

## THE DISAPPEARANCE AND REAPPEARANCE OF JANAKPUR

Richard Burghart

### INTRODUCTION

In the Brahmanical literature there is mention of an ancient kingdom, known as Mithila, which was bounded on the north by the Himalayas, on the south by the Ganges, on the east by the Kosi river, and on the west by the Gandaki river. Ancient Mithila was ruled by the Vaidehi dynasty, the kings of which held the title of Janak, and hence the capital of Mithila was called Janakpur. According to the *Ramayana* in the twenty-third generation of the Vaidehi dynasty, a great drought afflicted Mithila. So that Indra might bless the parched kingdom with rain, Janak and his family priest went to a field southwest of the palace where they performed a great sacrifice. In the course of the sacrifice, while turning the soil with a golden plough, Janak found a baby girl lying in a furrow. King Janak called the baby girl Sita and brought her back to his place where he raised her as his daughter.

When Sita became a maiden, Janak decided to offer his daughter in marriage to anyone who was able to lift and to string the Bow of Siva. This was a bow which Siva himself had left in Janakpur thousands of years earlier and which was so powerful that whoever wielded it could even cause the gods to tremble with fear. This was not a weapon for mere mortals, for when Janak had the Bow of Siva carried from its resting place to the parade ground, fifty thousand men were required to lift it. Kings and princes, proud of their exploits in battle, strode upon the parade ground, but they lacked the strength to lift the Bow. One by one they returned humbly to their kingdoms. One day Ram Candra, the Crown Prince of Ayodhya and the seventh incarnation of the god Visnu, arrived in Janakpur. With his soft-spoken manner and skin the colour of

the blue lotus he quickly won the hearts of all the people of Mithila including the heart of Sita who had seen him by chance one day in the garden of the temple of Girija. When Janak showed to Ram the Bow of Siva, Ram lifted it up without any difficulty. As he was stringing it, however, the Bow broke into three pieces. One piece ascended to heaven; a second piece sank to hell; and a third piece remained upon the face of the earth in Mithila. Everyone that day, who witnessed the breaking of the Bow, knew that Ram was the King of the Three Worlds. Ram was married to Sita in Janakpur and several days after their marriage the divine couple set out on their homeward journey to Ayodhya.

Some years later Ram, deprived of his right to succeed to the throne of Ayodhya, was exiled to the jungles of the Vindhya mountains where he lived with Sita and his younger brother Laksman. The demon king Ravana abducted Sita from her jungle hermitage and kept her under guard in his palace garden at Lanka. Ram and his younger brother together with the aid of Hanuman and an army of monkeys defeated Ravana in battle, rescued Sita from the palace garden, and returned to Ayodhya where Ram's throne was restored to him. As for the Kingdom of Mithila, for many years afterward the Vaidehi dynasty continued to occupy the throne. In the Dvapara Yuga, however, a dispute broke out between the Pandavas and the Kauravas and all of the kings in the lands between the Vindhya and Himalaya mountains found themselves engulfed in a terrible conflict. In the course of that war Janakpur was destroyed and the Vaidehi dyansty became extinct. What the opposing army did not destroy, the jungle covered over. Janakpur disappeared without a trace.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the present age, as the worship of Ram and the discipline of devotion spread throughout the Ganges basin, Hindu ascetics of the Ramanandi sect began to search for the places which during the Treta Yuga had been purified by the lotus feet of their Lord and Saviour, Ram Candra. Chitrakut, where Lord Ram passed his period of exile in the Vindhya mountains, was discovered by ascetics and by the sixteenth century had become an important Vaisnavite pilgrimage centre. Ayodhya, the site of Ram's birthplace and capital, had been visited by Hindu ascetics for many centuries, but during the Mughal period the town became the capital of the Suba of Ayodhya. It was not until 1754, when Sujauddaul transferred the capital of the Suba from Ayodhya to Faizabad, that Vaisnavite ascetics were able to establish their monasteries at the birthplace of their Lord (Sinha 1957: 132-33). Until the end of the seventeenth century, however, the site of Janakpur had not been discovered, For the Vaisnavite devotees Janakpur existed in their minds as an object of devotion and meditation, but *janakpur dham*, or the "site of Janakpur", remained unknown.

In this essay I shall reconstruct the reappearance of Janakpur and the events which led to the founding of the modern town of Janakpurdham in the early eighteenth century. I shall begin with the oral testimony of the ascetics, bards, and pandits, for our sole source of information on the reappearance of Janakpur in the Kali Age are the stories which are told today about the forebears of the incumbent abbots of the Janakpurdham monasteries. In the second section of the essay I shall corroborate, wherever possible, the oral testimony by the evidence from archeological and documentary sources. There are, in fact, certain themes in the oral testimony which do not accord with the archeological and documentary evidence, and after noting these themes, I shall conclude the essay by analyzing the testimony from oral sources on the founding of Janakpurdham.

#### ORAL TESTIMONY OF THE ASCETICS

Let us turn now to the stories which are told by ascetics, pandits, and bards about the reappearance of Janakpur in the eastern Tarai during the early eighteenth century. Be it remembered, of course, that in these stories the time element is vaguely conceived and the events are thought to have occurred at an earlier time of the Kali Yuga. According to many ascetics, pandits, and bards the first Hindu ascetic to arrive at the site of ancient Janakpur was Caturbhuj Giri. Caturbhuj Giri was initiated into the Dasnami sect by Durganath Giri of the famous Jyotir monastery at Badrinath and, it is said, that he travelled to the wilderness of northern Mithila seeking a place of solitude in order to discipline his body, speech, and mind. One day, in the course of his journey through the jungle, he stopped and slept at the base of an old banyan tree. In his sleep Lord Ram appeared saying, "Here, where you lie sleeping, is buried the ancient city of Janakpur, capital of the Vaidehis. After my marriage, while Sita and I prepared for our departure for Ayodhya, I gave to my father-in-law four images of myself so that he might, by gazing upon them, ease the pain of our separation. These very images, made by Visvakrama himself, lie buried in this ground. Raise them up and let the people of Mithila behold them so that they may obtain release from this transient world." At first when he heard the voice of Lord Ram and his divine form, Caturbhuj Giri was overwhelmed with joy. In reconsidering the words of Lord Ram, however, Caturbhuj Giri became very dejected. "In this lonely jungle how can I find the means to serve you, my Lord?" asked Caturbhuj Giri. "Saints come to this wilderness seeking solitude. They sleep under trees and eat jungle fruits. I cannot build you a palace, nor offer you meals befitting your exalted rank. Saints, hearing of your presence, will come from afar to behold you. When they see how poorly you live, I will lower my eyes

in shame.” Lord Ram replied, “The fruits of this jungle and some water, a handful of uncooked rice and a lump of crude sugar brought by a devotee – whatever you are able to offer me will be sufficient for my contentment.” The words of Lord Ram brought peace to the troubled mind of Caturbhuj Giri. When he awoke from his sleep, Chaturbhuj Giri dug into the earth where he had lain sleeping and there, entangled in the roots of the banyan tree, he found the four statues—Laksmi Narayan, Sesavatar, Dasavatar, and a Pancamuriti in which figured Ram, his three younger brothers, and Sita. Caturbhuj Giri erected the statues in the shade of the banyan tree and began to worship them.<sup>1</sup>

About this time an ascetic by the name of Sur Kisor also came to northern Mithila. It cannot be certain from the oral tradition whether Sur Kisor’s arrival preceded or followed that of Caturbhuj Giri. Sur Kisor was initiated into the Ramandi sect by Khem Das at the Galata monastery near Jaipur. Some time after his initiation, however, Sur Kisor took up residence at the Ramani monastery at Lohargal Sikar in western India. Sur Kisor worshipped the goddess Sita as if she were a young maiden and he were her father’s brother. Wherever Sur Kisor went, he carried with him, a small statue of the maiden Sita. He accompanied her to the temple garden to pick flowers and to weave them into garlands. He invited her to the bazaar and standing in front of a sweet shop, he asked her if she wanted this sweet or that. Sur Kisor was not content in his devotion, however, for how could he worship the maiden Sita as her father’s brother anywhere but in Janakpur? Yet how could he go to Janakpur since no one knew where the ancient city lay? One day, while muttering these thoughts aloud, the image of the maiden Sita replied to him saying, “Father, leave me here. Go to the land bounded by the Himalayas and the Ganges, the Kosi and the Gandaki, and wherever you find me, that place will be the fulfillment of all your hope and desire – the site of King Janak’s palace.” Sur Kisor left the idol of Sita at Lohargal Sikar and set out alone on foot for Mithila. Sometime later, while walking in the jungles of northern Mithila, he stopped to rest under a margosa tree. From out of the ground emerged the very same image of the maiden Sita which he had left behind in western India. He knew then that this was his blissful destination, the site of ancient Janakpur. He built a thatched hut by the margosa tree and sang of his contentment to his darling daughter.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. The story of Caturbhuj Giri and the founding of the Ram Candra monastery has been recounted in two locally published pilgrimage guides: Pandit Jibnath Jha, *Sri Mithila Mahatmyam* and Ram Swarup Prasad Nepali, *Janakpur Mahima*. I have relied on *Janakpur Mahima* for the dialogue of Lord Ram and Caturbhuj Giri at the site of Janakpur.
  2. The story of the arrival of Sur Kisor at the site of Janakpur and of the founding of the Janaki monastery has been recounted by Ram Snehi Das in his introduction to Sur Kisor, *Sri Mithila Bilas*. See also Avadh Kisor Das ‘Paremanidhi’,

According to one of these songs, which have been collected and published under the title of *Sri Mithila Bilas*, Sur Kisor also discovered the piece of the Bow of Siva which for Vaisnavite devotees has remained on the face of the earth in Mithila since the time of Ram and Sita.<sup>3</sup>

Twelve miles north of Janakpur,  
where lies a forest,  
Shines a Bow which was offered by Siva, held in trust  
by Janak, and touched by the hand of Ram !  
Oppressed by the torments of the Kali age,  
to see the earth of Mithila at this very time,  
Is like seeing the bodily presence  
of Sita and Ram, says Sur Kisor.

At the present day village of Dhanusa (literally, the "Bow") situated twelve miles northeast of Janakpurdham lies a long narrow seam of rock which is guarded by the spiritual descendants of Sur Kisor and is worshipped by Vaisnavite devotees as a piece of the Bow of Siva.

Some time after the discovery of the site of Janakpur by Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor, other ascetics travelled to Janakpurdham to behold the images which were found in the earth by the banyan and margosa trees. On the festival of the birthday of Lord Ram Raghunath Das, a Ramanandi ascetic who was the disciple of Oliya Ji, arrived from Maksudabad in Bengal and made his camp by Dhanusa Sar east of the hut and temple where lived the disciples of Caturbhuj Giri. One day while wandering in the dense forest about two furlongs northwest of Dhanusa Sar, Raghunath Das saw a fabulous jewel glittering by an abandoned pond. As he approached the jewel, tigers growled menacingly from the underbrush. Raghunath Das, however, was not afraid. As he looked about him, he knew that this was the site of King Janak's treasury. He called the pond Ratna Sagar (literally "Sea of Jewels") and built a thatched hut on its banks where he spent the remainder of his days.<sup>4</sup>

Another Ramanandi ascetic who contributed to the establishment of Janakpurdham was Pritam Das. Pritam Das came from the Muriya Rampur monastery near Gorakhpur but later he left the monastery to go on a pilgrimage to the Ganges. One

---

*Janakpur ki Jhanki*, pp. 51-55 and Yugal Priya Saran, *Sri Rasik Prakasa Bhakta Mala*, quatrains 105-12.

3. Sur Kisor, *Sri Mithila Bilas*, octave 29.

4. I heard this story from Ram Sevak Das who is the Pujari of Pipra Kutti and a spiritual descendant of Raghunath Das.

morning at first light Pritam Das rose from his camp-site near the Ganges and walked to the river bank to perform his ablutions. After evacuating, he reached with his left hand to scrape some dirt with which to purify himself. His fingers felt something hard and smooth and in the dim light he saw that it was a large stone embedded in the earth. Beside the stone, however, he found some loose soil which he scooped with his hand and applied to its purpose. He then clambered down the embankment to the river's edge and bathed in the purifying water. That night in his sleep Hanuman, the monkey God, appeared to Pritam Das, saying "You found me by the banks of the Ganges and then you ignored me. Dig me up and worship me and I shall be pleased." When Pritam Das awoke the following morning, he returned to the banks of the Ganges and scraped the earth from the stone. As he freed the stone from the embankment, he saw that the stone had the form of Hanuman. Pritam Das put Hanuman in a bullock cart and together they drove northward across Mithila to Janakpurdham so that they might behold the land where Sita passed her childhood and where she was married to Ram Candra. The journey lasted several weeks. When Hanuman and Pritam Das were only about one mile from their destination, however, the cart stopped in its tracks. Pritam Das pushed the cart and goaded the bulls, but still the cart did not advance further along the trail. Pritam Das then concluded that this was the place where Hanuman wanted to dwell. He took Hanuman down from the cart, erected a small temple, and began to worship the Monkey God there.<sup>5</sup>

By this time Ramanandi and Ramanuji ascetics had also discovered the place where King Janak performed the sacrifice with the golden plough and where Sita emerged from a furrow in the earth. The birthplace of Sita was called Sitamarhi (situated 32 miles southwest of Janakpurdham in the present day Muzaffarpur district of Bihar) and several ascetics built their hermitages there.<sup>6</sup> One such ascetic was Ram Das who was initiated at Sitamarhi and subsequently travelled to Janakpurdham in order to live at the site of King Janak's palace. One day, while walking on the western side of the site of Janak's palace, Ram Das discovered an abandoned pond which was half-filled with silt and whose banks were overgrown with bushes and vines. He saw that this was the place where the child Sita used to bathe every morning before going to the hermitage of Rajapurohit Satanand for her Sanskrit lessons. Ram Das built a hut on the sou-

- 
5. This story was told to me by Ram Bihari Das, the present abbot of the Hanuman Nagar monastery and the spiritual descendant of Pritam Das.
  6. It is possible that Sitamarhi is as old as, if not older than, Janakpurdham. According to Yugal Priya Saran (*Sri Rasik Prakasa Bhakta Mala*, quattrain 187) Kripa Nivas visited Sitamarhi and in the hagiographical literature both Sur Kisor and Kripa Nivas are said to have been doctrinal disciples of Madhvacharya at the Galata monastery near Jaipur.

thern bank and called the pond Sita Kund. Ram Das, however, soon discovered that he did not live alone at Sita Kund. Many years earlier a *jinn* had come across the neglected pond and had also made it his home. The *jinn* resented the arrival of the holy man to his pond and seized every opportunity to disrupt Ram Das' meditation. Ram Das had brought from Sitamarhi the *Srimad Mithila Mahatmyam*, a sacred book in which is recounted the glory of Janakpur, the birth of Sita and her marriage with Ram, the procedure for worshipping Sita, and the fruits of that worship both in the present and in future lives. From his little hut Ram Das sang aloud passages from the *Srimad Mithila Mahatmyam*. The *jinn* overheard the story of Sita and when Ram Das said that Sita herself used to bathe in the pond, the *jinn* refrained from disturbing Ram Das' meditation and offered to look for a home elsewhere. Shortly thereafter the *jinn* moved to a large tree by a mound which is located in the present day village of Ranipatti about one mile outside the circumambulation road of Janakpurdham.<sup>7</sup>

The ascetics, pandits, and bards who live in Janakpurdham today further relate that it was only after the arrival of the ascetics to this jungle region that Hindu householders began to dwell at the site of ancient Janakpur. It is said that at that time shepherds and cowherds used to lead their flocks and herds during the dry spring month northward along the Tarai river banks in search of green pasture. Some of them, by chance, happened upon the ascetics who had come to the site of ancient Janakpur in order to serve their Lord. The shepherds and cowherds prostrated themselves before the images of Ram and Sita and humbly presented their offerings. Returning southwards, they told the people of their villages about the discovery of Janakpur. Soon peasants as well made the journey, offering to Ram and Sita and to the ascetics who served them rice, crude sugar, salt, and ghee. Word eventually reached distant Makwanpur (situated to the west of the Bagmati river approximately equidistant

---

7. A *jinn* is a kind of being who possesses human form but who is much stronger than any human being. They normally dwell outside villages, along the banks of rivers and ponds, either in cultivated areas or jungles. The story of the discovery of Sita Kund was told to me by Ram Swarup Das who is the present abbot of Sita Kund Kuti and a spiritual descendant of Ram Das. According to Yugal Priya Saran (*Sri Rasik Prakasa Bhakta Mala*, quatrains 442-43) a saint by the name of Sita Prasad brought the *Srimad Mithila Mahatmyam* from Citrakut, dwelled for some time at Sitamarhi, and then travelled to Janakpurdham where he discovered Gyan Kup ('Well of Wisdom') where it is said that Royal Pandit Satanand instructed Sita in Sanskrit. Ram Das was initiated at a monastery at Sitamarhi and Gyan Kup is located no more than one hundred and fifty yards northwest of Sita Kund. It is possible that the ascetics of Sita Kund Kuti have appropriated certain themes from the story of Sita Prasad in order to glorify their spiritual ancestor, Ram Das. At present there is no hermitage at Gyan Kup and the memory of Sita Prasad has completely lapsed from the oral tradition.

between Kathmandu and the Tarai) whose king was the ruler of this jungle. The king left his palace in the hills and travelled to Janakpurdham where he worshipped Ram, Sita, and Hanuman. In the course of several visits the king bestowed rights over land in alms in favour of those deities and assigned to the ascetics the right to manage the income from the land on behalf of the deity. Soon peasants arrived to clear the jungle and to cultivate the land owned by the deities. Rents from this land enabled the ascetics to build temples and hostels and to offer hospitality to pilgrims. Some of the pilgrims who had come to behold Ram and Sita were reluctant to leave the holy place, and instead they built their homes near the monasteries. Other immigrants arrived and turned to trade. A bazaar was established. And thus was founded the modern town of Janakpurdham.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Our sole source of information on the founding of Janakpurdham are the stories which are told today by Hindu ascetics, pandits, and bards. In the first section of this essay I have recounted five such stories. There are additional stories as well as different versions of the stories which I have recounted. Regardless of this diversity of oral testimony, the ascetics, pandits, and bards who live in Janakpurdham today are agreed on one fundamental point. In the Dvapara Yuga ancient Janakpur disappeared (*lupt*) and in the Kali Yuga, by the grace of Ram and Sita, Janakpur appeared (*pragat*) again. Between the time of the city's disappearance and its later reappearance the land was covered by jungle. The jungle is a discontinuity in the chronology of human events. Where no human beings live, nothing ever 'happens'. Such, at least, is the conclusion which could be drawn from the oral testimony and at first the scenario of these stories, in which Janakpur reappeared in a desolate jungle, appears plausible. Until the 1950's the land only seven miles north of Janakpurdham was forested and even today thirty miles to the northwest and to the northeast of Janakpurdham one may traverse large areas of hardwood forest which are more the home of wild boar and deer than of man.

We are fortunate, however, in that we need not rely solely on the oral tradition for information with which to reconstruct the founding of Janakpurdham. Scattered temple ruins and land documents extend back five hundred years or more and provide us with some evidence with which to corroborate the oral tradition. Although this evidence does not comment directly on the reappearance of Janakpur, still it is useful in that it does enable us to date the arrival of Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor in the eastern



Tarai and to call into question certain themes in the stories of the reappearance of Janakpur. In particular, the archeological evidence reveals that the so-called jungle into which the early ascetics wandered had already been settled by Hindus who were organized politically into petty kingdoms or chieftaincies and who derived their livelihood by tilling the soil. Moreover, from Hamilton's sources (1819: 128-50) we know that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries neighbouring rulers from the plains and the hills competed for possession of these Tarai chieftaincies. In the second section of this essay I shall present the evidence from the land and revenue sources of the king and propose the means by which the hill kings secured the blessings of the ascetics and the deities in their conquest or defence of the revenue rich eastern Tarai.

Let me begin my corroboration of the oral testimony by establishing the approximate date of the arrival of the Ramanandi and Dasnami ascetics in the eastern Tarai. It is commonly agreed by the local ascetics, pandits, and bards that the ascetics who discovered the site of ancient Janakpur were Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor. There is no agreement, however, on the question of which of these two ascetics arrived first in the region.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately this disagreement in the oral tradition is compounded by lapses and confusion in the documentary sources. The original land grants from the kings of Makwanpur to Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor have not survived to the present day.

---

8. This enigma has apparently bothered the bards, for according to one version of the reappearance of Janakpur, Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor were uterine brothers who were born in western India, were initiated separately into different sects, and who later met one another at the site of Janakpur. Thus the original land grant from the King of Makwanpur is seen to have been awarded to both these ascetics for the purpose of providing for the worship of both Ram and the maiden Sita. Subsequently the land was divided into a Ram *patti* and a Janaki *patti*, the Ram *patti* being assigned to the Ram Candra monastery founded by Caturbhuj Giri and the Janaki *patti* being assigned to the Janki monastery founded by Sur Kisor. According to one version this division occurred amicably in the seventh generation of Sur Kisor's spiritual descendants. In another version the division occurred violently. A battle was fought for the control of Janakpur-dham between the militant orders (akhara) of the Ramanandi and Dasnami sects. At the end of the battle the Janakpur *mauja* was divided between the Ram Candra and the Janki monasteries. I have not found any documentary evidence in denial or support of this story, but it is well known that during the eighteenth century itinerant bands of militant ascetics frequented the Tarai (Ghosh 1930; Cohn 1964) and it is said by the incumbent Pujari of the Ram Candra monastery that the eighteen burial shrines (samadhi) located on the northern side of the Hanuman temple in the Ram Candra monastery contain the bodies of eighteen Dasnami ascetics who died in the battle of Janakpur-dham. Unfortunately the original land grant or grants from the Kings of Makwanpur to Caturbhuj Giri and/or Sur Kisor have not survived and the relationship, if any, between these two saints and the monasteries which they founded will remain a mystery.

Between 1810 and 1812, however, King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah confirmed the earlier gifts of *kusa birta* rights over land in the Mahottari district from the Sen rulers. In the 1811 confirmation of the land rights which were inherited by the spiritual descendants of Sur Kisor it is written that in 1727 King Manik Sen bestowed *kusa birta* rights in the name of the goddess Janaki.<sup>9</sup> Similarly a copper plate inscription in the Ram Candra monastery dated 1810 indicates that in that year King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah confirmed an earlier gift of *kusa birta* rights on the Janakpur *mauja* from King Indra Vidhata Sen of Makwanpur in favour of Caturbhuj Giri. According to this copper inscription King Indra Vidhata Sen had given the land on "samwat 1118 *sal sravan sudi 3*", or the third day of the bright fortnight of the month of Sravan in the year 1118 V.S. The year 1118 Vikram Sambat, or 1061 A.D., is obviously a misprint, for Manik Sen ruled in 1727 and Manik Sen and Indra Vidhata Sen were both grandsons (but by different wives) of Harihar Sen. Perhaps the land grant to Caturbhuj Giri was made in 1778 V. S. (1721 A.D.) or possibly even as early as 1718 V.S. (1661 A. D.). Alternatively the year was correct, but the calendar was wrong. In the former Tihut Sarkar south of the Mahottari district the calendar Fussily was used. One converts Fussily to the Roman calendar by adding 593. If the grant had been made in the year 1118 Fussily (1711 A. D.) this also would accord with what is known about Indra Vidhata's reign and the Sen chronology. At any rate we can be certain that Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor arrived at the site of Janakpur and established the Ram Candra and Janaki monasteries some time at or shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century.

Having dated the arrival of Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor in the eastern Tarai, we can now call into question the claim made by the ascetics today that formerly the northern limit of Mithila was a desolate jungle. Of course, it is true that much of the region at that time was forested; in the midst of that forest, however, there were a number of chieftaincies and petty kingdoms of local importance. No documentary evidence has survived from this time because the chieftaincies were located along or beyond the territorial limits of the Karnatak (1097–1324) and Oinavara (1353–1526) dynasties which ruled Mithila during the medieval period.

A number of mounds in the present day Nepalese Tarai, however, offer sufficient archeological evidence to rescue these chieftaincies and petty kingdoms from total oblivion.<sup>10</sup> One such mound lies in the village of Banauli six miles southwest of Janakpur-

---

9. The particular land and revenue documents to which I refer in this article have been listed in the references. Some of these documents have been published by Devi Prasad Lansal and Radhesyam Bhattari in *Pracin Nepal*, 26, 1974, pp. 23–35.

10. I am indebted to Professor Dharendra Jha of Tribhuvan University for my information on the petty kingdoms and chieftaincies in the region prior to the arri-

dham. Tradition links Banauli with the capital of King Puroditya. It is said that when the Oinavara king, Siva Simha, abrogated his treaty relationship with the Sultan of Delhi, the enraged Sultan invaded Mithila and defeated the army of Siva Simha. Siva Simha was lost in battle, and the Queen Lakhimi Devi together with the court poet Vidyapati fled northward where they sought refuge from King Puroditya. Lakhimi Devi lived in Banauli waiting for news from her husband. When no news came after the customary twelve years, she mounted the funeral pyre.<sup>11</sup> About one hundred yards west of the village of Banauli lies a ruined brick foundation which is referred to by villagers as the house of Vidyapati and south of the brick foundation is a pond in which an image of Laksmi Narayan was found about one hundred and fifty years ago.<sup>12</sup> Other evidence of Hindu settlement in the region of Janakpurdham is the mound in the village of Duhabi. A partial excavation of this mound by villagers in the late 1960's yielded a circular brick foundation, several vehicles of tantric symbols, an inscription "ma", and a statue of Ganesa. The vehicles of the tantric symbols are fashioned in the *kailasa* motif and resemble in miniature the famous temples at Bhuvaneswar in Orissa. Their style suggests the possible cultural influence of the Sen dynasty which ruled Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa from the eleventh century. The "ma" inscription which was found in the mound probably means *mai*, or mother, a common epithet of the goddess Durga. Inscriptions have also been found in the nearby village of Jogiyara.

Finally there is the temple of Silanath on the Kamala river, the mound at Ranipatti, and the mound at Ksireswarnath north of Sakhuwa Bazar where a *lingam* and *yoni* of Siva and Parvati were found. Laksmi Narayan, Durga, and the *lingam* and *yoni* of Siva and Parvati are often objects of worship in tantric cults. Such religious predilections accord with the traditions of the priestly Brahmans of Mithila and their former Oinavara patrons. Both were known as tantric devotees of Siva and Sakti. In sum, we know that prior to the arrival of the Vaisnavite devotional ascetics and their discovery of Janakpur, the region was settled by Hindu agriculturists who were organi-

---

val of the Vaisnavite ascetics. Descriptions and photographs of some of the archaeological remains in the region may be found in Janak Lal Sarma, "Citavandekhi Janakpursammaka Kehi Puratatvik Sthal," *Pracin Nepal*, 2, 1968.

11. Other legends say that Lakhimi Devi did not commit *sati* but instead returned to Mithila where she ruled as a queen for twelve years. See Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithila*, pp. 317, 320-21.
12. The image of Laksmi Narayan was removed to the Ramanandi monastery at Matihani where it was worshipped in the monastery temple. When Abbot Lakhani Narayan Das fled from Matihani in 1910, he took the image with him and installed it in the Ramanandi monastery at Caraut in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar where it remains to this day.

zed politically into chieftaincies or petty kingdoms and who possessed a sufficiently large agricultural surplus to build large brick temples (the mounds measure approximately 40 feet square at the base) and presumably to patronize the activities in these temples. Moreover, when the early ascetics arrived in the region, they found that previously the local religious benefactors had been devotees of tantric sectarian deities, such as Laksmi Narayan, Durga, and Siva, rather than devotees of devotional sectarian deities, such as Ram and Krishna.

Given the habitation of the region, could there also have been a settlement at Janakpurdham prior to the arrival of Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor ? Unfortunately I was unable to uncover any evidence which would allow us to answer this question. There are no visible ruins in Janakpurdham today and we have already noted that according to oral testimony the site of ancient Janakpur had become overgrown with forest.<sup>13</sup> Let me note in passing, however, a few intriguing observations. The earliest land grant which has survived the vicissitudes of climate and politics dates from 1740 and refers to the "*janakpur mauja*". The King of Makwanpur did not ordinarily create the names of his local administrative units; rather he adopted the traditional names used by his subjects in each locality. Did the Sen kings, after hearing of the appearance of Janakpur, rename the *mauja* Janakpur or did there already exist at that time a place known as Janakpur which was associated locally with the ancient Janakpur of the Treta Yuga ? Several images which were found in the sediment of Ganga Sagar and Argaja Sar at the turn of the twentieth century are now worshipped in the Janak temple at Janak Cauk and in the Sunayana temple in Janki monastery. The image at Janak Cauk has been sculptured in a tantric style (the image is encircled by a wreath of flame) and could be evidence of a tantric cult at Janakpurdham prior to the arrival of the Vaisnavite ascetics. Alternatively the images could be mere copies of pre-eighteenth century art, or if they date prior to the eighteenth century, it could be possible that they were worshipped elsewhere and brought to Janakpurdham after 1700.

Another enigma in Janakpurdham today is provided by the rows of great trees along the banks of certain ponds (see, for example, the trees on the southern bank of Ganga Sagar). Accurate dating techniques would enable us to determine the age of the

---

13. It is often written in both travel guides to Nepal as well as in the social science literature that Janakpurdham is the site of "extensive ruins" (see, for example, Gaige 1975: 58). Such 'observations' are completely baseless; there are *no* visible ruins in Janakpurdham which date prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Occasionally one finds patches of brick rubble of a temple which was destroyed in the earthquake of 1934, but these ruins do not even extend into the eighteenth century.

trees and from this we might deduce the age of the pond. If such a deduction is justified then it is likely that the ponds were dug prior to 1700. In sum, the lack of evidence obliges one merely to note the possibility that Janakpur was already inhabited by the eighteenth century and that there might have been a local tradition associating the site with ancient Janakpur. Rather than actually discovering the site of ancient Janakpur, Caturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor might have only confirmed a local tradition associating the site with Janakpur and then spread the renown of this sacred place to other pilgrimage centres in the Ganges basin.

According to the oral tradition, Janakpur was founded by Caturbhuj Giri and/or Sur Kisor who dwelled by the banyan and margosa trees at whose base their respective idols lay. Shepherds came upon these two saints and later told villagers about Janakpur. The oral testimony implies a theme which is also found in the notion of *ram rajya*, namely that purity (*pavitrata*) brings reputation and wealth. Thus the good reputation of Janakpur eventually reached Makwanpur whose ruler undertook a pilgrimage to this sacred place within his kingdom and offered land to the ascetics so that they might provide for the worship of Ram and Sita. A perusal of the early land grants from the Sen and Shah dynasties of Makwanpur and Nepal reveals, however, that these rulers had other motives besides piety in bestowing *kusa birta* rights over land to ascetics at Janakpur. Although the performance of religious activities was the condition under which the king offered the land and the ascetics accepted it, still the main purpose of the grant from the point of view of the king appears to have been to secure the favour of a deity in the territorial expansion or defence of the kingdom. In brief, conquest was a sacred duty of the king (*Manu* 7.99–101) and the king gave land to a deity in order to gain land or retain land for himself. These land grants to ascetics in Janakpur appear to have been an item of the king's military expenditure and our understanding of the founding of permanent local monasteries at Janakpur during the eighteenth century cannot be divorced from a consideration of the protracted dissolution of the Kingdom of Makwanpur and the rise of the Shah dynasty of Gorkha at that time.

Let me briefly summarize the chronology of events on the southern flank of the Himalayas and the eastern Tarai during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> The geopolitical location of the petty kingdoms and chieftaincies of the Tarai and the relative isolation imposed upon them by the forest enabled these chiefs to remain somewhat autonomous of the Oinavara kings who ruled Mithila in the plains from 1353 to

---

14. Unless otherwise stated, my sources of information on these political events are Dr. Francis Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, pp. 128–50 and Ludwig Stiller, *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*.

1526 A. D. During the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, however, Lohangga, King of Makwanpur, took an interest in the eastern Tarai as a source of revenue for his hill kingdom and led his troops southward into the Tarai where he defeated a certain Mohan Thakur, a local chief of Aniwar Brahman caste. Moving eastward, Lohangga captured the chieftaincy of Mahottari (where later Janakpur would reappear) which was ruled by an Aniwar Brahman. Then crossing the Kamala river, he invaded the region of Saptari and conquered their chiefs. East of Saptari he joined in alliance with tribal chiefs and defeated Vijaya Narayan thereby adding the Morang Tarai to his realm. By the end of his reign Lohangga had pushed the boundaries of his realm outward from the Adiya river on the west to the Mahananda river on the east, from the Mahabharat range of the Himalayas in the north to the Tirhut Sarkar and Purnea on the south and southeast, thereby making Makwanpur the largest hill kingdom of his time.

The territorial integrity of Lohangga's conquests, however, was subsequently jeopardized by the ambition of neighbouring rulers and by internal dissension among the descendants of Lohangga. In the fifth generation of the Sen dynasty of Makwanpur we find that the kingdom was divided into three sections and each section was assigned to a different descendant of Lohangga. Indra Vidhata Sen ruled the Morang Tarai; Mahapati Sen ruled the land between the Kosi and Kamala rivers and Manik Sen ruled Makwanpur west of the Kamala river. The division of the kingdom occurred at a very unfavourable time, for shortly thereafter Isfundiyar Khan, Nawab of Purnea, invaded the Morang Tarai, captured Indra Vidhata and his uncle Subbha Sen, and seized Indra Vidhata's territory. According to another account around 1700 A. D. Naripatti Thakur, King of Darbhanga, armed his zamindars and travelled north into the Tarai where he surprised an unnamed King of Makwanpur and exacted from him an annual tribute of 1200 rupees from the Tauter *praganaa* (Ahmad 1958: 23, 28).

At the same time that a weakened Makwanpur was defending its Tarai districts from the Nawab of Purnea and the King of Darbhanga, two more foes loomed in the distance. From the northwest came Prithivi Narayan Shah, King of Gorkha, who conquered Makwanpur and its Tarai districts in 1762 and from the southeast came the East India Company which in 1765 received the Diwani for the civil administration of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa from the Sultan of Bengal. The King of Gorkha and the Board of Directors of the East India Company now found that they shared a common border and mutually antagonistic expansionary aims. Prithivi Narayan Shah and his successors who founded the modern kingdom of Nepal pushed their troops onward until they had conquered all the hill kingdoms on the southern flank of the Himalayas from Sikkim in the east to Kangra in the west; meanwhile the East India Company extended its political influence and administrative authority throughout the

Ganges basin. Numerous complaints concerning the administration of border villages and restrictions on trade with Tibet led to armed conflict between the Gorkha army and Company militia. On the 8th December 1814 Company troops led by Major Roughsedge swept across the eastern Tarai and occupied Janakpurdham (Datta 1058: 4). In 1816 representatives of the King of Gorkha and the East India Company met at Sagauli and negotiated a truce. Company troops withdrew from Mahottari and in the following year the border between these two powers was drawn and demarcated by pillars (M. Regmi 1971: 174). Janakpurdham, situated in the south-central part of the Mahottari district, was included within the Kingdom of Nepal only seven miles north of Company territory.

A review of the early land grants in the Janakpur *mauja* suggests convincingly that the *kusa birta* rights over land which enabled the ascetics to establish permanent local monasteries at Janakpurdham were an aspect of the king's defence of the realm. More particularly, I suspect that the *kusa birta* rights were given on the auspicious occasion of the departure of the king's regiments for the war front. Sen chronicles refer to border disputes with the Muslim Nawab of Purnea and the Afghan Commander in the service of the King of Darbhanga in 1663, 1707, 1726, and 1752 (D. Regmi 1961: 37). The land grant from Hem Karna Sen of Makwanpur to Sital Giri, abbot of Kuwa monastery, is dated 1753 and closes with the words, the "vow of the Hindu-Muslim dispute". The land grants inscribed on a copper plate are dated from the time of their inscription which may occur several months or even a year after their ritual bestowal.<sup>15</sup> Hence it is quite possible that the grant of land to the Kuwa monastery and the reference to the dispute between the Hindus and Muslims refers to the events of 1752. In that very same year King Hem Karna Sen also granted *kusa birta* rights to Jay Krisna Das who founded the Laksman monastery. The grant of land to Janki monastery occurred in 1727 which is one year after the battle between Manik Sen's deputy in the Tarai and the King of Darbhanga (Ahmad 1958: 23). Unfortunately neither the date of Indra Vidhata's grant to the Ram Candra monastery nor the date of his battle with Isfundiyar Khan can be known, but apart from this gap in the records the dates of the grants of the major monasteries on the Janakpur *majua* correlate with dates of battles between the kings of Makwanpur and the rulers of neighbouring kingdoms.

---

15. In a copper inscription in the Ram Candra monastery which is dated 1807 it is mentioned that the ritual bestowal of the land occurred in 1806. A lapse of one year between the bestowal of the land and the inscription of the bestowal on a copper plate appears to be normal. See "Land grant from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah to abbot Amar Giri of Ram Candra monastery in fulfillment of a vow made to Hanuman by Kaji Amar Singha Thapa in 1806, Vaisakh Sudi 14, 1864 V. S. (April 1807)".

This correlation between the gifts of land to Hindu ascetics and the military campaigns of the Sen kings does not necessarily prove a relationship between the two events. Evidence from the early Shah period of Nepalese history, however, is more convincing. In a royal order from King Rana Bahadur Shah appointing Paramanand Das to the abbotship of Janki monastery in 1792, the king closes the order with the injunction, "Worship especially the Bow of Siva at Dhanusa". The Bow of Siva was thought to be so powerful that when Siva wielded it, the other gods trembled with fear. Siva entrusted the Bow to King Janak and it was in breaking this Bow that Lord Ram gained the hand of Sita in marriage. The piece of the Bow which remained on the face of the earth lies in the village of Dhanusa twelve miles northeast of Janakpurdham. The abbot of the Janaki monastery has been traditionally the overseer of the shrine at Dhanusa, and apparently an abbot of the Janaki monastery made known to King Rana Bahadur Shah the virtues of the Bow of Siva and the blessings which might be obtained by worshipping it.

In addition to the Bow of Siva the Gorkha rulers also sought the blessings of Hanuman, the Monkey God. The largest grants of *kusa birta* rights in land to local ascetics on behalf of the Shah kings were the grant from King Rana Bahadur Shah to Pritam Das of Hanuman Nagar monastery in 1781 and the grant from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah to the Abbot of the Ram Candra monastery in 1807. In both cases the recipient of the fruits of the land was Hanuman. Given the military ambitions and martial values of the Gorkha rulers, their interest in obtaining the blessings of Hanuman is not very surprising. Hanuman was the scout who discovered that Sita was being held prisoner in the demon King Ravana's palace garden. Hanuman was the spy who acquired strategic information concerning the plan of Ravana's capital at Lanka. He was the indefatigable messenger who flew to the Himalayas to procure the life-giving herb for Laksman. He was the military engineer who supervised the construction of the land bridge between the southern peninsula of India and the island of Lanka. Finally he was the general who led his army of monkeys into battle and defeated Ravana's army of demons. The copper inscription of the 1807 grant to the Ram Candra monastery reveals that the *kusa birta* rights had been offered in 1806 by Kaji Amar Singha Thapa in fulfillment of a vow. Kaji Amar Singha Thapa was the brilliant Nepalese commander who planned and led the Gorkha conquests in the far western regions. His visit to Janakpurdham could only have been a hasty interlude in his military campaign, for in 1804-1805 he had led the successful Gorkha counter-attack on Garhwal and in late 1806 he had returned to the far west in order to lead the assault against Kangra. The copper inscription at the Ram Candra monastery does not reveal the exact vow which Kaji Amar Singha Thapa made to Hanuman in Janakpurdham, but it was



probably related either to his recent campaign in Garhwal or to his impending campaign in Kangra. Later in 1815, when Kaji Amar Singha Thapa had engaged the East India Company in combat, he wrote to the King from the western front:

When the Chinese army invaded Nepal [in 1792], we implored the mercy of Heaven by offerings to the Brahmans and the performance of religious ceremonies; and through the favour of one and the intercession of the other we succeeded in repulsing the enemy... by these means [alms-giving] many thousands of respectable Brahmans will put up their prayers for your protection, and the enemy will be driven forth. By the practice of charity the territory acquired in your generation may be preserved and through the favour of God, our power and dominion may be still further extended (quoted in Sanwal 1965: 170-71).

In sum, the evidence from documentary sources suggests that in most cases the king bestowed *kusa birta* rights over land in favour of Hindu ascetics on or near the Janakpur *mauja* as part of a more general policy to extend or defend his realm. Moreover one finds that after 1816 when the boundary of the modern kingdom of Nepal attained nearly its present form and further expansion of the kingdom was blocked by the Chinese Emperor and the East India Company, the period of royal largesse to ascetics in Janakpurdham also ceased. To be sure ascetics continued to receive royal gifts of land on auspicious occasions of royal rejoicing such as the birth of the Crown Prince or the coronation of the king but these grants did not normally exceed 25 *bighas* in area and hence were significantly less munificent than the earlier gifts.<sup>16</sup> Thus by relating the land which was given to the ascetics in Janakpurdham to the expansion and defence of Makwanpur and Nepal, one can explain not only the commencement of the period of royal gifts of land to ascetics but also the end of that period.

For the ascetics who travelled to the site of ancient Janakpur during the eighteenth century the importance of such land grants cannot be overstated. At that time in the eastern Tarai of Nepal there was no market in rights over crown land; instead the ruler exercised proprietary authority over his kingdom by assigning rights over land on an annually renewable basis to his tenants and to his civil and military officers. Only the king (or a noble who had obtained the consent of the king) could irrevocably offer

---

16. King Rajendra Vikram Shah endowed the Sita Kund Kuti (1833), Ratna Sagar monastery (1834), and the Agni Kund monastery (circa 1840) with *kusa birta* plots of between five and twenty *bigha*. There is no record of any royal land grants to ascetics in Janakpurdham after the abdication of King Rajendra in 1847. The Shah kings and the Rana prime ministers did, however, use the *guthi* category of tenure to endow several Sanskrit colleges, poorhouses, and charity kitchens in the region of Janakpurdham.

revenue-exempt land to an ascetic. Without such gifts the ascetic would have enjoyed neither the tenurial security nor the surplus income necessary to establish a permanent monastery and a pilgrims' hostel at Janakpurdham.

With regard to the early history of Janakpurdham, therefore, I would propose that the endowment and subsequent development of the site of ancient Janakpur during the eighteenth century was an indirect consequence of the political instability on the southern flank of the Himalaya as two different hill kingdoms sought to gain and retain the revenue rich Tarai from neighbouring plains kingdoms. Assuming the dependence of the ascetic on the king for access to productive resources and given the knowledge that the king gave land in alms on the auspicious occasion of sending troops into battle, might one further propose that the political instability on the southern flank of the Himalaya and the hope of obtaining alms from the king led Hindu ascetics to the site of ancient Janakpur? Although such thoughts of gain might have passed through the minds of some ascetics during the eighteenth century, still such a proposition does not seem valid in the light of other evidence. The flowering of the devotional discipline (*rasik sadhana*) occurred in the Ganges basin during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries as Vaisnavite ascetics began to dwell in the places which in previous ages had been sanctified by the actual presence of their tutelary deity. These places, such as Ayodhya, Chitrakut, and Vrindaban, were conceived and developed by the ascetics as esoteric cities or villages, the entrance into which was gained by virtue of a secondary initiation of the sect. Thus the discovery of the site of ancient Janakpur and the migration of ascetics to this sacred place was a continuation of certain developments in north Indian Vaisnavism and was not motivated or generated by political instability in the Himalayan kingdoms. Nevertheless it would be valid to conclude that the early endowment of Janakpurdham as a Hindu pilgrimage centre was a consequence of two unrelated but contemporaneous events: the flowering of the Vaisnavite movement in the Ganges basin and the politico-economic competition of hill kings for control of the eastern Tarai.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE TESTIMONY OF ORAL SOURCES

Historians who have taken an interest in the origins of Janakpurdham have either been bemused or bewildered by the stories about the reappearance of Janakpur in the Kali Age, for the oral testimony of the ascetics not only tests the limits of their credulity but also is at odds with the documentary and archeological evidence. Yet the ascetics do assert that Janakpurdham is built on the site of ancient Janakpur and furthermore

ascetics who are respected for their learning claim that they have evidence which proves the validity of their assertion. Because the ascetics do not see themselves as speaking falsely, we should ask ourselves why these stories are true for those who tell them. There are two problems here. First, what is the criterion of evidence for the ascetic in his claim that Janakpur is built at the site of ancient Janakpur, and second, what is the purpose for which the ascetic organizes the evidence into a coherent narrative about the past? Let us begin the final section of this essay by considering what the ascetics mean by evidence and then we shall turn to the purpose of the stories about the reappearance of Janakpur in the Kali Age.

Respected ascetics in Janakpur today explain their criterion of evidence (praman) in terms of the Sankhya doctrine of the four states of selfhood: wakefulness (jagrit) which is ruled by the sense perceptions (indriya), dream-sleep (svapna) which is ruled by the mind (man), deep-sleep (susupti) which is ruled by consciousness (cit), and the "fourth state" (turiya) which is ruled by the soul (atman). Each state of selfhood abides in a different body. Wakefulness abides in the gross body, dream-sleep in the subtle body, and deep-sleep in the causal body. The soul, however, does not abide in a body because it is not subject to death or decay. Each state of selfhood is born from and depends upon each successively higher state of selfhood. Sense perceptions depend on the mind which depends on the consciousness which depends on the soul. When the soul departs from the human organism, the sense perceptions, mind, and consciousness die in their respective bodies. The soul, however, is self-existent and dependent upon no other. It is unconditioned and hence eternal. For the Hindu ascetic this unconditioned state is real; the other three states of selfhood – wakefulness, dream-sleep, and deep-sleep – are lower states of illusion in which consciousness veils the self from its true nature. The so-called evidence of the historian which is drawn from his observations of the transient world prove for the ascetic nothing but the transience of that world. For the ascetic evidence of the location of Janakpur graced by the eternal presence of Ram must have its source in the unconditioned reality. Herein lies the riddle. Janakpur reappeared to several ascetics in the Kali Age, but what the ascetics saw was not necessarily an object of perception.

The story of Chaturbhuj Giri's discovery of Janakpur illustrates the difference between the historian's and the ascetic's criteria of evidence. In this story Lord Ram appeared in a dream and explained to Chaturbhuj Giri that where he lay sleeping was the site of ancient Janakpur and that entangled in the roots of the banyan tree were four statues of Lord Ram. For the historian the images are evidence by which one might prove or disprove the claim that Janakpur is built at the site of ancient Janakpur. An examination of the style in which the images were fashioned and a chemical-analy-

sis of the kind of stone from which they were made would enable the scholar to date the idols according to an historical period and perhaps to locate the region from where the stones were quarried. For the ascetic, however, the proof cannot be established by an analysis of the four stones which lie visibly before him; rather the proof lies with the vision which Lord Ram bestowed upon Chaturbhuj Giri. The sleep of Chaturbhuj Giri was the dream-sleep of the second state of selfhood in which the mind directed his awareness. Chaturbhuj Giri had reined in his sense perceptions and was dead to the transient world. With his mind, not his eyes, he "saw" Lord Ram dwelling in his soul and with his mind, not his ears, he "heard" Lord Ram calling from his soul. That experience was caused by the contact of the mind with the eternal unconditioned soul and hence that vision has authenticity (praman). Chaturbhuj Giri knew that he had arrived at the site of ancient Janakpur.

In addition to revelatory knowledge the ascetics also have a second criterion of evidence which resembles the criterion of the historian in that it is based on empirical observation of the transient world. The ascetic, however, does not resolve the potential contradiction between revelatory knowledge and empirical knowledge in the same manner as the historian. Whereas the historian resolves the contradiction by rejecting facts which cannot be empirically observed or corroborated, the ascetic resolves the contradiction by ranking hierarchically the different modes of knowing. Revelation is superior to empirical observation as a mode of knowing because the transient world is historically and physically dependent upon eternal forces. Thus at some, albeit lower, level of perception ascetics consider their stories about the reappearance of Janakpur to be accounts of how the past actually happened, and as such, these stories should lend themselves to corroboration by the archeological and documentary sources. This presents us with a problem, for the evidence from archeological sources, which lies visibly before the local ascetic, calls into question a major theme of the ascetic's oral testimony, namely that prior to the arrival of Chaturbhuj Giri and Sur Kisor the site of ancient Janakpur was lost in the midst of a desolate jungle. I have already mentioned the mounds at Ksireswar, Duhabi, Ranipatti, and Banauli and I have described the images which were found therein. Also on the periphery of Janakpur are the temples of Siva at Kalyaneswar and Jaleswar, both of which date from at least 1700, and at the village of Mithileswar on the banks of Janak Sarovar there used to be a temple of Siva whose existence was noted in nineteenth century pilgrimage guides but of which no trace has remained in living memory. How then do the ascetics deal with this evidence which proves the prior settlement of the region? According to the sacred texts the god Siva was the lineage deity of the Vaidehi dynasty of Mithila and hence Siva was also the guardian deity of ancient Janakpur. For the early ascetics of Janakpur-

dham the scattered temples and mounds were thought to date from the time of King Janak himself. The four temples of Siva at Kalyaneswar, Jaleswar, Ksireswar, and Mithileswar are situated approximately ten miles distant from Janakpurdham to the south, southwest, north, and northeast respectively. *Panc kosa*, or approximately ten miles, is an auspicious distance for Hindus and these four temples of Siva were taken by the Vaisnavite ascetics to be the remains of the south, west, north, and east gates of ancient Janakpur. By the early nineteenth century Sita Prasad of Sitamarhi and Sur Das of Pipra (Muzaffarpur district) "had brought to light" the circumambulation of Janakpur (Saranf1961: quatrains 442; 449-50). The route which the ascetics followed lay at a ten mile radius from the Janaki monastery in Janakpurdham and lasted five days beginning and ending at Kalyaneswar and passing by way of Jaleswar, Ksireswar, and Mithileswar where the ascetics offered *bel* leaves and water to Siva, the guardian deity of Janakpur. Thus these ruins, which the historian sees as evidence of a former tantric cult and prior settlement of the region, were seen by the ascetics as evidence of the gates of ancient Janakpur where King Janak used to worship the guardian deity of his capital. By taking the ruins of the medieval chieftaincies to be ruins of ancient Janakpur, the local ascetics failed to see the contradictory importance of this evidence and at the same time incorporated within their devotional cult the remains of the former tantric cult thereby leaving the surrounding jungle as the *tabula rasa* of modern Janakpurdham.

In so far as the ascetic recounts past events as he thinks they actually occurred he is performing a role which is comparable to that of the historian. The ascetic, however, does not tell his stories to an academy of scholars nor to an "informed public". Except for several university-educated teachers at a local college, Janakpurdham does not yet have any historians; rather it has its ascetics, pandits, bards, genealogists, and so forth. The ascetic's oral testimony is an act of devotion in which he glorifies his spiritual ancestry and his tutelary deity. In this glorification the ascetic may ornament or exaggerate his narrative with a view to invigourate the power and majesty of the worshipped and to express his own devotion to the tutelary deity. This extrinsic purpose of the ascetic oral tradition influences both the information which is presented in the story as well as the social context in which the story is told. Thus the oral testimony presents how Janakpur reappeared and Janakpurdham was established but the particular emphasis of the testimony is the auspicious origins of Janakpurdham, that is to say, the way in which both the tutelary deity and great ascetics sanctified a territory in the Kali Age so that Hindus might find release from the transient world.

Given this purpose of the oral testimony then one should not only query, as I

have done, whether the site of ancient Janakpur was found in a desolate jungle but also one should examine the significance of the jungle in the discovery of Janakpur. In the folklore of the south Asian subcontinent one does not usually encounter stories of Hindus living in the jungle. The jungle shelters and nourishes aboriginal peoples, but such people were thought by Hindus to be uncivilized. For Hindus jungle life is fraught with confusion and danger. Tigers slip silently through the tall waving grass. Leopards spring from overhanging limbs and seize their startled prey. In abandoned ponds and desolate watercourses dwell *jinn* who possess human form but who are violent by nature and more powerful than any human being. Where the vegetation has covered over abandoned villages and towns, the ghosts of people who died in battle or in sickness and who were not properly cremated roam in discontent. Deprived of their passage to the ancestor world, they seek their vengeance among the living on earth. In brief, the jungle is not a place where nature exists in a pristine state; rather it is a place of disorder and as such, jungle life is opposed to civilized life as disorder is opposed to order. For the Hindu, civilization is brought into existence with the social order and this order is, in turn, sustained by the cosmic energy in the universe. Thus in the Kali Age the spiritual energy which generated the mind-born cosmos of Brahma is thought to be running down; and in the gloomy visions of the Kali Age, which are found in the Puranic literature, the description of Hindu social life resembles the Hindu vision of aboriginal social life in the jungle.<sup>17</sup> according to the sacred texts the Hindu king, whose temporal power had been quickened by the Brahman priest at the time of coronation, was the source of authority in the social world. The king's duty was to protect the subjects on his territory. The king, however, was ill-trained for chastising *jinn* and ghosts in the jungle. In order to deal with such subtle creatures subtle methods were required. The person who knew those methods was the ascetic. Armed with the *mantra* of his tutelary deity, he sallied forth into battle with these subtle beings and banished them from the territory. In the stories concerning the founding of Janakpurdham the town prospered under the benevolent protection of the kings of Makwanpur and later the kings of Nepal but it was the spiritual kings such as Ram Das of Sita Kunda Kutti who rid the jungle of the *jinn* and ghosts thereby favouring immigration to the site of ancient Janakpur. As the terrestrial intermediary between mundane and subtle creatures the Hindu ascetic was the spiritual midwife of nascent Janakpurdham. By

---

17. For example, in the *Visnu Purana* (6. 1) it is written: "Marriages in the age [of Kali] will not be conformable to ritual.....All gods will be gods to them that worship them and all orders of life will be common alike to all persons..... Gold, jewels, diamonds, and clothes will have perished..... The people will all live like anchorites upon leaves, and roots, and fruit....."

virtue of his spiritual energy acquired through self-discipline the ascetic banished the elements of disorder from the jungle thereby rendering the territory fit for civilisation.<sup>18</sup>

The other stories which I recounted in the first section of this essay express in a similar way the theme of the auspicious founding of Janakpurdham by Ram and Sita and their celibate devotees. The early ascetics are said to have travelled to the jungle of northern Mithila in order to discipline their body, speech, and mind. The jungle, however, has a double meaning for the actual place where the ascetic established his powers of self-rule was the esoteric jungle of his sense perceptions in which stalked the tigers of his unfulfilled desires. Hence in the story of Raghunath Das' discovery of King Janak's Treasury the tigers who growled from the undergrowth tell us more about the state of mind of Raghunath Das than of the *fauna* of the Nepalese Tarai. That Raghunath Das was not afraid of these tigers should come as no surprise, for he followed the path of desirelessness (*bairagya*). The fabulous jewel which he found in the jungle was more likely a 'thought gem' (*cintamani*) than some bauble which glitters on the finger of an indolent prince. Since King Janak (*Sirdhwaj*) was a great patron of sages and was himself an ascetic king (*rajarsi*) we might expect that he had a predilection for accumulating 'thought gems' in his royal treasury. The Rantan Sagar monastery which Raghunath Das founded at the site of King Janak's Treasury was known throughout the region as a place of power (*siddha sthan*) because of the austerities which Raghunath Das and his disciples performed there, and householders on pilgrimage to Janakpurdham often went to Ratna Sagar monastery to seek the blessings of the resident ascetics. As for the founding of the Ram Candra monastery, I have already analyzed the significance of the story in which Lord Ram Himself told Caturbhuj Giri that where he lay sleeping was the site of ancient Janakpur. In the account of Pritam Das' founding of the Janki monastery Hanuman travelled by bullock cart northward across Mithila to Janakpurdham. One mile south of Janakpurdham, however, the cart stopped in its tracks and Pritam Das was unable to advance the cart further. Hanuman is the servant *par excellence* of Ram and Sita and as such, he is represented by Vaisnavite ascetics as a red pennant on a bamboo pole guarding the

---

18. Although this relationship between the king and the ascetic is in some sense traditional, it is interesting to note that during the Vedic period land was rendered fit for civilization not by the ascetic battling with subtle creatures of the jungle, but by the Brahman priest causing Agni to taste the fruits of the land in sacrifice. So consecrated the land became fit for habitation by Hindus. In the *Satapatha Brahmana*, 1.4.1.14-17 there is an account of the role of Brahmans in the original settlement of Hindus in ancient Mithila.

entrance to the temple of Ram and Sita. When Hanuman stopped Pritam Das' cart on the outskirts of Janakpurdham, he knew exactly where lay his destination – not in Janakpurdham itself with Ram and Sita but instead just beyond the centre on the main pilgrimage route from the south at which place he guards the entrance to Janakpurdham. Finally there is the account of the founding of the Janki monastery in which Sur Kisor's image of the maiden Sita located the site of king Janak's palace. This particular image of Sita is thought to contain the inner essence (adi sakti) of Sita herself and hence her emerging from the ground at Janakpurdham in the Kali Age recalls her earlier emergence as a baby from a furrow in the earth during the Treta Yuga.

The earliest description of Janakpurdham as a Vaisnavite pilgrimage centre occurs in *Sri Maharaja Charitra* which was written by Raghunath Prasad of Bara Sthan, Ayodhya and was completed in the year 1805. From Raghunath Prasad's description of Janakpurdham we may conclude that by 1805 most of the ancient city of Janakpur had already 'reappeared'. In this pilgrimage guide the pilgrim is urged to begin his homage in Janakpurdham at King Janak's palace (the present Janaki monastery) and then to continue to the other sites associated with the marriage of Ram and Sita:<sup>19</sup>

From Janak's palace proceed to the east; there the parade ground can be seen  
Where the Lord of the Raghus broke the Bow and everyone sang the virtues of  
Ram.

One piece of the Bow flew to heaven; one piece sank and lodged in hell.  
He threw the massive piece in his fist and it fell twelve miles to the north.

The pilgrimage to Dhanusa twelve miles northeast of Janakpurdham to behold the piece of the Bow of Siva is recommended, but the pilgrim is duly warned:

Elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, and wild buffalo; words cannot describe the journey through that impenetrable jungle.

Several ponds are mentioned in the text: Dhanusa Sar where the Bow of Siva was kept prior to its removal to the parade ground (the present Ranga Bhumi) and Ganga Sagar where Mithi, the first of the Janak kings, was born from the body of Nimi. Also mentioned are Dasrath Kund, Ratna Sagar, and Laksman Kund where Ram's younger brother Laksman bathed and where by bathing there, the "heart overflows

---

19. The passages relating to Janakpurdham are found on pages 69–72 of the 1930 edition of *Sri Maharaja Carita* which was published by Cintamani Das of Bara Sthan, Ayodhya.



with affection". Particular emphasis is given to Argaja Kund where occurred Sita's *ubatan*, a ceremony prior to marriage in which the bride's body is annointed with a paste of turmeric and curds:

—And there shines Argaja Kund, a pure and incomparable place which is pleasing to behold

Where Sita's limbs were annointed with the *ubatan* paste at the time of her marriage to Raghu Rai.

Steps of white stucco lead down the embankment to the bathing water, bestower of joy.

In *Sri maharaja Carita* we also find mention of several villages outside Janakpur-dham which are pilgrimage sites for Vaisnavite devotees. Sitamarhi, situated thirty-two miles southwest of Janakpur-dham is the place where King Janak found the baby Sita lying in a furrow. Bisaul, ten miles south of Janakpur-dham, is the site of Viswamitra's hermitage. Before arriving in Janakpur, Ram and Laksman passed the night at the hermitage:

And the dwelling at Bisaul is pleasant; the name of Viswamita dear and pure.

The following morning Ram and Laksman walked several miles westward to visit the temple of Girija. Girija is the pale-complexioned Parvati the consort of Siva. It was in the garden of this temple, located in the village of Phulwar ten miles southwest of Janakpur-dham, that Ram and Sita beheld one another for the first time:

Two (?) miles south of the parade ground and turning a little west

Lies Sri Girija's rare and beautiful pond where is the image of the pale complexioned one.

The maiden Sita went full of affection and prayed to Girija who showed her exceedingly great love.

And so the garden of Girija shined causing love to swell at the time of meditation.

In 1800 Janakpur-dham was not a town; rather it was a pilgrimage field (*ksetra*) at which were located the monasteries founded by Chaturbhuj Giri, Sur Kisor, Raghunath Das, and the other devotional saints. Near the monasteries were situated the thatched huts of the peasants who tilled the monastery land plus the ponds and pastures, orchards, fields, and tracts of forest which the Sen rulers of Makwanpur and the Shah kings of modern Nepal had gifted to the ascetics. A customs shed sheltered goods in transit on a minor trade route linking Sindhuli in the mountains to Darbhanga on

the plains. A bi-weekly bazaar in an open field provided a market for the peasant farmers from the neighbouring villages (Hamilton 1819: 161). Yet in those rude surroundings in which the rough outlines of the future town of Janakpur were rarely visible, lay an esoteric Janakpur which owed its origin to a state of mind. An entire town which had disappeared in the Dwapar Yuga reappeared in the Kali Yuga as an object of devotion so that man might cross over the sea of conditioned existence and find eternal refuge at the lotus feet of Lord Ram.

In this essay I have presented some of the stories which ascetics, pandits, and bards tell of the discovery of Janakpur and the founding of the pilgrimage centre. Archeological evidence and the land and revenue documents reveal, however, that these stories told by the ascetics, pandits, and bards do not necessarily recount how the past actually happened. We have then considered these stories as a source of information not on the content of the past but on the intent of the past. In particular, we noted the significance of the jungle as a place of disorder and the role of the Hindu ascetic who banishes from the jungle the subtle predatory creatures thereby rendering the territory fit for civilization. Second, we noted the role of the ascetics and the deities in consecrating Janakpur so that Hindus who undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred town might find release from the transient world. Thus in learning from the ascetics about the reappearance of Janakpur in the Kali Age, we must remember that the purpose of their oral testimony is not so much to tell us about the history of a place but rather to tell us about a place which releases man from history.

#### REFERENCES AND SOURCE MATERIALS

This article is based on field work carried out at the Vaisnavite pilgrimage centre of Janakpur in the eastern Tarai of Nepal in 1973–1975 with a grant from the School of Oriental & African Studies and the Central Research Fund of the University of London. I wish to thank the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies at Tribhuvan University, the Guthisanshthan, Mahesh Regmi of the Regmi Research Institute, and ascetics, pandits, and bards of Janakpur for their cooperation in my research on the history of Janakpur.

##### A. *Documentary sources from the Janakpur monasteries.*

Royal order from Sujagat Sen of Makwanpur bestowing *kusa birta* rights over land in the Janakpur *mauja* and the Barah Kati *mauja* to abbot Sital Giri of Kuwa monastery, 1797 V. S. (1740).

Royal order from King Hem Karna Sen of Makwanpur confirming the bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land on the Janakpur *mauja* and the Barah Kati *mauja* to Abbot Sital Giri of Kuwa monastery, 1810 V. S. (1753).

- Letter of appointment from King Rana Bahadur Shah confirming the accession of Abbot Paramanand Das to the throne of the Janaki monastery, Marg Sudi 15, 1849 V. S. (December 1792).
- Royal order from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah confirming the bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land in the Manipatti *mauja* by Kaji Amar Singha Thapa in fulfillment of a vow to Hanuman at the Ram Candra monastery in 1806, Vaisakh Sudi, 14, 1864 (April 1807).
- Royal order from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah to Abbot Amar Giri of the Ram Candra monastery confirming a previous bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land on the Janakpur *mauja* on Sravan Sudi 3, 1118 by King Indra Vidhata Sen of Makwanpur to Caturbhuj Giri, Phalgun Sudi, 1, 1867 (February 1811)
- Royal order from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah to Abbot Pritam Das of Hanuman Nagar monastery confirming a previous bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land in the Barah Kati *mauja* in 1838 V. S. (1781) to Pritam Das, Bhadra Sudi, 5, 1867 V. S. (August 1810).
- Royal order from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah to Abbot Pati Ram Das of Laksman monastery confirming a previous bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land in the Rajaur *mauja* on Phalgun Badi 9, 1810 V. S. (1754) from King Hem Karna Sen of Makwanpur to Jay Krisna Das, Bhadra Sudi 5, 1867 (August 1810).
- Royal order from King Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah to Abbot Visambhar Das of Janki monastery confirming a previous bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land on the Janakpur *mauja* on Kartik Sudi 7, 1784 V. S. (1727) from King Manik Sen of Makwanpur in the name of the goddess Janki, Phalgun Sudi 10, 1867 V. S. (February 1811).
- Royal order from Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana confirming the accession of Kamala Das to the abbotship of Sita Kund Kuti, Kartik Badi, 5, 1920 V. S. (November 1863).
- Royal order from King Surendra Vikram Shah to Abbot Narayan Das of Ratna Sagar monastery confirming a previous bestowal of *kusa birta* rights over land in the Mujeliya *mauja* on Jyestha Badi 7, 1891 V. S. (1834) from King Rajendra Vikram Shah to Abbot Bitthal Das, Magh Badi 6, 1933 (January 1877).

B. *Books and articles.*

- Ahmad, Q. 1958. "Early Anglo-Nepalese Relations with Particular Reference to the Principality of the Raja of Makwanpur." *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission* (Trivandrum), 34.

- Cohn, Bernard 1964. "The Role of the Gosains in the Economy of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Upper India." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1.
- Das, Avadh Kisor 1974. *Janakpur ki Jhanki*. Janakpur: the author.
- Datta, K. K. 1958. "Correspondence of Edward Roughsedge Relating to the Nepal War, 1814-1816." *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission* (Trivandrum), 34.
- Gaige, Frederick 1975. *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Ghosh, Rai Sahi Jamini Mohan 1930. *Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Dept.
- Hamilton, Francis 1819. *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal, and of the Territories annexed to this Dominion by the House of Gorkha*. Edinburgh : Archibald Co.
- Jha, Pandit Jibnath n. d. *Sri Mithila Mahatmyam*. Janakpur: the author.
- Kisor, Sur 1958. *Sri Mithila Bilas*. Faizabad: Sri Amla Devi.
- The Law of Manu*. 1886. Trans. from Sanskrit into English by George Buhler. Sacred Books of the East Series, 25. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nepali, Ram Swarup Prasad n. d. *Janakpur Mahima*. Jaleswar: the author.
- Prasad, Raghunath 1930, *Sri Maharaja Caritra*. Ayodhya: Sri Cintamani Das of Bara Stan.
- Regmi, D. 1961. *Modern Nepal*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyaya.
- Regmi, M. 1971. *A Study in Nepali Economic History: 1768-1846*. New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House.
- Sanwal, B. D. 1965. *Nepal and the East India Company*. London: Asia Publishing House.
- Saran, Yugal Priya 1961. *Sri Rasik Prakasa Bhakta Mala*. Commentary by Janaki Rasik Saran. Ayodhya: Laksman Kila.
- Sarma, Janak Lal 1968. "Citavandekhi Janakpursammaka Kehi Puratatvik Sthal." *Pracin Nepal*, 2.
- Satapatha Brahmana*. 1892. Trans. from Sanskrit into English by Julius Eggeling. Sacred Books of the East Series, 12. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sinha, Bhagawati Prasad 1957. *Ram Bhakti men Rasik Sampradaya*. Balrampur: Avadha Sahitya Mandir.
- Stiller, Ludwig 1973. *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*. New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House.
- Thakur, Upendra 1956. *History of Mithila*. Darbhanga: Mithila Institute.
- Vishnu Purana*. Trans. from Sanskrit into English with notes by H. H. Wilson. 6 vols. London: Turbner and Co., 1864.