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Editorial Note

As announced in our previous editorial, the present issue is the last paper version of EBHR. The next issue (no. 56) will be published exclusively online. Providing a date is quite a gamble these days but we expect to have it out by next summer. EBHR's dedicated website address will be widely distributed among the community as we release the issue and launch this new format.

With this last printed issue, we would like to pay a special tribute to our colleagues at Social Science Baha who, under the direction of Deepak Thapa, have been responsible for EBHR's layout and printing in Nepal since issue 27 (2004). Their rigour, promptness, patience and great kindness are to be commended. At this time, we are still unable to send the paper version of issue 54 to our subscribers, although it was printed a long time ago. This is due to the interruption of Nepal's outbound postal services, and we have no leverage in this matter. We hope that the present issue will not suffer the same delay.

The two articles that open this issue are an excellent illustration of the EBHR project since its inception: to report on the diversity of scholarship carried out in the region by giving space both to studies on current social developments and to works providing insight from the past. The journal must continue to promote and nurture social sciences that are firmly rooted in textual or ethnographic data. The Book Review section illustrates the liveliness and diversity of Himalayan studies and, more than ever, their openness to neighbouring areal studies.

The online publication will broaden EBHR's readership, attract even more contributions and significantly reduce publication time. It will also allow the use of new formats and types of content (image, audio, video) that we will soon detail in a forthcoming call for contributions. Another advantage of an online presence is to disseminate information faster and more efficiently, notably about events of relevance to Himalayan studies. This will restore the original role of EBHR, that of a 'bulletin' that would, as stated in the very first 1991 editorial, 'keep us informed of current research and research opportunities in our field'. It kept the name 'Bulletin' even after becoming a fully fledged scientific journal so

as not to compromise an acronym that had become very familiar. We hope, however, that with the new medium EBHR will assume more than ever its original role of promoting exchanges in the Himalayan studies community.

The Bulletin remains open to all proposals for articles, reviews, announcements and other contributions. We appeal both to our senior colleagues to continue the endeavour and to our younger colleagues already well represented in the last two issues and doctoral students to publish the results of their research on the Himalayas in the broadest sense and in the humanities and social sciences as a whole.

The editors, European Bulletin of Himalayan Research
Tristan Bruslé, Stéphane Gros and Philippe Ramirez

Population Ageing and Family Change: Older people's perceptions of current changes in family composition in rural Nepal

Sarah Speck and Ulrike Müller-Böker

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Abstract

Rapid population ageing and massive outmigration have affected the traditional family composition. In villages of the middle hills of western Nepal in particular, outmigration of younger generations has profoundly complicated older people's living conditions. This article sheds light on how the family as a social institution has been influenced by current socio-economic changes linked mainly to ageing and outmigration. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with older people and on group discussions in five different rural villages, the study explores changes and transformations within the family from an emic perspective of older villagers. Changes in the family include modified living arrangements, a redefinition of roles and status, a redistribution of work among family and household members, changes in the attitude of younger people towards older people and a decline in intergenerational care and support. These changes are perceived by the majority of older people as unjust and of no benefit to themselves. Older people find themselves undergoing a transition phase where state provisions remain largely limited and family support is on the decline and no longer guaranteed. Founded on a tacit intergenerational agreement, the family as the major provider of support in old age is falling apart.

Keywords: family change, intergenerational contract, Nepal, outmigration, population ageing, societal change

Introduction

In Nepal, the incessant outmigration of young people and people of working age, particularly from the hill regions, has precipitated population ageing. Outmigration, the dwindling importance of subsistence farming and of land-based resources (eg Paudel et al 2014, Jaquet et al 2016) and the increasing monetarisation of livelihoods have led to changes in the family and the household composition. These developments represent a challenge for older people living in the middle hills of western Nepal. The region has already been described as 'overburdened with the proportion of older people in general' (Subedi 2005: 16), and villages are said to be 'toothless' (Speck 2017: 430), inhabited mainly by old people and very young children. The absence of young people here affects the family and household composition. Multi-generational households where young and old generations live together are on the decline and, consequently, family-based care for older people is no longer guaranteed. Families and society are having to cope with this challenge, which requires a renegotiation of intergenerational contracts.

Few studies about older people and population ageing specifically focus on Nepal. Subedi (1996, 2005) reported the marginal, isolated status of older people in society. More recently, Chalise (2010, 2012) and Ghimire et al (2018) investigated older people's mental well-being and physical health. Yarger and Brauner-Otto (2014), and Korzenevica and Agergaard (2017) looked into the change in receipt of care and support by family members and the renegotiation of intergenerational relations among different family members. KC et al (2014) researched older people's perceptions of the State in relation to social pensions. So far only Pun et al (2009) and Parker and Pant (2009, 2011) have provided a general overview of the current situation regarding older people's living conditions in Nepal.

A wealth of literature about migration addresses the situation of the family that has been left behind, especially the wives and children of migrants. Not as much is known about the implications for older persons within dispersed families. As we will see further on, the few publications that deal with the way migration affects these people's lives and living conditions reveal that it above all has adverse implications for them.

To fill this gap in research, this article sets out to report current

changes in the family composition and intergenerational contracts and the transformation of roles – triggered by a rapid demographic transition, migration and general multifaceted socio-economic change. Inspired by the critical livelihood perspective (Geiser et al 2011), the study adopts an emic approach by focusing on a specific age group. This empirical contribution aims to disclose older people's own experiences and views. It attempts to elucidate how they perceive and assess these changes in the family and the household, the living arrangements, the division of the workload and intergenerational behaviour patterns that affect their lives.

The main research question here is: in what way are intergenerational relations, the tacit contract between parents and children, and attitudes towards and support for older people changing? How do older people perceive these changes? The sub-questions addressed in this article are: what are living arrangements in rural hill villages currently like? How do older people regard the transformation of the socio-economic status of women and especially of the daughter-in-law? How do older people apprehend the shift in roles and responsibilities among family members? How do they feel about the changing attitudes towards them?

To address these questions, the study relies on qualitative interviews with older people from five rural villages in the middle hills of western Nepal. To understand family change, the study refers to the concept of the family as a basic social institution (Giddens 2006, Thornton and Fricke 1987). Furthermore, it draws upon the concept of implicit intergenerational contracts within the family (Croll 2006 p. 487 ff, Kabeer 2000: p. 465). We assume that the family as a basic social institution and its members' intergenerational relations are rapidly changing and that these developments constitute a challenge for older people both in their daily lives and in terms of family-based care. The family can no longer be considered a reliable source of support and care in old age.

By listening to the views of older people, we wish to give voice to them. We are aware that the voices of the younger generation are left unheard in this study. However, older people's views and needs have until recently been overlooked in research and policy-making, not only in Nepal but in the Global South in general.

Demographic change and outmigration in Nepal

Nepal's population is in the midst of a demographic transition.¹ Though it maintains a large proportion of young people, the country now has an ageing population. The constant outmigration of young people from rural hill areas has precipitated the ageing of Nepal's population.

Rapid ageing of the population

A substantial decline in fertility and mortality, plus a significant increase in life expectancy, characterises the current demographic transition in many countries of the Global South. The consequence of these demographic developments is the ageing of the population (UNDESA 2017). Demographic estimates predict that nearly 80% of all old people (defined as being of 60 years and above) will reside in the Global South in 2050. The proportion of old people in South Asia increased from 5.8% in 1950 to 6.7% in 2000 and to 8.4% in 2015. Forecasts for 2030 predict 12% and 18.9% for 2050 (UNFPA 2017a).

Nepal provides a good example of the fast-changing demographic trends that have taken place over the past three decades. Since records began in 1952 the country has undergone a remarkable decline in fertility and mortality rates, and at the same time a massive increase in life expectancy, which more than doubled to 66.6 years in 2011 (UNFPA 2017b). The current 2.5 million old people amount to 8.6% of Nepal's population (UNDESA 2019). The country still has a large population of young people and people of working age, but the young population (age ≤ 14 years) is declining due to a sustained drop in the birth rate (Amin et al 2017, Feeney et al 2001).

Given this demographic change in Nepal, a rapid ageing of the population is expected. The annual growth rate of the older population (3.59%) is nearly three times the overall population growth rate of 1.35%. Consequently, a rapid ageing of the population has to be anticipated, and a substantial imbalance of the dependency ratio between young and old is thus to be expected (Feeney et al 2001, Subedi 1996).

1 The demographic transition refers to a model that describes a population process that passes through several phases over time, including shifts from high birth and high (infant) death rates of populations to low birth and death rates, and high life expectancy (Thompson 1929).

Outmigration precipitates population ageing and changes in the family composition

Migration is not a new phenomenon in Nepal. However, the scale and dimension of migratory movements for work purposes has, despite some fluctuations, increased over the last two decades (Hagen-Zanker et al 2014: 6). The growing body of literature about migration in Nepal addresses migrants and their destinations (eg Bruslé 2008), the remittances they send home (eg Seddon et al 1998, 2002), new forms of multi-local households (eg Thieme et al 2011, Maharjan 2015) and the situation of household and family members who have been left behind (eg Shrestha and Conway 2001, Maharjan et al 2012, Adhikari and Hobley 2015).

Internal rural-to-rural (mainly from the mountains and hills to the lowlands) and rural-to-urban migration has redistributed the population within the country. International migration has reshaped the demographic make-up and local socio-economic structures in many areas, especially in rural areas. The highest proportion (44.81%) of the absent population is from the 15–24 age group. Due to the diverse migration patterns, about half of households from the middle hills of western Nepal are now missing at least one household member (GoN 2012: 38, 2014).

These different generational and partly gendered mobility patterns create multi-local social networks rooted in the family's place of origin (Poertner et al 2011). Forty-five years ago, Macfarlane found that in most cases, at least one male family member of Gurung families was away on military service or had migrated for labour purposes, and he labelled this household composition 'incomplete joint families' (1976: 15). Nowadays, multi-local households are common and may consist, for example, of a father working in Dubai as an unskilled labourer, the mother staying in Pokhara with her two eldest children, earning a small income as a shopkeeper, and the grandparents living with the youngest children in the village and tending the fields. Though the separate household members are linked to each other financially, their daily lives and work are played out at different places and in different familial settings with renegotiated roles and responsibilities (eg Korzenevica and Agergaard 2017).

Although, remarkably, remittances make up more than a quarter

(26.2%) of the country's gross domestic product (GoN 2020) and contribute to the livelihoods of those left behind, economic outmigration depopulates rural hill and mountain regions and complicates the lives of those who remain in the villages.

The comprehensive literature about implications of outmigration emphasises the fact that migration by young people leads to a change in social rules and relations, and to the abandonment of the rural economy (Blaikie et al 2002). The focus lies on the fact that women in general face higher workloads and need to renegotiate roles and responsibilities (eg Shrestha and Conway 2001, Kaspar 2005, Childs et al 2014). Other case studies reveal that the absence of male family members leads to the breakdown of the household – for example if the migrant's wife sets up her own household –, or to households spreading across rural and urban areas (Maharjan 2015), or to separate kitchens under the same roof (Pun et al 2009, Speck 2017).

Publications about how old people's lives are affected by migration indicate that migrants' parents are being neglected both emotionally and financially (Subedi 1996, Yarger and Brauner-Otto 2014): their workload increases (Gautam 2008, Speck 2017) and some of them are even forced to move to old people's homes (Khanal et al 2018). Furthermore, they reveal that a permanent or temporary absence of family members leads to a change in living arrangements: for example to grandparents living with their grandchildren or to old people living alone. This situation has been labelled the 'empty nest syndrome' by Subedi (2005: 13).

The family as a crumbling social institution for support in old age?

Universally, a family is 'a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility for caring for children' (Giddens 2006: 206). Informal codes of behaviour and diverse activities allocated to specific members apply in this most basic of social institutions. It is an organised social entity where individuals seek certain common objectives, such as co-residence, socialisation, production and consumption, transfer of property and so on (Thornton and Fricke 1987).

Traditionally, people rely on their family as a major source of support in old age. Filial piety in particular, a virtue of respect for parents and other older people, is considered to be an important normative value

that determines intergenerational relations. Kabeer points out (2000: 465) that one important aspect of demographic transition ‘is its influence on how relationships between parents and children play out in these different phases, particularly on how parents view their obligations to their children and what they expect in return’. She introduces the concept of ‘implicit contracts’ within the family, which stipulates that parents look after their children when they are young and in return expect support and care in old age.

The traditional family model in South Asia, and for a large part of Nepal’s population, is generally described as an extended or joint family (*thulo ghar*) living under one roof, comprising parents, unmarried daughters and sons, married sons with their wives and children in co-residence, and in some cases even the grandchildren’s wives (Bista 1967, Michaels 2020: 287). A patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal kinship structure dominates in South Asia. In Nepal, women leave their parents’ home (*māitī ghar*) after marriage to move to their husband’s parents’ place of residence (*ghar*). The multi-generational household is headed by the eldest male who directs, coordinates and controls the household members and manages resources (eg property or labour) to maintain the whole family’s livelihood (Goldstein and Beall 1986, Macfarlane 1976, Michaels 2020: 287). Male adult children are expected to be the first main provider of social and financial support for their parents in old age (intergenerational contract). Of course, the diverse ethnic groups and castes in Nepal adhere to their respective family models and family-related customary rights, and these values and norms characterise the family. Nevertheless, there have always been childless persons and parents with only daughters. These family compositions, which have always been stigmatised, are considered to pose the greatest risk and to disadvantage older people today (Michaels 2020: 297).

The downfall of the joint family?

Over the last decades, South Asia has witnessed the decline of the traditional joint family and of the norms and values attributed to it. In the early 1970s and 1980s, Cowgill and Holmes (1974, 1972) theorised that the status of older people in society and in the family generally declines with increasing modernisation. A common assumption prevails that ‘modernisation’, that is Western ideas and values about family

composition but also emerging concepts of modern living arrangements and lifestyles and increased individualism, weakens the intergenerational relationship between parents and children (eg Bhandari and Titzmann 2017). Hence, they erode societal values and jeopardise the traditional welfare system for older people. A parent's pay-off in later life in the form of support and care from their children is obviously begrudged in these times of socio-economic change (Martin 1990, Subedi 2005). In the early 1980s Goldstein and Beall (1981, 1982, 1986) described changes in family patterns in rural villages of Lamjung district as being the result of migration and modernisation. Sons who became financially independent started their own households, challenging the sacrosanct power of the eldest male in the family. The idea that the loss of the traditional family and general societal change aggravate old people's lives is clearly stated in the above-cited publications. By contrast, Korzenevica and Agergaard (2017: 135) stress the fact that relations and arrangements within the family and household constantly change. Hence, traditional practices are not at risk but shift. Focusing on Brahmanically influenced North India and Nepal, Michaels (2020) questions the statement that the situation of older people in general was much better in the past. Notions in Sanskrit texts indicate that the rejection and poor treatment of old people, particularly in joint Hindu families, are not recent phenomena and are solely a consequence of modernity or Westernisation but are 'rooted in a structural ritual separation or, in some cases, even exiling [...] old people due to the traditional *āśrama* system² – one of the strong spiritual pillars of Hinduism' (Michaels 2020: 301).

At this point let us bear in mind that, compared to the past, an important change has indeed taken place: today people live longer and have fewer children, resulting in the ageing of the population. This demographic development, further intensified by outmigration, has also contributed to a decrease in the size of households over the last two or three decades. Whereas households with five or more persons dominated until the 1980s, subsequent censuses show an increase in smaller households. The average household size dropped from 5.8 persons in 1981 to 4.6 in 2015-16, the four-person household now being

2 The *āśrama* system according to which high-caste male Hindus should live a life according to four phases, the last two phases stipulating the withdrawal of old people from active work and their independence from their family (Michaels 2020: 289f).

the most prevalent size (19.92% of all households) (GoN 2017a). Having fewer children is attributed to an increase in the schooling of girls and to an older age at which women marry and give birth to their first child (see Ghimire and Axinn 2006: 181, 193).

The report *Progress of Women in Nepal 1995–2015* (Pudasaini 2015) also reveals that Nepal's constitutional and legal frameworks now regard more favourably gender equality and women's rights, as evidenced for example by the changes made to inheritance laws: the interim constitution of 2007 guaranteed a daughter equal rights to parental property for the first time. The proportion of households where women own land doubled from 2001 to 2011 to reach 20% (Pudasaini 2015: 167).

These achievements by women and their improved position in society contribute to the loosening of traditional rules such as patrilocality or the dominance of the eldest male at the head of the household. And migration is regarded as an important catalyst. The absence of a husband and male relatives has led to a larger number of female-headed households (eg Kaspar 2005). According to the annual household survey of 2015–16, 24.8% of households were run by female members (GoN 2017a).

To sum up the current situation based on the literature discussed here, shrinking households, a reduced number of family members due to migration and the change in the daughter-in-law's social status, combined with a growing proportion of old people, represent a major challenge in terms of family-based care for older people. Implicit contracts between parents and adult children need to be renegotiated, while changes in the family composition that disadvantage older people call for a review of new forms of care but also of new roles and norms (especially gender roles and norms) within the family. In this ongoing negotiation process, older people represent a negotiating party with different needs and life concepts compared with other family members. As we will see further on, it is the elderly who lament both the loss of the traditional family and change in general. As the saying goes, things were better back then.

Indeed, we do not discuss in a balanced manner the overall perspectives but disclose only old people's views. We regard this as a necessary contribution to initiating further debate on the issue. However, we also consider the transformation of the social status of young women

and daughters-in-law who are often accused of the decline in care and support in the South Asian context, '(...) because women have learned to go out' (Lamb 2000: 92).

Changing family compositions in the middle hills of western Nepal: old people's perceptions

This section reveals old people's experiences and shows how they perceive changes and transformations within the family due to demographic and socio-economic changes. Following the introductory part on the description of fieldwork and applied methods, we first look into old people's current living arrangements and then present the assessment made by older villagers of the role and status of women, especially of the daughter-in-law. Respondents' thoughts on the once clearly defined shifting roles and responsibilities within the family are subsequently revealed. The last section discusses how old people assess the perceived changing attitudes of young people towards them.

Fieldwork and applied methods

Empirical case study data from the middle hills of western Nepal was used for the following empirical sections. The study was conducted in four different rural Village Development Committees (VDC)³ in Kaski district (Ghachowk, Machhapuchhare, Parche and Namarjung VDC) and on one site in Syangja district (Thuladihi VDC), both located in Gandaki province. The region's long history of migration dates back to the early nineteenth century when the British Indian army began to recruit from the ethnic Gurung and Magar groups (eg Macfarlane 1976). Since the 1990s in particular, international migration has increased both in terms of numbers and patterns. In 2012, 49.7% of households in Syangja district were missing members and 32.3% in Kaski district (GoN 2012: 38). Officially recorded absentees from the district's total population amount to 17.5% in Syangja and to 11.6% in Kaski (GoN 2014: 227).

Various ethnic and caste groups inhabit the area, though Gurung, Chhetri, hill Brahmin and Dalit are the largest groups. Livelihood strategies and income sources include farm work such as subsistence farming, livestock and commercial crop production, as well as non-

3 We refer to the old administrative and political terms as used by interviewees in 2016 and 2017.

agricultural activities like running a small business (eg tea shops). Remittances play a vital role in ensuring a livelihood (eg Seddon et al 2002).

Semi-structured problem-centred interviews (Witzel and Reiter 2012) were conducted with older villagers, focusing on a set of topics related to ageing and life in old age. For the purposes of this article, we only took into account data that serves to illustrate old people's views on changes in their family and village. Interviews took place in informal settings, either at respondents' homes or during a chance encounter on the road. Random purposeful sampling (Patton 1990) was applied to determine a selection of people aged 60 years or above who originated from eight different castes and ethnic groups.

The whole sample for the study consisted of 71 older villagers: 29 female and 42 male interviewees⁴ of ages ranging from 57 to 97 years.⁵ Their castes and ethnic groups included: Gurung (18), Brahmin (15), Dalit (12), Chhetri (10), Magar (9), Tamang (4), Newar (2) and Maithil (1). Most respondents were married, 25 were widowed, three separated from their spouse and one single. All had children with the exception of two respondents. Three quarters of interviewees reported at least one adult child or grandchild who had migrated. Of these 54 cases, 44 respondents reported having family members abroad and, in the other ten cases, within Nepal. During data collection, migrants were for the most part absent.

Two group discussions took place using a simple participatory visual method to comprehend local people's perceptions of various institutions, individuals and programmes (Kumar 2002). Empirical data was collected during the months of autumn 2016 and 2017. All interviews, with few exceptions, were conducted in Nepali, recorded with the respondents' permission and translated into English with the help of a field assistant. Text data was then analysed by the structured content analysis method according to Mayring (2010).

4 There were fewer female participants than male participants because women feel intimidated giving interviews and refuse to share their experiences. And they go out of their homes more often than men (to the market or to work in their fields).

5 Only one woman was younger than 60. She was desperate to give an interview and insisted on taking part as a 'grandmother and old woman'.

Shrinking households and incomplete families

What are living arrangements in rural hill villages like today? In the case-study area, the majority of families may be labelled ‘incomplete’ (Macfarlane 1976). Living and household arrangements change as people, mostly young men but also increasingly women, migrate or move away from their native village. Most young adults who migrate leave on a contract to work abroad for several months if not years.

The living arrangements of the old people in the study (see Table 1) show that coresidence with at least one child still prevails (49 of 71 cases). Of these, 29 live in a three-generation household and the others in a two-generation household. However, it is worth noting that altogether one third of all respondents live in a single-generation household, consisting of people of the same age group: either a spouse (11 cases), kin and non-kin adults (1 case),⁶ or alone (10 cases). One- or two-generation households are characterised by smaller households. Twenty-two respondents have separate households but, in 10 cases, their children still live nearby (see Figure 1). In two of these 22 households, the kitchen used by older family members is separate from the other kitchen, though the other rooms are shared equally (see Figure 2). Financial resources are managed separately in these two cases. The remaining interviewees talked about pooling money from remittances, their old age allowance⁷ or other income sources.

The traditional patrilocal family model prevailed. Only one Gurung interviewee lived in his own daughter’s household. Several older respondents reported that some of their children lived in Pokhara and that they commuted on-and-off between their village and the town. Their main reasons for going to Pokhara were to look after or to spend time with their grandchildren and to benefit from urban infrastructures and services, mainly health care. One older woman had moved from the Tarai to a village in the hills to stay with her youngest son who works in Kaski district. Another of her sons lived in Banke district with his family. She therefore commuted between Kaski and Banke.

6 In this case, two sisters lived together, sharing the house with people with whom they had no kinship ties.

7 Old age allowance (or senior citizen’s allowance): the Nepalese social pension scheme comprises a monthly cash transfer (2,000 Nepalese rupees = 16.65 US Dollars) and is unconditionally available to all people aged 70 years and above, and for Dalits from 60 years and above. In rural areas of the country, it is usually distributed every four months.

A few respondents mentioned the possibility of following their children to a new place of residence; however, none of them would have preferred this option to living in their husband's ancestral village.⁸ Gautam (2008: 149f) makes similar observations in nearby Galkot (Baglung District) where old people left behind in the village do not wish to move away from their homes but hope that their children will return to the village in the future.

| Kaski and Syangja districts | Total sample (n=71) | Total sample (%) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Co-residence | 49 | 69% |
| 2-generation household ^a | 19 | 26.76% |
| 2-generation household ^b | 1 | 1.40% |
| 3-generation household | 29 | 40.84% |
| With spouse only | 11 | 15.49% |
| Alone^c | 10 | 14.10% |
| With adult relative(s) only | 1 | 1.41% |
| Total | 71 | 100.00% |

a Person lived with at least one child, son or daughter-in-law

b Person lived with daughter and son-in-law

c Person had a child living nearby, in an urban area, or was childless.

Table 1: Living arrangements of older respondents in the five villages of Kaski and Syangja District.

These figures represent a snapshot and do not prove that there is an established trend. However, the topic of shrinking households and of incomplete families has always been a subject of conversation with old people. 'Joint families break into different small families' (Group discussion 1, 2016) – this issue was also largely addressed in group discussions. A few participants bemoaned the loss of *gharko vātāvaraṅ* [house environment] due to the family no longer being intact or complete. By 'environment', they mean receiving proper treatment

⁸ As data collection was limited to the villages, we have no data for older people who moved to town.

and mutual support from their adult children and food that is prepared for the whole family using the same kitchen. Both women and men expressed a feeling of regret and of the loss of a multi-generational household living under the same roof. However, male respondents were more wistful when talking about their past life. One old man reported:

I've already told you that old people do not receive care and affection like in the past. (...) In the past, if you asked [people] what the condition was then – it would be as follows: old people used to stay at home with their son and daughter-in-law. Children used to care for their parents. They used to cook together and share everything, provide something good from time to time, insofar as they were able to. But at present, everyone has gone to towns for a job, education and to do business on their own. (Interview 155, 2016)

Separate households of a smaller size are not only the result of increased mobility and migration of the young to urban areas and abroad for education purposes and work opportunities: this phenomenon also correlates with the changing role of women. The following section



Figure 1: An old ex-Gorkha Gurung soldier lives with his wife in a longhouse under the same roof as his relatives, but in separate households (Ghachowk, 2018, U. Müller-Böker)

reveals the consequences of these developments on women's status, in particular the status of the daughter-in-law.



Figure 2: An 82-year-old Brahmin woman stands in front of her house explaining that her three sons (1 married with 3 children, 2 with a disability) live under the same roof but have separate kitchens (Ghachowk, 2016, S. Speck)

The shifting social status of women and daughters-in-law

How do old people perceive the transformation of the socio-economic status of women and especially of the daughter-in-law? As mentioned in the literature review, reports and publications show that women's social status has improved inside and outside the family and that many young women challenge the daughter-in-law's traditionally ascribed role and duties. The following critical statements in this section, which were made by old people, reflect this change.

Some respondents shared the view that, contrary to the situation in the past, their daughters-in-law would not help with household chores and agricultural work. They preferred to look after themselves and their children. Besides, an increasing number of married women have taken up paid employment in urban areas (see Speck 2017). Furthermore, moving to an urban area presents the possibility of ensuring an education for their children. A 66-year-old woman from Tanting described the changes:

Most of them [her sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren] have migrated. I think society is changing these days. It is good for them as they get good jobs and education there. I don't think they go there in vain, I believe they get good jobs. And their children, they stay in student hostels for their education and studies. We cannot afford everything that our children and grandchildren demand, so our children have to work too. (Interview 63, 2017)

Respondents talked rather unwillingly about the conflicts between their children and their respective partners and their failed relationships, yet it became obvious that broken relationships between daughters-in-law and their husbands, who had migrated, led to the decision either to separate or to move away completely from the husband's home and village (see also Yamanaka 2005). In ten cases in our study, daughters-in-law either set up a separate household nearby or moved away from their in-laws' place of residence. Intergenerational conflicts too may lead to the decision to leave (see Thieme et al 2011: 66). A 72-year-old man complained about quarrelling with one of his sons who lived at home. When the altercations became too much to bear for both parties, his son moved away with his family to another place. A 70-year-old man complained about his daughter-in-law who had decided to live with her parents soon after she gave birth, instead of living with him and helping him with household and agricultural work while his son was away in India. The old people in our sample were intimidated by their daughters-in-law's new self-confidence and decision-making power, especially in the absence of their husbands. Old women in particular mentioned how they struggled with their daughters-in-law's modes of communication and behaviour, as described by this 73-year-old Brahmin woman:

Everyone is doing that: they have left their old parents at home. In the past, we had to follow the orders given by our in-laws, our husband. But now, instead, we have to be careful about what our daughter-in-law tells us. We are afraid of what our son will think about us. Today everything is the other way around. In our time, back then, we had to obey the orders of our elders, our parents and our in-laws. But today, we have to obey whatever our daughters-in-law say. We have to do whatever they say. Daily activities and who should do what are

now assigned by our daughter-in-law, and we have to eat what she provides. We can't discuss this with them as they are familiar with the modern world, new rules and technologies. These days, we older people are *daman* [dominated]. They [daughters-in-law] dominate mothers-in-law. (Interview 59, 2017)

According to many female respondents, daughters-in-law behave increasingly badly and ignore traditional roles (see Bhandari and Titzmann 2017). Male respondents were somewhat disappointed about these changes. Several older men were not at all satisfied with the recent transformation and emancipation of women. A 60-year-old man expressed his concern as follows:

When women start to talk more, I don't feel good, I feel uncomfortable (*sahaj mahasus gardina*). When women talk about their rights and everything, how can I, a man, be satisfied? They should speak and behave politely, and speak only to a certain extent, not too much. (Interview 141, 2016)

He explained that he felt discriminated and marginalised when female family members in his own household joined discussions and took part in important decisions. Others mentioned that women were breaking *paramparā* [tradition rules]. In one case, a male respondent talked about his sister's family where a relative had recently passed away. Both the daughter and son of the deceased organised the funeral instead of only the male family members as dictated by tradition. The respondent was unwilling to understand this new practice.

The daughter-in-law's role and responsibilities within the family are highly contested. The older generation deplores the reversal of hierarchical positions, particularly between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. Moreover, the old women and men in this study barely acknowledged or understood what the international development agenda has defined as a central goal, the empowerment of women. They associate the daughter-in-law's changing role with less care and attention towards their generation.

Shifting roles and responsibilities

The majority of our respondents mentioned that ageing made them less mobile and thus more housebound and confined to walking shorter distances around the house. While 17 respondents complained that age-related afflictions such as poor eyesight, pain in their joints, problems walking and other physical ailments prevented them from contributing to household chores or work in the fields, the others said that they still helped in the household, taking care of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, collecting firewood, foraging, gardening and carrying out agricultural work. The redistribution of household chores and agricultural work among those remaining at home during the absence of migrant family members was particularly highlighted by respondents. How are the redistributed and renegotiated responsibilities and the shift in roles among family members viewed by older people?

In cohabiting households (which represent 69% of our sample), the son was mainly responsible for managing financial and other material resources. 'My sons manage everything. And sometimes we ask how they manage, but they reply that is not necessary for us to know how they manage' (Interview 58, 2017). This Brahmin woman complained that, unlike in the past, her adult children would not ask her for advice nor tell her husband or herself about any decisions they made. Data shows that roles that used to be clearly defined – such as taking responsibility and making decisions concerning material and financial resources – are changing. Older respondents reported that the role of the head of the household and the associated authority are now assumed by those bringing in financial resources, mostly in the form of remittances. In the absence of adult sons, their wives – daughters-in-law – often hold managerial positions and administer the finances (see Maharjan et al 2012: 117 ff, Gram et al 2018). It appears that, given their dwindling share of household chores and economic contribution, older family members are increasingly being deprived of their say in household matters.

These changes in the family composition, the new distribution of roles and recent laws in favour of gender equality have affected other traditional rules. Transferring and dividing land among male offspring used to be common practice. However, in our case study we observed different forms of intra-household landownership.

Forty-nine of the 71 respondents said they owned land: of these 49

respondents, 25 lived in co-residence. Twenty of the 71 respondents confided that they were economically active, gardening, farming and raising livestock on their own land, and two respondents, one Dalit and one Chhetri, reported that they worked on land that belonged to somebody else. Six of the 20 respondents said that their land was tilled by tenants (see Speck 2017); four had already transferred their land to their sons; and three respondents stated that they shared land equally with their offspring (see Table 2).

The remaining 22 of the 71 respondents had either no land at all (13 cases) or only a tiny garden (1 case) or knew nothing about their land tenure (8 cases).

Of the 13 respondents with no land, four were Dalits, three Gurungs, three Magars, one Tamang, one Maithil and one Brahmin. Eight of the 13 were widowed. This reflects the fact that single (widowed or separated) persons and Dalits in particular possess fewer physical resources. In our sample, there are one and a half times more widows than widowers. One possible explanation for landlessness among widows is that in the past they had no right to their husband’s property (Michaels 2020: 297 ff). Four of the 13 respondents were not locals but had migrated from other places and had not purchased land.

Eight respondents out of the 22 reported not knowing how much land they actually had. However, six of those said that their sons or hired labour worked the land or that it was left barren.

| Land-owner | Respon- dent him-/ herself | Spouse (m/f) | Work on somebody else's land | Shared with children | Trans- ferred to son(s) | Total land- owners |
|------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | 27/5 | 8/0 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 49 |

Table 2: Landownership of the 49 respondents in the study.

In old age, land is commonly equated with a safety deposit. Handing down land to ones descendants once guaranteed that the younger generation cared for their elders in old age. This was referred to by interviewees and discussed in one of the group discussions (see also Speck 2017). An 87-year-old Chhetri man expressed this very clearly:

Sons don't talk to their parents if they [parents] don't provide a son's share of the property. They won't care about their parents. (...) This is happening not only here in my family but everywhere, in everybody's family. This is the kind of experience and feeling people have today. That's why old people complain about their children, that their children do not care about them, or support and provide them with food. (Interview 155, 2016)

His statement shows that land is an important aspect in terms of security, authority and intergenerational relations in the family. This opinion is still widespread and embedded in old people's minds. In the 1980s Goldstein and Beall already observed the dilemma whereby, once property had been transferred to the sons still living in the household, members of the older generation became 'a powerless appendage to the son's household' in a way that forced them 'to relinquish their independence and diminish their self-esteem as well as economic and authority status' (Goldstein and Beall 1982: 747).

Only a few interviewees said they realised that land is no longer as important because there are other economic sources and strategies, other than via agriculture, for earning a living these days. However, other scholars have reported the growing abandonment of agricultural work, with an increase in the amount of land that is left fallow and in forest coverage, showing that farmland has lost its importance (Jaquet et al 2016, B. KC et al 2017, N. R. Khanal and Watanabe 2006, Niraula 1995, Speck 2017). In rural Nepal, the value of farmland, which is an important pledge of the tacit intergenerational contract in the hands of older people, has decreased considerably.

Less respect and appreciation

How do older people assess young people's changing attitudes towards them? In addition to shifting responsibilities and roles, interviewees underlined the fact that they were shown less respect and esteem. The following reflections made by an 87-year-old Chhetri man express these changes very clearly:

The son and daughter-in-law should feel obliged to look after and care for their parents when they become old. At present, we

haven't seen many of our adult children speaking or caring about their parents. They think that their parents have grown old and are too old to continue to work. (...) Their [adult children's] view and mindset focus only on present issues, not on future problems. (...) The younger generations will not follow *paramparāgat cālcalan* [traditional behaviour]. Very few will follow this, because the majority are (now) following the Western culture. (...) Instead of caring for us older people and trying to understand our feelings, our children criticise us and ask us what older people do for them [as they are physically incapable of working anymore]. (Interview 155, 2016)

The old man remarked on the growing individualism among young people at the expense of familial ties and reciprocal intergenerational support. The majority of interviewees shared similar views: for example, an 83-year-old woman who remembered having shown utmost respect and provided assistance to her elders and to her own parents. However, 'today it is no longer the same with the young generation', she said. Some respondents formulated the unfulfilled expectations they had of their own children. Statements such as, 'I expect that. It would be good if they looked after us, fed us, provided us with facilities, comfort' (interview 164, 2016) were frequently heard. They felt that they received less care and support compared with their parents. Male interviewees in particular reflected about the deviating behaviour of the young who do not act according to their expectations. Older respondents acknowledged their declining social status within the family but also in the community. For example, an 85-year-old man said that he had noticed that young people even avoided direct contact and no longer spoke to him.

The fear of exile (see Michaels 2020) and of being driven out of their own homes by their children was present in a few conversations. However, none of the interviewees had undergone such an experience, but they referred to stories they had heard in the village. Many were worried that a trend towards scorning and disregarding old people had become the norm. However, there was the hope that children 'remember that the parents raised them, made great efforts to care for them when they were children' (interview 66, 2017). A 68-year-old father of four daughters expected the latter to look after him in old age even though

he knew they had paid jobs and had to fulfil their duty towards their in-laws and that these things were not in keeping with the tradition of daughters assuming this responsibility.

Respondents experienced, for the most part verbally, the change in attitude towards old people in society. Some respondents also noted a downward trend in caring behaviour, respectful interactions, and financial and emotional support. Ageism, unacceptable behaviour and attitudes, and even physical abuse of old persons were reported in certain cases and confirmed by other studies (eg Speck 2017, Rai et al 2018). Indeed, when asked about any misbehaviour or ill-treatment by younger people towards them, only 12 of the 71 respondents said that they had never been treated badly. This applied to their own children but also to other people who used to speak politely and to show respect and appreciation towards them.

The present empirical findings are not explicit evidence of an increase in verbal or physical mistreatment of old people by the younger generation. However, the fact that virtually all respondents shared the same experiences and views showed clear dissatisfaction and perceived neglect on their part.

Concluding remarks

This study reveals the views of older people on current changes in family composition, the intergenerational contract and the transformation of roles – triggered by rapid demographic change, outmigration of younger generations and socio-economic change in rural remote villages of the hill region of western Nepal. Having seen their lives significantly affected by the intertwining of these three major processes – demographic transition, migration and socio-economic change –, older people have entered a transition phase.

This transition is manifested by the current wide range of older people's living arrangements. The majority of households (53 of 71) have absent members. Co-residence with at least one child still prevails. However, one third of respondents live in a single-generation household. According to our data, the traditional concept of patrilocality whereby the daughter-in-law moves into her husband's house (*ghar*) largely prevails. Nevertheless, we assume that it is also only a matter of time before this practice changes. Smaller households and the nucleation of

families with fewer children not only derive from the increasing mobility of the younger generations but also result from women's changing role, which reorients the social fabric of families.

The role and responsibilities of the daughter-in-law, especially within families receiving remittances, have grown. Many young women openly represent their own interests and those of their children. And in many cases, it can be assumed that the relationship between spouses has evolved into a partnership. However, this empowerment of women is not to the liking of the older generation because it clearly threatens the system of support and care for them (see also Yarger and Brauner-Otto 2014).

Ageing means that the ability to work and mobility are on the decline. The absence of family members who have migrated also leads to a redistribution of household chores and agricultural work among those who are left behind. Younger family members are increasingly taking over the reins of power by assuming responsibility and managing financial and material resources, especially those who bring in or receive financial resources, mostly in the form of remittances.

As previously mentioned, land is of great importance to old people as it is seen as a safety deposit. Those, who do not possess land, in our case Dalits but also widowed or separated men and women, cannot fall back on this asset. Yet the increase in the amount of fallow land and in forest coverage shows that agricultural land has lost much of its value. Furthermore, the new inheritance law that ensures a daughter equal rights to parental property (GoN 2017b) will shape future generational and gendered power relations, and will contribute to a dissolution of patrilineal and patrilocal practices.

The empirical data here reveals that, on the whole, old people still cling on to traditional family life and to living in a joint family composition, and often reminisce about a rosier past. The majority are dissatisfied with the transformations that have affected the family unit and which they regard as negatively affecting their own lives and most importantly their welfare in old age. Several respondents expressed concern that soon only old people will be left in villages to look after young grandchildren, the house and the land, receiving very little or no care and support in their old age (see also Speck 2017).

In Nepal, demographic growth that results in an ageing society

goes hand in hand with societal change, which in turn entails changes in traditional care and support for old people. Hence, the latter find themselves in a precarious transitional phase in which the family as the basic social institution in old age is in danger and is falling apart. Living together as a family under one roof and benefitting from reciprocal intergenerational support can no longer be taken for granted. The intergenerational contract has to be adapted and renegotiated by considering the different needs and life concepts of all family members.

We have not balanced older people's statements and experiences against the perspective of younger people. We are fully aware of this one-sided view. Nonetheless, it is of utmost urgency to depict the perceptions of this specific social group, old people, as they have long been neglected and their voices left unheard in development and livelihood studies and, by and large, in research on population issues in the Global South. With regard to transferability, it needs to be borne in mind that Nepal, and especially the middle-hill region, is a particular case with regard to massive outmigration of the younger population. The voices of old people contribute to the overarching goal: to raise awareness about current and future challenges related to population ageing and family change, and about opportunities that call for political and societal response and negotiation of the intergenerational contract. Our research shows that several forms of development take place simultaneously and are inevitably entangled, changing the intergenerational contract and family living arrangements for older people.

Despite the pressing issue of filling the widening gap in support and care, and of meeting the needs of old people, the challenges and demands of an ageing society have not yet been properly anticipated nor fully recognised by most governments in the Global South. However, greater focus on ageing populations in politics and society is inevitable in view of the rapid demographic changes and continuous migration practices in countries of the Global South.

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Abodes of the Vajra-Yoginis: Mount Mañicūḍa and Paśupatiḥṣetra as envisaged in the *Triḍalakamala* and *Mañiśailamahāvādāna*

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Abstract

This study examines how the logic of localisation functions in Buddhist tantric literature and ritual as a powerful tool to convey knowledge and authoritative lineage via the immediacy of the manifest world. Literature composed in Newar (*Nepāl Bhāṣā*) and Sanskrit continues to link the pantheon of Buddhist tantric deities to religious figures and multivalent sites in the Kathmandu Valley. Narratives of exploits (*avadānas*) and songs describe how heroes (*vīras*), heroines (*vīreśvarīs*) and magical female beings (*yoginīs*) reside and are encountered as site-specific mandalas of Buddhist tantric systems. This article examines two such sites in light of their related corpus of local literature: a unique solitary form of Vajrayoginī – Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī – who is worshipped at Mount Mañicūḍa near Sankhu, and Nairātmyā – the semi-wrathful consort of Hevajra – who is worshipped in Paśupatiḥṣetra, Deopatan. In this article, I look at local accounts, excerpts from the *Mañiśailamahāvādāna* composed in *Nepāl Bhāṣā*, and offer an edition of the Sanskrit *Triḍalakamala* practice song (*caryāgīti*). I utilise these sources to investigate how the sacred landscapes of the Buddhist *vajra-yoginīs* in Nepal remain integral to the hermeneutics of reception of tantric Buddhism.

Keywords: Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism, *caryāgīti*, Nairātmyā, Ugratārā Vajrayoginī, sanctified landscape

Introduction

‘Earthy, immanent and wise, all dualities end here, all binaries perish in you, o’ terrible beauty...’ (Gupto 2016: 1). In his *Prayer to the Goddess*, Shreedhar Lohani aptly conveys the sense of how the sacred can be perceived as connected with the manifest world – the earth in particular – rather than as transcending it. The ambiguous goddess of whom he speaks facilitates a means to a soteriological end: a reality of awakening to non-duality which is at once terrible, beautiful and indissolubly associated with the land. According to Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions, tantric divinities can be conceived of in a multitude of ways. Tantric divinities may be considered to be present within the *vajra* body of the aspirant (*sādhaka*) as called for in the body mandala, a practice often highlighted by the tantric commentaries. They may also be present as the life force (*prāṇa*) of a deity, which can be established (*pratiṣṭha*) through processes of consecration, as residing within suitable vessels: variously crafted images (*mūrti*) in a temple, *paubha* paintings, *maṇḍalas*, *caityas*, and even *sūtras* (O’Neill 2020: 54). Yet, Newar, Nepalese and Tibetan Vajrayānists are also the caretakers and lineage holders of tantric Buddhist traditions that recognise and worship tantric divinities as emerging spontaneously and residing at specific geographical sites and rock formations in the land. These outer dwelling places of tantric deities are sometimes referred to as seats (Skt. *pīṭha*, Tib. *gnas*). This terminology may normatively refer to physical sites located in concentrically arranged body (*kāya*), speech (*vāk*) and mind (*citta*) circles such as the twenty-four seats (*pīṭhas*) of the Cakrasaṃvara (Tib. *gnas chan nyer nyer lna*) or Maheśvara systems. Yet there are also other cases of external and physical abodes of the deities that may be circumstantially and locally referred to as various kinds of dwelling places (Skt. *pīṭha*, Tib. *gnas*) of the pantheon of tantric deities.

Ritual officiants of Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism, Vajrācārya temple priests (*pūjārīs*) and lineage holders (*mūlācāryas*) venerate and care for a plethora of Buddhist yoginis – magical female beings who dwell in marginal and liminal locales (Sugiki 2009: 517) among other divinities, as the inhabitants of this earthly domain. This article focuses on two of the local sites in the Kathmandu Valley where the Buddhist yoginis Ugratārā Vajrayoginī and Nairātmyā are considered to be present. These two figures are considered to have emerged locally and in connection

with features of the land: from the flowing water (*jala*) of natural springs and from divine flames (*jyoti*) that arise spontaneously. First, I discuss Ugratārā Vajrayoginī of Sankhu (New. *Sakva*) as envisaged in one version of the *Maṇisāilamahāvādāna* (*MŚM*), a text local narrative extant in *Nepāl Bhāṣā* and in Sanskrit.¹ Second, I turn to local literature related to *Nairātmyā*, the semi-wrathful consort of Hevajra, worshipped by Newar Buddhists within the Guhyeśvarī temple complex near Paśupati-nāth temple within the ‘field of Lord Śiva as Paśupati’, Paśupati-kṣetra – a popular Hindu pilgrimage site. I explicate how Ugratārā Vajrayoginī and *Nairātmyā* are both worshipped in the local Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions of Nepal and I provide an edition of the practice song (*caryāgīti*) *Tridalakamala* (*TDK*) that has been prepared on the basis of an undated Nepalese manuscript in *pracalit* script² from Bhaktapur and compared with three other witnesses.

The two yoginīs dwell in clearly distinct places: Ugratārā Vajrayoginī resides (New. *birājamāna*) in a functional Newar *bāhāḥ* or monastic institution (*vihāra*), while *Nairātmyā* yoginī is located in a multivalent pilgrimage site, the temple of Guhyeśvarī, which does not share the same characteristics as a Newar monastic institution such as the required presence of a *caitya* in the central courtyard. In this article, however, it is my aim to describe how these two figures of the *yoganiruttaratantra* category both function as tantric deities and lineage deities (New. *diḡu dyah*) in unique local ritual and literary traditions of tantric Buddhism where it is considered that a person can encounter (*melāka*) them directly in the manifest world, each at their respective hillside shrines.

This article navigates between two theoretical worlds that are often made distinct from a methodological perspective: classical textual analysis and the study of the contemporary praxis of Vajrayana Buddhists. In this interstitial space, I present my study of two Buddhist manuscripts and share varied perspectives on these texts and their related sites in Buddhist ritual worlds. This article aims to highlight how caretakers of tantric traditions – storytellers, philosophers, artists

1 The author’s dissertation on the Nepāl Bhāṣā version of this text is forthcoming.

2 The *pracalit* script, one of the three Newar scripts used to write Sanskrit, resembles Tibetan script in a number of ways, one being that it stacks sub-scripted letters under the radical, unlike the *devanagari* script from which Tibetan script is thought to have been derived.

and yogins alike – still rely on the tangible world to convey the path of tantric Buddhism in a manner that is visceral and therefore compelling. In this respect, the visualisation of the deity, the yogini in this context, becomes more than an intellectual exercise. It also involves recollection (*smaraṇa*) based on the memory of engagement and encounter (*darśana*), and devotion (*bhakti*) towards divinities present in the past, which persists today in the continuity of lineage and literature. It is this close relationship between the memory of the yogin and the perceived power of the tangible world – as not ontologically independent from the yogini – that remains an important medium for the process of tantric transmission. I argue that emplaced tantric traditions and their rituals constitute a pedagogy of locale that is supported by a related corpus of literature, a method of practice and teaching that has been crucial in the spread, preservation of both esoteric and exoteric Buddhism in Nepal.

Emplaced Buddhism in Nepal

The power of place, a form of power that becomes mobile and reproducible in the hands of its agents, has long reflected how Buddhist systems have been introduced, conveyed and localised, or emplaced, across Buddhist Asia. Expansion often involved dynamic processes of narrative transmission in local vernaculars with a good deal of wandering, as shown by Neelis (2011) and Lenz (2010). But, as Huber points out in his study of Tsari, Tibet, places are not necessarily perceived as ontologically different from the beings who reside there and the socially normative assumption is one of a, ‘complex ontological continuity between persons, places, substances and non-human beings’ (Huber 1999: 14). The observation of how emplaced local narratives have contributed to this oral and material transmission of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Nepal and beyond is not new (Lewis 2000, Emmrich 1999, Neelis 2014). There is wide recognition of the ways in which relics, stūpas, book worship and narratives of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, both preceding and following the lifespan of Śākyamuni Buddha, all facilitated ‘shifts which increased the Buddha’s ability to be present in new ways’ (Wedemeyer 2014: 71–72). But what agents, methods and local practices in this process facilitated this increased ability of the Buddha? In the Kathmandu Valley, Newar Buddhists composed narratives in the form of prose, metred poems, songs and scroll paintings (New. *paubhā*) that

portray the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding foothills as the dwelling places and shrines of a vast pantheon of Buddhist divinities including *buddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, *bhairavas*, *kṣetrapālas*, clan deities (New. *digu dyah*), *aṣṭamātrkāś* – and yoginis who are sometimes synonymous with them.

In the exoteric Buddhism of Nepal, exploits of *buddhas*, *bodhisattvas* and Buddhist goddesses are communicated by Vajrācārya storytellers at public events that range from commonplace recitations to dramatic representations that transport the listeners in time and space. Transregional narratives emplaced in Nepal, localised *avadānas* and the *jātakas* act to forge associations between sites and events and figures in textual traditions (Neelis 2014: 252), while also facilitating the adaptation of Buddhism to local socio-economic and cultural milieus (Lewis 2000: 4). Emmrich further notes how localised stories in Nepal function within an inverse framework that also connects (or adapts) the local to elements of a broader global literary tradition (Emmrich 2012: 541). In and around the major Newar cities of Kathmandu (New. Yeṃ, Skt. Kāntipur), Bhaktapur (New. Kvaṇa) and Patan (New. Yala, Skt. Lalitpur) and many Newar towns, storytelling accompanies ritual events and observances (*vratas*) (Lewis 2000: 116), events that are often organised during auspicious occasions, such as the lunar month of Guṃlā when merit (*puṇya*) accumulation is maximised. In the predigital age before television was prevalent in the region, such events would have acted as the primary resource for pleasurable entertainment and communal gathering.³ Vernacular readings of the *Vyāghrī Jātaka* (aka *Mahāsattvarājākumāra Avadāna*), *Siṃhalasārthabāhu Avadāna*, *Bisvaṃtara Jātaka* and other narratives composed in Newar or Nepāl Bhāṣā (New. nevaḥ bhāy), all meant to be orally narrated, describe the lives and teachings of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* residing in Nepal.

Previous *buddhas* like Dīpaṃkara, Vipassī (Vipasvi), Sikhī and Kāssapa are all described in the *Svayambhūpurāna* as having resided in Nepal (Bajracharya 2014: xii). Storytelling thus functions as a highly effective pedagogical tool of transmission that renders the experience of the devotee much more visceral especially when a connection between site and narrative is conceptualised and acted upon. In terms of Vajrayāna Buddhism – a system of tantric traditions that aspire soteriologically

3 Bal Gopal Shrestha, personal communication, January 2020.

to liberation from *samsāra* in this lifetime –, the sense of urgency and immediacy imparted by living, emplaced traditions becomes a pedagogical tool *par excellence*.

Nepal as a Residence of Tantric Deities

Early tantric developments in Nepal were centred around the configuration of the Five Buddhas (*pañcatathāgata*), with later developments evolving to include their consorts in about the ninth century (Gellner 1992: 252). Solitary mother deities, local protectors and lineage deities (New. *digu dyaḥ*) were also assimilated into the fold of the Buddhist tantric pantheon and nomenclature from an early period. As noted by Davidson, a primary method of reception of the Buddhist tantras was a tendency to identify specific locales, ‘wherein was located a divinity with specific properties (such as his family) and specific mantras’ (Davidson 2002: 211). Yet, as Snellgrove pointed out long ago, even though ‘in the [tantric] commentaries, one is dealing always with the internal process as the end envisaged,’ and for those commentators, there are in fact, ‘no places of pilgrimage like those within one’s own body,’ the purview of the tantras (and of Vajrayāna Buddhists) has always been coupled with rites in the manifest world (Snellgrove 1959: 8-9). In this respect, an understanding of places, specifically meeting places (*melaka*), is indispensable. The locales I look at in this article act in unique ways as ‘places of meeting’ (*melāpaka*) where mantras and mandalas of the tantric pantheon are greeted and received by the tantric acolyte within the ritualised context of Vajrayāna Buddhism. These locales facilitate the introduction of the aspirant to the *yoginī*, her corresponding worship (*pūjā*) and practice (*sādhāna*) with the lofty goal of transcending the suffering world (*samsāra*) and reaching mundane and supramundane achievements (*siddhi*) by which one becomes liberated (*mukta*) or awakened (*bodhi*) in this life.

In Nepal, esoteric practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism include the systematised and targeted practice of pilgrimage and worship (*pūjā*) at the seats (*pīṭhas*) of the mandalas of the tantric Buddhas: for example, the mandalas of Cakrasaṃvara, Hevajra and Maheśvara⁴ and their corresponding heroes and heroines, to name a few. This practice is

4 According to Naresh Man Bajracharya, a Buddhist form of Maheśvara.

known as *purvasevā* because it is a preliminary yet post-initiation tantric ritual, or *pīṭhasevā* and *pīṭhapūjā* since it takes place at various abodes or seats (*pīṭhas*) of tantric divinities. While some of the narratives and songs about these pairs of heroes (*vīras*) and heroines (*vīreśvarīs*) and the *yoginīs* are popular among the Newar Buddhist community and are reproduced at community gatherings during the month of Guṃlā, according to orthodox Newar Vajrayanists, others are reserved for tantric rituals during the post-initiation period, if one is to adhere to the prescribed stages of the path in Newar Buddhism.

Before I turn to the sites specific to Ugratārā Vajrayoginī and Nairātmyā, it is important to address the issue of ambiguity surrounding the definition of an authentic *pīṭha* site, a topic of concern which, for many commentators on Buddhist tantras, has been seen as being of utmost import. In Nepal, this definition is further complicated by the manifestation of various seats as assimilated within a system of worship of aniconic and autochthonous divinities associated with land and family lineages (*kula*). Yet, even in the eyes of compilers of Saṃvara, Hevajra and related tantric cycles, there also seems to be a certain degree of ambiguity that is worth noting. Generally, the essence of a *pīṭha* in Saṃvara and Hevajra cycles is defined as a place where the *yoginīs* congregate and communicate in a coded language (Davidson 2002: 267). And regarding places of congregation, the *Hevajratantra* states:

There at that meeting place [*melāpaka, melaka*], abiding within that sacred domain, do whatever the *yoginīs* say. [And when] Vajragarbha asks, ‘What, O’ Lord, are these places of meeting?’, the Lord replies [listing the 10 site categories (*pīṭhādī*)], ‘They are *pīṭha*, and the *upapīṭha*, the *kṣetra* [...]’⁵

Sugiki, however, mentions a Saṃvara text that defines the essence of a *pīṭha* site rather as consisting of naturally occurring geological rock formations of various [aniconic] shapes, including rock lingas and dharmodayas manifested in the landscape.⁶ This text is the

5 tatra melāyāṃ divyagocaram āśritya|| yad vadanti yoginīyas tat sarvam kartavyaṃ|| (transliteration in Snellgrove 1959, Vol. II, p. 22).

6 Abhayākaragupta and Śākyarakṣita were proponents of the theory whereby female beings constitute the ‘essence’ of *pīṭhas* (ibid), not the presence of sexed rock and

Śrīcakrasaṃvaravikurvaṇa ascribed to Nāropāda and translated by Marpa, which is included in the Tibetan bsTan ‘Gyur’ and which, I argue, may reflect particular views specific to the Himalayan concept of the Buddhist yogini and *pīṭha* as emplaced in the land.

Ugratārā Vajrayoginī at Mount Mañicūḍa, Sankhu

The *Mañisailavadāna* (*MŚĀ*) is an undated narrative work extant in a single incomplete Sanskrit manuscript hand-scribed into a notebook kept at the home of a Vajrācārya resident of Sankhu. In the past, the story contained in the sixteen chapter *MŚĀ* and its analogous thirteen chapter relative composed in Nepāl Bhāṣā, the *Mañisailamahāvadāna* (*MŚM*), was read aloud in all the quarters of the town of Sankhu during the month of Guṃlā, a tradition that has since fallen into decline. The last extant Sanskrit *tyasaphū*-style manuscript of the *MŚĀ* is thought to have been damaged and washed away by heavy rains after it was buried in the massive earthquake of 2015 that devastated Sankhu and caused the loss of many lives. The *MŚM* is extant in several Nepāl Bhāṣā renditions, the most recent and popular version being the one produced by Barnavajra Bajracharya who published it in two editions: first in 1962 and 1963, and then as a single volume in 1999. This local narrative preserves the story of the emergence of Ugratārā Vajrayoginī self-described as a ‘glorification of place’ (*mahātmyā*) even though the designation of *mahāvadāna*, a ‘great tale of acts’, is the title provided by its editors and compilers. *MŚM* records: the origin and a detailed description of Ugratārā Vajrayoginī as well as her exploits around Mount Mañicūḍa; a description of the divine properties of the area and how she created the town of Sankhu; and the origin story of a noble lineage of married *vajrācārya pūjārīs* priests whose families are entrusted with safeguarding the well-known Sankhu Vajrayoginī shrine (*mandir*). Furthermore, *MŚM* includes an account of the initial encounter between Ugratārā Vajrayoginī Devī and two tantric yogins, a husband and wife, at the site of Padmamāla

spring formations. However, the presence of sexed rocks and massive sexed rock formations is attested to in the Tibetan tradition.

- 7 Tsunehiko Sugiki (2009: 516–517) notes that this text is in the bsTan ‘Gyur P.T. No. 4628 as written by Nāropa and translated by Marpa (1012–1097). No extant Sanskrit manuscript bears witness to this but it may be an apocryphal text attributed to Nāropa. Yet it is clear from Marpa’s biography that he studied the tantras with several Newar vajrācāryas in Nepal.

Dharmadhātu Mahāvihāra. This Buddhist monastery is located in the wooded wilderness of Mount Mañicūḍa, also known as Mount Padmagiri (MŚM 13: 4,7),⁸ where the popular Sankhu Bajrayoginī shrine and temple complex now stands.

The first chapter of MŚM conveys the tale of the appearance of Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī from within Mount Mañicūḍa⁹ in the form of a divine flame (*jyoti svarūpā*). Her subsequent deeds and the deeds of her *vajrācārya pujāri* lineage unfolds in the telling of the nine subsequent chapters of MŚM before the story turns to a local version of the *Mañicūḍāvādāna* that bridges the two tales and their protagonists in an interesting twist of plot where Vajrayoginī blesses the birth of the generous bodhisattva prince Mañicūḍa.¹⁰ All the events in MŚM occur in the area between the town of Sankhu, in the valley, up to the Tamang and Lama areas of Gumarichowk closer to the flat peak of low-lying Mount Mañicūḍa. According to MŚM, Ugratārā Vajrayoginī is considered to have ‘self-originated’ (*svayambhū*) – having manifested from within the mountain in the form of a jewel stone (*mañisīlā*) as a divine flame (*jyoti*). In MŚM, no one less than Śākyamuni Buddha himself tells the story of the moment of Ugratārā Vajrayoginī’s emergence from within her jewelled abode in Nepāla¹¹ at the request of Maitrī Bodhisattva.

In the Satyayuga age, in the place called ‘Nepāla’, up on Mount Mañicūḍa, there was a mañistone that sparkled and shone ever so brightly, like an inlaid solitaire mañi-jewel. [In this place] Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī Devī is said to have manifested spontaneously – of her own accord – as the essential nature of a divine flame, from a hole in the middle of this wide and massive stone. (MŚM Barṇabajra 3, 11–15)¹²

8 Also identified as Svayambhū Hill.

9 A low-lying mountain, more of a foothill, to the north of the town of Śankharapūra (New. *Sakva*).

10 This narrative was once told in stages throughout each of the eight quarters of Sankhu (and perhaps elsewhere) during the summer month of Guṃlā until it gradually became less popular due to the introduction of technology. Bal Gopal Shrestha, personal communication, January 2020. I am not aware that MŚM continues to be recounted in the same manner.

11 A social and political area equated with the Kathmandu Valley and its vicinity.

12 *nhāpām satyayugayā samaye nepāla dhayāgu sthāne mañicūḍa parvate mañisīlā dhayāgu mañiratna jaka thunātayāguthyem jvālā-jvālām thinācvaṃgu taḥgvagu lvahaṃphañtayā dathusa cvaṃgu pvālam śrī ugratārābajrayoginīdebī āphaiāpha,*

As one ascends from the base of the mountain to her hillside shrine located about halfway to the top, one can see that the road cuts through the original path of stone steps that leads up to the peak. The entire mountain sparkles with silica deposits, which brings to mind her story and the reference to ‘jewel stones’ (*maṇisāila*). Although Ugratārā Vajrayoginī is worshipped as a site-specific deity who has emerged from the mountain and taken the form of an image (*mūrti*) in the central shrine which may sit just above the site of her origin, Gellner notes that the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī also functions, for some Kathmandu Śākya and Vajrācāryas, as a family lineage (*kula*) or clan deity (New. *diḡu dyaḡ*) (Gellner 1992: 240): a local lineage protector that manifests as an aniconic stone.¹³ There are, moreover, several divinities in residence next to her hillside shrine: the local protector (*kṣetrapāla*), Mahākāla, the king of *nāgas*, Vāsuki, and Akṣobhya Buddha, each of whom manifests as an aniconic rock in the vicinity. This array of divinities has been described in detail by Shrestha, Vajracharya and Vajracharya (2016: 83) and Bal Gopal Shrestha, in his in-depth monograph (2002). According to *MŚM*, Ugratārā Vajrayoginī once caused a small spring (*kuṇḍa*) called the *Maṇikunda* to burst forth at the summit of Mount Maṇicūḍa, which resulted in the creation of a small pond in the midst of a clearing that is utilised for Vajrācārya ritual and picnics alike. This pond empties into a tributary of the Manahara (or Maṇirohinī) River and is considered to possess sacred life-giving properties. The residents around Sankhu Bajrayoginī, who were familiar with the stretch of land where the Manahara River flows down towards the Bajrayoginī *mandir*, told me that a pathway (about halfway between the *mandir* and summit) used to be marked by a statue of the Buddha but that the latter had recently been removed.¹⁴ This statue once indicated the trail previously used by Vajrācāryas who came there on occasion to take a dip in the place where the water pours down over a circular depression in the vertical rock face. This panhole in the rock was considered to function as a portal of sorts

thavathe thaḡhmana jyoti svarūpa juyā utpattijuyā bijyāna dhakā śrī bhagavāna nam
saṃkṣiptamātra ājnāda-yekābijyātam ||

13 Naresh Man Bajracharya suggests that the Ugratārā operating in this function may have been moved there from a location near Buddhanilkantha. However, this cannot be confirmed.

14 The exchange between Sankhu residents and myself at this site took place in 2016.

and was thought to be the place where Vajrācāryas who had attained yogic accomplishment (*siddhi*) could pass through the mountain's solid rock face. The entire wooded area around Mount Mañicūḍa is supplied by this river and other tributaries that descend from the summit. These streams, in addition to nine small ponds mentioned in one version of *MŚM*,¹⁵ are all described as possessing magical and healing properties and a variety of plants and flowers found in the surrounding area are also considered to be useful, potent medicinal herbs, some of which even possess 'the power to wake up a corpse' (Shrestha, Bajracharya and Bajracharya 2016: 50–51).

Chapter one of *MŚM* describes Ugratārā Vajrayoginī, also referred to as the forest goddess (*bāṇdevī*), as being accommodated in this jungle brimming with fragrant blossoms, flora and fauna that are described as embodying the dharmic principles of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). Bumble bees buzz like the primordial sound of mantra:

When the many varieties of fruit trees such as: lime, lemon, Chinaberry, citrus, camphor, jackfruit, *bayar* and so forth flower, swarms of bees (New. *bhramarāgaṇapim*) come to imbibe their fruity nectars. Buzzing everywhere – moving to and fro – they produce the sound of the syllable *hum* thereby increasing the glory of the mountain. [...] And there are water lilies, white and blue lotuses and many other varieties of flowers in blossom; one's eyes never tire of such a splendid sight [...]. The flowers emit a fragrance that permeates the entire mountain. [...] The wild animals of the forest, such as tigers, antelopes, bears, fish, foxes, wild cats, deer and others, live in harmony, with love and affection for each other. For this reason, they never engage in hostility towards each other and greatly increase the glory of the mountain [...]. (*MŚM* Barṇabajra 2, 8–21)¹⁶

15 In the *Gumbahā* manuscript entitled *Mañisailamahavadāna* in Shrestha, Vajracharya and Vajracharya (2016).

16 *tavasī, jhamasī, khāisī, cākusi, kavsī, phamsī, baysī, ādi nānāprakārayā phalasayā cvaṃguliṃ bhramarāgaṇapimvayā phala-phulayāgu rasatvanā huṃkāra śabdanam hālā ukheṃ thukheṃ cāḥcāḥ [j]ulā juyācvāṃguliṃ parvatayā śobhā vadhejuyā cvaṃgu du | [...]palyesvām, cavaśvām, uphosvām ādi aneka svāna hvayā sva svām svaye magāka [...] ukīyā bāsanānam parvata chaguliṃ nasvānā chvaṃgu | [...] hākanam banajantu dhāye, dhum, caṃlā, bhālu, tyaru, guṃkhićā, guṃbhau, hariṇa, ādiṃ nānā*

An episode in the third chapter of *MŚM* describes a yogin couple's dissolution into this elemental *vajra-yoginī* after practising extensive meditation in 'Siddha Cave' (New. *siddhaguhā*): a process during which the two yogins 'gazed with meditative vision' (*dhyānadriṣṭi*) towards the mountains where the sun was rising (*udayācala*) and likewise towards the mountains where the sun was setting (*aṣṭācala*), contemplating day and night (*rātrīsanhitham*). They also completed all the necessary rituals (*kriyākarma*)¹⁷ and composed a Sanskrit *stotra* that they sung melodiously to the yogini goddess, and in which they begged to merge as one with her divine form. Vācāsiddhi Ācārya and his wife, Jñānavatī, beseeched Ugratārā Vajrayoginī in unison, invoking a mood of fervent devotion:

O Mother! Show mercy and compassion for us, right now! Please!
Take [us] into your body and having merged with [us] welcome [us]
in! (*MŚM Barṇavajra*, 11, 4-5).¹⁸

Their liberation in this life is subsequently facilitated through the astonishing power of Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī Devī in the form of a divine flame. This process is described in detail in a longer passage that I have rendered briefly as follows:

Having offered the *stotra* praise, Śrī Ugratārā Bajrayoginī Devī became kindly disposed and began to emit splendid rays of light from her body. [She] then transformed into a blazing conflagration that shone for half a day. As if encircled by a ring of fire, her body was no longer visible, becoming completely absorbed into the blaze. How was this splendid light described? It blazed like a 'fire' that was neither hot nor cold [...]. The mere touch of the splendid light of Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī Devī caused rays to fly out from the husband and wife simultaneously [...]. Merging, the three flames became one and blazed even more intensely. Then, in an

prakārayā banajantupiṅ bāsayanā paraspara thithiṅ sneha-pratitayā mitrabhābayānā
cvaṅguliṅ lvāpudhayāgu madayā atikaṅ śobhābadhejuyā cvaṅgu du |

17 Udayācala parbatam aṣṭācala parbata paryantam dhyāna-driṣṭi svayā vicārayānā
lacchitaka rātrīsanhitham paṃcākṣara sahitayānā pūjāyānā cvanāvijyāta || lacchivite
juyā vaṃseṃli kriyākarmadakvaṃ siddhayānā

18 hemātā, chalapolam jimita dayā kripātayā yākanam he chalapolayāgu śarīre
grahaṇayānā 'linayānā' dukayā bijyāham |

instant, there was no light at all, and Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī Devī manifested her form once again. O Maitri Bodhisattva, this is how, by the glorious power of Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī, Vācasiddhi and his wife attained liberation in this life (*jībanamuktijuyā*), having both been assimilated into [the body of] Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī Devī. (*MŚM Barṇavajra*, 8–20).¹⁹

The liberation of this couple in one life (New. *jībanamuktijuyā*) is thereby envisaged in the *Mañisailamahāvadāna* as an external physical process by which the body of the goddess appeared to both devotees directly and then, having taken great delight, she dissolved into her original elemental form: the fire that once emerged from Mount Mañicūḍa. The husband and wife then merge with Ugratārā Vajrayoginī as their bodies are amalgamated into the blazing conflagration. Then a re-materialisation of Ugratārā Vajrayoginī alone occurs, presumably in the form of her incarnate image (*mūrti*) which stands in the main shrine named after the epithet attributed to her, ‘the red faced mother’ (New. *hyaumkhvāhmāju*) and ‘the yogini who wields the sword’ (*khaḍgayoginī*). This passage provides a unique account of union and liberation occurring via a site-specific Buddhist yogini that manifests from the landscape and comes into direct contact with her disciples. The passage above also indicates an intense mood of devotion (*bhakti*) and the expression of a sense of self-surrender surrounding ‘this life’ attainment that is brought about in a way that modern Buddhists would consider either highly

19 vācāsiddhi ācāryayā nimha stripuruṣaṇaṃ thathedhakā stotrayānā bijyāseṃli śrīugratārā bajrayoginīdevī praśanajuyā thaḥḡu śārīraṃ rasmi pikayā rasmiyāḡu mayejuyā bānu michoyācvamḡu jvālāthyem jvālā mālājuyā barhe-jujuṃ śārīra chuṃkhanemadeka jvālāmāyeyuyābijyāta || gathimḡu teja dhālasā ‘mi’ samānaṃ thinācvamḡu nākaṃ pugunaṃmakhu nākaṃ khvāuḡunaṃ makhu atyanta manoharajuyā jvālāmāna thinā cvana || || thatheju gukhanā vācāsiddhiyā stripuruṣaṇimhaṃ bismayecāyā rasmisa tijaka thiyāsvata || thugurasmisa thiyema gathenayekane śrīrya yāḡu rasmikhaye mātraṃ mipyāhāṃvai vat-hathem śrīugratārā bajrayoginīdeviyāḡu rasmithiye mātraṃ thupimstrī purūṣa nimhasikenam rasmipyāhāṃvayā tejarūpajuyā tacvataṃ choyābala || lipā śrīugratārā bajrayoginīdeviyāḡu rasmi jham jham badhejuyā vācāsiddhikā stripuruṣa nimhasyāḡu rasmisa thaḥḡu rasmiṃ cauyekā dhayepunākāla || thatheyāye mātraṃ rasmisvaguliṃ chajūjuyā tacvataṃ choyā kṣaṇamātraṃ antarasmigunā rasmi chuṃmadayā hnapāyāthem śrīugratārā bajrayoginīdeviyāḡu rūpa-juyā sthīraṃbijyānācana || || hemaitribodhisatva śrīugratārā bajrayoginīdeviyāḡu prabhāvaṃ bācāsiddhiyā stripuruṣaṇimhaṃ jībanamuktijuyā śrīugratārā bajrayoginīdeviyāke linajuyāvana || ||

unorthodox or highly symbolic of internal yogic processes. Even though these images described in *MŚM* are not our own, they are configured as relatable through the familiarity gained through listening to the tale. A kinaesthetic memory of sorts is thus prefigured and suggested to the devotee by listening to this story as a first-person narrative directed to one's self, an idea forwarded by Lewis (Lewis 2000: 5). After all, in *Maṇiśailamahāvadāna* it is Ugratārā Vajrayoginī herself who urges her disciples to: 'remember me with devotion' (New. *bhaktibhāvayānā jitalumaṅkā*). As a final warning, Ugratārā Vajrayoginī declares what may be either her last ultimatum or just an unfortunate eventuality. Even though she emerges spontaneously from the land, her presence at Maṇicūḍa is not permanent and should not be taken for granted. Rather, it depends on the presence and continuity of the ritual actions of her noble Vajrācārya lineage. Śrī Ugratārā Vajrayoginī spoke:

For as long as your lineage remains steadfast, know that, until then (New. *uthāyetaka*), I will remain here at this place (*jithana du*). But, when your lineage fades into decline (*mhāse*), at that time, know that I will no longer dwell in this place.²⁰

Encountering Hevajra Nairātmyā in Paśupatikṣetra

The region of Nepāla is identified as an Upacchandoha, the abode referred to as Himālaya where the seat (*pīṭha*) of the goddess Khagānānā (or Khagamukhadevī) and her consort Virūpākṣa are situated within the larger panIndic system of Cakrasaṃvara. This is a region identified as being suitable for yogic ascetic practices (von Rospatt 2009: 65), a sentiment also echoed in Tibetan accounts.²¹ It is well known that the Kathmandu Valley, or Nepāl Maṇḍala,²² is also configured by Newar Buddhists as a complete localised Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, replete with all twenty-four *pīṭhādīs*, along with their pan-Indic place names (von

20 guthāyetaka chaṃ saṃtāna sthīrajuyācvani | uthāyetaka jithana dudhakā sīki guble chaṃ saṃtāna hmāse juyāvani | uble ji thugusthāne maṃtadhakā sīkidhakā śrīugratārā bajrayoginī devīm ājñādayekā bijyāta ||

21 MacDonald (1975) includes the Tibetan text of Choskyi Nyima (1730), who described the classification of Nepal as *pīṭhadī* and the paradisiacal land of Upacchandoha.

22 The Newar term Nepāl Maṇḍala can be understood as a political and religious designation that refers primarily to the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding areas, not to the current geopolitical borders of Nepal.

Rospatt 2009: 72; Bajracharya 1998: 4), which, according to various Newar Vajrayāna lineages, are located around disparate centres.²³ Naresh Man Bajracharya has also written about the configuration of Nepāl Maṇḍala as a localised mandala of Hevajra and Nairātmyā, an alternate identification reflected in Guru Badri Ratna Bajracharya's version of *Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa* (SvP), which provides an account of the emergence of Nairātmyā from the spring at the lotus root stalk that bloomed above Svayaṃbhū Hill (Bajracharya 1998: 7).

'Nairātmā', as she is called in local vernacular, is known to reside at several sites around the valley but, for the present purposes, I focus on her site located in the wooded environs of Deopatan, the city of the gods where she is one of the many gods located on Śleṣmāntaka Hill. This larger area is crucial for Hindu pilgrims because it is the abode of Lord Śiva as the Lord of the Animals (*paśupati*natha), but the temple of the goddess Guhyeśvarī on Śleṣmāntaka Hill within this domain remains a significant site for Newar Buddhists in terms of the encounter (*darśana*), worship (*pūjā*), accomplishment (*sādhana*) and lineage (*kula*) worship (*digu pūjā*) of the tantric cycle of Hevajra Nairātmyā.

Within the larger Indic framework of the *Mahāyoga* and *Yoginītantras*, the *Hevajra* cycle is thought to have existed in its present form since around 900 CE in East India (Davidson 2004: 41), although Heruka-type material has been in existence from the eighth century (English 2002: 4). One might therefore surmise that practices related to the *Hevajratantra* were handed down within tantric circles at around the same time in Nepal, since it was part of the panIndic circuit well before SvP came into circulation. The translation of the root *Hevajratantra* into Tibetan in the eleventh century by tantric pandits like Go Lotsawa and others, who came across it in India and Nepal (Snellgrove 1987: 506), also supports this time frame. Thus, the transmission of Cakrasaṃvara and Hevajra cycles in Nepal may predate SvP literature by at least four centuries, even based on Tibetan Hevajra lineages. The late Guru Badrīratna Bajrācārya was not the only personage to identify the Guhyeśvarī temple site and the goddess Guhyeśvarī with Nairātmyā. Brian Hodgson, in one of his translations, also mentions this association and Von Rospatt alerts us to the idea that the Newar Buddhist localisation of Nairātmyā

23 Von Rospatt argues that, according to the *Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa*, the sites may have centred specifically around the Svayaṃbhū *caitya*.

on Śleṣmāntaka Hill may have developed independently of SvP (von Rospatt 2009: 72–78). As we shall see here, local practices and sources further support the emplacement the Hevajra Maṇḍala in Nepal with the Guhyeśvarī site as a central focus for Newar Buddhists.

There is no doubt about the significance of the Guhyeśvarī temple site and its blessed waters (*jala*) within the jurisdiction of the area currently administered by the Paśupatiath Development Trust (PADT) for Hindu and Buddhist Newars.²⁴ There is, however, another popular site in Balaju, Kathmandu, called Puraṇo Guhyeśvarī (Michaels 2008: 129–130), which may or may not predate the Guhyeśvarī site in Deopatan. Raju Sakya of Patan states that he personally believes Puraṇo Guhyeśvarī to be the older of the two²⁵ and he holds the view that goddess Guhyeśvarī (again associated with Nairātmyā) underwent a relocation to Śleṣmāntaka Hill at a later point since the temple structure was established by Pratāpa Malla in the seventeenth century.²⁶ I do not attempt to address the archæology or antiquity of the site on Śleṣmāntaka Hill, but rather focus on its significance for a select community of local Newar Buddhists – a significance pointed out succinctly by Gellner (1992: 80) and Michaels (2008: 141), and further supported by the literature addressed in this article.

Two Newar Vajrayāna Buddhist monasteries (New. *bāhā*) – one in Kathmandu and one in Bhaktapur – dually worship Nairātmyā Devī as their family lineage deity (*digu dyaḥ*) and their tantric tutelary deity (*agaṃ dyaḥ*), as is sometimes the case among Vajrācārya and Śākya families. Ugratārā Vajrayoginī is another example of this dynamic. In accordance with the ritual duties required of a noble descendant who venerates Nairātmyā as their personal lineage deity, this *pūjā* (which is performed once a year) takes place at Guhyeśvarī temple on Śleṣmāntaka Hill.²⁷ The individuals who regularly maintain these *digu dyaḥ pūjās* are associated with two *viḥāras*: Surataśrī Mahāviḥāra (New. Taḥ Chem Baha)

24 Michaels outlines her multiple identities as: a vaidic-paurāṇic *Pārvatī*, a tantric alcohol-accepting goddess, a Vajrayānist Buddhist goddess, the consort of *Hevajra (Nairātmyā)*, *Tārā*, *Prajñāparāmīta* and the Newar folk deity, *pīgāmāi* (Michaels 2008: 8, 139, 140, 142).

25 Raju Śākya, personal communication, 23 May 2020.

26 Axel Michaels has elucidated in detail the connection between these two sites in local legend and the historical chronicles on the foundation of Guhyeśvarī temple in Deopatan (Michaels 2008: 127–138).

27 Naresh Man Bajracharya, personal communication, 10 April 2020.

at Asān Tol and Chaturbrahṃa Mahāvihār of Bhaktapūr, a *vihāra* whose transmission for the praxis of Hevajra Nairātmyā was derived from a Vajrācārya descendant of Surataśrī vihāra.²⁸

If one is permitted to visit Guhyeśvarī temple on Śleṣmāntaka Hill, one may notice Newar devotees and a Newar Hindu Karmācārya priest (New. *ācāju*) who performs daily worship (*nityapūjā*) and other priestly duties.²⁹ While wedding ceremonies, visits to celebrate anniversaries and pilgrimages are popular events on the site, Newar Vajrācāryā priests gather there to perform rituals on the 10th day of the lunar month.³⁰ The tantric rituals of Newar Buddhism performed at the Guhyeśvarī site are, of course, carried out in strict confidence and the entire site is generally closed off to tourists and non-Hindus. Naresh Man Bajracharya mentions the possible significance, in his local lineage of practice, of a journey to the forest (*bānjātra*), specifically to the forest around Guhyeśvarī temple, which is required and undertaken after undergoing Cakrasaṃvara initiation (*abhiṣeka*). As part of this initiation, upon the devotees' arrival at the Guhyeśvarī site, the Vajrācārya guru may grant authorisation for recitation of the mantra of Hevajra – Nairātmyā³¹ (notably, not Cakrasaṃvara) according to normative ritual procedures for the transmission of site-specific esoteric mantras. This practice may indicate the importance of this site for the mandala of Hevajra, yet also indicates a relationship between the two systems. Interestingly, in terms of the configuration of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala in Nepal and its overlap with that of Hevajra, Naresh Man Bajracharya has asserted that the centre of the twenty-four *pīṭha* of Cakrasaṃvara is in the centre of Kathmandu at Indrachowk (Bajracharya 1998: 2). Von Rospatt has, however, pointed out: that for the Manabajra Bajracharya lineage of Kathmandu, the Guhyeśvarī temple on Śleṣmāntaka Hill is identified as the centre of the Cakrasaṃvara mandala based on the premise that 'it is visited after the year-long pilgrimage to the twenty-four local sites (*pīṭhapūjā*)' of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala (von Rospatt 2009: 74). Given these local dynamics, we may begin to see the overlap of these two local

28 Naresh Man Bajracharya, personal communication, 10 April 2020.

29 Naresh Man Bajracharya, personal communication, 10 April 2020.

30 Naresh Man Bajracharya, personal communication, 18 April 2020.

31 Naresh Man Bajracharya, personal communication, 18 April 2020.

systems of *Yoginītantra* sites,³² an overlap that is manifest in the literary sources introduced in this study as described below and furthered with the comparison of the Newar and Tibetan accounts addressed later in this article.

The Tridalakamala Caryāgīti

Several ‘practice songs’ (*caryāgītis*, New. *cacā*) pertaining to yoginī Nairātmyā are preserved in a local canon of manuals, published and unpublished handbooks and collections. Three popular *cacās* concerning Nairātmā Devī, predominantly utilised by Newar Buddhist Vajracāryās and Sākyas, are: the anonymous and undated *Three-petalled Lotus* or *Tridalakamala* (TDK), *Guhyeśvarī* (Nairātmā) *Nīla Humkāra* and *Hevajra Nairātmā*, a *caryā* song that may have been composed by the Newar Vajracāryā pandit Lilāvajra (8th c.).³³ *Hevajra Nairātmā*³⁴ and *Guhyeśvarī* (Nairātmā) *Nīla Humkāra*³⁵ were both published in Ratnakaji Vajracharya’s treasury of *caryāgītis*, the *Cacāḥ Munā* (1996: 30, 119). *Hevajra Nairātmā* mentions the glorious Gopuccāgra Caitya, ‘The Oxtail End’ *caitya* – indicating the Svayaṃbhū *caitya*³⁶ – and refers to ‘five jīnas of five colours’

32 Von Rospatt (2009) writes that Manabajra Bajracharya identifies Guhyeśvarī temple near Deopatan as the centre of the Saṃvara maṇḍala that is to be visited and worshipped after pilgrimage, but Bajracharya maintains that the pilgrimage (*pūrvasevā*) to the twenty-four *pīṭha* sites begins, for some unknown reason, at Deopatan Guhyeśvarī temple (Bajracharya, personal communication, 2018).

33 However, in the final verse in the 1996 version of *Cacāḥ Munā* compiled by Ratna Kaji Bajracharya (VS 2053, CE 1996) that reads *pravanti nirābajra huṃkāra saṃjātā*, it is possible that ‘nirābajra’ refers to Hevajra, a being, a blue vajra that originates from the huṃ syllable, not the eighth-century pandit Lilāvajra.

34 rāga:-kahū tāla: phaṭakarīkālā nīla huṃkāra prajvalita kiraṇe 2 ūrddhva piṅgalakeśa śeī hevajararāyā|| dhu || jagata mokṣakārī śrīnairātmā devī || nīlavarṇa devī karatī kapala dhārī 2 jagata vivācchita vara phala dātā || krodha virahita āligaṇa samādhi 2 soḍaśa bhujā karoṭaka dhariyā || bhaṣma vibhūṣita ṣaṭmudra bharaṇa 2 vyādhacarma parahita naraśīramālā || bramhā maheśvara nārāyaṇa indra 2 cāpapi cau cāraṇa catumārī madanā || dhu ||

35 rāga:- karṇādi tāla:-japa cvami: nirābajra (lilā) hevajra nairātmādevī tribhuvan nātha pañcājina byapitāpañcavarṇa dehā || namāmi 2 śrī gopucchāgra caitya 2 śrī heruka sṛiguhyeśvarī vajrayoginī śūnyatā || dhu || pūrva diga thita bhairaba nīlavarṇa 2 dahine patradhārī vāmay vindū || ghasarī, chaurī yoginī devī 2 pravanti nirābajra huṃkāra saṃjātā ||

36 Choskyi Nyima, the fourth Khamtrul Rinpoche (1730), and Brough (1947) have drawn attention to significant mobility in origin myths in Svayaṃbhūcaitya with narratives associated with *Liyul* or Khotan. Both ascertain that it was the Tibetans who conflated the two sites and the *Gomasala Ganda Stūpa* of Ox Horn (*Gośṛṅga*) mountain with the

along with Śrī Heruka, Guhyeśvarī and Vajrayoginī. *Guhyeśvarī* (*Nairātmyā*) *Nīla Humkāra* focuses on iconography and doctrine exclusively related to the practice of Nairātmyā, without mentioning place names. The *cacā* that I focus on for the present purposes is the *Tridalakamala* in various renderings from Bhaktapur, Kāntipur and Lalitpur. *The Tridalakamala* (*gīti*) clearly recalls many features of the Guhyeśvarī site in Deopatan but does not mention the name of the goddess *Guhyeśvarī*. Regardless of the location mentioned in the song, it is performed during tantric rituals at various sites connected with Nairātmyā throughout the Valley. When necessary, it may also be incorporated into tantric *pūjās* held within the realm of the tantric god-sanctum (*āgāchē*) of private homes or Newar Buddhist monasteries.³⁷

According to popular belief, the *Tridalakamala* is associated with the first time Mañjuśrī worships Nairātmyā after having a direct vision of her at the site of the lotus-bed spring of Svayambhū at Guhyeśvarī. This occasion is actually credited with being the very first enactment of *caryā* or *cacā* singing in Nepal (Thapa 2015: 106) and the site of this lotus bed is most commonly identified as the Guhyeśvarī site on Śleṣmāntaka. I utilised four witnesses³⁸ of the *Tridalakamala* for my edition provided in this study.³⁹ Each of the witnesses is composed according to the unorthodox Sanskrit grammar common to *caryāgītis*,⁴⁰ a ritual vernacular that prioritises metre (*tāla*),⁴¹ melody (*rāga*), rhyme and versification

site at Svayambhū hillock. Choskyi Nyima asserts that the Newar Buddhist name for Svayambhū: *Seṃgu*, interpreted by Tibetans as 'shing kun' was the likely cause of the confusion that potentially added additional layers to the local narrative and the Tibetan imaginary in particular. It is unclear whether *Guhyeśvarī* is mentioned or not in the *Gośṛṅgavyākaraṇasūtra*.

37 Naresh Man Bajracharya, personal communication, 18 April 2020.

38 The other witnesses of *Tridalakamala* that I refer to here and in my edition included in appendix A of this study are either in the possession of, or compiled and transmitted by, Suban Vajracharya (SV), Yagyaman Pati Vajracharya (YPV) and Ratna Kaji Bajracharya (RKV).

39 My edition of *Tridalakamala caryāgīti* based on the complete documentation, on a close comparison and on the four aforementioned witnesses along with notes is included in Appendix 1.

40 The *Caryāsaṃgraha* also contains similar uncommon terms and grammar, for example *heruva* and *saṅge*.

41 The *tāla* for *Tridalakamala* across texts is *tala mātha*, a fourteen-measure metre. It should, however, be recognised that there is no strict adherence to metre with reference to the syllabic structure of the *gīti*, since syllables and words can be drawn out, as necessary, to

over grammatical structure or literal comprehension. All four witnesses of the *Tridalakamala* refer to features around Guhyeśvarī temple: the Bagmatī river, Virupakṣa, Vatsalā, nearby *tīrthas* and the Mṛgasthālī forest, with the bound, folding manuscript (New. *tyāsaphū*) from Bhaktapur, in Pushpa Shakya's (B-PS) possession, perhaps exhibiting the most consistent mention of locale.

The B-PS manuscript is hand-scribed on two folios in Newar *pracalit* script: folios 63 and 64. It appears to be the oldest of the four witnesses – perhaps around a century old. The second witness of the *Tridalakamala* is a bound codex notebook utilised horizontally and hand-scribed in *devanāgarī* script. It is in the possession of Suban Vajracharya of Kathmandu (SV). The third manuscript is an unbound *tyasaphū*-style manuscript on loose leaves of yellow paper, hand-scribed in *pracalit* script. This version is included in a compendium of *cacās* compiled by Yagyaman Pati Vajracharya of Kathmandu (YPV).⁴² The fourth is a well-known witness of the *Tridalakamala*, the one published in Ratna Kaji Bajracharya's *Cacāḥ Munā* (1996: 123) which I refer to as *RKV*.⁴³ The three subsequent versions show close parallels to the old Bhaktapur manuscript and all four *gītis* refer to the three-petalled lotus (*tridalakamala*) and an unspecified heruka (*heruva*), Virūpākṣa, Khagamukha Devī, Nairātmyā (New. *nairātmā*) and Vatsalā or Vatsaleśvarī (or Pīgāmāi), yet another *piṭha* goddess of Paśupatiṣetrā (Michaels 2008: 42). Notably, all four versions of the *Tridalakamala* address the goddess directly as a manifestation of a 'divine flame' (*jyoti*) despite her appearance and description in the landscape as a continually flowing spring (*kuṇḍa*). In terms of landmarks, B-PS, SV and YPV refer to the site as being in 'central Nepal' (*madhyanepāla*). All four witnesses mention the nearby 'deer park' (*mṛgasthālī*) on Śleṣmāntaka Hill. Three witnesses, with the exception of SV, mention the locale as, 'the bank of the Bāgamatī river' (*bāgamatī tīre*). My edition has documented all possible textual variations of each of the four witnesses. Variations of this *caryāgīti* have likely occurred in the process of revision or transcription from oral sources or alternate

fit the 14 measures. This attenuation is what allows for considerable variation between the texts. Fewer than half of the lines are actually 14 syllables long.

42 This is a version that Raju Sakya reports as being in popular use in Patan (Lalitpur).

43 The first half of this *gīti* was translated by Ned Branchi in 2016.

textual sources for reasons that only the compilers and transmitters of the tradition can comprehend.

Even though the Nairātmyā site on Śleṣmāntaka Hill, which is referred to in the *Tridalakamala*, is dually worshipped as Guhyeśvarī and Śrī Mahāmāyā Satī, the goddess Guhyeśvarī is not mentioned in any of the *Tridalakamala* witnesses, with the exception of the one reference to the goddess given the title *Guhyeśvarī* (*Nairātmyā*) (*Tridalakamala*), in Ratnakaji Vajrācārya's *Cacāḥ Munā*. As for the narrative of the goddess Guhyeśvarī as the lotus bed origin of the *Svayambhūcaitya* as promoted in select versions of *SVP*, the story is neither implicitly nor explicitly referred to in the *Tridalakamala*, which centres around invoking and praising the presence of Heruka and Tridalakamala in relation to Khagamukha Devī and Virūpākṣa of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala along with Nairātmyā, Vatsalā and the eight bhairavas and eight yoginis – who share the same sites as the exoteric 'eight mothers' (*mātrikās*). Reference to a divinity called the 'three-petalled lotus' (*tridalakamala*) is thus rather ambiguous. *Tridalakamala* could well refer to any goddess related to a *heruka*-type figure, such as that of the Saṃvara cycle and it is only through performative aspects of dance (*nṛtya*), the title offered by Ratnakaji and the lineage of local interpretations that one can explicitly identify the song with the goddess Nairātmyā in the Newar Buddhist tradition. Notably, the epithet '*tridalapadma*' is also found in the *Caryāsaṃgrahaḥ* with reference to the secret (*guhye*) mandala of Vajravilāsini that represents great bliss and does not mention Nairātmyā.⁴⁴

The verses of the *Tridalakamala* are enacted through melodious song in *vibhāsa rāga* and *mātha tāla*⁴⁵ with a traditional instrumental accompaniment and, if the ritual requires, 'practice dance' (*cāryanṛtya*) in which a *vajrācārya*⁴⁶ expresses the verbal meaning of each word of the *gīti* – offering praise to the entire retinue of divinities described in the song through symbolic hand gestures (*mūdras*) and rhythmic ritual movements.⁴⁷ The translation of my edition of the *Tridalakamala* (which

44 The verse, *tridala padma guhye maṇḍala mahāsukhakṣare*, is found in relation to the *vajrayogini* Vajravilāsini.

45 In classical Nepali music *rāga* is equivalent to melody and *tāla* is roughly equivalent to musical metre, which, in this case, is 14 counts.

46 Mainly performed by a Vajrācārya priest but in some circumstances by other families such as Śākya.

47 Although the various gestures that accompany the *Tridalakamala* would no doubt

is in keeping with the variable fourteen-measure *mātha* metre⁴⁸) reads as follows:

rāga: vibhāsa tāla: mātha⁴⁹

- 1 Three-petalled Lotus,⁵⁰ blooming flower⁵¹ of the forest,
Where the honeybee – O Heruva⁵² – comes to merge.
- 2 Śrī Virūpākṣa with Devī Khagamukha –
Filling up well the heart of Nepāla.⁵³
- 3 Praise to Nairātmā,⁵⁴ who pervades the triple world,
[as]⁵⁵ Vachalā Devī⁵⁶ of glorious Mṛgasthali.
- 4 All⁵⁷ the gods and demi-gods worship at your feet –
Powers and accomplishments are granted by you.
- 5 In the blissful forest of Sandalwood trees,
Many blooms amidst the Coral Jasmine's perfume.⁵⁸

contribute another valuable level of understanding to this study, I have not included them in the scope of this paper.

- 48 See Appendix 1 for the documentation of normative variation in the measures of the *mātha* metre.
- 49 I have not translated the *Tridlakamala* literally since it is essentially word fragments strung together poetically and much of the grammar is missing. Priority has been given to metre and rhyme so that it can be utilised as caryā song if required.
- 50 *tridlakamala* literally means three-petalled lotus, but it is also an epithet of Nairātmā.
- 51 One syllable (flow'r).
- 52 Heruva is the term used in all four witnesses and is synonymous with Heruka.
- 53 It might seem unusual that the verb *vyāpita* is repeated in verse 3B and the verse immediately following it, verse 4A. Given the fact that the syllable count seems to fall short at nine syllables only in *B-PS*, *RKV* and *SV*, I might conjecture the possibility of *vajrapīṭha* since the verse also refers to Virūpākṣa and Khagamukha of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala.
- 54 *Nairātmā* is the common vernacular term for Nairātmā in Newar Buddhism. Since this is a very local text, I thought it was best to retain the local terminology.
- 55 Emendation suggested by Naresh Man Vajracharya.
- 56 *Vachalā* is the local term for the goddess *Vatsalā*.
- 57 'All' (*sakala*, *sayala*) could also be read as *sayara* which, according to Raju Sakya, means 'surrounding' as written in *YPV* and *RK*.
- 58 The night-flowering Coral Jasmine tree with red blooms.

- 6 On the banks of the Bāg'matī – like eternal Ganga –
There are many subtle and pure tīrthas,
- 7 The eight bhairavas with eight yoginī-devīs,
Gods and demi-gods – the protectors of this place.
- 8 Eight great fears and all evil, extinguished – removed,
Every obstacle overcome completely.
- 9 Liberating⁵⁹ goddess, you pervade the world.
Spotless flame – unblemished and indestructible.
- 10 You are the one who yields the desired fruit of bliss.
Lifetime after lifetime, at your feet I seek refuge.

This poetic composition demonstrates the ontology of the yoginī – the Three-petalled Lotus – with aesthetically pleasing imagery, as indivisible from her elemental form of a flame. Furthermore, the imagery of *B-PS* invokes a mood of devotion (*bhakti*) to a saviouress (*tārīṇī*). In terms of her absolute manifestation, the goddess represents the inverse of individuated experience. *Nairātmā*, the ‘selfless one’, is described as pervading the world (*viśvavyāpita*) as the essence that appears as a pristine flame (*jyoti nirmalā*) and bestows the blissful result. The result, which according to the *Hevajratāntra* is ‘the state of unity achieved in the process of realization[,] is deemed as Excellent Bliss, as Great Bliss’, further described as ‘the single self-existent [...] perfect and eternal [...]’ (Snellgrove 1959: 92, 94). And since this is the state that she bestows, the *Tridalakamala* acts as a literary trope that subverts even the Buddhas to the power of this goddess in the all-pervasive form of a flawless flame. Shaw (2006: 388) writes that the realisation of selflessness or ‘no-self’ (*nirātman/nairātmya*) can be effected through identification with a [female] Buddha such as *Nairātmyā* in a process in which the meditator is envisaged [visualised] as having the appearance, qualities and enlightened awareness of the divinity. But this kind of practice, if visualisation, is neither the mood nor the intent expressed in this *cacā*,

59 *Tārīṇī* could also be *taruṇī*, youthful.

which is rather one of devotional praise to a liberating goddess that has the power to bestow the final result. The mention of Khagamukhadevī, the bird-faced goddess who is equated with Khagānanā and who is the *vīreśvarī* of Virūpākṣa of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, waxes poetically as, the entrance (*mukha*) to coursing (*ga*) in the sky (*kha*). The goddess, assuming the form of a divine flame (*jyoti*) and by whose grace the blissful desired result is attained, as we have seen earlier, is also a theme prevalent in *Maṇiśailamahavadāna*.

References to Mrgasthalī and Virūpākṣa, whose self-arisen ‘statue’ (*mūrti*) is also located near the *ārya* cremation *ghāt* behind the main Paśupati shrine, frames the entire wooded hill as being within the realm of the deity Tridalakamala and heruka (*heruva*), if even just for a literary moment. In the context of this *cacā*, Virūpākṣa may be understood as being the male *vīrā* connected to the Cakrasaṃvara system, although the figure has multifarious manifestations in Nepal in both tribal and Brahmanical forms. The presence of Virūpākṣa and Khagānanā in this song further indicates parallel Saṃvara and Hevajra traditions at the site and demonstrates an intertextuality between sacralised emplaced Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara systems in Nepal. The mention of Nairātmyā here is associated with and perhaps also manifests as the local blood and alcohol-consuming deity Vatsalā, whose shrine is located on the Bagamatī behind the main Paśupati Temple. As pointed out by Michaels, Vatsalā is a female deity that challenges the authority of Śiva in the form of Lord Paśupatinātha in a ritual drama of *jātrā* and *mūlamphu* which occurs annually in Paśupatikṣetra (Michaels 2008: 230). In this version of the local drama, all gods and demi-gods are subjugated, if only temporarily, and in the Tridalalakamala too, they are portrayed as bowing at her feet.

Tibetan and Nepali-speaking Perspectives

It is also important to recognise the perspectives of Tibetan Vajrayānā pilgrims and tantrikas,⁶⁰ and of other Nepalese Buddhist communities, like Lamas and Gurungs, as they overlap with the Newar Vajrayānā world. Tibetan-speaking communities consider a visit to Guyeśvarī to be a sacred encounter with the blessed womb-fluid of the yogini

60 I visited the periphery of the site with Lapchi Dordzin Dondrup Palden on several occasions.

Vajravārāhī.⁶¹ The divinity residing at her *pīṭha* is understood as a Tibetan abode (Tib. *gnas*). One might therefore surmise that the small spring (*kuṇḍa*) which comprises the shrine at the centre of Guhyeśvarī temple courtyard has played a salient role in multiple Buddhist tantric traditions in Nepal from an earlier time. Tibetan-speaking Buddhists in Nepal call the site ‘The Womb Fluid of Vārāhī’ (Tib. *phag mo'i mngal chu*), a name that draws attention to the natural salt-water spring enshrined there, a feature not overtly mentioned in Newar texts: namely the *Tridalakamala* discussed above. In practice, however, the benefits of the blessed water (*jala*) of Guhyeśvarī/Nairātmā are widely recognised by the Newar community. Phuntsok Gurung Lama, in his *Guidebook to the Buddhist Sites of Nepal*, further describes the site in Nepali as a bathing place (*tīrtha*) with the water of deathlessness and a rock from within which the yogini’s blessings flow forth – emerging as a small water fountain:

In the [Tibetan] language of the Himālaya Bhoṭa, this site is called Phākmongāḷkṣu (sic). Buddhists maintain that this bathing place (*tīrtha*) is a manifestation of the blessed waters of deathlessness which flow forth from the vulva (*bhaga*) of the vajra-yoginī. However, according to Hindus this is the site where blessed water flows from the female organ of the goddess Śrī Mahāmāyā Sati.⁶² In this temple that has been renovated and restored from time to time by Nepalese kings, is a spring located in the central courtyard where water continuously flows from the shape of a *bhaga* [in the stone] which is believed to be self-arisen. This water of deathless nectar flows over the *bhaga*-shaped border of the fountain and the small pool is covered by a lid of gold-plated copper. This plate is for the purposes of the preservation of the rock.⁶³

61 This site is largely regarded as part of a set of four crucial emplaced yogini sites around the valley: namely those of Vajravārāhī (Deopatan), Vajrayoginī (Pharping), Vidhyeśvarī (Svayaṃbhū) and Ugratārā Vajrayoginī (Sankhu), which are not subsumed within either of the Nepāl Maṇḍal schematics.

62 The site of the secret organ of Sati is also considered to have fallen at the famous *śakti pīṭha*, Kāmarūpa in Assam.

63 Himālibhoṭa bhāṣamā yaslai ‘phākmongāḷkṣu’ bhanincha. bauddhaharule yo tīrtha bajrayoginiko bhāgabāta niskeko āṃṭajalko rupamā viśvās gārincha bhane hinduharule śrī mahāmāyā satī deviko bhāgabāta niskeko āṃṭajalko rupamā

An earlier description composed by Phuntsok Gurung Lama gives a similar account of *Guhyeśvarī* but from a Tibetan language perspective. Tibetan speakers' preferred term for the site is 'birth site' (Tib. *skye gnas*), a term that encompasses notions of a physical geographical site (Tib. *gnas*) and female anatomy, and conveys the notion of a place from where Buddhas are born. This passage also pertains to invoking the Rudra subjugation myth in terms of establishing the *pīṭha* identity as a Saṃvara site. The text reminds the devotee that outlook is of prime importance in order to avoid the fault of transgressing one's Buddhist refuge commitments:

Very close to 'Pashupatinath (Tib. Gu lang)', on the north bank of the Bagmati River is Guhyeṣhārī (sic) there is a 'site' (Tib. *gnas*) of the esoteric Mahādevī (*dbang phyug ma*)' or the goddess Uma, known to Tibetans as The Water of Vārāhī's Womb. At this site, several generations of the Kings of Nepal have established a temple made from gilded copper, silver and gold. Inside [this temple] which is exceedingly marvellous, shiny, clear and joyful to behold, there is a support which takes the shape of a birthing place (*skyes gnas*) which is self-arisen. At the centre of her secret place salty water streams forth continually, gradually filling up and forming a small pool. In recent times, a small eight-petalled lotus lid fashioned from copper and gold has been installed as a covering and a vase is placed on top of that. This 'birthing place' has arisen naturally on its own, but its significance can be [dually] interpreted as the place of the one to be tamed (ie subjugated), the sign of the Goddess *Umadevī*, or that of the one who has done the taming – the secret sky of the Mother of the Victor, the Adamantine Sow *Vajravārāhī*. Tibetans recognise this place as 'The Fluid of Vārāhī's Womb' and, when they pay respect and offer to this site, they view [the site] in the manner of a disciple who has been tamed by a teacher. Otherwise, if the site is apprehended as an ultimate support of the goddess *Umadevī* while [one is] performing prostrations

viśvās garincha. yo mandir nepālka rājāharule samaya-samayama marmat ra sudhār gareka thië. mandirko prānggnama raheka jal niskene ṭāu bhāgakārako raheko ra so bhāgakāra svayaṃ utpatti bhaeko viśvās garincha. āmṛtajal niskane bhāgakārako kinārā ra ḍaknī samet sūnko jalap baeko dhatule banaieko cha. yasko saṃrakṣaṇako nimiti yastai banaieko ho. (Gurung Lama 2011: 72).

and making offerings, it would be considered a violation of the [Buddhist] refuge precepts.⁶⁴

Lama includes no mention of how the site is venerated by Newar Buddhists. The reason for this omission is unclear. It is perhaps notable that Vajravārāhī and Nairātmyā display parallel iconographical programmes: they both adopt the dancing posture (*ardhaparyāṅkhyā*), their right leg raised and their left pressing down on a corpse; and, crowned by Akṣobhya, both are encircled by a halo of blazing flames, a feature that relates to the manifestation of both divinities in the form of or as immersed in a divine flame (*jjyoti, joti*). However, Vajravārāhī is referred to as Vajradevī by Newar Buddhists and in Newar Buddhist traditions she possesses some unique requisite features: namely, her crimson hue and free-flowing hair (*mukta keśā*),⁶⁵ whereas Nairātmyā is described as blue-like and possesses crimson ‘upwards flying hair also blazing like a swirl of fire’ (*urdhva piṅgala keśā*).

The Cathartic Qualities of Water

It should be noted that Newars do not commonly refer to Guhyeśvarī temple as an abode (*piṭha*), a natural spring (*kuṇḍa*), or conflate it with the nearby bathing place (*tīrthā*), but refer to it as ‘Guhyeśvarī *jala*’:

64 gu lang dang shin tu nye bai byang phyogs waka mati'i 'gram nag gu hye ṣha ri ste gsang ba'i dbang phyug ma'm lha mo uma'i gnas kyis phag mo mngal chu zhes pa de yod. gnas 'dir ne pāl gyi rgyal po rim byon gyis bsgrubs pa'i dgnul dang. gser zangs kyi lha khang shin tu ngo mtshar che zhing khams dvangs la spro ba'i nang du rang byung gi rten skye gnas kyi dbyibs can de yi snying po nas tshva ba'i chug gyin du 'phyur ba'i rim gyis khengs yong wa zhig yod. dus physis su gser zangs kyi padma 'dab ma bryad pa zhig gis gyogs pa'i kha bkad chung ngu zhig dang. de yi steng du bum pa zhig bzhag 'dug. rang byon du byung ba'i skye gnas kyi mtshan ma 'di yang gdul bya'i dbang du byas na lha mo uma'i mtshan ma dang. 'dul byed kyi dbang du byad na rgyal yum rdo rje phag mo'i mkh' gsang ste gnas 'dir bod mi rnam kyis phag mo mngal chu zer ba'i rgyu mtshan yang de ltar yin pas na mjal ba'i skab sua'ng gdul bya 'dul byed kyis btul yin pa'i gnas tshul she pa'i sgo nas mchod pa las. lha mo u ma'i gnas dang mthar thug gi rten du sems nas phyag mchod byas na skyabs 'gro'i bslab bya dang 'gal ba yin. (Gurung Lama 1998: 60).

Not venerating worldly gods is listed as one of the basic refuge precepts of Buddhism since, though they can grant boons, worldly gods cannot grant the state of awakening that can only be accomplished through one's own efforts: the accumulation of merit through virtuous deeds and the accumulation of wisdom through learning, contemplation and meditation.

65 A similarity reflected in the Drikung Kakgyu Tibetan lineage.

the water of Guhyeśvarī. As the last part of SvP famously asserts, the founder of Nepal, Mañjudevācāryā – a bodily emanation (*nirmāṇakāya*) of Mañjuśrī – had a direct encounter with Guhyeśvarī, ‘first in the form of water, then in the form of all things (*viśvarūpa*)’ (Michaels 2008: 141). Bajracharya mentions that Mañjudevācāryā performed the ritual for the yoga of stopping water (*jalastambhanayoga*) at the site but still the flow of water did not cease, and it was then that Mañjudevācāryā had a vision of Śrī Nairātmyā Devī along with all the deities of the complete Hevajra maṇḍala in that very water (Bajracharya 1998: 7). Thus, healing and life-giving imagery is associated with the emergence, confluence and immersion in currents of moving water recognised as both the origin and outflow of the ‘central channel’ (*avadhūti*). The awakened yogini in her watery form is an epistemology of sacred space which plays a fundamental role in the hermeneutics of tantric reception and liberation. This process is made all the more tangible through the process of localisation, and we can see this dynamic play out in both contexts of the pond and stream on Mount Mañicūḍa and the spring shrine at Guhyeśvarī temple. Interestingly, even though both Nairātmya and Ugratārā Vajrayoginī are also associated with spontaneously emerging flames, their sacred environs are closely related to aquatic realms that bestow health, long life and even deathlessness. In addition to the generation of these physical benefits, the act of imbibing water at Guhyeśvarī or immersing oneself in the spring (*kuṇḍa*) at Mañicūḍa are also considered to bestow a range of spiritual boons: conventional and ultimate ‘attainments’ (*siddhi*) and ‘psychic powers’ (*rddhi*).

Multiple enigmatic meanings of water that arises spontaneously from the landscape and assumes the form or essence of the deity (*utpattikrama*) are further incorporated into a paradigm of internal tantric ‘completion stage yogic praxis’ (*saṃpannakrama*), passed on through literary accounts of the site. An example of this kind of analogical description of water is found in the *Vajravārāhi sādhana*. Umāpatideva writes: ‘Just as there is nourishment in the sites [and other places] with the water of the river, so in the body, the flowing channels (*nāḍīs*) nourish [aspects of the body, beginning with] the nails [...]’.⁶⁶ Therefore, conceptualised alternatively as a correlate to the inner workings of human anatomy, the spring at

66 Translated by Elizabeth English 2002: 279.

Guhyeśvarī is, in her more immanent form as water, the yoginis Nairātmyā for Newars and Vajravārahī for Tibetans, being interpreted as this feature of the landscape by each respective community. A primary feature of the enigmatic yogini Tridalakamala present at Guhyeśvarī temple complex is the characteristic of being the flow of powerful regenerative and cathartic fluids: menses, reproductive fluids and substances that issue forth from the womb of the *vajra-yoginīs*. The desired liberating result: the resultant knowledge of awakening can thus be conveyed through the visceral and tangible experience of encountering her as her healing waters (*jala*); an embodied and participative religious experience that remains integral in the contemporary practice and transmission of tantric Buddhism across Vajrayāna Buddhist communities in Nepal.

Conclusion

In Nepal, emplaced narratives facilitate the view of a space and time where, in the awareness of the practitioner, their doctrine and divinities are made tangible and immediate through localisation in the physical environs. Localisation in textual traditions tends to lend prescriptive authority to the practices of ‘travelling to (these) sites’ or ‘abodes’ (*purvaseva*, *pīṭhaseva*, *pīṭhapūjā*), an activity that seems to have remained integral to the transmission of Vajrayāna in Nepal now as it perhaps was in tantric observances in the past. Regardless of the emphasis on and concern with the internalisation of the *pīṭhas* within the body of the yogin, as called for in body mandala (*kāyamaṇḍala*) practices of the *Yoginītantras* and their associated commentaries, Ugratārā Vajrayoginī and Nairātmyā are two Buddhist yoginis localised within the domains of their earthly realms, who emerge and can be directly encountered at meeting places (*melaka*) in various forms including a divine light or flame (*jyoti*) and sacred water (*jala*). Buddhist vajrācāryas and storytellers teach about these immanent Buddhist deities Nairātmyā and Ugratārā Vajrayoginī as the localised and emplaced tantric traditions of the Kathmandu Valley. Although the tradition of storytelling may be on the decline, populations speaking various Tibetan dialects, such as Nepali, Gurung and Newari (to mention just a few), form part of a larger Vajrayāna Buddhist community in Nepal in which tantric teachings continue to be conferred through narrative and embodied approaches that effect and create a meeting with and a memory of these yoginis as crucial figures in a long-gone past,

but who are still present in the land and in collective memory. Through this comprehensive pedagogy of locale and landscape intertwined with local narratives, tantric traditions have continued to be transmitted and will persist into the future in Nepal given the continuity of a community of lineage holders that remembers both the narratives and songs of the *vajra-yoginīs* at their sites and their access to such sites. This close relationship between the memory of the yogin and the perceived power of the tangible world – as *the yoginī* – is thus a medium for the process of authorising tantric transmission. In light of this, deity visualisation becomes more than an intellectual exercise as it involves a recollection (*smaraṇa*) based on a memory of encounter and devotion (*bhakti*), experiences that are prefigured by first-person narratives in which deities are the main protagonists. After all, in the *Maṇiśailamahāvadāna* it was Ugratārā Vajrayoginī herself who urged her devotees to ‘remember me with devotion’ (New. *bhaktibhāvayānā jitalumaṃkā*).

This paper therefore draws attention to an engagement with the manifest world that can be demonstrated through inter-textual traditions of local narratives on yoginis and multi-vocalities that relate to how landscapes – as both fluid and fiery centres that facilitate awakening – are utilised to connect people with authentic modes of Buddhist tantric transmission. In the context of the *Yoginītantras* as transmitted in Nepal, axial abodes (*pīthā*) are places (Tib. *gnas*) where the body of the yoginī – appearing as inseparable from the environment – can be encountered (*melāka*) and partaken of in material and elemental forms.

The methodology utilised here has been chosen in an effort to practise classical philology and Buddhism that includes an in-depth study of Sanskrit and Newar manuscripts and witnesses, which avoids an overly scientific approach divorced from local perspectives and ritual requirements. This is most certainly not a new idea, but it is an approach that requires a continuous engagement. In terms of this paper’s overarching argument, I have foregrounded the idea that emplaced narratives and their enactment in tantric rituals have been and continue to be a crucial pedagogical strategy in which authentic lineages may be received in relation to and in reliance on site-specific abodes of vajra-yoginis. This reflects a process which is a particularly effective and affective semiotic pedagogical approach to localisation and geological emplacement that has persisted throughout the transmission

of exoteric and esoteric Buddhism in Nepal and the Himālaya. In terms of a broader comparative project outside the fold of the Newar context, a comparative engagement with local Buddhist texts across the Himalaya, in Tibetan and Buddhist Asia – in all their unique vernaculars – may shed further light on this particular pedagogy of locale in tantric Buddhism and further our understanding of the hermeneutics of the reception of Buddhism across Buddhist Asia and beyond.

APPENDIX 1

Tridalakamala Edition: Introductory Comments

Due to the problems presented by the language of this *caryāgīti* in its four variants, I was initially hesitant to attempt an edition of what is essentially a collection of word fragments poetically strung together. Because of this fragmentary style, it was difficult, for example, to know where to recognise compounds and where not to. Determining an authorial version was made more difficult by the vast differences between the versions received. As an example of this problem, the many additional visargas given in the old Bhaktapur text (B-PS), after the names of deities and at the end of lines and verses, suggest that perhaps the visarga is used in this text either as a marker for the end of the sung line or for the addition of an extra syllable when needed.

I do not think that we should allow the unorthodox structure of this text to diminish its ultimate value. In fact, the text's obscure and unusual structure and its many variants are what makes it important and interesting. The unusual structure leads us to wonder how such a text was initially composed, how it changed as it was passed on between oral and literary musical and ritual worlds, and why it is best utilised as it is. The multivalence of meaning, the adaptation of words to metre and the structure across all four variations are quite fascinating.

I make no claim here to have figured out a final edition or to have comprehended the meaning of these verses. For the most part, I have tried to leave vernacular terms (especially if they were common across all four witnesses) and the syllable count as they are. When I first began working on the text, I made many emendations. However, as I continued the editing process, I found that I reverted back to the local vernacular

so as not to change the essential character of the text, rendering it unrecognisable and unusable in ritual praxis. My aim here is to present, word by word, the emendations and interpretations that others who have written down this text have gone to great lengths to introduce in these four witnesses and only to suggest minor emendations. With this, I invite further investigation of this text which, while written and read on the page, is brought to a much more meaningful life through musical, rhythmic and ritual enactment in the context of Buddhist tantric worship (*pūjā*), *sādhana* and initiation (*abhiṣeka*).

Sigla and Marks in the Edition

The sigla have been named after the place and the compiler or owner of the text and are arranged in alphabetical order: *B-PS*, *RKV*, *SV*, *YPV*.

- B-PS *Tridalakamala* from Bhaktapur (New. Kvapa) in the possession of Pushpa Sakya (*pracalit* script)
- RKV *Tridalakamala* published in Ratna Kaji Vajracharya's *Cacāḥ Munā* (1996: 123) in *devanāgarī* script
- SV *Tridalakamala* from Kathmandu in the possession of Suban Vajracarya (*devanāgarī* script)
- YPV *Tridalakamala* from Kathmandu in the possession of Yagyaman Pati Vajracharya (*pracalit* script)
- †† obelus on both sides of a single word marks words that are problematic and which I cannot interpret.
- em. marks my emendation.

Tridalakamala Edition

rāga vibhāsa || tāla mātha ||

- 1 tridalakamala⁶⁷ vana⁶⁸ kusuma⁶⁹
madhukara⁷⁰ he heruva⁷¹ lina⁷²

67 tridalakamala] *RKV*, *SV*, *YPV*; tridalakamalaḥ *B-PS*.

68 vana] *B-PS*, *RKV*, *SV*; varṇa *YPV*.

69 kusuma] *B-PS*; kusumarasaṅge *SV*; kusumasayarā *RKV*; kusumasaraṅge *YPV*.

70 madhukara] *B-PS*; madhukare *RKV*; madhukare *SV*; madhukala *YPV*.

71 heheruva] *B-PS*; heruva *RKV*; heruvaha *SV*; heruha *YPV*.

72 lina em.] linā *B-PS*; virā *RKV*; rinā *SV*; riṅā *YPV*.

- 2 śrīvirūpākṣa⁷³ khagamukhadevī⁷⁴
madhyanepālasuvyāpitā⁷⁵ || dhrū ||
- 3 namāmi nairātmā⁷⁶ tribhuvanavyāpitā⁷⁷
vachalā⁷⁸devī śrīmṛgasthalī⁷⁹
- 4 sakala⁸⁰ surāsūravandita⁸¹ caraṇe⁸²
anega⁸³ ṛddhi⁸⁴ siddhivara⁸⁵ pradātā⁸⁶||
- 5 nandanavana⁸⁷ candana⁸⁸ taruvaḥ⁸⁹
anega⁹⁰ kusuma⁹¹ pārijāta⁹² vane⁹³
- 6 nitya⁹⁴ gaṅgāsambhāgamatī⁹⁵ tīre⁹⁶
anega⁹⁷ tīrtha⁹⁸ sūkṣma⁹⁹ nirmalā¹⁰⁰ || ||

73 śrīvirūpākṣa] B-PS, RKV, YPV; śrīvirūpākṣatra SV.

74 devī] RKV devīḥ SV, devīḥ YPV; devīḥ B-PS.

75 madhyanepālasuvyāpitā] B-PS; martyamaṇḍalasunirmalā RKV; medianepālayavyāpitā SV; medianepālayavyāpitā YPV.

76 nairātmā] RKV; nairātmāḥ B-PS; nairātmādevī SV; śrīnairātmādevī YPV.

77 tribhuvana vyāpitā] RKV; tribhuvana vyāpitāḥ B-PS; tribhuvana mātā SV; tribhuvana mātā YPV.

78 vachalā] B-PS, RKV, SV; bacchala YPV.

79 śrīmṛgasthalī em.] śrīmṛgasthali B-PS; śrīmṛgasthare RKV; śrīmṛgasthani SV; śrīmṛgastharī YPV.

80 sakala em.] sayala B-PS; sayara RKV; sayela SV; sayara YPV.

81 vandita] B-PS, RKV; vanditaḥ SV; vaṇḍita YPV.

82 caraṇe] RKV, YPV; caraṇeḥ B-PS; caraṇe RKV; caraṇoḥ SV.

83 anega] RKV, SB, YPV; aṇega B-PS.

84 ṛddhi] SV, YPV, RKV; riddhi B-PS.

85 vara] SV, RKV, YPV; B-PS vala.

86 pradātā] B-PS, RKV; prasādā SV; prasādā YPV.

87 vana B-PS] vanamiva RKV; vanamiva SB; vadane YPV.

88 candana] RKV, SB, YPV; candane B-PS.

89 taruvaḥ em.] <ta>taruveheḥ B-PS; taruva RKV; taruva SB; taruve YPV.

90 anega] SV, RKV, YPV; aṇega B-PS.

91 kusuma] RKV, SB, YPV; kusumaḥ B-PS.

92 parijāta] B-PS, YPB; pārājita RKV; pānijāta SV.

93 vane] B-PS, SB, RKV; vadane YPV.

94 nitya] RKV, YPV; naitya B-PS; nitye SB.

95 bhāgamatī em.] vāgamatī B-PS; vaḡamatī RKV; samatī SV; vāgamatī YPV.

96 tīre RKV] tīreḥ B-PS; tīrtha SV; tīrthe YPV.

97 anega] B-PS, SB, YPV; aneka RKV.

98 tīrtha] RKV, SV; tirathaḥ B-PS; missing YPV.

99 sūkṣma] sūkṣa B-PS; missing RKV; surakṣatrvane SV; surakṣatrvanaḥ YPV.

100 nirmalā] nirmmalā B-PS; sunirmalā RKV; missing SV; missing YPV.

- 7 aṣṭabhairava¹⁰¹ aṣṭayoginī¹⁰² devī¹⁰³
 anegadevāsura¹⁰⁴ kṣatrapālā¹⁰⁵
- 8 aṣṭa mahābhayaḥ¹⁰⁶ durita¹⁰⁷ †nirāvale^{†108}
 anegavighana¹⁰⁹vināsana¹¹⁰ || ||
- 9 viśvavyāpitr¹¹¹ tāriṇī¹¹² devī¹¹³
 akṣaya¹¹⁴ nirañjana¹¹⁵ jyoti¹¹⁶ nirmalā¹¹⁷
- 10 ābhimata¹¹⁸ sukhaphala¹¹⁹ dāyanī¹²⁰
 janma janma¹²¹ tunjupāyoh¹²² śaraṇaṃ¹²³ ||

Notes Verse by Verse in the Edition

Note on *tāla* and *mātha*: *tāla mātha*, which is a 14-measure metre, does not seem to adhere, in any witness, to the strict rules regarding the number of *aḥśaras* per line. The metre in caryā songs is rather flexible since the words can be adapted to the *tāla* by either elongating or shortening the number of beats given to each word or syllable. In my translation, I have attempted to follow to within two syllables the number of syllables in manuscript *B-PS*, *RKV* or *YPV* so that the English may also be easily utilised.

- 101 bhairava] *RKV*, *SV*, *YPV*; bhairavaḥ *B-PS*.
 102 aṣṭayoginī] *RKV*, *SV*; aṣṭajoginī *B-PS*; yoginī *YPB*.
 103 devī] *RKV*, *YPV*, *SB*; deviḥ *B-PS*.
 104 devāsura] *B-PS*, *RKV*, *SB*; sura *YPV*.
 105 kṣatrapālā] kṣatrapāla *B-PS*, *RKV*, *SV*; kṣatrapār? *YPV*.
 106 mahābhaya] *SV*, *YPV*, *RKV*; mahābhayaḥ *B-PS*.
 107 durita] *B-PS*, *RKV*, *SV*; śarita *YPV*.
 108 nirāvale] nilavāluleḥ *B-PS*; nivāraṇī *RK*; niravākraṇī *SV*; niravāraṇī *YPV*.
 109 vighna] *YPV*; vighana *B-PS*; vighnaṇī *RKV*; vignani *SV*.
 110 vināsana] *B-PS*; nivāraṇī *RKV*; niravākraṇe *SV*; nivāraṇe *YPV*.
 111 viśvavyāpitr] *B-PS*, *RKV*; viśvavyāpita *SV*, viśvavyāpita *YPV*.
 112 tāriṇī] tāruṇī *YPV*, *RKV*, *SV*; tāruni *B-PS*.
 113 devī] *RKV*, *SV*, *YPV*; deviḥ *B-PS*.
 114 akṣaya] akhaya *B-PS*; akhaya *RKV*; akhaya *SB*; akhaya *YPV*.
 115 nirañjana] *B-PS*, *RKV*; nirariñjana *SB*; nirariñjana *YPV*.
 116 jyoti] joti *B-PS*; jyotirūpā *RKV*; jotimaya *SV*; jotimaya *YPV*.
 117 nirmalā] nirmmalā *B-PS*; omitted *RKV*; omitted *SV*; omitted *YPV*.
 118 abhimata] *RKV*, *YPV*; abhīmatha *B-PS*; atīśānta.
 119 sukhaphala] *RKV*, *SV*, *YPV*; sukhaphalaḥ *B-PS*.
 120 dāyanī] *B-PS*; dāyanidevi *SV*; dāyanidevi *RKV*; dāyanidevi *YPV*.
 121 janma janma] *SV*, *RKV*, *YPV*; janama janama *B-PS*.
 122 tunjupāyoh] tunjupāyo *B-PS*; tuhma *RKV*; tumupāya *SV*; tunjupāya *YPV*.
 123 śaraṇaṃ] saranā *B-PS*; śaraṇāgatha *RKV*; śaraṇā *SV*; śaraṇa *YPV*.

Verse 1A note: the word ‘together with’ (*saṅge*) is present in the *Caryāsaṅgraha*.

Verse 1B note: the word *heruva* for *heruka* is used in all four witnesses, so I have left it unchanged.

Verse 2B note: *Vachalā* is the local pronunciation of the goddess *Vatsalā*, so I have chosen not to emend it. *Dhrū* marks the refrain or verse to be repeated.

Verse 3A note: the reason why ‘pervading the triple world’ (*trihuvanavyāpitā*) is written using the masc. *ā* is unclear, but the long *ā* was preserved in all four versions, so I left it in.

Verse 5A note: the double *ta* syllable may be left in here for metre or rhythm.

Verse 6B note: ‘various’ or ‘not one’ (*aneka*) appears most commonly as *anega* and *aṇega* in all four witnesses and so I have left it as it is so as not to alter the sound of the verses.

Verse 7b note: *Kṣatrapāla* is used for *kṣetrapāla*, ‘local protector’, in all four witnesses so I have left it in with the understanding that it is local vernacular.

Verse 8A note: what appears as *niravāṭuleḥ* in *B-PS* and has been emended to *nirāvāle* is very close to the *māravighna niravārure*, for example, that appears in the *Caryāsaṅgrahaḥ*.

Verse 9B note: Libbie Mills¹²⁴ points out that *akhaya* for *akṣaya*, meaning ‘indestructible’, makes sense if *akhaya* is understood as a Middle Indo-Aryan sound adjustment. Naresh Man Vajracharya mentions that *akhaya* can also be understood as ‘clear’.

Verse 10B note: the phrases *janma janmamaru tujupāya śaraṇā* and *vajravārāhī tujupāya saraṇā* appear in the *Caryāsaṅgraha* and I am under the impression that the word *tujupāya* or *tuṃjupaya* means ‘your feet’, although I have unfortunately not had the opportunity to confirm this point.

Notes on Metre

Each witness documents the metre of the *caryāgīti* to be *māthā tāla* or *tāla mātha*, a 14-measure metre. I have noted, however, that the metrical measure does not correspond to the number of syllables in each verse.

¹²⁴ Libbie Mills personal communication, October 2020.

Each witness demonstrates a minor disparity in syllables per line (usually just a one- or two-syllable difference) from the lines of other witnesses. They all remain within a reasonable enough range so that a word might be extended to fit the measure. Notably, some lines across witnesses are of the same syllable count. Although this song is sung to a 14-measure metre, the commonest syllable counts per line are 11 (15 occurrences), 12 (with 17 occurrences) and 13 (with 14 occurrences). I have also completed a verse-by-verse breakdown of the syllable count for the two lines of each verse according to my English translation and, in brackets, each of the four witnesses.¹²⁵

Tridalakamala Translation

raga: vibhāsa tāla: mātha¹²⁶

- 1 Three-petalled Lotus,¹²⁷ blooming flower¹²⁸ of the forest,
Where the honeybee –O Heruva¹²⁹ – comes to merge.
- 2 Śrī Virūpākṣa with Devī Khagamukha –
Filling up well the heart of Nepāla.¹³⁰

125 Syllable count:

1A 14/12 (B-PS 12, RKV 14, SV 14, YPV 14); 1B 12 (B-PS 10, RKV 9, SV 10, YPV 9)

2A 12 (B-PS 12, RKV 11, SV 11, YPV 12); 2B 10 (B-PS 9, RKV 9, SV 9, YPV 9)

3A 12 (B-PS 15, RKV 13, SV 14, YPV 15); 3B 12 (B-PS 10, RKV 10, SV 10, YPV 10)

4A 12 (B-PS 14, RKV 13, SV 14, YPV 13); 4B 12 (B-PS 12, RKV 12, SV 12, YPV 12)

5A 11 (B-PS 14, RKV 13, SV 13, YPV 13); 5B 12 (B-PS 13, RKV 12, SV 12, YPV 13)

6A 13 (B-PS 12, RKV 12, SV 9, YPV 10); 6B 10 (B-PS 12, RKV 9, SV 11, YPV 11)

7A 12 (B-PS 14, RKV 12, SV 12, YPV 10); 7B 12 (B-PS 11, RKV 11, SV 11, YPV 9)

8A 12 (B-PS 16, RKV 13, SV 14, YPV 13); 8B 12 (B-PS 10, RKV 10, SV 10, YPV 9)

9A 11 (B-PS 11, RKV 10, SV 11, YPV 11); 9B 11 (B-PS 12, RKV 11, SV 12, YPV 11)

10A 12 (B-PS 12, RKV 13, SV 11, YPV 13); 10B 13 (B-PS 13, RKV 13, SV 11, YPV 11)

126 I have not translated the *Tridalakamala* literally since much of the grammar is missing. I have given priority to metre and rhyme so that it could be utilised as caryā ‘practice’ song if required.

127 *tridalakamala* literally means, ‘three-petalled lotus’, but it is also an epithet of *Nairāṭmyā*.

128 One syllable (flow’r).

129 Heruva is the term used in all four witnesses and is synonymous with Heruka.

130 It might be unusual for the verb *vyāpita* to be repeated in verse 3B and the verse immediately following it, verse 4A. Given the fact that the syllable count seems to fall short at only 9 syllables in B-PS, RKV and SV, I assume that it is possibly *vajrapīṭha* since the verse also refers to Virūpākṣa and Khagamukha of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala.

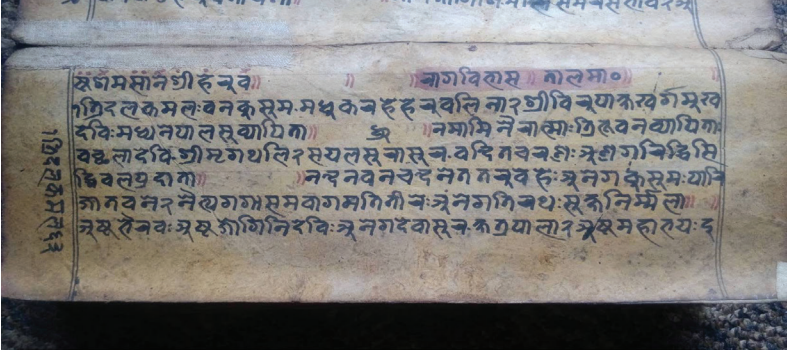


Figure 1. The first folio of the Sanskrit Tridalakamala caryāgīti in pracalit script included in the manuscript from Bhaktapur (B-PS).

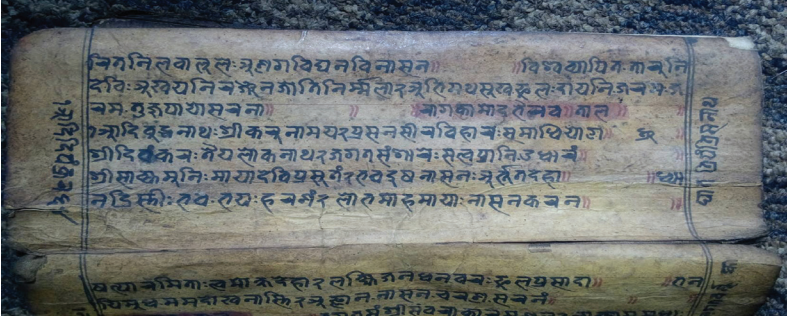


Figure 2. The second folio of the Sanskrit Tridalakamala caryāgīti in pracalit script included in the manuscript from Bhaktapur (B-PS).

- 3 Praise to Nairātmā,¹³¹ who pervades the triple world, [as]¹³² Vachalā Devī¹³³ of glorious Mṛgasthalī.
- 4 All¹³⁴ the gods and demi-gods worship at your feet – Powers and accomplishments are granted by you.
- 5 In the blissful forest of Sandalwood trees, Many blooms amidst the Coral Jasmine’s perfume.¹³⁵

131 Nairātmā is the common vernacular term for Nairātmīyā in Newar Buddhism. Since this is a very local text, I thought it was best to retain the local terminology.

132 Emendation suggested by Naresh Man Vajracharya.

133 Vachalā is the local term for the goddess Vatsalā.

134 ‘All’ (sakala, sayala) could also be read as sayara which, according to Raju Sakya, means ‘surrounding’, as written in YPV and RK.

135 The night-flowering coral jasmine tree with red blooms.

- 6 On the banks of the Bāg'matī – like eternal Ganga –
There are many subtle and pure tīrthas,
- 7 The eight bhairavas with eight yoginī-devīs,
Gods and demi-gods – the protectors of this place.
- 8 Eight great fears and all evil, extinguished – removed,
Every obstacle overcome completely.
- 9 Liberating¹³⁶ goddess, you pervade the world.
Spotless flame— unblemished and indestructible.
- 10 You are the one who yields the desired fruit of bliss.
Lifetime after lifetime, at your feet I seek refuge.

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¹³⁶ *Tāriṇī* could also be *taruṇī*, youthful.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Recent publications on central Himalayan arts and architecture: a review essay

David C. Andolfatto

Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris

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Books reviewed:

La Statuaire Primitive de l'Ouest du Népal. The Primitive Statuary of Western Nepal, by Jean-Luc Cortes & Jean-Claude Brézillon. Paris: Éditions Héritage Architectural. 2011, 427 pp., 295 colour illustrations, ISBN 978-291509-614-9.

Heritage of Western Nepal: Art and Architecture, by Dilli Raj Sharma. Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies. 2012, 395 pp., 200 black and white illustrations, ISBN 978-993-752443-8.

Mountain Temples & Temple Mountains: Architecture, Religion, and Nature in the Central Himalayas, by Nachiket Chanchani. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2019, 288 pp., 80 colour illustrations, ISBN 978-0-2957-4451-3.

This review essay presents three publications on central Himalayan arts and architecture. Published over the past decade, they constitute the most recent works on the subject. It is worth noting here that central Himalayan material cultures have so far received limited attention from scholars. This situation is in stark contrast with the amount of research devoted to nearby regions, such as the Kathmandu Valley, Himachal Pradesh or Ladakh, to cite a few. It also contrasts with the valuable and more numerous studies on the area's history and religious anthropology.¹

The recent publication of Chanchani's *Mountain Temples & Temple Mountains* triggered my interest in reviewing it together with Jean-Luc Cortes and Jean-Claude Brézillon's *The Primitive Statuary of Western Nepal*

1 See for instance, Lecomte-Tilouine 2009a and 2009b, Pant 2009, Joshi 2009 and Childs 2012.

(2011) and Dilli Raj Sharma's *Heritage of Western Nepal: Art and Architecture* (2012). The main reason for bringing these titles together in a joint analysis is that they have so far attracted no attention or reviews. Given the scarcity of books on the topic, I took the opportunity offered to me by the editors of this journal to fill this void and, I hope, to stimulate interest and further discussion.

These works focus on central Himalayan art and architecture, and each of them addresses this broad but largely overlooked topic from a unique perspective. Chanchani's and Sharma's studies deal with the medieval heritage of neighbouring areas, respectively the Indian state of Uttarakhand and the western and far-western regions of Nepal. On the other hand, Cortes and Brézillon's book stands out because it looks into the tradition of the so-called 'primitive' statuary of the Karnali Basin (western Nepal). Due to the nature of these sculptures, habitually made of wood, the period covered in this book goes back no further than two centuries.

Two issues may immediately emerge here and, since this essay is about the central Himalayas' past, it is worth seizing this opportunity to address them. Firstly, note the use of the Western historiographic concept of 'medieval'. As noted by Bryan J. Cuevas in the context of Tibetan studies, 'there has been no open discussion among Tibetanists, and thus little consensus, about the precise dating of the "medieval" period in Tibetan history or even what we should accept as the key defining characteristics of "medieval" Tibetan society' (Cuevas 2006).² This is also the case with central Himalayan studies, where scholars have similarly incorporated large sections of proto-historic and historic periods into this broad chronological window. Besides obvious indications regarding the historiographic organisation, mental constructions and ideological connotations, resorting to the term 'medieval' highlights the general lack of data. Moreover, archæological excavations are almost inexistent in the given regions of western Nepal and in Uttarakhand. However, inscriptions on rocks or metal supports are extant, their scattered presence in the expansive and complex landscape aptly illustrated by the uneven, scattered mention of them in publications.

An obvious difficulty lies in the naming and the phasing of historical

2 I am grateful to Yannick Laurent for bringing my attention to this important question.

periods, a topic that has kept a certain number of scholars busy since Antiquity. In Europe, Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) was the first to coin the term ‘Middle Ages’ (*media ætas*), defined as an obscure period supposedly succeeded by a new era of intellectual wisdom driven by the Humanists, and subsequently called the Renaissance. The central Himalayas were marked by historical, technological and intellectual events that are distinct from the rest of the South Asian subcontinent. Moreover, little is known of these events. This is enough to make the use of an already much-debated European terminology problematic. Nevertheless, the European term ‘medieval’ has, to some extent, been consistently applied to the periodisation of Nepalese and Indian history. In Indian historiography, it was generally conceived as part of the traditional triad: ‘Ancient’, ‘Medieval’ and ‘Modern’, corresponding to ‘three major periods, Hindu, Muslim and British’ (Thapar 2015 [2002]: 18). In Nepal, Dilli Raman Regmi (2007 [1965]) adopted an identical terminology, though for different reasons and with slight chronological differences. Luciano Petech (1984) also used the term ‘medieval’ but adhered to Mary S. Slusser’s dynastic subdivisions: hence the late Licchavi, the transitional (or Thakuri) and Malla periods (Slusser 1982). While these eras can seemingly be adapted to the study of the Kathmandu Valley, they become complicated as soon as one deals with the rest of the country. The central Himalayan region in particular witnessed the emergence of other dynasties, such as the Katyūris, the Chands and the Khaśa Mallas, to cite the most famous ones. Unfortunately, as noted above and despite the efforts of researchers, our understanding of these dynasties, their history and the exact extent of their territories remains uncertain. Generally speaking, the material elements at our disposal in this context are the (for the most part, religious) monuments, sculptures and the inscriptions visible above ground. The subsoil remains largely unexplored.

Thus, when contemplating a varying regional history, the term ‘medieval’ constitutes a convenient (yet temporary and arbitrary) label, though its use is subject to certain provisos. In the present situation, the medieval period could be roughly situated between the middle of the first millennium CE and the late eighteenth – early nineteenth century (the terminus corresponds to the annexation of today’s western Nepal and Uttarkhand to the Gorkha dominion). This is a mere working concept,

mainly inspired by Jacques Le Goff's idea of a 'long [European] Middle Age' (Le Goff 2014) and leads us to the second issue in this preamble.

An objection may indeed be raised that the 'primitive statuary' dealt with in Cortes and Brézillon's book is, for chronological reasons, not related to the medieval heritage of western Nepal. This very interesting debate needs to be built on a holistic approach using in-depth field research. It is nevertheless tempting to question whether the so-called 'tribal', 'archaic' or 'primitive' sculptures so far found in this region are inherited from 'medieval' artistic idioms and, if so, to what extent. An *in-situ* approach in the Jumla district of western Nepal reveals that medieval decorative patterns have been used and transformed over time, and that this process continues today (Andolfatto 2019). Still in western Nepal, I was fortunate to be able to procure the result of radiocarbon dating of a 'tribal' wooden sculpture from this region. The results dated it between 1446 CE and 1635 CE (calibrated), thus making the study of such artefacts an essential component of Himalayan historical research.³

Let us bear in mind that the objects presented by Cortes and Brézillon cannot be taken as direct – formal and functional – continuations of medieval art. Such a reasoning would throw us back into the maze of outdated and dangerous ethnographic comparativism (Georget et al). This said, I believe that the cautious study of 'primitive statuary' can provide valuable insights and clues about past artistic traditions, especially in a context where there is little material data.

I have already mentioned the rare and scattered research on central Himalayan history. This statement should not undermine valuable works published prior to the books reviewed here, and notably the volume *Bards and Mediums: History, Culture and Politics in the Central Himalayan Kingdoms*, edited in 2009 by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine. This opus contains research of great value for our understanding of the region and provides learned reappraisals of historical documents.⁴ Unfortunately, one cannot but

3 Sculpture of a character praying, from a private collection in Paris, see Andolfatto 2020.

4 A good example of the book's contribution is the study of inscriptions from the Karnali region by Mahes Raj Pant. Pant (2009: 295–297) reviews inscriptions such as the 1223 CE Baleshwar inscription of Krā Calla. This inscription, now lost, was first translated by E. T. Atkinson (1884) and later published by others who strangely gave different translations containing key information that was absent from the original text; namely that the copperplate and conquest of Kartipura (Kartṛpura, in Kumaon, capital

help remarking that, besides Chanchani, no other author presented here mentions this key publication.

The book by Cortes and Brézillon, *La Statuaire Primitive de l'Ouest du Népal. The Primitive Statuary of Western Nepal*, is a bilingual (French and English) publication.⁵ With dual texts and its large coffee-table layout, it is the most voluminous of the three titles presented here. The authors themselves make it clear that the book does not claim to be an academic work but instead offers a personal point of view of western Nepal's statuary (p. 16). This point of view and the information provided in the publication are largely based on Jean-Luc Cortes's travels in the region of the Karnali river basin. The region, and especially Jumla district, is famed for its sculptural tradition that is visible on different supports: wooden bridges, vernacular temples and votive sculptures.

A series of short prefaces and notes by the ambassador of France to Nepal at the time and two gallerists and collectors come after the authors' Foreword.

The first part of the book, titled 'Himalayan complexity' (p. 56–72), reminds the reader of how the fine arts of the Kathmandu Valley came to be metonymically regarded as the arts of Nepal. This attitude, conveyed by Westerners and the Nepalese alike, led many authors to qualify objects of lesser elaborate craftsmanship as 'jungle art'. The disdain for 'non-classical' and, in a way, for non-Newari art forms and aesthetics, is accompanied by a lack of information regarding the iconographies, uses, purposes and geographical origins of objects. The latter are now found in an alarming number in curio shops in Kathmandu. Disconnected from their original context, most sculptures representing figures praying (*añjali mudrā*) have been wrongfully labelled 'fountain keepers' or

of the Katyūri kingdom) date back to the sixteenth year of Krā Calla's reign. As noted by Pant, the original text published by Atkinson does not contain this information, which led previous authors to situate Krā Calla erroneously as early as 1207 CE. See also Joshi (2009: 335–338) for a full translation of the inscription.

5 To better understand this editorial choice, it is essential to recall that most publications on the subject of 'non-classical' ('primitive', 'tribal' etc) Himalayan art have so far been published in French and produced by French or French-speaking collectors, art dealers and by a few CNRS researchers. See Petit 1995, 2006, Pannier 2007, Krauskopff and Goy 2009, Krauskopff and Dollfus 2014.

‘spring spirits’ by those who sell them in Nepal. As very few collectors and scholars have bothered to visit the Karnali region to evaluate the sculptures’ actual context, this identification is still used today at many auction sales.

Here the authors describe the roles of two key religious specialists of Nepal: the *dhāmi* and the *jhañkri*. Following Daniela Berti’s observation of similitudes between mediums of the Karnali region (the *dhāmis*) and those of the Kullu Valley (the *gurs*), Cortes and Brézillon propose that *dhāmis* are specific to the Khaśa community that allegedly migrated there from present-day Uttarakhand (p. 64–66).⁶ When not placed in houses, ‘primitive’ sculptures of western Nepal are often found in the vestibules of temples used by *dhāmis* for oracular consultations. The authors question whether these images are also of Khaśa origin. They observe their absence from the artistic landscape of the Kullu Valley and therefore conclude that they are most likely a borrowing or an inheritance from the Magar tradition. Here Magars are considered to be one of the branches of the Kirati tribe that populated western Nepal before the arrival of the Khaśas. This Khaśa migration is still difficult to situate in time. Although no material evidence exists at this point in time, it may be suggested that this process took place around the middle of the first millennium CE.⁷ Given the relative scarcity of archæological data pertaining to population processes in the central Himalayas, one can understand Cortes and Brézillon’s prudence and deductive reasoning. The assumption that the Karnali statuary is of Magar origin requires further research, but it certainly stands as a good working hypothesis since, as they authors note, similar images are found to the east of the Karnali River and, as far as I know, not to the west of the Mahakali River.⁸ A limit to this reasoning is that these images may exist west of

6 This had already been highlighted in Gabriel Campbell’s thesis on Jumla’s oracular religion (Campbell 1978).

7 Maheshwar P. Joshi considers that ‘the theory of a large-scale migration of the Khaśas to Kumaon and Garhwal region is unfounded’ (Joshi 1990: 199). He nevertheless estimates that the arrival of Khaśas on the Indian subcontinent (from Central Asia) cannot be earlier than the first century BCE (Joshi 1990: 197). It remains impossible to ascertain this claim for various reasons: mainly the lack of archæological data and, as a corollary, attempting to define the proto-historical material culture of ethnic groups known only from historical or mythological literature represents a real methodological challenge.

8 On pre-Khaśa occupation of western Nepal by Tibeto-Burmese groups see Witzel 1993.

the Mahakali River but have never been published. Cortes and Brézillon go on to suggest that Khaśa migrants adopted the artistic idioms from the region newly controlled by them and integrated them into their religious practices (p. 70). This was done once ‘their military superiority was established’ (p. 70). This statement infers that ‘permanent migration’ took place over a short period of time and that the pull factor for Khaśa populations would have been the availability of new land. In the religious sphere, this would have been manifested by the replacement of ‘shamans’ (*jhañkri*-s) by *dhāmi* mediums (p. 82). It is so far impossible to determine exactly when and how the Khaśas settled in western Nepal. I am personally inclined to believe that it was a continuous process that might have occasionally benefited from military forays rather than a historical event for which we have no actual evidence.⁹

The next section, ‘The Statuary’, is the most descriptive part of the book. In it the authors carefully describe the various characteristics of the sculptures encountered by Cortes during his field trips. With very few exceptions, all the selected sculptures are figurative. They are described in terms of position (standing, squatting etc), proportions and dimensions, gestures, attributes, and so on. Their different functions and uses are then listed, as well as the materials in which they are executed (metal, stone and wood). Because of the longevity of the material, the stone sculptures are considered to potentially predate the wooden ones (p. 152–156). Future archæological excavations will surely confirm their antiquity. Cortes and Brézillon then try to demarcate regional styles found in the statuary (p. 164–177). This exercise fails to convince because these regional stylistic features seem to have been elaborated on artefacts that are disconnected from their original location, thus suggesting that the authors tried to make sense of information provided by Kathmandu art dealers. Throughout the book, only the sculptures from Jumla district are presented in their original context.

The following part, ‘The statues and their context’, takes up information published by previous authors (especially Gaborieau 1969) and includes personal observations from Cortes’s own experience in the Karnali region. This part focuses on mediums’ performances that take place at sanctuaries (where numerous sculptures are to be found)

9 For the study of trans-Himalayan migration patterns, see Childs 2012.

during the main full-moon festivals. Observations are made concerning practices in Jumla district. Since there are no clear indications of where the events take place, the reader may be led to think that possession rituals are executed in the same way throughout western Nepal, or at least in the Karnali river basin. However, this is not the case. Indeed, the oracular seances described in this part are specific to the Jumla area and differ from those of neighbouring Dailekh, Dolpa and Jajarkot districts. This therefore attests to the contextualisation of images from Jumla but cannot be regarded as a standard rule for other regions.

Cortes then discloses his 'Traveling impressions' and provides a short note on 'The effigies', where he gives his personal views on the aesthetics of western Nepal's statuary. After these few pages is a catalogue of 109 sculptures from private Western collections. One might regret that the sculptures are not presented district by district, which would facilitate our understanding of regional styles as the authors describe them. The book closes on another note, with the authors expressing their concerns about the ongoing risk of endangering the cultural fabric of western Nepal (modernisation, evangelical proselytising etc).

Before outlining some concluding remarks, it is important to mention the publisher's rather poor choices regarding the book's layout: the format is very basic and the different parts of the book are not clearly distinct from each other.

With *The Primitive Statuary of Western Nepal*, Cortes and Brézillon deliver an aesthete's documented view of this art, which had so far only been given within the comfort of collectors' cabinets. More work needs to be done on the fabrication process of sculptures, and this can only be done by providing the artists responsible for their creation with more space. Their participation in research will no doubt confirm some theories. Likewise, a study founded on emic views will surely relegate many other theories to the crowded cemetery of interpretative fantasies. This book is probably the first of its kind to attempt a much-needed contextualisation of objects. The authors try to put into perspective the chronology of the relatively recent 'primitive' wooden sculptures with the medieval remains visible in the same region. Although no definitive answer is provided regarding the history and sociocultural threads connecting these idioms, one cannot but welcome this attempt.

Despite the publisher's note that Dilli Raj Sharma's *Heritage of Western*

Nepal: Art and Architecture 'will be useful for researchers; teachers; students and all who are interested in this field' (p. i), it has received no attention from the academic world. The main reason is that the area and the topic itself have drawn little scholarly attention, at least since 2010.

Sharma's work opens with a general presentation of the geographical, historical, religious and historiographic setting of western Nepal. The book then deals with four administrative zones: Bheri (Dailekh, Surkhet and Bardiya districts), Karnali (Jumla, Mugu, Kalikot, Dolpa and Humla districts), Seti (Achham, Bajhang, Doti and Bajura districts) and Mahakali (Dadeldhura, Baitadi and Darchula districts).¹⁰ A chapter is devoted to each of these zones and is divided into two parts marked 'Phase 1' and 'Phase 2'.

Before turning to the information in these chapters, it is important to discuss both the phases in question and Sharma's presentation of the region's history. The first of these is covered in the space of five pages, while the historiography of the study of art and archæology in Nepal extends over thirteen pages, which are irrelevant to the topic (Ch. 2). This unbalanced situation, which is regrettable given the topic of the book, is matched by a profusion of chronological inanities. According to Sharma, the early history of the area can be traced back to the sixth century on the basis of Lichhavi characters inscribed on *tsha tshas* (moulded clay tablets) recovered from a cave in Sinja (Jumla district, p. 8). This statement by a Nepali scholar is wide of the mark since the inscriptions on these objects, which are ascribable to the twelfth–fourteenth centuries, are clearly in Nāgarī script, not in an early Gupta-related script such as Lichhavi. Sharma goes on to state that the 'region's chronological history starts when the Mallas began to reign over the region during the latter half of the 11th century A.D.' (p. 9). The author obviously ignored previous research by Prayag Raj Sharma (1972) and Surya Mani Adhikary (1997 [1988]), who rightfully situated Nāgarāja, the founder of the Khaśa Malla Empire, at the beginning of the twelfth century. D. R. Sharma's confusion about the chronology of this political entity is obvious. It is exemplified by his interpretation of the famous standing Buddha from the Cleveland Museum of Fine Art (Inv. No. 66.30). The bronze sculpture bears an inscription stating that it is the 'personal image of Lha-btsun Nāgarāja'

10 In conformity with the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, these zones have been rescheduled and are currently part of Karnali Pradesh and Sudurpaschim Pradesh.

but gives no date. Sharma surmises that it was made in the year 1000 CE and that this Nāgarāja is the Khaśa Malla ruler. This contradicts both the author's assertion that the (Khaśa) Mallas started ruling in the second half of the eleventh century and the fact that Nāgarāja is a popular name found in various western Tibetan lineages of the time and most likely refers, in this case, to one of Yeshe O's two sons,¹¹ who was active between c. 998 and 1046 (Klimburg-Salter 1982: 103, Petech 1997: 235, von Schroeder 2001: 84, 86). These chronological inconsistencies lead to the affirmation that the Khaśa Mallas 'ruled for nearly five hundred years' (p. 11), an untenable statement since the last Khaśa Malla lord ruled over a much-reduced territory up until the 1390s (Andolfatto 2019: 64). Indeed, even if we were to accept the author's claim that the Khaśa Malla Nāgarāja lived in 1000 CE, the total duration of the dynasty's reign would still not amount to five centuries.

One then wonders what 'Phase 1' and 'Phase 2' correspond to. Though the author does not clearly define them, a clue is given in the short section devoted to religion: 'The second phase from 12th century to 15th century A.D. is the time of heyday of Malla rulers under whose inspiration a favourable situation was created for the development of arts in their large territory' (p. 12). The reader is thus left to guess that the first phase corresponds to the pre-Khaśa Malla period.

The content of the chapters devoted to the art and architecture of western Nepal is more descriptive than analytical. Sharma describes monuments and sculptures with varying degrees of detail. It appears that in some cases the author did not visit the sites himself but relied on reports made by others. This is evidenced by the unequal quality of the many pictures reproduced in the volume and by several inaccuracies. For instance, a stone fountain from Bhambada, in Mugu district, is said to display 'beautiful carvings' (p. 195). Having surveyed this monument myself, I could not find any specific carvings on it. Sharma also reproduced editorial mistakes published in P. R. Sharma's 1972 study: he locates the site of a *pañcadeval* (a complex of five śikhara temples) in Ukhadi (Jumla district) on the basis of a picture whose caption was interchanged (by the publishers?) with the one for Ukhadi's sole temple (Sharma 1972: Pl. V). This *pañcadeval* is in fact located in Manma, in the nearby district

11 Lha Lama Yeshe O ruled over the Kingdom of Guge at the end of the tenth century.

of Kalikot. This is a crucial element since *pañcadevals* are only found in areas controlled by the Raskoṭi kings, who replaced the Khaśa Mallas in about the 1370s. The former's territory did not cover Jumla district (or only during the last decades of the fourteenth century), where power was in the hands of the Kalyal dynasty and where no *pañcadevals* were to be found. This geographic distribution corroborates the idea that *pañcadevals* were subsequent to the Khaśa Malla era, hence suggesting, despite claims by most authors,¹² that artistic and architectural activities did not cease or decline in quality with the fall of the western Mallas (Andolfatto 2019: 85–93).

This recurring idea that the Khaśa Mallas created a favourable economic and cultural environment and allowed the arts to develop and that their disappearance from the political scene is responsible for artistic decay, can be explained by a methodological lacuna observed in most works. None of the authors preceding D.R. Sharma adopted a chrono-typological approach to the region's artistic and architectural productions. Sharma provides the embryo of a chronological approach to archæological vestiges but his work remains incomplete, partly because of the structure of the book, which is primarily organised by region. Nothing is said of the Khaśa Mallas' successors, yet a careful study reveals that the construction of a certain number of temples and stūpas can in fact be attributed to them. For instance, the *deval* (the term locally used when referring to śikhara monuments) temple in Ukhadi (Jumla district) bears the date Śaka era 1408 (1486 CE). In the same district, contemporary inscriptions on a group of thirteen caityas from Michagaon bear the dates Śaka 1404 and 1423 (respectively 1482 and 1501 CE). Sharma makes no use of these important pieces of evidence when mentioning the inscriptions (p. 183–184).

These remarks should not diminish the value of Sharma's publication. I started my PhD research on the subject in 2013 and Sharma's book became the main resource on which I relied to prepare my field surveys (the task was complicated by the absence of maps to locate the sites). The opus does not contain all the heritage sites, but it does provide a very satisfying list of the most significant ones on which to build further investigations. Moreover, the author dedicates a significant number

12 See for instance Sharma 1972 and Pandey 1997.

of pages (p. 129–166) to the iconographic study of the circa-twelfth-century Buddhist temple of Kakrevihar (Surkhet district). He accurately identifies the Jātaka scenes on the façade of this unique monument. As it was still in a state of ruin until the years 2012–2014, when Nepal’s Department of Archæology launched its reconstruction, it was no doubt difficult for the author to make sense of the temple’s original architecture from its scattered ruins. Nevertheless, the large quantity of śikhara (tower) pinnacles recovered from the site indicates that it was built in the śekhari śikhara style. This type of architecture is also found at Gujjar Deva (Dwarahat, Uttarakhand) and, as demonstrated by Nachiket Chanchani (*infra*), marks the presence of architects and artists belonging to the Māru-Gurjara school of western India.

The Indian state of Uttarkhand is dotted with numerous pilgrimage sites of major importance for Hindus from all over the subcontinent. In *Mountain Temples & Temple Mountains: Architecture, Religion, and Nature in the Central Himalayas*, Nachiket Chanchani investigates the significance and antiquity of these places that are indicated by the presence of stone temples whose vertical, pointed pinnacles somehow evoke the surrounding mountains. Nachiket Chanchani’s book sets out to investigate how the region developed as a ‘land of the gods (*deva bhūmi*)’, which has so far attracted a regular flow of devotees and an increasing number of tourists. This endeavour is more than necessary because, until recently and despite many scholars’ attempts to date and historically contextualise these monuments, our knowledge of this subject was limited, contradictory and often based on mere suppositions. As mentioned by Chanchani, a well-known reason to explain this frustrating situation is the scarcity of epigraphic data. To tackle this lacuna the author begins by considering the central Himalayas from an outsiders’ perspective and especially that of poets attached to different courts of the Indo-Gangetic dynasties.

The first chapter discusses the way these mountainous lands are mentioned in literature, how they were perceived and how legendary characters such as the Pāṇḍavas travelled across them. These elements are considered in view of the meagre historical and archæological data available. In this regard, third-century-BCE Aśokan edicts carved on a

boulder at Kalsi are studied in the context of their geographical location in the Himalayan foothills. Likewise, sculptures found in Kalsi and in Rishikesh are used by the author to confirm connections between the region and other cultural centres in the Indo-Gangetic plains such as Mathura, from as early as the Kūsān period. The selected examples thus illustrate the ‘progressive exaltation of this landscape’ and demonstrate the idea of a ‘political and religious conquest of the front and middle ridges of the Central Himalayas’ (p. 44).

The second chapter dwells on the early architectural phase that took place in the central Himalayas between the fifth and the seventh century. The author postulates that fifth-century temples such as those at Udayagiri and Nachna (Madhya Pradesh) are architectural allegories of mountains or grottoes. ‘Temple Hinduism’ developed under the Guptas, yet Chanchani describes how, in the central Himalayas during the post-Gupta period, deities turned into ‘gendered and juridical beings’ and were worshipped in temples. The latter process is illustrated by the discovery of brick monuments such as the sixth-century temple in Koteswar (Rudrapur district, Uttarakhand). The earliest stone temples date back to the seventh century (Palethi, Tehri Garhwal district, Uttarakhand). It is in this environment of religious, architectural and literary emulation centred on the image of the Himalayas and their divine population that, between the sixth and seventh centuries, rulers from the plains turned their attention towards the central Himalayas. Inscriptions from this period record land donations, which are considered by the author as indicators of agricultural intensification.

Chapter three focuses on the temple complex of Jageshwar in Kumaon. This part reveals the role of Pāśupatas in the development of central Himalayan religious sites from the seventh century onwards.¹³ By doing so, Chanchani challenges legendary accounts (vehiculated by local oral traditions) of Śaṅkarācārya’s visit to Jageshwar and his destruction of pre-existing Buddhist monuments (p. 87). As in previous chapters, the historical discourse is punctuated and brilliantly illustrated by references to religious (puranic) texts and to the poetry of the time. These

13 This topic was covered in an article by Maheshwar P. Joshi (1989), absent from Chanchani’s bibliography. The role of Pāśupatas has also been prominent in the development of Kathmandu’s Pashupatinath temple since at least the seventh century. See Mirning 2016.

references reveal the importance of the landscape and its perception by recently established Himalayan powers (mainly Kumaon's Katyūris, successors of the Kuṇindas), local inhabitants, wandering artisans and ascetics. Thus, classical narratives allow the author to take the reader through the formative phase of central Himalayan architecture and art. However, more importantly, it is the birth of the region as a place of generative mythology that is presented here. Chanchani further argues that it is in about the tenth century (after the development of Jageshwar in the eighth and ninth centuries under the leadership of Pāśupatas) that lay householders and regional rulers took on more importance (if not the lead) in the expansion of the site.

The following chapter discusses the site of Pandukeshwar (Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand) nested in the mountains dominating the Vishnu Ganga River and located on the way to Badrinath. The focus on Pandukeshwar is more than justified by the idiosyncrasies of its ninth-to-tenth-century architectural setting that brings together southern Indian Dravida temple architecture and northern Indian Nāgara architecture. Here Chanchani rightly questions how these models from South India came to be built in such a remote Himalayan valley. This southern presence is also visible in metal images such as the Nārāyaṇa metal sculpture kept in one of Pandukeshwar's temples. Different hypotheses have been formulated, each plausible and all involving people's movement from the Himalayas to South India and vice versa. The claim that Pandukeshwar's location on the route leading to the Kailash and Manasarovar area of southwestern Tibet could partly explain the site's architectural development (p. 131) could be further nuanced. Chanchani dates the Pandukeshwar temples to between 850 and 1000. The famous Buddhist institutions of Tholing (Guge, Ngari prefecture) and of Khojarnath (Purang, Ngari prefecture) were both founded by Yeshe O in 996 (Vitali 1996: 312, n. 485, Kalantari and Allinger 2018). The second phase of the dissemination of Buddhism (*phyidar*), initiated by King Yeshe O's invitation to Atiśa, who reached Tibet in 1042, certainly marked the height of the region's renown and attracted a growing influx of pilgrims from Tibet and India. Pandukeshwar, as well as other central Himalayan religious centres, undoubtedly benefited from this dynamic but during a later phase and most likely as an indirect consequence of western Tibet's religious development.

The final chapter is dedicated to eleventh- and twelfth-century

architectural developments. It demonstrates a historical shift in the evocation of sacred Himalayan centres (*thīrta*) on the Indian subcontinent, the former being referred to not only in poetry or epic stories but also in architecture. Indeed, religious sites in the Himalayas seemed to have gained such a reputation that several rulers from the Indian lowlands financed the construction of new Kedarnaths (Kedareshvara temple in Balligamve, Karnataka, p. 143–146) and new Jageshwars (Jageshvar temple complex in Davada, Gujarat, p. 146–147) within their territories. This practice allowed devotees to avoid the dangers of a long journey to the Himalayas and to establish the gods' residence and accompanying wealth in different landscapes. Likewise, as the idealised view of central Himalayan religious centres made its way southwards, builders from these areas, especially from today's Gujarat, travelled northwards. Here Chanchani masterfully identifies their presence in the architecture and ornamentation of temples such as those of Gujjar Deva in Dwarahat (Almora district, Uttarakhand). He notably proposes that local communities and foreign builders guilds may have achieved these architectural projects with the intercession of 'priests and mendicants', with no further information as to their identities (p. 160).

In short, *Mountain Temples and Temple Mountains* stands as a valuable opus and a must-read for students and researchers. It delivers a well-illustrated and careful analysis of hitherto overlooked or recently discovered sites and monuments such as Koteswar and Paletti. Monuments are accurately described with their technical Sanskrit nomenclature, in an agreeable manner that allows even non-specialists to grasp the topic. Architectural terms are explained in a glossary at the end of the volume. Furthermore, the book provides relevant, new interpretations to explain religious developments in the central Himalayas. In this respect, the study has the merit of identifying the primordial role of Pāśupatas and 'émigré artisans' such as the Māru Gurjaras in shaping the region's sacred geography. This dynamic of transforming the Himalayas into the abode of the gods started between the fifth and twelfth centuries and has continued until today. The appendix to the book contains an invaluable list of medieval temple sites in the central Himalayas. This list, like the book itself, will no doubt stimulate further research into the fields of Himalayan History, Archæology and Art History.

Concluding remarks

The three volumes presented here address the arts and history of two central Himalayan regions demarcated by the Mahakali River: the Indian state of Uttarakhand (Chanchani 2019) to the west and the districts of western Nepal to the east (Cortes and Brézillon 2011, Sharma 2012). The approaches used are very different. Cortes and Brézillon observe nineteenth- to twentieth-century sculptural art of the Karnali area from a formal angle. They also try to contextualise it with contemporary religious activities. They suggest that 'primitive statuary' has survived from the traditions of Tibeto-Burmese folk (Magars) residing in the region prior to the eastward migration of Khaśas. Sharma, on the other hand, focuses solely on the medieval vestiges of western Nepal. His arguments are based on the artefacts themselves rather than on a comparative study with neighbouring regions. The artistic dynamics are not clearly defined because of the absence of a typo-chronological approach. Lastly, Chanchani offers a scholarly approach to the history of architecture in Uttarakhand by linking it to other types of sources, such as poetry, and to other parts of the subcontinent. He sets Uttarakhand within a larger picture and hence provides a documented answer to the question of how the area developed as a 'land of the gods'.

Note that the works under review comprise different modes of historical periodisation. Cortes and Brézillon regard the Khaśas' migration (still a subject of debate) as a pivotal point in the sculptural tradition of western Nepal. Aesthetic idioms of the original Magar population are conserved but adapted to Khaśa religious beliefs. Dilli Raj Sharma considers two phases (1 and 2) with no clear chronological boundaries or defining features. One gathers that the first phase corresponds to a pre-Khaśa Malla empire and the second phase to the Khaśa empire. As mentioned above, the post-Khaśa Malla period is totally overlooked. This is regrettable since many of western Nepal's monuments and artefacts that are known to us were made during this period (Andolfatto 2020). Nachiket Chanchani articulates his chapters around monuments and artefacts that illustrate successive phases of intellectual conceptions of Uttarakhand (both in the area concerned and on the Indian subcontinent) and the development of sites by different actors (pilgrims, ascetics, émigrés artisans etc).

The history of western Nepal and Uttarakhand are interlinked by key

historical events. One such event is the 1223 seizure of Kartarpura by the Khaśa Malla Emperor Krā Calla, who is said to have ruled from Dullu, in today's Dailekh district (Nepal). The two regions are also interlinked by common cultural and linguistic traits. As a result, the historical, archæological and artistic study of such closely related regions calls for the development of a connected approach. In terms of periodisation, the two regions cannot be considered as a monolithic bloc. Although Uttarakhand, or at least Kumaon, is likely to have fallen under the sway of the Khaśa Mallas during the thirteenth century, hardly anything is known of these rulers' presence in the area before and after Krā Calla's conquests. A different periodisation is therefore required for Uttarakhand and western Nepal. Regarding western Nepal's medieval era (which I am most familiar with), I would propose the following periodisation:

- Pre-imperial period: eighth–twelfth century (corresponding to the estimated antiquity of the region's earliest monuments)
- Imperial period: twelfth–fourteenth century (corresponding to the rule of the Khaśa Malla emperors)
- Post-imperial period: 1378 to 1789 (corresponding to the dismantling of the Khaśa Malla empire into semi-independent kingdoms [often referred to as the Twenty-Two Kingdoms or *Bāise Rājya*] and their conquest by the Shah dynasty of Gorkha).

The observations made throughout this review point to the twin-track approach that I believe should be adopted for future research on the history of the central Himalayas. First, more archæological excavations need to be conducted, not only in the hills and mountains but also in the Tarai plains. Reports of these activities need to be readily accessible and archæological sites have to receive adequate legal and physical protection against looting. Second, one could create a new series of epigraphical publications dealing with each Himalayan region, like *Epigraphia Indica* (published until 1978). Both archæological and epigraphic research will constitute valuable and complementary tools to further our knowledge of the history of the Himalayas.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Masters of Psalmody (bimo): Scriptural Shamanism in Southwestern China

by Aurélie Névoit. Leiden: Brill (Religion in Chinese Societies Series, vol. 15), 2019, 264 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-41483-9 (hardback), 978-90-04-41484-6 (e-book)

Reviewed by Daniel Berounsky

The title of the new book by Aurélie Névoit might give the impression of an anthropological or ethnological study dealing with ritual specialists among the Yi peoples of China. It should be made clear from the outset that this is not the case, although the book does indeed explore a class of ritual specialists called *bimo* and ethnological materials do play an important role in it.

Névoit attempts to discuss the nature of the rituals performed by the *bimo* by focusing on the role of the scriptures they use. It is a highly interesting topic, worthy of detailed exploration with implications that reach far beyond studies of the Yi per se. The reader is presented with invaluable information on the symbiosis of literacy and orality among the *bimo*, which is hard to discern at a first glance. The author mentions that it was only after she had spent a long period of time among the Yi-Sani people that she realised that there are highly interesting though barely perceptible features of this symbiosis that are linked to the confusing usage of books among Yi ritual specialists.

On a closer look at the contents of the book, the latter deals primarily with the Yi-Sani branch of the Yi people. The analysis is based on a comprehensive body of knowledge that has been gleaned from the author's long-term research among them in Shílín Yízú Zìshì Xiàn (The Autonomous County of the Stone Forest Yi Nationality, 石林彝族自治县). This information mainly concerns the role of the so-called *bimo*, male ritual specialists of the Yi people. Female specialists are called *chema* and are also discussed in the book as part of a larger picture of the ritual space. But *bimos* – the only specialists to use written texts – receive much more attention. The role of the *bimo* is apparently to facilitate communication between the community and the realm of the spirits.

The author consequently considers them to be part of a 'shamanistic' type of religion, despite the absence of trance-like states in *bimo* practices. The term 'scriptural shamanism', which appears in the book's subtitle, indicates that scriptures play an important role in this form of 'shamanism without trance'.

The author's rendering of *bimo* is 'master of psalmody'. It shows that, unlike the usual translation of the term by 'master of scriptures', these ritual specialists make a deliberate distinction between oral performance on the one hand and the use of scriptures on the other. This seemingly slight difference is crucial and could be regarded as the book's primary concern.

The discovery of the fascinating features of the use of scriptures starts with the observation that *bimos* understand writing as 'blood'. This blood secures transmission within the family lineage, the books being copied by the sons of *bimos*. The blood in this case is not red animating liquid, but black ink. The writing itself is associated with the feminine gender, thus contrasting with the purely male lineages of ritual specialists. This 'blood' plays a crucial role in securing the *bimo* lineage and in the disciple's mastering of ritual chanting. While writing is understood as being 'blood', the text itself is called 'mountain' with reference to ascending to the sky.

Scriptures copied and read in the presence of the master *bimo* are an essential part of the apprenticeship. Yet, at the same time, individual lineages do not necessarily share the same script and the same writings. The writings are therefore important for marking individual lineages and are, indeed, in this sense at least, their 'blood'. They are also indispensable for mastering the art of *bimo* ritual specialists. However, they do not exactly portray what actually occurs during the ritual performance. The voicing of the scriptures' written contents is conceived of as an animation of blood; in other words, scripture is not a record of the chant, but rather the other way around. The chant stems from the writing, but the scripture is not a precise record of the chant. An uninitiated person would not be able to use the scripture properly, nor understand it. Knowledge of the script (which varies from one lineage to another) is not the sole requisite for chanting. Additional knowledge about words missing in the scripture, of unwritten contexts and meanings have to be acquired orally and through experience (Chapters 1-4).

The book continues to focus on rituals (Chapter 5). It briefly describes the ritual of animal sacrifice, which constitutes the core of *bimos*' ritual practice. The blood sacrifice accompanies most of the rituals performed by *bimos*, including healing and funeral rituals. The author clearly shows that during animal sacrifice the suitably chosen animal is purified and animated by *yi* – 'cosmic essence, vital energy, etc'. Therefore, what matters is that the process of animation brings about the ability of the animal to speak to spirits, rendering the sacrificial offering a means of communication with them. The 'vital energy', *yi*, is carried by the animal's blood (*se*), which is placed on the altar following immolation. The meeting of the 'blood' of the *bimo*'s script (*se*) with that of the animal (*se*) enables the ritualist to communicate with the spirits. The message in the 'blood' of scriptures is vitalised through chanting. Carried by the animal's animated 'blood', it then speaks and reaches the spirits.

After addressing writing, books and rituals among the Yi-Sani, Névot's book discusses the extraordinary myth called *Achema* (Chapter 6). This myth, recorded in script, is exceptional. It is not customary to chant it during the ritual and it does not accompany an animal sacrifice. The author recognises that, behind the poetic and tragic story of the young lady *Achema*, lies an important pattern that displays a broader context of the ritual world of the Yi people. The story narrates the events that followed negotiations to marry *Achema* and continues until her tragic death in a cave, where she turns into a rock. It is undoubtedly a foundation myth about the role of female ritualists called *chemas*. Through self-sacrifice, the petrified young lady becomes an echo of the voice of her brother *bimo*. The author carefully analyses the context of the story and notes that the role of female ritualists is (as during animal sacrifice) to echo the voice of the *bimo*. *Chemas* do not require script ('blood of ink') since human blood is associated with females and renders the use of external blood (ink) redundant in their case.

A rather substantial part of the book (mainly Chapter 7) is devoted to the recent, current situation in which *bimos* operate. This might appear off-topic but it is quite the contrary. There is a fine demonstration of how contemporary Chinese authorities' encroachment in administrative matters blurs traces of what was once essential for understanding the role of scriptures. Research among Yi people is undoubtedly an extremely difficult enterprise. The distant past has not been clearly

recorded and only a few contours are occasionally fleshed out from the otherwise opaque mist. The present state of matters offers a distorted picture due to state policies towards 'minorities' in China. The sections showing how contemporary politics – mainly the effort to unify both the script and the performance of *bimos* – deform the outer appearance of what *bimos* are engaged in are an indispensable and meaningful part of the argument, focusing on the role of writing in this case.

To conclude, it could be said that this book by Névot makes a highly interesting contribution both to Yi Studies and to the broader field of studies on oral traditions.

As a humble Tibetologist, I am naturally inclined to see some implications of the research presented by Névot within my own field of studies, which also deals with speakers of Tibeto-Burmese languages. In the case of Tibetan-speaking peoples, an interesting perceptible combination of the massive use of the written word with a very strong sense of orality can be observed. Névot's book is very inspiring in the sense that it shows a very particular case of an amalgam of written language and oral tradition. Similar research is certainly a desideratum in Tibetan Studies and this book provides great inspiration for the future.

As for the broader significance within studies on oral traditions, I am convinced that it is also of great importance. Note that the author does not, unfortunately, provide the reader with much context of the studies on oral traditions and, for the author of this review, her theoretical framework is rather confusing. Nevertheless, this in no way lessens the value of the book and its vital contribution to this field.

It is extremely rare to encounter purely oral traditions in the world today. Written traditions and orality are not juxtaposed in living practice despite the tendency to oppose the two in theory. Today, most instances of orality are in fact influenced by written texts in a number of ways and *vice versa*. The book reveals an interesting and rather unusual case in which the strengths of writing and the strengths of orality are knowingly employed. Each of these media retains great significance and the two are carefully combined in a ritual context where the power of orality is supported by a written text. Needless to say, the strengths of written texts and oral performances are seen differently by the Yi compared to how they are viewed in the context of the modern world. For the ritual specialists and their clients, they are a very important and powerful

part of the ritual space. However, the writing in these texts is replete with esoteric characteristics that render them far from accessible to everybody. It is precisely these ostensible obscurities that makes them the 'blood' that animates the various ritual lineages of *bimos*.

On a general level, the book provides information on a very careful evaluation and treatment of the written text by certain human societies. Supported by the experience within their environment, those people certainly knew about their strengths and weaknesses. The final words of this review might therefore be addressed to those who question the commonplace of written texts in the modern world: the book will certainly nurture your interest. It is certainly worth reading!

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Narrating Love and Violence: Women Contesting Caste, Tribe, and State in Lahaul, India

by Himika Bhattacharya. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017, 205 pp., ISBN 978-0-8135-8953-4.

Reviewed by Nilamber Chhetri

In this book, Himika Bhattacharya discusses the experiences of women living in the region of Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh. Using multiple sources such as storytelling, autobiography, poetry etc, the book documents oral narratives about love, sexuality and the violence committed against women in the region. It uses ethnographic co-performance as a method to open up new possibilities for exploring the troubled lifeworld of these women within the polyandrous society of Lahaul. The book documents the voices of Adivasi Dalit women living at the intersection of caste and tribe in the region.¹ Taking into account women's narratives around gendered violence perpetuated by a host of actors, the book offers fresh insights into women's lifeworlds in Lahaul. Drawing inspiration from Dalit feminism, the book weaves a complex yet compelling narrative that goes beyond the standard victim-agent framework. Using co-performance and dialogic exchange as her method, the author unearths subjective worldviews of women to document their quotidian experiences of discrimination.

Within the space of six chapters, the book provides deep insights into the vulnerabilities of women in the region. It discusses the discursive tropes that represent women as both agents of the modern democratic state as well as victims of tribal cultural practices. According to

1 According to the District Census Handbook of 2011, the Schedule Caste (SC) population in Lahaul consisted of 1,699 persons, of which 853 were males and 846 females. The total Scheduled Tribe population consisted of 15,163 persons, of which 7,501 were males and 7,662 females (p. 31). Though this concerns a relatively small number of people, this data is significant with regard to Bhattacharya's emphasis on the shifting contours of 'caste' and 'tribe' and the politics involved in their usage as constitutional categories. The usage of terms such as 'tribal' hence did not consider them Dalits' and the demands of local leaders to be granted dual status (both as SC and ST) highlight the complex intersection of categories in Lahaul (Bhattacharya: 44-47).

Bhattacharya, the government's official designation of the district as a 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) zone increases the vulnerability of Dalit women, who are bereft of protective laws such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act, which are not applicable in Scheduled areas.² The uniqueness of this setting paves the way for a fascinating investigation of the working of a caste system within the tribal community and of the multiple hierarchies operating in the region. In noting these aspects, the book unearths the meaning Lahaulis attribute to the social categories of tribe, caste and gender. Drawing on stories about rape and suicide, the book eloquently presents the narratives of honour and dishonour that circulate within the intervening space of tribe and state. It recounts compelling stories that depict how the tribal political rhetoric of glory and honour subjugates women, stripping them of their agency.

The overlapping boundaries of caste and regional identities are graphically documented throughout the book. Through the voice of women protagonists, this work succinctly captures the anguish women in Lahaul suffer. Interestingly, it discusses the practice of forced marriage and the trauma and social stigma faced by women who dare to defy these cultural practices. According to Bhattacharya, love is the cardinal theme through which women weave their stories. It reaffirms the self-worth of the narrator and registers her challenge to the caste-based discrimination in the region. Love thus acts as the medium through which women choose to narrate their stories in the midst of violence and discrimination. According to Bhattacharya, this refashioning of love transforms it from an ordinary fact of life into a radical political tool that is relayed to challenge the hegemonic constructions of society. This rendition suggests an epistemic shift from the individual to a community-centred conception of love.

Using women's ruminations about love and marriage within a polyandrous setting, the book portrays another idea of love that positions the self within the community. Bhattacharya counterpoises these conceptions to statist views, which regard polyandry and other

2 The wholesale labelling of Lahaul as a Scheduled Area in administrative parlance has negated the internal working of caste in the region, creating a 'bubble' in which social hierarchies and statuses are played out exclusive of official apparatuses. The Swangla community, for example, considers itself Brahmin, but its location in the region places it in the ST fold in all dealings with the state.

customary practices as immoral acts. Such a view reflects a deep-seated casteist and patriarchal discourse, wherein women are represented as promiscuous and unruly beings who cannot be protected by the state against any impending violence (p. 49). According to the author, systematic erasure of indigenous practices is conspicuous in the official discourse, which promotes monogamous unions and in turn reinforces sexual and caste domination (p. 101).

The book provides a gripping analysis of the patriarchal moorings of the state and the tribal community in producing women as unreliable subjects. This is demonstrated by a discussion about the relevance of memory to the violent death of a woman in the official and public discourse. The story of Bina (pp. 107–115), who commits suicide due to her failed marriage with a violent husband, forcibly illustrates this. The book examines the official documents surrounding her death, which transform her death from murder to suicide and finally to an accident. However, by going beyond the official, juridical narrative about her death, Bhattacharya offers a succinct analysis of the memory of the event embodied in the collective memory, which is common knowledge but never openly spoken about. Comparing these divergent death-related narratives, the book documents the shifting contours of memory reinforced by normative codes of gender and sexuality that are perpetuated by both the state and the tribe at large.

Weaving multiple stories and life experiences, the book sets out to recover women's memories that have been suppressed in Lahuali society. Bhattacharya argues that memories of caste violence are not chronologically patterned but are loosely woven upon multiple nodes of experiences, which produces an alternative mode of knowledge. The book emphasises the processual aspect of memory, noting the intersectional marginality of the women of Lahaul who navigate within structures of tribe and caste. The author argues that memories are intentionally recollected by the women to combat the deliberate forgetfulness of their public representatives, be it the state or tribal leaders (p. 141). By documenting the counter-narratives embedded in women's lived experiences, the book attempts to outline the role of remembering, which aims to transform vulnerabilities into acts of resistance.

The book effectively documents the anguish, the pain and the remorse that the women endure in their everyday lives. These are not just

qualms and complaints: lurking within these narratives are experiences of love that have been reconfigured as forms of resistance against systemic domination. Bhattacharya offers a fascinating account of the contestations and collusion of the oppositional patriarchies of state and tribe in reinforcing marginalities and perpetuating gendered violence in the region. This compels us to rethink the categories of tribe and caste through the lens of gendered violence and invites us to accompany these women in their everyday struggles. With its astute handling of the subject matter, deep ethnographic insights and unflinching commitment towards a gender-just society, the book is likely to stir the interest of academics and activists alike. It will be of immense value for scholars of gender studies and for those exploring the contested nature of social identities and categories in South Asia.

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Le Chemin des humbles. Chroniques d'un ethnologue au Népal

by Rémi Bordes. Paris: Plon, Presses Pocket (collection Terre Humaine), 2018, 622 pp., ISBN 2266286358, 9782266286350.

Reviewed by Gisèle Krauskopff

Le Chemin des humbles ('The path of the humble'¹) is a book about travelling, about a go-between journeying between different world views. It is also a book about what underlies ethnological knowledge: the intersubjective encounter, which is the basis of ethnographic practice. Bordes reminds us of this from the outset: 'the ethnologist draws his legitimacy from longterm personal experience, yet it is agreed that he must keep silent about it' (p. 16).

Prior to embarking on an in-depth field investigation, Rémi Bordes first made his way, step by step, across India to the western Nepalese border, as attested to in the opening chapter, on a journey evoking the spirit of the 1960s–70s that would ultimately lead him to 'the path of the humble' and to the villages of far western Nepal. For '[t]he ethnologist in distant lands... is a traveller... perhaps in his own way one of the most tenacious' (p. 22), even if 'travelling writers and ethnologists are wonderfully ignorant of each other' (p. 23). He relates the encounters, the discoveries and the questions arising from a backward glance at the world he has left behind. He lays bare the emotional strain between this lived experience and the scientific project that will lead him to the final object of his research.

In a book entitled *L'Adieu au voyage* that traces the relationship between ethnology and literature, Vincent Debaene (2010) highlights a pattern that is particularly noticeable in France: the ethnologist's desire, once their scientific investigations are complete, to publish a 'second' book that recounts their personal experience. Published in a collection (*Terre Humaine*) that has long been dedicated to the 'ethnologist's second book', as Debaene calls it, *The Path of the Humble* is in fact the author's first

1 All quotes from R. Bordes' book are translated from the French by G. Krauskopff.

work. It was written several years after an unpublished doctoral thesis on the oral literature of the bards of western Nepal and thus reveals the author's priority: to bear witness not only to his own experiences and those of 'the humble' but also to the founding complexity of ethnographic practice, ie an 'in-between' where the construction of ethnological knowledge is the issue at stake.

The book unfolds, shifting between nostalgia for another world and disillusionment. The first half recounts the vicissitudes that led the author, in 1998, to experience his first contact with 'the facilitators', a 'faltering moment' (p. 57) that heralded his settling in a Brahmin village in the district of Doti in far western Nepal. These 'facilitators' – a small local businessman who speaks English and a young man torn between two worlds and with dreams of going to America – took the foreigner home, to a village where a local teacher took him 'under his wing'. This reminds me of similar characters caught between two worlds that accompanied my own first steps in the field twenty-five years earlier. These encounters, which seem to be the fruit of chance, suggest a pattern of contact that depends perhaps on the places and fieldwork, which deserve not only to be revealed but to be analysed. The ethnologist's quest is confronted with local people's attraction to the foreigner. Bordes aptly describes this dual quest: his wish to record the lived experience that inhabits every ethnologist and the villagers' mirror-like desire, which is of just as much value.

A second journey, three years later, marks a rupture midway through the book: a difficult moment, in which, 'once the feeling of being in a brand new place had subsided', the true nature of the relationships and the violence of conflict seem to leap out at him (p. 335). Has the veil been lifted on this enchanting change of scenery? ('le mal-en-peine' [plight], p. 375–400). After renouncing his status as the adopted son of his Brahmin family hosts, the author settles in a house of his own in a multi-caste village and discovers the 'disharmonic chaos' of the music of Dholi untouchables. This plummets the author from the top rung of the social hierarchy down to the very bottom and, while the first part of the book describes the mutual quest for friendship, the second part reveals opaque relationships and resistance to scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, swept up by the Dholis' pleasure in telling stories, Bordes finds his subject of research: the oral poetry these 'humble talents' (p. 510–511)

sing during collective rituals that characterise the oracular religion of western Nepal. He finds his method: learning the local language, forming a work team and immersing himself in these texts – ‘veritable flows of humanity’, ‘vestiges of courtly romance’ (p. 518).

Bordes evokes his regret at not having been prepared for fieldwork while unravelling the threads of personal and intersubjective ventures: the ethnologist’s ordeal. The doubts that assail him and the experiences he undergoes are all anchored in a long stay in a distant (exotic) land. The practice of field anthropology in our globalised world has changed considerably in recent years and with it the discipline itself. Do we embark on fieldwork today with such nostalgia? What intermediaries do we encounter in today’s global and connected world? The author evokes these changes in the last chapter... with a certain form of nostalgia.

While the questions about conducting fieldwork in an ‘exotic environment’ which run through this book may be somewhat dated, the exploration of ethnological practice and its disclosures are plainly relevant, touching on the very core of the transactions between investigator and informant, and between theory and practice. *The path of the humble* is a milestone on this crucial path towards the relational but hidden complexity at the basis of ethnological analysis, which goes beyond the question of the links between literature and ethnology, between the poetic and the academic approach (p. 23).

The book, which is aimed at a wide audience, is a beautiful introduction to Nepal. Though some of the author’s notes may seem like digressions, they are very suggestive such as: the omnipresence of mutual eye contact in relationships; the role of celebrations in integrating foreigners who ‘have to create links’; doings which are not valued, whereas relationships are, whether with humans or with gods (p. 106), and so on. These openings onto knowledge about this complex country also represent ethnological propositions. Such is, for example, the role of the laity in cults that address social conflicts through rituals to secure good health for everybody, these rituals being a sort of ‘group therapy’, ‘since it is often necessary to go back through the generations to find the original offence’ (p. 480). The story is punctuated by proverbs, epics and songs that introduce us to the role and creations of these untouchable poets, which will perhaps be the subject of a ‘second book’.

The experiences of the author and the villagers between 1998 and

2006 coincide with the 'People's War', a time of rupture in the history of Nepal that put an end to monarchic rule. Bordes' book, which is some way between a nostalgic quest and disillusionment, alludes to the history of ethnology and its practice in this region which was late opening its borders to research and where the collective imaginary around the Himalayas as a Shangrila weighed in the choice of fieldwork. This vivid account can be read on several levels. It is the first of its kind in the ethnology of the Himalayas and a translation into English is highly recommended.

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Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas

by Radhika Govindrajan. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018. xiii, 220 pp., ISBN 9780226559988.

Reviewed by Nicolas Lainé

With *Animal Intimacies*, Radhika Govindrajan immerses us in passionate case studies on the multiple relationships between Kumaoni villagers and animals in Uttarakhand (India). To do this, she discusses the recent but now well-established body of works dealing with the more-than-human approach in anthropology (Ingold 2000) to which she offers a gender perspective. Throughout the volume, the author engages with the notion of relatedness, a notion that helps to go beyond the relationship between two living beings, and which encapsulates the '*multispecies family*' (p. 3). Thus, relatedness not only credits animals with intention and agency but also projects the reader into the heart of the daily intimacy that villagers share with them in Kumaon. Indeed, relatedness carries a powerful heuristic value within each of the narratives the volume discusses.

The book's five case studies feature goats, cows, monkeys, wild boars, leopards and pigs. While each of these narratives has much to say about Kumaoni villagers, they also provide insightful views on the current challenges the Indian subcontinent has faced in recent years and is indeed still facing. Through an attentive study of the complex relationship with animals, Govindrajan deconstructs often obvious arguments or discourses on crucial societal and ecological stakes at play in contemporary India, and offers an alternative view of these discourses from the perspective of daily life in Kumaon. Villagers' relationships with animals help Govindrajan offer fresh insights into caste, gender and identity. These are much-needed alternatives, notably in the country's current context of rampant Hindu nationalism.

Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 deals with the question of sacrifice and the inextricable link between the officiant, the sacrificed animal and the receiver of the sacrifice (deity). Govindrajan's analysis goes beyond a simplistic image of sacrifice that is limited to the killing of

an animal – a practice surprisingly questioned today by both right-wing Hindu nationalists and animal activists – to encompass the relationship between human and non-human bodies, and the way these are played out in ‘lived material relation’ (p. 39) long before the actual offering takes place. It is women in particular who, by raising goats like their own children, enact a contract with the animal and acquire the debt of the gift of the animal; a phenomenon that echoes the relationship between breeders and animals in France, which is well documented by Porcher (2017).

Chapter 3 shows how understanding daily relationships with cows helps to counter recent attempts by right-wing nationalists to unite Hindu populations under the symbolism of *gau-mata* as mother of the nation, and to exclude Muslim and Christian communities. However, locally, villagers are more attentive to the conduct and behaviour of imported Jersey cows as opposed to their hill-dwelling cows. For them, Jersey cows do not have the same capacity to participate actively in their ritual and social lives as local cows do, making political attempts to laud the imported cows nonsensical in Kumaoni villagers’ eyes.

Chapter 4 deals with the cohabitation of Kumaoni villagers with certain monkeys that cause damage and strike fear in the human population. For locals who are used to cohabiting with *pahari* monkeys (mountain monkeys), their particular trauma is blamed on monkeys translocated from cities. Again, relatedness is highly significant in marking this distinction. According to villagers, because translocated monkeys’ habits are akin to those of ‘*city folk*’, they ‘did not know how to behave in villages’ (p. 100). The chapter is well informed by the history of city macaques in India as well as by primatological research on their behaviour, but it is the local viewpoint that is foregrounded throughout. While villagers know how to negotiate with *pahari* monkeys, with whom they share a sense of belonging, ‘outsiders’ are described and experienced as aggressive and criminal in behaviour. Differing from mountain monkeys even in their choice of food, translocated simians serve as metaphors, for Kumaoni villagers, to express the attitudes and intentions of urban- and plain-dwelling people towards them.

The well-known narrative about a sow that escaped in colonial times and the subsequent proliferation of wild pig in the area launches a discussion on wild versus domestic in Chapter 5. The sow’s initial

escape came from a renowned colonial institution (Indian Veterinary Research Institute) that imposed and still represents control of both land and people in the area. For local people, even though this building and its compounds lie in ruins, the latter still embody the colonial past, including its domination-based relations and configurations of land and space. However, this chapter is not only a discussion of the construction of wild, domestic and inbetween spaces. As a result of its 'fetishization' (p. 127), which began in colonial times, Govindrajan demonstrates how the notion of wilderness (and nature conservation) is closely related to notions of race, sexuality and gender. Their control is always a matter of power, domination and caste. Indeed, while the upper class would prefer to eat wild pig, the lower class – equated with dirtiness and impurity – is associated with domestic pigs.

Chapter 6 deals with labour organisation in Kumaon and particularly with what the work performed by women with farm animals and the work of collecting fodder in forests says about genderisation and patriarchy in rural Uttarakhand and, more broadly, in Indian society. In their daily work in the forest, women encounter wild bears. The author uses narratives of these encounters to discuss gender and patriarchy. For example, when women tell of being kidnapped by male bears and of eventually having sexual relations with them, the author points to the transgressive imaginary of these encounters as a way to reverse the dominant patriarchal hierarchy where women must behave as 'good wives' according to orthodox Hindu conceptions.

Throughout the volume, we follow the daily lives shared by humans and animals in Kumaon. However, Govindrajan does not forget to question her own relationship with both of them by way of constant reflexivity. Thus, the wealth of each of the narratives presented in the volume lies not only in its meticulous description and illuminating analysis, but even more so in the author's concern for honesty, rigour and lucidity. Govindrajan's complex description of intertwined relationships in no way concedes to a form of 'simplistic' Manicheism. Or to put it another way, Govindrajan demonstrates her ability to 'stay with the trouble', as described by Donna Haraway (2016), an author she widely and quite rightly refers to throughout the book: 'trouble' here being understood each time as situations marked by contradictions, even strong contradictions.

In addition, Govindrajan's analyses demonstrate the excessive generalisation of animals as uniformly represented and behaving species, which reflects the current 'biologisation' of the social that our contemporary societies are experiencing. She shows that many singular beings (human/nonhuman) weave complex relationships with just as many other individual ones.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, one of the other strengths of this rich, intellectual work is that it deals with the main challenges facing contemporary India: the question of the place of religion, the rights of marginal populations (including gender and caste groups), colonial heritage and nature conservation. To counter conventional ideas or ready-made arguments, Govindrajan never overlooks the historical dimension of her case studies, demonstrating that they do not derive from a newly discovered fact but rather stem from long sociopolitical processes that encompass aspects other than the situation studied in isolation. Thus, in addition to being of great interest for those curious about human-animal relationships, the volume is to be highly recommended to South Asia scholars, conservationists, as well as those interested in Indian politics in general.

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Kultur und Geschichte Nepals

By Axel Michaels. Stuttgart: Kröner, 2018, 495 pp., including glossary, register of persons, index of places and subjects, illustrations, ISBN 978-3-520-21201-6 (print), ISBN 978-3-520-21291-7 (e-book).

Reviewed by Michael Mühlich

This book, as the title indicates, is dedicated to the relationship between Nepal's culture and history. The chapters cover various aspects of this relationship – such as the history of the Kathmandu Valley; the history of individual regions; the state, economy and society; the history of the country's religions; art and culture; and the architectural history of the Kathmandu Valley – and thus provide a comprehensive, richly detailed overview of the history of Nepal. In a nutshell, the book is about the cultural foundations, achievements and the effects of rule and power-sharing in Nepal. Axel Michaels, former Senior Professor of Indology at the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg, draws above all on his in-depth knowledge of local historical documents, inscriptions on temples and other historic buildings, on records from European archives and on his knowledge of the legal framework of the 1854 *Muluki Ain* ('state law') that was conceived during the Rana regime. From the historical picture thus drawn, which also takes in the early history of Nepal, he tries to explain the legitimisation of the division of rule and power – still felt in the present – between the (former) royal and (today increasingly) disparate political actors, such as the prime minister, high-ranking officials, district administrators and leaders of ethnic groups. This powersharing has, as the author summarises in the final chapter, been able to survive mainly because of the feudal distribution of landed property, which, 'alongside coercion and the ideology of the supposedly unifying Hindu king',¹ created a system that 'to a frightening extent worked to the detriment of the peasants, the Tibetoid population groups and the casteless' (p. 414). However, the author also notes the following: 'Notwithstanding the weak points mentioned, the strengthening of

1 All quotes from A. Michaels' book have been translated from the German by Philip Pierce. Responsibility for the correctness of the translation remains with the author.

(Hindu) religion has not hindered modernisation and the first steps towards the equal treatment of people, or state unity' (p. 411). It was precisely in the nineteenth century, during the period when the Nepalese nation state and Nepalese state law were emerging, that 'a certain secure legal framework and the first steps towards equality before the law were introduced' – steps that stood 'in opposition to arbitrary feudal rule' (ibid). But what was the sharing of power rooted in?

The introductory chapters present the sources and a general understanding of 'land' and 'people', and also the social order as historically shaped by the caste system. According to Michaels, it is above all the *Chronicle of the Kings* which is important as a source for comprehending the development of historical power structures in Nepal. Summarising its chapters, he states that it clearly has a legitimising function in that it mixes miracles performed by the rulers in its narrative of past events (p. 20). In the latter, save a few exceptions, the interaction between humans and between rulers and subjects was not viewed critically, and this way of thinking – of transfiguring the past – seems to persist in official discourse today. The general classification of Nepal's main population groups adopted by the author from the 2011 census thus reflects the persistence of an ideology under which the social cohesion of the caste system was shaped (compare also Nepal Tamang Ghedung, UNDP Report 2006).

The thinking shaped by the caste system, that is, the ideology of purity and impurity in particular, is explained by the author on the basis of András Höfer's study (1979) of the *Muluki Ain* of 1854. This law code, promulgated during the rule of the first hereditary prime minister of Nepal, Jang Bahadur Rana, defined a hierarchy of castes (p. 45 ff.). For the purpose of the author's line of argument, special emphasis is placed on the distinction between the 'enslavable' (*masinya*) and 'non-enslavable' (*namasinya*) subgroups among the ranks of the 'alcohol-drinking castes' (*matwali jat*), the latter – with reference to their ritual traditions – here being members of the Janajatis. As gathered from ethnographic studies (eg Egli 1999 on the Sunuwars, Oppitz 1968 on the Sherpas), alcohol is not only served as a drink among these groups, but also features in an important manner in rituals performed during ceremonies. As the author rightly explains, the transgression of purity/impurity rules applying to all castes could lead to severe forms of punishment (including

enslavement) for members of lower castes, while the same offence was sometimes sanctioned with simple penance ceremonies for members of higher castes.

Beginning with the chapter on the 'History of the Kathmandu Valley', Michaels develops his thesis relating to the division of power on the basis of a precise description of the shifting history of rule. The earliest indications of rulers in the Kathmandu Valley, according to the chronicle, date back to the Kiratas, while the first secure dynasty, whose stone inscriptions can be traced back to the beginning of the sixth century, is the Licchavi dynasty. The author emphasises: 'The most consequential ideology that the Licchavis, whether descendants of the Indian Licchavis or not, brought to Nepal was the hierarchical caste system' (p. 61 ff.). The chronicles further suggest that peace reigned over the Kathmandu Valley at least between 600 and 753. The last Licchavi inscription dates from 877 (p. 67). There followed a 'dark period' lasting three centuries of which little historical evidence remains. Gradually, several city kingdoms emerged: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur (Patan), Banepa and others. Of these, Bhaktapur was especially powerful until the end of the fifteenth century (p. 68). However, the transitional period also gave rise to many new phenomena, which still attract great interest among visitors to Nepal: stories of saints (yogins, siddhas) said to have had supernatural powers (such as Matsyendranath and Gorakhanath), and the Avalokitesvara/Bungadyah cult associated with grand processions (p. 70). The following period of the Newar (or Malla) rulers (thirteenth–eighteenth centuries), whose kingdoms competed with each other in the Kathmandu Valley, continues to make its presence felt through its monastic foundations and many historical buildings erected in honour of gods. As Michaels notes concerning the chronicles of the Malla period: 'Kingship was often expressed in the Malla period not so much in the tools of power as in symbolic and ritual power – as when the king, for instance, weighed out his own weight in gold and donated it to a temple. The king himself was considered a god (Vishnu), but he also had to provide for the other gods because otherwise disaster threatened. In the inscriptions, kings almost always called themselves the "ruler" (literally "God") of Nepala (*nepalesvara*)' (p. 75).

The period of the Gorkha monarchy (1768/69–1846) brought about a change in the tools of power, which became, in Michaels' view, primarily

legitimated on military grounds. The conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah was followed by demonstrations of military superiority and brutality until the last Malla kingdom of the Kathmandu Valley was subjugated (p. 82). The Gorkha rulers also had to combat envy and competition within their own ranks, which resulted, among other things, from the law of agnate succession (p. 128). Another factor in the special division of power lay in the concept of 'land' as understood at the time. In the wake of their conquests, which amounted to approximately the area covered by today's State of Nepal, the Gorkhalis claimed what the petty kings had earlier claimed (p. 87). However, their expansion ran up against a completely different notion of territorial claims, especially in the Tarai lowlands in the south of the country. As Michaels writes: 'Above all, it was two different concepts of territorial power and of its borders that clashed here: the British, who set up in India a sort of land registry office similar to what they were familiar with in their motherland, wanted clearly defined borders'. For the Gorkhalis, however, 'it was more important to control and exploit the land. They understood landownership as an inheritable right to use the land, especially as this applied to petty kings in the mountains, who could either use the land in the Tarai from time to time or else claim taxes on it. Landowners might simultaneously be paying taxes to two rulers from different territories' (p. 86). In their expansion, for example, the Gorkhalis encountered idiosyncratic notions of communal land use and property rights (called *kipat*), which they did not dispute as long as they received the levies they demanded.

Then the period of hereditary prime ministers (*ranas*) dawned. In 1846, Jang Bahadur Rana seized power in a coup d'état that has gone down in history as the 'Kot Massacre' and had the Shah ruler, King Surendra, grant him the title Maharaja of Kaski and Lamjung. This raised Jang Bahadur family to a level on a par with the royal household that legitimated future marital bonds between the Ranas and the Shahs (p. 95). Under his rule, the first state code of law (*Muluki Ain*) was written. This relatively harsh law code was reinforced under Chandra Shamsher (1901-1929), as in the passing of laws abolishing suttee in 1920 and slavery in 1925. At the same time, Chandra Shamsher further strengthened the caste system so that even certain Rana subgroups were excluded from power (p. 97). Although the details disclosed in this chapter may

seem familiar to us, as previously presented for example by Karl-Heinz Krämer (1996), Michaels' use of chronicles as original sources provides a deeper understanding and vivid descriptions through contemporary testimonies.

A review of the chapter on the history of individual regions is omitted here for lack of space. However, this chapter covers highly interesting details, such as the history of the Khasa-Malla kingdom in western Nepal, the traditional legal system in Mustang, the oral traditions of the Rais or the system of post-runners created by the Gorkhas included in the author's short presentation of the Sherpas. In the chapter on 'The State, Economy and Society', Michaels provides a fine overview of the categories of land (land as fiefs, land as a reward, land grants as religious merit, land as remuneration, land for loyalty and land under communal ownership), which are dealt with in detail in early articles of the Muluki Ain. This testifies to the great historical importance of land allocation in Nepal, as detailed by Mahesh Chandra Regmi (1978). As the territorial expansion of the Gorkhalis and the Ranas reached its limits, their interest increasingly shifted to the land of local populations and ethnic groups. In the long term, as Michaels notes, the communal land use (*kipat*) system in ethnic-majority regions could not survive. This was primarily due to the introduction of Hindu caste groups as settlers as part of the state's expansion, which granted them taxable fallow land as *raikar* land (p. 173). In the event of non-payment of the required tax, the threat of individual family members being enslaved and their lands expropriated loomed large (thus threatening the basis of peasant existence). In this context, Michaels points out that most Nepalese people who migrated to areas around Darjeeling in Sikkim in the nineteenth century came from ethnic groups, whereas hardly any Brahmans or Chetris were registered among the migrants of that time (p. 195). There were just as many terms for forms of thralldom – such as socage, forced labour and bondage – as there were terms for the awarding of land. As the author notes (p. 206), debt bondage was officially abolished by law only in 2000. The implicit argument that loyalty to the state and to the Rana rulers' tax policy was forced comes up rather short, however, since the latter could only be applied to land that was already under state administration (ie *raikar* land). In the case of communal landownership (*kipat*), land had first to be converted one way or another into *raikar* land. Here the author

would have done well to consult Philippe Sagant's extremely reliable and comprehensive 1996 study on the process of Hinduisation and to mention it for critical discussion (Sagant 1996). In it, the concatenation of events leading to the indebtedness and Hinduisation of the Limbus is thematised. With the acceptance of the new ruling class's cultural norms came Hindu customs that were associated with large expenses for certain ceremonies. In particular, the Hindu tradition of marriage called for a hefty dowry from the family of the bride to be handed over to the groom's family. This has been a significant factor in household debt in Nepal. At the time of the *kipat* system, although usufructuary rights of the land held under that system were transferred to a creditor for a period of time to pay off a debt, the land itself was supposed to be returned to either the debtor or the local headman, but new settlers refused to fall in line with this. Instead, new settlers and Indo-Nepalese moneylenders might offer new loans to the debtors in order to secure a permanent lease on the land, which, according to Sagant, slowly led to a transformation of *kipat* land into *raikar* land.

Michaels' focus is more on what evidence from historical chronicles has to say about the relationships between the ruling class and the regions it dominated. As he notes in reference to Richard Burghart's article 'The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State' (1984), within the history of the kingdom of Nepal notions of the specific nature of territorial claims come into play that are not, as they are today in Western thinking, based on the territorial claims of a single ruler or state (p. 132). In the Malla period it was land donations and donations in honour of temples and for the celebration of festivals that were especially effective publicly. In the Shah and Rana eras, the symbolic concept of power morphed into what Michaels describes in his own words as a 'domain' ('Domäne', *ibid*) of the ruling class within which it claimed and shared power and land, and which found heightened expression in the notion of the ruler being the protector of the people and the land, and of his heroism and struggle to claim legitimate power.

What impression does the reader gain from Michaels' account of Nepal's culture and history? His thesis in the final chapter is that Nepal's position in the world has much to do with the particular path it has taken towards forming a state within a multi-ethnic and multireligious context, and its styling itself as the last Hindu kingdom in the world

(p. 406). The main local rulers, whether king, prime minister, senior officials or political leaders and popular leaders, have successively adopted legitimising elements of the past, including its enduring rituals, because they are aware of their symbolic power and efficacy. An interesting question here would be: how, in the history of Nepal, has the legitimacy of the rulers shifted, in Max Weber's terms, from the traditional legitimation of power to the category of charismatic rule? Is Nepal really, as Michaels refers to Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, on the way towards 'pluricultural integration', in the course of which there will be an increasing ethnicisation of politics and minorities will claim their rights and have them enshrined in the constitution (p. 419)? Although I have only been able to discuss excerpts from Michaels' rich work here, I would strongly recommend that anyone interested in Nepal read his book. However, readers should also be willing, with regard to the sources mentioned by the author, to form their own picture of Nepal's culture and of its ethnographic diversity.

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Trans-Himalayan Borderlands: Livelihoods, Territorialities, Modernities

edited by Dan Smyer Yü and Jean Michaud. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 2017, 310 pp., 29 black and white illustrations, ISBN 978 94 6298 192 8.

Reviewed by Abhimanyu Pandey

Published in 2017, this volume, an anthology of twelve essays by Chinese, European and North American social scientists, is an inaugural, multinational, collaborative project run by the Center for Trans-Himalayan Studies (CTHS) at China's Yunnan Minzu University (YMU). Its genealogy includes conferences and workshops held between 2013 and 2015 by The New School, The Yale Himalaya Initiative and lastly YMU. These events all explored new ground in Himalayan studies by focusing on connectivity, inclusion and new voices in the region from a transboundary perspective.

The first thing that might catch the eye of many a reader on first seeing this volume is its title, 'Trans-Himalayan Borderlands', a seemingly questionable nomenclature once one goes through the Table of Contents. A cursory glance shows that of the twelve studies presented in this book, at best only four – the chapters by Sara Schneiderman, Dan Smyer Yü, Hildegard Diemberger and Brendan Galipeau – relate to sites in the 'Trans-Himalayas', if this term is to be understood according to its widespread conventional usage in ecology (eg Shrestha 2000: 1–2) and geology (eg Sorkhabi 2010). This conventional scientific usage traces its etymology to Cunningham (1854) and Hedin (1909–1913), and signifies the region of high-altitude ranges, valleys and plateaus with generally arid or semi-arid biomes that starts immediately north of the Great Himalayan Range, is bound in the north by the rough continuum of Kailas and Nyechenthangla ranges, and in the east extends beyond Lhasa. The other chapters represent studies conducted in regions that are rather distant and eco-geologically very distinct from the Trans-Himalayas as understood in the above-mentioned sense, such as the lower Himalayas of Uttarakhand and Nepal, the Thai-Myanmar border and China's borderlands with Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos.

In the Introduction, Dan Smyer Yü – the founding director of CTHS and one of the volume’s two editors – goes to great lengths to spell out a novel connotation of the term ‘Trans-Himalayas’, which forms a common conceptual and regional thread for the essays in this book. While aware of the colonial etymology of ‘Trans-Himalayas’, Smyer Yü shifts the emphasis onto the prefix ‘Trans’, so as to signify a ‘transboundary area’ (p. 17) that cuts across the Himalayas to include contiguous highland regions of Asia that possess ‘a “spatial cohesion”... an entwinement of eco-geological forces as well as translingual connections, religious affiliations, civilizational encounters, and commercial interactions’ (p. 17). This revisioning helps to reconceive the Himalayas and other proximate Asian highlands as ‘a multiple-state space’ wherein adjacent borderlands of modern nation states are acknowledged as a ‘continuous zone rather than disconnected spaces’. Historic ties of intercommunal and interregional trade, transhumance and pilgrimage (p. 16) enabled by the porosity of the Himalayas (p. 12–14), though often disrupted by the fraught border demarcations brought about by ‘contended national sovereignties’ (p. 16), form the basis for this new imaginary.

The ‘High Asia’ in this volume includes ‘the Central Himalayas (including their Northeast India, upland Bangladesh, Nepali, and Bhutani peripheries), Mainland Southeast Asia, Southwest China, and Northwest China including the Tibetan Plateau’ (p. 17): a region broadly overlapping Van Schendel’s ‘Zomia’ (2002), exclusive of the extensions he added in 2007, which include Xinjiang and a large part of Central Asia (p. 17, 22). However, Smyer Yü’s efforts at redefining the ‘Trans-Himalayas’ are somewhat undermined by his frequent usage of ‘Zomia’ (p. 12, 17, 21, 22) and its indexically related terms ‘High Asia’ (p. 16, 17, 18), ‘great Himalayas’ (p. 16), and ‘greater Himalayas’ (p. 36). Nonetheless, the use, ultimately, of ‘Trans-Himalayan borderlands’ rather than of ‘Zomia’ in the title of this volume derives perhaps from the recent but growing discursive practice in Chinese academic and policy circles of referring to countries along China’s southern and western borders as a ‘Trans-Himalayan area’ (eg Wang 2018). This discursive practice seems to be in keeping with Van Schendel’s (2002) argumentation for the disciplinary need to recognise Zomia as an ‘area’ with a substantial ‘theoretical problematique’ (Van Schendel 2002: 654). At the same time, it appears to be an effect of contemporary China’s economic and geopolitical engagements with its

southern and western neighbours, often transcending the borders of these states that often overlap the Himalayas.

The chapters in this book are divided into two groups. The first group, consisting of five chapters, relates to the trans-thematic 'Territory, Worldviews and Power through Time'. Each of these chapters represents a study that explores 'the cross-border flows that existed prior to the establishment of the modern sovereign nation and that are now considered illegal or illicit by modern national and international legal definitions' (p. 28). These chapters also explore some of the ways in which colonisation processes or modern nation-building affected these flows. Jean Michaud's chapter illustrates how the modernisation and developmental projects of nation states in the Himalayan uplands – from those of Northeast India, through Southwest China, to mainland South East Asia – have often been based on a poor, often prejudice-ridden understanding of these regions' complex ethnolinguistic diversity among their lowland political masters. In several instances, this has led to violent ethnic movements, the loss of upland livelihoods and mass migration to the lowlands. Sara Schneiderman's chapter narrows the focus from Michaud's broader canvas to three districts in Nepal – Banke, Dolakha and Mustang – while investigating the different histories and present-day implications of notions of territory for the peoples, both indigenous and migrant, residing in these districts. She shows that notions of territory emerge from both affective ties to the land and from administrative contours designating place, and that these notions of territorial belongingness, as essential parts of identity formation, need to be taken into account in Nepal's ongoing political restructuring.

Dan Smyer Yü's chapter discusses how, along Tibet's contested Himalayan border, the notion of territory currently becomes an exclusively top-down, administrative exercise of 'cartographic slicing' between China and India, with the roots of these territorial claims lying in the Manchu and the British imperial imagination. This process becomes bereft of affective consciousness of Tibetan territory and yet sees the Dalai Lama's secularity – taken in the sense of 'public expressions of religion and institutional appropriations of religious practices for nonreligious purposes' (p. 86) –, especially within Indian policy circles and the Tibetan exile community, as a key card in settling the Tibet issue. Hildegard Diemberger's chapter explores how

the 'galaxy of communities' linked by Tibetan Buddhism in the upper Himalayas of Nepal and Tibet have for centuries been engaged in an intense, transnational web of interdependent connections, through material flows and exchange loops in the production of sacred books. The geopolitical restructuring of the Himalayas in the second half of the twentieth century led, after a temporary pause, to a new, ongoing configuring of 'imagined and virtual geographies' (p. 106) sketched by scriptures in digital form. Finally, Gunnel Cederlöf's chapter presents an archival study of British colonial encounters, in the early nineteenth century, with pre-existing trade networks of the southwest Silk Road, which linked diverse ethnolinguistic communities in a region spanning Assam, Burma and Yunnan. It uncovers the complex pre-existing cross-boundary alliances and regional tensions that found new arenas during the colonial project, thus complicating the simplistic asymmetry represented by coloniser-colonised binary (p. 141).

The seven chapters making up the second group are linked together by the trans-thematic 'Livelihood Reconstructions, Flows, and Trans-Himalayan Modernities'. Each of these chapters represents a study that explores 'livelihood reconstruction in the context of transborder and transboundary modernization processes in the southern Himalayas, Southeast Asia, and Southwest China' (p. 31). Georgina Drew's chapter reports on an ethnographic and discursive enquiry into the politics of building the Tehri Dam, a massive hydroelectric project in the Garhwal Himalayas of India, on the River Ganga, a holy river for the Hindus. In illustrating the divergent responses from the state, from religious spokespersons and from environmentalists to this development project – which has a fixed expiry date – this study makes a case for 'examining modernity's influence alongside the distinct ways of being and behaving in the world that persist' (p. 163). Alexander Horstmann's chapter on the humanitarian aid programmes for the war- and repression-stricken Karen people in the Thai–Myanmar borderlands reveals the 'everyday politics of humanitarianism' (p. 169). Humanitarianism emerges as a complex terrain with a plurality of agendas and indeed with biases based on local actors' affinities and intimate links with international humanitarian and religious organisations.

Yang Cheng's chapter studies the impact the displacement of farmers in Kunming, China, due to construction work under China's

most significant 'Trans-Himalayan' economic project in present times, the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative, has had on their livelihoods. An insufficient level of income under this irreversible urbanisation has led these displaced farmers to rent farmland within commuting distance of Kunming to supplement their income and to increase their social respectability, in what Yang Cheng calls 'circular livelihoods' (p. 191). Brendan Galipeau's chapter describes how in Shangrila (northwestern Yunnan) Catholic Tibetans have successfully dug out an economic niche in home winemaking and its marketing, while building on state-sanctioned viticulture for economic development and on their heritage of winemaking by nineteenth-century French missionaries. He uses Demossier's notion of 'terroir' (p. 216) in the context of Shangrila to discuss how the Catholic Tibetans successfully market their wines, orienting their marketing campaigns to combine the paradisiac notions of Shangrila and of the wine-growing countries of their European Catholic progenitors. Delving into the tea-offering rituals during annual festivals among the De'ang people of western Yunnan – historically, a tea-growing community – Li Quanmin constructs the notion of a 'merit-landscape' (p. 231), wherein the offering of tea to Buddhist ritual masters by De'ang tea growers eventually comes back to them as merit for the tea growers and as blessings for the landscape. This merit-landscape is shown to keep alive and to sustain an affectively rooted, traditional sense of livelihood and territory amidst growing pressure and competition from neighbouring cash-cropping communities.

Li Yunxia's chapter studies the agency of the transboundary Akha community along the Yunnan–Laos border in optimising economic opportunities in rubber production and trading, particularly within Laos, enabled by the loosening of the flows of labour, capital and goods by the Chinese and Laotian states. She posits frontiers as a space of multiple engagements enabling the Lao Akha to experiment with a spectrum of social and economic opportunities as they transition from a subsistence-oriented livelihood to a market-based one (p. 243). Similarly, the last of the second set of chapters, by Sarah Turner, presents a case study of increasingly commoditised black cardamom farming and trading among the Yao and Hmong communities of upland Vietnam, along the border with Yunnan. Though strengthening and sustaining historic transborder networks and links, this livelihood creates an uneven playing field, with

differential economic returns for the actors and ethnicities located at different points along the black cardamom supply chain.

All the chapters in the book are striking for their dense, long-term ethnographic and/or historic engagements with the communities and themes they seek to investigate. The geographic scope, together with the transboundary and transnational relevance of the issues discussed in each of the chapters, creates a finely textured panorama of the dynamic, charged, interconnected and yet constantly reinvented 'Trans-Himalayan borderlands'. This volume helps to create a consciousness of the 'sticky materiality of practical encounters' (Tsing 2004) that permeates the responses, resistances and negotiations of transboundary histories, the ethnolinguistic ties – between peoples and between peoples and landscapes, and trade and religious networks – to the forces of modernity, nation-building, globalisation and technological revolutions. Overall, these case studies, firmly rooted in places, cultures and histories, fully illustrate Jean Michaud's contention in the volume's Conclusion that 'ethnically rooted agency' plays a key role in 'local interpretations and translations of global commands and engagements' and in decision-making regarding livelihoods in the 'Trans-Himalayan borderlands', but is often 'ignored or dismissed in development initiatives' (p. 291–292). This volume is indeed a valuable contribution to the growing discourse on Zomia and bears much relevance outside academia, particularly for development agencies, intergovernmental organisations, humanitarian organisations and indeed also for the informed traveller. One factual error in this book, however, that merits a mention is Smyer Yü's chronological misattribution of the Shimla Convention, where 'the McMahon Line was drawn', to the year '1941' and thereon to 'the Sino-Indian border wars [that] broke out 20 years later' (p. 15). The Shimla Convention, where the McMahon Line was drawn, was signed in 1914 and the Sino-Indian border wars occurred in 1962, nearly fifty years later.

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Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environments

Edited by Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018, 336 pp., ISBN 0-19-948355-8.

Reviewed by Anna Pradhan

This volume of work edited by Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman is an ambitious one. The central thread of the book is that the legend of Darjeeling – including its vivid imagery of lush tea gardens and mountain vistas plastered across billboards and used as backdrops for Bollywood films – conceals the ‘hard realities of life in this particular corner of India’ (p. 2). The work of the 11 chapters then, is to present Darjeeling ‘on its own terms’ (p. 21), producing new readings of the region which has long been the subject of colonial and post-colonial fantasy. Interdisciplinary to its core, *Darjeeling Reconsidered* assembles chapters from sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, historians, development practitioners and others to work in ‘productive tension’ with one another and to offer new insights into tales told about this place (p. 4). The volume is divided into three categories: (I) Histories of Exception, (II) Politics and Social Movements and (III) Environments and Labour, and is accompanied by an Introduction and an Afterword.

Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman’s Introduction sets out a compelling case for refreshing the scholarly study of Darjeeling, an area of inquiry that has seemingly been eclipsed by growing interest in nearby Sikkim (p. 263). The allure of reconsidering Darjeeling, they argue, is in its potential to reflect on the wider challenges of ‘modern South Asia and the postcolonial world writ large’ (p. 4). Taken together, the chapters analyse the ‘entanglements’ of economic change, social politics and territory from different disciplinary perspectives, and how these themes proliferate in the lives of those residing in the hills today (p. 4).

The chapters that follow are vaguely chronological, with Townsend Middleton’s first essay on the ‘unwritten histories’ of Darjeeling, carefully tracing Darjeeling’s status as an ‘exceptional place’ (p. 28).

Through an interesting exploration of the labour histories of the region, Middleton argues that Darjeeling's 'exceptionality' was produced by British administrators, and not a 'natural outcome' of its wider geographical setting (p. 29). Rune Bennike then develops this with a thorough deconstruction of how the tourist gaze and the wider perception of Darjeeling as a place of respite and relaxation conceal the exploitative labour practices on which it was established. Jayeeta Sharma's chapter follows with an excellent analysis of the labouring histories of those who 'played a crucial role in the constitution of Darjeeling as a vibrant space for circulation and enterprise' during the colonial era (p. 75). She provides a vivid and fascinating account of the lives of 'Himalayan subjects' in early Darjeeling whose identities and stories 'appear only fleetingly' in established archives (p. 75). These three chapters work together to revisit Darjeeling's status as an exceptional or unusual place, drawing on historical perspectives to locate the town within the wider social dynamics on which it was established.

The second part of this volume compiles the work of six scholars to explore the complex electoral, ethnic and activist politics that marks Darjeeling's recent history and its present-day realities. Bethany Lacina delivers a clear account of the Gorkhaland Movement, tracing the different phases of Gorkhaland politics through a biographical lens of the major political leaders. Miriam Wenner follows this with an analysis of the moral politics at the heart of the movement's evolution, which links up well with Mona Chettri's essay, which follows, on Darjeeling 'rowdies'. The subsequent chapters shift the focus from party politics to the contemporary tribal and ethnic politics of the region. Nilamber Chhetri sheds light on the transformation of ethnopolitics in Darjeeling, an analysis that has wider ramifications for understanding how other ethnic minorities interact with the post-colonial state (p. 155). Later, Swatahsiddha Sarkar and Babika Khawas delve into the work of Kumar Pradhan, addressing 'the class question' with respect to 'Indian Nepali national identity formation.' (p. 178). These five chapters produce a comprehensive and diverse account of contemporary Gorkhaland and of the ethnic political struggles facing those in the region. They are a very useful starting point for scholars of Darjeeling, particularly those embarking on a study of Gorkhaland politics.

In the third section, Sarah Besky's ethnographic account of the short-lived Darjeeling Tea Management Training Centre gives readers detailed insight into the tension that lies at the heart of a new generation of hopeful tea managers striving for qualifications and security but whose aspirations ultimately conflict with the political intentions of the centre. Roshan Rai and Georgina Drew's chapter also stands out, with its intricate explanation of the failings of Darjeeling's water management system and the promise of local solidarity networks to help communities navigate these challenges. It is these essays and Debarati Sen's chapter on fair trade and female entrepreneurship on local tea estates that provide a captivating account of how Darjeeling's everyday politics revolves around the hillside. The chapters in this section are some of the best in the volume, with the authors paying urgent attention to the micropolitics of Darjeeling's natural resource management issues.

A remarkably honest summation and critique of the contents of this book is found in Tanka Subba's Afterword (p. 262) in which he questions the authors' wider engagement with post-colonial theory. Subba makes a welcome contribution, reflecting on the contemporary political, social and environmental landscape of Darjeeling in light of the authors' varied perspectives. While aspects of the volume might prove highly specialised for readers unfamiliar with the area, the ethnographic material of certain chapters, the editors' skilfully written Introduction and Subba's lively Afterword inject some spirit into the book, making it broadly accessible to students and scholars alike.

In many ways, the chapters assembled in this volume recount sprawling, disparate narratives about Darjeeling; but such is the challenge of reconsidering a region steeped in various academic, political and resource struggles. Despite the diversity of disciplinary backgrounds, all the works compiled in this volume stay true to the book's premise and challenge and ultimately reconsider the tales told of this remarkable place. Editors Middleton and Shneiderman and the multiple scholars that follow them achieve in three-hundred pages a thorough work of care and commitment to the people of Darjeeling, providing an honest assessment of the historical, political and environmental forces that have shaped the region. This volume is a productive starting point for scholars of Darjeeling and its surrounds and gives urgent and careful

insight into the issues shaping the everyday realities of those residing in the hills.

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Himalayan Histories: Economy, Polity, Religious Traditions

by Chetan Singh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019, 316 pp., ISBN-13 978-1-4384-7521-9 (hardback), ISBN-13 978-1-4384-7522-6 (paperback).

Reviewed by William S. Sax

Chetan Singh is former Professor of History at Himachal Pradesh University and was Director of the Indian Institute for Advanced Study from 2013 to 2016. The book *Himalayan Histories* consists of a number of republished essays plus two new chapters at the beginning. There are two main areas of focus in the book: the pre-eminent role of regional gods (*deota*) in traditional and contemporary politics, and the complexities of Himalayan pastoralism.

In Chapter 1 Singh pleads for more attention to poor and isolated Himalayan communities who have left behind few written records, and this results in a well-considered discussion of oral history. He also makes strong arguments, not only for the centrality of local gods (*deotas*) in traditional polities but also for their continuing relevance. Although Himachal Pradesh has made clear and quantifiable gains in virtually every social indicator of development, 'none of this has diminished the faith of village communities in their local gods . . . Therefore, the continued authority of village deities to decide important matters of secular (and sometimes even political) concern in large parts of Himachal comes across as somewhat of a puzzle. Perhaps', he writes, 'the village folk do not see the religious and the secular as discrete domains, but as fluid components of a single sphere' (p. 11). Indeed, the traditional inseparability of religion and politics is a claim that Singh makes again and again in the essays assembled in this book.

In Chapter 2, Singh discusses the degree to which mountain environments lead to distinctive social forms. He also takes up the thesis, introduced by Willem van Schendel (2002) and made famous by James Scott (2010), that the western Himalayas are part of a region, including highland South East Asia, which is characterised by anarchic communities

who have made a conscious decision to reject the oppressive states of the lower altitudes for the sake of freedom and autonomy.

In Chapter 3, Singh provides much useful material about the theocracies of the region; small territorial units ruled by local *deotas* (gods) from their temple-fortresses. He argues that the small isolated communities of the region needed a high level of solidarity for purely practical reasons. This solidarity focused on and was generated by the village *deota* in his temple. According to Singh, 'socio-political objectives' were couched in a religious register. The movement of communities from one place to another and the establishment of new ones were associated with the travels of local *deotas*. His main thesis is that these movements were a sort of code that signified the movements of people. On the whole, Singh confirms what myself and others have written elsewhere: that local deities were (and still are) regarded as kings (p. 47). He suggests that these small theocracies did not precede – as is often supposed – larger, more familiar kingdoms ruled by human beings, but were more likely imitations of them: an interesting thesis that is, unfortunately, directly contradicted on page 68. What Singh is trying to characterise here are the bases of community identification and solidarity: what one might call a kind of protopatriotism. He finds them in the cult of the *deotas*, in the popular protests called *dhoom* or *dum* (discussed here on page 50 ff., and the focus of Chapter 7), and in the festivals of Dashehra and Sivaratri. He argues that the organisation of the modern state did not eliminate the old theocracies, but simply added another layer to them. The old forms remain, but the contents of debate have changed radically, with local *deotas* leading resistance movements against development projects such as ski resorts and hydroelectric projects (pp. 52–54).

In Chapter 4, Singh deploys what one might call a 'legitimation' hypothesis to explain the origin and prospects of local *deotas*. 'Himachal hill rulers', he writes, 'realised quite early the power of non-military, hegemonic control'; they ruled their subjects 'through the clever use of religion' and 'religious symbolism' (p. 67; see also pp. 88–90). I find this hypothesis (which is not unusual in historical and anthropological writing) to be highly problematic since it asserts, in effect, that 'hill rulers' somehow stood above or beyond their own culture, without sharing the cosmological/ontological assumptions of their subjects. Singh seems to believe that, on the contrary, they shared *our* (modern,

secular, rationalist) worldview. He illustrates this argument with reference to the formal rulers of the former states of Kulu and Mandi, both of whom are temple images: Lord Raghunath, who arrived in Kulu in the second half of the seventeenth century (p. 59) and Lord Madho Rai in Mandi, who was installed as the formal ruler of the state in 1648. In both cases, 'religion' was for the human (co-)rulers of these states 'particularly useful as an instrument of social control' (p. 75). Singh then goes on to observe that in cases where a deity was formally installed as ruler, he was usually a form of Vishnu, even though worship of Vishnu hardly ever spread beyond the capital and the aristocracy. He also notes the important fact that local *deotas* remained subordinate to a state deity.

In Chapter 5, Singh continues with the same theme. He argues that when the (mostly oral and legendary) historical record suggests a change in the hierarchy of cults – for example when one *deota* defeats another – one should understand this as indicating past social change. Male deities tended to be highly involved in war and politics whereas a goddess, in areas where she acted as a ruler, was aloof and cosmic but superior (p. 83). It seems to me that Singh has neglected the fact that this difference corresponds to religious affiliation: warlike male deities are far more characteristic of the lower-lying, mostly 'Hindu' regions, whereas peaceful goddesses (along with the *deotas'* custom of fraternal and sororal visits to each other) are more characteristic of regions strongly influenced by Buddhism, eg Middle and Upper Kinnaur.

In Chapter 6, Singh once again raises the question of how best, in his capacity as an historian, to deal with the 'oral' culture of Himachal Pradesh. He returns to the myths of origin of the kingdoms of Bashahr and Kulu, and the main *deotas* Raghunath, Mahasu and Srigul. Central once again to the discussion is the relationship between the king and the state deity. Singh sees these myths and legends as means for binding people together and thus creating a sort of territorially based solidarity. He concludes the chapter by showing the continuing relevance of these ideas to contemporary politics.

Singh begins Chapter 7 with the claim that the western Himalayan environment required solidarity for practical ends like housebuilding and grazing, and that this solidarity was largely effected by the cult of the local *deota*. He argues that the peasant's voice or point of view has been largely excluded from political histories of the region but that this

omission can be remedied by research on the Dum – a traditional form of peasant protest that has been widely discussed in the literature – integrating ‘popular memory’ and oral history.

In Chapter 8 (‘Between Two Worlds: the Trader pastoralists of Kinnaur’), Singh takes up ongoing debates about the nature of pastoralism. He focuses on Kinnaur, showing that there was an ‘entwining of pastoralism, transportation and trade’ there, which facilitated connectivities with Tibet. He is particularly keen to illustrate the ‘adroit’ movements of the Kinnauras between the worlds of commerce, pastoralism and agriculture, as well as between Tibet and India.

In Chapters 9, 10 and 11, Singh engages with a number of debates among students of pastoralism, arguing that it is dependent on other systems; that the Gaddi pastoralists of Himachal Pradesh are also agriculturalists and have a rudimentary caste system, thus countering the common premise that pastoralist societies are intrinsically egalitarian; and that pastoralism has often been a significant source of state revenue.

In Chapter 12, Singh reviews the various ‘explanations’ of polyandry, apparently agreeing with Goldstein that it ‘is primarily selected not for bread and butter motives – fear of starvation in a difficult environment – but rather for the Tibetan equivalent of oysters, champagne and social esteems’ (Goldstein 1978: 329).

In Chapter 13, Singh makes a clever distinction between the normative concept of ‘modernity’ and the more easily identifiable ‘modernisation’, and offers a useful discussion of how Himalayan communities acted as thresholds between Indic and Tibetan civilisations. He also discusses the role of literacy in traditional Kinnaur and ends by posing important questions regarding his central theme: local *deotas*. He asks if modernisation involves ‘a shift away from earlier methods of invoking the village *deota* and towards a more secular discourse within constitutional institutions? Or was the earlier intervention of the *deota* actually political in essence and religious only in form...?’ (p. 251–52). This is an important and fundamental question, which he leaves open.

In Chapter 14, he points out that precolonial towns were almost exclusively state capitols where *deota* lived. What heralded a new age more than anything else were the sanatoriums built by the colonial authorities.

Singh is one of the most eminent historians of the western Himalaya

and he has invested a great deal of thought about the nature and practice of regional historiography. Moreover, he is very familiar with anthropological literature, which he uses to good effect. This book is a must-read for every specialist on the region.

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***Kingship and Polity on the Himalayan Borderland:
Rajput Identity during the Early Colonial Encounter***

by Arik Moran. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 248 pp, 12 images, 3 maps, 1 genealogical chart, ISBN 9789462985605 (print), ISBN 9789048536757 (e-book).

Reviewed by Chetan Singh

During the early colonial period, 'borderland' societies located on the fringes of major political regions of South Asia very often exhibited a deceptive simplicity. They retained separate identities through centuries of existence, yet had much in common with 'mainstream' people. The smaller polities into which they were divided shifted constantly between cooperation and conflict with each other. And their relationship with powerful mainland states that periodically gained dominance vacillated between resistance, subterfuge and acceptance. Rulers of peripheral states guarded their autonomy, but also embraced the practices of dominant cultures to establish their legitimacy. The grander monarchies at the political centre tended to produce authoritative histories of their rule. Local elites and landholders on the fringe made do with oral traditions, ballads and legends. These lesser 'historical' traditions sometimes assimilated small portions of major histories to validate their historicity. However, these traditions could also contradict hegemonic histories and question ideological conventions. The poverty of resources and the inaccessible terrain made fringe areas rather modest prizes for invaders. For the most part, they remained geographically secluded and politically autonomous. Indeed, it was travellers, traders and explorers who for a long time provided a brief glimpse of these outlying societies to outsiders. Subsequently, English East India Company papers and correspondence became more common, albeit biased, sources for historians. The relationship between 'borderlands' and 'mainland' remained ambivalent and fluid in precolonial times. This fluidity is also evident in *Kingship and Polity on the Himalayan Borderland* that deals, not with the precolonial period described above, but with the 'early colonial encounter'. Nevertheless, many of the concepts discussed in the book

are rooted in precolonial political processes. The book analyses selected events of the 1790s and the first four decades of the nineteenth century to explain how these concepts were transformed. This was a time of change. The crumbling Mughal Empire was yielding to state builders and military adventurers. Gorkha and the Punjab had expanded extensively into powerful kingdoms. Most significant, however, was the growing reach of the English East India Company.

Amidst this turmoil, hill rulers too redefined their relationships with each other. In doing so, they sought support from the new rising powers. This support from outside, however, changed the structure of their states (pp. 126–34; p. 162) and prompted them to portray a new ‘Pahari Rajput’ identity (p. 15). The sociopolitical ‘fluidity’ of their frontier region made these changes possible. According to Moran, modernity was introduced in the region as part of the ‘colonial encounter’ (though this is a rather contentious question). He argues that, as a result, the sociocultural norms and political practices of Himalayan societies were greatly transformed. Many of these were therefore only of ‘perceived antiquity’. This perception emerged from interaction between hill rulers and colonial officials in the nineteenth century (p. 197). Modern (British) historiography further fashioned an image of a local elite accustomed to both Brahmanical principles and heterodoxy (p. 203). Thus, even the ‘Rajput’ identity of hill rulers was a modern creation, the result of diverse interests interacting in a newly emerging colonial context.

Research on western Himalayan history is impeded by the dearth of reliable sources. Dateable inscriptional and archival material is unevenly scattered across different periods of time and places. Less reliable, but rich, bardic traditions partially compensate for this drawback. Formal archival research has therefore to be combined with a critical evaluation of oral traditions and a fieldbased appreciation of the landscape and its people. As a result, a patchy picture usually emerges, remarkably clear in parts and hazy in others. Portions of the book are fully supported by archival documentation. Elsewhere, discussions are based on legends and bardic accounts. The latter, though imprecise regarding dates, are more informative than documents about the names of persons and places. This renders the story interesting but creates problems. Nevertheless, Moran brings a range of skills to bear upon his subject. He has teased out

significant ideas from diverse sources and has developed new arguments of theoretical relevance.

The first three of a total of five chapters in the book are almost standalone descriptions of different events: (i) the battle of Chinjhiar, 1795; (ii) the Gorkha invasion and ensuing Nepali rule; and (iii) events involving ruling-class women and the question of *sati*. Moran interconnects these different events via thematic notions such as the *pahari* (hill person), the Rajput (including ideals, norms and observances) and the agency of royal women in politics. It is argued that these ideas grew out of a shared historical process experienced under early colonialism in the region.

The battle of Chinjhiar is a popular bardic narrative that the book recounts and supplements with histories of a later date. It was a conflict between three key hill chiefs and was probably the last major confrontation that stemmed from traditional precolonial rivalries and ambitions. Thereafter, according to Moran, the *pahari* king was transformed into a Sanskritised Rajput who portrayed himself as a 'modern version of the Kshatriya sovereign of antiquity' (p. 54). The second chapter discusses three important issues related to the Nepali invasion: (i) the rise of Sansar Chand of Kangra; (ii) shifting politics in Sirmaur; and (iii) the nature of Nepali rule in the Himachal Himalaya. Moran is probably the first scholar to seriously question the 'Katoch legend' and to explain how later histories created a myth around the Kangra ruler. Sansar Chand's popular image in folklore and local histories as an 'emperor of the hills' is not supported by factual evidence. The Mughals appropriated most of the Kangra territories for more than a century and a half. A Mughal garrison, commanded by a *qiladar*, controlled Kangra Fort from 1620 onwards. The Katoch rulers lived in political insignificance, confined to a small area. Sansar Chand's tenuous control of Kangra Fort over a period of about 26 years (1783–1809) and short-lived military successes hardly constitute an epic of dynastic greatness. He died (1824) a tributary to the Lahore court.

Moran has unearthed interesting archival information on the politics of Sirmaur. He rightly points out that, as Khash people, the Nepali invaders and western Himalayan defenders belonged to the same ethnicity. In stressing commonalities, however, he underestimates how divergent historical experiences and the sheer passage of time

can nurture diversity within an ethnic group. More significant are his arguments regarding the nature of Nepali rule in the western Himalaya. In the third chapter, Moran questions the male-dominated image of Rajput society by arguing that rulingclass women in western Himalayan states played an active role in politics. Examples from the kingdoms of Bilaspur, Bashahr and Sirmaur illustrate this point. A section in this chapter discusses two of Gayatari Spivak's widely read articles: namely, 'The Rani of Sirmur' and 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak's readings, says Moran, flatten out the complex world of non-Western women. A more nuanced approach is called for. Contrary to what Spivak argues, the rani in question exercised agency. She wielded power as regent – even while the deposed raja (her husband) was alive. She was not a voiceless 'subaltern'. Biographies constructed from 'fragmentary historical materials' can often be misleading. Each of the first three chapters questions important aspects of existing historical understanding. While some of the answers may appear to be exploratory, they do open new areas for future research.

The last two chapters merge into each other. They are fully supported by archival sources and the discussion focuses on a power struggle within the kingdom of Bilaspur (Kahlur) between 1795 and 1840. Over this extended period, this involved two rajas of Bilaspur (Kharak Chand and his successor Jagat Chand), close members of the ruling family and its collaterals. The other participants were powerful functionaries of Bilaspur, ruling chiefs of some neighbouring states and officials of the English East India Company. Mercenaries employed by the Bilaspur raja further contributed to the prevailing disorder. Fateh Prakash – who ruled Sirmaur during the period 1827–50 and whose sisters were married to Kharak Chand – played a particularly important role. Events that occurred in different places and at different times have been brought together to create the larger narrative of intrigue, manipulation and armed conflict that overwhelmed Bilaspur during these stormy years. Major conclusions drawn from these events reinforce the arguments made in the first three chapters.

One such conclusion is that the British undermined the customary balance of power between the raja and members of the extended ruling class. In lending support to the former, they weakened power groups within the state that had counterbalanced the raja's authority. This

ironically created a near absolutist monarchy even as the transition towards 'modernity' was underway. Colonial policy endeavoured to keep hill states confined within 'clearly demarcated boundaries under landed gentries' (p. 134). One may recall that even under the Mughals, subordinate rulers – all referred to as *zamindars* (landholders) irrespective of their status – were punished for encroaching upon each other's territory. Moran also argues that the Himalayan states were integrated into the 'military market in so far as their armed forces were primarily made of ad hoc coalitions of peasantwarriors' (p. 152). This may be true for the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries when Rohilla mercenaries offered their services to some states. In the normal course of events, and unlike the richer states in the plains, hill rulers almost invariably mobilised a ragtag army of peasants from amongst their subjects. They were not professional soldiers employed from the military labour market that thrived in large parts of the subcontinent.

Several of Moran's arguments have theoretical implications and thus provide new perspectives. For that reason, they need to be further examined. Two ideas – the '*pahari*' and the Rajput – are central to the book. They are further entwined with the concepts of 'kingship' and the 'state'. Together, these ideas become the basis of a 'uniform conceptual model of the (Pahari) "Rajput State"' (p. 18) based on presuppositions of British officials about western Himalayan history. Moran also concludes that '...the Pahari Rajput rulers revised their pasts along lines of Indic Kshatriya kings to display what is possibly the most successful case of regional integration into the body politic of modern South Asia' (p. 201). He suggests that terms such as 'Rajput Tradition', 'Rajput State', 'Pahari Rajput' kingship/polity etc took on a new meaning. The book argues that these concepts, as currently understood in the western Himalaya, emerged during the early colonial encounter.

Very few of the histories of the region, written in the early twentieth century, are based on reliable pre-modern historical sources. Thus, important links between its earlier history and colonial developments have remained relatively unexplored. Western Himalayan rulers had just as long established ties with the Mughal court as the rajas of Rajasthan did. Dharm Chand, the Kangra ruler, accepted Mughal suzerainty in the very first year (1556-7) of Akbar's reign. Other hill rulers followed him later and were all confirmed in their kingdoms. Raja Basu of Paithan

(father of Jagat Singh) was an important courtier of Emperor Jahangir as early as 1607. He commanded the Mughal army despatched in 1611 against Mewar, the most respected Rajput kingdom of Rajasthan. Some of the most famous, early Punjab legends relate to Rajput warriors, many of whom, interestingly, had converted to Islam. It was quite possible that the ruling clans in the adjoining hills, too, had acquired their Rajput status before the Mughals came to power. There is no clear evidence to indicate that rulers of the western Himalaya 'consistently modelled their world after that of Rajasthani Rajputs' (p. 87) or that they had developed a distinct '*pahari* Rajput' concept of kingship that was subsequently altered under British influence (p. 54). Their political circumstances did change under colonial rule, but the idea of a '*pahari* Rajput' kingship does not seem integral to this change. Moran specifies that the term 'Pahari' refers to 'the Khas ethnic majority of Himachal Pradesh' (p. 14, footnote 1). However, he uses it to refer also to the ruling clans. It is unlikely that the latter – who were a small minority amongst their predominantly Khash/Kanet subject peasantry – used the term '*pahari*' to supplement their Rajput identity. Its use in some local traditions and legends denotes a shared loyalty to places. This did not necessarily make it a component of caste or of the concept of kingship.

Moran mentions three theoretical models of sovereignty: Indo-Persian; North Indian Rajput; and Local (p. 66). In practice, they all overlapped, especially in Rajput-ruled states across India. The loose clan-based polity of the Rajputs had regional variations and responded diversely to political exigencies. Research has shown that the 'tension between tribal and caste elements' (p. 88) in pre-modern Indian society was not 'fundamental' and was more apparent than real. Their borders were permeable, and the Little and Great Traditions were entwined parts of one system. Most pre-modern states therefore accommodated both orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The language and content of numerous ancient/medieval temple inscriptions and land grants to Brahmins reveal that rulers in the western Himalaya, like their contemporaries elsewhere, sanctified their authority through formal Brahmanical practices. Later, diverse warrior clans rose to power through processes of conquest and state-building in most of North India. This new ruling class adopted the generic term 'Rajput'. Thus began the medieval phenomenon of 'Rajputization' of ruling clans, both old and new. Paradoxically, and

contrary to what Moran argues, the 'Kshatriya sovereign of antiquity' needed to dilute his rigid classical image to adopt the more energetic one of the 'Rajput'. The 'Rajputization' process continued and colonial records reveal how it was subsequently used by many Khash/Kanet landholders in specified areas for upward mobility. The latter were often influential officials in Rajput-ruled hill states, but never assimilated into the ruling clans.

Kingship and Polity on the Himalayan Borderland is among the few books on the Himachal Himalaya that offer an alternative historiography. Arik Moran uses several new sources. He brings to the table a set of original ideas that contest a prevailing historical understanding. This calls for serious discussion and a willingness amongst historians to move from purely empirical issues towards theoretical questions. There are also some things that the reader might disagree with. The last few paragraphs of this review are not so much a criticism of the book as an attempt to engage with it.

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Global Nepalis: Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora

edited by David N. Gellner and Sondra L. Hausner. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018, 580 pp., ISBN-13 978-0-19-948192-7.

Vernacular Religion: Cultural Politics, Community Belonging, and Personal Practice in the UK's Nepali Diaspora

edited by David N. Gellner. Kathmandu: Vajra Books and the Centre for Nepal Studies UK, 2019, 261 pp., 25 B/W photos, ISBN 978-9937-733-04-5.

Reviewed by T.B. Subba

In the preface to *Vernacular Religion* (hereafter referred to as *VR*), David N. Gellner, its editor and a scholar who has arguably made one of the most significant anthropological contributions to the study of Nepal and the Nepali diaspora, informs the reader that the essays in the volume 'should be read in conjunction with the much larger companion volume, *Global Nepalis...*' (p. xii). This review therefore covers both volumes. Of course, without the Covid-19 lockdown it would have taken much longer to read the 580 pages of *Global Nepalis* (hereafter referred to as *GN*), no matter how interesting each chapter of the volume is.

The two books under review resulted from the same project for which David N. Gellner was principal investigator and Sondra L. Hausner co-investigator. As may be expected, a number of authors contributed to both volumes, and the focus of both books is the Nepali diaspora. However, before presenting my review of the two books, I, as a Nepali, wish to take this opportunity to thank both Gellner and Hausner for making the Nepalis academically more visible across the world than they would perhaps otherwise be and for creating a benchmark for future studies on Nepalis. I do not need to say much about the editors to my fellow Nepali readers for they already know them fairly well.

GN contains 20 articles, written singly or jointly by 21 scholars, seven of whom also contributed to *VR*, which contains ten previously published chapters, none of which feature in *GN* – a great relief to the reviewer. Of

the ten articles in *VR*, eight are written by Gellner and Hausner, either singly or jointly with one or more of the following contributors, viz., Bal Gopal Shrestha, Chandra Laksamba, Krishna P. Adhikari, Mitra Pariyar and Florence Gurung. Furthermore, five of the 20 articles in *GN* were jointly written, as were half of the 10 articles in *VR*. In the latter, Gellner co-authored five articles and Hausner four. In fact, either one or both of them have co-written eight of the ten articles, which leads me to wonder whether the book could have been published as an authored rather than edited volume: this would have substantially increased its value.

Ten countries feature in *GN*: India, Myanmar, Thailand, Fiji, Singapore, Bahrain, Qatar, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Nepal. The other volume covers three countries, ie the United Kingdom, Belgium and India, although the subtitle of the book mentions only the first of these. *GN* is undoubtedly a much better edited book, which has been thoroughly proofread, and contains very few repetitions compared to *VR*. Fortunately, there is no repetition between the two volumes. And even where the same author has written about the same community in the two volumes, the focus is very different.

One of the interesting dimensions that *GN* brings to the table is the categorisation of the Nepali diaspora into 'old' and 'new'. We all know that no categorisation is perfect, as all categorisations include a fair amount of arbitrariness. The same applies to the categorisation of the Nepali diaspora into 'old' and 'new', whether we focus our attention on the number of people, the time of their migration or the reasons for their migrating to a given country. I expected Gellner to dwell a little longer on the concept of diaspora, on how it has evolved over the years and on how it has assumed different hues in different contexts across the globe. And yet he would perhaps not have concluded his 'Introduction' by stating that in most places Nepalis do not constitute a diaspora because, for him, the second and later generations are, as reported by Brubaker, wholly assimilated (p. 24). A lack of assimilation is certainly an important dimension of diaspora, but this is certainly not the only one, nor perhaps the most important one. Furthermore, assimilation into host societies does not mean that migrants have forgotten what they call 'home' or have abandoned the desire to return home or that the host population may continue to perceive them as a diaspora, even though Nepalis themselves may not necessarily see themselves that way.

In my view, the GN volume comes short of perfection and is definitely the best I have read on the Nepali diaspora. However, a few human errors have slipped in. For instance, Gellner and Hausner, in their Preface to the volume, write (p. xvi) that ‘the term “Nepali” is consciously avoided’ in Sikkim, which is incorrect: what is avoided in Sikkim is the term ‘Gorkha’. The editors could also perhaps encourage the contributors to include a fair amount of vernacular literature, which is rather lacking since only about 20 of more than 600 references are in Nepali. Sushma Joshi’s spelling of ‘yoma’ on page 92, in the last paragraph, is incorrect: the correct spelling is Yuma, which in the Limbu language means grandmother. Similarly, Bandita Sijapati, on page 255, spells ‘Vhootee’ for Bhote, which is a derogatory version of the more respectable ‘Bhuthia’, and ‘Gardan’ for *gaardhan*, which means hidden treasure. In addition, Florence Gurung, on page 365, misspells *dhyangro* as ‘dangro’. Finally, the United Kingdom, Britain and England are used interchangeably in this volume, though they do not mean the same thing.

Turning to the VR volume, one of the key arguments it puts forward is that no one-to-one correlation can be drawn between one’s religious identity and one’s religious practice. The book also shows that, while religious identities and practices are less complex at the two extremes of the Nepali social hierarchy, people occupying the middle rung display a complex orientation towards their religious beliefs and practices. The data presented in various chapters of the book indicates that multiple religious orientations exist in most Kirata communities, who not only identify themselves as Hindu and Buddhist, but also profess their animist and reformist religious identities. Their practices also show overlapping allegiances at individual and family level. Whereas most countries do not consider more than one religious category for one individual for the purpose of the census, religious practice can be – and the data on Nepalis in the United Kingdom and Belgium shows this – a lot more complex than one would expect from the monolithic categories that represent them. Gellner and Hausner rightly conclude: ‘Thus we cannot refer to religion *tout court* without specifying whether one is referring to religion as a category or religion in practice’ (p. 28). According to them, not specifying this could be dubbed as ‘methodological religionism’ (p. 30).

The book evokes an interesting issue regarding categories, whereby

people, when put under pressure, claim to belong to a religion which is not in fact their own. A prime example of this occurred during the Panchayat period in Nepal (1960-1990) when certain groups that were subjected to pressure declared themselves 'Hindu' in the hope that their job applications would be accepted. One may also recall how some non-Nepalis in Darjeeling even claimed that their mother tongue was Nepali during the 1971 Census, in support of the movement for the inclusion of the Nepali language in the VIII Schedule to the Constitution of India. Gellner and Hausner therefore rightly insist that '...category and practice must be analysed as separate and separately malleable elements of religion' (p. 50). In other words, we cannot relegate religion to the realm of category or to the realm of practice alone, as the two in a sense define and overlap one another.

On a rather negative note, I think the main problem with *VR* is repetition. The repetitions become more prominent, and even a little irritating, as one gets further into the book. However, there is perhaps little the editors could have done to avoid these repetitions since the editors are also, as mentioned above, the principal authors of eight of the book's ten chapters. There are also a few other minor editorial errors, which Vajra Books could have corrected. I would, for instance, like to draw the reader's attention to the following mistakes: in line 3 on page 51 the word 'either' should appear only once; in line 10 on page 142 the word 'me' should be 'us' since the chapter is written by three persons; in footnote 11 on page 154, Nakane and Arora do not actually claim to represent the 'Nepali point of view'; in line 8 on page 155, Thami or Thangmi is spelt 'Thamil'; the translation in line 5, page 184, should read 'there aren't any, there won't be any either' instead of 'there aren't any, nor would it be right'; on page 239, Asian Affairs should be italicised; and on page 247, *Pahilo Pahar* is literally translated as 'First Watch', though its cultural translation is 'dawn'.

These are minor errors that can creep into any book. Otherwise, one can only wonder at the quality of the articles the editors have put together in this volume. Edited volumes usually have some good and some bad articles, but this is certainly not the case of this book. I would also like to express my appreciation to the editors for including a set of three articles at the end of the *GN* volume, which in a sense ties up the loose ends in all the chapters of the volume, leaving nothing for

further speculation. The volume ends with a rather reflexive, insightful Afterword penned by Hausner.

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Geographies of Difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian Studies

edited by Mélanie Vandenhelsken, Meenaxi Barkataki-Ruscheweyh and Bengt G. Karlsson. London and New York: Routledge, 2019, xxvii+297 pp., ISBN 978-0-367-27790-1 (paperback).

Reviewed by Raile Rocky Ziipao

Geographies of Difference brings together scholars from diverse backgrounds to construct Northeast Indian Studies as a field of research in its own right. Most of the chapters in this book were first presented during the international conference 'Negotiating Ethnicity: Politics and Display of Cultural Identities in Northeast India', held in Vienna in July 2013. Following the recent major reconfigurations of Areas Studies in South and Southeast Asia, the volume approaches Northeast India as an emerging geo-historical entity. The book sets out to rethink the Northeast as a lived space, a centre of interconnections and unfolding histories. This approach is well encapsulated in the Preface by the editors, in Karlsson's Introduction and in van Schendel's chapter.

It is interesting to note that the pieces written by two academic stalwarts (Bengt G. Karlsson and Willem van Schendel) are strategically placed at each end of the book, as an alpha and omega. They lay out the key framework and direction of Northeast Indian studies. To illustrate this, Karlsson introduces the emergence, transformation and future of Northeast Indian Studies as an emerging field of research in its own right. He calls for introspection during the recent surge of research and urges scholars to pay critical attention to local voices as well as to indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. This he suggests as a way forward to emancipate or liberate Northeast Indian Studies from the shackles of colonial categories and modes of thinking. He concludes by suggesting a few themes through which to critically engage and further Northeast Indian Studies, such as mobility and migration, class formation, emerging urban space and the interface of society and the environment.

Part 1 of the book, 'Historical and Ethnographic Encounters', begins

with a powerful essay by Sanjib Baruah. He explores the colonial production of knowledge in the context of unequal power relations by assessing through the eyes of indigenous people the scholarship of FÜRER-Haimendorf, author of the rather controversial book *The Naked Naga*. While Baruah credits FÜRER-Haimendorf with skilfully writing the ethnography as a product of knowledge, he is critical of the author's silence on the political issues/turmoil of the people he studied. In short, Baruah states 'it would not be an exaggeration to say that FÜRER-Haimendorf did not have an ear for what today we would call the politics of equal dignity' (p. 25). Pursuing the colonial discourse on knowledge production and power, Bianca Son engages the process of categorisation and construction of Zo identity. She argues that much of the information used to construct the Zo was based on early accounts of colonial personnel and their (Bengali and Burmese) informants, and that the 'truthfulness' of these findings was created through the sheer tenacity of repetition and reiteration. Anandaroop Sen's chapter provides a historical account of boundary making in Tripura, a princely state at the time. This first part of the volume then moves to contemporary issues, as ably demonstrated by Dolly Kikon in her rich ethnographic account of everyday life in the Assam–Nagaland foothills. She unravels intimate relations across ethnic communities in the foothills and simultaneously charts out the 'different imaginations that fuel connections and contestations' (p. 87). Mélanie Vandenhelsken gives a detailed ethnographic account of the sociopolitical and cultural processes of Gurung struggles for recognition as Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim.

Part II, 'Politics of Land and Material Resources', engages with materiality, the question of land and identity, and resistance movements. Mibi Ete in her chapter unfolds the politics of hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh. She adds an interesting perspective on how, in some cases, locals seek to participate in these projects, which invalidates the popular discourse on dams. Sanjoy (Xonzo) Barbora draws the reader's attention to the complex conflict of land ownership and belongingness, foregrounding identity politics that often result in violence and displacement in western Assam. In the following chapter, Iris Odyuo discusses Naga handicrafts and traces the changes and continuities in distribution by taking the case of three Nagaland villages. Teiborlang T. Kharsyntiew's chapter unearths the influence of Korean

street fashion, hip-hop and heavy metal among the young generation in Northeast India. He posits that fashion is an act of political protest by young people in Northeast India against the political domination of the Indian state.

Part III, 'In and Out of the State', comprises four chapters that deal with state-specific (Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram) issues and a concluding chapter by Mark Turin that addresses the linguistic classifications of Northeast India. Kaustubh Deka's chapter echoes Xonzo's chapter by addressing the conflict in Assam. He critically examines the electoral incentives and their correlation with the culmination of ethnic conflict in Bodoland, Assam. In the subsequent chapter, Cornelia Guenaur takes the readers to the election in Meghalaya, a predominately tribal state. She observes that during the election campaign, the idea of the individual mattered more than party ideology. The chapters by Soibam Haripriya and by William Singh respectively deal with civil society in Manipur (Meira Paibis) and Mizoram (Young Mizo Association, YMA). Haripriya problematises women's agency among the Meitei community in Manipur. She points out that not all women's organisations have a feminist agenda, but work instead according to the archetypal role of women as mothers. Singh's chapter historicises the YMA in Mizoram. He posits that even though the YMA's vision and mission are apolitical, its functioning lies at the centre of Mizo identity and the promotion of Mizo-ness. However, the author fails to delineate the YMA and the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA). What is central to both chapters is the notion of civil society in Northeast India. It is indeed pertinent to engage critically with the concept and category of civil society in Northeast India as they are intricately linked and affiliated with specific ethnic communities, such as the YMA with the Mizo, the Meira Paibis with the Meitei, the United Naga Council (UNC) with the Naga ethnic group, and so on. The final chapter by Mark Turin addresses language politics, policy and identity, taking the case of Sikkim and crisscrossing between Nepal and Bhutan.

The volume ends on a high note with the Afterword by William van Schendel. He sums up the chapters, theorising Northeast India, giving direction to future research and encouraging collaborative research on what van Schendel calls the 'Greater Northeast', with the suggestion that academics implement a 'Look East Policy'. He argues that the history of

Northeast India begins with Partition in 1947, which gave it a wealth of narratives. It is interesting to note how Northeast India has been conceptualised 'as a new space, a contested space, a vertical space and a fragmenting space' (p. 273), the multiplicity of conceptualisations making an important theoretical contribution to the emerging field of study.

Geographies of Difference provides an interesting framework to engage with the Northeast as an emerging geohistorical entity. And yet, just as this perspective/framework offers to unravel the intricate social reality and scope of theorisation through a new lens, it might also render scholars blind to the persistent issue of structural inequality and power relation dynamics within and across the region's respective states. Though the book makes passing reference to the emergence of a new post-Partition regional power hub, ie the Brahmaputra Valley, it does not address the question of unequal power relations between ethnic groups (ie tribal and non-tribal, hills and valley) in the Northeast. It is therefore equally important to chart out the different communities inhabiting the centre of power and the internal struggles that drive certain communities further out to the periphery where they have to bow to the dominant community's authority in post-Independence Northeast India, as is the case of tribes in Assam, Manipur, Tripura and eastern Nagaland. And all the more so since social reality stems from tribal society in Northeast India, whose complexities tend to defy the existing dominant social theories and frameworks and are consequently inaccurately situated and explained. Hence, it is imperative to situate what SR Bodhi and Jojo Bipin (2019) term the problematics of tribal integration into the Indian state – an approach the volume also calls for in underlining the plurality of perspectives on regional issues through an innovative methodology.

To conclude, *Geographies of Difference* is a welcome addition and timely intervention to theorising Northeast Indian Studies. It is a valuable resource for scholars and researchers whose research interests lie in Northeast India and Southeast Asia.

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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

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

References

References in the body of the text should use the Harvard system (author-date style), eg '(Hacchethu 1997: 17)' with a space after the colon and no comma between author and date; where there is more than one reference listed, put a comma, not a semi-colon, between each of them.

In the list of references, give the main title of a book in capital letters, but use lower case in the subtitle after an initial capital. Use lower case after an initial capital for the title of an article or book chapter (sentence style capitalisation).

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