

DISMEMBERING THE BODY POLITIC: CONTESTATIONS OF LEGITIMACY IN TAMANG CELEBRATIONS OF *DASA*¹

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Introduction

Dasa has often been interpreted as the primary ritual of political integration of village Nepal with central authority (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1993; Ramirez 1993). Buffaloes and other animals are sacrificed, and village leaders give *tika*, reproducing the same role as the king at the heart of the nation. Its popularity has been suggested to be linked to local elites' use of the rite as a strategic political resource (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1993: 270). Recognition of the diversity of practice encountered in celebrations of *dasa* has been interpreted as an indication of the vibrant adoption of central ideas, forms and relationships in particular local contexts.

After the 'revolution' of 1990 reports began to come in of *dasa* being rejected by certain 'ethnic' communities as an instrument of Hindu Gorkha cultural hegemony. This paper considers the experience of *dasa* in a Tamang-speaking village. Here the future of *dasa* suddenly appeared to be imperilled in 1992, after the effects of one general and one local election under the new

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order of multiparty democracy. However, it was far from an explicit rejection of a symbolic instrument of an unpopular system of government that brought about this festive dilemma. It was precisely the effectiveness of the festival's political symbology (as interpreted in and transformed by distinctive local meanings), to bring out issues of legitimate authority in the new atmosphere of contested power, that threatened the continued celebration of *dasa* as a party-less, collective rite of community solidarity.

Both the structure of ritual sequence, and the conflict over rights to symbolically marked parts of the animal, reveal *dasa* to contain deeply contradictory meanings, and to provide also an occasion for local conflicts to coalesce around contesting symbols of power and authority in the community.

This paper presents, to start with, a synthetic outline of the formal sequence of events over the *dasa* period, giving background information to explain some of the contextual significances of the festival's basic elements. With this structure in place, I then present accounts of actual events which occurred at *dasa* over three years, culminating in a dramatic showdown between village factions.

The Basic Elements of *Dasa* in Tengu

The Search for Buffaloes and Festive Finances

Before the work of manipulating centrally derived political symbols even begins, the process of provisioning villages with sacrificial buffaloes activates fundamental channels of regional and national integration. The village of Tengu, Rasuwa District, at 2,000 m is about the upper limit for keeping these clumsy, belligerent, but productive creatures. Nevertheless, *dasa* buffaloes are sought from mixed caste Parbatiya villages to the south,² where they can be obtained for a cheaper price. Tamangs from villages further up the valley themselves come through Tengu looking for animals. If they are unsuccessful in finding a buffalo at the right price in Tengu, they often enlist the help of people they know as kin or affines in Tengu to assist them in looking for animals in

² For the more Hindu population, male buffaloes are required for *dasa*. For Tamang speakers, buffalo gender is irrelevant.

other villages close by. Overlapping social networks facilitate a relaying of buffaloes in a movement through progressively higher communities.³

The buffalo is indeed the classic animal of Hindu iconography depicted as being subdued by Durga, which in Sanskritic terms is what this festival is all about. It will come as no great surprise that Tamang speakers are not much interested in Hindu mythology, though "nau Durga, nau Bhowani, nau tika" can be heard in some of the shamanic chanting associated with *dasa*, but the Tamang's preference for buffaloes at *dasa* needs to be explained, as prior to the festival many hundred Tamangs are involved with a perhaps surprising counter-directional journey to the one taking buffaloes uphill. From the new moon of the month of Aswin (Tam. *Asauda*) flocks of Tibetan sheep and goats are brought down from Kyirong, down the Trisuli valley, and these days are often taken the last leg of the journey to Kathmandu by truck. The popularity of these animals to the inhabitants of Kathmandu is not only the superior quality (reflected in price) of the meat, and the acceptability of goat to most Bahun families, but the fact that one animal can be killed and shared in what is conducted primarily in the framework of a domestic ritual. In Tengu, by contrast, the whole business of the division of the meat is to do with the symbolism of intra-community functional specialisation, for which the larger carcass of a buffalo is well suited.⁴

The demand for sacrificial animals obtained from outside the sacrificing communities has more than a symbolic value of national integration. Many of the Tamang and other Nepali rural elite whose authority is highlighted at *dasa* have historically been important livestock traders. To anticipate some of the themes developed further on, my suggestion is that control over the movement of livestock is a continually present dimension to issues of local power connected with *dasa* for these agro-pastoral people. The festival marks the mid-point of the transhumant oscillation between summer and winter pasturing (*yartsa-martsa*), with village sheep and goats grazing around the edges of the settlement at this moment. In terms of residential sociality, it constitutes a periodic convergence of neighbourhood ideal and practice, as most other times of year the village is more than half empty, because the demands of agro-pastoral transhumance allow few occasions for village residence. Till

³ A similarly economically integrative relay process in the opposite direction is the search for seed potatoes always from higher communities.

⁴ All inhabitants of Tengu eat buffalo meat except the few members of the Gyalsum Ghale, and Ploen Tamang clans.

the early 1970s it was the headmen (*mukhiya* in Rana times, then *adhyaksa*) who coordinated the collective movement of livestock onto different areas of pasture, in particular onto the harvested maize fields prior to *dasa* (this coordinating role has subsequently been undermined by the effects of national park regulations). *Dasa* is the centripetal fulcrum, the 'Return to Go' of the village's transhumant agro-pastoral calendar, with animals brought close to the settlement nucleus, and house rafters hanging with the maize harvest. When this village-level convergence is considered in conjunction with the wider scale of Tibetan sheep and goats being taken to the symbolic central pasture of the nation, at Tundikhel in Kathmandu, a synchronising of village and national pastoral chronometry is evident. Such a unique point in the year is an obvious focal opportunity for displays of productive and political control.

When household budgets are considered, *dasa* is the one moment of the year when even the poorest families will try to get sets of new clothing, and peripatetic Damai tailors arrive for business. In 1991 most Tengu families spent around Rs 500 per head on expenses for *dasa*. Many take loans at this time from the local rich (*baru*) who are frequently the officiating headmen of the whole *dasa* rite. Women set about brewing beer to distill into *raksi*, and give their husbands money to buy rice, clothing and meat⁵.

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (1993:273-5) mentions the fact that *dasa* came to be constructed as the key national festival in the nineteenth century by the Shah and Rana regimes. Whatever the political motivations, the timing at least concurs with rural rhythms particularly as a marker of the end of the monsoon. Villagers told me they had heard that the spring *Caita dasa* had once been bigger than the autumn event, until a king said that because in *Cait* the farmers tended not to have much food, the autumn festival should be celebrated more. It is a time of plenty, of return (especially of family members working away from home), and of renewal.

Preliminary Rites

Prior to the onset of collective festivities, households may conduct certain smaller sacrifices. Chickens are killed by *bombos* over the bamboo mats used for storing maize for the god *Bhimshing*. Apart from *Bhimshing*, other deities to

⁵ Women control the household purse strings, because of course "men cannot keep account" (*rembo tse atsor*).

whom cockerels are offered on the day of Phulpati⁶ are *Guruchen*, *Kyekpasung*, and *Tangshing*. Most of these sacrifices are accompanied by the *bombo* chanting the routes of mythical trails from the Tamang speakers' place of origin in Tibet, Wi Samye, down to Gyagarden (India), or more commonly Gorkhana (thus connecting household health and prosperity with the state of Nepal), before returning back up to the village.

On the morning of the principal sacrifice, the village children take small chickens to the *lhaben*, a hereditary specialist who officiates at sacrifices for local territorial deities, for decapitation on a large rock to the god *Tangshing*.

The Sacrifice and Funeral of the Buffalo

Fifty years ago when there were only ten houses in the village, one buffalo sufficed for the whole community. In 1991 with a population of 250 people, three were killed. The animals are taken to terraces close by the houses and a *bombo* or *lhaben* sprinkles rice (*mone*) and water along the body from the head, chanting "nau Bhowani, nau Durga, nau tika", until the beast eventually trembles and shakes (*pururule kharpa*), indicating divine acceptability. One of several eager strong men is then directed by a ward chairman to perform the execution with an axe blow to the back of the head. A cauldron is immediately placed under its neck to catch the blood, some of which is taken by the chairman, mixed with rice, and dabbed as *tika* on the foreheads of anyone present. I was told "the state made the order, and the festival was honoured".

As the animals are skinned and cut up, involving a division of labour with women collecting up and washing intestines while men deal with hacking up the meat and bones into shares, a *bombo* takes off a few pieces of meat on a stick to roast quickly. Back at the site, these first pieces of cooked meat are tossed in the air for the hungry ghosts (*shingo*, *mang*) who would otherwise come saying "haha, huhu, hehe", making people have stomach ache, heart ache, vomit, and have diarrhoea.

⁶ Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka refers to the names of the four principal days of *dasa* as *Phulpati*, *Asthami*, *Navami*, and *Vijaya dasami*. In Tengu they are known as *Phulpati*, *Mar*, *Kali*, and *Tika*.

The ward chairmen in consultation with residents decide how many portions of meat to make at what price. Women turn up with jugs and kettles to carry off blood to mix with flour for sausages (*krung*). The hide is cut into strips and divided too for drying as yoke-plough shaft connecting straps. The head (*kraa*) is kept by the ward chairman,⁷ the tails (*meeh*) are taken by Kami blacksmiths,⁸ and the tripe (*tsiibu*) is given to the lamas.⁹ The rest of the day is spent with each household cutting the meat into strips to hang over the fireplace, eating and drinking.

The next formal event of *dasa* comes the following day with the buffalo funeral (*mai mane*). Tengu villagers are aware that higher up the valley live other more pure Buddhist communities who do not partake of *dasa* in the same way and regard the sacrifice as sinful. Although in Tengu they explicitly attribute the sacrifice to the command of the state, they still regard the act as sinful, for which they need to atone by giving the animal a funeral. The buffalo's head is kept in the house of the ward chairman overnight, with a butter lamp burning continuously between its horns. "Puja is done for the buffalo. It is said killing brings sin, so a lamp is lit on its head".

The funeral takes place on the second night after the sacrifice, "the funeral makes the sin go away" (*mane tse dikpa yerba*). The funeral is in fact not at all of the same order as for a person. Texts are not read, painted *thangkus* are not on display, drums are not beaten, *tormos* are not made, but the hymns are sung and danced through the night, led by the lamas. In the early hours cooked pieces of the buffalo's head and *raksi* are produced from the chairman's house, and fed to the people after a blessing by the lamas (*shelgar cheppa*), and a prayer is said for sentient beings. The dancing continues with more *raksi* being contributed which is dedicated to dead headmen of the

⁷ I was told that before Tengu had its own *mukhiya* (headman in the Rana state), buffalo heads always had had to be delivered to the *mukhiya* in the larger village five miles away.

⁸ *Dasa* is one of four annual festivals (the others being *magha sankreti*, *cheita dasa*, *saun sankreti*, when Kamis come for grain, meat and alcohol, to households they maintain a service, rather than cash, relationship with. I was told that in villages where Damai also participate in the division of the buffalo carcass, it is they who receive the tails and the Kamis get the base of the neck.

⁹ Holmberg (1989:35) mentions a mythical connection between lamas and tripe in the context of a Tamang narrative concerning the origin of caste differentiation.

village. As in the case of human funerals, there is a marked point at which the time for hymn singing comes to an end and secular songs (*wei*) can begin.

Hospitality and *Tika*

The day following the buffalo funeral is when the authority vested in the headman through officiation of the sacrifice, cleansed of its sinful connotations, becomes disseminated throughout the community by means of *tika*. This obviously used to happen more ceremoniously than in recent decades, for I was told "in olden times on the day of *tika* the *mukhiya* shot off his gun, and every household¹⁰ had to go to the *mukhiya*'s house".

The *tika* can be given with varying degrees of accompanying verbal formality along with the smear of butter in the hair above the forehead. I recorded what a respected village elder said was a roughly standard formula spoken with the giving of *tika* (tam. *mar kyappa*, literally 'to anoint with butter'). It begins:

Long life to you.

This is is not our *tika*. This is indeed the *tika* of The King of Kings.

This is indeed the *tika* of The Sri Panch.

May misfortune and illness be carried off by the wind of the Tibetan Plateau

May they be carried off below by the Trisuli river

If you touch a leaf may it become cloth

If you touch soil may it become grain

If you touch stone may it become a palace

From one goat may you be given a flock... (etc).

practical

Apart from village leaders, *tika* blessings are particularly sought from one's *ashyang* (MB, FZH, EF), who are offered respect (*shu laba*) and gifts of food and drink (*phit saaba*). *Ashyangs* are particularly privileged by the indigenous logic of wife-giver status superiority, and are the key legitimating figures in all life cycle rites.

¹⁰ The word used for household in this quote was *thuri khargar*, meaning separate roof-beam, and is the term employed for 'household' in formal contexts such as the exaction of corvée labour (which the *mukhiya* also oversaw).

From this emphasis on status difference, the mood of the festival shifts to a more egalitarian form of exchange in the following days, as neighbourhood households feed each other rice and meat in rotation on different nights, known as *nangsho*.


Public Dialogues on Power and Community at *Dasa*

If the description above of the key elements of *dasa* has come over as procedurally formalistic, that was an inevitable, but necessary prelude to the real thing, which needed the referential structure initially laid bare. In this section it is the opportunity *dasa* presents for airing intra-community dissent that comes to the fore.

Political authority in the village is a contested but diminished domain. Real power to affect serious issues of concern to all villagers is not seen to be within their grasp. Villagers have no illusions about the disparity of power between themselves and officials of the national park, of banks, health workers, the police, and military. I would argue that the effective centralisation of local power in the *pradhan panch* (under the Panchayat regime), and the offices of state administration, and the many barriers (illiteracy, prejudice towards *Bhote*¹¹ etc.) confronting Tamang villagers' access to influence their relationship with the world beyond their village, make occasions such as *dasa*, focussing on the symbolic distribution of the body politic, a residual arena for dialogues of power among a basically impotent and fragile community¹². I say that political authority in the village is a diminished domain because by all accounts the Rana period incumbent of the office of *mukhiya* had very considerable powers. This is not simple nostalgia

¹¹ A derogatory 'ethnic' slur which aggregates all Buddhist, beef-eating, speakers of Tibetan derived languages as a suspect population in the state of Nepal.

¹² I have chosen not to include in this paper a discussion of how villagers engage with the process of electioneering. I was not present at the local election from which the fallout manifested at *dasa* is retold here, but among this electorate which is so unfamiliar with the meanings of the discourse of national political parties, the primary interest of villagers is to enjoy as much as possible the free meals, drinks and other inducements to cast votes offered to them by all party representatives. Elections are momentary reversals of power relations, when the poor delight in the attention to which they are not normally accustomed. For an insightful study of attitudes towards politicians in Nepal see Clarke n.d.



because the memories of forced corvée labour, the exaction of fines, and the granting of rights to clear forest for fields are still vividly recalled. What is particularly salient is the reduction of village control over the common property of forest and pasture, once supervised by the *mukhiya* and subsequently ward chairmen (*adhyaksha*). Much of this control (at least the authority and coercive power to respond, however erratically, to infractions) has been assumed by the Langtang National Park since the 1970s. This deprives the village community of the formal means of control and accountability in the organisation of the productive basis of the village economy. In these circumstances, the contemporary position of ward chairman carries little weight.

In the absence of an effective political structure to articulate demands for change, and given the peripheral location of the village to organised class interests in Nepal, the institution of *dasa* is for the community a political event in that it presents a model for the local political constitution.

In 1990 half a dozen households had moved up to the motorable road constructed some five years previously, which passes a couple of hundred metres above the old village. The idea of this new settlement sacrificing its own buffalo was strongly resisted by the ward chairmen, whose interests lay in maintaining the all-inclusive character of the festival. A separate sacrifice would have definite interpretations as a diminution of the chairmen's authority. In fact, one of the chairmen preempted a separate sacrifice by personally dragging the buffalo in question downhill.

In 1991 the sacrifices were again kept in the old village but a dramatic incident erupted over the justice of distributing the tails to the Blacksmiths. The village crowd was excited by the prospect of bellyfulls of meat, and was already part-inebriated. Men were cutting up the larger hunks into equal shares, up to their elbows in blood and splitting bones with axes, while women squeezed out the contents of the ruminant's extensive innards, and dogs tried their best to snatch any morsel without getting kicked. Into this scene walked the Blacksmith who had left the village three years before to move to the bazaar town of Dhunche five miles away. He had continued to work for the villagers, but rarely visited except to collect his customary dues of grain, meat, and alcohol. Two months previously a new family of Blacksmiths had decided to try working in the village, and set up a forge in the porch of a rarely used village house. I was told that the original Blacksmith had left of his own accord for the better prospects of waged custom in the growing Dhunche bazaar, and the new one had moved in unsolicited but welcome. A

row erupted, with the Dhunche Blacksmith furious that the newcomer was about to be favoured with the buffalo tails, of which there were three. In the ensuing confusion over what the justice of the situation might be, the angry older Blacksmith put two of the tails in his bag. Before he got to the third, one of the ward chairmen seized the remaining tail and proclaimed that he had left a piece of iron with the Dhunche Blacksmith to make a hoe six months before, and it had still not been made, so the rights to the tail were forfeit. The new Blacksmith was clearly embarrassed and did not want to be seen to have encroached on the other's patch, who was an older relative after all. The latter left still angry, but the villagers seemed to consider the outcome fair enough in the circumstances as the new resident deserved some share, and if the Dhunche Blacksmith had not met the needs of some of the villagers it was because he had plenty of work in the bazaar.

At the *dasa* of 1992, during a brief revisit to the field, the political atmosphere in the community was still highly charged after the local elections of May in the same year. A factional divide had emerged around rival candidates, compounded by allegations that one of the new ward chairmen had pocketed a few thousand rupees from a sum granted by the local administration to build a new path connecting the old village site with the new settlement by the road. The successful candidate's behaviour in office was in question, and his right to a position of authority in the community was in dispute. *Dasa* provided a stage for the playing out of political tensions.

The opposition faction included the head village lama who had stood in the election as a communist and lost, as well as the main family of *bombos*. This group organised for their own buffaloes to be killed. The competence of the chairman's overseeing of the sacrifice and funeral was deliberately challenged through ritual non-cooperation. The opposition faction insisted that the chairman's buffaloes were not killed with the proper rites, as only a lesser specialist known as *sangdung*, rather than a *bombo* or *lhaben* was present to ward off the hungry spirits. Subsequently, the dysfunctional consequences of the situation came to the fore with the problem of what to do with the tripe of the buffaloes sacrificed under the aegis of the two chairmen. In order to sustain the symbolic integrity of legitimate political authority the tripe was required to be presented to the head lama, who would also be necessary to lead the funeral to overcome the sinfulness of the sacrifice. The lama had taken particular offence at a reported comment by a man of the new chairman's faction that "lamas and *bombos* are no longer necessary" ("*lama ado, bombo ado*"). The lama had complained that he endures night after night

without sleep in the performance of funerary rites, and cannot come and go as he pleases, or opt out of his duties to the community. One old woman expressed horror to me at the notion of a world without lamas in which the dead would simply rot in the rain.¹³

Neither the chairman nor the lama were going to take the initial step towards a reconciliation on the day of the sacrifice. A long-resident, in-married Newar began shuttle diplomacy, insisting on the need for villagers to come to an agreement ("*namsaba dii doba*") moving back and forth between the two sacrificial sites reporting the entrenched positions of both sides. The head lama said he certainly wasn't going to come and collect the tripe himself. After four attempts at bringing about parley he was accompanied by the older chairman who had held office several times, a couple of elder men, and the factionally neutral villager who has achieved highest status in the outside world as a soldier in the Nepal army. The comment about lamas no longer being necessary was asserted not in fact to have been said. The new chairman was seen to have acknowledged the desire for a resolution, rather than risk the social consequences of the tripe not going to the lamas, and the collective funeral of the buffaloes not being performed. The Newar was pleased that even if the compromise was grudgingly acquiesced to, forearms had not been bared with a view to a fight.

The night of the next day the buffalo funeral was held, but the ward chairman and his closest supporters did not dare emerge from their houses to join in or send the meat of their buffalo heads. Revelling in their sense of having put the chairman in his place, some of the funeral dancers of the lama-bombo alliance hurled abuse at him for all to hear. The next morning, sitting resplendent in his red turban, the oldest *bombo*, a senior kinsman of the head lama, sat in his house receiving visitors for *tika*, and told me that this year he was the most respected figure in the village for people to receive *tika* from. In the next days the ward chairman's circle of *nangsho*-entertaining consisted of a humiliating three households. The popular authority conferred by the electoral process had been effectively forfeited by the de-legitimation engineered by means of non-cooperation at *dasa*.

¹³ By way of a de-exoticising comparison, British people of my generation can remember the political impact of the Winter of Discontent in 1978/79, when the prevalence of strikes led to the dead not being buried.

These *dasa* incidents demonstrate the continuing importance of admittedly brittle notions of local community, linking social changes with local understandings of political authority. When faced with the prospect of the buffalo funeral perhaps not being performed in the future due to factional irreconcilability, one unrelenting villager of the new chairman's camp pointed out that the buffalo funeral is not a collective rite in the bazaar society of the local town Dhunche, where households make their separate arrangements for the provisioning of meat. I take this attitude to signify a profound change in the village, as it implies a hitherto unconscionable position of household independence from the secular and religious unity of the community. It mirrors the processes of commoditisation in labour, the lost ability of wealthy households to command unpaid labour of dependent clients, and the diminished authority of headmen in the transhumant economy, supplanted by the national park. It reflects, in ritual organisation, the ascendant power of delimited household interests in the pastoral and cash economy over those of extensive community incorporation under headmen. The alternative constitutional model suggested to that of households' unified interdependence under the complementary authority roles of village headmen and lamas, is explicitly that of independently organising households in semi-urban, market complexity, not beholden to participate in a show of symbolic unity.

Conclusion

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka writes of *dasa* that "[e]ven where there was no Hindu population, local elites started performing this ritual (with...deviations), claiming a central position for themselves within the local community as if they were kings of Nepal" (1993:282). Village society invokes the sovereignty of the Centre in legitimising its local structures of authority. In Tenggu's locally meaningful enactment, the rite has been seen to be transformed from a sacrifice into a funeral, with the secular authority taking the buffalo's head into his house to guard its soul until the villagers can dance the mourning songs in collective expiation of their sins. The renewal of secular authority is seen as dependent on the performance of religious purification. Additionally, the division of meat acts generally as a focal metaphor of the social order, and not just in the context of *dasa*¹⁴.

¹⁴ The other main sacrifice for the benefit of the whole village is made at the full moon of *Baisakh* when a goat is divided up between all village households, and the *lhaben* gets a shoulder.

Macdonald (1987) has written of the phenomenon of the distribution of meat acting as a marker of social difference in relation to some Tamang texts concerning yak dismemberment, in which the division of meat is first used to differentiate a hierarchy of courtly functions, and secondly to provide names, derived from parts of the carcass, for different clans. The division of meat thus serves as "an indigenous model of and for the differentiation of society" (1987:79), and, further, that such models "are used by men and groups of men as instruments of social control" (*ibid.*: 81). In the account of *dasa* I have included from 1992, it is clear that if we talk about 'social control' this is not just a matter of a vertical relation of power, as the model can be turned around for use as a challenge to authority.

Ramirez discusses the idea that 'cosmo-dramas' connected with *dasa* "put into play the legitimation of royal authority by divine authorities", but draws attention to "the manipulation of this festival by more common actors, precisely by local dominant figures" (1993:48). His historically oriented research on *dasa* in Argha Kanchi reveals 'symbolic manoeuvrings' by priestly lineages who also held *mukhiya* office. In so many accounts of *dasa*, the particular ceremonial details are of such variety that, though the theme of religious legitimation of secular authority is a constant, as Ramirez has suggested, "central authorities did not care much about the content of the ritual" (*ibid.*: 48). Pfaff-Czarnecka by contrast is impressed by the very pervasiveness of *dasa's* celebration, whatever the symbolic variability, and attributes this to the dissemination of domination relationships "when subjects strive to display cultural elements of the powerful" (1993: 271).

Some of these points can be examined through the data from Tengu. It might initially be tempting to see the emphasis on funeral rather than sacrifice as a Buddhist community's statement of cultural difference from the ritual forms of the hegemonic power. However, the message of the buffalo funeral has clear parallels with the overall communicative intent of Hindu rituals legitimating royal power. Other approaches to the Tamang response to Hindu symbols include Holmberg's interpretation of a myth that deals with the origin of caste hierarchy in which he argues that the myth "refracts Brahmanical ideology and social order according to a different symbology rather than participates in this ideology" (1989:37). This idea of refraction allows the

The distinction between Tamang and Ghale clans is highlighted in the event of cattle dying, when the head used to go to the Tamang *tsok*, deputy to the non-beef-eating Ghale *mukhiya*, and Tamang lamas receive the tripe.

popularity of *dasa* to be taken seriously as not simply an imposition from above. Höfer uses the idea of "flexible integration, which does not also exclude creative misunderstandings" (1986:12) to convey the adoption of certain symbolic forms into differently constituted cultural logics.

I offered the preceding accounts of *dasa* partly in response to Macdonald's suggestion that "[i]t may be that future Tamang ... leaders are more likely to win response and active support to models phrased in terms of the redistribution of surplus production or the class-struggle rather than to old tales about cutting up yaks" (1987:81). The occasions of intense dispute over rights to shares in the *dasa* carcass highlighted the potential this festival provides for political drama and the public expression of claims for social justice. As such it is clearly no straightforward instrument of hegemonic control, and offers the occasion for public articulation of resistance. The question which remains for future research is whether *dasa* will remain a potent arena for political symbolism or be supplanted by new forms of democratic discourse.

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