

# THE NEPALESE STATE AND GORAKHNATHI YOGIS: THE CASE OF THE FORMER KINGDOMS OF DANG VALLEY: 18-19TH CENTURIES

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## Introduction

Kings and Yogis, and kingdoms and monasteries have been often connected. Through a process of common conquest of new territories and mutual legitimation, magico-spiritual and temporal powers have collaborated. This has been the case in some western Himalayan kingdoms – in Gorkha and also in the Dang-Deokhuri Valley. The process lent to a gradual hinduization of remote areas. This had political consequences as fostering hinduization also promotes the Hindu concept of kingship, allowing political use to be made of the religious status of the monastery.

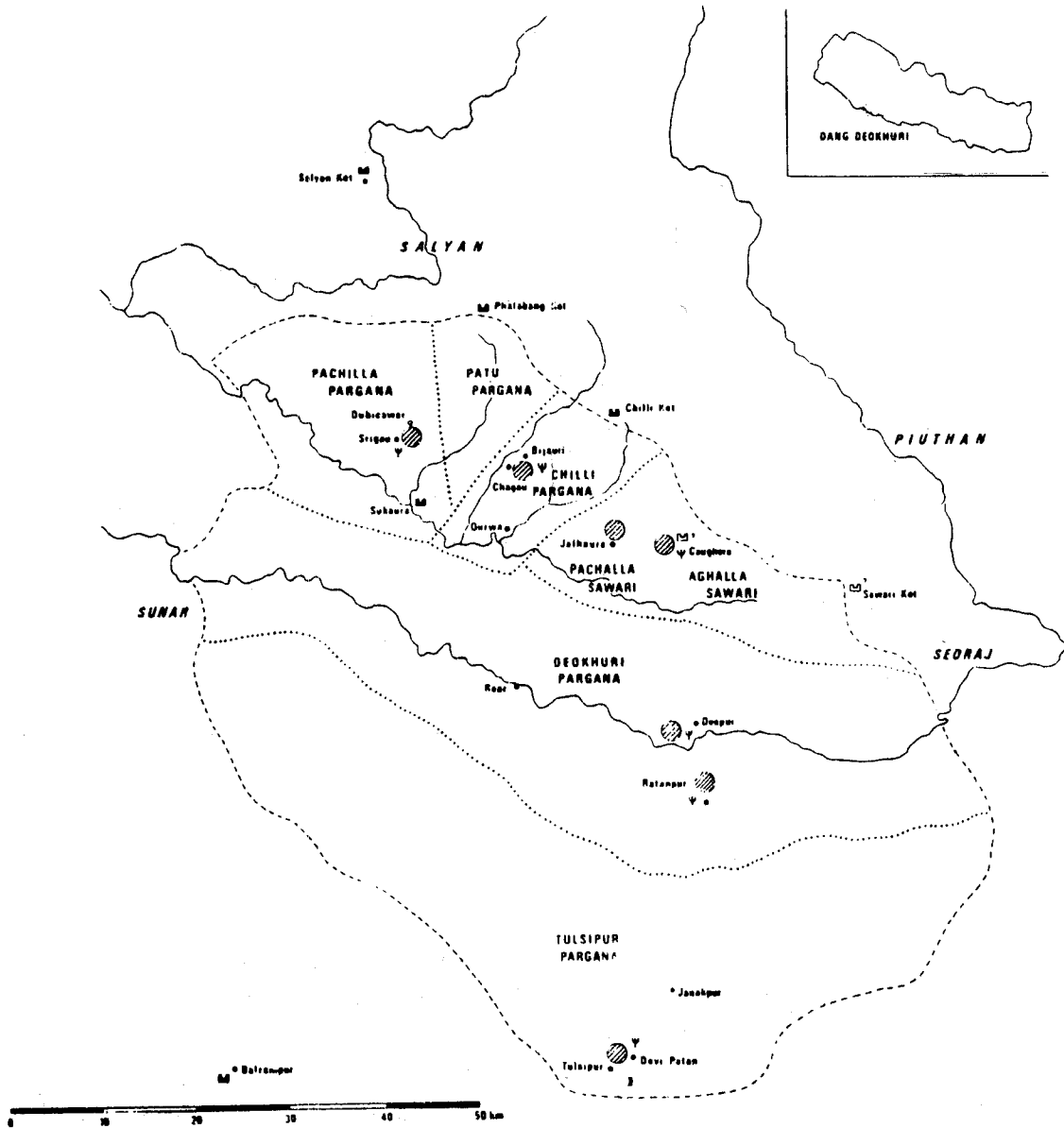
The aim of this article is to get a glimpse through documents of the previous last century of the sometimes conflicting relationships between royal powers and monasteries and to show the permanency of this mode of relationship, despite changing political conditions.

Prior to the conquest by the Gorkha troops in 1786, the territory of the Dang Valley was divided among small kingdoms: Dang and Chilli in the valley itself, Sallyan and Phalabang in the hills.

This valley is situated in the southwest of Nepal in the Inner Terai, bordered by the Mahabharat Lekh on the northern side and the Siwalik on the southern. Many rivers, swelling suddenly during the monsoon, run through the valley, which was covered with forest until the nineteenth century and infested by malaria up to the mid-twentieth. South of Dang, the valley of Deukhuri is part of the administrative and social unity of Dang. This Deukhuri Valley, although more fertile, has been cleared lately, and documents show that the limits of allotted tracts of land were never very precise, thus subject to encroachment and contestation in this jungle landscape. Separated from the hills of central Nepal by the Mahabharat Lekh, Dang, like the whole of Terai, was culturally very much related to North India and the original inhabitants of Dang, the Tharus, reside on both sides of the border. The connection with hill Nepal slowly strengthened after the annexion of the previously independent kingdom by Prithvi

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- — — — — Approximate limits of Dang the Kingdom
- ..... Limits of Pargana
- PATU Names of Pargana
- Villages
- Forts
- Ψ Yogi temples
- ▨ Guthi Land

*Map of the Dang Kingdom in the beginning of the 19th century  
[From G. Krauskopff, 1989: 43]*

Narayan's successor in 1986. As part of the Indian influence, the Gorakhanthi ascetics settled in the valley and established temples and monasteries. Among them, the monastery of Caughera, founded by the legendary Siddha Ratannath, grew preeminent. The relationships between the monastery and the king was a dominant feature of the former Dang *rajya*, as also for Chilli and Phalabang, and it continued after the Gorkha conquest.

I will focus on the relationship of the monastery with the political power in the changing conditions of that time. My main points will be:

- a brief introduction on the Kanphata Yogi or Gorakhnathi sect,
- a summary of the legend of foundation of the monastery in its relation to kingship,
- some data on the history of the Dang, Chilli and Phalabang *rajyas*, mainly from the viewpoint of the monastery,
- the relationships between the monastery and the Nepalese State as included in the *guthi* system,
- the *guthi* as the delegation by the king of a part of his sovereignty,
- the conflicts with collectors or with the State regarding fiscal matters,
- the conflicts regarding traditions: problems of purity,
- the State as an arbitrator.

### The Gorakhnathis or Kanphata Yogis

The sect of the Kanphata Yogis was founded around the eleventh century in the line of the last saiva tantricised movements. Its founder, Goraknath, created an organisation of celibate ascetics. Their aim was to attain immortality through the practise of Hatha Yoga. The liberation, *moksa*, was less the attainment of an undifferentiated state, unqualified absolute, than the state of Sivahood understood as a state of bodily perfection and mastership of natural processes and control over the universe. Thus the quest of *siddhis*, (powers), which in "purer", more brahmanized conceptions of asceticism are subordinate to the ultimate goal of liberation, became among the Yogis their main goal (of. Dasgupta 1976; Briggs 1938; Banerjee 1962). And they were soon well known for their magical abilities. As I have shown in previous articles (Bouillier 1986, 1989, 1991), this magical orientation makes the Yogis the best auxiliaries to a conquering power, and many legends, especially in Himalayan kingdoms, associate them to the foundation of new princely states. These legendary foundations had their prolongations in many Saiva cults where the Kanphatas are the officiating priests of the palace temples dedicated to Goraknath or any local Nath, Bhairav and the Devi.

Many of these Yogis married, and we now have an important community of *gharbari*, householder Yogis, who remain in one way or another related to

their ancient status of ascetics. And most of the pujaris of the temples related to palaces, like the Gorkhnath's cave temple in Gorkha, are married and part of the Yogi caste. This is not the case in Dang. The monastery and the *seva*, the service of the temple, are restricted to the celibate and fully initiated, *kan cereko* Yogis (i. e., "ear-splitted," the last level of initiation consisting in splitting the cartilage of the ear to insert large earrings). Caughera and Mrigasthali are the only two monasteries of this kind in Nepal. But nowadays Caughera is far more important than Mrigasthali where there are only a few ascetics around the *mahant*. Approximately thirty ascetics live permanently in Caughera, and many more spend a few days there on their way to Muktinath or Pasupatinath. Usually the residents are Nepalese and the itinerant Indian.

### Foundation Legends

There are different versions of the legend describing the foundation of the Caughera monastery<sup>1</sup> but all of them link this foundation with kingship.

The common background is the jungle: "In the beginning, there was the jungle," thus start all the narratives. The jungle, as a thick and humid forest, at the same time, expresses the physical reality of the Dang valley in the past and, on a metaphorical level, the meeting point of the three characters of our story. The wilderness of the jungle is a place common to the ascetic, to the hunting king and to the local, "savage", *jungali* inhabitant, here the Tharu. And the focal point of their relationship is the wild beast; both the ascetic and the king argue about the violence, the *himsa* of the hunting king and the *ahimsa* professed by the ascetic; and the stake is the sovereignty upon the third party, the inhabitant of this wild country, this "*sava lakh jhar khanda*" (one lakh and a quarter of bushy territory) as Dang is defined and called.

The legend tells us of a king who went hunting in the wood. He saw a deer, a beautiful *mriga*, and shot an arrow. The wounded deer went deep into the forest, and the king followed it. Then suddenly, in the middle of the jungle, he met a radiant ascetic, seated in *samadhi*. The arrow was in front of him. The king understood his mistake and apologized. The Siddha forgave him and granted him a boon.<sup>2</sup> He showed him, through yogic power, all the land between the east and the west and offered him its sovereignty. The king felt unable to reign upon such a huge kingdom. Then the ascetic showed him a smaller territory, a thousand *yogana*. The king again refused and finally accepted to reign over the Dang Valley. Then the Siddha, whose name was Ratannath took the arrow and gave it to the king, saying, "as long as you keep the arrow, you will keep your kingdom firm." The king then initiated the worship of Ratannath, and since then the king's lineage worships Ratannath and keeps the arrow for six months. The other six months, the

yogis worship the arrow and the king must give them half of the revenue he gets from his kingdom” (Narharinath 2022: 516).

The legend makes obvious this relationship between a protective deified Shiddha and a protected king through the gift of an object emblematic of the king’s status. And this founding relationship is continued in the sharing relationship between the king and the Yogis, the successors of Ratannath.

The transitivity of this relationship transcends all the historical changes. The relationship is between Yogis and kings, whoever the king is. And even if the sharing is not as favorable to the Yogis as in the legend, there is, through gifts of land and privileges from the king, a sharing of sovereignty.

This relationship revolves around a central place, the Ratannath’s temple, and further around the monastic centre, where the worshippers of the siddha live, and the territory given as *guthi* to ensure its proper maintenance.

### **Ratannath’s Temples in the History of the Dang Valley**

**Palaces and Temples:** The spatial proximity between the temples and the palaces gives some clues of the former history of the Dang Valley, then divided among various small kingdoms. Ratannath was worshiped in a palatial cult in all of these kingdoms and it today we know very little about them (even the palaces have disappeared), we still find the Ratannath’s temples, in a more or less decayed state, which were previously related to the palaces.

Three kingdoms share a mythical as well as ritual connection with Ratannath: Dang, Chilli (both in the Dang Valley) and Phalabang higher on the ridge. All the three are connected with one legend, based on the same structure as the one related before. This story, written at the foot of one of the paintings of Caughera Monastery, is ambiguous regarding precise locations and dates, but it shows clearly the connection between the king’s sovereignty and the territorial presence of Ratannath. The Siddha’s blood marks the main points of a journey through a ritually defined realm.

The king of Phalabang saw one day a huge *bandel*, wild boar, in his garden. He shot an arrow which wounded the boar on its right side. The boar ran away, taking a specific way. He arrived at the Tharkot ridge, and because of the pain, stopped there, where a pool of blood appeared. The king arrived. Seeing him, the boar ran away and arrived in the Dang Tulsipur forest and stayed hidden there. The king arrived. The boar ran away again and arrived in Chilli gau where he rested under a bush, where another pool of blood appeared. The king arrived. The boar ran away to a bush near Pacurka village. And there when the king arrived, he saw a young Yogi in front of him, wearing all the distinctive marks and having an arrow in his right side, blood dripping on the ground. The king of course was terrified and apologized, “I

am a king, I am used to hunting.” And Ratannath said: “At each place where my blood was shed, build a temple dedicated to me and establish a *guthi*; build a temple in Tharkot, another in Tulsipur, give the name of Thangau; in Chilli, erect a temple and give it the name of Chillithangau. In Pacurka, once a year during Patanyatra,<sup>3</sup> give an arrow .... With your friend Nawal Sen, king of Caughera, collect alms from every house in Deukhuri and give them to the Yogis for my journey to Patan. If they are satisfied, you will have a large descent.” After saying that, he sent the king back to his palace and blessed him.

There are till temples in Chilli-Thangau and Tulsipur; as for Tharkot, it is probably related to Phalabang.

It is striking that, in all three cases, there is not only a close spatial relationship between the palace and the Ratannath's temple, but also a duplication of this relationship, following the movements of the king and his court between winter and summer capitals. Like the Gorkhali,<sup>4</sup> the kings of Dang, Chilli and Phalabang used to have a winter capital in the valley and a summer one on the ridge on the northern side. This movement was made even more necessary due to the presence of malaria in the Terai during the monsoon. Thus there are winter palaces and winter Ratannath's temples and summer palaces and temples. The movement between the two solemnized by a procession in which the Yogis carried the emblem of the deity from one temple to the other.

In the case of Dang, the winter Ratannath's temple and the king's palace were close together in Caughera. There was also a smaller Ratannath's temple, probably inside the palace and under the responsibility of a yogi *rajguru*. But nowadays nothing remains of the palace except a larger *maidan* and some walls. The summer residence was in Sawarikot where a monastery was built according to the same rules as Caughera. But the last twenty-five years of neglect have left nothing of the palace nor of the monastery, except a few stones and a pipal surrounded by tridents.

The procession used to leave Caughera for Sawarikot in *Asadh* (June-July), already with the rains as can be seen in a wall painting in Caughera. According to this painting, two Damai came first leading the yogis and playing the flute and the drum; following them, came the main Yogis carrying flags, fly-swatters, torches and silver clubs; then came the head of the monastery, the *pir*, wearing the strange conical red cad which is the sign of his office and carrying the emblem of the monastery, the *patradevata*,<sup>5</sup> hidden under cloths and flowers. After him followed the ordinary Yogis, then the Tharus carrying the goods for them. After a few months in Sawarikot, at the end of which the Yogis celebrated the Dasai festival, the same procession

returned back to Caughera. The Yogis retained this tradition until the eradication of malaria, twenty years ago.

In Chilli, we find also this duplication between a Ratannath's temple in Thangau and probably a palace in Bijauri not far away for the winter in the valley and a palace and a temple on the ridge in Chillikot for the summer. The memory of this seasonal movement remains, but few other traces. In Bijauri, there is just a huge wall around the present sanscrit college, and in Thangau there is a Ratannath's temple with a dilapidated Bhairav's temple nearby, with a Yogi *pujari* calling himself *rajguru* and paid by the Guthi Samsthan since 1942 AD.

In Chillikot, only two temples remain both dedicated to the Devis Kalika and Malika and worshipped by a Kunwar Yogi. A procession is led from Thangau to the higher temples for Dasai and Caitya Dasai.

The tradition is much more alive in Phalabang. The winter residence in the valley belonging to the nineteenth century raja of Phalabang (of. passim) was in Tulsipur, now an important bazaar to the northwest of the Dang Valley.

The palace is a Rana house, now the residence of the zonal Commissioner, and not far away, is the Ratannath's temple, recently rebuilt in concrete. Nearby is a *sikhara* temple devoted to Ratannath's disciple, Balaknath, which was built with a private donation, and nearby is the house of the *pujaris*. This Yogi family has been in charge of the temple for six to seven generations, and until 1927, it was also managing an important *guthi*. Now three brothers share the responsibility. The worship is celebrated in winter in Tulsipur, then in summer in Phalabang. One Tuesday in Baisakh (April-May) two of the *pujaris* go up the hill, carrying the emblem of Ratannath (in this case a plate with his foot-prints) called also *patradev*. They walk for six hours, accompanied by Damai musicians, then arrive in Phalabang and stay there all summer until a Tuesday in *mangsir* (November-December), when they return to Tulsipur. In Phalabang there are two palaces, an old one in Newar style and a new one in Rana style, both quite imposing. In the old palace, there are the Ratannath's temple (a small pagoda in brick) and altars to Bhairav. The *pujaris* place Ratannath's emblem in this temple for six months and perform there the Dasai celebration.

There is a striking similarity between the past division into the three kingdoms of Dang, Chilli and Tulsipur-Phalabang (with their *kot*, their fortresses of the ridge, and the protection of Ratannath) with the nineteenth century division of the valley into *parganas* where the chiefs were the Tharus *caudharis* (of. Krauskopff 1989:47, 1990). The connection is also found in rituals, since Ratannath is considered by the Tharus as the ultimate deity, a form of Siva worshipped as a guru whose disciples are the divine ancestors of the Tharus and the masters of the soil. A until thirty years ago, when the

Yogis in Procession took Ratannath to the goddess sanctuary of Devi Patan in Balrampur, the *caudhari* publicly worshipped his ancestor deity and renewed his own power that he had inherited from the divine sovereign of the soil (Krauskopff 1989: 49,52).

History Prior to the Gorkha conquest, in the Light of the Documents of the Caughera Monastery.

### Dang Rajya

Inhabited by the Tharus who, according to their traditions, believe in a former Tharu kingdom Dang was probably once under Jumla domination. There is one mention in 1336 A. D. inscription of orders given by Punya Malla to his subordinate *mahatam* in Dang (Rajaure 1981:157). Later the tradition tells that the kingdom was conquered by a would-be Rajput king, and of course it is tempting to imagine a joint arrival of the rajputized kings together with the Yogis (as was the case in the legend of western kingdoms, after the Malla downfall), but we have no information.<sup>7</sup> According to Nevill's Gazetteer of Bahreich (1922:124), in 1485 Dangdun was in the possession of a hill raja named Udat Singh, of the Chauhan dynasty.

All we know is that the last independant king ruled from Caughera and was called Nawal Singh (in the documents of Caughera, but "Newal Singh" for Nevill [1921:79], "Mawab Singh" for Hamilton [1819, 1971: 277]. and Nawal Sen on the wall paintings of the monastery). His relationship with the monastery is well established, as known from the mention of an edict, unfortunately not fully dated (14 clear fortnight of *Phagun*, but no year mentioned), a *stithipatra*, a "letter about customs," concerning a special tax, the *kar kathala*. Its revenue is still now given to the monastery. This letter had been written in the assembly hall (dalaica of Sawari kot) in the presence of the king Nawal Singh of Dang and of the *barapanthi* (authorities of the sect) and among them the Bhagavantnath. The mention of this Yogi is interesting, as he is linked to the Sallyan kingdom and was given land in the Dang Valley (in the western portion which was part of the Sallyan kingdom) in 1780.

The king Nawal Singh is also mentioned in the *Yogi vamsavali* in relation to one of his *rajgurus*, whose name appears in the list of the various charges in the Caughera Monastery in 1776 (Narharinath n.d.: 48).

But at this time the Dang *rajya* had already been allocated, on paper, to Krsna San, the king of Sallyan, as a dowry for the marriage in 1763 of his son, Ranabhim Sah, with Prithvi Narayan's daughter. King Krsna Sah received this Dang *rajya* thanks to his benevolent neutrality during the Gorkha conquest. The Dang territory of *jagga* is described also as a *desa* (of Krauskopff 1990:36-37), and its borders are the Madi river on the eastern



side, the old border with Balrampur on the southern side, and the old borders with Sallyan on the western and northern sides (*tamapatra* from 1804 V. S., Narharinath 2022:409)

The king Nawal Singh was of course unhappy with these arrangements, and he plotted against Sallyan and Kathmandu. He was defeated in 1786. He asked refuge later from the king of Balrampur, who gave him an estate in Tulsipur *pargana* (cf. Nevill 1921:79 ff).

We have thus a change in the political sovereignty in the Dang Valley, but the status of the Caughera monastery remains unchanged.

In a document consequently during the regency between 1785 and 1794 unfortunately undated but signed by both King Rana Bahadur Sah and prince Bahadur Sah, we find a confirmation of "what has been given as *ghar khet gar*, house, field, village to the Ratannath's *math* by the king of Dang. That the Yogis eat what is theirs and the king what is his. Do not create trouble in the *guthi* of Yogis. Let them do *puja* according to the tradition" (Narharinah 2022:659).

Yet later the Sallyan king is invested with the sovereignty, and we have many documents concerning the monastery, signed by Krsna Sah and his son Ranabhim Sah. For instance, in 1789: "Sri Krisna Sah, son of Samgramasah, warns not to creat any trouble in the collection of funds for the portorage and the food intended for the Yogis going to Patan Devi for *patradev yatra*."<sup>9</sup> He sets himself up immediately as the protector of the Caughera tradition and perpetuates the privileges given by the former dynasty.

But this Sallyan sovereignty will not last very long. In 1809 Ranabhim Sah is thrown out, following a conflict with Bhimsen Thapa and a forged accusation of treason (cf. Manandhar 1986). The administration of Sallyan is given to a governor, Rudra Vir Sah, who signs many edicts concerning the monastery. After him, Caughera deals with different aministrative officials, but no mention is made of Tej Bahadur Sah, who in 1827 worked as a tax-collector for Sallyan, then was appointed as Raja of Phalabang with collection rights on Dang. Apparently, Caughera is outside his jurisdiction and directly responsible to Kathmandu.

After the Rana ascendancy, we find many documents signed by the different prime ministers. The administrative condition of Coughera follows the common procedure: on the first level, contacts with the local *mal kacajari* (tax office), *adalat* (law court in Sallyan), *guthi kacahari* (Guthi office), and then an appeal to the Prime Minister, or a request made directly to the Prime Minister during his *sawari* (visit), i. e., his hunting expedition in the Terai, which was very important to the administration of Terai.<sup>9</sup> These expeditions, made every year, were the opportunity of a direct contact with

the minister, and thus a special office was in charge of collecting the requests made by the people on these occasions. Many times the *manbhau* seized the opportunity to claim some monastery rights.

### Phalabang

For the second of the kingdoms associated with Ratannath, Phalabang, the historical data is very poor. We know for sure that the newly made king Tej Bahadur Sah had the title of king of Phalabang. According to Baburam Acarya (quoted in Manandhar 1986:103), it is in "a place in Salyan called Phalawang" that Vilas Kumari, the wife of the expelled King Ranabhim Sah of Salyan, and the daughter of Prithve Narayan, was exiled in 1809. Whether Phalabang was a part of Salyan or a separate kingdom, before the Gorkha annexion, we don't really know. There are some small indications in favor of the opinion of a separate kingdom.

(1) Hamilton (1819, 1971:278) mentions that, after the conquest, the rajahs of Dang, "had withdrawn to Phalabamb, which was not not the plain, but on a hill immediately overhanging it. This town is not (1802) often called Dang .... New Dang or Phalabamb was protected by the Nawab Vazir." And Hamilton continues, without explaining if Phalabang has been conquered later on: "Nawab Singh, who was deprived of his estates, was reckoned the fortieth chief of his race. He retired to a house... twelve coses north from Tulasipur." But Hamilton does not count Phalabang among the *rajyas*, among the Baisi, as he does for Dang and Chilli.

(2) D. R. Regmi is more affirmative but does not provide evidence for what he says. "Both Phalabang and Salyana were ruled by different rulers. Phalabang had cooperated with the Gorkhalis and the Raja became the ruler in the other principality after their victory" (1975:13)<sup>10</sup>.

(3) The *tamapatra* of 1804 A. D., recalling the dowry given by Prithvi Barayan to his daughter, presents Phalabang as independant from Salyan, "In 1823 VS (1766) the king and the queen gave their daughter in marriage to Ranabhim Sah, the king of Salyan and together with her, they gave him Chilli, the Phalabang Hills, the Terai of Dang Deukhuri, and all this sand in *kus birta* exempt from taxes." The same *patra* mentions, "the ancient *muluk* of Salyan limited on the eastern side by the ancient border with Phalabang" (Narharinath 2022:409).

Anyhow, whatever the status of phalabang, we find mythical and ritual connections between the royal palace and the Siddha Ratannath with his Yogi priests. I suppose that this connection was anterior to the new *rajya* status given to Phalabang in 1837. If not, I cannot see why Tej Bahadur Sah and his successors needed to establish such a strong relation with a deity totally

alien to Sallyan and connected with Dang, a vainquished kingdom, outside their dominion.

### Chilli

The political situation is also quite complex but we have more documents. It is listed by Hamilton as one of the Baise, the twenty-two rajyas, "as a very small territory partly on the plains and partly on the hills; but it produced, as the Raja's share, 2,500 rupees ayear. The chief's residence was on a hill, the ascent to which may be  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in length. There is round his house a small town containing two hundred houses. He is of the samal tribe, that is, of the Malbum family, and is a branch of the Dang chief's house. Being nearly connected with the Gorkha family by marriage, when his estates were weized, he went to Kathmandu and procured the whole to be restored without even tribute. If Bhimsen has respected them, he is the only chief from the Tishta to the Yamuna, that has retained his estates of power" (1919,1971, 279).

It seems that Chilli had supported Gorkha in its conquest and kept its independency, than later on, was annexed by Dang. A royal order of King Girban Sah to Maharaja Bir Bhadra Sah of Chilli (translated in RSS, 21, 12, 1989: 172) made in 1860 V. S. (1802 A. D.) says, "In recognition of your services during the battle of Argha, our father (Rana Bahadur Sah) has reconfirmed your possession of Chilli. Subsequently Chilli was joined to Dang on the ground that it was a vassal (*thapale*) of that principality.<sup>11</sup> However you, Maharaja Bir Bhadra Sah, submitted a petition protesting against that decision. Inquiries revealed that Chilli was not actually under Dang.... We restore it to you .... Remain loyal to us, and rule the territory of Chilli from generation to generation."

This same Bir Bhadra Sah was already reigning in 1790 A. D. (cf a letter from V. S, 1847, Narharinath 2022:608). But he seems to have had a difficult time, since a *rukka* of 1863 V.S. (1806 A. D.) refers to trouble with money lenders, which later on will be settled, since, "yesterday the king of Chilli ascended the throne" 2022: 608).

But I did not find any document on what happened afterwards or when the Chilli *rajya* was abolished.

### Guthi and Sovereignty

In all the three places, Caughera, Phalabang-Tulsipur and Chilli, *Guthis* were added to the Ratannath's temples. I will focus here on the situation of Caughera as it appears from documents mostly from the nineteenth century.

The foundation of the monastery appears very much related to the gift of land made by the king. The revenue of these lands in intended for the maintenance of the monastery with the aim of performing the rituals. On this

point legend and actual observation meet: the centre of Caughera and its *raison d'etre* are the permanent worship of a symbolic object representing Gorakhnath, and in other versions of the legend, given to Ratannath. The Yogis are considered as the *pujaris*, the officiating priests of this institution; here temple and monastery are not dissociated.

Thus the gifts of land were conditional. They were not made only in consideration of the ritual status of the recipient, like royal gift to Brahmans, because of the meritorious act of giving to a Brahman (cf. Burghart 1987); they were given to the deity Ratannath. And the Yogis are the beneficiary of usufructuary rights, provided that they perform the "*nitya naimittika puja*," maintain and repair the buildings, and feed the Yogis and pilgrims.

And as it was explained in the legend of the arrow given to the king by Ratannath, the Yogis get a share (half) of the revenue of the kingdom because they also share in the care of the protective arrow—they collaborate with the king for the welfare of his kingdom. The right performance of the *puja*, the working of the *guthi*, are necessary to the well-being of the king, to his success, to his leadership. And many requests made by the monastery's administrative chief, the *manbhu*, end with these words: "it there is any trouble on the *guthi* land, how can we maintain the *guthi* of Ratannath and praise (*jaya manai*) the State (*Sarkar*)" (of. a letter of 1909 V. S., in Narharinath 2022: 483). And Sarkar answers, "we confirm this *guthi*, do the *puja* according to the tradition and praise us *-hamro jaya manau-*" (2022: 493).<sup>12</sup>

The Caughera or Ratannath *guthi* is composed of seven villages, the "*sat gau*"; among them five are in the Dang Valley and two in Deukhuri. it seems that they were given together, as they are always mentioned as a whole in the letters or edicts regarding the *guthi* (of. Narharinath 2022: 502, 507, 510, etc.). When were they granted to the monastery? The first retrenches I have found are dated after the Gorkha conquest, but, as they are edicts of confirmation, it means that the *guthi* was already in existence.<sup>13</sup>

This *guthi* is still managed by the Yogis of Caughera. It covers approximately 1,250 *bigha*, or 850 hectares, and includes: in Dang, in the Sawari *pargana* where Caughera is situated, the four villages of Uttar and Dakhin Amrai, Jalaura and Caghu in the Chilli *pargana*, the village of Dubicaur—in Deukhuri, the village of Ratanpur where the grass for the elephants of the monastery was collected, and the small town of Lamahi-Deupur (a new bazar which was in the beginning of the nineteenth century just a campsite, pal, for the Yogis in their journey to Devi Patan).

These villages plus two or three fields are listed in a *lal mohor* of 1883 V.S. (1826 A. D.) by the king Rajendra which says that he confirms a *lal mohor* made by his father in 1866 V. S. "The land given since the beginning

for the *dhuni pani* of Dang Caughera and all the taxes for the *dhupbatti* in Dang which have been collected till now, we maintain them, plus the *kar kathala*" (Narharinath 2022: 493).

**Guthi as Delegation of Sovereignty:** As R. Burghart has shown, "at the turn of the nineteenth century the king of Nepal saw himself as the autonomous lord or master of his territorial possessions and of the peoples who lives upon his land" (1987: 149). "In making a ritual gift—like in giving *guthi* land—he irrevocably alienated his pre-eminent right to enjoy and repossess the land" (1927: 250).

The land given in *guthi* to religious institutions or temples was granted forever in the documents, we see the importance of this idea of timelessness in the constant reference to a kind of eternity, "since the beginning, since former times, *aghdekhi*," and regarding the future, a eternal curse is cast against any destroyer of the *guthi*.

Theoretically, only the king has the right to give land; but what happened is that some *birta* owners registered part of their *birta* as *guthi*, to preserve the lands from being sold by their heirs or requisitioned by the state (M. C. Regmi 1976:53). So in 1806, Bhimsen Thapa initiates a procedure of registration of all *guthis* led to the eviction of many non-royal *guthis* or *guthis* without documents (M. C. Regmi 1968, 4:65-73). But later on, Jang Bahadur attempts to settle the conflicts by restoring some *guthis*, provided that they were properly managed.<sup>14</sup> We can see the importance, in this contest, of the *lal mohor* and *sanad* registering the donations; indeed, their mention is like leitmotiv throughout the nineteenth century documents. For instance, for the election of the new head of the monastery, the *pirsthapana*, it was then registered that the former *pir* had to deposit before the community not only all the goods of the temple but also all the documents, *lalmohor*, *rukka*, *sanad* (Narharinath 2022: 483, 513). And in many occasions, the administrative official summoned the *math manbhau* (administrative head): "come to our office with your *lalmohor*, *rukka*, *sanad*", and in the lawsuits, each party claimed that he was in possession of some edict.

These expropriations did not concern Caughera. Although its *guthi* lands had been given by a vanquished king and confirmed by an expelled one (Ranabhim of Sallyan), they are nevertheless confirmed by the Gorkha kings. And this is in accordance with the policy of conquest of Parihvi Narayan and his successors, who, putting forward their Hinduism, take on the spiritual patronage of their deities (Burghart 1987:265). And all the more in the case of Dang where the main deity Ratannath is the *cela* of their eponymous deity Gorakhnath.

In spite of their permanency, the *guthis* are, in the case of Ratannath, limited to one condition: the aim of their foundation is to maintain the cult. And the king, as a guarantor for the *dharma*, is the ultimate authority responsible for the right performance of this cult. He is thus entitled to ask for accounts, to make sure that the revenue from the land is really applied to what it was collected for. And, in what is a limitation to the monastery's autonomy, the *manbhu*, the Yogi in charge of the administration, is appointed by the king (or the prim minister). Take, for instance, the *rukka* of Jang Bahadur ratifying the succession between Bhaktinath Gosain and Hiranath in 1863 A. D. "Hiranath, we appoint you as *manbhau* starting from the year 21 harvest which is used for doing the *puja* in the Ratannath's temple; now do the *puja* according to Ratannath's tradition and praise the government" (Narharinath 2022:500). And later on in 1869: "Our greeting to *manbhau* Harinath of the Ratannath temple of Dang of Dang Caughera: as *manbhau* Hiranath is dead, we issue a *rukka* to appoint you as *manbhau* for maintaining the properties of the temple and doing the *puja* according to the ancient tradition" (2022:484).

But a much stricter control was exercised by the state on the administration of the *guthi*, and I was surprised to find a note, a *purji*, from the Dang *mal kacahari* (land revenue office) to the head Yogis of the Ratannath's temple, saying in 1886 A.D. "For everything which has been given (*cadhauna*), land, gold and silver silver, jewels and gems, you have to present a report every week; this order came from the Sallyan *adalat* ... if you fail to do it, you will be punished" (Narharinath 2022:484).

The revenue received by the monastery from the *guthi* land was of different kinds.<sup>15</sup> First were the agricultural rents. In the case of Cughera, the fields were cultivated mainly by the Tharus, and according to G. Krauskopff (1989:45), at the beginning of nineteenth century, the enure was in favour of the tiller with the *potet* system ( the tenant keeps all the harvest for himself but works for noting on a section of his land-owner's fields, 1 *bigha* for 5 or 7). But the situation became decreasingly favourable to the tenant and even worsened under the present system (since the sand reform of 1964) of *adhiya*, a sharing the harvest in half.

In addition to the rent, the *guthi* owner was entitled to collect various taxes. The *guthi* is *maphi*, free of taxes, which means that the tenants working on the *guthi* land have to pay these taxes either directly to the *guthi* owner, here the monastery, or indirectly to collectors or revenue officers who hand these taxes over to the *guthiyar*. These taxes include economical or commercial duties and judicial fines or fines for adultery or illicit sexual relationships.

So the king delegates to the monastery, or more precisely to the deity Ratannath, part of his proprietary rights and thus of his rights and duties regarding the people living in his realm.

But our documents show that the situation was not always clear, as these rights were frequently disputed. The tenurial autonomy of the monastery was actually limited, on one hand, by attempts from collectors or officials to increase their own revenues, on the other hand by the reluctance from the tenants or other villagers to abide by the rights or privileges of the monastery, which was then forced to call on the state to settle the dispute.

### Conflicts with Collectors or with the State

**Forced labor: *jhara*:** Throughout the nineteenth century, we witness the same protest from Caughera over the imposition by state officials or collectors of compulsory labor on the people working for the *guthi*. According of the *maphi* or exemption status of the *guthi*, the State had waived its right and given to the Yogi *guthiyars* the right to exact unpaid labor or goods from their tenants. But several times the order of exemption had to be repeated.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that there were two cases of forced labor: on one side, the craftsmen (*kami*, *tamauta* of *sunar*) working for Ratannath and probably in charge of the making and repairing for the cult objects; on the other side, the tenants working on the *guthi* lands, in other words, the villagers of the seven *mauja*. Take two examples: a Sardar in a letter to the soldiers going to Dang to exact *goljhara* (forced labour on charcoal) in 1845 writes, "This year again, do not exact *goljhara* from three *kami* houses of Savari Gau, as they are employed for the Ratannath's *puja* and have been exempted forever" (Narharinath 2022:496); and in 1828 a letter to the soldiers in charge of imposing compulsory labor for the purpose of gathering wild elephants Narsingh Thapa writes, "do not impose it on the villages of the Ratannath's *guthi* as they are yearly exempted from tax"(2022:494).<sup>17</sup>

Among our documents the number of complaints and orders regarding the *jhara* and the troubles imposed on people is striking. Generally the order to stop bothering tenants is given to "*sipahi*" or to some "company" (for instance the "Bhavani company" under the Dafdar Khana Office (Narharinath 2022:499). M. C. Regmi (1971: 110, 178, 188) mentions the use of military forces to impose *jhara* but in the present case, I do not know if these terms refer to soldiers or simply to any "*piun*" or unskilled administrative employee.<sup>18</sup> Anyhow, the "compulsory labor" seems to have been imposed with great harshness.

**Conflict on Taxes:** The documents give some examples of the normal procedures. In 1850 the Ditha in charge of collecting the *chapaiko rakam* (a tax on priting?) writes, "According to the tradition, the one who has to collect this tax from Ratannath's villages' territory, must order the making of an object. Therefore we order the making of a bowl in sandal wood which costs 24½ roupies and we offer it before the assembly" (Narharinath 2022: 497).

As M. C. Regmi (1967:46) writes, "Where the beneficiary was a temple, the proceeds [of State levies and taxes] were usually utilized to make ornaments for the deity." And although it created a lot of disputes and agruments, this was the case in Caughera, for what is called the crown levies, in other words, the levies used to finance the ritual celebrations of the royal family, thus : the *gadi mubarak*, for the royal coronation, the *goddhuwa*, for the marriage of the eldest royal princess, the *cumawan* for the sacred thread ceremony of the crown prince.<sup>19</sup> In fact, these levies were sometimes used for very different purposes, for instance a *cumawan* was levied in 1810 to pay the troops in Kumaon (Regmi 1971:64). In theory everybody had to submit to this taxes, but *guthi* endowments could be exempted if the "deed has made an express provision to this effect" (Regmi 1967:46).

It was not the case for the Ratannath's *guthi*, which was therefore submitted to these crown levies. A long letter from Chandra Shamsher (in 1961 V. S. ) answers a complaint made by the *manbhau* Durganath. Apparently until 1853 V. S. the tradition was to collect the levies and dedicate the amount to the making of jewels for Ratannath. But in 1853 V. S. a *goddhuva* was collected, but not conveyed to the temple. The same happened in 60 with a *cumavan*, and the *manbhau*, to his utmost indignation, was even arrested, "I, a man in ascetic garments, I have been put in jail for twenty days!" (Narharinath 2022:510). He lays a charge against the *mal adda*, and after some administrative procedures, Chandra Shamsher decides that half of the amount must be devoted to the making of jewels, and half given in a sealed parcel to the *pujari* and put in the Ratannath's treasure.

This privileged status had not been recognized when in 1855-56 A.D. Jang Bahadur decides to levy a special tax for financing the war with Tibet. According to M. C. Regmi (1967:38). "This levy amounted to three *manas* of grains per *muri* of land under all tenure form."<sup>20</sup> This *trikhandi* was collected from Caughera, as we know from a receipt, "*Trikhandi* for the year 11/12 V. S. has been collected from Manbhau Hiranath; its amount is 30 rp. 22 paisa" Narharinath 2022:498). But later in 1915 V.S. (1858 A. D.) the monastery seems reluctant to pay, and the chief of the Bhavani military



company threatens Hiranath, “You have not paid yet the *trikhandi*, we are sending *sipahi* with the *dittha* to collect the money” (2022:499).

**Social Conflicts:** Conflicts with the state took place not only on fiscal matters. We have also some instances of disputes about problems of pollution by food or sexual contact and thus about purification. And, of course, it had also a financial aspect, as the purification certificate was given for a fee paid to *dharmadhikar*.<sup>21</sup>

Take, for example, the *sarva candrayana*. *Candrayana* is a series of fasts made according to the lunar fortnight, but here it means a “fine paid to the *rajguru* by anyone who has conhabited with a woman of lower caste” (Turner [1931] 1980:591). It also means, according to Hodhson, “an expiatory ceremony performed by the whole city or kingdom in atonement for the commission of some heinous sin or uncleanness” (quoted in Marize 1980:146). But in our context it looks more like a yearly tax. For instance, there is a receipt from a Tharu head of *parganas* collecting 1942 V. S. *sarvacandrayan* from 40 Tharu houses; maybe the sexual misconducts were such that there was an agreement to collect the fee on a general lend?

Anyhow, like the taxes mentioned before, it has always been a tradition “to give the *sarva candrayana* to Ratannath.” Thus, says a letter from 1947 V.S. Narharinath 2022:485), “regarding the villages of the *guthi*, it will be levied by the *Mabhau* and put in the Ratannath’s treasury.” But there were many conflicts in the past and, in 1951 V.S. the *dharmadhikar* wrote to the *manbhau* Hiranath, “We have sent the order to raise *sarve candrayana* on the Jogi of Kaulya village. The *sipahi* in charge of this collection came back with your reply that there was an exemption edict for the Yogis of your temple, signed by the *guru* of Sallyan and stating not to take any payment (*dastur*) from Srintath. Give your proof or you will be punished according to the law” (or precisely “prevent from water” 2022:499).

The question of purification is always troublesome in the relationships between Caughera and the royal authority. We have for instance, in 1851 AD the case of a contamination during feast (*bhandara*). In this *bhandara* in Sallyan, the Yogis of Caughera shared food with the Yogis of a village in Malneta. In this village, Mangali, the daughter of Baijanath Yogi had a sexual relationship with a Kami. The whole of the village, all the Yogis, then all the *bhandara* became polluted. The *dharmadhikar* wrote to Caughera, forbidding the Yogis to make the *puja* without *prayascitta*. The Caughera Yogis refused, “We don’t have to make *prayascitta*.” The *dharmadhikar* concluded, “In this affair of *prayascitta*, you cannot disobey. If you have any proof from Sri Nath, come and show it to me” Narharinath 2022:497).

Thirty years later, in 1885 AD. the *dharmadhikar* agrees to recognize the rights of Caughera to itself carry out the purification, "to be directly purified by Ratannath", as it is said in another case. The *dharmadhikr* writes, regarding another sexual misconduct, "Since the begining, for the Yogis from Ratannath's temple, the *pani apruva dastur* (i.e. the fee for water acceptance), is not given to the *dharmadhikar* but to the Ratannath's temple. Therefore, as Sobhi Jaisyani had hidden her relationship with Karvir Kami and as all people from pure castes have been contaminated by water, the Yogis have to pay the *dastur* to the Ratannath's temple" Narharinath 2922:508).

This acknowledgment by the *dharmadhikar*, therefore by the king, of the special rights of Caughera, leads to another conflict, but this time among the Yogis themselves. In 1770 A.D. Prithvi Narayan has given to a Sallyan Yogi, Bhagavantanath, and to his heirs, the *mandalai*, which includes among other privileges the right to benefit from the fees for illegal sexual relationships among the whole Yogi caste (cf. Bouillier 1991). Consequently the *mandalai* and the purificatory rights of Ratannath overlap (Narharinath, 2022:2,3,311).

This introduces another mode of relationship between the monastery and the state, as the state was requested to arbitrate the dispute.

The Caughera monastery, as holder of *Guthi* lands, is involved in conflicts, first with other landowers or villagers, secondly with the people living and working on the *guthi* lands. In these conflicts, the state acts as an arbitrator, as the ultimate authority.

Most of the problems with villagers close to the *guthi* land were water problems. I have seem at aeast 15 requests made by the *manbhaus* to the *subbas*, *subedars* and lately lately to the Rana Prime Ministers during their *sawari* (their hunting expedition in the Terai), and concerning troubles with irrigation channels (Narharinath 2022:495, 496, 504, 505, 507-9, 513). It should as if people were spending most of their time diverting or even destroying each others irrigation pipes. And always, the *manbaus* were complaining, "if they take the pipes out, our *guthi* land becomes dry, we cannot cultivate and there is no income to do the *puja*, tha we cannot bless the *sarkar*."

Other conflicts involve the *guthi* tenants, who do not want want to fulfill their onligations any more. Here again, the *manbhau* complains to the authorities. We have for instande letters of this kind, dated from 1809 A. D., a politically difficult period during which the tenants probably tried to evace their obligations, especially in portorage for the pilgrimage. The same happened recently in 1951, and we have a letter of commitment signed by the Tharus from the *guthi* villages, "We, tenants of the *guthi* recognize that in the beginning, we were doing the necessary work for *akhada dhuni*, we were

taking care of the journey to Sawarikot and Patandev .... We were not paying rent as it is the case on the kraikar land but were paying in kind and cash as it is the case on the *raikar* land but were paying in kind and cash as it is the case on the *birta*; for the kind, we gave what was necessary for the *puja* as it was written before. But this year we have eaten the fruit but we have been late to do the work for the journey. Today we recognized the facts and, from now on, we will do the work for Sri as usual, we will do what we are supposed to do in exchange for the land. If we do not, we will abandon the land" (Narharinath 2022: 496).

### Conclusion

Here were some examples, from the documents published by Narharinath, of the relationship between the monastery of Caughera, its *guthi* endowments and the state. The tenurial autonomy and the sovereignty it implied were, nevertheless, submitted to limitations and to constant reinstatement. But since the foundation, or rather, the last period of the Dang autonomous *rajya*, until now, the monastery, its Yogis and the Ratannath's cult have succeeded in maintaining their spiritual and political preeminence, their out-worldly and in-worldly success.

An earlier version of this paper was presented in a symposium on "Sovereignty in the Himalayan region" held in the South Asian Institute of Heidelberg (June 1991), and then summarized for the Sociological and Anthropological Society of Nepal (SASON) conference held in Kathmandu in September 1992. I am grateful to the organizer and all the participants for their interesting and useful comments.

### Notes

1. See a summary of the different legends in Unbescheid (21-24). The version presented here is adapted from Narharinath (2022: 516-17) and from the booklets published by the monastery. The legends related to Ratannath are also the themes of the paintings on the wall of the assembly hall. For a well documented comparison between Hindu and Sufi versions of the legend of Ratannath or Baba Ratan, see Horovitz (1914).
2. The motive of the hunt of a magical deer is quite common in Hindu tradition, but the context of the Ratannath legend seems more related to the Buddhist Tibetan tradition of the Milarepa's legends (cf. "The huntsman and the deer" in the Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa), and especially the moralistic discourse on *abimsa* told by the Siddha to the king (not quoted here). It was striking to find a similar story in a popular version of Milarepa's legend (Mumford 74).

3. The Yogis of Caughera undertake every year a pilgrimage to Devi Patan, a Devi sanctuary near the Indian town of Tulsipur (Balrampur District). They leave for one month, walking only during the night and staying fifteen days in Deokhuri. They arrive in Devi Patan for *chaitya* Dasai and there celebrate the worship of Ratannath and Patesvari Devi. It seems that this ritual journey through their territory was anterior to the exile of the former king of Dang in Tulsipur after the Gorkha conquest (cf. *passim*), since an edict dated from three years after this event (1789 A.D.) mentions the Yogi pilgrimage like something customary (Naciharinath 2022: 486).
4. Cf. Burghart (1984:111) quoting Vajracharya: "The movement of the court between seasonal capitals has been a Gorkhali custom since the founding of the kingdom by Dravya Sah".
5. The *patradev* or "divine recipient" is the ritual centre of the temple. Supposedly given to Ratannath by Gorakhanth, it is the *svarup*, the essential form of the deity. Resting on a high altar, covered with clothes and flowers, it is worshipped exclusively by the *pir*, the spiritual head of the monastery. Contrary to the duplication in some temples between *utsava* and *mula murti*, the *patradev* icon, carried from one residence to another, embodies the totality of the deity.
6. Kunwar is the name given to Yogis, mainly householders, who have not performed the last initiation rites and thus who do not wear the earrings.
7. On the antiquity of a Gorakhnathi influence and its remains in the Dang valley, see D.R. Sharma (1988).
8. Narharinath gives, in Nariharinath (2022: 486-491), a list of 120 documents related to Caughera and publishes the text of about half of them. Unfortunately, the edict mentioned here appears only in the list, under No. 13.
9. On administration, see B. Hodgson (1880); M.S. Jain (1972); M.C. Regmi (1978, 1988); D.W. Edwards (1975), J.C. Marize (1980).
10. D.R. Regmi adds a surprising remark, "In the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah Phalabang rose to rule over a large entity before Gorkha came into the scene".
11. We have traces of this, in a *tamapatra* from 1804 VS trying to define the borders of Dang and Sallyan, "Some people, claiming that Chill is a different kingdom from Dang, had obtained a *lalmohor*. Then, after gathering 52 *lakhs* (sic) of people, it was established that Chill had been annexed by Dang" (Nariharinath 2022: 408).
12. It is quite interesting to find the same type of relationship between the Yogis and the Moghols. Goswami and Grewal (1967) give many

documents on the land granted to the Jogis of Jakhbar (Punjab) as "*madad-i-ma'ash*" by the Moghol emperors; "significantly, the grantees were expected to 'remain occupied with praying for the permanene of the Conquering Dynasty' .... They all belonged to, what Jahangir called, 'the army of prayers'" (1967: 23).

13. Cf. an edict signed by both Rana Bahadur Shah and Bahadur Shah (Nariharnath, 659), thus from the period of regency, between 1785 and 1794. This is also the first mention of the term "*guthi*"; according to Regmi, the use of the term *guthi* to denote the religious and charitable land endowments, "probably started only after the Gorkhali conquests" (1976: 47).
14. See M.C. Regmi (1967: IV, 71-75) for the complex attitude of Jang Bahadur, desirous to "entrench the sanctity of the Guthi system" and at the same time to appropriate the surplus income of the land endowments (cf. also Regmi Research Series, 1979, 11, No. 5, p. 68).
15. Unfortunately Caughera *lalmohor* or inscriptions give far less details on the various tenurial privileges than the ones R. Burghart found in the Janakpurdham monasteries. See the list of exemptions in his thesis (1978: 171-72).
16. For the many examples of the "rapacity of tax collectors," see M.C. Regmi (1971: 72).
17. Another example of capture of wild elephants through compulsory labor, in Regmi (1971: 69).
18. I am thankful to A. Höfer who drew my attention to the different meanings of the term "*sipahi*." On the use of this term, as well as the one of Company, for non-soldiers employees, see Edwards (1975: 109-110).
19. *gadi mamarakh* or *mubarakh*, gift to "make the throne auspicious," *goddhuva* ("to wash the feet"), name of a rite in the marriage ceremony during which relatives and guests pay homage to the young couple and offer them some coins; *cumavan* or *cuvan*, from *cumvan*, "to embrace," is, according to Sharma's dictionary (1962: 325), "a fee to be paid for the *bratabandha* of the king (at this occasion, the people having the *darsan* of the king embraces his feet and makes a gift)."
20. Hence its name of *trikhandi*. But later on (1988: 48), Regmi writes, "The tax was collected at the flat rate of one-third of the total income, hence it was known as *trikhandi*," According to the amount paid by the monastery and also to the possibilities of the people, this second interpretation seems overestimated.

21. One of the Brahmane Rejaguru in charge of the application of the law relating to the purity rules. On this office, see Regmi Research Series, 1979, 11, 5 ff.

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