

Ancient and Medieval Nepal

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Social Conditions in Medieval Nepal

During the medieval period, as in ancient Nepal under the Licchavi dynasty, absolute monarchy by divine right was the form of government. Such royal titles as *bhagavatapaśupati bhaṭṭaraka pādanugrihita* stated that the ruler enjoyed a special blessing at the feet of Lord Pashupati.

The other titles adopted by the ruling monarchs were 'King of Kings' (*mahārājadhīrāja*) 'Great God' (*paramēśvara*), 'The Most Venerable' (*paramabhāṭṭaraka*), 'Overlord of Kings' (*rājadhīrāja*). The later Malla rulers of the three kingdoms in the Valley styled themselves 'Lord of Nepal' (*nepāleśvara*) or 'Lord of the Whole of Nepal's Land Area' (*nepālamahimaṇḍalakhaṇḍa*). The royal titles retained the reference to the favour or blessing at Lord Pashupati's feet, and

also mentioned the favour of Māneśvari, the titular deity of the dynasty adopted by Jayasthiti Malla and his successors (*manēśvariṣṭadevatacaraṇa labhdaprasāda*). The titles of the Kings of Kathmandu and Bhadgaun referred to the presence of Hanūmān or the monkey god in their standards (*hanūmāndhwaja*). But the crowning section of the title, shared in common by all the Malla Kings of the Valley, and still retained by the Shah King of Nepal is 'Lord of the Mountains, Crest Jewel of the Wheel, God Among Men' (*girirājacakracuḍāmaṇi naranārāyaṇa*).

The period between 1274 and 1382 was characterized by instability and uncertainty, as we have seen above. During this period, the Khasya Kings of the Karnali region invaded the Kathmandu Valley: Jitāri Malla in 1287, 1289, and 1290; Ripu Malla in 1312; his successor, Āditya Malla, in 1328, and Punya Malla in 1334. In addition to this there were repeated incursions by the Doya (the Tirhutiyas from Simraungarh). However, the invasion by Sultan Shamshudin Ilyas of Bengal (1342-1357) in 1349 proved to be the most devastating. The impact of these invasions was aggravated by the unstable situation which already prevailed in the Kathmandu Valley. Centrifugal tendencies received an impetus and several men with strong local influence appeared upon the scene.

The absence of an organized feudal hierarchy made it possible for the Kings of the Kathmandu Valley to act without any restraint. Perhaps the small size of their kingdoms was not conducive to the growth of an effective feudal organization, but whenever feudal elements did emerge, they were able to curb the absolute powers of the monarch. The roles of the Jivas of Udayapur, of the chiefs of Dhavalasrotri, of the Rāma-Varddhanas of Banepa, of the so-called Thakuri chiefs of Nuwakot and Patan and, to a lesser extent, of the Ravutas of Pharping deserve mention in this connection.

The system of dual government (*dvairājya*) meant different things at different times. Some times it meant two kings ruling two separate territorial units which formed an integral part of one and the same kingdom, one of the kings having a subordinate position. At other times, it implied joint rule of the kingdom as a whole by two kings of equal status. Along with *dvairājya*, the word *ardharājya*, which means 'government of one-half of the kingdom, occurs in the inscriptions and colophons of the period between 1000 and 1382. This system of dual government was used at times by both the Thakuris and the Mallas. The dual government of Narendradeva (c. 998-999) and Udayadeva (c. 998-1004) and

of Nirbhayadeva (c. 1004-1009) Rudradeva (c. 1007-1028) and Bhojadeva (c. 1009-1020) in the pre-Malla period, and the joint rule of Jayānandadeva (1361-1382) and Jayasthiti Malla may be cited as examples. After Jayasthiti Malla's death in 1395, his three sons Jayadharmā Malla, Jayajyotir Malla, and Jayakirti Malla ruled the kingdom jointly. This provided an example of three-man rule (*trayarājya*).

Sylvain Levi has quoted a quatrain from Kalidasa's drama *Malavikāgnimitra* in praise of the system of *dvairājya*. The English translation of the stanza is as follows: 'These two kings, supporting the fortune of their overlord divided between them, as the horses support the yoke of their charioteer, will remain firm in their allegiances to thee, without being distracted by mutual attacks'. Despite Levi's praise of the system, the dual or the triple government, which undermined the authority of the state, may be taken as the precursor of the subsequent partition of the kingdom of the Kathmandu Valley into three kingdoms after 1482. The ideal working of the system, as visualized in Kalidasa's stanza, may have been frustrated in Nepal by the absence of a dominating paramount ruler to keep the co-rulers in their places.

The Crown Prince (*yuvarāja*) was mentioned in some inscriptions together with the other favorite sons of the ruling monarch (*mahārājakumāra*). Their actual powers depended on the nature of their relationship with their ruling fathers. After Yakṣa Malla (1428-1482), the Kathmandu Valley suffered fragmentation, with disastrous consequences for both the kingdoms and the dynasty. Pratāpa Malla's demonstrated partiality for one son gave rise to serious friction among his sons after his death over the question of succession. The result was that his favourite son, Mahipatindra Malla, was deposed and persecuted all his life by his half-brothers. As a rule, the eldest prince was regarded as the heir apparent. Whenever this rule was violated without sufficient reason, the political consequences were disastrous.

Polygamy was common. It often led to fierce competition among the wives of the king for the status of 'the favourite wife' and to savage struggles to obtain the right of succession for their sons. Concubinage created a further problem of whether sons born out of wedlock should be allowed to succeed to the throne. Problems of succession were, as a rule, resolved smoothly and expeditiously. However, there was much controversy about legitimate and illegitimate succession during the reign of Raṅajita Malla (1722-1769), the last Malla King

of Bhadgaun, who favoured an illegitimate son for succession to the throne. The controversy was resolved only by the Gorkha conquest.

Women were generally debarred from succession to the throne. However, this did not imply that women had no role in influencing political developments, or that the husbands and sons of royal women were debarred from succession. The role of Princess Nāyakadevī and her daughter, Princess Rājalladevī, of Bhadgaun, and of their grandmothers, Padumalladevī and Devaladevī, who functioned as their regents, deserves mention in this connection. Jayasthiti Malla (1382-1395), Rajalladevī's husband, founded a new dynasty which lasted 350 years. Mothers of infant rulers generally exercised considerable authority as regents during the minority of their sons. Yogamatī, daughter of King Yoganarendra Malla of Patan, played a conspicuous role as a king-maker.

Religion, in a rather narrow sense, influenced the life of the people; and astrologers and sooth-sayers were invariably consulted before political enterprises were undertaken. Even then, religion was treated merely as a handmaid of politics. A Nepali counterpart of Cardinal Wolsey or Cardinal Richelieu never emerged. Men of religion remained advisors to the rulers without political ambitions of their own.

Feudal titles, for people of importance who were not royalty were often connected with administrative functions but became hereditary in due course. The title Sāmanta or Mahāsāmanta used in the earlier period occurs also occasionally in the early medieval period. Among others, the ruler of Pannaga or Panumga is mentioned in 1150 and 1160 as a Mahāsāmanta, as is the feudatory chief of Udayapur (1066, 1104, 1120 and 1128). The highest office or title was that of *mahātha* (Sk. *mahattaka*) 'Prime Minister'. It was used at least once (for the heir apparent Jayadharma Malla) in 1377 as a purely honorary title for a royal prince. This title was also held by Anekarāma Varddhana and Jayasimsharāma Varddhana of Banepa.

The most common title for the average nobleman in the medieval period was *bhāro* (or *bhāroka*, *bhalloka*) which one finds as early as the eleventh century. In the 14th century the term *mūlami* came into use and soon became the title used by most of the leading nobles. Both of these titles were peculiar to the landed aristocracy. The city nobility (*pradhāna*) had different titles. In Patan the typical

title for the nobility was *pātra* or *mahāpātra* to which title was added *pradhānāṅga*. Eventually seven families of these *mahāpātras* became the dominant families of the city and are frequently referred to as the *saptakutumbaja mahāpātras* the 'Seven Noble Families'. Eventually these families formed a sort of council which controlled the affairs of the city. Later they are referred to as the *pramāṅgas*, a title which seems to indicate 'Official Certifier' or 'Notary'. The ruling nobles of Pharping referred to themselves as *rāvuta* or *mahārāvuta* ('Principal Ancillary Chief').

The commander-in-chief was called *jodhapati* (Sk. *yuddhapati*). The military officer in charge of a garrison fort was called *kvāṭhanāyaka* (Sk. *koṣṭanāyaka*). Titles in Sanskrit such as *amātya*, *mantri*, *rājaguru*, and *dharmadhikāra* were also used at times. Little information is available about the common people. Some inscriptions mention goldsmiths as 'donors' of some religious images, but nothing is known about the merchant class.

Two or three incidents, mentioned in the chronicles and also in the accounts of contemporary Christian missionaries, indicate that the people exercised some form of control over the despotic acts of the rulers. As we have seen in the cases of King Sadāśīva Malla of Kathmandu, King Jitāmitra of Bhadgaun and his minister, the unfortunate Bhagirāma, the common people could exercise their right only in exceptional circumstances. Public opposition to the appointment of a Muslim as Chief Minister by King Mahendrasimsha of Kathmandu and Patan forced him to cancel the appointment. When Raṅajita Malla wanted to nominate his illegitimate son as his successor, Thimi's action and popular clamour forced him to apologise to the people and drop the proposal. The reaction to the cold-blooded murder of King Viśvajita Malla of Patan by a court-official's son, with whose wife he lived in sin, may be cited as another example of popular action against the ruler. But all these incidents were rather unusual. They do not indicate that the people had a constitutional means of effective control over the king, but they do show that the people were not docile and unconcerned with politics. Even the apparently spontaneous uprisings may have been instigated by frustrated court officials or royal relatives.

The fragmentation of the Kathmandu Valley into three separate kingdoms after the death of King Yakṣa Malla in 1482 proved to be a disaster for the Malla dynasty. The three kingdoms, although ruled by descendants of

the same family and with their frontiers within a few miles of their capitals, were perpetually torn by internal dissension. The rulers' vision, over a period of three hundred and fifty years, hardly ever extended beyond the Valley and its adjoining areas such as Palanchok and Nuwakot.

The rulers of all the three kingdoms sought personal aggrandizement at the cost of each other. Whenever one of the rulers made any sort of gain, the other two would combine against him. Joint raids into Makwanpur and Morang did not result in lasting and positive gains for any one of them. The rulers sought the assistance of Gorkha as well as of Tanahū and Lamjung whenever they were pressed by any one side in their fratricidal war. However, Gorkha, Tanahū and Lamjung did not intervene in the affairs of the Kathmandu Valley without the prospect of real acquisitions for themselves.

It was not merely a case of mutual jealousy and rivalry among the three rulers. Court life had become charged with intrigue and suspicion at every level. Ministers conspired against ministers, sons against fathers, brothers against brothers and wives against husbands. Unscrupulous courtiers hired agents and professional assassins. Courtiers plotted among themselves, but the successful plotters were soon paid back in their own coin. The ladies of the royal household, and even regent queens, became subjects of court scandals. Powerful ministers of the Malla court, such as Cikuti, Bhagirāma and Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Jośī gained power as a result of conspiracies during the minority of the rulers. However, they did not wield power for long and soon fell a prey to counter-plots.

In 1696 a joint proclamation of the three kings of the Valley, Bhupalendra Malla of Kathmandu, Bhūpatindra Malla of Bhadgaun and Yoganarendra Malla of Patan, condemned and banned the members of the Ojhā family as arch-criminals and conspirators, and warned the public against having anything to do with them. As a lasting monument to the hypocrisy and self-deception of these decadent rulers, there exists to this day in the main quadrangle (Mulchok) of the old Patan palace a copperplate on which their joint proclamation is inscribed. The statement itself is poignant with a deep sense of pathos and irony, and reflects a measure of self-pity and self-condemnation on the part of those who were a party to it. In this joint proclamation the rulers seek to blame the Ojhās for the faults of their Malla fathers and themselves. But to posterity their efforts appear merely as a willful design to divert the attention

of the common people from the sordid and sinister reality of contemporary court life and politics. The rulers conveniently forgot, and wanted the people to forget too, that those fallen arch-criminals and villains were, in fact, the creations and instruments of the sinister will of the highly placed victims themselves.

Thanks to the natural defenses of the Kathmandu Valley, its fertile soil, its favourable location for trade and, above all, to the constructive attitude and industry of its common people, the three kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley, despite their endless political intrigues and chronic instability, endured for a period of 350 years without experiencing internal revolution or external conquest.

In spite of all the pomp and glitter of the royal courts, and in spite of their interest in art, culture and literature, the later Malla rulers proved politically ineffective. The main fabric of their political life had worn out, and became thin and thread-bare. Perpetual conspiracy, fraud and deceit had undermined their moral fibre; and their health and character were equally affected by their excesses.

Economic and Social Conditions

Set against the extravagance and degradation of the court life, the solid and lasting achievements of the common people in the field of agriculture and trade, as well as art, architecture and sculpture appear surprising. It is possible to admire innumerable buildings and statues; lovely additions to palaces and temples with artistic windows and doors, that are in themselves fine specimens of wood carving and trellis work; tastefully decorated water conduits and fountains of the finest design and quality; elegant and neatly laid out squares in front of the royal palaces; and quadrangles of palaces decorated with finely wrought images of gods and goddesses by Newari artists, artisans and ordinary labourers over a period of centuries.

The fertile soil of the Kathmandu Valley and the industry and skill of its people in agriculture and trade provided not only for basic needs, but also for frequent religious and social festivals and chariot processions (*jātrās*). Documentary evidence regarding specific economic conditions of Nepal during the medieval period exists, but so far scholars have not studied these in depth. However, we know that the people in the Kathmandu Valley were a prosperous

agricultural community. A section of its enterprising members were very successful in trade. Some of the more prosperous merchants were engaged in the profitable entrepot trade between Tibet and India through Nepal. The position of the Kathmandu Valley as a main centre for entrepot trade in the trans-Himalayan region imparted economic vitality to a society which had few viable alternatives open to it. During the Malla period, the Kathmandu Valley owed its prosperity largely to this trade. The Malla rulers had drawn much of their revenue from direct participation in the complicated trading system which linked the East India Company and Tibet through Newari traders, Gosains, and Kashmiri Muslim Trading houses.

Nepal's practice of minting coins for Tibet was also an additional source of profit to the Malla rulers of the Kathmandu Valley. Apart from charging a handsome fee for minting coins, the Malla rulers also exploited the frequent fluctuations in the price of bullion on the Indian market and used to their own advantage the exchange rate of gold and silver for rupees, which was fixed with Tibet on an annual basis. However, Rājā Raṇajita Malla of Bhadgaun and Rājā Jayaprakāśa Malla of Kathmandu taxed to the utmost this profitable system of minting coins for Tibet in order to ensure the supply of funds they needed for their internecine disputes and for their war against the Gorkhas. In the process, both monarchs seriously debased the value of the coins minted by reducing the ratio of silver to other less valuable metals. This increased the revenue for the Malla Kings concerned but it seriously undermined the confidence of Tibetans in the Nepali currency. The result was a long-standing dispute after the Gorkha conquest of the Kathmandu Valley over the circulation of Nepali currency in Tibet, with adverse consequences to the India-Nepal-Tibet trading system.

Coinage is the only category of economic history about which bits of information can be pieced together. The period of the Licchavis and their successors yields coins which, though undated, correspond to the inscriptions of the period in Gupta characters. Although literary evidence shows that in the 12th century Śivadeva struck gold and silver coins, these have not yet been discovered. Mahendra Malla (1564-1574), King of Kathmandu, minted silver coins which mentioned the name of his kingdom, 'Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa', along with his name. No Nepali coins of the period between the 8th and the 16th centuries are available.

Gold coins seem to have disappeared quite early from circulation. After

Mahendra Malla remodeled the currency in the 16th century, only silver coins remained in circulation. Silver coins minted in Nepal were legal tender in Tibet for a long time before the Gorkha conquest of the Valley in 1768-69.

A system of standard weights and measures prevailed in medieval Nepal. Land was measured in terms of *javas* and *ropanīs*, four *javas* making one *ropanī* which was equivalent to 343.6 square feet. The standard volume measures were *mānā*, *pāthī* and *murī*. One *mānā* was equivalent to one pint. Eight *mānās* made one *pāthī* and twenty *pāthīs* made one *murī*. The prevalence of a system of standard currency, weights and measures shows that the Kathmandu Valley's economy was fairly well developed during the medieval period. Although a market economy in the modern sense did not exist, there were several trade centers where buyers and sellers would gather on certain fixed days.

The system of private and public trusts called '*gūthīs*' was a remarkable feature of Nepali social and economic life during the medieval period. Their elaborate organization, on the basis of occupational castes, suggests a comparison with the guild system in medieval Europe. But the *gūthīs* were, in fact, more comprehensive than the guilds in their scope and regulated not only the profession or occupation but also the social and religious life of their members. The caste-system, as regulated by Jayasthiti Malla in Nepal, proceeded immediately to a scheme of sixty-four occupational sub-castes, without bothering about the classical four *varṇas*, or castes, which had only a marginal bearing on the prevailing conditions in Nepal. The system of the sixty-four occupational castes such as *chitrakāra* (painters), *takṣakāra* (carpenters), *śilpakāra* (craftsmen) etc., each with a guild or *gūthī* of its own to regulate not only its economic but also social and religious life, indicates a fairly advanced level of economic and social activity with a large variety of specialized functions performed by a number of occupational castes.

Religion in Medieval Nepal

The broad and pragmatic outlook of the people on religious matters helped the growth and synthesis of different religious sects and beliefs on an eclectic basis. It is not known precisely when Buddhism actually entered the Kathmandu Valley, but there can be no doubt that it did so from the south.

Buddhism is said to have been introduced into Nepal either by Gautama Buddha himself or by Emperor Aśoka and his daughter. However, little is known about its history except for the Aśoka pillars at Niglihava and Rupandehi in the Kapilavastu district of the Lumbini Zone, and the stupas at Patan in the Kathmandu Valley.

While Buddhism was still engaged in its steady and continuing struggle with shamanism, or primitive animism, in and across the Himalaya, Brahmanism in the Indian plains was gradually re-establishing its age-old authority against the comparatively new doctrine of Buddhism. But it was not until the eleventh century that the Buddhists finally gave up their struggle in India. Thereafter, they either conformed to Hinduism or sought sanctuary in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. Even in the Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere in the hill regions of Nepal Buddhism had to concede a good deal to Brahmanic tradition, just as it had to make large concessions to the beliefs of the Bon or shamanism and to local superstition in the northern hill areas. In any case, in Nepal Buddhism had to make accommodations with the Brahmanic tradition but was not reconquered as in India.

The Mahāyāna School of Buddhism, or the Great Vehicle, is said to have originated between the age of Aśoka and the Christian era. It appeared later than both of the well-known schools of Buddhism—the Theravāda (represented by the Pali Canon) and the Sarvāstivāda—collectively described as the Hīnayāna, or the Low Vehicle, which taught that all the individual had to do was to pursue the teaching of Buddha and seek *nirvāṇa*. Those who sought to realize this goal immediately, by aspiring to the state of *arhat*, each for himself, were the monks; and this system of discipline was known as the Śrāvakayāna, 'the Vehicle of the Disciples'. However, these schools did not rule out the possibility of realizing Buddhahood even without listening to and following the teaching of the Buddha. Those who acquired Buddhahood in this way were said to follow the Pratyeka-Buddhayāna.

One of the chief Mahāyāna *sūtras* (some of which probably date from as early as the first century A.D.) describes the *yānas* 'or 'careers' taught by various schools under the parable of the chariots. The Mahāyāna is like a great bullock chariot, whereas the older schools are like goat and deer chariots in this parable.

According to the relatively new doctrine of the Mahāyāna, an individual, while seeking to attain *nirvāṇa* for himself, should aim at being a Buddha so that he can preach to others and promote the welfare of all. One who sets this as a goal is a *bodhisattva* and undertakes rigorous training and discipline by which, through several rebirths, he acquires great merit and attains six virtues or perfections known as *pāramitā*. The *bodhisattva* ideal is sometimes represented by the picture of a human Buddha feeding a hungry tiger on his body. The Mahāyāna was also called the *Bodhisattvayāna*. The aim of this school was not to turn all disciples into saviours but to make ordinary men look up to certain great *bodhisattvas*, who, by their accumulated merit, redeem men from hell (perdition) and insure rebirth in heaven to all those who devoutly repeat the name of the favorite *bodhisattva*.

This largely accounts for the great attraction the Mahāyāna sect of Buddhism held for the simple and unsophisticated people. No wonder that it was described as a great 'bullock chariot' compared to the older sects of Buddhism. The Mahāyāna School, in order to promote the cause of Buddhism, sought to exploit in practice the instinct for prayer and devotion engendered by popular versions of Hindu worship such as the earlier versions of Shaivism and Vaishnavism. While conveniently ignoring in practice the question whether Buddha, who has attained *nirvāṇa*, can be said to exist, the Mahāyāna School of Buddhism encouraged an approach conducive to contemporary Hindu polytheism by suggesting that the Buddha who has attained *nirvāṇa* abides with other Buddhas in heavens at the ten points of space. The Mahāyāna School seems to have belatedly developed an approach to monotheism by emphasizing belief in one universal Buddha, but it is by no means the predominant doctrine. Avalokiteśvara, one of the most popular of the *bodhisattvas*, is said to take the form of Shiva or Vishnu in order to teach the doctrine to the devotee.

The metaphysical aspect of the Mahāyāna School is based on the doctrine of the Void (*śūnyatā*). The Mahāyāna teachers sought to find an absolute, not merely as an ultimate goal but as a cosmic principle. The most developed system is that of Nāgārjuna, who is usually thought to have taught in the second century A. D. In his system, the doctrine of the void becomes a doctrine of relativity. Its essence is that the truth of no individual part can be maintained because nothing is real independently of the whole. This system is known as *Śūnyatāvāda* or *Mādhyamika*. The system of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu is known as

Yogacāra or Vijñānavāda, in which everything is denied except consciousness (*vijñāna*). It is thus a system of subjective idealism. The systems of Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda are important from the viewpoint of the evolution of Indian philosophy as they are elaborately refuted in the commentaries on the orthodox philosophical *sūtras*, and also because the Vedantic doctrine of *maya*, cosmic illusion, has adopted some of the principles of Vijñānavāda.

The element common to both the Mahāyāna and the Vedantic schools of philosophy is what the Indian scholastic methodology calls *samanvaya*, i.e. the institutionalized attitude of reconciling discursively contrary notions by raising them to a level of discourse where these contradictions are thought to have no validity. Those who are engaged in metaphysical speculation are content to say that when the absolute and the phenomenal are brought side by side, there is *samanvaya*, but the Tantrics insist on actually experiencing it. Both Hindu and Buddhist Tantras emphasize that the only one reality which exists has to be comprehended through a process of conceptual and intuitive polarization. Both Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism, intended as short cuts to redemption, are characterized by a common outlook on fundamental absolutism and stress a psycho-experimental rather than a speculative approach. According to the tantric concept, the poles are characterized by activity and passivity and the universe operates on the basis of their interaction. The only difference between Hindu and Buddhist tantrism in this respect is that unlike in Hindu tantrism, it is the male pole that is active in Buddhist tantrism. Hindu tantrism assigned the principle of knowledge (*jñāna*) to the passive male pole and the dynamic principle of energy (*śakti*) to its female counterpart. The whole tantric movement may be described as 'psycho-experimental speculation'.

It is idle to look for differences between tantric and non-tantric forms of Buddhism and Hinduism, because Śākta and Mahāyāna Tantrism do not contain anything which is not already there in some non-tantric schools in both religions. What Hindu and Buddhist tantrism have in common is the methodology. Tantra is merely the psycho-experimental interpretation of non-tantric lore and is certainly more value-free than the non-tantric tradition. Psycho-experimenting implies experimenting with one's own mind in the fashion of a would-be psychoanalyst rather than that of a poet or a philosopher. Like the psychoanalysts of today the tantric teachers and their pupils form a closed group for the realization of both temporal and spiritual ends.

Another feature shared by both Śākta and Mahāyāna tantrism is the interest in magic and magic formulae (*mantra, dhāraṇī*) and the religious use of sexual symbolism in which each Buddha or Bodhisattva is provided with a female counterpart in the same way that each god has a Śakti (female counterpart) assigned to it in the Purāṇas. The use of magic, although found in the earliest Buddhism, is not treated as a part of the doctrine. But in tantric Buddhism, the repetition of meaningless syllables is a means of acquiring merit and the continuous repetition of Avalokiteśvara's name is enough to assure rebirth in heaven. The Vajrayāna Buddhists take for granted the identity of *nirvāṇa* and *samsāra* i. e., the absolute and the phenomenal modes of existence as taught and emphasized by the Madhyamikas. But, with regard to their ritualistic aspects or contemplative exercise (*sādhanas*), there are fundamental differences of the same kind as there are between the non-tantric monists or Śaivas, who profess the oneness of Shiva and Śakti, and the Hindu tantrics of the Śākta School.

The Vajrayāna Buddhists are said to have correlated their cognitional concepts of the void (*śūnyatā*), supreme quiescent wisdom (*prajñā*), non-selfhood (*nairātma*), with the connate notions--active compassion (*karuṇā*) and means or method (*upaya*).

It is commonly believed that, unlike the Hindu Vedantic philosophers who insist on a transcendent-immanent personality principle (*ātman* or *brahman*), the Buddhists deny, at least in theory, the existence of any self or super-self. In practice, however, the Vajrayāna and for that matter, all Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrines presuppose the existence of a kind of super-self or ersatz self which cannot be defined in terms of the Hindu entity-postulating terms. According to Agehananda Bharati, the Vajrayāna and the Mahāyāna arrive at their hypostasis or quasi-entity through altogether different speculative processes and accept it, not in lieu of the Hindu entity, but in spite of it. The Buddhist dialectician derives his notion of *śūnyatā* from the premise of the denial of any entity and from that of the axiom of momentariness. On the other hand, the Hindu dialectician has a self-existing god to serve as a focus for his speculations on a self, a static entity.¹

¹Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London, 1970) p. 26.

The Vajrayāna entity consists of *śūnyatā*, Buddhahood and such philosophical non-entities as the tantric deities, like the goddess Nairātmya (non-selfhood), personified in a multitude of ingeniously devised anthropomorphic forms. The proliferation of gods and goddesses, demons and demonesses does not seem to bother the Vajrayāna tantrics who regard them merely as the necessary anthropomorphic tools used to find out what is inside the word. Although the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā* and the Vedantic concept of the Brahman may appear to casual observers identical intellectual constructions, they are not so because Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, does not have any ontology or metaphysics.

According to Nepali Buddhism, Buddha, the 'enlightened', a sage of the Sākya clan (*Śākyamuni*), is the Buddha for the current aeon. In former aeons, other perfect and enlightened sages had taught the doctrine and in a future aeon Maitreya will be the Buddha. Ādi-Buddha (the primordial Buddha) embodies the principle of Buddhahood. This principle, when taken as operating throughout the cosmos, is represented as five-fold, with figures at the four cardinal points related to the central figure, which is resplendent and appears in the form of Buddha Vairocana (the Illuminator or the Brilliant). In a diagram or *maṇḍala* of these five Buddha Vairocana occupies the central place with reference to the other four representatives of Buddhahood.

The Buddha spirit, pervading the entire cosmos, is represented at the four cardinal points of the compass in these forms: Buddha Akṣobhya (The Imperturbable) in the east, Buddha Amitābha (The Infinite Light) in the west, Buddha Ratnaśambhava (The Jewel Born) in the south and Buddha Amoghasiddhi (The Unfailing Success) in the north. Each of the above five Buddhas is associated with an orientation, a cognizance, a colour, a consort (*Prajñā*), a *bodhisattva*, a spiritual heir, and even additional members of his family. Failings such as wrath, malignity, desire, envy, and stupidity are associated with each of the five Buddhas.

Idams (Sk. *iṣṭa devata*) are chosen divinities who are said to guarantee the tantric worshiper his union in Buddhahood with any one of the five Buddhas with whom his human failing is associated. Heruka implies the fierce aspect of a Buddha. Each of the five Buddhas has his Heruka aspect, and each Heruka has several forms. Through the tantric mechanism of these Heruka-Idams the human

failing is changed into the special kind of wisdom represented by the particular Buddha. This explains the fierce forms of Aṅṣobhya and the different forms of Heruka such as Hevajra and Samvara.

An acquaintance with the general concept of the Five Buddhas (*pāñca-buddha* or *pāñca-tathāgata*) is essential, not only to the understanding and appreciation of the later forms of Buddhism found in Nepal but also to the symbolism of Nepali art and sculpture. Chart 1 presents a summary view of the scheme of the Buddhas.

Sakyamuni himself is said to have accepted three of the above mentioned mortal Buddhas or Tathagatas as his predecessors: Krakuchanda, Kāśyapa and Kanakamuni. Vipaśya, Sikhi, and Viśvabhu are also mentioned in order of succession as the forerunners of Śākyamuni's predecessors. Thus, there are seven well-known Tathāgatas or Buddhas, including Gautama Buddha, but the list can be interminably drawn further back. Although these Tathāgatas or Buddhas, (with the exception of Maitreya), are without historical foundation, all of them are sometimes described as the 'historical' Buddhas merely to indicate the chronological order of their appearance on earth. As 'historical' they are in contradistinction to the Five Transcendent Buddhas who do not appear on this earth.

From the eleventh to the fourteenth century, Nepal became a testing ground for different systems of religious thought and practice imported from India. The influence of the Brahminical reformist movement, led by Śaṅkarācārya of South India, penetrated into Nepal at about the same time as the esoteric practice of Tantrism based on the earlier Śaiva and Śakta cults and on Buddhist Mahāyāna formalism. Nepal became not only a focal point where these divergent religious practices converged, but also a melting pot of different kinds of religious thought and rituals which were transmogrified into the Nepali version of Vajrayāna.

Despite the fact that Hindu and Buddhist tantras and their respective synthetic products remained separate from one another, the Vajrayāna, especially in its local manifestation, showed a remarkable capacity for assimilating most of the significant traits of religious evolution in Nepal. The notion of the thunderbolt as a phallus penetrating the void which is

Buddha	Vairocana (Brilliant)	Akṣobhya (Imperturbable)	Ratnasambhava (Jewel-born)	Amitābha (Infinite Light)	Amoghasiddhi (Unfailing Success)
Consort	Vajradhātīśvarī	Locanā	Māmakī	Panduvāsini	Tārā
Position	Centre	East	South	West	North
Colour	White	Blue	Yellow	Red	Green
Mudra (Cognizance)	Dharmacakra (Teaching)	Bhūmiśparṣa (Calling to Witness)	Varadā (Giving)	Dhyāna (Meditation)	Abhaya (Fearlessness)
Symbol	Cakra (Wheel)	Vajra	Ratna (Jewel)	Padma (Lotus)	Khadga (Sword)
Vehicle	Lion	Elephant	Horse	Peacock	Garuda
Earthly Buddha	Krakucchanda	Kanakamuni	Kaśyapa	Gautama Śākyamuni	Maitreya
Bodhisattva	Samantabhadra	Vajrapāṇi	Ratnapāṇi	Avalokiteśvara	Viśvapāṇi
Element	Space	Earth	Water	Fire	Air
Human Personality	Consciousness	Form	Feelings	Perception	Impulses
Five Aspects of Wisdom	Pure-Absolute	Mirror-like	Discriminatory	Homogenous	Active
Evil	Ignorance	Wrath	Desire	Passions	Envy

CHART 1 The Five Buddhas (*Pañcabuddha, Pañcatathāgata*)

represented by the female generative organ, and the elements of superstition and magic common to all primitive religions largely accounted for the popularity of the Vajrayāna among the masses. However, it is not certain to this day whether non-Buddhist Indian, tantric or similar ideas were responsible for the creation of the Vajrayana school, which was first introduced in Nepal and then transplanted to Tibet, or whether the left-handed (*vāma mārgī*) tantric schools owed to Buddhism the tantric notions using sexual polarity.

After duly pointing out that Buddhism was a mass religion and that it was not easy for the masses to comprehend the real philosophical significance of Prajñā, Upaya and Nirvāṇa, Benoytosh Bhattacharya presents the problem in simple terms:

The Bodhi Chitta merges in Niratma and there remains in eternal bliss (Mahasukha). The word 'Niratma,' it may be noted, is in the feminine, the Niratma is therefore a Devi, in whose embrace the Bodhi Chitta remains. The masses will understand the significance of Nairatma, and this feminine aspect -- an outcome of Mahasukha Doctrine -- in the doctrine of Nirvana gave rise to Vajrayana.²

Certain features of Vajrayāna Tantra might have some analogues in pre-Buddhist Tibet and also in the era of the pre-Aryan Paśupata cult in the Kathmandu Valley. The Vajrayāna cult, which came originally from Bengal and Bihar, in its Nepali version, served as a means of bringing together some of the features of both the Hindu Śākta and Buddhist Mahāyāna traditions as modified by local conditions. For example, notwithstanding the fact that Buddhist tantric tradition assigns a passive function to female goddesses, in the Nepali and Tibetan versions of the Vajrayāna, goddesses like Aparājita (The Invincible) and Vajravarāhī (The Adamantine Sow) who play a relatively more active role compared to traditional Mahāyāna tantric goddesses. Their role is similar to that of the Śaktis, or the dynamic female energies, in the Hindu or Śākta Tantric tradition. However, in keeping with the accepted tradition of Mahāyāna Tantrism, the Nepali and Tibetan versions of the Vajrayāna have also adopted the passive goddesses like Tārā or Locanā and have retained the traditional Mahāyāna

²Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism* (Varanasi, 1964) p. 27.

goddesses like Prajñāpāramitā ('Perfection of Wisdom') and Nairitya ('Non-self-hood').

There had always been an exchange of students and teachers between Nepal and the Buddhist universities of Bihar and Bengal. After the fall of the Pala and the Sena dynasty in Bengal, and of the Karnataka dynasty of Tirhut to the successive waves of Muslim invasion between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries, tantric teachers from Bengal and Mithila sought sanctuary in Nepal. Great teachers of Buddhism, such as Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava in the eighth century, and Atiśa in the eleventh century, came to Nepal and then went on to Tibet where they made lasting contributions to Tibetan Buddhism.

Buddhism continued to penetrate into the Kathmandu Valley through its intellectuals. Thus Nepal served as a relay-station for transmitting Buddhism across the Himalaya, and, for a long time, Nepal supplied teachers and artists to Tibet. Tibetan abbots and princes sent for Nepali artists, sculptors and craftsmen to beautify their temples with frescoes, to cast statues or to copy early Buddhist manuscripts. Tibetan monks learned Sanskrit from Nepali teachers of Buddhism and translated into their own language the masterpieces of Buddhist ritualistic literature. Nepal therefore served as a channel for southern influences to penetrate to the north. As Professor Tucci, an authority on Indo-Tibetan cultural relations says, 'Nepal brought the task of mediation between Indian and Tibetan cultures to perfection'.³

In the evolution of the religious synthesis represented by the cult of the Vajrayana there were initially clashes between upholders of the orthodox Brahminical tradition and those of Mahāyāna ritualism. The puritanic zeal with which Śāṅkarācārya's movement for Brahmanic revival was conducted led to resistance from the followers of Mahāyāna Buddhism. There is a popular legend about the massacre of seven hundred and seventy Brahmans by Buddhists. Although doubtless an exaggeration, the story offers a clue to the reactions of the indigenous followers of Buddhism to the provocation caused by the aggressive disciples of Śāṅkarācārya.

However, such religious antagonism did not last long. Brahmanic

³G. Tucci, *Nepal—The Discovery of the Malla* (London, 1962). p. 83

tradition, and the deities of ritualistic Buddhism that figured in the original Vajrayāna cult were gradually adopted and worshipped, even by the descendants of the upholders of the orthodox Brahminical faith. The disappearance of Buddhist monasteries and monastic life in Nepal, which is generally ascribed to the subsequent predominance of Hinduism, also resulted from the growth of the Vajrayana tradition which did not give to celibacy the same importance as the earlier Buddhists.

Nine books of Mahāyāna Buddhism became the canon of the Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley. They were: *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* ('The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Stanzas'), *Gandhavyūha* ('Blossom Decoration'), *Daś-abhūmisūtra* ('The Ten-Character Field'), *Samādhirājasūtra* ('The Principal Book of Concentration'), *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* ('Scripture Concerning Buddha's Entry into Lanka'), *Saddharmapundarika* ('The Lotus of the Good Law'), *Lalitavistara* ('Buddha's Boyhood'), *Suvarṇaprabāsaśūtra* ('Golden Illumination'), *Tathāgata Gūhyaka* ('Secret Doctrine of the Tathāgata'). Abstract notions of Mahāyāna Buddhism assumed concrete forms like Hindu gods and goddesses. Some of the most popular in Nepal were: *Prajñāparamitā* (Perfection of Wisdom), *Nāmasaṅgīti* (Harmony of Name), *Pañcarakṣa-Maṇḍala* (Pattern For Five-Fold Protection), and *Nairātma* (Non-Self-Hood), a fierce goddess representing The Void (*śūnyatā*).

Atiśa (Dipaṅkara Srijñāna), a famous Buddhist teacher from India, gave formal shape to Vajrayāna in the eleventh century, and by the fourteenth century it had become fully developed. Simple religious and social life, based on a trinity of Buddha, Dharma (Religion), and Saṅgha (Organization), was replaced in the casteless Buddhist society by an ecclesiastical hierarchy resembling the Hindu caste structure. In Tibet, Buddhism, under the influence of tantrism, developed into Lamaism with its belief in reincarnate Lamas and other ritualistic formalities, while in Nepal Vajrayāna became more and more associated with the Brahminical traditions.

Tantrism is based on texts called Tantra, works of revelation. It prescribes rites by which Knowledge of the Self (*ātmaññāna*) or Buddhahood (Enlightenment) can be attained. Tantrism influenced Hinduism and Buddhism through the introduction of an esoteric system of rites. Hinduism, as influenced by Tantrism, took the form of ritualistic worship of Śakti as a symbol of dynamic female energy. Thus, the pre-Aryan elements of Hinduism, such as the worship

of the Linga or the Phallus and the adoration of the female generative organ as a symbol of the cosmic mother, were absorbed by Tantrism.

The cult of the Linga was so prevalent in the religious symbiosis achieved in Nepal that even Buddhism could not escape its influence. The Yoni, or the female sex-organ, became the symbol of the cosmic waters, representing the turbulent movement of the infinite possibilities of being, whereas the Linga represented emergence from this turbulence of the lotus which symbolized the ordered life with its culmination in spiritual serenity. Vajrayana, which was derived from the *mahāsukha* doctrine and sought to sublimate sensuous or even sensual enjoyment, merely presented the same principle in another form, when it regarded the Vajra or thunderbolt as the means of penetrating the void or *śūnyatā* in the process of securing release from the bond of worldly enjoyment in order to attain *nirvāṇa* (desirelessness).

The ultimate objective of those initiated into the practice of tantric rites was to merge the individual self into the universal or divine self, that is, to become one with god. It symbolized the union of the male and the female cosmic principles, Puruṣa and Śakti, manifesting themselves in the creation of the world (*līla*). The union also evoked a sense of divine unity by underlining the sexual dualism of the deity as exemplified by the concept of a half-man and half-woman image (*ardhanārīśvara*). The images of many tantric divinities, such as those known to the Tibetans and the Chinese as Yab-Yum (Father-Mother) and Yang-Yin (Active Male and Female Principles) respectively, are similar to what the Śaiva schools define as Śaiva-Śakti. All of them symbolize, in different forms, the union of man with the supreme principle of being.

This conception of oneness is not confined to Nepali and Tibetan Buddhism, but is familiar also to the philosophical tradition enshrined in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣadas. In the Purāṇas also, each god has a Śakti assigned to him. Principal among the Śaktis is Pārvatī, the consort of Shiva. She is widely worshipped in the form of Kālī or Dūrgā as a Mother Goddess. Pictures of Umā-Maheśvara show the god Shiva in the company of his Śakti, Umā (Pārvatī).

Buddhism, in spite of its essentially moralistic doctrine, developed into the ritualistic cult of the union of *upaya* (means or method) with the female principle, *prajñā* (gnosis or quiescent wisdom) under tantric influence. The

conception of Idam Samvara or Hevajra, commonly reproduced in Nepali bronzes and paintings, visualizes the Heruka or fierce aspect of Buddha in union with his female partner, Vajravarāhī, the cosmic mother, in the form of the Adamantine Sow. It is with a mixed feeling of love and fear that the illiterate masses of the people worship the cosmic mother, who is represented in various mild and terrible forms in the temples of Nepal. This cosmic mother in various manifestations characterized by postures or symbols, joyous or horrendous, provides profound insights to keen observers and devotees of 'becoming', which works through the dialectic of birth and death, procreation and elimination, these two phases being inextricably bound up with each other, even in the realm of *maya* or the perpetual state of flux, through the magical operation of the Śakti, producing the supreme synthesis of eros or *kāma* and thanatos, the shadow of death.

Tantrism, at its best, preached that like *yoga* or spiritual discipline, the path of *bhoga*, or sexual enjoyment, could also lead to the union of 'substance' with 'essence' or the identification of the *ātma* with Brahma. The sexual symbolism employed for the interpretation of tantric philosophy or for the explanation of the various stages of divine epiphany contemplated therein were not intelligible to the non-initiates. The *pañcamakāras* or 'five words beginning with the letter "m"' (*madya* wine, *matsya* fish, *māṃsa* meat, *mudrā* parched kidney bean, *maithuna* copulation) have two meanings: the literal and the esoteric. For example, *māṃsa* could mean flesh or religious formula, *matsya* fish or senses, *madya*, wine or nectar, *mudrā* an aphrodisiac or the refulgent lotus which in the practice of *yoga*, glows like a dazzling flame on top of the head, and finally *maithuna* coitus or the consummation of *yoga*, i.e. the attainment of supreme wisdom. As the number of initiates decreased, the tantric insistence on the *makāras* was misunderstood, notwithstanding the repeated warnings of the masters of tantra that the books of tantra were secret and meant only for those who were properly initiated by qualified masters.

It was not only the lack of proper interpretation that could be held responsible for the decline of tantrism. A woman, or especially a virgin, was at first exalted to the position of a living goddess by making her an object of solemn meditation. But in due course, this resulted in the recommendation for copulation in the *mandala* or psychocosmogram with a view to giving the initiate an actual experience of transcending the level of worldly pain and pleasure and experiencing a state of happiness or ecstasy even though for a few moments.

The idea, however, was to enable the initiate to attain, by gradual stages, a permanent state of bliss, the first experience of which he had already acquired from sexual union with the object of his meditation. This might have sublimated the sexual practice and symbolism by placing it on the same level as the process of 'transference' or 'transfiguration' in religious or yogic contemplation. Unfortunately, it also led to the wide prevalence of deviant forms of sexual practice.

Not all tantras or all sections of the tantric texts served merely as a guide to salvation. They contained chapters on magic and discussed ways of dominating the world, by the restoration of peace and the destruction of enemies, the warding off of dangers, the performance of terrible deeds, the submission of another person's will (especially a woman's) to one's own. Certain tantras contained chapters on medicine along with those which gave prescriptions for aphrodisiacs and pills intended for delaying ejaculation. Tantric rites, in the hands of unscrupulous practitioners degenerated into a form of sorcery and were practised to appease evil spirits. This led to the subsequent decline of tantrism. However, the Vajrayāna cult, which combined the mystic and devotional features of Shaivism and Vaishnavism with the primitive elements of magic, superstition, and sensuous enjoyment, easily captivated the minds of the common people for a long time.

It cannot be stated definitely when tantrism was developed or when it entered Nepal, but it had appeared there in an embryonic stage as early as the seventh and eighth centuries. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries untouchables like Poṛes were admitted, as votaries and caretakers, into the temples of the goddesses on the banks of the cremation rivers and lonely places, thus allowing them the right of participation in the worship of the cosmic mother for their salvation. Kathmandu's eight Kālikās, Bhadgaun's eight Mātrkas and Patan's eight Kumārīs date back to the sixteenth century, and by this time many new gods and goddesses had come into existence under the impact of tantrism.

A large variety of gods and goddesses, saints and *siddhas* from both Buddhist and Hindu pantheons were introduced into Nepal and were absorbed into the Vajrayāna cult as it gradually attained its full development. In addition to the Five Buddhas of the Mahāyāna pantheon, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Virudhaka, Virupākṣa, and Vaiśravaṇa became the guardians of the four quarters (*catur mahārāja*), and the ten guardians of the directions (*daśalokapāla*) were Indra,

Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera, Isāna, Agni, Nairṭya, Vāyu, Brahma and Krishna. The eighty-four Vajrayāna siddhas known in Tibet were also known in Nepal but eight of them became quite popular: Luipā, Nāgārjuna, Virūpā, Kukuripā, Karnaripā, Ghantapā, Naropā, and Sabaripā. They were pictured with meditative postures slightly different from those of the Tibetan siddhas of the same time.

The worship of goddesses of all kinds came into vogue in medieval Nepal under the influence of tantrism. Pārvatī, consort of Shiva, began to be worshipped in many manifestations. The so called *aṣṭamātrka* group of eight goddesses associated with certain failings were Brahmayānī (Arrogance), Kumārī (Chimera), Rudrayānī, Vaiṣṇavī (Greed), Varāhī (Envy), Indrayānī (Fault-finding with Evil Design), Chamuṇḍā (Eavesdropping) and Mahālakṣmī (Wealth and Prosperity) with other variations of eight names such as Dūrgā, Brahmānī, Kumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Maheśvarī, Varāhī and Narasiṃhī. Pārvatī became Tārā in the Buddhist cult of Vajrayāna. The goddesses common to both Śākta and Buddhist tantras are Vajravārāhī, Vajrayoginī or Ugratārā, Vijayeśvarī, Vidyadhari, Dakṣinakālī, Chinnaṃastikā, Chandeśvarī, Gūhyeśvarī, Sobhābhagavati, Annapurṇa, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvati.

Among the female deities of local origin may be mentioned Lumāḍī (Bhadrakālī), Mahipī (Maheśvarī), Maitidevī, Kāṅga Ajimā (Kankeśvarī), Lutumārī (Indrayānī), Manthalidevī (Martyeśvarī). All of them are connected with the ancient cult of the mother-goddess or the cosmic mother, notwithstanding later attempts to identify them with the Śākta goddesses. Of the local deities, special mention must be made of Hāriti Ajimā and Māpatadeva (Ākāśadevī) as both of them were said to have been fond of killing children for their food until their own children were carried away by Buddha or Visnu to teach them the lesson that other children are as dear to their parents as their own children are to these two goddesses. They eventually received their children back with the understanding that they would leave other people's children unharmed. This Hāriti-Ajimā, or Śitalā, is the popular goddess of small-pox who is shown as a deity who 'rides on a donkey, has such emblems as a sweeping broom and a pitcher, and is adorned with a winnowing fan on her head.' Naradevī, Raktakālī, Maṇi Maiju, Chandeśvarī (of Tokha and Baṅepa), Rudrayānī of Khokana and Harisiddhi (Ajimādevata) were important centers for tantric rites where at one time, it is said, human sacrifices were made.

The cult of Taleju or, Māneśvari, the tutelary goddess of the later Mallas, reached its full development in the fourteenth century. During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries Jhañkeśvari, Rājarājeśvari, and Kubjikā were worshipped by the feudal chiefs of Pharping as their tutelary goddesses. The legend 'Lokanātha' is embossed on the coins of the Patan kings. Lokanātha (Padmapāni Lokeśvara) is identified with Matsyendranātha, and Taleju with Śaiva Dūrgā and the Buddhist Tārā. The temple of Budhanilakantha is dedicated to Vishnu as are the four famous Narayana temples of Changu, Ichangu, Sikhara, and Visankhu.

The people of medieval Nepal lived in mortal fear of a myriad of demons and deities, ogres and ogresses, supernatural beings and godly creatures, ghosts and evil spirits against whom they needed constant protection from superior gods and goddesses, who, in their turn, were supposed to be appeased and propitiated much in the same way as ordinary human beings. To those who lived in medieval times the external world was entirely peopled with ghostly beings, airy nothings, shapeless and bodiless apparitions that were largely the creation of their imaginations. Among these creatures of fantasy, the malignant and evil ones easily outnumbered the benevolent and the good. As a means of appeasing the malignant spirits and gaining the blessings of the benevolent ones, magic, incantation and esoteric rites had a great attraction for the simple-minded people living in an atmosphere surcharged with a feeling of blind faith and superstition.

The introduction of numerous rites and the proliferation of gods and goddesses diluted the philosophical and mystical elements of both Buddhism and Brahmanism. Both these religions began to be treated merely as guides to the performance of religious rites to propitiate gods and goddesses with the object of attaining happiness both in this life and the next. This led the people to conceive of gods as human beings with human weaknesses such as malice, wrath, envy and greed. The tantras claimed to provide the mechanism for the transformation of those apparent human failings on the part of gods into real blessings for the initiates. Had it not been for the Vajrayāna impact on Buddhism, the latter would have been swept away by the rising tide of Brahmanism in Nepal and Bengal as in the rest of the Indo-Gangetic plains. The influence of Vajrayāna practices can be felt not only on the evolution of religious culture but also on art, architecture, and learning during the period.

The later Śaiva or Hindu predominance merely consolidated the process which Vajrayāna had set in motion.

According to Percival Landon, three factors played an important role in the making of the Nepali pantheon. He states,

The Nepalese pantheon contains three elements: firstly, aboriginal deities such as the Nagas and the other nature spirits; definitely Buddhist deities or Bodhisattvas of whom Manjusri receives the most honour; and thirdly, Hindu deities such as Ganesh or Krishna. The popular deity Machhendranata or Matsyendranata, appears to combine all these elements in his own person.⁴

Matsyendranātha who is identified with Avalokiteśvara or Padmapāni Lokeśvara, the spiritual heir of the Buddha Amitābha has become a legendary figure in Nepali religious life. The legend has it that he redeemed the parched valley after a long period of drought by making Gorkhanātha rise from his seat of Nāgas (serpents) to give the valley the much sought-after rain. According to the Buddhist accounts, the gods of the Hindu pantheon showered praise on Avalokiteśvara for performing this remarkable feat, whereas the Hindu version, while admitting that Matsyendranātha was the tutor of Gorkhanātha makes the latter the central figure of the legend. The cart festival of Matsyendranātha is attended by both Hindus and Buddhists with equal reverence and enthusiasm.

Although, as we have seen the fierce manifestations of Buddha are depicted trampling on the Hindu gods, Brahma, Indra, Vishnu, and Shiva as Evil ones (*māras*) no hostile feeling is in evidence between the tantric Buddhists and the Hindus, probably because the latter have accepted Buddha himself as one of the ten incarnations of the Hindu god. Percival Landon has rightly pointed out that 'of odium theologicum there is little in Nepal because any differences between these two interwoven faiths would more probably be caused by a political than a religious issue.'⁵

⁴Percival Landon, *Nepal* (London, 1928), II p. 216.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 218.

Medieval Art and Architecture

Religion has always provided Nepali art and architecture with inspiration and motifs. However, this is not to minimize the quality of Nepali artistic sensibility. Percy Brown has made the following observation on the artistic achievement of the Nepalis:

The temples and public buildings reveal such a wealth of fine and applied art that it is clear that the inhabitants of the valley from a very early period possessed a keen appreciation of the aesthetic. This admirable trait in the Newar national character appears to have been instinctive, while at the same time both their rulers (the Mallas and the Shahs) seem to have fostered and encouraged this feeling for art to its fullest extent. The result of this favourable combination of circumstances is that Nepal may claim to have critically developed a distinctive art of its own, in other words, a Nepalese school of art.⁶

Recent expeditions into remote Nepal, close to the Tibetan border, have led to the discovery of architectural relics and monuments. Their styles do not seem to differ in the main from those in the Kathmandu Valley, which has been the epicentre of Nepali art and architecture. The creative genius of Newari artists and artisans in various fields has earned for Nepali schools a place of respect and renown in the history of Asian art. During the past half century archaeological surveys and excavations have uncovered the pre-Ashokan ruins of Kapilavastu in the mid-western tarai, near Rupandehi and Tilaurakot. Similarly, ruins of the old Kingdom of Simraungarh have been discovered in the central tarai. It is clear that Nepali architectural styles have influenced several other Asian countries including China, India and Burma.

Nepal offers two main styles in architecture: the *caitya* style and the so-called pagoda, or multi-roofed style. The oldest structures in the Kathmandu Valley are specimens of the *caitya* style. Examples of these are the *stūpas* found in the town of Lalitpur, two or three miles to the south of Kathmandu. There were five *stūpas*, four at the cardinal points outside the city and one, no longer

⁶Percy Brown *Picturesque Nepal* (London, 1928), p.152-53.

extant, at its centre. These are plain, dome-like structures of earth and brick on a plinth built of the same materials and are devoid of any decoration or ornamentation except for a chapel on the top.

The chapel is said to have been dedicated to Vairocana, one of the five Buddhas, and the chapels at the four cardinal points of the compass are dedicated to the four other forms of Buddha: Akṣobhya, Amitābha, Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi. The one at the centre stands on a base made of stone and has a summit consisting of a cube-shaped canopy formed of semi-circular rings or arches which hold and sustain a parasol on a tripod of metal.

Two of the best known *stūpas* in the Kathmandu Valley are those of Swayambhu and Bauddhanath, which are situated at the western and north-eastern outskirts of Kathmandu respectively. According to the *Gopālarājavamsāvalī* Swayambhu was founded by King Vṛṣadeva, the great-grandfather of King Mānadeva, about the beginning of the fifth century. A damaged stone inscription discovered in the grounds at Swayambhu seems to confirm this. Because of its antiquity all kinds of religious myths and legends have grown up around it. Like Devapatan in the vicinity of the famous Pashupatinath temple, the Swayambhu area has been an important centre of cultural activities for a period of about sixteen hundred years.

While the Swayambhu *stūpa* may have had its origin as a standard Mahāyāna Buddhist shrine, it gradually acquired many features of tantric Buddhism and has grown into a place of worship for Nepali Hindus as well. Located on a hillock, Swayambhu has within its holy precincts quite a number of *caityas*, multi-roofed temples and other shrines. According to legend the hillock was once marked by an eternally burning and self-existent flame (*svayambhu*). In a later age the *stūpa* was built over the eternal flame as a permanent monument. To the northwest of the *stūpa* is the shrine of Hārīti-Ajimā, the protectress against smallpox. Though Hārīti is of Buddhist origin, the image is worshipped by Hindus alike who refer to her either by the generic name of Ajimā ('Grandmother') or the Hindu name Śītalā. A large number of lingams or phallic emblems scattered around the area are either covered as *caityas* or have the faces of the four Buddhas carved on them. The copper thunderbolt (*vajra*), placed at the top of the stairs to the east overlooking the valley, and the two white *śikhara* temples on either side of it are tantric in inspiration and were erected by King Pratāpa Malla

of Kathmandu. On a secondary hillock to the west of the Swayambhu *stūpa* stands a shrine to Mañjuśrī. The shrine consists of a *stūpa* with the western side enlarged to house an image of Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara. In front of this image are a pair of feet which represent Mañjuśrī. The shrine is frequented by large numbers of both Buddhists and Hindus, who worship not Mañjuśrī but Sarasvati. These two are constantly conflated in the Valley and this is one of the few instances where Hinduism and Buddhism get thoroughly mixed. This is understandable, as Mañjuśrī and Sarasvati are both deities of learning or wisdom. Later tantric texts tried to reconcile the two by saying that Sarasvati is the wife of Mañjuśrī.

The Bauddhanath *stūpa*, sometimes called the Khāsa Caitya, is more distinctively Tibetan in character and surrounding. It is mentioned in the *Gopālarājavamsāvalī* which attributes its foundation to King Śivadeva (c. A.D. 590-604), though another chronicle attributes it to King Mānadeva (A.D. 464-505). However, available historical records at the site go back only to medieval times. The present distinctly Tibetan character of the shrine dates to this period when it became a shrine of people of Tibetan culture who then renovated and expanded the shrine. Perhaps by that time it had been abandoned by the Newar Buddhists who now have no ritual connections with the shrine.

Both the Swayambhu and the Bauddhanath *stūpas* are surrounded on all sides by houses which are inhabited, not by the monks as in former times, but mostly by the laity. Despite their claims to a much earlier origin, those *stūpas* do not appear to be as old as the *stūpas* at Lalitpur, most probably a result of successive renovations which were more in keeping with the Tibetan than the Nepali tradition in architecture.

Miniature *stūpas* are often called *caityas* in Nepal, though the two Sanskrit terms have the same meaning. These *caityas* are of the same design and execution as the larger monuments. The site of a *caitya* is often called 'Ci-bāhā' today, a term derived from a shortening of the Sanskrit term *caitya-bhattāraka* ('revered *caitya*'). The Dhanadeu Caitya at Chabel (a large monument despite its name) and the numerous small *caityas* and images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas surrounding it are remarkable for their antiquity and also for their artistic design which is of the highest order. The Dhanadeu Caitya is said to have been founded by King Dharmadeva, the father of Mānadeva. The still current name of Dhanadeo is a corruption of his name, and the name is attested to by a number

of still extant inscriptions at the site which refer to the monastery which existed there as the Dharmadeva-Caitya Vihāra. The exquisite image of the Buddha to the side of the caitya is estimated to be of the fifth century and the small *caityas* have been accurately dated to the seventh century.

While *stūpas* are also found in India and the *stūpas* at Patan bear a striking resemblance to the one at Sanchi in India, the multi-roofed, or so called pagoda style, temple architecture has come to be recognized as quintessentially Nepali. Recent study and research, however, has shown both the antiquity of this style and its dependence on Indian art. The multi-roofed style of temple, typified by the Pashupati temple, shows a number of unique features which were established some time before A.D. 400 and have been carried on faithfully since that time. These features all derive from north India and the typical brick structure of the Nepalese temple with its forward sloping roofs derives entirely from the art of the Kusana period in India. Some features from the later Gupta period were subsequently incorporated, but the basic structure has remained the same. Later developments in India added a few incidental features, but after the Muslim invasions of the 13th century inspiration from north India ceased and the style was handed on to the builders of the Malla period unchanged as it has remained to the present day.⁷

Some authorities have argued that the Nepali multi-roofed style of temple antedates the development of the pagoda style of architecture in China. Sylvain Levi was of the opinion that the earliest specimens of the pagoda style now extant in Nepal are much earlier than the oldest known pagodas in China. This can hardly be held any longer, as the oldest extant temples of the Valley date to the 13th century. The fact that Wang Hsuan Tse, a seventh-century emissary to Nepal, expressed his astonishment at the sight of the pagoda-like structures in Nepal seems to have led Levi to conclude that this style was unknown in China at the time.

King Bhūpatindra Malla (c. 1696-1722) of Bhadgaun will forever be remembered for the 'five-roofed' or Nyātapola, temple which he built in Bhadgaun and dedicated to the goddess Bhavānī. This temple is a typical example of Nepali temple architecture. This type of structure has roofs in tiers and may have

⁷See Ulrich Wiesner, *Nepalese Temple Architecture, Its Characteristics and Its Relations to Indian Development* (Leiden, 1978), p. 106-9.

as many as six stories. The base is a terraced platform of stones which has as many stages or folds as there are stories. The Nyātapola temple has a five-fold base of rectangular terraces with a steep stone-paved stairway watched over by five conventional pairs of men, elephants, lions and two other kinds of deities. At the top, a square chamber enclosed by a colonnade of wooden poles and pillars sustains the lowest and the heaviest roof. The floor of each of these stories (surmounting one another) is a square entablature of brick which goes on diminishing in size and area until the structure reaches the fifth or the uppermost roof with a gold finial atop. The topmost roof is of gilded copper. Each of the roofs is sustained by struts projecting at an angle of about forty-five degrees from the entablature which rests for support on the pillars of the lower storey. Both the graceful carvings in relief or in the round and the vigorous sculptures that decorate the struts are characteristic of Nepali architecture in general. As a matter of fact, the Nyātapola temple is not as beautifully carved as the Changunarayana temple or even some of the other temples. The temple of Changunarayana, to the north of Thimi, and the Matsyendranātha temple in Lalitpur may also be cited as typical examples of this style of temple architecture.

The well-known Hindu temple of Pashupati is perhaps the most typical of the Nepalese temples. Although the image and temple of Pashupatinath, the guardian deity of Nepal, are known for their great antiquity and are said to have existed before 533 A. D., they have not always existed in their present form. They were damaged and destroyed by Shamsu-din Ilyas, who invaded the Kathmandu Valley in 1349 A.D. According to the available stone-inscriptions, the temple of Pashupatinath was reconstructed in 1381 by Jayasimharāma Varddhana, the leading feudatory of Banepa, during the time of Jayasthiti Malla. Further renovations took place in the late Malla period, and the temple was last extensively renovated in 1967.

There is no dearth of references in religious literature to Gūhyeśvarī, the most esteemed and the holiest of the goddesses of the *śākta* tradition, and this can be cited as proof of her antiquity and holiness. However, the first historical record available at the site of the temple of Gūhyeśvarī is the stone-inscription of King Pratāpa Malla of Kathmandu, dated A.D. 1660. This inscription mentions a few donations made by him. A statue of King Pratāpa Malla stands to this day by the side of the temple.

The temples of Taleju, the tutelary goddess of the Malla rulers of the medieval period, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, are also done in the typical Nepalese style. An image and temple of Taleju was first established at Bhadgaun in the early fourteenth century. King Ratna Malla and King Siddhinarasimha Malla are also said to have set up temples of Taleju in the vicinity of the royal palaces at Kathmandu and Patan respectively. King Mahendra Malla of Kathmandu is credited with building the present temple of Taleju at Kathmandu. The three Taleju temples differ in plan and size, but the Kathmandu temple is the most impressive of all. The Patan temple is characterised by simplicity and elegance whereas the one at Bhadgaun is an unadorned structure built like an ordinary house. The Bhadgaun temple has two separate sanctums of the goddess in the Taleju quadrangle inside the Bhadgaun Royal Palace.

Nepali architectural ornamentation is rich and varied. Cornices crowning windows and doors, lintels and sills, beams, struts and brackets supporting roof projections and eaves overhanging the walls of the structure are decorated with either floral arabesques or with images of deities. The windows, which are more or less of a square shape, are screened with a finely wrought frame of trellis and appear to be slightly slanted. An architrave, covered with images of deities in bold relief, adorns the doorway which has a gilded copper finial (*kalaśa*) at the centre. The golden door of the Bhadgaun palace and the doorway of the Changunarayana temple are the finest specimens of this kind of work. The entire inside of this temple is also exquisitely decorated with fine specimens of wood carving. Besides the temples, quite a number of old palaces and houses in the Kathmandu Valley are done in the typical style of architecture.

The traditional houses, usually built of plain red brick, are not as high as the temples. But even the houses have seldom less than three stories and usually display a profusion of wooden struts, pillars, eaves, arches and spandrels providing a wide scope for the use of Newari talents in wood-carving. However, during the past century there has been a growing tendency to ignore traditional Nepali architectural styles in the construction of both religious and residential buildings. The Rana palaces show no evidence of the traditional Nepali style of architecture, but are entirely subject to western influences; and much new housing built in the last four decades also ignores indigenous styles.

The squares in front of the old royal palaces in every one of the three cities

in the Kathmandu Valley were planned and laid out with great artistic skill. These squares have excited the admiration of many a foreign visitor. Impressed by the beauty and antiquity of the Darbar (palace) Square in Bhadgaun E. Alexander Powell, a globe-trotting western visitor, pays glowing tribute to it in the following words:

The golden temples of Siam, the pagodas of the summer palace in Peking, the sculpture-crowded terraces of Boroboedor, the grotesque structures which line the bank of the Ganges at Benares, Samarkand's wealth of colours, the carvings at Angkor, the torii of the Shinto sanctuaries in Japan--Bhatgaon holds vague suggestions of them all without actually resembling any of them. I who have seen all, or nearly all, the famous cities and buildings of the world, give you my word that were there nothing else in Nepal save the Durbar Square of Bhatgaon it would still be amply worth making a journey half-way round the globe to see. . . . From the standpoint of the architect and the artist, Bhatgaon is a cave of Aladdin. It is a jumble of architectural fantasies, a vast storehouse of the treasures of Newar art. In the Durbar Square alone are enough carvings and statues to fill a score of great museums to overflowing. For here, in this forgotten valley, artist-priests and mastercraftsmen have been at work unceasingly for generations beyond reckoning. Here the architectures of two great religions meet and mingle. Here have been concentrated the artistic energies of a nation. Here is to be found a living fragment of India as it must have been in those glowing, glorious, far-off days before the Moslem came.⁸

The squares in front of the old royal palaces at Lalitpur and Kathmandu are also equally impressive and beautiful. Apart from the architectural magnificence of the palaces themselves, the squares present a colourful array of temples, shrines, images, and idols, sculptured pillars and statuaries, royal baths and fountains all of which enhance the special charm and beauty of the general spectacle.

⁸E. Alexander Powell, *The Last Home of Mystery* (New York, 1929), p. 216-17; p. 218-19.

Sculpture

Nepali sculpture in the early medieval period was influenced by both South Indian and Eastern Indian traditions. The Sena rulers originally belonged to the Deccan. Nānyadeva came from Karnataka, in the same region, and conquered a portion of North Bihar at the edge of the Nepal foothills. Some stone images of the Sena school, which had acquired the ornate features of contemporary Kanarese sculpture, were brought to Nepal by Nānyadeva and his successors. Again, during the twelfth century, the Muslim conquest of Bengal led to an exodus of refugee artists to Nepal from there. It was then that the Eastern Indian tradition was subtly reinterpreted in Nepal.

Under the early Mallas (1200-1481), Nepali art, architecture and sculpture reached its climax in the thirteenth century and A-ni-ko carried the art of Nepal to Tibet and China. The image of the sun-god below the Thapahiti Fountain at Patan and the image of Garuda in front of the 'five roofed' or Nyātapola temple at Bhadgaun may be mentioned as examples of Nepal's stone sculpture in the 11th and 12th centuries respectively. The stone image of Gaurī at Devapatan, which belongs to the early thirteenth century, is also especially noteworthy. According to an inscription on its pedestal, this image of Gaurī emerging out of the lotus was erected to commemorate the death of a full-grown girl. Apart from its artistic qualities, it is one of the few early images that mention the name of the sculptor, one Nandapāla. There is an image of the sun-god at Banepa, dated A.D. 1393. It belongs to the period of the feudatory chief Madanarāma Varddhana (1382-1395) and is another example of the very few Nepali works of art which mention the name of the artist themselves. The sculptors of this image mentioned were Rājamūlami and Jayatāmūlami. The Banepa image of the sun-god, with a lotus in full bloom in both hands, riding on a chariot drawn by seven horses is remarkable from the viewpoint of the evolution of Nepali sculpture and foreshadows the developments in this field to the end of the Malla period. The images of various gods and goddesses, and specially those of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara and those of Vishnu, sculpted during the medieval period, are heavy in their physical build and are characterized by rotundity. The design of the image and of the setting and ornaments has also become more ornate and florid compared to those of the earlier period which are simpler in concept. However, the above-mentioned image of the sun-god may be cited as a remarkable example of medieval stone sculpture which from this time on seems to suffer a gradual decline.

By the sixteenth century, the Mallas had established themselves in power in the three Kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley. It was during the last phase of Newari creative art that a myriad of anthropomorphic representations of tantric concepts used in contemplative exercises (*sādhana*) found expression in images of frenzied grandeur.

As a matter of fact after the tenth century, stone-sculptures in Nepal were inferior to the bronzes, while metal images, both cast and repousse, retained their quality until the end of the sixteenth century, and, in some cases, carried it on into the nineteenth century. The only stone sculpture which deserves mention after the 10th century is the image of Surya (1065) at Thapahiti in Patan. The finest creative artists of the later period were workers in metal and wood. The different phases of the woodcarver's art have not as yet been categorized nor have those of the workers in rock crystal, ivory, human bones, and dry lacquer.

The fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries abounded in new creations typical of the evolving style of metal work. With an unbounded zeal, the tantric images were cast from the mid-fifteenth to the eighteenth century. The principle of the *unio mystica* finds expression in the sexual embrace of male and female figures. The male figure symbolises the active compassion (*karuṇā*) or the means or method (*upaya*) and the female figure represents supreme quiescent wisdom or gnosis (*prajñā*), or the void (*sūnyatā*), the symbol of the absolute. Buddha, in his human form, penetrates *prajñā* and seeks confirmation of his Buddhahood. The male is the means and the female is the end, and together they symbolize the realization of the absolute. The fierce form of Buddha Heruka, in union with his partner, the Adamantine-Sow (*Vajravarāhī*) is called Hevajra. The twelve armed, four-headed deity with his normal-handed *Prajñā* clasping his waist in passionate sexual embrace is the Herukacakra Saṃvara of Nepal, the Yidam Sang-*dui* of Tibet. While dancing in union with his partner, this fierce human manifestation of Buddha tramples on the Hindu gods Brahma, Indra, Vishnu and Shiva as *māras* (evil ones).

The *sādhana*, or injunction for contemplation, and the making of these images, had originated in India centuries earlier as part of the rituals connected with the practice of the Vajra and Sahaja cult. Dr. Stella Kramrisch has pointed out that

in the fifteenth to the eighteenth century in Nepal, those ancient symbols became quickened not with new meaning but with new life, and the ability arose to project into the sanctioned forms an emotional immediacy amounting to frenzy, whether in the experience of the tremendous or the horrendous⁹

There was a time when the Nepali school of metal statuary was regarded merely as a sub-branch of the Tibetan school with which the western scholars and critics had become familiar at an earlier date. Sometimes the Nepali and Tibetan schools were even grouped together as the Tibeto-Nepalese school. However, there is no such confusion now and the prevailing opinion is that Nepal, rather than Tibet, was the prime inspiration in the field. The following comments of Ananda Coomaraswamy, the editor of the Indian art magazine *Rupam* on this point are highly appropriate:

We have more than once commented on the fact that out and out Nepalese images are labelled and described in many museums as Tibetan works, and the whole relation of Tibetan art to Nepalese art has been misunderstood or deliberately ignored. The Lamaistic school was the result of a direct pupilage to the Nepalese tutors; and although it developed many special features, the groundwork of the Nepalese style was always a staple part of the Tibetan work. Evidences are now pointing to the fact that many Nepalese images must have been made to order for the use of Tibetan worshippers.¹⁰

Nepali brassware i.e., incense burners, candelabras, vases, and religious and secular vessels of other types are admired both for their practical utility and their high aesthetic quality. Newari artisans have attained a high level of excellence in the field of metal statuary. In this sphere, they have exercised a remarkable influence on the art of the whole Indian sub-continent. Commenting on the importance of the Nepali school in the history of Indian art, one authority states that the former continued the best tradition of Indian sculpture at a time when

⁹ Stella Kramrisch p. 42.

¹⁰ Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'A Tibeto-Nepalese Image of Maitreya,' *Rupam*, No. 11 (July, 1922), p. 73.

Indian art, in India itself, was in a state of decline. Another writer comments that the better specimens of Nepali metal statuary of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have proven to be the most representative and exceptional masterpieces of Indian art.

Although early Nepali metal statuary also possessed considerable aesthetic quality, it was only during the period between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries that this form of artistic expression reached its zenith in Nepal. Ananda Coomaraswamy has succinctly summed up the history of the evolution of Nepali metal image-casting in the following words:

On the whole, we may say that Nepalese art has remained throughout decidedly more conservative than that of the plains, a natural consequence of isolation. In the older Nepalese figures, the Indian character is altogether predominant, and there is no suggestion whatever of anything Mongolian; they recall the work of the Gupta period and are, perhaps, as near as we can hope to get to examples of Taranath's 'school of the east' and they cannot be wholly unrelated to works of the Bengali school of Dhiman and Bitapala. They are characterized by a very full modelling of the flesh and almost florid features; the bridge of the nose is markedly rounded and the lips full. On the other hand, those of a later date, and up to modern times, are no longer so robust and fleshy, but svelte and slender-waisted and more sharply contoured: the nose becomes aquiline, some times even hooked, the lips clear-cut and thin, thus the development involves an attenuation and refinement of the forms: at the same time iconographically, the forms are often much more complicated and the ornament richer.¹¹

Painting

A wide range of religious and social considerations seems to have inspired Nepali paintings. Pictures were painted to celebrate the occasion of the attainment of a ripe old age of seventy-seven years (*uṣṇiṣa-vijayotsava*);

¹¹Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'A Nepalese Tara,' *Rupam*, No. (April 1921), p. 1.

to comfort the souls that had already departed to heaven; to commemorate participation in ceremonies characterized by the performance of fasts and fire sacrifices; to visualize tantric concepts for meditative purposes (*sādhana*); to introduce books; to bring good luck to patrons and to popularize the religious stories of the Buddhist Jātaka Tales or Avādhana Stories and the Hindu Purāṇas.

The earliest specimens of Nepali painting which have been discovered so far are illustrations on palmleaf manuscripts of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries and the pictures on the wooden book covers that date back to the tenth century. There is a thousand-year-old picture on the wooden covers of a book called *Prajñāpāramitā* that dates from about A.D. 920. The pictures of the five Buddhas and four Savioreesses are drawn on the top wooden cover. On the bottom cover are pictures of tantric deities such as *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom), *Vajrasattva* (Diamond-Being) and the divine ladies taking part in worship with flowers, conches, and lamps. A picture of *Shiva-Pārvatī* encircled by other gods and goddesses on the wooden covers of the book called *Nisvasa Tantra*, dated A.D. 1060, is in keeping with the *Śākta* tantric tradition. As an example of the Vaishnava tradition in painting we may cite wooden book covers depicting Vishnu holding in his four hands a conch, a wheel, a club, and a lotus. The representations are eleven in number and severally enclosed by arch gates (*torāṇa*). These pictures go back to the rule of Abhaya Malla in the thirteenth century. Pictures of *Mañjuśrī* and *Mahāmañjuśrī*, contained in a book called *Aṣṭasahasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā*, dating from the twelfth century, and pictures of five Buddhas and their *Prajñās* (female counterparts), five Savioreesses (*Tārās*) each of them beautifully painted on a separate page in a book of palmleaves, dating from the thirteenth century and preserved in the Bhaktapur picture gallery, are outstanding examples of this art form.

The above pictures are strongly influenced by the Pala form of Eastern Indian painting. All Nepali paintings, whether on palmleaf, paper, wood or cloth are in gouache, that is to say, they are painted in opaque colours which have been ground in water and mingled with a preparation of gum. The Nepali painter is not primarily interested in modelling by colour, shading and line, and even when he is interested in doing so, he is not too successful.

Gradually, the meticulous forms of miniature painting, with or without modelling, gave way to the more schematic, or to state the truth, rather sketchy,

cursive outlines. This technique was suited to cope with the demand for paintings by the Gelugpa Sect which was founded in Tibet by Tsong Khapa (c. 1357-1409). Nepali artists were sent for to paint in the Nor monastery in southern Tibet, and the influence of A-ni-ko and his party of eighty Nepali artists still seemed to prevail there. Hierarchs of the Sakya school were painted by them on cloth. Those Nepali artists had several religious paintings to their credit.

Apart from miniature painting one finds larger paintings known as *pauva* or *paubhā* in Newari. Two styles of painting were in evidence in Nepal at the time, both of them rather schematic or ordered forms of painting: the *maṇḍala* and the *patā*. *Patā* (Sk. *patākā*) is a general term for a 'banner painting', but is often used in contradistinction to a *maṇḍala* painting. A *maṇḍala* is a diagram of a *sādhana* and the entire circle of deities to be visualised in the course of the yogic meditation. It is designed to chart one's way out of the chaos of the subconscious and the complicated problems of the world. The painting of a *maṇḍala* demands a great deal of accuracy and precision from the painter and is not suited to the needs of creative experience and freedom. A *patā* is a painting of a single deity or a small group of deities selected from the *maṇḍala*. In this case there is more scope for the urge of creative experience and hence the *patā* tends to be less rigid.

Maṇḍalas painted in Nepal are less rigid in their organization than those painted in the Tibetan monasteries. In the case of the Nepali *maṇḍala*, the central square houses the main deity with greater freedom as in a *patā*, and the scenes around the encompassing circle of cemeteries are not always illustrated. Even when they are not illustrated, the earlier paintings are still full of narrative and leave no space for the images of the lesser divinities. Nepali paintings, whether *maṇḍala* or *patā*, are on coarse cloth whereas the Tibetan paintings are painted on fine cotton cloth.

In Nepal itself there are many such paintings preserved among the collections of tantric manuscripts kept in the secret tantric chapels (*āgam*) in *viḥāras*, temples and private homes, but they cannot be seen by the general public. They depict Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, Hindu tantric *yantras* and a wide variety of secret tantric deities. Mention must be made of the painting of Bhairavānanda and Kubjikā, which belongs to the reign of Jyotira Malla around A.D. 1418. It is not only remarkable from the artistic point of view but is also an accurate representation of tantric concepts and ritualistic forms and designs on a grand scale. Another

notable feature of this painting is that the painter's name, Tejarāma, is given. Thus Tejarāma is one of the few masters of Nepali medieval painting whose name has come down to us. In most other works of art, the artist's name is not mentioned, and only the name of the patron or donor is given.

A fifteenth century (A.D. 1401) painting of Herukacakra Saṃvara shows the sixteen-handed fierce (Heruka) aspect of Buddha Akṣobhya in passionate sexual embrace with his female counterpart (*prajñā*), the Adamantine Sow (Vajravārāhī), with the principal Hindu gods and goddesses of Shaivism lying prostrate at his feet as a mark of respect to him. This *patā* is treasured in the secret room (*āgam*) at Jana Bāhā, the Macchendraṅāth shrine in Kathmandu.

The period between the latter half of the fourteenth century and the late sixteenth century was characterized by works of touching nobility and concentrated power both in painting and in sculpture. In this connection, mention must be made of the Nepali *patā* which is treasured in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, in the Netherlands. According to its inscription, it represents Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara of the Mahābhūta temple at Bhadgaun, and its purpose is to bring prosperity and a large number of children to the donors. This painting is reproduced in Dr. Stella Kramrisch's *The Art of Nepal*. The Malla rulers of Nepal patronized painting and there are many paintings that mention the Malla Kings as patrons. By the end of the sixteenth century, Nepali painting had begun to show the influence of Rajasthani as well as Chinese-Tibetan styles. Although the Nepali masters were the teachers of Tibetan artists in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the Tibetan style had begun to make its influence felt in Nepal by the middle of the seventeenth century. In the traditional Nepali style, occasionally found as late as the mid-eighteenth century, the images are set against a flat opaque background, but Tibetan paintings (*thangkha*) of that time present images as part of a transparent curtain against the background of a Chinese landscape fantasy. Traditional Nepali painting resisted the intrusion of this landscape background until the nineteenth century.

Another type of painting of this period is the narrative scroll. Narrative scrolls were long known in India, and, when transferred to the wall, they had provided long friezes in the Ajanta caves as early as the beginning of the Christian era. In Nepal these scrolls acquired a sense of spatial illusion about this time but from a different source. It came through the Rajasthani style of painting from

India. Rajasthani painting, under the impact of Muslim and particularly Mogul painting, acquired some features and perspectives of both Persian and Western Renaissance painting. Painters of Nepali narrative scrolls found it difficult to resist the temptation of imitating features of the Rajasthani style once they were exposed to it. There is in the British Museum a long Nepali narrative scroll (dated: A.D. 1705) which illustrates the story of Buddha's life. It displays not only the kind of western perspective which was introduced into Nepal by seventeenth century Rajasthani painting but also includes Indian figures both in Hindu and Muslim costume.

The wall paintings in the Bhadgaun palace are done in this new style. Murals or frescoes can still be seen on the walls of the buildings in the main quadrangles of the Bhadgaun palace such as the Kumāricok and Mūlcok. They date back to the reign of Jitāmitra Malla toward the end of the seventeenth century and the time immediately following his reign in the eighteenth century. The seventeenth century frescoes on the walls of the ground floor are of a higher quality than the murals on the walls of the second floor which reveal the decadent features of eighteenth century Nepali painting.

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