezing ancient traditions (ibid: 17-18).

Hobsbawn and Ranger point out that tradition is rarely neutral. Drawing on the English case, they observe how the reinvention of the past served to reintroduce the idea of the superior and the inferior (1983:10). In Bhutan, 'ancient traditions' were politicised, popularised and standardised, and in the process attributed different meanings, as convincingly argued by Phuntsho (2004). This politicisation happened primarily through the appropriation and re-articulation of central notions of tantric Buddhism: *tha damtsig*, *tsawasum* and *driglam*. My analysis draws on studies by Dargey and Phuntsho. Whereas Dargey can be seen as an academic spokesperson for the conservative sections of society, Phuntsho represents a liberal group whose members have pursued academic studies outside Bhutan.

According to Dargey, one can distinguish two essentially different political meanings of *tha damtsig*. In my reading, these lie at the root of the politicisation of two cultural notions: *tsawasum* and *driglam*. In the first understanding offered by Dargey, *tha damtsig* denotes a bond of loyalty. In tantric Buddhism it refers to the religious initiation ceremony bestowed by a lama upon his disciple (2005: 14). It symbolises the establishment of a bond of 'pure loyalty' between the two, implying the unquestioned obedience of the disciple. During the theocratic period, this norm became

formative for the relationship between the local lords and their subjects, often with feudal undertones of dependency (Aris 1994a: 53). In the quest to establish national unity, *tha damtsig* likewise became a means of evoking popular loyalty towards governmental authorities (Phuntsho 2004: 571, Whitecross 2010). *Tsawasum* can, in my reading, best be seen as the ideological extension of this reinterpretation.

In a tantric Buddhist context, *tsawasum* denotes the three roots that are expected to assist the disciple in his efforts to obtain enlightenment, and serve as a source of 'blessings, attainments and activities' (Dargey 2005: 39). According to Phuntsho, the notion has been appropriated from Buddhism to fit modern political purposes as the trinity of Bhutanese nationhood. In the search for a shared national identity understood in terms of oneness, it came to signify a bond of loyalty between the population and the political authorities (2004: 571). Dargey describes the character of this bond:

...It basically conveys the three basic foundations of the country—the King, the Government and the People, which means His Majesty as the most benevolent of benefactors, the Royal government as the most considerate and beneficent of governments, and the subjects as the devoted and faithful citizens (2005: 40).

At the heart of this lies the idea of a reciprocal relationship between the governors, who are expected to take on roles as kind, caring and benevolent parents, and the people, who in return are expected to obey the former with unquestioned loyalty. Although the discourse in principle is secular, metaphors that sacralise the rulers have a tendency to slip through. An example is Dargey's projection of the king: 'He is the sun whose rays of loving kindness shine equally on the people'. This is related to the historic view of the monarchs as famous reincarnations and the tendency to perceive and treat them as Bodhisattvas (Aris 1994a: 109).

There are two distinctively different perspectives on the origin of *Driglam Namzha*, one religious and one secular, both of which are presented by Dargey. These perspectives may or may not be exclusive. According to the religious argument, *driglam* is seen to originate from the Buddhist Vajras, namely 'body', 'speech' and 'mind'. In tantric

Buddhism the taming of these elements is seen as essential to achieve enlightenment. The secular argument for the genesis of this concept is related to the second interpretation of *tha damtsig*, in a view of society as organised through five relations, which according to Dargey consists of relationships between ‘peers and subordinates, between parents and children, between religious persons and lay people, between husband and wife, and between friends, relatives and neighbours’ (2005: 15).

Dargey describes how the relationship between peers and subordinates includes the entire hierarchical ranking in the government service as well as society at large, beginning with the relationship between king and ministers. In this, the anticipation is that authorities are respected and served, whilst they are in return expected to help and support their subordinates. This philosophy is seen to originate from the Buddha himself, according to Dargey:

The Buddha is known to have said: When a ruler of a country is good, the ministers will become good. When the ministers are just and good, the higher officials are just and good. When the higher officials are just and good, the rank and file will become just and good (ibid.: 37).²

The idea of society as organised through relations can be traced back to the ‘sixteen moral principles’ (*Michoe Tsangma Chudrug*), the first temporal law implemented in Bhutan by the first Desi, Udez Tenzong Drugyel (Lam and Tenzing 1999: 150). These principles, in turn, presumably have their roots in the first general law promulgated by

2 The idea of taming of speech, mind and body is derived from the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the fourth of the five *nikayas* in the *Sutta Pitaka*, which is one of the three foundations of Theravada Buddhism. According to K. Sri Dhammanada, the quote also originates from this source (2002: 315). The ideal of a harmonious society as organized through five or six sets of hierarchical relations (*ren*), which are maintained through the practice of rituals (*yi*), however, also bears some resemblance to Confucian thought (as is equally hinted at by Whitecross (2010)). Although this is a rather crude way of presenting Confucius’ philosophy, these are usually named as the relationships between: King and minister (or ruler and subject), father and son, older brother and younger brother (or elder and younger), husband and wife, and between friends. Equally important is the relationship between the teacher and the student (or the ‘wise’ and his learner/disciple) although this is less often emphasised (Analects XII, 11, translation, Legge (1893: 18, 83); Chan (2008: 113-39). Whether there is a relationship between Confucian and Bhutanese thought is a subject for further research.

Songtsen Gampo in Tibet in the 7th century (Dargey 2001: 199, 224). During the theocratic period these principles were institutionalised in the monastic and administrative systems, and later adopted at court during the Wangchuck dynasty. My interviews in eastern, western and central Bhutan lead me to concur with Phuntsho that these principally remained important aspects of elite rather than popular culture (2004: 573). In seeking to establish national unity by nationalising culture in the image of Drukpa Kargyupa tradition, *driglam* was codified in order to ensure that it represented 'true' tradition. With the semantic addition of *namzha*, connoting 'system', it became systematised and made obligatory for the entire population, whose members were tutored on how to follow 'their' traditional culture in correct ways. In the process this diffuse set of practices was ritualised, standardised and homogenised and came to epitomise a Buddhist national identity (Bothe 2011: 523). In its traditionalised version, the 'taming' of body, speech and mind came to signify the right way of behaving in the hierarchical relationship between the governors and the governed (Dargey 2005: 36). According to this interpretation, the subordinates (the citizens) treat their superiors (the state officials) with the utmost respect, whilst the latter in return govern with benevolence.

This fusing of a traditionalised version of Buddhism with modern forms of governance has left an important trace. It has ingrained an image of the state as a benevolent, paternalistic and semi-divine apparatus in the minds of the citizens. Moreover, the superiority of the authorities has been embodied in the ritualisation of encounters between state officials and citizens (Bothe 2011: 300-322, e.g. narrative of female, 77 years, western Bhutan).

The following analysis will show how these traditionalised discourses of authority frame the process of constitutionalising the state. It will do so by scrutinising the argument that there was no popular pressure for change, and then analyse the strategic purposes served by the process of gifting the constitution.

The birth of the constitution

The constitution drafting process was initiated in 2001 and lasted for over four years. Before proceeding to an analysis of this process, a timeline is a helpful starting point:

2001	26 Mar 2005	29 Oct 2005 – 24 Dec 2005	14 Dec 2005	28 Dec 2005 – 27 May 2006	18 Jul 2008
The draft- ing proc- ess com- mences	Distribution of the con- stitution	The IV King meets the 'people'	The IV King abdicates	The Crown Prince (Fu- ture V King) meets the 'people'	The con- stitution is enacted

The idea of the constitutional process as 'gift giving' rests on the assumption that the King decided to adopt the constitution voluntarily and was under no pressure to do so. From an external perspective, this was confirmed by Western donors who said they asserted no direct pressure for change (conversation, Torben Beller, Head of Danish Representation, June 2005). It is hard to gauge whether there was any pressure from Bhutan's close friend, India. It is, however, noteworthy that India's aid to Bhutan increased by 50 per cent immediately after the process was initiated (Hutt 2006: 123). In addition, India returned full independence to Bhutan with respect to its external affairs in 2008 when the constitution was implemented.³ It is perhaps more fitting to speak of indirect pressure in the form of positive encouragement by its powerful neighbour, on whom Bhutan is dependent in terms of its defence and development and a market for its hydropower.

Inside Bhutan there was an intriguing lack of public pressure for change. In the years prior to the inception of the process there were no mass demonstrations in the streets, no general strikes and no protests. In effect, there was a striking absence of any open demand for democracy at all. Nonetheless, the claim that the constitution was enacted in a situation without any pressure should be treated with caution. Crucially, it fails to take into account the historicity of popular organisations for citizen rights inside Bhutan, more specifically the indirect pressure from the approximately 100,000 refugees, who criticise the absence of democracy from outside the country. The neglect of these factors is important

3 In Article 2 of the original treaty of 1949, Bhutan is 'guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations'. The new article states that Bhutan and India 'shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests'.

because they are likely to have made citizenship reforms a prerequisite for the future stability and survival of the state.

From a historical perspective, the lack of outspoken claims for rights is more likely to be a product of the shared imaginarity of the Bhutanese. Most importantly, the image of social order is constituted through a bond of unconditional loyalty between the individual and the state authorities, rooted in the politicised and nationalised ideology of *tsawasum*. The main effect of the promulgation of this normative principle was the semantic separation between the monarchists, defined as loyal citizens, from those who agitated for rights, who were branded as traitors (Phuntsho 2004: 576). Criticising political authorities was defined as treason and penalised by prison or exile, and even capital punishment, though this was never applied and was abolished in 2004 (*Kuensel*, March 27, 2004). These penalties were codified in detail in the law on *tsawasum*, i.e. the National Security Act of Bhutan 1992. Such punitive practices were, at least to my knowledge, no longer applied by the time of the constitutional process. Nevertheless, the historical trace of these experiences still governed the imaginarity of most Bhutanese, who had come to associate criticism of state authorities with such consequences. These experiences therefore still shaped the way in which they conceived of their political role as one characterised by fear and submission. As a result, few respondents had the courage to imagine, let alone advocate, any kind of governance other than one led by the King. Instead, a culture of silence had emerged in which criticism of state authorities was perceived as practically unthinkable. Nonetheless, there was a sense of rising discontent within the system, one that was whispered behind closed doors, yet apparently with increasing strength. Demands for rights were rising, in particular amongst the educated and increasingly unemployed young people,⁴ who found their opportunities hampered by the older and less-educated people who generally held the top positions in the bureaucracy. Moreover, although the King was highly popular, frustration was growing over the way in which his extended family, which was increasingly perceived as unaccountable, was seen to exploit its position of power. As an effect of the decentralisation reforms, the obligation to supply labour for these dignitaries had for many come to be seen as illegitimate and unjust, in contrast to their labour contribution

4 As was noted by Whitecross to this author (correspondence, 19 January 2012).

for projects that benefitted their local communities (female 30 years and female 65 years, central Bhutan, interviewed May 2005). The experience shared by the local citizens is reflected in a narrative of a village elder who was exempted from volunteer labour, but shared the experience of those in her village:

R: All the households have to do work for this dignitary. /.../ I was told they do not get paid and they do not get food or even water, and if you do not work real hard he will take his stick and just point his stick right in your stomach (gesturing).

I: What would you do if he pointed his stick in your stomach?

R: I would just make sure that I would work real hard! (Female 65, central Bhutan)

Her response reflects how to many locals the supply of volunteer labour was connected with feelings spanning anger, apathy and despair. Such feelings were expressed most forcefully in the area of the Ngalongs, the group that formed the main support base of the monarchy. Although this criticism was not as yet directed towards the King or the monarchy in general, discontent was thus smouldering beneath the surface even though everything appeared calm at the top (see also Bothe 2011: 277, 425).

If its internal legitimacy was fragile, the government was by contrast highly successful in creating a positive brand for its state project in the outside world. In the new millennium it successfully projected Bhutan as a country with the highly appealing development strategy of 'gross national happiness'. This philosophy maintained the essentialist view of the state, but simultaneously attempted to merge this with the modernity narrative. Such attempts were reflected in the gradual opening up of the political system for competition at local as well as at national level. The inception of the constitution can best be understood as just one reform (albeit a highly important one) in this sequence of redefining the relationship between the state and its citizens. It simultaneously addressed the need to adjust the political system to be more compatible with contemporary norms of governance as controlled by the people, while also accommodating the unspoken pressure for change.

In the calm that existed at the beginning of the new millennium, one

without popular agitation for political reform, the moment was thus seen as opportune for constitutionalising the state while the process could still remain under the control of the governing elite. This motive is evident from the King's opening speech of the constitutional debates:

Bhutan, through good fortune and fate, cannot hope for a better moment than now for this historical development and will never find another opportunity like this. Today the King, government, and the people in all sections of society, enjoy a level of trust and fidelity that have never been seen before ('Draft Constitution to be distributed to all Bhutanese', *Kuensel*, 23 March 2005).

This opens up the possibility of new understandings of governance, but what is equally apparent in the King's speech is the anticipation that the process can be maintained within the normative boundary of *tsawasum*. As will be shown in the following section, the traditionalised normative context sets the stage for the constitutional process.

The process of 'gifting' the constitution

On 26 March 2005 I attended a ceremony in which the constitution was handed over to the people at a remote Dzong⁵ in western Bhutan. As Dasho Dzongdag (the district governor) proceeded past the line of attendants, they, in turn, respectfully stepped backward in prostration, whilst stretching their *kabneys* and *rachus* (sashes) forward and displaying their palms.⁶ Following the code of Driglam Namzha, they were paying tribute to his high rank. His position was symbolised in the way he enjoyed the privilege of wearing a *patang* (sword) as well as his fully red coloured scarf, which went with his title of *dasho*, equivalent to the designation of nobility. The procession proceeded into the main temple, where the monks performed a series of prayers and religious rituals. The chair of the DYT (district development council) opened the speeches:

5 The Dzong is historically a fortress, which even today serves as the district centre for the administrative and religious bodies.

6 This refers to the traditional clothes worn at official buildings. A *kabney* is a scarf worn by men and *rachus* are silk embroidered cloths carried over the shoulder by women.

Bothe

Today is a historical occasion to take the constitution due to the King's kindness. Therefore we have to be grateful to the King for his visionary leadership. Normally you get power through fighting and pressure groups, but here you get power from the throne... It is the responsibility of the DYT members to read the constitution and give feedback to the ministers and the King with all our commitment and dedication.

Dasho Dzungdag continued:

The King has made a royal command to read out the constitution... This is the noble thought of the Royal Government... The King will visit all the 20 Dzongkhags to speak about the constitution to the people. The people will have to provide feedback to the King during his visits. We hope to fulfil the vision of gross national happiness!

Concluding, he held the constitution high above his head, before handing it over to the local representatives, who received it with their heads bowed and palms turned upward, according to the codex of Driglam Namzha.

The discourse at the ceremony articulates the idea of the constitution as a gift, but the implications are much more profound than this image would imply. It projects a discourse on rulership that closely follows the norms of *tsawasum*. This is seen from the way in which both the DYT Chair and the Dzungdag envision the constitution as a document written by benevolent, visionary and kind governors. In return, the attendants are expected to embrace the constitution with gratitude. This way of imagining the relationship between state authorities and the 'people' is explicitly reflected in the Prime Minister's opening speech in the debates:

All this is possible because of the complete trust and faith between the King and the people who have full faith in His Majesty... ('Draft Constitution to be distributed to all Bhutanese', *Kuensel*, 23 March 2005).

As an implication of these norms the governing elite in general were uncomfortable with the idea of democracy. As the Chairman of the Royal

Advisory Council, who was also a member of the constitutional committee, contemplated as the process commenced:⁷

...the people are concerned about how the constitution would affect the Monarchy and they are disturbed by the idea of political parties, believing that party politics will be unhealthy for a small country like Bhutan ('The first draft of the Constitution submitted to His Majesty', *Kuensel*, 13 December 2002).

This apprehension was generally reflected in interviews with the governing elite, who associated democracy with instability and inequality, and party politics with ethnic conflict and corruption. Monarchy, on the other hand, was linked to peace and national survival.

Regardless of this apprehension, the King set out to mobilise popular support for the constitution. In *Kuensel's* summary, he comes across as a ruler with a genuine commitment to engaging the people in a dialogue, continually encouraging them to speak their views freely. However, although the 'people' engage in the debates they do so on the premise that the monarch, and in his image the state officials, are the unquestioned authority. Such a view is reflected in *Kuensel's* summary of the King's meeting with the 'people' in Thimphu:

Apart from specific responses on the 34 articles, a palpable emotion was their deep concern about a future that remained, to many, unfathomable ('A Constitution for the future of Bhutan', *Kuensel*, 29 Oct 2005).

In this context, the idea of the constitution as a 'gift' serves its strategic purposes. It implies a special relation of reciprocity between the benevolent 'gift giver' (the state authorities) and the recipients (the citizens), who in appreciation of the gift vest their loyalty in the giver. It is, however, also a highly hierarchical relationship that is differentiated according to one's position in it, as prescribed by Driglam Namzha. The meetings are

7 The drafting committee of 39 members was chaired by the Chief Justice, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye. It was comprised of the Speaker of the National Assembly, one representative each from the 20 dzongkhags elected by the DYT, the members of the Royal Advisory Council, five representatives of the government, and two lawyers from the High Court.

effectively penetrated by these rituals, as was reflected in the ceremony. Specifically, the ritualisation of the reciprocity in ‘gift giving’ is described in a manual on Driglam Namzha, which has a specific section on how to offer a present to the King when asking for *kidu*, i.e. a gift. Whilst prostrating three times the citizens are instructed to envision him as their ‘beloved King’ (Lam and Tenzing 1999: 201). This way of imagining the monarch underlies the discourse in Thimphu. Its effect is to render the participants powerless, as is evident from the reference to them as ‘overwhelmed’ and their view of the future as ‘unfathomable’ (‘A Constitution for the future of Bhutan’, *Kuensel*, 29 Oct 2005). The normative root of such feelings is most vividly reflected in the opening speech of the Speaker:

The place for a baby to cry is on its mother’s lap.... that is why we submit our concerns here (ibid).

This discourse draws on the image of the state authorities as benevolent and kind parents, whilst it simultaneously imagines the citizens as children of the state—and children by definition do not take responsibility. It positions them as inferiors whilst elevating the state authorities to a superior position. Seen from the perspective of a western social imaginary, this is somewhat at odds with the King’s own view of the ‘people’ as responsible and competent participants. From the perspective of a traditionalised cultural context, however, the role of a political participant is rather one of ‘submission to the ruling government’, to borrow Dargey’s phrase (2005:15). Whilst the King is thus emphasising their ownership of the constitution, the attendants ritually confirm their unquestioned faith in his initiative:

...a common submission on the draft Constitution was that their faith in any initiative introduced by His Majesty was so complete that they would not question the wisdom of the royal vision... (‘A Constitution for the future of Bhutan’, *Kuensel*, 29 Oct 2005).

This was accompanied by a specific image of the citizen, most vividly captured by the Crown Prince:

One of the main reasons for the success of the past 33 years...is the

unflinching loyalty, faith and support the people place in the King...
 ('People of Tsirang discuss the draft Constitution with the Crown Prince', *Kuensel*, 11 February 2006).

The idea of the constitution as a gift from above, in effect, left the local elite (the Gups (elected leaders of a District) and Chimis (assembly members)) little option but to accept a change they had neither asked for nor wanted:

... today, in the presence of His Majesty the King, the representatives of Punakha dzongkhag pledge their full support for the Constitution although it represented a change that they had not even imagined in their dreams ('The unfolding of a new era', *Kuensel*, 30 November 2005).

The choice of the word 'pledge' harks back to the coronation of the first Wangchuck monarch in this same Dzong in 1907, where the regional leaders agreed to submit to his rule, albeit with a certain degree of coercion. When the local representatives pledge their support to the constitution during the King's visit, by contrast, they predominantly do so out of their loyalty to the monarch. As such, the legitimacy of the change remains attached to the monarchy rather than to the process itself.

The practical effect of this discourse is reflected in a subsequent *geog* meeting (a sub-level of a district), which I happened to stumble across. During the meeting the constitution was handed over to the Tshogpas (village representatives) by the Chimi:

When you get a copy, instead of keeping it in the safe you should read it thoroughly and explain it to the people. Then the King will come to all the Geogs and discuss. He will visit all the Geogs including ours. He will hear if the people have understood the constitution. When the King visits, if you cannot answer about the constitution, then the King will not think we have informed you. People will have to understand the constitution, and if the King asks any questions they will have to clarify it to the King. If you feel there are certain doubts to clarify in the constitution, you will have to clarify to the King. Otherwise it will seem as if I have not explained about it to the people. In that case you and I will have to debate about it (Participant observation of geog meeting, Western Bhutan, 28 March, 2005)

In this, the Chimi emphasises the Tshogpas' responsibility to explain the constitution to the people. However, his speech takes on a slightly different tone, as he projects the image of the King as a teacher, who will rehearse the 'people' in the constitution. Moreover, the word 'clarify' indicates the possibility of posing questions to the King, but only in so far as the Chimi has approved of these questions. It reflects the way in which the local elite easily takes control of the process, due to inequalities in education and exposure. Meanwhile, the response by the Tshogpas expresses their feelings of inadequacy in fulfilling this responsibility:

Tshogpa (male): If you do not understand, don't expect the paper to fly down from above! [laughter] If you don't understand then drink heavily and read! [laughter].

Male: Or put it under the pillow at night and sleep on it [more laughter].

Their jokes need to be understood in light of the 'culture of silence', which makes humour their only mean of protest. Because they are illiterate, or have had only a few years of schooling, it is an impossible task for them to read, let alone to explain the constitution. And even if they were able to understand the words, concepts such as 'freedom of expression', 'opposition' and 'political parties' hold little meaning for them, because they lie outside their cognitive field of experience. They were, nevertheless, expected to explain the constitution to the people, regardless of their lack of competence to do so. In spite of these reactions, in the National Assembly the local Chimi subsequently portrayed the people of this Geog as

eagerly waiting for discussions on the Constitution so that they can learn more about their responsibilities ('The Constitution: a grave responsibility', *Kuensel*, National Assembly, 2005).

The event poses the question as to why there is a need to engage the local citizens in such an obviously impossible task. The answer may be found in the way in which the 'gift' easily transmutes into a 'royal command', a phrase applied by the Dzongdag in the ceremony described earlier. This discourse became even more outspoken in the debates between the

Crown Prince and the people of Dagana, where he legitimised the change with a reference to the King:

His Royal Highness encouraged the people to fulfill His Majesty's command by taking active part in the discussions ('Crown Prince conducts public consultations on the Constitution in Dagana', *Kuensel*, 8 February 2006).

This was, of course, in line with the political system at this point in time. In this context the difference between the idea of a 'gift' given by the King and a royal command was of little relevance. Nevertheless, it signifies a need to uphold the cultural norms by applying more overt forms of discipline. It displays the apparent paradox between the expectation that the people should take on roles as active participants, but do so in obedience to a command. The paradox is reflected in the impressive representation of every household in the discussions, as observed by the Crown Prince:

His Royal Highness said that His Majesty the King would be particularly happy to know that every gewog and household had taken part in the fruitful discussions that he had conducted in Lhuentse, Trashigang, and Pema Gatshel ('The Crown Prince explains the Constitution to the people of Pemagatshel', *Kuensel*, 4 January 2006)

At the same time, however, the following explanation from a Bhutanese UN employee indicates that participation may not have been entirely voluntary: 'All households have to go to the village meetings. In some cases they have to pay for it if they fail to show up'.⁸ This followed the widespread practice of fining those who were absent from village meetings (see Bothe 2011: 457). To the outside observer, there appeared to be some discrepancy between the image of faithful, loyal and obedient citizens and the need to discipline them to take on roles as participants. To the local governors, however, there was seemingly no contradiction. Rather, the need to civilise the citizens into cultured participants through disciplinary sanctions was altogether seen as intrinsically interlinked. In effect, one geog even used income from fines derived from absenteeism to

8 Interview with Bhutanese working for an international organisation, Thimphu, 2005.

help fund courses on Driglam Namzha (interview, Mang Ap (deputy Gup), eastern Bhutan, July 2005).

Curiously, the King himself comes across as one of the few agents who poses a slightly alternative discourse to the dominant one of loyalty and unconditional obedience, as for instance can be seen in the way in which he applies the word ‘discussion’ to the process. However, when the King uses such words the participants are well socialised to interpret these in the normative context of *tsawasum*. This is apparent from his opening of the debates, where he presents the constitution as a product of the ‘trust and fidelity’ between ‘King, government, and the people’ (‘Draft Constitution to be distributed to all Bhutanese’ *Kuensel*, 23 March, 2005). These norms are reflected in public references to the debates, which are semantically described with sentences such as ‘explaining the constitution’ or ‘proposals for change’, and most frequently ‘clarifying doubts’. The absence of a vocabulary of ‘criticism’ and ‘influence’ in the discourse is equally noticeable. Words have real meaning, and reflect a normative context in which criticising the constitution is perceived as a betrayal of *tsawasum*.

The analysis, however, raises the question of whether the debates, as described in the summaries published in *Kuensel*, truly represent the views and sentiments of the ‘people’. What is striking is the absence of critical questions posed by the more liberal minded intellectual elite, quite a few of whom were sceptical about the constitution. This lack of critique is particularly remarkable at the meeting in Thimphu, given that it is the base of the educated middle class, which is normally seen to constitute a more vibrant and assertive section of the population. The editor of *Kuensel* illuminates this paradox:

Some of the comments were predictable, meaning that speakers focused on broad compliments and on His Majesty’s own phenomenal achievements more than the issues in the draft Constitution itself... There is, of course, the dilemma that we all face. We all know that the draft Constitution of the kingdom of Bhutan is a special document. Not only has it been initially drafted by a committee of selected representatives of Bhutanese society, it has been done so under the close guidance of His Majesty the King himself. Many of the citizens attending the Thimphu meeting did say that, given this formidable

background to the Constitution and their complete trust in it as an initiative of His Majesty the King, they did not even see the need to question any aspect of it ('The Constitution: much to learn', *Kuensel* editorial, 29 October 2005).

If one reads between the lines, this could be seen as a criticism of members of the elite for not daring to risk their careers by taking up critical issues. Interestingly, the author of the editorial includes himself in this critique with his remark that it is 'the dilemma that we all face'. In effect, it took an ordinary farmer to pose the only critical question at the meeting, although *Kuensel* refrained from referring to this. The lack of criticism reflects a general feeling of powerlessness and apathy among the liberal oriented elite with respect to their marginalisation in a process over which they held little influence, as narrated by an intellectual:

I did not attend, because I was not obliged to go. I did not want to attend, because it is like a mock session. Not real. You are not being true to yourself. You are being so artificial. Like when you have a drama: 'Let's have the mock session, and the real one will come out better afterwards.' Only there will be no real session. It wouldn't be the real thing. It would not be genuine. /.../. The Head went because he had to go, it was obligatory for him to go. But he came back early. He said: 'It's so boring. The people are thinking: 'The King' all the time (communication with public employee, 2006).

The narrative draws an analogy between the discussions and a rehearsal for a theatre play, but one without a first night. It is a play in which the script is already defined by the traditionalised norms of how to act, and even how to think. The debates therefore became a site for celebrating the myth of the King's wisdom and benevolence. This, in effect, is also likely to reflect how the vast majority of the citizens actually felt, though only a few were given the option of gaining knowledge of other ways of organising the relationship between the governors and the governed.

As the constitution was about to be enacted, there was a subtle, but important, change in the discourse on authority, which imbued the process with a sacralised undertone. The monastic members of Parliament naturally articulated such divine metaphors of authority most vividly, for

instance the Dorji Lopon (second highest religious leader):

May the wisdom of the Constitution, which is drafted with the help of jangchu sempas [bodhisattva, i.e. an enlightened being who renounces Nirvana] grow from strength to strength and cover the four corners of the world ('The Constitution: a grave responsibility', *Kuensel*, 22 June, 2005).

It is as if the historic myth of the Kings as Bodhisattvas (Aris 1994a: 109) had finally come true through the King's decision to involve the citizenry in the political process. Evidently, a document created with the help of a Bodhisattva is divine by nature. Even the 'people's' responsibility to participate in the process is given divine connotations as seen from the way in which the Prime Minister concludes with a plea to: 'fulfill this sacred responsibility' (The Constitution: a grave responsibility', *Kuensel*, 22 June 2005).

In contrast to the discourse in the National Assembly, the King promotes a secular discourse during his meetings with the people, both on issues of state authority in general and on the constitution in particular. The Crown Prince continues his father's discourse by encouraging the people's active participation. Yet there is a significant change from the secular to the sacred, as is also observed by Whitecross (forthcoming). With the loss of the King as a legitimising force, the secular discourse on the constitution seems to lose its persuasiveness. To reassert its legitimacy, the discourse on authority is sanctified, as is apparent from the speech of the Crown Prince in his opening consultation:

To me, personally, His Majesty is my King, my teacher, my inspiration, and my Tsawai Lam [root guru] ('Crown Prince holds his first historic consultation', *Kuensel*, 28 December 2005, reporting from Lhuentse).

Divine metaphors such as these serve the implicit purpose of legitimising the transfer of power by invoking the image of the divine King, who symbolises the state in the imagination of the citizens. However, this legitimacy is insufficient in a situation where this very symbol is abdicating. My interviews in rural communities suggest that such a situation can be expected to raise an array of local fears of chaos, war and

anarchy, because this is what the citizens have been taught will happen in a situation without the King (male 29 years and male 51 years, central Bhutan, interviewed May 2005). This, however, needs to be understood against the fact that their dependence on the King was a frequent topic at village meetings (male 49 years, eastern Bhutan, interviewed July 2005). His abdication therefore presents a compelling need to reassure them that order is being restored. In the process, the discussions change their strategic purpose, and now become occasions for reasserting the position of the next King in line:

While I am his oldest son – a Crown Prince – I have never in my life thought of myself as a Prince. I have always been, first and foremost, an ordinary subject whose only duty is to serve my King and country ('Crown Prince holds his first historic consultations', *Kuensel*, 28 December 2005, reporting from Lhuentse).

Despite the Crown Prince's claim to be an ordinary citizen—which of course every ordinary citizen will know he is not—he fulfils the people's expectations by reproducing the image of a king who humbly serves his people. By placing himself at the level of the ordinary citizens, he thus transgresses his role and elevates himself beyond the position of these, by carving out his image as a selfless ruler:

When I was granted the title of Trongsa Penlop here two years ago, I had only one thought. Every Trongsa Penlop has gone on to serve his nation and country selflessly in immeasurable ways. That is the legacy and duty to which I aspire. That is my goal ('Dzongkhag consultations ends, the future begins', *Kuensel*, 27 May 2006, reporting from Trongsa).

In this manner, the disorder the constitution threatens to bring is replaced by a sense of order represented by the continuity of the Wangchuck dynasty. During this drama one enlightened King retires, but is immediately replaced by the next in line with equivalent divine lineage and character. This discourse has real effects on the way in which authority is conceived of in the *Kuensel* narrative:

the people of Lhuentse said that they were overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia, given the changing times, and reassured by the confidence conveyed by His Royal Highness as he concluded his first Constitution meeting. Many shed tears. Many expressed their hope for the future ('Crown Prince holds his first historic consultations', *Kuensel*, 28 December 2005, reporting from Lhuentse).

Although *Kuensel* is likely to be selective in its presentation of the 'people's feelings', the statements are nevertheless likely to reflect the depth of the discourse on the monarchy.

This process of sacralising authority can be placed in a cultural perspective by the chapter on 'gift giving' in the aforementioned manual on Driglam Namzha:

When you prostrate to the His Holiness the Je Khenpo (highest religious authority) you should visualize him as the Buddha ... You also prostrate to His Majesty the King as the beloved Monarch (Lam and Tenzing 1999: 201).

In spite of the clear distinction between the religious and the mundane, this separation becomes blurred in practice. Both the Je Khenpo and the King carry a full yellow scarf, and the etiquette observed by their subjects in their presence are identical. Nevertheless, the discursive separation between the King as the beloved ruler and the Je Khenpo as a Buddha figure is important. During the process of debating the constitution, the discourse however seems to slip from that of the 'beloved monarch' to one in which the citizens are expected to also think of the monarch as a Buddha figure. This establishes an image of a sacralised relation between the state authority and the citizens, in which the King is elevated to a position of a divine being, and in his image the state nobility as such.

The hierarchies behind the drama

Drawing on Bourdieu, deeper insight into the process can be gained by analysing it in the context of the hierarchies of the field. In this, interest is understood as formed by the field, or what Bourdieu terms *illusio*, as opposed to a narrow economic definition. The background for understanding the situation is the economic organisation of the

relationship between the state and its citizens, in which the farmers live in a subsistence economy and the state represents the principal venue for economic and symbolic profit.

The state nobility is situated at the top of the hierarchy. Unlike the metaphorical usage of this term by Bourdieu, the term 'nobility' should, in a Bhutanese context, be taken at face value, because high-ranking officials are awarded titles of nobility. They are firm believers in the idea that Bhutanese sovereignty is intricately linked with its ability to project the unified image of a traditionalised society to the outside world. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that they have a stake in maintaining one of the essential features of the traditionalised monarchy, i.e. the symbolic elevation of their authority. It is, effectively, in the image of the King that they are bestowed their noble titles and hence their position elevated above ordinary citizens. This is reflected in the way in which they are awarded scarfs of different colours that mark their different position in the hierarchy. It is, however, not that they crave this prestige and honour. Rather, they have come to see this symbolic hierarchy as the foundation of social order (see also Bothe 2011: 226-228).

Located in between the state nobility and the local citizens are the local elites. During the debates on the constitution, it is almost invariably these who pose the questions. They have little exposure to liberal discourses. Instead, they essentially view social order as being upheld by the ritualisation of the hierarchies that are defined by the traditionalised cultural system. Because the King legitimises the system, social order is seen to revolve around his figure. This, however, also cannot be separated from the fact that they are the group most likely to have the strongest interests vested in the monarchy at the local level. In effect, their role as mediators between the population and the monarchy has elevated their position of power to one above that of the ordinary citizenry, in both symbolic and economic terms. What they want is therefore for the King to remain in power, judging from their questions as printed in *Kuensel*. This is evident from this assertion by a local representative:

The Druk Gyalpo should continue to be the final appellate authority to whom the Bhutanese people should continue to appeal for justice ... ('The unfolding of a new era', *Kuensel*, 30 November 2005, reporting from Punakha).

Placed at the bottom of the hierarchy are the local citizens, who are situated in a position of what Mann terms ‘organizational outflanking’—a situation formed by their lack of knowledge, alliance partners and organisational resources, in combination with their ignorance of the strategies of power (1986: 7). A principal cause of this position is their isolation from the outside world, which means that their political horizon is demarcated by the national borders, and for the majority even by the slopes of the surrounding mountains. There are, however, also more profound reasons for this. During a human rights campaign prior to the elections, international development workers were clearly instructed not to discuss the political and civil rights aspects of the human rights charter with Bhutanese citizens (conversation with international development worker, December 2010). Hence, whilst the citizens were in the process of being granted new rights, they were not allowed to become acquainted with these. Rather, according to their accounts, they were repeatedly imprinted with narratives of the benevolent and paternalistic King, and in his image the governmental authorities who take good care of their subjects. This was set in contrast to a situation of chaos, anarchy and war in other countries. It contextualises why the citizens were ‘fearful of the potential threat to their beloved monarch and his son’, as noted by Whitecross (forthcoming).

Seen in this light, the process of ‘gifting’ the constitution appears to serve a purpose other than that of popularising it—namely, to convince the subjects, and in particular the local elite, that the reform follows the historic tradition of guided reform, with the Wangchuck monarchy as the principal catalyst of change. Its effect is to legitimise the reform by attaching it to the norms of a reciprocal obligation, which induces the unwilling elite to embrace the King’s ‘gift’ with loyalty and dedication.

In this analysis lies the clue to understanding the strategic purpose served by the discourse of ‘gifting the constitution’ (although this, in a Foucauldian spirit, should not be seen as a conscious strategy). It evidently does not serve the principal purpose of introducing the citizens to the political and civil rights given to them in the constitution, with which they are not allowed to become acquainted. Rather, it serves to reproduce a relationship of reciprocity under the normative prescription of *tsawasum* and *Driglam Namzha*. In this they are given the right to choose their leaders, but they are also kept in their position as subjects of the

state. This is a highly hierarchical relationship, which provides the state representatives with an aura of divinity whilst the citizens are relegated to an inferior position.

Conclusion

'Forgetting', wrote the distinguished historian Ernest Renan, 'is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation' (1990: 11). In Bhutanese discourse the constitution is imagined as a gift, in the argument that it is not claimed by the people, but given to them by their benevolent monarch. Meanwhile, the popular campaigns for democracy and citizenship rights that took place only a decade before the reforms seem to have been forgotten, along with the voices of the Bhutanese living in exile. Instead, the narrative of the constitution as a gift seems to serve an implicit strategy of delinking the reforms from those events.

The idea of the constitution as a gift, however, makes it a rather unusual one. It is one that is presumably neither intended by the giver, the King, who wants the citizens to take responsibility for the process, nor do the receivers, the 'people', whose imaginary is shaped by the paternalistic narrative of the King, necessarily want it.

Rather than representing an absolute truth, the notion of the gift serves the purpose of reproducing a traditionalised image of authority. This places the idea of the constitution as a gift in a different light. It is a gift that implies a relationship of reciprocity between the 'gift givers', in the image of the benevolent and deified authorities, and the 'giftees', viewed as their loyal subjects. In this sense, the 'gift' renews the contractual relation between the state and the people. The citizens gain the right to choose their leaders, but continue to be expected to vest their unconditional loyalty and trust in the state authorities. The main strategic effect of the debate is therefore to reproduce the normative bond of loyalty between the governors and the governed, under the norm-set of *tsawasum*.

Translated into a local reality, the drama therefore serves to alter the political landscape on its surface, but not in any depth. While the system is reformed, the worldview of the Drukpa establishment retains its dominant position, upheld by the continuation of the Wangchuck dynasty. As such, the debates came to be a scene for legitimising the change, whilst reproducing authoritarian discourses and relations of authority.

The process of 'gifting' the constitution to the people therefore appears

to serve highly contemporary strategies of power. It can, arguably, best be understood from Bourdieu's perspective, as a process of consolidating the symbolic domination of the governing elite over the citizens. In contrast to overt coercion, he argues, symbolic domination is a gentle and invisible process, because of the obligation of trust and personal loyalty implied in the process of giving such a selfless and benevolent gift. Borrowing his eloquent formulation, gift giving

...enables domination to be established and maintained through strategies which are softened and disguised and which conceal domination beneath the veil of an enchanted relation... It enables those who benefit most from the system to convince those who benefit least from grasping the basis of their own deprivation (1991: 24-25).

As such, the 'gift' discourse seems more suited to promoting the interests of those who are already in privileged positions of power, rather than including those who are marginalised. The ones to gain the least from the process are the local citizens, who are spectators in a process that lies far beyond their framework of knowledge. Following Mann, it is because of their position of organisational outflanking that they consent to a situation in which they are dominated by others (1986: 7). This is caused by the unequal distribution of knowledge. At the top are the state nobility who are well educated and exposed to the world, and who have the power to manage the development funds provided by the international community. At the other extreme are the rural citizens who are kept isolated from external discourses on rights and political deliberations. What is remarkable is how such practices, which strategically aim at isolating the citizens from this knowledge, occur during an announced reorganisation of political practices that is designed to lead to the introduction of these very same rights. Instead, narratives of state authorities as protective paternal figures form their imaginary. They therefore lack the crucial knowledge that might enable them to understand the process in which they are compelled to engage. It would, however, be too un-nuanced to view this as a conscious elite attempt at seizing power. Rather, their worldview conditions them to maintain the hierarchies in a way that will not threaten or upset the current social order and the normative 'bond of

loyalty' that defines the relationship between the state and its citizens.

The ones who gain the most are the members of the Drukpa elite, who have come to view the narrative of 'culture as national self-defence' as an unquestioned truth. They have, to a high degree, managed to divert attention from Bhutan's image during the 1990s of a country torn by ethnic conflict and dissent over citizen rights. Instead, they have succeeded in painting an image of the country as a lost 'Shangri la' that promotes a policy of happiness. The narrative of the benevolent King who gives the constitution as a gift to his people has served this strategy well. As one of its rewards, it has gained India's recognition of Bhutan as a fully-fledged sovereign state in the shape of a document that is gifted to Bhutan on the eve of its constitutional monarchy— and this is a gift that is, indeed, both intended and wanted.

Seen from the outside, the Bhutanese process is testimony to how the current tendency to romanticise traditional, oriental and nationalist discourses facilitates the maintenance of forms of authority that are essentially authoritarian in nature. This orientalist view has guided the governing elite on a path that is barely compatible with liberal ideas of freedom and equal worth, and which serves to refer the citizens to the role of supplicants, as opposed to becoming an engaged demos in the future. This, I argue, is no coincidence, but rather an effect of the essentialist view of state formation. As argued by Calhoun:

... where nationalist rhetoric stresses oneness at the expense of a notion of a differentiated public, it becomes repressive not just of minorities, but of all citizens (1995: 254).

It is not that liberalism is incompatible with traditional Bhutanese culture. Rather, it is the homogenisation, standardisation and politicisation of tradition that is incompatible with liberalism. As such, the main problem lies with the essentialist discourse itself, and in particular the idea that the national security of a small country is contingent upon its ability to project a unique culture shared by the entire nation.

Meanwhile, one should not be blind to the fact that the rights of citizens are, for the first time in Bhutanese history, inscribed in the fundamental law of the state. This makes the constitution a rather potent tool for future contestations. Thus, in spite of the ceremonial revitalisation of autocratic

forms of authority, the process may yet open up new spaces for claiming rights, once ordinary citizens are acquainted with them.

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From Sentries to Skilled Migrants: The transitory residence of the Nepali community in Singapore

Hema Kiruppalini

Introduction

After a special treaty between the government of Nepal and the Khalsa (Sikh) government was signed in 1839, Nepali hill men began to travel to Lahore to join the army of the Sikh king Ranjit Singh (Kansakar 2003: 92-93). Therefore, from the early nineteenth century onward, Nepali hill men who served in the Sikh Army at Lahore were termed *lāhure*, which can be translated as 'one who goes to Lahore'. A soldier who has travelled abroad is still popularly known as a *lāhure* in Nepal. A prefix is attached to the term *lāhure*, depending on the country of the soldier's service, e.g., Singapore *lāhure*, British *lāhure*, Brunei *lāhure*, Hong Kong *lāhure*, etc. It has been argued that what all the men who are called *lāhures* share is a relationship with a foreign place, an experience of a world beyond the familiar (des Chene 1991: 237).

The term *lāhure* is increasingly used as a term to refer to all Nepalis who secure foreign employment. In their study of international labour migration from Nepal, Seddon, Adhikari and Gurung (2001) have characterised the new category of Nepalis abroad as 'New Lahures'. In 1991, des Chene postulated that men who undertake civilian jobs in India or travel to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to work in the oil fields are called *lāhures*, regardless of whether they have first been soldiers (des Chene 1991: 237). As one informant in Singapore remarked,

Lāhures no longer refers to just the Gurkhas. It also refers to those going to the Middle East or elsewhere. My father was a Singapore *lāhure*, but I am a new *lāhure* since I am doing a medical related Ph.D in Singapore.¹

The Gurkha Contingent was formed as a special paramilitary unit under the Singapore Police Force on 9 April 1949. The timing of its creation was

1 Personal communication, anonymous informant, Singapore, 10 January 2010.

significant, because it coincided with a period of racial riots: the Contingent was expected to function impartially as an anti-riot squad. The Gurkhas are now famed as sentries who guard Singapore's key installations, and their key role continues to define the Contingent's purpose as a neutral force. Over the last 63 years, Gurkha policemen have rendered invaluable service to Singapore, and their gated residence at Mount Vernon Camp, an entirely self-sufficient township, distinguishes them as an independent and impartial unit. Gurkha families are politically disenfranchised and are repatriated to Nepal after a Gurkha's service in Singapore ends, usually after 20 or 25 years.

In Singapore, apart from the Gurkhas (the original *lāhures*) there are other groups of Nepalis (the new *lāhures*) who reside temporarily or permanently in growing numbers. They include Nepalis who emigrate to Singapore in search of job opportunities, primarily in the food and beverage sector; students who look to Singapore to further their education, mainly in the field of hotel management, tourism and hospitality; and a sizeable number of professionals who work as engineers, doctors, educators, etc.

Over a period of two years of fieldwork in Singapore and Nepal from 2008-2010, I conducted detailed and semi-structured interviews with 45 individuals: Nepali restaurateurs, professionals and students in Singapore and ministry officials, ambassadors and academics from both Singapore and Nepal, plus a number of Singapore Gurkhas. An examination of the Nepali community in Singapore must take account of a variety of factors. Therefore, my research adopts an interdisciplinary method as a framework of analysis and draws on diasporic theory to study the dynamics of the migratory formation of this community. Primary sources in the form of oral interviews and archival material constitute the backbone of my methodology.

In order to obtain information about the Nepalis concentrated in the food and beverage sector in Singapore, I met individuals from the Nepal Academy of Tourism & Hotel Management (NATHM). I also visited the Ministry of Education in Kathmandu to obtain statistical data on the number of Nepali students studying in Singapore. In terms of archival material, the National Archives of Singapore, newspaper articles in the Singapore Press Holdings and online newspaper articles by Lexis Nexis Academic have also been useful sources of information.

Nepal continues to be a largely agrarian society. However, declining

crop productivity and a lack of employment prospects in other sectors are some of the reasons for international migration. This has been compounded by the Maoist insurgency which erupted in 1996. Although the internal conflict has ended, continued political uncertainty continues to hamper economic growth, pushing many Nepalis to seek a livelihood in foreign lands.

Singapore is regarded as an economically viable and politically stable country, and this has drawn Nepalis who have chosen to reside there, either temporarily or permanently. Ganesh Gurung, a sociologist at the Nepal Institute of Development Studies, has exclaimed that Singapore is seen as a 'dream country' because Nepali politicians frequently express an aspiration to make Nepal 'like Singapore' in the speeches they give at political rallies.² In addition, according to various Nepali informants, a feeling of affinity with the island city-state is also based on Singapore's multiracial composition and Asian culture. The image of Singapore as a safe and secure country, coupled with its relative proximity to Nepal (compared with distant countries such as the USA and the United Kingdom) has attracted Nepalis to Singapore.

The sudden influx of Nepali emigrants into Singapore during the 1990s and at the turn of the millennium begs the question of why this particular period saw these particular trajectories. Changes in state policies towards foreign employment in Nepal and Singapore, the role of social networks, and the growth of private recruitment agencies are critical factors.

The profile of the new *lāhures*

Foreign labour migration is highest in those regions of Nepal that have a longstanding history of emigration. According to David Seddon, a majority of the new *lāhures* come from the western and eastern hill regions from which enlistment into the British army began in the early nineteenth century (Seddon 2002: 28). Seddon, Adhikari and Gurung contend that a majority of the Nepali migrants working in East Asia and Southeast Asia comprise Gurungs, Magars and Thakalis from the western hills and mountains, Rais, Limbus and Sherpas from the eastern hills and mountains, and Newars from the Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere (Seddon *et al* 2001:

2 Personal communication, Ganesh Gurung, Nepal Institute of Development Studies (NIDS), Kathmandu, 5 May 2010.

76-77). These findings are mirrored in the case of Singapore. Figure 1 shows that the majority of the Nepalis in Singapore hail from the Eastern (38.3%) and Western (36.3%) regions of Nepal.

In Singapore, most professionals are Newars hailing from the Kathmandu Valley, alongside a small number of Bahuns, Chetris, Magars, Rais and Gurungs. However, those working in restaurants usually have a different regional and ethnic profile. Data drawn from eleven ethnic Nepali restaurants suggest that a majority of the Nepali owners and employees hail from Baglung and Gulmi districts in the Western region and Jhapa and Ilam districts in the Eastern region. Those who work in restaurants include several from the Kathmandu Valley and the Tarai. A substantial number of English-speaking Nepalis work in other food and beverage outlets in Singapore, in both managerial and non-managerial positions.

Tables 1 and 2 reproduce the official statistical data on the number of Nepalis abroad in 2001. Table 2 shows the distribution of the emigrant population from Nepal by country of destination and reason for absence. In 2001, 3363 of the 762,181 Nepalis living abroad were residing in Singapore. Of these 3363 Nepalis, 1249 were classified as having undertaken jobs in the personal service line, 1044 were employed in institutional services, 347 had emigrated for educational purposes, and 145 had emigrated for marital reasons. The pursuit of business opportunities is the least important reason given for emigration to Singapore, with only thirty Nepalis recorded as having emigrated for this purpose.

These figures are a gross underestimate of the current Nepali population of Singapore, because large numbers of Nepalis have left Nepal during the almost eleven years since they were compiled. The figures are also lacking in accuracy, both in relation to the number of Nepalis temporarily or permanently residing in Singapore, and the nature of the jobs they pursue. According to officials from Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics, the data do not take the Gurkhas into account, because they were not present in Nepal at the time of the survey.³ Furthermore, it is evident that the new *lāhures* in Singapore are prominent in the business field (e.g., restaurants, travel agencies, trade in precious gem stones and

3 Personal communication, Rudra Suwal, Deputy Director, Chief of National Accounts Section. Central Bureau of Statistics. Kathmandu, 9 June 2009.

Table 1: Source regions of population absent in Nepal and countries of destination (CBS 2001: 113)

Countries	Nepal		EDR		CDR		WDR		MWDR		FWDR	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Total	762181	100.0	121911	16.0	107631	14.1	331890	43.54	94724	12.43	106035	13.91
India	589050	100.0	67388	11.4	63508	10.5	263150	44.63	90006	15.28	105018	17.83
Pakistan	558	100.0	107	19.2	232	41.6	138	24.73	36	6.45	45	5.06
Bangladesh	952	100.0	133	14.0	410	43.1	239	25.11	65	7.25	101	10.61
Sri Lanka	201	100.0	44	22.0	52	40.8	62	30.85	8	3.98	5	2.49
Maldives	370	100.0	130	35.1	56	23.2	129	34.9	17	4.59	8	2.2
China	1354	100.0	225	16.0	706	52.1	305	22.5	58	4.28	60	4.4
Korea	2679	100.0	484	18.1	567	21.2	1541	57.5	67	2.50	20	0.8
Russia and others	747	100.0	126	16.9	358	47.9	153	24.5	41	5.49	39	5.2
Japan	3726	100.0	358	9.0	1509	42.1	1752	46.3	47	1.26	27	0.7
Hong Kong	12001	100.0	4111	34.3	1821	15.2	5952	49.6	87	0.72	30	0.3
Singapore	3363	100.0		38.9	628	18.7	1221	36.3	213	6.33	13	0.4
Malaysia	6813	100.0	2562	37.0	1026	15.1	2983	43.8	153	2.65	59	0.9
Australia	2491	100.0	365	14.7	1476	59.3	556	22.3	53	2.13	41	1.7
South Africa	67460	100.0	23179	34.4	13873	20.6	27775	41.2	2475	3.67	158	0.2
Qatar	24397	100.0	9256	37.9	4547	15.6	10164	41.7	376	1.54	54	0.2
Kuwait	3688	100.0	1457	39.5	692	16.3	1450	39.3	69	1.87	20	0.5
United Arab Emirates	12544	100.0	4157	33.1	2590	20.7	5408	43.1	321	2.56	68	0.5
Bahrain	2737	100.0	1511	55.2	272	9.9	918	33.5	33	1.21	3	0.1
Other Asian Countries	3845	100.0	921	23.5	1334	34.7	1440	37.4	127	3.30	27	0.7

Countries	Nepal		EDR	CDR	WDR	MWDR	FWDR	%				
	Total	%										
United Kingdom	7271	100.0	1645	22.0	2602	35.3	2811	38.7	160	2.20	52	0.7
Germany	1638	100.0	270	16.5	671	41.0	653	39.9	33	2.01	11	0.7
France	250	100.0	40	16.0	156	62.4	50	20.0	4	1.60	0	0.0
Other European Countries	1958	100.0	210	10.5	931	45.6	818	40.9	22	1.10	17	0.9
USA, Canada and Mexico	9557	100.0	1147	12.0	6661	69.7	1566	16.4	116	1.21	67	0.7
Other Countries	1877	100.0	534	28.5	617	32.9	568	30.3	86	4.58	72	3.8

Table 2: Distribution of the population absent from Nepal by countries of destination and by reasons for absence 2001 (CBS 2001: 114-5)

Country of Destination	Reasons of Absence							
	Total	Agri-culture	Busi-ness	Per-sonal Service	Institu-tional Service	Study/ Training	Mar-riage	Others
Total	762181	7763	12050	506221	94329	31747	14101	95970
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
India	589050	7763	10832	385062	69102	19337	12772	84182
	77.28	100.00	89.89	76.07	73.26	60.91	90.58	87.72
Pakistan	558	0	66	211	41	160	12	68
	0.07		0.54	0.04	0.04	0.50	0.08	0.07
Bangladesh	952	0	40	277	71	411	14	139
	0.12		0.33	0.05	0.08	1.29	0.10	0.14
Bhutan	610	0	28	328	71	33	15	135
	0.08		0.23	0.06	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.14
Sri Lanka	201	0	7	88	22	50	6	28
	0.03		0.01	0.02	0.01	0.16	0.04	0.03
Maldives	370	0	8	268	46	7	9	32
	0.05		0.01	0.05	0.05	0.02	0.06	0.03
China	1354	0	44	587	154	382	16	171
	018		0.37	0.12	0.16	1.20	0.11	0.18
Korea	2679	0	28	1990	462	83	16	100
	0.35		0.23	0.39	0.49	0.26	0.11	0.10
Russia and Others	747	0	12	142	53	330	11	199
	0.10		0.10	0.03	0.06	1.04	0.08	0.21
Japan	3726	0	88	2172	492	585	97	292
	0.49		0.73	0.43	0.52	1.84	0.69	0.30
Hong Kong	12001	0	111	8249	1902	331	224	1184
	1.57		0.92	1.63	2.02	1.04	1.59	1.23
Singapore	3363	0	30	1249	1044	347	145	548
	044		0.25	0.05	1.00	1.09	1.03	0.57
Malaysia	6813	0	18	5521	892	37	5	340
	0.89		0.15	1.09	0.95	0.12	0.03	0.35
Australia	2491	0	20	579	176	1487	62	167
	0.33		0.16	0.11	0.19	4.68	0.44	0.17
Saudi Arabia	67460	0	123	54902	8907	56	18	3454
	8.85		1.02	10.85	9.44	0.18	0.13	3.60

Country of Destination	Reasons of Absence							
	Total	Agri-culture	Busi-ness	Per-sonal Service	Institu-tional Service	Study/Train-ing	Mar-riage	Others
Qatar	24397	0	38	19278	3351	17	4	1259
	3.20		0.31	3.90	3.55	0.05	0.03	1.31
Kuwait	3688	0	4	2957	543	4	2	178
	0.48		0.03	0.58	0.58	0.01	0.01	0.19
United Arab Emirates	12544	0	28	9963	1932	50	10	561
	1.65		0.23	1.91	2.05	0.16	0.07	0.58
Bahrain	2737	0	6	2180	421	9	2	119
	0.36		0.05	0.43	0.45	0.03	0.01	0.12
Other Asian Countries	3849	0	70	1947	917	453	79	383
	0.50		0.58	0.38	0.97	1.43	0.56	0.40
United Kingdom	7271	0	101	2513	2088	1631	200	738
	0.95		0.84	0.50	2.21	5.14	1.42	0.77
Germany	1638	0	37	948	207	262	28	156
	0.21		0.31	0.19	0.22	0.83	0.20	0.16
France	250	0	9	86	26	75	9	45
	0.03		0.07	0.02	0.03	0.24	0.06	0.05
Other Euro-pean Countries	1998	0	35	892	339	504	56	172
	0.26		0.29	0.18	0.36	1.59	0.40	0.18
USA, Canada and Mexico	9557	0	238	2482	770	4930	261	876
	1.25		1.98	0.49	0.82	15.53	1.42	0.91
Other Coun-tries	444	0	1877	29	900	300	176	28
	0.06		15.58	0.0	0.95	0.94	1.25	0.03

Source: Population Census of Nepal 2001

rudraksa, garment stores etc.) and it is unlikely that business pursuits are the least significant reason for their absence from Nepal. In addition, after Singapore was marketed as a 'Global Schoolhouse' in 2003, students from Nepal flocked into the state, especially between 2004 and 2008. This large number of students is absent from the official 'Study/Training' tabulation because many of them came to Singapore on the pretext of being tourists but in actuality were students searching for places in private schools.

There are approximately seven thousand Nepalis in Singapore. Approximately six thousand are from the Gurkha Contingent and about

one thousand are professionals and semi-skilled workers.⁴ According to the President of the Nepali Singapore Society, there are only about thirty Nepalis who are Singapore citizens, and most of these are professionals.

Historicising the new *lāhures*: state policies, social networks and agents

State policies

During the 1980s, the Nepal government's policies impeded Nepali emigration to foreign countries. From the middle of 2005 onward, positive shifts were apparent in its attitude to foreign employment. The gradual liberalisation of policies concerning international migration led to a growth in the number of recruitment agencies, especially in Kathmandu. It has been noted that as of July 2002 301 recruiting agencies had been registered in Nepal, mostly in Kathmandu, and that Singapore was one of the listed destinations for Nepali workers to be officially recruited (UNIFEM 2006: 12).

Singapore's immigration policies are also instrumental in determining the nature of emigration from Nepal. One can easily notice the concentration of Nepali migrants in the food and beverage sector and as semi-skilled restaurant workers, and it is also clear that students who look to Singapore to further their education do so mainly in the field of hotel management, tourism and hospitality. There is also an increasing number of Nepali professionals who reside in Singapore, either temporarily or permanently. The nature of employment undertaken by the new *lāhures* is very different from that undertaken by the other South Asian migrant workers in Singapore. Nepalis neither work as construction or industrial workers like those from India and Bangladesh, nor as female domestic workers like those from India and Sri Lanka.

Given this situation, questions arise as to why there is a selective streamlining of the Nepali immigrants in Singapore. Apart from a small number who are citizens or permanent residents, most of the new *lāhures* are holders of Employment Passes or Business Passes. These categories

4 Personal communication, Amar Chitrakar, President of the Nepali Singapore Society, Singapore, 9 March 2010; Ong Keng Yong, Former Non-Resident Ambassador to Nepal, Singapore, 4 May 2010. See also: Jamie En Wen Wei, 'Ex-Nepalese prince and family relocate here', *The Straits Times*, 20 July 2008.

require holders to be either skilled, professionally qualified or have a decent level of education, e.g. SLC and above. The majority of the Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Indian workers only hold work permits issued to foreign unskilled workers and they enter Singapore as construction workers or domestic maids.

Nepalis are not eligible for this kind of work permit. On 16 June 1995, in a response to an enquiry from maid employment agencies about the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Nepal and Singapore, the latter state's Ministry of Labour said that Nepal was not approved as a source of foreign domestic workers, and that only domestic workers from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Philippines were eligible for work permits (National Archives of Singapore: June 1995). A few weeks later, it was maintained that there would be no move towards opening the labour market to non-traditional sources like Nepal (ibid: July 1995).

In trying to explain why there is a concentration of Nepalis in selected job scopes within the context of Singapore's policy towards these immigrants, it is apparent that the non-Gurkha Nepalis are concentrated in the food and beverage sector, and there are substantial numbers of professionals. It may therefore be concluded that the pattern of Nepali emigration to Singapore is distinct from the pattern of Nepali emigration to elsewhere in the world. Nepalis work in menial jobs in India and Malaysia and as construction workers in Hong Kong and Gulf countries, and they are known to lead a B-grade lifestyle in America. However, in the case of Singapore, a select group of Nepalis enters via professional or skilled categories. Many of these are educated and from privileged backgrounds.

Social networks in ethnic Nepali restaurants

At present, there are about nine Nepali restaurants in Singapore. Most of them were set up from the late 1990s onward. They include: Everest Kitchen, Shish Mahal North Indian and Nepali Cuisine, Albert Café and Restaurant, Kantipur Tandoori Restaurant, New Everest Kitchen, Gurkha Palace, Gorkha Kitchen, Himalaya Kitchen, and Kathmandu House.

Seddon, Adhkari and Gurung draw our attention to the idea of 'paths of migration', based on the notion that social networks have contributed to alleviating the risks involved in migration. According to them, these 'paths' are established on the basis of social networks and linkages, which

are themselves framed by kinship, caste, ethnicity, gender and class (Seddon *et al* 2001: 66).

Interviews conducted in several of the restaurants in Singapore suggest that most of the workers are directly employed by the restaurant owners. Harvey Choldin explains that 'chain migration' facilitates the movement of prospective migrants who have their initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with earlier migrants (Choldin 1973: 164-65). This pattern of 'chain migration' is evident amongst the Nepali semi-skilled workers in the restaurants.

Most of the managers and waiters in the various Nepali restaurants in Singapore are relatives, distant relatives, or friends of one another, and hence most of them have managed to secure their jobs through recommendations and kinship ties. Churamani Kharal, the owner of Pardesh Restaurant and Café, related that one of the main reasons he came to Singapore in 1993 is because he had a friend there.⁵ Binraj Dahjol, a waiter at Shish Mahal Tandoori restaurant, who came as a student in 2004 to undertake a food and beverage course, said that his brother Muni Raj, who works at Kantipur Tandoori restaurant, assisted him in coming to Singapore.⁶ Khagen Limbu, a chef at the Gurkha Palace Restaurant, was directly employed by the owner of the restaurant who was his neighbour in Nepal.⁷ The ethnic affinity present in the Nepali restaurants was further affirmed by Krishna Bahadur Pun, who related that he came to Singapore through a recommendation by his relative, and that his wife is now also working in the New Everest Kitchen restaurant.⁸ Employees of various Nepali restaurants in Singapore offer an insight into how tapping into kinship networks and mobilising social capital ensures job security. These emigrants depend heavily on informal and personal connections to make a living in Singapore.

Furthermore, a connection between the old and new *lāhures* is evident: some respondents explained that the Gurkha Contingent played a part

5 Personal communication, Churamani Kharal, owner of 'Pardesh Restaurant and Café'. Singapore, 10 December 2009.

6 Personal communication, Biniraj Maharjan Dahjol, waiter at 'Shish Mahal Nepali and North Indian Restaurant'. Singapore, 24 September 2008.

7 Personal communication, Khagen Limbu, chef at 'Gurkha Palace Restaurant'. Singapore, 6 April 2010.

8 Personal communication, Krishna Pun, manager at 'New Everest Kitchen'. Singapore, 16 April 2010.

in their decision to come to Singapore. One informant explained that his uncle, who had worked as a Gurkha, showed him around Singapore and helped him settle in.⁹ Another informant, Laxmi Gurung, related that one of the reasons he came to Singapore was because he has relatives and friends inside Mount Vernon Camp.¹⁰ Several of the Nepalis working in the food and beverage sector are relatives, distant relatives or friends of Gurkhas, thus indicating the direct connection between the Gurkha families and the food and beverage sector in Singapore.



Plate 1: An example of the hundreds of posters that encourage Nepali students to go abroad to study in Singapore.

The serving and repatriated Gurkhas have created an awareness of Singapore in Nepal, and this further explains why the Nepalis there primarily hail from the Eastern and Western regions of Nepal, and also accounts for their ethnic/clan similarities. The fact that the *lāhures* and new *lāhures* hail from similar regions is in part explained by the existence of an exclusive informal network.

Nepali students and professionals

The role of intermediaries is critical to our understanding of the impact

9 Personal communication, Ujjwal Satya, Head of Department (Human Resource) at the NATHM. Kathmandu, 15 May 2009.

10 Personal communication, Laxmi Gurung, Assistant Floor and Bar Manager at 'Serenity: Spanish Bar and Restaurant'. Singapore, 19 December 2009.

that agents have often had in catalysing migration. Sometime between 2004 and 2008, hospitality, hotel management and tourism were popular educational choices among Nepali students who sought the assistance of agents to secure a place in a private school in Singapore. In the course of trying to establish links with Singapore, many students chose to get trapped by agents rather than go through the formal process of sourcing an educational institution.

At the turn of the century, as the Maoist insurgency continued to disrupt the country, educational prospects in Nepal were bleak. It therefore became imperative for Nepali students to go abroad and it was during this period that hundreds of posters and advertisements produced by private educational agencies mushroomed across Kathmandu, capitalising on students' desire to go abroad to countries like the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Singapore, and Cyprus. These posters encouraged prospective students to pursue further studies, especially in the field of hotel management and hospitality, or to work as waiters and chefs in restaurants.



Plate 2: 2011. Nepali Restaurants in Singapore.

Furthermore, according to Ujjwal Satya from the Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM), subjects such as hotel management were introduced at the post-SLC level in Nepali schools during the late 1990s. This subject became immensely popular among students and approximately fifteen thousand students enrolled as it was

deemed easier than other subjects.¹¹ Unfortunately, due to the dire state of higher educational institutions in Nepal, only 4% of the cohort could be accommodated within Nepal (*ibid.*), leaving the rest to pursue their interest in this field abroad.

As a result of a massive advertising campaign for studying abroad, and given that there was a large number of eager students in this field of study who could not be accommodated in Nepal, Singapore was envisioned as one of the prime destinations for the pursuit of higher education. Nepal's Education Ministry data confirm that the courses most commonly undertaken by Nepali students in Singapore included a Diploma in Hospitality Management, and a Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality Management (Report of 'No Objection Letter' 2008).

Coincidentally, in 2003 Singapore launched its education hub plan and was marketed as a 'Global Schoolhouse'. This plan chimed well with the thousands of students from Nepal who were seeking a reputable country where they could study abroad. Singapore was considered to be more affordable compared to the exorbitant costs of studying in the United States or the United Kingdom. In addition, the close proximity of Singapore to Nepal (direct flights; approximately five hours), the stable social and political environment, and the perceived affinity of an Asian country, all in all placed Singapore in a favourable light among prospective Nepali students.

More importantly, unlike the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, most of the private institutes in Singapore did not require a 'No-Objection Letter' from Nepal's Education Ministry (Report of 'No Objection Letter' 2008). The absence of this administrative procedure in Singapore, together with the easy availability of on-arrival visas for Nepali students, contributed to an influx of Nepali students during the period 2004-2008.

Although they came on the pretext of being students, many of the Nepali migrants were keen to find a job. Among them, several were caught working illegally (the Student Pass prohibits them from working) and had to leave Singapore without completing their courses.¹² The euphoria of coming to Singapore was also short-lived for hundreds of students who

11 Personal communication, Ujjwal Satya, Head of Department (Human Resource) at the NATHM. Kathmandu, 15 May 2009.

12 Personal communication, Pujan Rai. Singapore, 19 October 2008.

were left stranded after being cheated by unscrupulous agents. One, Subhas, was cheated by an agent, and subsequently his student visa was cancelled. He lamented over how much money his family had had to fork out for him to receive an education in Singapore, and how he is now back in Nepal with no certificate.¹³ Nepalis were among other foreign students from India, Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam and elsewhere who were trapped by agents or were caught working illegally with a Student Pass. It was reported that as of March 2009 there were 99,000 foreign students in Singapore (Toh 2009). The number of private schools in Singapore had expanded from just 305 in 1997 to 1,200 in 2007.¹⁴ Many of these private schools, despite lacking reputable credentials, managed to successfully market themselves and lure foreign students.

Against a background of burgeoning complaints, a large number of newspaper articles between 2008 and 2009 brought to light the issues plaguing foreign students (see Sim 2008 and Davie 2009). These articles, together with the testimonies of returning foreign students, served to shatter Singapore's image as an education hub. Compelled to address the criticisms confronting Singapore's global education hub, new rules have been promulgated by the Singapore government. The fiasco created by shady agents and shoddy schools has contributed to a decline in the number of Nepali students entering Singapore. These students have since returned to Nepal to embark on yet another journey to fulfill their education and employment related dreams.

Unlike the students from Nepal, whose experiences in Singapore were often intertwined with stories about unscrupulous agents, the Nepali professionals exercised self-agency in their employment in Singapore. However, like the students, the Nepali professionals are largely in Singapore for a short period of time, and they are at best ambivalent about making Singapore their permanent place of residence.

Many of the recent batch of professionals perceive Singapore to be a launching pad for their subsequent ambitions, and have made their way to Singapore on a transitory basis after completing their degrees in other foreign countries. Many of the Nepali professionals working as doctors, accountants, engineers, or in banks, have studied in Canada, England or

13 Personal communication, Subhas. Kathmandu, 29 April 2009.

14 'New Rules for Private Schools' *The Business Times*, 11 February 2009.

Australia, and thereafter decided to transit in Singapore to find a job and acquire work experience.

The transitory residence of the new *lāhures*

A large proportion of the new *lāhures* reside in Singapore for less than five years and there are a variety of reasons for them forming part of a larger circulatory migration. Among the professionals, Singapore is seen as a country where experience can be gained before aiming for something better in countries like Australia, the United Kingdom or America. The Nepali students and restaurant workers who are keen on prolonging their stay in Singapore after two or four years are hindered by immigration regulations. In recent times, the inability of Nepali nationals to extend their employment passes is most evident among those in the food and beverage sectors or in other service-oriented industries. The liberal immigration policies that led to the influx of Nepalis have been amended and this has led to a downsizing of the immigrant population. Informants related that:

I have worked in 'Welcome Om' (restaurant) for slightly over 2 years but my employment pass did not get renewed. I do not know why I cannot continue to work in Singapore. I have to return to Nepal and then try to come to Singapore again. Otherwise, I will have to go to another country.¹⁵

Two years ago, those working in my restaurant were largely Nepali. But of late, almost all their employment passes are not getting renewed and they have gone back. I do not know what has caused this change in immigration rules concerning Nepalis.¹⁶

Most of the contemporary Singapore-based Nepali professionals obtained their tertiary education in Australia before coming to Singapore to get jobs. Several have permanent residence status in both Singapore and Australia. At this point, while there are a growing number whose options are constrained by immigration rules, they are also others who are

15 Personal communication, Ramesh Shrestha, waiter at 'Welcome Om'. Singapore, 14 November 2011.

16 Personal communication, Dan Bahadur Shahi, owner of 'Everest Kitchen'. Singapore, 3 May 2010.

undecided about settling down in Singapore, Australia or a third country. Some respondents commented that:

...it is not only the Nepali restaurateurs who have to return. Even among the professionals, many of my friends are not able to extend their employment pass or in some cases, their application for permanent residency has been unsuccessful. They have gone back to Nepal and perhaps they might re-migrate to the West... As for me, I feel that it is convenient to live in Singapore. It is neat, tidy and there is a good infrastructure in place. It is very Asian and I don't feel so foreign here. But, whatever I'm doing here, I always say it is temporary.¹⁷

I knew this Nepali girl who studied in Australia, and she worked in Singapore for five or six years. She was doing well. But she decided not to settle here. Instead she went back to Sydney since she got a better offer.¹⁸

Various informants who work as professionals admitted the possibility of becoming a citizen but at same time expressed their reluctance to make Singapore their home. They would frankly state:

I came to Singapore to get my MBA and my employment happened by chance. I've been here for about 2 years or so but have never tried to settle in Singapore. I will go back to my country, even my family wants me back home.¹⁹

There are benefits if I become Singapore citizen. But I do not know if I want to settle here. I do not know where I am going to be, I could be anywhere.²⁰

There is no problem for me to get a Singapore PR but I am definitely going back to Nepal. I spent my childhood in Nepal but left my country for 30 years. It is only fair I give back something.²¹

17 Personal communication, Kishore Dev Pant, engineer. Singapore, 10 January 2010.

18 Personal communication, Amar Chitrakar, President of the Nepali Singapore Society. Singapore, 9 March 2010.

19 Personal communication, Dhoroj Shrestha, Academic Executive Officer. Singapore, 22 April 2009.

20 Personal communication, anonymous teacher. Singapore, 18 March 2010.

21 Personal communication, anonymous academic. Singapore, 24 March 2010.

The transitory residence of the new *lāhures* is a poignant feature of their migration to Singapore. The length of the migrants' stay in Singapore is determined not only by their occupation type and personal ambition but also on the immigration rules relating to their respective vocation. In general, Nepali migrants stay in Singapore for less than five years. The exceptions are found mainly in professional categories who have lived in Singapore for a longer period of time.

A Nepali quasi-diaspora in Singapore

The Nepalis in Singapore live in a situation of temporality. If they are conceptualised as a quasi-diaspora, this accounts for the permanent transience of the Nepali diasporic movement to Singapore. The ambiguous diasporic position of the professionals who are undecided as to whether to take up Permanent Residence (PR) in Singapore or return to Nepal in order to venture into another country is striking. Paradoxically, as much as they would like to settle down in Singapore, which they regard as an ideal place to live, there remains an inclination to return to Nepal and/or venture to a country in the West. Most of the new *lāhures* have lived in Singapore for approximately five years, thus giving their residence some permanence. Yet, given the transient and complex nature of their migratory movements, their settlement in Singapore lacks a permanent character.

William Saffran has discussed a variety of collective experiences. He defines diasporas as follows: a historical trajectory of dispersal, conjuring up memories of the homeland; feelings of exclusion in the host country; a longing for eventual return and a strong myth of return; rendering support to the homeland; and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship (Saffran 1999: 364-65). The hallmarks of diaspora include settlement in a foreign country; racialised discourses that underscore the power dynamics and social relations between different groups of people; and identity quandaries that render visible the tensions produced by laying one's roots elsewhere (Clifford 2006; Brah 2006; Hall 2006).

A pertinent question which then arises is whether the Nepalis in Singapore are 'transmigrants' or 'temporary migrants'. Are they 'diasporic' or are the dynamics of the Nepali community in Singapore exceptional? The community embodies two types of migratory flows. While the Singapore Gurkhas are defined by a British colonial immigration heritage,

the relatively recent movement of the new *lāhures* is a product of various factors (e.g. Nepal's and Singapore's foreign policies, kinship networks, and the role of agents). The Nepali community in Singapore is fissured by differentiated histories and patterns of migration.

Rupa Chanda critically questions the classical tenets of diaspora theory, postulating that

...while diaspora refers to people from one country who are settled abroad permanently, does this only mean those who have changed nationality, or does this also include those who have retained their nationality but changed their permanent residence, or might it include those staying abroad for a long time, without changing either, perhaps because they are not permitted to do so as in the case with the expatriate community in Gulf countries? (Chanda 2008: 3).

The concept of 'diaspora' has long tended to be equated with permanent settlement abroad. Chanda questions this very notion. Similar to the expatriate community in Gulf countries, the Gurkhas are perceivably a diasporic community. This is despite the fact that they stay in Singapore for a very long time without integrating into their host country, they retain their nationality, and their permanent residence in Nepal usually remains unchanged. Similarly, the new *lāhures* can also be considered to be diasporic, although they have retained their Nepali nationality, have resided in Singapore for a substantial period of time, and are still vacillating between leaving or staying in Singapore.

The Nepali community in Singapore simultaneously conforms to and contests the classical bedrock of diasporic theory. In terms of conjuring up memories of the homeland, it resonates with classical notions of diaspora theory. At the same time, disengagements are evident when one tries to situate the community within the context of notions such as a historical trajectory of dispersal, a strong myth of return, and a collective identity. The unique dynamics of the Nepalis in Singapore serve as a case study which challenges some of the classical prerequisites normally associated with diasporic communities.

First, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal might have pressured Nepalis to emigrate to some extent, but nonetheless their migration to Singapore does not entail being 'dispersed' as it does in the Jewish and Armenian

contexts. Second, Saffran contends that diasporic communities retain memories of their homeland, and this is evident amongst the new *lāhures* in Singapore. The Nepali Society in Singapore was formed in 2008 as an initiative undertaken by members of the new *lāhure* community. The society seeks to maintain its cultural and traditional identification with Nepal. Through various events (e.g., *Dasai*, Nepali *Naya Barsa*, etc) organised by the society, memories of Nepal are conjured up and retained.

Third, in relation to the Nepalis in Singapore, the issue of 'return' is not a myth. The new *lāhures* are allowed to settle in Singapore provided they meet the necessary criteria to gain permanent residency. However, as explained earlier, a negligible percentage of new *lāhures* are Singapore citizens. A majority of them return to Nepal either because they want to venture into another country or because they are unable to prolong their stay in Singapore due to the immigration rules. This makes the 'myth of return' a misnomer among the Nepali community in Singapore.

Fourth, given the diversity present in the Nepali community in Singapore, it is difficult to speak of a collective identity and group consciousness amongst them. The *lāhures* and new *lāhures* live polarised lifestyles in Singapore, and are subject to different rules and regulations. To some extent, the expansion of the ethnic Nepali restaurants over the last fifteen years has helped to bridge the gap between the two groups, thus facilitating the development of an overarching Nepali identity in Singapore. Gurkha families patronise the restaurants and sometimes participate in the events organised in restaurants by the Nepali Singapore Society. Nevertheless, a discord is prevalent between the two groups, and there continues to be minimal interaction between the *lāhures* and new *lāhures*, given the formers' role in Singapore's national security. According to Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs, the Gurkhas' principal roles now are to act as a specialist guard force at key installations and to serve as a force supporting police operations. They have also provided security for major events such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in 2006 and the 13th ASEAN Summit in 2007.²² Increasingly, the Gurkhas assist the police in guarding Singapore against terrorism.

Although it conforms to some of the classical notions of diaspora

22 Personal communication, Charlotte Loh, Senior Public Communications Executive, Ministry of Home Affairs. Singapore, 16 October 2008.

theory, the new *lāhure* community in Singapore exhibits some peculiar features. In terms of relating to their homeland and defining themselves with reference to Nepal, the new *lāhures* lend themselves to the classical notion of diaspora. However, the unique dynamics of the community serve to reconfigure notions such as a historical trajectory of dispersal, a strong myth of return, and a collective identity.

Whilst recognizing that the *lāhures* are sojourners and politically disenfranchised individuals, the Gurkha Contingent as a community has thrived in Singapore for 61 years and the longevity of the Nepalese 'settlement' in Singapore vis-à-vis *lāhure* families allows them to be constructed as a diasporic community. Return is not a myth for them, because *lāhure* families return to Nepal after living in Singapore for 20 to 25 years. The nostalgia experienced by various *lāhures* for Nepal during their service in Singapore is just as salient as their exilic nostalgia for Singapore when they resettle in Nepal. In this context, notions of 'host-country' and 'homeland' undergo complex negotiations, shaping a dual sense of belonging.

On the other hand, the new *lāhures* in Singapore are still at an early stage of community formation. Composed of pioneer immigrants who are gradually putting down roots in Singapore, after having had Singapore-born children, they are arguably a community in the making. Still in an embryonic stage, the Singapore Nepali community is yet to fully develop, and thus the term 'quasi-diaspora' would be apt as it articulates the incipient nature of the community.

Conclusion

Nepali emigration to Singapore began in 1949 with the movement of Gurkhas. The second phase gained momentum after 1991 and intensified following the turn of the twenty-first century with the advent of new *lāhures*. It is clear from the profile of the new *lāhure* community in Singapore that a majority of them hails from the Eastern and Western regions of Nepal, similar to the Gurkhas, and also from the Kathmandu Valley. Possibly, the Gurkhas have created awareness about Singapore, and an exclusive informal network between the Gurkhas and the new *lāhures* serves to explain the regional and even ethnic/clan affinity between the two groups.

Seddon, Adhikari and Gurung postulate that it is not only in the

Gulf that Nepali migrants encounter 'dirty, degrading and dangerous' conditions at work. Whether in Korea or Kuwait, Singapore or Saudi Arabia, the risks and the hardships are real (Seddon *et al* 2001: 16). However, it has been demonstrated that Singapore's immigration policies pertaining to the Nepalis hinge on the need for them to be educated and skilled. The job scope for the new *lāhures* in Singapore is distinct, considering that Nepalis are largely categorised as blue-collared workers in other parts of the world. Singapore's immigration polices continue to define the occupational niches of new *lāhures*.

In spite of the bulge in the numbers of new *lāhures* in Singapore, a majority of them are not permanent residents. The mobilisation of social networks in the ethnic Nepali restaurants has contributed to facilitating the movement of semi-skilled workers in the food and beverage sector. Some of the owners of these restaurants are Singapore citizens, and have integrated into the island-city because the stable political and economic environment is perceived to be conducive for their business. However, the workers are cornered by immigration regulations that require regular renewals of their Employment Passes. It is often the case that such workers live in a constant state of uncertainty in Singapore.

After the controversy over shady agents and shoddy private schools, Nepali students have become a negligible part of the Singapore Nepali population because a majority of them have returned to their homeland. While there are a handful of professionals who have become Singapore citizens, the majority of recently-arrived professionals are uncertain about making Singapore their permanent residence. This uncertainty is further compounded by their transnational motives, because many of them have ambitions to migrate to Australia, America and other countries in the West.

The transitory nature of the new *lāhures'* residence in Singapore is a crucial aspect of their migration pattern. Arguably, the new *lāhures* form part of a larger circulatory migration pattern. Their sojourn in Singapore demonstrates that there are either structural impediments to their ability to settle in Singapore or that they are themselves searching for better economic opportunities.

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On the Historiography of Nepal: The ‘Wright’ Chronicle reconsidered*

Manik Bajracharya and Axel Michaels

Introduction

It is an often-discussed theory that India (and this includes, for once, Nepal as well) did not produce any historiography.¹ As early as around 1030 CE the Muslim scholar and polymath Al-Biruni could write:

Unfortunately the Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things, they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and when they are pressed for information and are at loss, not knowing what to say, they invariably take tale-telling (quoted in Witzel 1990: 2).

For Friedrich Hegel, influenced by Friedrich Schiller’s famous inaugural lecture ‘Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?’ (What is universal history and why does one study it?) delivered in Jena in 1789, this meant that all non-European cultures, including India and China, were without history: ‘Because Indians do not have history as historiography, they do not have history as an arena of action (*res gestae*), i.e. they did not develop (history) into a truly political field.’²

This notion of the lack of Indian historiography has often been repeated. The historian R.C. Majumdar, for instance, wrote in *The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Vedic age*: ‘It is a well-known fact that with the single exception of Rājatarāṅginī (History of Kashmir), there is no historical text in Sanskrit dealing with the whole or even parts of

* This paper is the revised text of a joint lecture delivered on 12 March 2012 at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the South Asia Institute Heidelberg and the 25th anniversary of its branch office in Nepal.

- 1 See Berkemer (1998) for a discussion of the relevant literature; with regard to Nepal, the works of Witzel (1990) and Mishra (2010) have been especially helpful.
- 2 ‘Weil die Inder keine Geschichte als Historie haben, um deswillen haben sie keine Geschichte als Taten (*res gestae*), d.i. keine Herausbildung zu einem wahrhaft politischen Zustande’ (Hegel after Glasenapp 1960: 65; our translation).

India' (1951: 47). Even Wilhelm Halbfass repeated the argument in *India and Europe*, his *magnum opus* published in 1981:

The Indian tradition has not brought forth historical accounts or inventories of developments, changes, chronological sequences of ideas. Innovations and reorientations have not been documented as such (Halbfass 1988: 367).

However, one must see this notion in relation to the monopolistic Western claim of scientific historiography, which denies the scientific value of other historiographies. We will return to this point later. To be sure, India did not have an Herodotus, a Thucydides or a Livy, though not even these historians produced any 'historiography as a separate, impartial science' (Witzel 1990: 40) or made claims for its universality. One does not find this in the West before the 18th century; as an academic discipline it was established in the 19th century only. To be sure, history writing always serves certain political or epistemological interests (see Mishra 2010: 18). The same holds true for the denial of any scientific sense for history and historiography. It seems that one has to see the 'rationality' of history as a science, in relation to the alleged 'irrationality' of other forms of history writing.

In 1924 Hermann Goetz, an Indologist and art historian at Heidelberg University, challenged the view that India did not develop any historiography:

In academia there are sometimes theories that have developed due to the lack of knowledge of material and then remained ineradicable despite experiences collected in the meantime. Such a theory is also the theory that Indians did not develop a real historiography and a sense for history (Goetz 1924: 3; our translation).

Goetz then lists a number of chronicles: 19 in Sanskrit, 5 in Pali, 11 in Sinhala, 22 in Hindi and Rajasthani, and 4 each in Bengali and Tamil; among them the famous *Dīpavaṃśa* and *Mahāvāṃśa* from Sri Lanka, the *Gāṅgavaṃśāvalī* from Orissa, and the *Chambavaṃśāvalī* from Himachal Pradesh. Yet he knew nothing of the Nepalese chronicles, possibly the largest collection of such texts in South Asia (cp. Hasrat 1970: XV).

The Nepalese Chronicles

The Nepalese *vaṃśāvalī*s range from a few folios up to more than 300. There is one early chronicle of the Malla period, the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* (Vajrācārya and Malla eds. 1985), which was compiled from various chronicles (Witzel 1990: 18) at the end of the 14th century, probably in Bhaktapur, in hybrid Sanskrit and Old Newari, and many later chronicles, mostly written in Nepali. The catalogue of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project lists 110 *vaṃśāvalī* manuscripts and the Hodgson Collection³ in the British Library 65.⁴ These chronicles were mostly composed or compiled in the late 18th and 19th centuries; the authors and compilers are generally not known. The chronicles became popular after the Shah dynasty conquered the Kathmandu Valley in 1768/69. To the group of later chronicles belong *inter alia* the Hindu *Bhāṣāvāṃśāvalī*, the *Rājavaṃśāvalī*, the *Rājabhogavaṃśāvalī* and a number of smaller and specific *vaṃśāvalī*s related to certain ethnic groups, e.g. *Sena-*, or *Guruṅ-Vaṃśāvalī*.

Only two longer chronicles have so far been translated into English:

- a) The so-called *Padmagiri's Chronicle* included in Bikram Jit Hasrat's *History of Nepal* (Hasrat 1970) which is based on the English translations of various texts prepared by Hodgson himself. These translations are preserved in the Hodgson Collection at the British Library (vols. 16 and 17) and entitled 'Sacred Legends and Vamsavalis of Nepal Proper or the Great Valley'. Hasrat attributes the *vaṃśāvalī*s to a figure named Padmagiri, who is not mentioned in the Hodgson documents.⁵
- b) The so-called *Wright Chronicle*, one of the oldest of the later chronicles, which has become most famous through its English translation by Daniel Wright (1877), a physician who served at the British Residency in Kathmandu from 1866 to 1876.

3 Brian Houghton Hodgson lived in Nepal from 1820 to 1843, and from 1833 as British Resident (see Waterhouse 2004 and Whelpton & Hutt 2011).

4 One of the original chronicles in the Hodgson Collection (Vol. 52, folios 83-86 and 55-56), entitled *Nepālarājaparāmarā*, has been edited and translated by Riccardi (1986).

5 See Ramesh Dhungel et. al, online catalogue. The catalogue mentions Hasrat's claim that the author of Volume 17 (folios 173-219) is Padmagiri. However, a more detailed study should be done to find out the exact relationship between Hasrat and Hodgson's translations. 'Padmagiri' is mentioned in *Svayambhūpurāna* (1.50) as a name attributed to the Svayambhu hill, not as a person.

Despite the fact that several Nepalese scholars—for example, Nayanath Paudel, Devi Prasad Lamshal, Gautamvajra Vajracharya and K.P. Malla, and Dinesh and Mahesh Raj Pant—have edited some of these texts in Nepali, the state of the art regarding the Nepalese *vaṃśāvalī*s is unsatisfactory, as remarked by Theodore Riccardi in 1986:

There are neither adequate texts nor translations in print, and, curiously, where translations are available there are not texts, and where we have texts there are no translations. Much of the discussion therefore is based on reports *about* texts rather than on the texts themselves, and outdated translations. Kirkpatrick's text is lost. The text used by Wright has never been published, and only Petech reports in print that he has examined it. The chronicle discussed by Levi the *Brāhmaṇa-Vaṃśāvalī*] has never been published. Hasrat has published transcriptions of English translations found in the Hodgson papers, but he gives no information about the original texts. Other texts are fragmentary (Riccardi 1986: 248).

The Wright Chronicle

Given this situation, we decided to prepare the *edition princeps* and a new translation of 'Wright's' *History of Nepal*, which has remained one of the major sources of Nepalese history and legends. It has been reprinted no fewer than ten times by different publishers. Being the most readily available translation of the *vaṃśāvalī*s, Wright's book has been used extensively by scholars all around the world. It also happens to be the only Buddhist *vaṃśāvalī* of its time.

For the preparation of the critical edition of the text we have so far collected four manuscripts of this *vaṃśāvalī* which were prepared at different times but are closely related to each other:

- a) CA: This *vaṃśāvalī* in the collection at Cambridge University was the actual manuscript used for Wright's translation. Wright acquired this manuscript from Edward Byles Cowell who later donated it to the university. Cecil Bendall's *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge* (1883: 205) lists the manuscript as 'add. 1952'. The manuscript runs to 184 leaves of Nepali paper with nine lines per page. The size of the manuscript is 11 by 4.5 inches and

it is in a well preserved condition. The author is unknown. Additional notes on the margins of pages are by a different scribe. The manuscript ends with a report of the birth of king Surendra Vikram Shah (1829-1881) in 1751 of the Śaka era.

- b) BL: The second manuscript is archived in the Hodgson Collection in the British Library as ‘vol. 52, fols. 7-52’. This *vaṃśāvalī* was probably compiled by Pandit Amritananda Vandya for Hodgson. The first six folios are missing from this manuscript. It contains a total number of 46 leaves of Nepali paper. The number of lines per page varies from 22 to 55. The very well preserved manuscript has three different kinds of writing, probably by the same scribe. It has rough jottings on several pages. The manuscript ends with the description of historical events up to Rajendra Vikram Shah (reigned 1816-1847). Surprisingly, this important manuscript has so far escaped the notice of historians and philologists.
- c) NA1: A manuscript in the National Archives, Nepal, titled *Nepālavamśāvalī*, dated N.S. 1001, which was microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project on 14.4.1972 (Manuscript no. 4-1010, reel no. A319/2). It has 71 folios; the first and final folios of the manuscript are torn out, and page margins are damaged. In the colophon, the scribe Babu Maniraja Patravamsha of Pimbahala and the patrons Virasingh Vana and his son Harsha Bahadura of Athanani Nakabahil are mentioned. The manuscript ends with a description of events during the reign of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher (1901-1929).
- d) NA2: A manuscript in the National Archives, Nepal, titled *Nepālako Vaṃśāvalī*, which was also microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project on 14.4.1972 (Manuscript no. 4-2814, reel no. A319/5). It is a modern bound book of 93 pages, measuring 28x16 cm. It is undated and ends abruptly at a description of events during the reign of Shrinivasa Malla (1661-1705; Shrinivasa Malla was a joint ruler with his father Siddhinarasimha Malla as early as 1649⁶).

Wright’s knowledge of Nepal and Nepalese languages was very limited as he admits in his preface: ‘I am not myself an Oriental scholar, and have

6 SHAH (1992:84).

had nothing to do with the translation beyond revising it for publication, and adding a few notes regarding the customs and places mentioned.’ (p. vi). ‘His’ translation was probably prepared by the Indian Munshi Shew Shunker Singh, who apparently also did not know the places very well. Even the help of Pandit Gunanand was often misleading. Thus we read on p. 130: ‘This Rājā [i.e. Viśvadeva Varman] once said that the human sacrifice to Bacchlā [Vatsalā] was a piece of cruelty, whereupon the Narasivā made a great noise.’ In a footnote Wright explains Narasivā: ‘Literally ‘man-jackal’; perhaps the sacrificing priest. The Pandit cannot explain this passage.’ What in reality happens is that a (New.) *dhvājūju* (‘jackal’s king’), a man with a semi-priestly function during the Vatsalājātrā, howls like a jackal in the Vatsalā Temple near the Paśupatinātha Temple early in the morning of the last day of the procession (see Michaels 2008: 91-92). Wright and his assistants apparently neither knew the procession nor the Vatsalā Temple, which they also confused with the Vajreśvarī or Pīḡāmāī shrine.

It thus happens that Wright’s translation is inadequate in many regards. First, it is much shorter than the original manuscript because he fails to translate many obscure passages and most Sanskrit verses and inscriptions in the text, especially those from the Malla period. Second, he often misidentifies places or understands technical terms incorrectly.

Another example demonstrates that one also has to include visual material together with the translation in order to identify the sacred places. This concerns the identification and localisation of the ‘Madunāsala-deva’ Temple (Wright 1877: 214). In the manuscript we read:

*pherī kāṣṭhamamaṇḍapasaṁdhi eka prācīna liṅgākārabhitrakā devālayakā
nṛtyanāthakā dhyāna nikāsī sundara mūrtti banāikana āphule kavitā banāī
śilāmā lekhī kavindrapura nāma rākhī ṭhulo satala banāī madunāsaladeva
kahalāī basāyā* (CA 130a)

In the *Wright Chronicle* this is translated on p. 214 as follows:

He [King Pratapa Malla, r. 1641-1674] made a beautiful image of Nṛitya-nātha, exactly like one in a conical-shaped temple, and placed it in a large *pātī*, newly built for the purpose, which was named Madunāsala-deva.

Our new translation will be as follows:

And then he [King Pratapa Malla] pulled out the *dhyāna* of the Nṛtyanātha (sculpture) in a shrine inside an ancient *liṅga*-shaped temple in the vicinity of Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa, got made a beautiful statue, composed a poem, engraved it in a stone, established a large *sattal* (rest house), gave (it) the name ‘Kavīndrapura’, and called (the deity) Madu-nāsala-deva.

Our new translation shows that Wright and his assistants neither mentioned the proximity of the Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa, nor the pulling out of the *dhyāna* of the Nṛtyanātha sculpture from a *liṅga*-shaped temple, nor the inscription of Kavīndrapura with the engraved poem of Pratapa Malla (published by Vajrācārya v.s. 2033: 232-3).

However, even with this new translation it does not become clear precisely which sacred place the chronicle is referring to. This only happens if we carefully analyse the topographical and local situation. Then it becomes evident that the chronicler is speaking about the previously four-tiered building at the end of the Kathmandu Darbar Square, which is



Fig. 1: Kavīndrapur Temple, locally known as Nāsadyah Temple

still known as Kavīndrapur Temple, or locally in the Kathmandu Newari dialect as ‘Marunāsaḥ’. (The temple lost its fourth roof during the 1934 earthquake: see the photo of ca. 1920 and the drawings in Gutschow 2011: 512-513.) ‘Kavīndrapur’ is related to King Pratapa Malla, who saw himself as king of the poets (*kavindra*). This is why the fourteen deities of the temple include ‘Nṛityanātha’ (=Nṛṭyanātha), the god of dance and music, in Newari also named ‘Nāsaḥḍyaḥ’ or, as in the chronicle, ‘Nāsala’. ‘Madu’ is related to the city quarter Marutvāḥ, where the temple is located, close to the Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa.

As mentioned, our translation will be supplemented by unpublished drawings and paintings of mid-19th century Nepal, which Niels Gutschow discovered in the Royal Asiatic Society London (see Head 1991) and other places. Among these sources, there are, for instance, two historical illustrations from the time of the composition of the *Wright Chronicle* showing the Kavīndrapur or Marunāsaḥḍyaḥ Temple:

- a) A drawing by Rajman Singh (archived in the Royal Asiatic Society, London) and collected by Hodgson.
- b) An unpublished water painting by Oldfield (1822-1871) from 1857.

Both illustrations show the Marunāsaḥḍyaḥ Temple near the Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa with attached shops. From the caption of the Singh drawing and a note on the back of the Oldfield painting we learn that the temple or *sattal* was erected in ‘1656(N.S 770)’⁷ by Pratapa Malla, called resp. ‘Bhū Bhandel or Dhansār’ by Singh/Hodgson and ‘Dunsar’ by Oldfield. Singh/Hodgson add that the temple is dedicated to ‘Nityanāth or NasaDeo.’ Both probably refer to Nep. *dhansār* (Skt. *dhanaśāla*), which apparently indicates that the building was also used as a kind of treasury.⁸ This means that the illustrations sometimes give us information additional to the *Wright Chronicle*. We then understand that the temple is primarily dedicated to Nṛṭyanātha whose statue – a rare image with Nṛṭyanātha in his anthropomorphic appearance – is in the centre of the front arcades – and not to Narasiṃha as a plate from the Guṭhi Saṃsthāna at the entrance door suggests. This is also confirmed by the fact that the two inscriptions

7 The calculation of Singh/Hodgson is wrong, because NS 770 equates to 1657 or 1658.

8 ‘Bhandel’ could also come from bhaṇḍāra, ‘treasury house.’

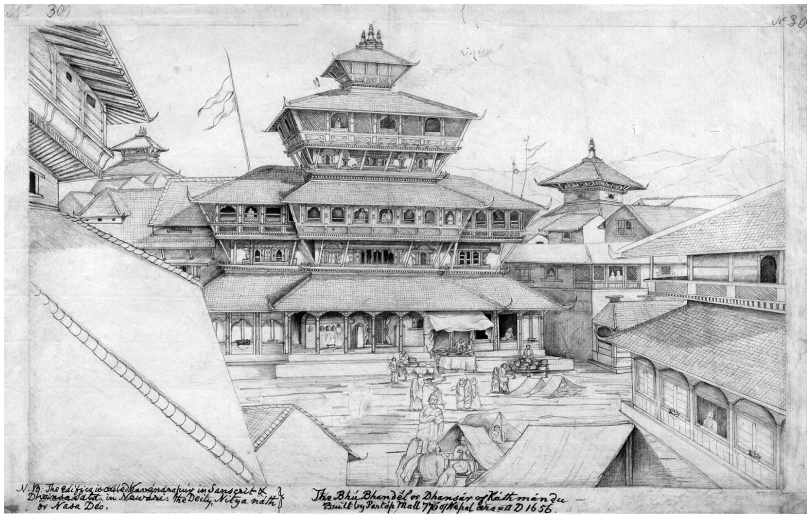


Fig. 2: Drawing by Rajman Singh in the Hodgson Collection at the Royal Asiatic Society



Fig. 3: Kathmandu, watercolour painting by Henry Ambrose Oldfield (1822-1871). Written on the reverse side: 'The Dunsar in the city of Kathmandoo, March 1857' (courtesy: British Library, Shelfmark WD 3278, Item number 3278)

include the poem of Pratapa Malla mentioned in the Wright Chronicle.

The unsatisfactory state of the existing *Wright Chronicle* makes it all the more important to prepare a critical edition of the *vaṃśāvalī*, to completely translate it anew, to add as many annotations as necessary and to supplement it with historical and modern maps, drawings and photographs.

Nepalese Historiography

The Nepalese chronicles have often been classified as historical source material that lacks the status of proper historiographical texts. Daniel Wright called 'his' chronicle a 'native history', Bikram Jit Hasrat has given his book the title *History of Nepal as Told by its Own and Contemporary Chroniclers*, Theodore Riccardi (1986: 247) regarded the texts as a 'major source for the writing of Nepalese history' and attests the *vaṃśāvalīs* an 'unquestioned value as historical documents' that 'have created as much confusion as they have illumination.' Michael Witzel classified and valued them as sources of parahistorical nature. However, as Yogesh Raj Mishra aptly remarks, 'the epistemological superiority of history over sources of history is a vestige of a certain political order of knowledge, and not (...) a consequence of an ignorance of historiography in South Asia' (Mishra 2010: 15).

Indeed, even if it might be too early to come to robust conclusions, we can already see how the chronicles result in a certain concept of history that has its own characteristics. These texts claim to narrate the history of Nepal, or mostly the Kathmandu Valley, and the sequence of its rulers along with their major deeds and most important events. Their focus is often on the donation of temples and other monuments, but also the description of rituals and festivals, as well as the genealogy of rulers.

The chronicles have mostly been written from the dynastic or ethnic point of view. After all they are *vaṃśāvalīs*, i.e. pedigrees of a particular dynasty (*vaṃśa*) similar to lists of old teachers (*paramparā*). There are no larger causal relations; myths, legends and facts are mixed. We find in them realistic reports of fires, earthquakes, repairs of temples etc., but we also find the narration of legendary figures and deities as historical agents and their miraculous acts. We encounter illusory lengths of reigns ('he ruled for 1000 years'), but also exact dates for events. We notice that the chronicles apparently try to heal a departure from tradition, or try

to connect to the south, i.e. India, for instance by claiming that Sthitiraja Malla or Pratapa Malla trace their origin to the famous Karnataka king Nanyadeva (Brinkhaus 1991, Witzel 1990: 4).

It goes without saying that India and Nepal produced more historical sources than just the chronicles which apparently survived more at the margins of the subcontinent, i.e. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kashmir or Orissa, 'not disrupted by intervening Muslim periods of government' (Witzel 1990: 40), thus showing that Indian historiography is not derived from the Arabic-Persian tradition of history-writing. In Nepal, the chronicles are complemented by inscriptions, a vast number of historical documents, *praśastis*, manuscript colophons, old coins etc. Besides this bedrock historical material, Nepal has another category of historical texts, written in Newari (see Mishra (2010: 24)), i.e. *thyāsaphū* (Ieporello), *aitihāsikaghatanāvalī* ('garland of events'), *aitihāsikatipoṭa* ('historical notes') or *dharahpau* ('a leaf of list'). We further find pauranic historiographies (*itihāsa*) and many eulogising texts, i.e. *purāṇas* ('based on a framework of a genealogical nature' (Witzel 1990: 2)), *kathās*, *māhātmyas*, or *sthalapurāṇas* such as the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, *Paśupatiṭpurāṇa*, *Himavatkhanda* of the *Skandhapurāṇa*, or the *Nepālamāhātmya*. We have a few historical *kāvyas*, though not of the extent of Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅginī* (which lists its own sources such as inscriptions, *praśastis*, manuscript colophons, old coins, etc.). We also lack, as far as we know, specific temple histories (such as the *Mādālā Pāñji* of Orissa).

We therefore can now say that there is a Nepalese (and Indian) historiography and concept of history. This was also Hermann Goetz's conclusion: 'We face a richly developed Indian historiography starting from the 11th century in all Indian languages, not only in Sanskrit' (Goetz 1924: 22, our translation). Other scholars confirm this: 'Taken together, these sources represent a bulk of material perhaps as large as found in other civilizations' (Witzel 1990: 39). Much of this material has been neglected as historical material—probably due to a Brahmanical purism that focused on Sanskrit at the cost of the vernacular languages, and due to the regional and thus limited scope of the *vaṃśāvalīs*.

However, the question is not so much whether Indian and Nepal historiography exists: this cannot be doubted anymore. It is important rather to specify the distinct form of this Nepalese and to a certain extent also Indian concept of history. It is true that the chronicles do not speak

for *the* history of Nepal but ‘only’ for a certain historical perspective and therefore remain a kind of ethno-history, i.e. a local, or ethnic or indigenous form of historiography. But in a way all history is ethno-history, the narrative of a certain region and period (see Mishra 2010: 19).

There are indeed peculiarities of Nepalese historical narratives that show the uniqueness of the Nepalese (and Indian) concept of time and historiography and which at the same time can cope with the universalistic claim of history as science:

- Nepalese historiography is primarily the report of a series of events⁹ with chronology as its organising structure. The *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* (fol. 30b) refers to itself as ‘accounts of the past’ (*bhūtavṛttānta*): and the Cambridge manuscript of the *Wright Chronicle* refers in its opening stanza to various past incidents (*anekapūrvavṛttānta*).
- The chronicles are commissioned work with a focus on specific dynasties, often ‘to bolster the claims of minor local chiefs and kings to a high rank’ (Witzel 1990: 3).
- Fact and fiction are not separated; events sometimes stem from the literary imagination of the author(s) or compilers, though eyewitnesses’ testimonies, protocols etc. are also included.
- Emplotment becomes an important element; historical events are generally told as narratives with actions of human and non-human agents. The historian or author of historiography does not gain supremacy over the narrator as is the case in European historiography: ‘retelling—not the first hand account of unique experience—rules’ (Guha 2002: 60, cp. Mishra 2010: 21)
- Indian and Nepalese historiography is not a *śāstra*, i.e. a scientific form of knowledge. ‘Overt argumentation is absent, and so is engagement with other narratives’ (Mishra 2010: 16). It did not produce a special genre of texts but depends on existing literary categories such as metrical poetics (*kāvya*), myths and legends, or eulogies (*māhātmya*, *purāṇa*). *Vaṃśāvalīs* therefore abound in religious contents and narratives.
- In Nepalese historiography, and this is perhaps most important, a

9 Mishra (2010: 37) speaks of ‘cases’ defined ‘as the bare particulars of an (real or imaginary) event *in* a historical text’ but not in the world.

sense of wonder and religio-aesthetic appreciation are the primary goal of the narrations.

None of this is writing history in the narrow academic sense of reflecting how ‘it really was’ –to use a famous phrase of the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886). However, according to the American historian Hayden White this claim is anyway impossible since there are no strict differences between historical and literary texts. Both are different narratives, ‘manners of speaking’ or story-telling: ‘Narratives per se did not distinguish historiography from other kind of discourses, nor did the reality of the events recounted distinguish historical from other kind of narratives’ (White 1973: ix). For White all historical texts are narratives and fictions with special forms of ‘encoding of the facts contained in the components of specific kinds of plot structures’ (White 1978: 70) and certain master tropes or styles of discourse. Indeed, it is true that only by telling stories is the permanent and undifferentiated flow of life or everything that happens turned into temporally limited and unidirectional chains of events bound together by causes and thus attributed by agency.

In the case of *vaṃśāvalīś*, we are often dealing with a religiously motivated narrative of events and thus with a religious concept of time and agency, which is dominated by divine forces and agents and includes for example a focus on origins, creations, miracles, curiosities, sensations, dreams of deities or kings. Events are thus related to a soteriological concept of time that is not interested in temporality and historicity but in eternity and immortality.

This concept implies many characteristics that result in a special form of historiography—for instance, the singularity or uniqueness of events and the denial of change. Whatever occurs happens on a mythological time level, and this means it can only be retrieved but not repeated. The ritual, for instance, is celebrating the unchangeable that always remains as it was from the beginning; it is therefore never simply repeated but always enacted again as before; in this way it remains the original. A religious or mythical concept of time knows only proto- and archetypes. This is somewhat similar to the idea of Sanskrit conceived as the gods’ language that ‘simply ‘cannot’ change’ (Witzel 1990: 5) which resulted in a certain disinterest in historical changes of languages among pundits.

Conclusion

The concept of Nepalese and Indian historiography is very much related to such religious and aesthetic notions. History in China ‘has always been perceived to be closer to philosophy than literature as is the case in Europe or India’ (Mishra 2010: 38, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 1996: 84-85); India and Nepal on the other hand have often regarded historiography as religiously motivated narratives of wonders created by divine influences. This, however, does not mean that the chroniclers did not sense and value historical facts. The introductory *śloka* of the *Wright Chronicle*, not translated by Daniel Wright, makes this very clear:

jyotirūpaṃ mahābuddhaṃ guhyadeviṃ nirañjanīṃ,
 jyotirūpaṃ mahādevaṃ śrīgaṇeśaṃ namāmy aham.
 anekapūrvavṛttānta śrutvā dṛṣṭvā yathākramaṃ,
 nepālikānāṃ bhūpānāṃ vaṃśāvalī pralikhate.

‘The Great-Buddha-in-the-Form-of-Light; Guhyadevi (Guhyeśvari), the Spotless One; the Great-God-in-the-Form-of-Light (Śiva); Glorious Gaṇeśa, I pay homage to you.

This Chronicle of the kings of Nepal has been written in accordance with various past incidents heard and seen.’

This is why we will in our edition no longer call the *vaṃśāvalī* the ‘Wright Chronicle’ but give this important source of Nepalese historiography back to Nepal by doing justice to its original name: ‘Nepālikānāṃ Bhūpānāṃ (Bauddha) Vaṃśāvalī (NBhV)’ or ‘The (Buddhist) Chronicle of Kings of Nepal.’

There is certainly no privileged form of narrating the past or history unless one accepts the superiority of scientific over religious historiography (and *vice versa*). Only through a multitude of historical narrations will Nepal discover her history, and only by listening to these stories will it find her future.

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WORKSHOP REPORTS

Workshop on ‘Authoritative Speech in the Himalayan Region’ organised by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Anne de Sales, Paris, 26-27 November 2011.

Anne de Sales

This conference was the third opportunity to gather European specialists of Himalayan oral traditions around common questions. The project was initiated by Martin Gaenzle, who organised a workshop on ‘Ritual Language in the Himalayas’ at the University of Vienna on 22-23 May 2009. This was followed by a second workshop on the occasion of the ‘World Oral Literature Project Workshop’ organised by Mark Turin at the University of Cambridge on 9-10 December.

The Paris conference aimed at exploring the social and political dimensions of linguistic interactions in the Himalayan region. According to Bourdieu, a linguistic community is the outcome of political processes; consequently, any position within a given community is bound to involve power relations expressed in the linguistic interactions of its members. Speech acts should therefore be understood as signs of authority that are intended to be believed, or even obeyed. These power relations are most clearly revealed in the case of performative statements: the efficacy of these statements depends on the speaker’s social function, which must match his or her speech act, something that has often been neglected by followers of Austin’s seminal work. According to Bourdieu, it is always the *function* of the spokesperson of a group that is invested with authority, rather than the individual who fulfils that function. The power of the spoken word comes from the ‘symbolic capital’ that the group confers on its spokesperson. Acts of authority are ‘authorised’ and through this process of ‘social magic’ the spokesperson produces the group as much as the group produces its spokesperson.

In Nepal, we observe that great linguistic diversity and the traditions of hierarchical caste society continue to be important alongside characteristic processes of centralisation, nation-building, and the emergence of a class society. These phenomena mean that there is unlikely to be a single language of legitimacy. Within this complex society, various spokespersons are recognised either as especially competent speakers or

as specialists of particular oral traditions. However, their social statuses vary greatly and their speech is not always addressed to their own group: shamans, for example, officiate for all, regardless of ethnicity; the Damai bards or the Gaine minstrels whose status is located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy perform for their high-caste patrons; revolutionary leaders profess values that are contrary to those of the high castes from which most of them come. On what does the authority of a speech rest, when the spokesperson of a group does not belong to that group?

Comparative questions such as these, concerning the various oral skills or forms in the Himalaya, their social dimensions, the sources of their legitimacy, and the various techniques by which their ends are achieved, can only be answered through a collective scholarly endeavour. The conditions of enunciation (where and when do performances take place, what are the events that trigger the performance?) must be explored as well as the roles of the speakers in their respective groups and in global society. What are the oral techniques that are used in order to mobilise people, convince them, and make them obey or believe in the speaker's speech? Several language registers, specific vocabularies and temporalities, scansion, gestures, narrative motifs, and various representations of reality must be investigated. Emotions, fascination, but also humour, farcical episodes and derision are many of the effects that speakers may have on their audience. Finally, these techniques convey values such as authenticity, heroism, antiquity or scientific authority, that must be explained in relation to the power relations that structure society. These questions are especially interesting to investigate at a time when Himalayan societies in general and Nepali society in particular are going through an epochal reorganisation.

A book including a selection of the contributions is in preparation.

List of presentations:

Friday 25th November

Chair person : Michael Hutt, SOAS, London

— GREGORY G. MASKARINEC (University of Hawai'i)

'Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts: Does knowing and knowing how to use ritual language confer convertible 'cultural capital' on practitioners who use it?'

- ARIK MORAN (University of Haifa):
'On Speech and Historical Truths: A case study from Himachal Pradesh'
- JOHN LEAVITT (Université de Montréal):
'Central Himalayan Oracular Discourse as Evocation and Injunction'
- WILLIAM S. SAX (SAI, Heidelberg):
'Oracular Speech, Collective Consciousness, and the Ideology of Absence'
- DANIELA BERTI (CNRS, CEH, Villejuif)
'Oral Dialogues and Legal Records in Shimla District Court 2/3'
- BARBARA BERARDI-TADIÉ (EHESS, Paris):
'The Ambiguous Power of the Legal Discourse and its Mobilization by Women's Associations in Nepal: A case study (daughter's property rights)'
- PUSTAK RAJ GHIMIRE (Oxford University):
'Authority, Status, and Caste Markers in Everyday Village Conversations (eastern Nepal)'
- MARIE LECOMTE-TILOUINE (CNRS, CEH, Villejuif):
'From the Bottom to the Top and Vice Versa: The bard and his patron in western Nepal'

Saturday 26th November

Chair person : CK Lal, editorialist, Nepal

- CHARLES RAMBLE (EPHE, Paris)
'The Babbling Lark and the Dragon that Defines the Seasons: Recipes for powerful speech in the Tibetan historical tradition'
- CHRISTIAN JAHODA (Institute for Social Anthropology, AAS, Vienna)
'Authoritative Speech Traditions and Socio-political Assemblies in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur and Purang in the Past and Present'
- MIREILLE MAZARD (University of Regina)
'Gendered Forms of Persuasion and Authority on China's Tibeto-Burman Frontier'
- FRANCK BERNEDE (CNRS, CEH, Villejuif):
'Authoritative Speech in the Musical Apprenticeship of Newar Farmers (Nepal)'
- MARTIN GAENZSLE (University of Vienna)
'Meaning and Intention in Rai Divinatory Discourse'
- JUDITH PETTIGREW (University of Limerick):
'Contested Authority: Who speaks for the Pyetā Lhutā?'

– MARK TURIN (University of Cambridge & Yale University)

‘Performative Plurilingualism and Competitive Codeswitching: the Register of the Thangmi Shaman’

– ANNE DE SALES (CNRS, LESC, Nanterre)

‘The Sources of Authority of Shamanic Speech: Examples from the Kham-Magar’.

The conference was sponsored by Région Ile-de-France-Centre d’Etudes Himalayennes (UPR 299, CNRS, Villejuif)-INSHS-CNRS-Ecole doctorale MCSPP (Université Paris Ouest Nanterre)/ Laboratoire d’ethnologie et de sociologie comparative (UMR 7186, CNRS) - ANR JustIndia.

The 10th BNAC Nepal Study Day

Krishna Adhikari

The Britain Nepal Academic Council (BNAC)'s annual Nepal Study Day (NSD) is growing and becoming more popular every year, with an increasing interest shown in presenting research and projects related to Nepal and in participating in the event. As a result, the ninth NSD at Cambridge University was organised over two days in 2011 and, the tenth, organised by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK (CNSUK) also adopted a two-day format (19-20 April 2012) at Queensland College in Reading.



The organisers maintained the tradition of offering a forum to budding student researchers as well as experienced academics from a range of disciplines, and researchers were encouraged to present their research and projects at various stages of development. These diverse presentations were threaded together by their relevance to Nepal or the Nepali cultural world. Even though we aimed to accommodate as many papers as possible, we had to be selective because of the large number of submissions. Eventually, we managed to include 30 papers for presentation. For the first time, we also introduced poster presentations to the NSD, and five were selected for display this year. In total, 68 participants (excluding

community members) from diverse fields took part in the two-day programme, and participants came not just from within the UK but also from Nepal and other European countries.

The programme began with some opening remarks from the BNAC chair, Prof. Michael Hutt, and a welcome and introduction from the convenor, Dr Krishna Adhikari. It was divided into seven presentation sessions grouped under broad themes: conflict, identity and ethnicity (6 papers); education and development (3 papers); environment (3 papers); mobility and diaspora (5 papers); health (6 papers); NGOs, rural development and local governance (3 papers); and miscellaneous (literary, tourism, gender and real estate) (4 papers). There were five poster displays: three were related to health, one to the Nepali diaspora and one to ethnicity. Keeping the duration of each presentation to 15 minutes followed by a 5 minute discussion enabled us to bring many fresh and interesting research works related to Nepal together. At the end of the two-day programme, an interesting 30-minute film, 'Secrets of Dhaulagiri' by Prabesh Subedi, was screened.

This was the first time that the NSD was organised outside a university structure and close to the local Nepali community. A large number of diverse studies related to Nepal and Nepali culture are presented at the NSD every year for academic purposes but without the participation of or any direct benefit to the growing Nepali community in the UK. In order to make the Nepali community aware of this BNAC activity and enable them to benefit from it, this year's NSD sought to involve them in the organisation of the event. As a result, the Non Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) UK, the Greater Reading Nepali Community Association (GRNCA) and Queensland College Reading joined hands as the local community partners. With their generous financial help, we managed to help a number of Masters and PhD student presenters to meet the costs of their travel and registrations. The local communities, along with the Gurkha Square Tandoori Restaurant, provided a free venue, tea and coffee and subsidised Nepali lunches, and even hosted a reception. Those who attended the conference dinner also met singers from Nepal and enjoyed a Nepali Gazal performance. Furthermore, several local community members also attended the programme for the full two days as participants.

In keeping with BNAC principles, BNAC members were allowed to attend the NSD for free. The important reputation the NSD has earned

among researchers and academicians as a forum for mutual sharing, learning and networking also attracted some new presenters and participants. The feedback from the new participants as well as community partners has been very encouraging. Dr Thea Vidnes, who came from Norway and attended the NSD for the first time, wrote to say, 'Thank you for making last week's study days such a smooth-running success. As a first-time speaker, I feel I benefited from possibly the best start I could have had!' The feedback from local participants and community members was equally encouraging. For instance, Dr CB Gurung wrote, 'It was an excellent programme and most useful to the Nepalese and those scholars who had wanted to know more about Nepal and Nepalese people. Moreover, you have handled the whole programme so systematically; it was beyond the expression.'

CNSUK is grateful to all participants and local community partners and feels that by organising this event it has further consolidated the institutional partnership between BNAC and CNSUK and contributed to its motto of 'advancing knowledge on Nepal'. We look forward to attending the 11th BNAC study day in another institution in the UK. The detailed programme, abstracts of presentations and photographs of the event can be accessed at www.cnsuk.org.uk or www.bnac.ac.uk.

The Creation of Public Meaning during Nepal's Democratic Transition: report on two workshops

Michael Hutt and Pratyoush Onta

This three-year partnership project is funded by the British Academy and the partner institutions are SOAS (University of London) and Martin Chautari, an academic NGO founded in Kathmandu in 1992. The presence of four contributors at the second workshop was made possible by additional funding from the South Asia Specialist Group of the Political Studies Association and the Editorial Committee of the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*.

Until comparatively recently, Western scholarly work on Nepali society has largely failed to engage with indigenous discourse, mainly because the political economy of scholarship on Nepal conducted outside Nepal has never demanded such an engagement. The print media, television and radio, film and theatre, poetry and popular song, which exist predominantly in Nepali but also increasingly in other Nepalese languages, have been largely omitted from considerations of the immense changes Nepal is undergoing as it emerges from a period of armed conflict and begins to construct the framework for a more representative non-monarchical state. This project explores the ways in which the meaning of socio-political events and developments is constructed, conveyed and consumed in Nepal. It aims to enhance our understanding of the democratic transition in Nepal, foster increased collaboration between foreign and Nepal-based researchers in these fields, and draw the Nepali and international research communities into a new kind of conversation with one another.

The first workshop was held in Kathmandu on 4-5 September 2011. It was hosted by Martin Chautari in its own premises. Thirteen papers were presented over the course of two days. Four papers looked at the media coverage of specific events and issues: Vice President Parmananda Jha's oath-taking in Hindi incident (Alaka A. Chudal, Vienna University), Prashant Tamang's performance in Indian Idol Season III (Harsha Man Maharjan, Martin Chautari), declaration of Nepal as a republic in 2008 (Indra Dhoj Kshetri, Kudos Research) and the drafting of Nepal's

2007 Interim Constitution (Mara Malagodi, SOAS). *Janajati* cinema and magazines were the subjects of papers presented by Martin Gaenzle (Vienna University) and Pratyoush Onta (Martin Chautari) respectively.

Cultural activism through performances by Newars of Kirtipur was analysed by Ingemar Grandin (Linköpings University) while Anna Stirr (Oxford University) focused on commercial folk songs popular among Nepali labour migrants in the Gulf to discuss an intimate public and its 'relationship to gendered ideas of nationhood, unity, difference and inequality.' Writers and readers in Nepal in the most recent years was the topic of the paper by Michael Hutt (SOAS) whereas the history of the image building of Madan Bhandari after his accidental death in 1993 was discussed by Ramesh Rai (Martin Chautari). Rune Bennike (University of Copenhagen) described how erstwhile spatial imaginations of the state had come under challenge in a politically dynamic Limbuwan in recent years. Chandra Laksamba (Centre for Nepal Studies, UK) discussed the creation of public meaning while the Maoist insurgency grew and Amanda Snellinger (Seattle University) analysed the idea of 'consensus as a political ideal' in recent Nepal.

Om Gurung, Shiva Rijal and Dambar Chemjong of Tribhuvan University, other academics such as Meeta S. Pradhan, John Whelpton, Bandita Sijapati, Seira Tamang, and Ramesh Parajuli and journalists and commentators Prashant Jha, Aditya Adhikari, CK Lal, and Khagendra Sangraula were the designated discussants of various papers. Their feedback and those provided by an additional thirty or so participants enriched the quality of discussion during the workshop.

The second workshop was hosted by the Centre of South Asian Studies at SOAS on 4-5 July 2012. Thirteen papers were presented and discussed. Of these, two (an incisive paper on the language of ethnicity by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (Bielefeld) and a presentation by Khadija Chennoufi-Gilkes (SOAS research student, Linguistics) of her approach to the content of an online Sherpa community journal) focused on the emergence of a discourse of ethnic identity. Four papers analysed the Nepali media's treatment of specific topics: peacebuilding (Tejendra Pherali, Liverpool JMU); the failed attempt by the then Maoist prime minister to replace Indian pujaris with Nepali pujaris at Pashupatinath temple in 2008 (Johanna Buss, Vienna); the portrayal of Nepali women (Seira Tamang, Martin Chautari) and the royal palace massacre of June 2001 (Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, CNRS, Paris).

Ramesh Parajuli (Martin Chautari) provided some historical depth to the discussion with his analysis of the ways in which the Nepali government attempted to police the print media during an earlier period of political transition, during the 1950s. Rumour and conspiracy theory was the central concern of papers by Mallika Shakya (Pretoria), who described the way in which a series of riots that were sparked off by disparaging remarks about Nepalis supposedly made by the Bollywood star Hritik Roshan played out among the workers in a garment factory in the Nepal Tarai in late 2000; and Michael Hutt (SOAS), who attempted to explain the huge commercial success of the 2007 book *Raktakunda*. In addition to all of this, Monica Mottin (London Met) described the ways in which political dissent has been articulated in recent Nepali theatre, Kailash Rai (Martin Chautari) analysed the content of a selection of memoirs published by women who fought on the Maoist side in the 1996-2006 'People's War', Dan Hirslund (Copenhagen) assessed Maoist political rhetoric in relation to perceived instances of 'corruption', and Laura Kunreuther (Bard College) described the new trend among the Nepali middle class of maintaining archives and producing biographical texts. The designation of a discussant to each paper enriched the workshop greatly; these included David Holmberg and Kathryn March from Cornell, Amanda Snellinger from Seattle, Ingemar Grandin from Linköping, Anne de Sales from Paris, Stefanie Lotter from London, Sondra Hausner from Oxford, Bandita Sijapati from Kathmandu and Chiara Letizia from Milan.

We intend to publish a selection of the papers from the two workshops in forthcoming issues of the Martin Chautari journal *Studies in Nepali History and Society* and in the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*. An edited volume is planned for the longer term.

The State of Religion in a Non-religious State: Discourses and Practices in the Secular Republic of Nepal 7-8 July 2012, Oxford

Chiara Letizia

This workshop was hosted by the School of Anthropology and Museum of Ethnography at the University of Oxford and made possible by funding from All Souls College, the British Academy, and the University of Milan Bicocca. The original impetus came from the research on secularism in Nepal that Chiara Letizia carried out between 2009 and 2011 thanks to a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship held at Oxford's Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Prof. David Gellner, Dr Chiara Letizia, Dr Anne de Sales, and Dr Sondra Hausner convened this workshop in order to bring together a group of scholars who share a deep knowledge of the field and have observed religion as it is practised, in order to reflect on the state of religion in the present secular state of Nepal. The participants were invited to discuss the implications of the recent thoroughgoing political transformations on religious practices in the areas where they conducted fieldwork and to reflect on religious practice at the local level in the now officially secular Nepal.

The main questions addressed were: Are religious practices on the wane, or are they rather very much alive but transformed? Are they undergoing a process of privatisation/spiritualisation or are they, on the contrary, gaining a public presence? Has the declaration of the secular state led to a secularisation of the country, or has it instead stirred up religious activism among both the 'liberated' religious minorities as well as on the Hindu side? Has the 'People's War' made the religious experience irrelevant or has the violence of the conflict led to new forms of religious experience in a time of crisis?

During the People's War the Maoists adopted inconsistent attitudes towards religion. On the one hand, they declared that religion was 'the opium of the people', occasionally prohibiting 'superstitious cults' and sometimes deliberately violating religious taboos; on the other hand, there seem to have been occasions when in practice the Maoists themselves also

summoned shamans, worshipped deities, visited pilgrimage places, etc. More generally, some anthropologists have noted the religious aspects of Maoist discourse and the religiously inspired sacrificial symbolism of much of their rituals and ceremonies. What are the current expressions and implications of these contradictory attitudes and discourses on religion?

Another key point seems to be the emergence of a new sensitivity concerning blood sacrifice. In the course of the last fifteen years, reformists of very different types – Maoists, Hindu modernists, Theravada monastics, ethnic activists propagating Buddhist modernism, followers of the Satyahang Kiranti religion – have all converged on a position condemning animal sacrifice as superstitious and backward. The ‘war’ waged by activists and the mass media against the Gadimai *mela* in 2010 was telling: for weeks newspapers ran articles by activists from Nepal, India and around the globe about the backward character of the sacrifice of thousands of buffaloes in this suddenly famous Tarai temple. Has the condemnation of blood sacrifice lead to a reflection on what religion is – once the sacrificial practices are left out? How should we understand the Buddhist activists’ invitation to practice *ahimsa* in a country that has suffered so much violence, or the Maoist ban on animal sacrifice while people were themselves called to sacrifice themselves in the People’s War? And what are the discourses and practices of sacrifice in post-conflict Nepal? How much real change in actual practices has been brought about by the discourses of ethnic activists (for example advocating the boycott of Dasain, or the adoption of Buddhism)?

Many researchers have encountered issues related to religion: the fresh outbreak of possession, the ritual and sacrificial aspects of Maoist ceremonies and discourses, the religious aspects of ethnic activism, the new sensitivity about blood sacrifice, the religious aspects of political leadership and rhetoric, the growing presence of meditation and spiritual practices among urban middle-classes, etc. As far as the latter is concerned, the multiplication of forms of ‘new age’ religions among the urban elite has become evident: meditation *reiki*, yoga, a growing number of followers of spiritual masters (mainly Tibetan Buddhist masters, but also Osho, Sai Baba, etc.) Are these phenomena signs of the spiritualisation and privatisation of religion? How do these new practices coexist with traditional ones? One clear conclusion of the workshop was that, although

Nepal may now be a legally secular state, religious practices, movements, and sentiments continue to thrive.

Nine papers were presented and discussed:

- Chiara Letizia (Milan-Bicocca University), 'Ideas of Secularism in Contemporary Nepal', presented competing views on 'secularism' (*dharma nirapekshata*) collected from social actors of differing religious and political affiliations in Kathmandu and three cities of the Tarai. These views were put in relation with a discussion of court cases dealing with the state and religious traditions in the new secular Nepal.
- Gérard Toffin (CNRS, Paris), 'Neither Statues nor Rituals: Encounters with some new religious organizations and therapists in Nepal', described some new religious movements, linked to the 'Hindu galactic world', which bring a new freedom of choice, a rejection of ritual, and a different more middle-class style of spirituality to urban areas of Nepal. He discussed their main themes and modes of operation, their interactions with Indian and wider transnational connections, and how they borrow from, but also contrast with, traditional Hindu practices.
- David Holmberg (Cornell University), 'Tamang Lhochhar and the "New Nepal"', examined the ongoing creation of Tamang Lhochhar as a primary festival activity directly related to formations of identity and demands for recognition in contemporary Nepal, as well as responding to the needs of far-flung Tamang diaspora populations. Analysing this new ritual, which works to produce Tamang solidarity and leaders at national and international levels, Holmberg contrasted the decline and abandonment of the Chhechu festival, which had a very different relationship to power and resistance.
- Axel Michaels (Heidelberg University), 'Blood Sacrifices in Nepal-Transformations and Criticism', discussed the ideology and visibility of blood sacrifices in Nepal, especially among the Hindu and Buddhist Newars. His presentation dealt with responses and criticism elicited by these rituals, as well as their transformations in a transcultural and media-saturated world. Michaels focused on discourses evolving around the materiality of the blood itself and its imaginaries in the

public sphere, including their presence in the celebration of martyrdom in the Maoist movement. He drew attention to the fact that indigenous Sanskrit-based scriptural traditions theorised the notion of sacrifice very little, when compared to Abrahamic traditions.

- Brigitte Steinmann (University of Lille), 'Confrontations between Maoism and Buddhism among the Tamangs and Tibetan Buddhist Populations of Kabhre-Palanchok', presented an ethnographic panorama of the confrontations between Maoism and Buddhism among the Tamangs and Tibetan Buddhist populations of Kabhre-Palanchok, covering mainly the period from 2000 to 2008. She also presented the case of a 'Tantric Buddhist communist' lama she knows well.
- Ben Campbell (Durham University), 'Tamang Christians and Sensibilities of Distance from Old Times', presented a promotional, evangelising DVD showing the spread of Christianity among Tamang-speaking communities in Rasuwa district. It was noteworthy that the film made use of traditional forms of devotional song, dance, and drama, but in choreographed harmony with modernised DVD-ready, and mobile-phone-compatible, production values, i.e. it presented Christianity through specifically Tamang symbols and cultural forms.
- Ina Zharkevich (Oxford), 'When Gods Return to their Homeland in the Himalayas: Tales and Practices of Religion in the 'Maoist' Model Village of Thabang', shared her research on the long-term impact of the 'People's War' on religious beliefs and practices in Thabang. Two very different reflective informants explained the social and religious changes that had taken place by saying that the gods have left to return to their Himalayan homeland. Although the Maoists might be expected to have attempted to suppress religion altogether, they have in fact presided over a modernisation of it, using development funds to rebuild the Brahma temple according to more urban architectural models.
- Pustak Ghimire (Visiting Scholar, Oxford), 'Women Possessed by the Goddess Bhagavati: On the Spread of a New Form of Worship in eastern Nepal', presented an ethnographic study of the diffusion of a cult of Bhagavati in Khotang district, namely among its Rai, Kiranti, Magar and Dalit communities. Characterised by the possession of women who become 'living goddesses', the cult rose sharply during the Maoist

insurgency and continued to spread after 2007. He analysed some functions of this cult and its interactions with local social and political actors, as well as reasons for its development.

- Martin Gaenszle (University of Vienna), 'Redefining Kiranti Religion in Contemporary Nepal', discussed the strong impact of the new Kirant ethnic organisations on the conception of religion among their communities, and explained how the scope and pace of the changes have been affected by the diaspora. He outlined some basic features of the 'traditional' religion, and what has changed in the contemporary context of secularism: in particular, the emergence of written forms of the tradition, single festivals shared by the whole group (e.g. Sakela for the Rais), specific culture heroes and religious gurus, and the development of a shared Kiranti religious site in Hattiban in the Kathmandu Valley.

During the final session there was a detailed and wide-ranging discussion of different understandings of secularism, both on the part of ordinary people and on the part of scholars. There was no definite conclusion but there was general agreement on the need for further ethnographically sensitive investigation of the topic.

‘Nepalis in Diaspora’, 9-10 July 2012, University of Oxford

David Gellner

A two-day workshop considering the lives and movements of Nepalis in all parts of the world was held in Oxford as part of the AHRC project *Vernacular Religion: Varieties of Religiosity in the Nepali Diaspora*, co-directed by David Gellner and Sondra Hausner. The discussion circled the globe: the panel discussions started in India, continued east to Southeast Asia (Thailand, Burma, and Singapore), west to the Gulf, and across the earth to North America and Europe (UK and Belgium), in order both to draw out patterns of similarity among Nepali populations across the world and identify possible differences between locations. One overarching similarity was the strength of the associational life of Nepalis everywhere in the world (although there were apparent differences in the kinds of organizations that had the most popularity and momentum). And one paradoxical problem that emerged everywhere—but had seemingly different responses in different places—was whether Nepalis thought of themselves as a diaspora. In some cases, longer-standing populations no longer appeared to consider themselves as such, or found themselves required to deny diasporic connections (as in India), while in others, earlier migrants were the main forces behind self-consciously diaspora movements (as in the USA and the UK). Material from Southeast Asia at this workshop was particularly new and welcome, raising interesting questions of assimilation and diversity over the course of the last century in a region close to but culturally still quite distant from Nepal.

Papers

Tanka Subba ‘Is the Nepali Society in India Diasporic?’

Jeevan Sharma ‘Marginal Migrants? Migrant Associations and the Lived Experience of Nepali Migrant Workers in India’

Melanie Vandenheksen ‘The Gurung Association, the Gurungs and the State: Negotiations for the Making of Ethnic Boundaries in Sikkim’ [in absentia]

Sushma Joshi ‘Hindus and Buddhists in Myanmar and Thailand: Notes from the Nepali Diaspora’

Anil Sakya 'Nepalis in Thailand'

Kelvin Low 'Home, Belonging, and Not-Belonging: Experiences of Nepalese Gurkha Families'

Kathryn March 'Reproducing Tamang Gender in a World of Shifting Courage and Honor'

Anna Stirr 'Performing "Nepaliness" in Bahrain: Dohori Restaurants and the Nepali Diaspora'

Susan Hangan 'Transnational Politics in Nepali Organizations in New York'

Bandita Sijapati 'Imagined Secularisms: Perspectives from the Nepali Diaspora'

Bal Gopal Shrestha 'Invention and Tradition: Religiosity in the Nepali Diaspora, with special reference to the Limbus'

Florence Gurung 'Death and Society: The Performance of Gurung Death Rites in the UK'

Radha Adhikari 'Transnational Ties between the UK and Nepal: Family Rituals and the Role of the Internet'

Krishna Adhikari & Chandra Laksamba 'The Centre for Nepal Studies UK Survey (2008)'

Mitra Pariyar 'Prize and Prejudice: Nepali Dalits in England and Australia'

Chandra Gurung 'Martial People of the Himalayas'

Sondra Hausner & David Gellner 'Multiple versus Unitary Belonging: How Nepalis in Britain deal with "Religion"'

OBITUARY

Augusto Gansser, 'Baba Himalaya' [28 October 1910-9 January 2012]

Roger Croston

Professor Augusto Gansser was a pioneering, adventure loving Swiss geologist who gave vast insights into the world's great mountain chains and oil exploration. He made exceptional, strenuous journeys to remote areas when there were still blank spaces on geological maps. He was the first to geologically study Tibet's sacred Mount Kailash, disguised as a Buddhist pilgrim. Regarded as a man of few spoken words, he was a prolific author who recorded much in field sketches and photographs. His work and studies took him worldwide.

He was born in Milan, to a Swiss businessman trading in tanning products and a German mother. When he was aged four, his family returned to Switzerland where he went to school in Lugano. During a family holiday to Andermatt, when he was seven, he developed a lifelong passion for geology upon finding a large rock crystal in the foundations of the Furka-Oberalp railway, then under construction. He kept it in a display cabinet for the rest of his life. He took to mountaineering at an early age and in 1929 studied geology at Zurich University from where, before he graduated, his adventures began in 1934. Via an invitation through the Swiss Alpine Club, he joined a four-month long Danish expedition to east Greenland under the leadership of Lauge Koch who was looking for tenacious scientists. Voyaging on a three-masted sailing ship, the 'Gustave Holmes' with a crew of 60 and a seaplane, he was to help explore Shoresbysund Fjord. On this trip, Gansser learnt to write field notes in mirror script to prevent his insights being deciphered by others. The ship became trapped in pack ice for a week and all began to fear an over-wintering, 'when we would have ended up chewing our leather belts.' Breaking free, the ship was battered by fearsome autumn storms, which, for the landlubber Gansser, caused him to 'give up all attempts to lie down, eat or sleep.' On September 14th, a great cracking sound was followed by 18-inch deep water pouring into his cabin. The ship finally put into Reykjavik from where Gansser returned home to complete his Doctorate in 1936.

Shortly afterwards, under the geologist Professor Arnold Heim, together with the noted mountaineer Werner Weckert, he made up the first three man 'Swiss Himalayan Expedition' of 1936, promoted by the Swiss Scientific Society. They aimed to study the structure of the Himalaya along the Kali valley in geologically unexplored Kumaon through Nepal to Tibet. Repeated efforts to gain access to the latter lands proved futile as both countries were closed to foreigners. Three days after the start, Weckert suffered appendicitis and was taken by stretcher to Ranikhet where his life was saved. The two remaining Swiss, 'ruefully aware, as we made for the wilds, that we were both "happy" possessors of an unremoved appendix', plus their thirty porters, three Sherpas and a 'boy' cook (the only one to accompany them throughout), pressed forward from Almora to roam widely amongst the Himalayan giants in the worst summer in living memory, under excesses of cold rain, snow and storms. Having forgotten insect repellent, they were fiercely attacked by myriads of bugs. Despite the prohibitions, several visits were made to the forbidden lands, producing results which were well worth the embarrassing consequences.

They first crossed forbidden borders onto the Api glacier where the far northwest of Nepal meets Tibet. Here, at 19,000 feet they claimed 'firsts' for skiing in both countries. Travelling further northwest, on 28th June 1936, out of more than geological curiosity, Gansser decided to visit Mount Kailash, upon which only a handful of Europeans had ever set eyes. He crossed the border via the 18,380 foot Mangshang La [pass] into Tibet, disguised as a Buddhist pilgrim, 'from regions far away'. Whilst Heim continued his research, Gansser travelled with two local traders on pilgrimage to the peak, two Tibetans and a Sherpa porter, all of whom protected his real identity. The party made the clockwise circumambulation of this most holy of holy mountains, Gansser 'with no less reverence as a pilgrim of science in search of the sacred in this wonderful mountain where the gods dwell.' He added, 'I was able to hide a lot of things under my red sheepskin Caftan cloak, such as a geologist's hammer, a camera, sketch books and a compass.' His particularly blue eyes, he feared, might give him away, but actually offered him protection. They were noticed by the lamas in the monasteries who recognised he was no real monk, but because of this peculiarity, they opened their doors to him.

He pressed on, at times fighting off fierce mastiffs, drinking butter

tea brewed on yak dung fires in smoke filled nomads' tents and, sleeping in a sack under open skies, he was drenched by rain storms far worse than anything he had ever encountered in the Alps. His clothes froze and he proceeded in squelching boots. At the first sighting of Kailash, all in the group threw handfuls of rice into the air as a blessing. On being approached by bandits he forgot his incognito and attempting to take their photograph, was rushed at with a sword and had to flee. He managed, however, to sneak a few pictures of the holy mountain by hiding behind a rock. Taking geological samples was also risky because all stones in the area were deemed sacred and their collection sacrilege; he circumvented this by collecting rocks which were hidden by his sweeping cloak. At the main pilgrimage Gumpa he paid his respects to the head Lama who gave him, 'a bag of tiny pills which would preserve me from every possible mischance. In the dim light he had no suspicion that he was receiving a European in audience.' In a cave beneath the chapel, Gansser, along with other pilgrims, rotated a great prayer drum and prostrated himself in front of the holiest of all images, that of Kailash. After crossing the Dolma-La, at 18,000 feet the highest pass on the pilgrimage circuit, he returned south to rejoin Heim who was camped inside the Tibetan border. Gansser had now changed from pilgrim to shepherd. His collection of tell-tale rock samples collected from rich fossil beds was smuggled out disguised as bags of salt, a local trade item, in small sacks on the backs of 12 sheep and 17 goats - traditional local pack animals, which his party had purchased from local traders and which required night time protection from prowling wolves.

Kailash, Gansser later enthused, was unique, having been elevated to above 20,000 feet from sea level with its strata remaining horizontally undisturbed, despite being encompassed by steeply inclined bedrock. On the southern flanks, he found rocks of a type also found on the Indian side of the Himalayas, and sensationally, 'Ophiolite' - formed on the bed of the ancient Tethys Sea. This discovery of the 'Indus-Yarlang-Tsangpo Suture Zone' supported Heim's original idea of ancient colliding continents uplifting the Himalaya. The concept was further developed in the 1960s when Gansser put it into the context of the now accepted theory of Plate Tectonics and he was instrumental in interpreting the origin of the Central Asian mountain belts.

Moving north west, Gansser again made an excursion into Tibet by

uncharted routes to the gorge containing the sacred River Sutlej. He suffered from fever, which he termed 'Tibetan malaria' and the party endured thirst and survived a flash flood. They overnighted in the caves of an unknown, abandoned ancient 'City of the Rocks'. After many further adventures, back in India, the District Deputy Commissioner, Mr Finley ordered their arrest in their camp at 17,000 feet. Ordered to return to Almora, they chanced upon a few British officials on tour dressed in khaki shorts and topees who totally ignored them, 'because we had not been introduced, were unshaven and unkempt.' Their border misdemeanours were referred to Delhi. During this enforced delay the Swiss were astonished to meet an Indian botanical physiologist whose laboratory was filled with the very latest equipment, measuring electrical currents in isolated living cells.

After nine days with no reply from the authorities, the pair set off to Garhwal whose Deputy Commissioner permitted them to travel the pilgrim's way to holy Badrinath and the sacred lake at the source of the river Ganges at the snout of the Satopanth Glacier. Gansser swam in the lake which swarmed with tiny fire-red plankton. En route to Josimath they met the mountaineer Eric Shipton and his two Sherpas on his return from Mount Dunagiri. After eight months, having tramped more than 900 miles around the central Himalaya, the duo finally returned home, one by ship, the other by 'plane.

Home in Lugano in 1937, Gansser married Linda Biaggi, a champion swimmer. They drove to Morocco on honeymoon in a Fiat Balilla car, camping in a small tent. Henceforth, his wife, nicknamed 'Toti' was to accompany him on his worldwide travels whenever she could; they used their local Swiss dialect as a secret language. Later that year, the Shell Oil Company recruited Gansser to work as an oil-pro prospector in Colombia for three years, where three of their six children were born. Here he thrice explored the geologically unknown Macarena Mountains, each expedition lasting three months. Due to the outbreak of the Second World War, the family was unable to return to Switzerland until 1946, when they took passage on the recently decommissioned British aircraft carrier 'The McKay'. Gansser smuggled two large emeralds on board which he had found jutting out of a Colombian rock. At the port, he learnt it was forbidden to export uncut precious stones, so he hid them in the nappy of his then infant son, who claims to this day they are the reason for his back pain.

Gansser did not remain at home for long. In 1947, he was deployed by Shell to work in Trinidad for three years and in 1951 he was appointed Chief Geologist of the National Iranian Oil Company for whom he worked for eight years. Gansser selected an area north of Qom to probe for oil. The fifth drilling, at 9,850 feet, resulted in the then largest ever 'wildcat' oil gusher on 26th August 1956, which destroyed the drilling rig. Some 80,000 tons of oil per day spumed out a hundred feet into the air, causing massive environmental damage and forming enormous black lakes. A state of emergency was declared and experts from Texas were brought in. Three weeks later, it was deliberately set ablaze and the flow finally ceased when the well closed itself. Once, Gansser and 'Toti' followed a caravan of Kashgai nomads on their annual transhumance migration with their camels and thousands of sheep from the Zagros Mountains to Shiraz. Gansser obtained a set of camel bells which he eventually took home to Switzerland with which he would ring welcome to each new morning until his dying day.

In 1958, Gansser accepted simultaneous 'Ordinarus' full professorships at the University of Zurich and the Federal Institute of Technology (the ETH - Eidgenoessichen Technischen Hochschule), on the proviso that he would still be permitted to travel. He found that in addition to his geologist's hammer, pencil and paper were the most important tools, 'by drawing, one gets much closer to the subject.' He was regarded as a charismatic speaker - his lectures were sought after and well attended. When giving them, he had the remarkable ability to draw exquisitely coloured geological profiles in chalk with one hand, whilst simultaneously writing with the other on a blackboard.

Between 1963 and 1977, Gansser made five visits to Bhutan, where Swiss funded technical development was established due to personal friendships established by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. Through the support of the King and the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, Gansser was able to travel to remote northern Bhutan along the Tibetan border. In the high, northern, isolated villages of Laya and Lunana he heard tales of evil spirits causing glacial lake dams to catastrophically collapse; as a consequence he surveyed them. In 1967, he reported specific dangers so that Bhutan's population could be protected from future flood disasters.

Gansser retired as Professor Emeritus in 1977 after which, in 1980 and 1985 he was invited by Deng Xiaoping, the reforming Chinese politician,

to make tours of Tibet. In 1985, he returned to Lugano where his beloved wife 'Toti' of 63 years died of Alzheimer's disease in 2000. Often asked what was his most difficult situation in all his adventures, he declared it was the loss of his wife. In recent times, he recalled that the reason for his longevity might be, 'that near Mount Kailash the Lama in charge of a monastery, gave me some pills for a long life. I am grateful to him to this day because it seems that they worked really well.' However, as he became infirm, he was to express that he felt as though he was a prisoner in his own body.

Augusto Gansser was a member of The National Academy of Sciences [USA]; the Academia Nazionale dei Lincei [Rome]; the Nepal Geological Society and The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research. He received many awards, of which the principal ones were: The Wollaston Medal of the Royal Geographical Society; The Prix Gaudry of the French Geological Society; The Gustav Steinmann Medal of the Geological Society of West Germany and the King Albert [of Belgium] Medal of the King Albert I Memorial Foundation for Mountain Research. In 1983, he was given the honorary title 'Baba Himalaya – Father of the Himalayas' by Peshawar University, Pakistan.

Gansser's main publications include *The Throne of the Gods* (1938) and *Central Himalayan Geological Observations of the Swiss Expedition 1936* (1939), both co-written with Prof. Albert Heim. His monographs, *Geology of the Himalaya* (1964) and *Geology of the Bhutan Himalaya* (1983) are considered classics of descriptive geology. In 1999 he wrote a book on ancient rock carvings 'Schalensteine / Cupstones'. His technical papers are listed in a bibliography running to some twenty pages. An illustrated biography in German, *Augusto Gansser*, was published in 2008 in Switzerland. An English translation was published in 2012.

Near his life's end he declared he was, 'not superstitious, but somewhere exists something greater. I have no fear of death; when it comes, it comes. Instead of flowers I would like a geologist's hammer.' He died surrounded by four of his six children. He is survived by two sons and four daughters.

BOOK REVIEWS

Ladakh. A Glimpse of the Roof of the World

By Tilak Ranjan Bera, with a foreword by Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir.

Kolkata: Woodland Publishers, 2012, 256 pages, illus., maps

ISBN 978-81-906121-6-6.

Reviewed by John Bray

Tilak Ranjan Bera is a medical doctor who has previously published on Nicobar, the Andaman Islands and Goa. He first visited Ladakh in 1985 and has returned there on a series of visits in more recent years. This illustrated book presents his findings and observations. In a series of disclaimers in the preface, Bera says that he is neither a 'photographer nor a writer'. This is a clear case of false modesty: the photographs are excellent and the book is overall produced to a high standard.

A Glimpse of the Roof of the World is divided into twelve chapters. It starts by introducing the rugged terrain, the peoples of the region, and the road from Kashmir to Leh, the largest town in Ladakh. It then looks more closely at Leh itself ('the melting pot of Ladakh') before examining a selection of the most notable Buddhist monasteries ('the goldmines of wisdom'). Six chapters follow on selected regions of Ladakh: Nubra, Dah, Hanu, Suru, Zaskar, and the lakes in the east of the region near the border with Tibet. The book concludes with an 'Adieu', illustrated by pictures taken from the plane leaving Ladakh, and a final set of reflections on 'the Mystic Godland'.

The wonders of the Ladakhi landscape are the first and most enduring impression conveyed by the book. Bera's most recent visits to the region evidently took place during the spring and early summer. This is the season when the green of the village oases, sustained by glacial streams, contrasts most vividly with the browns and ochres of the mountain deserts that surround them. Bera rejoices in the wild flowers of the Suru valley and in the fauna of the entire region, ranging from magpies to snow partridges, redstarts, blue sheep (*bharal*), marmots and wild asses (*kiang*).

Bera has an eye—and a lens—for the picturesque and the 'traditional'. In that respect his book is a contemporary Indian successor to travel volumes on Ladakh by earlier generations of Western writers, with titles such as *The Road to Lamaland* (M.L.A. Gompertz, 1926) and in *In the World's*

Attic (Maria Henrietta Sands, 1931). His view is that of a romanticising outsider in which the past is seen as good and even divine, almost without qualification.

Nevertheless, contemporary developments intrude at several different levels. The 'Destination Ladakh' chapter includes photographs of memorials to Indian soldiers killed in the 1947/1948 conflict and the 1999 Kargil war. On pages 38 and 39 he touches on the effects of climate change, and includes vivid images of the damage caused by the 'flash flood' of August 2010. On page 61 we see an official notice referring to a 'protected monument'—an ancient rock carving showing ibexes, hunters and war scenes—only to discover that the rock itself was destroyed during road building operations. On page 245 we learn—and see for ourselves—that Changpa nomads make tents of yak wool, but also of discarded parachutes.

The accompanying text offers a basic introduction to the history and culture of the region: this is helpful in setting the context, but the details need to be treated with care. For example, the 'Treaty Road' from Kashmir to Ladakh was given its name not because of an agreement between the rulers of Ladakh and Kashmir, as we read on page 49, but as a consequence of the 1870 Commercial Treaty between the British and the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir. The Dalai Lama's formal relinquishment of his political responsibilities in 2011, which is discussed on page 123, is indeed a significant event in Tibetan history. However, Ladakh was in any case never subject to the Dalai Lama's political authority, and it is questionable whether the resignation truly amounts to a 'total change in the basic philosophy of Buddhism' as the author suggests.

These details do not detract from the visual impact of the book. Bera does not claim to be writing a scholarly analysis. Instead, he promises us a 'glimpse' of Ladakh. He delivers.

Sugata Saurabha. An Epic Poem from Nepal on the Life of the Buddha by Chittadhar Hṛdaya.

Translation by Todd T. Lewis & Subarna Man Tuladhar; Introduction and Part II by Todd T. Lewis.

Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010. ISBN 978-0-19-534182-9
viii, 404 p.

Sugata Saurabha. An Epic Poem from Nepal on the Life of the Buddha by Chittadhar Hṛdaya.

Annotated Newari-English translation and introduction by Todd T. Lewis & Subarna Man Tuladhar. Harvard Oriental Series, vol 67.

Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University/Harvard University Press 2007, 847 pages. ISBN 9780674027121

Reviewed by Ingemar Grandin

This is a review of three works. The first is the Harvard edition, brought out some years ago, where Todd T. Lewis and Subarna Man Tuladhar have translated Chittadhar Hṛdaya's *Sugata saurabha* into English and commented on this text in a lengthy introduction of about 100 pages, and in which the original Newari text is rendered in the devanāgarī script. The second work is a new edition of this book, published by Oxford, which includes the translation (slightly revised) but not the Newari text, and in which the introduction has been reedited and reworked into a short introduction alongside a series of thematic essays. The third work, of course, is Hṛdaya's text itself.

Hṛdaya's text presents the Buddha's life-story in the form of a narrative poem. Hṛdaya pulled together Newari literature, the Indic tradition of *kāvya* poetry, and the literature on the Buddha in order to create an epic poem. *Sugata saurabha* thus belongs to the literary or the religious rather than the scholarly body of literature.

But, as the translators point out, Hṛdaya's method is to fill in content from his own culture where his Buddhist sources are silent. And with this, *Sugata saurabha* can be read as an ethnography of sorts of Newar civilisation. Hṛdaya presents this civilisation in terms of its religious festivals, its rituals, its ceremonies of birth and marriage, of the agriculture,

trade and artisanship underlying its economy, and of the urban character of its domestic life, the details of architecture, clothing, jewellery, foods, tools, utensils. The translators offer the reader an illuminating discussion on this aspect of *Sugata saurabha* (Oxford: 354–58; Harvard: xlv–xlix), including a useful table where Hṛdaya’s presentations of the different details of Newar culture are indexed. For a reader wanting to find out what Hṛdaya has to say about ‘clothes and jewellery’, ‘Newar urban life’, ‘rituals’ and so on, it will be easy to find the relevant pages.

While the Buddha’s renunciation is the major theme of Hṛdaya’s story, a strong undercurrent is a celebration of the materiality of life. There is not necessarily a contradiction here—it is precisely this rich life that Prince Siddhārtha chooses to leave. The texture of urban culture, the beauty of natural scenery, agriculture and foods, the long list of presents given at a wedding, the wares that shop-keepers display, the many forms of music, the skilful telling of the story in the text itself—all of this communicates a strong sense of ‘joy for life’ in the material world, in line with Lewis’s personal impression of the poet (Harvard: i). And this presentation is also in accord with Hṛdaya’s own community of Newar Buddhist laymen, who see *nirvāṇa* as a distant possibility to be achieved only after a long series of rebirths (Lewis 1996: 250) rather than from renunciation of life in this world.

The Newar community of merchant Buddhist laymen is one with which both translators are intimately familiar—Tuladhar belongs to this community himself, while Lewis has been conducting research among them since the 1980s. And as noted by the translators in their comments (Oxford: 377–8; Harvard: xlvii–lii), *Sugata saurabha* is ‘a biography of the Buddha from a merchant Upāsaka’s [devout layman] perspective’. Merchants are given a prominent position in the book, both in the description of urban life and as followers and patrons of the Buddha. One could even say that other groups, such as farmers, are somewhat ‘otherised’ by Hṛdaya:

Quarrels at home were rare and festive occasions frequent, even in the farmers’ huts (Quoted from Oxford: 38, cf. Harvard: 23)

Farmers are observed from some distance, their faces reddened by rice-beer and liquor, the men sweating from their heavy work, the women

exposing their calves to public view while working the soil.

It is clear, however, that in accordance with Newar civilisation, the farmers also live inside towns. In one vivid scene, the poet relates how farmers come from their different neighbourhoods (*tvāḥ*)—just as they would do from a Newar town such as Kathmandu—to work in the fields. The following scene is on the occasion of the ‘summer ploughing ceremony’, a standard story in biographies of the Buddha:

Taken to the field were sturdy and shapely oxen of different colors for plowing (Oxford: 76, Harvard: 65)

Yet this sits uneasily within a Newar setting. Newars—in most of their settlements—famously maintain a ‘taboo’ on ploughing and would see it as sinful to have a pair of oxen draw a plough (see Webster 1981 for more information). It is interesting to watch how Hṛdaya works his way around this problem. When describing the actual work, he says nothing about any ploughing taking place. Instead we observe men turning over the soil with their ‘digging hoes’ (*kū*), which is standard Newar practice.

The most graphic scenes in *Sugata saurabha* are those which the poet fills with details from Newar life: birth, marriage and festivals. Another scene with similar ethnographic richness is a dispute over water in Hṛdaya’s chapter 16. Here the Buddha’s own tribesmen, the Śākya and their neighbours, prepare for war over the scant water available for irrigation when the river dries up for lack of rain at the time of rice-transplantation. One would think that the poet’s sources would be similarly dry here: Newars have not been involved in warfare since their homeland was conquered by outsiders in 1769. Tuladhar and Lewis (Harvard: xciii; not in Oxford) suggest that the ‘scene of men coming out of their houses with swords recalls the Newar Mohani festival and its *khadga yātra* [sic; sword festival]’ and that at this point, Hṛdaya wants to counter the prevailing picture of Newars as non-martial (Oxford: 386; Harvard: lxxix).

Another possible source of inspiration for this depiction might be the ritual fights between lower and upper Kathmandu that are still in living memory among Toffin’s (1984: 201) and van den Hoek’s (2004: 12) informants. These fights, rather like the dispute over water, took place in the river bed, at the end of the dry season, just before the beginning of rice-growing, and would occur between close neighbours. The poet

describes how armed men march out into streets that echo with rāga *Mālakośa* as played on trumpets that, as we learn (from Harvard: 290), are called *bherī*. I have three comments here.

First, we know from Tingey's work (1994: 105) that these trumpets play only at most three different notes and hence they are used for 'idiosyncratic fanfares', not for melodies. Might this suggest that the poet, for once, is less well-informed here? Second, *bherī* trumpets do not belong to the Newar instrumentarium and consequently they fall outside of the poet's area of expertise. Instead, they were part of Shah army music, played by the Damāi caste of musicians (Tingey 1994: 31f). Third, instead of using the Shah conqueror's music for this martial scene, Hṛdaya could have employed the purely Newar *dhimaybājā*, whose thundering drums and crashing cymbals, according to Hṛdaya's associate, the Newar scholar Thakur Lal Manandhar, were employed precisely as war music (see Grandin 2011: 102). All in all, might this not suggest that the poet wanted to mark war as *non*-Newar rather than reclaiming martial qualities for the Newars? Such an interpretation would fit well with Lewis's (1996: 247) own observations on pacifism and the 'precept against violence' among Newars.

As 'a kind of cultural encyclopedia of Kathmandu Valley civilization' (Oxford: 356), *Sugata saurabha* is especially rich when it comes to music. Hṛdaya knew this field well, as witnessed by his *Nepali music* (Hridaya 1957), a short but pioneering text which was extensively quoted by the first Western scholar to study Newar music, A. A. Baké (ms.). In this text, Hṛdaya points out that rāgas as encountered in Newar music have 'our own stamp and colour, though the names of the ragas and raginis remained the same' (1957: 3) and are thus different from what is found in India. It is interesting to note, therefore, the way in which Hṛdaya cites the melodic content of raga *Mālakośa*: *re, pa, totāḥ ṣaḍaj, madhyam, ni, dha, ga byākaṃ komal* (Harvard: 291) which is to say that the second (*re*) and fifth (*pa*) notes of the scale are omitted, whereas the third (*ga*), the sixth (*dha*) and the seventh (*ni*) are all flat (*komal*). Similarly, the poet cites raga *Gauḍaśāraṅg* thus: *śuddha svarayā nāp gabaleṃ tivra madhyam* (Harvard: 42). This means that in this rāga, the fourth (*ma*) is sometimes natural, sometimes sharp, whereas the rest of the pitches are non-altered. It is in precisely this form that we encounter these two rāgas in compilations of contemporary Hindusthani practice, such as Kaufmann (1968), or indeed on the Internet.

A little surprisingly, then (and though rāgas such as *Basanta* and *Byāṃcali* that do have Newar ‘stamp and colour’ are mentioned by name in the work), in the passages where the poet presents specific melodic content this is not that of ‘Newar’ rāgas but that of contemporary ‘Indian’ rāgas!

That this is so is not evident from the English text, where the two passages quoted above are rendered in a less technical way (‘All the soft and low notes in the musical scale’ for *Mālakośa* on p. 291, ‘Appropriate notes, shrill and medium’ for *Gauḍaśāraṅg* on p. 42). On the topic of the technical details of music, I might add another comment. *Gujarāti* (Harvard: 42 and 108; Oxford: 55 and 116) is translated as ‘wooden flutes’ and ‘wind instruments’, while *rasan* (Harvard: 42 and 89; Oxford: 55) is given as ‘wind instrument’. To be more specific, these are both different sizes of oboes (Baké ms.: 17, Hoerbürger 1975: 72; photo of *rośam muhālī* in Darnal 2061: 88–89).

But these are ultimately just tiny details that in fact testify to the sheer complexity of the work undertaken by Lewis and Tuladhar. To do true justice to their achievement, a full team of reviewers would be required. My review here has primarily read *Sugata saurabha* as a reflection of and on Newar civilisation. And in this context, the book—in either of its editions—is a rich experience for the reader, made even more rewarding by the commentaries and footnotes provided in the translations. For a student of any aspect of Newar life, this is truly a canonical work; and I am certain that a review of the book from the perspective of Himalayan or South Asian literature, or of Buddhist studies would reach a similar conclusion.

As Lewis and Tuladhar point out, the complicated language of Hṛdaya’s original text would make *Sugata saurabha* tough reading for most speakers of Newari. So let me finally suggest the possibility of a South Asian edition of this book, incorporating as in the Harvard edition the original text in the devanāgarī script, and including the notes and comments as presented in the Oxford edition. This would be a fitting tribute and much in the spirit of Hṛdaya, the cultural activist who offered ‘body, mind, wealth’ (Harvard: xxiii, Oxford: 9) in the service of the Newar civilisation.

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North East Indian Linguistics: Volume 3.

Edited by Gwendolyn Hyslop, Stephen Morey, and Mark W. Post.

New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd. 2011. 253+xxii pages, ISBN 9788175967939.

Reviewed by Nathan W. Hill

This is the third volume of proceedings resulting from the annual International Conference of the North East Indian Linguistics Society. The third meeting took place at the Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati (Assam) in 2008.¹ The book is divided into six sections: 'the View from Manipur', 'the Sal Group', 'Tibeto-Burman nominalization', 'Tani', 'Eastern Indo-Aryan' and 'Austroasiatic', the number of papers in a given section ranging from one to four. Morphology predominates among the themes; the majority of papers study a specific morpheme or grammatical category in one language: *ca* in Marma (Kuziwara, chapter 7), *ke-* and *ka-* in Karbi (Konnerth, chapter 8), *-ə* in Mising (Pegu, chapter 10), person marking prefixes in Purum (Sharma and H. T. Singh, chapter 1), agreement markers in Tangsa (Morey, chapter 6), deictic markers in Tani languages (Post, chapter 9). These papers offer tantalising glimpses into many interesting phenomena, inspiring the hope that their authors will proceed to study other morphemes in these languages with equal clarity and detail.

Morey's treatment of agreement markers in the three Tangsa languages Cholim, Locchang and Moklum stands out as a highlight among the morphological chapters. The discussion of Cholim and Locchang is based on Morey's own fieldwork and that of Moklum on Das Gupta (1980). In addition to the anticipated tables of paradigms and example sentences, Morey provides wave forms of verbal complexes to support his analysis of morphological structure (pages 84, 93). In addition to the typological comparison of the systems found in the three languages, Morey's presentation of vowel correspondences between Cholim and Locchang (page 81) allows him to isolate cognate forms in the agreement systems

1 For the first and second volume see Morey and Post (2008, 2010). Volume Four is rumoured to be in press. The mostly recently held conference, the sixth, took place at Tezpur University (Assam) in winter 2011.

of these two languages. The chart of correspondences only gives one example for each correspondence. Although this facilitates the clarity of presentation, it renders his conclusions unverifiable. This is however a minor objection. Morey seamlessly combines instrumental phonetics and historical linguistics in service of his morphological arguments without ever compromising the focus and clarity of presentation. The modest conclusion calling for further research does not give proper credit to this feat.

H. T. Singh (chapter 2) presents a discussion of efforts to promote the Meithei script in Manipur and the attendant controversy over whether to include characters to represent voiced consonants. Unfortunately, like all presentations of the Meithei script (e.g. Chelliah 1997: 355-365), the discussion omits mention of many conventions which one must know in order to read Meithei. Two instances occur in the first few lines of the *Cheitarol Kumpapa* (Parrat 2005). The title of the work itself is written *Cay-thā-rol Kum-pau* in Meithei script, transliterated by N. H. Singh into Bengali script as *Caithārol Kumbābabu*. The writing of two vowels on a single consonant appears to indicate that the consonant in question should be repeated; one may therefore transcribe the Meithei version as *Kum-pa[p]u*; this orthographic convention seems to be previously undescribed. Similarly, the ligature *sn-* in the name *Lā-i-sna* (folio 1a. Line 4), *Laiśnā* in Bengali transcription (N. H. Singh 1967: 1), is nowhere described.

Burling devotes an essay to divergent uses of the terms 'language' and 'dialect' in North East India. Few readers will be surprised that linguists use 'language' to mean a 'collection of spoken dialects that are mutually intelligible' (page 36), whereas for others a 'language' is either the collection of speech forms used by a particular ethnic group or written with a particular alphabet. Despite their straightforwardness and predictability, such distinctions of usage are easy to lose sight of; as Burling shows, Bradley's (1997: 28) inattention to such niceties has marred his presentation of a Stammbaum (pages 39-40). Basic lessons must be ever relearned.

The papers by DeLancey and Wood focus on historical linguistics. Wood's paper is a disappointment; his blunt deployment of the comparative method belies an unfamiliarity with standard methodological thinking in historical linguistics. Contravening Antoine Meillet's dictum that "ce qui est probant pour établir la continuité entre une « langue commune » et

une langue ultérieure, ce sont les procédés particuliers d'expression de la morphologie" (1925: 25), Wood bases his reconstructions on regularities; for him 'those case-forms that are consistent across the modern languages will be assumed to represent the case-ending in P[roto-]B[odo-]G[aro]' (page 51). In Germanic this approach would lead to disastrous results. The dative morpheme *-e* remains in German in only a few fixed expressions (*zu Hause, Stein im Wege*) and lacks cognates in many modern Germanic languages. Wood would either overlook this morpheme or see it as an innovation, whereas in fact it is reconstructible to proto-Germanic. In Bodo-Garo, the Deuri genitive *-o* or the Kokborok instrumental *-bay* may be instances of just such overlooked archaisms (page 52).

Without comment, Wood extends to syntax the same method of majority rule. Such an approach simply does not work; it would lead to the false conclusion that the coincidence of constructions such as *je suis allé, ich bin gegangen*, and *Я (есмь) пошёл* is due to inheritance. Wood devotes no discussion to distinguishing cognate constructions from areal patterns. The lack of a syntactic equivalent to a regular sound change at least demands circumspection. To isolate inherited constructions, Calvert Watkins focuses on fixed formulae, stereotypical or archaic constructions found in conservative genres (e.g. legal texts, religious liturgies), or the treatment of traditional subjects (e.g. athletic contests) (1994: 254). Such caveats do not stymie Wood.

In addition to errors of method, Wood also commits errors of fact. Relying upon A. H. Francke, he compares demonstratives such as Boro *be* and Deuri *ba* with a supposed Tibetan demonstrative *-bo* (page 48). Francke's decision to call *-bo* an 'article' (not a demonstrative) must be understood contextually. In the section that Francke is annotating, Jäschke follows de Kőrös (1986[1834]: 37) and Schmidt (1839: 50-51) in his choice of nomenclature, but specifies that *-bo* and its ilk "might perhaps be more adequately termed denominators, since their principal object is undoubtedly to represent a given root as a noun, substantive or adjective" (Jäschke 1929: 17). Subsequent grammars have followed Jäschke's analysis of *-bo* as a nominalizing suffix (e.g. Beyer 1992: 127-129, Gyurmé 1992: 131-138, Sommerschuh 2008: 50-54). A desultory rummaging through secondary literature is an inadequate basis upon which to build Tibeto-Burman comparative linguistics. A better Tibetan comparison could be made between the Bodo-Garo third singular demonstrative **u* and Old

Tibetan *ḥu* [ɣu]; the Old Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* furnishes a nice example: *bud-myed-las ḥdod-žen che-ba myed-pas / « ḥu nī sñogs! » śes mchi-baḥī rigs* / ‘Because there is no greater desire than a women’s, she will say “Pursue it (a deer)!”’ (I.O.L. Tib J 737.1 lines 141-142, cf. de Jong 1989: 112).

DeLancey’s paper succeeds exactly where Wood’s fails. Continuing in his pursuit of the history of Tibeto-Burman verbal morphology (cf. 1989, 2010), DeLancey compares ‘sentence final words’ (abbreviated SFW) in Jinghpaw and Nocte; his use of irregular morphology in reconstruction is a model of clarity and insight. Despite Meillet’s own pessimistic assessment that ‘la restitution d’une « langue commune » dont le chinois, le tibétain, etc., par exemple, seraient des formes postérieures, se heute à des obstacles quasi invincibles’ (1925: 26-27) studies such as DeLancey’s or the recent paper of Jacques (2007) show that Meillet’s method is up to the task.

The editors of this series are to be thanked and congratulated for their hard work, which has already made a significant contribution and promises to do so into the future.

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Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques. Recent Research on Ladakh and the Western Himalaya. Proceedings of the 13th Colloquium of the International Association of Ladakh Studies

Edited by John Bray & Elena de Rossi Filibeck.

Supplement No. 2 to *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 80 (New Series). Pisa & Rome: Sapienza, Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Studi Orientali, 2009, 288 pages. ISBN: 978-88-6227-188-2

Reviewed by Patrick Kaplanian

First, we must congratulate the organisers for holding the 13th Ladakh conference in Italy, the homeland of two of the great 20th century Tibetologists, Giuseppe Tucci and Luciano Petech, as well as the 18th century Jesuit explorer Ippolito Desideri. Appropriately, this volume begins with an article on the latter in his capacity as precursor of modern Ladakh studies. Enzo Gualterio Bargiacchi presents Desideri's qualities, his acute sense of observation, and the intellectual honesty that led him to revise his initial impressions of Ladakh and of Tibetan Buddhism. Why did Desideri's *Relazione* lie unpublished until the late 19th century? The author believes that he was far in advance of his time.

In the past, the scope of International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) conferences has extended far beyond the boundaries of Leh district, for example towards the Skardu region in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. However, in this collection the contributors turn more towards Himachal Pradesh. Thus, Christian Jahoda presents a very clear history of Spiti and the numerous changes in its political relationship with Ladakh and Tibet. In practice, regardless of which kingdom to which it was necessary to pay homage at any particular time, this isolated valley was left more or less to itself as soon as it had paid appropriate tribute. Nonetheless, the author finds that certain Ladakhi customs influenced Spiti, for example the worship of the protective deity Dorje Chenmo, as well as aspects of local music and dance traditions. Also turning towards Himachal Pradesh, Kurt Tropper's paper provides us with a transcription and analysis of a donor's inscription at Nako in Kinnaur.

Georgios T. Halkias analyses the Tibetan text of the 1679 Tibet-

Bashahr Treaty, together with earlier English renderings, and proposes a new translation. At the outset of the Tibet-Ladakh war (1679-1683/84), Bashahr sided with Tibet, the ultimate victor, and as a result was able to regain control of Upper Kinnaur on the higher reaches of the Sutlej river. Bashahr centres on Rampur and Sarahan, lower down the Sutlej, and these developments therefore brought it closer to Tibet, geographically as well as politically. Halkias shows that the smooth functioning of the caravan route from Rampur via Kinnaur and across the Shipki-la to Tibet was one of the underlying strategic issues.

This episode in Bashahr had a completely differently outcome from a later episode in the history of Kangra (also now in Himachal Pradesh) in which—as Arik Moran describes—the tentative opening of a new trade route proved unsuccessful. The aim was to link Kangra with East Turkestan (present-day Sinkiang/Xinjiang) via Leh. In 1867, together with the tea planter Robert Shaw, the Jalandhar divisional commissioner Douglas Forsyth decided to open a trade fair at Palampur near Kangra. Despite its initial success, the fair did not develop in the way that its sponsors had hoped. Its avowed objective was to attract buyers of tea from East Turkestan. However, this did not happen and before long, Kangra's limited commercial relations with East Turkestan came to a definitive end following China's re-conquest of the region in 1877. Why this setback? For a number of reasons: because the Afghanistan route was more practical for traders than the road through Leh; because of the extension of St Petersburg's influence over the future Xinjiang following the Russian conquest of West Turkestan; and finally, because the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, which controlled the route via Ladakh, had become too desirous of taxes. The issue of taxation was one of the factors that led the British to press the Maharajah of Jammu & Kashmir to accept the appointment of a British Joint Commissioner in Leh from 1871 onwards.

John Bray and Tsering D. Gonkatsang are similarly interested in the political and commercial significance of a caravan route. Under the terms of the 1684 Tibet-Ladakh treaty, the King of Ladakh, succeeded from the mid-19th century onwards by the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir, had to send a caravan known as the Lopchak (*lo phyag*) to Lhasa every three years. The authors have found three 19th century texts associated with the Lopchak. The first is a detailed receipt from the Lhasa government's

treasurer in 1872. It shows that the list of symbolic gifts carried by the Lopchak had hardly changed since the end of the 17th century. The other two documents are letters addressed by the Lhasa government to W.H. Johnson, the Maharajah's *wazir* (governor) in Leh from 1870 to 1883. Those who are not accustomed to reading this type of correspondence will be struck by its verbose and pompous style. An analysis of the texts in their wider political and social contexts shows that the Tibetans regarded themselves as superior to the Ladakhis, but that the continuation of the Lopchak mission provided benefits to both sides.

Now let us turn to the Muslim communities. The contributions by Abdul Ghani Sheikh and Shahzad Bashir complement each other. The former presents an overview of the Sufi penetration of Ladakh. He argues that pre-Islamic Hindu and Buddhist traditions in Kashmir provided a favourable terrain for the Sufis at the time of Islamisation. He then describes the arrival of the first Sufis in Ladakh, together with that of Shams al-Dīn rāqī (d. 1526) and the Nūrbakhshīs. We learn that there are some 5,000 Nūrbakhshīs in Ladakh.

Taking as an example three differing accounts of the Nūrbakhshīs in the wider region (Kashmir, Ladakh and Baltistan), Shahzad Bashir shows how difficult it is to interpret such historical sources unless one places them in their proper context. Depending on how one reads the texts, the founder Muhammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 1464) can be seen as a messianic figure, the reformer of a corrupted Islam, or a true Sufi whose message has been distorted. These contrasting representations depend on the origin of the text and the nature of the intended audience.

All these contributions are primarily concerned with history. Let us now turn to the papers dealing with ethnology and the other human sciences.

Pascale Dollfus focuses on the Kharnak community, one of the three nomadic pastoralist groups in the high plateau of the Ladakhi Changthang. She describes their history and way of life, showing its distinctiveness. One learns, for example, that the Kharnak population is divided into six clans (*phaspun*). The nature of the *phaspun* has been a source of controversy in a number of studies on Ladakh. In this case, it is interesting to note that the Kharnak-pa deny that the *phaspun* descend from a common set of ancestors, an apparent contrast with other regions of Ladakh. On the other hand, the Kharnakpa trace their origins to two households. Is this

a contradiction? Maybe so, but the study of mythology often mocks our desire for consistency.

Elena de Rossi Filibeck studies a series of 39 marriage songs. She gives the original texts together with English translations. This is a valuable contribution to the study of Ladakhi marriage customs which complements the publications of the Leh branch of the Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy in the 1980s.

Petra Maurer discusses a divination text: chapter 32 of the *Vaidūya dKarmo* by Sanggye Gyatso (Sang rgyas rgyamtsho, 1653-1705), the regent who governed Tibet after the death of the 5th Dalai Lama. This chapter deals with the art of geomancy (*sadpyad*, literally 'examination of the earth'), the prime purpose of which is to decide on the sites of new buildings. She compares the details of the text with the actual practice of two contemporary Ladakhi astrologers.

Erberto Lo Bue has chosen to focus on 'sky burial', the funerary practice, common in Tibet, which consists of cutting up the corpse and leaving it to the vultures. He seeks to find out whether sky burial has been practised in the Western Himalaya and does in fact find traces and personal testimonies to show that it existed in the past. According to him, this custom disappeared in Indian territory in the 1940s. It is still practised in Mustang and even gaining renewed popularity in Tibet.

Poul Pedersen discusses the relationship between two people of completely different backgrounds who might not have been expected to meet. Abdul Wahid Radhu is the heir to a family of traders from Leh, while Marco Pallis was from a family of Greek businessmen and later became a specialist in baroque music, particularly the viola. What brought them together was a certain spirituality and an interest in the work of the French Muslim scholar René Guénon, whose *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* (1921) had been translated by Pallis.

Before an important ceremony on 21 March 1996, the Dalai Lama solemnly declared that anyone who was a worshipper of the protective deity Dorje Shugden should leave. What is the source of this 'excommunication' of the devotees of this divinity? Martin Mills focuses on the way that the Dalai Lama's orders were executed in Ladakh. He shows the ambivalence of Ladakhis' eventual submission to the Dalai Lama's authority: were they responding to him in his capacity as a leader of the Gelugpa order, or as the political leader of the Tibetan government in exile?

Finally, Sonam Wangchok presents us with a tableau of sacred sites in the Nubra valley: mountains, lakes, caves, trees and footprints preserved in stone.

Taken together, the papers in this collection are very much in the spirit of the IALS, which has chosen not to limit itself to a narrowly defined view of Ladakh but rather to take into account neighbouring regions ranging from Baltistan to as far as the borders of Kumaon. Similarly, the Association is interested not just in Buddhists but also in Muslims and the followers of other religions, and it has adopted an interdisciplinary approach, linking ethnology with history and, more broadly, the human sciences to ecology. In short, this volume is a welcome and successful contribution to the field.

God of Justice: Ritual healing and social justice in the Central Himalayas

by William S. Sax

New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 284 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-533585-9 (paperback), \$ 25.00.

Reviewed by Arik Moran

William Sax's book is an in-depth exploration of ritual culture in the Central Himalayas that focuses on the cult of Bhairav in Chamoli District of upper Garhwal (Uttarkhand, India). The uniqueness of the cult is largely determined by its composition, which is primarily but not exclusively made up of untouchable castes. Sax thus departs from his earlier studies of Brahmins and Kshatriyas in Garhwal, and complements them with a view from outside 'normative' society. This also allows for addressing the central ethnological question of the place of Harijan culture and religion within Hinduism (p. 7). As the book's numerous case studies demonstrate, untouchable religious culture in Garhwal does indeed share broad similarities with orthodox Hinduism (e.g., the parallels between local and orthodox Hindu rituals; pp. 68-69), and in some instances it even converges with that of higher castes (e.g. a Kshatriya serving as oracle to the Harijan god; pp. 103-107).

Sax describes the evolution of his interest in and eventual study of Harijan religious culture as one of gradual awareness, from an initial obliviousness to the modest shrines of Bhairav through an erroneous identification of the Garhwali deity with the Sanskrit Bhairava until finally embarking on a detailed ethnographic analysis that culminated in this book. Along the way, Sax also refined his understanding of what conducting ethnographic research is all about, affording us a rare view of the trials and pitfalls of fieldwork. As an 'exponent of ethnography' (p. 4), Sax devotes his introduction to addressing critiques of the discipline in recent decades through colourful personal accounts of his initial encounters with ritual specialists. Ethnography is defined as 'the method of long-term participant observation that is central to the discipline of ethnology', which 'has something special to contribute to the understanding of particular cultures, and thereby of human beings

generally' (p. 4), and its critique from postmodern-epistemological and postcolonial-moral quarters is carefully addressed. Commencing with the epistemological critique that it is impossible to arrive at objective scientific knowledge since phenomena are necessarily mediated by language, Sax reposts by opting for a highly reflexive mode of writing that highlights the ethnographer's 'prejudices and predispositions ... [and] the ways in which the data were gathered and the text constructed', thereby acknowledging the limitations and partial nature of the researcher's analyses (p. 5). This also partly answers the criticism levelled by postcolonial-moral scholarship, which faults ethnography for exoticising the 'Other' through an 'immoral' emphasis on cultural difference. Sax rightly dismisses this as untenable insofar as the study of any field requires an object of study, and the ostensible 'ethical dilemmas' deriving from the ethnographer's position as an outsider to his field of study are more straightforwardly located in 'economic and political asymmetries' than in the realm of culture (p. 20).

Next, Sax presents the history of the cult of Bhairav on the basis of local memory, oral history and oral texts (p. 27). We thus learn of Bhairav's eastern provenance, his predominant role as saviour of the oppressed (pp. 32-37), and his multifarious representations, of which possession is judged to be the 'most persuasive and powerful ... more compelling than any iconographic description and more immediate than any story'. Rolling on the ground, 'writhing in pain, their hand twisted into the shape of a bird-like claw' (p. 45, as well as cover photo), the possessed enact the suffering of Bhairav and, by extension, that of his Harijan followers (p. 47). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *hexis*, Sax explains that Harijans in Garhwal, despite enjoying greater freedom than their counterparts in the plains (most notably the right to own land), have nonetheless internalised their inferior status and stigmatisation through bodily and social practices (pp. 25-26). The display of *hexis* through ritual is further elaborated with an enquiry into the performative aspects of possession. In the cult of Bhairav, possession is qualified as performance since it comprises musical sessions that are judged by participatory audiences. Referencing John Austin's notion of the speech act, Sax notes that the utterances pronounced during possession are not 'purely performative' but rather contingent on 'antecedent social conditions' (p. 47); in the present case, the powerful position of gurus in Garhwali society as the ritual specialists

who command gods and spirits. Accordingly, the physical manifestation of possession constitutes an embedded (and not linguistic) act, in which the contorted body of the possessed reflects the suffering of Kachiya (the most commonly venerated form of Bhairav among the Harijans) and his followers (pp. 48-49). Performativity thus defines caste by social rules that facilitate the Harijan *hexis*, which is learned, mimetic and inscribed in ritual practice, strengthening Sax's longstanding thesis that 'public rituals are the sites par excellence where identities and relationships are created, re-affirmed, reiterated, and sometimes reconfigured' (p. 49).

Sax then goes on to explore the links between landscape, memory and ritual. This seeming flight from a purely social relations-based description of ritual is justified by local definitions of place in terms of human history and action (p. 90). This approach is congruent with Edward Casey's privileging of 'place' over 'space' as the site where meaning is created through dwelling, embodiment and movement, granting Garhwali 'public and ritual representation of "palatial" relations' an authority that is both representative and constitutive of those subsisting between ritual participants (pp. 52-53). The use of rice grains from the client's crops in oracular consultations is a case in point. The grains (landscape) are handed over to the oracle who uses them to read and diagnose the client's condition. The oracle then leads the ritual through dialogue, helping the client 'to remember' the factors that may have contributed to his present plight, effectively composing 'a plausible story that will explain the cause of his suffering' (p. 56). The same chapter usefully provides detailed descriptions of the key rituals associated with the cult that are frequently referenced in the various case studies presented in the book. These include the preparatory *kas* ritual, the ritual for establishing a shrine (*than ki puja*), and the *chhal puja*, a highly popular ritual for exorcising crafty demons (pp. 65-73, 73-77 and 83-90, respectively). The means by which the cult spreads are then explicated and highlight the relationship of kinship, residence and ritual: the path of aggression sees shrines established in order to counter curses (but see notes on chapter 7, below); the path of the land (*dharti*) denotes cases in which migrating families maintain extant shrines insofar as these are the residences of divine beings; finally, the path of the outmarrying daughter (*dhyani*) underlines the persistent links between recently married brides and the Bhairav of their natal home (*mait*) in their new abodes (*saurya*) (pp. 77-83).

The question of agency among ritual specialists is broached in the fourth chapter. Noting the conflation of 'agency' with 'resistance' in scholarly research during the 1980-1990s (primarily among postcolonial-moral critics), Sax wrests the term from its misinterpretation as 'free will' and consequent opposition with 'structure' by broadening the discussion to agency's natural counterpart, 'patience' (p. 93). In the cult of Bhairav, the gurus who command gods and spirits are marked agents, while the oracles, the vehicles of possession, are qualified as patients. Patience is illustrated in three fascinating case studies (pp. 95-107), in which oracles make futile attempts to avoid possession by gods. The gurus, on the other hand, undergo elaborate Tantric initiations, most notably by spending a night in a cremation ground, where they make offerings to the Masan and his minions. These test the gurus' courage and, ultimately, grant them power over the spirit world (pp. 107-132). Significantly, both parties' 'reputation and success' relies on the degree to which they are believed to embody (in the case of oracles) or control the gods and/or other supernatural beings (in the case of gurus) (p. 95). This ultimately means that 'healing agency is always distributed in networks' consisting of oracles, gurus and the beings with whom they interact (p. 133).

The focus on multiple agents is expounded upon in the remainder of the book, which explores social aspects of the cult. First, Sax focuses on family unity, which is presented as a ritual, therapeutic and moral principle (p. 136). In identifying and analysing the different strands of this 'principle', Sax takes issue with the broader world of anthropological theories concerning South Asian (Hindu) society. He thus partly agrees with the Dumontian claim that the category of the 'individual' is alien to Indian society, and highlights the Marriott circle's promulgation of the 'dividual' as the fundamental unit of the Hindu social imagination, which relates persons to broader wholes/groups (usually caste, in this case, the family). Informing the dividual's identification with a larger social body are 'broad cultural assumptions', such as 'the idea that people's natures are continually altered through transaction of substance', especially as regards sex and food (p. 138). This last point is particularly pertinent in Garhwal and recurs in almost all of the case studies presented, which faithfully capture the fluidity and sense of peril underlying séance sessions (for a particularly lucid example, where a client vainly attempts to avoid explicitly asking for a curse to be cast upon his relatives, see pp.

146-151). The 'clear and consistent moral pressure for particular persons to subordinate their wills to those of the family' exhibited throughout these case studies thus highlights the function of ritual as a means for constituting and reinforcing the principle of family unity, and also seem to support the claim that "individualism" [in India] is a problem to be solved, not a goal to be pursued' (pp. 163-164).

The sixth chapter extends the investigation of family unity to the realm of the dead. Caught midway (*ardhagati*) between this world and the next, the ghosts of the departed are ritually appeased in order to be transformed from ambivalent and potentially harmful ancestors (*bhutamakaya*) to benevolent ones (*pitramakaya*) that are safely distanced from the world of the living (pp. 165-166). The connection between exorcisms and family unity is clearly brought out in the words of a guru, who explained that 'ghosts come into existence when the body is abandoned but the person's thoughts (*kalpanam*) remain' (p. 179). It is precisely this lingering in proximity to the living that renders ghosts ambivalent, their presence a source of anxiety that exists alongside the positive sentiments harboured by their living relations. This ambivalence is further captured in the mode of exorcism, which consists of singing tender, loving songs to the accompaniment of 'irritating' beatings on metal utensils (p. 178). The guru's task is to lead the ghost from its intermediate state to the realm of the dead by forcing it to present itself (by cutting 'yama's net' above the head of the person possessed by the ghost), identifying its unfulfilled wishes and securing its relations' promise to work towards their achievement. Only then can the ghost be transported (in the form of a small silver image) to the high-altitude lake of Nara Kund near Badrinath, from where it ultimately parts for Lake Manasarovar in West Tibet (p. 173). As in rituals of family unity, exorcisms aim to re-establish healthy relations within the family by 'clearly dividing the living from the auspicious ancestral dead' and are thus also therapeutic (p. 195).

Ambivalence is not, however, the sole prerogative of ghosts, but also found among ritual participants, who are often suspect of instrumentality (as one oracle put it, 'god on the lips but a knife at the hips', p. 163; see pp. 139-146, for the case study in question). This leads to a discussion of the fundamental question regarding the 'realness' of possession. The problem is situated in the context of the debates sparked by Ioan Lewis's study of the Zar cult in Sudan (1971), which centred on the 'idea that so-called

peripheral possession cults were a means for relatively powerless people to express their dissatisfaction and/or to obtain a measure of power and authority' (p. 196). This debate, Sax argues, was largely occluded by the distinctly modern framing of religion in terms of belief instead of practice. If, however, possession is seen as a form of what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'strategic practice', its underlying logic becomes apparent: similar to dinner invitations in Europe and cross-cousin marriages among the Kabyle, possession proves to be fundamentally grounded in misrecognition (*meconnaissance*). The possessed thus dissociates the expediency of practice from the underlying principles of ritual, which enables him to 'consciously subscribe to ideas about possession, participate in exorcism rituals, and even feel himself to be possessed, while still behaving "strategically" by utilizing the ritual for his own purposes' (p. 198).

The last chapter explores the highly contentious topic of ritual aggression. Because of its contradiction with the principle of family unity, the casting of curses or 'sending the god back' is invariably construed as a defensive—and therefore moral and legitimate—act (pp. 201-202). Distinctions are drawn between longstanding grudges that assume the form of a curse (*hamkar*) and deliberate acts of aggression (*ghat*) by the desperate. As with the 'instrumentally possessed', the curser's actions are legitimized by misrecognition: the person casting the curse customarily offers himself as sacrifice to Kachiya should he be found at fault, and only then does he ask the deity to punish his opponent, thereby convincing 'oneself of the justice of one's position, and the legitimacy-and even morality-of the curse' (p. 202). The case studies presented (pp. 202-230) are, to say the least, disturbing, and have to do with rape, suicide and quarrels over land. These dramas (or, rather, tragedies) find their solution in the customary path of reconciliation, 'when the rival parties come together to worship the god; that is, when the family is reunited' (p. 203).

The book concludes with a postscript on ritual, healing and modernity (as well as its Garhwali synonym, 'development'). Modernity, it is argued, is characterised by a distinctly suspicious stance towards ritual, which is negatively judged in terms of efficacy. Proponents of modernity/development perceive rituals to be thoroughly grounded in superstition and, because they have no palpable outcome, they are dismissed as 'inefficient' and thus intrinsically linked with the 'underdeveloped' or 'primitive' world. Accordingly, the educated and economically advanced

classes deem ritual healing through possession to be ‘backwards’ (pp. 236-237). However, the preponderance and persistence of ritual healing in Garhwal, as well as in the West, suggests it meets certain needs that are left unfulfilled by modern medicine. For Sax, these are epitomised by modern medicine’s compartmentalisation of problems, which fails to address the holistic—in this case social—aspects of healing. For, while modern medicine may cure a disease, ritual healing may restore the wellbeing of the individual, while also tending to ‘social and interpersonal relationships’ (p. 242). The utility of ritual efficacy thus becomes secondary, as rites are no longer perceived as hiding deeper meanings that require the deciphering skills of intellectual researchers, but as techniques that subscribe to context-specific logics (p. 238). The healing practices associated with the cult of Bhairav fulfil this description, in which ritual practice is primarily aimed at the betterment of the ‘social field’, rather than the body or psyche of the patient.

Lucidly written and carefully grounded in theory, *God of Justice* makes a significant contribution to the ethnography of Garhwal that will benefit social, cultural and medical anthropologists, as well as regional specialists in general. Sax’s rich experience, engaging prose and candid reflections quickly draw the reader into the mysterious, dangerous and often conflicted world of untouchable religion in practice, while reminding us of the persistent importance of rigorous ethnographic research long after the waves of critique of the 1980-1990s have subsided.

The Kuhls of Kangra: Community-managed irrigation in the Western Himalaya.

by J. Mark Baker

Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 2005 (simultaneously published by Permanent Black, Delhi). xiii + 271 pages, tables, figures, plates, maps, notes, references, glossary, index, ISBN 978-0-295-98764-4

Reviewed by Charu Singh

J. Mark Baker's interdisciplinary study of community-managed irrigation institutions focuses on the *kuhls*, the intricate irrigational flows of snowmelt and downpour that traverse the Kangra valley in the Western Himalaya. Built both by the pre-colonial Katoch rulers and by local agricultural communities, kuhls have a long history of local management, maintenance and endurance even under ecological uncertainty, economic change, colonialism and technological pressures. Baker sets out to explain their tenacious longevity in the face of ecological distress and a radically altered context for communities' dependence on agriculture and kuhl-irrigation in Kangra, created by the proliferation of non-farm employment opportunities. In doing so, he challenges the dominant narrative of common property resource theory that would in fact predict the collapse of the kuhls under such pressures. Baker develops an eclectic framework based on theories of 'rational choice, social networks, state-formation, and regionality' (pp. 20-50). In order to address the lacunae in rational choice scholarship, he investigates closely the dialectics between state institutions; the densely tiered and inter-connected kuhl networks within a watershed; the historically informed socio-economic and cultural articulations of community and identity; and the ecological particularities of Kangra. His method ably combines participant observation, surveys, and interviews with the use of archival sources.

Through rich ethnography (and photographs), Baker lets the reader explore kuhls as an 'institutional whole,'¹ deeply embedded in the agrarian, social and religious processes of Kangra. Baker presents a vivid picture of

1 David Mosse, *The Rule of Water: Statecraft, ecology and collective action in South India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003: 1.

how kuhl regimes survive by adapting in the face of growing pressure from the market economy and the state: by shifting *khana* (labour required for kuhl maintenance) days to Sundays in order to allow even those who are otherwise committed to non-farm employment through the rest of the week to participate (p. 71); through the introduction of record-keeping in khana attendance since the 1960s (p. 73); the substitution of labour contributions with monetary contributions (p. 74); and the formalization of kuhl management through committees.

The complexity of kuhl management as a common property resource, Baker shows, is reflected in the figure of the *kohli*, simultaneously ‘integrator of local knowledge and governance authority’ (p. 68); at once hereditary office holder, religious functionary and also social negotiator. The pressures felt by kuhl regimes are also paralleled in the changes in the institution of the *kohli*, who in some cases has come to be elected and appointed, and in others, faces the challenge posed by bureaucratisation in the form of the kuhl committee. Further, by performing the annual religious rituals associated with kuhl management (p. 82), the *kohli* is also critical to the social reproduction of the community of irrigators in the region.

In an effort to move away from economistic, ahistorical and apolitical understandings of common property, Baker draws on theories of state-making and governmentality to make a strong case for ‘bringing the state into the study of common property resource management’ (p. 41). Following the historical trajectory of state-formation, Baker emphasises the ways in which geography, landholding patterns and lack of intermediaries have shaped state engagement with kuhls in pre-colonial, colonial and post-Independence Kangra. While the pre-colonial Katoch rulers’ construction of some of the longest kuhls in Kangra inscribed and legitimated power through kuhls, the colonial codification of irrigation customs, the creation of new judicial arenas for the negotiation of rights to kuhl water, and the implementation of revenue assessment and collection systems set in motion irreversible changes in kuhl regimes. Baker’s critical discussion of the *Riwaj-i-Abpashi* (Book of Irrigation Customs) reveals how state-formation deeply implicated kuhls as sites for legitimation and the formation of community. As Baker notes, the process of codification created a fixed written model for resolving future disputes: the text continues to be used for resolving contemporary kuhl

disputes in Kangra (p. 128-130). However, as the example of farmers using the *Riwaj* to their own ends to sue the Irrigation and Public Health Department of Himachal Pradesh in the late 1980s shows, state-making is a continuous (though usually unequal) process of negotiation between state institutions and communities of users (p. 131). In the post-1947 period, the most significant aspect of state involvement has been the formation of kuhl committees in 14 kuhls and the takeover of the maintenance of long kuhls by the Irrigation and Public Health Department. Interestingly, the records of these committees provide scholars such as Baker with an extremely rich entry-point into the contemporary management of kuhls (p. 142-144).

The strongest point of Baker's analysis is his focus on the 'regionality' of the kuhls. He conceptualises 'regions and places as being constituted by social relations "stretched out" over space' (p. 12) and attempts to locate the kuhls both 'within a hydraulically defined landscape unit' (p. 13) and in the historical, political, social and ecological space of Kangra. This notion of Kangra as a region is encoded and produced in several ways: in naming practices and contestations between upstream and downstream communities (p. 148); in the strong local bias against buying food grains and the high value attached to self-sufficiency (p. 60); in stories told about kohlis (Appendix 2). Baker points to the ways in which the 'Kangriness' of kuhl regimes (p. 14) is produced through indigenous ideas that in turn provide the semantics of collective action, such as notions of fairness and reciprocity; the importance of reputation; the ethics of access established by diversion structures between upstream and downstream users (p. 79); and the principle of acting in accordance with the principle of *bhai bundi se*, 'through brotherhood'. Thus, kuhls serve as markers and sites of history, memory, place and social relations.

In *The Kuhls of Kangra*, Baker provides a strong critique of common property resource theory, which is his professed aim. At points, however, readers may find that Baker's ethnographic and archival materials strain against the confined framework of common property, which also mars the style and narrative of an otherwise fluid story of meaning, history, and identity. As the title suggests, the objects of this particular environmental narrative are the 'kuhls' and not 'communities,' a particular problem (of agency) faced by scholars telling stories about nature. Though the communities enter Baker's narrative, it is only to the extent that they are

made visible by kuhls. In some places, Baker also appears to accept stories narrated to him by his informants at face value (p. 110, p. 146). Lastly, if the truth of environmental narratives is ‘political rather than historical,’² how do kuhls enter state-level politics in contemporary Himachal Pradesh?

Baker’s valuable focus on ‘region’ explains the book’s apt appearance under the ‘Culture, Place, and Nature’ series of the University of Washington press. *The Kuhls of Kangra* is a valuable addition to the growing body of environmental scholarship on water resources in South Asia. It will be of interest to scholars of irrigation and agriculture in the Himalayas; environmental anthropologists and historians of South Asia; and readers attracted to interdisciplinary approaches to the intersecting questions of nature, power and identity.

2 Mosse, *The Rule of Water*, p. 12.

ENDPIECE

From Buddhisagar Chapain's *Karnali Blues*

Buddhisagar published this, his first novel, in the summer of 2010, and it has since been warmly received and widely praised. *Karnali Blues* is a lengthy (376 pp.) first-person account of growing up in a Pahari family in the west Tarai. It is written in Nepali but several of its characters speak in Tharu and the Jumli dialect of Nepali. The novel is set in recent times and centres upon the central character's relationship with his father, who lies dying in a hospital bed. Its ten chapters each begin at the father's bedside, then resume a narrative of the author's boyhood, from his early years to his eventual move to Kathmandu after he passes his SLC.

Karnali Blues is sophisticated in structure and ethnographically and linguistically rich in content. It contains many entertaining anecdotes and characters, but its overall tone is one of poignancy in its portrayal of a father-son relationship characterised by the son's search for approval, the father's small acts of kindness and forgiveness, the son's fears for his father's dignity as his fortunes fail, and his mother's emotional ups and downs all the while.

The following translation by Michael Hutt is taken from the second chapter of the novel, headed 'Second Day' (*dosro din*), pp. 80-86 in the first edition, published by Fine Print Publishers, Kathmandu.

Purnabahadur Bista!
Jagat Rawal!
Basudev Chaulagain!
Phulba Chaudhari!

Chandre ripped up some dub grass from the playing field, put it into his mouth and pretended to chew. His face was turning blue, as if he had been stung by a scorpion. Although the sun was hanging up in the sky, I felt as if it was squatting on my forehead. Sweat drenched my face as if I had been splashed with water.

Ninety five students were spread out across the playing field, like scraps of the question papers and answer booklets of the previous examination. If anyone spoke I would die. From far away the sound of the mill reached our ears: *tuktuk, tuktuk*.

Results day. At school the Sirs were reading out the results. Our elder sisters' results were being read out in the classroom, the results of classes below Grade 5 on the playing field. Karnabahadur Sir had taken

responsibility for announcing our results. Everyone wanted to hear his name from Sir's mouth. Sir was turning the pages of the Lali Gurans exercise book and calling out the names. I was already semi-unconscious.

Oh Lord, may that exercise book never come to an end.

Sir shouted, 'Aitabahadaur B.K!'

There, even his name has come. Aite jumped up and spun around. He laughed like Shiva in the photo, standing on one leg: hehehe! He was the biggest in our Class Three. Fourteen years old.

Sir was standing on a high bench. When he looked at the exercise book he did so through strong glasses. After he said each name he looked out over them. A white shirt, brown patterned pants, leather shoes—Sir was always smartly dressed. There was always a muffler around his neck. That's why Sir was popular with everyone—he never beat us and he taught the class all three subjects. Lifting his eyes from the book he shouted—

Rambahadur Bogate!

Bogate too jumped up and ran towards the gate. Now ants began to run along the nerves in my brain. I felt as if my head was swelling and getting bigger and bigger, too big to support. I hung my heavy head low.

'We've failed, I reckon' said Chandre in a disconsolate voice. 'Sir's book is nearly finished'.

'We'll come at the end.' I looked at Sir with great hope.

And then, Yuvaraj Gautam!

Yuvaraj wasn't there, so he didn't get up. Chandre's breathing whistled like a river. His lips trembled. He rolled his wet eyes at me and hiccupped.

Sir shut the book, and I thought my breath would stop. All the students jumped up and danced and ran towards Sir, because Sir had pulled the red *abir* out of his pocket. They used to put *abir* on those who had passed. There were ten or twelve of us whose names had not come. I had failed. There now, there goes my blinky watch. I held back the sobs.

Sir was happily putting *abir* on the foreheads of the passes. The fails headed for the gate, hanging their heads. Chandre and I just sat where we were. Our sisters had passed. They would move up to study in Class Six. They came up to us, giggling. They both looked fresh in their sky blue shirts and dark blue skirts.

Parvati Didi bent down a little and asked 'What happened?'

'Fail' I told her in a dead voice.

Suddenly Chandre burst into sobs. His body shook. Mamata Didi put

her hand on his head and said, 'Don't cry, my brother.'

'Ba will beat me.' Chandre wept uncontrollably.

'Don't cry, I won't let him beat you.'

This affection made Chandre tremble even more.

'Study well next year' Parvati Didi said, 'And you'll pass'.

Holding our hands, our sisters got us up and made us walk. Three-Heads was standing near the gate with *abir* all over his forehead. Two boys were beside him. Three-Heads was chewing on a long stick of sugarcane. When he saw us he laughed mockingly, because there was no *abir* on our foreheads. Our sisters went out through the gate giggling and patting one another. We approached Three-Heads. That was the route we had to take. Three-Heads suddenly made as if to strike Chandre over the head with the sugarcane, whack! Chandre ducked to the right to save his head. All three of them laughed like demons on the radio, making the very school shake—hahaha.

'Passes eat sugarcane!' Three-Heads shouted at the top of his voice.

The two boys who were with him laughed, 'And fails?'

'This here...' Three-Heads pointed at his private parts.

Chandre became tearful. He looked at Three-Heads from red eyes. I grabbed his arm and pulled him away, and he came along limping. Even when we were well past him, Three-Heads was still shouting.

Our sisters had gone on ahead without us because they were happy to have passed. Chandre and I were on our own. We didn't speak all the way home. Whenever we saw someone on the road we hid behind a tree. What would we say if they asked us if we'd passed?

We snuck down via the far bank of the Amauri Khola, in case they asked at the teashop too. Dusk had already fallen. The Amauri Khola was deserted. Chandre and I sat on the edge of the river. The breeze was cold—it was touching us inside, getting in through the torn armpits of our shirts and up through the gaps in our shorts. A little way off the yellow light of a lantern spilled out of the teashop. The murmur of people's voices reached us. The Sauji had recently begun to sell sealed bottles of raksi. People said the lights burned in the teashop until midnight!

Chandre was silent. He knew that tonight his father would thrash him. So he was refusing to go home. Even now his lips were trembling a little.

'Your father won't beat you, right?' Chandre looked at me.

I said nothing, I just lowered my head.

'Let's go' I said, catching hold of his hand.

He said nothing but slowly got up. We walked on, brushing off our shorts. Like dark stumps, we were returning home via the bank of the Amauri Khola at the time when the English news comes on the radio. I was the stump in front, walking hurriedly, the other stump was Chandre, limping along.

'Come here' Ba called me as soon as he saw me.

I climbed up with a miserable face.

'You failed, didn't you? You didn't put your mind to it when it was time to study. Everyone passed, you failed.'

The skin on my face tightened.

Ba stroked my hair. 'I thought my son would study and become an important man, but you're on your way to being a cowherd.'

My eyes filled with tears.

'You have saddened my heart, son.'

I sobbed.

'All right, off you go. You'll pass next time.' Ba pushed me gently away. 'I'll bring you a watch next time.'

I went down the stairs wiping my eyes.

'You've made us cry today.' That was all Mother said.

'Study well from now on, you hear?' Sister looked at me, with the *abir* not washed very well from her face. 'I'll teach you'.

I cried all night. From time to time I thought of Chandre. His father must have beaten him badly. If only he had a father like mine—he didn't beat me, but he slapped my heart.

Next day, in the afternoon, Magarmama told us, 'I had diarrhoea in the morning, and when I went outside there was a black shadow going towards the Amauri Khola. I was scared that it might be a ghost.'

I knew that this was Chandre, because he said it was limping.

Chandre disappeared from the village that very morning.

His father searched all over for him. In Lamichane Basti, Tharu Gaon, Paharipur, everywhere. Ba said he even went to Katase and filed a report at the police post.

'Hey, did Chandre say anything to you?' Ba asked me on the third day of Chandre's disappearance, 'Where might he have gone?'

'He used to say he'd go and see his brother', I told him, 'Perhaps he's gone to Bombay.'

'He didn't encourage you to go with him?'

I sat in silence. Ba's face darkened.

'Someone who runs away from home just for failing once is a coward' said father, tossing a two rupee note toward me. 'A son should not run away from home.'

After Chandre ran away Ba was very frightened that I might run away too. Whenever he came back from Katase he would look for me immediately. By luck he would find me studying. After Chandre had gone I didn't go to the Amauri Khola for several days. After many days I met Bhagiram on the bridge near the Amauri Khola one Saturday afternoon. He set his fan down to one side and asked me, rubbing tobacco in his hand, 'Where did that silly boy go?'

'Bombay.'

'How could such a little boy get to Bombay?'

I couldn't forget Chandre for many days. Even in my dreams he seemed to be calling me. After a couple of weeks Ba went to Nepalganj for five days. He came home on the afternoon of the sixth day. Because it was Friday I had come home from school early and I was sleeping. I woke to the sound of his bicycle bell and ran downstairs, wiping the saliva from my cheek. Ba had brought a bunch of grapes, tucked into his waistband. His face was flushed. I went up to him shyly and touched my head to his feet.

'Be lucky' Ba said. 'Is there no one at home?'

'She's gone to the shop to get some sugar.'

'Go and get me some water, I'm parched!'

I hurried off and brought a pitcher of water for him. Ba drank it, making his adam's apple go up and down. Some water spilled down and wet his chest. Setting the pitcher down on the floor, he moved his hand towards his pocket. When it came out, there it was in his hand—a blinky watch.

'Come here.' Ba took hold of my left wrist. In a second he attached the watch to my wrist. Ba asked, 'What time is it then?'

'Thirty five minutes and seventeen seconds past three' I said shyly.

'Go and study.'

I ran off to the attic like a whirlwind.

At meal time that evening Ba told us that on his way back he was on the same bus as Lamichane Kancha. He told Ba that he had seen Chandre

in a teashop in Nepalganj. He was washing tea glasses there. When he saw him he ran away limping.

‘I don’t know where he came from’, the potbellied Sahuji shouted, ‘I gave him work but the little sod ran away again.’

I couldn’t sleep for a long time, thinking of Chandre. From time to time I pressed the button on the rim of the watch, and the watch lit up. When I was looking at the watch at 12:45:17 Ba woke up.

‘How many more times are you going to look at your watch? Go to sleep now!’ said Ba, yawning. Then he went back to sleep. I could hear the faint sound of his breathing.

Here in Matera there is no one as loving as my Ba.

INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

Proposals and manuscripts should be sent to the Managing Editor, Michael Hutt (mh8@soas.ac.uk) via email. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

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[Monographs]

Bennett, L. 1983. *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and symbolic roles of high-caste women in Nepal*. New York: Columbia University Press.

[Chapters in books]

Ishii, H. 1995. 'Caste and kinship in a Newar village'. In *Contested Hierarchies: A collaborative ethnography of caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*, edited by David N. Gellner and Declan Quigley, pp. 109-57. Oxford: Clarendon.

[Journal articles]

Scheppele, K.L. 2003. 'Aspirational and adversive constitutionalism: the case for studying cross-constitutional influence through negative models'. *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 1(2): 296-324.

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EBHR 40

ARTICLES

Himalayan Flutes, Sprites and Mountainous Geographies <i>Andrew Alter</i>	9
The Monarch's Gift: Critical notes on the constitutional process in Bhutan <i>Winnie Bothe</i>	27
From Sentries to Skilled Migrants: The transitory residence of the Nepali community in Singapore <i>Hema Kiruppalini</i>	59
On the Historiography of Nepal: The 'Wright' Chronicle reconsidered <i>Manik Bajracharya and Axel Michaels</i>	83
WORKSHOP REPORTS	99
OBITUARY	117
BOOK REVIEWS	125
ENDPIECE	155

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