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Special Double Issue

Representing Local Histories in the Himalayas

European Bulletin of Himalayan Research

The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research (EBHR) was founded by the late Richard Burghart in 1991 and has appeared twice yearly ever since. It is a product of collaboration and edited on a rotating basis between France (CNRS), Germany (South Asia Institute) and the UK (SOAS). Since October 2002 onwards, the German editorship has been run as a collective, presently including William S. Sax (managing editor), Martin Gaenszle, Elvira Graner, András Höfer, Axel Michaels, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Mona Schrempf and Claus Peter Zoller.

We take the Himalayas to mean, the Karakorum, Hindukush, Ladakh, southern Tibet, Kashmir, north-west India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and north-east India. The subjects we cover range from geography and economics to anthropology, sociology, philology, history, art history, and history of religions. In addition to scholarly articles, we publish book reviews, reports on research projects, information on Himalayan archives, news of forthcoming conferences, and funding opportunities. Manuscripts submitted are subject to a process of peer-review.

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Representing Local Histories in the Himalayas

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Editorial

The current issue of the *Bulletin* is a double issue that originated from the panel “Representing local history in the Himalayas”, which was convened by Gisèle Krauskopff and Martin Gaenzle during the 17th European Conference on Modern South Asia Studies in Heidelberg (on September 10-11, 2002). In effect, the *Bulletin* “sponsored” this panel with an eye to future publication, because we believe that the topic is an important one and we knew that the contributors would have something original and useful to say about it. The quality of the essays in this issue certainly confirms our assessment.

The *Bulletin* has a history of double issue, including number 12/13 in 1997 on Himalayan Music. We think that such double issues are quite useful. Sometimes they even become standard references for a particular field of research, and so we hope that this will not be the last such double issue.

This is the first issue of the *Bulletin* to be printed in Kathmandu, by Himal Books, and distributed from there. It may turn out to be a cheaper and more practical way of production and dissemination that is currently the case, especially since editorship changes countries every three years or so. In any case, this is a one-off experiment. Please let us know if you have any complaints (or compliments!) about the new system. The editing of the *Bulletin* remains in Heidelberg.

The editors wish to thank Susanne Kleinmann for her technical assistance.

Bo Sax

Managing Editor

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Martin Gaenzle teaches anthropology at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg. He has carried out field work in various parts of East Nepal and in Banaras, India. Presently he works together with linguists in a project documenting two endangered language traditions in Nepal. His books include: *Verwandtschaft und Mythologie bei den Mewahang Rai in Ostnepal. Eine ethnographische Studie zum Problem der 'ethnischen Identität'* (1991), Stuttgart; *Himalayan Space: Cultural Horizons and Practices*, with Balthasar Bickel (eds.) (1999), Zürich; *Ancestral Voices: Oral Ritual Texts and their Social Contexts among the Mewahang Rai of East Nepal* (2002), Münster.

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Peter Sutherland gained his D. Phil at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University in 1998 after a first career in architecture and architectural photography. He currently directs the International Studies Program at Louisiana State University, where he teaches classes on South Asia, colonialism, diasporas and globalization. In addition to completing a book on the western Himalaya, *Travelling Gods and Foreign Power*, his interest in the anthropology of religion, memory, movement and space now includes new published work on transnational practices of African diasporic identification linking vodun in Benin, Haiti, Louisiana, and a global Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage project concerning the Nipponzan Myohoji sect.

Introduction: Representing Local Histories in the Himalayas¹

Martin Gaenzle

Professional writers of history in the Himalayan region have been predominantly concerned with larger social units, dealing with issues such as the formation of states, colonial rule and, above all, nation-building. This applies both to traditional chronologists, who are in charge of an official, often “dynastic”, history, and to academic historians who are interested in the genesis of the modern political order. Yet, the memory of the past is not the privilege of professional (or semi-professional) historians, and there is a broad field of more localized “indigenous” genres of history-making that exists alongside the dominant discourse, complementing, ignoring, (creatively) misunderstanding, and – often – countering the latter. Many ethnic groups, for example, defying the homogenizing attempts of national history-writing, have recourse to traditional representations of their own past, often rewriting previous accounts and trying out new forms of depicting historical events.

The papers in this volume deal with such cases of history-making, which might be labelled “ethnic”, “tribal”, “regional” or “local”, even though all these terms are in some way problematic (see below). The primary focus is on the construction of pastness as an ethnographic phenomenon. Therefore the notion of history is taken in its broadest sense, as cultural representations and imaginings of the past, as practices of remembering previous times. Contrary to what early anthropologists claimed, there is no “people without history”. Even today there is a tendency to regard only the genre of academic history-writing as “true” history and everything else as fiction. Of course, no one denies that history as science has a different methodology and different standards of verification. Nevertheless, in an ethnographic perspective, academic history is also a genre of narratives about the past, governed by certain generic conventions, and ultimately a cultural construction.

The local histories presented here belong to a broad range of genres. They include various kinds of oral accounts: legends or oral histories (Blackburn, Schmidt), folk narratives or myths (Sutherland, Schlemmer, Berg), but also written discourse: newspaper articles and booklets

¹ The articles of this volume are revised versions of papers presented during the 17th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies in Heidelberg (2002) at the panel convened by Gisèle Krauskopff and myself. I am grateful to all the participants for their contributions. As the editor of the present collection I am also grateful to András Höfer and Bo Sax for their support in the preparation of this volume.

(Schlemmer), as well as an “official” text (Steinmann). History may be represented in many forms or media: material objects like beads, (Blackburn), images (Schlemmer), or ritual performances (Sutherland, Schlemmer, Steinmann, Berg), though narrative forms clearly predominate. Often such representation is “plurimedial”, i.e. employing various media at the same time. Yet there is a strong tendency to value the written word as more prestigious and authoritative, to regard it as intrinsically more authentic.

The view that histories are basically cultural constructions raises a number of broader issues. Whereas a conventional approach asks how the past led to the present, this question is here turned around: How does the present create the past (see Chapman et al. 1989: 1)? In other words: in this perspective historical memory is seen as primarily linked to concerns of the “here and now” and leads to the question of self-definition and identity. One can go so far as to claim that there is no past outside the present. The past only matters as long as it is made use of – otherwise it is forgotten (cf. Peel 1984, Bloch 1977). Yet, though this might be a truism, such presentism tends to obscure the fact that the past is generally experienced as different. “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.” This initial phrase of a novel by L.P. Hartley, which was taken up by David Lowenthal and made the object of an interesting “key debate in anthropology” (see Ingold 1996), captures this experience in a metaphoric manner. But it is precisely because the past tends to escape understanding and familiarity, that people continually strive to re-connect it to the present. The work of memory and the process of construction is never finished.

Imaginations of the past thus have to be examined as part of a social arena in which meanings are continuously under construction, and at the same time may always be contested. As Appadurai has pointed out, this process is subject to certain constraints: the past is not simply “a limitless and plastic symbolic resource, infinitely susceptible to the whims of contemporary interest and the distortions of contemporary ideology” (1981: 201); rather, it is a “scarce resource”, bound by cultural values and rules. Narratives about the past require authority (or legitimacy in a Weberian terminology), continuity, i.e. a credible link with the source of authority, and a certain time-depth in order to be accepted. All these features can be observed in the examples of this volume. In some cases the authority resides in the genre itself (the legends, and myths), in other cases it resides in the person of the author (educated activists, chronologists). Continuity is either simply assumed, or else may be constantly emphasized. And the relevant time-depth ranges from “times immemorial” to specifically dated events. In all cases it is clear that a claim to truth is fundamental and it is validated by rather similar means.

The making of history, depicting the past, is bound up in the politics of re-presentation (in the true sense of the word of “making present again”).

Much has been written on this in recent years, and it is not necessary to recapitulate the debate. What is important is an awareness of the power relations involved and a focus on the following questions: Who are the authors of historical accounts, the makers of history? Who is the audience, the consumers and users of these accounts? And how are these different actors related in terms of interest, status and power? The characterization as “elite history” or “history from below” (Fabian 1990) is not always unproblematic. Even a “subaltern” group (such as the Rai) may have elite versions of history as well as “ordinary” ones (Schlemmer). And what presents itself as an “official” chronology can be a “history from below” – or from the margins – when seen in the context of a broader nationalism (Steinmann).

Representation is a cultural practice and as such is embedded in other cultural practices. The telling of past events may be formalized, for example when a bard gives a performance in a ritual context, or it may be restricted to non-ritual, everyday communication (Blackburn). It may be closely linked to the political order, for example when validating claims to property ownership and preserving a memory of feuds (Schmidt, Sutherland), or when redefining a political identity under the changing conditions of a modern nation state by taking recourse to mythic traditions (Schlemmer). Tellings may be concerned with establishing a religious order, e.g. divine agency, rain-making and the provision of fertility (Sutherland), and they may be accompanied by religious ceremonies, e.g. tribal dances or Buddhist festivals (Steinmann, Berg). In all cases, representations of history are construed by means of cultural practices, and thus they crucially contribute to the formation of identity.

In what sense then are these histories local histories? In recent years we have seen a return of the local as a counterpoint to the global, but what exactly this “local” means is rather indefinite and dependent on context (see the discussion in Harneit-Sievers 2002: 12-17). Often, it is more or less circumscribed by ethnic attributes, and of course, anthropologists have always been experts on this kind of small-scale social unit. But today neither the local nor “the ethnic” are necessarily constituted as territorial spaces: both can have a distributed (diasporic) and virtual existence, e.g. through print or electronic media (see Schlemmer). Locality is not simply there, it is constantly “produced” (Appadurai) through forms of communication, ordinary discourse, ritual action, and the imagination. The spatio-temporal production of locality is a complex affair: it is not only the conceptual demarcation of a life-world, a space and its history, but a “structure of feeling”, i.e. it implies an emotional tie and thus affects experience.

The papers

In his contribution on legends of migration among the Apa Tani in Arunachal Pradesh, **Stuart Blackburn** looks at the migration routes in the narratives and confronts them with scholarly discussions on the “real” origin of these peoples. Though most scholars argue that the Apa Tani first came from the east, i.e. Burma or Southern China, the Apa Tani themselves (and some recent studies) claim that their ethnic origin lies in the north – in Tibet. This claim is underlined in social practice by the ceremonial use of beads which also have their origin in Tibet and which are a frequent topic in Apa Tani stories. Blackburn shows that both the migration legends, i.e. the narratives about beads, and the social practice of wearing beads all contribute to the construction of a social memory which marks the Apa Tani off from their “non-tribal” neighbours. The making of history is not only a verbal practice, it is linked to cultural practices such as trade, ceremonial display of wealth, female inheritance etc. It is difficult to say much about the time-depth of this memory, and the question of historical “truth” must remain open. Yet, the interesting thing is how the imagination of the past clearly shapes the formation and negotiation of identities in the present.

The next paper, from the other end of the Himalayan range, also deals with oral narratives about a tribal past whose time-depth is vague. **Ruth Laila Schmidt** examines the legends of Shina speakers in Kohistan that describe a kind of “tribal revolt” by the ancestors of the Darṃá lineage in which former autocratic rulers in the locality were killed. This dramatic political event, which also marked the victory over pre-Islamic religion, is vividly remembered by the elders as the foundational moment of local rule. Schmidt carefully reconstructs the historical context in which these narratives have been transmitted. According to her interpretation the events can be set in the early nineteenth century, but detailed analysis suggests that the stories retain the memory of an ancient kingdom dating back about a thousand years. It becomes evident that oral history, though not easily linked to a precise time-axis, is a storehouse of transmuted memories which are kept alive even in periods of fundamental change.

Quarrels over local control in the past are equally prominent in the paper by **Peter Sutherland**, but here the narratives focus on the actions of deities. As the kings of the former Shimla hill states (Himachal Pradesh) are the earthly re-presentatives of the gods, political agency is conceived in terms of divine agency. Mythic stories recount the events of migration and (what the author calls a “prelocal”) searching for land, which is followed by the eventual division of the land. The moment of localisation is one of violence: Sovereignty is established through a sacrificial killing. And such violence continues to be an important element of local politics. Sutherland examines the contested accounts of a feud between two localities that happened in 1934. Two versions of the historical narrative tell two different stories: one about magical agency, the other about a legal quarrel. The

difference of views is not only due to the partiality of the two narrators from the opposite sides, it is also due to different concepts of historical time – different “timescapes”. Thus the paper describes alternative histories which compete and whose competition is not only narrated but also eristically performed in processions.

Whereas the former cases all are histories transmitted orally, the case study on the Kirant of eastern Nepal presented by **Grégoire Schlemmer** discusses the (re)writing of history in the literal sense: the writing of historical books and booklets, which are locally printed and disseminated. The agents of this recent production of new histories are what Schlemmer calls “indigenist” intellectuals, i.e. educated, usually middle-class representatives of the ethnic group who adopt an academic style and claim scientific truth for their depictions of the past. Here too we have an alternative history, one that regards the standard, national version as wrong and biased in favour of the high caste Hindus. While in the common view the Kirant are tribals who were brought into the civilising orbit of Hindu kingship about two hundred years ago, Kirant intellectuals turn things upside down (yet retaining the rhetorical style): they argue that the Kirant had a highly developed civilisation, or nation, long ago, in ancient times, but this was destroyed through Hindu military expansion. As Schlemmer shows, the lively debate on history is accompanied by an active “revitalisation” – or reinvention - of ritual tradition. It is clear that these discussions on history are not merely scholarly exercises, but underline political demands and agendas as well.

A bit further to the east, in Sikkim, a nationalist history was already written a hundred years ago. **Brigitte Steinmann** examines the official history of the ruling Buddhist dynasty (written in 1906) which carves out a specific Sikkimese identity in contrast to the political “others”, the Hindu neighbours and the British colonial power. Steinmann interprets this text in light of the country’s social history and contemporary ethnography and shows how it links the present order in a foundational past of first ancestors and a sacred geography of mountains and territorial deities. The text creates not only a demarcated place, by defining the mythical boundaries of the kingdom, but also the image of a peacefully integrated multi-ethnic society, which lives in unity despite the fact that access to land is highly contested. Besides being represented in a royal written and printed text which today is also used in schoolbooks, the history of Sikkim is likewise performed in the form of ritual dances, which today are in a process of revitalisation and often used in the context of election rallies and other political events.

Such ritual dance performances with masked actors who reenact the foundational episodes of local history are the special focus of **Eberhard Berg**’s contribution. In his description and analysis of the Sherpa Dumji festival celebrated in Solu (Nepal), Berg reads this local clan ritual of the Lamaserwa as a “ritual of unity and identity” that is of particular topicality

in the present situation of rapid social change, political turmoil and civil war. The Sherpa have a long tradition of written histories, but these are made accessible through the tradition of ritual dances which was established in the mid-19th century in order to celebrate the coming of the founding lama, Dorje Zangbu, and the taming of local divinities. Here, then, the commemoration of local history is embedded in a religious festival which at the same time ensures prosperity and well-being of the people. The “return” to the past, one might say, is the most powerful guarantee of a good future.

Conclusion: Ethnographies of competing histories

In a time of extreme acceleration of change, frequent tensions, and sometimes violence, a shared memory of the past is apparently of crucial significance for social stability. In individual psychology the refusal to remember is seen as a likely indication of a former trauma. The experience of rupture and violence may lead to an erasure of memory. Similarly, a social group may have such traumatic blanks in its collective past. Seen in this perspective, the construction of a cultural memory (cf. Assmann 1997) can be an attempt to heal old wounds. As a mimetic tradition it codifies and reconstitutes through performance the proper way of action. In any case, it is a strategy to maintain or regain agency.

The Himalayan local histories in this collection remind us of the fact that the making of history is always a contested ground and that there are several alternative histories which counter dominant representations of the past. Of course, this is not restricted to the Himalayas. Yet what is perhaps unique to this area is the highly variable and localised character of the social forces: tribal polities interacted with little mountain kingdoms, and Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic rulers lived in close proximity, while the British colonists appear to have maintained a vigilant though often remote presence. The localities we encounter here are often small and inward-looking, separated by ridges which could be used as natural boundaries, though this rarely prevented mobility and the creation of larger networks. The Himalayan polities described in the papers were generally on the margins of Empires, and yet they often define themselves in reference to a largely imagined centre (such as Benares or Lhasa).

In all the case studies we can observe the construction of histories in dialogue with other representations of the past. Many different media can be used, and it becomes clear that the written word is only one of them. Likewise the authorship of these histories varies considerably. In oral histories the author is usually unknown, or at best an imagined ancestor, whereas in written histories the author takes on a prominent role. And the locality in question can be of many kinds: one or two valleys with a small number of villages, or a whole region, or an imagined “nation” with mythic boundaries. Yet in all these ethnographies of history there is a strong

emphasis on the competitive nature of history making. The local histories are foundational for an identity linked to the landscape and they generally imply political claims (e.g. land rights). As such they tend to be contested by rival groups, they are sometimes hotly debated, and, especially if there is a lively public sphere, they are constantly recreated in discourse as well as action.

It is no coincidence that in recent times there has been a considerable increase in the interest in and the production of such local histories. And one may expect this trend to continue. The modern nation state, exerting its homogenizing force, leaves little room for distinct local identities, and so it is no surprise that in some regions in the Himalayas demands for political and cultural autonomy have been voiced that are reminiscent of earlier nascent nationalisms worldwide. Today such movements can make use of modern technologies, and disseminate their ideas through a great variety of media. Publication, especially through electronic media (such as websites), has become easier and cheaper – but also more short-lived. Many printed or web-based local histories never reach the archives, and their existence may be even more fleeting than that of oral accounts. Thus it is an important task to document the practice of making histories as broadly as possible. Nothing more and nothing less than this is the aim of this volume.

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Memories of Migration:

Notes on legends and beads in Arunachal Pradesh, India¹

Stuart Blackburn

No one knows, with any certainty, when or by what route the people of Arunachal Pradesh came to their current homelands.² Isolated on the southern flank of the eastern Himalayas, outside the control and beyond the interest of the civilisations and empires surrounding them, these Tibeto-Burman tribes are nonetheless central to an understanding of the cultural and linguistic history of Asia. The first attempt to write down the history of Arunachal Pradesh, William Robinson's account of 1841, referred to the "dark veil which conceals the origin of the tribes" and the several histories written during the succeeding 150 years have not yet dispelled that obscurity.³ A major problem is the scarcity of written records: before British records began in the early nineteenth century, only two sets of sources refer to the hill tribes of Arunachal.⁴ First, we have Tibetan texts that mention contact, beginning in the fifteenth century, between Tibetans and tribes along the northern border of present-day Arunachal Pradesh. The other documents are Ahom chronicles, which again refer to conflicts with tribes, this time along the southern border with Assam from the seventeenth century. Two other possible sources, Sanskrit texts and archaeology, contain little useful information.⁵ The tribes themselves have no indigenous writing.⁶

The initial motivation behind this essay was to shed some light on the history of the people of Arunachal; and as a folklorist, I naturally turned to oral traditions, to the legends that describe the migrations of the various tribes of the state. Fortunately, oral legends from almost all tribes have been recorded by researchers since about 1900; unfortunately, most of these sources provide only summaries, although a few recent studies do include genealogies and maps. Another limitation is that, as far as I know, there are no published descriptions of the performance or other social use of these oral legends; indeed, my own fieldwork and the available information suggest that, in contrast to oral traditions elsewhere in India, migration legends are not often or regularly recited. Rather, in Arunachal oral performance is dominated by ritual texts, which refer to ancestors and mention early history but do not tell a history of migration. Still, memories of migration are strong, and most people have a clear sense that they are not native to the region, that they arrived from "somewhere else."

Memories of the past, as we know, are transmitted not only by oral tradition but also by material culture, and so this essay also considers beads. As lightweight, high-value objects, beads travel well and often over the same routes that people travel. With this in mind, I first wondered what memories these mobile beads might carry, and what relations might exist between them and migration legends in Arunachal. If I was lucky, I thought, I might find legends in which beads are dropped along the path, as an *aide-mémoire*, to mark the route, like Hänsel and Gretel dropping stones in the forest, or Sita dropping Rama's ring while being carried away over the sea. What follows, in fact, is first a summary of what we know about migration to Arunachal, especially a debate regarding points of origin, and then a discussion of the trade and use of beads in Arunachal. I wish to emphasise that this is a preliminary report, emerging from an ongoing research project.⁷

Migration legends: Overview

Although legends are one of the three major genres of oral storytelling, in comparison with the folktale and myth, they are not well studied. With the exception of the saints' legend, and more recently the urban legend, most other types have attracted little interest; migration legends have been studied by some historians, but there is virtually no comparative scholarship on them. Following Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1816-1818, folklorists usually define the legend as a narrative about historical events or personal experiences, even illusions, which are believed to be true.⁸ However, because oral genres are culture-specific categories, and because notions of the "past" and "truth" are notoriously vague within any culture, legends are not easily separated from other oral narratives. Because they speak of the past, legends cannot be neatly separated from myth; because they tell what is believed to be true, they partake of history; because they go back to origins, they resemble genealogies; and because they include the fantastic, they sometime appear like folktales.

Despite this ambiguity, I think we can distinguish legends from other forms of oral narrative. Most cultures make a distinction between true and not-true stories, and within true stories, those with the greatest degree of chronological, historical and geographical specificity may be identified as legends. Migration legends are the most specific, with an emphasis on named events, places and people or groups; indeed, this named specificity is what distinguishes legends other true stories about the past, or myths. The most important distinction, however, is that legends are not regularly performed. For this reason, they lack certain conventions, such as an opening formula ("Once upon a time"), as well as the parallelism that characterises so much oral performance. Instead, legends are usually told, or just referred to, as part of an ongoing conversation, in fragments, as an anecdote of oral history.

Unlike myths, or other oral historical narratives, migration legends are not typically recited as part of a ritual performance; although migration is very often referred to in ritual and myth, the story of migration is not usually performed in a ritual context.⁹

All this, especially non-ritual performance, is certainly true of migration legends in Arunachal Pradesh. Memories of migration there are not recited or otherwise expressed in song, dance or festival among the central tribes of Arunachal.¹⁰ The long, complex chants which accompany the ritual sacrifices and feasts and healing ceremonies will speak of ancestors and origins but do not narrate the story of migration. That kind of historical knowledge is not stored as song or chant but rather in simple prose. Ironically, for people without writing, such as the central Arunachal tribes, oral legends function less like performances and more like books, not to be read from cover to cover, but to be taken off the shelf for reference, for verification, for consultation, and for reflection. In sum, migration legends are less like orally transmitted narratives and more like memorised historical records.

Legends, however, only record events and experiences that are thought significant by the group. And the range of those events and experiences is surprisingly limited. Legends tend to record cataclysmic events, such as battles and natural disasters, explain local landmarks, such as bridges and mountains, extol wondrous individuals, such as miracle-working saints, and narrate personal experiences of the supernatural, like encountering vampires and the return of the dead. Migration fits none of these categories exactly, yet when Jan Vansina drew up his short list of events remembered in oral histories, he began with "origins, migration, descent..."¹¹ Reviewing legends across the world, it is clear that Vansina was right: migration is among the small number of events significant enough to generate and transmit oral legends over a considerable period of time.¹²

The underlying reason for this, I believe, is that legends link the past with the present in a unique fashion. Although other oral texts, especially ritual texts such as myths, re-enact past events in the present, migration legends connect past and present by literally mapping the space between them.¹³ If ritual texts linguistically create parallel worlds of past and present, migration legends conflate the two by telescoping history into local reality. Time also operates differently in myths and migration legends. One reason that no Arunachal migration legend describes beads dropped along the path of migration is that these kinds of stories do not contain return journeys. Returns are essential to myths, to many folktales and to some legends whose heroes are expelled from their place of birth, wander and suffer but return to claim their rightful place in the family or on the throne (such as Hänsel and Gretel, Romulus and Remus, Oedipus, Hercules, Krishna and Rama, to name only a few).¹⁴ Return journeys, however, are not part of the logic of migration legends, in which the plot is unilinear, leading from a place of origin to a present-day settlement.

There is no return journey in migration legends because they have no heroes. Many types of stories – legends, myths and epics – narrate the origins and historical movements of people, but most focus upon the adventures of a hero. When, on the other hand, the movement of a people itself is the emphasis, we have a migration legend. Legends have no epic figure whose story defines the identity of a group or region (as with oral epics in India); they have no monument, fort or temple, whose story encapsulates the history of a caste or region (as with temple legends, *sthalapurāṇas*, in India). Instead, migration legends are filled with names–place names, names of ancestors, names of groups and sub-groups, tribes and clans. This is one of the striking features of migration legends across the world and in Arunachal: not through heroes but through geographical and genealogical naming, migration legends help to locate a people's place in the world.

Migration to Arunachal: An overview

This essay focuses on the tribes of central Arunachal because most of the published translations of migration legends, as well as my own field collection, comes from them;¹⁵ they are also less well-documented in written records than are the migration histories of some of the Buddhist (or buddhicised) tribes.¹⁶ The central group (including Nyishis, Tagins, Hill Miris, Adis, Apatanis; the Mishmis further east are anomalous) is known locally as the "Tani" group", from their common mythical ancestor Abo-Tani, who figures prominently in their oral traditions. Linguistically, too, the Tani languages form a discrete group within the Tibeto-Burman family.¹⁷



Arunachal Pradesh: Tribal areas

If the Tibetan¹⁸ and Ahom¹⁹ sources are at all accurate, these central tribes have been in the Arunachal mountains from at least the fifteenth century, and probably much earlier. From British colonial records and oral histories, we also know something of the movements of the central tribes within Arunachal during the past two hundred years. Dunbar, perhaps the most authoritative source until the 1960s, traces a mysterious migration route from "central Asia" across the mountains, and then provides some evidence for a dispersal, mainly down rivers, into present-day settlements (Dunbar 1916: 12-15). He also describes several examples of internal migration southward in the form of establishing satellite villages; similar movements were noted for the Nyishis and Hill Miris by Fürer-Haimendorf in the 1940s. The main reason for this internal migration has been the need for more forest area and the powerful magnetic pull of trade in the plains of Assam. There is also the "push factor" of Tibetan groups moving into areas occupied by Arunachal tribes: in the eighteenth century, for example, the Tangams, the northern-most group of Adis, were reportedly forced south from Pemako, across the now-international border, into Arunachal; in the early twentieth century, floods in Yigrong valley in eastern Tibet pushed Tibetan groups into Idu Mishmi country; again in the twentieth century, Membas moved down the Siang and drove the Adis southward.²⁰ A southern drift has also brought sections of Adis all the way to the plains of Assam, where they settled centuries ago.²¹

While this essay will describe a debate on "origins" and will thereby pursue long-term movement, it is important to emphasise that the migration of central Arunachal tribes has probably not been a single, fixed and long-distance event. It is far more likely that they have moved in a series of short journeys, over a long period of time, eventually arriving in present-day Arunachal, where they continued to migrate, down river systems and over highlands, until they reached the areas where they are settled today. As recently as 1950, clans of some tribes were still moving southward within their settlement area; and even today, we can see a micro-migration down from isolated hills toward the roads that link all parts of the state with Assam, and the rest of India. Finally, movement across the international border has greatly decreased but has not stopped altogether.²²

Disputed Origins: Tibet or Burma?

Nevertheless, all the tribes have traditions that claim origins outside Arunachal, and if we know little about when they arrived, we can be more certain about where they came from.²³ With one exception, all the tribes of the region speak a Tibeto-Burman language, which suggests that their origins lie either north of the Himalayas, or east, beyond the Patkai Hills which separate Arunachal from Burma.²⁴ These two possibilities have long divided scholars writing about the history of Arunachal, especially central Arunachal, into two camps: one holds that the homeland is to the north, in

Tibet, while a second argues that it lies east, where northern Burma touches southwest China. I will refer to these two positions as the "Tibetan" and the "Burma/China" hypotheses.²⁵

The Burma/China hypothesis, which is the older and dominant position, is largely derived from the writings of early scholars on Tibeto-Burman languages and peoples but has also received support from new ethnolinguistic research. By the late eighteenth century British scholars in Calcutta assumed the "cradle of the Indo-Chinese races", or Tibeto-Burman peoples, to be northeast Tibet, from where waves of migration flowed over Asia, including the Assam valley (van Driem 2001:408). The first modern study of Tibeto-Burman, by Sten Konow in 1902, claimed that the homeland of the languages of central Arunachal was in northern Burma, "the country about the headwaters of the Irawaddy [sic] and Chindwin rivers... from where they [tribes] crossed the Brahmaputra and wandered to their present habitat".²⁶ According to Konow, this was the region where the "different branches of the Tibeto-Burman family were in mutual contact" and would thus account for the position of these languages, midway between the Tibetan and Burmese branches.²⁷ This reasoning, apparently, was accepted by Grierson a few years later for his *Linguistic Survey of India*, in which he paraphrased Konow to the effect that the languages of central Arunachal showed evidence of "various waves of Tibeto-Burman migrations".²⁸ Greater geographical detail was added a few decades later by R.A. Stein, who claimed that their ancestral homeland was in northeast Tibet, from where a loose confederation of people, known as the Q'iang (or Ch'iang or Kyang), migrated south and southwest.²⁹ Van Driem's speculative reconstruction of Tibeto-Burman identifies Sichuan (and possibly Yunnan) as its "geographical centre of gravity"; according to him, speakers of the languages of central Arunachal left that homeland some time before the seventh millennium BC and spread along the Brahmaputra valley and into the surrounding hills (van Driem 2001: 410, 447). However, the only systematic study of the Tani languages (= of the central tribes) concluded that they are "relatively recent" arrivals in Arunachal (Sun 1993: 12-14). Nevertheless, and despite this uncertainty about chronology and geography, there is broad consensus that the homeland of Tibeto-Burman is somewhere in that famous region where northern Burma meets southwest China and four major rivers (Yangtze, Mekong, Salween, Irrawaddy) run side by side from north to south.³⁰

This Burma/China hypothesis has also been, until recently at least, the favoured position among scholars of Arunachal, some of whom support the idea that Tibeto-Burman peoples originated from northeast Tibet and are related to the Qi'ang (Chi'ang).³¹ Irrespective of the ultimate origin of the people of central Arunachal, most historians have argued that they did once live in the riverine corridor and then moved west, crossed the Patkai hills, entered the Brahmaputra valley and then moved into the hills north of the

river; other tribes, such as the Bodos, it is claimed, remained in the valley, while others, such as the Garos, went into the hills south of the river.³² Chowdhury presents this origin and migration as a consensus, but it can be faulted, based as it is on the specious anthropometrics, imprecise geography, speculative linguistics and limited ethnographic data from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Nevertheless, in its broad outlines, the Burma/China hypothesis is supported by most scholars of Arunachal.

The Tibetan hypothesis, on the other hand, is that the present inhabitants of central Arunachal crossed not the Patkai hills but the Himalayas. The argument is that most migration occurred at points where two rivers (the upper Subansiri River in the Tsari region and the upper Siang [Tsangpo]) cut through the Himalayas into Arunachal Pradesh. In other words, ancestors of the present people in central Arunachal may have moved eastward but never as far east as the northern Burma/southwest China border; that is, they never "turned the corner" southward and into the famous river corridor. The proto-homeland in this Tibetan hypothesis remains vague, somewhere north of the Himalayas; some oral histories even locate it in what these sources referred to as "Mongolia".

Before discussing these two hypotheses, we should consider two alternatives. First, might not the mixture of Tibetan and Burmese linguistic features in the Tani languages suggest that their speakers migrated through both Tibet and Burma? This is the opinion of Frank Kingdon Ward, the famous botanist who spent many years in the 1920s and 1930s exploring southeast Tibet and the route of the Tsangpo River. Noting the migration of several Tibeto-Burman tribes in the Pemako region of the upper Siang (south of the watershed, near the bend of the Tsangpo), he concluded that the general movement of Tibeto-Burman people had been southeast from Lhasa along the river valley toward the eastern end of the Himalayas (Kingdon Ward 2001 [1926]: 303, *passim*); from there, he claimed, they "turned the corner" and moved in a series of migrations down the river corridor, across the Patkai hills and into the Brahmaputra valley. Unable to settle in that fertile (and already occupied?) valley, they were forced north into the mountains, as high up as the upper Siang, where he found them. Such a circuitous route seems highly unlikely.

But there is second alternative: could the people of central Arunachal (whatever their original homeland in Tibet) have migrated westward from northern Burma/Yunnan, across the northern flank of the eastern Himalayas and then down the river systems, through the mountains and into Arunachal? In other words, could they have entered Arunachal from Burma by a northern route and not by crossing the Patkai hills to the south? Not likely, according to Robert and Betty Morse (1966:198, *passim*), since the snowcap in northern Burma would drive any migration attempts south and east into the Salween and Mekong valleys. Any migration, they say, had to go either east or west of this snowcap; and having descended into the

Salween valley, it would have been very difficult to head eastward across the high mountains.

Most writers, then, have argued for either a Tibetan or a Burmese origin for the central tribes; and most of the published scholarship refers to the Adis, one of the largest tribes in the state. Although they were slow to trade at the "fairs" established by the British in the early nineteenth century, Adis had the earliest contact with modern education (in 1920 the first school and in 1964 the first college in Arunachal were established in Adi country, at Pasighat); as a result, many leading scholars of Arunachal are either Adis themselves and/or write about Adi history. The current debate began with the publication in 1960 of what is one the very best ethnographic studies in Arunachal. Its author, Sachin Roy, acknowledged that Adi oral traditions claim origins from Tibet, but he dismissed these as unreliable and instead argued that Adis migrated from a region south of the Himalayas (Roy 1997 [1960]).

Roy's argument is premised on the idea of a cultural watershed that runs "a few miles south of the Himalays [sic] and parallel to it".³³ Above this line is the Tibetan cultural region; south of it lies another cultural region, to which, in Roy's view, the Adis and all tribes of the central group belong. This southern region Roy called the "trans-Brahmaputra" cultural area, which linked the tribes in the hills south of the river (that is, the Burmese- and Naga-related groups, and indeed parts of southeast Asia) with those north of the river (Adis and other central tribes). The evidence for placing Adis in the southern cultural region, Roy argues, comes from religion and art but especially from material culture: for example, Adis wear a cotton, sleeveless open-fronted jacket (not the padded, wool jacket and long trousers worn by Tibetan groups); Adis do not wear shoes or felt hats; girls wear a girdle of cane or brass loops (*beyop*) unknown in the Tibetan area; Adis build houses of bamboo, not stone or wood; Adis had a system of dormitories; they sacrifice mithuns and have no permanent religious structures. As for linguistic affinities, Roy defers judgement. On the basis of this evidence from material culture, Roy is confident that the Adis and other tribes of central Arunachal belong to the southern, trans-Brahmaputra cultural area and not to the northern, Tibetan region. "It is too early to assert that the Adi culture moved northwards," he concludes, "but this direction of movement is more likely than the opposite one" (Roy 1960:259).

Roy's view has been supported by others, including J.N. Chowdhury (1990:15), who underlines the argument that the material culture of Arunachal tribes does not match that of Tibetan cultures; he reiterates Roy's argument that the Adi jacket, which is common in central Arunachal, could not have originated in the cold, northern climate on the Tibetan side of the Himalayas, and is worn by groups in northern Burma and southeast China. Another scholar has extended Roy's thesis, locating the Adis' homeland in Yunnan by citing similar cultural practices, such as the reading of egg omens

and certain (unspecified) dress and hair styles (Bhattacharya 1965; Bhattacharjee 1975; Bhattacharjee 1977). He also claims that Adis moved from Yunnan to Pemako, stayed there for 200 years and then crossed the Patkai hills, followed the course of the Lohit River and came to their present location.³⁴

More recently, however, the Burma/China origin generally, and Roy's arguments specifically, have been challenged by an Adi historian. Writing in 1993, and drawing on oral histories, T. Nyori dismissed Roy's reasoning – that a lack of Tibetan cultural traits among Arunachal tribes rules out a Tibetan origin – as illogical (Nyori 1993:43-45). Nyori advances two principal arguments. First, he claims that the absence of Buddhist practices and beliefs among Adis may be attributable to the fact that they left Tibet before Buddhism took hold in Tibet in the 7th century; equally, Adis might have left from areas which were not fully buddhicised or they might have been driven out of those areas by buddhicisation. Second, Nyori argues that the similarities between Adi and southeast Asian cultures (Roy's "trans-Brahmaputra culture") can be explained by the fact that migrants assimilate the material culture of their new location; in other words, Adis build their houses of bamboo and cane not because they came from a bamboo-cane culture but because those are the available materials in the present habitation. In support of this, Nyori cites the Misings, a branch of the Adis who live in the plains and have adopted the material culture of their Assamese neighbours. Another example would be the Bokars, an Adi tribe close to the Tibetan border, who seem to have a hybrid culture: they wear long, woollen coats in the Tibetan style, and they use both bamboo and wood for building houses (Banerjee 1999: 172).³⁵

The impressive core of Nyori's study, however, is a body of oral traditions about migration, many of which he collected. Whereas Roy dismissed such oral legends, Nyori believes that their internal consistency is proof of their reliability (Nyori 1993: 44). Considering migration legends from thirteen separate Adi groups, Nyori concedes that they do not always agree (sub-groups of a single clan claim they came from different places, and some places are unidentifiable), but they are consistent in tracing origins from north to south, directly across the Himalayas into the present settlements. Furthermore, the oral accounts contain "no story of the migration of the tribe from the south to the north" (Nyori 1993: 43). He adds that the oral legends among other tribes in the central group similarly trace their migration from the north and that there is no tradition anywhere of a migration from the south. These oral histories also reveal, as noted above, that migration occurred over time and in small groups, not as a large, single movement.

Nyori's research is summarised in a (poorly-drawn) map, which shows the thirteen migration routes traced in oral legends. They add up to the inescapable conclusion that the Adis came from the north, that is,

"somewhere in Tibet" (Nyori 1993: 60), and then moved down several river valleys, principally the Siang and the Siyom. Although he does not cite it, Nyori's conclusion was, in fact, arrived at nearly 80 years before him, by a British official who wrote that "[t]he migration of the Abors in a southerly direction, down the [Siang] valley, may be considered as fairly well-established" (Dunbar 1916:14).

The Tibetan hypothesis has been supported more recently by another historian in Arunachal. J. Nath builds on Nyori's arguments and undermines the Burma hypothesis by pointing out that it is, in part, based on poor geographical knowledge: he refers to a belief, begun in the early nineteenth century, that the Tsangpo flowed into northern Burma and came into Assam as the Lohit river, whereas now we know that the Tsangpo flows into the Siang, a fact which shifts the migration route to the west and supports the Tibetan hypothesis. Again like Nyori, Nath provides details from oral histories (*abe*), which contain place-names identifiable with those in Tibet and the upper Siang; no place-names, he notes, are identifiable with any in either Burma or Assam (Nath 2000: 23ff).

One of the most detailed oral histories, cited by both Nath and Nyori, was provided by Ano Perme, who wrote down his version of the migration of Adis in 1968 (Perme 1968). In print it covers only five pages, but it takes the history back to Mongolia and then mentions a series of places, forming a chain that leads south toward Lhasa and then eastward to two bridges: at this point one branch of ancestors (Bhutias & Monpas) crossed a bridge that took them west, while the rest took the second bridge and continued east along the bank of the Tsangpo. Later, at another place, they again separated: the Mishmis went further east, and the rest followed the Tsangpo, eventually through the mountains and into Arunachal. This account of the Adis' migration and dispersal also includes a genealogy, describing how, at a certain place, the first ancestors gave birth to four sons, from whom Adis are descended.

Even if these oral traditions consistently point toward Tibet, is there any other evidence that would also situate the homeland of central Arunachal tribes north of the Himalayas? As already mentioned, the historical linguistics of the area is still far from certain, but what about religion? Even if we accept the Tibetan hypothesis and assume that the migrants adopted the material culture of their new environment, what about more enduring cultural practices such as ritual? After all, if the central tribes did originate in Tibet, then their religious practices and beliefs should show some similarities to those in Tibet before the advent of Buddhism in the seventh century AD. This issue is addressed by Nath, who expands on Nyori's evidence from material culture by adducing what he believes are similarities between what he calls "Bon religion" and the religion of central Arunachal tribes.³⁶ Even ignoring the fact that the history and nature of Bon practices are a matter of dispute, his arguments are unconvincing by themselves.

Nath traces central Arunachal tribes to earlier Bonpos in Tibet, claiming "that some batches of such banished Bonpo are the present Tani groups of tribes living in Arunachal Pradesh" (Nath 2000: 15). Nath also attempts to pinpoint the time that these proto-Adis left Tibet, but again his reasoning is far from convincing. He argues, for example, that because Adis do not have a calendar or writing they must have left before they were introduced to Tibet in the seventh century. Similarly, Nath claims that Adis are fiercely democratic and thus would have chaffed at the despotism of Srong btsan sgam po, the king who supposedly spread Buddhism and drove Bon out during the second half of the seventh century. It may be true that what some choose to call "Bon" specialists migrated from Tibet to others areas during the period between 800-1000 AD, but there is no evidence to suggest that any "banned Bonpos" were the ancestors of present-day people in central Arunachal.³⁷ The simple fact is that what is referred to as Bon "religion" (a legendary founder, textual authority, formalised theology, contemplative practices and monasteries) has no parallel in Adi practices and beliefs. They may share the practice of animal sacrifice, but that practice is hardly unique to them.

What all this demonstrates is a need for better ethnographic and folklore research in order to determine the histories of the Tibeto-Burman-speaking cultures. Published literature and current research do hint at similarities in ritual practice, especially between the Na-khi and the tribes of central Arunachal.³⁸ On the other hand, comparative mythology reveals some intriguing parallels that link the Tani group to Siberia.³⁹

While we are unlikely ever to positively identify the ancestors of central Arunachal tribes with any people in Tibet, we do know that some members of some of those tribes have historically been in contact with Tibetans as traders, seasonal labourers, slaves and participants in ritual exchanges.⁴⁰ Tibetan sources, from as early as the eleventh century, refer to these non-Buddhist people who straddle the international border, and sometimes cross it, as "Klopa" [pronounced and sometimes written as "Lopa"], a Tibetan word for "barbarian" which is loosely applied to any "tribal" people in the Tibetan cultural zone.⁴¹ From the early twentieth century, we have first-hand reports and even photographs of central Arunachal people in southeast Tibet and adjacent areas. Dunbar's 1916 memoir lists the Adi villages he visited in Pemako (Dunbar 1916:93-6), and although the writings of Kingdon Ward and Cawdor, a few years later, lack ethnographic detail they contain enough to confirm that some of the people they encountered in Kongpo (probably seasonal labourers or slaves) and Pemako are related to the Adis of the upper Siang (Kingdon Ward 1926: 146, 238; Cawdor 1926: 268-274). In one anecdote, for example, we learn that Adis travelled twenty-five marches to the market town of Pe (in Pemako) in order to barter rice for salt, which they would then haul across the 13,000 ft. Doshong La into the upper Siang (Kingdon Ward 1926: 194).

Similarly, there is no doubt that the Klopas of the upper Subansiri are closely related to the central Arunachal tribes living in the high ranges and river systems close to the Tibetan border (Tagins, Nyishis and Hill Miris). Reports from the Tsari region, in the upper Subansiri, in the early twentieth century referred to the wild tribes there as "Loteus, a clan of the Loba tribe", and described them as wearing their hair as some central Arunachal tribes do today; they also had poisoned arrows in bamboo cases, as was common for the central tribes (Dunbar 1916: 3-6; Dunbar 1932:184-5). More evidence for this identification comes from G. Sherriff's photographs and descriptions from the Tsari region in the 1930s; after seeing those photographs, Fürer-Haimendorf confirmed that the people there were virtually indistinguishable from the people he had seen farther south (Fürer-Haimendorf 1983: 216). In addition, we now have confirmation from another source: pilgrims to the Tsari region interviewed by Huber in the 1990s.⁴² In all these reports, specific details – the skewers worn in the hair, the long piece of cloth, hornbill feather head-dress and strings of blue porcelain beads – identify these people as the tribes who now live in the upper Subansiri; and from a recent essay, we learn that they were Tagins.⁴³

Apatani migration legends

No migration legend (to my knowledge) for Nyishis, Hill Miris or Tagins is yet available in print, but I have collected a few examples from the Apatanis, who are closely related to them.⁴⁴ Apatani oral traditions are divided into two categories: *miji* and *migung*. The chief distinction is performative: *miji* are recited in ritual performance, whereas *migung* are not. *Miji* are largely myths, including origin myths and stories about the mythic ancestor Abo-Tani, as well as healing chants; *migung* also include stories of Abo-Tani (when told outside ritual contexts), as well as a few tales and many more stories about "historical" events, such as the coming of the British in 1897, village raids and migration. As remarked above about migration legends in general, they are not regularly or publicly performed and are not narrativised; rather Apatanis hold them in social memory and speak of them, from time to time, as part of a conversation.

Most Apatani accounts of migration are like anecdotes, which state that they and other tribes of central Arunachal were originally one people who split up and settled in different places. Some oral accounts, however, are more detailed and trace the migration of the common stock of all central tribes, describing a series of dispersals and divisions, which resulted in the present distribution of the tribes. Like the Adi legend referred to earlier, the Apatani legends all begin north of the Himalayas;⁴⁵ and like that Adi example, they describe an ancestral migration route defined by a series of places. Apatanis call these stopping place *supung* [or *lemba*]: the route leads from Wi Supung, to Nyime ("Tibet")⁴⁶ Supung, to Hising Supung (the source of the

Tsangpo River), to Shango Supung, along the bank of the river, to Miido Supung, still in the Tsangpo valley.



Mudan Pai, an Apatani nyibo (priest) chanting at an animal sacrifice, January 2003.



Padi Kago, an Apatani man, singing a ayu (ritual chant) on request, February 2002.

From there the ancestores continued east, crossed the mountains, forded rivers (two of which, the Kamla and Khru, are identifiable) and came to Ziro, or Shwlo Supung, which is the valley at 5000ft where the Apatanis live today.⁴⁷ Here is one telling, from a 70-year old man, recorded in 2003⁴⁸:

Kolyun Lemba

Kolyun Lemba is the earliest place of origin. All our ancestors, elders and cultural life originates from there. This place was created by Nguntii

Anii. When she created this place, life flourished there. The first man of Kolyun Lemba was Ato Tajung.

Ipyo Lemba

Ipyo Lemba was similar to Kolyun Lemba because all our ancestors and life was there. But it is important because the first *dree* festival was celebrated there, after hailstorms destroyed the crops.⁴⁹ The cause of the storm was that a woman, named Ami Lulu Bunyi, came to the fields, despite a prohibition. Other celebrations, like *murung*, *myoko* and *subu*, were also celebrated for the first time in this place.⁵⁰ The first *myoko* was performed by Ato Diyu, the first *murung* by Ato Hape, the first *subu* by Ato Mipu, the first *emo huniin* by Ato Piisan.

The life of our ancestors flourished there for many generations. But some of the ancestors decided to migrate elsewhere to start a new kind of life. So they did a ritual, called *turi tunii* on a *lapang* in order to decide where to go, in which direction.⁵¹ The ritual was conducted by an old woman, Tuki Soki, and an old man, Tubi Tabe-Tok Piiro. This way they determined their direction and route of migration. They set out on the *landu* and *lacho leyu* path, on the *chilan* and *kiipu pingo* path.⁵²

When they left Ipyo Lemba, on these path, they met many obstacles. First they came up against an obstacle— maybe it was a large boulder— on the path. In the end, a woman, Manu Landu, and a man, Libo Sah, helped them to cross it and continue on the path.

Nyime [Tibet]

On the way to Nyime, the people met another huge boulder, which blocked the way. But they had to cross it, so they did. Later they went to a place called Kari Lemba, where many people were trapped and died. But again they had to move on and they did. Then *dundu lamin* blocked the path to Nyime, but they circled around it and continued on the path.⁵³

They reached Nyime, where many of the ancestors assimilated to the local life. In Nyime, women wore ornaments and beads made from river grasses. In Nyime there were two groups: the original people were Nikun Nyime; the other were Necho Nyime, who married separately. The Nikun people are from Tupe Nyime; whereas the Necho people were from the Hikun. Payan Radhe Nyime, the local king, married Pukun Puri of Hintii and they had six daughters:⁵⁴ Yaya married Ipyo Jeng; Yaya [a second one] married Miido Talying; Yaya [a third] married Supung Talying. But we are descended from the children of marriages of the other three daughters: people in the [Apatani] villages of Hari and Bela descend from marriage of Ane Haya and Aba Tayu;

people from the villages of Diibo, Hija and Duta descend from marriage of Ane Bendi and Taso Darbo; and the people from the village of Hong come from Loli Yari and Babin Hiipa.⁵⁵

Crossing the Kru River

Then they met the mighty Kru River, whose deep currents make a loud sound like gurgling water.⁵⁶ The river was so powerful that the people couldn't cross it for the next 20 generations. They were stranded, helpless, until a small boy, named Nyibo Ruchi, who was a skilled swimmer, used a boat and helped everyone to cross the river.

They continued along their desired route until they came to a huge mountain, blanketed in thick fog. Then two men, Chilan Tagyan and Kiipu Tapin, sacrificed two mithuns, named chayen tapin and nyokin taku, and then they were able to cross the mountain.

Miido Lemba/Doding Lemba

After crossing the Chilan mountain, they came to Miido Chilan, which was the nearer side of Miido Lemba. Then, further along, somewhere near Miido Lemba, they came to Doding Lemba, where many the ancestors lost their lives. The cause was a monkey and an eagle, who blocked the path. A woman, Ama Pucha, killed the monkey and the eagle by putting poisoned breast-milk into water. This opened the path for the people to move further ahead.

While in Doding Lemba [Miido Lemba], the people split into different groups, to follow different routes. Those people who preferred rice seed became the Apatanis, those who liked millet become Nyishis; and those who liked betel nut became the *halyang* [outsiders]. Before the groups separated, however, they held a big feast and sacrificed mithuns, named *doding dindo* and *taso sibo*. Then they set out on their different paths [which took them to the present-day villages in the Apatani Valley]: the people of Hong village took a path along the lower part of the river, a path called Sickhe. The people of Diibo, Hija, Dutta and Reru went along the path called the Chilan Rego. Finally, our people of Hari and Bela, went along the upper part, a route called Silo.

As illustrated here, Apatani legends trace migration along a series of stopping places, at each of which an important event occurs: the performance of a major ritual, a natural disaster or overcoming an obstacle.⁵⁷ A major event in all versions is the subdivision of the original stock of people, when at some point the ancestors divide and go separate ways. Details vary, but the typical division is tripartite: *tani* (Apatani), *misan* (other central tribes) and *halyang* (outsiders, all non-tribals,

including Indians).⁵⁸ Most versions agree that the separation occurred at Miido Supung, in the Tsangpo valley, just before crossing the mountains; and this division at this point is consistent with other credible information: that Adis followed the course of the Tsangpo down the Siang and that other tribes (Apatanis, Nyishis, Hill Miris and Tagins) crossed at the headwaters of the Subansiri River in the Tsari region.

Beads: Trade and use

We know that these migration legends are not publicly performed, but we also know that history is transmitted by memory as well as by words. This social memory is often lodged in significant objects, such as the beads that have travelled along the same migration routes as the tribes of Arunachal. I said above that beads are not dropped in migration legends because return journeys are not part of the logic of these stories without heroes; but there is another, very simple reason: beads are far too valuable to be dropped – a single bead might be worth 1000 rupees (£13) and a necklace might be worth 1 lakh rupees (£1300); among the Apatani, the *sampo*, large, chunky white beads (conch shell), for instance, are worth about 13-15,000 rupees (£200) but in London would probably be sold for about £50, or even less.

Types of necklaces and their usages vary from tribe to tribe in the central group, but there are commonalities: they are worn by women in all tribes, of all ages, but rarely by unmarried girls; in some tribes, men also wear necklaces (and other ornaments), but these are usually single-strand, less expensive and less spectacular than those worn by women. In most central tribes, beads are the only form of wealth controlled by women; handed down from mother to (usually oldest) daughter, they are sometimes buried with a woman's corpse. Beads are popular and valuable among all the tribes in the central area, but the largest and most elaborate sets of necklaces are worn by Nyishis, Apatanis, Hill Miris and Tagins.

The geographical location of Arunachal Pradesh, between Tibet on the north, Burma on the east and the plains of Assam on the south, meant that these beads passed through the region as part of a vast network of trade routes linking South Asia with the rest of the world, not only its neighbours Tibet and China, but also Egypt, Mesopotamia, Europe, Africa, East Asia. We know, for example, that beads made in the Indus Valley between the second and first millennia BC were traded into central Asia and western China (Xinjiang).⁵⁹ When beads reached northeast India, they entered the regional section of this international trade network, which was once based on fairs and pilgrimages and is now part of global capitalism; this regional network moved goods back and forth across the Himalayas, largely through Bhutan but also through Arunachal, as well as along an east-west axis. Most scholarship about the southern side of this trans-Himalayan trade focuses on Nagaland. Dubin, for instance, has found that carnelian, shell and glass

beads began to move from Calcutta up to Nagaland about 1700; and Untrach has documented a brisk trade in beads and other body ornaments between Calcutta and Nagaland in the early nineteenth century.



Apatani women in ceremonial dress and beads at a feast, January 2003.

Many of these were glass beads, imported from Venice, Bohemia, Germany, China and the UK, and reworked by Indian craftsmen; indeed the first good description of beads in Arunachal, in the 1820s, noted large necklaces of blue beads that looked like turquoises, but upon closer examination were clearly fired glass.⁶⁰ By the mid-nineteenth century, when

India had shifted from being a producer to a consumer of goods, the import of glass beads into India greatly increased.⁶¹ A large percentage of foreign-made beads came into India on the Cambay coast of Gujarat and was traded onto the northeast by a network of Marwari merchants. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was reported that beads traded to Arunachal people by Tibetan pilgrims at Tsari were manufactured in Birmingham and Germany, and that they found their way to southern Tibet by way of Calcutta, Darjeeling and Lhasa (Dunbar 1932: 218-19). By this date, however, India's domestic manufacture of beads had revived and begun to supply glass beads to the northeast.

This bead trade in northeast India was only one part of a complex trans-Himalayan trade, which was largely conducted through trade fairs (*duars* or "doors") from at least the early 1600s. To these annual trade fairs, set up by the Ahom rulers at several locations in the plains of Assam close to the hills, came Tibetans, Bhutanese and Indian traders, for whom Arunachal tribesmen acted as middlemen and porters.⁶² The items traded, which varied according to the specific location along the Assam valley, were numerous and exchanged in large quantities. Down from the hills and to Assam came Tibetan ponies, woollen blankets, pipes, yaks' tails, lac, gold, Chinese silk, rubber, cowries and beads (of conch shell, porcelain and glass); these goods were bartered for Assamese "silk" (endi silk), other glass beads, deer antlers, deer musk (used for medicinal uses), iron implements, brass vessels and utensils, salt and paddy. One vivid report from the early nineteenth century describes the two-month journey required for the large caravans, which carried one lakh of silver bullion and nearly that amount in gold, to go from Lhasa to the fair at Udalgiri in Assam, where "[t]raders from all parts of Thibet, from Lassa and places east, west, and even north of it are present in crowds, some of them clad in Chinese dresses, using Chinese implements...Many have their families with them" (quoted in Elwin 1959: 10-11).

The fairs ceased temporarily during the turmoil in the Ahom dynasty in late eighteenth century and the Burmese invasion of early nineteenth; they flourished again under British control after the 1820s, and by the turn of the century a large volume of goods flowed up and down the hills and back and forth across the Himalayas. Beyond this regulated trade, overseen by the colonial government, individual traders, mostly Marwaris and later British entrepreneurs, also bought and sold goods by setting up shops in the major towns in Assam. By the early twentieth century, these increasingly professionalised capitalists, who had succeeded in displacing the state-regulated fairs, continued the old practice of trading beads in the tribal northeast. The other major development which contributed to the rise of private bead traders in Assam was a general southern drift of trans-Himalayan trade. Arunachal tribes began to trade more and more in the market towns of Assam and less and less across the mountains; even

adventuresome Tibetan traders, from Nepal, expanded into Assam and from there into Arunachal (van Spengen 2000: 182). Although this southern drift toward Assam was certainly encouraged by British colonial policy and propelled by the disruption caused by the Chinese expansion into Tibet after 1950, this "southern orientation" was a long-term development in response to the advantages of trade in Assam, such as rail lines, roads, modern commercial practices and a stable political situation (van Spengen 2000: 143).

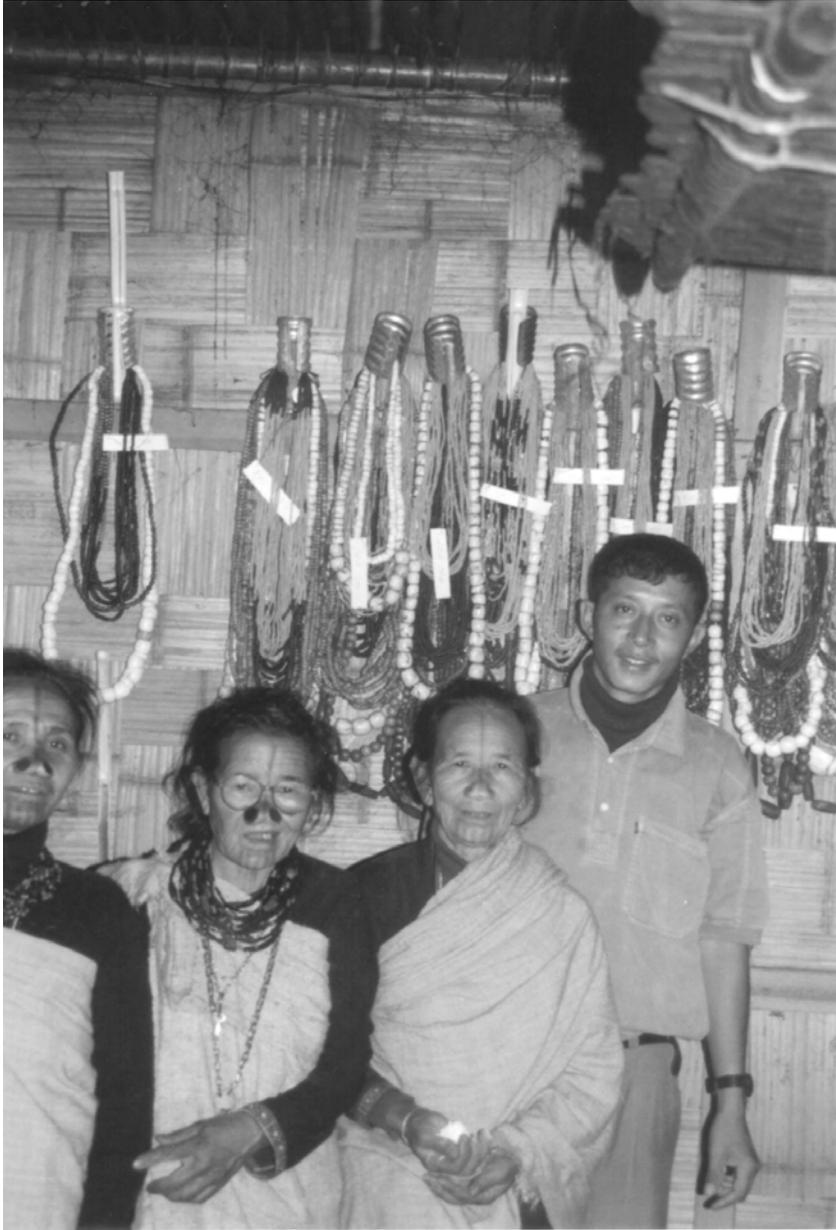
Relatively less is known about the northern side of this trans-Himalayan trade, but van Spengen has shown that it was part of a network linking monasteries and fairs and that it involved essential commodities, such as rice and salt, as well as low-weight, high-value items such as herbs, deer musk and gems (van Spengen 2000). Although only one of van Spengen's reconstructed trans-Himalayan routes leads into Arunachal, to the Tibetan Buddhist monastery at Tawang, near the border with Bhutan (van Spengen 2000: fig. 4, p. 83), we know that Arunachal tribes traded directly with Tibet at many points in the eastern Himalayas.⁶³ Goods from Assam were traded and bartered up and down routes that led into the hills, and then traded by the tribesmen along the river systems and over the Himalayas: on the upper Dibang River, for example, Tibetans, Chinese and Mishmi traders constantly crossed the Mishmi hills; on the upper Siang and Siyom rivers, Membas, Boris and Bokars acted as middlemen for most of the Adi area; and on the upper Subansiri, Tagins were go-betweens for Nyishi, Hill Miris and Apatanis further south across the Kamla River. Cross-Himalayan trade on the upper Subansiri in the mid-twentieth century is clearly described in Huber's book, with valuable details on bamboo and cane goods (Huber 1999: 210-13). It also appears that traders did not travel long distances (as they did in Nepal) because of frequent and unpredictable feuds; nor were there professional traders (like the Bhotias in Nepal). Instead, small groups of tribesmen would travel for 3-6 days and trade their skins for salt, which another group, further north, might have bought in Tibet (Fürer-Haimendorf 1983: 215). In brief, from the Arunachal traders the Tibetans got mainly deer antlers and musk, animal skins, rice, high-grade cane, Assamese-made daos and other implements, red madder, chillies and woven textiles; from Tibetan or other middlemen, Arunachal tribes acquired woollens, swords, bells, brass plates and beads. Some of the items traded down from the north were the same as those traded at the fairs in Assam, such as woollen blankets, horses and gold; but for the people living above the "salt line", Tibet was the source for this essential commodity.

Another nexus of trans-Himalayan trade were pilgrimage sites; from one particular location we have evidence that Tibetan swords, bells, plates and beads were obtained by Arunachal tribes since at least the seventeenth century. On the upper reaches of the Subansiri river, Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims paid these goods as tribute in exchange for which they obtained

what they valued even more highly: access to sacred landscape. As Huber's research shows, the Tsari region was the location of the most important pilgrimage for Tibetan Buddhists; every twelve years, from the early seventeenth century until 1956 (when the ritual ceased following the Chinese takeover), approximately 15-20,000 pilgrims gathered to circumambulate the "Pure Crystal" mountain. The lower slopes of this mountain, far from Lhasa or any major Tibetan cultural centre, were the domain of Tibeto-Burman-speaking tribes. In return for permitting the pilgrims safe access to the sacred slopes, the Tagins exacted tribute in an exchange ceremony, known as *dapo* ('peace treaty'), where they received, among other items, large quantities of Tibetan swords, bells and "large quantities of coloured beads for women's jewelry".⁶⁴

Tibetan swords, bells, brass plates and beads have been the items most desired by Arunachal tribes. Today beads are the most public and most numerous of these valuables, and although a great variety of colours and styles were and are worn, it is interesting to note a consistent preference for a light blue bead, probably made of porcelain or glass.⁶⁵ Large necklaces of these blue beads were noted in the very first report on beads in Arunachal, among the Adis in the 1820s, and in subsequent reports right up to the 1950s.⁶⁶ In 1845, for example, Dalton wrote that men and women in the Subansiri region "wear around their necks an enormous quantity of beads, mostly of blue, like turquoise, but also of agate, cornelian, and onyx and glass beads of all colours" (Dalton 1845:261). Fifty years later, the first Briton to visit the Apatani valley was careful to take blue beads with him to give as presents (Crowe 1890, quoted in Elwin 1959: 192). Dunbar's account in the early twentieth century also mentions "blue and green porcelain" beads, from both Tibet and Assam, among the Adis and Galos (Dunbar 1916:30) These same blue beads from the plains were apparently still the fashion among Apatani women in the 1940s and 50s (Fürer-Haimendorf 1950: 37; 1962: 56-60).⁶⁷

More important, the tribes in central Arunachal make a sharp division between beads believed to come from the plains and those believed to come from Tibet. Although these beads (including some varieties of the famous dZi beads) "come from Tibet", Tibetans are traders and not makers of beads. Among the Apatanis, beads are classified into two categories: the most valuable are called "original" (or "ours"), which are those thought to be the oldest and to come from Tibet; other beads are called "duplicate" (or "outside"), which are thought to come from Assam and are less valuable because they have been unstrung, rearranged or tampered with. Given the high market and cultural value of these objects, there is a strong incentive to claim a Tibetan origin.



Apatani beads on display inside a feast sponsor's house, January 2003.

The perceived origin of beads determines not only their relative worth but also their use, which has not changed much since the 1940s.⁶⁸ Again among Apatanis, beads from the plains are generally worn everyday, as part of a woman's ordinary dress and often in a mixture of small, brightly coloured yellow, blue and red beads (*chamer*); they are part of everyday use, although younger and educated women wear them less and less. "Tibetan beads", including the light blue ones, on the other hand, are reserved for ceremonial wear, at major festivals, feasts and other public occasions. There are no formal rules, but the general practice is that only married women (and widows) wear beads of either type; at the festivals, it is especially the

young wives, the daughters-in-law of the clan, who wear large, heavy and expensive strings of beads as they perform their duties, smearing rice powder and rice beer on the-soon-to-be sacrificed animals, serving the beer and powder to onlookers, giving and receiving donations of rice and millet. At some festivals (*murung* and *miida*), after the sacrifices, these spectacular sets of necklaces are hung on a wall inside the sponsor's house, for everyone to see. Tibetan beads (or those thought to come from Tibet), which enhance female beauty, are thus a public display of the sponsor's wealth and his clan's fertility.⁶⁹

Stories about beads

The history and social meanings of beads are also reflected in oral traditions among the central tribes of Arunachal. First, there are many references to beads as items of trade, and all these references speak of beads from Tibet, never from Assam.⁷⁰ Second, in all the stories (eleven in total) in which beads are the narrative focus they appear as sources of wealth. In some Adi stories, one set of brothers is deprived by another set of brothers, or are abandoned by their mother, but later acquire beads; in a few stories, beads are made from the fingers, knee-caps or toes of spirits (*wi*), or dead men, and presented to a girl, who then becomes rich.

In other stories, characters acquire beads because they perform a funeral for a rich woman (the person who performs the funeral is entitled to the assets of the dead) or simply because whenever they laugh, beads fall from their mouth. Third, in nearly all of these stories beads come from either the spirit world (the *wis*) or the natural world, of trees and animals; beads are not given a supernatural or magical explanation, they are not gifted by the gods. Instead, beads are made from bones or from a dog's heart, while their holes are created by a woodpecker. Curiously, a snake is very often brought into the explanation: it bites the beads, which explains their markings; it spits on them, which is the reason for their colouring; and in one Apatani story, a snake, cut into pieces and boiled in a pot, becomes a heap of expensive beads, which rescues a poor couple from poverty.⁷¹

In two stories, the connection between beads, the connection between the natural world and wealth is made explicit through the image of a necklace-tree. In an Adi story, the first ancestor, Abo Tani, acquires a mithun and tethers it to a necklace-tree (*gimse rine*) from which strings of beads hang like fruit. When the mithun eats the necklace-fruits, the tree falls on it and transfers its soul to the animal, which is why the mithun is so costly today (Bhattacharya 1965: 12-13). A similar necklace-tree also appears in an Apatani story, where the beads symbolise not only wealth but womanhood, as well (see Appendix). An unmarried girl, Ami Dori, is falsely accused of having sex with two snakes; she says she is innocent, but first her sisters-in-law, then her brothers, parents and finally the whole village rejects

her. She kills herself by hanging from the fruit tree, and she is buried. Later, her maternal uncle arrives; he is the person given the task of investigating unnatural deaths in Apatani society, so he keeps an open mind and makes a public declaration: "Ami Dori, you said you were innocent; if that is true, then give us a sign of your innocence, here at your grave." The next day, a small shoot appears, no larger than a snake's fang, and it grows day by day. Soon it becomes a tall tree, called the "Dori tree," and from its branches hang the many necklaces worn by Apatanis – dark blue, light blue, red, red-brown, green, yellow and white⁷². In this well-known story, as in festivals, beads among the Apatani are symbols of both wealth and female identity.

Both social practice and oral narrative reveal that, in central Arunachal, beads symbolise wealth and identity. The representation of wealth is more or less explicit, but identity is a more elusive quality; we can, nevertheless, distinguish two kinds of identity marked by beads. First, they symbolise womanhood; although small, usually single-cord necklaces are worn by men in some tribes, the large, valuable beads are worn only by women, chiefly by married women, and especially at festivals and feasts. As one woman said, when asked how she could wear such heavy necklaces, "If a woman cannot wear them, she is not a woman".⁷³ Second, beads are a visible display of a pan-tribal, non-Indian identity. The migration legends among the tribes in central Arunachal preserve a shared history and common ancestry, a sense of cultural identity, but cultural identity is often defined over against others – the outsiders, foreigners, those who are not us.⁷⁴ Central Arunachal is no exception: most of the languages in the Tani group make a sharp distinction between "us" and "outsiders", that is, non-tribals.⁷⁵ Non-tribals – Assamese, Indians, foreigners – do not as a rule wear beads, and the jewellery they do wear is nothing like that worn by the tribes. By stark contrast, all tribes wear necklaces, and they wear spectacular ones at public occasions.

These cultural meanings of beads in central Arunachal are not unusual; research in Africa, for instance, has also found that beads mark wealth, womanhood and cultural identity, and sometimes affirm continuity with the past.⁷⁶ Within central Arunachal, however, beads are the only items of material culture that mark both wealth and cultural identity. Other objects, such as Tibetan bells and plates, and now cars, are also expensive, but they are not displayed as markers of identity. Similarly, although textiles mark cultural identity (of specific tribes and increasingly a pan-Arunachal identity), they are not symbols of wealth because (unlike beads, bells and plates) they are made locally. Since beads come from outside, they appear to resemble what Marshall Sahlins called "commodity indigenisation", in which objects are stripped of their meaning and uses and are given new ones. Examples of this process include the Venetian rosaries accepted as heirlooms and used for bride-wealth payments in west Africa, Rajasthani jewellery held to be "traditional" for the Gonds in central India, and brass

boxes with an image of a Hindu goddess adapted by Nagas to hold hunted heads (Trivellato 1998: 64; Gell 1986:131; Untrach 1997: 60).

Something like this commodity indigenisation has occurred in central Arunachal for the Tibetan prayer bells, which are without handle or clapper (tongue) or any ritual function but are extremely valuable and are sometimes used in payments. "Tibetan" beads, however, are different. They are highly valued and publicly displayed because they are associated with the prestige and wealth of Tibet and because they claim an historical link with Tibet; but they cannot be stripped of any original meaning or use because the beads traded to Arunachal from Tibet are neither made nor worn by Tibetans. Rather than "stripping away", the borrowing culture has invested the objects with a new history, imagining it to have the same meanings and uses in the source culture which it has acquired in the borrowing culture.

This process of meaning-making in Arunachal is actually closer to what Mary Helms has described in her study of acquisition and power: objects acquired from sources outside a culture, she argues, are invariably "associated with primordial places of origin or with ancestral heroes or original creative events" (Helms 1993: 96, *passim*). As a result, she continues, these distant places, events and people, and the objects associated with them, are vested with authority, authenticity and power. These two observations bring us full circle in a search for relations between legends and material culture in Arunachal. First, the beads that central Arunachal tribes get from Tibet are by that very fact linked to origins and ancestors; second, the display of these "ancient" and valuable objects is a display of power.

Conclusions

The history of the approximately twenty-five tribes living in Arunachal Pradesh is not well documented in writing: from Tibetan sources we know that the tribes of central Arunachal were in the Himalayan borderlands in the fifteenth century, and Ahom chronicles report their presence on the southern border with Assam from the early seventeenth century. They probably came to Arunachal well before these dates, but as yet we have no other reliable evidence. This uncertainty regarding the original homeland of these tribes has divided scholars into two camps: one claiming Tibet, the other Burma/China. Since the study of Tibeto-Burman languages began in the late eighteenth century, most scholars have believed that the central tribes came from the east, across the Patkai Hills in northern Burma/southwest China; and this view has largely held sway in modern scholarship. Some recent studies, however, have called attention to migration legends, which uniformly point toward the north, and to the fact that migrants adopt the material culture of their new environment. The

trade in beads also leads across the Himalayas, and oral stories and local beliefs about beads demonstrate that the central tribes trace their migration from Tibet.

However much they agree on a homeland, the oral traditions and material culture of the tribes of central Arunachal Pradesh do not transmit memories of migration in the same way. The legends, which describe long journeys, genealogies and shared ancestry, are not publicly performed; they are held quietly in storage and referred to when necessary to substantiate an opinion. The necklaces, on the other hand, tell no stories, but they are very public displays. Beads thus nicely illustrate the argument that social memory is passed on not only, or even primarily, by texts; Paul Connerton, for example, persuades us that social memory is primarily transmitted by "bodily practices", such as ritual performances and commemorations.⁷⁷ When we then consider the associations between the acquisition of distant objects, origins and power described by Helms, we realise why Tibetan beads are chosen as the objects of such memory displays.

Both beads and migration legends are acquiring even greater significance amid the rapid and sometimes fundamental cultural change underway in today's Arunachal Pradesh. Festivals are now centralised and celebrated on a fixed date; Christianity has become a major force; neo-traditional religions are emerging; tribes are changing their names and writing their histories. In this emerging public arena of cultural politics, stories of origins and migration have a special authority, and beads help to mark the thick line drawn between tribal and non-tribal. We still do not know conclusively whence or when the tribes of central Arunachal came to the region, but we do know where the legends and the beads point. And even if these oral traditions and beliefs about beads are not historically accurate, they still occupy a prominent place in contemporary culture. Invented or not, migration legends and beads continue to shape perceptions of the past as well as construct current identities by placing the tribes of central Arunachal in relation to each other, and to the people in the plains.

Appendix

The Story of Ami Dori

There was a young girl called Ami Dori. She was an extremely good person, who spoke kindly and never ever had a bad word for anyone. She was also very beautiful, of incomparable beauty. She was as lovely as the rising sun and the shining moon, a girl of good speech, thought and action. Because she was so perfect she was considered the elder sister of the god *iipyo wi*.

But her brother's wife became jealous of her perfection and began to slander her. "Everyone says that your sister, Ami Dori, is good but she's not. She's evil. Do you know what she's done? She had illicit sex with Tadu and with Bume – that's what they say, she's done bad things with them." When he heard all this about Ami Dori, her brother believed his wife and then he, too, began to speak ill of her. And when their parents heard what the brother had to say, they also started to call her names. Hearing what the parents said, others outside the family began to talk ill of Ami Dori.

When she heard all that was said about her, all this horrible talk, Ami Dori felt terrible, very bad inside, and said to herself: "At first everyone praised me and said I was a good person, but now they say I'm bad." That's how she felt. "I am the sister of *iipyo wi* and so I've never had a bad thought in my heart, never done a bad thing. Not in the past, not even in childhood, not in the present and not in the future would I ever do anything bad. I never had and never will even entertain bad thoughts. You [her family] have prevented me from living my life as I wished."

Full of sorrow and pain, Ami Dori left her parents' house then went to a grove where she made the *takun* tree her mother and the *sangko bacho* tree her father. Why did she do that? You might ask. Well, her sister-in-law had slandered her, her brother had slandered her, her mother and father had slandered her, the whole village had slandered her. She was devastated and began to think: "If my mother doesn't act like a mother, and if I can't consider her my mother; if she can't think of me as her daughter, if my father can't think of me as his daughter, if my brother can't think of me as his sister, if my sister-in-law can't treat me as a sister-in-law, if everyone calls me an evil person, then I don't know how I can live on this earth."

Then she said to the creator god, "Since my birth, until this very day, I have done nothing wrong. I did nothing with Biilyi Tado and Bume Tah; I never even looked at them. To say I had illicit sex with them is idle gossip. God, you know everything – the stars, sun and moon, all the gods, souls, including the malevolent *giirii wi*; you created all the creatures, from spirits

to humans and animals, all the insects and reptiles, the flora and fauna, trees, everything little and big. Everything and everyone is your creation. So you know me, what I've done and what I've said and who I am. I also know and because I know I can no longer live among people. I'm going to leave this earth. They say that I had sex with Biilyi Tado and Bume Tah and I am humiliated/disgraced."

With these sad words and thoughts, she tied a cane-rope to a branch of the *takun* tree and then around her neck and committed suicide. There, in that *takun* grove, she took her own life and left this earth. After her death, her maternal uncle [and his brothers ?] came and said, "Ami Dori was always a good person. How could you speak about such a good person in such a terrible way? Because she felt disgraced, she killed herself." [They thought that she died because she felt disgraced?]

Ami Dori's family replied, "We all believed what the others said, that she was bad. We believed what her sister-in-law said about her, what her own brother and her own parents said. Asking more and more questions, the maternal uncle found out that her brother and his wife had first said that she was bad, that she had sex with Biilyi Tadu and Bume Tah. He also learned that they were not humans, but snakes, who became humans who turned back into snakes. Ami Dori had played with those snakes. They explained this to the maternal uncle and his brothers. [When they heard all this] the maternal uncle and his relatives spoke directly to Ami Dori, "You are sister of *iipyo wi*, the good Ami Dori, but they said that you were bad. But we, in our hearts, do not believe them. All those people accused you of doing evil, but you have said that you did nothing wrong with Biilyi Tado and Bume Tah, that you have been wronged, that you are blameless. But instead of taking revenge, we will bury you. Then you must show us that you are pure and not evil; give us a sign from your grave that you led a good life."

On the next day, in the early morning, her family and her sister-in-law's family [?] went to her grave and saw a small shoot growing, no taller than a snake's fang. On the second morning it was the size of a lizard's leg. And on the third day a full tree had grown over her grave mound, a big, thick tree with many branches. From her grave, through the power of god, spiritual power, she showed that she really had committed no evil. Different flowers blossomed on the many branches of that tree – a red flower, a white flower, a green flower and a dark flower [this is in *nyibo* language]. And the tree was called the "Dori" tree and the necklace tree because different coloured necklaces hung from those branches – the *domin*, *doku*, *rite*, *tado*, *sampyo*, *santer*, *ahing paming*, and *lebu* – all these necklaces grew on the tree.

"One person watches and one makes a hole [in the bead]; one person rolls the thread and one puts it through the hole; and plucks the beads from the tree." [In the same way ?] everyone now knew that Ami Dori was a good woman, that she had done no wrong; that god had made her a pure being. They knew that she had done nothing wrong with Biilyi Tadu and Bume Tah,

that everyone had unjustly slandered her. The necklace tree appeared to show this to everyone. When the tree had demonstrated Ami Dori's goodness to the maternal uncle, the others – her brother and sister-in-law, and her parents stood accused.

In order to show the rest of the world that she was innocent, her uncles took the necklaces [from the tree?] and set out to sell them. This is said to have been the "first business". In our *miji* language we have the saying: "Tado must go and sell; Haley must go and sell". [Tado-Haley refers to a generic trader] These two men set out to sell these necklaces, which were created by the creator of all we see [the stars, sun, moon, etc.] They went to sell those necklaces to show the world that Ami Dori was innocent.

They went to the house of Nyime Payang Radhe [a ruler from Tibet?], to try to sell them to his daughters. But they rejected them, saying they weren't up to the mark. So the uncles took the necklaces and wandered from place to place, trying to sell them, explaining that they were expensive because they were the ornaments of Ami Dori. North and south they went, here and there and everywhere, until they reached the house of Pan Pachi Tari [some kind of title]; to his women folk they said, "Here are fine necklaces; look at them and see how nice they are." Then Pan Pachi Tari bought them for his daughters, saying, "I'll buy them with my lands." And so it was that because Ami Dori was a virtuous person, of excellent character, kind thoughts and gentle speech – because she was the best person on earth her sister-in-law, her brother and her parents spoke ill of her, and others did until the whole world slandered her. God made her pure and through the power of *meping wi*, the necklace tree grew and showed the world [that she was innocent].

NOTES

¹ My thanks to Toni Huber, Richard Blurton, Martin Gaenzle and Mark Kenoyer, whose comments on earlier drafts enabled me to revise this essay.

² "Our knowledge about the early history of the people of Arunachal Pradesh is extremely vague and no connected account of the events that took place in later times is available" (Tamo Mibang 2000: 45). The compendium volume published by the Anthropological Survey India begins by stating that the history of Arunachal Pradesh is "shrouded in myths and legends" (Dutta and Ahmad 1995: 10).

³ Robinson 1841: 335. For recent histories, see Bose 1977; Barpujari 1981; Chowdhury 1990; Osik 1999.

⁴ Hsuan Tsang, the famous seventh century Chinese Buddhist traveller, mentions that Assam borders a region of "barbarians of the south-west (of China)" but makes no mention of tribes within Assam or on the southern flank of the Himalayas (Beal 1906: 198-99).

⁵ Sanskrit sources, dated before both the Tibetan and Ahom sources, refer to the Kiratas in Kamarupa (lower Assam), who are assumed to be a yellow-skinned (Mongoloid) people in the "high hills"; we cannot, however, use these vague references to identify the Kiratas with any present-day inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh. Archaeological research has reported neolithic tools in the region but not who might have made or used them (Ashraf 1990); the earliest such evidence is an inscription on a stone pillar of the early sixteenth century, which refers to an annual exchange of goods between the Mishmis and an Ahom king (Phukan 2002: 145, fn 8).

⁶ The only tribe in the state with its own script (related to Shan and Burmese scripts) are the Khamptis, a Buddhist group who migrated from the Shan area of northern Burma in the mid-eighteenth century. Among Buddhist tribes on the border with Tibet, Monpas use the Tibetan script, while the Membas use the Hikor and the Khambas the Hingna script, both derived from the Tibetan. Assamese has been widely used in Arunachal for centuries and Hindi since the second world war, while English has become popular since the 1960s. Experiments with roman scripts for tribal languages began in the 1960s but have enjoyed only limited success.

⁷ Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK, "Tribal Transitions" is a five-year study of cultural change in Arunachal Pradesh, with emphases on ritual life, material culture and oral traditions. Website at: tribaltransitions.soas.ac.uk.

⁸ Volume two of the Grimms' anthology of *Sagen* contains the "historical" legends, including some about battles in Roman times, attacks by Attila the Hun, plus stories about the coming of the Saxons, Angles, and Picts, among others.

⁹ For references to migration routes in ritual performances in Tibeto-Burman cultures, see note 57 below.

¹⁰ Little description is published on the use of migration legends in Arunachal. The *abe* in Adi, which contains details of clan history and migration, appears to have been public oratory (Nath 2000: 23; Roy 1997 [1960]: 47). In Apatani, details about migrations are found in chants called *ayu* and in other non-ritual, "historical" texts.

¹¹ Vansina 1985: 120.

¹² On oral tradition and migration generally, see Vansina 1985: 17, 32, 118-120. For representative studies of migration legends in specific groups, see Gatschet 1969 [1884], for the Creek Indians; Vom 1993, for the Badeng of Sarawak; Mukherjee 1943, for the Santals of eastern India.

¹³ See Gaenszle 2002 (37-44) for a discussion of "ancestral voices" which link past and present in Tibeto-Burman cultures in Nepal.

¹⁴ On the cycle of return in myth, see Eliade 1954; on the "expulsion and return" pattern in oral literature, first described by von Hahn in 1876, see Nutt 1881.

¹⁵ It is convenient to divide the tribes in Arunachal into four groups, based on their material culture, religion and probable homeland; these groups largely but not entirely correspond to linguistic groupings. Moving from west to east, as Verrier Elwin did when he first suggested this kind of division:

1. Tibetan-Buddhist groups (whose religious system is mixed with animism) in the northwest near Bhutan and along the Chinese border (Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khambas). [In between the Tibetan-Buddhist and the central groups are the Aka, Miji, Sulung, Bugun and Bangru, whose languages are unclassified and whose cultures are hybrid.]
2. Central, or the Tani group.
3. Burmese-Buddhist groups (whose religious system is mixed with animism) in the east, near Burma (Khamptis, Singphos).
4. Naga-related groups (Noctes, Wanchos, Tangsas) also in the east, near Burma and Nagaland.

¹⁶ Information about the Tibetan-Buddhist groups in the northwest, as gleaned from Tibetan records, suggests that these groups had long been caught up in dynastic and sectarian rivalries between powers in Tibet and Bhutan; the Monpas appear to have come under direct Tibetan rule and adopted Gelukpa Buddhism by the 17th century, when it is believed that the monastery was built at Tawang (Aris 1980; Sarkar 1980: 11). We also know, largely from a combination of Ahom and British records, that other tribes arrived in Arunachal during the past two centuries:

1. The Membas, a Nyingma Tibetan-Buddhist group, were driven out of the Tawang area during the expansion of Gelukpa domination during the 17th or 18th century and settled hundreds of miles to the east, in Menchuka and the Upper Siang, by about 1800 (Dutta and Ahmad 1995: 195; Dunbar 1916: 93). Tibetan records (Billorey 2000: 2, 5) and oral tradition (P. Dutta 2000) among the Membas, however, claim origins directly north in Tibet. However, the fact that Membas speak a Tshangla dialect places their early history in the Tawang/Bhutan region to the west (van Driem 2001: 872). This view, however, has been challenged by Toni Huber (personal communication, June 2003), who believes that the Menchuka Membas have more complex origins, incorporating different Tibetan populations.
2. The Khamptis, a Tai-speaking group, migrated across the Patkai hills in the mid-18th century. Dalton (1872: 7) mentions that in 1850, three to four hundred new settlers arrived in the area, while Sarkar (1987: 2-10) provides an origin myth, and details of migration and of contact with the British.

3. The Singphos, who also crossed the Patkai hills and who are directly related to the Kachins/Jinghpaws in northern Burma, arrived in the late eighteenth century.
4. The Yobins [Lisus], apparently arrived in the early 20th century, again via the Patkai hills (Mibang 2000: 49), while the Chakmas arrived in the 1940s from the Chittagong Hill tracts (Chowdhury 1990: 10).

¹⁷ Sun 1993; Weidert 1987; van Driem 2001.

¹⁸ In early Tibetan historical sources the area of Arunachal Pradesh is known variously as Klo yul, Klo bo or Klo bkra (these names exist in a number of variant forms: Glo yul, Slos bo, Slos kra, etc.). The first reference to these non-Tibetan people living in the borderlands between India and Tibet appears in a geographical text attributed to the eighth century but which probably dates from the twelfth century (e.g., Vimalamitra. *Kun tu bzang po klong drug rgyud kyi 'grel ba*. 1988, Delhi: Samdrup Tsering, p.237); several thirteenth-century references are mentioned in later historical works.

A Tibetan text from the sixteenth century describes conflicts (from a century earlier) between Tibetans in Kongpo and adjacent Klopa tribes to the south, in what is today eastern Arunachal (the famous history by dPa' bo gTsug lag Phreng ba (1504-1566), written in 1565 (*Dam pa'i chos kyi 'khor lo bsgyur ba rnams kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, 2 vols. 1989, Beijing: *Mi rigs dPe skrun khang*, vol.2, p.1047). Another sixteenth-century text provides more detailed accounts of the lives and appearance of people in north central Arunachal, adjacent to the Tsa ri district; the text is based on encounters which must have occurred in the early decades of the fifteenth century, when the Tibetan lama Thang stong rgyal po (b.1361) had contact during a two-year period with the tribes living adjacent to the Tsa ri district (see the biography by Lo chen 'Gyur med bde chen (1540-1615), *Dpal grub pa'i dbang phyug brtson 'grus bzang po'i rnam par thar pa kun gsal nor bu'i me long*. 1982, Beijing: *Mi rigs dPe skrun khang*, pp. 142, 136, 138, 142- 148, 150-152.) The information in this note was kindly supplied by Toni Huber.

See also Aris 1980 for a translation of the 5th Dalai Lama's edict of 1680, which claims Tibetan authority over the western region of Arunachal, and Murty 1986, who refers chiefly to the *Biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama*.

¹⁹ The Ahom chronicles, serially compiled during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, also contain numerous but brief references to central Arunachal tribes (Gait [1926: 3] lists six chronicles in Ahom and eleven in Assamese). Written in either Ahom (a Tai language) or Assamese, these chronicles, or *buranji*, cover the period from the early thirteenth century, with the invasion of the Ahoms from the Shan states in northern Burma, until the early nineteenth century, when the long Ahom dynasty came to an end (Barua 1930). The most complete history is contained in the *Ahom Buranji*, written in the Ahom language and Ahom script (related to other Tai/Daic scripts of northern Burma [personal communication, Dr. J. Watkins, March 2003]). This chronicle begins with the creation of world and then narrates major events of the Ahom dynasty, internecine struggles, coronations and battles with outsiders (mainly the Mughals in the seventeenth century); it

concludes with the intrigues that led to the fall of the Ahom kings, the entry of the British in the late eighteenth century and the assumption of British control in the early nineteenth. The earliest reference to a central Arunachal tribe appears to be in 1615, when the chronicle mentions a raid by "Miris [Hill Miris?, Misings?] and Daflas [Nyishis]" that forced the Ahom army to retreat (Gait 1926: 120). Contact and conflict with other tribes, especially Nagas and Mishmis, were also frequent throughout the seventeenth century; and in the eighteenth century we find another cluster of references to Nagas, Mishmis and Miris, plus the Abars [Abors/Adis?], who joined with the Khamptis in opposing the Ahom rulers. "Nagas" are mentioned in the mid-sixteenth century (Barua 1930: 75); "Miris" in the 1650s (p. 135); "Daflas" [Nyishis] in the 1670s (p. 218-20); "Misimis" [Mishmis] in the 1670s (p. 231-2); in the 1790s' the Abars [Abors/Adis?] joined the Khamptis, Nagas, Miris and "Misimis" in a battle against the Ahoms (p. 364). Nyori (1993:30, 66) says a nineteenth-century Ahom chronicle contains the first mention of Adis: they are reported to have received *posa* or tribute rights in a few villages in the early seventeenth century. Finally, according to Mibang, the Ahom chronicles record the presence of Noctes in Arunachal as early as the thirteenth century (Mibang 2000: 48).

²⁰ Dunbar 1916: 17, fn. 1; Jackson 1999: 12; Tarun Bhattacharjee 1983: 32-33; Dunbar 1916: 93.

²¹ These are the Mising (or Miri) people.

²² People from Arunachal, albeit in small numbers, live today in southwest Tibet (Sun 1993: 23-24 on Na Bengni and Bokars; Toni Huber, personal communication, June 2003, on Bokars; Jomoh Miri Mishimbu, personal communication, February 2003, on Idu Mishmis).

²³ Some tribes (the Akas, for example; Dutta and Ahmad 1995: 13) claim that they moved from the Assam plains up into the hills, but this movement may have occurred after having first arrived from somewhere north or east of the mountains.

²⁴ The exception, Khampti, belongs to the Tai group, which is considered by some linguists to be part of the larger Sino-Tibetan family and by others to be a separate family.

²⁵ There is a parallel debate about the place of the languages of central Arunachal within the Tibeto-Burman family. They were first placed in the "North Assam Group" by Grierson in 1909, and later scholars have continuously reclassified and renamed the group to which these languages belong (for summaries of this debate, see Sun 1993: 363-73; van Driem 2001: 388-408, 481-96). Despite this confusion, the integrity of the Tani group and its constituent languages is not in doubt (Sun 1993: 372).

²⁶ Konow 1902: 136.

²⁷ Konow 1902: 136.

²⁸ Grierson 1909: 572.

²⁹ The Q'iang [Ch'iang] have also been linked to the Na-khi-Moso, a Tibeto-Burman people in northern Yunnan by Rock (1947 vol. 2: 358), a view endorsed by McKann (1998: 28-30), but not Jackson (1979: 276-290).

³⁰ McKann, for instance, argues that Tibeto-Burmans, coming from northeast Tibet, settled in this riverine corridor more than two thousand years ago (McKann 1998: 28-29).

³¹ Nath identifies the Chi'ang as the ancestors of the central tribes of Arunachal (Nath 2000:12). However, translations of ancient texts, some of which are assumed to be specimens of early Chi'ang oral literature, show little similarity with oral texts from Arunachal (Thomas 1957).

³² Chowdhury 1990: 13-18; Nath 2000.

³³ Roy 1997 [1960]: 255, *passim*.

³⁴ See also Bhattacharya 1965, for details of other migration routes.

³⁵ Nyori (Nyori 1993: 45). Also rejects Bhattacharjee's claim (Bhattacharjee 1977) that Adis originated in northern Burma/Yunnan, drawing attention to the fact that Bhattacharya has misidentified place-names in the oral legends: for example, Nyulum Siang is not, according to Nyori, the Zayul river, and it is not a tributary of the Lohit (Bhattacharjee 1975: 41).

³⁶ A similar link between Tibetan and Arunachal conceptual systems was suggested also by Ramirez 1989.

³⁷ On the history of Bon, see Karmay 1972; the disputed narrative of Bonpos driven out by Buddhists is discussed by Snellgrove (1987: 399-407, 426-28).

³⁸ The priest in central Arunachal is called *nyibo*, or some variation of that word (*nyibu*, *nibu*); the meaning of *nyi* is unknown and is not used by itself, but *bo* is the pronominal suffix in many central Arunachal languages (e.g., *ini* + *bo* = 'one who went' in Apatani). Thus *nyibo*, the term for priest, means 'he who does or is *nyi*'. In Na-khi religion, one term for the original ritual specialist is *ssan-nyi* (Rock 1959: 777; Jackson 1979: 57), where *nyi* means 'to heal', 'to cure'. [He is also called *llu-bu*; and there is another category of specialist who reads texts, but they arrived later, apparently with Bon influence.] Thus, in central Arunachal *nyi* + *bo/bu* would translate as 'one who heals', which is just what they do. The Na-khi priest is also similar to the Arunachal specialist in that neither, unlike much shamanistic practice in Asia, goes into trance or becomes possessed (Rock 1959: 806).

There are also similarities between Na-khi ritual practices and those of central Arunachal: during the *muan-bpo*, the important feast of the Na-khi, pigs are sacrificed, chicken blood sprinkled on altars, wine made, and an egg placed in a split stick--all of which occurs also in major festivals in Arunachal (Jackson 1979: 106-09; Rock 1998: 180-185). The ritual altars constructed by the Mo-So, a group closely related to the Na-khi, also resemble those built in central Arunachal (Rock 1959: plate 2). Finally, the story behind the ritual – that the pig sacrifice is performed to appease the anger of one party whose daughter was unlawfully married by a second party – is close to the story behind the *myoko* ritual among Apatanis (Rock 1998: 185).

³⁹ For example, the only reported parallel to the defining myth of central Arunachal, the story of the origin of death (with female sun and male moon) has been reported among the

Buriats (Holmberg 1927: 424). This distinctive gender pairing in the Arunachal story – a female sun deity and a male moon deity – is found only among Nagas and among "most peoples of Turkish origin living in Siberia" (Holmberg 1927: 422).

⁴⁰ A fundamental problem in any possible identification is that a lack of good ethnographic data has spawned a confusing array of terms: "Tibetan", "Tibetanised", "semi-Tibetan" and "Tibetan-influenced", plus "Lopa", "Mon", "Loteus", to name only a few.

⁴¹ Other terms are/were also used (Ramble 1997; Huber 199: 133-34, 180; Huber personal communication, July 2003).

⁴² Huber's informants describe the Klopas they saw at Tsari in the 1950s wearing the long pins [= skewers] in their hair; Sherriff's photos (in Ludlow 1937; Ludlow 1938) show them with these skewers, swords, long cloth dresses and hornbill feather head-dresses, and fibre raincoats.

⁴³ According to Riddi 2002, the exchange at the Tsari pilgrimage site was between Tibetans and the *mra* clan of Tagins.

⁴⁴ Mitkong et al. 1999 provides a detailed creation myth among Tagins, which describes the distribution of all central Arunachal tribes, but does not speak of origins or migrations. About the Hill Miris, Dalton (1845 p. 261) says that "[r]egarding their migrations they have no traditions" and believe they always lived in their present area. Kumar (1979: 10-18) describes the migration of Boris (an Adi group) from north to south and southwest, along the banks of Siyom, Siang and Siyu rivers.

⁴⁵ Two versions of a story (told by Mudan Donny, in Hapoli on 1.02.01 and 25.03.02), like the Adi legend noted earlier, locates the origins of the Tani group in "Mongolia." See also Kani 1993: 33-40.

⁴⁶ *Nyime* is the Apatani word for 'Tibet'.

⁴⁷ Fürer-Haimendorf (1955: 187) noted that a high peak, Pij Cholo, is also mentioned in Apatani legends of migration.

⁴⁸ Told by Hage Tapa, Hari village, 28.02.03; collected and partially translated by Hage Komo.

⁴⁹ *Dree*, which occurs in the summer, is celebrated as an all-Apatani festival.

⁵⁰ *Myoko* (March-April), *murung* (January) and *subu* (January or February) are feasts sponsored by individual families or clans or villages.

⁵¹ A *lapang* is a large wooden, raised platform in open space.

⁵² These paths have not been identified with known geographical places; some of these path names recur as personal names of ancestors.

⁵³ *Dundu lamin* is unknown to Apatanis today; some suggested that it was a "large stone."

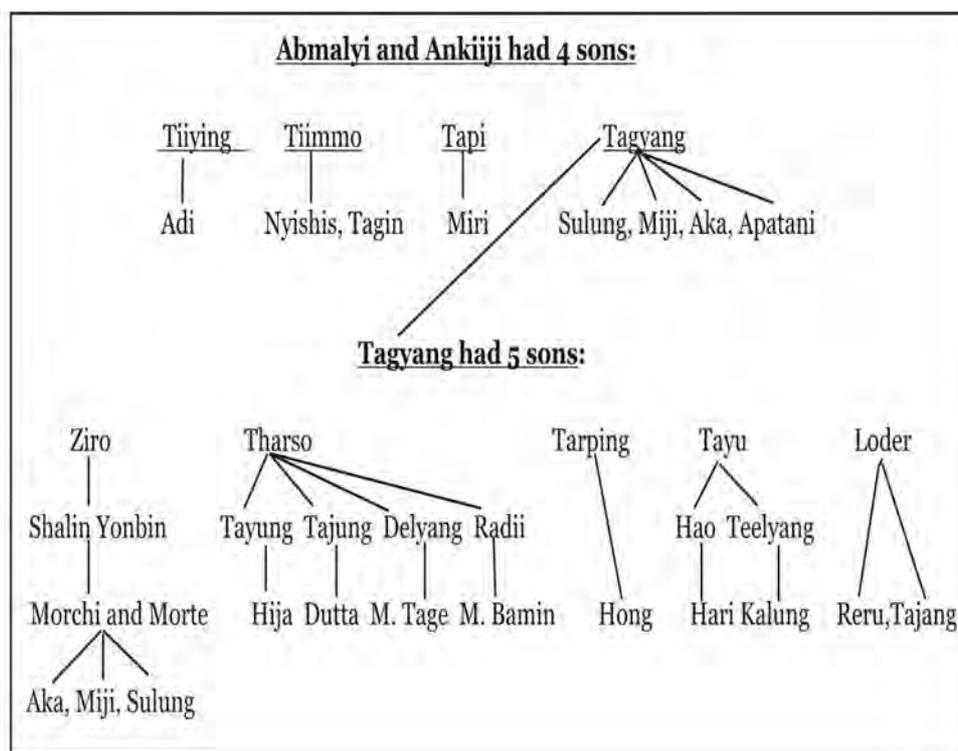
⁵⁴ "*Hintii*" has not been identified, but a possible translation is 'a place from below'.

⁵⁵ The villages named in this paragraph are those found today in the Apatani valley.

⁵⁶ The Kru River is a tributary of the Kamla, which flows into the Subansiri River.

⁵⁷ A strong parallel between Apatani and other Tibeto-Burman cultures is the centrality of a concept of the "path", which is reported in ritual texts of Tibeto-Burman tribes in northern Burma (Jinghpaw, see Sadan forthcoming; Rawang, see Morse 1966), southwest China (Naxi-Moso, Yi, Lisu, Permi, Dulung, see McKann 1998), Nepal (Rai, see Gaenszele 2000, 2002; Gurung, see Pettigrew 1999; Magar, see Oppitz 1999; Tamang, Höfer 1999) and central Arunachal (Apatani and the anomalous Mishmi, Blackburn, field notes 2001-2003). In most of these cases, ritual chants describe a route that takes the souls of the dead back to the tribal homeland or the land of the dead or the place of creation of mankind. In some cases, the ritual paths are procession or pilgrimage routes.

⁵⁸ The following genealogy was given by Mudan Donny on 1.02.01 in Hapoli. These genealogical groups roughly correspond to the language groups constructed by linguists, with the major exception that linguists place Sulung, Miji and Aka in a group outside the Tani group (van Driem 2001: 473-496; Sun 1993: 242, 281-86).



Note: Hija, Dutta, M. Tage, M. Bamin, Hong, Hari, Kalung, Tajang and Reru are names of Apatani villages.

⁵⁹ Ming 1974. Ongoing studies of stone beads by Mark Kenoyer indicate that some carnelian beads from the Indus Valley were traded into northern and central China and buried in tombs of the Western Zhou period (Mark Kenoyer, personal communication, 2003). Other agate and carnelian beads that may have been made in either the Indus

Valley or central Asia appear to have been traded as far as the Korean peninsula by the 3rd century BC (Glover 1990). Excavation in Thailand and in Burma have turned up a number of bead types that appear to have been made in the Gangetic region, the Deccan Plateau or even Sri Lanka. It is not improbable that some of these beads were also traded into the highlands of northern Assam and Arunachal (Mark Kenoyer, personal communication, 2003).

⁶⁰ Wilcox 1832: 403.

⁶¹ Francis 2002.

⁶² Moving from west to east: there were five duars collectively known as the "Eastern duars"; five called the Kamrup duars; three known as the Darrang [Dirang] duars; four called the Charduar; nine called the Naduar; and finally six known as the Choiduar (Phukan 2002: 141-42). The duars in the western end of the Assam valley were controlled by Bhutan (Gait 1926: 311-12).

⁶³ Rididi (2002) lists fourteen trade routes linking central Arunachal and Tibet, and Phukan (2002) identifies twenty-six "passes". See also Showren 2002, who mentions that Nyishis bartered animal skins and a special red dye for Tibetan valuables (bells, swords, plates and beads).

⁶⁴ Huber 1999: 138. See also Rididi 2002; Krishnatry 1997. These ritualised payments in the Himalayas resemble what we know of the tributes paid annually to tribes in the Brahmaputra valley, at the foothills; the *posa* system operated by the Ahom kings, and then inherited by the British in the early nineteenth century.

⁶⁵ Apatanis have two such beads: *sambyu* (larger) and *sampyu* (smaller).

⁶⁶ Wilcox 1832: 403.

⁶⁷ Fürer-Haimendorf (1962: 56-60) also mentions that women also wore other larger and darker blue beads, probably from Tibet, as well as "crudely cut cylindrical glass beads of dark blue colour" which had lost their market value. See also Dunbar 1916: 3-4; Roy 1960: 84-85.

⁶⁸ Fürer-Haimendorf's description of bead use in the 1940s (1962: 57-60) corresponds in almost every detail with what I know from 2000-2003.

⁶⁹ Sciama (1998: 15-16) believes that beads "symbolically represent the eye as well as female genitalia; she cites the ancient Mediterranean where eye-shaped beads were used as amulets for healing and Africa where beads are associated with fertility. Apatani "eye" (*ami*) beads are popular and valuable but are not thought to have healing powers.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Elwin 1958; 1970: 91, 96.

⁷¹ Cf. origin tales told about beads in Tibet (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1952) in which insects, mountains and spirits are often cited.

⁷² The Ami Dori story is similar to the international folktale known to folklorists as "The Singing Bone" (Aa-Th 780), in which a bone or bush or flower or tree grows above the grave of a murdered person and reveals the identity of the murderer. Later, the necklaces

are taken by her uncle, who tries to sell them to show the world that she is innocent. But they are too expensive and no one can buy them. A (Tibetan?) king, Nyime Radhe, rejects them as sub-standard; finally, Pan Pachi Tari, a merchant in Assam, buys them for his daughters.

⁷³ Nyishi woman at Nyokum, Doi Mukh, February 2002.

⁷⁴ On the dynamics of oppositional identities, see Thomas 1997: chap. 8.

⁷⁵ The Apatani have a tripartite division between "us", other tribals in the Tani group, and outsiders.

⁷⁶ On Africa and Latin America, see the essays in Sciamia and Eicher 1998; and Sciamia 1998: 16-18.

⁷⁷ Connerton 1989.

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The Oral History of the Darṃá Lineage of Indus Kohistan

Ruth Laila Schmidt

1. Introduction

Indus Kohistan lies on the western margin of the Shina-speaking zone, which includes the Gilgit and Kohistan Districts of Pakistan, the Kishanganga and Dras River systems of Indian Kashmir, and parts of Ladakh. Shina is classified as a member of the Dardic branch of Indo-Aryan languages,¹ and historians have long attempted to identify the speakers of Shina with an ancient ethnic group known as the Dārada. Classical Greek, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and epigraphic sources place the country of the Dards, or *Dāradadeśa*, in the Neelam/Kishanganga valley.² The rock carvings³ discovered by Jettmar in the Indus valley show that Chilas was between the 5th to the 8th centuries A.D. probably a frontier district of a Dārada kingdom with its seat in the Neelam/Kishanganga.⁴

Linguistic evidence links the Shina language with the Gandhari Prakrit of the lower Kabul and Swat River valleys, which is attested in the Ashokan (3rd century B.C.) and later inscriptions. When this area was conquered by Pashtun tribes, between the 11th and early 16th centuries, groups of Shina-speakers may have migrated or been pushed north into the valleys tributary to the Indus.⁵

Most ethnic Shin [*Ṣiṅ*] speak Shina, but some non-Shin ethnic groups, such as the Yeshkun, also speak it. The origin legend discussed here belongs to the ethnic Shin of Palas in Indus Kohistan, which is an isolated valley lying approximately halfway between the modern Tarbela Dam and Chilas. The Shin of Palas have a tradition that they came from the town of Chilas, on the Indus River side of the Babusar Pass.

I became interested in Shina for linguistic reasons. Shina preserves a number of archaic linguistic features, including partial preservation of the Old Indo-Aryan sound system and a high percentage of cognates with Sanskrit. It also shows interesting phonological and grammatical innovations not generally observed in other branches of the Indo-Aryan family (for example, the development of pitch accent). Shina has been until the last few decades an unwritten language, thus its oral traditions have never been contaminated by competition with written versions.

1 Morgenstierne 1961.

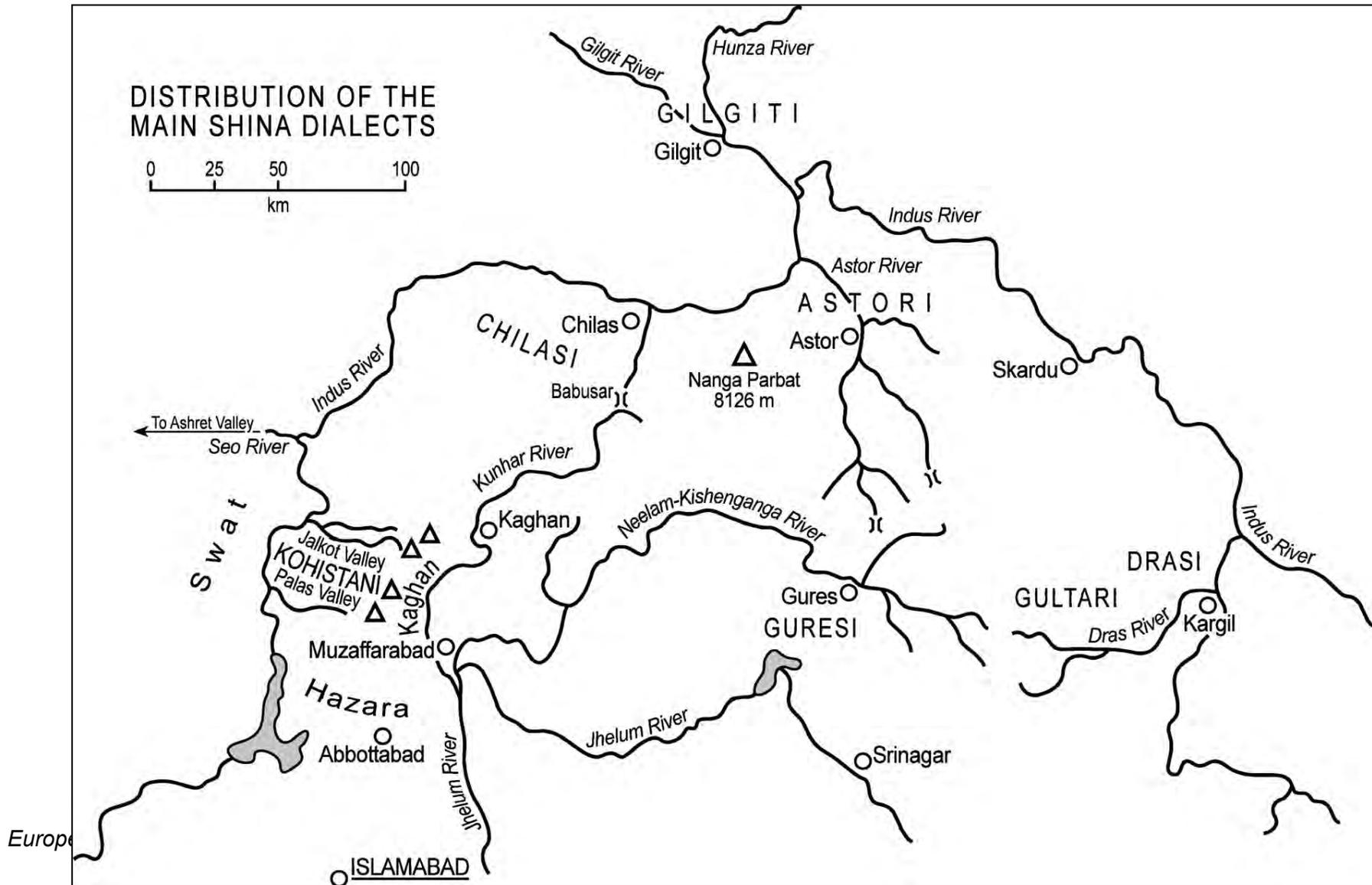
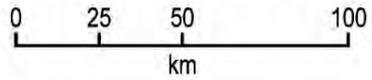
2 Vohra 1981: 53-66; Jettmar 1977: 411-433; 1989, 2: 114.

3 These petroglyphs date from prehistoric times until the 10th or 11th century.

4 Jettmar 1989, 1: xix.

5 Fussman 1989: 55-56.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE MAIN SHINA DIALECTS



Unfortunately, no Shina records or inscriptions trace the history of this region, and so we have to rely on oral history and linguistic evidence. Among the Darṃá lineages⁶ of Indus Kohistan, oral history plays several important roles. It is used to validate claims of property ownership, since there are no written records of the *wesh*, or land distributions, in which land was allocated to *záats*, or lineages, in equal amounts.⁷ It preserves the memory of feuds between different lineages, feuds which in some individual cases remain unresolved. Legends are cited to enhance the collective reputation of one's lineage; for example, Darṃá lineages point to their historic overthrow of the mighty adversary Dam Siṅg as testimony to their courage. Conversely, false histories are invented to discredit some *Šiṅ* lineages, claiming that their ancestors were originally artisans, such as carpenters or ironsmiths, or were merely found under a tree.

Not much is known about how legends contribute to defining local identity. Land tenure, feud histories and the cycle of seasonal migration are far more powerful shapers of local spaces than legend,⁸ and ethnographic work has focused on these. But legends and oral histories are associated with all these things, and help to give a higher profile to places of minor political or economic significance. Kaṅdróṭ, in the hills above the village of Chórṭo near the Indus River, is supposed to be the ancient capital of Bóṭi Siṅg's kingdom. Rich treasures are said to be buried somewhere in Tiyáal, where he was captured. Summer pastures named Ledí and Muṛú are remembered as places where five of the Twelve Martyrs were killed. The cultural geography of Kohistan is a subject which could be further explored through legend, song and ritual, preferably by scholars with a knowledge of Shina.

Most Kohistani oral history has a secular character, even when the subject is the bringing of Islam to Kohistan, that is to say, the legends are considered history (*tazkirá*), and are not usually associated with any rituals. There are however exceptions, notably the story of the Twelve Martyrs. In premodern times, a scuffle between two women of the Hakimá and Aztá lineages escalated into a thirty-year feud between these lineages, in which eleven men of the Hakimá lineage (including a *mulāna* or religious scholar) and one of the Cuthyá lineage, were killed in various tribal battles. The story is told in a blow-by-blow narrative, in which the names of all the participants, the weapons they used, and the circumstances of each battle are given careful attention. The victims attained the status of martyrs, and their tombs came to be treated as a shrine, at which people still stop to pray when travelling from Palas to Pattan. Gradually rituals evolved around these martyrs, such as offering food cooked in their names to the poor, and asking for their help in solving problems. However Deobandi Sunni influence in

6 The Darṃá are a *dal* or a division of the *Šiṅ* ethnic group living in Indus Kohistan.

7 Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 10-17.

8 Knudsen 2001: 69-146, 223-244.

modern Kohistan discourages worship at the shrines of saints, and these rituals are being given up.

In this paper I examine three versions of the origin legend of Palas in the light of historical data on Chilas, Kashmir and Hazara District, and of comparative linguistic analysis. The legend sheds only a hazy light on the recent history of Kohistan. It may however contain a memory of a kingdom dating back a millennium, the “Bhatta-Shâh” kingdom found in Chilas by Al-Biruni.

2. The founding myth of Palas

In Palas, “The story of Bóṭi Siṅg and Dam Siṅg” is passed on from generation to generation, told by old men called *qasmáar*, on request from interested listeners. It describes the migration of the Daṛmá lineage of the Shin of Indus Kohistan from the north, and the invasion of Kohistan or overlordship of it by two men, usually said to be Sikhs, also coming from the north. I have collected three versions of this story, which I summarize here.

In an interview in Lahore in 1980, the Shin tribal elder Haréq told Manzar Zarin that Daṛóomo, the ancestor of the Daṛmá lineage, originally migrated from Chilas to Kohistan at a time when Sikhs ruled Kohistan, and the region still lay in darkness, i.e., the light of Islam had not reached it. According to Haréq, the Palas Valley was then ruled by a Sikh named Dam Siṅg, and the Jalkot Valley by a Sikh named Bóṭi. Daṛóomo’s nephews, Tóolo and Dodoóko, are converted to Islam by another uncle, Soróom, who has secretly converted to the new religion. Tóolo and Dodoóko kill Dam Siṅg in Dáro (upper Palas) while Bóṭi Siṅg is away in Chilas, and keep a watch on Bóṭi Siṅg’s return route in order to kill him as well:

In those days, Dáro was ruled by a Sikh called Dam Siṅg and the population in lower Palas were farmers by profession. Jalkot was ruled by another Sikh whose name was Bóṭi. Tóolo and Dodoóko came down to Dáro and killed Dam Siṅg and escaped to their maternal uncles in lower Palas. Then they crossed the Indus River and went to their mother who lived in a place called Tiyáal in Jalkot. She treated them very well. Bóṭi was visiting Chilas at that time, and on his way back he heard the news. They kept watch on [Bóṭi's] route with the intention of getting rid of the Sikhs, in order to bring the light [of Islam] to the region. They were doing so because they had already accepted Islam.

In the meanwhile, the ancestor of the Sormá [lineage], called Soróom, had gone secretly to the Sayyids of Króoṛ, in Swat, and had converted to Islam. This was not yet public knowledge. Tóolo and Dodoóko were the sons of his [Soróom's] younger brother. Soróom constantly worked to make

converts among his relatives: Poëês and his sons, until they all converted to Islam.⁹

Razwal Kohistani has recorded another version of the same story from several sources. This version says that Bóṭi Siṅ lived in Jalkot and collected taxes from as far away as the Shina-speaking region above Seo on the Indus. Nothing is said about his being a Sikh, but he doesn't seem to have been a Muslim, as Tóolo and Dodoóko are said to be “the very first to bring the Faith to Kolai, Palas and Jalkot”. In Kohistani's version, Tóolo and Dodoóko kill Dam Siṅ and Bóṭi Siṅ in revenge for their father Darákan, whom Dam Siṅ has murdered for failing to pay taxes:

At that time Bóṭi Siṅ was living in Jalkot. He used to collect taxes from as far as Şunaáki. One day Bóṭi Siṅ sent him a message that Darákan in Palas should be killed. Darákan was not paying tax to him. Darákan had a friend in Palas. His name was Haṅyaál. He was living in Şarkóoṭ. Around the onset of spring Darákan came down to meet him. He stayed a while. One day he set off for Jalkot via the Kharát path. Dam Siṅ had him attacked and killed by four or five men...

Darákan had two sons; they called one Tóolo and the other Dodoóko. In time they grew up. Taking leave of their mother, they came down to Şarkóoṭ. Haṅyaál arranged for a weapon and told them the way ... They climbed a tree and looked, and there sat Dam Siṅ on the rocky escarpment. He was smoking a water-pipe. Tóolo and Dodoóko were ready with the weapon. One drew the bow and fired an arrow. It struck Dam Siṅ's navel. Dam Siṅ died on the spot. Tóolo and Dodoóko took to their heels. After a while they killed Bóṭi Siṅ in Jalkot ... Tóolo and Dodoóko were the very first to bring the Faith [Islam] to Kolai, Palas and Jalkot.¹⁰

A third version of the myth is told by the elder Zar Jahan of Jalkot. In Zar Jahan's version, Dam Siṅ and Bóṭi Siṅ are Sikh commanders in Gilgit, who occupy Chilas, and from there, attack upper Palas (Dáro). Tóolo and Dodoóko join their uncle Daṛóomo in the battle and kill Dam Siṅ. Meanwhile Bóṭi Siṅ attacks Jalkot. Tóolo and Dodoóko enlist the support of the Khúka-Manká lineages of Kolai, and the tribal army confronts Bóṭi Siṅ's army at Tiyaál in Jalkot. Bóṭi Siṅ flees, but is caught and killed. The Darṁá of Palas ask Daṛóomo and his nephews for support against the Sikh regime, and the resulting tribal coalition of Darṁá, Khúka and Manká¹¹ makes numerous raids on Chilas.

⁹ Told by Ali Khan Haréq, 30 October 1980 in Lahore, Pakistan. Quoted from Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 6-7.

¹⁰ Quoted from Schmidt and Kohistani 2001: 138-141, and recorded by Razwal Kohistani from his mother in 1962, and also from Soṅgalií of Luuṅí Séer (1992), Peereé of Sharéd (1993) and Gul Séer of Páro (1996). According to Soṅgalií, Dam Siṅ's sister was married to Bóṭi Siṅ.

¹¹ All the Shin lineages of Indus Kohistan.

In Zar Jahan's version, Daṛóomo's ancestors were Afghans who first migrated to Gilgit during Afghan rule in Kashmir, and later to Chilas. Daṛóomo migrates to upper Palas (Dáro) with his men by a short route in the southeast, and later occupies lower Palas as well.

Bóṭi Síng and Dam Síng were actually Sikh commanders in Gilgit. They invaded Chilas and occupied it. From there Dam Síng attacked upper Palas. Tóolo and Dodoóko joined their uncle, Daṛóomo, in the battle and killed Dam Síng. In the meanwhile, Bóṭi Síng had also attacked Jalkot and reached a place, Tiyáal. His army was now located in another place called Kaṇḍróṭ on a hill near the Indus. The remains of their wine-presses still exist there.

Tóolo and Dodoóko came to know about Bóṭi Síng's occupation in Palas. They asked the Khúka Manká in Kolai for help and quickly moved to defend their land. Both the armies met near Tiyáal. Bóṭi Síng and his wife fled. However, Bóṭi Síng was captured at Bóṭi's Olive Tree. They gave his wife an offer to spare him if she gave them gold equal to his weight. She refused and they killed him. His wife was killed afterwards. Bóṭi Síng had the strength of twelve men.

The Daṛmá of Palas asked Daṛóomo and his nephews for assistance against the Sikh regime. As a result, the Khúka, Manká and their joint armies raided Chilas numerous times. At last they succeeded in conquering Chilas.¹²

My translations do not show the fictional devices in two of the original texts, such as repetition and rhyme. Also not shown is the quotative: 'they say', 'I have heard that', 'people say that' which introduces many statements. Some six generations have elapsed between the end of Sikh rule in Kashmir and the earliest recording of our legend, and even the oldest narrator, Haréq, who was 85 in 1980, does not claim to have heard it from an eyewitness. Nevertheless the legend is considered history, and references are made to a tree that Bóṭi Síng liked to rest under, the rock cauldrons which his army used to make wine in, and the flat boulder that Dam Síng used to sit on, and to Haṇyaál's land in Śarkóoṭ, all of which can allegedly be pointed out to the observer. Unlike the narration of a folktale, the audience may put questions to the teller or debate whether the events are true, although doubters are usually silenced by the audience.

The legend may shed light on some questions that ethnohistorians have sought to answer: Where have the Shina-speakers of Indus Kohistan migrated from? When was the region converted to Islam, and what was the previous religion? Where do they fit into the history of the wider region? But the legend introduces new confusions. Bóṭi Síng and Dam Síng are not mentioned in any written accounts of Chilas, and no historical source mentions Kohistan as tributary either to Ranjit Singh's empire, or to the

¹² Recorded by Manzar Zarin in Rawalpindi in April 2002.

Dogra empire which succeeded it in Kashmir. On the contrary, on the few occasions they are mentioned, the tribes of Indus Kohistan are described as “republics”.

In a later interview with Razwal Kohistani,¹³ I collected the following additional information. Dam Siṅg is said to have belonged to the Chiliis tribe, pointing to an origin in Chilas.¹⁴ Tradition says that the Chiliis migrated north from a place called Qarnáa (30 miles below modern Thakot on the Indus River) 900 years ago. Another tradition connects them with the juniper species (*chilíi*), of which there was an enormous specimen in Qarnáa. Their migration, under a chief named Dumáa, took them first to Kolai in Kohistan, and later on to Jalkot and Palas. Tradition says that between 1400 and 1500 they grew so powerful that the Darṃá tribe, to whom the regional elders belonged, decided to give them land in dispersed areas in order to weaken their power. The interested reader can follow a discussion of the Chiliis in Kohistani 1998, especially pp. 57-9 (where the origin of the Chiliis is discussed and the Dam Siṅgiyãã [Dam Siṅgite] lineage appears as a branch of the Chiliis), and on p. 81, which shows the major territorial groups to which lineages of Chiliis origin are everywhere attached; for example, in Kolai they are attached to the Manká tribe, but in Jalkot they are attached to the Darṃá tribe (*ibid.*, pp. 167-8). In short, whatever their religion, tradition says that the Chiliis were local people and not Punjabi Sikhs.

3. What do the stories say?

All of the stories agree that the main contestants in the struggle are Dam Siṅg and Bóṭi Siṅg on one side, and Tóolo and Dodoóko on the other. Two of the stories trace the origin of the Darṃá Shin to Chilas, and one traces it as far as Gilgit. In two of the versions, Dam Siṅg and Bóṭi Siṅg are rulers or military commanders. In the third, Bóṭi Siṅg collects taxes, implying that he was a *jāgīrdār*. That some kind of tribal revolt took place seems to be in little doubt, but whether it was a religious war or a tax revolt seems uncertain. None of the Kohistani names is Islamic, but we do not know their religion. Two of the stories assert that Dam Siṅg and Bóṭi Siṅg were Sikhs, and this is a recurring motif in local legend, however there is nowhere any mention of a connection to Sikhs in Panjab.¹⁵ The name Siṅg proves nothing, as Biddulph (1880: 99) mentions that many Muslim Shins had the surname “Sing”. It is also a Rajput name, and the earlier form *siṃha* is a frequent element in the colophons of the Gilgit Manuscripts (datable to probably not later than the 9th century A.D.). Even the mention of Sikhs

¹³ Interview conducted in November 2003 in Rawalpindi.

¹⁴ There is a phonetic problem with this folk etymology. The initial affricate in modern “Chilas” is not aspirated; *Ciláas* (چلاس), whereas the initial affricate in the name of the tribe is aspirated: *Chilíis* (چھلیس).

¹⁵ There are also echoes of Hinduism in Kohistan: there is a ruined settlement lying between Kolai and Palas (near Kuz Gaber) with the name *Hinduwáanodaar*.

must be taken with a grain of salt, as by the end of the 19th century, the word ‘Sikh’ had become a term of abuse.¹⁶

The repeated mention of Sikhs does nevertheless require us to examine the period between 1815 and 1860, as Sikhs are unlikely to have become a subject of legend before they became an expanding power, when Ranjit Singh established his empire at the beginning of the 19th century, and his erstwhile tributary Gulab Singh extended it into immense territories east, north and west of Jammu. I first return to Chilas, which was not always the backwater it is today.

4. Chilas in the first millennium A.D.

Lying on an important route from Central Asia through Gilgit south to Panjab or to Kashmir, Chilas has been a crossroad since prehistoric times, as testified by the over ten thousand rock carvings discovered there by Jettmar (1989, 1: xvi). These depict motifs and inscriptions dating from as early as “three or four millennia” ago, up through the Scythian, Achaemenid, Parthian and Kushan periods. Most noteworthy is a Brahmi inscription mentioning a “*śri palola śāhi surendrādityanandi*”, read by von Hinüber (1989: 64-5), linking Chilas to the Paṭola or Palola dynasty of Gilgit, ca. 5th to the 8th centuries, known also as Bolor. Jettmar (1989: 104-5) argues that sometime prior to the 10th century, the Dārada kingdom probably merged with this Paṭola dynasty, becoming powerful enough to exert pressure on Kashmir. In the 11th century, Alberuni found “Shiltas” (Shilathasa) part of a “Bhatta-Shâh” kingdom whose people plagued Kashmir with their inroads. The title *bhaṭṭa-*, *bhaṭṭāraka-* appears in several of the Brahmi inscriptions read by von Hinüber, and means ‘lord’, ‘master’. This suggests the reading *Bhaṭṭa Śāh* for the kingdom mentioned by Alberuni.¹⁷ The interpretation of *śāha* as ‘king’ is based on the reading of *śāhī* as ‘ruler’, with the Persian palatal sibilant treated as a retroflex sibilant in Dardic.¹⁸

16 Leitner 1893: Appendix IV: 10-11.

17 Sachau 1910: 207. See also Richard Strand’s (2001b) website on the *Bhaṭesa zip*, where he relates the ethnonym *Bhaṭ-* of the people of *Bhaṭera* (located in Indus Kohistan, across the Indus from Besham and well south of Palas) to CDIAL 9402, MIA *bhaṭṭa-*, ‘lord, noble’ < *bhārṭṛ* or CDIAL 9366 ‘mixed caste of bards’

(<http://users.sedona.net/~strand/lngFrameL.html>). The *Bhaṭṭas* seem to have been powerful in Indus Kohistan in former times.

18 Von Hinüber (1989) discusses the title *śāhī* twice, rendering it variously as the title of a family or the title of a dynasty: *kṣatraśāhī vajranandi* ... “might have been the son of the ruler” (p. 63); *śri palola śāhi surendrādityanandi* ... “This king should be identical with *surendrāditya* ... ruling approximately between 720 and 725 as the last ruler belonging to this dynasty” (p. 64). The title *śāha* also occurs, but von Hinüber finds no interpretation for it.

Vajranandi means “he who delights in the *vajra* [the thunderbolt]”, apparently a ruler’s name, as it points to Indra, the king of the gods (Lars Martin Fosse, personal communication, 1 November 2003). *kṣatrā* means ‘might, rule’ [√ KṢI] (CDIAL 3648), and is cognate with the Persian word *śāh* (Vullers (1855: 392) and Platts (1911: 719) give

The *Rājataranḡiṇī* or *Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr* contains numerous accounts of Dārada threats to Kashmir.¹⁹ The last cluster of inscriptions found at Chilas, dated to ca. the 11th century²⁰ seems to be associated with this expanded Dārada kingdom. We do not know why people stopped carving on rocks at Chilas, but as the second millennium begins we are now in the realm of legend. There are oral accounts from diverse sources of civil war in Chilas and migration out of the region, and these accounts are supported by linguistic data (see below, Section 7). Biddulph (1880: 16) records that:

The Chilasis relate that in former times a Hindoo Rajah, named Chachai, ruled in Chilas over the whole of Shinkari [the Shina-speaking valleys of the Indus], but that, dying childless, his country became divided into republican communities, as at present. In later days a disastrous civil war broke out in the community between two brothers, Bôt and Matchuk, which ended in the defeat and expulsion of all the partizans of the latter. The Bôte are now the most prosperous family in Chilas.

Strand (2000) and Cacopardo and Cacopardo (2001: 119-124) present evidence that a group of Chilasis, with an ancestor named Bôtâ, migrated to Chitral in the middle of the 17th century. This will be examined later, but first we ask whether the records show Chilas or Kohistan ever coming under Sikh or Dogra rule. This period is summarized in some detail, to show that by the mid-19th century Kohistan was hemmed in on three sides either by Sikh forces (in Hazara and Kaghan), or by Dogra and Sikh forces (in Chilas).

the Zend form *khshaya* [from the root *khshi*]). *kṣatraṣāhī* appears to be a translation-compound of two words meaning the same thing in different languages (a common phenomenon in multilingual regions): ‘ruler-ruling’. If so, *kṣatraṣāhī* can be translated: ‘ruler, of ruling lineage’. The retroflex sibilant seems puzzling at first glance, as OIA *kṣ* usually becomes *çh* in Dardic, and retroflex sibilants did not occur in Middle Persian (Fridrik Thordarson, personal communication, 1 November 2003). The inscription itself is the only evidence that it was pronounced that way, as Alberuni wrote in Arabic, which lacks a way to represent retroflex sibilants.

If *ṣāha* was indeed borrowed from Persian, there is no rule that states that a Persian palatal sibilant invariably corresponds with the Sanskrit palatal sibilant श (ś) (though in fact it does so in modern Shina, which also has a three-way sibilant contrast). Its treatment would have depended on the actual phonetic values of श (ś) and ष (ṣ) in Chilas at the time, and on the actual phonetic value of Persian ش (š) in the eastern Iranian zone. In fact, there are other examples of the Persian palatal sibilant ش (š) corresponding with Dardic or Nuristani ṣ: Pers. *bādšāh* ‘king’ > Khowar *bāça* ~ *bāṣa* ‘king’, Pers. *dānišmand* ‘learned’ > Khowar *daṣman* ‘maulvi’ (Elena Bashir, personal communication, 3 November 2003); Pers. *šahr* ‘town’ > Kamviri *šor* ‘winter (lowland) grazing ground’ (Richard Strand, personal communication, 2 November 2003). See also Richard Strand (2002), “Phonological processes on the Indo-Iranian Frontier”, at the website: <http://users.sedona.net/~strand/Phonology/IIFproc.html>. It appears that the tongue is backed in Eastern Iranian as one gets closer to the Indo-Iranian frontier, and that the palatal sibilant tends toward laminal post-alveolar in this zone.

19 Stein 1900.

20 Jettmar 1989, 1: xxv.

4. The Sikhs and the Dogras

From 1751 to 1819 Kashmir was part of the Durrani empire of Afghanistan, until Ranjit Singh annexed it and sent Sikh governors to rule it.²¹ Like the Mughals before him, Ranjit Singh sometimes paid his deputies by assigning to them *jāgīrs*, or the revenue of designated tracts of land. The hill state of Jammu, adjoining Kashmir, became tributary to Ranjit Singh in 1815, but prior to this, three nephews of Jammu's Rajput *rājā* joined Ranjit Singh's service as common troopers. One of them, Kishora Singh, was installed on his uncle's throne by Ranjit Singh. Another, Gulab Singh, was given a *jāgīr*. On Kishora Singh's death in 1822, Gulab Singh became *rājā*.²² Gulab Singh began to add new territories to his own domain, although if the occasion required he would bring his own forces to support the Sikh army. By 1843 he controlled all of what was to become "Jammu and Kashmir" except the valley itself, Gilgit, Rajauri and Punch.²³ By 1844 he became powerful enough to withhold revenues and negotiate terms for sending military support.²⁴

When war broke out between the British and the Sikhs in the winter of 1845-6, Gulab Singh remained on the sidelines during the decisive battle, tipping the balance in the favor of the British and emerging as a power broker.²⁵ The Sikhs had to cede Kashmir and Hazara to the East India Company, and recognize the independent sovereignty of Gulab Singh. The British then rewarded Gulab Singh by selling him Hazara and Kashmir.²⁶ The reduced Sikh empire remained independent only until 1849, when Panjab was annexed to the British empire. Gulab Singh, though nominally tributary to the British, was now *Mahārājā* of Jammu and Kashmir, *de facto* free to do as he wished. He now turned his eyes toward Gilgit, which had previously been occupied by the Sikhs, in ca. 1842. That war ended in a negotiated peace, with the kings of Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar giving a daughter to the Sikh commander, Nathu Shah.²⁷

In 1847, Nathu Shah transferred his services to Gulab Singh, and Dogra troops relieved the Sikh posts at Astor and Gilgit. Most of the soldiers, who were few in number, re-enlisted under Gulab Singh.²⁸ The Dogras were

21 Drew 1875: 18.

22 Grewal 1990: 106-107.

23 Drew 1875: 13-20.

24 Grewal 1990: 123.

25 Schofield 2000: 6-7, Drew 1875: 20.

26 In the second Treaty of Amritsar, Gulab Singh was awarded "all the hilly or mountainous country, situated to the eastward of the river Indus and westward of the river Ravee". There was no clause in the treaty preventing Gulab Singh from conducting his own diplomatic relations (Schofield 2000: 11) and no practical obstacle to his further expansion.

27 According to Drew (1875: 437) Nathu Shah was a [Muslim] Sayyid of Gujranwala, in Panjab.

28 Drew 1875: 437-439.

expelled from Gilgit in 1852, but retook it in 1860. In 1866, when the ethnologist Leitner first visited it, he found villages burnt down and the Gilgit valley deserted.²⁹ There is considerable confusion in Leitner's account as to whether the invaders are Sikh troops, Kashmir troops, or Dogras. For those who were conquered, it does not seem to have made much difference whether the troops were commanded by a Sikh or a Rajput Hindu.

Chilas now re-enters written history. It is still notorious for raids, now against Gulab Singh's territory: the Astor, Kishenganga and Gilgit valleys. Justification for the raids against Astor was claimed on the grounds that the Astoris were Shias and so religious enemies.³⁰ In ca. 1850 and 1851 Gulab Singh made punitive expeditions against Chilas, mentioned by the first British agent in Gilgit, John Biddulph (1980: 16), and described in detail by Leitner (1893: 80-87). In the first raid, the *Mahārājā's* Dogra troops were badly defeated by the Chilasis and their independent tribal allies (including forces from Kolai, Palas and Jalkot in Indus Kohistan). The following year the Dogras took and destroyed Chilas Fort, and the Chilasis had to agree to send an annual tribute to the *Mahārājā*, along with two hostages. Leitner's Sazini informant provides a wealth of detail, calling the attackers "Sikhs" and listing the names and homes of Kohistani participants, unfortunately Tóolo and Dodoóko are not mentioned.

In the last decades of the 19th century the British, worried about a possible Russian invasion, took a more active interest in the region, and in 1892 George Robertson burned Chilas and built a fortified position above it, to defend the new road across the Babusar Pass. In 1893 the Chilasis, with their usual tribal allies from the areas further down the Indus, re-occupied Chilas in what was called the Indus Valley Rising.³¹

There were thus several contests over Chilas, at a time when the inhabitants had evidently already converted to the Sunni sect of Islam, but European records are silent about any conquest of Indus Kohistan. If Kohistan did fall under Sikh rule, it probably did so before the British appeared on the scene.

6. The Sikhs in Hazara

Could Dam Singh and Bóṭi Singh have pushed up the Indus from Hazara, or over the watershed from the Kaghan valley? Hazara passed from Durrani to Sikh rule in 1818.³² The unsettled border between Sikh-ruled Panjab and Dogra-ruled Jammu and Kashmir lay in Hazara, and all the routes out of Kohistan pass through it except two: the route to Swat on the west, and the difficult and dangerous route along the Indus to Chilas.

²⁹ Keay 1993: 29-31.

³⁰ Leitner 1893: 80.

³¹ Keay 1993: 228-237.

³² Punjab Government 1883-4, *Gazetteer of the Hazara District*: 22-23.

The British administrators of Hazara after its annexation knew little about Kohistan, except that it was inhabited by a non-Afghan race “who by language and race are evidently closely allied with the people that holds the northern part of the Swát valley and the country from Gilgit to Chitrál.” They were rarely seen in the district capital, Abbottabad.³³

The Kohistanis were probably aware of the wretched conditions under Sikh rule to their south, since after the fall of Peshawar to Ranjit Singh in 1823, there arose a movement of resistance and religious fervor in the hills of Hazara, enlisting the Yusufzai and Khatak tribes and the people of Kaghan, in other words, all the peoples adjoining Kohistan. The movement’s charismatic leader, Sayyad Ahmad Barelvi, raised an army to wage holy war against the Sikh infidel, and succeeded in briefly retaking Peshawar in 1830. Although he was killed by Sikh forces in 1831, resistance continued, especially in the Black Mountain region of Hazara, immediately south of Kohistan, until the British pacified Hazara in 1892.³⁴

A glimpse of the depth of opposition to Sikh rule is afforded by the papers of Captain James Abbott, who was sent in 1846 to settle the border between Panjab and Jammu and Kashmir. Hazara had then been in revolt for over a year. Ignoring Abbott’s escort of Sikh troops, one tribal leader after another came to Abbott to beg the British Government to accept their allegiance and relieve them of the tyranny of Gulab Singh. Abbott found that Sikh rule in Hazara had been extremely repressive, with up to two thirds of crops required as tax, and public expressions of the Muslim faith banned.³⁵ *The Gazetteer of the Hazara District* (1883-4: 180-181) reports that in theory, the Lahore state was entitled to half the produce, but in practice, it took the highest amount the cultivator could bear, which might only be one third. The strain on cultivators might still be considerable in hilly regions with little arable land. Abbott and his assistants succeeded in detaching Hazara from Gulab Singh’s kingdom and returning it to the Sikh darbar in Lahore, from which it soon passed to British rule.

If *jāgīrs* had been granted by Lahore in Kohistan, there seem to be no records of them. However Hazara itself has been almost completely ignored by historians, so it would be surprising if we found records for Kohistan. What is clear is that by the 1840’s, Kohistan faced Sikh forces on the south and west (in Hazara and Kaghan), and Dogra and Sikh forces in the north (in Chilas). Opposition to them was widespread, but without Sayyad Ahmad Barelvi, it consisted mainly of guerrilla raids. Only on the west, where the Yusufzai Pashtun had extended their political control northward into Swat Kohistan,³⁶ were powerful allies against the Sikhs and Dogras to be found, and it is in that direction that Uncle Soróom goes to convert to Islam.

33 Punjab Government 1883-4, *Gazetteer of the Hazara District*: 173

34 Caroe 1962: 300-305; Punjab Government 1883-4, *Hazara Gazetteer*: 27-31; Nayyar 1988: 2-4.

35 Allen 2000: 130-135.

36 Cacopardo and Cacopardo 2001: 35; Lindholm 1982: 78.

Cacopardo and Cacopardo (2001: 35) find that generation counts cannot place the introduction of Islam to eastern Kohistan earlier than the late 18th century. Conversion may have begun in Durrani times, and accelerated after the expansion of Ranjit Singh's empire, when Islam no longer was the religion of invaders from outside. There is in Palas little trace of the original religion, except for many tales of spirits (*peerée*), witches (*ruúi*), fairies (*xaaprée*) and monster demons (*déo*).

7. Linguistic evidence

Schmidt 2002 compared lexical and grammatical data from four dialects of Shina: the Kohistani, Gilgiti, Guresi and Drasi. Unfortunately, data for the dialect of Chilas is not available, however Razwal Kohistani, who is familiar with it, describes it as closely related to that of Indus Kohistan.³⁷

The Guresi and Gilgiti dialects retain archaic features, and appear to occupy a central position within the Shina speech zone. The Kohistani and Drasi dialects (spoken on the western and eastern margins) present different and unique innovations. This fits nicely with the placement of the ancient country of the Dards in modern Gures, north of the Kashmir valley,³⁸ and suggests diffusion of Shina speakers east and west from a central zone stretching from Gures up through Astor to Gilgit.

Guresi perfective verbs, however, show no trace of the absolutive stem which Gilgiti, and to some extent Kohistani, perfective verbs preserve. This allows a second hypothesis, that the original dialect split is between Gilgiti and the ancestor of the remaining three dialects, with a subsequent separation of Kohistani from Guresi/Drasi, and finally the separation of Drasi. It does appear that Drasi, with its innovative grammaticalization of 'come', and Kohistani, with its innovative future tense, assumed their peripheral roles in fairly recent times (Schmidt 2002).

An archaic form of Shina, called Palula (*paaluulaá*) is found in the Biyori and Ashret valleys of southern Chitral, and this language and its associated oral histories provide evidence for a migration from Chilas.³⁹ The similarity between Palula and the name of the 5th to 8th century dynasty, Paṭola or Palola, seems unlikely to be coincidental.

Strand⁴⁰ has collected the ethnohistory and genealogy of the people of Ashret (the Açar'íta or Shîng). Calculating 20 years to a generation, he reckons that the Açar'íta must have left Chilas in ca. 1640. The name of "the

³⁷ Schmidt and Kohistani 1994: 2.

³⁸ Jettmar 1977: 411-433; 1989, vol. 1: xix.

³⁹ Palula has been studied by Morgenstierne (1941), Strand (2001a) and Liljegren (2001 a and b).

⁴⁰ Strand 2000:

users.sedona.net/~strand/IndoAryan/Indus/Atsaret/AtsaretCulture/Atsaretgen.html

users.sedona.net/~strand/IndoAryan/Indus/Atsaret/AtsaretTexts/AtsaretHistory.html

first grandfather” is maCô’k, his son is Cô’k and his grandson is bôTâ. The Açar’îta themselves told Strand that they have been living in Ashret for “eight or nine hundred years as the Shîng tribe” and that from among the Chilasis, the Shîng tribe originated from Gilgit. Palula does not however seem to share the Burushaski influence that characterizes the Gilgiti dialect,⁴¹ nor does it appear to have a closer relation to Gilgiti than other Shina dialects.

The Cacopardos have also collected genealogies, in which the first three ancestors, Machoke, Choke and Bota, are identical with those in Strand’s. In one branch of the tribe, the name Shing appears: Shing Baro is a grandson of Bota, and Gilshing is his grandson; the latter name appears as girS’înge in Strand’s genealogy.⁴²

This introduces one final possibility: that Bôṭi Siṅg is a memory of a Bhatta-Shâh king, belonging to a Shing lineage. This would require not only correcting the transcription of Bhatta to Bhaṭṭa, but adding an accent: Bháṭṭa. The following sound change rules (shown below with examples from the Palas dialect of Shina) would apply:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>bh-</i> > <i>b-</i> | RV <i>bhaktá-</i> ‘meal, food’ > Ko. Sh. <i>baát</i> ‘cooked rice’; Skt. <i>bhávati</i> ‘becomes, is’ > Ko. Sh. <i>bó-</i> ‘be’. |
| 2. <i>-á-</i> > <i>-ó-</i> | RV <i>pánthā-</i> ‘path, road’ > Ko. Sh. <i>pón</i> ‘path, road’; Skt. <i>mástaka-</i> ‘head’ > Ko. Sh. <i>mótho</i> ‘brain’; Skt. <i>bhávati</i> ‘becomes, is’ > Ko. Sh. <i>bó-</i> ‘be’. |
| 3. <i>-ṭṭ-</i> > <i>-ṭ-</i> | OIA <i>*kaṭṭa-</i> , ‘young male animal’ > Ko. Sh. <i>káṭo</i> , ‘buffalo calf’. |
| 4. (hypothesis) | Skt. <i>bhártr-</i> ‘husband, lord’ > Bháṭṭa > Bóṭa > Bôṭi (see CDIAL 9402). |

Example 3 shows a counter example to the otherwise well attested rule, *á-* > *-ó-*, indicating the need for more detailed analysis of sound changes from Old Indo-Aryan to Shina. The final *-i* in *Bôṭi* is also unexplained, but might be a m.pl. suffix, referring to the king’s lineage.

Strand’s genealogy contains a bôTâ (= *bōṭā*), pointing to the central weakness of the linguistic hypothesis: we need to take into account regional variations for which we unfortunately have little data. The hypothesis can not be confirmed. But it points to the possibility that the memory of Bháṭṭa Ṣâh has become the archetype of an overlord, on which later experiences with overlords, whether direct or reported, have been calqued.

⁴¹ Fussman 1989: 56-57.

⁴² Cacopardo and Cacopardo 2001: 119-124.

8. Conclusion

If Bháṭṭa Śāh has indeed been transformed into a Sikh overlord named Bóṭi Siṅg, how did this happen? According to Eliade (1974: 43), a real personage survives in popular memory at most for two or three centuries, after which he is assimilated to a mythical model. Thompson (1978: 11-2) finds that when events pass beyond first and second-hand memory, they become simplified, restructured and stereotyped, and that they are more useful as evidence of values, than of facts. Anachronisms may be caused by the reordering of memory; most commonly, recent events are attributed to an earlier period, legitimizing them; but according to Vansina (1985: 177) events can also be made younger.

Bóṭi Siṅg and Dam Siṅg appear in the texts as stereotypes of oppressive overlords, whom it is acceptable to kill. In all the versions of the legend they are enemies: individual enemies, political enemies, or religious enemies. In two versions, they are associated with negatively-valued activities: collecting land taxes and drinking wine. In one version, they have the power of life and death over their subjects.

Princely states have long existed in the large river valleys of Gilgit, Yasin, Chitral and Astor, but in the remote and isolated valleys of Indus Kohistan, stateless political systems prevailed,⁴³ because their inaccessibility made it difficult for states to integrate these valleys. The Kohistani claim to have eliminated the need for a central government by borrowing from Swat the customs of *wesh*, or equitable land distribution, and the *jirga*, a council which allocates land and decides local disputes. In contraposition to this, Bóṭi Siṅg and Dam Siṅg stand for a system of autocracy. In the 11th century the nearest model for a centralized state was probably the kingdom of Bháṭṭa Śāh. In the 19th century the nearest models were the Sikh *darbar* and its *jāgīrdārs*, and the kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir. Linguistic change had already transformed Bháṭṭa to Bóṭi; when Siṅg is added, Bháṭṭa Śāh is reinvented as a Sikh.

It seems impossible to come closer to the truth than this, because the legend lacks an essential element of history: a chronology.⁴⁴ For the Palula-speakers of Ashret and Biyori we have a rough generation count, because their migration myths are embedded in genealogies linking the individual to an apical ancestor, who is also remembered in Chilas. But among the Kohistani Shin, the lineage genealogy serves primarily as the basis of the *wesh* or land distribution, and need only show the apical ancestor, the ancestors of moieties, and the present-day lineages.⁴⁵ It is not possible to trace an individual, such as Haréq or Zar Jahan, back to the apical ancestor, and thus no way to estimate how many generations have passed since Uncle Soróom went to Swat to convert to Islam.

43 Cacopardo and Cacopardo 2001: 40.

44 Vansina 1985: 173-185.

45 Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 44-46.

We can, however, make a reasonable guess. In the third decade of the 19th century, a movement of holy war and religious fervor swept Hazara, which took six decades to completely die down. By the fifth decade, the records show that Chilas had been converted to Sunni Islam, was attacking populations of Shia Muslims to the north and west, and now faced reprisals from Gulab Singh's Dogras. It would be surprising if this regional ferment did not strike a chord among the Kohistani Shin, who have never cared for central rule. I suggest then, that Daṛóomo and Soróom, who judging from their names were not converted under Durrani rule, came under the influence of Yusufzai missionaries during the third or fourth decades of the 19th century, and that Soróom's conversion was automatically associated with the then prevailing opposition to Sikh rule in adjoining areas.

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| CDIAL | Turner (1966) <i>Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages</i> |
| Ko. Sh. | Kohistani Shina |
| MIA | Middle Indo-Aryan |
| OIA | Old Indo-Aryan |
| Skt. | Sanskrit |
| RV | R̥gveda |

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Local Representations of History and the History of Local Representation: Timescapes of theistic agency in the Western Himalayas

Peter Sutherland

The moment we think of the world as disenchanted...we set limits on the ways the past can be narrated (Chakrabarty 2000: 89)

“Representing local histories,” the topic of this volume, suggests at least three propositions. First, a truism: that each place has its past. Second, a comparison: that local histories differ in kind from universal history. Third, a process: that locality and historicity are dialectically produced in relation to each other. But what of representation? Elaborating on Stuart Hall’s two-step approach, each proposition suggests a different theory of signification.¹ In the first, which is not an explicit theory, the process of representation is ignored as if the meaning of reality were transparent. In the second, representation is seen as distorting or *re*-presenting a pre-existent meaning by the adoption of a particular perspective. In the third, following Hall’s preferred interpretation, representation is understood as constitutive of meaning, which cannot be grasped prior to or independently of mediation. In this view, meaning does not pre-exist representation, which cannot therefore be said to be distort it. If the third proposition is closest to the truth – that locality and historicity are co-produced in and by the process of representation, it follows that the pasts of places and the place of the past, whose Himalayan representations we wish to study, may not be considered independently of each other or outside the discursive regimes, which form them.

To test this hypothesis, this essay complicates the relationship of locality, history, and representation by taking as its object of study not so much the *re*-presentation of local histories in the Himalayas – as if place, time and meaning unproblematically preceded signifying practice, but rather the *local* representation of history as a spatial record of political memory, and the history of local *representation* so defined, in which gods act as political agents.

In using the trope of chiasma above, I play on the double meaning of “representation” in English usage that is clearly distinguished in German as

¹ I am following Stuart Hall’s constructionist paradigm of representation as explained in his well-known video lecture “Representation and the Media” (1997).

the difference between *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. On the one hand, representation refers to a *semiotic* process of mediating reality (*Darstellung*) as in poetry or painting. On the other hand, it refers to a *political* process of standing in for, or acting on behalf of, another person or group and their interests (*Vertretung*). In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Spivak (1988) refers to the famous passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, in which Marx uses this double meaning to understand the absence of collective consciousness among the small peasant proprietor class, “which,” as Spivak explains quoting Marx’s terms, “finds its ‘bearer’ in a ‘representative’ [namely Louis Napoleon] who appears to work in another’s interest” (1988: 276). The term Marx uses here is *Vertreter*. The small peasant proprietors, in Marx’s words:

cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Their representative must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small peasant proprietors therefore finds its last expression in the executive force subordinating society to itself (1974: 239).

In the absence of a sense of collective class interests, Marx argues, this class without class-consciousness fails to organize itself politically and so to transform itself by pursuing its interests. This “false consciousness” is due to the conflation of *Darstellung* (representation as self-knowledge) and *Vertretung* (representation as political substitution). Is this the case for the west Himalayan peasants I examine in this article, whose consciousness of collective identity, interest and power is (politically) represented by gods – gods who in turn are (semiotically) represented as kings?

Marx’s description is particularly apt in many respects. The representatives of territorial assemblies of peasant-warriors I describe are indeed conceived of as their masters. As kings they have absolute authority over their subjects and governmental power that protects them from others. As gods they are quite literally understood to send rain and sunshine from above. But in other respects, the universalist assumptions of Marx’s description of French peasants in the 18th century are inadequate to explain the political lives of west Himalayan peasants under Hindu kings, indirect British rule, and the modern Indian state between 1935 and 1988 – the period defined by the local history I examine. In the historical *pahāḍī* (lit. mountain) polity I discuss, local peasant communities called *khūnds* both represent themselves – by local leaders (H. *mahāṭṭa*, or Pah. *māṭa*),² and are represented by others – local gods construed as kings. But their interests are not represented as a single “class” by a single executive authority subordinating society to itself, but rather as a cluster of locally differentiated

² To indicate languages referred to in this text, I use A, for Arabic, H. for Hindi, P. for Persian, Pah. for Pahari, and U. for Urdu.

entities of the same “caste” in a regional scale of similar theistic polities embedded in foreign imperial formations. More particularly, in describing the nexus of locality, history and representation so defined, the cultural construction of the Pahari political field escapes the descriptive reach and analytical power of Marxian demystification, which cannot properly address the central questions at issue: 1) can subaltern gods speak on behalf of subalterns? And if so, 2) how do gods act historically as political representatives?

In the west Himalayan region of the Simla Hills, both semiotic and political modes of representation are elided in the signifying practices of “government by deity” (*deotā* or *devatā kā rāj*). This hybrid Hindu institution constitutes the contemporary field of political memory, collective identity and rural diplomacy in remote parts of Himachal Pradesh and neighbouring parts of Uttaranchal to the east. According to its traditional regional idiom, territorial gods (*deotā* or *devatā*) conceptualized as “kings” (*rājā*) not only stand in for, and act on behalf of, local communities as their representatives in the various rituals that both manage ecological conditions and choreograph traditional rural polity; they also produce locality, history and collective political consciousness by their symbols, taxonomies and spatio-temporal practices.

To what extent does this Himalayan “running ... together” of *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* lead, as Spivak (1988: 276) warns, “to an essentialist, utopian politics”? – “especially [when this is intended] to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*.” Spivak’s warning was directed at French intellectuals such as Foucault and Deleuze, whose failure to examine the epistemic problems involved in speaking for subaltern others caused them, in her analysis, to essentialize the subaltern subject as a Eurocentric subject, and so render Third World subalterns (especially women) invisible. The situation I describe differs in one important respect. I do not pretend to speak on behalf of west Himalayan peasants as their political representative (*Vertreter*). Instead, I describe their own subaltern idiom of theistic self-representation and use it to problematize Euro-modernist constructions of political agency, history and time from an Indian postcolonial/modern perspective.

In another essay (Sutherland 2003), I describe the festival repertoire of processional practice, by means of which west Himalayan political history is “written” in the landscape by traveling gods. Reproducing the internal units and relations of former west Himalayan Hindu states by routinized movement, the *spatial* agency of contemporary gods is what I have in mind in speaking of the *local* representation of history. Political memory is registered quite literally in the *loci*, or trajectories, of gods on the move. Traveling in procession as kings seated in palanquins, Himalayan gods perform political history in a ritual idiom of patterned movement. In that essay, I isolate three processional geometries that inscribe political memory in the landscape at festival times by 1) circumambulating territories, 2)

exchanging visits with brothers and friends, and 3) assembling at political centers.

In this essay, I focus on the other half of the chiasmic equation – the historical discourse of local *representation* by gods. To do so, I juxtapose two discrepant kinds of knowledge: the empirical “facts” of British colonial gazetteers and my ethnographic evidence of the discursive/narrative constitution of local identity and political location in government by deity, focusing in particular on origin myths and oral histories of temple foundation and feuding.

Unlike modern academic history, whose subject is the nation-state, west Himalayan histories have local gods as their subjects. But does the presence of gods as actors discount the latter as legitimate records of political agency in the past or present? Those who would dismiss religious conceptions of agency as irrational would do well to consider recent critical accounts of the discursive construction of the modern state as a transcendent essence – the “magic of the state” (Taussig 1997), the “state effect” (Mitchell 1999), “the state’s own myth of itself” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 17) – that belie the supposed rationality of modern post-Enlightenment political theory. While the political voices of west Himalayan peasants are silent in the elite discourse of British colonial, Indian nationalist *and* postcolonial historiography, any attempt to restore their political subjectivity must face the charge that local gods and their human oracles, through which west Himalayan subaltern collectivities *do* speak to each other, fail to qualify as legitimate political actors in modern Indian political history.

Representing subaltern pasts

I begin with an intriguing glimpse of political representation by a west Himalayan god at the court of the Mughal emperor in Delhi, and the meteorological representation of the god. Recorded in the Punjab District Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States (1910: 6) by British colonial authors, the story is still recounted in Bashahr:

One of the Mughal Emperors, [it is not stated which] held a great durbar of the hill chieftains, which Raja Kehri Singh [of Bashahr] attended. When he appeared at Delhi, it was observed with some surprise that wherever he went he was sheltered from the sun’s rays by a small cloud in the shape of a *chatra* or royal umbrella. The emperor heard of the phenomenon and summoned the Raja to the Diwan-I-Khas. On his attending, the cloud was seen to accompany him into the Imperial presence. The Emperor asked for an explanation, and the Raja naively answered that it was the favour of the gods and goddesses of his country, who wished to protect a hill man from the unaccustomed heat of the plains. The Emperor greatly pleased said: “*O Rājā, āp ko khudā ke ghar se chatra milā huā hai, is liye āp ko Chatrapati khitāb [sic] diya jātā hai.*” (Sir Raja, you have got a chhatra from the house of God and therefore the title of Chatrapati is conferred

upon you), and at the same time bestowed upon him a dress of honour [i.e. *khelāt*].³

On several occasions,⁴ I heard the same story in Sarahan, the ceremonial capital and summer palace of the former Bashahr kings. In each account, the cloud was identified as the sign of the eponymous Bashahr rain-god, *Basārū* (the pronunciation I heard in Sarahan). The Simla District Gazetteer (1904:38) lists the god's name as "Basheru," and describes his temple "seat" as the village of "Basherāh" in the Tin Kothi territory. The discursive linkage of rain-making and political authority is a common characteristic of Hindu kingship, in general, and of west Himalayan theistic sovereignty, in particular. Rain-making is also the mythic attribute of most "species" (*jātī*) of west Himalayan local gods. While *Nāgs* are the archetypal Hindu rain-making god, other local species including *Nārāyaṇs*, *Jākhs* and *Mahāsūs* are also believed to control the weather.

The same mythic tropes of rainmaking and a magical cloud reappear below in the oral history of a longstanding feud between two other west Himalayan local gods: Jabali Narayan, ruler of the Jhigaya territory, and his neighbour, Suni Nag of Khabal. In different episodes, as we shall see, Jabali Narayan both summons a rain-cloud with his magical power and represents his territory and people at the court of the Bashahr king. Unlike the case of Basaru, however, in which a hill-god accompanies a hill-*raja* to a superior court in the form of a cloud, Jabali Narayan combines both roles of god and king, when he appears before the Bashahr Raja as a theistic sovereign in the usual west Himalayan way – objectified in a palanquin carried by bearers and embodied by an oracle (*mālī*) who gives voice to his wishes. How should we interpret such indigenous accounts of theistic representation at the courts of the Mughal emperor and the king of Bashahr? To what extent can we count them as instances of historical political agency?

In both narratives of Basaru and the feuding gods Jabali Narayan and Suni Nag, the juxtaposition of apparently discrepant discourses engages a central problem in subaltern history: the challenge posed to modern secular norms of social explanation by religious conceptions of agency. In seeking to restore the historical presence of peasant political consciousness in India, rendered invisible by British colonial and Indian nationalist historiography, members of the Subaltern Studies collective have struggled to rethink the

³ Bernard Cohn (1990: 635-6) describes the ritual significance of the gift of a *khelāt* as follows: "Under the Mughals and other Indian rulers, these ritual prestations constituted a relationship between the giver and the receiver, and were not understood as simply an exchange of goods and valuables. The *khelat* was a symbol 'of the idea of continuity or succession...and that continuity rests on a physical basis, depending on the contact of the body of recipient with the body of the donor through the medium of the clothing.' The recipient was incorporated through the medium of the clothing into the body of the donor".

⁴ I refer to two visits to the Dasahra festival in 1988 and 1994.

apparent “anachronism” of “supernatural agency” in peasant accounts of anti-British insurgency. Rejecting Hobsbawm’s (1978 [1959]: 2-3) characterization of peasant religious beliefs as “prepolitical” or “archaic,” Ranajit Guha (1983) insisted on viewing the Indian peasant engaged in nationalist struggle as a true modern citizen and political agent. Thus, peasant beliefs in gods, spirits, and ancestral beings should properly be seen as contemporary with colonial modernity and not as throwbacks to, or survivals from, pre-modernity. Historians, in other words, should conceptualize the modern occurrence of theistic agency in homeochronic and not “allochronic”⁵ (Fabian 1983) terms. But how can that be reconciled with the secular logic of historical explanation?

Building on Guha’s argument, that “South Asian political modernity brings together two noncommensurable logics of power, both modern,” Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 14) argues against the stagist conception of modern nationalist history by proposing a plural model of historical temporality. Instead of “tak[ing for granted] the single, homogeneous, and secular historical time” associated with the dominant paradigm of “transitions to modernity,” we must rethink the temporality of the modern in more complex, heterogeneous terms in order to allow “gods and spirits to be existentially coeval with the human” (*ibid.*: 16). To do so, argues Chakrabarty, “the problem of capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological problem of historical transition...but [rather] as a problem of [cultural] translation” (*ibid.*: 17). Thus, analytical history in the Marxian mode of demystification “which tends to evacuate the local by assimilating it to some abstract universal” must be complemented by an “affective history” in the Heideggerian mode of hermeneutics, that pays attention to such humanist issues as “the diversity of life-worlds,” “place” and “belonging” (*ibid.*: 18).

This brings us to the heart of the problem – what might be called the chronological imperative in modernist historiography. By this I refer to the so-called “historicist” paradigm for understanding cultural difference according to a Euro-modernist conception of progressive linear time. Although discredited by anthropologists and historians alike, evolutionist conceptions of time linger on in development discourse and modernization theory.⁶ The teleological chronology of modernization theory characteristic of global development discourse and Third World national policy is incompatible with more complex notions of temporality required to theorize the simultaneous coexistence of religious and secular conceptions of agency

⁵ By “allochrony” Johannes Fabian refers to the common practice of temporal distancing according to which anthropologists in the colonial era conceptualized the objects of their research as existing in a different era.

⁶ For a brilliant critique of the linear, stagist, stereotypical and teleological construction of time in modernization theory, ethnographic representations and received postcolonial understandings of urbanization in Southern Africa, see James Ferguson’s *Expectations of Modernity* (1999).

in the same historical period. Coeval forms of cultural difference such as these violate the purity of linear temporality, are usually classified as *anachronistic* – against, out of, or in the wrong time – and are seen as evidence of “contradiction” or incomplete transitions to modernity. Faced with similar ideologies of progress in Zambia, James Ferguson refers to Stephen Gould (1996) for an alternative paradigm of change. His account of Gould’s approach is worth quoting at length.

Teleological evolutionary narratives always operate through the identification of series of types, with change represented as a ‘trend’ – a sequence or succession of those typical forms...But what such representations ignore – indeed, conceal – is the continuing diversity of forms, and the actual relationship between those forms, in each of the periods...What Gould calls for as a corrective is an insistence on viewing change not as a sequence defined by ‘typical forms’ for each period but as a less linear (and less plotlike) set of shifts in the occurrence and distribution of a whole range of differences – the ‘full house’ of variation that is obscured by teleological narrations and sequences of typical forms. In a world not made up of neat Platonic types but messy spreads of variation, changing realities must be conceptualized not as ladders or trees defined by sequences and phases but as *dense ‘bushes’ of multitudinous coexisting variations, continually modified in complex and non-linear ways* [my emphasis] (1999: 42).

Building on this important reformulation, I propose a further subjectivist rethinking of change in terms of simultaneity – what one might think of as the horizontal or transverse dimension of change – that is often overlooked as an aspect of time. To understand the transverse temporality of the simultaneous, I propose, requires a *spatial* theory of “temporalization” (Munn 1992) – the practices by which temporal relations are produced among clusters of co-present objects, persons and places in the landscape by embodied forms of movement in action and narration. In such a model, the apparently linear temporality of the moving subject co-exists with another *thick* temporality of multiple rates of change, which the moving subject experiences as it were in the temporal background. These include the objects in the landscape through which the subject moves, other subjects in motion, and memories or narratives of historical events associated with those objects, persons, and places – all of which are experienced *at the same time*.

The spatiality of the simultaneous is something that Foucault already described as characteristic of the present era, but in a manner that renders it anti-temporal, static. His description, I propose, also describes the complex temporality of memory and myth, in which past time is evoked and embodied as another layer of temporal experience in the present.

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in an epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life

developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (Foucault 1986: 22).

In order to overcome the problem of anachronism that simultaneous difference presents to modernist historians, it is necessary to rethink the totalizing temporality of European historiography in spatial terms of multiple “coexisting temporalities.” “What this simple but undeniable recognition point[s] to,” argues Naoki Sakai (1989: 106), “[is] that history is not only temporal or chronological but also spatial and relational...Whereas [western] monistic history...thought itself autonomous and total, ‘world’ history conceive[s] itself as the spatial relations of history.” In other words, space is inscribed with competing cultural constructions of the past.

Bearing all of the above in mind, my analysis of the local representation of Himalayan history proposes a spatial model of time that allows for *polychronicity*. By this, I refer to the cultural construction of competing fields of temporal relations in the landscape – local, monarchical, colonial, national – by different t(r)opologies of discourse and action. Rather than using the static textualist image of the palimpsest, I characterize such temporal fields in practical terms as timescapes animated by different modes of movement. The simultaneity of multiple timescapes, that commonly shapes the experience of place, memory and belonging, provides a spatial alternative to “chronistic” paradigms of stagist or developmental history that are usually associated with the triumphalism and teleology of nationalist histories. And so, taking local gods and British colonial authors as my guides, and combining demystification with hermeneutics, I examine the spatial arts of religious performance, by means of which the history of local representation by Himalayan gods is reproduced in the postcolonial present as counternational history.

Icons of political location

On India’s west Himalayan border, not far from the southwest corner of Tibet, the tutelary gods of Rohru district ride in ritual vehicles, whose characteristic designs define a regional index of caste-ranked political identities and locations – if we can but read their meaning. The gods of land-owning Khas-Rajput territorial “militias,” or *khūnds*, ride in “palanquins” (*pālgī*), carried on the shoulders of two or more men. Palanquins, in turn, come in three distinct models – “long-haired,” (*jhāmgruvālā*), “box-type” (*sandūkvāla*) and “chair-type” (*kursīvāla*), each associated with a different species of god and place of origin. By contrast, the gods of land-owning Brahman villages, or *bhāṭolīs*, ride in copper “pitchers” (*kalaśa*) carried on the head. The gods of subaltern “Koli hamlets,” or *kolwāḍa*, emulate the vehicles of their Rajput or Brahman patrons, and beyond the arena of rural society, the remembered state deities of former kings ride in scaled-down versions of the multi-wheeled “chariots,” or *rath*, of the plains, which devotees pull by ropes.

To read the spatial history encoded in these vehicle designs, it is necessary to understand the regional idiom of government by deity and its iconic symbolism for representing political location, identity, power, and agency. By “political,” of course, I do not refer to democratic representation in the western sense, but rather to a regional Hindu mode of collective representation by local gods (i.e. deotas or devatas). Exemplifying Guha’s and Chakrabarty’s point about the persistence of theistic agency in modern times, one Rohru teacher elided religious and secular political idioms in explaining the historical significance of devatas in the former Bashahr state as follows:

Devatas were just like the MLAs [Members of the Legislative Assembly] we nowadays elect to represent our interests in the Himachal Legislative Assembly in Simla. Previously, “in the era of kings,” devatas were our representatives at the court of the Bashahr kings. The traditional territories called *ghoris*, which devatas represent at our festivals today, used to be the local constituencies of the Bashahr kingdom. In Rohru-Bashahr, we call these local rural communities *khūnds*.⁷

This article examines a remarkable history of the theistic representation of local rural interests at three superior courts – of the Bashahr kingdom, the British Empire, and the Indian nation-state.

In the former territories of the Bashahr kingdom, the term *khūnd* mentioned above draws together three competing conceptions. As well as meaning a Rajput warrior in the singular, the term refers to the local assemblies and militias of the dominant, agro-pastoralist, Khas-Rajput caste in Rohru, and (in Kinnaur) to the seven territories incorporated in the original Bashahr kingdom. According to the idiom of government by deity, each *khūnd* and its so-called *ghori* territory is ruled at home and represented abroad by its local god, whose subjects address him as “*rājā sāhab*” (respected king or ruler).⁸ *Khūnds* also acted as local militias to defend their territories against aggression by neighbours, especially in

⁷ Indicating its regional importance, the term is used in a number of complementary senses all of which refer to the close relationship between military force, occupied territory, and political community. On the one hand, it refers to a prestigious category of Rajput warrior (as in the caste title *Khūnd Kanait*); on the other hand, in Kinnaur, *khūnt* refers to the spatial formation of the original seven territories, which were incorporated in the Bashahr kingdom by Parduman Singh. The sense of *khūnd* used in Rohru combines the military and the territorial in the sense of a local political community and its militia.

⁸ In his recent regional survey of Pandavtila performances in Garhwal, William Sax (2002) describes similar understandings of the Kaurava deity Karan as the “divine king” of the Singtur territory. Although considerable differences distinguish social and religious life in Garhwal and the Simla Hills, my own observations during two brief periods of fieldwork in the Singtur territory in 1988 and 1994, suggest that a west Himalayan institution of government by deity with characteristic regional variations extends from Chamba and Kullu in the west through the Simla Hills to Garhwal in the east. To what extent other variants exist in western Tibet, Kumaon, and western Nepal remains to be explored.

pastoral conflict over grazing rights in the high altitude pastures. I discuss one such protracted conflict below.

Throughout Himachal Pradesh, local gods provide a conventional idiom for politically representing local rural communities of all three castes *and* their former rulers in mythic discourse and ritual practice. Some of my English-speaking informants affectionately call the regional pantheon so defined “*hamārā pahārī devī-devatā system*” (our mountain system of goddesses and gods). Ronald Inden’s (1990:268) concept of “political theology” neatly fits this regional idiom of tutelary representation. But how do we decipher the local histories encoded in this mythico-ritual iconography of collective identity?

Decoding local history in a Gazetteer pantheon

Nowadays, the symbolic persons of local gods stand for traditional, local, caste communities, act on their behalf in oracular modes of collective decision-making, and ritually articulate their external relations – with each other, former ruling elites, remembered empires, and the nation-state. In such ritual practices, the otherwise invisible persons of gods are made palpably present as actors in the human world by a visual/material regime of “signs” (*niśān*) – images, swords, maces, thrones, temples, palanquins. In conjunction with the objectification of theistic power by such material signs, and its mobilization for action in palanquins, human oracles (*mālī*) embody and give voice to deities in temple practices of consultation, in the course of which decisions are made by “dancing” the deity in his palanquin and asking for his advice in all manner of individual and collective issues – medical, marital, agricultural, pastoral, legal, political, and military. In this way, gods are enabled to rule as kings through the choreography of the palanquin – an Indian version of the *deus ex machina* constructed as a governing machine – and the “shaking speech” of the oracle who gives voice to the deity’s wishes.

The dance and travel movements of these governing machines and the trance speech of oracles define spatio-temporal relations of action and narration in the landscape, that link the present era of secular democracy to the former era of Hindu kingship in the complex experience of political memory. Rather than interpret the reproduction of Himalayan theistic kingship as anachronism, I view the remembered political history so performed as a “meaningful temporal horizon” (Munn 1992) against which rural communities produce the present and the future in relation to the past in local, and sometimes, counternational terms. Central to such localizations of history are the origin myths of traveling gods, whose movements, encounters and adventures specify networks of particular sites and routes in the landscape, in terms of which communities are meaningfully located in space, time, and the political field. Villagers refer to the regional corpus of theistic knowledge so defined as “history” (*itihās*). In what follows, I explore

the localizing tropes of west Himalayan theistic history and examine to what extent this ritual t(r)opology intersects with the data of colonial sociology, in particular with respect to such modern criteria for historical evidence as details of place, time, number, cost, actors, and motivation.

As local charters of “government by deity” (*deotā kā rāj*), I shall argue, regional theistic histories are characteristically structured by three *spatial* moments in the constitution of gods as local, sovereign, political actors: 1) the *prelocal* moment of mythic migration, in which gods leave home in search of places to found a “seat” (*kursī*) or kingdom of their own; 2) the *localizing* moment, when the disembodied and initially disordering power (*śakti*) of a god is geographically sited, ritually ordered, architecturally formed and politically located; 3) the *interlocal* moment of projecting newly localized power in peaceful *and* conflictual relations with others.

Local knowledge of theistic history is encoded in the goddesses and gods of the regional pantheon – if we can but discern the significance they convey to local people. Such names as Basaru, Kilbalu, Badrinath of Kamru, Sarahan Bhimakali or Hanoli Mahasu denote not only key ritual actors in the contemporary system of government by deity; according to British colonial evidence, their tutelary categories also define the historical structure of the political field of the former Simla Hill States during the period of indirect British rule. I found the evidence by critically re-reading the gazetteers, glossaries, revenue settlements, decennial censuses, and survey maps of British colonial sociology, produced between 1815 and 1947, against my contemporary ethnographic data.

In one of these texts, the 1904 Simla District Gazetteer, one hundred and forty-three deities are listed as “worshipped in the Simla hills” (SDG 1904: Ch.I, C 36-9). Despite its many shortcomings and lacunae, this gazetteer pantheon acted as my Rosetta Stone during fieldwork. Simply put, it provided the spatial clues that enabled me to decipher the religious practices of government by deity as a register of political history.

Information about the deities listed in the gazetteer pantheon is classified in five columns, headed “Number,” “Name of god,” “Village or seat of the god,” “Territory,” and “Remarks.” For instance, entry “Number 1” for Bashahr State reads “Name of God: Bhimakali / Village or seat of the god: Sarahan / Territory: the Bashahr State / Remarks: This goddess is worshipped throughout the territory of Bashahr. Also there are other minor gods that are considered under this goddess” (*ibid.*).

In its subsequent listings for lesser deities, the table revealed the systematic correspondence between contemporary religious symbolism and historical political organization in each of the “native states” of the Simla Hill States District – though not without considerable detective work on my part. According to my ethnographic survey of some thirty-five territorial gods listed for Rohru in the gazetteer, all continue to be worshipped in the same locations, and most of the origin myths and rituals described in

colonial texts are not only still remembered, but also actively reproduced in contemporary religious discourse and practice – especially in local festivals. The most notable exceptions are extravagant rites such as the *parnāth* sacrifice of Kamru, Kinnaur, which was once performed at the expense of the Bashahr king, or the perpetual procession of Chalda Mahasu, formerly funded by contributions from local communities and kings, especially the raja of Jubbal. After Indian kings lost their “privy purses” in 1971, the Parnath sacrifice was discontinued, and the regular scheduling of Chalda Mahasu’s territorial progress has been delayed and deferred in recent years.⁹ What remains throughout the Simla Hills and surrounding region is a peasant political culture of theistic kingship and rural diplomacy – remembered in narrative and reproduced in the dance and travel movements of gods.

Fieldwork revealed the wealth of this local knowledge and its ritual practices, the indigenous meaning of whose categories, forms and distinctions eluded most of the British gazetteer authors. On the one hand, indiscriminate colonial use of the term “territory” turned out to cover a broad scale of political spaces. On the other hand, distinctions of caste among gods and their worshippers are virtually absent from the gazetteer table, although caste is central to the indigenous taxonomy of the regional pantheon of goddesses and gods. The caste-inflected design of ritual vehicles is a vivid example we have just discussed.

The gazetteer follows indigenous territorial conceptions of religion in the Simla Hills as seen in its enumeration of local deities worshipped in each of fifteen hill states. Because each deity represents a finite territorial space, the geographical scale and political complexity of indigenous states is directly proportional to the number of deities in their tutelary pantheons, as seen in the following list:

| Name of state | | Size of pantheon |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Kothkai and Kotguru | 1 |
| 2. | Kothguru | 8 |
| 3. | Kothkhai | 10 |
| 4. | Kanethi | 1 |
| 5. | Kumharsain | 8 |
| 6. | Bashahr | 68 |
| 7. | Bashahr, Jubbal, & Rawin | 1 |
| 8. | Balsan | 13 |
| 9. | Rawin/Keonthal | 2 |
| 10. | Punnar/Keonthal | 2 |
| 11. | Sangri | 6 |
| 12. | Ghond | 3 |
| 13. | Theog | 4 |
| 14. | Jubbal | 13 |
| 15. | Tharoch | 3 |
| Total for all states | | 143 |

⁹ Personal communication by the Raja of Jubbal (1988).

Of course, there is more involved than numbers of gods and size of territory. To understand the historical political life of these Hindu hill-states, it is also necessary to know the different *kinds* of territorial space that deities represent, and how theistic representation was actually practiced in interactions *between* territorial communities and with former kings. In this respect, the gazetteer lists proved disappointingly thin by failing clearly to distinguish the indigenous caste ranking and territorial classification of gods or describe their ritual communication.

The 68 deities listed as worshipped in Bashahr present the researcher with a cryptic and incomplete guide to the administrative and religious geography of the kingdom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In what follows, I focus on the southernmost of the three districts or *tahsīls* that were formerly incorporated in the Bashahr State, namely Rohru *tahsīl*.¹⁰ Recently reconstituted by the Himachal Pradesh government as Rohru District, the extent of the contemporary administrative territory is virtually identical to its historical antecedent, occupying the upper reaches of the Pabar river and neighbouring Rupin river valleys. Interpreting my fieldwork in light of Sir Herbert Emerson's unpublished *Assessment Report of the Rohru Tehsil* [sic] of 1914 (Emerson n.d.1),¹¹ I have come to understand that religion, caste society, and politics were linked in monarchical times by the territorial organization of the Bashahr state revenue system, and that gods as well as human subjects were counted as *mālguzār* or “one paying revenue to (or holding land under) government: tenant; landlord” (McGregor 1993).¹² As such, seven elite local deities were honoured by the Bashahr kings as “holders of rent-free land” (*muāfidār* or *māfidār*: A. *mu'āfā*, P. *māfi* exemption).¹³ I examine two of these below, Suni Nag of Khabal and Jabali Narayan, both deities from Rohru *tahsīl*. In

¹⁰ In addition to Rohru, the other two *tahsīls* of the Bashahr state were formerly called Rampur and Chini.

¹¹ Sir Herbert Emerson retired as Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in the 1930s after an outstanding career in the India Civil Service, for which was knighted. During the first two decades of the 20th century, his unusually long tour of duty as Manager of the Bashahr State made him intimately acquainted with the religion of the area's dominant Kanait agropastoralists. After his retirement Emerson wrote a detailed ethnography of Kanait religion, whose unpublished manuscript is currently housed in the India Office Library in London.

¹² Emerson defines the revenue term *malguzār* as follows in the glossary of his 1914 *Assessment Report of the Rohru Tehsil* (n.d.:72): “Malguzar – a revenue payer.” See also Baden-Powell's glossary (1972[1892]: “Mālguzār (P.= payer of the māl or revenue).” In the Bashahr state, both individual households and temples were classified as payers of revenue, which was assessed on land holdings and collected in kind.

¹³ According to all reports I heard during fieldwork, the seven revenue exempt deities of Bashahr were Bhairing Nag of Sangla, the three Maheshvars of Chagang, Tolang, and Sungra, Narayan of Jabal. Suni Nag of Khabal, and Gudarū of Gawas. When speaking with former local officers who served in the Bashahr administration under British indirect rule, the linguistic form of Persian revenue vocabulary reflected an Arabic influence, hence *muāfi* and *muāfidār* rather than *māfi* and *māfidār*.

addition, according to Emerson (*ibid.*: 46), certain temples also enjoyed revenue-free land grants (*muāfi* or *māfi*) from the Bashahr king.

Such grants were made in former times in return for supposed services by the deity and, as they carried with them the transfer of the obligation of personal service [i.e. *begār*] from the State to the temple, the worshippers raised no objection [...] Instead of giving a month's labour to the State [they] work for a few days for the god.

According to a common Hindu conception of royal power (Burghart 1978), the Bashahr king's political sovereignty was based on his ownership of all land in the royal domain, which he administered in the name of the state goddess, Bhimakali (Emerson n.d.1: 12). According to this constitution, Bhimakali was the true sovereign.

The Raja was the vice-regent of the national goddess, holding his kingdom from her and on her behalf, and generally acting in accordance with the orders of her oracle. It was therefore incumbent upon him to preserve an intimate connection between religion and the State, and to provide fully for the requirements of all official, as apart from village, temples. The obligation applied with equal force for his subjects, for they also enjoyed what possessions they had by the grace of Kali. Hence a large proportion of the total revenue was expended on the maintenance of the national worship¹⁴ (*ibid.*: 13-14).

Fieldwork revealed the same theistic conception of sovereignty as central to the contemporary institution of government by deity throughout the former Simla Hill States at *all* levels of political organization except the *tahsīl* – from villages and local territories, through the remembered administrative divisions of former Hindu states, to the quasi-imperial formation of the paramount regional deity, Mahasu.

While fieldwork confirmed the accuracy of the names of deities, temple locations, and territories listed in the gazetteer pantheon, it also revealed the incompleteness of colonial knowledge and its biased view of tutelary representation, especially with respect to the caste and spatial status of gods. With the sole exception of four local gods representing Brahman communities in Rampur *tahsīl*, the gazetteer only includes the deities of Bashahr's ruling dynasty and of rural communities of the dominant Kanait caste (now Khas Rajput). No reference is made to the nine Brahman communities of Rohru which worship Parasuram, or of *any* subaltern Koli communities and their gods, of which the latter still form the most numerous, albeit least powerful, category in the Rohru pantheon. It is unlikely that Emerson was ignorant of these other deities, given his interest in low-caste religion, his fourteen-year stay in the area as Manager of Bashahr, and the frequent administrative tours of the localities his work required. Emerson may have been in the district when the 1904 gazetteer

¹⁴ Emerson specifies that the Bhimakali temple took a 3% share of the annual 25% land revenue cesses to fund state rituals (1914: 11).

was compiled, but we do not know to what extent he was involved in its production. While the gaps in the list may be explained by colonial ignorance or as a reflection of colonial fiscal and political interests in only recording the gods of the ruling elite and tax-paying landowners, it closely resembles dominant representations of the pantheon still in force today – inscribed in common knowledge and enunciated every winter in the annual oracular prophecy called *bakhān* (lit. statement or report).¹⁵ Emerson had clearly heard one of more *bakhāns*. In his unpublished study of Kanait religion (Emerson n.d. 2), he gives a detailed description of the *bakhān* of the local god, Jakh of Janglik, guardian of the Pabar headwaters. But rather than assume Emerson’s involvement in the gazetteer, I prefer to view its partial listing as reflecting colonial reception of the hegemonic form of local knowledge underwritten by dominant caste power.

The categorical structure of political location

To grasp the systematicity of theistic representation that reproduces an historical regional political order, we need to unpack the plural meanings conveyed to local people by the deities of the regional pantheon. It is common knowledge that each tutelary god does representative duty in two cosmological contexts: on the one hand, as the divine representative in the human world of a caste ranked, territorial community in its ritual relations with the gods of peers, clients, and rulers; on the other hand, as the local “watchman” (*caukidār*), “policeman” (*pulis*), and representative on earth of the great gods of heaven, Shiva and Kali. In addition, each tutelary god represents its human community in heaven in the annual battle with demons that determines world-order as reported in *bakhān*.

Thus, the political locations represented by the gods of the regional pantheon are structured by a triple taxonomy of social, spatial, and cosmological positions. By social positions, I refer to the regional scale of caste categories or *jātī*: royal Rajput, rural Khas-Rajput, Brahman, and Koli. By spatial positions, I refer to the scale of territorial “fields” or *kṣetra* that formed the administrative divisions of the former Bashahr state [in descending order of magnitude]: kingdom (*rājwāḍa*), *tahsīl*, *parganā*, *ghori*, *cak* (village revenue circle), and hamlet (caste name + *wāḍa*, as in *kolwāḍa*). By cosmological positions, I refer to local understandings of the three “worlds” or *lokas* and their inhabitants: 1) the underworld (*Jamlak*: lit. “world of Yama”) of the ancestral dead, ghosts and spirits (*bhūt-pret*), and demonic beings (*rākas*); 2) the human world (*Prithvī*) of caste society; and 3) the heavenly world of the gods (variously *Svarga*, *Indralok*, or *Aṣṭakulī*).

¹⁵ The term *bakhān* (H. report, statement) refers to an oracular report delivered by each local god in Rohru through the “shaking speech” of his oracle on the results of the annual battle in heaven between local gods and demons for control of the coming year.

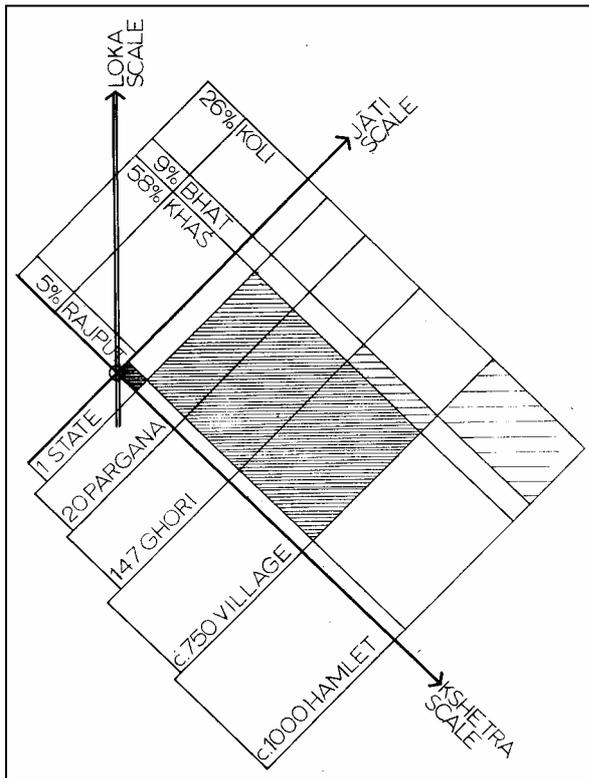


Fig. 1: The political field of the Bashahr state

This triple taxonomy of positions structured the field of political identity and interaction in the former Bashahr state, and is reproduced in present times by the representative practices of government by deity. This triple structure may be visualized as a three dimensional cosmos. The axes of caste and territory define the horizontal dimension comprising the field of political locations. The vertical dimension indicates the cosmological dimension, in terms of which kingship is legitimated by the power of the gods, which triumphs over demons, death, and disorder. This vertical dimension is given everyday material, visual, and

verbal form in sacrificial ritual, temple architecture, and oracular discourse, especially in the common geometry of the center and the four cardinal directions that informs *maṇḍalas* (ritual diagrams of the world), temple roofs (*śikha*: lit. summit, peak), and the “eight-sectored” city, Ashtakuli, atop Mount Kailash, where the gods meet every year in heaven. In each case, the center defines the vertical axis along which power circulates through the three worlds embodied by traveling gods and demons.

Some idea of the numbers of gods in each political location can be gained by combining the relative sizes of castes with the number of territorial types. Herbert Emerson’s (n.d.1: 30) table of the “Tribal Distribution of Rural Population” gives some idea of caste percentages in Rohru in 1914 as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Brahmans | 9% |
| Rajputs | 5% |
| Kanets [Kanaitis] | 58% |
| Lohars | 1% |
| Carpenters | 2% |
| Turis | 1% |
| Kolis | 22% |
| Mohammadans | 1% |

The numbers for each category of territory in the Bashahr state were as follows:

| | |
|----------|--------------------|
| State | 1 |
| Tahsils | 3 |
| Parganas | 20 |
| Ghoris | 147 |
| Villages | c.750 [estimated] |
| Hamlets | c 1000 [estimated] |

Each of these territorial spaces was represented by a tutelary god in the historical system of government by deity with the exception of *tahsils* (the largest administrative territories of the state).¹⁶

There is more to political representation than abstract categories, numbers and spaces, however. To understand the historical cultural forms of discourse and practice, in terms of which theistic categories of political location were implicated in political practice and subjectivity, it is necessary to turn to the expressive record of local narrative. In what follows, I examine the origin myth of two local dominant caste deities, Suni Nag, the god of the Khabal *ghori*, and the history of his on-going conflict with one of his peers, Jabali Narayan, the god of the neighbouring Jhigaya territory. In doing so, we not only see how gods were conceptualized and treated as historical political representatives in the institution of local government by deity; we also chart the changing historical geography of power and territorialization, in terms of which locality was re-conceptualized and re-configured as political location in three different superordinate political contexts: the Hindu kingdom of Bashahr, British indirect rule, and the secular Indian state.

Locality and foreign power

That local government is conceived in opposition to intrusive forms of foreign power might seem to be a foregone and universally applicable conclusion, but in Rohru district the reverse is true. Rather than being based on oppositional understandings of “the outside” as the “ground” against which locality is “figured” – its defining “context” – as Arjun Appadurai (1996:182-8) has convincingly argued, local sovereignty in Rohru originates in a mythic reversal of the disordering intrusion of foreign power.¹⁷

¹⁶ The significant exception is the largest territorial division of Bashahr, the *tahsil*. The absence of tutelary deities of the tahsil suggests that the establishment of this Islamic territorial category occurred at a time subsequent to the heyday of theistic conceptions of sovereignty. These emerged under Kashmir-rule in the 8th century C.E. (Inden 2000).

¹⁷ In conceptualizing “locality,” Arjun Appadurai argues that “the production of neighborhoods [i.e. the social forms of local consciousness] is always historically grounded and thus contextual” (1996: 182). “Insofar as neighborhoods are imagined, produced, and maintained against some sort of ground (social, material, environmental), they also require and produce contexts against which their own intelligibility takes shape. This context-generative dimension of neighborhoods is an important matter because it

This clearly problematizes universalist constructions of the local and the foreign.

Local gods are central to Pahari constructions of locality, history and political location, at the heart of which is a mythic transformation of the foreign into the local. As symbols of local identity, community, and power, the tutelary persons of local gods are formed by an apparent paradox. Despite their status as icons of locality, all the 35 Pahari gods I studied in Rohru are described in their myths as intrusive *immigrants*, born outside the localities they represent – some just beyond the village in a forest or spring, others from as far away as Tibet or Kashmir. The powers they embody are also conceptualized in exogenous terms as originating outside the settlement, usually in lakes located in the forest (*jaṅgal*) or high mountain wilderness (*parbat*). In this, Pahari thought conforms to a longstanding Hindu textual paradigm of royal power and authority inscribed in the oppositional relationship of social space/village and wilderness/forest that Malamoud (1976) characterizes as “*grāma*” and “*araṇya*” and Sontheimer (1997: 201) as “*kṣetra* and *vana*.”¹⁸ *Grāma* or *kṣetra* is the settled space of human society ordered by a king, Brahmanical law, and sacrificial ritual. But royal sovereignty has its origins in the wilderness of *araṇya* or *vana* – the place of brigands, enemies, and demons, but also of renouncers and gods. For instance, in the Indic imperial rite of the conquest of the quarters, the horse sacrifice, royal power is derived from outside the kingdom by conquest then legitimated as authority on the king’s return to his capital by (re)consecration (Inden 1978). It is therefore only those

provides the beginnings of a theoretical angle on the relationship between local and global realities” (*ibid.*: 186).

¹⁸ Malamoud gives a structuralist account of the Vedic concepts of *araṇya* and *grāma* as an opposition that defines the totality of the world. “These two zones, of the forest and the village, are distinguished less by material traits than by the religious and social significance attributed to each” (1976: 4). *Grāma* is defined more by social relations than by spatial limits. “*Araṇya*...is the other of the village” (*ibid.*: 5). Deriving from the term *araṇa* (strange), “its constant characteristic is that of an empty, interstitial space...a hole (*iriṇa*), desert, or in-between (*prāntara*)” (*ibid.*). *Grāma* is the place of the householder and order (*dharma*), where sacrifice is performed. *Araṇya* is the place of gods, the site of the absolute, and the abode of the renunciant (*samnyāsī*) beyond ritual. “*Araṇya* is defined...by a lack: the absence of village” (*ibid.*: 11). But the opposition of *grāma* and *araṇya* is elided in the forest-abode or *vānaprastha* hermitage of the third stage of life, which Malamoud characterizes as “an Indian utopia” (*ibid.*: 18). [My translations]. Taking a more historical approach to “*vana* and *kṣetra* or wilderness and settled space,” Sontheimer (1986: 201) avoids “the terms ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ since *vana* and *kṣetra* may be co-substantial.” “A Brahmanical *kṣetra* with a *purāṇic* deity may relapse again into a locality where pastoral people and ‘predatory’ people dominate. The deity is forgotten and is superseded by a folk deity attended by a non-Brahmanical caste...The forest with all its implications, e.g., social, mythological, ritual, philosophical and so on, was also...very much a physical reality until the extension of agriculture in modern times. 150 years ago or so Rama still would not have had to go very far from Ayodhya to be in the midst of a forest. *Kṣetra* I would describe, in brief, as a well-ordered space, the riverine agricultural nuclear area which is ideally ordered by the King, and by Brahmins with their *dharmaśāstra*.”

powers of the outside, which have not been ritually localized, that constitute the foreign. Such powers include not only the ubiquitous demons, which mark the threshold of every Pahari household or territory, but also former Muslim emperors, British officers, or their contemporary counterparts – government servants, road engineers, and Gurkha migrant workers.

In what follows, I use the local histories of the tutelary gods, Suni Nag of Khabal and Jabali Narayan, to examine the three spatial moments characteristic of the west Himalayan paradigm of political localization. First I chart the local constitution of theistic sovereignty in origin myths and rites of temple foundation. In light of this, I then read the political inscription of space by theistic agency as evidence of the local representation of history in Rohru.

The prelocal moment of local histories

The origin myths of west Himalayan government by deity echo a longstanding Indic imperial discourse involving the foreignness of power and its violent intrusion into everyday life. Power must be wrested from the “forest” (*araṇya*) by a conquering king, then introduced into “settled space” (*grāma*), to be ritually ordered as legitimate authority (Inden 1978). The power of kings, in other words, was not taken for granted as ready-made or given by hereditary ascription. The king had to prove himself capable of acquiring power by successful military action outside the realm. This is one of the lessons of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic. The origin myths of government by deity in Rohru-Bashahr offer a variant of this narrative. Local gods are produced in the image of kings by the disordering intrusion of foreign power and its subsequent re-ordering and localization by temple foundation.¹⁹ Though separated by several centuries, both these theories of sovereignty share theistic conceptions of world-(re)ordering kingship, in which western concepts of politics and religion are elided by Indic practices of rule.

In the Simla Hills, world creation is not the primary subject of Pahari mythology. Instead, local revolutions are described, in which existing political order is transformed. In some narratives, this involves the radical change from government by demon to government by deity; in others, the ouster of an incumbent god by an intruder; in a third group, the establishment of a local god, where none existed before. In Rohru, there are two kinds of local god. Those that originate not far from the place of their adoption, and those that originate outside Rohru. In myths of the former, gods embody the double power of the forest that initially manifests as a violent and destructive curse (*doṣ*) until transformed by ritual into the blessing (*lābh*) of increase. In such myths, the opposition of forest and village is mediated by two complementary vectors: the outward movement of cattle herding or shepherding flocks from settled space to forest or high-

¹⁹ See also William Sax’s description of the Garhwal local deity Karan (Karna of the Mahabharata epic) as a “divine king” (2002).

altitude pastures; and the reverse movement of wild power, spontaneously materialized in a divine image (*utpati mūrti*) then imported from forest to village.

Those gods that originate outside of Rohru are usually members of divine brotherhoods (*birādarī*). Six different brotherhoods of gods have members in Rohru: the 7 Narayans of Ramni, the 3 Nags of Burua, the 7 Bhairing Nags of Barar Sar, the 3 Nags of Balusan, the 3 Khantus of Mansarovar, and the 7 Mahasus of Kashmir [in order of increasing distance to native place]. These six mythic networks of divine kinship structure competing regional geographies of identity and communication by a common discourse of “roots and routes” (Gilroy 1993), whose tropes evoke an indeterminate and possibly unrecoverable social history of competition for land, lineage fission, migration, and re-settlement.

Suni Nag and Narayan belong to this second group. Both are immigrants from outside Rohru. Both belong to brotherhoods and originate in lakes. Suni Nag and his two brothers come from Balusan, a mountain lake on the Shrikhand ridge. Narayan and his six siblings are associated with a pool just outside Ramni village in Kinnaur, where their mother, a serpent goddess called Sutanang Matting, dwells. Leaving home and traveling in search of unsettled space to found “seats” (*kursī*) of their own, the mythic dispersal of each brotherhood of gods forms a narrative landscape of divine diasporas, in relation to which local caste communities orient themselves in terms of space, time and belonging. Every three years, for instance, Jabali Narayan returns home to visit his mother in Ramni, where his palanquin is laid on its side beside her pool to recharge his energy. In this second corpus of narratives of divine diasporas, the opposition between wilderness and settlement is complicated by a third superordinate category of space ordered by the state (in particular by roads, political territories and communication) – a category of space which is outside the village, but not outside society. This third interlocal space of trade, travel, transhumance, and processions is also the predominant setting for most of the narratives of divine migration I studied.

Rather than adduce the myths of both gods in full, I highlight two characteristic moments in the pre-local history of Suni Nag: 1) his migration journey with its evocation of roads, place names, and political geography, and 2) the disordering intrusion of his foreign power into settled space.



Fig.2: Mythic itinerary of Suni Nag

Suni Nag's divine migration (summary of narrative by Nanda Lal Jitam of Khabal)

Traveling in the guise of a renouncer from his birthplace Balusan to Sorga Sarapa on the Old Tibet Road, Suni Nag takes a local woman as travel companion, then crosses the Sutlej river bridge that leads to Sarahan – ceremonial capital of the Bashahr kingdom. Making his way south through Rampur *tahsīl* to the Nogli river, he next encounters the serpent god Balsru, lying asleep across the road beside the lake where he lives, Bahli Sar. Calling down a hailstorm, Suni Nag nearly kills Balsru who submits to his authority and joins his party. Looking for a place to settle, the three travelers fly through the air to Kyalag pasture, high on the ridge that overlooks the Ransar valley in Rohru *tahsīl*. From above, they sight the Khantu brothers, who are already well established in the area. So they continue on to Jakhnoti, where they find Jakh deota already established. Next they catch sight of the two gods Jabali Narayan and Maudev of Pujiyali dancing at a festival in a forest clearing. So Suni Nag could not settle there. Then Jakh deity joined their party and they traveled on, all three in the guise of renouncers, to Kothi, seat of the Maultiyan chiefs. The next day, not liking the place, they carried on to Gumbhridhadha in the forest, then to Bariya, both above Khabal. Suni Nag sent the woman back to Sorga-Sarapa having given her seven sons, then went into hiding with Balsru.

Suni Nag subsequently reveals his divine power and identity by reversing agricultural work and disrupting political order. Seven pairs of bullocks were ploughing a large field belonging to the oppressive landlord, Mahatta Saund. By evening, there was only a little left to plough. When the workers returned

the next morning, however, they found that all their work of the previous day was undone. The field had somehow become unploughed. The same thing happened for the next seven days: each day's work was undone overnight. On the eighth day, Mahatta Saund came to supervise the ploughing, ordering his servants to complete the work that very day. Around four o'clock as the sun was setting, the bullocks transformed into bears and the ploughshares into serpents. When the ploughmen went to see what had happened, Suni Nag appeared from the ploughshare in serpent-form and raised himself upright. So they put him in a goat-wool basket and hid him back home in Sondari village in a safe place, where no one would see him. Improperly housed in a basket instead of a temple, the power of the god continues to make its presence felt by disturbing the existing political order in the Tikri chiefdom.

At that time, the area surrounding Sondari and Khabal was under the rule of the Tikri *thākur* (chief). One day, the son of the *thākur* came to Sondari and got into a fight with Mahatta Saund. But the chief's son lost the fight and, as a forfeit, his father lost control of the chiefdom. Some time later, a lama came to Tikri and divined that the chief had lost his domain, because of the power of a lineage deity in Sondari. It was Suni Nag and he was the real winner in the fight with Mahatta Saund. After taking the lama's advice and adopting Suni Nag as their lineage deity (*kul kā deotā*), the thakurs of Tikri defeated Mahatta Saund and regained control of the area. Chiefly sovereignty, in other words, requires legitimation by theistic power.

Subsequently, in Khabal, the Jitan lineage of Brahmans became the hereditary priests of Suni Nag and, some time later, the people of Gaziyani made a palanquin for him.

Up to the point he flies over the landscape, Suni Nag's journey follows a long-established trade-route linking Sorga, Sarahan and Bahli, namely the Old Tibet Road, along which salt from Tibet was exchanged for wool from Bashahr and iron from Rohru. In addition to the economic context of trade and roads, Suni Nag's journey also describes the scale of political actors that formerly structured the Bashahr kingdom: 1) the Bashahr state goddess (Bhimakali in Sarahan); 2) two chieftains of Kothi and Tikri; 3) five *ghori* deities (the two Khantus in the Ransar valley; Jakhnoti Jakh, Jabali Narayan and Maudev in the Jighaya tract); and 4) the local landlord, Mahatta Saund. Despite the mythic trope of flying over the landscape looking for unoccupied space in which to settle, there is nothing fanciful about the incumbent deities and places mentioned. All refer to the historical geography of political territories that were listed for Bashahr in the 1904 Simla District Gazetteer pantheon and are still remembered today by the presence of their tutelary gods.

After telling me the origin myth, Nanda Lal went on to describe the foundation of the Khabal temple, the events of which sowed the seeds of future feuding by looting animals from neighbouring communities for sacrificial victims.

The localising moment of temple foundation

After the adoption of Suni Nag as a lineage deity, the next episode in his oral history describes the characteristic moment of localization, in which the disordering intrusion of theistic power is ordered in a temple “seat” (*kursī*) by consecration, then inserted in a network of political relations with neighbouring *khūnds* by its re-projection as military aggression.

In former times, the *kumbharumana*²⁰ (lit. placing the water-pot) consecration rite of laying the first stone of a temple was associated with two kinds of ritualized violence: blood sacrifice and a raid. Shishi Ram, another official of the Khabal temple, told me how sheep and goats were looted from the flock of the Kotidhar *khūnd* [in the Supin Valley] to get sacrificial victims for the temple-foundation rite. First he sang the “*Ghurī Mahāṭṭa*” song that evokes the story, then he explained exactly what happened.

Speaking through his oracle, the *devatā* orders: “Sheep must be looted (lit. eaten)²¹ – someone else's sheep.” He specifies the sheep of the Khashdhar *khūnd* on the opposite side of the Pabar valley. The temple headman (H. *mahāṭṭa*; Pah. *māta*), Ghuri, is reluctant to take them from Khashdhar because his in-laws live there. He argues with the deity and insists on raiding another flock from Kotidhar, promising to do so in the deity's name. While the Khabal *khūnd* is travelling to the Kotidhar pasture on Chamshil ridge, the deity inspires the oracle to warn Ghuri Mahatta once again that he is disobeying the deity's instructions. Finding the Kotidhar flock in a rocky place, the men of Khabal are forced to lead the sheep away in single file. Progress is halted when a ram gets its horns stuck between two boulders. As Ghuri Mahatta is struggling to free the animal, the Kotidhar shepherds arrive and one of their dogs, a bitch, attacks him, fastening her teeth in his leg. Swinging his axe at the animal, he misses and hits himself in the leg. Badly wounded and unable to move, he is left behind by the Khabal *khūnd* as they escape with the stolen sheep, and the Kotidhar shepherds kill him – a fate he brought on himself by disobeying the deity. Back in Khabal, the foundation sacrifice is performed with the stolen sheep and goats and the first stone is laid on top of the blood as an offering to the “earth-goddess” (*bhūmī devī*). According to Shishi Rām, all this happened long ago. “Even our maternal grandfathers' great-grandfathers (*nānā parnānā*) do not know when this temple was built. According to our paternal grandfathers' great-grandfathers (*dādā pardādā*), when it was time to place the final stone on the temple roof, we ‘ate’ the Jabalis' sheep.”

²⁰ The Sanskrit term *kumbha* (water-pot, funerary urn) is compounded with the Pahāri term *rumana* (to place). I also heard *rumana* used to denote the planting out of rice-seedlings in the monsoon season.

²¹ In this story, the verb *khānā* is used in both its literal sense, 'to eat', and its figurative sense, 'to loot' or 'steal'.

Thus, the establishment of a temple-seat is politically construed as an act of conquest. Beginning and completion of temple construction are marked by violent rituals, which bond the newly established tutelary god with the *khūnd* by implicating him in two kinds of political relationship to the local (*ghori*) territory. Internally, the sacrifice of sheep and goats incorporates the deity as co-parcenor in the pastoral community of Khas-Rajput property-owners. Externally, the initial raid on Kotidhar for the foundation sacrifice and the subsequent raid on Jabal for the completion sacrifice position the deity unambiguously on the Khabal side as their representative in relations of enmity with other *khūnds*.

However, the Khabal people do not have things all their own way in locating their deity in the political field. The deity also asserts his supreme authority over the community by using his curse to punish the temple headman's disobedience. Thus, once the deity's wild *śakti* has been institutionalized, the disordering power of his curse described in the origin myth is inverted as the ordering sanction of political sovereignty.

The Jabal raid was apparently the first act of violence in a longstanding relationship of conflict between Khabal and Jabal. Enmity between the neighbouring *khūnds* was reignited in 1934 and continued in different forms of conflict during much of the twentieth century in a long lasting feud (*boīr*). Famous throughout the Pabar valley, the feud is memorialized in the much loved “*Jabalī-Khabalī*” and “*Bazīra*” ballads sung by men from both places, when carousing at festival times [see below].

The former inclusion of a military raid in Rohru's rites of temple foundation may be usefully compared with other traditions of ritual raiding among *khūnds* in district Chaupal to the south. According to Denis Vidal (1982), a human head obtained by raiding the village of a neighbouring *khūnd* was indispensable to the performance of the *śānt yajna* (pacification sacrifice).²² Such gestures of challenge were basic to the spirit of bravado that still characterizes the remembered warrior culture of *khūnds* in Rohru. The taking of human heads was also central to feuding among *khūnds* in neighbouring district Jubbal, but it did not form part of their version of *śant*. Instead, the human victims of former feuding were incorporated in a complementary symbolism of local foundation, which amounted to a form of human sacrifice to Kali. The severed heads of enemy warriors were brought back to the village and buried in the *jagah thaur*, the settlement foundation shrine dedicated to the earth goddess in “communities of *khūnds*” (*khūndwāḍa*).

²² Here, 'pacification' refers specifically to placating the wild powers of demons and Kali with blood sacrifices (*bali*).

The interlocal moment of feuding between Khabal and Jabal

Local representation by gods, as we have seen, is not confined to friendly relations of reciprocal visiting (*deoālī*, *dewālī*) at festival times (Sutherland 2004). It also extends to warfare and enmity. Rohru is renowned throughout the region for its former culture of violence and feuding. Nowadays this history of feuding is memorialized in the lyrics of songs performed at festival times, when diplomatic relations of brotherhood between *khūnds* are renewed by the serious political work of drinking. The best-known song throughout Rohru celebrates the infamous feud between Jabal and Khabal that brought longstanding relations of alliance between the two *khūnds* and their deities, Narayan and Suni Nag, to an end. The contested accounts of the conflict told in each location give a vivid glimpse of the everyday practices of divine agency and warrior culture under indirect British rule. As the saga of the feud unfolds, the shifting locus of conflict charts the passage of the two local gods through different levels of territorial organization in the historical political landscape of India: from local government by deity in Rohru, via the court of the Bashahr king in Rampur, to the British capital of the Punjab Province, Lahore, and finally to the law-courts of post-colonial Simla.

Caused by conflicting grazing rights in the Kalkapatan [also Kalgapatan] pasture, the feud brings shepherds, gods, policemen, kings, and British officials into conflict over competing historical conceptions of legality, property, authority, and land. With the outbreak of hostilities, the alliances formed by the rival gods indicate the political significance of mythic brotherhood and ritual exchange as the Himalayan framework for interlocal alliance in times of conflict. On the one side, Jabali Narayan is assisted by his “blood brothers” (*birādar*) in Gokswari and Ramni villages. On the other side, the Khabal god Suni Nag, is helped by his “adoptive brothers” (*dharmbhai*), the two Jakhs of Janglik and Jakhnoti.

In alternative versions of the history of the feud from Jabal and Khabal, the contrasting discourses employed in representing the rival gods as agents goes beyond Dipesh Chakrabarty’s polemical point about rethinking historical temporality in plural terms with a vivid case of what I describe as the thick temporality of simultaneity. While the Jabal narratives use indigenous concepts of magic (*tana mana*), curse, and power (*śakti*) to depict Jabali Narayan as a theistic sovereign, the Khabal accounts of Suni Nag’s agency invoke the secular jargon of bureaucracy, policing and jurisprudence.

The Jabal version of the feud (as told by Bahadur Singh [BS] of Jabal)

BS: The affair begins when the Khabal shepherds attack and beat the Jabal shepherds with sticks. The four Jabal shepherds who get beaten return to Jabal and a meeting is held. Now the song begins. [He translates the Pahari lyrics into Hindi].

The temple messenger goes to all the villages of the *ghori* to tell them to assemble at Jabal to fight the Khabalis. The Twelve Score (*bārah bīś*) [members of the *khūnd*] arrive at Jabal and the deota gives them orders and they're happy. Narayan orders them to go to Kalkapatan grazing ground. There they meet the Khabalis and both sides exchange blows with sticks and swords and bows.

And they took [the drums of the deity] with them, the *gūjū* and the *ḍhaums*.²³ Each of these signs (*niśan*) conveys and projects Narayan's power. When the *gūjū* and the *ḍhaums* speak, the whole earth shakes. They played Narayan's rhythm all the way up to Kalkapatan and, when they reached the ridge, the drummers played [the goddess] Kali's rhythm to give strength to the fighters.

When the earth shook, the people of Shiladesh [on the other side of the valley] were awakened from their sleep by the earthquake and asked, "What's going on?" And the Twelve Score killed seven or eight Khabal shepherds and took their *māl* [goods, here sheep and goats] to Jabal. And the goods were kept above the Mana temple [...] and the temple messenger was posted to guard them.

At this point, Bahadur Singh stopped translating the song and continued the story in his own words.

They left the female goats and sheep in the meadow and took all the males to the temple, where they sacrificed them on the temple roof (*śikha*). The blood flowed down from the roof and filled the courtyard. After cooking some of the meat, they threw the remaining bones and carcasses into the courtyard. It was knee-deep in gore.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the Jabal villagers, the police were on their way up to Jabal [summoned by the Khabalis]. The deity was seated on the temple verandah and his palanquin started to move of its own accord. The villagers wondered why [he was moving]. They took his palanquin into the courtyard and asked the god, and the deity answered [through his oracle], "I suspect the police are coming."

So the deity said he'd do some magic (*tana mana*), and he ordered five cauldrons of water to be brought. At the time, the sky was cloudless. The five cauldrons were emptied into the courtyard and the deity bowed to the earth. Then one single cloud appeared in the clear-blue sky right above the village. And rain fell on the courtyard and washed away the blood and bones, and cleaned the whole place up. And the water flowed on down the hill towards the police, who were in the ravine coming up, and the flood hindered their progress.

Later, when the police reached the village, no evidence was to be seen of the stolen livestock. So the police arrested all the men in the

²³ The *gūjū* is a two-headed, barrel-shaped drum (*ḍhol*). The *ḍhaums* is a smaller battle-drum with the hour-glass shape of Siva's handheld drum, the *ḍamarū*.

village and put them in the Raja's jail in Rampur. And the women were left alone in the village, so they asked the deity for help. And the deity told them, "Take me to the Raja in Rampur."

When Narayan reached Rampur, the Raja did not come out to greet him but asked from inside the palace, "Who is this deity?" Then Narayan ordered the Raja to leave his throne and come out to meet him. When the Raja came out, the deity bowed towards him and said, "You must listen to what I have to say." The Raja said, "Whatever you say, I will listen. What do you want to say?" And Narayan replied, "Release all my people."

And Raja Padam Singh [last reigning king of Bashahr] pardoned the Jabal men and released them all from jail. But the Raja said that for every male goat and sheep they had killed they should give the Khabalis 50 *paise* (i.e. half a silver rupee). And Narayan said he would order the money to be given. And the Khabalis were also in Rampur and they took the money and the Raja wrote off the case. Then the Raja gave Narayan a male goat and the Jabalis food and sent both Jabalis and Khabalis home.

Then the Khabalis said they wanted to fight again and they made a clay-pot (*tumbri*) and put Janglik Jakh's magical spell (*tantra mantra*) inside it in order to afflict the Jabalis. And when the [Jabal] astrologer, [Ramni Sukhanand, a brahman of Khantali] discovered they had made a *tumbri*, he destroyed it from afar by sending a counterspell comprising the collective power of all three Narayan brothers – Jabali, Ramnaltu, and Goksi.

Two years later, the Khabalis went to Kalkapatan pasture in force and a few Jabal shepherds who were up there escaped to the village and gave the alarm. And the Jabal *khūnd* went up to Kalkapatan under cover of darkness. At daybreak, the Khabalis saw the Jabalis advancing and the Khabalis ran up the hill and attacked with sticks and stones from above. And the Jabalis went up and met them and joined battle.

Then Bazir, a man of Khabal, seized a Jabali and the sword of Bharan of Desoti village spoke, "I am going to kill a man today!" Then Bharan saw Bazir attack the Jabali and ran to his aid and saw that Bazir was striking him with a sword. So he struck Bazir who fell forward dead and his long coat fell over his head from behind and hid his face. And the Khabalis came up and saw the body and, thinking it was a Jabali, beat it with sticks. Then the two bands withdrew behind their borders and the Khabalis saw that Bazir was missing. Then they realized they'd been beating [their own man] Bazir and they took his body back to the village.

Then the police came to Jabal and whom did they arrest? The two temple officials, Loberama *kajāncī* (treasurer) and Sundar Singh. And

they beat them with their sticks. And when they started to beat them, the deity began to move spontaneously on the temple verandah. The name of the “station officer” (*thānedār*) was Kishan Chand. When he saw the palanquin move of its own accord, he said that someone must have hidden under its “skirt” (*ghāghā*). So he came to have a look and lifted the deity’s skirt. But when he saw there was no one hiding there, he was struck with fear and stopped the beating.

Then the *thānedār* tried to go into the temple to investigate, but the deity does not permit anyone [from outside the Jabal *khūnd*] to enter his temple. Narayan told him that he was not allowed to go inside, but the *thānedār* said, "I am a government servant and you cannot stop me." And when the *thānedār* peeked in through the doorway and looked up into the temple, Narayan made his eyes stop working and he couldn't see and everything became dark. But when he turned around and looked back outside the temple, he could see again. When the *thānedār* came back to the temple verandah he felt afraid and said that he couldn't see anything inside the temple. So he asked Narayan's forgiveness and promised to do whatever the deity required. And our respected deity told him, "You must not beat my temple officers!" So the *thānedār* promised not to beat them, and took them away to Rampur.

The court case was held in Rampur and about five men from different villages in the *ghori* were sent to prison in Chamba [to the west in present-day Himachal]. This is not in the song. Then the wives of the prisoners came to Narayan and complained of their hardship, with children to look after without their menfolk. And the temple committee was summoned and one old man without any family called Kalija of Mkatot offered to go to prison in their place. He would go to the police and say that it was he, not the five, who had committed the killings. And the deity gave him money. And he did seven years in prison.

In the Jabal version, the people of Jabal are portrayed as wronged by the Khabalis who are said to have started the initial violence, and the Raja is viewed as an ally of Jabal. But, two months after I heard the above account, when I made my last visit to Khabal, Shishi Ram told me a substantially different version of the conflict. In addition to insisting that the guilty party was Jabal and that the Bashahr Raja was biased in favour of the Jabalis, his account presented a different narrative voice. While the narratives from Jabal represent the feud in theistic terms of Jabali Narayan’s magical power and intervention, the Khabal version I adduce below presents a secular discourse of Urdu administrative terms, bureaucratic protocol, British procedure, and legal decisions. From Shishi Ram's point of view, deities are not so much theistic agents as legal persons, who own property, receive rents and can be sued in court. Deities, of course, are both, but the difference in Shishi Ram’s discourse marks the historical influence of

Mughal and British imperium as well as the narrator's more worldly experience of bureaucracy as a temple administrator.

The Khabal version of the feud (as told by Shishi Ram [SR] of Khabal)

In 1934, when the conflict between Jabal and Khabal began, Shishi Ram was a young man in his early twenties. As the son of the priest of the Khabal temple, a post that he later inherited himself, he was privy to an inside view of the affair. At my request, he began his account with the song of the feud most commonly sung in Khabal – *Bazīra*. The following is my own free translation of the song.

Like savoury pastries boiling in a pot, the two *khūnds* swarmed over Kalgapatan pasture.

Whistling their battle-cries, they spread out like water overflowing.

One man called Bazira from Khabali died, seven from Jighar [Jabal].

Brave Nandala of Khabal split the wooden image of Bhaumda,

the Jighalus' pastoral deity, with his sword – in value more like a Pound Sterling than a Rupee.

On the first or second day of the month of *śāūṇā*, the Khabali drummers beat their gongs, sounding the alarm to go to Kalgapatan.

“We are happy here in the village,” the men complained. “Why should we go to Kalgapatan? What do you want with us there?”

Like savoury pastries boiling in a pot, they are swarming over Kalgapatan, whistling for battle. See their horses gallop.

“Young men of Khabal! Hit Hukminanda Pangetu of Jabal! Hit him hard with your shoes!”

In the translation of our conversation that follows, Shishi Ram's alternative view of the feud mixes English and Urdu technical terms with everyday Hindi. English terms are marked with single quotation marks.

SR.: It started like this. In the month of Shraavan (*śāūṇā*), when the Jabal sheep and goats (*māl*) went up to the pastures, they assembled in Adalto pasture, which is our domain (*haq*). So legal proceedings (*kānūn kārvāī*) were taken to stop them. Properly announced by a drummer, notices were posted and the drum was beaten in the thirty-two villages of Jabal *ghori*. A musician was brought from Rohru and a peon came from Rampur. The musician received seven rupees for his labour and the peon with him was called Vikramjit, a Kinnauri from Sangla. They visited all thirty [sic] villages and posted notices stating “you may not bring your sheep and goats to the Kalkapatan pasture.”

E: Who employed the peon?

- SR.: The 'government.' The Rampur Raja had the drums played to stop them, but the Jabal people didn't stop.
- E: Did this happen in the very beginning?
- SR.: No! This happened later.
- E: So how did it all begin?
- SR.: The story of the beginning isn't sung; it is spoken (*zabānī hai*) [i.e. it is oral history]. We used to give Jabal *devatā* two rupees for the pasture-land. Then we were allowed to graze our flocks there.
- E: So, to whom did the pasture belong?
- SR.: The pasture belonged to them. But each party wanted its own rights (*haq-huq*). We were 'under' them. We gave two rupees for the flock to the Jabal temple. Now, there was a Forestry guard here, who had a map, and he asked us, "Why are you giving two rupees to Jabal? This pasture-land belongs to the Khabal people. It says so on the *mehaqmā* [?] forest map."
- E: An English or an Indian map?
- SR.: It was Indian, from here, from Bahli in Rampur *tahsīl*. From Bahli Dalog. So, when he explained this to us, we stopped paying the two rupee tax (*lagān*), and he gave us boundary signs (*niśān*) to show that from Jakhshadhar, Cigrithach, and Shukrordhar to here is the pasture-land of the Khabal people. Then we stopped giving the two rupees. And when we stopped, the quarreling began – a domestic quarrel (*gharelū jhagaḍā*) [i.e. just between Jabal and Khabal].
- E: So who pointed out the boundaries (*oṛā*)?
- SR.: First, the *oṛā* was drawn on the 'service sheet', then the 'boundary' was marked with signs by the 'patrol'. Boundary pillars (*ṭhūngā*) were made. The man who made the pillars was from Maila, he was with the 'Survey' people. They explained that on this side is Jabal, and on that side is Khabal. The boundary was fixed at Jakhshadhar. From Jakhshadhar eastwards was Khabal and westwards was Jabal. Then, after that, they looted our sheep.
- E: Because you didn't pay the two rupees.
- SR.: Yes! Because we didn't pay the two rupees. They looted our sheep. In the month of Shravan, all the men of our four villages – from some houses four, from some houses two, from some houses one – had gone with the *devatā* to Dodra Kwar. That is, to dance and play together at a festival there. First we had invited them here; now they were inviting us there in return. Then, one man from Jabal came to find out our secrets, to find out what was going on in Khabal. Most of our men were away. Some had taken the senior god [Suni Nag] to Dodra Kwar and others has taken the junior one [Pabasi Mahasu] to Janglik. So, in

all the houses, there were only women. Not a single man. Up in the grazing-grounds, there were just two children and four old men with the sheep, old men like me. Six people in all. When the Jabalis came, they took the sheep and goats – about one thousand. They belonged to the four villages of Khabal *ghori*: Denwari, Khabal, Sondari, and Jiltwari. There were none from Tikri. At that time, the Tikri flock was on Chamshil pasture [the pass between the Pabar and Rupin valleys] with the men from Shildesh. So that's when they made their move. Early in the morning at five o'clock, the Jabal men stole the sheep and goats from here. They were seven or eight hundred men at least. From Chirgaon to Hingori, men came from all the thirty-two villages. Then two shepherds returned to the village and made it known that the Jabalis had stolen our sheep. So they sent off two young men from here to Dodra Kwar [to break the news].

They reached Dodra Kwar as we arrived with the *devatā*. And we all split up to eat in different houses in the village. Some were eating and others were not, but all heard about the theft of the sheep. I was there at the time. That night, we sent twelve men to Rohru. One night they set out from Dodra; the next night they reached Rohru. Then they went to the police station. The *thānedār* was Gobind Singh from Hatkoti. His house is a little above Hatkoti. So he too went to Jabal. [Meanwhile] the [stolen] sheep had arrived below the village of Jabal. The stream had become swollen there, so they were throwing the animals over the water to get across the stream. The *thānedār* met them and asked: "Whose goods are these?"

"They belong to Khabal."

"Where are you taking them?"

"I have to take them to Rohru."

"Why?"

"I have to take them to the pound (*phāṭak*) [for missing animals]."

There was a 'government' pound there in the time of the Rajas. If you caused any damage, your animals were put in the pound [as security] and it was necessary to pay a fine to get them back.

"Ah yes! I understand," said the *thānedār* [sarcastically], "so you're taking them to the Rohru pound, are you? Come on, let's go up to Jabal and bring those animals too."

So the *thānedār* gave the animals back [to us]. Then he made an investigation (*tehkikāt*) and found some animal skins and some bones [the remains of the sacrifice on the temple roof]. Having completed his investigation, he counted the [remaining] animals and gave them back. We received [a total of] 1800 rupees for all the animals, which were killed. Those, which were still alive, came with us. 1800 rupees at three rupees a head.

E: Only three rupees?

SR.: Three rupees each, for small ones and big ones. After that, there was lawsuit after lawsuit. They proved the rent [should be paid]. We proved the pasture [was ours] and were awarded the pasture. They were awarded the two rupee rent. Then they were awarded costs against us. Whereas the rent had originally been two rupees silver, we were now charged five rupees, a five rupee note. So we appealed and the Khaniyara people [from a nearby *ghori*] gave evidence (*śahādat*) against us. On the basis of their evidence, seventeen and a half rupees costs were awarded against us. And what decision did the Raja sahab make? The Raja decided it as “*daftar* (report) number eleven.” But he did not prove his case. First he gave his decision and left the proof till later. And so, he came to be known as the “*rājutiketā*” [i.e. raja-adjudicator]. First decision, then proof! So, afterwards, seventeen and a half rupees costs were awarded against us. And we made another appeal, and that was dismissed.

E: Why did the Raja make this decision?

Appeal to the British Political Agent

SR.: The Raja had one official (*karamcārī*), some secretary (*munśī*) or other. Early in the morning, our attorney (*mukyatār*) was going for his morning walk (*śaulān*) [i.e. to defecate] and he met this official on the path, who said, “Hey brother! The Raja really killed you, didn't he?” But it was unjustified, you know. At that time, we had no idea that an appeal was being made against the Raja's decision.

Then he explained that the appeal was lodged with the [British] 'Political Agent' and it was he who had determined the Raja's decision.

E: In Simla?

SR.: No! In Lahore [capital of the British Punjab Province]. We appealed against the Raja's decision to the Political Agent in Lahore. Then one of our chaps (*bandā*), Timchu Ram,²⁴ the father of a former village headman (*pradhān*) called Lila Singh, went to Lahore with his *nānā* (maternal grandfather), Ran Bahadur. They made an appeal to the Political Agent in Lahore. When the Political Agent had received their application (*darkhvāst*) and looked it over, he wrote a reply to the Raja saying that, within a week, he wanted a fourteen-page answer on the matter. Fourteen pages! When the letter reached the Raja, he really found himself in a fix. The Raja summoned every official from Rohru, Rampur, and Chini [*tahsīls*] from *paṭwārīs* (village land

²⁴ The word *tīmcū* refers to a type of throw in the game of marbles. My assistant suggested that Tīmcū Rām must have been a good player as a boy.

registrars) from *qānūngos* (*parganā* land-registry officers) to *tahsildārs* (sub-collectors of revenue). And he said to them, "Look at this!"

And he took them into the palace assembly hall (*baiṭhāk*), all the officials from *paṭwārī* to *tahsildār*. The Wazīr at that time was Kehar Singh. And he told them,

"Look at this order I have received from the Political Agent down in the plains to give a fourteen-page reply. What is this, "daftar number eleven," "rājutiketā?" Who knows what to reply? A reply has to be sent, but nothing comes to my mind about what to reply." And nothing came to anyone else's mind either. So the Raja had to give the Political Agent eleven muleloads (*khaccarā*) of silver.

E: As a fine?

SR.: No! A bribe. So, one pot of gold and eleven muleloads of silver had to be given. Then the Raja got out of trouble. That's the story, sir (*janāb*).

E: So, in the end, was a decision reached?

SR.: In the end, a decision was reached in three different courts (*adālat*) – in Lahore, in Simla, and in Rampur – that Kalkapatan pasture belongs to Khabal. Then, do you know what decree the Raja made? He wrote that the freeholder (*mulk mālik*) of Kalkapatan pasture is the government, the property (*mālkiyat*) belongs to Jabal devata and Khabal should pay two rupees to Jabal temple.

E: No difference from the beginning.

SR.: That's the decision the Raja made. After he retired, Bakhshi Sita Ram, a government lawyer from Simla, took our case, and he said in court that if the property belongs to Jabal *devatā*, then in three years the people of Jabal should prove what kinds of crops they have produced there: what things they have sown, what crops they have gathered. And if there are no crops, then whose property is it? Property [i.e. ownership of land] is decided by sowing and cropping. So then it became a question of property. And their case was dismissed. Now the pasture is an empty (*khulā*) 'number' [i.e. common land]. It's not for cultivation; it's for grazing. None of it is [individual] property. None of the pastures in the mountains is individual property.

The fighting began in Sambat year 1991 [= 1934]. Bazir Singh was murdered in Sambat year 2005 [= 1948]. And the lawsuits lasted about 40 years [= 1988]. [Shishi Ram subsequently referred to the final court case being decided in 1986].

E: So that's the whole story? It's somewhat different from what they tell in Jabal. They didn't tell me that you went to Lahore.

SR.: What did they say?

E: They just said that the Raja decided in their favour.

SR.: That's a big 'item' to leave out!

Apparently, according to Shishi Ram, the legal decision did not put an end to the feud. Not long after the case was decided, in about 1986, the feud was revived at the performance of *phīr*, the Jabal name for the great “peace” sacrifice of Rohru usually called *śānt* – ironically, a rite intended to put an end to conflict. But that is another story.

Timescapes of theistic agency

In juxtaposing the Simla District Gazetteer pantheon with narratives of Suni Nag and Jabali Narayan, I have sought to trace the theistic idiom of locality, historicity and representation, in terms of which west Himalayan local histories are constructed. In examining three characteristic moments of theistic history mythic origins, temple foundation, and feuding, we have traced the *spatial* discourse of political representation by tutelary gods as it shifts from the *prelocal* moment of disembodied power, through architectural and ritual modes of its *localization* as sovereignty, to its re-deployment in external relations of *interlocal* alliance and conflict. As the competing accounts of the feud unfolded, we also charted an expanding scale of external political contexts – royal, colonial, and national, in relation to which the experience of locality and political location had to be re-imagined, re-configured, and re-territorialized. In this sense, the narrative of the local history we examined was spatially rather than chronologically structured. Moreover, as the record of this history is embodied (not textualized) in the contemporary imagery of palanquins, voices of storytellers, or “shaking speech” of oracles (not examined here), it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the past is *presented* – that is to say, made present in present time in the material forms and performative routines of living memory. Thus, rather than treating the persistence of theistic agency in the Jabal-Khabal feud as evidence of an incomplete transition to modernity, or anachronism, its coevalness with successive British colonial and Indian national secular regimes makes it necessary to rethink modernity in *relational* as opposed to transitional terms. Modernization does not eliminate cultural difference; it gathers cultural alternatives as temporal relations in the landscape.

Engaging Guha’s and Chakrabarty’s challenge to incorporate religious agency in historical explanation, I have argued for the historicity of theistic agency in western Himalayan political discourse in two ways. On the one hand, focusing on *Vertretung*, I have demystified government by deity by demonstrating the common social and territorial referents of theistic and political representation in the Simla Hill States under British rule. To do so, I linked gazetteer knowledge and contemporary ethnographic evidence in

interpreting the Pahari pantheon as an historical index of identities and locations in the political field of the former Bashahr kingdom. On the other hand, focusing on *Darstellung*, I have traced the simultaneous histories of traditional Pahari government by deity and modern secular governmentality in the colonial and postcolonial Indian state revealed by contested narrative representations of the same feud.

Basaru's cloud at the Mughal court with which we began, which Hobsbawm might have characterized as *pre-political*, may now be understood as a theistic representation of sovereignty – no less political for being theistic. Illustrating what kind of sovereignty this was, the local narratives of Suni Nag and Jabali Narayan offered a privileged view of the everyday practices of theistic agency in military, diplomatic, and legal modes of interaction. To characterize these practices as *pre-political* assumes a Euro-modern, universalist and teleological conception of the political that excludes the co-existence of alternative political cultures. Modernization does not sweep away difference; it supplements and complicates cultural traditions. To interpret theistic agency as anachronistic fails to grasp its simultaneous articulation with discrepant forms of the state – Hindu kingdom, British empire, and Indian national, which are stereotypically assigned to different ideal stages of political development.

In the expressive texture of the narratives adduced above, we see the tropes, forms, and practices by means of which the otherwise invisible persons of gods are and were conceptualized, materialized, and mobilized as historical political actors. The historical presence of west Himalayan gods so defined involves a triple chain of complementary forms of representation. First, there is a *semiotic* mode of representation by means of which an imaginary being is made present in human society through mythic inscription (in song), materialisation (in a palanquin and other signs), and embodiment (in an oracle). Second, there is a *political* mode of representation, according to which the person of a god so defined is made into a king by the ritual practices, through which local groups are ruled and represented in government by deity. Third, there is a *legal* mode of representation by lawyers and disputants, in which the two gods and the communities they represent pursue their interests as plaintiffs in a series of modern courts of justice.

Particularly striking in the alternative versions of the feud is their divergent accounts of theistic agency. In the narratives of his mythic origins and temple foundation, Suni Nag is depicted as a magical agent: sending down hail, flying over the landscape, undoing the work of ploughing, or punishing his headman by the power of his curse. While the mythology of Narayan was not examined here, the mythic discourse of Suni Nag's theistic agency may be taken as characteristic of other gods such as Jabali Narayan. In Bahadur Singh's account of the feud, Narayan is portrayed in similar terms as a magical agent: shaking the earth with his drums, making rain, spontaneously moving his palanquin, terrifying the *thānedār*, and

commanding the king. But in Shishi Ram's account, Suni Nag is also portrayed as a modern historical agent and legal person inscribed in a secular discourse of revenue payments, strategic analysis, bureaucratic protocols, and jurisprudence with scrupulous attention paid to the material details of names, places, dates, numbers and costs.

The simultaneous representation of Suni Nag as magical agent and legal person vividly illustrates the need for a plural conception of historical temporality. Suni Nag's presence is both "nonmodern and modern" and this shows, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 16), that "historical time is not integral, that it is out of joint with itself", that "the present is noncontemporaneous with itself." This continuity of the past with the present, Chakrabarty argues, is precisely "what allows historians to historicize" because "the medieval or the ancient ... are never completely lost" (*ibid.*: 112). But how exactly can such abstract temporal categories as "ancient," "medieval" and "modern" be said to coexist in the present, if history is conceived in objectivist terms of temporal *sequence* that exclude Gould's full house of variation. Plural temporality requires a subjectivist theory of *simultaneity* predicated on the temporal complexity of embodied experience, which Chakrabarty's paradox of the present's non-contemporaneity, however, fails to permit. In addition to the thin time of before and after (the rational temporality of causation, proof and truth), what we also need is the thick time of here and there (the associative temporality of juxtaposition, memory and feeling). Without the spatial component of simultaneity linking an observer and a plurality of names, objects, and places at the same time, there can be no co-presence of plural temporalities. Simultaneity requires the space of juxtaposition as Foucault maintains. What makes the narratives of Suni Nag and Jabali Narayan historical, I propose, is precisely their "contrapuntal" view (Said 1984: 171-2) of cultural difference that permits the discursive intrusion of theistic sovereignty in the colonial/modern sphere of police work, bureaucracy, and the law courts. The field of west Himalayan peasant agency is simultaneously magical and modern, theistic and secular, and its local history is spatially inscribed in the transverse temporality, or border-time, where subaltern and dominant epistemologies meet and interact in a landscape of memory. In tracing the movement of local gods through discrepant spaces and contested representations, I have argued for rethinking the linear representation of time in modern history in spatial terms of timescapes defined by action and narration. And so, made present as motion in origin myths, oral narratives, songs and palanquins on the move, Pahari memories of theistic agency in a plurality of local, royal, colonial and national timescapes require that we rethink Foucault's static *spatial* model of simultaneity in dynamic terms as a *temporal* network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

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New Past for the Sake of a Better Future: Re-inventing the history of the Kirant in East Nepal

Grégoire Schlemmer

In the Hindu kingdom of Nepal, official history was for a long time only the genealogy of ruling dynasties, and it focused mainly on national unification. This phenomenon reflects the domination of the Indo-Nepalese in the country, which was unified through conquest in the second part of the eighteenth century. Consequently ethnic populations, as well as low castes, were rejected for a long time as marginal and prevented from holding any kind of influential function, and also from writing a history of their own. With the democratic revolution in 1990, which has led to the emergence of freedom of expression, ethnic minorities now want their share of the cake, and they fight for social, economic and political recognition. While traditionally any wish to elevate one's position in society implied a full adherence to the high caste model, now perhaps the only common feature of their claims is to question the Brahman domination in the country, the so-called *Bāhunvād* ('Brahmanocracy').¹ The wishes of ethnic minorities are founded on claims of a common identity and culture, and one of the privileged ways to express this is through possessing a proper history. Indeed, for the Kirant (which is one of these ethnic groups)² a new past is emerging, written in Nepali or English, portrayed in booklets, and sometimes found on various web sites. These publications are my main

¹ Nepal is officially a "Hindu Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom." Brahmans constituted around 13 percent of a total population of more than twenty two million inhabitants in 2001. The *Chetri* or 'warrior' caste equivalent to the Indian *Kṣatriya*, who share with the Brahmans the status of a 'pure' caste, – make up around 16 percent of the population. Comparatively, the 'ethnic groups' category of the census constitutes a third of the population (the others being mainly other castes and religious groups; Gurung 1998). High castes exert much of the political but also economic and cultural power. On the relation between Brahmans and the state, see Bouillier 1995. On *bāhunvād* as a main factor of discrimination against the marginalized groups, see Lawoti 2001. On the perception of this phenomenon by indigenists themselves, see Tamang 1999.

² This name can be written *Kirāt*, *Kirāta*, *Kirāti*, *Kiranti*... To simplify the reading I have decided to use the term Kirant, and to use *Kirāta* when referring specifically to the old ruling dynasty (see below). The same applies to the word *mundhum* (written *mudhum*, *muddhum*...). Nepali, if rendered in italics, is transliterated according to Turner's system.

sources of information.³ Through an analysis of these documents, this article attempts to describe how Kirant indigenists view their history in this new political context.

I use the term “indigenist” to refer to intellectuals who write about (usually their own) ethnic groups, promoting their culture, identity, and rights in the nation. They are usually cut off from most of the rural Kirant, but present themselves as spokespersons for their groups. So the rewriting of history is not initiated in rural Kirant: all discourses I will present came from a minority of partially uprooted intellectuals.⁴ This fact leads us to ask how urbanized and uprooted people perceive the culture they want to promote, comparing the rural life they leave behind and an urban middle class they emulate. Rejecting official history, Kirant indigenists try to write their own history by setting themselves up as a dignified nation.⁵ But given the lack of documents concerning the history of Kirant, how can these indigenists pretend to write an attested history? We shall see how this past emerges from a mix of sources, like the traditional myths collected among elders of the community (which can be considered as one kind of ‘local history’), and other materials, such as researchers’ books, classical Sanskrit literature (such as the *Mahābhārata*), as well as royal chronicles. I will try to show how indigenists deal with these sources and how they express their history and identity.

³ I should also note that data used for this article were collected in the field (between 1996 and 2002), but this subject was not my main concern at that time (my main research topic is the religious organization of the Kulung Rai, one of the remotest Rai groups).

⁴ A similar topic has already been dealt with by M. Gaenzle (2002), who shows a development from a “spatio-temporal production of locality” in a traditional context to a “translocal anchorage of Kirant identity” based on the affirmation of a distinct culture. The present article, more focused on political aspects of the rewriting of history and culture around the notion of Kirant, can be read as a continuation of his article.

⁵ Of course, not all these intellectuals are motivated by a unique and clear goal. There are different opinions, different ways to act and write, and also numerous contradictions, showing that views are emergent. Differences exist between Rai and Limbu writers (two major groups constituting the Kirant entity) and amongst Rai authors, who generally adopt a more traditional approach: they refer to their own village traditions (Bam Bahadur), deal mainly with their own group (Bhupadhwaj, Kandangwa), and express their personal points of view (Bhuidal Rai, Nepal Khambu), sometimes being very vindictive (Tanka Bahadur). In contrast, Limbu authors (S. Subba, Kainla, and T.B. Subba) have an academic style, even though they sometimes evince a militant tendency. It could be due to Chemjong’s influence (the most famous Limbu intellectual, appointed professor at the university of Kathmandu in 1961; see Gaenzle 2002), but it can be more generally explained by the Limbu’s higher social and economic integration, both in Nepal and in India. The majority of those Limbu writers were born far from the traditional Limbu area, have studied in India (Darjeeling, Bengal or elsewhere) and are still linked to universities, where some of them are teachers. On the other side, Rai authors are mainly born in Rai villages, did their (shorter) studies in Kathmandu and are not linked to any academic institutions. But they all live in cities and were educated outside their traditional culture, which explains why they express their wish to know more about their own culture.

Introduction: The rise of ethnic movements and intellectuals

Kirant is a generic word used to designate related ethnic groups mainly located in the mountains of East Nepal but also numerous in Sikkim and Darjeeling (India). They number approximately one million (around five percent of the Nepalese population) and speak languages belonging to Tibeto-Burman. Kirant culture is clearly different from the Tibetan and Indo-Nepalese ones, although it has been influenced by them through long term contacts. The Kirant are mainly composed of *Rāi* (also called *Khambu*) and of *Limbu* people (also called *Yakthumba*).

During the second part of the 18th century, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of the modern Nepali state, conquered present-day Nepal. After a few years of violent war in which the king was confronted with strong armed resistance, he included the Kirant area in his kingdom. To conciliate these turbulent groups, he granted them a certain amount of political and cultural autonomy with regard to land ownership. But these privileges have progressively been withdrawn due to a slow but continuous process of land spoliation, limitation of political rights, and imposition of a strict Hindu model (Caplan 1970, Sagant 1975). Actually, less than a third of the population in the traditional Kirant settlement area are Kirant. These political, demographical and economical factors (all linked to control of peoples and resources) are of course fundamental for understanding the birth of indigenist movements (see, among others, Weiner 1978).

Resistance movements have appeared since Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest, but because of the government's repression and a ban on any kind of demonstration, they were not very well organized.⁶ Nevertheless, ethnic claims were upheld by the emigrant communities outside Nepal. The relative liberty of expression, coupled with an already existing ethnic awareness of the Limbu community, explains the early rise of Kirant ethnic movements in Sikkim in the second half of the 19th century.⁷ These

⁶ Nevertheless, during the Rana period (1846-1950) political meetings were periodically organized in the hills, sometimes leading to sporadic revolts. Rai leaders like Ram Prasad participated in the 1950 armed revolution against 'Ranarchy' (Rai 2051). At that time, Rai and Limbu armed units wanted to drive high caste peoples out of some Kirant villages. During the thirties and forties, another important movement was by Phalgunanda, a Limbu former adept of *Jasmāni* (a devotional *bhakti* sect). He created a new Kirant religion, drawing on puritan principles (vegetarianism and a ban on alcohol) and Limbu traditions and scripts. It became fairly well spread, and several temples were built, but it was in the end strongly persecuted as an oppositional movement, apparently because it began to revive Limbu nationalism (Jones 1976, Pradhan 1991: 171). There are still some adepts of this movement (Subba 1999: 116). Finally, sporadic political resistance movements (mainly lead by members of the Congress and Communist parties) appear between the revolutions of the fifties and the nineties, like the 1974 armed struggle in Okhaldunga involving several Rai; see "Human Rights Movement 1961-1991" web site.

⁷ During the middle of the 17th century, the new Tibetan rulers of Sikkim unified the Lepcha (the 'native' population of Sikkim) and the local Limbu under the Lhomongsongsum, the association of the Tibetans (*Lho*), the Lepchas (*Mon*) and the

movements were officially campaigning for the preservation of the Kirant language and culture, but were also fora for political discussions.

Over and above the Hindu and Buddhist influences on their social environment, Kirant intellectuals have been affected by different kinds of discourse. First, the British cultural, linguistic and historical studies carried out on Kirant were widely re-appropriated, in form as well as in content, and quoted by indigenists⁸. The second source of influence was Christianity, spread through British schools where some members of the local elite were educated. Even if not converted, some intellectuals (such as Chemjong) used Christianity as a model and as a source of inspiration, perhaps because it showed the possibility of the existence of a respectful religion, different from Hinduism and Buddhism. And thirdly, leftist movements played an important role in inspiring oppositional forces from the beginning of the century (Subba 1992). They often tint indigenist discourse with social demands. All these influences are still present in the way indigenists define themselves.

A fourth factor is perhaps coming from ethnic movements in India, both the tribal messianic movements (which share numerous similarities with the Kirant one, see Fuchs 1965) and, more surprisingly, the Hindu nationalist movements, which fight to “re-establish the Hindu nation in its superior and glorious splendour” (Pandey 1993: 240). It is difficult to know how far such movements influence Kirant intellectuals (no explicit reference is made to them), but several shared features exist between Kirant and Hindu nationalists from India. Reification of the Country, the Community, the Religion (all existing naturally and similarly since the beginning of time), anchoring the population in a territory (Hindus are the natives of the fatherland of India, in contrast to Muslims or Christians), the necessary link between a nation and a religion, or even the emphasis on the military values (*bāhubala*, the physical strength): all these points characterizing Hindu nationalist movements (Pandey 1993) are, as we will see, also fundamental features of the Kirant indigenist movements.

Limbu (*Tsong*). Organised on the basis of Tibetan values, this association tried to conciliate newly conquered groups but did not give real power to them. In any case, this endowed the Limbu with a sense of identity, and limited their absorption into the well-organized Gorkhali (e.g. Nepali) identity movement that appeared in Sikkim during the 19th century. Indeed, despite the Sikkimese government’s wish to federate all centrifugal forces in the country, Nepalese from all groups (numerous in Sikkim) organized as a political and cultural entity. Kirant could then play on both fields: they were members of the Gorkhali associations and also claimed membership in the autochthonous community of Sikkim (Subba 1999).

⁸ Campbell, Hamilton, Kirkpatrick and Hodgson are the most often quoted (e.g. R.K. Rai 1998). Some are thanked (as Hodgson, who wrote that Kirant are one of the most interesting groups of the Himalayas), and some are criticised (as Hansson, for having shown the linguistic diversity of Rai, e.g. their disunity). These examples show the difficulty of carrying out neutral research under these conditions: one is either for the Kirant cause, or against it.

After the democratic revolution of 1990, indigenist movements (locally known as *jana jāti*) gained new strength. Freedom of expression made room for the creation of diverse Kirant organisations. They all claim Kirant unity, but their multiplication reflects the endemic fragmentation of Kirant society. Although there are real cultural links between all Kirant groups, there has never been an ‘emotional community’ (Subba 1990), and these differentiations are a major handicap for the creation of a strong and unified community.⁹ These new ethnic organisations, officially motivated by cultural goals, coordinated political activities by establishing contacts between associations of the same type (some were united in the Forum for the Rights of All Nationalities that fought especially for a better political participation of ethnic minorities) and with foreign researchers, NGOs, the UN, members of the political parties, or the Maoist movement.

I. Rewriting history

a. Extension of Kirant: From clanic factionalism to pan-Mongol unity

In their books the first question the indigenists try to answer is often: who are the Kirant and where did they come from? In the absence of material evidence, the name of a group is sometimes the major basis for re-thinking history. For a long time there have been debates concerning the extension of the label "Kirant". Behind the question; “who are the Kirant?” there is a debate on identity leading to the question of legitimacy concerning the presence of different ethnic groups on Nepalese soil.

The term Kirant is not an endonym. It is an old Sanskrit word that apparently had two main meanings. The first one can be rendered as "highlanders"; it also referred to a form of Shiva (Frédéric 1987: 632). There is a complex link between this god, mountains, and tribal people (see below). The second (and apparently more common) meaning referred in a depreciating generic sense to Himalayan tribes, without further precision.¹⁰

⁹ This fragmentation even concerns each sub-community of the Kirant entity. The unity of the Limbu community is stronger than that of the Rai. Symptomatically, despite variations, the Limbu language is one while more than 20 Rai languages are identified (Hansson 1991, Driem 2002). Limbu culture and political organisation is more unified, perhaps because of the old centralizing influence of Sikkim. Similarly, in Sikkim there is a Rai group unified by a shared culture and a feeling of being one group. This unity probably results from the coexistence of migrants from different Rai groups: it certainly leads to the formation of a common Rai culture through cultural homogenisation and attenuation of differences. This is one more reason why Limbu and Kirant of Sikkim play an active part in the process of ethnic claims.

¹⁰ For an analysis of its use in Sanskrit literature, see, among others, Lévi (1905), Rönow (1936) and Chatterjee (1998: 27-36); for the history of its application to Rai and Limbu populations, see Gaenzle (2000: 2-12, 92-96). It also should be noted that different

There is evidence of the term's use in old texts, such as the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Purāṇa* as well as Ptolemy's writing. Later this word was used by the Nepalese to refer to the ethnic groups of East Nepal: especially the Rai and Limbu people. Its first documented occurrence in Nepal is in the *gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, the genealogy of the herder kings, dating from the 14/15th century (Bajracharya 1971: 139). In any case, the Rai and Limbu people themselves, followed by the indigenists, have progressively appropriated this word, transforming it into a federative endonym, and have reconstructed this notion by giving it a new extension.

In Rai mythology, there is a common story explaining that the Kirant were originally four brothers. The first three (usually Rai, Limbu and, according to the group telling the story, Yakkha, Sunuwar, etc.) populated the Himalayas, while the last one stayed in the plains. Through this mythological lost brother, the Rai had the possibility to affiliate with different groups, and perhaps to be linked to a centre of power. Indeed, this fourth brother is often associated with the Meche and Koche, two populations from the plains who were apparently part of the Vijayanarayan kingdom, the earliest documented kingdom in East Nepal, going back to the time before the *Sen* rulers. This mythological period has been prolonged by indigenists; but rather than simply creating a link with populations from the plains, they rallied a large number of Asian populations around the banner of Kirant. Thus, indigenists were inspired by Western references containing different speculations of 19th century authors about physical, cultural and linguistic similarities between 'Mongoloid populations', with a view to building a theory of Asian people and the origin of human beings.

Chemjong (1967) is the first author who embarked on such a hypothetical archaeological and etymological synthesis. Adopting Chatterjee's terminology,¹¹ he regroups all Mongoloid populations under the category of Kirant, and perceives them as an *essence*. Any Sanskrit reference to "Kirant" (or supposedly related words) becomes historical evidence for a very large proto-Kirant group spread all over Eurasia. As an example, since the Rai are sometimes called *Khambu*, sometimes written *Kamboja*, the conclusion given by Chemjong is that Cambodia is populated by Kirant. Further, he quotes historians referring to an ancient population living close to the Mediterranean sea named *Kereti*, arguing that this can only be the

Indian ethnic groups present themselves as being Kirant (as some Mechei and Garo; Subba 1999: 26).

¹¹ Chatterjee is an Indian scholar. His book, published in 1951, is a historical work on "Indo-Mongoloid" groups (e.g. Tibeto-Burman speaking populations of India, a "group" he also calls "Kirata") and their 'contribution to the history and culture of India'. For indigenists, Chatterjee's book has the great merit of integrating Mongoloid people in Indian history... and calling them Kirant! But in fact it is not a panegyric to Mongoloid people: in this book the main Mongoloid contribution to Indian history can be summarized as a common wish to be converted to Hinduism and an effort to defend this religion against Muslim invaders.

deformed name of *Kirati*. Finally Chemjong lists various hypotheses which lead him to see a Kirant origin and influence in all the ancient civilizations from the Mediterranean Sea to Mongolia or Cambodia, and so to claim all (cultural, social, architectural...) achievements of these populations (the Persian empire, Ankor temples, etc.) as Kirant. For Chemjong and his numerous followers the historical anchorage and the guiding thread of their re-written history are confirmed by the recurrence of the word *Kirant* in all these references.

Thus the re-adoption of the originally pejorative name of Kirant offers glorious perspectives to Rai and Limbu intellectuals. By this “translocal anchorage of *Kiranti* identity”, the major concern of Chemjong is to show that Kirant history dates back as far as that of others and that *Kiranti* culture is on an equal footing with the great traditions (Gaenzle 2002: 340). But for some of his followers, like Tanka Bahadur Rai, the label Kirant becomes a synonym for the ‘mangol’ population,¹² unifying all Nepalese ethnic groups by a common history and common interests. And by the simple fact that the Rai and Limbu still bear the name of Kirant, these populations acquire the status of the purest and archetypal representatives of this ethnic entity. It provides them with historical depth, a prestigious past, and origins that are used to express their autochthony and ethnic specificity in opposition to the “Arya” (e.g. Indo-Nepalese), the “invaders” associated with the Sanskrit heritage and India.

b. Heritage and lost glory: The ancient nation of Kirant

The structure of Rai mythology is linked to a spatial and temporal axis extending from their mythical birthplace to their actual living area. This axis, or path, has several landmarks: one in Varāhakṣetra, the confluence of three important rivers and also the site of a famous and ancient Hindu shrine (linked to the Sen rulers, Krauskopff and Deuel Meyer 2000: 115); and one in Halesi, which seemed to be an important Rai political centre. Both are major places of pilgrimage (for Halesi, see Macdonald 1986). But some versions also add other places: talking about migration a villager explained to me that the Rai went to Kathmandu where they ruled. This claim, present in almost all Kirant groups’ mythology, seems strange. However, we can read in a Nepalese scholar’s book that “There were 29 kings of the Kirant dynasty who ruled over Nepal for about 1225 years” (from 900 B.C to 300 A.D); “They were the ancestors of the present day

¹² The word ‘Mangol’ stems from the Western scholars’ racial classification (mongoloid) of the Asian race (for example, some indigenists speak about “Mangolkirat nation”). In the Nepalese context, it refers to populations that western scholars actually call Tibeto-Burmese, by reference to a linguistic classification. But some indigenists do incorporate Austro-Asiatic or Indo-Aryan populations, like the Tharu and some other populations from the plains who, according to some indigenists, share among others with Kirant their status of natives.

Kirant” (Uprety 1994: 15). The existence of this ruling dynasty in Nepal seems to be an accepted fact, proved by old inscriptions,¹³ even if there is no evidence that this dynasty has any link with the current Kirant, except for the term.¹⁴

In any case, this fact, agreed upon by both Kirant indigenists and Nepalese scholars, is becoming a central element in the indigenist construction of memory and of the legitimacy of their culture. The chief consequence of this is to prove that “the first inhabitants of Nepal were Kirant”, even that they possessed “one of the oldest civilizations in the world”. Such affirmations of Kirant seniority can be found in almost all indigenist books. But they go further.

Several books written by Kirant intellectuals give an idealistic description of this glorious time of the Kirant rulers. They make up a long list of the brilliant achievements of Kirant civilization: some point out the socio-economic development achieved by its rulers (clay and weaving, development of irrigation, business, ‘developed and scientific administration’ are all Kirant inventions...), showing the Kirant as “contributing enormously for the thriving of ancient civilization” (Subba 1995: 17). One writer refers to the effects of this development: “because of its economic prosperity, people from different places, of different tribes and races came to Nepal and settled down” (www.infoclub.com.np/nepal), showing that this period was the origin of one of the oft-claimed characteristics of Nepal: its multiethnic composition. More frequent is the claim to greater social justice implemented by the Kirant: there was no social or gender discrimination, as in the caste system, and women were not subordinated to their husbands. As Bam Bahadur summarizes: “It seems that Kirāta have been practicing democratic socialism as their political system” (2055: 59). All those great achievements seem to be motivated by the high moral values of the Kirant race. Each author lists fundamental

¹³ According to Slusser, the earliest evidence of a Kirāta dynasty in Nepal is the term ‘Kirāta’ “in a newly discovered but disappointingly fragmentary description” (1982: 10). The first link between this Kirāta dynasty and the current Kirant is found in the genealogy of the Gopal Kings (*gopālarājavamśāvalī*), where we can read that, according to Vajracharya, “... there were 32 Kirata Kings. These Kiratas (now) inhabit the regions between the Tamakoshi and Arunakoshi rivers” (1971: 139). This implies that the link between the *Kirāta* dynasty and the actual Kirant population was extant in the fifteenth century.

¹⁴ We have to remember that Kirant is a Sanskrit word used to name tribes from the mountains. There is toponymic evidence that the people of this dynasty were in fact Tibeto-Burman, but this does not prove Kirant ancestry; they could also be the ancestors of the Newar. Interestingly, the linguist van Driem actually classifies Kirant and Newar – but also Magar, Raute and Chepang – in a large linguistic family called Maha-Kiranti (Driem 2002, ethnologue.com). In fact, the current Kirant could be linked with the Kirāta dynasty, not in direct filiation, but as descendants of this larger Tibeto-Burman substratum. But this affiliation would have no more (and no less) meaning than, for example, to say Gauls are the ancestors of the current French.

values of the Kirant, the most common being bravery, frankness, strong sense of community, and solidarity, principles they present as intrinsic to their religion, the Kirant *mudhum* (some say Kirantism). To sum up the indigenist discourse: the Kirant, their nation and their culture, which are independent from India (“the Kirats had created their own civilised society before the Aryans reached Sapta Sindhu”, www.exploredarjeeling.com), are the real founders of modern Nepal and its progressive values. We are confronted here with a kind of putsch in reverse: they, the Kirant, had been the State.

But if the Kirant reigned over Nepal and were the founders of such a brilliant civilization, how did they manage to become this small group of tribes far away in the mountains? In other words, how can they explain this divergence between the claimed past and the present? The most widespread explanation is simple. Let me quote an indigenist I questioned on this point: “Before, we had our king in Kathmandu. At this time, the *mudhum* (‘tradition’, see below) was unique and true. But Hindus arrived, declared war on us, and destroyed everything. Everything was divided, and many people were killed. They turned us into displaced people”. The origin of the decline is identified: Hindus (or Arya; both terms are used as synonyms) are guilty. This explanation became a corner stone of indigenist speeches, legitimising all identity claims and their vindictive aspects.

This does not mean that all indigenists express it so bluntly, nor do they all think in such a way. It is possible to distinguish two (ideal) types of indigenist opinion concerning the place of the Kirant in Nepalese society. The ‘moderate’ ones write in favour of a greater recognition of their group, but still think of themselves as being integrated into the Nepalese nation; on the other hand the ‘hard-liners’ believe that the relationship between the Kirant and the Nepalese people only leads to the subordination of the first by the second, and that both societies should be segregated. But even the ‘moderate’ writers express the idea of a kind of Kirant golden age having been ‘perverted’ by ‘outsiders’.¹⁵

¹⁵ Subba, one of the ‘moderate’ writers, wrote in a section called *Renaissance and Retrogression*, “The oral literature of the Limbu reveals that their ancestors have experienced a certain level of civilization in the remote past [; they] were enjoying prosperous life both culturally and materially in their ancestral land (...). But a long period of turbulence afterwards, continuous conflicts among various racial groups, intermittent struggles for survival and migration, hostile competition between divergent cultural codes (etc) might have caused cessation or discontinuation in the progress of indigenous material and non-material culture of Limbu which eventually brought aberration, incoherence and even some omissions in the contents of *Mundhum*” (Subba 1995: 292-294). Even the rich and analytic book of Subba is not exempt from ambiguity on his position, for example in his critique of Dahal’s and Regmi’s (two Nepali anthropologists, see Dahal 1983, Regmi 1976) opinion on Kirant (Subba 1999: 41, 105). But we should also note that some Kirant writers promote their inclusion in the Hindu world, (Gambhir Rai Arya, Swami Prapannacharya) claiming Kirant Aryan origin (Subba 1999: 97).

Tanka Bahadur, a ‘hardliner’, expresses it more crudely: the generous Kirant granted protection and gave refuge to Aryans who left India. But after that, the perfidious Hindus conspired against them, took power by tricking them, and tried to suppress any trace of their civilization. “Immediately after their settlement in the lands of Kirant, the Licchavis [the dynasty coming after the ancient *Kirāta*] started to conspire and plot against Kirant and to spread Hinduism and its values, which eventually made a negative impact on the religious and cultural values of Kirāta society” (2043: 116). The reason, as he says elsewhere, is that “Hindu society is a non stabilized, irregular, insecure society filled with similar characteristics such as cheating, insincerity, betrayal, selfishness, individualism, which is based on discriminative philosophies” (*ibid.*: 95). The grievance against Hindus is evident. But it is interesting to see that in Tanka Bahadur’s narrative, the process of Kirant Hinduisation, which historically took place mainly during the nineteenth century, occurred in ancient times (the Licchavis are situated from 300 to 800 A.D.). The projection of this process onto many centuries leads us in turn to view this mythological history as a metaphorical reading of the present.

Such a historical reconstruction has consequences even in the most remote villages. It is perhaps the only major point of these indigenists, writings that has a real impact on village life. *Dasaĩ* is a Nepalese festival in honour of the warrior goddess *Durgā*, during which hierarchical relations with regard to authority, e.g. the *tālukdār* (tax functionary), are reaffirmed (Krauskopff and Lecomte 1996). For the last five years, it has not been celebrated in my fieldwork area, the remote Hongu valley, Solu-Khumbu district, the homeland of the Kulung Rai subgroup. The answer I got when questioning a villager about this topic is, “At the time of our king, there were no *tālukdār*, they have been imposed by the Nepalese king. He killed our king; he mixed rice in his blood, and made *ṭikā* [an auspicious mark] with it. That is why we stopped performing *Dasaĩ*, and that is why now we are asking for a new king.”

c. History debate with ‘Hindu’ intellectuals

As indicated above, the fact that Kirant ruled over Nepal is also accepted by the Nepalese intellectual elite. But they, of course, do not draw the same conclusion from this fact. As an example, let us briefly introduce the thesis of Bhattarai and Joshi on Kirant history. Bhattarai, an Indo-Nepalese writer, recognizes Kirant antiquity in Nepal, and their specific contribution to the construction of the Nepalese nation. Similarly, Joshi writes, “the Kirata regime played a significant role in the growth of Nepalese nationalism” (1985: 22). In Nepal, anything that clearly distinguishes Nepalese civilization from Indian civilization is always a precious argument. But for Bhattarai, manifestly a pious Hindu, Kirant were fervent defenders of Hinduism. “It is a well proven fact that these Kiratas were Hindus, the main

brave Hindu nationality (2017:11)". He even denies the specificity of Kirant languages, arguing that they came from Sanskrit, the "mother of world languages" (*ibid.*: 76). Moreover, he argues that Kirant are in fact of Chetri origin (*chetri*, or *kṣatriya*, are a high caste traditionally having military and political functions). Joshi defends a similar thesis when he writes, "Although these *Kiratas* were of the Mongolian stock which is non-Aryan, they were very brave and valorous. So the Aryans, in later times, amalgamated them in their own folds (...). This is the very reason why [the laws of] Manu had accepted the *Kiratas* as [one?] of the *Kshatriya* class" (1985: 24). The laws of Manu do in fact refer to a group called *Kirāta* (but we should not forget this word was more or less synonymous with 'wild men' or 'tribesmen'), and are described as being *kṣatriya* degraded to *sūdra* status because of their rituals and Brahmans' negligence (Lévi 1905: 77). In Nepal and India, several groups (also some Limbu, see Utpreti 1976) present themselves as degraded *kṣatriya* (caused by deceit or self-sacrifice for a good cause) in order to reclaim this original status (Sinha 1995).

But how do we explain the fact that Kirant do not themselves claim this prestigious status? Bhattarai's explanation is that "they remained far from the Brahmans and it caused difference in their manners and behaviour. Consequently, they forgot to add the word Chetriya to their names" (2017: 74). It is this non-respect of the Hindu precepts that made Kirant forget their origin. Joshi's explanation of this rupture is more 'perfidious' in view of the democratic claim of Kirant indigenists: according to him, former Kirant were republicans by tradition, but "those Kirata (...) fully well understood the political conditions of the South [of India], where the big empires were being established and petty republican states were swept away". This is why they adopted the monarchical system (1985: 21). "But it is natural that the ancient people had no faith in the monarchical system, because they were brought up in republicanism. This was the reason why the ancient tribes of Nepal, revolting against the Kirata, had driven them out of the country" (*ibid.*: 23).

Thus Kirant are Chetri without knowing it; this is an argument frequently used by Indian nationalists to reintegrate 'tribesmen' into the bosom of Indian hierarchy. As Pandey notes, "in the case of many tribal and untouchable communities, it is commonly argued that they are 'fallen' Hindus, Hindus who do not know (or have forgotten) that they are Hindus and need to be taught this truth" (Pandey 1993: 257). In our case, Indo-Nepalese writers counter upon themselves a status craved by many groups on the South Asian subcontinent:¹⁶ everybody wants to be a *kṣatriya*, because a *kṣatriya* is a ruler. But Kirant indigenists do not want the *Kirāta* to be recognized as *kṣatriya* rulers, they want the (ruling) function without the caste! Now their primary wish is to be distinguished from the Hindu

¹⁶ See S. Sinha on the relation between the tribal people of Central India and the *kṣatriya* (Rajput) model (1995).

world. Let us just mention that when confronting different views on politics, both types of intellectuals make use of historical arguments in order to justify their particular vision of the cultural heritage of their nation.¹⁷

II. Revisiting the present

a. Reinvention of tradition

For Kirant indigenists history gives sufficient evidence: after ‘Hindus’ have destroyed everything the Kirant have to reconstruct their heritage, and their social fabric has to be renewed as well. Indigenists’ debates focus in particular on religion, which offers the most powerful social fabric, and this leads to the reinvention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

For most Rai living in their ancestral villages the religious system (called *mudhum*) is ritualistic knowledge and *savoir-faire*, necessitating neither devotion nor meditation, nor even explicit moral values, but respect for the ancestral order concerning the way to deal with spiritual forces. As the Kirant traditional religious system is clearly different from Hinduism, in local communities few conflicts occur with the Hindu world.¹⁸ First, their tradition concerns a *specific* way of life in a *specific* area transmitted by their *own* ancestors. Consequently, there is a kind of intrinsic relativism in their conception of tradition: each group has different ancestors, hence different traditions. But in specific situations, Hinduism serves as a reference point, i.e. when dealing with exterior forces (like forest deities, roaming spirits) and when invoking specialists (shamans) able to deal with them, or when citing common Hindu myths. Since these fields are, in principle, shared by all, such knowledge is expected to be common to all groups. This conception of unity in diversity is in harmony with the caste system.¹⁹ Secondly, there is no equivalence between the *mudhum*, which can be translated as ‘tradition’, and Hinduism, referred to as *dharma*. Rai from villages are reluctant to translate *mudhum* as ‘*dharma*’ (as indigenists often do); the meaning of *mudhum* is closer to what anthropologists sometimes call the ‘little

¹⁷ The political message of these historical writings is clearly perceived, and sometimes affirmed. For example, an article published in the *Nepal Digest* (“Ancient Kirant were Hindus?”, 06/07/94) concludes: “The icon of this rejection [of Hindu heritage] is the rejection of the Sanskrit language for schools by the modern day Kirats”.

¹⁸ By ‘Hindu world’, I mean the normative socio-religious conceptions and attitudes of the high caste people and of the Nepal state (e.g. “Brahmanism”). On the relation between Hindus and Kirant, see Jones (1976), Gaenzle (1993), Allen (1997).

¹⁹ As Dumont writes, “In the hierarchical scheme a group’s acknowledged differentness whereby it is contrasted with other groups becomes the very principle whereby it is integrated into society” (1970: 191).

tradition'.²⁰ A villager explained to me: "We, Rai, have only little *dharma*", as if having no *dharma* were not conceivable for the Rai. But *mudhum* is not the same as *dharma*. The latter term relates to supreme beings (e.g. *Bhagavān*) which are described as "what people from everywhere worship". It is understood as a universal and divine principle transcending all religious traditions, explaining why villagers are receptive to such Hindu ideas.

But for indigenists, villagers are wrong: "even the Kirāta today do not know anything about Kirāta religion" (Rai 2055: 28). Villagers are said to have misunderstood their own religion, and "being unable to find their own independent religion, the Kiratese have been travelling in a world of darkness for a long time. Without knowing what to do, some of them took up Hindu religion and some Buddhist" (Tandukar 1980: 45). And therefore, "Kirant are losing their language, script but also themselves" (Rai 2052: 1). According to indigenists, "Kirāta festivals and traditions are not only totally different, but in fact almost opposite to Hindu values" (Rai 2043: 93). So the *mudhum* is the real religion of the Kirant (some indigenists say of all autochthonous people), but "it has been perverted by the conspiracy of Aryans", and "if we find any influence of Hinduism [and in fact, there is], it is only because of the process of conversion imposed on Kirāta by the government".²¹ This leads to a wish to 'purify' it from any Hindu influence. And if not suppressed, those Hindu elements are being reinterpreted: e.g., Tihar, Lakshmi's festival, became the commemoration of an ancient Kirant king²² (see web site: msnepal.org/reports_pubs/ekchin/jan2000/7.htm).

The struggle has now moved on to the domain of religion. As religion is perceived as being the "spirit of the group directing Kirant's life" (Khambu 2052: 13), Kirant identity depends on its preservation. The political aspect of religion is evident²³ and clearly perceived by some indigenists, such as Bhuidal Rai, who claims: "because to accept others religions means to accept a defeat in the religions battle [sic], (...) and to accept to be governed by others"(Rai 2052: 4).²⁴ Bhuidal Rai argues in favour of changing Kirant

²⁰ It is interesting that in the area caste people like Chetri also use the word *mundhum* to specifically qualify ritual practices concerning local spirits not present in 'pure' Hinduism.

²¹ Subba has a quite different view on the question. For him, Kirant religion shares similarities with Hinduism, but this is mainly due to pre-Aryan (e.g. Kirant) influence on the formation of Hinduism (Subba 1995: chap.XV).

²² The fundamentals of Kirant nationalism are well formulated by Subba: "(re)creating the Kirata nation, which means picking up certain commonalities and ignoring the differences within the groups categorized here as 'Kirata'; and two, showing how much such features differ from those existing among other categories, particularly the Tagadharis [high castes carrying sacred tread]" (Subba 1999: 84).

²³ As Sales writers, "it may be more accurate to see religion as the frame within which people make politics" (1999: 81).

²⁴ Rai criticizes a number of adverse religious communities who influenced the Kirant. For example, he presents them as sources of *factionalism* (or *communalism*). In South Asia, this argument is commonly used to criticize ethnic movements, as any movement fights

religion's "bad" aspects, such as killing animals and drinking alcohol, explaining these negative features are not religious, but cultural (though he accepts the Hindu model of purity). But even to rid Kirant religion from its "bad" cultural aspects and from external influences in order to find again its original purity is not enough. Bhuidal Rai goes further and proposes to "revise our own authentic religion", and explains that "it is really true that today we need a completely new vision and work about religion. Our Kirāta community needs to start something new in this matter. Even our attempt would not be a universal one, it should be competitive. We don't want to be late even in religion" (2052: 7).

For most of the indigenists, the objective is clear: the Kirant have to (re)discover their 'real' religion. Their religion is not the kind of jumble anthropologists can actually study in remote villages. For indigenists, the *mudhum*, the original religion of the Kirant, is one of the oldest in the world: "Kirāta had already their own religion before other religions existed and spread all over the world" (Rai 2055: 26). This knowledge of the universe given by the ancestors forms "one of the world's most beautiful epics", often compared with the *Mahābhārata* or the Bible. The *mudhum* is sometimes presented as a kind of positivist religion with a scientific basis, but also mystical (based on devotion, meditation), offering supernatural power (like vision of the past and of the future, apparition, illumination, telepathy...). It is also perceived as a moral and ethical religion, teaching love and tolerance (principles sometimes expressed as the *ten commandments*²⁵). It is also a philosophy leading to harmony between land and nature, and it is political, giving "the guidelines for the creation of a beautiful human society".

Such a religion has to have respectable gods, not like those worshiped by villagers, who are closer to roaming spirits than a supreme god. If ancestors are still present in indigenists' discourse (they are "the source of energy and power"), *mudhum* is mainly defined as a 'worship of nature' referring to 'mother earth', and a devotion to supreme gods. The main god for the Limbu is *Yuma* (also called *Niwaphuma*). She is described as "the ultimate and supreme deity. She is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinite and eternal" (Subba 1995: 284). And in the case of the Rai, there is an emerging consensus that the main gods are Paruhang and Sumnima.²⁶

for interests of a particular group. Secondly, it shows Hindu and Christian religious acts as non-economic and governed by political manipulation. Both arguments are frequent in Christian and communist rhetoric of conversion.

²⁵ This term suggests Christian and/or Buddhist influence (the 'tenth sin', *mi dge ba gcu*).

²⁶ Ironically both Paruhang-Sumina and Yuma are identified by villagers as Shiva/Parvati. All Rai groups identify Paruhang as their first male ancestor and as being Shiva. According to Sagant, Limbu associate Yuma with Parvati, Shiva's wife (1996: 295). Some indigenists recognize this link: ("Shivaism is our main religion" wrote Bam Bahadur Rai 2055: 27), while others, as Tanka Bahadur Rai, deny it: "Kirāta used to live in this area for thousands of years and since then they believe in authentic mundhum religion since. It is only after a long time that Aryan Hindus entered Kirāta land as refugees. They tried to attract Kirāta

I should also mention graphic (or iconic) representations, which necessarily are a part of a respected religion. While some explain the absence of any representation in a positive way (“just like Buddhism, they do not worship any image and regard light or knowledge as their god, which is omni-present,” Tandukar 1980: 53), others try to prove the existence of such representations.²⁷

b. Shamanic speech and sacred books

But how do these indigenists legitimise their claim to define true religion? A difficulty with putting the *mudhum* and universal religions on an equal level lies in the former’s lack of a script. For most Kirant, the absence of books is perceived as a big problem, and it is interesting to look at the Kirant relationship to scripture. They encounter it mainly in two ways: through Hindu, Buddhist, and later Christian sacred books, and through the Nepalese administration. In both cases, the existence and use of a script was perceived as contributing to the power of these institutions: it is partly the Kirants’ ignorance of any script that has led to their loss in the struggle for land ownership. So we could see the promotion of a Kirant script as a response to the wish to possess such a powerful tool. But in fact, indigenists claim that the Kirant already possess a script. “Long after, some Kiratese such as Mr. Imansing Chemjong and others, were able to discover their own religion beautifully written in old manuscripts” (Tandukar 1980: 47). Therefore, indigenists are able to speak of a true religion.²⁸

Unfortunately this script, dating from the end of 18th century, was based on a Sanskrit and Tibetan model and has never been used by the population (Vansittart 1896/1992: 135). Kirant intellectuals had two main concerns regarding this script: to prove its great antiquity, and to prove that it was the specific property of the Kirant. It is said to have been invented by Srijanga, a

in their religion through many ways. Thus they created a hypothetical god having the same characteristics as Kirāta. They called him Shiva, who used to drink alcohol, takes all kind of hallucinogens and if angry destroys everything (...). Thus, the reason behind relating Paruhang to Shiva is a conspiracy to convert Kirāta to Hindu religion. But Rai are not confused by this funny and baseless attempt and will never be (Rai 2049: 47). It would take too long to explain the reasons for this identification of Shiva with Kirant. Concerning the importance of Shiva’s figure in Nepal, notably among tribal people, see Bouillier 1992).

²⁷ Among such common representations are the re-appropriation of the Mahadev Kirateshvar statues (an old statue of Shiva in the Kathmandu Valley having slanting eyes), a now widespread picture of Yelambar (a famous – but hypothetical – Kirant king, victim of his frankness and honesty but having the “dubious honour of being slain by Lord Krishna himself”), Srijanga (the father of Limbu script, a martyr, represented in Saint Sebastian’s posture, bristling with arrows), or the Subhas Rai paintings representing Shiva and Parvati with Mongol faces and traditional Kirant ornaments.

²⁸ On the relation to script among local groups, see Oppitz 1998 and Carrin 2002. This rediscovering of sacred book also evokes the Tibetan ‘hidden-treasures’ (*terma*); see Blondeau 1999.

Limbu who was a former Buddhist monk from Sikkim and who was killed on the orders of a Sikkimese ruler because of his political activities (Chemjong 1967: 107). Based on the existence of another person called Srijanga in the 7th century, some conclude that this script was created then, and on top of that, they present the second Srijanga as an incarnation of the first (Chemjong 1967: 49). Consequently, this script is associated with an ancient king and with a religious leader, who died like a martyr. This first 'historical figure' represents the symbol of the Kirant golden age when they had a country, while the second represents the Kirant decline, which is due to foreign forces.

If the Kirant have such a script, where are the books? The rhetoric is the same as the one employed with respect to politics: "First we had our Kings, we had our books, and *Mudhum* was unique and true, but the Hindus destroyed everything. So *Mudhum* had to be reproduced orally by shamans. But the shamans distorted and deteriorated it", a member of an indigenist movement explained to me. The existence of a script is perceived as the foundation of respectability and unity of a culture. This is particularly conclusive because of the handicap caused by the *mudhum's* diversity that shows disunity among the Kirant people. For indigenists, the Kirants' linguistic diversity is the most obvious sign of their disunion. So finding a script for their language means fixing and unifying it.

Having a script enables them to claim a prestigious standardized religion, but also "to maintain, preserve, develop and standardize our endangered Kirat mother tongue" (Dhan Raj Rai, *Rising Nepal*, Sept. 20, 2000). This goal, the preservation of culture through language, is the main basis of the Kirant associations since the beginning: they have tried to promote their languages written in Srijanga's script from the beginning of the 20th century. All these associations give priority to the work on language (like publishing dictionaries, novels, or sacred books in Kirant languages, retranscription of myths and of ritual speech). Actually, the Limbu script is taught in Sikkim (around 5000 students in 1988). This fact, perceived as an important victory, encourages the Kirant in Nepal to be more assertive with their demand to implement the teaching of ethnic language at schools (legally allowed but never implemented).

c. Putting history into practice: The ritual dances of the soil

To sum up, the new 'refreshed' version of the *mudhum* tradition, adapted to modern values and transformed into a religion (i.e. rationalised, intellectualised and moralised), is said to be the basis for identity preservation; that is why it has to be unique. The difficulty is that the *mudhum* not only displays significant variations in theory, as we have seen, but also in practice. Indigenists want to minimize or deny any variation and put forward new unified practices to promote it.

The ‘chosen’ federating element is the ritual dance (called *Sakewa*, *Sakela*, *Chandi*, *Sili*, *Yalang*, etc. according to the groups), presented as an “intrinsic entity of Kirant culture.”²⁹ Effectively, despite important variations of details, Rai and Limbu communities all practice ritual dances. These dances are usually performed once or several times a year, depending on the agricultural calendar, with people (only men or both men and women) usually dancing in a circle, accompanied by cymbals and/or drums, while dancers sometimes mime agricultural acts. For villagers, these dances are to ensure agricultural prosperity by pleasing the ancestors and the Land (perceived as a kind of divine entity).

Despite important local variations, indigenists view these dances as specific as well as common to all Kirant (Gaenszle 1997: 367). Following a policy of promoting them as their cultural heritage that should be nationally recognized, these dances are now performed in public in cities of Nepal and Sikkim (where they are considered as ‘state holidays’). It is easy to understand why these dances have been chosen as a federative Kirant symbol. It is one of the few rituals performed collectively, and is present among all Kirant groups. Moreover, dance is a pleasant and apparently neutral folkloric practice, often the only kind of ethnic manifestation that the State tolerated. But it is something of a paradox that urban people should have chosen a rural cult with the aim of requesting agricultural prosperity from the ancestors, the symbolic landowners. Of course, indigenists have introduced significant changes, reflecting a wish to purify the cult (no blood sacrifice, no alcoholic drinks), to modernize it (e.g. using a sacred book in a modern permanent temple), and to give it more “noble” motivations, such as the feeling of togetherness in mystical harmony with a deified nature.

In Kathmandu these dances are followed by a ritual carried out three days later. On the full moon day of *maṅsir* (November-December), the *Chasok* ritual of *ubhaūli* (the ‘descending time’), was performed in Sano Hattiban (in Patan). It was organized by Kirat Rai Yayokkha, Kirat Yakthum Chumlung, Kirat Yakka Chuma and Sunuwar Sewa Samaj associations, but seemed to be controlled by members of the Phalgunanda sect.³⁰ According to C. Subba (1995: 46), *Chasok*, or *Chasok-Thisok*, is a harvest ritual

²⁹ As each Kirant sub-group has its own rituals, it is difficult to find any unifying ritual events. Some indigenists emphasise life-cycle rituals because they vary less than others; that is with good reason: they are strongly influenced by Hindu practice.

³⁰ Apparently, a similar “important Kirant religious festival where thousand of people participate” is organized every year, in the village of Laramba (Bajho VDC, Ilam district). This festival, called *Yakwasewa Maha Astayangya*, is realized in honour of ‘Lord *Kiranteshwar*’, as well as for praying to the gods “for good harvest and for welcoming the coming of spring”. It is organized by Atmananda Lingden, ‘great priest’ of the *Kiranteshwar* temple, with support of the Association for the Upliftment of Kirant Religion and Literature (adepts of the *Satyahangma Dharma*, i.e. Phalgunanda’s religion). (See Suman Pradhan, Katmandu Post, Jan. 20, 2000).

dedicated to Yuma (but includes several other gods), conducted by the Limbu community, individually as well as collectively. It includes animal sacrifices as well as alcohol, and is a festive celebration. In this case, the atmosphere is quite different. It was described to me as a land (*bhūmī*) and harvest (*bali*) festival addressed to the supreme god, *Bhagavān*. The ritual took place on top of a small hill where these associations plan to build a big temple. The ritual area was composed of a large platform with pyramidal terraces in the middle. Close to it, there was a big trident surrounded by two large bells, and a little further a triangular fireplace. The entire area was decorated with flower garlands and prayer flags (on which are words in the Srijanga script) flying above benches with moons and suns painted on them, reminiscent of the commemorative resting places built after funerals in Kirant communities. On the pyramidal terraces and on the ground, offerings brought by devotees and ritual paraphernalia could be seen (such as incense, candles, fruits, flowers oil for lamps). Men and women, young and old, all Kirant, were gathering, mainly from the urban middle class. The ritual borrows a mix of Hindu and Buddhist elements, with some Kirant symbols such as the two-headed drum, and ritual books written in Srijanga script. The performance consisted mainly of ritual speeches by the priest, while devotees walked clockwise three times around the altar and the fireplace (as it is common in Kirant rituals) for praying. The performance ended with a vegetarian and non-alcoholic communal meal (*prasād*) and the giving of *ṭikā* (auspicious mark). Except for some details, hardly anything was reminiscent of village rituals; rather the ritual organisation evoked sectarian Hindu practices.

But since there are no community links between ancestors and villagers, the *raison d'être* of the original ritual, is this cult not an empty shell transplanted into a city? By celebrating such a cult in the heart of Kathmandu, do these people, claiming a direct filiation with the glorious Kirant Kings, perhaps try to express their rights to the soil, their soil?³¹ Different Western researchers have argued that such a cult of the soil, known as *bhūme*, could have developed among tribal groups from Nepal as a response to Indo-Nepalese domination on the land (Lecomte-Tilouine 1996, Krauskopff 1996). These cults are perhaps a continuation of this phenomenon. Kirant indigenists all insist on their privileged and symbiotic relationship with the motherland, as a Limbu leader, Manju Yakthumba, stated in a discussion on indigenous people and territorial rights during a

³¹ Slusser points out that in “Tikhel, southwest of the old city [of Patan, Kathmandu Valley] proper, Kiranti recently restored a shrine in deference to their tradition that a Kirāta temple once stood there.” And she concludes “What, if not some ancient association, should bring modern Kirantis of distant and inaccessible eastern Nepal to a particular temple site in Patan, or induce them to foregather about their clan god at a secluded spot in the interior of the city?” (1982: 96).

UN conference. He did so by referring to Caplan:³² “Kipat [traditional land tenure and ancestral territory] is fused with and articulates the culture, and any assault on Kipat is seen as a threat to the very existence of the Limbu as a separate community within the society.”³³

We now understand how these dances can be quite subversive folklore. They are performed during all cultural programs, and these programs as well as the booklets previously mentioned are always media used to express criticism of Brahman domination, the status of Hinduism as a national religion, the teaching of Sanskrit, the low political representation of ethnic minorities or the question of land ownership. Some demands are more concrete. For example, Kirant associations did obtain the governmental recognition of a religious forest (Kirat Dharmik Ban) in Lalitpur and of a Kirant graveyard which had to be destroyed because it was situated in a Hindu temple's garden as Kirant sacred areas. Another aim of the campaign was to declare the ‘Kirant Hangsam Mojollug Manghim’ area (Banjho VDC, Ilam district) a religious place, as part of the world's cultural heritage, and the recognition of the Kirant dance ceremony as a national holiday. Kirant associations send volunteers campaigning for Kirant community members to register as Kirant in the census because census figures are always perceived as of great political importance: the numerical importance of a group is a sign of its political force (Cohn 1987). Moreover, after the 1999 census, the Kirant activists gained the right to add ‘Kirantism’ as a new religious category.³⁴

Conclusion

In the indigenists' scheme of historical analysis everything is linked: the ancient and glorious Kirant nation was governed by true religion, educating

³² Caplan's famous study (1970) focuses on the relationship between high caste Hindus and Limbu and describes this process as a progressive appropriation of Limbu lands and power by the Indo-Nepalese. This book has been recently criticized by Dahal as partial, showing Limbu “as an innocent and naive people, in stark contrast to the Brahmins who are portrayed as cheats or otherwise dishonest in their dealing” (himalmag.com/96may/deviant.htm). Regarding the criticism of occidental researchers' clear-cut opposition between “Hindus” and “Tribals” see also Sharma 1978.

³³ Concerning the Limbu mythology's emphasis on the relation to their territory, see Gaenzle (2002). On the declaration of the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN) made in 1994 after a UN Resolution calling for a decade of Indigenous Peoples, see Gellner (1997: 20). This declaration shows the wish to present the ‘Indigenous People of Nepal’ as being not Hindus but Animists and as being the first settlers of Nepal, but ‘displaced from their own land’ and subjugated by the State.

³⁴ It is interesting that less than 40% of Kirant regard themselves as belonging to ‘Kirant religion’ (1999 census). Apparently the more communities are influenced by Hinduism and disintegrated, the more the answer is positive (32% for eastern mountain area, 46% for eastern hills and 53% for eastern Terai). It shows a low influence of the indigenist thesis on rural Kirant people.

people with a moral principle and a rich modernist and socialist philosophy, and unifying people in regard to their ancestors and land. The religion is defined in holy books, ensuring its purity, unity and perpetuity. But Aryans invaded the country, destroyed their society, burnt their books, occupied their land, divided the Kirant, and marginalized them. These outsiders are the cause of Kirant disunity and of the perversion of the Kirants' traditions. This finally led to the disintegration of the *mudhum* and the loss of harmony between the Kirant, their land and their ancestors, and was moreover the cause of their current poverty, backwardness, and low political representation. While the struggle is founded upon historical arguments, numerous claims are very specific and refer to current economic, social and political issues. Through the promotion of language, culture, religion and a new version of their history, indigenists' wishes lead to more aggressive actions, like the defence of political and economic interests and land ownership rights. It is clear how this vision of the past legitimises the claim to their lost rights and to the nation they should inherit. And since material aims are linked to spiritual ones, the Kirants' desire to regain their lost rights inevitably involves the re-establishment of the *mudhum*. Subsequently, inventing the past is inheriting the future.

Everything could conjure up a messianic movement except for one important point: messianic movements are linked to political projects, usually focused on a charismatic leader. Up to now, nobody has emerged as a leader (except Phalgunanda, but his movement was short-lived). The endemic tendency to fragmentation of the Kirant movement (despite the wish of unity always claimed in all discourses) and the confrontational and generalized politicisation of Nepalese life³⁵ prevent any unity. Moreover, it creates a rupture with the more traditional view of inter-community relations. By trying to give their culture a noble character, in the course of time indigenists adapt it to the current standard values of the dominant Nepalese culture of urban elites, ironically mainly urban high caste Hindus. The most obvious example is the appropriation of the ancient *Kirāta* genealogies to claim, on a typically Hindu royal model, to be the first settlers and rulers of Nepal. Indeed, all indigenists are from the urban middle class and the form of their contestation can partially be understood as a response to their exclusion from the social status group they emulate.³⁶

They do have specific values, but they are also inspired by external ideas: military values represented by the British, communist social claims, a

³⁵ According to Subba, Kirant indigenist organizations are no exception to the rule. For example, the *Kirant Yakthung Chumlung* is close to the United Marxist-Leninist Party while *Kirant Yakthung Songchumbo* is pro-Nepali Congress (1999: 122).

³⁶ Weiner argues that "nativism tends to be associated with a blockage to social mobility for the native population by culturally distinguishable migrant population" (1978). For a more general analysis of the relationship between the "tribal" and the "Hindu civilisation", see Sinha 1981.

rhetoric of development, a special relationship with nature, influenced by the Western infatuation with animist religions perceived as intrinsically ecological. Even this claim to be the original inhabitants of the country can be seen as a consequence of the British legal framework established in India (see, for example, Bates 1994). The wish to have a culture independent from the dominant one leads them to reconstruct their culture in total opposition to their “enemies”. By doing so, the rejected culture still remains a model: a mirror version, but still a model³⁷. I tried to show briefly that villagers inscribe their tradition in their locality but think of it as integrated in a wider context, showing unity in diversity. By contrast, indigenists build a new culture in total opposition to the dominant ones but, in the end, similarly oriented: everything is done to show the cultural gaps between ‘Hindus’ and Kirant, but religious, economic and political goals are in fact much the same. There is a feeling of diversity in unity.

Such a position led to the relatively slight indigenist influence on the majority of Kirant still living in rural areas. Even though, as we have seen, villagers accept the historical part of this reconstruction and its political implication, such as is evident from the boycott of the *Dasai* festival, they still adhere to their traditional vision of religion. And it is rather the growing Maoist movement that has become the outlet of increasing anger. The armed Rai movement of the Khambuwan Mukti Morcha has joined and is now almost assimilated to that of the Maoists.³⁸

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³⁷ Even this is not unique to the Kirant movement. According to Frykenberg, modern Hinduism is the product of a socio-political process of reification which has evolved during the past two centuries and which has led to a syndicated or organized religion: “Indeed, perhaps no single set of movements did more to further the growth of modern Hinduism in its ‘corporate’ and its ‘revivalistic’ forms than [Christian] missionary institutions which were of this alien or colonialistic character. Both in the radical reactions which they provoked within local societies and in the educational institutions which were resisted, infiltrated, utilized, and ultimately copied by these same local elite societies did the rise of ‘Hinduism’ in its modern manifestation probably owe more to certain missionary institution than anything else” (1991: 39). See also Pandey (1993) for the construction of ‘Hindus’ in opposition to Muslims.

³⁸ In the rural area, Maoist leaders try to tug at the heartstrings of the new ethnic conscience, inscribing in their program a semi-autonomy of the ethnic area, as I could see written on houses in my fieldwork area. Neither Maoists nor Khambuwan are very popular. Nevertheless, this movement attracts many young people (on the relation between ethnic movements and Maoists, see Sales 2001).

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National Hegemonies, Local Allegiances: Historiography and ethnography of a Buddhist kingdom

Brigitte Steinmann

The attempt by the 9th Sovereigns of Sikkim Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshe Dolma (1860-1914) to document the formation, expansion and decline of their kingdom (the 'Hidden Country of Sikkim' or *sBas Yul 'Bras mo ljongs*)¹, from its foundation (1642) to the end of their own reign (1914), presents a primary source of historical documentation for the ethnographer, which can be read in the particular historical context of the kingdom at that time and the political debate that aimed at the annexation of the kingdom by India in 1974.

The work of the historian, according to Marc Bloch (1997: 7-30), starts not only with the collection of facts but also requires an act of construction on the historian's part, to transform the source material into documents and then to reconstitute these documents, these historical facts, into a real debate. The reconfiguration proposed by Marc Bloch attempted to rethink the real function of history: the documents, as evidence of the reality, could only be relevant on the condition that one knew how to make them relevant. From another perspective, linked also to the French "School of the Annals", Henri-Irénée Marrou (1954: 30) proposed a philosophical conception of History, which he defined first as "valid knowledge: history as opposed to false, unreal and imaginary representations of the past, for instance imaginary stories, fictions, utopias, folk traditions, or stereotyped legends promulgated with pedagogic aims in primary schools by the great modern

¹ Chos rgyal mThu stobs rNam rgyal dang rGyal mo Ye Shes sGrol ma gnyis nas sgrig mdzad, *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. 2003: 55. This original Sikkimese version, written in Tibetan, has recently been published in Gangtok (August 2003). Previously, I had access only to the English translation of a text entitled "History of Sikkim", written by the palace translator, Sir Kazi Dawa Samdup, whose few copies were circulating in Sikkim and abroad. The authors of the Gazetteer of Sikkim (1894) had published an English version of this "History", quoted by, among others, Siiger (1967: 26) in his masterpiece about the Lepchas. The English typescript of the *History of Sikkim* upon which I based this article comprises 175 pages, typewritten in the English on 35cm. long pages. Copies of this English typescript could also be recently found in the Oriental and India Office Collection, London, under reference MSS Eur E 78, and in the manuscripts department library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, ref: MS 380072. Before getting the Sikkimese Tibetan version, I worked with the English typescript, personally obtained in 1996 from the family of the last Chogyal's private guard, Captain Yongda (see Steinmann 1998: 117-142 and note 3: 141). Here I draw mainly on the English translation (Namgyal and Dolma: 1908), but I refer to the Tibetan text for different events where the English translation did not follow the Tibetan version.

states (...) as a creative effort, a dramatic mental struggle”, showing the limits and the humbleness of the writer faced with the huge and complex task of reconstructing the past, while seriously taking into account relative and contemporaneous aspects of the intellectual and moral needs of the current day.

The task of the ethnographer gathering his field data starts also with a collection of source material, which will be later transformed into real documents. But interviews and direct contacts with eyewitnesses provide basic and invaluable information only on the condition that data is evaluated carefully, owing to the selective nature of people’s and anthropologist’s memory. Considering both these approaches to history and ethnography, I propose to introduce a general discussion of the interest of reading this local historiographic Sikkimese chronicle in an ethnographic context, hoping to throw some light on the historical relevance of a political and religious description of a Buddhist kingdom made by the Rulers themselves. I shall draw on comparative ethnographic data, collected in Sikkim at various places and times over the last thirteen years.²

History of Sikkim: The political context

Namgyal Thutob and Yeshe Dolma’s *History of Sikkim* (1908) was composed when the 9th Chogyal of Sikkim was placed under arrest by the first British Political Officer, Claude White. From 1641, the date of the coronation of the first Chogyal, Phuntshog Namgyal in Yoksum (West Sikkim), which is stated in the History of the Namgyal, until the 19th century and the intervention of the British colonial forces, succession in the Namgyal dynasty passed from father to son.³ Sikkim had been overrun by the Bhutanese in 1706, under the third Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal. Tibet came to the rescue of Sikkim but the kingdom lost the province of Limbuana to Nepal, and under the reign of Tenzing Namgyal (1780-1790), Nepal invaded Sikkim as far as the Tista River. At the end of the 18th century, war broke out between Nepal and Tibet and the Nepalese firmly established themselves in Sikkim, south and west of the Tista. In turn, the Chinese intervened after expelling the Nepalese from Tibet and they started to reformulate the kingdom’s frontiers. They gave the region west of the Tista to Nepal, while the northern and eastern boundaries of Sikkim were fixed at the Chola and Jelep range. The Chumbi Valley, which had been a part of Sikkim, was given to Tibet.

British relations with Sikkim began in 1814-15 with the intervention of the East India Company which tried to expand trade with China via Tibet.

² I have been collecting ethnographic data all over Sikkim starting in 1991, during different periods of stay. Until recently, the access to field research in Sikkim was conditioned by difficult territorial reserves and restrictions.

³ Raghunadha 1978: 3-9.

The Company wanted both to protect its interests from the Nepalese and Bhutanese interventions, and to gain easy access to Tibet against the Gurkhas' will. The Company signed the Treaty of Sagauli with Nepal in 1815, and agreed to hand over the territory between the rivers Mechi and Tista to Sikkim. The Chogyal accepted and signed the Treaty of Titalia on 10th February 1817, which marked the beginning of the end of Sikkim's independence. In 1835, Sikkim was forced to give Darjeeling as a "gift" to the Company. The relations between Sikkim and the Company worsened, although the Company granted the Chogyal annual funding after he had given possession of Darjeeling. But the Tibetan resistance in Sikkim was growing, and led to another British military expedition into Sikkim towards the end of 1860. The Chogyal submitted completely to the Indian Government through the Company, which could have annexed Sikkim at that time. This was not done for fear of a coalition between Nepal and Bhutan and an open war with Tibet or China. But the Treaty of 1861 brought Sikkim under the control of British India and made Sikkim a protectorate, despite a number of weak points in the Treaty (like the retreat in Chumbi), which further helped the Chogyal to resist the British India Government.

Although the authors of the *History of Sikkim* pretend to trace the constitution of Sikkim back to the time of the 5th Dalai Lama and his personal recognition of the first Chogyal of Sikkim⁴, to whom he would have offered valuables and precious texts for his coronation, the political relations between Sikkim and Tibet itself never ceased to waver between promises of support and threats of retaliation, while the British were involved. In 1892, the British removed Thutob Namgyal from the throne and recognized his second son, Sidkeong Namgyal, as successor to Sikkim's throne. In 1903, the Younghusband Expedition invaded Tibet and forced it to sign the Lhasa Convention on 7th September 1904. Tibet had recognized *de facto* the status of Sikkim as a protectorate, which was also confirmed by the Peking Convention with Tibet in 1906. Chogyal Thutob Namgyal died on 11th February 1914. His son also died on 5th December of the same year, and was

⁴ Concerning this recognition by the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Chos rgyal mThu stobs rNam rgyal (2003: 55). In Namgyal and Dolma (1908: 30), the translator Kazi Dawa Samdup gives the following explanations : "And as the Maharaja Chogyal Phuntso Namgyal of Sikkim was also one of the canonised saints of the doctrine, the Dalai Lama condescended to regard the brotherhood thus established and sent the Raja a most friendly and complimentary letter recognising him as the ruler of the sacred land of the southern slopes, and accompanying the letter with the silk scarf of congratulation, bearing the Dalai Lama's seal, the mitre of Guru Rinpoche extracted from a hidden store (gTer) as well as the Phurpa (devil dagger) and the most precious sand image of Guru as present". The Tibetan version (Chos rgyal 2003: 54-55) emphasizes the initiation of the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* conferred to the Great Fifth Dalai lama by Lhatsun Chenpo. The Dalai Lama asks Lhatsun to be the chief of the doctrine and recognizes him as his Guru. He offers Lhatsun a silk scarf and sends the gifts mentioned above to the Raja of Sikkim, Phuntshog Namgyal. This passage emphasizes the reconstruction of a direct lineage tracing Lhatsun Chenpo's legitimation back to Guru Rinpoche.

succeeded by his younger brother, Tashi Namgyal, who ruled the kingdom till his death on 2nd December 1963. The *History of Sikkim*, written by the Chogyal in 1906, was retained and considered a private property for a long time. A translation into English was done by Kazi Dawa Samdup,⁵ but the original Tibetan version was kept by the different reigning families of Sikkim and Bhutan. Joseph F. Rock, who was interested in the genealogy of the Sikkimese family, and Nebesky-Wojkowitz who worked on the religious mountain cults, had access to the Tibetan sources.⁶

The composition of the *rgyal rabs*

The *History of Sikkim*, although being titled “History”, is composed partly with hagiographic and historiographic documents,⁷ illustrating how a dynasty of twelve rulers created and propagated the sanctity of their reign and country. They start with the description of their territory as the “sBas Yul ’Bras mo ljongs” or ‘Hidden Land Full of Crops’, as it is called in Tibetan *gter ma* literature. Cosmologies, stories, legends, anecdotes, excerpts from holy guides (*gnas yig*)⁸, Tibetan revelations and historical texts (*gter ma* and *rnam thar*) constitute the bulk of this history, composed as a royal genealogy (*rgyal rabs*). It defines how the country, its people, mountains, lakes and valleys became the most sacred centre of a Buddhist kingdom. The supposed foundation of the monarchy in 1642, with the consecration of the first Chogyal (Phuntshog Namgyal) by Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (otherwise known as Lhatsun Chenpo), the founder of the Dzogchen sect in Sikkim and the personal delegate of the 5th Dalai Lama, along with two other lamas, became the core of a vast model aiming to link the rulers’ ancestors to the Minyak dynasty in Kham and the Tibetan Sakya Hierarch’s lineages. In the manuscript, many dated events, such as the long series of conflicts with the Tibetans, Bhutanese, Gurkhas, Limbus (Tsongts), Magars and Lepchas (Rongs), of Nepal and Sikkim, make this text resemble a modern history. Socio-political data recreate the ambience of diplomatic relationships between the reigning family and the British traders and colonists. The traditional presentation of their country through mythological and religious

⁵ The Earl of Ronaldshay (1923: 130) during his travels in Sikkim, met the translator of the *History of Sikkim*: “We spent a pleasant day or two at Gangtok preparing for one journey up the head waters of the Tista river, and no one could have been more charming or more helpful than H. H. Tashi Namgyal, C. I. E. Maharaja of Sikkim (...). He placed at our disposal the knowledge and practical assistance of his officers, amongst whom was one, Kazi Dawa Samdup, a man of learning with a great knowledge of English and a scholarly knowledge of Tibetan. His study of Tibetan manuscripts has already been responsible for results of no little interest”.

⁶ Rock (1953: 925-948) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956: 218). Other authors have mentioned the *History of Sikkim* (see Steinmann 1998: note 3: 141).

⁷ See Namgyal Thutob (1908: 30).

⁸ Tibetan words in italics and between quotation marks are given in correct transliteration (Wylie).

descriptions owes as much to the necessity of reaffirming the antiquity of the kingship and Buddhism as to the urgency of offering resistance to new waves of colonial powers from Nepal, installed by the British. After Indian independence was won, Sikkim became the arena for violent and revolutionary processes aiming at the constitution of a democratic movement. In 1948, the Sikkimese leaders requested a representation for Sikkim in the Indian Parliament from Nehru. But the demands of the people of Sikkim, mainly concerning the implementation of land reform, were constantly rejected. The first elections in Sikkim were held in 1953, on the basis of six seats for the Bhotias-Lepchas and six seats for the Nepalis. At that time, there was not any real political frame for a democratic representation of the different ethnic groups in Sikkim, although strong traditions of local chieftainships and governments still existed among the Lhopos and the Lepchas of Sikkim, and among the bordering Tibetan and Bhutanese populations. The existence of some estates, private palaces and monasteries complicated the administration of the land. Finally, due to internal political fractions and to numerous appeals to India for help by the king himself and the different political parties, the country was completely incorporated into the State of India in 1975.

Since then, the *History of Sikkim* has appeared as a major document, in the form of a speech for the defence of a destroyed kingship, sacrificed at the altars of the East India Company's trade and politics. After the incorporation, sBas Yul 'Bras mo ljongs officially became "Sikkim" in the new Indian Constitution. The various and heterogeneous populations who lived there, diversely self-designated as "Lhopos, Mons, Tsongs, Rongs, Lachenpas, Lachungpas, Hapopas, Bhotias *a. s. o.*", became *de facto* "Sikkimese citizens" or Denjongpas in Lhopo language, which meant also "tribal peoples of the Himalayas" in the rhetoric of the Hindu colonialists.

The rise of a national consciousness

The controversial question of the country's annexation to India, or its merging into a wider democratic nation, was discussed, analyzed and publicly debated in Sikkim.⁹ To understand the various aspects of the

⁹ Several writers took a strong stance on this question, among them Jigme N. Kazi, originally a Lachenpa, chief editor of the *Sikkim Observer* and author of *Inside Sikkim, Against the Tide*. He wrote for instance (1993: 212): "Ten years after his controversial move to declare Prince Wangchuk the 13th Chogyal of Sikkim, Bhim Bahadur Gurung admitted that he had always felt uncomfortable and somewhat guilty at having been a party to the 'selling of Sikkim'. Gurung saw the Chogyal's death and his funeral on February 19th 1982, as a god-sent opportunity to expiate himself of the sins he had committed, and made attempts to vent his true feelings. In 1975, Gurung moved a resolution in the Assembly, abolishing 'the institution of the Chogyal' and declaring Sikkim to be a 'constituent unit of India', thereby paving the way for Sikkim to become the 22nd State of the Indian Union".

development of a national consciousness from an ethno-historical point of view, let us first consider the singular and unique position of this small Himalayan kingdom among the bordering countries. We have seen how the modern frontiers were the result of different waves of colonization (Tibetans, Gurkhas, Bhutanese, British, Indians), and intense conflict concerning the kingdom's efforts to establish its capital in a central location. In the past, Sikkim had occupied a much larger territory, including part of the Limbu territory, called Limbuwan by Limbu writers. It occupied this region which spread westward into Nepal; the Chumbi Valley into Tibet, and into the part of western Bhutan up to Tagong La. To the south, the country included the district of Darjeeling and a part of the country of Morang in the Tarai. The Gurkha raids of Nepal and the policy of the East India Company deprived Sikkim of the western Limbu and Lepcha territories, until, in 1817 and 1834-35, Darjeeling and the southern territories were lost. Finally, the Chumbi Valley was taken in 1890.¹⁰ It is interesting work for the ethnographer to understand how these political and geographical frontiers are perceived by the population and how the social ties are woven in a country where solidarity is still based on ethnic self-definitions, kinship and personal allegiances. One should consider the transformation of local groups, ethnically labelled, into national citizens, members of a unique entity and the Sikkimese State of India, through the following dynamics:

- The long history of the inclusion of heterogeneous populations, stereotyped as Lho (Lhopos/Bhotias), Mon (Rongs/Lepchas) and Tsong (Limbus/Subbas), into national "Sikkim" or Denjong¹¹. This movement relied on models of centralisation based on selective genealogies, the creation of national myths rooted in a *maṇḍala*-state system, and indigenous conceptions of democracy.
- The constitution of a politically legal Indian community through the transformation of Sikkimese customs caused by India's violent annexation, which paved the way for a series of reforms primarily concerned with land tenure system and land tenancy rights.
- The delimitation of the national territory, which now depends on an image through which different communities try to redefine themselves by reconstructing ethnonyms and socio-political frontiers such as ethnic, religious and political revivals, a fast growing tourist industry and the conversion of people to foreign religions and sectarian movements.

The first aim of the *History of Sikkim* seems to have been a clear desire to determine the roots of the myths of origin of the royal lineage and

¹⁰ See the presentation of Sikkim by Chantal Massonaud (1982: 117-118).

¹¹ There was, and still is, a kind of political game and debate about the stereotyped designations of the different populations, issued from this nationalised and centralised vision: see Steinmann (1998a: 145-158).

Sikkimese Lhopos in a greater Tibetan tradition. Although these myths are believed to be known throughout the country, they essentially refer to the Lhopos and then to the Lepchas. The *History of Sikkim* clearly shows the Chogyal Thutob Namgyal's will to describe these populations as the legitimate ones. The holiest monastic figure is the *arhat* Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (lHa bTsun nam mkha' jigs med), whose image is present in many Nyingmapa monasteries of the Mindroling tradition in Tibet. Oral narratives shape the various encounters between Lhatsun and a Lepcha priest and reveal divergent Lhopo and Lepcha conceptions of Buddhism. The links they create between the Tibetan model of Buddhism, particularly with regard to mountain cults and their own conception of the territory, are heterogeneous, although Lepchas, as well as Lhopos, are fervent practising Buddhists.¹² Today, the Lepchas are strongly engaged in a movement of political revival, appealing to a tradition of "animism". They claim to be the real "autochthonous ones" and argue against conversions to foreign religions believed to have been imposed on them by Christian missionaries, or Buddhist and Hindu priests. The Lhopos, on their side, also wish to promote some new and revived concepts of Buddhism, prevailing around certain tantric monasteries and schools, and linked to the foundation of seventeenth century kingship in Western Sikkim.

In addition to *History of Sikkim*, a great number of contemporary booklets and publications aim to show a modern and democratic country. They provide descriptions of different encounters between Nepalese, Lepcha, Tibetan and Bhutanese populations, and provide secondary sources of ethnographic documentation. Lay associations and festivals centered around traditions and heritage aim at redefining local traditions, while asking governmental delegates to promote the minorities' integration into a larger community. We now find in Sikkim the same context of ethnic revivalism that we find in Nepal, beset as it is with conflicting relationships between castes and tribes, and described within a wider racist distinction between Mongol populations and Indo-Aryan ones.¹³ One of these recent compilations, endeavouring to create a national consciousness (although based on particularism), is a new *rgyal rabs*, recomposed from excerpts of *History of Sikkim* and taught in schools and colleges. It is entitled "Denjong Charap" (*Bras ljongs chags rabs*, Bhutia Rapid Reader for classes IX and X)¹⁴ and is written in Lhoke (*lho skad*), the national language of Sikkim. This text retraces the history of the main lineages of the Pemayangtse monastery, one of the three temples founded by Lhatsun Chenpo, the

¹² Elsewhere, I have discussed different aspects of this comparative mythology (Steinmann 2003).

¹³ See for instance the case of the Magar populations in Nepal, analyzed by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (2002), or Schlemmer (this volume).

¹⁴ Melanie Vandenhelsken drew my attention to these publications that she collected in Gangtok, Sikkim, during her fieldwork.

spiritual master of the kingdom. It also describes the main rituals surrounding the emblematic figure of the main mountain deity, Kanchenjunga.

Local traditions of democracy and state centralisation

In addition to these reconstructions around the royal genealogy, oral and written narratives about the Lhopos' and Lepchas' ancestral origins describe an encounter between the Lhopos' and the Lepchas' chiefs as a form of ritualised alliance. This story has taken on the dimensions of a national myth. The authors of the *History*¹⁵ explain how a friendship was forged between a Tibetan prince, Kye Bumsa (*Gyad 'Bum gsags*), the founder of the great Lhopo clans of Pemayangtse, and a Lepcha ancestor, The Kong Tek. Kye Bumsa was linked to the Sakya priests by marriage. He married Jomo Guruma of the Sakya family; then he went to Sikkim through Pakshi, to the north of Khampa Jong. He built several temples, among them Pakshi Gompa, and continued his route to Chumbi Valley, where he fought against a Bhutanese spirit medium (*dpa' bo*), Ngawang Gyepe Palbar (*Nga dbang Gyad pa'i dPal 'bar*), a renowned athlete. After extended conflict, he sought the help of a famous Lepcha priest. During his retreat in the Chumbi Valley, Kye Bumsa had heard about the existence of a famous holy man living in the country of Mon. He went to Sikkim, in search of this man, passing through the Chola mountains. On arriving in the place, which was actually called Kabi Lonchok, he met The Kong Tek, whose name in the Tibetan version of the *History* is "*Guru'i sprul pa*"¹⁶, literally, 'the emanation of the Guru (Rinpoche)'. This Guru is described as living in a bamboo hut and sitting on a throne, covered with all kind of shamanistic garments. Kye Bumsa, who had no heir, was able to have three sons, thanks to the believed intervention of The Kong Tek. The Chogyal's insistence on the importance of this direct alliance, sworn with blood of sacrificial animals between the Tibetan ancestor and the Lepcha chief, can be read as a symbolic parallel to the pleading for indigenous democracy in Sikkim by modern writers and

¹⁵ Namgyal and Dolma's *History of Sikkim* 1908: 15 sq.

¹⁶ In the English translation of the rGyal rabs (Namgyal 1908: 17), The Kong Tek is also called a "patriarch and wizard". The Tibetan text (Chos rgyal, 2003: 31) reads : *De nas Chu 'bir lo gsum tsam bzhugs kyang sras med par mon yul du Guru'i sprul pa The Kong Teg Nyo Kong dang bya ba gnyis yod pa des srid kyi rten 'brel 'grig thabs shes zer thos pa dang*: "Although Kye Bum lived for three years in Chumbi, he did not have any sons; having heard that there was a certain emanation of the Guru called The Kong Teg with Nyo Kong in the country of Mon, who was able to confer a progeny, he wished to meet with him." Kye Bumsa is called *dpon g-yog*, or 'master with servant'. For historical details about this Tibetan version, see Mullard 2003: 13-24 and note 10. Anna Balikci-Denjongpa (2002: 19-20) has shown how the alliance which was sworn between the Lhopos' ancestor and the Lepcha chief was the beginning of the transformation of the mountain deity Dzönga into a Tibetan *pho lha* or male ancestral deity who may bless the patrilineages with male descendants".

journalists. During the difficult period of the annexation, some fought to maintain the uniqueness of the local traditional systems of chieftainship¹⁷, while being aware of the contradictions between the claims of being at once both an “autochthon” and a supporter of the values of a modern democracy. In the following present-day example, we can see how these contradictions directly express power divisions at a local level.

In 1994, elections took place in the village of Lachung, North Sikkim, to choose a new village leader. The assembly assisted by the main landowning households (*'dzoms kha*) and headed by the village leader (*spyi dpon*), gathered in the traditional open court, tightly controlled by the Indian army which surrounded the area. Governmental delegates and secretaries of the rural development committee were sent from the capital to attend the meeting. According to custom, the ancient village leader gave a long introductory speech before addressing the items of the day, namely the new elections and the organization of the New Year's festival performance (*lo srung*). Soon the people were harbouring resentment against the old village leader, who had proven himself unable to express the villagers' political views. The assembled villagers of Lachung shared an acute awareness of having been treated as second-class citizens for too long, borderland people derogatorily called “Bhotias” by the central government of Gangtok; when in fact they saw themselves as “pure” Lachungpas, people born in Lachung and able to control and administer themselves and their own land. In reality, divisions based on a conception of the greater or lesser antiquity of people's settlements in the village were the real source of conflict and social classification on a local level. Pure Lachungpas could trace back several generations of ancestors, while “Bhotias” were considered as mixed-bred settlers, the “other”, *i. e.* mere “barbarian strangers”. In 1978, the status of Scheduled Tribe was given to the Bhotias and the Lepchas and immediately generated strong divisions in the country, particularly between the Bhotias and the various Buddhist Nepalese communities, already considered as minorities or “OBC's” (Other Backward Classes) in Sikkim. Strong competition for gaining access to development funds arose in the bordering villages of North Sikkim, which were isolated by restrictive border controls and heavy army occupation.

In Lachung in 1993, the modern political parties were divided between the party of N. B. Bhandari (Sikkim Sangram Parishad) and the party of P. K. Chamling (Sikkim Democratic Front). They had recently gained the support of local divisions of recently installed and newly wealthy tenant-

¹⁷ Kazi (1993: 197) writes: “the lifestyle of the people of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim and their administrative set-up under the ‘Pipon system’ is far more effective and democratic than the present panchayat system. This type of open democratic society in North Sikkim has endured the tests of time. The Lachenpas and Lachungpas have, down the centuries, maintained their unique democratic system, which has also enabled them to preserve their ancient cultural heritage”.

farmers or “Bhotias”, as well as of impoverished Lachungpas, who had been colonised by the new traders and by the Army. Oppositions and fractures resulted from the election of two *spyi dpon* per party, which gave a total of four *spyi dpon*, recreating the “democratic way” supposedly imparted to the people from above. The political discourse continued to be beyond the reach of ordinary people, whose real interests remained neglected. The village election now became largely organized and controlled from outside the village. Another Sikkimese writer has shown how the same phenomenon was reproduced on the national level when on May 11th 1974, one year before the annexation of Sikkim by India, the *kazi* leader Lendhup Dorje who was a village *spyi dpon*, allowed himself to become the political spokesman in Delhi, which eventually put an end to the autonomy of the kingdom.¹⁸

Political revival

On the religious and ritual side of village life, the staging of sacred dances (*cham*) performed in the courtyard of the temples during the main festivals, became an important element in local elections. Traditionally, under the monarchy, the celebration of the masked dances in honour of the mountain deities Dzönga-Yabdü (*mDzod lnga* and *Yab bDud*) played a central role. They reinforced national sentiments when the country came under India’s control. The *History of Sikkim* states that the first dance of Panglhasol (*dpang lha gsol*), the most important ritual masked dance performed before the Sikkimese New Year (*lo srung*) in honour of the gods, was established in the 13th century when the ritual brotherhood was cemented between the Lepcha chief and the ancestor of the Lhopos. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who studied an original manuscript preserved in the Tolung monastery in the northern restricted area of Sikkim, and who also had access to the *History of Sikkim*, explains the origin of the cult of the gods of the Kanchenjunga starting from the thanksgiving ceremony performed by Lhatsun Chenpo in the 17th century in honour of all the deities of the country (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 217-218). The saint is said to have thanked the gods for his safe journey from Tibet across the Himalayas. The cult of Dzönga in the Panglhasol (basically an “offering to the witness deity”) and its codification, are explained in a guide entitled Denjong Nesol (*’Bras ljongs gnas gsol*). The choreography of the dance is believed to have been established by the third king of Sikkim, Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal (*Phyag rdor rNam rgyal*,

¹⁸ Datta-Ray (1980: 212), shows the transformation of local village leaders into national democratic leaders by ironically pointing to the enormous gap between the local way of governing and talking to the people about their own affairs, and the complete brainwashing which must be learnt by those who want to appear on the national scene: “Where did Lendhup Dorje learn such words? Did he even know their meaning, he who hardly knew how to read newspapers?”. I have already described this political event in the village of Lachung in Steinmann (1998a: 155-156).

1686-1716) (Steinmann 1998b: 197-198). This national ritual was originally performed by tantric monks in the Palace's chapel (*gtsug lag khang*), in front of the king, and later in different Nyingmapa monasteries of Sikkim. Dancers embodied the two deities, Dzönga and his acolyte, Yab bdud, an emanation of Mahākāla, powerful representations of the sacred and hierarchical order established in the kingdom, around the person of the king himself. The physical apparition of the masked deities and other effigies displayed in the gompas, guaranteed social order and the sacredness of the king's reign. The historical importance of this Buddhist vision of the mountain¹⁹, the solemn oath taken by the king's ministers, dignitaries, monks and lay people present, in front of the threatening mountain deities staged through masked dances and effigies, symbolized these strong links between religion and sovereignty. Offerings and exorcisms which were made during the performance came from widespread Tibetan representations of the mountains being inhabited by ambivalent and potentially malevolent beings, sources of welfare or warfare, protecting frontiers against potential invaders and more specifically, protecting places of origin of ancient kings.²⁰ These masked dancers and the god's effigies were explained by the lamas to the people as a direct symbol of the king's presence. Consequently, they generate an atmosphere of high reverence and fear. The religious aspects of the cult of Dzönga were connected to the political and religious role of the Sovereign, ruling according to *dharma* (the chogyal is a *dharmarāja* in the Indo-Buddhist tradition). The last celebration in the Palace was held in 1991, before being forbidden by the Chogyal himself. Then it moved to Pemayangtse, the residence of the tantric guardians of the ritual.

As a sign of revival of the Buddhist traditions in the country, the Sikkim Tribal Youth Association has published a booklet about the origin and meaning of the Panglhasol performance, which starts by declaring that the Panglhasol or worship of the guardian deities came into existence after the visit of Guru Padmasambhava to Sikkim, in about the eighth century A. D.²¹ The close connection between doctrine and reign are thus being traced back to the Buddhisation of Tibet. Yet, Tibetan Buddhism became the state religion only during the period of monarchy. We understand that it became a sign of nationalistic rallying for young Sikkimese who wanted to resist the Hinduisation of their country, as it also became a pinpoint in the villages' traditional political assemblies, after the end of the monarchy, to refer to a revered past order, symbol of a certain autonomy and self-dignity for societies living on the borderlands.

¹⁹ See the analysis of the different representations of the cult of Dzönga among the Lhopos by Balikci (2002).

²⁰ According to Stein (1981: 22 and 27), ancient Tibetan kings are directly connected to mountains.

²¹ *Pang Lhasol Souvenir* (1989: 1).

Reinventing ethnonyms and toponyms

In Sikkim, representations of mountain deities and of frontiers were thus closely associated. Conflicts along these frontiers played a significant role in the rise, expansion, decline and the fall of the Sikkimese monarchy. The *History of Sikkim* shows how the mythic origins of the Beyul Demojong are based on an etymological interpretation of the country's name and a schematic and religious resettlement of a sacred centre within the territory of some indigenous tribes (Tsongs or Limbus, Rongs or Lepchas, and probably other groups among the Nepalese), which were incorporated in the new Buddhist kingdom. Concerning the name of Sikkim as Demojong, Dr Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa (Ngodup 1998: 1-12) has posed the question:

The revealers of hidden treasures have given various accounts of the origins of the 'Bras-Mo-ljong's name: 1) Valley of fruits, 2) Hidden Valley, 3) Bar-Yul or the country sandwiched between two countries, (i. e. Nepal and Bhutan). The last is the new interpretation never previously found in modern books on Sikkim.

The naturalized and religious visions of an Edenic country, through Tibetan mythology, would not completely exclude other political conceptions of the frontiers. Religious lhopo representations of the sacred site of Pemayangtse are sketched as a *maṇḍala*-like territory, drawn in the landscape with four caves, representing important places of pilgrimages and retreats and conceived as surrounding the heart of the country or the king Phuntsog Namgyal's first place of coronation (Yoksum):

- The East Bayphug or the secret cave lies between the Tendong and Maynom mountains.
- The South Khandu Sangphug, as the cave resort of occult fairies. Here is a hot spring and on the rocks are the Guru's footprints.
- The West Dechen phug or cave of the Great Happiness. It is in the snow near Dzongri.
- The North, Lhari Nyingphug or the central cave of the Gods on the hill, situated along the most difficult path and holiest of the four.²²

These frontiers, which also eventually became colonial agricultural and military settlements, are idealistically described in the *History of Sikkim* (Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 29):

According to the oracles, Sikkim would have been a part of the political Tibet. In fact, it is composed of one continent (sic), three valleys and twenty mountains. At the time of the three kings of Tibet, the frontiers spread up to China in the East. In the country of Shabru Kangkar, there is

²² Ngodup, *ibid.* See also a new and revised version in Ngodup (2003: 75-86). See the map of the Tibetan religious representation of this landscape in Steinmann (1998: 118).

a pillar of white conch shells. To the South, the frontiers extend to India: a green pillar in obelisk in the country of bamboos. To the West, it extends as far as Naga country: pillar of white silver or obelisk. To the North, mountain of Manas, pillar of copper. These lands are therefore owned by Tibet.

In defining their country's borders according to Tibetan oracles, the Sovereigns were showing allegiance to their Tibetan protector, when the alliance between them was at a breaking point and they were in constant conflict on their Eastern and Southern borders. But it was also a means of re-establishing the integrity of their territory against the East India Company, which relentlessly resorted to using some powerful *kazi* leaders and feudal lordmen to achieve their trade goals with Tibet. Later, in the *History of Sikkim* (Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 121), and in a less idealistic way, the Chogyal refers to a reported message from Tibet:

We are in receipt of a communication from Sikkim minister, the Karmapa (Raja Thondup), that all the land beyond Jelep la belongs to Sikkim, and that unless we withdraw our troops stationed in the Lingter before the third day of the second month of the Saji year 1889 and vacate the fort, Her imperial majesty the Great Empress will be appraised of the matter and suitable retaliatory steps will be taken. We are of the opinion, as you may be aware, that the British Government after gradually absorbing the Sikkim and Bhutan States, is gradually advancing upon Tibet and making roads, laying bridges, and building barracks at Kupuk within Tibetan territory.

If mythology and political history were so densely interwoven, this was at a time when the representatives of the central authority, the kings, made themselves the patrons of the land. The "private property" or usage of the land by any group or tribe, had to be adjusted and redefined through these centralized religious conceptions. Ideally, the sovereigns' conceptions bore a vision of freedom and peace. When Herder (Sternhell 1972: 28) was raising the question of national, historical and cultural particularities as catalysts of political action, he was describing the beginning of the process of dismantling collectivities perfectly. These entities were not yet assimilated as marginalized societies by the nation-states, but were still free to follow their own customs, ignorant as they were of the state of "political" frontiers. Two examples from the *History of Sikkim* can illustrate this point.

When Thutob Namgyal had to escape from the control of governor Claude White, he tried to seek refuge with his family in Walungchung Gola, beyond the Sikkimese borders of Kanchenjunga, an area that was considered a barbarian borderland, but still a potential refuge (Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 140).²³ After an exhausting trip, and at the point of dying, the

²³ About the political situation of the Tibetan chieftains in Walungchung Gola in the 20s', see Steinmann (1988).

Namgyal's family arrived in the country of Tsongs and Newars (or Paharis). The Tsongs immediately interpreted his arrival in their territory as an open declaration of war, and detained him as a prisoner for three days. In the other example, a Mangar chief had died in 1750. His son wanted to have his inauguration ceremony performed or graced by the presence of a representative of the Sikkim Maharaja. The regent neglected to respond or to send a royal delegation. Taking revenge, the Mangar chief sought the patronage of the Dev Raja of Bhutan (Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 52).

We see through these diplomatic mistakes how the placing of societies into a peripheral position, which is historically the experience of numerous Asiatic societies now considered by modern nation-states as marginal and minority, is often the result of a largely imagined vision of a centre. The real frontiers are themselves the result of political actions. These frontiers produce, as much as they issue from, a progressive cultural differentiation. The Mangar chief needed only legitimation from the king of Sikkim. The result is a new alliance with the enemy and a cumulative process of division. The primary vision of a territory is first understood by any society in its local language, which conveys a particular use of land and a particular vision of origin of the ancestors' land. The natural limits are situated beyond geographical barriers, like mountains or rivers. Ethnic groups do not have a ready-made theory about what their identity or nationality should be as long as a State does not impose an official existence upon their dialect or upon their right to use certain spaces, as specifically defined through the limits of a region. The "region" could be defined here in the terms provided by E. Benveniste (1969: 14-15). The *regio*, etymologically, is first a "frontier", the result of a policy. The construction of a *regio* is thus the consecration of a new "designated limit". In this way, when the Lachungpas or Lachenpas, among others, claim to be considered "pure Lachungpas," they paradoxically contribute to the restriction of their own space and unknowingly aid the intervention of the State, which will eventually create "reserved and restricted" areas to maintain their illusion of a pristine purity of untouched ethnic groups. This is, for instance, the case of the Lepcha people of Dzongu, which was declared a "reserved and restricted area" in North Sikkim.

Reconstruction of patronyms is also a way for people to recreate a pseudo-"identity" with the idea that they would share a single and common destiny, or a particular region of origin. A writer of Rai origin, commenting in 1966 about the patronyms of the Tamang of Sikkim and Darjeeling (Rai 1966 : 25-26), gave different etymologies for "Tamang": Ta-mangpo, i. e. 'many horses', or Ta-marpo, 'a herdsman looking after herd of red horses' in the Himalayan pasture".

In Nepal in the sixties, people were rediscovering and reinventing new ethnonyms, in order to be recognized by the State and to gain status and prestige. Rai concludes for the Tamangs that, whatever the exact meaning of their ethnonym, they had chosen to add the name "Lama" at the end of their

patronym, to show that they would not renounce their Buddhist faith, while performing the work of soldiers. But he adds that if the leading personalities in Sikkim wrote Lama after their names, it was because Lama was a title carrying prestige and status. Paradoxically, Tamang-Lamas became a purebred stock of army men. These facts mirror the actual state of social relationships between the different Tibetan Bhotias of Sikkim, fighting each other for the right to be recognized as secondary citizens in India.

Lhopos from the Western district of Pemayangtse claim to be descendants of Kye Bumsa's three brothers, having established a lineage of eight clans, the "Bab mtshan brgyad". Presently, they are ordered in a strict social hierarchy between the Ourip and the Yarip, "lowest and highest" clans. The lowest clans are also called *khyep* or servants, while *jowo* are noblemen as opposed to *khyep*, who are from lower extraction (Vandenhelsken 2002: 226-39). If this particular hierarchy is proper to the Lhopos of Pemayangtse, it has direct repercussions on the Bhotia communities of the north, in Lachen and Lachung areas. The people here also claim to be the descendants of Kye Bumsa's three brothers, and to share the same myth of origin. Some of them claim to come from the Valley of Ha in Western Bhutan, and today, they share an awareness of having been marginalized by the State. But they distinguish themselves from the Lhopos of Pemayangtse who apply the title of "Yab" to their names:

In Pemayangtse, they call "Yab" the people of a higher class. In fact, *yab* means only 'father'. We, Bhotias, we reject this term; this is an incorrect notion. They have married Lepchas! The king gave them the preference because of the site of the kingdom, in Rabdentse.²⁴

Reconsidering origins through land tenure: Feudals and tribals

The borders of the North Sikkim district are situated, for the most part, in a mountainous region, at the limit of the forested area and the beginning of high-altitude pasture lands. The altitude of the inhabited area lies between 3600m and 5500m. There, one finds communities of seasonally migratory shepherds in mountain pastures. People are mainly agriculturalists and stock-breeders of yaks.²⁵ Inside the community, people divide themselves between ancient settlers and "colonists". Among the colonists, there are mainly the Indo-Nepalese groups, who compete for the land. The history of land tenure and the widely shared desire to be recognized as a more ancient and original settler, is a lynchpin in the history of the country. Through different episodes of the *History of Sikkim*, and the description of

²⁴ Commentaries collected in Lachen in April 2002.

²⁵ The centralisation of the State and political reforms have transformed certain ancient herdsmen into salaried civil servants, earning between 5000 and 6000 Indian rupees a month, to look after yaks that they don't own.

contemporaneous social tensions, we can define several front-lines of conflict among the groups.

The main line of demarcation is a linguistic division between Bhotias or Lhopos, speaking *lho skad*, the Sikkimese Tibetan dialect, Lepchas and Limbus, speaking respectively their own language, and the Indo-Nepalese populations, speaking mainly Nepali and Hindi. Nepalese, Limbus and Lepchas fight Bhotias over property and land-development, while Indo-Nepalese communities, stereotyped as “NBC” (Newar-Bahun-Chetri), are considered “colonists” introduced by the British, protected and exploited at the same time by the landlords (*kazi*), and together in conflict with all other groups. Another division is within the Lepcha groups, between the Christians and the Buddhists. Among Buddhist Lepchas, some claim to be ancient “animists” or “nature worshippers”. Here, let us consider the crucial question of land tenure and taxation, which articulates these links between self-given ethnic definitions²⁶ and the organization of life and work in a nationalized Hindu state.

The question of land is central to the political economy of Sikkim, both because it is scarce and because of permanent conflicts regarding moving and unsettled frontiers. As “feudalism” has been described in modern statistics and reports as “a stranglehold over land and society”²⁷, let us assign feudalism a definition that differs from the standard European and Chinese formulations²⁸. In the case of Tibet, Warren Smith (1996: 23) defined feudalism as “a system of government in which a ruler personally delegates limited sovereignty over a portion of his territory to vassals”. This political aspect of Chinese feudalism, which allowed the Hans to rule an

²⁶ Elsewhere I have described the political discourse around stereotyped ethnonyms (Lho, Mon, Tsong) and national political jokes describing these three potential “autochthonous” populations as a unique tripod (Steinmann 1998a).

About the Mon or Monpas, Smith (1996: 9) has given interesting explanations: “Tibetan scholars associate the Mon with the earliest Tibetan states of Kongpo, Pobo and Dakpo. The Mon can be reliably identified as a population who were encountered, displaced, and to some extent absorbed by those migrants from the north who were to become the Tibetans. The Mon can be included with some certainty in the list of ethnic groups that contributed to the ethnic identity of the Tibetans”. In the *History*, it is well understood that the Monpas were the Lepchas who went directly under the authority of the new Tibetan king (Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 19).

²⁷ See for instance Lama (2001). For the statistics and the historical perspectives on the land tenure and the inequality between the different landholders, I rely on the data given in this report.

²⁸ See for instance Bloch (1939), who emphasized the fact that feudal societies in Europe, despite great variation of forms, intensity and geographical and temporal expansions, bore important characteristics in common: the splitting of the central State into fiefdoms, the personal links of dependency, protection and heredity based on possession and exploitation of the land; the military vocation reserved to the superior orders or to the vassals, and the extreme social and political inequality favorable to a small oligarchy of landowners, warriors and clergymen. Slavery was often part of it.

immense empire and to integrate progressively all the countries situated on the borders, developed in a different way in the case of a tiny country like Sikkim, already a vassal of Tibet. We must begin with the strict definition of land-holding in Sikkim. The queen Hope Namgyal, when the crown tried to argue against the annexation of Darjeeling by the British (Namgyal 1966: 47-48), explained:

Traditionally, the land in Sikkim belongs to the king. All the farmers' land in Sikkim was property of the king. The cultivators had no title to the soil and a man may settle and cultivate any land he may find unoccupied without going through any formality whatever, and when once he had occupied the land, none but the Rajah can turn him out. But the Rajah can eject him at any time and if he should cease to occupy the land he would not retain any lien upon it (...) But a man who has terraced a piece of hillside could not sell the land but is allowed to sell the right of using the terraces (...) Also there were Kazis and headmen and various other officials who exercised jurisdiction over specific tracts of lands. The Kazis and officials enjoyed some authority but the final authority was the king in all matters of import. Aside from exercising some authority, judiciating minor disputes, and referring pertinent cases to the Ruler, the official also assessed the revenue payable by all the peoples settled on the lands within his jurisdiction; paid over to the Ruler a certain fixed contribution and kept the greater portion for himself. The Kazis had no proprietary right in the lands although they did have a kind of hereditary title to their office. The land was not assessed and paid no revenue. The assessment was on the payer of revenue personally, and in theory he was permitted the use of the King's land so that he could prosper and be able to provide services to the king which he was bound to do as the king's "live chattel" (sic). If the system had been extended to theoretical perfection he would have been obliged to give a small share of his labour, or the result of his labour to the State (...) The value of the wives, children, cattle, furniture, etc, were all accounted for but not the extent of his fields.

Historically, according to the definition of a Buddhist Tibetan kingdom and to the concept of royal powers rooted in sacred mountain deities, bound by an oath to follow the Buddhist doctrine, this definition sounds canonical. From another perspective, this concept of land as a "sacred property" has in fact developed through a system of forced labour and semi-slavery, although since the 17th century, it has helped to maintain the integrity of the kingdom against the invaders. Land rights were vested primarily in nine *kazi* families. At the time of the first king of Sikkim, Phuntshog Namgyal, the term "*kazi*" probably did not exist. It was introduced in the wave of colonisation and propagated with the importation of some models of Nepalese administration by the British civil engineer Claude White, who had been trained in colonial administration in Nepal. He introduced this model of land reform from Nepal into Sikkim thanks to the help of some Newar notaries he brought

with him. Shortly after his appointment in June 1889, he introduced a land settlement program known as the lessee system, which has been described by Rose. This system was transforming “the traditional land-grants owned by the kazis and the monasteries into fifteen year leases given out to kazis and ten year leases to Nepalese landlords (*thikadars*), for which they paid a fixed rent to the Government” (Rose 1978: 214 *sq.*). Each region of Sikkim was strictly separated from the others. Cultivation of the land was carried out in the name of village headmen, who were diversely called *maṅdal*, and were appointed by the *kazis*. Since Sikkim is predominantly rural, nearly all the population lived and still lives, in villages. This British reform fragmented the king’s authority and facilitated the acquisition of land by foreigners, mainly Nepalese. The traditional land-holding allowed the landlords and their heirs to maintain tenants on their private estates as compulsory labourers. In fact, the tenancy rights were applied as forced labour because the tenants had to provide more than half the crops to different *maṅdals* or primary landlords. Greater political and civil rights have been based on a demand made in 1949 for the abolition of this system. However, the private estates of the Palace and the monasteries were left untouched by the new land regime.²⁹

The Northern district of Dzongu constitutes a separate case. This north-western area of Sikkim, bordering Mount Kanchenjunga, is mainly covered with forest and mountains. It was the fiefdom of Lepchas and high-pasture yak breeders. These lands were given by the king to the Lasso Kazi, and later on, it was taken back and became the Queen’s Private Estate. It was successively administered by the Malling Kazi in the nineteenth century, and later by the Rhenock Kazi. Today, this private property is still kept as a reserved area for the “aboriginal” Lepcha population. At the time of annexation, this land became the most sacred core of the kingdom, in reference to the time when the priests of Pemayangtse monastery and the king chose the Northern Nyingmapa monastery of Tolung as the safest place for protecting the treasures and precious heritage of the Buddhist kingdom from Gurkha invaders. The Northern pass had always been considered as the place through which Lhatsun Chenpo came from Tibet.

Currently, Lhopos, Nepalese and Lepchas all work in the Dzongu district producing cardamom, yet the profits are established in a very uneven way. The greater part of the cultivated area is still owned by a few Bhotia families. Since Lepchas were designated the natural owners of the place by the State, they were not allowed to sell their land, but it has been progressively dispossessed through different administrative manipulations. This land is composed mainly of forested areas with difficult access. Since the sixties, many Nepali tenants have come to cultivate cardamom for the Lepchas.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Nevertheless, ancient landowners have been progressively deprived of their lands, according to the fact that in 1983, Nepalis owned 59% of the total cultivated area, Bhotias and Lepchas owned only 20% each.

They used to give them a bag or two that were immediately sold on the market to redeem debts.³⁰ The Nepali workers act as subsistence tenants on Bhotias' fields, while Bhotias rule them with an iron hand. The Lepchas, in turn, remain despised "tribals" in the Bhotia lexicon. The Lepchas are kept in a state of insulation and dependance. In the past, the question of installing Nepali settlers on the land of the Sikkimese Chogyal was a source of tremendous conflict between Tibetans, Kazis and Lamas.³¹

Thus far, the installation of new Nepali cultivators on the Kazis' and Lamas' private lands did not free the indigenous labourers, Limbus and Lepchas. One of the main interests of reading the royal historiography of this ex-Tibetan Buddhist kingdom in an ethnographic perspective, is to gain a deeper understanding of contemporaneous Tibetan and Nepalese conceptions of ethnicity and feudalism retrospectively, which gave rise to this unique Sikkimese country.

Concluding remarks

In this essay, we are not pretending to develop new definitions of ethnicity and feudalism but trying to throw some light on the origins and development of various modern political revivalisms, as deeply rooted in a genealogical reconstruction of their past by the ancient Rulers. For Lepchas and Lhopos, these recreated traditions of "autochtony" must be understood as a direct illustration of certain national myths. The *History of Sikkim*, seen in the light of the new democratic political debate about the value of status and ethnonyms, was an attempt to shape a national history in the form of a resistance against the Hindu assimilation, on the one side, and a desperate struggle against the British hold, on the other. While the kings tried to write a defence and illustration of their kingdom against British occupation, a modern and popular use of this *History*, re-interpreted and written through different lay publications, is at the core of the "revivalism", the nostalgia for a traditional order.

Comparative ethnographic and historiographic documents also reveal that we confront a social organisation which is primarily non-liberal, not yet mercantile, rooted as it is in a particular model of Tibetan Buddhism that

³⁰ For a study of the relations between the Bhotias and the Lepchas regarding the cultivation of the cardamom in the western area of Sikkim, see Steinmann 2000: 437-444.

³¹ Namgyal and Dolma's *History of Sikkim* (1908: 102) relates these events, at the time of the governor Ashley Eden: "Pemionchi lamas sent a batch of priests to turn out the Paharia settlers from Rhenock. Immediately, the Phodong Lama Karma Tangkyong at once took out the fire arms from Tanlang Palace, and gathering the men from Gar, Jongu, Sammong, Kabi behind the Phodang Spur, Shotag, Be-Tsa-ng and Yogtsa, armed them with guns. He also gathered the men from Rumtek, Katok, Phodang and Phensung. They all came to Rhenock and the lama ordered the Pemionchi lamas to desist from turning out the Paharis settlers. He offered the Tatsang lamas Rs 700/- per annum, so that they could keep the new Paharias settlers, but the Tatsang lamas would not entertain the idea at all".

further developed into an original form of Tibetan nationalism. Recreations of myths regarding ancestry and a highly spiritual vision of the land have forged a unique society which still has to fight to protect and keep its diversity and uniqueness. Now citizens of the Indian democracy, most of the Sikkimese have to work in a land tenure system which is still based on inheritance of debts and personal ties to the landlord. In the past, with the intervention of foreign merchants and religious missionaries, this system favoured the marketing of indigenous Sikkimese labour abroad. One of the greatest systems of debt fell on those situated at the base of the grass-root level work, i. e. the cardamom and ginger cultivators. These crops became international food products and spices, bringing money to the traders, but producing alienation and a hostile environment for the gatherers.

We saw how social tensions should also be understood in the light of the colonization (internal and external) and the debilitating effect of wars. Through the *History of Sikkim*, we understand the progressive loss of land by people, due to abusive landowners' policies oriented towards the service of the British hierarchy, and to internal disputes consequently aroused among the dispossessed. Let us consider, for example, the conflicts extending today in the South-Western district. The Limbus describe themselves as rivals of the Bhotias for stock management and access to land. They constitute an intermediate class between the Bhotias and the Lepchas, being conscious that in order to secure their place, they have to make Lepchas the scapegoats.³² In former times, Limbus and Lepchas intermarried and shared a number of complicated cultural features. Their shamans bore the same titles and they worked side by side in the same fields. But Limbus, caught between the desire to take hold of lands lost in the past, and to engage in a new kind of business and trade, like the Bhotias, have now become the rivals of their ancient allies and neighbours. This example is symptomatic of the different social and ethnic confrontations throughout the country. The East India Company and its allies, who made great efforts to introduce a free-market for their own profit, while trying to maintain the ancestral rules and hierarchy, failed to transform social organization and land tenure. A deeply rooted religious vision of the soil shapes the structure of land tenure and prevents the people from behaving as pure merchants or liberal landowners. A fondness for the ancient order develops through messianic beliefs, widely spread among Lepchas, Limbus and other Nepalese groups who are engaged in intense competition for the land.

³² Around Kechöpalri lake, a sacred place of worship both for Lepchas, Bhotias and more generally Hindus and Buddhists, some Limbu landowners complain about the Lepchas: "They go and borrow money from the Bhotias, making a bid for the next crop of cardamom and immediately spending the loan on drinking. Therefore, they only get half of their revenue when they could have earned more than the double, had they sold the crops on the market!"

Finally, as a hagiographic text and a well-documented historiography, the *History* helps us to understand the crucial role of ancient Tibetan mythology as a frame for expanding and ruling a country. As a first-hand historical document about the constitution of the Namgyals' dynasty and high rank Lhopos' lineages, we understand the process of legitimating a reign. By allowing themselves to be the chroniclers of their own reign, the Namgyals have also given a fascinating ethnographic description of the various populations of Sikkim and events that ended in the annexation to India. We can decipher how the category of "State" was popularized through centralisation of kingship and how national stereotypes were constituted and propagated in the midst of great ethnic diversity. After the British colonization, the Indian invasion was the last trial for this kingdom. Important figures such as the *kazis* entered the arena to help establish historical roles and status. They owed their legitimacy as much to foreign interventions as to local traditions.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this *History* of a Buddhist kingdom is the projection of a clear light on strategies which surround the construction of a political nationalism.

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On Local Festival Performance: The Sherpa *Dumji* in a world of dramatically increasing uncertainties¹

Eberhard Berg

It is important to remember, however, that Tibetan Buddhism, especially the form followed by the Rnying ma pa, is intended first and foremost to be pragmatic (...). The explanation for the multiplicity of metaphors and tutelary deities lies in the fact that there must be a practice suited to every sentient creature somewhere. Forms or metaphors that were relevant yesterday may lose their efficacy in the changed situation of today.

E.G. Smith (2001:240)

The Sherpas are a small, ethnically Tibetan people who live at high altitudes in the environs of Mt. Everest in Solu-Khumbu, a relatively remote area in the north eastern part of the “Hindu Kingdom of Nepal”. Traditionally, their economy has combined agriculture with herding and local as well as long-distance trade. Since the middle of the 20th century they have been successfully engaged in the trekking and mountaineering boom. Organised in patrilineal clans, they live in nuclear family households in small villages, hamlets, and isolated homesteads. Property in the form of herds, houses and land is owned by nuclear families.

Among the Sherpas, *Dumji*, the famous masked dance festival, is held annually in the village temple of only eight local communities in Solu-Khumbu. According to lamas and laypeople alike *Dumji* represents the most important village celebration in the Sherpas’ annual cycle of ceremonies. The celebration of the *Dumji* festival is reflective of both Tibetan Buddhism and its supremacy over autochthonous belief systems, and the way a local community constructs, reaffirms and represents its own distinct local

¹ I would like to thank the Sherpa community of the Lamaserwa clan, to their village lama, Lama Tenzing, who presides over the *Dumji* festival, and the ritual performers who assist him, and the Lama of Serlo Gompa, Ven. Tulku Pema Tharcchin, for their kind help, information and interest in my research project. I am grateful to Prof. Michael Oppitz, Prof. Sherry B. Ortner and to the late Dr. Richard J. Kohn for his inspiring comments. I owe a long-standing debt to Prof. Franz-Karl Ehrhard for his help with Tibetan sources and to Verena M. Felder for her advice and continuous support. Also I would like to thank the Lumbini International Research Institute (LIRI), Nepal, for financial support of my fieldwork and study.

tradition by way of the worship of local deities. Its elaborate performance follows a ritual pattern that is rooted in and governed by Tibetan Buddhism. In each place, however, the ritual performance of the masked dance celebration is staged in public according to a particular local tradition. As will be shown, it is the general ritual pattern of the Mindroeling tradition of “public festivals” and its sacred dances, an influential sub-school of the Nyingma order, that has been made use of as an overall ritual structure into which the distinct local tradition of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung has been inserted.

In his preface to a collection of articles on Himalayan rituals A. W. Macdonald has reminded us that an isolated ritual, taken out of its local cultural context, is deprived of its significance.² In this paper I intend to assess the relevance of the *Dumji* celebration in the formation of a particular local tradition and in its relation to Tibetan Buddhism.³ I examine the main issues that have been brought into play in the construction and elaboration of a distinct local tradition and the complex enactment of the *Dumji* festival in the village temple of Gompa Zhung (Nep. Junbesi). Gompa Zhung is the spiritual center of Sherpa Buddhism in Solu. It has to be noted, however, that this local tradition is exceptional among the Sherpas as it is equivalent to the particular tradition of the Lamaserwa clan being the only kinship group rooted in this locality.

First, a brief overview over the history of the Sherpas, their migration to Solu-Khumbu, the settlement of the Lamaserwa clan in the upper Solu valley and the origin of the *Dumji* in Gompa Zhung will be given. Then, to gain an appropriate understanding, two rather different traditions of sacred masked dance ceremonies, the *Dumji* and the *Mani Rimdu* festival which are staged annually among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, will be discussed. Having traced the distinct local tradition of the *Dumji* festival as performed in Gompa Zhung back to its historic origin, the meaning, general ritual structure and complex ritual performance of the *Dumji* ceremony in Gompa Zhung will be highlighted. Then follows a short description of the *Dumji* festival patronage in its relation with Sherpa identity.

It will be shown that the *Dumji* festival as held in the local community constitutes a key social institution in Sherpa society that binds the individual members of the local community into one common frame of action, thus continuously creating and reaffirming both their unity and identity. The performance of the *Dumji* festival offers a striking example of a cultural force that serves as a crucial guarantee of the maintenance and continuation of Sherpa Buddhist culture and tradition, especially at a time of serious conflict and crisis when the preservation of their cultural heritage is threatened. Thus, instead of presenting the static picture of a timeless ritual

² Cf. 1987a: 9.

³ This issue has been explored in an inspiring article by Ramble (1990).

in a never changing socio-cultural context, I want to shed some light upon the important question as to how a local tradition responds to the sudden emergence of dramatically altered circumstances.⁴ This will be dealt with in the last part of this paper.

1. Sherpa migration, their settlement in Solu-Khumbu, and the origin of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung

According to their own written tradition the ancestors of the Sherpas left from Salmo Gang, a region in the eastern province of Kham in Tibet, in the period between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. M. Oppitz mentions that the widespread and long standing fear of the Mongols was the reason they left Salmo Gang around 1500 for the area of Tinkye in Central Tibet.⁵ Again they had to leave because of a Muslim invasion of Tibet from Kashgar which managed to advance almost to Lhasa in Central Tibet. After a long journey the Sherpas entered Khumbu around 1533⁶. They took possession of this area in the second half of that century and later of Solu in the course of the 17th century.

According to A.W. Macdonald, Buddhism among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu "...was imposed locally by what one might term highly individualistic frontier lamas filled with a crusading spirit..."⁷ Already before their exodus from Kham the Sherpas seem to have been devout followers of the Nyingma school, the 'Adherents of the Old'. This is the order of the original Buddhist tantric tradition whose followers practise those tantras that were translated during the Royal Dynastic Period (eighth and ninth centuries). The *rNying ma pa* are 'the Old' in contrast to the Sarmapa (*Gsar ma pa*) or 'Adherents of the New' which include all of the other Tibetan Buddhist schools. The latter emerged as "reform movements" when about two centuries later a new set of Sanskrit texts was translated into Tibetan.⁸ M. Kapstein draws attention to the fact that the Nyingmapa share a common history and much doctrine but that this school is also characterised by a considerable degree of heterogeneity. In consequence each regional tradition adheres to rites revealed by a Nyingmapa visionary.⁹ This appears to be equally true for the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. It was the great treasure-discoverer Ratna Lingpa (Ratna gling pa, 1403-79) who transmitted the Nyingma tradition to the ancestors of the Sherpas. Subsequently, each locality has constructed its own distinct tradition. The core of this local

⁴ E.R. Wolf has recently proposed to see culture "... not as a fixed stock of materials and symbolic forms but as repertoires deployed in action." (1999: 132).

⁵ Oppitz (1968: 75).

⁶ Oppitz (1968: 78).

⁷ (1987b: 69).

⁸ E.G. Smith (2002: 14f.).

⁹ This has been emphasized by Kapstein (1983:42).

tradition is represented through the performance of the *Dumji*. It must be noted, however, that the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas has not been instituted in the interest of a political or stately power such as in Tibet, in Sikkim or in Bhutan but solely by the people of the local community themselves, owing to the initiative of a charismatic village lama of their own.¹⁰

The process of appropriation by the Sherpas of their new cis-Himalayan territory through certain ritual practices reenacted Padmasambhava's successful ritual taming and subjugating of the local spirits in Tibet which were hostile to the new belief system. A.W. Macdonald has called the "great ideological drama [that] was played out in the local landscape" a process of "Buddha-isation" that is typical for the Buddhist conversion of formerly non-Buddhist people and areas.¹¹ Accordingly the Sherpas' settlement in the Khumbu region was possible only after their religious and political leader, lama Zangwa Dorje (Gsang ba rdo rje), endowed with great miraculous powers, had tamed the diverse local spirit powers, bound them by oath and transformed them into local Buddhist protective deities. He also founded the first Sherpa village temple in Pangboche (sPang po che) where he, among others, instituted the *Dumji* festival. Later another charismatic figure, lama Dorje Zangbu (rDo rje bzang po), the mythical ancestor and culture hero of the Lamaserwa clan, led the members of his clan to the southern region of Solu. There they settled down in the upper Solu valley after their lama had performed some significant miracles and founded the first temple at what since then has been called Gompa Zhung, 'meditation place where one bows down repeatedly' (Nep. Junbesi, lit. 'moon valley'). According to my informants, however, this first religious monument in Gompa Zhung was only a *mtshams khang*, i.e. a retreat place for meditation.

Originally the Sherpas of the Lamaserwa clan lived in Serta in Kham. In their written history they claim direct descent from the "treasure discoverer" Nyangrel Nyima Özer (Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, 1136-1204) who is regarded as one of the main masters in the early history of the Old Translation School of Tibetan Buddhism.¹² All the descendants call themselves Serwa (*Gser ba*), i. e. people from Ser in Kham, who settled in a wide area in the upper Solu valley. In fact, they are members of the Lamaserwa patrilineage (*rus*) of the Nyang clan (*rig*), an important line of hereditary householder lamas (*sngags*

¹⁰ As to Bhutan in this context cf. Aris (1976:612-3); Pommaret (2002:17). As to the various ceremonies of the Lhasa year cf. Richardson (1993: 7ff.).

¹¹ Macdonald (1990:203).

¹² In the clan document II of the Minyagpa – one of the four Sherpa proto-clans– as translated in Oppitz (1968:57-58, see p. 57). – On Nyangrel Nyima Özer, the first of the "five kingly treasure finders" and the reincarnation of king Trisong Detsen see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991 (Vol. I: 755-759); Dargyay (1977: 97-103). J. Gyatso 1996 calls Nyangrel "one of the principal architects" (p. 162, fn. 9) of the "full-blown Treasure tradition" (p. 151).

pa) in Tibet.¹³ Among the Solu Sherpas there was no regular *Dumji* for about six generations after their settlement in Solu in the course of the 17th century. It was the learned village lama Nyangrig Dorje Jigdral (Nyang rigs rDo rje 'Jigs bral) who introduced the *Dumji* in Gompa Zhung on the basis of the text *byang gter phur pa* around the year 1850.

2. *Dumji* and *Mani Rimdu* – two traditions of sacred masked dance festivals among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu

The tradition of Tibetan sacred dance is old and represents an important genre of both Bon and Tibetan Buddhist tantric practice. The Tibetan Buddhist *'cham* tradition is said to have its prototype in the first recorded *vajra* dance performed by the great Indian sage and tantric master Guru Padmasambhava in the context of the construction of Samye, the famous first Tibetan Buddhist temple complex built in the year 779 on the initiative of King Trisong Detsen (742-797) who reigned from 755/56-797. According to Tibetan Buddhist historiography Padmasambhava performed this dance in order to subdue and tame local spirits hostile to the introduction of the Buddhist *dharma*, to bind them by oath and transform them into protectors of the Buddhist faith (*chos skyong*), thus creating a purified realm necessary for the construction of the temple. Another specific sacred dance that is of particular importance in this context is called *zvha nag* after the characteristic black hats (*zvha nag*) that are used in particular tantric ceremonies. This dance with its distinct costume – the traditional dress of a tantric practitioner – is associated according to Tibetan Buddhist narrative with the Buddhist monk Palkyi Dorje from Lhalung. Palkyi Dorje is said to have committed an ethically necessary and heroic murder by killing the anti-Buddhist king Lang Darma (reigned from 838-842), the last of the Yarlung kings, in the year 842 in public.¹⁴ In this act of ritual killing he made use of a bow and an arrow which he had concealed in the long sleeves of his flowing costume while performing this particular dance.¹⁵

¹³ Childs 1997 has reconstructed the origin of the “Sherpa Serwa lineage”.

¹⁴ For this ritual assassination refer to Stein (1987: 37); Shakabpa (1967: 52).

¹⁵ This mythical episode is of crucial importance especially in later Tibetan Buddhist historiography in which the emperor Lang Darma has been alleged to have persecuted Buddhism which justified the murderous act. As to its historical “truth”, this Buddhist narrative has been strongly criticized by Tibetologists. Against this version Karmay argues that the Buddhist clergy “...became too thirsty for political power so that the emperor was obliged to take action against the growing power of the Buddhist establishments, but did not persecute Buddhism as a religion...” (1998c: 532). According to Karmay, in reality no contemporary evidence of any persecution can be produced. Instead, Lang Darma seems to have dismantled Buddhist monastic institutions, as then they had frequently been involved in state affairs, and thus he had caused the wrath of Buddhists (1988:2). This view has recently been supported by Kapstein who sees the much debated “persecution of Buddhism” by Lang Darma as a mere withdrawal of royal patronage (2001: XVIII, pp. 11-12). He refers to a manuscript from Dunhuang, dating probably to the end of the tenth

Central features of these sacred dances performed by trained dancers who represent various divinities are the colorful costumes and, in many cases, the wearing of awe-inspiring masks symbolizing the oathbound protectors of the Buddhist doctrine. An important function of the '*cham*' is the physical manifestation of the great protecting divinities who have been invoked and worshiped in the course of the rituals during the preceding days. The ritual dances of the manifested divinities aim at the exorcism of evil for the benefit of the community that sponsors the festive event. Moreover, they are a powerful means for the purification of all obscurations and thus help to ease the path leading toward enlightenment (*byang chub*). Since Padmasamhava performed the first *vajra* dance, sacred dances are enacted also in the case of a *stūpa* to be built, a *maṇḍala* to be created or in the context of important ritual ceremonies. On all these occasions sacred dances are staged in monastic establishments as well as in village temples; however these are entirely different settings, and the ritual performances differ accordingly.

Sacred masked dances in a monastic context are performed by the monks of both the Bon religion and of the Nyingma, Kagyü, Shakya and Gelug schools of Tibetan Buddhism in the course of the most important rituals of the liturgical calendar.¹⁶ Each of the different schools as well as particular major monasteries have developed their own tradition of performing the sacred dances at different times of the year and on special days of the month. Specific manuals called '*cham-yig*' written by high dignitaries describe and prescribe minutely the ritual activities to be performed, the masques and the costumes to be used, and the dance

century, that strikingly does not mention Lang Darma in an enumeration of Tibet's royal patrons of Buddhism, while at the same time it contains no indication of a persecution. – It is an established historical fact, however, that this event in the year 842 had some disastrous consequences, as it led to the collapse of the Central Tibetan royal dynasty and the dissolution of the ancient empire. An ensuing civil war resulted in a protracted period of political division, as Tibet broke up into a number of small principalities competing for hegemony, and thus in the loss of its military power and political unity; for this see Beckwith (1987: 168ff.). The central authority was restored in 1247 when Sakya Pandita was invested with the right to rule over the Thirteen Myriarchies of Tibet by Prince Godan, a grandson of Gengis Khan, cf. Shakabpa (1967: 54).

¹⁶ The most comprehensive general work on the subject of Tibetan Bon and Buddhist sacred dances is still by de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976. On '*cham*' cf. Snellgrove & Richardson 1986: 246f.; Stein 1987: 126-9; Schrempf 1990 and 1994, Kohn 2001: 55-63. See also Aris 1976 and Pommaret 2002 on sacred dances in Bhutan; Karmay 1998a, Schrempf 2000 and 2001 on sacred Bon Dances; Richardson 1993 on annual ceremonies, processions, sacred dances in Lhasa; Schrempf 1997 on the transformation of Tibetan ritual dances in the context of Tibetan diaspora and the "global performance marketplace". Other useful treatises on this subject are by Hoetzlein 1991, Marko 1994, E. Pearlman 2002.

movements and hand gestures to be practiced, to the accompaniment of long horns, oboes, drums and cymbals, etc.¹⁷

In his path-breaking treatise R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz has drawn attention to the fact that the tradition of Tibetan sacred dance has given rise to two different categories of dances. *Gar* are the dances performed by monks in the absence of uninitiated spectators as part of the worship of certain deities. The other kind is called '*cham*'. This term designates the public religious dances with which this paper deals.¹⁸ As M. Schrempf has emphasized, '*cham*' is commonly understood as a public form of Tibetan ritual dance which is performed for a lay audience by monks dressed in colourful costumes and wearing masks mainly representing the protectors of religion (*chos skyong/ bon skyong*), and their assistants.¹⁹ Among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, however, two different kinds of sacred masked dance festivals, *Dumji* and *Mani Rimdu*, are staged annually at different times at different places.

Mani Rimdu centers on the cult of a little-known form of Avalokiteshvara, the patron-deity of Tibet, known as 'Lord of the Dance' (*gar dbang*).²⁰ The *Dumji* festival focuses on various emanations of Guru Padmasambhava depending on each of the eight distinct local tradition where it is held. *Dumji* is staged in the temple of the locality for the benefit of the local community and is performed solely by a lay tantric lama (Tib. *sngags pa*), who is hereditary village head lama, and assistants; these religious practitioners also perform the sacred dances. Usually, the latter have received from the tantric lama both an initiation into the ritual cycle of the celebration and training in the steps and movements of the sacred dances involved. All the ritual practitioners in the context of a *Dumji* celebration are married householders who are referred to as "lama" in the local community. In contrast to the most important annual ritual ceremony of the local community the *Mani Rimdu* festival is enacted in a monastic

¹⁷ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz has edited and translated the important dance manual for the *Vajrakila 'cham* (1976: 111-245) the major part of which had been written by Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatsho, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-82), while several other clerics had completed it after his death (cf. p. 85).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Cf. Schrempf (1997: 91).

²⁰ *Mani Rimdu* belongs to a species of Tibetan rituals known as *ril sgrub* which means 'pill practices'. The name *Mani Rimdu* is a corruption of the Tibetan term *maṇi* as it is pronounced in Sherpa language which R.J. Kohn renders as 'the practice of the mani pills'. This category of mani pill-rituals is dedicated to Avalokiteshvara, the spiritual patron-deity of Tibet (2001: 4). – The only major works on the Sherpa *Mani Rimdu* are by Jerstad 1969 as enacted in Thame Gompa in the region of Khumbu and the invaluable and meticulous research by the late Tibetologist Kohn (1985 and 2001) on its celebration in Chiwong Gompa in Solu. Moreover, the *Mani Rimdu* as it was then performed in the monasteries of Thame and Tengboche has been described by von Fürer-Haimendorf (1964: 210-224; 1984: 100-101).

framework before a mixed audience of clerics and laypeople. The acting performers in this large-scale monastic celebration are highly educated celibate monks and well-trained monk dancers.

Both the *Dumji* and the *Mani Rimdu* festival as they are held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu until the present day belong to a genus of Tibetan rituals known as *sgrub mchod* ('propitiations and offerings'). According to G. Tucci the goal of the cult act (*mchod pa*) composed of scriptural recitation and liturgical performances is either to pacify or to give pleasure to a deity or to promote the deity's actualization.²¹ Moreover, both kinds of religious ceremonies are embedded in an overall ritual complex comprising liturgy and dance performance that is called *sgrub chen* which Tucci has rendered as 'great liturgical performance'.²² In Sherpa language the two ritual categories *sgrub mchod* and *sgrub chen* are blended with each other. This mix of terms results in the word *Dumji* which is the name of the festival.

Moreover, both the *Dumji* and the *Mani Rimdu* festival have their origin in the grand public festivals with their elaborate dances that have become a hallmark of the Mindroeling tradition. This important Nyingma teaching tradition was founded by the famous teacher and treasure discoverer Rigzin Terdag Lingpa Gyurme Dorje (Rig 'dzin Gter bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje, 1674-1714), the great abbot of Mindroeling monastery in Central Tibet, which he had established in 1676, and his younger brother Lochen Dharmashri (Lo chen Dharma shri, 1654-1717).²³ Enacted before large audiences of both clergy and laypeople over a period of several days, these spectacular public ritual ceremonies necessitated resources that only a large and wealthy monastery could provide. The ritual dances that figured prominently in many of Terdag Lingpa's newly introduced public festivals were performed by highly educated monks, often in large numbers, who had received a solid training in monastic dances.²⁴ These elaborate ritual ceremonies were created by Terdag Lingpa (1646-1714) and his younger brother Lochen Dharmashri (1654-1717) as an efficacious device in their effort to reunite the warring factions of the Nyingma order and thus to consolidate the "Old School" through new large-scale public festivals.²⁵

²¹ Tucci (1988: 115).

²² Tucci (1988: 150).

²³ For the teaching tradition of Mindroeling refer to Kohn (1997: 368; 2001: XXX, 3f., 10, 15f., 35, 49-52). For the life and spiritual achievements of Terdag Lingpa, who is revered as the second-most important master of the "Old School", and the translator Lochen Dharmashri refer to Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, Vol. I: 825-834 and 728-732.

²⁴ For brief descriptions of this kind of elaborate sacred dance as created by Terdag Lingpa and performed in Mindroeling since the end of the 17th century until 1959, thereafter restarted in exile in 1991, refer to Dalton (2002: 34, 204, 206). – This valuable treatise was kindly made available to me by Ehrhard.

²⁵ See Dalton (2002:8).

It is of particular significance that the creation of these new grand public ceremonies at Mindroeling for political reasons was also inspired by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatsho (1617-1682), who at the same time similarly instituted a range of new public festivals in his mission to build and consolidate the new Tibetan state that he had founded in 1642 with the help of Gushri Khan (1582-1655), the chief of the Qosot Mongols.²⁶ As R.J. Kohn observes, Terdag Lingpa occupies a special position in the history of Tibetan sacred dances, as he was instrumental in making *'cham* a national phenomenon in Tibet.²⁷ According to Kohn it is also said that the sacred dances that form an essential part of many of Terdag Lingpa's newly created Nyingma public festivals inspired his older contemporary and spiritual friend, the Fifth Dalai Lama, to introduce similar dances to the Gelug school.²⁸

Hence, both traditions of sacred masked dance celebrations as staged in Solu-Khumbu have their source of origin in the teaching tradition of Mindroeling, the most important monastery of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism in Central Tibet. It was Zatul Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (rDza sprul Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu, 1866-1940), the abbot of Dzarongphu monastery in the Dingri area on the northern side of the Everest range who brought the *Mani Rimdu* traditions to his monastery.²⁹ Having adapted them into their present form he used this particular Mindroeling tradition as the basis for the liturgy for the creation of the *Mani Rimdu* festival that is celebrated in present-day Solu-Khumbu. As to the sacred dances, he took the majority of the *'cham* from a monastery in Tsang province in Central Tibet to which he added some of the dances from Mindroeling.³⁰ According to R.J. Kohn the performance of the *Mani Rimdu* at Dzarongphuk began between 1907 and 1910, and from there it was transmitted to Solu-Khumbu, about 1940.³¹ It is enacted in public rituals annually at different times at only the three monasteries of Tengboche (October) and Thame (May) in Khumbu and of Chiwong (November) in Solu.³²

²⁶ Cf. Dalton (2002: 8, 206-209).

²⁷ Kohn (2001:56).

²⁸ Kohn (2001:49).

²⁹ For the history of Dzarongphu monastery and the life, achievements, and the spiritual influence of the charismatic *Dzatul* Ngawang Tenzin Norbu among the Sherpas who inspired his disciples to found monastic establishments in Solu-Khumbu and who was instrumental in the spread of monasticism in that region see Aziz (1978: 209-211); Diemberger (1992: 2-5, 3-4 and 3-5; pagination acc. to chapters!). For Ngawang Tenzin Norbu's creation of the *Mani Rimdu* festival refer to R.J. Kohn (2001: 4, 51-3.).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51f.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52f.

³²As R.J. Kohn observes, although the liturgical text and the complex of rituals are the same, the ritual performance of the *Mani Rimdu* differs slightly at each monastery (2001:4).

The *Dumji* festival has been held traditionally in the five village communities of Pangboche, Thame, Khumjung, Nauche and Rimishung in Khumbu and in Gompa Zhung, Sagar-Bhakanje, and Goli in the southern region of Solu.³³ Unlike the clear-cut history of the *Mani Rimdu* based on just one liturgical text as it is performed in Solu-Khumbu, the history of the *Dumji* among the Sherpas is more complex and thus more difficult to trace, since each village community where it is held has a distinct tradition of its own which also includes as its key element the basic text or collection of texts used as liturgy.³⁴

3. The tradition of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung

Inspired by an influential lama in south-western Tibet the tradition of the *Dumji* came to Gompa Zhung some time after 1850. Shortly before the middle of the 19th century a number of charismatic Sherpa village priests travelled to the region of Mang yul in Tibet to study with the Trakar Taso Tulku Mipham Choki Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1775-1837).³⁵ This famous master gave them instructions and empowerments of a number of ritual and meditational cycles which have been practiced in the context of communal ceremonies throughout the villages of Solu-Khumbu up to the present day. Choki Wangchuk practiced the teaching tradition of Mindroeling in central Tibet. Moreover, being committed to an encompassing approach to the teachings of the Nyingma school, Choki Wangchuk also transmitted the ritual cycles of the “Northern Treasures” of revealed literature (*byang gter*).

Terma (Tib. *gter ma*) or treasures are religious texts and diverse sacred objects concealed by Padmasambhava, his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, Vimalamitra and other masters. Later, “...when the time was ripe for disciples to be trained...”, they have been discovered by the reincarnations of those disciples of Padmasambhava who were prophesized as *terton* (Tib.

³³ *Dumji* traditions have disappeared in some places whereas in others the same or a slightly different tradition has been invented. In at least five instances, the tradition of performing the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas has become extinct in the last three decades. On the other hand, in at least four localities the *Dumji* celebration has been instituted in the same time span. Moreover, in 1993 the married lama of Chialsa Gompa in Solu started the sacred masked dances called *Guru Tsengyed* (Tib. *Gu ru mtshan brgyad*, ‘the eight different aspects of Padmasambhava’). This tradition, among others also linked with Mindroeling, was wholly unconnected with Sherpa Buddhism. It was Dilgo Khentse Rinpoche (1910-91) who had advised the Chialsa lama to establish this new tradition of sacred dances at his gompa. Through the help of the former head of the Nyingma school (from 1987 until 1991) the monks of Chialsa gompa received a sound training in the practice of *cham* at Shechen gompa in Bodhnath.

³⁴ Unfortunately, space forbids going into the different local traditions in this paper.

³⁵ This eminent Nyingma teacher was instrumental in the transmission and spread of the *terma* teachings of his school in the Tibetan-Nepalese borderlands. On the achievements and the spiritual career of this master refer to Ehrhard (1993: 93, n.31 and 32; 1997: 255).

gter ston) or treasure revealers, explains Dudjom Rinpoche.³⁶ The *terma* tradition represents the interrupted as opposed to the orderly oral transmission of the continuous (*bka' ma*) instruction, both of which represent the two important traditions of instruction among the Old School.³⁷

The *byang gter* lineage represents a complete system of treasure-teachings within the Nyingma school which were first revealed by the visionary Rigzin Godem (Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru ca, 1357-1408) in the year 1366.³⁸ It was this great master, who being one of its main revealers, established the tradition of the “Northern Treasure Texts” in Tibet. After a difficult beginning at another place the lineage of the “Northern Treasures” of ritual and meditational cycles found its centre at Dorje Drag, the second major monastic institution of the “Ancient Translation School” in central Tibet since its foundation in 1610. From then until 1959 the “Northern Treasures” have been a major religious system that controlled over fifty monasteries. It is of significance that Dudjom Rinpoche puts strong emphasis on the eminently political nature of the Northern Treasure tradition of revealed literature.³⁹ Certain of its rituals concerned with the “expulsion of armed forces” (*dmag bzlog*) were used, against invading Mongol armies, and this sometimes led to the persecution of this sub-school of the Nyingma order.

According to the *byang gter* chronicles, cultic texts and ritual practices concerning the fierce deity *Vajrakīla* were among the many teachings transmitted to Tibetan devotees by the Indian tantric master and sage Padmasambhava in the eighth century. The *terma* texts of the “Northern Treasures” center on the cult of the deity *Vajrakīla*, a wrathful emanation of

³⁶ Cf. 1991 (vol. I: 782).

³⁷ For this refer to Smith (2001: 15). The third stream of transmission of the Nyingma tradition is that of the “profound pure visions” (*zab mo dag snang*) in which Padmasambhava in person appears to the treasure-revealer and transmits a treasure to him.

³⁸ Cf. Boord (1993: 2). The life and spiritual achievements of Rigzin Godemcen and the history of the Northern Treasure tradition, its ritual cycles and practices is described in Dudjom Rinpoche 1991 (Vol. I: 780-83). – The line of reincarnations of Rigzin Godemcen as the lineage-holders of the Northern Treasure tradition is sketched by Karmay (2002: 32-3). Whereas recently M.T. Kapstein has recalled that the system of the Northern Treasures “remains so far unstudied” (2001: 209, fn. 66), a detailed overview of the history of the Northern Treasure tradition has already been given by Boord (1993:21-35). See also Dalton (2002: 165-89).

³⁹ According to him the *byang gter* tradition “...contains, without omission, everything that anyone might require for increasing the teaching, turning back invading armies, terminating infestuous disease, the pacification of civil war, exorcism of Gongpo spirits, restoration of governmental authority, and the control of epidemics and plagues. It contains various ways to promote the happiness of Tibet, (...), and also the notices and keys for many sacred places and lands, this single treasure is universally known to resemble a minister who beneficially serves all Tibet and Kham.” Cf. 1991 (Vol. I: 782).

Padmasambhava. The Sanskrit term *Vajrakīla* is rendered in Tibetan as Dorje Phurpa, the deity of the *phur bu*, the ritual dagger, which is another name for the fierce aspect of Padmasambhava called Dorje Zhonnu.⁴⁰ Within the *kīla* cult in which the deity *Vajrakīla* is worshiped, *kīla* is a weapon of ritual magic. It is the foremost ritual emblem of the *byang gter* tradition; and *vajra* is originally the thunderbolt of the Indian god Indra. Since one of the stated aims of the *kīla* doctrines is to provide a method for the subjugation of “all enemies and obstructors”, the cult was readily able to assimilate troublesome local gods and demons wherever it spread.⁴¹

One of the Sherpa village lamas who travelled to Mang yul to study with the Trakar Taso Tulku was the learned Nyangrig Dorje Jigdral of the Lamaserwa clan in Gompa Zhung. Choki Wangchuk inspired the introduction of the *Dumji* in Gompa Zhung that represents a combination of Dorje Drak rituals of the Northern Treasures tradition and the tradition of Mindroeling *sgrub chen* practices and its sacred dances. Moreover, Choki Wangchuk compiled the basic liturgical text *byang gter phur pa* that is used for the performance of the festival in Gompa Zhung. It consists of four different treasure-texts unearthed by two different treasure-revealers of the *byang gter* tradition. It was this treasure-text that Choki Wangchuk transmitted to Dorje Jigdral after having received the instructions and the initiation for its ritual use. Dorje Jigdral passed on the received teachings to his own disciples. These teachings have been transmitted within the Nyang family of Gompa Zhung in one line of village lamas from Dorje Jigdral down to the present village lama, Lama Tenzing (bLa-ma bstan 'dzin, b. 1939). According to Lama Tenzing's information he has presided over the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung since the death of his father and predecessor eighteen years ago.

4. Meaning and general structure of the *Dumji* festival and its ritual performance according to the distinct local tradition of Gompa Zhung

The *Dumji* festival focuses on offerings and requests to the gods and on offerings and threats to the demons. After a distribution of ritual foods to all those present, it closes with a “long life blessing” ceremony (*tshe dbang*). In other words *Dumji* represents a ritual ceremony performed to propitiate the deities by prayer (*gsol 'debs*) and to worship them by meditation and offerings in order to secure their benevolence, protection and help while, on the other hand, exorcising the evil forces from the local community. To

⁴⁰ Dorje Zhonnu is depicted in Dudjom Rinpoche 1991 (Vol. I: 482).

⁴¹ Cf. Boord 1993, p. 8; Boord also highlights the history, iconography, and religious chronicles of the *kīla* and the Northern Treasures *kīla*, see pp. 39-251. On the cult of *Vajrakīla* in Tibetan Buddhism see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991 (Vol. I: 710-716); Mayer 1996; Khenpo Namdrol 1999; Smith (2001: 238-9).

accomplish all this, the elaborate religious celebration that is based on a complex set of several different ritual categories extends over a period of five days.

The main ritual acts include the purification of the ritual space (*bsang*), the calling or invocation of both the transcendental and the local deities⁴² (*'spyan drang*), the offering of place (*bshugs pa*), the offering (*mchod pa*) consisting of seven substances⁴³, praise (*bstod pa*), supplication (*'phrin las bcol ba*), and recitation of mantra (*bzlas pa*) in the course of meditation. In this context music, chanted *mantra* (the sound-form which represents and is the deity), *sādhana* (the ritual prescription for the visualization and proper worship of the central deity including a description of the deity's form and attributes), dance movements with masks and costumes, ritual objects, especially the ritual dagger called *phur bu*, and *mudrā* (symbolic hand gestures) come together and create a carefully prepared and well organized performance of gods and goddesses dancing on the local ground of the celebrating community. According to my lama informants the medium of tantric dance is regarded as the necessary guarantee for the power of certain important ritual activities. Musical instruments such as bell, cymbal, long horn, oboe, big drum and small hand drum are used for invocation and veneration of the deities. Their use enriches the ritual performance with power and blessings.

Usually the masked dance ceremony builds on three different acts: (a) a preparatory phase of meditation by all performers within the temple on the *yi dam* or patron deity concerned, as well as an empowerment of the *gtor zor* or 'defensive weapon' represented by a ritual cake (*gtor ma*) later to be cast against the evil forces; (b) the public performance in the courtyard which reaches its climax in the exorcism of evil forces (*gtor zlog*); and (c) the dissolution phase within the temple where the performers' visualisations of the deities involved are dissolved into emptiness.

A *'cham* performance such as the *Dumji* festival just as any other important ritual celebration generally provides the possibility for the "two pursuits of life" (Tib. *tshogs gnyi*)⁴⁴: the accumulation of both religious merit (Tib. *bsod nams*) for a favourable rebirth and of mundane wealth. For the clergy, however, the main reason to perform the masked dance consists in the symbolic expulsion of the accumulated evils of the past year that harm the Buddha's teachings and all sentient beings.⁴⁵ Moreover, the dancers

⁴² Transcendental deities can lead to enlightenment and can offer any kind of help in this world and the world beyond. Local deities can offer help and protection in this world only.

⁴³ These seven substances are: 1. drink, 2. purified water including *nyer spyod*, i.e. "the five kinds of offerings to be made to the gods in worshipping them": 1. flowers, 2. incense, 3. lamps, 4. odours, 5. eatables (Das 1989: 488).

⁴⁴ Cf. Das (1989: 1033).

⁴⁵ Owing to this important function Richardson (1993: 123) has called these dances "protracted rites of catharsis."

believed to procure blessings (*byin rlabs*) for all participants, to generate faith in the Buddhist Dharma in both the lay people and the lamas, and to ease the way to enlightenment (*byang chub*). At the same time the lamas use the *'cham* performance as an impressive means of instruction of the lay population by depicting the supremacy of the Buddhist *dharma* while at the same time entertaining them.⁴⁶

For the people of the local community, however, the *Dumji* festival also serves their mundane existential needs as it marks with the transition to spring time the beginning of the agricultural cycle.⁴⁷ The local deities to be worshiped can offer help and protection in this-worldly affairs only. They reside in specific locations and grant their help if they have been properly worshiped. The Sherpas turn to these deities to make them grant general well-being and prosperity. The requests directed to the local deities concern health and well-being = the prosperity of agriculture, cattle and trade as the three pillars of the Sherpas' economy; protection from natural disasters such as hail, landslides and earthquakes, and progeny. The *Dumji* festival represents the major cult of the local divinities that is performed within the framework of the worship of the central deity on which the *Dumji* celebration focuses. The local divinities and their worship is contained in the sacred book that serves as liturgy and is recited by the practitioners on the first three days of the festival.

The general ritual structure of the *Dumji* celebration among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu is as follows. Beginning one week before the festival, the village lama performs a daily reading of a *kangso* text in worship of the local and regional protective deities as well as their clan deities.⁴⁸ It is this act practiced in solitary retreat in the village gompa that necessarily precedes the celebration of the *Dumji* festival.

On the first day a juniper-burning offering ritual (*bsang*) usually performed in the morning ensures the purification of the relationship to the gods and of the site.⁴⁹ Another important ritual act is the circumambulation (*skor*) of the village temple complex by all sixteen performing lamas. On the second day at night there is a long dance rehearsal without masks, while on

⁴⁶ This paedagogical aspect is noted by Stein (1987: 126); and in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* by Jerstad (1969: 3,74). In personal conversation with lamas the complaint as to the lack of knowledge among the laypeople concerning both the history of Tibetan Buddhism and of Sherpa Buddhism is a recurrent theme.

⁴⁷ In the southern region of Solu the *Dumji* festival is held in the months of March or April, whereas in the northern Khumbu region where spring is later it is enacted in April or May.

⁴⁸ Das (1989: 121) renders Tib. *Bskang gso* as 'to make copious religious services to the tutelar deities, angels, and the guardian spirits of the ten quarters'. S .G. Karmay renders the term as 'atonement ritual' (1988: 238). On the *kangso* celebration as performed in Solu cf. Berg (1998: 24-5).

⁴⁹ On the ritual of purification (Tib. *bsang*) cf. Karmay 1998b. In fact there are two different categories of *bsang* rituals: *klu bsang* as to the worship of the aquatic serpent deity, and the *lha bsang* concerning the worship of the transcendent deities.

the third day the *'cham*, the full set of masked dances consisting of a total of eleven dances, is enacted. The public performance in the courtyard begins in the late afternoon and lasts until around nine o'clock at night. The clerics regard this particular act as the most solemn part of the *Dumji* ceremony. It reaches its climax in the exorcism of evil forces (*gtor zlog*). On the first three days the ritual activities were devoted exclusively to warding off evil spirits harmful to the Buddhist dharma and to all sentient beings, on the fourth day starting in the late afternoon a "long life empowerment" ceremony (Sherpa *whong*; Tib. *tshe dbang*) is conducted. The latter seems to be of utmost importance to the lay audience because of the complex "long life blessing" which is bestowed at its end on all people lined up in a queue. Its major components are: (a) long life pill (*tshe ril*), (b) long life beer (*tshe chang*), (c) long life torma (*tshe gtor*), (d) long life water (*tshe chu*) and (e) ritual arrow made out of bamboo (*mda' dar*). The blessing by the sacred book used as liturgy is executed by the presiding tantric village lama, the blessing by the ritual arrow by his assistant. Then follows the distribution of the aforementioned components of this blessing from the hands of other village lamas. The diverse variations of this structure according to the distinct local traditions notwithstanding, meditation, offering and dance with costumes and masks constitute the key elements of the *Dumji* ceremony.

The enactment of the *Dumji* masked dance drama in Gompa Zhung extends over a period of five days. On each of these days a part of the liturgical text is read by the lamas in the village temple. The beginning of the ritual celebration is marked by a *pūjā* in commemoration and worship of Dorje Zangbu, the village's founding lama who is regarded as the mythical ancestor and culture hero of the Lamaserwa patrilineage in Solu, at the small *stūpa* which contains his relics. In the early afternoon the juniper-burning ritual ensures the purification of the site. This ritual act is followed by the circumambulation (*skor*) of the village temple (*gompa*; Tib. *dgon pa*) and an offering to the guardian kings of the four quarters (*phyogs skyong rgyal po*). After night has fallen the tantric village lama performs the Black Hat Dance. Following the ritual of "taming" the evil forces by summoning them into a small cloth doll effigy of entirely featureless human shape called *ling ga*, this tantric dance reaches its climax when the *ling ga* is pushed by the lama's foot into a triangular pit in the courtyard. It is immediately covered with one of the flagstones that pave the courtyard.

On the second day at night there is a long dance rehearsal with almost no audience apart from small children and few old people. On the third day the full masked dance performance consisting of a total of eleven different dances is enacted at night. The clerics regard the performance of the sacred dances as the most solemn part of the *Dumji* festival. The dance performances include, among others, one dance each of Gonpo (Tib. *Nag po chen po*, Skt. *Mahākāla*), of the lion-faced goddess Senge Dongma (Tib. *Seng ge gdong ma*, Skt. *Simhavaktra*) and of Palden Lhamo (*dPal ldan lha*

mo, Skt. *Śrī Devī*), the chief-guardian goddess of the Tibetan Buddhist Pantheon. The *'cham* performance culminates in the exorcism of evil forces (*gtor zlog*) which are represented by an effigy made of a sacrificial dough cake (*gtor ma*). The exorcism is effected by the tantric village lama who in the course of meditation, first in retreat, then in public, invokes and subsequently becomes the central deity. Someone has to carry the effigy along the path marked by two parallel white lines made of *tshampa* dough that leads down to the place of the village area below the main *stūpa* where it is cast away. The person on whom the burden falls to cast it away has to be a social outsider, usually a person of low status like a *Kāmī*, or someone from another ethnic group, thereby acting like a scapegoat.

On the fourth day starting in the late afternoon, after the “long life empowerment” ceremony (*whong*; Tib. *tshē dbang*), the more than one-and-a-half hour long colourful public “long life blessing” seems to be the most important aspect of this festival for the assembled laity. Its typical feature is the ordered chaos of a crushing crowd in an almost trance-like state while the uninterrupted blowing of the oboes, signifying the presence of the deities, keep the festival’s atmosphere at its climax, lasting for about one and a half hours. On the fifth day the *Dumji* celebration concludes with the *kutshab ternga* ceremony in the village temple.

An important part of the festival is constituted by the ritual activities of invocation, offering, and worship of the high deities as well as the local gods. The latter are represented by two different effigies each of which are made of sacrificial dough cakes (*gtor ma*). One of each is placed on the altar in the temple, whereas the other one is put on the second altar in the center of the courtyard. Most prominent among the local protective deities are the male god (*lha*) of the inhabited land (*yul*) of the Solu region (*Shorong Yullha*, Tib. *Gshong rong yul lha*) named Tashi Palpoche (Tib. *bKra shis dpal po che*, Nep. Numbur) and the aquatic divinity Lumo Karmo (Tib. *Klu mo dkar mo*, i.e. white female *nāginī* or serpent deity). Both of these local deities are particularly venerated for their care and protection of the mundane well-being of the whole region.⁵⁰ According to the acting lamas the most important marker of local distinctiveness is the *kutshab ternga pūjā*, held on the fifth and concluding day, and the blessing by that sacred statue.

The *kutshab ternga* are the “five treasure representations” of Guru Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric master and sage who according to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism was instrumental in the introduction and establishment of the Buddhist doctrine in Tibet.⁵¹ Padmasambhava is

⁵⁰ On the worship of the local and regional protector deities in Gompa Zhung cf. Berg 1998.

⁵¹ Cf. Das (1989: 90): *sku tshab*: – ‘a representative’ (i.e. a statue or sacred text representing a deity, in this context: a statue of Guru Rinpoche – E.B.); *gter*, ‘treasure’, i.e. Buddhist scriptures and sacred objects hidden by Guru Padmasambhava and other tantric masters; – *nga*, ‘five’.

said to have created these five statues himself and to have hidden them, one of them in Tsibri, at the time of his departure from the Land of Snows for the protection and well-being of the Tibetan people. Hence these *kutshab ternga* statues are endowed with a very special power (*byin rlabs*) for the adherents of the Nyingma school, and consequently they bestow tremendous merit on those who receive their blessing.

Of these five sacred statues the Lamaserwa clan owns one. No other village gumpa in the whole Sherpa area of Solu-Khumbu owns an extremely sacred and powerful statue of Guru Padmasambhava of comparable religious importance. According to their written tradition its owner Sungden Dorje gave the sacred statue to Dorje Zangbo, their mythical hero, while he had been studying for three years in Tibet.⁵² The *kutshab ternga* statue in Gumpa Zhung represents a lama with a typical hat sitting in meditation posture on a lotus throne. Its size is only about ten centimeters and it is made of clay that is covered with a layer of gold. It is kept in a finely crafted silver box that is decorated with jewels and stored in a separate room on the upper floor of the village temple. Laypeople have access to it only for a short while on the fifth and last day of the *Dumji* festival when it is taken out to be displayed in public for the blessing. The village lama blesses people by touching the crown of their heads with the statue.

As already mentioned, the *Dumji* festival staged in the temple of a village community is enacted by tantric lay practitioners, i.e. married householder lamas. The sacred dances on occasion of the *Dumji* ceremony are performed according to the same patterns such as those of the monastic counterpart, the *Mani Rimdu*, but in a markedly less elaborate mode. In their village community the ritual performers are all indiscriminately referred to as “lamas”. As a rule, monks neither officiate at nor attend village ceremonies with the exception of funerals.⁵³ But, as happens in Gumpa Zhung, a monk may officiate at the *Dumji* performance in his capacity as member of the celebrating clan. He acts as the head lama’s assistant and as such he is regarded as the second village lama of the Lamaserwa clan community.

The majority of Sherpa men have had some instruction in reading, writing and the fundamentals of religion either in a monastery or from a lama whether as novice, lay student or ordained monk who may have later on broken the vows and chosen the secular life of a married householder. Thus, most Sherpa men are able to at least read and chant some of the basic religious texts, play some of the musical instruments and officiate in support of the village lama in the context of the performance of village ceremonies.

⁵² Cf. Macdonald (1987b: 71f.).

⁵³ On the existing deep cleavage between these two kinds of religious practitioners in Sherpa Buddhism – the celibate lamas, monks, and nuns on the one side and the married householder lamas on the other – which is due to still rising pressure from the religious establishments that has been felt since their emergence in the early twenties of the 20th century, and the effected changes cf. Ortner (1995: 359; 377; 1999: 171-75, 262-72).

Owing to this fairly high standard of religious education among men – absent among women – the local Sherpa community is almost self-sufficient in its religious affairs.

In most cases a local community among the Sherpas consists of scattered hamlets and isolated homesteads that are centered around the *gompa* of a village. Composed either of a single clan as in the exceptional case of Gompa Zhung or of several clans as in all other seven localities where *Dumji* is celebrated, it consist of a group of families linked by one or more relationships which favours concerted action in the general organization of both secular and religious activities. Daily life revolves around the village *gompa*. Buddhist precepts and practices govern, at least ideally, the conduct of the Sherpas' spiritual and worldly affairs such as farming, herding, and trading.

The householder lamas form a body which conducts the annual liturgical ceremonies in the village temple as well as the domestic rituals, both of which are based in the Sherpa Buddhist scriptural tradition. Apart from that they are in charge of the maintainance of the temple and of the administration of the temple funds. Moreover, they have to perform various tasks before, during and after the religious ceremonies.

As far as the *Dumji* festival is concerned, the current hereditary village lama presiding over the celebration had received the initiation and empowerment (*dbang*) for the ritual enactment of the ceremony in direct transmission from his father, his predecessor, and two other village lamas from the Lamaserwa clan. From his father he had also learnt the movements of the different dances, the way of chanting, the words that are chanted and their order in a lineage from teacher to student that is regarded as the only way to impart the tradition from one generation to the other. It is significant that the village lama's father had not only received the usual transmission, initiation and empowerment necessary for the proper enactment of the *Dumji* ritual cycle within the paternal lineage. The latter had also received the instructions and empowerments directly from the abbot and the monastic community at the newly established Tengboche monastery (1916). As has been already mentioned above, its wealthy founder, Ngawang Norbu Zangbu (Ngag dbang nor bu bzang po, 1848-1934), popularly known as Lama Gulu, had brought the Mindroeling tradition including the sacred masked dances at the beginning of the 20th century to Solu-Khumbu from the aforementioned Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (1867-1940), the lama of Dzarongphu Gompa situated in the Dingri area just on the northern side of Mt. Everest.

As is customary among Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, the present village lama's father was eager to regenerate his ritual knowledge and power by way of the most direct link with the teaching tradition to which the ritual cycle of the *Dumji* celebration belongs. At this time the tradition was represented in person among the Sherpas by Ngawang Norbu Zangbu to

whom not only many monks, but also many of his contemporaries among the village lamas travelled to receive their religious education. It is from this Sherpa lama that the latter received, among other things, the direct explanations and instructions as to the Mindroeling teaching tradition to which the ritual cycle of the *Dumji* celebration belongs, including the sacred dances. According to my information it was this particular regeneration of their ritual knowledge through this eminent Sherpa lama of Solu-Khumbu in the early 20th century that enabled the village lamas to correctly perform the same *Dumji* festival but enacted each on the basis of a distinct local tradition.

All the masks and costumes used for the celebration of the festival were crafted by religiously trained artisans of the Lamaserwa clan. In fact, in Gompa Zhung all masks and costumes are of considerable age and none of the religious artisans who had created them is still alive. But none of my lama informants seemed to worry particularly about the fact that today there are no young Sherpa artisans to continue with these traditions of religious craftsmanship. The usual pragmatic answer is that in case the community has to celebrate an important festival but lacks officiating lamas, masks, costumes, musical instruments or other ritual paraphernalia, all kinds of help is granted by the two monasteries in the valley, which were founded and organized by clerics of the Lamaserwa clan, and also by nearby Serlo Gompa founded and managed by abbots of the Thaktho (*Gragstho*) clan. Moreover, it is added, it has become common practice today among the Sherpas to purchase most of their religious items in the shops around the great *stūpa* at Bodnath, northeast of Kathmandu, where they are cheaper.

5. Local *Dumji* performance, festival patronage, and Sherpa identity

It has to be noted that among the Sherpas the *Dumji* festival with its colourful masked dances was not instituted in the interest of a political or stately power such as happened with public festivals in Tibet or Bhutan, but solely by the Sherpa people of the eight localities where it is held.⁵⁴ In each case the *Dumji* was introduced thanks to the initiative of a charismatic village lama. The celebration of the *Dumji* festival is the major festive occasion on which the two categories of “place” and “territory” come together and thus have a direct bearing on Sherpa identity and its different layers.

The *Dumji* celebration in Gompa Zhung is embedded in the history of the Lamaserwa clan that is rooted in its geographical territory as symbolized

⁵⁴ For the political purpose of the establishment of new public festivals in Tibet and Bhutan in which sacred dances figured prominently see Macdonald (1987: 10f.). For the sacred dances as performed in Bhutan refer to Aris (1976: 612f.); Pommaret (2002: 175). As to the staging of sacred dances in various public ceremonies of the Lhasa year until 1959 cf. Richardson (1993: 7ff.)

by the heroic deeds of the mythical ancestor, which he had performed at certain places, and the local protective deities. Both the former and the latter are being worshiped in its course. Hence the ritual ceremony gives a collective identity to the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community. As such it can be regarded as an elaborate ritual self-enactment of the Lamaserwa clan and its history which is clearly mirrored by the fact that Sherpas of other origin may take part solely as simple marginal spectators. At the same time the *Dumji* festival represents the traditional link between the Lamaserwa community as part of the Sherpa ethnic group and Tibetan Buddhism. The *Dumji* festival builds upon crucial episodes and several matters such as the liturgical text belonging to the *terma* tradition and the *kutshab ternga* statue which are at the heart of Tibetan Buddhism and its history in the Land of Snows. Consequently, in the course of their *Dumji* festival the members of the Lamaserwa clan celebrate their clan community as a whole thereby also reaffirming their individual clan membership. Moreover, this is the ritual in which they celebrate themselves as both Sherpas and Tibetan Buddhists, clearly belonging to the Tibetan cultural realm.

In fact, the Sherpas are not only proud of being Sherpas, but they consider themselves as both Sherpas and Tibetan Buddhists. Religion is the distinctive idiom – as it is to Tibetans in general – in which the Sherpas present themselves in their dealings with Hindus or people of other ethnic origin, whereas the reference to locality is employed in their interaction with both Sherpas of other regions and Tibetans and also with other Nepali people.⁵⁵

It is predominantly in the context of the major local religious celebration of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung that the individual as well as the communal identity of the members of the Lamaserwa clan is moulded and given its particular character. Moreover, the worship of the regional protective deities such as the male god of the inhabited land of the Solu region – *Shorong Yullha* – in its course constitutes the regional identity of the Solu Sherpas as opposed to that of the Khumbu Sherpas who during the corresponding ritual events venerate the *Khumbu Yullha*. It is only on this festive occasion that all the people of the Lamaserwa clan unite once a year with both the high gods and their local deities to protect their people and territory against evil forces and to secure the benevolence and help of the deities, thus reaffirming the future well-being of their community. Here it may suffice to quote the view of a Sherpa business man who has been living with his wife and children permanently in Kathmandu for more than a decade and who had come to Gompa Zhung for the *Dumji* in 2002 to fulfill his duty to act as one of the four annual sponsors of the festival. His view,

⁵⁵ These two markers of Sherpa identity are shared by all other of Nepal's Tibetan speaking groups. Ramble (1997: 379) has pointed out in a comprehensive treatment that the identity of the Bhotiyas, the indigenous Tibetan-speaking people of Nepal, is based on religion and "...very largely on their association with a limited territory."

articulated with great pride of Sherpa culture and religion, is illustrative of the eminent double function that the *Dumji* celebration fulfills in the local Sherpa community and that the average Sherpa is fully aware of:

Today, many Sherpas have left their local community in Solu-Khumbu and many others follow them for a variety of reasons. They live in Kathmandu, but a steadily growing number of Sherpas have established themselves abroad. But nevertheless, we keep our houses and fields, and often a part of the family remains. We Lamaserwa people try to return, at least, for the annual *Dumji* festival. If one's term has come to assume the role of the *zhindak* on that occasion we do our best to arrange our business schedule accordingly, even if one lives in Europe, Japan, or in the United States. The celebration of the *Dumji* is necessary as only this guarantees the help and blessings of our deities without which we cannot exist. Moreover, it ensures the well-being and cooperation of our Lamaserwa community here in Gompa Zhung just as it does in the case of all other communities in Solu-Khumbu where the *Dumji* is celebrated.. As you have seen, the celebration of our *Dumji* brings us all together. And since it forces us to act as *zhindak* in this context at least once in our life-time we all contribute to be brought together at least on occasion of this annual festive event. Indeed, without the proper annual celebration of *Dumji* the continuity of our religion and culture will be broken and as Sherpas we will be lost.

Accordingly, I suggest that for the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community the *Dumji* festival can be understood as a “ritual of unity and identity”.⁵⁶

In Sherpa culture practically all communal celebrations are based upon the social institution called *zhindak*⁵⁷ (Tib. *sbyin bdag* – Skt. *dānapati*). S.Ch. Das renders the term as “patron, more especially a dispenser of gifts, a layman manifesting his piety by making presents to the priesthood”.⁵⁸ Sponsorship of the annual local celebrations is considered to be one of the main communal duties of each head of a nuclear family household. However, sponsorship in the case of *Dumji*, being the Sherpas' most

⁵⁶ Pommaret (2002) has analyzed the annual sacred dances in the Paro Valley in Bhutan, a territory which is represented by its local divinity. According to her these dances reveal the identity of the people of the central valley of Paro (p. 175). Other valuable contributions to the question of identity-building in the context of the worship of the local protector deities cf. Diemberger (1994: 144); Kind (2002: 271, 285f.).

⁵⁷ In a comprehensive treatise Ruegg (1995) has highlighted the ancient Tibetan relation between a lama, the religious officiant/counsellor/spiritual preceptor as donee (*mchod gnas*) and the royal lay donor (*yon bdag*). On the the institution of the *zhindak* in Sherpa society in general cf. Ortner (1998: 23-29); in the particular context of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung cf. E. Berg 2003; in the context of the *Dumji* festival as held in Khumbu where the sponsor is called *lawa* cf. Fürer-Haimendorf (1964: 185-208).

⁵⁸ Das 1989: 939.

important annual celebration in village ceremonial life extending over five days, involves considerable resources so that many householders have to save money for quite a few years in advance to meet the expenses involved.

Each local community where *Dumji* is celebrated has a traditionally fixed set of special patron organizers – mostly four or eight – called either *zhindak* or, more specifically, *chiwa* (Tib. *spyi pa*) who are in charge of the full preparation and organization of the festival. S.Ch. Das renders this term as ‘head, chief, leader, superintendent’.⁵⁹ In this context the *Dumji chiwa* acts predominantly both as ‘superintendent’ and as ‘steward’ translated by C. Ramble.⁶⁰ This office rotates annually according to differing schemes among the number of households which constitute the local community. It is the temple-committee (Tib. *tshogs pa*) that usually selects the *chiwas* for the following year’s festival. This is done on occasion of the official *chang* test which is held in the week before the beginning of the festival. In a book called *tho* which S.Ch. Das translates as ‘register, list’ all the patrons’ names are continuously recorded as proof in potential conflicts over the selection of the *chiwas*.⁶¹ This register is kept in the *gompa*.

The *chiwa*’s duties are manifold, the most important one being organisational such as fund raising, collecting of grain, providing of all food, and the execution of the festival. Together with their wives and daughters the *chiwas* are responsible for catering, either for all the people present or for the officiating performers only. Their wives have also to brew a considerable quantity of *chang*, the Tibetan beer made of buckwheat, millet, corn or rice, to be consumed in the festival’s course.

Among the Sherpas, to act as *chiwa* for the celebration of the *Dumji* constitutes the most important communal duty of the married householders which has to be performed at least once, sometimes even twice in his life-time. If a Sherpa for some reason is incapable to meet these obligations in one year the order of rotation may be changed even for a certain time. But permanent exemption from this communal duty is impossible as it results in the loss of full membership in the local community.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 806.

⁶⁰ Ramble (1987: 228). In his Ph.D. thesis (1984: 283-335) on the local community of Bonpo householder priests of Lubra in Western Nepal Ramble has presented one of the most detailed description of the economics of ritual and festival patronage in the Tibetan cultural realm. It seems that the system of festival patronage as practiced among the Sherpas of Gompa Zhung is very different and far less complex when compared to the economic organisation of village rituals and the patronage system of the Lubragpas. Their *sbyar tshogs* (‘combined accumulation’) system of patronage (p. 297, 331) operates through accumulating donations and using them as capital which is invested in trade. For a recent contribution on festival patronage see the paper on lay sponsors of communal rituals and their involvement in the revival of Bon monasticism in Amdo Shar khog by Schrempf 2000.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 588.

In the course of the *Dumji* celebration, membership in the local Sherpa community is celebrated and reaffirmed by the social institution of festival patronage. As far as the process of identity building in Sherpa culture is concerned (which is primarily constituted within the local community), the *Dumji* patron, organizer, and steward assumes a key role. According to the norms of Sherpa society it constitutes an important civic duty of the married householder to act as patron or *chiwa* of the *Dumji* festival at least once, sometimes even twice in his life-time. Mostly people know beforehand when their turn as patron is likely to come. This knowledge is important as many householders have to save for quite a long time to be able to cover the expenses involved. If someone is not able to meet these obligations the order of rotation may be changed for some years. But permanent exemption from the duty to act as a patron in this context is impossible as it implies the loss of full membership in the local community. However, according to my informants, this has never occurred.

As already mentioned, the office of the *Dumji* patron entails fairly high expenses as well as a range of time consuming duties to be performed before, during and after the festival. But apart from the obvious burden of those expenses and duties there are also definite advantages, privileges and pleasures associated with the patron's job which from the Sherpas' traditional point of view by far outweigh the disadvantages. Most important seems to be the following fact: at least once, in some cases even twice in their life time, it provides all men as representatives of the households, be they rich or poor, including their wives and children with the opportunity to act in the leading role among the assembled laypeople on the communal stage. This happens in the context of their main ritual celebration that mirrors the distinct history of the local Sherpa community within the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, a short separate public ceremony devoted to the *Dumji* patrons is conducted on the first day just after the juniper-burning ritual. After that only the *chiwas* together with their wives and their mostly young children receive a special blessing. Due to this and the special merit that accrues to the *Dumji* patrons and their wives in organizing the *Dumji* festival the office of the patron was not only held in high esteem in the past, but also in the present.

The patron's leading role involves caring for the religious space of the village temple complex which is necessary for the undisturbed performance of the festival. He has to assume a role which resembles that of an otherwise non-existent policeman whose word has to be followed unquestioningly without delay by the lay audience. His main duties in this respect consist in keeping the children – in this context usually more or less out of bounds – at bay; in avoiding and, if necessary, in settling the outbreak of a verbal or physical conflict among Sherpa adults which usually has been latent and of long standing; in providing help to all those, mostly people of old age, who have lost their self-control normally from drinking too much *chang*; and in

constantly keeping an eye on the correctly dressed dancers so that their masks and costumes fit properly during the long performance of the sacred dances.

Actually, the ritual enactment of the *Dumji* celebration and the patron's activities in its course offer a telling example of how the distinct tightly-knit social web typical of Sherpa Buddhist society is continuously created and renewed. It is a world in which people are closely interconnected and have ongoing mutual obligations. Since their early childhood Sherpa girls and boys become familiar with their communal festival and its performance, its origin and meaning, the different rituals and sacred masked dances, the complex procedure of the "long life blessing" and the religious merit accruing from the participation in the festival and also with the range of mundane enjoyments that go with it. A least once they have experienced the whole festival from the privileged perspective of the patron's family.

In two long dances the young boys of the local community are even given their own role on stage in the context of the solemn *Dumji* celebration. Inserted into the sequence of the eleven masked dances are those two interludes which are not considered sacred dances ('*cham*'). These so-called "comical acts" which usually end in obscene gestures and sexual allusions seemingly endlessly repeated are performed with much enthusiasm and considerable noise but with no stage training and only very little creativity by young boys who are dressed up in fantastic costumes. They are called *tek-tek*, i.e. 'small demons' which is also the name of this kind of dances. According to the clerics these two interludes are said to have been introduced only in order to catch the attention of the laypeople whose usual capacity of concentration is rather limited in the course of such a long ritual performance and who otherwise would either fall asleep, start conversation or simply leave and get drunk. Sherpas seem to enjoy especially these two interludes whereas the clerics most often look bored as they consider them an intrusion into the solemn ritual celebration of the *Dumji* festival.

Unmarried young adults, both girls and boys, help their relatives when it is their turn to act as patron or they are married to one of the patrons. Moreover, for them the festival represents a major opportunity for meeting partners of the opposite sex and for merry-making. After marriage they have to save for years to provide the means necessary for the patron's duty. For those Sherpas of the middle and the old generation who are simply off duty, the festival provides a favourite time to meet others, to engage in long conversations, to drink *chang*, to sing and dance while performing late at night the *shyabru*, the Sherpa round dance, around the pole which is the center of the courtyard of the village temple. And as grandparents they give explanations to their grandchildren while watching over the correct performance of the sacred dances until in quite a few cases their liberal consumption of *chang* brings their concentration to an end. Often this leads to an interesting role reversal later at night when the small grandchild has to

lead the drunk grandmother or grandfather along the trail back home through the darkness.

6. The *Dumji* celebration in 2002 in Gompa Zhung in the context of growing political instability

Around noon about fifty Sherpas of the Lamaserwa clan of all generations had assembled in the village temple of Gompa Zhung where the *kutshab ternga* ceremony was being conducted by the tantric village lama, i.e. the village head lama, and his sixteen ritual assistants. It was the day of the Kalachakra New Year, the first of the third month of the Tibetan Water Horse Year 2129 (i.e. April 13th 2002) and the last day of the *Dumji* masked dance drama. In this locality the celebration extends over a period of five days. The *Dumji* festival is the most important annual religious celebration of the Sherpas as enacted in village ceremonial life. Its main purpose consists in an annual exorcism of evil forces which are believed to have gathered since its last performance, thus providing good fortune for the future well-being of both the Lamaserwa clan and its individual members. Its general ritual structure as described below consists of a juniper-burning offering ritual on the first day, a dance rehearsal on the second, the full set of eleven dances on the third, a “long life empowerment” ceremony on the fourth and the *kutshab ternga* ceremony on the fifth and last day.

On the two preceding days only about two hundred Lamaserwa Sherpas – that is far less than half of the usual number of participants – had enjoyed the spectacular mask dances and received the blessing after the “long life empowerment” ceremony (*whong*; Tib. *tshe dbang*). Moreover, the participants all dressed up in their finest garments, had spent the long cold and humid nights until the early morning hours merrily drinking, singing and performing the *shyabru* (Tib. *zhabs bro*), the Sherpa round dance, in the temple courtyard. Most of the unmarried young women and men, however, had disappeared sooner or later into the “disco” which was erected by them in a deserted house on the same occasion about five years previously.

Normally the *Dumji* celebration is the festive occasion of the Lamaserwa clan for which up to four hundred and fifty people from a total of eighty four households gather in the village of Gompa Zhung. Most of the households are located in remote hamlets and isolated homesteads which are scattered over a considerable territory in the upper Solu valley. The members of the Lamaserwa clan come to the *gompa* of their spiritual center to watch the colourful masked dances, to generate merit, to receive the blessing of long life and to indulge in a range of mundane entertainments.

The *kutshab ternga* celebration is not only the second-most auspicious religious ceremony of the *Dumji* festival; actually it is also one of the most pleasant parts of the whole festival. All those assembled are in high spirits

while at the same time being fully relaxed if not just simply tired. Present are all the sixteen performing village lamas, the four sponsors of the *Dumji* celebration, their wives and children. Moreover, all families and individuals from Gompa Zhung proper and from diverse hamlets in the vicinity participate. Even after some days of intensive feasting the latter still can manage to take part in the final ceremony and receive the *kutshab ternga* blessing at its end.

After the ceremony the village lama introduced a wholly new element into the traditional ritual procedure. He gave an hour-long carefully prepared speech in front of his Lamaserwa audience. As the prominent keyholder of the *kutshab ternga* statue from distant Phaplu could not take part any more due to Parkinson-disease, the village lama was free to modify the celebration according to newly arisen circumstances. For the first time the framework of the major annual ceremony was deliberately used by Lama Tenzing to articulate urgent problems of communal interest. However, he still related the local history of the religious celebration and of the sacred statue to make his people aware and proud of their cultural heritage as epitomized by the *Dumji* festival.

What was new to all those present was the lama's deliberate reference to the growing predicament that the Sherpas presently face. Unlike a contemporary Nepali politician's speech, however, he neither presented some easy political analysis of the current situation nor any proposals as to which path to choose for a better future. Nonetheless he made his message very clear as he alluded to the increasingly dramatic political turmoil of the Maoist insurgency, and how it affected everyday lives and livelihoods.

On this day the atmosphere in the village temple was markedly different. On all the preceding days the ritual celebrations had been performed in a religious space which was shared by many children who, as is the norm on festive events such as this, had been playing and chasing around noisily in the courtyard and in the temple; at the same time many of the adults had been engaged in long and loud private conversation and quite a few of the old ones, male and female, had already been enjoying *chang* for some days brewed only on occasion of special religious celebrations such as the *Dumji* festival. Today, however, the attention of most of those present was fully concentrated on their highly respected lama's elaborations; the children were exhorted successfully to remain quiet in order to listen carefully to the lama's words which they actually did, and all those who tended to fall asleep were quietly kept awake.

In fact, the lama's speech represented a carefully prepared teaching to his audience hitherto unheard of among them. In its course, Lama Tenzing first gave an extensive overview on Tibetan Buddhism, its history and its central tenets starting with the achievements of Guru Padmasambhava in taming the malevolent spirits, binding them by oath and thus building Samye, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet in the year 779. Its second part

focused on the historic origin of the Sherpas in Kham and their *Dumji* festival, its complex meaning, and on their long migration across the Himalayan divide to Solu-Khumbu. In the largest part, however, he elaborated at great length on the history of the Lamaserwa clan and on their famous ancestors. This was followed by a detailed account of when and how the *Dumji* came to Solu-Khumbu and to Gompa Zhung. Of particular importance for the listeners seemed to be both, the purpose – the expulsion of evil forces from the community - and the distinct benefits accruing from the annual correct performance of the *Dumji* for the local community of the Lamaserwa clan as a whole as well as for the sponsors and their wives and families.

In a noteworthy concluding statement the lama summarized his exposition which amounted to a pointed local history of Sherpa religion, culture and society as an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. Only then the village lama made use of a Tibetan term which describes the state of particular worldly circumstances or of a whole era from a religious perspective. According to him the present era in which the Sherpas and all other sentient beings have to live in and suffer from, is a time of grave *dip* (Tib. *grib*), which clearly signals *kali yuga*, i.e. the dark era in which the evil triumphs over the good. *Dip* is translated by S.Ch. Das as ‘shade; defilement; filth; contamination, mostly in a religious sense’.⁶² Ch. Schicklgruber, however, has highlighted its use in the particular socio-religious context of the ethnic Tibetan Khumbu in northeastern Nepal. He has rendered it in its extended sense, which is of interest here, by ‘chaos’ as opposed to a “religiously and socially ordered world”.⁶³

Consequently the end of the village lama’s speech was marked by the statement that especially in these difficult times of chaos it is and will be of vital importance for the Sherpas to stick firmly to the Buddhist dharma, to be proud of the Sherpas and, in particular, of the Lamaserwa clan’s glorious past and present, to continue the celebration of their religious festivals and to devote all their available resources to the preservation of their cultural heritage. Lama Tenzing’s speech, which left the majority of his listeners in deep thought, clearly marks a turning point in the Lamaserwa clan’s recent history.

By way of this short reference to their endangered culture and religious tradition the village lama only subtly alluded to the presently increasing predicament of the Sherpas’ daily lives and livelihoods. He thus articulated and reflected upon what everyone present had become clearly conscious of in the course of what had happened to them in Solu in at least the last eighteen months.

⁶² Das 1989: 244.

⁶³ Schicklgruber 1992: 724.

Just opposite to the stairs leading into the courtyard of the village temple had been one of the rare police posts in Solu-Khumbu which had been established only seven years ago. Since it had been blown up by the Maoists in November 2000 it was given up by the state authorities. Its ruins are regarded as a mirror that reflects the Sherpas' current life conditions more clearly than anything else. Telecommunications with Solukhumbu which had reached the area just less than a decade ago were totally destroyed in March 2002; the highly successful major hydro power station in the region completed in 1993 was devastated in January 2002; most of the small and simple local stations are also out of function but will not be repaired as long as the present political instability prevails. These two achievements truly had meant "progress" to the population as they had highly improved the circumstances in Solu-Khumbu. Now, however, life conditions resemble the negative side of the old days when nights used to be black and Kathmandu far away.

From time to time Maoists in smaller or larger groups – most of them being of Hindu caste origin – move into Gompa Zhung at night, put up a camp in the center of the village for some days and establish their own "rule". Up to now there have been almost no Sherpas involved in the Maoist movement. Currently the latter seems to follow more or less the unpredictable, arbitrary rule of mere warlords better known from some Third World countries other than Nepal. Here they extort food and money from the population, especially from the owners of the seven local lodges, paint their symbols and political slogans on sacred monuments thereby causing growing hopelessness among the local population. Among others, the young enthusiastic followers of the Maoist underground movement have resorted to corporal punishment – what they called "disciplinary measures" – directed against three of the lodge owners and the widely respected headmaster of Solu's only Hillary Secondary School: they were publicly beaten within the schoolyard in the village's center as they were declared as "class enemies". Since then all of them and many more whose local lives have been shattered have escaped to the Kathmandu valley.

Since the royal massacre of June 1st 2001 the insurgency has become more and more threatening and the situation increasingly hopeless. This has caused, among other things, the almost total breakdown of the formerly flourishing trekking tourism on which the majority of the local Sherpas have been more or less dependent as the village of Gompa Zhung has been a major rest stop on the Everest Basecamp trail. This sad state of the trekking business has prevailed until the year 2003 and yet there is no hope that it will recover in the near future. Since the authorities – police and army – have given up state control over wide areas of Eastern Nepal many of those who can afford have already moved or have been planning to move to the Kathmandu valley in search of a better future as they cannot bear the growing uncertainties any longer. Less than fifty percent of the usual

population has remained, most of them being the poor and the old people. The middle-aged generation and their children have almost fully disappeared but they still continue to show up for the duration of the *Dumji* festival. Of the total of twenty-four houses in Gompa Zhung proper seven have been deserted. The two well-established lodges have been closed down by the Maoists, the other five lodges have been empty as there have been almost no tourists at all in that high season. For the first time during the *Dumji* festival the hammer and sickle banner was fluttering on top of the main *stūpa* since the local Sherpas were too afraid to remove this unloved emblem. But fortunately the insurgents neither showed up in the village nor disturbed the religious celebration, as had been predicted by rumours. Such was the rather depressing context in which the *Dumji* festival was held in the year 2002.

After completion of the *kutshab ternga* ceremony in the early afternoon the religious practitioners remained seated, to be served with food and drink by the sponsor and his wife. The audience, however, dissolved slowly and people started to leave for their homes in smaller and bigger groups. The usual calm of everyday life returned to the temple courtyard again while the merry singing of the groups of disappearing Sherpas could still be heard from afar for quite a while. Only some young men remained whose duty was to remove the tent and the central pole in the courtyard which are put up only for the performance of the *Dumji* festival. The highly concentrated mix of smells of sweet herbal incense, oily butter lamps and of sour *chang* filled the air.

7. Conclusion

To summarize, the ritual performance of the *Dumji* masked dance festival constitutes a key socio-religious institution which integrates the individual members of the local community into a common frame of action. Moreover, it establishes an alliance between the local people, high gods and the local and territorial divinities which has to be purified and reaffirmed annually, thereby renewing the forces of fertility and prosperity. The celebration allows the local community to define itself as an autonomous social unit as well as an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. In consequence, the annual staging of the sacred mask dances continuously creates and renews unity, thus giving an identity to the celebrating community that is based on its own history and is rooted in its territory.

Accordingly, the *Dumji* festival as the major ritual performance among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu that unites the local people and gives them a complex identity serves an important social function especially today, in the current situation of a more and more deeply-felt crisis, for the preservation of Sherpa religion, culture, and society. At present, the Sherpas have to wrestle with at least two kinds of radical changes within the larger political

framework of the Hindu nation-state which are due to two entirely different processes. One has been of their own making. It is articulated by a rapid rise from being traditional high-altitude agro-pastoralists and traders to their successful engagement in Nepal's globalized trekking and mountaineering industry.⁶⁴

The recent dispersion of a growing number of Sherpas to far-away places such as Kathmandu, London or New York and the concomitant shift in values and ideals are mirrored, among other things, by the currently increasing withdrawal of those Sherpas, who had made a fortune, from their customary moral obligation to act as donor on behalf of the monasteries and their respective monk communities. It has to be recalled that since their emergence from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, monastic establishments and the celibate lamas, monks, and nuns have always been strongly dependent upon lay sponsorship from the side of wealthy "big men".⁶⁵ Today, however, the monasteries are almost all more or less fully supported by Western and Japanese individuals and/or organisations.⁶⁶

In contrast to the currently decreasing patronage of monastic institutions among the Sherpas which depends on free decision, it represents a social obligation towards one's own clan community to act as donor on behalf of their communal religious festivals such as the *Dumji* celebration at least once in a life-time. But the village temple committee has also to cope with increasing problems which are felt when it has to designate the group of four donors for the enactment of the following year's festival. The main reason for these difficulties consists in the fact that at present more and more Sherpas have their centre of life in places far away from their local community in Solu-Khumbu. Owing to these new circumstances those Sherpas are often not able to fulfil their customary obligations at a fixed date that has not been of their own choice. More and more often, Sherpas cannot meet their obligation to act as donor in this context, and they resort to a customary device and send a representative in their stead, usually a sister or brother. In this way they make sure that although they cannot participate personally the proper celebration of the *Dumji* is guaranteed and thus the

⁶⁴ The tourist, trekking and mountaineering business kept flourishing until 2000/01 when Western media began to report more steadily on the Maoist insurgency, and it reached almost a complete breakdown in 2001 after the events of the 11th of September without having had the chance yet to recover from that state.

⁶⁵ For this important chapter of recent Sherpa history see Ortner (1989: 99-149). See also part II of this paper.

⁶⁶ According to my recent information at present only the two Sherpa *gompas* each at Rimishung in Pharak and at Goli in Solu are supported solely by Sherpas themselves. In the case of Rimishung the bulk of the material support is being provided by the village lama who for fifteen years successfully runs a meditation centre in Taiwan whereas in Goli, formerly a village of rich traders, the village community itself still takes care of their religious establishments.

preservation of both the core element of their local tradition and of Sherpa Buddhism and society.⁶⁷

The second process, however, has been invading Sherpa Buddhist society in less than the last three years from the outside through the growing violence in the course of the expansion of the Maoist insurgency. Currently, the latter shatters the order of Sherpa village life and confronts the Sherpas with a world of growing uncertainties hitherto unknown to them, while the pursuit of the Hindu state policy as far as the Buddhist high-altitude areas are concerned, has still remained one of more or less blatant neglect.

According to my information there is at the moment a rising awareness among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu concerning the growing realm of problems which currently affect their culture, religion and society. But most probably it will take them some time to find appropriate solutions at a time when they have to cope with several waves of serious changes. When asked about this, both Sherpa monastic clerics and village lamas generally are fully aware of their currently strongly growing predicament which they understand as a clear indication of the “degenerate times” that are typical of our present era. Nevertheless, they are very optimistic as to the future of Sherpa Buddhist culture and society. Their optimism seems to be justified by the fact that hitherto their rotation system of the patrons of the *Dumji* ceremony has kept working. In fact, until now not one case has been reported of a Sherpa who flatly refused to act as donator or simply didn't show up for the performance of this duty.

Moreover, the village lamas keep referring to the Sherpas' long history of migration which was possible only because of their capacity to adapt successfully to novel conditions, even in our era when Sherpas in growing numbers migrate to Western countries and to Japan. According to my informants, their past has clearly shown that the annual and correct celebration of the *Dumji* festival has been the appropriate powerful ritual means in Sherpa history thanks to which all evil was successfully averted from the local community up to the present day. Indeed, its performance will be of utmost importance, especially at times of growing political conflict and economic crisis such as in our present era. Hence, in their view the Sherpas will also be able to master the profoundly changed conditions of today provided they continue firmly to stick to their traditions which are rooted in Tibetan Buddhism.

It is this view that has been expressed to me by both the village lamas of Gompa Zhung and of four other localities where the *Dumji* is held, and a great number of laypeople whom I had the opportunity to interview. Moreover, their optimistic view is shared, among others, by the Sherpas'

⁶⁷ All interviewed Sherpas expressed this concern emphasizing that without the celebration of the *Dumji* festival the future of Sherpa society as is lived in the locality as well as of Sherpa Buddhism in general will be seriously in danger.

spiritual authority, Trulzhig Rinpoche XI, the highly venerated abbot of Thubten Choeling monastery situated just an hour's walk away. He is representative of the Dzarongphu tradition and leading dignitary of the Nyingma school, who has been active in strengthening Sherpa Buddhism, for instance by recruiting a young generation of Sherpas and initiating them into the meditative and ritual cycles such as those of the *Dumji* which a lay tantric lama has to perform on behalf of his local community since the old village lama of Gompa Zhung represents one of the last of lay tantric practitioners of his profession.

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**CORRESPONDENCE,
ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS**

Conference Report on *Tibet and Her Neighbours* April 24-25th, 2004, Harvard University

By Mark Turin

In the spring of 2004, the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies and the Committee on Inner Asia and Altaic Studies at Harvard University sponsored a short two-day conference entitled “Tibet and her Neighbours”. By invitation only, the conference was conceived as the continuation of a very fruitful meeting hosted by Dr. Christoph Cüppers some years ago at the Lumbini International Research Institute in Lumbini, Nepal. The present conference was concerned with the cultural, religious, literary and political interactions between Tibet and its neighbours – the Indian subcontinent, the Kathmandu Valley, Inner Asia and China (from Tang to Qing).

Well organised, intellectually stimulating and held in a welcoming environment, the conference was a resounding success with 18 scholars presenting their research findings on a wide range of topics pertaining to Tibetan studies. The sessions were organised by geographical orientation: Tibet’s Eastern Neighbours, Eastern Tibet, Tibet, Tibet’s Western Neighbours, Tibetan Cultural History and Tibetan Medical Traditions. Readers will note, as this reviewer did, the conspicuous absence of a full panel dealing explicitly with Tibet’s southern neighbours: India and more particularly Nepal. Nevertheless, many individual presentations addressed relations with the southern frontier.

A wide range of topics and fields of study were visited during the short presentations, including history, linguistics, biography and medicine. Save for a few papers which dealt with contemporary issues, many presentations primarily focussed on earlier periods of Tibetan history. Presentations of special interest included Gray Tuttle’s discussion of Mongour ethnicity, Holly Gayley’s paper on female identity along the borderlands, John Ardussi’s reflections on Sikkim, Kurtis Schaeffer’s discussion of Indian intellectuals at the court of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and Robbie Barnett’s analysis of poster art in present-day Tibet.

Particular recognition must go to Professor Dr. Leonard van der Kuijp and the staff and students of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies for the warm welcome they extended to their guests, and for steering the discussions so effortlessly.

conference website: www.fas.harvard.edu/~sanskrit/tibetconf.html

BOOK REVIEWS

***“If each comes halfway”*: Meeting Tamang women in Nepal** by Kathryn S. March. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8014-8827-3. xvi. index, illus., 271 pp.

Les Enfants du Singe et de la Démone: Mémoires des Tamang récits himalayens by Brigitte Steinmann. Nanterre: Société d’ethnologie, 2001. ISBN 2-901161-63-4, index, illus., 501 pp.

Reviewed by Ben Campbell, Manchester

The publication of these two books represents a very significant threshold in the study of Tamang society, and in the quality of ethnographic approaches to the understanding of rural Nepalese society more generally. Both works are distillations of the authors’ long-term acquaintance with their subjects and communities of research. They share a rare intellectual commitment to carrying forward and experimenting with practices of ethnographic writing in order to convey and analyse the lived worlds of Tamang women and men.

The two books complement each other in that March’s concerns a community of “Western” Tamang in Nuwakot District, while Steinmann’s deals with a core “Eastern” branch of Tamang in the Temal area of Khabre Palanchok. Both works are particularly oriented to the narrative and lyrical resources of the people whose lives are discussed. March explains aspects of socio-cultural practice through the perspectives of women’s life histories revealed in expansive interviews, while Steinmann seeks to forefront the way that experiences of fieldwork fundamentally affect how the ethnologist comes to understand ritual, belief, and kinship.

The styles of the authors differ substantially. March writes in a way that will be easily accessible to undergraduates, and presents the reader with characters whose lives give shape to possibilities for contextual elaboration of domestic sociality, economic activity, and the transformations in social relationships experienced through crises of births, marriages and deaths. Steinmann by contrast writes in a somewhat peregrinatory, non-linear manner, and her accounts of fieldwork relationships extend into reflections on the limits to presumed cultural coherence among communities linked by traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. A certain indulgence of Tibetological scholarship and specialist regional knowledge is a prerequisite for the reader in her case.

Taking the works now separately, March's offering is centered on the personal accounts of fourteen women. She explains the idea of *If each comes halfway* as a combination of her own agenda to rectify androcentric anthropological representation, and the desire of the Tamang women themselves to have their lives recorded for the sake of their progeny. She takes us into the worlds of these people with great sensitivity and insightful commentary, managing to convey the uniqueness of each individual's story and the relational complexity of their domestic and inter-domestic connectedness, while drawing into the picture commonalities and structures of more general applicability. In this way, cross-cousin marriage, clan solidarities, agro-pastoralism, and histories of corvée labour service to the state are introduced as interactional practices involving very particular effects on the rhythms of life, and possibilities for agency the women contend with. Starting from such personally relevant everyday textures, rather than from abstract principles of form, function, and status, endows the approach with a commendable accessibility for newcomers to the study of rural life in Nepal, while resounding with ideas that scholars of comparative Himalayan ethnography will want to engage with.

The title of the book refers not only to the meeting of prospective spouses, but also to the coming together of participants in the production of anthropological knowledge. For this reason, and due to the evident seriousness with which the author considers her joint endeavour with the women and her fieldwork assistants, the book is not driven primarily by a theoretical framework. The major general theme is the writing of person-based anthropology, and March takes issue with examples that have not effectively questioned the shape of coherent, singular, chronological life narratives familiar to Euro-American understandings of personal biography (with Shostak and Abu-Lughod in mind, but also decrying the exoticised two-dimensionality of more popular representations of Nepali lives by Western writers). Where March offers her greatest contributions to thinking about lives and words, is in her attendance to anthropologically distinctive lyrical practices. She makes this clear in a passage (p. 39) in the first biographical chapter, on the grandmother Mondzom, who cuts and weaves her personal account with song and proverbial sayings. This leads March to reflect on mirror-rhyme structures, and on the acoustic physicality of song in the mountains, telling of her realisation that a man she came across was singing in pace with the rhythm of his echo. It is, though, to be lamented that her plea for the women's voices to be heard "down to the roundest vowel" (p. 13) is hard to meet through the text, as it tends to be only the most difficult to translate words that are left in Tamang for the reader. Luckily, a CD-Rom accompanies the book, and so the vowels can be heard in all their glory. An appendix of selected transcriptions would have been most valuable.

At its best this work informs, provokes, and genuinely moves the reader into listening to the subject positions of her characters. An exceptionally well written passage occurs between pages 181 to 189. Purngi, married into her father's sister's household takes part in the last hours of her dying aunt/mother-in-law, but is torn between her duties to the day's work group and meeting the sick, old woman's wishes to be helped out of the house to relieve herself. She protests to no avail, only to be told after having carried the larger-bodied woman outside, she just wanted to sit and look, except that everything had become all yellow in her failing vision. Calling on Purngi to look for lice in her hair the younger woman is shocked at the wandering herds of the pests. When finally returned inside and after some of the work party had passed by, the old woman dies, with her breath and her lice leaving her body. The intensity of the scene, the sequence of exchanges between the women over the day, and the capturing of Purngi's complex responses to the death through her images and phrasings are admirably worked through.

By casting light on persons and their dilemmas of deciding how to deal with the relationships they find themselves in, March provides examples of how collective social practice can exist in paradoxical relationships with women's independent-minded possibilities for not doing what is expected of them. Indeed, though March does not choose to take this particular line of analysis, it emerges that the notion of individual autonomy is far from a simple opposition to conformity. In the case of Sukumaya, discussed in the last biographical chapter, her drawn-out resistance and cumulative reluctance to go along with her parents' choice of a spouse, turns out to be far from a purely voluntaristic inclination, but instead comes to be revealed as a response to the isolation the young woman experienced in a new hamlet where she had no other clan sisters to interact with as a counter to her affinal identity. Other examples evoke the dread of loneliness built up by women married off to high-altitude livestock keepers, and their sequential marital careers though spoken of in terms of fate, give insights to understandings of life-agency that defy the explanatory constraints of voluntaristic choice or conformity.

In *Les Enfants du Singe et de la Démone*, Brigitte Steinmann takes the reader through an exploration of Tamang ritual practice and the relationship to contemporary lifeworlds of mythological understanding of origins and being. Rather than assume that Tamang evocations of Tibetan ancestry or adherence to Buddhism mean that their cultural life can be reduced to, or be explained as degenerations of, Tibetan models, she brings our attention to the ways in which mythical strands, institutions and social roles have been appropriated and fashioned to the social and geo-historical circumstances in which this society of intermarrying clans has moulded itself within a locatedness in Nepal. Crucial to this task is her explicit strategy of not privileging textual authority over the irreplaceable

understandings derived from ethnographic observation of contested knowledges and the processual qualities of ritual and symbolic life.

Steinmann's account very effectively bears witness to the problems ethnographers face when attempting to access and communicate across systems of knowledge and authority that are challenged by other members of the same society. She introduces the Tamang as an ethnic group in which the channels of respect towards the mother's brother and sacred knowledge are being superseded by new skills and powers connected with secular writing, the tourist industry and the command of English. She compares the difficulties of rendering Tamang song and lyrical tradition in French with those she encountered in translating letters sent by tourists to their porters evoking concepts such as romanticised landscape.

Steinmann's strategy is to locate the cosmological in practices of social difference and symbol-linked associations of usage. She does this through tracing for example the significance of men's and women's particularised relationships to foods and beverages. Gendered habits of beer and soup consumption are pursued into a discussion of the symbolic potency of nettles, women's collection and preparation of them, and the male shamans' horror of them. She finds how, in the round, such associations produce an ensemble of distinctions that confer relational identities and complementarities, while making it appear that women "embody a particular form of resistance to law and civilisation" (p. 154).

In parts two and three of the book, most chapters deal with specific rituals as Steinmann has encountered them, giving lively accounts of event sequences, characterisations of the protagonists, and reflections on the possibilities for interpretation afforded by textual sources. She does not though encourage a view of these rituals as taking place according to fixed scripted templates, and most effectively conveys the loose, interactive qualities of their unfolding. The position of Tamba, specific to the Eastern Tamang, a spokesperson for the social order and heir to the state sanctioned authority conferred in the Rana era on headmen, is discussed in the context of marriage that provides occasion for recalling the rock demoness and Boddhisattva monkey, whose union is said to have resulted in the ancestors of contemporary clans. This coupling of different sources of belonging and being for Steinmann encapsulates the central image of the Tamangs' enigma of identity. Narratives of the demoness and monkey recur in various chapters, none perhaps more striking than the account of a celebration (literally a 'making') of clan gods, *la sopa*. In this wonderfully written passage a human hostage is taken scapegoat, initially an old, poor Bahun, later replaced by a Magar and dressed as a woman, to act as revealer of the terrible secret symbolised in the showing of brewing yeast, that represents the scandal of incest committed by the offspring of demoness and monkey. Steinmann applies her technique of making symbolic association in drawing comparisons between blood and yeast, both operating in veils of taboo and

in shadows and containers of liquid (p.343). Her descriptions of the atmosphere of erotic enthusiasm, notably expressed by sons-in-law of the sponsoring clan exhorting the propitiating head clan lama to have sex, are brilliantly constructed.

Elsewhere, in a chapter focusing on death rites and the mourning feast, *kewa*, Steinmann manages to bring the similarly ritualised shamelessness of sons-in-law into the overall consideration of how life, body and soul are conceived. Rather than privileging a purely metaphysical interpretation of reincarnation, she presents the reader with a view of how the participants adopt specific roles, from the lamas' actions which are necessary to make the distinctions between humanity, animality, and the demonic, to the sons-in-laws' explicit claims to fulfil their desire for meat and the living 'flesh' of clan daughters, while providing all the demanding menial services to their wife-givers. Her analysis of this issue resonates entirely with my own field experiences among "Western" Tamang where the expression *shya klangba* ('playing/hunting flesh') is heard in this regard. My only reservation would be that Steinmann states the wife-takers' saturnalian exuberance is a concession for their ritual hard labour (p. 241). I would suggest a greater participation in the mood of erotically celebratory behaviour, even though it may be the affines whose performative role is to be outrageous.

It is in Steinmann's account of shamanic initiation and pilgrimage that some of the most telling analytical points on the ethnography of narrative resources are made. She warns against treating oral narrations as if they are linearly structured or hold singular frames of meaning. In the "permanent recomposition" of oral memory, narrations are punctuated with gestures and oratorical moments, such that "it is only possible to grasp them in their extreme diversity, lability and fragmentation. Meaning is given ...by the plurality of their officiants who all take their turn to invest in the story their own particular sense..." (p. 376, my translation). Yet she is taken aback by responses from her women friends to her enthusiastic account of the pilgrimage and its enchanted encounters. Their incredulity and mocking of Steinmann's immersion in shamanic imaginings brings her abruptly down to earth, in the realisation she had falsely attributed a non-provisional quality of "belief" to her companions talk of supernatural events. Similar cautions against presumptions of unproblematically shared cultural values come when a woman friend castigates Steinmann for thinking of giving money to a lama who would end up compelling all villagers to participate for no reward (other than merit) in a religious building project (p. 287).

Steinmann's book is immensely rich ethnographically and thought-provoking on many levels. Its terrain is moreover multi-sited, incorporating her fieldwork further to the east. Her description of celebrating Dasain in Limbu territory with appropriately copious imbibations (pp. 173-183) is a truly excellent piece of writing. There is a melancholic thread to the book which speaks reflexively of the "sad fate" of the ethnologist. She argues for

instance, that the professional “neutrality” of the researcher is ultimately a neutralisation by others of the harmful effects of her voluntary non-engagement (p. 289). Her dedication to the task of learning serially from the mutually competitive claimants to authentic knowledge (Tamba, lama and shaman), and her honesty in portraying the relational contexts, furtive cigarettes and culinary endurances entailed in the whole process deserve strong congratulations. If the strengths of the book are in its ethnographic locatedness, a weakness is the lack of an explicit discussion of alternative approaches. Steinmann says the danger of naming demons is to bring them alive. In terms of demonstrating the value of her contribution in relation to other scholarship, this could have been a risk worth taking as important debates remain implicit.

As a pair these publications raise the quality of ethnographic knowledge of the Tamang to a new plateau. They are works that deserve repeat visiting, as they contain innumerable levels of relevance and insight commensurate with the complexity of the lives they describe. As a fictive younger brother of these scholarly sisters I pay respect. *Nanama ta shyu laji, ale tse.*

Das Königreich Mang yul Gung thang, Königtum und Herrschaftsgewalt im Tibet des 13.- 17. Jahrhunderts [The kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang, kingship and political power in 13th to 17th century Tibet], vols. 1 and 2, by Karl-Heinz Everding. Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag 2000. Series Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abteilung I, Band 6 (1,2). ISBN 3-88280-062-3, diagrams, sketch-maps, facsimile of Tibetan texts (8 pages), pp. 748.

Reviewed by Hildegard Diemberger, Cambridge

Karl-Heinz Everding has presented us with an impressive study of the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang. This important and still little-explored polity between Central and Western Tibet shaped the history of the Himalayan regions from the 13th to the 17th century. Located at the gateway between Tibet and Nepal, this kingdom, founded by the descendants of the

Tibetan royal house, became part of a system of shifting alliances and political competition involving the kingdoms of Western Tibet, the Sa skya polity and the rulers of southern and northern La stod.

Even from a quick glance it is clear that this work is not only a comprehensive study of the local history and of the monarchs and their rule, but is also a far-reaching compendium that provides precious information much beyond the immediate scope of the title.

The study is organised in two volumes: “The *Gung thang rgyal rabs* chronicle - edition and translation,” and “Studies on the history of the kingdom”. Volume I is devoted to the study of an important historical text, the *Gung thang rgyal rabs* by Kaḥ thog Rig ‘dzin Tshe dbang nor bu. It is subdivided into three parts: The *Gung thang rgyal rabs*: value and significance - Transliterated text and annotated translation - Facsimile edition. Volume 2 is devoted to the study of the history of the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang, from the earliest historical evidences about the area as part of Zhang zhung conquered by Srong btsan sgam po around 643-44 AD, to the demise of the Gungthang kingdom following its conquest by gTsang pa sde srid in 1620. The volume is subdivided into four parts - Sources - Geography and history of Western Tibet: an overview - The kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang - Appendices.

Everding’s work is a philological *tour de force* that sets out from the translation and discussion of the *Gung thang rgyal rabs* and touches on a number of important research themes and discussions. The sheer size and richness of the work makes it impossible to present its contents systematically within the space of a book review. I shall rather outline some key points and highlight a few aspects that may be particularly useful for scholars who do not usually work within the framework of historical and philological studies and who may fail to give to this work the attention it deserves.

The great significance of the *Gung thang rgyal rabs* had already been noticed some time ago by a number of historians such as Ariane Macdonald/Spainien who drew upon it in her discussion of the *sku bla* and the ancient territorial cults, and David Jackson who discussed it in the framework of his work on Mustang. The importance of the fact that this text is now available in full translation in a western language, enriched by numerous notes that set it in relation to other historical sources and to current Tibetological research, cannot be overestimated.

The full title of the text is “How the genealogy of the God-kings of mNga’ ris smad Mang yul Gung thang originated, the book ‘magic mirror of crystal’”. It was composed in 1749 by Kaḥ thog Rig ‘dzin Tshe dbang nor bu while he was residing in the royal palace of Mustang. The text was compiled on the basis of pre-existing genealogical documents and should be seen as a sequel to Rig ‘dzin Tshe dbang nor bu’s work on the history of the Tibetan

kingdom *Lha btsad po'i gdung rabs*. The *Gung thang rgyal rabs* is the only chronicle that links up the local ruling house with the ancient kings of Tibet. Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu's undertaking seems to reflect the contrast between ancient political greatness, seen as a source of inspiration, and more recent internal and external strife in Tibet. Everding acutely observes that it was conceived in order to provide orientation for government practice according to the Dharma, and aimed at the religious and political leadership of his time. In his words (which I translate from the German) this work was a "literary production aiming at the creation of culturally shaped historical images rather than at a factual and critical account of the history of the kingdom" and had to be seen first of all in the context of its compilation. In order to do so he provides the reader with an exhaustive account of the author's life.

Everding devotes a particularly valuable chapter to Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698-1755). This rNying ma pa master, mentioned by Hugh Richardson as an 18th century "antiquarian" (Richardson 1998: 379-382), is a sort of celebrity among scholars working in very different fields of Tibetan history and culture. This is due both to the multifarious character of his achievements and to the wide range of his travels: he was born in Eastern Tibet; took an interest in Tibet's ancient history and reproduced early inscriptions in Lhasa and in Kongpo (Uebach 1985); took part in the scriptural revival and reproduction of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (Cantwell 2002: 360); was involved in the spread of the doctrine in the Himalayan areas and in the so-called "hidden valleys"; was sent to Nepal to take care of the restoration of the stupas of Bodhnath and Swayambhunath in Kathmandu (Ehrhard 1989: 1-9); was closely connected to Pho lha nas and the Seventh Dalai Lama; and was active as a political mediator in Ladakh (Schwieger 1995: 219-230), just to name a few of his "deeds". Despite his importance, knowledge about Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu has so far been somewhat fragmentary as he has been discussed mainly in the framework of his specific activities. The present comprehensive outline of his life history, year by year, along with a discussion of his biographies and autobiographies is therefore important and useful pieces of work in their own right, beyond the fact that it provides an illuminating introduction to the *Gung thang rgyal rabs*.

With the study of the history of the Kingdom of Gung thang, Everding provides us with a detailed, chronologically oriented account of the history of this area which in many ways seems to have belonged to both Central and Western Tibet. He sees the question of the geographic ascription of Mang yul Gung thang as an underlying theme that pervades his whole study. Without diminishing the importance of borders and geographic classification, I sometimes wondered whether this question could be answered in a context in which we observe multiple affiliations shifting over time, in which we have to infer a lot from scanty evidence and in which we

probably have to question the very notions of territory and boundary. Having said all this, I nevertheless found it extremely useful that the author looked carefully at the political alignments of this kingdom, which oscillated between Western and Central Tibet.

In providing the historical account of the kingdom in vol. 2, Everding weaves together biographies and chronicles so as to create a fascinating narrative that follows individual histories of political and religious personalities, their religious deeds, marriage alliances, and disputes. On the “stage” of local history we see, appearing together with the rulers of Gung thang, outstanding religious figures like Mar lung pa, Rig ‘dzin rGod ldem, Bo dong Pan chen phyogs las rnam rgyal and the Sa skya representatives who played a particularly important part as protectors of Gung thang.

In the captivating historical account we find also a very subtle reconstruction of how narratives concerning the early Tibetan kings were re-enacted and manipulated to fit local contexts and political needs. A remarkable example is the discussion of a 13th century episode: the religious master Mar lung pa used a distorted representation of the 9th century history of Mu tig btsan po and the killing of Zhang dBu ring to find a “karmic” justification for the king of Ya rtse who had executed the local lord, bTsad chung Khab pa. In his argument Mar lung pa “recognised” his contemporaries as reincarnations of the previous historical figures and claimed karmic links between the two situations. Unfortunately Everding’s comment highlighting the efficacy of Mar lung pa’s strategy brings an unexpected dissonance in the account. I quote (translating from the German): “It is important to understand that such a simple way of thinking [*einfache Denkweise*] for the people of this cultural area [*dieses Kulturraumes*], for whom the law of *karma* was an all-life determining reality, was plausible and understandable and that such an interpretation of the events, since it corresponded to the mentality [*Mentalität*] of these people, could not fail to achieve its effect” (p. 380). I think I am not alone in having experienced people of rural Tibet showing a great sense of intrigue, ability to see through political manipulation, contrasting views of events, together with a general awareness of the law of *karma*. (And even more could be said about how people in the western world have been manipulated again and again with the most bizarre readings of history.) It seems that here the narrative was suddenly caught in a series of essentialist representations of Tibetan local “mentality” – an unreflected legacy of some “orientalising” tradition of Tibetan studies? This passage is, however, an isolated case, a simple lapse, but worth mentioning mainly because of the recurrence of the problem in the work of other authors (for a valuable critique by a Tibetan scholar, see Shakya 2002:39-60). Everding’s sophisticated analysis of the voices emerging from the different texts, however, shows a much more perceptive attitude throughout his work, which is always to the highest standards.

A particularly useful aspect of this Tibetological study is the fact that its author did not only rely on well-known historical texts, but also went to great lengths to highlight little-known sources about the area, many of which have appeared only recently thanks to research programmes such as the Nepal Research Centre and the publication of Tibetan texts in China, India and Nepal. An important part of volume 2 is devoted to the outline of rare sources, such as letters and documents from Gung thang, the biography of Chos legs and the biography of Mar lung pa, an extremely important source for the history of western Tibet, to name but a few. In addition, the appendices provide a useful additional collection of overviews and translations of important passages from *Chos legs rnam thar*, *Mar lung rnam thar*, Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu's *lHa btsad po'i gdung rabs*, *Ta dben rtogs brjod* and Padmasambhava's instructions to the kings of Gung thang contained in the prayer *bSam pa lhun grub ma*.

Everding's work of translation is extremely accurate and well-thought through. I may perhaps point out just one intriguing detail. Referring to the maternal ancestry of Bo dong Pan chen phyogs las rnam rgyal in an earlier publication of his, Everding equated his "nephew-line" (*dbon brgyud*) with matrilineal kinship (*matrilineare Verwandtschaft*). Indeed Phyogs las rnam rgyal's mother was the sister of Grags pa rgyal mtshan whose mother was the sister of Byang chub rtse mo, whose mother was the sister of sPang Blo gros brtan pa. However, the notion of *dbon brgyud* seems to highlight the male relatives in these kinship relations, rather than represent a female transmission line. This issue points to the interesting broader question of how we should render Tibetan systems of reckoning kinship in our own western languages and anthropological models.

Finally I wish to underline that this work is a precious basis for further interdisciplinary research and that many of the themes touched on by Everding point to promising avenues of investigation. For example, analysing local royalty and practices of governance; studying the architecture of the royal palace of Gung thang that seems to have been a template for other palaces in the region, like the royal palace of Mustang; mapping the pattern of kinship relations between Gung thang, La stod lho, La stod byang and Sa skya; exploring the political and religious role of the numerous prominent women who appear in the *Gung thang rgyal rabs* and related sources; or even examining the importance of local historical memory in the current revival of traditions are all likely to be very rewarding enterprises.

In short, we should be extremely grateful to Karl-Heinz Everding for having produced an excellent piece of historical and philological work that will prove very useful far beyond the circle of experts in Tibetan history. It is worth considering whether this work, or parts of it, could be translated into English so as to facilitate its access to an international readership and to Tibetan scholars in particular.

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***Sacred Landscapes of the Himalayas*, edited by Niels Gutschow, Axel Michaels, Charles Ramble and Ernst Steinkellner. Wien (Vienna): Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003. ISBN 3-7001-3109-7. Numerous colour & b/w plates, plans and drawings, pp. 212.**

Reviewed by Caroline Humphrey, Cambridge

This is a rather unusual book. It combines two characters that are usually kept separate in publishing: the proceedings of an academic conference, on the one hand, and the beautiful book of stunning colour photographs on the other. If one associates “proceedings” with the often slightly grim collections stuffed with the good and not-so-good papers of the meeting, this book avoids that fate, for the papers are well-chosen and all of them provide insights onto a common theme. As for the “beautiful book”, which is normally provided with patchy captions, inadequate references and/or

mystical expostulations, this volume also bypasses that convention. It is well-referenced, and amply provided not only with photographs but also with plans, maps, diagrams and sketches that directly illustrate the text.

As an academic work, *Sacred Landscapes of the Himalayas* is part of a growing literature that focuses on Himalayan landscape, religion, architecture and art. It has a broad geographical scope, since the sites studied range from Western Tibet, through Himalayan India and Nepal, to Bhutan in the east, and this also means that it encompasses both Buddhist and “Hindu” cultures. The introduction by Axel Michaels sets out the theme of the book – the ways that land and nature are made sacred in Himalayan cultures. Michaels focuses on a theoretical discussion of how sacred space differs from “ordinary” or “scientific” concepts of space. He argues that in mundane thought the distinction between “up” and “down” is simply directional within a homogenous continuous space, whereas in religious thinking “up” belongs to a sacred potency of direction, which is symbolically organised, and felt rather than perceived. Almost all of the articles in the book resonate with this theme. They suggest that for Himalayan peoples significant space and place is primarily religiously conceived, and yet throughout the book scaled maps of villages, rivers and fields, height contours, and measured plans are provided to indicate how the religious spaces relate to what Michaels calls “ordinary” or “scientific” space. Some of the chapters, particularly “A landscape dissolved: households, fields and irrigation in Rinam, Northwest India” by Kim Gutschow and Niels Gutschow, attempt to remove the sacred/profane distinction, in this case by envisaging the village as a confluence of interrelated economic, historical and ritual processes. In this analysis, changing resource management in a situation of scarcity is not separate from, but linked to, religious ideas of sanctification, through negotiations in which traditions are reasserted rather than erased.

It is difficult in a short review to draw attention to all of the interesting themes that emerge from a book as rich as this. Michaels’ introduction mentions the importance of processual activities, such as the walking (especially pilgrimage and circumambulation), building and re-building, numbering, naming and colouring. The iterative effect of these activities draws the ethnographer’s attention to the use of spatial models, such as the three-layered world, the *maṇḍala* or the four cardinal points, which are found at different “levels”. Several of the papers mention a homology of such models with respect of the body, the house and the village, and Dujardin discusses analogous nested levels of spiritual protection. These levels (house, settlement, district, region, etc.) are protected ritually by what Dujardin calls “thresholds”, and he likewise depicts “vertical thresholds” in built constructions and “life-cycle thresholds” in social contexts. It is unclear, however, whether the indigenous term for threshold is used throughout these sequences of “levels” or whether the term has been

extended from one context to others by the anthropologist. One of the best and most thoroughly researched papers in the volume is the chapter by Niels Gutschow and Charles Ramble, "Up and down, inside and outside". This article is meticulous in providing the Tibetan terminology and makes particularly illuminating use of photographs and diagrams. It describes ethnographically a full panoply of spatial markers and protective devices, and succeeds in making clear how these occur in sets of diverse elements (e.g. the set comprising prayer wheel, chörten, poplar tree, gate, and Rigsum Gonpo, a small three-coloured shrine). Direction is particularly important. It is also ambiguous, since chörten face the outer world to protect the inner space, but at times appear turned around to "watch" the site they protect. Between neighbouring communities, the "inside" of one becomes the "outside" of another. Particularly interesting in this chapter is the section describing how a series of rituals in a number of differently valued sites can be organised in such a way as to create a "vertical" axis, as well as the horizontally linked protective networks.

The chapters by John Harrison, "King's castles and sacred squares" and William Sax "Divine kingdoms in the Central Himalayas" move to a more "political" analysis. Sax, in particular, makes a strong argument for a new understanding of "divine kingship", analysing this notion through the examination of sacred places. If we try to sort out the relations of king, gods and kingly gods, he argues, we must remember that territorial control is often predicated on relations to particular sacred places. In a wonderfully comprehensive survey of polities of different scale, from the small district to the "divine kingdom", Sax shows how in each case a specific notion of godly kingship is related to other social forces, such as kinship, economic pursuits and territorial rivalries. The combinations produce specific relations of domination and subordination, but traced through them we find recognisable idioms that enable the reader to make sense of the regional character of politics.

The strength of this book is its ethnographic documentation of the complex and fascinating ways that the peoples of the Himalayas have constructed sacred landscapes. As this review has indicated, there are many common themes between the chapters (though the reader mostly has to make the connections – they are not drawn out by the authors). Meanwhile, the differences between diverse cultures are not glossed over. In fact, the documenting of the distinctive ways particular types of ritual are carried out is very useful, as it provides a register, as it were, of possible variations. The chapter by Ada Gansach, "Expressions of diversity: a comparative study of descriptions of village space in ritual processions in three villages of North West Nepal", is especially helpful in this regard, as it shows clearly how three different types of ritual procession are related to the histories and economies of three valley cultures in one region.

Although the book is not entirely free of editorial and printing glitches, the overwhelming judgment must be that it is splendidly informative and deeply interesting. It will certainly inspire further research.

***Histoire et Devenir des Paysages en Himalaya. Représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh* edited by Joëlle Smadja. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2003. ISBN 2-271-06000-1, ISSN 1269-701X, 66 figures, 60 photographs, 13 tables, 25 boxes, 646 pp.**

Reviewed by Hermann Kreutzmann, Erlangen

Whenever in recent years the relationship between man and his environment in the mountains has been discussed certain hypotheses, concepts and theories have been put forward, in the Himalayan context in particular. In the final quarter of the 20th century several Western scholars predicted that demographic growth would lead to destruction of natural resources, and projected a vicious circle of processes that would result in an early end to Himalayan nature and societies before the new millennium began. So far the Himalayas have survived, and the doomsday scenario was questioned by scientists from various disciplines, ushering in a controversial debate on what came to be called the "Himalayan Dilemma" (so the title of a publication by Jack Ives and Bruno Messerli in 1989). It soon became clear that the problem had not solely to do with the mountains and their resources, with the population and its utilization strategies, but also with certain discrepancies between the orientations of academic research on the one hand and development practice on the other. Were the appropriate questions asked? Were the adequate methods applied? And how much scope was provided for contradicting interpretations of empirical evidence? From the viewpoint of a natural science-driven approach, improvements in all these realms were required. A further drawback lay in the fact that although the mountain population was identified as the chief actor in problem-solving, little attention was devoted to the need of consulting it, investigating its role or soliciting its participation. Thus, the chances of

human survival in general and culture in particular were not addressed adequately. The mutual bias that prevailed between the protagonists of research and practice on the one hand, and the cleft between the theoretical approaches of the natural and social sciences on the other proved to be major obstacles in the debate on how to grasp the man-environment relationship in its entirety and how to take account of the complexity of Himalayan life. Since then, as a consequence of a paradigm shift, the need for holistic approaches has been propagated by development practitioners and earth systems researchers. At the same time, social sciences have experienced a “cultural turn” in that they now devote more attention to action-oriented and qualitative approaches. Discourses of history and memory, perception and construction of environment, socio-cultural spheres, imagined communities, and hybrid identities – these are just a few keywords in recent debates that have opened up new perspectives for old questions about the living conditions, culture and society in Himalayan environments.

It is in this context that we have to appreciate the book edited by Joëlle Smadja, which as a result of recent empirical research is a fresh contribution to the ongoing debate. In her introduction, Smadja begins straightforwardly with reflections about the state of dominant knowledge systems, and the issues of uncertainty and complexity. Not surprisingly then, the first box in the book recapitulates the so-called “Theory of Himalayan Environmental Land Degradation”, the critique of which was central to the “Himalayan Dilemma”. This is only the initial reference point for the argument that a time-space approach is required, which allows us to take account of cultural factors and thus enhances an understanding of landscapes in the wider sense of the term. As emerges from the introductory chapter, time and space are indeed the main dimensions of investigation. Both are constantly referred to throughout the book and remind us of the fact that cultural landscape has always been a result of human activity, including an appropriation of space over long periods of time. Reading of landscape (*lecture de paysage*) is the key issue in this book, and in their attempt at understanding environment as a “text”, the authors draw on data collected among, and interpreted by, informants from different regions and different language groups. Local knowledge, fieldwork in a number of case study areas, as well as published and archival sources provide the basis for interpretation.

Evidently, such a task could not have been carried out by a single researcher. Joëlle Smadja is supported by a team of twenty contributors to the volume, all of them more or less closely affiliated with the CNRS Himalayan Research Group in Paris/Villejuif (six of the co-authors are permanent staff members of the “UPR 299, Milieux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya”). The case study areas have been selected according to the research activities of the CNRS team during the past few decades. Thus, the

middle and lower mountains of Nepal, especially the Salme region as the key area of CNRS and the editor's activities, along with Ladakh where Valérie Labbal and Pascale Dollfus conducted fruitful long-term field research, are prominently represented. This spatial restriction of focus is important to bear in mind, all the more so since a similar concentration on certain regions can also be observed in some other publications.

The introductory chapter identifies the key themes, such as frame conditions and their relationship of environmental destabilisation and demographic growth. The perception and representation of environments are highlighted, along with the historical development of land use, land cover change, and resource management. Options and risks in present-day usage of environment are addressed from the theoretical perspective of the current international debate.

The main body of the book is organized in four parts, the first of which deals with the frame conditions of environment and population. In chapter 1, Joëlle Smadja discusses geographical categories and units of measurement, and addresses issues, such as the structural properties of slopes, landscape profiles, cultivated land in general and terraced fields in particular – all examined on different scale levels. A new classification of landscape units is proposed, and informative tables with translations from the vernacular languages together with cross-references recapitulate some of the findings. Pascale Dollfus and Valérie Labbal interpret, in chapter 2, the attribution of certain properties to landscape elements in Ladakh, and illustrate it by photographs and drawings. Soil classification and the local taxonomy of land utilization are summarized in a table. Chapter 3 by Olivier Dollfus and Monique Fort focuses on the natural landscape and the process of landscape transformation in Nepal. Pairs of matched photographs stemming from different periods of time show the transformation at work on steep slopes and flat cones. The second objective of the first part of the book is dealt with in more detail by Philippe Ramirez who analyses statistical information about population growth and density in a spatial context and with reference to agricultural and some other economic activities in Nepal.

The second part of the book, devoted to the perception and representation of environment, begins with a lucid chapter by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine on the exegesis (*exegèse*) and appropriation of landscape in some local contexts of Nepal. It demonstrates the multi-dimensionality of space as perceived in emotional and biological settings, embedded in religious worldviews, defined by territorial demarcations, and subject to transformations. The discussion of the interconnections between sanctity and worldly power as manifest in the ordering of space opens up new venues for our understanding of “sacred geographies”. Her major findings of a reading of the landscape of the village of Salme in Central Nepal are presented by Joëlle Smadja in chapter 6. She treats settlement strategies

and the utilization of space by the Tamang population as processes of transformation, and points out that permanent dwellers operate filial settlements, requiring a high degree of seasonal mobility. In addition, the continuous appropriation of space and the expansion of settlements result in a fluctuation in the composition of household members. The dependence on, and the damages caused by, water are part of local livelihoods and constitute a focus in certain rituals concerned with the village territory. In chapter 7, Pascale Dollfus and Valérie Labbal contribute samples of toponyms collected in their fieldwork areas in Ladakh (Hemis-shukpa-chan and Sabu, respectively), while chapter 8, by Lucile Viroulaud, gives an interesting account of the diverging socio-religious contexts of landownership among Christians and Hindus in a Magar village of Tanahun district.

The third part of the book is devoted to historical studies of land use and resource management. In chapter 9, Pascal Dollfus, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Olivia Aubriot investigate the persistence of human activities in Himalayan landscape in the light of evidence provided by archaeology, mythology, epic and historiographical sources from Nepal and Ladakh. The issues of famine, of agricultural innovations, including the introduction and impact of new varieties of plants, stand in the foreground. Drawing on official documents from the 18th and 19th centuries, in chapter 10, Philippe Ramirez undertakes an attempt to explain the background of the estimation the Nepalese administration fostered for forests in general and certain kinds of trees in particular. In chapter 11, Bruno Muller gives an outline of legal history in examining the development of traditional rights and privileges concerning the utilization of forests and pasture lands in Nepal. Chapter 12, jointly authored by Blandine Ripert, Isabelle Sacareau and Stéphanie Tawa Lama, analyses resource management and environmental policies of the Nepalese State since 1950. The entire agenda of international development practice that has been applied in the “Himalayan laboratory” of Nepal – including the “Himalayan ecological crisis”, the “Himalayan dilemma”, and even buzzword issues, such as “sustainable development”, “nature protection”, “NGO’s”, etc. – are critically scrutinized in a tour de force.

The fourth and final part of the book bears the title “Local practices: between options and constraints”. In chapter 13, Satya Shrestha (she and Pramod Khakurel are the only contributors hailing from the Himalayas) investigates the link between environmental protection and pauperisation in a case study of a community on the southern border of Rara National Park in Western Nepal. Shrestha provides us with a blueprint approach to the problem of nature protection in a specific instance where external agents interfere in local practices. The same topic is taken up, in chapter 14, by Isabelle Sacareau who shows how the inhabitants of the Annapurna Conservation Area have responded to landscape changes over time. In chapter 15, Blandine Ripert examines the effects the change of

landownership rights has exerted on privatisation and communal utilization of land in the local context of Salme, and concludes that both the variety of simultaneously applicable rules and the availability of different options must be understood against the background of a legal pluralism. Gérard Toffin contributes a chapter on the practices and social organization of the Balami, wood cutters who have been increasingly deprived of their access to the forests on the southern precincts of the Kathmandu Valley. This is followed by a further case study of a region in the lower hills of the Mahabharat range in Palpa district where “*bocage*-type of landscapes”, reminiscent of France, are to be found. In this chapter 17, Tristan Bruslé, Monique Fort and Joëlle Smadja focus on landscape dynamics as shown, among other things, by the comparative evaluation of photographs from 1922, 1932 and 1997. Here again, local practices stand in the foreground. As regards the fields enclosed by stone walls, the findings contrast with what is revealed by the rest of the case studies in the book.

The concluding chapter by Joëlle Smadja articulates some reflections on the present state of environments and points out that all researchers are confronted with the existence of “artificial landscapes” and the persistence of change. She also highlights the temptation for political actors to exploit natural resources in remote areas, examines the importance of local initiatives to planting trees outside the forest proper as a panacea, and addresses some further issues, such as the role of a global, but unequally structured information society, the access to knowledge and the chances of participation by the local population. In concluding, Smadja raises the question of what is at stake: the protection of the environment against man or the protection of man against being deprived of his resources?

It goes without saying that for reasons of space, the present reviewer cannot do justice to this book with its mass of detailed information based on empirical evidence. Some readers might miss references to a host of further studies relevant to the subject, as well as certain methods and concepts, the recourse to which would have perhaps been helpful. Yet this a matter of personal preference. What weighs more is that its publication in French is unlikely to enhance the accessibility of *Histoire et devenir* to a wider readership. Who in Nepal and India will be in a position to benefit from it? Be that as it may, Joëlle Smadja is to be congratulated on persuading her co-authors to participate in the project, and on editing this substantial volume which amply demonstrates how rewarding the application of new perspectives and multi-disciplinary approaches can be.

***Frauen und Feen. Entwicklung und Wandel einer Beziehung. (Besessenheit in Yasin/Nordpakistan)* by Maria Marhoffer-Wolff. Culture Area Karakorum Scientific Studies. Köln (Cologne): Rüdiger Köppe Verlag 2002. ISBN 3-89645-157-X, 1 map, 3 diagrams, pp. 401.**

Reviewed by Elisabeth Schömbucher, Heidelberg

Frauen und Feen (Women and Fairies) is an ethnography of women's living conditions and their states of possession in the Yasin valley in Northern Pakistan. As a member of the interdisciplinary research project *Culture Area Karakorum* (Kulturraum Karakorum), funded by the German Research Council, the author was interested in indigenous medical knowledge systems and local concepts of illness. When she began her fieldwork in 1989, concentrating on birth control and fertility problems among women, she soon came across young women who were possessed by fairies. Not unlike some other anthropologists doing fieldwork in South Asia, she was immediately fascinated by the object of her observation and consequently embarked on a "long and difficult process of clarification and differentiation" (p. 13). The results of her research were first submitted as a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Tübingen in 1996.

The Yasin Valley in the Northern Areas of Pakistan (northeast of the larger Chitral Valley) is part of the Eastern Hindukush. Its population is rather heterogenous in terms of religion and language. In the southern part of the Valley, Khowar, the language of neighbouring Chitral, predominates, whereas in the northern part, the Yasin dialect of Burushaski is spoken. The southern part is inhabited by a minority of Sunnite Muslims, the northern part by Ismailites who form the majority of the population of Yasin.

After a brief description of her research methods (visiting various settlements in the Yasin Valley, accompanied by a male research assistant while living in the house of a local family), the author introduces the reader to the living conditions of women, such as gender-specific socialization (chapter 2), seclusion and marriage (chapter 3) and childlessness (chapter 4). Living as a new bride in the house of her in-laws with a husband who is often absent for long periods is surely the most difficult stage in the life cycle of a woman. This is the time when young women come into contact with fairies, and are likely to be possessed by them. One is reminded immediately of I.M. Lewis's *Ecstatic Religion* and his concept of "peripheral possession", which relates the possession of young women to their social situation as oppressed brides. Surprisingly, however, Marhoffer-Wolff makes no attempt to "explain" possession, but simply "demonstrates" (p. 100) how some of the strongest, most self-confident and persistent of these Muslim women, who

are usually represented as oppressed and passive, are able to shape their conditions of living once they have become associated with the fairies.

In order to “demonstrate” this specific form of possession, Marhoffer-Wolff begins by describing the realm of the fairies (chapters 6 – 8). The fairies, known by the Persian term *parí*, dwell in the higher regions of the mountains, an area considered ritually pure in contrast to human settlements, which are regarded as impure. The *parís* indulge in great luxury, with golden palaces and delicious food (which, however, they do not eat). *París* always take young fairy boys along with them on their journeys to the precincts of human settlements. If a fairy boy falls in love with a beautiful young woman among the humans and wants to marry her, the fairies take her with them to the fairy-world, which must seem a paradise to any human being. Among the reasons why the *parís* take young women into their world, the people of Yasin point out that freshly married young daughters-in-law are in a state of extreme purity and are also attractive, because they wear beautiful clothes, and take special pains with their appearance. It deserves particular emphasis that women of Yasin regard the love marriage with a fairy boy as an ideal union, quite in contrast to the customarily arranged marriage between human partners.

Chapter 9 is devoted to the relationship between a young woman and a *parí*-boy. A woman who has contacts with a *parí* is called a *mómalas*, literally ‘the woman who is afraid’. For the young woman this is a frightening experience, and she is forbidden by the *parís* to tell anyone about her visits to their world. Her family at home finds her behaviour increasingly peculiar. She sleeps a lot, seems to be depressed, and cannot, or does not want to, work. A healer is summoned to find out whether a *parí* is really responsible, or whether the girl is simply pretending to be in contact with fairies. From chapters 10 through 12, the author concentrates on the specialists for the treatment of possession, the *xalífa*. *Xalífa* are religious functionaries in the Ismaili community, and some of them are famed for their extraordinary ability to deal with *parís*. Exorcisms (*arzahím*) are family affairs, in which only the males are permitted to participate. Women would be too weak to risk the temptations of the *parí* and thus would be in danger of becoming possessed by them.

In most cases the *parí* can be expelled from the young women after a number of elaborate and more or less costly exorcising rituals, but sometimes the *parí* won’t consent to leave the woman. In such cases people say that the *parí*-boy has already married the girl and that further attempts at exorcism would jeopardize her health. Instead, contact with the *parí* is cultivated in an extensive process of transformation in which the *mómalas* and her family learn to deal with the situation. The *parís* come regularly on specified days and, through their *mómalas*, distribute prophecies for people who ask them for advice (chapter 13). As a matter of fact, only a few *mómalas* hand out prophecies for fear of causing conflicts among the

persons concerned and their relatives and neighbours. Quite in contrast to other spirit media in South Asia, *mómalas* do not gain in experience in old age; instead, they lose their power as they grow older. Due to their increasing impurity and decreasing attractiveness, they are finally abandoned by the fairies, who are attracted solely by young girls (chapter 16).

The author's cautious approach to the phenomenon of possession in Yasin, namely by depicting attitudes towards, and discourses on *mómalas*, is reflected in chapter 17. It is only here, at the end of her book, that she attempts to define the term *mómalas*. And in this way she is able to avoid the evocation of undesirable associations the reader undoubtedly would have had with terms such as "possession" and "shamanism".

Marhoffer-Wolff's book cannot be read quickly, inasmuch as it elaborates step by step the *mómalas* and the indigenous conceptions about their contact with the fairy world. Nevertheless, the reader's patience is rewarded in the end. The book offers insights which reveal parallels with other possession cults in South Asia. The author shows the lengthy process of dealing with fairies once they have entered into contact with human beings. Not only the person possessed, but her family as well must get acquainted with the new situation and go through long-term negotiations to decide whether the fairies could be exorcised or whether the relation with them should be encouraged and cultivated. Marhoffer-Wolff also demonstrates that possession cannot simply be categorized as an illness, but might very well develop into a proficiency in ecstatic techniques, as shown for instance by Gananath Obeyesekere in his famous *Medusa's Hair*. Yet whereas in most other areas in South Asia (as, for instance, in possession cults among South Indian fishermen, studied by the present reviewer), women gain ecstatic expertise over the years, in the Yasin Valley the opposite development takes place: aging women there gradually lose their ecstatic abilities, which appears to be a consequence of their gradual loss of ritual purity, thus making them increasingly less attractive to the fairies. The phenomenon might be better understood against the background of the culture-specific spatial orientation in which the sphere of high altitude, where the fairies dwell, is associated with the highest degree of ritual purity.

To put it briefly, the author's method of discussing indigenous world views on possession in Yasin without any recourse to sociological or psychological explanations provides an array of insights which would have been lost, had she clung to the current anthropological approaches. Her "multi-perspective approach", taking into consideration both the female perspective of the *mómalas* and the male perspective of the *xalífa*, not only meets an important methodological demand in anthropology, but also reveals the existence of conflicting discourses on the phenomenon. Marhoffer-Wolff shows, among other things, that even in a male-dominated society, as is the case in the Yasin Valley, women have been agents resisting

male efforts to “cure” them from their “fairy illness” for a considerable period of time. Contrary to what has been predicted by some ethnographers (cf., e.g., Karl Jettmar *et al.*: *Die Religionen des Hindukush*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1975), the pre-Islamic belief in fairies in northern Pakistan is far from being threatened by extinction. Instead, it persists as a kind of counter-discourse within the dominant Islamic society.

***Aspects of Migration and Mobility in Nepal* edited by Susanne von der Heide and Thomas Hoffmann. Series Man and Environment No. 2. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2001. ISBN 99933-0-361-5, 242 pp.**

Reviewed by Susan Thieme, Zurich

This second contribution to the series Man and Environment shows once more that people in Nepal are increasingly diversifying their livelihood strategies, using migration as one of them. The book contains studies of selected examples covering the high mountain region of Nepal, its central hill region and the Terai. The authors explain the various dimensions of migration and mobility and their impact. The list of contributors provides an interesting mix of Nepalese and non-Nepalese authors, including representatives from Nepali politics, international organisations and universities.

After a foreword by Hon. C. Pd. Bastola, the first part of the book includes two papers on migration in general. M. Schneller draws attention to the impact of migration on the stability of the international political system. Unfortunately, he does not illustrate his theses with Nepali example. Based on an impressive amount of tables and figures, H. Gurung provides a quantitative analysis of domestic and international migration trends in Nepal since 1950. He also interprets the Population Census of 1991 in anticipation of the results of the Census of 2001, which was unfortunately released shortly after the publication of this book, and summarizes the results as follows: “It is apparent that development interventions of the last four decades have had only a marginal impact in highland Nepal. This explains the strong propensity for highlanders to migrate to other regions”

(p. 38). This is somewhat unsatisfactory, and a more differentiated analysis of the doubtless very detailed data would have been welcome.

The main body of the book consists of eight case studies dealing with the socio-economic and socio-cultural change brought about by migration and mobility.

P. Tulachan stresses the fact that migration and trade both to India and within Nepal is the main livelihood strategy of the Lobas of Lo Monthang besides agriculture and animal husbandry. S. von der Heide examines some aspects of migration, mobility and the democracy movement among the Thakalis, along with the effects of cultural change and the danger of cultural loss. The dynamics of migration and dependency with respect to external and internal factors are exemplified by T. Hoffmann's study of the Solu-Khumbu District of eastern Nepal where patterns of emigration have fundamentally changed twice. For more than a century, Darjeeling was the main economic and immigration centre of the Eastern Himalayas. Later, the north-east of the Indian subcontinent attracted labour migrants. Since the 1970s, Kathmandu, Khumbu, and increasingly some foreign countries, apart from India, have replaced the former destinations – a development which has mainly been conditioned by tourism making jobs available to migrants as porters, cooks and tourist guides.

The question of who is really profiting from the positive aspects of migration is raised by M. Schroll. He takes as an example the off-farm employment and temporary migration in a village near Pokhara in the Kaski District, and concludes that certain assets, such as land and cattle or special skills, are required in order to benefit from, or participate successfully in, migration. Although traditional caste-related labour divisions are disappearing, lower castes are still disadvantaged by their economic and social positions. This is also reflected by patterns of migration, which show that lower castes are not benefiting from migration in a way similar to the higher castes.

The contribution by N. Shrestha and D. Conway sketches the "shadowy existence" of a migrant's wife in the hill district of Lamjung and probably exemplifies stories of countless other hill women. It sheds light more on the domestic effects and the emotional orientation than on the economic consequences. A historical analysis of Pahariya migration to the Tharus' settlement area in the inner Terai is given by U. Müller-Böker. She shows how the immigration of other ethnic groups contributed to the development of Chitawan from its former marginal role as "fever hell" to becoming the melting pot of Nepal. Still, the relationship between the Tharus and immigrated Pahariyas remains strained.

R. R. Regmi elucidates the ongoing process of social change among the Dhimal, generated by political changes, infrastructure projects and immigration of other groups to the Terai. The Dhimal themselves are

increasingly emigrating from their home region, and this is not solely conditioned by economic "push factors". At the same time, they are adapting traditional institutions to fulfil needs, as examples of family planning or the use of modern medicine show. The collection of essays concludes with a paper by W. Ellingsen. He introduces the term "supported farming system" to point to the significance of migration for rural development in the humid upland farming system of Nepal in two Gurung villages. Here the functioning of the farming system relies crucially on cash income from migration which finances the local labour market and thus subsidizes rural production.

Notwithstanding the foreword by Hon. C. Pd. Bastola, the book would have benefited from a more penetrating introduction by the editors. Also, one would have liked to see more information about the recruitment of the contributors and a statement as to whom the book intends to address. One of the editors, S. von der Heide, points out in the preface that the book intends to provide some research reports that otherwise would not have been easily accessible for the public, and assures the reader that the contributions do take into account the results of recent studies. The data of the articles is based on sources from the mid-1980s till end of 1990s. Although these data remain still valuable and interesting, the reader will be disappointed by the lack of references on recent migration research. For example, Gurung 2001, Graner 2001, Seddon et al. 2001, Yamanaka 2000, Cameron et al. 1998, Seddon et al. 1998, etc. could have been discussed at least in the editors' preface, written in December 2001. In some papers, e.g. in P. Tulachan's or T. Hoffmann's, the references are not congruent with those in the bibliography at the end of the volume, and some of the utterly detailed tables, maps and diagrams are overloaded with information and thus difficult to read. On the whole, the book lacks the editorial care that would have ensured that all contributions be based more firmly on theory, be provided with clear-cut conclusions, and apply a consistent system of citation referencing.

The strength of the essays lies in the very detailed descriptions and will be of relevance to anyone interested in migration and Nepal.

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***Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the van Manen Collection* by Heleen Plaisier. Kern Institute Miscellanea 11. Leiden: Kern Institute 2003. ISBN: 90-9017656-X, paperback, 72 facsimiles, price: €30, 260 pp.**

Reviewed by Mark Turin, Ithaca

This catalogue offers a detailed description of the 182 Lepcha manuscripts in the van Manen Collection, presently kept in the library of the Kern Institute of Leiden University. Johan van Manen (1877-1943), a now largely forgotten Dutch scholar, was involved in scientific exploration throughout his professional life and collected a wealth of material pertaining to Tibetology and Oriental Studies. For 16 years he served as General Secretary of the (later Royal) Asiatic Society of Bengal, and has been referred to as the “founder of Tibetology in the Netherlands” by Professor Yang Enhong (*IIAS Newsletter*, No. 19). This collection of manuscripts written in the Lepcha language is by far the largest of its kind in the world. By identifying these manuscripts, and describing their contents and external features, this catalogue renders a unique collection accessible to the wider public.

Lepcha is an endangered language of the Tibeto-Burman language family, and is spoken by upwards of 50,000 people in Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal in India, the Ilam district of Nepal and in

south-western Bhutan. Unlike most other tribal languages spoken in the Himalayas, the Lepcha people have their own indigenous script. The Lepcha people call themselves *Róng* or *Róngkup*, ‘children of the *Róng*’, or *Mútuncí Róngkup Rumkup*, ‘children of the *Róng* and of God’, in full, and they refer to their language as *Róng-ríng*.

According to Lepcha tradition, the script was invented by the Lepcha scholar Thikúng Men Salóng, believed to be a contemporary of the patron saint of Sikkim, Lama Lhatsün Chenpo (also known as Lhatsün Namkha Jimi, 1597-1654). The codification of the written language was probably motivated by the religious activities of Buddhist missionaries. The Lepcha literary tradition can be dated back to the eighteenth century, when the Lepcha script was devised during the reign of the third chögel of Sikkim, Châdo 'Namgä' (1700-1716).

The first twenty pages of the catalogue focus on fonts, Lepcha orthography and the Lepcha alphabet, revealing the academic background of the author, Heleen Plaisier, who has been investigating the language and culture of the Lepchas since 1994. The first two chapters provide a particularly useful and level-headed overview of the competing orthographic conventions and linguistic theories held by the various scholars who have studied Lepcha, both indigenous and foreign.

The description of the catalogue itself opens with a brief introduction to the history of Lepcha literature and an overview of the contents of the different texts in the collection, followed by a commentary on the physical features of the manuscripts and related items in the van Manen Collection. These helpful schematic sketches are all that exist for the majority of the texts in the collection, thus providing an invaluable point of departure for further scholarship. Plaisier offers meticulous descriptions of the structural features of manuscripts, including helpful information on their shape and form, remarks on the paper and ink used, the identification of scribes and the date of transcription, the physical condition of the manuscript and supplementary data on illustrations and labels. In the final portion of the book, comprised of five appendices, the author provides the reader with a comprehensive list of additional works in Lepcha in the London, Vienna and Gangtok collections.

Plaisier makes an important point regarding the content of the textual corpus of the collection, demonstrating how the “Tibetan influence on Lepcha literature has been much overemphasized”:

Lepcha literature has hardly been studied at all, yet it is generally believed that an indigenous Lepcha literature does not exist. This view is based on the fact that many written Lepcha texts are translations, or rather adaptations, of Tibetan Buddhist works. (2003: 37).

Plaisier’s point is welcome: Himalayan ethnic groups and their languages and cultures are all too often portrayed as being deviant or

archaic branches of one of the “great” traditions to the north and south, and not as viable cultural entities in their own right. Particularly colourful and intriguing Lepcha tales documented in the manuscripts include “The Legend of the Ants” (Number 15), a popular story about the interactions of a holy man and an insect, and “The Legendary Origin of Tobacco” (Number 16) which deals with the demonic origin of tobacco and the negative consequences which follow from its use and abuse.

In conclusion, the *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts* is both beautifully produced and affordable, a combination sadly uncommon in academic publications. The author must also be commended for the manner in which she effortlessly incorporates the Lepcha script alongside her chosen transliteration system, with the result that each salient Lepcha name or term is provided in a graceful Lepcha font. This superb catalogue can be ordered online from IndexBooks: www.indexbooks.net.

***Gespräche mit einem Brahmanen im Kumaon-Himālaya: Diskursanalytische Transkripte und annotierender ethnographischer Kommentar* by Ulrich Oberdiek. Ethnologie 3. Münster, etc.: Lit. Verlag 2002.**

Reviewed by Claus Peter Zoller, Heidelberg

The book is a collection of transcripts of interviews that the author recorded with a brahmin from the Kumaon-Himālayas. The subjects discussed by the two neither focus on Kumaon nor do they reveal new, hitherto unknown information about India. They do present a fairly comprehensive overview of the “typical worldview” of an educated male member of the Indian middle class. Those who have spent some time in India will surely have frequent “flashbacks” when reading through topics such like the caste system, mythology, national characters, arts, etc.

The theoretical approach – not to deliver readymade products of field research but instead rather seeking to illustrate and comment on the encounter between the researcher and his partner, and on the inequalities and conflicts such encounters frequently entail – is in line with current ethnographic practice. Even though it was certainly helpful to move away from an all – too – complacent attitude of “the people of... say, they

believe...”, and give the others more space to represent themselves, this approach, too, has its problems.

- As there can be only one “foreground”, extensive comments and annotations put other parts of the record into the background. Although the author expresses his hope (p. 36) that the relation with his partner was not too asymmetric, the presented transcripts do become asymmetric due to the extensive comments and annotations exclusively produced by the author. The asymmetry, however, is twofold: comments and explanations are offered not only as supplements to apparently fragmentary statements of the Indian partner, but also with regard to the presumed incomplete background knowledge of the prospective readers. The asymmetry between author and partner is intensified by addressing the partner as “you” in the dialogues and as “he, Pandey” (or “Herr Pandey”) in the comments (where the prospective readers are now the “you”), and by numerous corrections of information given by the partner. All this reinforces the central position of the author in a way that is probably not intended by him.
- The introduction to this book – again in line with other ethnographic literature – shows a decided concern for ethics, morals, power and exploitation, etc. However, as usual, the issue is discussed only with regard to the behaviour of the researcher and not of the researched. Moreover, it is not continued in the post-field research phase when the researcher returns to his own campus and the process of re-contextualization of the field data begins.

The value of this book lies not in the content of the subjects discussed (which is often trivial) but in its formal structure. It clearly separates the perspectives of interviewer and interviewed with regard to India (and many other topics), and thus invites the reader to learn something not only about the worldview of an educated representative of the Indian middle class, but also about Oberdiek’s own picture of India as reflected by his numerous comments and annotations.

Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the managing editor, Prof. William Sax. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

We would prefer that you send us both "hard" and electronic copy of your contribution, formatted in Microsoft Word. Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the "Harvard" format.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.L. 1988. A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya. *Kailash* 6 (2): 121-83.

Smith, B.C. 1992. Looking for ostriches. In *Research Methodologies for the Himalayas*, edited by J. Pande, pp. 110-145. Shimla: Mountain Publishers.

Use of quotation marks:

Use **double quotation marks** (" ") for quotations of any kind, and for so-called "epistemological distancing".

Use **single quotation marks** (' ') for quotations within quotations and semantic glosses, including literal renderings of indigenous terms.

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