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EDITORIAL

Welcome to EBHR No. 41, and please join me in welcoming two new members to our Editorial Committee: Heleen Plaisier and Arik Moran. I would like to thank them both for their invaluable contributions to the editing work that went into this issue, and I look forward to working with them on subsequent issues. I must also thank Art Mitchells-Urwin for copy-editing two of the articles contained herein.

I am happy to announce that as from this year, the contents of each issue of the EBHR will be available online at Digital Himalaya twelve months after hard copy publication, instead of after three years as at present: www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/ebhr

The first article in this issue is a further contribution to our understanding of the Naga languages, following on from the publication in this journal of Bouchery and Gangmei's important article on the kinship terminology of Rongmei Naga (EBHR No. 38, 2008). We are proud to be playing a part in bringing this fascinating work to the attention of a Himalayan Studies readership.

The articles by Maharjan and Parajuli are two early products of the British Academy-funded South Asia Partnership Project on the Creation of Public Meaning in Nepal, involving SOAS in London and Martin Chautari in Kathmandu. Both papers were presented at seminars held at SOAS during 2012. Maharjan's essay is a case study of the Prashant Tamang phenomenon that sets it in the context of the debates on ethnic identity and inclusivity that were current in Nepal at the time. Parajuli presents us with a detailed analysis of the state censorship of the embryonic Nepali press media during the 1950s—a crucial decade of Nepal's modern political history that remains poorly documented.

Satya Shrestha-Schipper's photo essay also provides some interesting documentation of another key period of recent Nepali history: the ten years of the Maoist janayuddha. This collection of annotated photographs of Maoist gates in Jumla and Mugu districts records a part of the physical legacy of the internal conflict that is quickly disappearing, but is of considerable interest.

Finally, Anja Wagner's article takes us deep into the Gaddi society of Himachal Pradesh and asks penetrating questions about the relationship

between joking, irony and gender relations. Her discussion concludes with a number of observations that are of relevance to South Asia as a whole.

Michael Hutt

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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The Kinship Terminology of the Sangtam Nagas

Pascal Bouchery and Lemlila Sangtam*

Sifting through the voluminous ethnographic material on the Nagas compiled during the colonial and post-colonial periods, one finds only very sketchy information on the Sangtam. Despite the fact that they represent one of the major ethnic groups of present-day Nagaland, very little indeed has been written about the Sangtam, neither from a linguistic nor an anthropological perspective. This paper aims to present a first outline of the hitherto undescribed Sangtam kinship system. As we will see, the Sangtam nomenclatural system not only differs from most Naga kinship systems by displaying several atypical features, it also does not fit readily into conventional kinship categories.

Located in Eastern Nagaland, the Sangtam dwelling areas do not form a contiguous block but are split into two regions, separated by a mountain range which is also the watershed that divides India from Burma. Each region is inhabited by one territorial group or 'section': a western section (formerly known as the Northern Sangtam) inhabits the westernmost part of the Tuensang District, in the Chare and Longkhim subdivisions, whereas an eastern section (formerly known as the Central Sangtam) occupy the Kiphire district west of the Zungki (or Tiho) River¹. Although the Tuensang and Kiphire Districts both extend along the Burmese border, Sangtam villages are only found on the Indian side of the international border. Oral history points to a migration from South to North, mainly along the natural corridor formed by the Tizu and Tsutha (formerly

*For this study Lemlila Sangtam conducted fieldwork in Tuensang and Kiphire districts in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Additional data were collected by the two authors through interviews with Sangtam residents of Kohima and Dimapur.

1 Only one Sangtam village, Yezashimi (Yangzase in Sangtam) is located in Zunheboto District, abutting the Kiphire District. During the colonial period the three Sangtam sections were known as 'Northern', 'Central' and 'Southern', and the two former were sometimes denoted by Sumi (Sema) terms, respectively Lophomi and Tukhumi. In the 1960's the Sangtam of the southern section inhabiting the erstwhile Kohima District chose to merge themselves with the Eastern Rengma and Eastern Angami to form a new composite tribal entity, 'Chakhesang', which became known as Pochury after the defection of the Angami component.

Tita) valleys, and suggests that at one time the Sangtam territories were adjoining. Communication between the two sections was interrupted prior to European contact by an eastward expansion of the Sumi Nagas on the one hand and a westward movement of the Yimchungru Nagas on the other hand. The Sumi (formerly Sema) now occupy several former Sangtam sites whose original Sangtam population has been gradually expelled or absorbed. The Sangtam country is located to the immediate east of the Ao and Sumi speaking territories. To the East, their immediate neighbours are, from north to south, the Chang, Yimchungru, Tikhir, Makhuri, Chirr, and Longpür (or Longphuri) Nagas. On the south they are bordered by the Pochury.

The Sangtam Nagas are patrilineal and patrilocal. They have named, non-localized, exogamous patrilineal clans (*ahong*). Some seventeen clans have been recorded through field investigations, but it is unclear if this is a complete list. Major clans such as Thongrü (Thonger, Thueru, or Theru according to the dialect spoken), Jingrü (Jinger, Jingre), Mongzarü (Mongzar), Anaru (Anar), Langti Thongrü (Langti Thonger), Rudy Thongrü (Rudy Thonger), are found more or less throughout the whole Sangtam country. Others have a more limited distribution. The Yangpha Theru (or Yingpi Thonger) clan, for example, is found only in the eastern section. Some of the smaller and more localized clans are of particular interest, since they identify themselves with major clans. For example, the Thezoru clan of Sanphure village relates itself to the Langti Thongrü clan, the Keori clan of Ngoromi identifies itself with the Jingru clan, and the Lamongri clan of Phelungre associates itself with the Anar clan. This occurs in very much the same way in which throughout the Naga Hills, clans often identify themselves with more major clans belonging to a neighbouring tribe.² Major clans had certain prerogatives and duties in the past, mainly in the realm of rituals. Contemporary Sangtam use their *ahong* titles in a way which is similar to how Westerners use surnames. Each clan may be segmented into distinct subclans or patrilineages but there is no specific term to denote the subdivisions, all of which are called *ahong*. For example, Kuchirü, Shunyak Kurü Thongrü and Sünghthang

2 Throughout the Naga hills, identifications are found between clans belonging to neighbouring tribes, often on the grounds of a common tradition. On the system of intertribal corresponding clans, see Hutton (1921: 135); Mills (1922: 92); Kauffmann (1939: 219).

Thongrü are all regarded as subdivisions of Thongrü and therefore their members cannot marry other members of the Thongrü (Thonger) clan.

As a language, Sangtam is spoken by approximately 80,000 people.³ It belongs to a sub-grouping of the Tibeto-Burman language family which, besides Sangtam, also includes Lhota, Ao Chungli, Ao Mongsen, Ao Changki, Yimchunger, Tikhir, Chirr, Para, Koki, Makhuri, Yacham and Tengsa. The geographical extension of this group covers the central region of Nagaland and adjacent areas of Burma, stretching eastward from the edge of the plain of Assam across the Saramati mountain range to the bank of the Chindwin River in Burma. Sangtam speakers recognize several variants within the language, viz. ‘Longkhim’, ‘Kiphire’, ‘Sanphure’, ‘Hurong’, ‘Phelungre’ and ‘Alisopur’,⁴ though the total number of dialects of Sangtam spoken today is unknown.⁵ The present description pertains to both Western and Eastern sections and refers more specifically to the Longkhim and Kiphire dialects. The transcription of kinship terms follows the rules adopted by the missionaries who first devised a standard orthography for Sangtam, which was based on the dialect spoken in villages around Longkhim administrative headquarters in Tuensang district.

Sangtam kinship terms are independent nouns, consisting of a root and a neutral, non-relational prefix *a-*, for example *aja*, ‘grandmother’. The vocative form, which is used when directly addressing someone, is formed by prefixing the kinship noun root with the possessive marker *i-*, ‘my’, thus the appropriate kin term for addressing one’s grandmother is *ija*, ‘my grandmother’. This form is also used when referring to one’s grandmother as a third person in a conversation. The only exception to this rule is the term used for addressing one’s father, *ua*. Similarly, the second person singular term is formed by adding prefix *nü-*, as in *nüja*, ‘your grandmother’. When the noun root occurs with the non-relational prefix *a-*, it simply indicates the kin category, such as *aku*, ‘maternal uncle’, and is used in a referential context. As a rule, kinship noun roots never occur alone but are always prefixed.

3 83,714 according to the Census of India, 2001. Official figures for 2011 have not yet been published.

4 All names, except the first one, are also village names. The Alisopur variant is spoken only in one village, Alisopur.

5 Nor do we know to what extent those six ‘dialects’ can be said to be mutually intelligible.

Several kin terms take a feminine form by suffixing the kinship noun root with one of the feminine semantic gender markers *-tpüh* or *-la*, or a combination of both, whereas the masculine form is usually left unmarked. Thus *aphüli* stands for both sister's child and sister's son, whereas *aphülitpüh* specifically denotes the sister's daughter. There are two semantic masculine gender markers, *-thre* (in *atsuthre*, 'son') and *-ba* (eg. *ani azaba*, 'younger brother', or *au aziba*, 'father's elder brother'). The plural gender for most kin terms is formed by adding the suffix *-rü*, as in *azarü*, 'children', or *ashumtsurü*, 'grandchildren'.

As a rule, vocatives are indicative of the relationship or attitude between the interlocutors. An individual is expected to address and refer to his senior relatives by way of proper kin terms whenever such terms exist, as a mark of respect. It would be considered as disrespectful for a person to address his or her senior by their name. Junior relatives are referred to by kin terms, and addressed either by kin terms or by their name. The use of kinship terms towards juniors, and to a lesser extent among contemporaries, indicates formal or neutral address, whereas the use of personal names indicates familiar or intimate address.

The terms presented in Table 1 appear as they are used in indirect reference and, unless explicitly specified, are employed by both sexes alike:

	Kinship Term	Focus	Derivative denotata
1	amü (‘grandfather’)	GF	FF, MF
2	ajü (‘grandmother’)	GM	FM, MM
3	au (‘father’)	F	FB, MZH (SC), WMB, HMB
4	atpah/aya (‘mother’)	M	FZ, MZ, FBW, MBW, WM, WFZ, WMZ, HM, HFZ, HMZ
5	aka/akü (‘maternal uncle’)	MB	MZH*, MBS+, WF, HF, DHF
6	ama*/among** (‘elder brother’)	eB	FBS+; MBDH+ (SC), MZDH+ (SC), FZDH+ (SC), HZH+
7	afü (‘elder sister’)	eZ	FBD+, MBSW+, MZSW+, HZ, SWM

8	ani (‘younger sibling’)	ySb, yB (with suffix <i>-achangba</i>), yZ (with suffix <i>-achangtpüh</i>)	FBS-, MBDH- (SC), MZDH- (SC), FZDH- (SC), HZH-FBD-, MBSW-, MZSW-, HBW-; HyZ, DHM-
9	akitrum (‘first cousin’)	MBCh, MZCh, FZCh	
10	atsu (‘child’)	Ch	S (with suffix <i>-thre</i>), D (with suffix <i>-latpüh</i>), BCh, ZCh (f. sp.) FBGCh, FZGCh, MBGCh, MZGCh, FZDH (SC), BDH, ZSW, ZDH, WBCh, WZCh, HBCh, HZCh
11	shumtsurü (‘grandchild’)	GCh	GrGS (with suffix <i>anyü-u-chung</i>), GrGD (with suffix <i>anyü-u-chungtpüh</i>)
12	aphuli (‘sister’s child/niece’)	ZS (m. sp.), ZD (m. sp., with suffix <i>-tpüh</i>)	ZSW* (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i> , or <i>atsulatpüh</i>), WBS* (or <i>atsuthre</i>), WBD* (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i> , or <i>atsulatpü</i>), WZS* (or <i>atsuthre</i>), WZD* (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i> , or <i>atsulatpüh</i>)
13	atsunya (‘child’s spouse’)	DH, SW (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i>)	BDH*, BSW* (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i>), ZDH*, ZSW* (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i>)
14	axi*/axü** (‘husband’s brother’)	HB	
15	axitpüh (‘sister-in-law’)	BW* (m. sp.) WZ	FBSW, FZSW, HBW**
16	ajangning (‘brother-in-law’)	ZH, WB	FZH, FBDH, FZDH**
17	ani (‘spouse’)	Sp, H, W (with suffix <i>-tpüh</i>)	
18	aling* (‘sister-in law’)	eBW (f. sp.), HyZ	
29	anyi/anyü** (‘mother-in-law’)	WM	
20	azuh** (‘wife’s sibling-in-law’)	WZH	WBW

21	amari** (‘children’s parents-in-law’)		SWF (with suffix <i>-rü</i>), SWM (with suffix <i>-larü</i>), DHF (with suffix <i>-rü</i>), DHM (with suffix <i>-larü</i>)
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* W. Sangtam only m.sp. male speaking SC: if of same clan as the speaker

** E. Sangtam only f. sp. female speaking s.a.: if of same age as the speaker

Description

a) Consanguines

Grandparents/great-grandparents

In the second ascending generation the system distinguishes terms by the grandparent’s gender, but not by the parent’s gender. Only two terms exist, which can be glossed as ‘grandfather’ (*amü*) and ‘grandmother’ (*ajü*). Kin terms for great-grandfather and great-grandmother are formed by adding ‘anyü’, ‘two/second’, followed by an appropriate gender suffix, to each of these elementary terms, thus *amü-anyü-uba* for great-grandfather and *ajü-anyü-utpüh* for great-grandmother. There are no terms for direct ascendants beyond great-grandparents.

Parents

Two distinct terms for ‘mother’ are used by the Sangtam, the usage of which depends on the speaker’s clan. The term *itpa* is used by people from Jingrü, Mongzarü, Rüdi Thongrü and Anarü clans, whereas people from Thongrü and Langti Thongrü clans call their mother *iya*. The corresponding terms of reference are respectively *atpah* and *aya*.⁶

Uncles and aunts

Paternal uncles are terminologically equated with the father (*au*), and differentiated by their relative age to Ego’s father by adjunction of the suffixes *aziba* (‘older’) or *azaba* (‘younger’). There are no special terms for paternal and maternal aunts, these are simply equated with one’s mother, and similarly differentiated by their relative age to Ego’s mother. Thus the terms *atpah azitpüh* (or *aya azitpüh*) and *atpah azatpüh* (or *aya azatpüh*)

6 A similar use of two terms for ‘mother’ is reported among the Lhota (Mills 1922: 94-95) and the Ao (Coupe 2007: 491; Mills 1926: 174).

are applied to the father's and mother's sisters, real and classificatory. Only maternal uncles are designated by a specific term, *aku*. They too can be further differentiated between *akü aziba* and *akü azaba* according to the relative age of the speaker to the mother's brother. In addressing a paternal uncle a person would simply use *ua* ('father'), and *itpah* or *iya* ('my mother') to address any aunt, according to clan. Maternal uncles are addressed as *iku* or *ika*.

Siblings

For elder siblings, three basic terms are distinguished according to the relative age of the speaker, with a further distinction in gender. *Ima* (or *imong* among Eastern Sangtam) and *ifa* are used in address respectively for elder brother and elder sister, whereas *ini* can simply be glossed as 'my younger sibling'. If needed, the latter can be broken into *ini achangba* and *ini ahangtpüh*, for younger brother and younger sister respectively. The corresponding terms of reference are *among*, *afü* and *ani*. In colloquial conversations, a male or female Ego usually calls his or her younger siblings by their personal names, whereas the younger siblings may call the older siblings by the appropriate kin terms.

Cousins

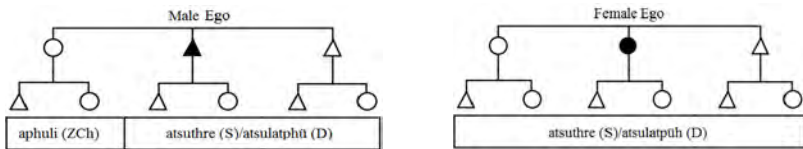
No specific term exists for parallel cousins. The children of the father's brothers are addressed with the kinship terms for siblings, i.e. elder brother or sister (*ima/ifa*) if they are older than the person speaking, and either by name or as 'younger sibling' (*ini*) if they are younger. If they are of the same age as the speaker, they are simply addressed as 'siblings' (*ijena/ietpü*). All other first cousins are equated with one another and designated by a specific term, *kitrum*, irrespective of their gender and relative age to the speaker. In direct address an individual may simply call his cousin *ikitrum*, 'my (first) cousin'.

Sons and daughters

Parents often call their children by their personal names or by pet names, though they may also use the proper kin term, which is *itsu* (or *itso*) for a boy, and *itsulatpüh* (or *itsolatpüh*) for a girl. There are no general rules in this regard, and the usage varies from family to family. One's children are addressed collectively as *itsurü/itsularü*.

Nephews/nieces

The only specific term for nephews or nieces is *aphüli*, which can be glossed as ‘sister’s child’, and this is used by males only. Parallel nephews are equated to the speaker’s own children by both sexes, and female speakers may also address all their nephews and nieces by name or by using *itsuthre/itsulathre* (‘my son/my daughter’), in the same way they address their own children.



Descendants from cousins

The children of a person’s first cousins are equated terminologically with one’s own children, i.e. they are addressed either as *itsu/itso* or *itsulatpüh* according to gender, or by their personal names.

Grandchildren

There are only two kin terms available to refer to a grandchild, and these are determined by the gender of the grandchild. *Ishumtsurü* is used in direct address for males and *ishumtsularü* for females. The corresponding terms of reference are *shumtsurü* and *shumtsularü*. In colloquial conversation, grandchildren and great grandchildren are usually called by their personal name. Great grandchildren are referred to as *shumtsurü anyü-u-chung* (‘second grandson’) for males and *shumtsurü anyü-u-chungtpüh* (‘second granddaughter’) for females. Terms for consanguines beyond the third descending generation do not occur.

b) Affines

The five elementary terms that are used by both Sangtam sections to denote ties of affinity are: *atsunya/atsunyatpü* (‘child’s spouse’), *axi/axitpü* (‘sibling-in-law’), *ajangning* (‘brother-in-law’), *ani/anitpü* (‘spouse’), *aling* (‘elder brother’s wife’, female speaking). The Eastern Sangtam use three additional terms: *anyi/anyü* (mother-in-law), *azuh* (wife’s sibling-in-law), and *amari/amaritpüh* (children’s parents-in-law).

Spouses

A Sangtam husband uses a specific term, *nütpa*, to address his wife, whilst the wife uses the term *nüo* to address her husband. In a referential context, *ani* and *anitpüh* stand respectively for husband and wife.

Spouses of uncles and aunts

The spouse of one's uncle, both paternal and maternal, are terminologically equated with one's mother (*atpah/aya*). As for uncles and aunts, these can be distinguished according to the relative age of the connecting relative to Ego's mother by the adjunction of the suffixes *-aziba* ('elder') or *-azaba* ('younger'), for example *atpah aziba* (or *aya aziba*) for FeBW and MeBW, *atpah azaba* (or *aya azaba*) for FyBW and MyBW. Husbands of maternal aunts are equated with the speaker's father (*au*) and are similarly differentiated according to the relative age of the connecting relative to Ego's father into *au aziba* (MeZH) and *au azaba* (MyZH). Husbands of paternal aunts, however, are treated as sister's husbands (*ajangning*) irrespective of their relative age to Ego's father.

Siblings' spouses

A male Ego addresses the wife of a brother as *ixitpü* ('my sister-in-law'), and refers to her as *axitpü*, irrespective of the brother's or his wife's relative age to Ego. A female Ego addresses her brother's wife by using the specific term, *iling*, for which the corresponding term of reference is *aling*. The husband of a sister is addressed as *ijangning* and referred to as *ajangning* by both sexes, but a female Ego can also address her sister's husband as *ika* or *ikü* ('maternal uncle'), while this male Ego can call her *ixitpüh*.

Spouses' siblings

A male Ego may address the brothers of his wife as *ijangning* ('my brother-in-law') and her sisters as *ixitpüh* ('my sister-in-law'), for which the corresponding terms of reference are *ajangning* and *axitpüh*. He may also address his wife's elder brother as 'maternal uncle', (*ika*), especially if the age difference between him and his brother-in-law is important. In informal or familiar conversations spouse's siblings may simply be called by their personal names, particularly younger ones. A female Ego addresses all brothers of her husband as *ixi** or *ixü*** ('my brother-in-

law') and his sisters as *ixitpüh* ('my sister-in-law'), though, in a more familiar context, both can be called by name.

Cousins' spouses

Wives of paternal male cousins are treated as brother's wives (*axitpüh*), whereas husbands of paternal female cousins are terminologically equated with brothers-in-law (*ijang/ijangning*). Spouses of maternal cousins are treated as siblings among the Eastern Sangtam. Among the Western Sangtam, wives of maternal male cousins are also equated with sisters, i.e. they are addressed as *ifa/ifü* or *ini* according to their relative age to Ego. However, for the husbands of maternal female cousins two terms are used, depending upon whether either the bride or the bridegroom is from Ego's clan. Husbands of matrilateral cross-cousins are terminologically equated with sisters if they belong to Ego's clan, but with maternal uncles if they belong to any other clan. Similarly husbands of matrilateral parallel cousins are addressed as 'sisters' if they belong to Ego's clan but otherwise as *ijena* ('my friend').

Children's spouses

The term *atsunya* is a specific term of reference for the spouse of one's children, and also stands for son-in-law (SW). The feminine form of this term is *astunyatpüh*, which refers to the daughter's husband. In direct address *itsunya* ('my son-in-law') and *itsunyatpü* ('my daughter-in-law') are used in a formal context, whereas in an informal or intimate context the children's spouses are mostly called by name.

Children's parents-in-law

The Eastern Sangtam also have a specific term for the parents-in-law of one's own children, which is *imari* in address and *amari* in reference. There are no special terms for the parents of the wife of one's son or the parents of the husband of one's daughter in the Western Sangtam section.

Parents-in-law and their siblings

Parents-in-law and their siblings are all denoted by using terms of consanguinity: both a male and a female Ego address and refer to their spouse's father as 'maternal uncle' (*iku/aku*) and address and refer to their spouse's mother as 'mother' (*itpa/iyā//atpah/aya*). Similarly,

they equate their spouse's paternal uncles with maternal uncles and classify their spouse's aunts (both paternal and maternal) in the mother category. The spouse's maternal uncles are equated with one's father among the Eastern Sangtam, while the relationship is viewed as too far removed for the application of a kin term among the Western Sangtam.

Extension of kin-terms

a) to kin-related people

- A male Ego puts all male members of his clan who are of the same age group into the sibling or 'friend' (*ajüni/ajünah*) category;
- He puts all men of his mother's clan who are of his mother generation into the maternal uncle category (*akü/aka*), and all women of his mother's clan who are of his mother's generation into the mother-category (*atpah/aya*);
- He also puts all the male members of his wife's clan into the maternal uncle category;
- He uses the term *ijangning* ('my sister-in-law') to address all the female members of his wife's clan;
- Similarly a female Ego puts all female members of her clan who are of the same age group in the sibling category (*etpüh*);
- She puts all the male members of her husband's clan into the husband's brother-category (*axü*).

NB: The relationship terms *ajüni/ajünah* and *etpüh* are used reciprocally.

b) General use of kinship terms for unrelated people

- Both male and female speakers address bosom friends from other clans than their own as *irangzu* or *irangza*, in order to express the closeness of the relationship;
- Elderly male persons are addressed as *ua* ('my father') irrespective of clan;
- Persons of the parental generation not belonging to Ego's clan are addressed as *ika* ('my maternal uncle');
- Persons of the children generation not belonging to Ego's clan are addressed as *ijena*, 'my friend'.

Discussion

The Sangtam kin terminology exhibits several features which differ strikingly from other Naga nomenclature. First, in contrast to all hitherto studied Naga terminologies, this is *not* a bifurcate merging system, i.e. it does not conform to the terminological equations

$$F = FB \neq MB$$

$$M = MZ \neq FZ^7$$

In the first ascending generation the nomenclatural system is neither bifurcate merging nor generational, but rather a combination of both: the father's brother is merged with the father (*au*) and the mother's sister with the mother (*atpah/aya*). But whereas there exists a specific term for maternal uncle (*akü*), the father's sister is merged with the mother:

$$M = MZ = FZ$$

$$[F = FB] \neq MB$$

As far as we know, no other Naga language terminologically equates the paternal aunt with the mother, with the possible exception of the Tikhir Nagas, on which information is scanty. It is all the more noteworthy that the term used for denoting the paternal aunt in various Naga languages, from proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) *ni(y) or *ney⁸, is remarkably stable and well-attested in both languages of the Sal subfamily and those of the Kuki-Chin subfamily.

In most Naga nomenclature, patrilineal and matrilineal cross-cousins are also referred to by the same term, but they are terminologically differentiated from parallel cousins as well as from sisters. This cannot be said of the Sangtam. In Ego's own generation also the nomenclature is neither bifurcate merging nor generational, but the pattern exhibited here is different from that of the paternal generation: whereas the Sangtam equate patrilineal parallel cousins with siblings, matrilineal parallel cousins are classified along with cross-cousins (*kitrum*).

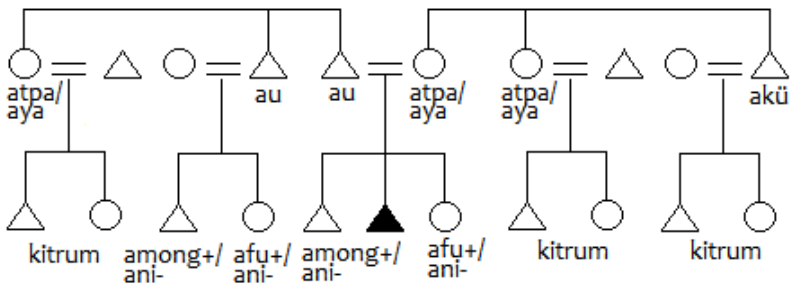
⁷ On this point, see Bouchery and Gangmei (2008).

⁸ J. Matisoff (2003: 640).

$$P_p = S_b$$

$$X_p = X_m = P_m$$

This pattern has been labeled by Murdock in his *Ethnographical Atlas* as one among four types of ‘unusual’ cousin terminologies.⁹ It is not found in any other known Naga tribe nor, in fact, in any ethnic group of Northeast India. What makes the Sangtam terminology stand out is the fact that the way of classifying parents’ siblings at G+1 is not consistent with the way of classifying cousins at G0: whereas a man refers to the children of any man he calls ‘father’ as his ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’, the children of any woman he calls ‘mother’ are his cousins (*kitrum*), not his siblings. Most Naga nomenclatures distinguish parallel cousins, who are equated with siblings, from cross-cousins. Here, simply no term exists for the ‘cross-cousins’. And the father’s sister is merged with the mother, notwithstanding the fact that her children are distinguished as cousins, not siblings. For that reason, the Sangtam terminological system also does not fit into any of Murdock’s patterns for cross-cousins,¹⁰ nor any of Shapiro’s Iroquian subtypes.



A corollary of the merging of FZ with M can be found in the way the spouses of uncles and aunts are classified. Many Naga nomenclatures exhibit some symmetry in the classification of the kin-related people that would fall into the English categories ‘uncle’ and ‘aunt’. For example:

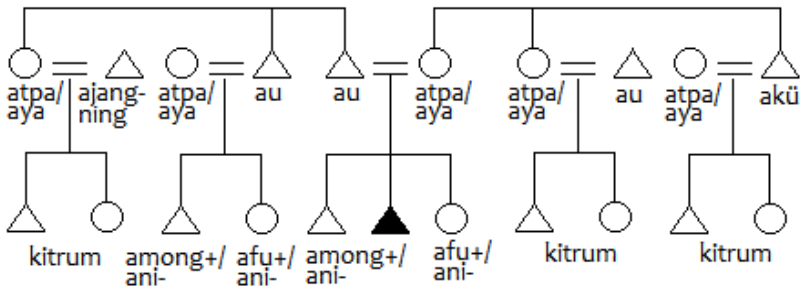
9 Murdock (1957: 673): ‘Unusual cousin terminology in which ortho-cousins (those of Ego’s lineage) are equated with siblings or half-siblings, all other cousins being differentiated therefrom and equated with one another.’
 10 Out of about 300 societies studied by Murdock in his World ethnographic sample, only two, namely the Minchia (Bai) and the Nayar, are of the same type (1957: 673).

F = MZH, M = FBW, FZ = MBW, MB = FZH (Chang, Khiamnungan)
 FB = MZH, MZ = FBW, FZ = MBW, MB = FZH (Zemi, Liangmai, Rongmei)

The father's sister being terminologically equated with the mother among the Sangtam, one would logically expect:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{FBW} &= \text{MBW} = \text{M} \\ \text{FZH} &= \text{MZH} = \text{F} \end{aligned}$$

However, this formula is only partially realized, since we have:



$$\begin{aligned} \text{FBW} &= \text{MBW} = \text{M} \\ \text{FZH} &\neq (\text{MZH} = \text{F}) \end{aligned}$$

Another interesting feature is the existence of two terms to denote siblings-in-law, *axi/axitpüh* and *ajangning*. These deserve particular attention, as this way of classifying is rather unusual in comparison to other Naga nomenclatural systems. This is not a distinction between 'brother-in law' and 'sister-in-law', nor is it a distinction based on the affinal vs. consanguineal character of the relation to the connecting relative, between 'sibling's spouses' and 'spouses' siblings'. It is also not just a matter of simply equating HB with BW on the one hand, and WZ with ZH on the other. *Axitpüh* primarily denotes, from a male ego's perspective, the in-married clanswomen, i.e. the women who have married a child of the agnatic line (brothers' and paternal cousins' wives, spouses of lineage or clan members). The wives of men born of women of an Ego's patrilineage, such as FZSW, also come under this purview, as also,

by extension, the wife's sisters and all the female members of the wife's clan. Married women simply follow their husbands in regarding both their spouse's brother's wife and their spouse's sisters as *axitpüh*.

Symmetrically, *ajangning* primarily denotes the married-out clanswomen, that is, for a male ego, the husbands of his classificatory sisters and of his paternal aunt (FZH, ZH, FBDH, etc.). The same way FZSW is included into the category *axitpüh*, FZH and (among Eastern Sangtam) FZDH are also regarded as *ajangning*. Thus the category comprises men who have married women of the agnatic line, and can be broadly equated with the patriline wife's takers. This is in no way specific to the Sangtam, as most Naga nomenclatures exhibit similar kin categories also corresponding to the wife's takers, which are differentiated from the wife's givers, especially the mother's brother's lineage. But in the majority of Naga groups, who favour the union with the matrilateral cross-cousin, the wife's takers and the wife's givers do not overlap. They do so among the Sangtam, as the category *ajangning* also includes WB, who represents the wife-giving patrikin. Symmetrically, the category *axitpüh* includes WZ, hence the equations:

$$WB = ZH$$

$$WZ = BW$$

These are suggestive of bilateral, rather than matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Although the Sangtam nomenclature contains equations which are also shared by the vast majority of Naga terminologies that reflect preference for cross-cousin marriage of the matrilateral type, such as MBD = M, MB = WF, FZCh = ZCh (or GrCh), at the same time the Sangtam system offers strong presumptive evidence for the rules of marriage between bilateral cross-cousins, with the following equations:

$$F = WMB = HMB$$

$$M = WFZ$$

$$ZH = WB$$

$$HF = MB$$

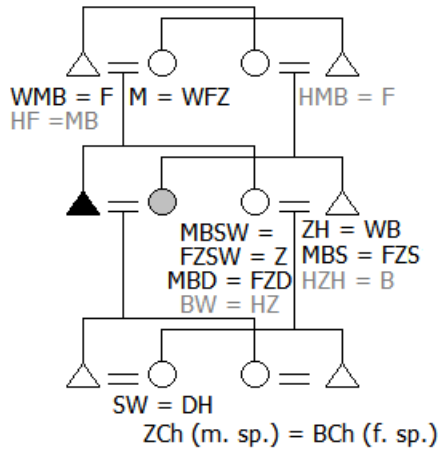
$$MBS = FZS$$

$$MBD = FZD$$

$$SW = DH$$

ZSW = D
 ZDH = S
 MBSW = FZSW = Z
 BW (f. sp.) = HZ
 HZH = B
 ZCh (m. sp.) = BCh (f. sp.)

This can be diagrammatically represented for male (in black) and female (in grey) Ego as below:



Undoubtedly, these are strong indices for inferring the practice of normative bilateral cross-cousin marriages. However, this particular type of preferential union (which corresponds to an exchange of sisters renewed from generation to generation) usually takes place in societies having two exogamous moieties, or between pairs of exogamous lineages. This is certainly not the case for the Sangtam Nagas, who have at least five major exogamous units and numerous non-exogamous subunits. The direct exchange of sisters, i.e. a man marrying his ZHZ, was forbidden in the past, and although the union of a man with his sister's husband's sister or brother's wife's sister is tolerated nowadays, none of these is a preferred spouse. Informants also deny the existence of any kind of regular preferential marriage between two clans, or two sets of clans.

In order to go any further, it is necessary to have a closer look at marriage

rules, as we know that even a consistently symmetric terminology can be associated with an asymmetric system of alliances.¹¹ Among the Sangtam there is no prescriptive marriage rule, and the choice of the spouse is governed only by a set of prohibitions. The first of these concerns clan exogamy: no member of a given patriclan (*ahong*) may marry a fellow clan member. This prohibition is followed by all Sangtam, Christians as well as non-Christians. Marriage within the same clan is considered as a taboo equivalent to incest, and is feared as it is believed that either the offspring would be handicapped or mentally affected, or the parental couple, whose union would not be blessed, might not live long. Informants say that, should marriage within the same clan occur, the couple would be debarred from all social activities, eventually driven out from the village and disowned by the village authorities. If this should occur to Christians, their names would also be struck from the church register. At any rate, the transgressing couple would be treated as unclean and no donation, tithes or any other offerings would be accepted from them.

Another major negative rule forbids the intermarriage between people who regard each other as *kitrum* ('first cousins'), that is, besides his FBD, a man cannot marry his actual FZD, MBD nor MZD. Informants are unanimous on this matter: '*Kitrumrü cannot intermarry*'. Prejudice against cross-cousin marriage and marriage between matrilineal parallel cousins takes the form of a taboo, and it is believed that such unions would result in the couple finding it impossible to have children. This was first noted by Archer in 1947¹², and the same statement was reiterated by our informants some sixty years later. Reluctance to marry the MBD in particular is explained by the ambivalent nature of the maternal uncle, and the fear of the uterine nephew of being too close in proximity to his MB. For whereas the maternal uncle has the responsibility to help, guide and support his sister's children in every walk of life,¹³ at the same time informants readily point out that a quarrel, mark of disrespect, act of disobedience, or anything done by the uterine nephew that can make the

11 For example the Garo. See Needham (1966).

12 'Manuscript notes by W.G Archer between 1946 and 1948, and miscellaneous papers and letters'. Retrieved from Naga Database website, <http://tartarus.org/richard/naga/export/coll/4/xcontents/detail/all/index.html>

13 The MB has the right to request assistance of his sister's children, and the latter are expected to help the former regularly. Uterine nephews also send over a piece of meat for every major festival to their maternal uncle.

maternal uncle unhappy would entail sickness: 'if a person disregards his mother's brother he/she will face sickness (*thse-zhumnung*)'. Correspondingly, whenever a person is sick, it is generally acknowledged that this may be the result of a bad relationship with the MB.¹⁴ Informants thus explain that marriage with the MBD would increase the risk of a dispute between the maternal uncle and his uterine nephew.¹⁵

A third major prohibition pertains to marriage with the patrilineal cross-cousin. As per tradition, not only is a man forbidden to marry his actual FZD, but this prohibition extends to the agnatic descendants of a man and his sister (respectively male and female) up to the seventh generation. Although this rule is no longer strictly followed in the present day, social prejudice nevertheless remains strong. The reluctance of males to marry into their paternal aunt's patriline is explained by a feeling of consanguinity which is obviously stronger from the paternal side. Conversely, whereas a man is forbidden to marry his MBD, the former's son may marry the latter's daughter, at any rate unions between matrilineal cross-cousins of the third degree are allowed. Information regarding marriage regulations between descendants of sisters is currently unavailable.¹⁶

The fact that marriage cannot take place between first cousins does not preclude the occurrence of matrilineal and bilateral unions, and in fact there are grounds to seriously consider, a marriage between second cross-cousins (but not between first cross-cousins). Firstly, the Sangtam regard the marriage of a man with his MFBSD as a good union. In this type of marriage, which corresponds to an union between the children of two female cross-cousins, a male Ego marries not the daughter of his actual MB, but the daughter of one of his MB's paternal parallel cousins. The rationale behind this preference is that the MFBSD will have a keen interest to take care of his husband's mother, as that mother hails from

14 In olden days the maternal uncle, or at any rate a representative of the mother's clan, had to provide a medicinal plant called *sami* (*Rhus semialata*, Murr.) to get the uterine nephew/niece healed.

15 A somewhat similar situation has been observed by Mills among the Rengma and the Sumi (1937: 137).

16 Cf. Hutton (1921: 134n1): 'The Changs bar marriage between the males of any clan and the descendant of females of the same patrilineal clan to the fourth generation, and although recently in some cases the bar has been reduced to two generations by rebellious individuals, this is regarded as dangerous and objectionable.'

her family. Secondly, though marriage between matrilineal parallel first cousins is barred, it is allowed for their children, meaning that a man is permitted to marry his FMZDD. Informants emphasize that marriage can and does occur between descendants of *kitrumrü* and *kitrumlarü* from the first generation onwards, and that such unions are contracted in order to maintain a close relationship between the two families. In particular, marriage between two persons whose maternal grandmothers are sisters (i.e. a man marrying his MMZSD), or whose paternal grandmothers are sisters (a man marrying his FMZSD) is allowed, as is the marriage of a man with his FMBDD and even his FFBDD. With marriage between first cousins being prohibited, the nearest potential spouse to foster and maintain ties of solidarity between families becomes a second parallel or cross-cousin, as long as clan exogamy is respected.

Such reversals of alliance kinship can be inferred from the terminology itself, especially from the existence of two terms for the wife of any *kitrum*, depending on whether she does or does not belong to the speaker's clan. Thus the husbands of MBD, MZD are treated as 'brothers' (*ama/among/ani*) if they belong to Ego's clan. Similarly the husband of FZD is called 'son' (*atsu*) if he is of Ego's clan, and 'brother-in-law' if he is of a clan other than Ego. These are clear indications that marital unions can take place with more distant cousins who are related to Ego either patrilineally or matrilineally¹⁷. Moreover, if the FZDH, or MBDH, belongs to Ego's clan, as pointed out by Lévi-Strauss (1949), the pattern of exchange is no longer unilateral but becomes bilateral.

Conclusion

Naga kinship systems are highly diverse, and the Sangtam terminology provides a new, hitherto unknown model, although it shares some features with the nomenclatural system of the Sangtam's immediate neighbours. Like the Lhota, Ao, Rengma and Angami, the the Sangtam terminology has two terms for 'mother' that differ according to clan affiliation¹⁸, though in the case of the Sangtam the usage of the distinct terms is not confined to a particular subdivision but occurs throughout the whole tribe. Along with the Lhota and Ao systems, the Sangtam system exhibits the same duality

17 Similarly among the Western Sangtam, the mother's sister's husband is called 'father' (*au*) if he belongs to the father's clan, but as 'maternal uncle' (*aka/akü*) if he does not.

18 Mills (1922: XXXI-XXXII).

regarding the identification of certain kin relatives, i.e. the existence of two or more terms for the one degree of kinship according to whether the named relative belongs to Ego's clan, Ego's father's clan or Ego's mother's clan. In common with their neighbours the Ao and the Chang, the Sangtam have specific terms for nephews and nieces which are further differentiated according to the speaker's sex: as mentioned above, a male speaker calls his uterine nephews and nieces by specific terms, whereas a female Ego simply calls them as her own children¹⁹. This coincides well with bilateral cross-cousin marriage, and indeed the Sangtam terminology, like that of the Chang and the Khiamnungan Nagas further east, exhibits a profusion of equivalences which are all suggestive of marriage between bilateral cross-cousins. But as far as we know, a system of symmetric alliances involving the exchange of classificatory sisters is attested only among the Khiamnungan, whose clans are grouped into two exogamous moieties, and only an extensive genealogical investigation can tell us to what extent the Sangtam and the Chang follow some kind of bilateral marriage system. The only thing that can be tentatively stated is that their consistently symmetric terminology does not seem to be in line with their marriage rules or marriage practices. Only with their eastern neighbours the Tikhir do the Sangtam share the absence of a specific kin term to denote the paternal aunt, and therefore, by contrast with all other Naga groups their kin terminology is not of the bifurcate-merging type. Most importantly, the Sangtam have their own unique way of classifying cousins which has no equivalent among the Nagas or among any of the neighbouring societies of the Indo-Burmese region, and this feature alone makes the Sangtam kinship system stand out from among other Naga kinship systems.

As atypical as it may be, the Sangtam kin terminology fits rather well into the model proposed by Lévi-Strauss in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949). According to Lévi-Strauss all Naga kinship systems present the same hybrid character, exhibiting some features corresponding to a simple formula of restricted exchange or bilateral marriage, and other features corresponding to generalized exchange or asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage. As noted above, the possibility that FZDH and MBDH

19 Sangtam: *phuli*; Chang: *li*; Ao Chungli: *anok/amu*; Ao Mongsen: *kümnak/kümo*; Ao Changki: *kümnak/kümo*.

belong to Ego's clan found among the Sangtam points to a bilateral exchange pattern, as do numerous equations of the Sangtam terminology. At the same time, considering Sangtam cross-cousin marriage, there is a clear asymmetry in prohibition degrees between the paternal and maternal lines, with the possibility for a man to marry the granddaughter of his father's maternal uncle (FMBDD) whereas, on the paternal side, similar unions between descendants of cousins are barred for six generations. But, in contrast with many Naga groups, such an asymmetry takes place in the absence of any prescriptive or preferential marriage rule, and may reflect more of a compromise between competitive objectives: on the one hand the desire to strengthen existing kin ties through marriage, on the other hand the wish to avoid the reduplication of affinal bonds from the father's side.

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Vote For Prashant Tamang: Representations of an Indian Idol in the Nepali print media and the retreat of multiculturalism*

Harsha Man Maharjan

Introduction

According to dominant accounts of the relationship between media and nationalism, the media can play a role in both inventing and perpetuating national culture. In his most quoted work, Benedict Anderson has discussed the role of the media, and especially the print media, in constructing national identities (Anderson 1983). Silvio Waisbord claims that scholarship has identified, in relation to this construction of national identity, three roles of media: ‘making national cultures routinely, offering opportunities for collective experiences, and institutionalizing national culture’ (Waisbord 2004: 386). Michael Billig’s surveying of a single day of the British media reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that these media represented the homeland by using words such as ‘our’ and ‘here’ alongside symbols such as the flag in their representations of Britain (Billig 1995).

This article discusses a struggle between proponents of monocultural and multicultural national identities in the Nepali media and contributes to a debate on the increasing trend towards a retreat from multiculturalism. The idea of multiculturalism or the tolerance of difference began in the late 1960s in western democracies, and was manifested in the recognition of the rights of ethnic, racial, religious and sexual minorities. This trend encountered heavy criticism from academics and politicians from the mid 1990s onwards. Kymlicka has argued that it is only in the case of immigrants’ rights that there has been a backlash and that there is no backlash regarding the rights of ethnic peoples and other minorities (Kymlicka 2010). But here I wish to argue that the Nepali media’s use of

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old symbols of national identity in relation to Prashant Tamang, a reality-show contestant on the TV show 'Indian Idol', represented an attempt to retreat from multiculturalism and to reprioritise a common national culture.

After a brief discussion of reality shows, including 'Indian Idol' and Prashant Tamang, I will engage with the debate on nationalism and national identity in Nepal in its historical context. This paper draws upon news reports, articles, editorials, and letters to editors published in the Nepali print media from July to October 2007. By 'Nepali print media', I refer to newspapers and magazines in both Nepali and English that are available at the Martin Chautari library. Although Prashant Tamang was declared the winner of 'Indian Idol 3' in September 2007, discussions regarding him continued into October.

The Idol series, 'Indian Idol' and Prashant Tamang

In October 2004, the Hindi General Entertainment Channel (GEC)'s share of the Indian television market was falling, but fresh format programmes like 'Indian Idol' helped it to increase its viewership from 19 to 25 percent (Krishna 2004). By July 2007, 200,000 people were calling each day, on 570 telephone lines and in four cities, to register themselves for the programme (Aiyar and Chopra 2000).

'Indian Idol' was an instant hit, with the first season being aired between October 2004 and March 2005. Over 20,000 people participated in auditions in four different cities (Bhandari 2005). This season, which was judged by Anu Malik, Sonu Nigam, and Farah Khan, was won by Abhijeet Sawant. 'Indian Idol 2' was aired from 21 November 2005 to 22 April 2006. Both the judges and anchors reprised their roles from the first season and Sandeep Acharya won the competition, becoming the second 'Indian Idol'.

The press release for 'Indian Idol 3' contained the title; 'Chahiye Woh Ek Awaaz Jispar Ho Desh Ko Naaz' Indian Idol 3-Coming Soon' (IndiaPRwire 2007), conveying the message that there was a search for 'a voice of which the nation could be proud'. This press release represented the call for registration for the auditions of 'Indian Idol 3', which were going to be held in twelve Indian cities: Jodhpur, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Srinagar, Nagpur, Baroda, Bhopal, Kanpur, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai (IndiaPRwire 2007). Interestingly, it did not mention that auditions were also to be held in London and Dubai, which suggests that these must have

been decided at a later date. Aspirants between the ages of 16 to 30 had to call or send an SMS to register for an audition.

Three days later, a new press release was issued. The singers Alisha Chinoy, Udit Narayan Jha and Anu Malik were announced as judges and the male host was also changed. When 'Indian Idol 3' started, there were four judges including the three singers and a lyricist Javed Akhtar. Both the marketing and hype worked, resulting in 25,000 people showing up to the auditions. 'Indian Idol 3' was aired from 4 May 2007 to 23 September 2007. It is believed that its opening episodes on 4 and 5 May attracted 27 million viewers (Indiantelevision.com team 2007).

As the final of the competition drew near, to be fought out between Amit Paul and Prashant Tamang, there was an upsurge of nationalism on a regional, national and transnational level. People in Meghalaya, from where Amit Paul hailed, initiated a campaign to support him by sending votes and other activities. This became known as the 'Amit Paul phenomenon'. His participation gave different groups from Meghalaya and Northeast India an opportunity to come together and promote a common cause (Punathambekar 2010, Mazumdar 2007). A similar campaign in support of Prashant Tamang began in Darjeeling, Nepal, and other places where Nepalese lived (Cooper 2008).

The two finalists received 70 million SMS votes during the final nine days (14- 23 September 2007), which was unprecedented in the history of 'Indian Idol'. Votes came in from nine countries: India, Nepal, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Kingdom.¹

'Hamro Prashant': Nepali identities and the retreat from multiculturalism

Though 'Indian Idol 3' was aired from 4 May 2007, coverage of Prashant Tamang in the Nepali media began about a month after the first telecast. This was not unusual, because 'Indian Idol' was a programme focused on the making of a star and people do not generally relate to participants during auditions. The liking and belonging process begins after the audience comes to know the participants closely, and it is

1 Available at http://www.sify.com/indianidol/images/jun2007/voting_terms.html. Accessed on 2 August 2011.

then that the fandom begins. This is especially true in respect of reality shows, because their stars are nearer to ordinary people than film stars (Homes 2004).

Before Prashant Tamang's blog (<http://www.prashantindianidol.blogspot.com>²) began on 13 June 2007, the Nepali media had already carried news items about him. The Nepali newspaper *Kantipur* published a report on 9 June and discussed the campaign that was being implemented around Darjeeling. It also quoted the actress Niruta Singh, who hails from Darjeeling, and who had gone there and witnessed the campaign. This report paved the way for other news reports and articles.

In the following section, I conduct a discursive analysis of the Nepali print media coverage. My analysis will also extend to the discourse of Nepali nationalism and national identities, Nepali language and national dress, anti-Indian Nepali nationalism and the crisis of Nepali nationalism.

Gorkhali/Nepali and other nationalisms

Although Prashant Tamang is an Indian citizen, the Nepali media presented him as a Nepali. This shows that, for the Nepali media, a nation is an imagined community that encompasses people beyond its borders. Common ancestry, memory and history are all important aspects for the Nepali media.

From the very first news items about Prashant in the Nepali media, he was presented as a symbol of Gorkhali pride. The article written by Benupraj Bhattarai published in *Kantipur* on 8 June 2007 had the headline, 'Wish to become idol' (Bhattarai 2064 v.s.). The focus of the article was the need to make Prashant the pride of all Gorkhalis by helping him win 'Indian Idol 3'. Alongside the information that people in Darjeeling were doing their best to make him the winner, the article also declared that Prashant had provided an opportunity to unite the people of Darjeeling in Nepaliness. It also included the request of Chief Minister of Sikkim, Pawan Chamling, to the people of Sikkim to make a Nepali singer the next idol. The next news item was published in *Samaya*, a weekly Nepali magazine, in its 15 June 2007 issue, under the headline 'Height of Prashant' (anon. 2064 v.s.). Here, it introduced Prashant as a Gorkhali youth and informed the reader that he would 'definitely establish the Nepali ethnic identity'.

2 The blog site moved to <http://prasanttamang.blogspot.com> later.

This article added that by his singing Tamang had increased his fame and the pride of people of Nepali origin and informed the reader that Prashant had reached the top twelve contestants remaining in the competition. These two examples show that, from the beginning, identities such as 'Gorkhali' and 'Nepali' were prominently used by the Nepali media in their reporting of Prashant.

So, what is 'Gorkhali', and what does it have to do with being 'Nepali'? To answer this, we have to observe the construction of these identities. The term 'Gorkhali' came from the kingdom of Gorkha, which remained small until King Prithvi Narayan Shah and his army expanded it from 1744 onward. During the war between Gorkha and the East India Company in 1814-16, the British were impressed by the Gorkhals' bravery and began recruiting soldiers from Nepal after the war ended. As the Nepali government opposed this process of recruitment, people from Nepal were encouraged to settle in places in India, such as Dehradun, Darjeeling and Shillong. Later, the Rana regime, which was established in 1846, gave formal clearance to the recruitment (Subba 1992: 57). A study by Banskota has shown that Thakuris, Khas, Magars, Gurungs, Limbus, Sunwars, Rais from central and eastern Nepal were recruited as Gorkhas from the Gorakhpur and Darjeeling depots (Banskota 1994). As there were flexible rules relating to migration, many Nepalese people migrated to various places in India, Sikkim and Bhutan. Furthermore, by 1864, and issued through a charter, the British government allowed the Gorkha regiment to buy land in places such as Shillong, Dharamsala, Almora, Dehradun and Gorakhpur (Golay 2009).

The formation of the Gorkha identity was related to this recruitment process. Bidhan Golay has argued that Gorkha identity was a construct of the British colonial discourse of 'martial race', consisting of 'the praise of the dogged bravery and masculine qualities of the Gorkhas' (Golay 2009: 78). Using a Foucauldian perspective, he says:

It also collapsed multiple identity and fluidities, typical of the Gorkha society then, and represented them as a single identity. The ethnic identities were stereotyped and continuously reproduced through a discursive practice... The Gorkha subject was dislocated by stripping off his past and relocated him back again as a deterritorialised subject of 'history' (Golay 2009: 79).

Due to the amalgamation of different identities, a singular identity evolved. It helped in nurturing the identity of 'composite Nepalinness'. A feeling of *we-ness*, encompassing the caste and ethnic boundaries of the Nepali *jati*, was discussed in Nepali public spheres during the Rana period, particularly in the diasporic communities in India (Onta 1996). This awareness came in opposition to Bengali and Hindi nationalism. According to Chalmers (2003), it was a Madhesi-less Nepali 'we' that could not extend beyond a hill solidarity. The post-1950 Nepali state, especially the Panchayat polity after 1960, continued this nationalism until 1990. During the Panchayat period, Nepali language, Hindu religion and monarchy were the three symbols of Nepali nationalism (Burghart 1994).

Until 1990, criticising this nationalism was not easy because the Panchayat constitution safeguarded these three symbols. However, after a democratic political system began in 1990, the environment changed. Scholars and activists demanded a new Nepali nationalism that accommodated cultural and linguistic diversity (Shah 1993, Sharma 1992). Although the 1990 constitution accepted Nepal as a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, thus providing space for the ethnic activism of Janajati groups (Onta 2006), it also attempted 'to impose a national identity based on the cultural and linguistic heritage of one minority' (Fisher 1994: 14).

One of the demands of the April movement of 2006 was a 'New Nepal': a restructuring of the Nepali state and a redefining of Nepali nationalism. When the interim constitution of 2007 was adopted on 15 June 2007, the umbrella organisation of indigenous people and nationalities, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) was dissatisfied because it included only one of its demands: a secular state. The demands that were not incorporated included the right to use ethnic languages in government and education, and 'proportional representation for ethnic nationalities in all sectors of the state, right to self-determination, restructuring of the state into ethnic and regional autonomous regions' (Hangen 2007). This dissatisfaction was not only limited to ethnic groups. The leaders of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) also felt excluded due to the constitution not including the word 'federalism'. The arrest of these leaders for burning copies of a draft of the constitution on 16 January 2007 ensured activities that gradually led to the 21-day Madhesi uprising. This movement was a response to hill-centric nationalism, and the constitution was amended as a result of it (Jha 2007). This movement

contributed to the growth of a nationalism based on the Madhesi identity. This nationalism was a manifestation of the dissatisfaction of the Madhesis about their systematic exclusion from the state machinery, and it resulted in the Madhesi demand for inclusion through the federal state (Hacchethu 2007). Whilst studying the national symbols and identities that were presented during Prashant Tamang's participation in 'Indian Idol 3' we should not forget these nationalisms.

On 15 June 2007, *The Kathmandu Post* published a feature about Prashant by Avas Karmacharya with the headline, 'Prashant Tamang at Indian Idol 3'. The article declared: 'And one among the ten finalists is Prashant Tamang. Belonging to Nepali origin, Prashant's melodious voice has made him one of the heartthrob contestants of the international show'. Beside this, it also included the views of three people from the music and fashion sector; Ram Krishna Dakal, a singer; Alok Shree, a music composer and Sugaika KC, Miss Nepal 2005. It is interesting to analyse the views of KC. According to the newspaper, she said:

All Nepalis should be proud of Prashant Tamang. It's not a joke to reach that level of competition and that too on an international platform. And I'm so thankful to all the Indians who've been sending votes for him even though he doesn't belong to their communities (Karmacharya 2007: 1).

In contrast to what the Nepali media thought about Prashant, a Madhesi interviewed by a researcher investigating the 2007 Madhesi uprising expressed the following views on the subject of Nepali nationalism:

The pahadis from India are not questioned about their loyalty to Nepal. Many Nepalese think that just because they are Pahadis their loyalty to Nepal is intact, despite being born in India. On the other hand we who are born in Nepal, whose ancestral homes are in Nepal, are called Indians (Mathema 2011: 48).

This is why the Madhesi scholars Chandrakishor, C. K. Lal and Ram Rijan Yadav viewed Prashant as a continuation of hill-based nationalism. All three argued that Prashant's popularity exposed the hollowness of Nepali nationalism, which was simply another form of the *pahade rastrabad* (hill

nationalism) promoted by King Mahendra during the Panchayat period. Chandrakishor thought that modern Nepali nationalism excluded the Madhesis while yet accepting people of Nepali origin living in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan as Nepalis. He even argued that the Prashant phenomenon threw cold water on the gains of the popular movement of 2006 and the Madhesi revolution (Chandrakishor 2007). In another article, C.K. Lal expressed the hope that Nepali nationalism would be more accommodative (Lal 2007). Similarly, citing the examples of the singer Aruna Lama, the painter Lainsingh Bangdel, the politician Ranbir Subba, the film director Tulsi Ghimire and the actress Niruta Singh, who all came from West Bengal to Nepal, Yadav argued that the Nepali state did not recognise the Maithili-speaking Indian Dharendra Jha 'Dhirendra' who had contributed a lot to the Maithili language (Yadav 2064 v.s.).

It is interesting that Janajati groups were perceived as supportive of Prashant Tamang, despite their longstanding critique of Mahendra's nationalism. I found no Janajati voices expressing any scepticism about the Prashant phenomenon in the Nepali media. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The Tamang Ghedung Sangh both campaigned to support Prashant and collected money for him (Gyawali 2064 v.s.) One way of reading this is that, although Janajatis were opposed to Panchayati nationalism, most were for hill nationalism and against Madhesi nationalism. Having failed to find any criticism of the Prashant Tamang phenomenon from Janajati activists, despite them criticising the governments of the Panchayat period for being communal, I argue that we need to see the Prashant issue as something more complex than simply a resurfacing of Panchayat-era nationalism. Yet, we should not forget that the main manifestation of this nationalism was similar to hill nationalism. An editorial published in the Nepali daily *Rajdhani* claimed that Prashant's victory had proved that Nepali hill origin people were brave and clever (Rajdhani 2007). While the Janajatis supported Prashant, initiating campaigns to collect money to send SMS votes and resulting in people visiting Darjeeling and Sikkim to distribute money, the nationalism presented in the Nepali media in Prashant's name was mono-cultural, solely representing hill nationalism.

The Nepali language as a symbol

The language celebrated in the coverage of Prashant Tamang in the Nepali media was Nepali. This represented the language of the conquerors (Malla

1979) when the Tamangs of Nepal were searching for a Tamang identity, but from the very first news items in the Nepali media, published on 8 June, one of the main symbols used to prove that he was Nepali, besides being a person from Darjeeling, was the language he spoke at home. These news items informed the reader that, during one episode of 'Indian Idol 3' one of the judges, Javed Akhtar, asked Prashant about the language he spoke at home. When Prashant replied that he spoke the Nepali language, Javed praised him for his Hindi, and for pronouncing some sounds not available in the Nepali language (Bhattarai 2064 v.s.a).

On 23 June, *Kantipur* published a full-page news story with two headlines; 'Kathmandu Taranga' [Kathmandu Wave] and 'Achanak Nayak' [Suddenly a Hero]. The first article had no byline, and informed the reader that the Nepalese were happy to see a Tamang police officer singing in the auditions. It also conveyed the information that he spoke with one of judges, Udit Narayan Jha in Nepali and that he had been selected as a representative of Indians of Nepali origin. In this article, his mother tongue was seen as the symbol of Nepaliness. The article contained a quote from one Vivek Karki of Maharajgunj in Kathmandu, who said that it was a source of pride for the Nepalese to have a person who was both of Nepali origin and Nepali speaking on an Indian platform. Furthermore, he stated that he would make efforts to ensure Prashant became the winner if there were provisions for the sending of SMS from Nepal (anon. 2064 v.s. a). Although the headline suggested that 'Prashant fever' had reached Kathmandu, there was no campaign to support Prashant at that time in the area. People were watching 'Indian Idol', but the fever only arrived in Kathmandu in September 2007.

Prashant, by ethnicity, belongs to the Tamang community. However, he does not speak the Tamang language. Until 1990, in comparison to Nepali, Nepal Bhasha and Maithili, there were few printed materials in Tamang (Hutt 1986). After the 1990 constitution declared Nepali as *rastra bhasha* (official language), and all other languages in Nepal as *rastriya bhasha* (national languages), a literary tradition began in the Tamang language. A scholar of South Asian language presented Tamang as the language that could create 'a pan-Tamang ethnic identity' (Sonntag 1995: 109). Again however, the question arises as to why the media's focus was on Nepali and not on Tamang, the language that the ancestors of Prashant abandoned after their migration to Darjeeling. To find the answer, we

have to go through the history of the Nepali language and engage with the debate on both the national language and the official language.

Nepali, which is quite similar to Hindi, was brought into Nepal by immigrants to Western Nepal. An earlier name of the Nepali language was Khas bhasha. There is a belief amongst ethnic activists that the decline of the other languages of Nepal went hand-in-hand with the ascent of this language. A report submitted by the Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) to the National Planning Commission in 2002 presented some cases of the suppression of local languages. One example was the then-King, Rana Bahadur, ordering Limbus to use the Khas-Nepali language instead of their own language whilst corresponding with the state (Subba 2002).

However, the expansion and acceptance of the Khas-Nepali language was more complicated than the report conveyed. Studies of the Nepali language show that the Khas language was popular amongst the people of Western Nepal, including Gorkha. Even before King Prithvi Narayan Shah extended the territory, Khas-kura speaking people had settled in the Kathmandu valley and the hills around it:

The migration of Parbatiyas over a widespread area and their infiltration of areas traditionally inhabited by other ethnic groups provided not only a large and extended community of speakers of the Khas language, but one which also had a strong enough sense of solidarity with fellow Parbatiya (whether this was based on linguistic or caste affinity) to welcome the rule of a Parbatiya dynasty in the area where they lived (Owen-Smith 2006: 28).

Although ethnic identities were fluid, the Khas language was related to the hill or parbatiya identity (Whelpton 2005). This is one of the reasons why Tibeto-Burman groups from the hills adopted the Nepali language, whilst people from the plains (the Madhes) were reluctant to do so.

As the Khas language became the language of administration and government, it was associated with the power of Gorkha, resulting in people calling it Gorkha Bhasha. With the penetration of the state machinery into their lives, people speaking certain Tibeto-Burman languages began to abandon their ancestral languages, whilst others became bilingual (Owen-Smith 2006). Examples of this include many of the Magars speaking Nepali

after the Gorkha conquest, and many Newars from the Kathmandu valley speaking both Nepal Bhasa and Nepali (Whelpton 2005).

Although Khas-Nepali had been a lingua franca since the Gorkha conquests, it was in 1930 that it was given the status of the official language of Nepal (Burghart 1984). Before this, the Gorkha Bhasa Prakashini Samiti had been established in 1913 in order to promote and censor Nepali literature (Hutt 1988). The Nepalese living in different parts of India during the Rana period nurtured this language as a national language before it was declared as such in Nepal. The constitution promulgated in 1958 mentioned Nepali in the devanagari script as the national language. This ended the debate on the possibility of using Hindi as a national language that had been started by the Nepal Tarai Congress in 1951 (Gaige 1975). Laws were subsequently changed in order to make Nepali an authentic language of both legal and commercial transactions (Hutt 1988). The Panchayat polity consolidated the use of the Nepali language in education and communication through various plans. Although we lack any policy documentation that demonstrates that the Panchayati state suppressed local languages, we have instances in which people were dubbed 'communal' when they promoted their own culture, tradition and language and not Nepali national culture (Maharjan 2011). The mantra of this polity was *ek bhasha, ek bhash, ek desh* (one language, one costume, one country), a modified version of the slogan *hamro raja, hamro desh; hamro bhasha, hamro bhash* (our king, our country; our language, our costume). The slogan from which it was modified is said to have been coined by the poet Bal Krishna Sama, and further articulated by a representative from the Lalitpur District during the first Intellectuals Conference called by Mahendra in 1962 (Shah 1993).

Scholars and activists had criticised this policy during the Panchayat system. In a mild tone, K. P. Malla said:

His Majesty's Government of Nepal is determined, not only to promote Nepali as an instrument of national integration, but also to discourage all linguistically divisive tendencies. The government does not sponsor any publications in any other Nepalese languages (Malla 1979: 146).

In a semi-academic and activist style, Sitaram Tamang claimed that the one language policy had helped to strangle other languages in Nepal. Consequently, Tamang demanded the recognition of other languages

as national languages. Giving the example of Switzerland, which had adopted the three languages of Germany, France and Italy as official languages, he argued that a multi-lingual policy would not hamper the feeling of national unity. Instead, he warned that the 'one language, one dress policy' was inimical to unification (Tamang 1994[1987]).

Even the 1990 constitution legalised discrimination against minorities, in terms of their language and religion, by declaring Nepal as a Hindu kingdom. Furthermore, the Nepali language was stated as the national language, despite the fact that there were demands for this not to happen (Hutt 1994). There was, however, some leeway in the 1990 constitution, which held that the government's responsibility extended to promoting and preserving other languages, a declaration which prepared roads for ethnic activism. Many actors and institutions evolved to disseminate the grievances of minorities.

The declaration of all languages as national languages by the 1990 constitution did not change the way in which the Nepali state saw other languages. Although this constitution defined the country as multicultural and multi-lingual, by declaring other languages as national languages, internal diversity was still taken to be a threat to national unity (Malagodi 2008) and the monolingual official language system still prevailed in administration and governance. This could be seen clearly in 1997, when the local bodies of Kathmandu and Rajbiraj Municipalities adopted the bilingual policy of using both Nepali and local languages in 1997 and the Supreme Court ordered a stop to the policy on 1 June 1999. Ethnic activists have dubbed this a 'black day' in Nepali history.³

Whilst the provisions related to language in the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 [2007] appear to be liberal, they are simply a continuation of the old mentality. Article 5, under 'Language of the Nation', says this:

- (1) All the languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal are the national languages of Nepal.
- (2) The Nepali language in the Devnagari script shall be the language of official business.

3 From 25 July 1997, the Kathmandu Municipality decided to use both Nepal Bhasa and Nepali language as official languages. Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Thimi, Kirtipur and Rajbiraj Municipalities followed the Kathmandu Municipality's decision. Rajbiraj Municipality used Maithili and Nepali languages (Lama v.s. 2056).

- (3) Notwithstanding whatever is written in clause (2), the use of one's mother tongue in a local body or office shall not be barred. The State shall translate the language used for such purpose into the language of official business for the record (Yadav 2009: 99).

This was against the demand of activists and politicians such as Upendra Yadav, who had been criticising the one official language policy (Yadav 2003). Although these provisions appear to ease the use of national languages in official business, they also agree on the supremacy of Nepali. As argued by Phanindra K Upadhaya, sub-clause (3) is 'linguistic trickery'. He argues that 'the representatives of the political parties who debated longer than anticipated on making the constitution as inclusive as possible, ultimately succumbed to the rhetoric of denial no different than those of the past rulers' (Upadhaya 2011: 125). Instead of this policy of denial, the linguistic expert Yogendra Prasad Yadav recommends a bilingual policy that recognises both the lingua franca and regional languages (Yadav 2009).

The media coverage tried to show that the Nepali language represented a national identity that unified all the Nepalese in the world, a concept that was believed in Darjeeling. Another example proves this intention. On 22 September 2007 *The Kathmandu Post* published a letter to the editor from Rabindra Kr. Yadav, who stated:

After the Nepalis living inside and outside Nepal watched Prashant Tamang speaking in Nepali language in spite of being an Indian in the very show, they went banana[s] after him for seeking financial support both at home and aboard to send him SMS (Yadav 2007: 5)

Historically, the Nepali language enabled immigrants, especially Tibeto-Burman-speaking people from Nepal, to interact with each other in Darjeeling. After a long struggle, 1992 saw the Indian government including the Nepali language in the 8th schedule of the constitution. Thus, in the context of India, the Nepali language is a symbol of unity amongst the Nepalese and constitutes 'the basic of Nepali ethnic identity outside Nepal' (Hutt 1997: 116). This is in contrast to the Nepali language being a state-constructed symbol of national unity in Nepal. Ramrijan Yadav argues that although India had authorised the Nepali language, Nepal had not provided such a status to the Madhesi languages (Yadav 2064 v.s.)

His argument suggests that he is dissatisfied with the status given by the interim constitution to all languages of Nepal.

On the pretext of supporting Prashant Tamang, Nepali media praised the Nepali language as a traditional symbol of Nepali identity. One possible reading of this is that, in an indirect way, they praised a mono-lingual policy. Another reason for this was, undeniably, the international arena, an issue to which I shall return later in this paper. Ultimately, the Nepali media promoted monoculturalism instead of multiculturalism.

The Nepali cap as a symbol of national identity

Another aspect of the national identity of Nepal discussed in the Nepali media was the national dress. A photo of Prashant wearing a Nepali cap surfaced in early September, by which time he had reached the top three contestants with Amit Paul and Emon Chatterji. In Darjeeling on 3 September he wore a Dhaka topi and was escorted by bodyguards supplied by Sony Entertainment Television (SET). Though the Nepali media published photos of him, no news outlet mentioned the cap he wore at this time. Instead, they were interested in the activities of his fans. His wearing of a Nepali cap became a topic of discussion in the Nepali media only after he had won 'Indian Idol' on 23 September and his mother had laced a dhaka topi on his head while he was on stage. The next day, newspapers like *Kantipur* (Bhattarai 2064 v.s.b), *Gorkhapatra* (Shrestha 2064 v.s.), *Rajdhani* (anon. 2064 v.s.b) and the *Rising Nepal* (Timilsina 2007a) all highlighted his wearing of the cap.

Writing in *The Rising Nepal*, Prasun Timilsina, asked, 'What more [do] the Nepalese want than their national cap portraying the Nepalese culture on the head of the Indian Idol?' (Timilsina 2007a). Prashant wore this type of cap during his concerts in Kathmandu and Pokhara, and wore a bhadgaunle topi when he met the late Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala. In one photo, Koirala was pictured placing a Bhadgaule cap on Tamang's head.

These kinds of caps became popular during the Panchayat period, but this does not mean that people did not wear them before this time. This is clear from an article published in 1956 in which the author expresses the wish that the Nepali cap, *daura-suruwal* and coat should be made mandatory (Mahananda 2011 v.s.) In another article, published in a Nepali magazine, *Nepal*, the author claimed that the concept of national dress was

institutionalised in 2011 v.s [1954-5] on the occasion of the coronation ceremony of King Mahendra (Basnet 2069 vs.). During the Panchayat period gazetted government workers had to wear the national dress, including a cap; male members of the general public had to wear one in order to enter a government office; and it was mandatory for men to wear it in the photo for a citizenship certificate. These practices did not end after 1990. A magazine report sums up the importance of the Dhaka Topi during the Panchayat period:

... demand for the cloth soon skyrocketed, along with the demand for daura suruwal, due to the rule imposed by the government under King Mahendra's reign. During Panchayat times, all high-ranking officials were required to be in the national attire and all other office staff had to be wearing at least a Nepali topi. According to a retired government official, those among the lower category of staff who did not want to buy a Dhaka topi could lease one for one rupee from one of the nearby stalls selling cigarettes and beetle-nut. Then they'd wear it during the office hours and return it back at the end of the day... The nationalist fervor attached to the daura surwal and Dhaka topi was at its peak during Mahendra's rule (1955-1972) (Pokharel 2008).

The national dress was not a subject of debate among ethnic activists. Instead, it was the Madhesi activists who raised this issue. Gajendra Narayan Singh, the Madhesi leader of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, raised this issue in 1992 and subsequently he and six other MPs went to the Parliament wearing dhoti and kurta, demanding that this should also be deemed to be the national dress (Sapkota 2069 v.s.)

Even after 1990, males applying for a citizenship certificate were still required to wear a Nepali cap in the photograph they submitted with their application. The application form stated that 'a black and white photo must show both ears wearing a Nepali traditional hat' (Laczo 2003: 78). This was seen as a discriminatory provision. A report published by UNESCO claimed that the cap was mostly worn by Parbate-caste Hindus from the hills and the majority of Nepalis had no habit of wearing it. It further said that although Muslims and Sikhs had different caps, and Christians and Kirats were not used to wearing the cap, all had to wear it in order to get the certificate (Pandey et al 2006). Whilst this report's

claim was partly true, in that we see the Kiratis wearing this kind of cap, it is also correct that this cap is linked to the identity of a group of hill Hindu males. The requirement to wear a cap in the photo for the citizenship certificate ended after the April 2006 Revolution.

Although the main headline over the letters page of *Kantipur* on 25 September was 'Dhaka topi on Prashant's Head', only one of the seven letters was directly related to it. A section of one letter stated, 'The Topi is a symbol of Nepal, but we from Nepali territory have left off wearing the Topi. We have forgotten national dress'. It criticised Sher Bahadur Deuba for wearing a suit and tie whilst meeting the US President, Bill Clinton, some years earlier and then minister Hisila Yami for wearing a pair of jeans whilst taking her oath. The letter then added, 'Prashant is of Nepali origin and a Nepali speaking person. His nationality is Indian. Topi is not his ethnic dress' (Bista 2007). Despite this, the topi and the khukuri knife were part of the identity of the Nepalese in India, and the topi that Prashant wore had a khukuri pin affixed to it. This is also a symbol of the Gorkha army, and this fashion is more popular in Darjeeling than in Nepal.⁴

For Madhesi leaders, the national dress was a symbol of hill nationalism. During the Madhesi uprising, people wearing Nepali caps were targeted. Several writers in Nepali magazines also saw the topi as an anti-Madhesi symbol: for example, a letter to the editor of *Nepal* magazine from Rajiv Kumar Dev, a Madhesi, questioned the tradition of searching for nationalism through the topi and asked how this would help in bringing dhoti-wearing Madhesis into the mainstream (Dev 2064 v.s.) However, this type of criticism was rarely published, suggesting that the Nepali media were inclined to promote one culture in the name of Prashant, despite the fact that the Madhesi people could not relate to the symbols of Nepali nationalism and national unity used in relation to him. As Stuart Hall has argued, national symbols and culture are also a 'structure of cultural power' (Hall 1996: 616), and as such, the Nepali media usually support the dominant group's symbols. The Nepal government published a notice in the *Nepal Gazette* on 23 August 2010, which reconfirmed the status of the old national dress.⁵

4 My thanks to Ramesh Rai, my colleague at Martin Chautari, for pointing this out to me.

5 Information available at: http://www.moha.gov.np/uploads/news/file/Dress_20111021113636.pdf. [Accessed on 22 October 2012.]

In this context, the Nepali media were clearly interested in portraying the cap as a symbol of national unity. As this cap is the symbol of hill nationalism, the media debate supported mono-cultural, not multicultural nationalism.

Prashant during the crisis of identity

Some news articles presented Prashant as a new symbol of national unity during a crisis of identity. Samuel P. Huntington argues that challenges to established national identities come from three different sources: other national identities; sub-national identities; and transnational identities (Huntington 2004). The Nepali media did not see the national identities of other countries or the transnational identities of global institutions as a threat to Nepali national identity. Instead, what the media feared was the sub-national identities of race, culture, ethnicity and gender.

For example, on 22 July 2007, *Nepal* magazine published an article by Narayan Khadka entitled 'New Basis of Nationalism'. In this article, Khadka claimed that the support that Prashant was receiving from Nepalis was due to a feeling of nationalism. He also expressed his concern about the displacement of Pahadi people from the Madhes and the killing of Pahadi civil servants there (Khadka 2064 v.s.). The main concern of writers who framed their articles around the crisis of identity was the deteriorating relationship between Madhesis and Pahadis in the Tarai (Bishwokarma 2064 v.s.). However, Prateek Pradhan, the then editor of *The Kathmandu Post*, argued in the article he published when Prashant reached the final of 'Indian Idol' that 'Smaller groups of indigenous people, dalits, Badi women, Madhesis et al are also unknowingly contributing to the bickering that is affecting the integrity of the country' (Pradhan 2007: 4). Pradhan was clearly portraying subnationalisms as the main threat to national identity. He further argued:

The story of Prashant Tamang is a lesson for all. It is clear that no matter where Nepalis are living, they consider Nepal their motherland, and will not blink over their identity. Obviously, there is a warning to all ill-intentioned groups. But at the same time, it is also a warning to all vested interests within Nepal that are fulfilling their aims at risk of nationality and integrity. There is definitely no need to be terrified by the warnings of a foreign diplomat, but we should be always keep

our eyes and ears open, and remain prepared to fight back [against] any element that threatens our national identity and our sovereignty (Pradhan 2007: 4).

After 2007, there had been an outcry in the Nepali media and in human rights circles regarding the displacement of Pahadis. In response to this, Bhaskar Gautam argued that the performance of the Nepali media was worse during the Madhesi uprising because it was guided by a Pahadi mentality, which provoked Madhesi community against the Nepali media (Gautam 2064 vs.). A bibliography (Manandhar and Bista 2064 vs.) on the Madhes uprising including news coverage highlights the fact that the media paid insufficient attention to the demands of the Madhesis. What most of these media ignored was that communalism was not the main feature of the uprising and also, as International Crisis Group claimed, the state's response was harsh (ICG 2007).

In Pradhan's article, concern was expressed that the Madhesi and the ethnic movements were challenging Nepali national identity. This can be linked to the shift of the intellectual debate on issues of differences and diversity to a new discourse about the dangers of chaos. Saubhagya Shah took the restructuring project, which accelerated after 2006, as a drive to replace 'the earlier national narrative of Nepal unification and unity' with a 'counter-narrative of diversity and difference'. He further stated that, 'The tension between universal ideals of citizenship and localized subjectivity can be potentially disruptive in state making process' (Shah 2008: 8).

An editorial in the English weekly, the *Nepali Times*, argued that the Prashant Tamang phenomenon represented a manifestation of Pahadi nationalism:

At one level the Prashant Tamang phenomenon showed the current Nepali craving for a feel-good story, the need for a knight in shining armour who, even if he can't rescue us, will make us feel momentarily proud. At another, it proved the need for national symbols when the motherland itself is being torn apart by centrifugal identity politics... Prashant epitomizes the shared geography, shared history, shared lingua franca of Nepalis no matter what their passport. But he also underlines a flaw in our perception of ourselves and the way

Nepaliness has traditionally been defined by hill-centric nationalism... We wonder if there would be the same interest or excitement in Nepal if, instead of Prashant, an Indian of Nepali madhesi origin was the finalist. Probably not. (anon. 2007). 'Idol worship'. Sep 28, p. 2.

Yet the term, 'a knight in shining armour', shows that the *Nepali Times* also believed that there was a crisis of identity in Nepal during 2007. This feeling of insecurity arose from the ideas of multiculturalism. Though there was criticism of Padhadi nationalism, it was minimal. It was the feeling of crisis that helped to gain support for Prashant in the Nepali media.

Prashant as an anti-Indian symbol

Although a few articles and letters to editors (e.g. Yagesh 2064 v.s., Pandit 2064 v.s.) claimed that Prashant Tamang was a symbol of Indian identity, more presented Prashant as a symbol that opposed the Indian hegemony over Nepalis in India. India's problematic relationship with South Asian countries such as Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh means that anti-Indian sentiment can be a part of nationalism. The perception of India as a hegemonic power has not changed, despite India's South Asia policy changing from the use of hard power such as military intervention, diplomatic coercion and economic sanctions to the use of soft power such as intergovernmental relations and economic co-operation after 1990 (Wagner 2005). In the case of Nepal, anti-Indian sentiment has been the main force of Nepali nationalism since 1950 for both left and right, also allowing King Mahendra and Birendra to maintain their rule from 1960 onward.

One concern of the Nepali media was the treatment of the Nepalese in India, as expressed in a news article published in *Samaya* magazine of 6 September: 'Nepalis believe that the success of Prashant will change hatred towards Nepalis in Darjeeling' (Sawa 2064 v.s.). This account merely mentioned the issue, but it was discussed in detail in an article entitled 'Prashant's Journey to Victory: Identity Movement of Nepali Speakers' published in the *Annapurna Post* on 6 September, and written by Karun Dhakal. It even mentioned that Prashant had once been presented during the 'Indian Idol' programme in the uniform of a Chowkidar. This angered Nepalese in India who saw it as an attack on their identity. Dhakal added, 'Now the victory of Prashant is no longer his personal victory; it

is related to the prestige and identity of Nepali speaking people in India' (Dhakal 2064 v.s.). In another article by Geetanjali Allay Lama, published in *The Kathmandu Post* on 20 September, Prashant was presented as the new image of Nepalis, which countered the Indian stereotype of Nepalis as bahadurs and chowkidars. She wrote:

We love him because he officially lifts away the mantle of the stereotypical 'Gorkha Gatemen', the epitome of servility and docility, donning Khaki, a precariously perched Dhakatopi, brandishing a Khukuri and speaking mongrel Hindi, an image that has dogged us for generations (Lama 2007).

In an article entitled, 'Will Prashant Win?', published in *Samaya* magazine after he reached the final, Achyut Aryal criticised the biased behaviour of the Indian media. Aryal informed the reader that, although Prashant's competitors were interviewed or made to sing on Indian TV channels like Aaj Tak and Star News, Prashant was not given these kinds of opportunities. He criticised the comments made by one of the judges, Anu Mallik, who once blamed Prashant's singing performance on cigarettes or tobacco, and by a guest singer, Sonu Nigam, who requested the audience to vote on the basis of the quality of the singing. It also discussed the preferences of judges., alleging that Alisha was biased towards Chang, Anu Mallik towards Emon and Javad Akhtar to Ankita, whilst no judge preferred Prashant (Koirala 2064 v.s.). He also painted a pathetic picture of Darjeeling, mentioning that the votes cast for Prashant were votes of frustration resulting from the neglect of Darjeeling by the post-colonial Indian government that had, incidentally, prided itself on tea from Darjeeling.

In an article published in *Kantipur* on 11 September, and entitled 'Bharat ma Nepali bhawana' [Nepali Feeling in India], Shrunuti Sing discussed why it was that Prashant wept when a judge praised his singing. She argued that the structure of the programme and the comments of some judges and members of the audience were biased towards Prashant, and that was why Indians of Nepali origins were fighting for their identity. She hoped that the behaviour of Indians towards this community would change in future if he won the the contest (Singh 2064 v.s.). In another article, Dil Sahani discussed his feelings and thoughts regarding the victory of the two final contestants. According to him, a victory for

Amit would represent the victory of a backward state, whereas a victory for Prashant would represent the victory of a minority backward state (Sahani 2064 v.s).

Prashant sang the song, 'Bir Gorkhali', after he was announced as the winner. The song was related to the Gorkhaland identity, and his singing of the song was subsequently praised in the Nepali media: 'He sang the song of bravery of brave Gorkhas. As he sang the song, all Nepalese might have sung with him' (Timilsina 2007a). Actually, this song by the Mantra Band was only popular in Darjeeling before this. It promoted feelings of being Gorkha or Indian Nepali alongside a manifestation of the Gorkhaland movement. Prashant stated in an interview that, 'It was said that if there was time I had to sing a song. And I was interested to sing the song liked by all. The word 'Gorkhali' touches my heart every time and I sang' (Anushil 2064 v.s.).

The Nepali media also highlighted the plight of Prashant's fans in Meghalaya in two reports published on 13 and 14 September in *Kantipur* and *Nepal Samacharpatra*. In the first, written by Upendra Pokharel, it was claimed that Prashant's fans were being compelled to participate in Amit's campaign, even being threatened with being kicked out of the state should Amit not win the contest. It also informed the reader that these fans were not allowed to enter Public Call Offices(PCO) and had to go into hiding to send SMS votes for Prashant Tamang (Pokharel 2064 v.s.). Similarly, Ramesh Samdarshi wrote about the physical and mental torture that the Nepalese were experiencing in Meghalaya (Samdarshi 2064 v.s.). These reportings presented the images of Indians who were harassing Indian Nepalis.

Conclusion

This discussion has situated the debate on national identity, sub-nationalisms and anti-Indian Nepali nationalism within the Nepali media's adulatory representation of an Indian Nepali, Prashant Tamang, in *Indian Idol 3*. Except for a few Madhesi writers, most of the media celebrated Prashant as a new symbol of Nepali unity. But what was praised were the old national symbols, in direct opposition to the then vibrant debate on the need to recognise the cultures of different ethnic groups. The media aimed for unity through a singular identity, and not for multicultural identity. Thus, multiculturalism retreated and was replaced by monoculturalism as the dominant theme in Nepali media representations of Prashant Tamang in 2007.

The debate on a 'New Nepal' which would be totally different from the previous, monocultural Nepal, had grown after the April 2006 movement and the 2007 Madhesi uprising. The state had begun to address the exclusion of Janajatis, Madhesis, sexual minorities and others and the government-owned media organisation, the Gorkhapatra Corporation, had also started to publish sections of its Nepali broadsheet, *Gorkhapatra*, in the languages of different ethnic groups. However, Prashant Tamang provided an opportunity to writers who were not supportive of the idea of multiculturalism and the Janajati and Madhesi movements. Similar to the discourse prevalent during the Panchayat period, which construed the demands of ethnic minorities for a recognition of their culture as an impediment to national unity, Prashant was presented as a new symbol of national unity or a 'hero' for Nepal and the Nepalese all over the world during a time of identity crisis in Nepal.

One reason for this is the dominant position of Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars in the Nepali media (Onta and Parajuli 2058 v.s.). Many writers and journalists from these communities praised and presented Prashant as a symbol of hill nationalism. Although Janajatis were opposed to Panchayat period monoculturalism, many of them were not opposed to hill nationalism and not supportive of Madhesi nationalism: this was also substantiated by the media coverage of the Madhes uprising.

Another factor favoring a retreat from the multiculturalism discourse was anti-Indian nationalism in Nepal. This became vocal due to the 'Indian Idol' contest being played out in both the international and Indian arenas. Prashant gave the Nepali media a platform from which to debate the Indian government's behaviour towards the Indian Nepalis and Indian domination in Nepal. In the international arena, national identity usually prevails over sub-nationalisms, and the Nepali media acted accordingly. It is unlikely that there would have been the same praising of national language and national dress in the context of a reality show staged inside Nepal. In such a case, the debate would more likely focus more on questions of sub-nationalism.

This paper has shown that due to these reasons, and contrary to what Kymlica has argued in relation to ethnic groups and minorities, there was a retreat from multiculturalism in the Nepali media's representation of Prashant Tamang. But was this retreat a reflection of a growing opposition

to quota systems in Nepal? It is difficult to prove. The media were only a small part of the Prashant Tamang fever that gripped almost all of Nepal at this time, and further research among the people who participated in the campaign of making him the Indian Idol would be needed to provide an answer.

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‘Objectionable Contents’: The policing of the Nepali print media during the 1950s

Lokranjan Parajuli

After the movement of 1950-51, the Nepali print media sector experienced significant growth. With the publication of the *Jagaran* weekly and *Aawaj* daily, both from the private sector, in 1951, the Nepali press also emerged from the state’s direct purview.

This article assesses the status of press freedom during this decade of media growth, i.e., between 1950 and 1960. By studying actions taken by the state agencies (mostly the Kathmandu Magistrate’s Office) against various newspapers, it seeks to answer the following questions: First, under what legal regime did newspapers function during this decade? Second, to what extent did newspapers enjoy the freedom of press enshrined in the Interim Constitution? Finally, what were considered to be ‘objectionable contents’ during this decade? By answering these questions, I show that the freedom enjoyed by the press was gradually curtailed through legal amendments, resulting in an increase in the number of actions taken against various newspapers. I also argue that the state agencies were particularly sensitive in regard to three institutions or agencies: the Shah monarch and his family; prime ministers and their governments; and foreign embassies and individuals. The likelihood of state action against newspapers increased when negative content was published in relation to any of these figures or institutions (cf. Hutt 2006).

In the first section of this article, the constitutional-legal arrangements that governed the press and publication sector during the period 1950-1960 are examined. This is undertaken in order to show the gradual shrinking of the freedom gained in 1951. The second section looks at a number of variables related to governmental actions taken against the papers. The third section explores what constitutes ‘objectionable contents’ in the eyes of the government agencies. At the end of the article there is a brief conclusion.

The first section of the paper uses state legal documents as its sources of information. The second and third sections rely mainly on the book *Nepalko Chhapakhana ra Patrapatrikako Itihas* by Grishma Bahadur Devkota

(2024 v.s.). More than half of this book (300 of a total of 560 pages) is devoted to detailing the actions taken against newspapers as a result of them publishing ‘objectionable contents.’ However, the entirety of what constitutes such ‘objectionable contents’ and the full details of the actions taken by the state agencies are not published in the book, thus limiting the scope of this research.

1. Constitutional/legal provisions

Provisions before 1951

The now infamous *Muluki Ain* (lit. Law of the Land) of 1854, prepared and enacted by the first Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur, contained no references to the press and publication sector.¹ In 1920, article 31 was added to the fifth part of the *Ain*. This addition made it mandatory for any document that was to be published to adhere to the following procedure: the proposed document should first be presented to the Nepali Bhasha Prakashini Samiti; the Samiti would review it; and, if it deemed it appropriate, would provide a no objection letter; only then would the document go to the press (PCN 2030 v.s.).²

Nepal’s first press act, the *Chhapakhana ra Prakashan Sambandhi Ain*, was enacted on 14 April 1948 and consisted of four sections and 34 articles. The Act prohibited the publication of a paper without first getting permission from the concerned authority of the state.³ Article 6 of the act proscribed the publication of content which indirectly, directly,

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- 1 Perhaps this was because there was no such need. In fact, it was Jang Bahadur who brought the first printing press, popularly called the *gidde* (vulture) press, to Nepal in 1851.
 - 2 If a document was published without prior permission from the office, the publisher/printer was to be fined NRs. 50 in the case of ‘non-objectionable’ content. If the content was found to be ‘objectionable’ however, all the copies were to be seized and the case referred to the appropriate authority for further prosecution (PCN 2030 v.s.: 124-25 also Acharya 2008 v.s.: 157-63). It is worth noting here that Krishnalal Adhikari wrote an apparently ‘non-political’ book, *Makaiko Kheti* (Farming Maize), and only got it published after receiving permission from the relevant authority. Despite this, the book was later banned and all but one copy were seized. The author was also jailed for the ‘crime’ of publishing the book, eventually dying in incarceration (see Ghimire 2068 v.s. and Poudel 2045 v.s.).
 - 3 Article 9 of this act detailed the procedure to be used to acquire permission from the concerned office.

or satirically; using words, symbols and sentences; in books, papers and other documents; committed the following: incited one to murder or conspire against *Shree Panch* (the king) or *Shree Tin* (the Rana prime minister), obstructed the governance or government, caused sexual arousal (*kamatur garaune*) or disturbed social harmony, etc.⁴ This Act also required both the printer and publisher to deposit one thousand rupees cash, or collateral to the same value (see PCN 2030 v.s.).

Provisions after 1951

After the ‘Delhi compromise’ of 1951, political leaders returned to Nepal alongside King Tribhuvan. On 18 February 1951, Tribhuvan read out a proclamation, popularly known as the royal proclamation or *shahi ghoshana*. Subsequently, the Interim Constitution of 1951 (*Antarim Shashan Bidhan*, 2007; lit. interim governance act) was promulgated. The document legally introduced Nepal to a new system of political governance. It guaranteed, constitutionally, freedom of speech, with provisions related to freedom of expression and publication being stipulated in section 2, article 16(a).⁵

However, even before the formal transition of power, and before the Constitution actually came into force, some individuals had already begun publishing papers. *Jagaran* weekly, for example, had started from 15 February 1951, the day that Tribhuvan and other political leaders returned to Nepal. *Aawaj* daily then appeared on the market from 19 February, i.e., the day after the royal proclamation. In the following weeks and months, more papers came out. These papers did not fully adhere to the terms of the now redundant but still existing legal document of 1948. Instead, they published on their own. On 15 May 1951, the secretary to the Home Department sent out letters to both the publishers and printers of the papers, reminding them of the 1948 Act. In the letter, the secretary urged them to follow the existing law and, in the process, assist the government

4 There were 14 points detailed in the list of things that the publications ought not do (see PCN 2030 v.s.: 93-112).

5 It is also to be noted here that on 9 September 1952 Tribhuvan promulgated a special Emergency Powers Act, through which he arrogated to himself enormous executive power, thereby abrogating the king-in-council principle upon which the Interim Constitution was said to have been prepared. The new Act clearly stipulated that ‘The executive power of the State shall be vested in the King who shall exercise it directly or through the subordinate officers according to the laws framed by him’ (Chauhan1971: 62).

in maintaining law and order. The letter further asked them to send two copies of the printed materials (newspapers, books, etc.) to the office immediately after they were published.

This attempt to revert to the governance of the old Act created a stir and resulted in the papers condemning the effort. Both the *Janamitra* monthly and the Bulletin of the Nepali National Congress ran an editorial on this issue. ‘Inappropriate order of the interim government; against press freedom,’ wrote the former, adding that, ‘the revolution was waged to break the draconian law, and civil rights were attained, but now there is this attempt to curtail the press freedom by using the same old act.’ The latter declared that the people must oppose such an arbitrary (*manpari*) action of the government. In light of the barrage of such criticisms, the government issued a press release on 18 May, in order ‘to clear up the misunderstandings’. The release stated, ‘Since the old Act is yet to be amended and the new Act still is not on the horizon, the press is printing irresponsibly (*jathabhavi*)’. This, it was claimed, forced the government to draw the attention of the press to the existing law, so as to maintain law and order. Moreover, it was also mentioned in the release that the law ‘will soon be amended and the press freedom shall in no way be curtailed’ (Devkota 2024 v.s.: 232-33).

Two Acts of 1952

In 1952, two Acts, namely the Nepal Chhapakhana ra Prakashan Registry Act 2008 and the Chhapakhana ra Prakashan Sambandhi Act 2009, were introduced.⁶ The former covered the registration of the printing press as well as publication related issues, while the focus of the latter was on the regulation of the contents of the press.

In the preamble of the Registry Act, it was mentioned that the Act was prepared to ‘control the press and newspapers and to collect and preserve a copy of all the documents either printed or lithographed from within Nepal.’ This Act prohibited the publication of a newspaper without following the proper legal procedure, i.e., without first getting permission from the concerned office.⁷ Those papers that were already in print

6 cf. footnote 5.

7 Violation of this provision was a punishable offense. The punishment for a violation was either a fine of up to NRs. 2000 or 6 months of imprisonment, or a combination of both (PCN 2030 v.s.: 193-123).

were required to register and acquire permission from the concerned authorities within 35 days of the publication of the Act.⁸ One apparent change was that the mandatory one thousand rupees deposit (for both printer and publisher) was removed.

The second Act was promulgated within five months after the first, and during the same year. This Act was prepared and enacted because, according to the government, ‘even though the old Act of 2005 v.s. was replaced by the Act of 2008 v.s., the press remained confused (*bhramma parera*) and continued to publish materials in bulletins, booklets, newspapers which posed a challenge to the law and order situation of the country.’ Therefore, as the preamble clearly mentioned, this act was promulgated ‘in order to fully control and regulate the press and maintain law and order’ (PCN 2030 v.s.: 73-92).

This Act more or less reinstated the provision of requiring a deposit from both the printer and publisher of the paper—an ambiguity due to it being left to the authority to decide whether or not to ask for the deposit. Furthermore, the authority could also ask for any amount of money as long as it did not exceed one thousand rupees. This allowed government officers to treat certain agents differentially, and therefore violated the new legal principle that all citizens were equal in the eyes of the law.

Moreover, this Act prohibited the press from publishing certain content, and any violation of this became a punishable offense. If a paper, book or other publication contained content which was deemed to be likely to contribute to an increase in the crimes listed in Articles 5(1) to 5(9)⁹, the government authority could then ask for a deposit of five hundred to three thousand rupees. Article 36 of this Act also allowed the government to impose a ban on the publication of news and criticism in cases where it deemed reasonable to do so in the ‘public interest’ (*duniyako hit nimitta*). It was, however, up to the government authority to decide what was considered to be in the interest of the public and what was not.¹⁰

8 In districts outside Kathmandu, the district police officer could take a decision on an application to register a paper.

9 This included inciting murder or other violent activities, fomenting disrespect or hatred towards the king, his family and government, creating law and order problems, etc. (PCN 2030 v.s.: 73-92).

10 This Article, along with Articles 4 and 8 (which allowed the bureaucrat to seek a deposit from both the printer and publisher), were the articles that were most criticised by the employees of the press (journalists and others). The report of the first ever Press

Amendments of 1954

The 2009 v.s. Act was amended on 28 April 1954. The existing Article 5 was scrapped, resulting in both the press owners and publishers subsequently being required to sign declarations that they would not violate the law, and if violation did occur to bear the consequences as the law dictated.¹¹ The existing Article 5(d) was also scrapped. In its place, a provision was created whereby printing or publishing materials opposing the king, his family, ambassadors to Nepal, the legally formed government and the judiciary/judicial administration and fomenting hatred amongst the king's subjects (*jati, varna, and upajati*), the king and his government, all became criminal offences (Devkota 2024 v.s.: 236-37).

Amendments of 1957

The Press and Publication Act was amended once again on 4 December 1957, with a particular emphasis on Article 5d. With this second amendment, the publication of content that fomented hatred and disrespect towards foreign countries, or caused disturbances in the relationship between friendly countries, was also considered a criminal activity and, as a result, became a punishable offence. As per the amended provisions, if disrespect or hatred was fomented against the king and his family, 'direct action' (*thadai karvahi*) would be taken against the offender. An additional penalty of a three year imprisonment, a fine of three thousand rupees, or a combination of both, would be imposed alongside other punishments as per the existing laws of Nepal. If a similar offence was committed against the government, the punishment would be two years of imprisonment, a fine of two thousand rupees, or both. A similar offence against a government employee would incur six months imprisonment or a fine of five hundred rupees (Devkota 2024 v.s.: 237-38).

In 1959, Mahendra initiated the production of a constitution and subsequently had it promulgated, despite the fact that in 1951 it had been agreed that elections would be held for a constitutional assembly.¹² Article

Commission, formed first under the press attaché of the palace but later reorganised and headed by a special judge of the Supreme Court, also recommended revisions to the aforementioned articles (see PCN 2060 v.s.: 266-383).

11 This provision was added, it appears, to further deter printers and publishers from publishing materials that were against the king and government.

12 Such an election was never held. After several postponements, the country did hold its first general election in 1959, but not for the purpose of a constitutional assembly.

4(7) of part 3 of the 1959 constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and publication, freedom of assembly without arms, freedom to form associations and freedom of movement.¹³ Although freedom of expression and press was thus accepted in theory, in practice this freedom and political space was gradually curtailed, regulated and controlled by acts that were introduced and amended at regular intervals. Thus, the gains of the 1951 political movement slowly seeped away, and while Nepal's political governance system gradually became more regimented, the control of the monarchy became stiffer.

2. Media growth and sanctions against the press

The growth of the press

Historically speaking, the Nepali print media sector is more than a century old, with the first newspaper of the country, *Gorkhapatra*, being established in 1901. However, it was only after the movement of 1950-51 that the sector saw significant growth.¹⁴ Compared to the number of papers registered in the first five decades of the twentieth century (a total of 16, including literary magazines), the number of papers registered in the decade after the overthrow of the Rana regime is large (264). With the publication of *Jagaran* weekly (edited by Hridayachandra Singh Pradhan) and *Aawaj* daily (edited by Siddhicharan Shrestha), the Nepali press also came out of the state's direct purview. Whilst this growth was mostly centred in Kathmandu, we can also see a few papers published outside the capital. Of the 264 papers registered between 1950-60, half were published at intervals of between a day and a fortnight and are therefore likely to be newspapers. The rest of these publications are likely to be magazines,

Instead, it was for the parliament. The constitution, which was intended to govern parliamentary politics, was enacted a week before the parliamentary elections (see Chauhan 1971).

13 For an analysis of the 1959 Constitution of Nepal, see Appadorai and Baral (2012).

14 Even though the press was severely restricted in Nepal during the Rana era, Nepali entrepreneurs in various Indian cities were involved in the newspaper business—e.g., *Gorkha Bharat Jeevan*, *Gorkhe Khabar Kagat*, *Gorkhali*, *Gorkha*, *Tarun Gorkha*, *Gorkha Sansar*, *Gorkha Sevak*, *Asam Gorkha*, *Gorkha Samachar*, etc.—catering to an 'imagined' Nepali community. See Onta (1996) and Chalmers (2003) for discussions of the formation of Nepali identity and the Nepali public sphere in the early 20th century.

bulletins or literary and other types of journals. (cf. Aryal 2068 v.s.).¹⁵

Table 1. Annual media growth

Year	No of papers published (registered)	Daily-Fortnightly only	Year	No of papers published (registered)	Daily-Fortnightly only
1898/9-1949/50	17	6	1955/6	20	17
1950/1	5	4	1956/7	24	15
1951/2	15	8	1957/8	39	22
1952/3	22	8	1958/9	28	11
1953/4	20	11	1959/60	34	8
1954/5	20	15	1960/1	37	13
Total (1950-61)				264	132

Source: Derived from *Nepalko Chhapakhana ra Patrapatrikako Itihas* by Grishma Bahadur Devkota (2024 v.s.).

The table above highlights that the number of registered papers increased annually.¹⁶ However, the growth is not even and the fluctuation is more pronounced in the case of newspapers. In 1957/8 (2014 v.s.) alone, 39 new papers were registered, of which perhaps 22 were newspapers. This is an important year politically with Tanka Prasad Acharya's more than one and half year long premiership coming to an end.¹⁷ Mahendra then appointed K.I. Singh as prime minister, although Singh was only

15 The distinction between newspapers and other variants is important because it was largely the former that attracted the attention of the state. There is a possibility that in a number of cases of registered papers no issues were ever published. Furthermore, some papers were shelved after a period of time. It is also to be noted here that some of the papers succumbed due to state interventions, as will be discussed in the later sections of this article.

16 This increase was not limited to newspapers. The period also witnessed the establishment of two news agencies, namely Sagarmatha News Agency and Nepal News Agency. After the royal takeover in 1960, the government dissolved both entities, subsequently setting up a National News Agency (Rastriya Sambad Samiti, later renamed Rastriya Samachar Samiti) under official patronage. Mahendra's press secretary was appointed the chairman of the new news agency (see Baral 1975 and Belbase and Murphy 1983).

17 Whilst accepting Acharya's resignation, King Mahendra also stated that Acharya had resigned on the grounds of not being able to hold the election—an accusation that Acharya denied, even going as far as making his resignation letter public (see Joshi and Rose 1966).

able to remain in this post for 108 days, after which the monarch took over power and began ruling directly. Mahendra's antics were criticised by many of the political parties, leading them to collectively launch a *satyagraha*, eventually forcing Mahendra to reach a compromise with them (see Chauhan 1971, also Gupta 1993). In order to increase their voice during this tumultuous political period, the parties began publishing new newspapers, thereby producing a surge in the total number of papers published.¹⁸

Actions taken against newspapers

With the rise in the number of papers after 1951/2, the number of actions taken against them also increased. During this period, 34 papers faced at least one type of action, collectively facing 100 actions in total (see Table 2). The number of actions increased gradually until 1957/8 (2014 v.s.) and then decreased sharply the following year. A total of 24 actions were taken in 1957/8 whereas the previous year saw 22 actions. These two years were, as mentioned earlier, years of intense political competition. The next year, a kind of national government was formed under the chairmanship of the Nepali Congress (NC) leader Suvarna Shamsher. Thus, there was less acrimony amongst the parties, and also between the government and the parties. Besides this, government agencies were also gearing up for the upcoming election, and hence fewer actions against the newspapers occurred. By 1959/60 (2016 v.s.), the first popularly elected government under BP Koirala of NC had come to power. The outcome of the election was quite surprising. Whilst many established leaders of various parties failed to win seats, the Nepali Congress was victorious with a two-thirds majority. The number of actions against the media increased slightly, totalling 9 actions in 1959/60 (2016 v.s.) and doubling the following year, during which many political parties ganged up against the reigning Nepali Congress government (Baral 2012a). This was orchestrated by the palace and involved especially those parties who had fared very badly in the election (Baral 2012b). This conflict was also reflected in the press. Subsequently, when the press started criticising, the government agencies also began taking actions.

18 During 1956-7 (2013 v.s.) and 1957/8 (2014 v.s.), we also see an increase in the number of severe actions taken against the papers. Although a number of newspapers were shelved, the individuals associated with them returned to the field with new papers.

Table 2. Annual actions taken against the media¹⁹

Year	No. of Actions taken	Year	No. of Actions taken
1951/2	1	1956/57	22
1952/3	2	1957/58	24
1953/4	4	1958/59	4
1954/5	8	1959/60	9
1955/6	8	1960/61	18
Total			100

I have disaggregated the actions against newspapers in order to see whether the leader of any given government made any difference in the number of actions. Table 3 shows that no paper faced any actions when Tribhuvan was directly ruling.²⁰ Similarly, the government under the premiership of Mohan Shamsher, formed after the fall of the Rana regime in which NC was a coalition partner, also took no actions against papers. The sole action listed in Table 3 during Mohan Shamsher's period of office was taken by the Apex Court against the Nepali National Congress Bulletin, in a contempt of court case.²¹ The government formed under the chairmanship of Suvarna Shamsher also took fewer actions, being limited to four instances. Going by these figures, the government under Tanka Prasad Acharya seems to have been the most negative towards the press as, during his tenure, a total of 34 actions were taken. The BP Koirala government comes second in this list with 27 actions: two thirds of these actions, as has been mentioned above, were taken during the second half of its tenure. Though the K.I. Singh government lasted for only 108 days, there were eleven actions during the period. Thus, if one compares the relative frequency of actions, K.I. Singh's government emerges as the one that was most negative towards the press.

19 Unless otherwise stated, the author has prepared all the tables included in this paper. This is achieved after coding various actions taken against the print media, collected in Devkota's *Nepalko Chhapakhana ra Patrapatrikako Itihas*.

20 After the fall of the Matrika Prasad Koirala government, due mainly to conflicts within the NC, Tribhuvan ruled for ten months with five royal advisors.

21 Three members of the party were found guilty in this contempt of court case; the ruling was based on the 1948 Act.

Table 3. Actions under various governments

Head of government		Duration	No. of actions
Mohan Shamsheer Rana	18 Feb 51-12 Nov 51	8m, 19d	1
Matrika Prasad Koirala	16 Nov 51-10 Aug 52, 15 Jun 53- 17 Feb 54, 18 Feb 54-2 Mar 55	8m, 28d and 1y, 8m, 17d	14
Tribhuvan Shah	14 Aug 52-14 Jun 53	10m	-
Mahendra Shah	14 Apr 55-26 Jan 56, 15 Nov 57-14 May 58	10m, 23d and 6m, 2d	9
Tanka Prasad Acharya	27 Jan 56-13 Jul 57	1y, 5m, 18d	34
K I Singh	26 Jul 57-14 Nov 57	3m, 18d	11
Suvarna Shamsheer Rana	15 May 58-26 May 59	1y, 10d	4
B P Koirala	27 May 1959-15 Dec 60	1y, 6m, 18d	27
Total			100

Of the 132 papers (ranging from dailies to fortnightlies) published in the period 1950-60, more than a quarter (34) faced actions. The cumulative actions taken against these papers totaled 100. During this period, the *Samaj* daily, edited first by Pasupatidev Pandey and later by Maniraj Upadhyay, faced actions 21 times. The Hindi weekly, *Sahi Rasta* (ed. Maniraj Upadhyay) and *Nepal Samachar* daily (ed. Shankar Nath Sharma) also faced six actions each during the decade. The dailies *Samaya* (ed. Maniklal Shrestha), *Diyalo* (ed. Tarini Prasad Koirala) and *Halkhabar* (ed. Bindunath Pyakurel, later Dataram Sharma) all faced five actions each. The rest of the papers faced four or less actions, as shown in Table 4.

Typologically speaking, it is the dailies that faced the most actions. Nineteen dailies, eleven weeklies and two bi-weeklies faced actions during the period. Similarly, the state agencies also took actions against one fortnightly publication and a bulletin. If we disaggregate the data in terms of the language of the papers, we find that four Hindi language papers,²² three English language papers and one Newari

22 On a side note, this shows the prevalence of Hindi in the Nepali or Newari heartland. This, however, slowly withered away, especially after the accession of Mahendra to the throne, after which the state vigorously pursued the one national language policy

Table 4. List of papers facing actions and frequency

S.N.	Name of the paper	Type	Frequency of actions	S.N.	Name of the paper	Type	Frequency of actions
1	Samaj	Daily	21	18	Goreto	Daily	2
2	Sahi Rasta (Hindi)	Weekly	6	19	Sandesh	Weekly	1
3	Nepal Samachar	Daily	6	20	Ranko	Weekly	1
4	Samaya	Daily	5	21	Desh Seva	bi-Weekly	1
5	Diyalo	Daily	5	22	Motherland (Eng)	Daily	1
6	Halkhabar	Daily	5	23	Bhugolpark	Daily	1
7	Samyukta Prayas	Weekly	4	24	Jhyali	Weekly	1
8	Sameeksha	Weekly	4	25	Bulletin of NNC	Bulletin	1
9	Rastravanai	Weekly	4	26	Nepal	Daily	1
10	Naya Samaj (Hindi)	Weekly	4	27	Nepal Bhasha Patrika (Newari)	Daily	1
11	Dainik Samachar	Daily	3	28	Nepal Pukar	Weekly	1
12	Nepal Times (Hindi)	Daily	3	29	Prahari (Hindi)	Weekly	1
13	Jan Prayas	Weekly	3	30	The Commoner (Eng)	Daily	1
14	Everest News (Eng)	Daily	3	31	Ujyalo	Daily	1
15	Sahi Sandesh	Daily	2	32	Karmavir	Weekly	1
16	Swantantra Samachar	Daily	2	33	Kalpana	Daily	1
17	Aarthik Nepal	Fortnightly	2	34	Khasokhas	bi-weekly	1
Total						34	100

paper were also prosecuted. The rest of the papers were published in Nepali.

Types of actions

We can only assess the state of press freedom correctly after analysing the types of actions faced by papers for publishing contents that were deemed objectionable by the state agents. The following types of actions were taken by the government or its constituent agencies against the papers: oral clarifications; written clarifications; seeking new or additional deposits; seizing (*jafat/syaha garne*) deposits already made; fines; closing down the publication; imprisoning the editor/publisher or other concerned individuals. As is evident from Table 5, most of the actions were limited to seeking clarifications—of which some were oral clarifications, but a large majority (71 percent) were written. The most common occurrence was for the editor, publisher or both to be asked to report to the magistrate's office within a specified time. There, they would be asked several questions relating to the 'objectionable contents.' In a few cases, the magistrate's office would post a letter seeking clarifications, with the editor/publisher also posting their explanations or clarifications in response.

Table 5. Types of actions

Type	Frequency	Percent
Oral clarification	3	2.6
Written clarification	82	71.3
Deposit (new/additional)	16	13.9
Fine	5	4.3
Ban	5	4.3
Jail/prison	4	3.5
Total	115*	100

* The total number of actions taken against the press was 100. In the table, the various categories of actions total 125. This is because some papers had to face two actions at the same time. For example, the government would first demand a written clarification from a paper. If this was found to be unsatisfactory, the paper would then also be penalised—either through an increase in the deposit they had to pay, or by being closed down.

(Nepali) at the expense of other languages of Nepal. The 'Nepali only' policy did not go unchallenged, but the state's might ultimately prevailed (see Gaige 1975). We find very few, if any, examples of an influential Hindi language press after 1960.

As explained earlier, it was initially required by law that anyone who wished to publish a paper had to deposit a thousand rupees. Apparently, however, this requirement was not adhered to by the papers that began publishing immediately after the political change of 1951. The provision was legally discontinued for a short period of time but was later reintroduced. As per this reintroduced article, papers (although not all papers, as it was left for the authority to decide which) were now required to deposit a certain amount of money (up to one thousand rupees) at the beginning of their operation. If the government agency perceived that a certain piece published in the paper was objectionable, it could seek a further deposit of up to three thousand rupees. This option began to be used by the government agencies and, as Table 5 shows, a deposit was sought in approximately 14 percent of cases. In some cases, the earlier deposit was confiscated (*syaha garne*) and a new or additional deposit was sought. Some papers were closed down, either because they were unable to deposit the sum required or because they were unwilling to do so. Generally, it was cheaper to start a new paper than to pay an additional deposit. In some cases (five, to be precise), the government closed down papers. During K.I. Singh's 108-day long tenure, two papers (*Samaj* and *Desh Sewa*) were closed down, during Matrika Koirala's tenure two other papers (*Rastravani* and *Khasokhas*) were banned, and during Mahendra's period of direct rule (15 Nov 1957-14 May 1958), a pro-NC paper, *Ujyalo*, was also closed.

When the government authority asked for a large sum as a deposit or gave an order to close a paper down, the individuals associated with the paper would usually register and begin to publish a new paper. For example, *Diyalo*, an NC-leaning paper edited by Tarini Prasad Koirala, was asked to deposit three thousand rupees. This was imposed on the paper for publishing content that 'fomented disrespect and hatred towards the monarch on a regular basis.' The paper was then shelved, and the same individuals registered a new paper, *Ujyalo*. *Ujyalo* did not last long either. It was not only banned when Mahendra was ruling directly, the NRs. 500 that it was asked to deposit whilst registering the paper was also confiscated. This group then began another paper, *Kalpana*. Similarly, *Prahari* was registered when *Sahi Rasta* closed down and when *Samyukta Prayas* was closed, the individuals associated with it began another paper, *Jana Prayas*. Table 5 also shows that papers were fined on five occasions. However, it was not always the government that imposed fines. The

judiciary was also involved in such disciplinary matters. A few individuals filed libel cases in the court, resulting in the court ruling in favour of the victims and ordering the papers to pay compensation to them.

Some editors or publishers were imprisoned for content published in their papers. Among those imprisoned were the editors Ishworananda Shresthacharya of *Ranko* weekly and Maniraj Upadhyay of *Samaj* daily. *Ranko*, a mouthpiece of the Nepal Janvadi Prajatantra Sangh, had published a news item with the provocative headline 'Nehru government's grave is to be dug in Nepal', based on a speech made by the Nepal Janvadi Prajatantra Sangh leader Prem Bahadur Kansakar. The government under Matrika Koirala not only seized the printed copies of the paper from hawkers in the streets, but also imprisoned the editor for two days and Kansakar for three months (c.f. Gautam 2009: 170-71). Another paper, *Samaj*, was against the K.I. Singh government from day one. It had also urged the press attaché of the king to take appropriate action, further threatening to take action should that not happen. After a number of news items appeared that were apparently against the interest of the then government, the Kathmandu Magistrate Office first sought clarification from the paper and later jailed the editor under the Public Security Act.²³ However, because the K.I. Singh government did not last long, the editor, Upadhyay, was released after two weeks.

Jhyali, a weekly paper edited by Pramod Shamsher Rana, published a news item on an allegedly failed agreement between the Nepali and Indian government. It reported that the Nepali government had proposed a treasonous (*rashtraghati*) agreement with India that could not materialise because Nehru did not agree to sign it. The paper even published a copy of the alleged agreement. When the paper hit the market, the Kathmandu Magistrates Office sent its staff to bring Rana into its office with orders to use force should Rana decline to be escorted. As per the official note prepared by the magistrate, he was to be given the maximum penalty provisioned in law, i.e., two years of imprisonment and a fine of two thousand rupees. Rana was released after he deposited two thousand rupees and an additional Rs. 432 that guaranteed avoiding arrest.²⁴

23 'Rajdrohi (person charged with treason) gets premiership; Rajbhakta (person loyal to the monarch) gets a Magistrate's Notice' was the headline of a news item published by *Samaj*. This was published after the Magistrate's Office sought clarification on the earlier pieces related to K.I. Singh's appointment to the premiership.

24 *Jhyali* had its deposit returned when it appealed to the BP Koirala government.

Action-taking authority

Which authorities actually took actions against the papers? As Table 6 shows, it was more often than not the district magistrate's office, in particular the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office. Of all the actions recorded, 87 were taken by this office. Usually the Magistrate's Office itself initiated actions against the papers but sometimes the home secretary, the home ministry and even the prime minister's office asked the magistrate to take action. In a few cases, the police office also took the initiative (e.g., *Nepal Samachar*, *Khasokhas*, *Rastravani*). In the case of *Sahi Rasta*, a police officer ordered the paper to close down due to it publishing 'objectionable content'. However, when the paper moved to the court, the court not only ruled in the paper's favour, it also berated the police office for breaching the law. The court declared that the law did not allow the police to do anything on their own, further ordering the concerned authority to reprimand (*nasihat dinu*) the officer who took the action (Dahal et al 2065 v.s.: 3-5). Although it was the judiciary that took the first action against a paper after the 1950-51 movement, it also stood by the papers in certain cases during the later years of the decade. When the government agency demanded a large sum or tried to close down a paper for publishing 'objectionable content,' the paper usually sought the court's intervention. The court, in general, also read the 'content' and gave a ruling. In some instances the ruling favoured the press (*Sahi Rasta*), and at other times did not (*Diyalo*, *Nepal Bhasha*).²⁵ While the role of the judiciary was, on the whole, not negative, it had to interpret the existing laws. As the laws themselves became narrower, this impacted upon court rulings.²⁶

25 *Nepal Bhasha* published a couple of news items in which it called for a secular state. It also criticised the legal provision which made cow-killing a criminal act in a country in which the 'majority of the people are non-Hindu.' The action taken by the Home Ministry said that the paper had tried to create a 'poisonous environment' (*vishakta vatavaran*) in the society, and hence should have been asked to deposit the maximum amount (Rs 3000). However, because the paper was being published in the language of a minority community, only Rs. 1000 should be asked to be deposited. The editor, Phatte Bahadur Singh, received his deposit back when he appealed to the NC Home Minister in 1959.

26 See Dahal et al (2065 v.s.) for details of some of the Supreme Court verdicts relating to newspapers of the period.

Table 6. Action-taking authority

Authority	Frequency
Kathmandu Magistrate, Home Secretariat/Ministry	87
Police	6
Judiciary	7
Total	100

3. 'Objectionable Contents'

Because actions were taken against papers based on what was printed in them, it is important for us to explore what sort of content was considered objectionable. The oral and written clarifications sought by the state authorities, alongside the additional questions that were asked, tell us about the nature of 'objectionable contents' in the eyes of these agencies and individuals. The (incomplete) transcripts of the clarifications and questions given by Devkota (2024 v.s.) were therefore coded for this purpose. News material or content that was negative and related to the following institutions/individuals were found to draw the attention of the state authorities: criticism of the monarch, monarchy and the royal family; criticism of the government, head of the government or government bureaucrats; and criticism of foreign governments or individuals. This is summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. Objectionable contents

Contents related to	Frequency	Percent
Monarch/royal family	25	20
Prime minister/government	53	42.4
Indian government/institutions	16	12.8
Other foreign countries/individuals	8	6.4
Government bureaucrats	13	10.4
Newspapers	2	1.6
Other individual/institutions	8	6.4
Total	125*	100

* The total number of objectionable items (125) exceeds the total number of actions (100). This is because there were multiple examples of objectionable contents or materials in some news items. For example, if a report criticised both the Nepali government and India, or the government and the king, and the clarification also referred to both, then both are coded.

If we look at the contents referred to when taking actions against the papers, we find that it was not only negative or critical content that dragged the publisher or editor to the magistrate's office but also simple information. This is especially evident during the first half of the decade in which even informative contents were flagged. The editors and publishers were subsequently asked, why and on what basis was the news published? In the latter period however, we do not see such clarifications being sought.

If we analyse the 'objectionable contents', we find that more than 40 percent of the actions were taken due to papers criticising the government, its head or its ministers. Content that was related to or negative about the monarch and his family drew the second highest rate of actions, i.e., around 20 percent. This shows that, despite the effort to sanctify the monarchy, it was not above criticism. The third largest category of objectionable content (around 19 percent), related to foreigners—both institutions and individuals. Of the content related to foreign institutions or individuals, more than two thirds were related to India, the Indian government or Indian military missions in Nepal. The amendments made to the press-related laws also show an attempt to safeguard the three major institutions, with the primary protected figure being the monarchy.

Colourful contents

The newspaper content of the 1950-60 period on which some of the actions were taken sounds amusing in today's context, as are the questions asked by the state authorities. In almost all cases, the questions asked began with: why?; based on what evidence?; do you have any evidence?; how do you know this?; what is your source?; what evidence do you have that that was in fact the case?; what do you mean by this?; what do you want to imply?, and so on.

For example, *Samaj* daily published a news report with the title, 'Chairman of the Royal Council to visit France' in which it was stated, 'It is understood that the chairman of the Royal Council is likely to visit France in the near future.' The Kathmandu Magistrate called the publisher of the paper to his office, asking, 'What is the basis of this report?' In another example, *Samaj* reported that 'Nandalal Pande MA' was fasting until death in the Nakkhu jail. The magistrate's office asked the publisher, amongst other questions: 'How do you know that this man has an MA degree?';

‘From which university did he get his degree?’; ‘What is the basis of this report?’

One is amazed, not only by the state agents’ concern for the ‘truth’, but also by some of the news items. ‘There is a rumour (*gamgum halla chaleko*) that out of the total six lakhs set aside to publicise Nepal’s five year plan, some amount is given to an individual related to a foreign newspaper,’ reported *Samaj*. The same paper threatened the government with action, stating, ‘this paper will be forced to take action should the press attaché of the king not take appropriate action on the way news related to PM K.I. Singh’s biography has been broadcast.’ It should be explained here that after Mahendra appointed K.I. Singh as prime minister, Radio Nepal began to air his biography and portray him as a true hero of 1950-51 movement, who had not only declined to recognise the Delhi compromise, but had also tried to stage a mutiny when he was languishing in jail. Radio Nepal was not only eulogising K.I. Singh, according to the paper, it was also blemishing the reputation of the late King Tribhuvan. Similarly, *Sahi Sandesh* called a government minister named Khadgaman Singh Malla a mad man (*bahula*). *Hal Khabar*, when asked to produce evidence for the news that it ran, pointed towards another paper that printed similar content, published after *Halkhabar* had carried the news.

Criticising the government: the influence of the partisan press?

Healthy criticism of those at the helm of power, be it the government’s head or its ministers, is considered perfectly natural and is tolerated to a large extent in a democracy. However, those at the receiving end have seldom shown patience in digesting such criticism, especially in the case of Nepal. The various actions taken against the papers during the 1950-60 period further illustrate this. As Table 7 shows, it is the newspaper content (news, opinion pieces or articles, editorials, letters to editors) related to the government that drew most attention. Of all the actions, 42 percent were taken due to the published material containing ‘objectionable content’ related to the government. If we add the objectionable items related to government bureaucrats, the total number of actions reaches fifty percent.

The large number of ‘objectionable contents’ highlights an uneasy relationship between the press and the government. This is also because of the political environment of the period. Political parties, both in and

out of the government, usually had acrimonious relationships with one another. The problem became acute when the king appointed K.I. Singh, a dubious political figure, as prime minister on 26 July 1957. Subsequently, the king terminated his role after a short period (on 14 November) and ruled directly. A similar case can be seen when the Nepali Congress emerged victorious with a two-thirds majority in the first ever general election in 1959. This reduced the smaller parties' chances of participating in the government, especially in the immediate future. Lok Raj Baral writes:

When the first parliamentary election was over in 1959, many of those who had suffered ignominious defeats predictably mobilized their resources to stigmatize the government on each and every count. The press, as it was divided along group lines, joined the fray in promoting political tension or in disseminating misgivings. (Baral 1975: 172)

Most of the papers against which actions were taken were affiliated to one or another party and in one way or another functioned as party mouthpieces. For example, *Ujyalo*, *Diyalo*, *Kalpana* and *Nepal Pukar* were run by individuals who were close to the Nepali Congress party. *Samyukta Prayas*, *Jana Prayas* and *Halkhabar* were affiliated to K.I. Singh's United Democratic Party. Likewise, *Samaj*, *Sahi Rasta* and *Prahari* were close to the Praja Parishad. Since these papers were run either by a party or an individual close to the party, it was not unusual to find the views of the party and its leaders reflected in them. We also find that the actions taken by a government were annulled when the leadership of the government changed. Likewise, there are examples of the government agency's (such as the magistrate's) decision being reversed by a government minister or prime minister upon a journalist approaching them.²⁷

27 For 'disrespecting and fomenting hatred against the monarch and the government', the Kathmandu Magistrate's Office ordered *Samaj* to deposit an additional NRs. 1500 within 15 days in August 1957. Should this deposit not be made, the office would issue an order that cancelled the paper's license. *Samaj* did not get a favourable decision either upon moving the decision to the court. But when the paper approached the newly elected Prime Minister BP Koirala (in 1959), he revoked the decision, saying that 'the new government's policy is to promote the press by providing as much facility to the press and not to control it.'

The monarchy: not beyond criticism, despite the severity of the law

The changes that occurred in the legal sector during this period, especially those relating to freedom of expression and the press, are also indicative of the changes that occurred in the power structure of the political sector. As described in section 1, freedom of the press and publication had been gradually curtailed through amendments in the laws. At the same time, these laws were primarily concerned with the safeguarding of both the monarch and his family. The penalty for criticising the monarch or the institution of monarchy became increasingly severe. Efforts were made to place the king and his family above the law and, in the process, engineer a situation in which he was unable to be criticised. In a sense, the institution was gradually becoming sanctified.²⁸ This also demonstrates the growing power of the king.

Despite the increasing severity of punishment, the press can still be found to be criticising the institution of monarchy. However, there are no examples of actions being taken against the press for criticising King Tribhuvan. This is presumably either because the papers did not criticise Tribhuvan, or alternatively, because the state agents did not bother the papers when Tribhuvan was ruling directly. The press did not spare his son, Mahendra, however. This is because he had become quite active in politics. He was, in fact, using one party after another to his benefit, and discarding them once their utility was over (Joshi and Rose 1966). The Nepali press began to criticise Mahendra on a regular basis. Mahendra used to tour Nepal in style and distribute money to individuals of his liking, all from state funds. He was also criticised for taking a large sum of money (52 lakhs) as a salary, and for ruling directly (see, e.g., *Samaj, Samaya, Diyalo, Bhugol Park, Swatantra Samachar*, etc.). Political leaders such as Ganeshman Singh, Pushpalal, Vishwabandhu Thapa and Tulsi Giri²⁹ criticised and even derided Mahendra at public functions for being an autocrat, and the papers reported these criticisms (see, e.g., *Nepal Pukar, Ujyalo*). When state agents sought clarifications from the publishers or

28 The 1957/8 (2014 v.s.) Press Commission report included a section (12) on 'rules for journalists', in which it recommended that journalists ought not to promote matters that would lead to criticism and drag the monarch and his family into dispute. This was due to both being 'pristine high-level institutions' (PCN 2060 v.s.: 348).

29 It is ironic that the latter two, Thapa and Giri, became Mahendra's henchmen after he dismantled the parliamentary democracy and introduced the partyless Panchayat system.

editors, they argued that it was the fundamental right of the press (and the public) to criticise the monarch (see Devkota 2024 v.s.). This shows that, despite the palace's efforts to tame the press and control the public sphere, the press continuously took risks and challenged such moves.

Foreigners: above criticism

If we look at the actions taken against the newspapers, it becomes evident that the Nepali state had become very sensitive towards foreigners and very careful not to antagonise them, be they individuals, institutions or countries. Initially, the law prohibited papers from criticising the foreign embassies in Nepal. Later, the law was amended to make it a punishable offence to foment hatred towards foreign, and potentially friendly, countries and to create disturbances in the friendship between Nepal and other nations. Of all the press items that drew objections from the authorities, half were related to India. The state agencies sought clarification on news items related to the Indian government, the then prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Indian military mission to Nepal.

It has already been mentioned that the editor who published a news item with the title, 'To not fight against foreign intervention is impotency; Nehru government's grave is to be dug in Nepal' was imprisoned for two days. Prem Bahadur Kansakar, the general secretary of the Nepal Janavadi Prajatantra Sangh, gave the speech reported in this article and was imprisoned for three months. He probably would not have been arrested if the paper had not reported his speech, because several other parties organised mass meetings on a regular basis in which they berated the NC government, India and Nehru without incurring similar reactions. It was the newspapers that criticised Nehru (e.g., *Sahi Rasta*, *Samaj*, *Goreto*, *Sandesh*, *Diyalo*, etc.), and also those who reported on the alleged 'terror' (*atanka*) of the Indian military mission, that provoked the state agent's actions, which included levying a new deposit. When *Naya Samaj* published a news item in which it was mentioned that a certain bureaucrat in the USSR embassy in Nepal whose job performance was considered unsatisfactory had left the country, the paper had to report to the Magistrate's Office for clarification. Similarly, when *Samaj* opposed, in a series of articles, the travels of Professor Tucci of Italy, accusing him of removing Nepali artefacts and stealing, the government's publication department refuted

the charge and the Magistrate's Office also sought clarification. Another paper criticised American aid in Nepal for being ineffectual and also had to report to the Magistrate's Office. It thus becomes clear that the state agencies were very concerned about materials relating to both foreigners and foreign governments.

4. Conclusion

After the downfall of the more than century-long Rana family oligarchy in 1951, the political system of Nepal changed drastically: democracy replaced autocracy. Referring to the decade that followed, Lok Raj Baral writes, 'People not only changed their political styles but also made innovations in various fields' (1975: 171). Kamal P. Malla recalls the 1950-60 period as a 'decade of extroversion. For it was a decade of explosion of all manner of ideas, activities and organized efforts' (1979: 192). People all across the country became excited, creating new *avatars* of themselves as individuals and as associations: political parties, schools, libraries, literary organisations, theatre groups, clubs, newspapers and so on (Parajuli 2009).³⁰

Enjoying the democratic space and the freedom of speech and press that had been enshrined in the new constitution, the number of papers increased significantly during the 1950s. Even though the sector grew enormously, it was both immature and disorganised—this is evident from the content that was produced. Political parties emerged as key players in the media sector, running a significant number of papers that were also influential. The acrimonious relationship between the parties, and particularly with the party in government, was subsequently mirrored in the papers (see Baral 1975). This also meant more 'actions' being directed against the papers that supported opposition parties, thereby instigating a surge in the number of actions against the media.

We have seen that the state agencies were primarily sensitive to criticisms of three institutions or agencies, namely the monarch and his family; the prime minister and the government; and foreign countries and individuals. However, the Nepali press of the 1950s took risks, choosing not to shy away from criticising even the highly guarded institutions, such as the monarchy. The valour shown by the press is commendable;

30 See Onta (2012) for an account of an academic exercise in the non-university setting during 1940-70. Also see Koirala et al (forthcoming) for magazines published between 1902 and 1960.

yet a pertinent question remains. How does one explain the state agents' preoccupation with the 'evidence or source'? Likewise, the concern towards the Indian government, Nehru or other friendly countries is perhaps understandable, but why did the government toil to protect an Italian professor? The preoccupation with the evidence or source is not just to unfold the 'truth', as it may seem. Instead, it should perhaps be seen as unease about the transition to an open society on the part of those who had controlled everything in the past. Similarly, for the government officials, be it an Italian professor or any other foreign individual or institution, the publication of any negative news related to them would mean severing the relationship between the two governments, or so it was believed, and this was to be avoided at all costs. These officials, who were gatekeepers of information in the bygone era, also wanted to regulate the information that was distributed to the public, so that nothing untoward would happen.

Scholars have documented the gradual transformation of power, from the people to the palace, in the democratic decade of 1950-60. The grip of the Shahs on the affairs of the country gradually increased, ultimately leading to a period of total control after the 1960 royal coup (see, e.g., Joshi and Rose 1966, Chauhan 1971, Gupta 1993). Much the same could be said about the freedom of press and publication, as is evident from the changes made in the laws that governed the media sector that were described in the first section of this article. We thus see the parallel growth of the public sphere and of attempts to regulate it during this period. At the end, however, as we all know, the nascent public sphere could not withstand the hegemonic political project of the Shahs and ultimately succumbed (cf. Onta 2010).

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Maoist gates in Jumla and Mugu districts: Illustrations of the 'People's War'

Satya Shrestha-Schipper

During the ten years of its insurgency (1996-2006) the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) made extensive use of images, either to convey its ideology or to advertise its presence in a locality.¹ The Maoists often used public, private and religious properties as places to plaster posters, write slogans and erect their party flag.² Besides these images, the Maoists also constructed gates and *chautārās* (platforms or resting places for travellers).³ In fact, building *chautārās* in the name of a dead person is not only a Maoist phenomenon, it has long been a part of Nepalese tradition. A *chautārā* is often built to keep the name of a deceased person alive, and gates are often erected to welcome participants and dignitaries to a particular event; sometimes permanent gates are built to welcome visitors. The Maoist gates are built, particularly in Jumla and Mugu districts, to commemorate fallen comrades and to welcome inhabitants of the region and outsiders, as well as to demarcate territorial divisions. The gates are often constructed on main paths rather than within a village; consequently, every passer-by has to walk through them. Even if the inhabitants want to bypass them, as they do elsewhere,⁴ they are not able to do so, because gates are often constructed covering both sides of the path. Furthermore, I have never heard that villagers wanted to go around the gates to avoid walking through them. These gates were often built by villagers on the Maoists' orders; some were built by the Maoists themselves.

Since the peace accord was signed by the CPN (Maoist) and the Government in 2006, most of the gates built by Maoists have become dilapidated; only a few were still in good condition in 2009. Some of the

1 Fieldwork for this research was financed by the ANR programme on the People's War coordinated by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine.

2 On the use of images in the People's war by Maoists as well as by the Army, see M. Lecomte-Tilouine and P. Ramirez, 2006, 'La guerre du Peuple en Images' in *Le maoïsme au Népal. Lectures d'une révolution*, edited by Brigitte Steinmann. Paris: CNRS, pp. 88-109.

3 They are often constructed to commemorate a deceased.

4 Cf. Lecomte-Tilouine and Ramirez (no 2): 90.

gates I saw in 2007 had disappeared by 2009, and in some places new gates had been constructed. Gates are often decorated with communist symbols such as the hammer and sickle and portraits of communist leaders. The edifices also often bear communist slogans and the names of fallen comrades. In the following pages I will present a series of gates built by Maoists; the pictures were taken between 2006 and 2009 in Jumla and Mugu districts, and are reproduced together at the end of the text. The architecture of the gates changes as we move from one valley to another. The text is divided according to district: we move from Jumla valley to Nagma village, then upstream to the Sinja valley, and finally to Mugu district.

Jumla district

Photo 1. Lamra village [in 2007]

The wooden gate built of timber is erected on the main path in Lamra village in Jumla valley. It is the first gate I came across while heading west from Jumla bazar (it is located two to three hours walk west of the district headquarters known as Jumla Bazar or Khalanga, in the direction of Kalikot district). During the Maoist heyday, this village was the beginning of the Maoist territory, and it was in this village that the insurgents and the government forces regularly clashed. The gate was constructed on the main path that passes through the village. It looked neglected in 2007 and had completely disappeared by the time of my follow up visit in 2009.

Photo 2. Tato Pani [in 2009]

This gate, built of stone and cement,⁵ is constructed in Tato Pani village, situated three to four hours walk to the west of Jumla Bazar. The gate is built over narrow stone steps which lead to the hot water spring (Tato Pani⁶) bathing area; all the pilgrims have to walk through the gate if they want to bathe in the spring. Tato Pani is a very popular bathing area. It is known to have miraculous powers to cure sickness such as asthma and

5 Cement is rarely used for construction in the region. Because of unreliable transportation, cement is difficult to get in the local market; if it is available, the price is very high. Stone, clay and wood are generally used as construction materials in this area.

6 The village is named after the Tato Pani (hot water spring) bathing area.

arthritis. Thus, the inhabitants of Jumla and surrounding districts come to take a bath in this hot spring at least once in their lifetime.

Both pillars of the gate are used as surfaces on which to write and rewrite Maoist slogans. These are written on top of older slogans that have been partially erased; therefore, some of them are difficult to decipher. The slogan on the left pillar reads: ‘Long live Marxism, Leninism, Maoism and Prachanda Path - CPN-Maobadi (*Mārksbād, Leninbād, Māobād ra Prachandapath jindābād*),’ and the one on the right pillar reads: ‘Give us rice and salt, otherwise give up power...’ (*cāmal, nun de natra sattā chod...*).’ The slogan on the right pillar is a poignant expression of the reality of the region. The region does not produce enough rice to feed the whole district all year round and salt has to be brought in from the Tarai. To compensate for the rice and salt deficit the government regularly distributes subsidised rice and salt to each family in the region. However, due to the government’s incompetence and corruption the villagers do not receive their quotas on time; sometimes, they spend days in district headquarters before they receive their share.

Easing the distribution of rice and salt is a favourite promise of political leaders. However, although the government decentralised distribution to certain VDC offices for a few years, this was once again centralised to the district headquarters because of the Maoist insurgency.

Photo 3. Nagma village [2007]

This wooden gate was built on the main path in Nagma village leading towards the Sinja valley. The village stands on the border with Kalikot at a place where two major rivers (the Tila from Jumla valley and the Sinja from Sinja valley), come together and flow westward to Kalikot as the Tila river. It is an important village for Jumli migrants returning from southern parts of Nepal. Because they mistrust the inhabitants of neighbouring districts, most returning migrants try to cross Kalikot district as soon as possible to reach this village, where they usually spend a night before heading to their own villages in Jumla valley or Sinja valley.

This gate stands as a welcome gate to Sinja valley and is constructed by the NCP (Maoist) Kalikot district. It reads: ‘We warmly welcome you all-NCP Maoist Kalikot’ (*ehāharuko āgamanko hārdik swāgat gardachau-Ne.ka.pā. māobādī Kālikot*). The architecture of the gate is very different from the other Maoist gates in Jumla district but very similar to the Maoist gates

in Mugu district. The gate has three distinct steeples, and the one in the middle looks very different from the two others. It resembles a miniature room⁷ with a window (with three closed shutters) and a door. A pinnacle is placed on the roof, and next to it a Maoist flag with hammer and sickle similar to that seen on most of the Maoist gates. The gate bears Maoist slogans, Maoist fallen comrades' names and their places of origin. The slogan on the top corner of the left pillar explains why and when the gate was constructed: 'The gate is built in memory of the brave and glorious martyrs of the People's War during the celebration of the 8th year of the People's War- Gate 2004' (*āthau (?) bārshik utsabko abasarmā janayuddhakā mahān bīr śahidharuko smritimā nirmī-* Get 2061); a quotation from Karl Marx (the *Mahān Guru*, 'Great Master') is written on the top of the right pillar. The names of martyrs from Kalikot district are written on the right pillar and the names of martyrs from Jumla district on the left pillar. Interestingly, the Maoists have written the real names of their martyrs instead of their *noms de guerre*. They record not only the real identities of their fallen comrades but also their places of origin.

Photo 4. Macche village [2007]

This gate is built of stone and plastered with clay and cow dung and stands on the main path to the upper Sinja valley, two hours walk from the border village, Nagma. The gate is built in a narrow valley. The only buildings here are two tea shops next to it; the village proper lies half an hour further up the hill. It is the most imposing gate that I have seen in the region; the thickness of the pillars is more than a meter. Beside a blurred slogan, nothing indicates that it was a Maoist gate. However, the shopkeeper next to the gate confirmed that it was built by Maoists.

Photo 5. Sanni village [2007]

This gate is situated a few hours walk from the previous one at Macche along the path towards the upper Sinja valley. It is built on the main path; however, the village is situated ten to fifteen minutes further on. The gate is constructed from stone, clay and wooden beams, like other buildings in the region.

7 Houses in Jumla district used to be windowless. However, more and more people have now started to place windows while building a house; nevertheless, most of the time these windows remain closed to conserve heat inside the home.

Photo. 6. Rani Khana [2007]

These two rundown wooden gates are erected within a few meters of each other on the main path in Rani Khana in Sinja valley. There is a shop next to the second gate and the village is situated a few minutes further from the main path.

Photo 7. Larja village [2007]

This colourful wooden gate is erected on the main path in Larja village in upper Sinja valley. On side A, Larja village can be seen in the background, whereas side B shows the main path that leads to the lower Sinja valley. The gate is built on the site of an older gate made of stone and clay, the remains of which are still visible.

Both sides of the gate are beautifully carved and painted with communist symbols: hammer and sickle, portraits of communist leaders and their ideologues. The top of the gate is decorated on both sides with two peacocks that are facing each other and with two wheels, one wheel in each corner. On each side of the gate, these are accompanied by communist symbols: the hammer and sickle, and a pheasant.⁸ In the centre of side A the gate has two portraits, one on each pillar. The left pillar has the portrait of an unidentified woman, and the right pillar has a portrait of Prachanda with his fist raised. Prachandra is given the appearance of a modern revolutionary man wearing a shirt and a green tie with the hammer and sickle. Although ties are generally not worn in villages in the region, jackets are popular. Side B of the gate has four portraits, two on each pillar. Portraits of Mao and Lenin are painted on the right pillar and portraits of Prachanda and Stalin are painted on the left pillar. In this portrait, Prachanda is presented as a PLA (People's Liberation Army) leader wearing a green military outfit. The lower part of the gate is decorated with pheasants and the hammer and sickle.

This gate, on the one hand defines the Maoist territorial division (NCP-M area No. 6) and on the other hand it commemorates the fallen comrade 'Martyr C. Narendra Shahi (*śahid k. Narendra Śāhī*)'. But the portrait does not specify where Shahi came from, unlike the portrait

8 The peacock is not native to this area, and unlike other parts of Nepal this region does not have any traditions that entail engraving its picture in temples. However the Kalij pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*) is commonly found in this region and is hunted for meat.

of the martyrs in Nagma village. We presume that Shahi came from a neighbouring village, because there is a large Thakuri (Shahi) settlement in this area.

Photo 8. Hat Sinja [2006,2007, 2009]

Hat Sinja village has two Maoist gates on the main path at both ends of the village, and is one of the few villages with two gates. The wooden gate (Gate A) is erected at the eastern part of the village and the stone gate (Gate B) is built at the western part of the village. Gate B is built by piling up stones and is therefore very fragile, it has been rebuilt many times.

The wooden gate was only carved during my visit in 2006. The top part of the gate contains the Maoist symbol of the hammer and sickle. Next to these, each pillar has a carved figure of a PLA member. Both PLA members are portrayed in a standing position, with their right fist raised and holding a rifle in their left hand as if to suggest they are undergoing military training. There are carvings of water jars on the lower part of the gate, and there is a carving of a Maoist flag with the hammer and sickle on the top part of the gate. A Maoist based in Hat Sinja in 2006 told me that this gate looked ugly, and that he was going to make those 'Sinjals' (inhabitants of Hat Sinja) work on it to make it similar to the gates from Larja village (Photo 7) and from Botan village (Photo 10). The Maoist kept his word and at the time of my subsequent visit in 2007, the gate was painted and looked similar to the gate from Larja and Botan villages. At the same time, the portrait of Prachanda with his fist raised and some Swastikas were added.

Photo 9. Front of Botan village [2007]

This wooden gate was erected in front of Botan village on the main path between Hat Sinja and Jumla district headquarter after the peace accord was signed. Edifices are often built by villagers on Maoists' orders, and this gate was built by a Maoist from Botan village, who spent many years in the PLA. The architecture of the gate is very different to the local architecture and most other gates in the region. According to the villagers, the builder tried to copy the style of the architecture he had seen during his seasonal migration to Northern India. The gate does not contain any slogans, there is just the Maoist flag with the hammer and sickle on the top of the gate that indicates this is a 'Maoist gate.' According to the villagers, it is not

a 'memorial gate,' but just a 'welcome gate', built to make the area more attractive.

Photo 10. Botan village [2006, 2007]

This village is well-hidden between two hills and security forces cannot approach the village without the knowledge of the inhabitants. The landscape of the village therefore provided the Maoists with a safe haven, where they could operate in the open. The Maoists used the village to train the PLA on a small scale and to organise political activities. Consequently, there was lots of movement in and out of the village. To welcome all the visitors who came to take part in the different political programmes, the Maoists who were based at the village built 'welcome gates' and put up banners and written slogans.

The 'Welcome (*swāgatam*) Gates' A and B were built in the middle of Botan village. Gate A, which I saw during my field visit in 2006, was not there anymore during my subsequent field visit in 2007; however, another gate (Gate B) was built a few meters away from the place where Gate A once stood. Both welcome gates look very similar, though some details set them apart. All the decorations on both gates are carved and painted.

On the top of both gates, there is a carving of a figure. The figure on the top of Gate A is portrayed wearing a hat, which gives him the allure of a PLA member who is keeping an eye on passers-by, whereas the figure on the top of Gate B is a more traditional one, similar to those figures made as offerings to local divinities. Some villagers do install such figures on their newly built houses, some say this is to protect their house from the evil eye and others say this is to make their house look attractive.

The lower parts of both gates are decorated with *khukuris* (traditional Nepali knives) and water jars⁹ with flowers, as if to wish good luck to all who walk through the gates. Gate A is decorated with two figures in a military outfit, with one figure on each pillar. Both figures look like PLA members. The figure on the left pillar is portrayed in a standing position, whereas the one on the right is in a shooting position. Similarly, Gate B is decorated with two figures in green military dress, one figure on each pillar. The figure on the left pillar has a gun under his right arm and is holding a *khukuri* in his

9 A pair of water jars filled with water and flowers are placed on both sides of a gate or path at the start of any journey.

left hand. The figure with a red beret on the right pillar, which is said to be Prachanda, is raising the index finger of his right hand and holds a *khukuri* in his left hand. He is given the allure of a brave Gorkhali, similar to King Prithvinarayan Shah who unified the Nation and is always portrayed with his right index finger raised, ready to charge on enemies.

In front of Gate A, a big billboard with Maoist slogans is placed. The slogan on the top of the billboard reads: 'Long Live World Revolution (*biśwo krānti jindābād*).' This is followed by another slogan, reading: 'Let's make a big success the celebration of integrated pioneering revolutionary movement (*ekikri[ī]t agragāmī rupāntarṇa abhiyāna bhabyarupmā saphal pārau*).' The text ends with a quotation from Prachanda: 'If the whole country does not rise to protest, the existence of Nepal and the Nepalese will end (*siṅgo deśa uṭhera pratirodha nagarne ho bhane Nepāl ra Nepāliko astitwo samāpta huncha*).' Under the billboard hangs a banner with Maoist slogan, which reads: 'Let's celebrate the 11th glorious years of Nepal People's War with fanfare (*mahān Nepālī janayūddhako eghārau bārṣika utsaba bhabyarupmā manāau*).' – United CPN-M (*NeKaPā Māobādi Ekikrita*). By 2007, all the slogans on the billboard and the banner had disappeared.

Photo 11. Budu village [2007]

This simple wooden gate is erected in front of Budu village in Sinja valley, where the shrine of Budu Masta (one of the most important divinities of the region) is located. We can see Budu village in the background. Although the village remained under Maoist control during the conflict, the Maoists were not able to make villagers work on the gate as in other places in Jumla. Consequently, the gate remains neglected. It was said that the villagers decorated the gate whenever any high-ranking Maoists visited the area.

Mugu district

Photo 12. Kawa village [2007]

The wooden gate is erected on the main path in Kawa village¹⁰ in the Khatyad khola (river) valley, Khamale ga.bi.sa. in Mugu district. It is a

10 The village is named after Kawa Masta, one of the Masta brothers and an important divinity of the region, whose shrine is located in this village.

'Martyr's gate (*śahida geṭa*),' erected for a fallen comrade. It reads: 'Long live brave martyr comrade Kisan (*bīr śahida kā. [kāmreḍa] Kisān amara rahun*).' The person standing in front of the gate is a Maoist from Sinja valley. He insisted on being in the picture, and thought it was very appropriate for a Maoist to be photographed in front of a Maoist gate.

13. Pāche Chaur [2007]

Gates A and B are built in Pāche Chaura, Gumtha ga.bi.sa, at the confluence of the Khatyad Khola (river) and Mugu Karnali. These gates are built a few meters apart, whereas Gate C is constructed an hour further downstream on the left bank of the Mugu Karnali River. This path was the main trail between Gam Gadhi (Mugu district headquarters) and Bajura district until the construction of the new path on the right bank of the river.

Gate A is made of wood and stands as a 'Welcome (*swāgatam*)' gate. One side of the gate is used to acclaim Prachanda Path: 'Long Live..... and Prachanda Path (... *ra Prachanḍapath jindābād*)' and the other side of the Gate (seen in the background of Gate B) is used to indicate the Maoist territorial division: 'Nepal Communist Party Maobadi district no. 3 Rara Mugu (*Nepāl kamunist pārti māobādī jillā nambar 3 Rārā Mugu*)'. The pillars of the Gate display the names of the fallen comrades: 'brave glorious martyrs (*mahān bi[ī]r śahidharu*).'

Gate B is built by piling up stone slabs on top of each other. One side of the Gate (B-1) is decorated with Communist flags and a portrait of Prachanda with his right fist raised, whereas a slogan is written on the other side of the Gate (B-2), which reads: 'Kasital memorial, 9th year assembly 2004 (*kāsital smārikā nabau barṣagaṭh 2061*).'

Gate C is made of wood and is also built as a welcome gate, at the same time it indicates the Maoist territorial division: 'Welcome. Nepal Communist Party Maobadi district no. 3 Rara Mugu (*swāgatam Nepāl kamunist pārti (māobādī) Rārā Mugu*).' A Maoist flag is placed on the top of the Gate.

14. Rara National Park [2009]

This is the last Maoist gate one comes across when walking towards Gam Gadhi (Mugu district headquarters). It is made of timber and is built in a desolate area at the entrance of the Rara National Park. Except for a military camp located near Rara Lake that protects the National Park, no

human settlements are allowed in its vicinity. As a result there is nobody to repair the gate that was constructed for a Maoist function and the gate is in a dilapidated state.

As we have noticed throughout this article, most Maoist gates are found in areas where the State had little or no control during the ten years of conflict, such as in Sinja valley where many gates were built. This region remained under Maoist control throughout the conflict, only on rare occasions did the security personnel come to patrol this part of the region. While I was in Jumla, I found only two gates. This being the administrative centre of the whole district, the government tried to maintain its control throughout the Jumla valley and as a result the security forces often went to patrol the area and destroyed these gates whenever they came across them. They also destroyed gates in Sinja valley, but these would be rebuilt when the security forces had left the area.

The building of gates became one of the ways of showing Maoist presence as well as Maoist authority in the region. These edifices were deliberately built in busy places to reach wider audience, where many people would come together, e.g., Tato Pani (the hot water spring bathing area; photo 2), or pass through, e.g. main paths (most of the gates are erected on main paths rather than in villages). The majority of the people inhabiting this region are not educated, Maoists therefore made extensive use of visual means to spread their beliefs and to inspire villagers. They carved figures of Maoist leaders and their ideologues on gates or painted their portraits on walls, particularly in Sinja valley, to make these leaders seem more familiar to the villagers, which sometimes succeeded. The gates are sometimes also used to write down slogans, although most slogans are written on walls, or used to indicate territorial division. Some gates portray PLA members in action as if to glorify their acts, and some gates are constructed to commemorate fallen comrades. These represent 'memorial gates,' on which the names of their martyrs were written. Although Maoists are very attached to their *noms de guerre* and like to be known by these names, in Sinja valley they identified their martyrs by their real names and the places they originally came from. This suggests that the Maoists tried to return the real identity of their fallen comrades to them upon their death, by specifying their real names and the places they hailed from. Any passer-by can look at the list and pinpoint who came from his or her own village. However, in Mugu district, only the *noms de*

guerre of the martyrs are mentioned, so if a passer-by is not familiar with these, he or she can only count the total number of martyrs.

These Maoist gates have great local significance and were built at a particular moment in a very violent period of Nepalese history. Maoists built the gates to spread their convictions, to inspire villagers and also to honour their dead. The gates are living witnesses of the intensity of the Maoist movement at a local level. Some of the gates have now disappeared and some have fallen into ruin. In the future they might completely disappear and take some local history away with them. Therefore, these gates must be seen as historical evidence at the local level of the bloody civil war that Nepal fought for ten years, which cost more than 15,000 lives.

Jumla District

Photo 1. Lamra village [in 2007]



Photo 2. Tato Pani [in 2009]



Photo 3. Nagma village [in 2007]



Photo 4. Macche village [in 2007]



Photo 5. Sanni village [in 2007]



Photo 6. Ranni Khana [in 2007]



Photo 7. Larja village [in 2007]



Side A (left)



Side B (right)

Photo 8. Hat Sinja [in 2006, 2009]



Gate A [in 2006]



Gate A [in 2009]



Gate B [in 2006]



Gate B [in 2009]

Photo 9. Front of Botan village [2009]



Photo 10. Botan village [in 2006, 2007]



Gate A [in 2006]



Gate B [in 2007]

Photo 11. Budu village [in 2007]



Mugu District

Photo 12. Kawa village [in 2007]



Photo 13. Pāche Chaur [2007]



Gate A



Gate B



Gate B-1



Gate B-2

Photo 13a. Pâche Chaur [2007]



Gate C

Photo 14. Rara National Park [in 2009]



‘This is How we Joke’. Towards an appreciation of alternative values in performances of gender irony among the Gaddi of Himachal

Anja Wagner

What do we make of the jokes and irony that we encounter during our fieldwork, in particular in the realm of gender relations? Jokes and ironic performances have been a rather neglected field of anthropological inquiry. In an article on practices of flirting, teasing, and sexual joking, Caroline and Filippo Osella have drawn attention to the significance of ambiguity, indeterminacy and ambivalence as values in the context of South Asian anthropology (Osella and Osella 2000). Their analysis of flirting by youth in Kerala, and of the joking involved therein as a form of play, offers an alternative to the established framework of hierarchy and hierarchical relations that commonly forms the basis for anthropological analysis in the South Asian context. The present article discusses this approach vis-à-vis the established approach of seeing performances that portray alternative values as discourses of subversion or resistance to dominant power structures. I thereby follow Osella and Osella’s focus on the recognition of ambiguity and irony as values in and of themselves in my investigation of performances of gender irony and joking by women in Northwest India.

My argument draws on fieldwork conducted in the district of Kangra in the state of Himachal Pradesh between 2006 and 2009. Kangra women and their oral performances are known within anthropology through Kirin Narayan’s work on songs (1986, 1997), but here I am concerned with a different kind of performance and a different section of Kangra’s population, namely Gaddi women. The Gaddi are known throughout Himachal Pradesh as a shepherding people. The majority live in the districts of Chamba and Kangra and the men are still famous for their large flocks of sheep and goats, with which they move throughout the year, reaching the high pastures in the Himalayas in summer and the Punjab border area in winter. Today many – although not all – Gaddi families have left shepherding for other jobs, and for college education. However, most families, mainly the women, still practise subsistence agriculture and

thus form part of Kangra's large agricultural population. Gaddi is also the language spoken as first language by most Gaddi people. Gaddi families often live in the same villages and interact and share many things in daily life with non-Gaddi speakers. They are thus an integrated part of the Kangra and Himachali population (see Wagner forthcoming). However, when it comes to weddings and ritual performances, many Gaddi would argue for a distinct Gaddi identity. The performances I will describe in the following are part of what would be considered a Gaddi practice by Gaddi people themselves, and moreover a rather enjoyable one.

Irony and joking by women form part of wedding celebrations and preparations. From the day a wedding is fixed, that is, when the date of the wedding has been written down by the families' priests about four weeks prior to the wedding date, women from the family and neighbourhood of the prospective groom gather each night at the groom's home. They sing wedding songs, play drums, dance, and sometimes drink. The atmosphere is that of joy in anticipation of the wedding as well as enjoyment of the dancing and singing as a distraction from daily routines.¹ At any point during these evenings, the atmosphere might turn from one of innocent dancing and singing of wedding songs to that of hilarity and outright sexual joking. The joking culminates on the day of the wedding, after the groom's party – the men – has departed for the bride's home, where the wedding ceremony with the circumambulation of the sacred fire will take place. The women remain at the groom's home, where they continue to dance, sing, drink, and most of all joke, as I will show below.

Performances by North Indian women that play on gender roles during weddings are well known in South Asian ethnography and society. The best known forms are *gālī* – indecent songs containing mockery, abuses and insults that are often exchanged at weddings between relatives by marriage (cf. Raheja and Gold 1994: 45). Gaddi performances fit within this larger picture. Among the Gaddi too, *gālī* are exchanged between relatives of the groom's and the bride's side: for example, they can be sung at the groom's house when the bride's relatives come to visit on the third day of a marriage. However, I am concerned with a different kind of performance here, which takes place among the female relatives of

1 The singing is also a kind of 'ritual' obligation or *sevā*, marked by the distribution of sweets to all participants at the end of the evening.

the groom and seems more graphic and blunt than the common abusive songs. This should not be a surprise, because Gaddi kinship practices also differ from practices dominant in wider North Indian society. In contrast to the hierarchical and asymmetric Rajput marriages prevalent in Kangra (Parry 1979), Gaddi marriage relations are symmetrical and egalitarian (cf. Phillimore 1982). Divorce and remarriage are tolerated (*ibid.*), although Kriti Kapila's study from Kangra has shown that especially the younger generation increasingly adopts more restrictive and mainstream societal values (Kapila 2004).²

Since the 1990s, the academic discourse on women and gender performances in South Asia has been strongly influenced by the work of Gloria Raheja and Ann Gold (Raheja and Gold 1994).³ These authors see women's performances and especially their oral performances, songs and narratives, as a kind of alternative discourse to mainstream societal and often male-dominated discourse. They see them as a critical response and resistance to those 'more widely known, more audible, and perhaps more pervasive South Asian social and cultural conventions that insist that women be controlled and subordinate' (Raheja 1997: 2).

Raheja and Gold's thorough ethnographic work on women's oral performances in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, as well as, for example, Kirin Narayan's work in Kangra (1986, 1997), has shown that women are not simply silently or uncritically approving of the conventions that assign young married women in North India the role of the obedient, modest and shy bride who blends smoothly into her husband's family without drawing much attention to herself, whether in family interactions or in interactions with outsiders. Rather, women are aware and at times critical of dominant conventions that assign them a subordinate position within their conjugal family. In this, the authors point to the existence of alternative discourses and forms of female resistance within the larger context of prevalent norms and conventions in South Asian societies.

2 Phillimore, in addition, reports on the special case of a localised phenomenon of Gaddi women becoming *sadhin*, a celibate state presented in the idiom of female asceticism and masculinisation, in Kangra in the 1970s. He interprets this as a reaction to wider Kangra society that does not grant women the option to remain unmarried (1991: 343). Thus, he reports on a temporal and localised way for women to lead a life that is accepted as different from mainstream conventions.

3 The more general anthropological discussion has further been influenced by Lila Abu Lughod's work (1986, 1990).

Similarly, in her analysis of everyday resistance of Bedouin women Abu-Lughod (1990) sees resistance as a diagnostic of power and interprets women's non-compliance with hegemonic discourse and decisions as an indicator of the webs of power that control their lives. From this point of view, women's performances amount to a subversion of dominant discourse and can tell us much about the different structures of power and dominance they resist.

A further point of reference for interpreting Gaddi women's performances could be the aspect of fertility expressed in them. Overt or covert fertility symbolism is prevalent in other parts of Hindu wedding rites (see, for example, Fruzetti 1982) and might well be connected to sexual joking too. However, in my understanding the idiom of fertility is not relevant for the current meaning given to these performances by Gaddi women and did not appear in the women's own explanations of their joking (see below). I will not take up the topic of fertility symbolism here, since I am interested in the current meaning of these practices.

The question I will discuss below is whether Gaddi women's performances can fruitfully be understood as a further instance of expressions of resistance to the dominant discourse, albeit one is that more graphic in form (though not necessarily in content) than the well-known abusive songs sung by women throughout the wider region or, rather, whether there is a need for an alternative framework through which to make sense of the practices of joking and performances of gender irony. In order to answer this question I will first give a description of the performances involved.

Ethnographic description: gender irony and sexual joking

Significantly, and in contrast to most of the performances described by Raheja and Gold and Narayan, Gaddi women's practices are not merely oral performances, nor do all oral versions come in the form of songs. My ethnography is rather about jokes, gestures, skits and other theatrical portrayals. The first time I ever witnessed this kind of joking, I was at a house where one of the sons was to be married, at night time one week after the date for the wedding had been officially fixed. The women of the extended family, who included the groom's mother, his father's brother's wife, an unmarried sister, his and his father's brother's sons' wives, and three or four women from the neighbouring houses, had gathered in one

room of the house to sing, dance, and celebrate the upcoming wedding. I had stepped out of the room after an hour of dancing to Gaddi folk as well as popular Punjabi songs from cassettes. When I went back inside, the whole atmosphere in the room had changed. Because I had only just started to learn the Gaddi language I did not understand much of the conversation at the time. However, I immediately noticed the change in the tone and mood of the singing and dancing. My slightly edited and translated field notes read:

First there was singing and drumming, then dancing as usual, later music from cassette and then again singing and drumming of Gaddi songs. Suddenly the atmosphere changed. I had gone outside and when I came back, the neighbour x had dressed up as a man with a turban and a walking stick. She was singing and making gestures. There was a question-answer play between her and two of the daughter-in-laws. The atmosphere was cheerful. [...] Then she started to dance on hands and feet turning herself around her own axis, interrupted by her own fits of laughter. Then she played the same story on the next person. Later on the neighbour and the daughter-in-laws y and z sang something about a doctor who had come and played the role of the doctor, checking lungs and giving injections among much laughter.

The first time I took part in one of these performances, I did not understand much of what I saw. The change in behaviour appeared to be rather sudden and for me unexpected. I will give more details of the jokes and their indecent content, which I have observed many times since, below, but first I offer some general observations.

When the atmosphere during the dancing changes to one of joking and sexual allusions, any boys and men that might be present are sent outside. Only small boys up to school going age are allowed to stay and often huddle in their mothers' laps. The older boys are strictly and even violently told to leave. Girls of all ages, on the contrary, are allowed to watch at any time. Generally, however, the older girls only dropped in briefly. They mostly preferred their own dancing together with the boys in a separate room. Punjabi and Bollywood music was apparently more popular among the youth than married women's joking during the time of my fieldwork.

The women who are present are the women of the groom's household as well as their neighbours, generally but not exclusively part of the same local descent group, and not necessarily solely Gaddi neighbours. Additionally, the married daughters of the family belonging to different generations (those of the groom and his father) will try to spend a few nights at the groom's house prior to the wedding, where they are called to help with preparations including the nightly singing and dancing. On the night of the wedding nearly all women related to the groom will be present. This large group spans different generations and groups of relatives on the mother's as well as the father's side. One characteristic of these performances is, thus, that they include a heterogeneous group of women in terms of generations and kin groups.

The performances and the joking do not stop at the play with gestures, dance steps, and song lines. Women perform a variety of skits and roles. The spot in the room or courtyard that is kept free for dancing then provides a place similar to a stage, where the performing women face the others.

Dressing up for a role, which is frequently done, largely means dressing up as a man. The change from a woman to a man's costume is rather impressive. The women take out the nose-rings typical of women in the region (elder women may even wear one large one on each side of their nose.) They draw large black moustaches on themselves with charcoal. They build a turban or put on a cap and wear a shirt and trousers or the Gaddi *colā*, a short sheep wool gown formerly worn by shepherds. With the *colā* the headscarf, then tied around the waist, is often converted into the essential male organ which can be pointed at the other women when lifting the skirt.

A skit that was popular in 2007 and 2008 is as follows, with minor variations depending on the performers involved. Two women leave quietly. The first woman comes back dressed as a man in shirt and pants with a cap. She has drawn a charcoal moustache over her mouth and taken out her nose-ring or rings. She enters the room crouching like an old man over a stick, carrying a bundle over her shoulder. The second woman is dressed as a newly married bride. Like the real bride, she wears a *nuāncarī*, the Gaddi women's dress, and a long veil that covers her head, face, and the upper part of her body up to the waist. She enters one step behind the 'man'. The 'man' faces the audience and starts to tell a story,

saying that the girl has told ‘him’ that she has to go and get married. ‘He’ would be from village x and – what should one do with the poor girl who had no one – he had agreed to bring her here. ‘He’ asks for the mother of the groom, who is made to stand up. After this introduction of the mother of the groom, the ‘bride’ immediately throws back her veil revealing her face and jumps at her ‘mother-in-law’s’ neck, hugging her and shouting ‘ah, my mother-in-law, ah, I found my mother-in-law’. Subsequently she peers over the groom’s mother’s shoulder into the audience asking ‘now, where is my husband?’ This episode of *milnā* – the ‘meeting’ between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, where the bride shows none of the shyness and modesty a real bride would be expected to show – is followed by the giving of gifts to the groom’s relations. The old ‘man’ unties his bundle and distributes the gifts that are stored inside. These gifts, unlike proper marriage gifts, are visibly old and worn items, although generally they consist of clothing appropriate for weddings. Apologizing that the gifts are not really new, ‘he’ hands out the gifts, promising that next time he will surely bring something good. Women in the audience are called out according to their kinship relation to the groom and awarded their gifts, accompanied by laughter from the audience. On one occasion I observed, shoes and a *salvār* (women’s pants) were given to the *mausi* (mother’s sister) and the mother of the groom, and a woman’s panties to the groom’s *māmī* (mother’s brother’s wife) – the latter was met with screaming laughter from the audience. Considering the kinship relations between giver and receiver, the panties here were presented by a woman to her brother’s wife, that is, in a highly marked kinship relation that I will comment on below.

At one wedding I attended, the popular skit of bringing in the bride was followed by a second skit. Here the mother of the groom explicitly asked one of her sisters to perform the second skit by handing her a piece of flat, round bread, a chapati or *fulkā*. The sister tore a small piece out of the chapati so that it had a hole in the middle. She then approached different women in the crowd with the chapati flat in her hand asking: *Tere indā pakānā?* (‘Do you know how to cook it?’). The person she asked – already laughing – answered: ‘Yes, I do.’ The women were screaming with laughter. The performer looked at them saying: ‘Oho, she knows!’ and holding the chapati up showing its hole to the first one: *Tere sharam na indā?* (‘Are you not ashamed?’). She then danced with the chapati in

her hand which she pointed at the crowd, singing several times *āk, āk fulkā* ('one, one bread') and subsequently went on to play the same game with another woman. To clarify: The dialogue on 'baking bread', apart from its visual aspect, has a double meaning – the actual act of cooking, on the one hand, and an allusion to sexual intercourse, on the other. Answering the question 'Do you know how to cook it?' is hard to avoid with reference to bread, since baking chapatis is one of women's daily chores and more or less a prerequisite to marriage, but the answer obviously invites a different interpretation here.

Further skits are played with similar and less elaborate costumes. Some women also practise the art of humorous story-telling rather than performing skits. Additionally, there are several character roles that are often played. Among them are the role of the doctor and the role of the old shepherd. The doctor is played by a woman dressed with male attributes – pants or simply a hat or turban. She enters the room and asks the women about their well-being and upon being informed about pains in the back, joints or legs, she then prescribes and administers *injections*. The whole dialogue becomes a play on words and meanings since the word *injection* itself is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The character of the old shepherd, in turn, is more graphic in performance. The performer will usually wear a *colā* and carry a cup or a small pitcher. Producing the familiar sounds to call on goats, 'he' will set out for milking, asking the others which of the goats is giving milk. As a response the women point out someone in the audience and the 'shepherd' attempts to place the cup between the appointed woman's legs.

Most easily performed, however, are a range of obscene gestures. At any point during the dancing, the women might start to run into each other pointing sticks or their hands between each other's legs. And usually a couple of elder women, when dancing in pairs of two or three, all of a sudden start to roll the bottom part of their *kamīz* (shirt) into a phallus, dancing obscenely or pointing it into the audience. Some go so far as to physically 'assault' other women, e.g., by climbing onto their laps or pulling at their legs. These gestures are often the start of the joking and usually appear prior to, as well as in between, the performance of skits.

In their songs and in the lines of their jokes, women address each other throughout by referring to their kinship relation to the groom, *lāḍā* in Gaddi. Thus, a woman singled out to be the recipient of the next teasing

is approached as *lāḍe kī mamī* (groom's mother), *lāḍe kī māmī* (groom's mother's brother's wife), *lāḍe kī bahin* (groom's sister), and so on.

While the repertoire of gestures, role plays and full-fledged skits is only performed during the nightly song and dance gatherings, joking and irony in the wake of a wedding is not restricted to these evening performances. During the wedding preparations, humorous jokes and witty stories are also told during the day among the women of the groom's neighbourhood, that is, those of the same *sharik* or local descent group as the groom's family. The regular afternoon chat among women from a house cluster is an excellent occasion for joking. More formalised jokes are told, as well as stories that tell of a happening related to someone who is known to all. In the latter case the storyteller usually starts by saying something like: 'You all know x, don't you? Guess what she did!' The person in question might be a daughter-in-law in or of the village, but also a sister of one of the women. The stories often verge on real, exaggerated or imagined happenings that involve a transgression of norms of behaviour which are formally unaccepted but are still likely to happen to every woman at some point in time. The character of the story might have accidentally shown her face or spoken back to her father-in-law or husband's elder brother, or even been seduced into doing so by a drunken and misbehaving counterpart. Both are persons with whom she would usually maintain a relationship marked by formal distance in her tone of voice, and also by veiling her face. The shock and shame displayed by the woman upon her realising her mistake is the punch line of the story, which is greeted with laughter.

Interpretation and theoretical discussion: joking as alternative discourse?

As the last example clearly shows, playing with prevalent conventions is certainly an aspect of the joking performances of Gaddi women. The conventions that are played with and reversed in the performances are those which pertain to the behaviour of women towards men in their conjugal family, as well as to the behaviour of the new bride, as in the skit of the over-confident and immodest bride described above. The new bride of the skit ignores conventional behaviour in at least two ways. First, it is the bride who initiates the journey to the groom's house, a journey on which a real bride is expected to set out only reluctantly, carried away

first by her brother and then by her husband's relations in a palanquin. Second, she is anxious to meet her mother-in-law, whom she greets not as a person of respect by touching her feet with the end of her headscarf, but as an equal by directly hugging her around her neck. Furthermore, she asks about the whereabouts of her husband, whereas a real bride would show no interest. In sum, this bride does not behave shyly, *sharmatī*, and does not display the modesty or shame, *sharam*, that a woman entering her in-laws' home should show. The imperative of modesty is further played with in the skit with the *fulkā*, as in the lines 'do you know how to cook it?' and its consequent 'are you not ashamed?' clearly show. Here, apart from conventional respectful behaviour, the frank discussion and admission of knowledge of sexual matters is at stake. In both cases, as in the other examples of playing the doctor or making more simple gestures, the modesty, respect, shame or shyness (*sharam*) that a woman should display in certain situations are played with through reversals or allusions that provoke laughter because of non-compliance with the norm. In addition, joking through male roles as well as the play with gestures not only makes fun of men (and especially old men), it also shows a rather affirmative stance towards sexuality, that is an openness and acknowledgement of its pleasures.

So far, the discussion of Gaddi women's performances is in accordance with Raheja and Gold's analysis of women's oral traditions as a kind of alternative discourse to the dominant conventions mentioned above. The performances, songs and skits show a different side of those who are otherwise modest women. They turn expected conventional behaviour upside down and can therefore be seen as a comment on a dominant discourse that assigns North Indian woman the role of the chaste and subservient female in her conjugal home.

Raheja and Gold have further noted the play on moral behaviour and the legitimacy of female desires expressed in women's oral performances in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (Raheja and Gold 1994, Gold 1990: 120). As Gold notes, in Rajasthani women's songs it is the veiled woman who uses her veil not only to protect her modesty, but equally to unveil and seduce: 'Coverings are not opaque; wraps can also unwrap...' (Raheja and Gold 1994: 52).

However, while Gaddi women's performances play with values and social conventions, I do not think they can be understood satisfactorily

simply as performances of a cultural critique along the lines suggested by Raheja and Gold or Abu-Lughod. While Raheja and Gold (1994) have taken the irony, ambiguities and indeterminacy in women's songs fully into account, Raheja (1997) interprets women's performances within the framework of power relations that inform the lives of the performers and thus vis-à-vis authoritative representations of gender, kinship, sex and authority. Gold, in the same volume, comments on the difference between 'private' encounters between spouses, where ideas of romance may well exist, and 'public' encounters that are shaped by distance and non-interaction:

All I have said about the latter [observable husband-wife relations] – concerning women's reticence before their spouses – applies to public encounters. Private encounters, everyone knows, are different. And of course, by definition, they are unknown to anyone other than the couple themselves. (Gold 1997: 106)

However, it is the 'public' convention with which Gold contrasts the songs. She states that 'female genres posit the legitimacy of female desires and place a strong positive value on their fulfillment – a value divinely sanctioned in the songs' (1997: 120). Female voices are sanctioned by references to similar demands made by goddesses or by positioning women's actions in the context of received blessings (*ibid.*). Therefore, Gold analyses the songs and stories within the framework of power relations and as a form of cultural critique. In her analysis, female desires need sanctioning because they deviate from another more prevalent norm and are only expressed within the ambiguity of this sanctioning. I strongly disagree with Gold on this point. Gold herself notes that in 'private relationships between spouses [...] rural South Asian culture allows and imagines intimacy' (*ibid.*: 106). This intimacy, I argue, is not only known by the couple themselves. Nor is it only to be known from what people confide about their 'private' life in intimate conversations with ethnographers.

First, rather than the quite absolute notions of 'public' and 'private' spheres, thinking in terms of shifting contexts that allow for or require certain behavioural conventions seems more fitting. Interactions and behavioural conventions are much more nuanced than a simple public-

private divide suggests. 'Context' here refers to both the people present and the place where an interaction takes places.

Second, alternative conventions for behaviour are visible and actually quite often directly visible in interactions, or at least known and recognised by others, including anthropologists. There are, for example, many instances where a positive attitude towards sexuality and much greater assertiveness is expressed by women, although these have been less intensely reported on in anthropological literature.

Among the Gaddi, this finds expression first and foremost in the joking relationship between *bhābhī* and *nanand*, brother's wife and husband's sister. The *bhābhī-nanand* relationship is a very pronounced joking relationship among the Gaddi. A woman will invariably joke with her husband's sister, and if the sister is married this will generally involve sexual joking. This joking relationship is well characterised by Radcliffe-Brown's definition of joking relationships (although not by the function he attributes to it). It is 'a relationship between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offense' (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 195). For the Gaddi this is a symmetrical relationship: a woman and her husband's sister and a woman and her brother's wife do mutually joke with each other. In this relationship, talk about or hints of sex, desires, and pleasures are appropriate and acted out as teasing. Moreover, sexual joking can even be required by convention if *bhābhī* and *nanand* meet in the presence of others, especially if those others are women in the same kinship relation. The joking does not take on a hidden form if other women (for example, a mother-in-law) or children are present, and even if the father-in-law or husband is just around the corner, well within earshot, although he will never be an active listener. As a matter of fact, during my fieldwork 'my' *bhābhī* teased me especially when other neighbouring women were visiting, and it was the mother-in-law who recognised that I would not know how to respond and fed me the answers, making sure I did not let any teasing pass without an appropriate response.

The question of moral sanctioning raised by Raheja and Gold is not predominant in Gaddi women's joking. There are no references to divine sanctions or actions found in the songs and stories analysed by Gold. Rather, sexual relations and behavioural transgressions are laughed about

and played with, leaving the question of moral sanctioning open. Judging from the joking between *bhābhī* and *nanand*, the expression of female desires does not need sanctioning for these women. What is needed is the appropriate occasion and context for the desires to be expressed.

Further nuances in conventions are visible in two other joking relationships, namely that of *jījā* and *sālī* (sister's husband and wife's sister) and *bhābhī* and *devar* (brother's wife and husband's younger brother). The former is another very pronounced joking relationship not only among the Gaddi, but across large swathes of North Indian society. The latter is a relationship characterised by joking and informality in contrast to the avoidance relationship between a woman and her husband's elder brother. The only adult man I ever saw as a direct observer of a Gaddi women's joking performance was related to the mother of the groom and her sisters as a *jījā*. He had returned early from the marriage celebrations at the bride's house and placed himself in a chair in one corner of the courtyard where his wife and the other women were performing their jokes. He did not remain a distant observer for long, because his wife's sisters started to group around him and directly address him in their jokes.

Talk about intimacy and relationships, however, is not only common in joking relationships. It is also observable in interactions between husband and wife, especially if both are not at their conjugal but in her natal home (Wagner forthcoming).⁴ Alternative conventions for 'open' behaviour among the Gaddi apply also in the presence of husband-wife and brother-sister pairs; that is, when a married couple meets the husband's sister and sister's husband or the wife's brother and brother's wife. Here the interaction between the partners will be much more relaxed than in the presence of the elder generation, especially the husband's relatives, and will include a great deal of teasing, generally on the moodiness, physical shortcomings and other weaknesses of the partner.

These alternative and less formalised behavioural conventions become visible if the focus is shifted from the behaviour of women as a single category to the interaction between pairs - whether married couples, pairs of women, or other mixed-gender pairs. The term 'gender' and its replacement of the term 'women' points to an understanding

4 I restrict myself to observations on young couples here. As is well known, different conventions hold for the behaviour of older couples with married children, where open interactions between husband and wife are much more common in their home.

of categories such as men and women as mutually constitutive and interdependent rather than as separate spheres (cf. Scott 1986). Still, gender has largely not been studied as gender in relations but rather as gender in opposition; that is, either in the study of women or the study of men. Historians of South Asian religion and classical Indic studies have described the emphasis on marriage and of the couple in South Asia in Hindu rituals, where husband and wife not only act as a unit, but are often literally bound together by their clothing. Anthropologists, too, have of course noted instances where emphasis is placed on the married couple, or the brother-sister pair, for instance during the festival of *rakhsā bandhan* when the brother-sister relation is celebrated. When it comes to 'less ritualised' contexts, however, ethnographers still seem reluctant to bring their observations on male-female interactions to the fore. However, it is not men and women pitted against each other as opposed groups representing hegemonic and subversive discourses respectively. Rather realities are much more fragmented. 'Women's' alternative discourses are shared by men and women too are protagonists of hegemonic conventions (see Raheja and Gold 1994).

All in all, the play with conventions during Gaddi wedding performances is in line with other spheres and situations of daily life, where mentioning intimacy and joking about gender relations, as well as sexuality or simply alternative conventions for interactions, are frequent and even part of expected behaviour. The jokes performed during wedding preparations do not merely play on formal conventions. They belong to a broader field of talk, ideas and joking that are publicly expressed in *bhābhi-nanand* joking relationships in the context of weddings, but also (as Gold too has noted), are not absent from interactions between spouses or from ideas of partnership. All this puts the authority of the so-called 'dominant' representations of gender into question: why contrast the joking performances only with those social conventions that define well-known gender roles and the 'public' behaviour of women and thus understand them merely as a subversive genre, instead of linking them to other social and moral values existing in Gaddi and wider Indian society?

I think one reason for the persistence of the analytic framework of hierarchy and resistance is the fact that the study of gender in South Asia is still strongly shaped by its academic roots, namely the developments in feminist studies that led to the anthropological programme of

foregrounding women in ethnographies (Bennett 1983, Fruzzetti 1982, Jacobsen and Wadley 1992). Before contemporary analysis turned towards the more specialised ‘gender and...’ topics – gender and politics, gender and reproductive health, gender in education, and recently also the study of men and masculinities – gender studies in India meant by and large the study of women. Together with the practice of focusing on what women do and say went the notion of power relations as inherent to gender questions. As Scott put it, ‘Gender is a primary field within which [...] power is articulated’ (1986: 1069). In the specific field of South Asian ethnography, the work of Gloria Raheja and Ann Gold on women’s oral performances has probably made this association of gender with power relations most explicit.

These interpretations, however, fail to highlight what women quite literally do on these occasions: they joke. The joking and irony involved here, in my understanding, is more than a statement or expression of power relations and thus needs to be analysed in and of itself.

This is in accord with what women themselves say about their performances. On one occasion, a woman who had just shed her costume as a man came up to me and asked if I could understand what they said in their jokes, then went on to inform me ‘this is how we make fun, this is how we joke at weddings’. The usual explanation I got for these performances is: ‘we joke, we make fun.’ One woman, my *bhābhī*, with whom I discussed the joking at weddings, saw the *bhābhī-nanand* relationship at the base of the joking, from where it would extend to all the women present. Although it is true that *bhābhī* and *nanand* meet during weddings, especially in the early phases of singing, a groom’s sister is mostly absent because she lives in a different place and will not be able to come to her natal home every night. So here it is not necessarily the two sides of in-married versus out-married women that meet in the joking. From my observations, it is rather a kind of generalised joking that takes place, apart from the standard joking relationships. So it is not uncommon for a young woman to act in a skit that is aimed at her mother-in-law or at her husband’s elder brother’s wife – both persons who should normally be treated with respect. Kinship, however, does matter and as might be expected the respective pairs of brother’s wife and husband’s sister will engage in heavy teasing (as noted in the example given above) and more generally the groom’s

mother and especially his *māmī* (mother's brother's wife) will receive their share of attacks.

There is another side to the reversal of social conventions acted out in joking performances. It is well recognised by the men and women concerned that the expected behaviour of, for example, the newly wedded bride, is a role she has to play. As no one would expect the new bride to be a shy person, women explicitly talk about the way they will have to comport themselves in certain situations or places. This explicit awareness of role playing was brought home when I was taken in by the performance of shyness of a new bride during her wedding. When I was asked by the other families in the village how I liked her after our first meeting after her wedding, I expressed my astonishment that she was quite outspoken and laughed a lot. In turn, the others laughed at me asking 'but what did you expect?'⁵ This recognition that a certain behaviour is expected of women (and also of men) in specific situations and places probably contributes to the play with irony and makes part of the joke of role reversal skits.

From dominant discourse to public morality, from critique to play

In search of an alternative framework for interpreting 'alternative discourses', I turn to a more recent approach by Osella and Osella. The authors first of all replace the term 'dominant discourse' by 'public morality' (2006: 107). 'Public' morality, rather than evoking questions of power and resistance, evokes knowledge about other, 'hidden scripts' (ibid.) that are not displayed but still recognised. What is widely acknowledged as the correct or 'public' morality does apply to many but does not apply to all contexts of social interaction, whether open or hidden. Youths behave differently in each other's presence from how they behave in the presence of their parents; groups of women or girls behave differently from groups of men or boys or mixed-gender groups. Morality and behavioural conventions thus depend on context. With the Gaddi, for example, what is unthinkable in front of a husband's elder brother because of the avoidance or respect relationship with him is not only acceptable but also common and even expected in front of his younger brother or sister, to whom a woman stands in a joking relationship. Her

5 Later on I learned that the question of how one likes the bride should be answered with a comment on her physical appearance.

open behaviour, in short, varies according to which person a woman is interacting with and the degree of formality required by the social relationship involved. Here I prefer the expression 'formal morality' to 'public morality', because 'public' refers to ideas about public and private spaces that are not easily translatable into different cultural contexts and are too rigid in their opposition to leave space for 'semi-public' spheres. By 'formal morality', on the other hand, I mean conventions in a formalised, official context in contrast to behavioural conventions in less formalised contexts for interactions where other existing ideas and values come to the fore.

Following Osella and Osella, we should thus not look for hierarchies and their reinforcement everywhere, but give also room to other 'under-theorized values' in South Asian anthropology (ibid 2000: 190). Osella and Osella look at practices of flirting, apparent harassment, and romance between youths. They show that in flirting, hierarchy is consciously played with while it is reversed, intensified or negated. The authors do not merely see these practices as counter-practices that critique or reinforce well-documented values of hierarchy in Indian society. They argue for the consideration of ambiguity, indeterminacy, and ambivalence as 'highly important principles of everyday Indian social life' that 'may act as independent sources of aesthetic and moral value', although these values have been under-theorised in South Asian anthropology (ibid.: 189-190).

I think that an understanding of Gaddi women's sexual joking at marriages fits within the line of thought advocated by Osella and Osella. The humour and irony expressed in the jokes is not trivial (ibid.: 196) but rather reveals the existence of a morality independent of 'correct' formal principles. Gaddi women's performances of gender irony thus do not merely represent a subaltern discourse that subverts and reinforces a dominant discourse on hierarchy, but portray a context where moral values that exist in everyday life are expressed in addition to the correct formal morality – as in the context of interactions between husband and wife or the joking between brother's wife and husband's sister. Thus, these jokes can be seen as revealing values different from formal moral conventions without primarily being a critique of the latter.

I would like to add to Osella and Osella that it is not only alternative values that are under-theorised in South Asian anthropology. Together with a neglect of alternatives to a formal morality in ethnographic

descriptions, it is also a positive attitude towards sexuality – as I see it expressed in Gaddi women’s joking and performances – that is rarely written about in the context of Indian women, who are usually described as facing the pressure of social conventions that phrase marriage and sexual relations in terms of kinship norms and reproductive questions. Gaddi women, as well as the women Gold encountered (Raheja and Gold 1994), clearly express a different stance towards desires and intimacy in the performances and everyday interactions described here.

Conclusion

What do the women then joke about: men, gender roles, themselves, sex, or maybe all of these and many other things too? In my view, the established framework of resistance and alternative discourses does not sufficiently grasp women’s practices. Neither would any reference to fertility rituals, which I have not discussed here. The scope of analysis has to be widened in order to make sense of the irony at the heart of the performances. While credit has to be given to authors like Raheja and Gold for recognizing the existence of alternative views, Osella and Osella’s terms ‘public morality’ and ‘alternative values’ draw attention to the parallel existence of conflicting but independent values of everyday life.

These values, moreover, become more visible if we shift our focus from exclusive male or female performances towards a recognition of couples, whether husband and wife, brother and sister, or sister’s husband and wife’s sister. Flirting and related practices, (and, I would add, performances of gender irony) are part of gendering processes crucial to the production of heterosexuality and the married heterosexual couple (Osella and Osella 2006: 116). As well as paying the necessary attention to processes of gendering and thus constituting in whatever way fragmented identities, attention should be drawn to the products of these processes. Drawing on Osella and Osella’s general call for a study of the production of conventional heterosexual couples in South Asia, I advocate a move away from the mere acknowledgement of ‘mutuality and interdependency between the sexes’ in the construction of gender categories (cf. Gold 1997: 129) – and towards the recognition of pairs or couples as the product of gendering processes.

Through a turn to the recognition of alternative moral values and irony, as well as the study of couples, I advocate a change of perspective,

or better, a widening of our view on gender performances. South Asian anthropology has long recognised that 'each culture harbours within itself critiques of its most authoritative pronouncements' (Raheja and Gold 1994: 193). To understand Gaddi women's joking not merely as a critique of hegemonic discourse, but rather as an independent everyday morality that exists in their society, opens new alleys for analysis that lead to the appreciation of a plurality of values in South Asia, among others the value of irony in itself.

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Report on the Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya 2012

Khem R. Shreesh

The inaugural edition of the Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya was held in Kathmandu from 18 to 22 July, 2012. Co-hosted by the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies (ANHS), Britain-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) and Social Science Baha (SSB), the conference was divided into three segments. The first part was devoted to 'Inequality and Affirmative Action: Situating Nepal in Global Debates'; the second consisted of papers that focused broadly on Nepal and the Himalaya; and the third was a policy dialogue on the subject of ayurveda and medicinal plant conservation.

The conference on affirmative action recognised the need to address inequality arising from various historical and social processes. It provided a venue for an exchange of ideas as well as open discussions on inequality and affirmative action among academics, policy-makers and activists. The conference came at an opportune moment since Nepal has been planning the historic exercise of state restructuring which is meant to lead towards a more equitable future for the country.

The first two days consisted of closed sessions, with keynote presentations in the evenings open to the public. Researchers and experts from Nepal and elsewhere presented 22 papers that dealt with the concept, nature and production/perpetuation of inequality along with analyses of attempts at addressing the issue through various policy measures. Keynote presentations were made by Ashwini Deshpande (University of Delhi), Glenn C. Loury (Brown University), Marc Galanter (University of Wisconsin) and Hilary Silver (Brown University). The third day was open to the public, and consisted of three panels in which nine papers were presented for a more general audience, with a separate panel organised in the evening for policy-makers and political leaders.

All the papers recognised the societal harm caused by inequality and looked at attempts at addressing inequality through affirmative action programmes. While the papers agreed that the existence of inequality in society has been universally acknowledged, they differed on the causes of

inequality and measures (to be) taken to address it. There was also general agreement that inequality results either from political design or from geographic, cultural and religious locations in society, not to mention factors such as ethnicity and gender.

In the context of Nepal, the conference highlighted how inequality became institutionalised with the promulgation of the Muluki Ain of 1854, which divided the Nepali society along the Hindu caste hierarchy, and created identity-based social categories. It was argued that marginalisation had resulted as much from regional/geographic and ethnic inequality as from a deliberate policy of neglect by the state. The centrality of the state was highlighted in all the papers, be it in producing and/or perpetuating inequality, or through its role in correcting these wrongs.

The papers also shed light on the ways in which inequality affects different groups differently. Since marginalisation and discrimination are merely two facets of inequality, the consequences of inequality are felt to be ultimately tied to social identity, leading to lack of control over and access to power, property and resources, which negatively affects the capability of the individuals, and results in under-representation of certain castes and groups/communities in the job market and state mechanisms.

Addressing inequality through various policy measures, either as a public good or as redressal for historical wrongs, were discussed in many of the papers. While some argued that equality was something to be desired of all humans, others focused on addressing inequality as reparation for historical wrongs that had led to the marginalisation and exclusion of many members of society. The three main arguments on why inequality needs to be addressed were: it will bridge the gap created by social marginalisation which lead to disparities in skill acquisition, and, consequently, in socio-economic status; it will ensure representation of the marginalised and include them in societal processes from which they are currently excluded; and, it will eventually result in greater social integration.

Various benefits of and strategies for affirmative action were discussed based on experiences from other countries. The flipside of affirmative action has been seen in India, where it has been implemented in the form of reservations in many spheres of public life. But, it has also led to stigmatisation of the process itself, stemming from the fact that although

victims of inequality have unequal bases to start with, and because it involves preferential valuation of social identity, the enhanced access to productive opportunities for these target groups cannot be achieved without lowering standards and/or distorting human capital decisions. Another issue plaguing affirmative action measures is the apprehension of those who have not benefited from such policies, often leading to a 'us vs them' divide in societies where implemented.

The fourth day of the conference, 21 July, was dedicated to a series of panels where the presentations focused on transition and transformation of the Himalayan region. A total of 27 papers were presented in 16 parallel sessions. While some of the papers focused on stability and stagnation as the main features of the present transition of Nepal; others charted changes in Nepal's diversity, culture, formation of identity and resistance using the media. Other themes closely related to the transition were non-electoral representation, and local democracy and governance. A series of papers focused on policy research in the fields of climate and the link and conflict between biodiversity and livelihood, highlighting traditional knowledge systems of local farming practices and ethnobotany.

The last day of the conference was devoted to a policy dialogue among researchers on 'Health and Nature: A Policy Dialogue on Ayurveda and Medicinal Plant Conservation'. This event brought together stakeholders from both the government and the private sector, as well as researchers and natural health-care practitioners working in the still largely separate institutions of indigenous health-care and environmental conservation.

BOOK REVIEWS

Introducing Tibetan Buddhism

by Geoffrey Samuel.

New York: Routledge. 2012. 280 pp. 72 b/w photos. ISBN 976-0-415-45665-4, price 24.97 €.

Reviewed by Georgios T. Halkias

Geoffrey Samuel, the author of numerous publications on Tibetan culture, including *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (1993) and the translation from German and Italian of Tucci's authoritative work, *The Religions of Tibet* (1980), is well up to the task of offering a knowledgeable and instructive introduction to Tibetan Buddhism for the Routledge World Religions Book Series. His present work is carefully arranged in twelve chapters that stand as independent units, though material is often taken up again in other sections, aiding students by revisiting topics previously covered. There is also a useful chronology of important dates and events, an appendix that serves as a tantalising sample of some important Tibetan lamas and their lineages, a glossary of the key Sanskrit and Tibetan terms mentioned (in phonetic rendition), and a substantial index at the end of the book.

The first two chapters, 'Background' and 'The development of Buddhism in Tibet', provide the reader with a good sense of the historical vicissitudes that led to the foundation and development of all the major Tibetan schools of Buddhism. Chapters Three and Four are dedicated to the clarification of some fundamental soteriological aspects of Buddhism from the textual perspective of sutras and tantras, and their fusion in the Tibetan arrangement of the union of the three vehicles. It is the hope of this reviewer that future introductions on Tibetan Buddhism will address the religious and political importance of Sukhavati (*bde ba can*) traditions for the formation and identity of Tibetan Buddhism, where we find a unique synthesis between esoteric and exoteric traditions and interpretations of Pure Land ideology not found elsewhere in Asia (for a pertinent bibliography see Halkias 2012, Kapstein 2003, Schwiieger 1978, and Skorupski 1995). The remaining chapters are innovative and refreshing, as they furnish us with information usually absent in most standard introductions to this subject. An anthropological interpretation

of the material throughout the book and an emphasis on current events reflects the author's expertise and offers an up to date perspective on the application and interpretation of Buddhism in Tibetan contexts.

Chapters Five ('Tibetan Buddhism as a system of knowledge'), Seven ('Lamas and other religious practitioners'), Eight ('Tibetan Buddhism as Practical Religion'), Nine ('Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan identity'), Ten ('Tibetan Buddhism, women and gender'), Eleven ('The Bon religion of Tibet: pre-Buddhist survival or variant form of Buddhism') and Twelve ('Tibetan Buddhism today and tomorrow') are especially illuminating in this respect, providing a more grounded approach to the subject of Tibetan religiosity in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular. For example, in the ninth chapter, the author delves into an insightful narrative of earlier Tibetan notions that held the natural landscape as sacred, imbued with spirits and deities, and examines how these conceptions reverberated with Buddhist ascetics and pilgrimage sites that reinforced a Tibetan tradition of identification with locality and perpetuated kin and clan-based social orders. Maintaining good relations with the surrounding local gods and spirits is integral to Tibetan society and practical concerns of this nature spill into a variety of religious sentiments that find expression in human oracles, divination techniques and rituals which are often managed by Buddhist specialists (chapter eight). This said, the last chapter, which deals with the revival of Buddhism in the post-Mao era, called by some the 'later diffusion' (*yang-dar*) of Buddhism, is rather frugal in its treatment of the topic and suggested bibliography, especially in respect to the development and transformation of Tibetan Buddhism in the West (for useful readings on this topic see Coleman 2001, Lopez 1998, Prebish & Baumann 2002, and Prebish & Tanaka 1998).

As with other introductory works of this kind, certain limitations are to be expected. Nevertheless, the author has succeeded in striking an admirable balance between simplification on the one hand and expert treatment on the other, with the section on 'Discussion Questions' leaning towards the former and the suggestions for 'Further Reading' at the end of each chapter toward the latter. I have my reservations as to the usefulness of rendering all Tibetan terms phonetically to the exclusion of the more cumbersome (but faithful to spelling and meaning) Wylie system of transliteration, not so much for privileging an approximation of the Lhasa dialect, but for failing to prepare students to read more specialised

literature and to inspire them to learn to read Tibetan as they would need to when approaching other major languages of Buddhism, like Sanskrit, Pāli and Chinese. The poor black and white reproduction of an otherwise instructive selection of images chosen by the author is a major drawback of the Routledge series, as is the lack of a comprehensive bibliography of all works cited at the end of the book. Nevertheless, Samuel's *Introducing Tibetan Buddhism* is one of the best available introductions of Tibetan Buddhism on the market and a recommended textbook for teachers and students of Asian religions.

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Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History

by Saul Mullard.

Leiden: Brill. 2011, 281 pages, 11 black and white photos, ISBN 978-90-04-20895-7, price €105.

Reviewed by Luke Wagner

In this, the first monograph on the history of Sikkim, Saul Mullard painstakingly presents, analyses, and compares the available sources related to the foundations of the state. He introduces sources contemporary to its formation in the seventeenth century and compares these with the better-known historical narratives that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In so doing, he presents a range of evidence that challenges what he refers to as the later 'orthodox' narrative and points to the conclusion that it was 'manufactured on the basis of serious political and religious concerns' (p. 5). In short, the evidence suggests that the state of Sikkim emerged over a longer period of time and with greater conflict than the orthodox account allows. This is not, however, an attempt to re-write the history of Sikkim, which is a task that he maintains requires further research. Instead, it is an effort to understand Sikkimese historiography by addressing its apparent contradictions (p. 4).

In the introduction, Mullard situates the book by surveying an impressive range of material, from the Tibetan antecedents of Sikkimese political theories and practices (pp. 2-12; 23-27), to the form and function of Sikkimese historiography (pp. 12-19), to scholarship on state formation and nationalism (pp. 19-24). Following Hayden White, he employs the term 'historical narrative' to describe Sikkimese historiography, distinguishing between *narration* ('the reporting of events and reality') and *narrativity* ('the imposition of the form of a story on those events and on reality itself') (p. 15). Mullard then offers a guide to the range of sources he uses, classifying them into three groups: religious literature; histories or quasi-histories; and legal documents (pp. 27-30).

Chapter two provides the orthodox historical narratives related to the origins of the Tibeto-Sikkimese people and the formation of the state of Sikkim. These narratives are 'amalgamated' versions based

on three sources written between 1860 and 1908 (p. 33), relying most heavily on *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* (BGR), which was written in 1908 and attributed to the king and queen of Sikkim. In brief, the first narrative traces the origins of the Tibeto-Sikkimese people to the eighth century Tibetan king, Khri srong lde bstan. One of his descendents, Gyad 'bum bsags, travels to Sikkim and befriends a Lepcha 'wizard/chief' (p. 40), Teg kong teg, marking the advent of the unity of the Tibetan and Lepcha peoples in Sikkim. Gyad 'bum bsags gradually extends his control over the territory and it is through his grandchildren that the four main clans and the first king of Sikkim descend (p. 36-43). The second narrative recounts the events that led to the coronation of Sikkim's first king. It is centred on the Tibetan lama, Lha btsun chen po, who receives a vision in 1644 and sets off for the hidden land (*sbas yul*) of Sikkim, where he meets two other Tibetan lamas who had simultaneously entered from other directions. In fulfilment of the prophecy revealed by Ratna gling pa, the three lamas find the layman destined to rule the hidden land, Phun thsogs rnam rgyal. With his coronation, the state of Sikkim is born (pp. 43-46).

In chapters three through six, Mullard presents sources contemporary to the period of state formation in Sikkim. Chapter three is dedicated to the earliest source, *La sogs du 'brel ba'i rgyal sab*, which is in line with the 'broad brush strokes' (p. 69) of the orthodox origin narrative, but diverges from the state formation narrative and suggests a much more gradual process, based on conflict and subjugation (p. 87). The narrative is further complicated by the text analysed in chapter four, *Mnga' bdag rgyal rabs*, which attributes the coronation of the king to Phun thsogs rig 'dzin (one of the three lamas assigned a minor role in the orthodox account) and makes no mention of the other two lamas (p. 109). Three texts from the collected works of Lha btsun chen po are analysed in chapter five. The texts not only suggest a different chronology and a more minor role for Lha btsun chen po in Sikkim's formation than the orthodox narrative, but also indicate that the coronation ritual took place several times, giving the impression that the legitimacy of Phun tshog rnam rgyal's reign was not immediately accepted (pp. 133-138). This impression is reinforced by a legal document presented in chapter six. The document, which was signed by representatives of the Tibeto-Sikkimese, Lepcha, and Limbu communities after some kind of war or rebellion, recognises

his authority, illustrating that it had previously been contested (pp. 140-146). An additional document analysed shows that these groups were incorporated into the structures of the state and subjected to its systems of stratification (pp. 153-158).

In chapter seven, Mullard seeks to account for the divergences between the earlier sources and the later orthodox narratives by placing Sikkimese historiography in the context of the War of Succession (c. 1699-1708) and the expansion of British influence in Sikkim. He argues that the War of Succession led to the expansion of the Lha btsun tradition in Sikkim, which explains the elevation of Lha btsun chen po's role in the orthodox account and the emphasis on the religious provenance of the state. Later, British expansion posed a material threat to Sikkim's sovereignty, which led to efforts to re-imagine Sikkimese history in 'an attempt to define Sikkim as a nation' (p. 186) and to portray the formation of the state 'as a peaceful and generally accepted transition, with the state being created, not for the usual political reasons, but for the benefit of Buddhism and by extension all sentient beings, in accordance with the prophecies of Guru Rinpoche' (p. 188).

In closing, Mullard reiterates that the orthodox narrative provides an overly simplistic account of the formation of the state and that the process was much more gradual and conflict-ridden. Here he is blunt, however, and argues it was not formed in accordance with religious prophecy or even by a rational decision to create a state, 'but by something more primitive, more human: the desire to control, establish and maintain power' (p. 191). Going further, he suggests that '(t)he creation of the state was primarily a political event born out of the political desire of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal to extend his personal power and wealth in a way akin to the writings of Charles Tilly' (p. 196). Religious traditions played 'little role' in the formation of the state, though they did perform a major role in its legitimisation (p. 196). This conclusion is somewhat perplexing, especially in light of all the tantalising evidence Mullard provides that could challenge (or at least amend) Tilly's approach, perhaps in the vein of Gorski's (2003) argument for the role of Calvinism in state formation in early modern Europe. Although it does seem clear that *realpolitik* was a large part of the story and that we can reject the notion that the formation of the state can be attributed to a single event, it is not clear why this means that we should so readily discount the religious worldviews

and technologies that may have motivated and facilitated the gradual expansion of the state.

This aside, *Opening the Hidden Land* is a resource rich in information and superbly detailed analyses. By shedding light on the foundations of the state of Sikkim, Mullard has opened several new lines of inquiry and has provided a tremendous service to the study of Himalayan politics and religion.

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The Tarai: History, Society, Environment

edited by Arjun Guneratne.

Nepal: Himal Books, 2011, 178 pages, ISBN 978-9937-8421-6-7,

price Rs 390/-.

Reviewed by Hilary Faxon

Anyone who has travelled through the region over land recognises the abruptness with which the soaring peaks of the Himalaya drop onto the plains of the Indian subcontinent. The Tarai is the space just beyond: a sliver between topographic and political boundaries, running along the southern edge of Nepal, dotted with foothills. A diverse range of people, nature, and history, unique and yet vital to Nepal's future, inhabit the wedge. The land has hosted important trade routes, conflicting Gorkhali, Indian, and British East India Company claims, and deadly malaria. As is common in similar geographical areas throughout the greater Himalaya, the citizenship, ability and identity of the people of the Tarai has historically been questioned. Today, half of Nepal's population, and a fair amount of its economic and political will, reside there. Yet studies to date have been unsystematic and especially sparse in the east and among non-Tharu groups, leaving the Tarai in the shadow of the hills above.

When most researchers and laypeople think of Nepal, they think of Kathmandu and the hills, and of their people. *The Tarai: History, society, environment* attempts to expand this conception, and to secure a place for the Tarai in scholarship on Nepal. The volume is the third in *The Himalaya Series in Nepal Studies*, with most chapters taken from Volume 29(1) of the journal *Himalaya*. Its seven chapters serve to open windows on avenues for future scholarship on the region, hinting at a rich array of social science research in history, politics, economics, ethnicity, gender studies, development, forestry, and community-based natural resource management. The individual articles, and the book as a whole, display interesting existing research and, more importantly, raise a host of research questions for the future.

The book opens with an introduction by editor Arjun Guneratne, introducing both the importance of the region to modern Nepal, and its lack of scholarship, especially in the eastern part and among non-Tharu

peoples. Guneratne asserts, 'the Tarai deserves better.' The subsequent chapters vary widely in subject and methodology, yet share this common thread: to call attention to an area traditionally overlooked.

The first two chapters deal with the history of the area's territory and identity definition. First, Bernardo Michael explores the emergence of the Tarai as a distinct region out of territorial debates in the Anglo-Gorkha War of 1814-1816. Michael describes a complex landscape in which various tribute, taxation and tenurial relationships fluctuated over time. Boundaries were demarcated at the war's end. While these shifted somewhat in later years, Michael argues that this colonial act of formally and physically marking a state contributed enormously to national and regional development, while stressing that the area has always had ties to both hills and plains. Guneratne's paper builds on this by exploring the shifting roles of Tharu people in the trans-boundary region, comparing the experiences of the group in colonial India and modern Nepal. His conclusion that the Tharu are Nepali, but seek to be so on their own terms, not those imposed by ethnic majorities, or by the state, holds great relevance for similar groups in Nepal and the Himalaya as a whole.

Two subsequent papers explore the emancipation and subtle continuation of the *kamaiya* bonded labour system among the Tharu. The first, by Tatsuro Fujikura, is an experiential piece describing the atmosphere and events around the time of the declaration of *kamaiya* emancipation in 2000. Fujikura pays particular attention to the roles and narratives taken up by different areas, especially the youth and Backward Society Education (BASE), a local NGO. The next chapter, by Birendra Giri, delves deeper into the world of bonded labour among children, which continues semi-formally, with wide variation in treatment and conditions. The paper relies on the narratives of the children themselves to assess the subtle and heterogeneous landscape of bonded labour, strengthening the author's observations with the *kamaiya* and *haliya* children's own words.

Environment, governance, and livelihoods are deeply interconnected in the Himalaya, as demonstrated by the papers on the evolution of forest management and on the social roles of local tiger volunteers. Jagannath Adhikari and Hari Dhungana trace the history of forest policy in the region from privatisation during unification and Rana rule, through nationalisation in 1950-1990, to evolving methods of community forestry in recent decades. The authors argue that forests and their management

affect not only community livelihoods but also state formation and power. In another paper, Teri Allendorf, Bhim Gurung and J.L. David Smith explore the role of *bagh heralu*, local villagers recruited as 'tiger watchers' for conservation efforts. The research consists of interviews to chart reasons for becoming a ranger, current benefits, and changes between these, as well as to determine what kind of individuals make the best local conservation officers. The paper is exciting in that it represents the second iteration of research from long-term, on-the-ground conservation work – after first setting up the tiger management model, the authors decided to look further into what had made successful employees.

The volume's last piece is an autobiographical account originally delivered as the keynote address at the 2005 conference 'Nepal Tarai: Context and Possibilities,' from which several of these papers were drawn. Ramawatar Yadav recounts some of his difficulties as a Madhesi, and reflects on the deep prejudices toward the region and its people from dominant Nepali society.

While the articles vary widely in subject and methodology, several themes resonate throughout and suggest directions for future research. The trans-boundary identity, addressed most directly in Guneratne's paper, is an important one to study, and seems fruitful for future research that makes a more explicit, comparative study. This concept ties closely to the idea of the Tarai and its people not being 'true' Nepalis, an idea expressed most personally and viscerally in the final paper. This is an experience shared by various minority groups in the nation and the region, but one that may change along with socio-political developments in the country. The rapid superficial abolition of the bonded labour system, combined with the persistence of its vestiges, such as child labour, serves as one example of manners of social change that could be further explored. Finally, the intertwining of environmental management with governance, whether at the scale of state formation or local prestige and social structure, has been studied throughout the region and is reinforced strongly in the two relevant papers here. Overall, this collection provides an intriguing entryway to an area often overlooked, and offers incentive for further study of both the Tarai and of similar boundary regions throughout the Himalaya.

Les Bergers du Fort Noir. Nomades du Ladakh (Himalaya occidental)

by Pascale Dollfus.

Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie (collection 'Haute Asie'), 2012, 343 pages, Bibliography, glossary and transliteration of names, ISBN 978-2-901161-99-8, 25 €.

Reviewed by Françoise Pommaret

The shepherds of the Black Fort. Nomads of Ladakh (Western Himalaya) is a fascinating study of a small group of people, the Kharnakpa or 'the people of the Black Fort', who today comprise thirty households and around 150 people. They pursue what can be called a nomadic lifestyle in Ladakh, in the east of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, on a territory of a few hundred square kilometres near the upper reaches of the Tibetan Plateau, at altitudes that vary between 4,200m and 4,700m. Dollfus's fieldwork started in the 1990s, when the community was more numerous, and as her narrative proceeds the slow disappearance of the shepherds of the Black Fort takes shape touch by touch. This monograph, written by one of the foremost anthropologists of Ladakh, complements and enriches the works of Goldstein and Beall on nomads in Western Tibet. It is representative of the French anthropological tradition in the Himalayas, started by Corneille Jest in Dolpo, which is based on lengthy fieldwork on a specific group.

The book opens with a reflection on nomadism, the meaning of the term and its often-archaic connotation. Dollfus demonstrates that sedentary groups have become nomads due to circumstances (p. 24) and argues that 'contrary to a widespread idea, sedentarisation is not the only way to control people, to allow [for] the emergence of a dominating class linked to the hoarding of wealth, and to enable the constitution of powerful political entities' (p. 25). She also defines the word in its Ladakhi context: 'Here nomadism is not erratic, implying the total absence of residence, but seasonal migrations done in a restricted area and according to an identical rotation from one year to the other' (p. 28). Dollfus ironically describes the view of outsiders on the nomads as happily living in a fantasy world, which contradicts their stigmatisation by the sedentary populations of the Indus valley as rough, uncouth fellows. The book then moves to a historical

account of Ladakh and the examination of local stories and myths of the origin of the Kharnakpa community, who in fact seem to have originally been a sedentary people. The other chapters describe Kharnakpa religious life, including the local deities, the different practitioners, the festivals, the alliance patterns and the sense of belonging to a particular territory, which is geographically defined by constant migrations from one specific point to another at well defined periods.

Dollfus writes detailed descriptions of the different animals this community raises (yaks, sheep, goats, and a few horses), of shearing, of their residences (crude houses and black and white tents which are similarly organised), of their trading routes and exchange patterns, and of past hunting customs. These chapters demonstrate Dollfus's great sense of observation and the thoroughness of her enquiries, as well as her extensive specialised vocabulary. The attention Dollfus pays to all of the shepherds' activities and to their material life is truly remarkable; the technical terminologies concerning plants, animal husbandry, milk processing and agricultural activities are exhaustive, but so naturally woven into the narrative that they never make tedious reading. The description of the houses and black tents is down to the last rope and stone. Her matter of fact observations combined with her underlying sense of humour make for great reading, at least in French. Not only is the reader enriched with ethnographic data, but it feels like one is actually living amongst the Khanarkpa, experiencing the hardships of a pass crossing, the bite of the icing cold at dawn, and the cloths and tents being drenched in rain and slush.

One of the most striking features of the study is the constant mobility of the Kharnakpa, either through their pastures or in the course of trade, in which they exchange salt from Tibet for grains from Lahul and Zanskar. It could thus be applied as a template for all nomadic communities traversing the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau. Interestingly, as elsewhere, the Kharnakpa combine pastoralism, trade and agriculture at minima, essentially for fodder. The schedule of their activities comes through in the book as gruelling and in extreme climatic conditions, where caravans travel to the northern lakes for salt at -35 degrees Celsius. While men's activities are directed at the outside world, the women work equally hard in maintaining their temporary encampments and the processing of dairy products.

Dollfus consistently relates the Kharnakpa's activities to those of nomads in other parts of Ladakh, in the Tibetan Plateau and even in Iran. She also explores the differences between several groups of nomadic people established in one region and their fights over pastures (the Kharnakpa, the Changpa and the Rupshupa). Therefore, through the study of one community, Dollfus present a whole range of nomadic activities in the region. Further, the perception of territory by the Kharnakpas is described with great insight: 'To the unique, centralised and clearly demarcated territory of the sedentary people, these nomadic shepherds oppose a disjointed territory with mobile boundaries, a combination of hierarchised places and itineraries, which vary according to the seasons, and where only the valleys-providers and the mountains-markers are individualised and named; these allow them to find directions in space and measure time, hours as well as months. Their country is not a fixed space (or perceived as such) but a vast archipelago where certain islands are temporarily left out while others are favoured' (p. 274).

In the final part of the book, Dollfus depicts the drastic changes in the community that were brought on by urban migration, schooling, roads, climate change, and the demands of the new economic market with the advent of pashmina goat-rearing. She shows how the processes of urban migration and development initiated by a centralised state, which recur throughout the Himalaya, totally transform the life of the Kharnakpa, contributing to the disappearance of local knowledge, terminologies and trading habits, and ultimately leading to the disappearance of the community itself. Dollfus writes, 'In less than 15 years, 80% of the population has given up nomadic life to settle in the Indus valley' (p. 16), and that although 'the territory that they know is broadening, it gets atomised and loses its coherence. Because intermediary places are no more resting places, their names and qualities are forgotten. No longer practised on a daily basis, the geographical knowledge of the elders, their way of understanding space and time, the names of places, plants and rocks are lost' (p. 269).

Dollfus's book gives evidence of intensive research work, not only in the field but also in specialised literatures (botanical, zoological, technical) that give the most accurate descriptions. She also provides, to the extent that this is possible, the equivalent of Ladakhi terms in classical Tibetan. The only major shortcoming of this book is, in the eyes of this

reviewer, the lack of a general yet relatively detailed map of the Kharnak region, which would allow the reader to follow the constant migrations of the people. This absence of a proper map is surprising because Dollfus has a keen interest in geography and is very precise when it comes to naming the different camps and places of Kharnak territory. This book goes well beyond the circle of scholars interested in Ladakh, and is much more than a monograph on one group of people and their way of life. It questions the very terminology relating to nomads and questions their position vis-à-vis sedentary people not only in Ladakh, but also in the Tibetan plateau. Apart from its numerous academic qualities, this work, enriched by photos, stands out because it is truly a work of memory for the Kharnakpas, which will keep their way of life alive, even when all the shepherds have left the Black Fort.

La Part manquante. Echanges et pouvoirs chez les Drung du Yunnan (Chine)

by Stéphane Gros.

Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie (collection 'Haute Asie'), 2012, 589 pages, Glossary, bibliography, index and plates, ISBN 978-2-901161-96-7, 28 €.

Reviewed by Françoise Pommaret

The population studied by Stéphane Gros in this book are the Drung, also called Dulong, who are classified as a minority (*minzu*) in China. The Drung speak a Tibeto-Burmese language and live in the Salween valley of Western Yunnan, sandwiched between other ethnic groups such as the Lissu, the Nung and the Naxi to their west, the Rawang of Burma to the south (who are considered a branch/kin of the Drung) and the Tibetans to the north. This reviewer's own limitations cannot do full justice to this brilliant and dense anthropological work, especially when having to summarise in a few words its enigmatic title *La part manquante*, 'the missing share'. Gros' thesis is that 'the missing share' is a logical operative mode, which runs throughout Drung society and which justifies its identity markers, its social reproduction and its political relations with its neighbours. For Gros, the missing share constitutes an alternative formulation to the logic of exteriority, which demands that fertility and power are brought in from outside.

Prior to this work, which was his PhD dissertation (2005), Stéphane Gros had already produced excellent articles in which the complexity of his subject was more than apparent in the course of his dealing with Chinese and Drung languages, as well as with Tibetan and obscure references such as French missionary writings. For a complete list of his works, one might refer to www.vjf.cnrs.fr/himalaya/fr/membres/sgros.htm, but two of his articles should be mentioned here as they are in English and provide an excellent introduction to this work. These are 'Economic marginalization and social identity among the Drung people of Northwest Yunnan' in *Moving Mountains: Highland livelihood and ethnicity in China, Vietnam and Laos*, edited by Jean Michaud and Tim Forsyth, pp. 28-49 (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2011) and 'A sense of place: the spatial referent in the definition of identities and territories in

the Dulong Valley (Northwest Yunnan - China)', in *Dynamics of Ethnicity in Asia: Interethnic relationships through ethnonyms, territories and rituals*, edited by Christian Culas and François Robinne, pp. 103-122 (Routledge, 2010).

The present work is divided into ten chapters which deal with the following: pygmies, slaves and the tattooed; the minority situation; chiefs from the East; salt, oxen and slaves; women's destiny; residential and lineage logics; movement of alliance; the domestic universe; from generation to perpetuation; the missing share. The introduction is in itself an important work, which reflects the whole approach of the book: grounded in facts and highly conceptual at the same time. The chapter 'Pygmies, slaves and the tattooed', in particular, provides a fascinating background of the complex geo-political situation of the Drung and dwells extensively on the minority issue in China, as well as on the implications of ethnonym and autonym. It warns against the temptation of too strict a categorisation, which would not take into account the ever-changing political situation. Gros puts great stress on the importance of facial tattooing, as in his analysis it is the thread that leads him to fertility, one of the central themes of his book. Tattooing in the Tibeto-Burmese areas has not been studied in depth, nor has it been studied from a comparative point of view; it is hoped that Gros will expand this study.

Gros's work is based on extensive and groundbreaking ethnographical work. In this respect, the book can also be read as a classical monograph on an unknown population. The Drung place the 'missing share' at the heart of their identity and it is the fundamental traits that are built with this operating logic that allow them to survive as a society. Gros vividly describes tattooing, alliances, political manoeuvres, rituals, household chores, and the exchanges and feuds between the Drung and their neighbours, alternating between storytelling, empirical descriptions, interviews and myths. This wealth of ethnographic material is used rigorously to advance several key notions. Amongst these is the notion that taking history into account must not aim at reconstituting a past, but rather at an understanding of temporality; societies must be understood in their relations to each other (p.33). In this, Gros follows the paths of Mauss, Leach and Amselle.

Gros also brings in the concept of Zomia, popular since the 2000s with anthropologists working on the margins. With great analytical finesse, he writes that the concept of Zomia would fit the case of the Drung well,

given their isolation in their valley and past role as victims of political and economic exploitation. However, what Gros learned from his experiences in the field is that the Drung themselves see their past and present social and political environment from an angle of hierarchy and asymmetry. Therefore it would be beneficial to see the Drung not only as victims or fugitives, but also as actors in a globalising hierarchical system that contributes to their local identity (pp. 28-29). Another important reflection underlies this work: the relation of a minority with the centralised Chinese state, and Gros notes that to speak about the Drung is also to speak of China, but from a decentralised point of view. Far from having an exotic view of the Drung, his work wants to place the Drung within the changes presently occurring in Yunnan and in greater China (p.26).

This work should find an echo with scholars working on the Himalaya because the Drung society and its vocabulary have much in common with ethnic groups surviving and adapting in other centralised states of South Asia. It also provides important historical documentation on the Tibetans operating in Northern Yunnan, which is located on the fringes of their sphere of influence. This 580-page book, beautifully but densely laid-out, as is the norm with the *Société d'Ethnologie*, includes photos, a long note on the different transcriptions and orthography used, scholarly footnotes and references, sketches, maps, elegant drawings of daily life objects, a bibliography, a Drung glossary, an index and a detailed table of contents. Such detailed representation allows the author to show his respect for the reader by providing him or her with as many technical supports as possible in order to make the topic more easily understandable in this maze of shifting alliances, ethnic groups and historical events in which the Drung tried to cling to their identity while adapting or fighting different 'masters'. A translation in English of this pioneering and thought-provoking work is highly recommended.

The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Nepal: Democracy in the Margins

by Susan Hangen.

London: Routledge, 2011, 208 pages, 9 black & white photos,

ISBN-13: 978-0415502085, 31 €.

Reviewed by Amanda Snellinger

On 28 May 2012 the prime minister of Nepal dissolved the Constituent Assembly (CA). His actions were in response to the Supreme Court ruling that overruled a fifth postponement of the CA deadline. The main obstacle that kept the CA from completing a constitutional draft was how to organise the federal state structure. Consensus had become impossible. The two major political parties of the 1990s, Congress and United Marxist Leninist (UML), could not bring themselves to support the ethnic federal structure agreed upon by the Maoist party, the Janajati CA caucus, and indigenous groups. The way the dissolution of the CA unfolded demonstrates the status quo attitudes prevailing in organised politics. This development has caused many to wonder wistfully if it could have been otherwise. What if ethnic parties were able to institute themselves in mainstream party politics in the 1990s? Would this have sustained the momentum to actualise ethnic federalism?

Susan Hangen's book provides an interesting perspective from which to consider these questions. It focuses on one of the three ethnic political parties that participated in elections during the 1990s, the Mongol National Organization (MNO). It provides an overview of how indigenous activism unfolded in the post-1990 democratic era and why more indigenous people's organisations (IPO) did not transition into organised party politics. Her analytic focus is on a party that never succeeded in party politics beyond a few districts in Ilam (East Nepal), and why this was the case. The MNO's choice to work within national politics was unorthodox because under Article 112(3) of the 1990 constitution, the Election Commission barred registration of parties formed on the basis of communal identity (Hangen 2010: 44). Therefore, the MNO struggled for Mongols' rights in party politics without official status. Rather, their candidates ran as independents without a permanent party symbol on

election ballots. Despite the MNO's grim position, Hangen believes the ethnicisation of politics to be productive. She pushes back against the dominant literature critical of ethnic politics, contending that ethnic parties allow citizens to assert a particular subjectivity in political practice, making it personal. In Nepal, ethnic activism has forced the state to deal with the heterogeneity of its citizens.

Hangen's support for ethnic activism is in part a result of her empirical focus: democracy in the margins. In order to grasp how democratisation occurs in practice, we must look beyond democratic ideals to the disjunctures in the system, how people perceive them, and in turn how they shape political action. This, Hangen argues, is best understood by focusing on where ordinary citizens find space to engage with politics. The MNO presents an ideal case study. Its stronghold was based in a few districts in rural Ilam rather than the political centre of Kathmandu and other urban areas. This is perhaps Hangen's main contribution to the existing literature. She provides a detailed ethnographic view of organised politics in rural Nepal during the 1990 post-democratic period. The existing political literature tends to be quantitative political science or focuses on the impacts of Maoist politics in the countryside. Hangen alternatively looks at how villagers in eastern Nepal negotiated the opening up of democratic space in which ex-Panchayat actors, underground Congress and communist activists, and new ethnic activists transitioned into multi-party politics. Her analysis demonstrates the impact this rural democratisation had on the local social landscape, as well as its roles in religious change such as the boycotting of Dasain and Gurung communities' return to Buddhist traditions. What emerges from her analysis is a complex agonistic dynamic in democracy; a dynamic in which people are experimenting with the opening of political space, yet are deeply ambivalent about how to integrate this new freedom into everyday village sociality.

What counts as organised democratic practice in rural Ilam differs from urban spaces in Nepal. There are no bandhs, chakka jams, or political declarations made through press releases to the media since there is no commerce or traffic to interrupt and no media observing the MNO's political agenda. Rather, the MNO party actors built their support by walking from village to village, politically educating villagers, organising mass assembly programs, and maintaining local political networks. This

approach was by no means efficient, and only minimally effective. Hangen notes that the party was fuelled by the charisma of its top two leaders, Gopal Gurung (the party founder and president) and Kiran Atkin, (the head of the Central Assembly), who provided few directives while discouraging autonomy. Local party organisers expressed a desire to conduct more robust party activity but did not know how to do so without guidance from the leadership. Hangen's main argument regarding party organisation is that the MNO's choice to do oppositional politics in organised politics positioned them between a political party and social movement. She engages with social movements literature, particularly from Latin America, to prove this point. However, it would have been beneficial if she had engaged more substantively with the literature on party organisation and practice in Nepal. Doing so would have allowed her to draw comparisons with disjunctures in other parties. For example, comparative analysis with work on the personalisation of politics in political organisations would have provided a perspective on the degree to which personality and ideology dictate party discipline and organisational consistency (Hachhethu 2002, 2006; Gellner & Karki 2008; Snellinger 2010). Furthermore, the intertwining of social movements and party politics is not an uncommon trend in Nepali politics. As I have argued, the historical struggle for multiple party democracy through the *andolan* has imbued party politics with a social movement agenda and activists consider their political activities to be social service (Snellinger 2007). Had Hangen connected her empirical data to the existing literature, she could have provided a more robust commentary on trends of democratic disjuncture in 1990s multiparty democracy that could have elucidated reasons for its erosion in the early 2000s and the compulsion to fight for its return in 2002-2006. Despite not having done this, her analysis of the MNO's disjunctive practice is a great source for others to do such comparative analysis.

The way the MNO focused on identity difference also made their politics marginal. In Nepal, identity politics revolves around caste and ethnicity. Hangen provides a wonderful background on this history and its development through the democratic era. She categorises the MNO as an Indigenous People's Organisation (IPO); however, its approach was quite different from that of other janajati organisations. The MNO focused on racial categories, positioning itself to represent the Mongol race against the high-caste Hindu state. The MNO focused on the shared

blood and biological relation of Gurungs, Magars, Rais, and Limbus. Hangen's analytical approach to ethnicity very much reflects a Barthesian theoretical understanding that distinct groups do not emerge because of any innate difference, but rather, cultural differences become markers of group identity within a shared political and social circumstance. The MNO chose to focus on racial difference. They produced their political culture in the form of cultural artefacts like songs, calendars, and festival practices that they used to reinforce their distinct identity as Mongols. For the most part, Hangen takes the MNO's racial position as a pan-indigenous approach that makes particularly quirky racial claims. Her analysis is fitting for Nepal's context and the debates in which the MNO found itself immersed. However, it would have been interesting if she had pushed deeper into their racial claims. The reader does not get a sense of whether Gopal Gurung or his party's supporters understand the history of race in the west and colonisation. Were they aware that racial categorisation has created similar histories of marginalisation that caste and ethnic discrimination have? I would have liked to better understand why the MNO chose racial distinctions over ethnicity, beyond Hangen's assertion that they opted for the modern universal, scientific categories of difference rather than local ones embraced by the state (p. 55). Was this a purely strategic choice meant to resonate with global indigenous movements or a unique approach to pan-indigeneity in Nepal? Since this is not engaged with, we do not know whether the MNO understood the potential dangers that racialising can take, and how it could have left their politics vulnerable to the Balkanising critique of identity politics. If they made their choice despite these risks, does this mean they had some faith in the durability of the Nepali state, believing that its unity could survive despite its citizenry being racially distinguished in politics? This is ethnographically interesting because it allows us to grapple with the productive and agonistic dynamics that identity politics insert into democratic process.

Rather than focusing on the dangerous implications of their racialising approach, Hangen instead focuses on the difficulty that the MNO faced in trying to embrace a culturally heterogeneous representation of its constituency. In chapter five she analyses the production of material culture such as MNO party calendars, songs, and holidays. What her analysis demonstrates is that in their struggle to be inclusive, they must

make choices that pull them away from specific identity markers. For instance, should they rely on Nepali or English as the lingua franca to avoid favouring one of their own languages over others? In the case of the calendar they decided to use Nepali, the state language. And they used the Gregorian calendrical system, which Hangen argues was not seen as a global homogenising force, but as an 'empty sign that could be incorporated anywhere' (p. 117). She demonstrates the inherent limits that kept their cultural production from providing people with a sense of Mongol identity beyond the party. The one distinguishing feature the MNO's targeted demographic shares beyond being Mongol is 'being not Hindu.' In chapter six, Hangen examines this identity marker and its effect on social transformation. She analyses the Gurung community's return to Buddhism and the Dasain boycott. The MNO supporters embraced the common janajati articulation of democracy, 'hamro bhasa, dharma, sanskriti' (p. 111). Both of these chapters demonstrate which ideals people associated with democratic freedom and how it helped construct and articulate meaningful identities. What is conclusive about Hangen's analysis is that the assertion of Mongol racial identity was a political act.

In her conclusion, Hangen analyses the 2008 CA election results, focusing on ethnic party participation. In 2008, the Election Commission was more lenient on party registrations, which allowed more identity-based parties to compete. Eleven ethnic parties participated, compared to three during the 1990s. Furthermore, the mixed electoral system and inclusion quotas created a more diverse CA than any democratically elected government during the 1990s. Nonetheless, the MNO failed to win any seats. Hangen's conclusive analysis demonstrates the impact that the emergence of new political subjectivities in post-1990 democratic Nepal had over the last decade, making this book a useful source to analyse possible trends of ethnic party organisation in the future, providing insight into the pitfalls that should be avoided.

I recommend this book for the classroom, particularly courses that focus on democratisation, social movements, and ethnic studies. Its straightforward analytic style makes the arguments accessible to an undergraduate level. Hangen convincingly demonstrates that we cannot dismiss the democratic transition as a failure because of its shortcomings. Rather, this book provides a view into the practical and discursive possibilities multiparty democracy has offered rural Nepal.

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