

PEOPLES AND POLITY: ETHNOGRAPHY, ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY IN NEPAL

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Introduction

The uprisings in Kathmandu during the spring of 1990 brought to an end a thirty year experiment with a "democratic" form of government in Nepal based on hierarchy and ideology headed by the nation's monarch. That experiment was popularly deemed failure, as it constrained both Nepal's development as a modern, industrializing nation state and the aspirations of millions of its own people who, for reasons of ethnic or caste affiliation, remained disadvantaged and oppressed in the former regime (Country Paper 1993; Raeper and Hoftun 1993). This dramatic break with the past set various ethnic, caste, and class interest to the task of renegotiating a new national framework of relationships.

Nepal, a nation of diverse societies separated until comparatively recently were separated by the harsh geography of the Himalayas and the north Indian plain, has been controlled and exploited by a hill brahmin (in Nepali, Bahun) and ksatriya (Chetri) nobility. Prithivi Narayan Shah, the Gorkha Chetris king who "unified" the country in the late eighteenth century, referred to his new kingdom as a "garden bedecked with four *varnas* and thirty-six *jats*", the four traditional castes of the Hindu *varna* system, by which the Hindu *paharis* of the lower middle hill regions were organized; and the thirty six known "tribes" of predominantly *jati* peoples – who made up Nepal's known indigenous populations of "Buddhist" "Hindu" and "animist" peoples and occupied the higher hill and mountain ranges to the north (Sharma 1992:7).¹ This caste and ethnic schema has been since Prithivi Narayan Shah's conquest of the substratum on which powerful relations were organized between the highest castes and the lower *jat*. This substratum was codified in the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, a legal code that prescribed different kinds of rights based on a religiously sanctioned schema. Despite the political victories of 1990, there are those within Nepal who claim that this hierarchical substratum still exists (Country Paper 1993; Tamang 1992).

Recently, the "supremo" of Nepal's ruling Congress party, Ganesh Man Singh, a Newar, accused his party comrade and Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, of favouring his fellow Bahuns in government largesse, contributing to the political crisis in the summer of 1993 which at times paralysed life throughout the country.² The prominence of Bahuns in positions of government influence, *bahunabad*, is increasingly coming under scrutiny in the post 1990 political transformation (Sharma 1992:8; Gurung 1992). Further, political movements organizing themselves around *jati* ethnic identities are pressing for differing levels of self determination from the central regime (Country Paper 1993). Ethnicity, along with such other forms of social identity as class and gender, has become a site on which the discourse about Nepal's future social and political structure is being engaged. Ethnicity for most Nepalese is bound up with kinship, language, regional and religious affiliation. Prayag Raj Sharma, in a 1986 article that in many ways anticipates the post-1990 context, defines ethnicity as characterized by a "rudimentary" sense of collective feeling that demonstrates little organizational tendency (Sharma 1986:131). Yet ethnic groups within Nepal, as well as elsewhere in the world, are engaged in emergent politics, and construct knowledge about themselves in part from the knowledge generated by others about them. Sharma, along with other Nepalese social scientists, warns of the consequences that this knowledge could have in volatile political circumstances (Sharma 1986, 1992; Shah 1993):

In the anthropological works mainly written by westerners about Nepal, brahmins have been depicted as a class of exploiters in relation to the ethnic groups.... They too are perhaps unwittingly being given an ethnic identity of their own. If this style is to prevail there might emerge several caste groups trying to mark their social boundaries very much along the ethnic lines and considering themselves to be quite apart from the rest.... These are all, no doubt, circumstances fraught with divisive tendencies capable of new tensions (Sharma 1986:133).

The grim anticipations of Sharma and others in Nepal stand in contrast to views of some anthropologists, who see nothing to fear in *jati* peoples being given more autonomy and allowed to develop their own unique institutions (Country Report 1993; see also Bista 1991, below). The diversity of Himalayan cultures has been celebrated in anthropology since Nepal opened to the west in 1951. Early writings warned of the probable annihilation of this diversity, rendering Nepal part of "the grey uniformity threatening to

spread over the greater part of the world (von Furer-Haimendorff 1981:xvi). Some of them saw signs of this degradation in their early travels, like David Snellgrove, who brought his expertise in the Tibetan language and religion to bear on an ethnographic "pilgrimage" in the late 1950s:

Perhaps it is respectable to call oneself Hindu, and a sign of enlightened education to despise all religion. The older folk are bewildered, for no one in Tukcha has the necessary knowledge to argue the validity of the old religions and they see the basis of life crumbling away. Our lama-host was himself the product of this unhappy environment. 'Is it true' he once asked me, 'that there are six spheres of possible rebirth?' I found myself speaking in defence of the Buddhist doctrine, explaining the relativity of existence and the basic truth of phenomenal impermanence (Snellgrove 1981:177).

The irony of a western textual scholar teaching a lama in Nepal the finer points of orthodox Buddhism highlights the retrospective understanding scholars like Snellgrove had of pristine Himalayan cultures. The "Buddhist" people of Tukchā, in the Kali Gandaki valley, appeared to be losing their religion, and a sense of their own identity through a process of "sanskritization", euphemistically known in contemporary census reports as "attrition to Hinduism" (Holmberg 1989:15; HMG 1993). The earlier work of both Snellgrove, von Furer-Haimendorff and others was invaluable in providing our first glimpses of Nepalese diversity, but their representation of the diversity was overstated, and they underestimated the resilience and mutability of culture forms. Communal identity for Snellgrove was based on some kind of orthodoxy through which "each group" as a contemporary critic puts it "becomes an artifact of its own origins" (Holmberg 1989:14). Do categories such as "Buddhist", "Hindu", *jati* or *pahari* obscure the range of similarities and the degree of integration between them in the Nepalese context? Has ethnography moved from a fascination with pure cultures towards an appreciation of the processes by which peoples, both in the past and in the present, organize or contest their differences under one national roof?

This paper intends to review what I consider some of the most recent and more significant ethnographic writing on Nepal, with a view to the questions above. In it I will contrast earlier assumptions of cultural disintegration and exploitation to the more recent insights that people resisted and shaped the structures of those who ruled them. First I will review a number of recent writings on Nepalese ritual and culture, and question whether ethnic identities

flowed from religious orthodoxies, as these provided the categories by which the *Muluki Ain* classified Nepal's diverse population.

Orthodoxies

The Gurungs in their own country are really Buddhists, though they will not admit it in India. To this day in their own homes are Lamas and Giabrings, but when serving in out regiments they submit to the Brahmins and employ them for all their priestly functions. They say with true philosophy 'Vaisa des vaisa bhes' which might be translated as 'Do in Rome as the Romans do' [British Gurkha recruitment officer, quoted in Ragsdale 1990:1]

It was partly the Gurkha regiments, Nepalese mercenaries fighting alongside British and Indian armies, which brought the Himalayan kingdom to the attention of the outside world during the nineteenth century. Regiments of Gurkhas had been instrumental in putting down the Indian "Mutiny" of 1856-7, a deed that not only won respect for these soldiers, but a knighthood for the first Rana oligarch, Jang Bahadur Rana, who inaugurated over one hundred years of authoritarian and reclusive rule in Nepal (Whelpton 1993:13). Yet the term "Gurkha", a gloss of "Gorkha", the home of Prithivi Narayan Shah, does not refer to any distinct Nepalese cultural group. Rather the ranks of these regiments were populated predominantly from Gurung and *jat*.

The Gurkha regiments did play a role in integrating these peoples into a national framework. The education given to Gurkha recruits was given in "Gurkha" as Nepali was known in the nineteenth century, and their operations were conducted in the language. Gurkha soldiers after demobilization received lucrative pensions from the British increasing their status and that of their wider families (Ragsdale 1990). But the "philosophy" of Gurung soldiers as rendered above is not exactly "do in Rome as the Romans do." It has little to do with "doing" anything, other than adopting the clothing (*bhes*) of the guest country (*des*).³ In "submitting" to the Brahmins, and by extension the hierarchical categories of the Gorkha conquerors, Gurung recruits paid a price for the benefits that followed from national patronage. This was one of many such cultural transactions conducted in Nepal between the powerful and Nepal's "indigenous" peoples. In agreeing to wear the national costume or speak the national language, however, peoples also won some rights to their own communal identity; it is not clear, as an earlier ethnographic discourse might have claimed, that these transactions were a complete sell out.

The distinction between ethnic or caste groups by Nepalese national discourses has been, and is still, drawn on the basis of traditional religious affiliation of linguistically distinct groups (Sharma 1986, 1992; Statistical Pocket Book 1992:22-23). A great deal of ethnographic writing has until recently assumed that these distinctions defined the cultural landscape of Nepal, and accordingly has emphasised religious identity in their representation of Nepal's ethnic diversity. Whether a given group is "Buddhist", "Hindu", or has strong "Tribal" or "Shamanic" influences, it has been the ritual life of a bounded social entity by which Nepalese cultures have come to be known to the outside world.

Sherry Ortner's 1978 book, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, and analysis of the ritual life of the Sherpa people of east-central Nepal, almost defines an ethnographic sub-genre which views the whole of a "culture" through the lens of religious ritual. Ortner views Sherpa core social contradictions, such as those between family and community interests, as mediated through local Buddhist ritual symbolism. Lay Buddhist rituals mediate between the exterior influence of a religious orthodoxy and local interpretations of it. What western scholars have assumed to be the renunciate and world rejecting thrust of orthodox Buddhism (see, for example, Dumont 1980; and for an opposing view, Tambiah 1976), according to Ortner underlies Sherpa ritual mediations which affirm the essential "atomism" of Sherpa society:

Nyungne is the most orthodox of the lay rituals, and its structure embodies the ideal Buddhist progression of consciousness, whereby one is moved from an experience of social embeddedness to a sense of one's problems as purely existentially generated and hence spiritually solvable. Nyungne is designed to produce true Buddhist individuals, socially detached expecting nothing from others and giving nothing from others (Ortner, 1978:164).

The *Nyungne* ritual, whereby Sherpas atone for sin while observing strict renunciatory vows for a limited time, is confined in this analysis to the actions of individuals. Obscured here is the participation of members of the wider community, who serve as sponsors and who collect to celebrate the completion of the *Nyungne* retreat with the *Tso* feast, which "nearly the entire village attends" (1978:35). This over precise examination of the ritual component of a community event tends to minimize its reciprocal elements, while at the same time it supports the idea that Sherpa society essentially atomistic, a picture of a "culture" seen through a specific and orthodox ritual act. Symbolic analysis illuminates the dynamics of religious and social life

but is by itself only a partial view that in the context of Nepal's ethnic diversity is all too often taken as the whole. Ortner herself recognizes this problem of representation in a later book, noting that the "atomism" that she observed in her research contradicted the observations of other observers of Sherpa life:

I now think, however, that the differences are relatively real and objective, and are essentially region differences: von Furer-Himendorff worked in the Khumbu and I, initially, in Solu. I later worked in Khumbu as well, and the people of that region did in fact appear more cooperative and community oriented... I note... (this) here simply because, after 30 years of varied ethnographic research among the Sherpas one can no longer give a simple account of their style and ethos (Ortner, 1989:6).

In this later book, *High Religion* (1989) Ortner moves firmly away from considerations of tightly defined rituals to a more comprehensive analysis, through the practices of key individuals, of how the construction of Sherpa celibate monasteries in the early twentieth century occurred in the context of the political economy of the Sherpa community. The influence of Buddhist monasticism, which had been minimal in Sherpa ritual life before the emergence of these monasteries, was a cultural development produced by both contests among powerful Sherpas and the growing participation of the less powerful in the Darjeeling (Indian) cash economy. This both facilitated their contributions to monastery building and freed them to some extent from the economic demands of Rana taxation and tribute (Ortner 1989:165). "Simple accounts" of a culture's ethos, where divorced from historical contexts (or where that context is confined to an introductory chapter), may be valid from various theoretical perspectives, but too often they obscure important nuances of variation within a society. Ortner develops an ethnographic method that breaks through the confines of statically defined cultural categories to a richer, integrative account of the life of a wider community. Orthodox ideals here are not exterior influences, they emerge rather through the practices of social life and are at every historical turn actively interpreted.

Until comparatively recently the Sherpa villages of the Solu-Khumbu regions have been isolated from events in Kathmandu and the emergent national ideology. Moreover, the early association of Sherpas with Westerners through Himalayan mountaineering over the past one hundred years placed them in a privileged position as Nepal became increasingly integrated into a wider world system (Ortner 1989; Fisher 1990; see also Stevens 1993). This was accomplished without the mediation of the Nepalese

state, as was the case with Gurung or Magar soldiers. As a result, Sherpa society has retained much of its communal identity, something that for other groups, closer to the source of national power in Kathmandu became a much more contested matter.

The Tamang, another predominantly Buddhist group, which have traditionally inhabited the hills and mountains around the Kathmandu valley, faced a much more direct and pervasive influence from the centre. Tamang men had little access to the foreign influence and wealth enjoyed by Sherpa labourers in Darjeeling or Gurkha soldiers in the pay of the British army. Tamangs, both men and women, were often coerced into exploitive labour relations with valley elites (Tamang 1992). The low status of the Tamang during the years of Rana rule forced their social and religious identity into a process of "introversion" in which cultural forms such as ritual became disconnected from wider influences, such as Tibetan orthodoxies, or from full integration with the Nepalese national religious ideology (Holmberg 1989:174).

In an analysis of ritual life, David Holmberg (1989) focuses on Tamang ritual in its wider contexts, emphasising the reciprocity between ritual specialists, the Buddhist *Lamas*, Shamanic *Bon-pos* and sacrificial *Lambus*. Unlike the Tibetan influence on the Sherpa monastic movement of the twentieth century, orthodox influences were effectively ended by the enforced isolation of northern Tamang peoples from Tibet by the Kathmandu government. Orthodoxy in Tamang life coexists with forms of shamanic healing and sacrifice that are antithetical to Buddhist moral restrictions on the taking of any life. Holmberg questions the usefulness of Robert Redfield's famous model of "great" and "little" traditions, suggesting that, for at least the Tamang, these are not discrete poles implying a unidirectional authority, but are instead dialectical, modified by political and historical circumstance.

The tension between a Buddhist orthodox opposition against blood sacrifice and local sacrificial practices was further sharpened by the national religious regime imposed by Hindu valley elites. The yearly *Dasain* festival, still a national holiday and an important element in what Holmberg describes as an additional "all-Nepal (ese)" religious realm (1980:4), was in part a sacrificial cult devoted to the Hindu goddess *Durga* that the Tamang were compelled to participate in. While Sherpa communities "celebrate" *Dasain* with a merit making feast to counteract the sin of sacrifice (Ortner 1978:130), in Tamang villages *lambu* perform propitious sacrifices which are tolerated by Buddhist lamas who in practice often hire *lambu* to carry out services which would be repugnant to themselves as *lamas* (Holmberg 1989:226). The uneasy division of labour between Tamang religious practitioners was based on local motivations and conformed to the ideological demands of the centre. The

predominant local "tradition" was constructed, then out of Buddhist orthodoxy and political expediency. It was also directed more towards the worldly concerns of villagers than the salvation of individuals. Like the Tamang many Tibetan groups in the north frustrate images of Himalayan cultures as pristine Buddhist societies by combining seeming contradictory practices into a tradition. David Snellgrove's expertise in the textual authority of Tibetan Buddhism could only partially prepare him for what he observed during his Nepalese pilgrimages. Western frustrations aside, the more interesting and important anthropological problem lies in the discrepancy between orthodoxy and lived reality in highland Nepal, in a tradition "...which manifests itself as the compromise between the effort to live according to the rule and the exigencies of living in the world at all" (Ramble 1990:186). The Tepas, a small Tibetan society in Mustang District, for example, is a superficially Tibetan Buddhist regime that incorporates an important sacrificial cult directed towards ensuring seasonal crop growth. Tepas cultural "tradition" is seen by Ramble as an aggregation of individual practices which use a "great tradition" as a kind of "raw material" (1990:188). Ironically, Buddhist orthodox discourse dissolves "Buddhism" itself as an essential form:

Buddhism is in fact just one of the tradition phenomenon which interact on the periphery, as it were, to produce the illusion of the centre. Break the chain of interdependent causes, dismantle the aggregates, and there is nothing at all (1990:197).

Breaking with what he calls the "two part narrative" of "great" and "little" traditions, Stan Royal Mumford in *Himalayan Dialogue* describes a religious between Tibetan lamas and Gurung *paju* in the north central Annapurna region where traditions are constructed in light of each other (1989:23). Borrowing from Mikhail Bakhtin, Mumford describes a process of "interillumination" by which the "ancient matrix" of Gurung Shamanism constitutes a voice embedded in contemporary Tibetan Buddhist ritual (1989:111). This interillumined dialogue draws attention to the arbitrariness of tradition, as lamas and *pajus* compete for influence of both Tibetan and Gurung villagers by contesting the other's claims to effectiveness. This intercultural dialogue is carried on not only between religious specialists, according to Mumford (following again Bakhtin), but also between historically "layered cultures" represented by these specialists (1989:11)

The perspective of *Himalayan Dialogue* is distorted by the theoretical schemata that is placed template-like over the rituals discussed. Critics have charged that Mumford's "allegiance" to Bakhtin has led him to over determine the dialogic quality of the relationship between lama and *paju* while

obscuring the material and political basis of their competition (McHugh 1992:554). Nevertheless, Mumford has attempted to bring contemporary theoretical tools to bear on the problem of relating bounded orthodoxies to heterodox practices. Boundaries between "Buddhist" and "Shamanic" identities are shown to malleable, even if they are not historically ordered.

The misleading nature of such categories becomes even more problematic in the cities of the Kathmandu valley, which at the time of Prithivi Narayan Shah's unification in the eighteenth century were inhabited by the Newars, the linguistically distinct urban centred culture responsible for much of the Kathmandu valley's distinctive works of art and architecture. In the cities of the valley the nominal distinction between "Hindu" and "Buddhist" is perhaps even more difficult to draw than in the countryside, and to the inhabitants has been traditionally of less concern.

The Newars of the city of Patan, just south from Kathmandu, have traditionally been aligned to one or the other religion by virtue of hereditarily acquired family priests either Hindu or the Vajracharya and Sakya Buddhist priests through which David Gellner (1992) views the religious and social hierarchies of the Buddhist Newars of Patan. While all Newaris nominally fall into one or the other category, according to traditional allegiances and in the national census of the country, Gellner points out that from the perspective of religious practices it is only the priestly castes to whom anything of a pure religious identity can be ascribed. For the majority of middle to lower caste Buddhist Newars, religious devotions and ritual services are drawn from either tradition, as exigencies see fit; it is among the high priestly castes that religious practices attempt to bridge the every day world with the higher salvational aims to which Buddhism is directed (Gellner 1992:72). One of the primary social problems Newar Buddhism addresses is why a Buddhist society should have "caste" at all.

The Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest of Gellner's title represents in turn the hierarchical levels of Newari Buddhism: the celibate monk ascetically distanced from the work; the priestly householder charged with the ritual performances for patrons of the community; and the Tantric specialist performing rituals that invert more worldly ethical practices to achieve a spendier enlightenment. Drawing on Dumont (1980), Gellner observes that Tantric rituals, performed exclusively by Vajracarya and Sakya priests, subsume the two inferior levels in an integrated system. In the social world, too, the exigencies of everyday life, including the organization of life into hierarchical castes, are subordinated and encompassed by a Tantric Buddhist ideal— and by the castes capable of realizing this ideal. Viewing Newari Buddhism from this perspective, Gellner in part concludes:

Like all forms of traditional Buddhism, Newar Buddhism recognizes spiritual hierarchy. It is true that all Buddhism presupposes spiritual equality of opportunity over the long run. But the long run means many hundreds of lifetimes, so that at any given moment some are always more advanced than others. Consequently, Buddhism is inherently elitist (Gellner 1992:343).

This is a surprising conclusion for an analysis which intends to describe Newari Buddhism from a Newari perspective, correcting "ethnocentric" and "modernist" misconceptions about Tantrism (1992:21). But the perspective is not Newari, it is the interpretation of limited and elite priestly castes. Buddhism, if we are to believe Ramble, is not anything. Newari interpretations of Buddhism uniquely adopted a universalized doctrine into a specific cultural context, contexts which even within historically isolated Nepal were constantly changing. An elite perspective of Newari "orthodoxy" is the least sympathetic vantage point from which to view these changes, an inadequacy where Gellner discusses an emergent "modernist" *theravada* movement among the valley's Buddhist Newars.

This contemporary reform movement, emphasising a return to celibate monasticism in some ways similar to the Sherpa reform movement described by Ortner (1989), challenges Newari caste hierarchies by translating Buddhist texts, formerly the domain of hereditary priests alone, into the Newari and Nepali language, and by opening religious practice to all comers (Bechert and Hartmann 1988:15). There is, in short, little that is "inherently elitist" about it. Contemporary Newars are engaged in reinterpreting their tradition from the raw materials of a now wider knowledge of Buddhist orthodoxies, a reinterpretation that Vajracarya and Sakya traditionalists find threatening, and a process that Gellner, because of his positioning, underestimates.

But Gellner's stated aim is less an analysis of contemporary Newari processes than with its traditional hierarchies, and with ambient historical questions such as the disappearance or encompassing of Buddhism by Hinduism in India, inspired by Sylvain Levi's famous aphorism "Nepal is India in the making" (1992:2). Gellner's is a retrospective piece of writing, seeing clearly what has survived from what has been, but some what myopic on emerging realities.

The city of Bhaktapur, only a few kilometres east of both Kathmandu and Patan, was another important centre of the urban Newari culture before Nepal's unification. Bhaktapur, unlike Patan and, particularly, Kathmandu, which early on in the Gorkha years became a metropolitan city, has until

quite recently retained its unique Newari social order. It was this order, based on a Hindu structure of hierarchy enacted through the spatial and symbolic organization of city life, that inspired Robert Levy's *Mesocosm*. Like David Gellner, Levy's preoccupation is with the Bhaktapur of the past, when these modes of hierarchical organization help more authority than they do today. And like Gellner, *Mesocosm* sees this order through the perspective of its highest levels; Levy's "collaborator" in this book is a Rajopadhyaya Brahmin priest. However, Levy is careful not to allow this perspective to stand for the entirety of Bhaktapur's cultural experience. He does, however, make a claim to the primacy of that perspective in the design and execution of Bhaktapur's performed and spatialized hierarchy:

This coherent symbolic order is a peculiar attempt to order a community. It is not in itself adequate to represent the "life of the community". That life has many aspects, levels and kinds of order and disorder. To try to make one aspect the "real" is to engage in ideological polemics or, worse, tendentious and covert use of the exotic. However to neglect order where it does exist is another and peculiarly postmodern ideological move in itself (Levy 1992:10).

Bhaktapur's civic space is punctuated by thousands of ritual sites and its predominantly Hindu Newari population organized into caste-like endogamous *thars* charged with ritual roles in the performance of the city's "ballet of marked symbolism" (Levy, 1992:32). *Thar*, occupational groupings, were defined through principles of purity and pollution, as in many South Asian societies. But, breaking with Dumont's principle that caste is maintained by a fear of loss of status, Levy shows that something more akin to Dumont's "tribal purity" motivates the experience of caste boundaries. Pollution acts on the body, to which it is an exterior an exterior substance experienced as disgusting (Levy 1992:382). The picture of caste identity in western discourses as an essential difference between peoples akin to racism (that is, ordered by birth into preexisting castes) in the case of Bhaktapur ignores how this status is maintained by a performed "civic ballet" which organizes difference in an emotionally convincing way (Levy 1992:397). Without this performance, Levy writes, Bhaktapur's social structure would collapse. Bhaktapur is, paradoxically, a dynamic social process yielding the illusion of static order.

Yet *Mesocosm* remains silent on the resistances within that unchanging order, and it fails to describe the process by which changes are incorporated into it. In another study of a south Asian "mesocosm", James Duncan (1990)

has shown how competing ideas about how to construct the symbolic order of the city of Kandy, in what is now Sri Lanka, provided opportunities for resistance to the dominant order, which eventually led to the fall of the city to the British. The history of Bhaktapur tells of no peasant uprisings such as experienced in Kandy during the early nineteenth century, but the neatness of Levy's account leads one to wonder how individual acts of resistance (or, for that matter, innovation) contributed to the character of its predominant order. The retrospective views of Levy and Gellner, both taking the "traditional" as their point of reference, contribute to a knowledge of Nepal as it was, that is, when the difference between cultural practices of urban Newari society and modern Nepalese society was at its greatest. In the contemporary context Newari tradition appears as something that is disappearing, to the extent that Levy and his Rajopadhyaya collaborator feel compelled to salvage what is left (Levy 1990:7). A trend in recent ethnographic writing on Nepal has, however, attempted to reconcile the "traditional" with contemporary realities: Ortner's discussion of Sherpa historical processes connects the formation of cultural institution to political-economic changes which challenged them; Holmberg shows that persistent pressures on Tamang people helped to shape their unique but introverted religious identity; Mumford focuses on the experienced pace of change in the central Himalayan region as this affects the dialogue between competing cultural interpretations. The subjects of the latter three authors tend less to be "artifacts of their own origins", but rather continually evolving and changing entities that somehow, and for different reasons, communicates a sense of communal identity to their members. These books have shown how the diverse peoples of Nepal have interpreted religious orthodoxies in political and cultural circumstances, using identity to maintain a degree of autonomy as against hegemonic elites, or "monological" orthodoxies.

This continues to be the case, to a degree, in contemporary Nepal. The most recent Nepalese national census, conducted in 1991, indicated small but significant increases in the number of people who claimed a religious affiliation other than Hindu and languages other than Nepali as mother tongue (Shah 1993; Fisher 1993). Although these increases may be accounted for by anomalies in census data collection, it has been suggested that more and more people in the country are choosing to define themselves as being outside the culturally dominant centre.⁴ The cultural differences celebrated by western anthropology, mainly through the lens of religious ritual and identity, have become politically charged in a contemporary atmosphere where the peoples of Nepal are redefining their relationships.

Peoples and Polity

“Hamro raja, Hamro desh
Hamro bhasa, Hamro besh”

(Our king, our country,
Our language, our custom)

Balakrishna Sama
(Country Paper, 1993:7)

The picture of a diverse aggregation of societies interrelated through powerful historical relationships is not one which Nepal as a nation-state has been anxious to show to the world, or to itself. Unlike other Asian countries, such as Indonesia, that explicitly articulated an ideology of “unity through diversity”, Nepal's diverse ethnic groups have since the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 been subordinated through a hierarchy which the Rana regime, until 1951, interpreted for its own material benefit. The *Muluki Ain* which the founder of the Rana dynasty promulgated was repealed by King Mahendra in 1962 when he halted an early experiment with multi-party democracy and founded his own 28 year dynasty of *panchayat* (village based) “democracy” (Country Paper 1993:7). The hierarchy on which it was based remained a central feature of Nepalese ideology and continues to underlie not only official images of Nepal, but oppositional ones that compete with it. In the following section I will examine this national and unifying image as portrayed through unique set of institutions and the points where people are able to resist or modify it.

Šaubhagya Shah, a Nepalese sociologist, identifies three key symbols of an “historically weak” Nepalese nationalism: the national “Hindu” religion, the Nepali language, and the monarchy which represents the predominance of the highest Pahari castes (1993:7). The prevalence of Hinduism, specifically the form of Hinduism practised by “hill” Bahuns and Cherais, as the raw material for a national calendar of ritual observances and the basis of the *Muluki Ain*, has remained a constitutional mainstay in Nepal even after the *Muluki Ain* itself was rescinded in 1963. The 1990 constitution, while breaking with some aspects of traditional Nepalese nationalism, has retained the status of Nepal as an “officially Hindu kingdom” (Sharma 1992:7; Raeper and Hoftun 1993:176). The historical picture of “sanskritization” in Nepal is not one of monolithic integration of peoples, however, and the term itself may obscure the variations in religious and ethnic identity that the centre tolerated (Holmberg 1989:15).

For various reasons some *jati* communities found themselves in positions of prestige and influence with the national regime. Positions of relative prestige and influence were often concretized in ownership and control over

land. Beginning in the eighteenth century Kathmandu valley monarchs granted lands to Buddhist peoples in the northern Helambu region in return for the performance of rituals which were believed to have halted the advance of an epidemic into the valley. Thus began a relationship of relative privilege that the Yolmo peoples enjoyed with central authorities which continued into the administrations of Prithivi Narayan Shah and the Ranas (Clarke 1980: 15). At about the same time that Nepalese kings granted lands to Yolmo priests in return for the performance of rituals of merit, some Tamang religious lands were appropriated by the same regime and given to prominent Bahun and Chervis, ostensibly in retaliation for Tamang support for Tibet during border wars of the time (Clarke 1990: 168; Tamang 1992: 26; see also Holmberg 1989:49). The importance of Yolmo priests as landowners was seen to legitimate their placement in a karmic hierarchy as material wealth was interpreted in Yolmo as a sign of spiritual wealth (Clarke 1990). But it legitimated as well the place of the Yolmo or "Lama people" in the national hierarchy as above the Tamang. The boundary between "Lama" and "Tamang" was permeable, and many Tamangs aspired to the "Lama" name and increased their wealth and status (Holmberg 1989:20). To speak of Yolmo and Tamang as different cultures conceals not only their points of convergence, but the nationally sanctioned asymmetry that such differentiation implied.

The principle policy apparatus by which Nepalese central governments maximized tributary output through the Rana years was the land tenancy system which was closely integrated with the national hierarchy of the *Muluki Ain*. Under this policy, lands were granted as a reward for those having done service to the state, those who for various reasons were unable to engage in subsistence labour (powerful Bahuns were granted lands this way, which were then worked by corvee labour), and bureaucratic appointees, who were given farmland in lieu of salaries. Others cultivated land in return for taxes or agricultural tributes, or both, and all lands were alienable, the state could reclaim them at any time (Regmi 1976:17).

There were two possible exceptions to the latter condition, institutional *guthi* lands, usually granted to support temples or monasteries (but note that Tamang *guthi* lands were probably expropriated in the early nineteenth century); and *kipat*, lands held in communal ownership by *jati* outside of the dominant order, a right that was still recognized by the Rana regime (Regmi 1976). *Kipat* has many variations of form, but it is fair to assume that, for many *jati*, land was closely tied to community identity. The eastern Rai peoples identified their communal lands through an oral tradition (Gaenzdale 1993), coming close to articulating an idea of a communal "homeland" which is perhaps analogous to the identification with ancestral lands of North American indigenous peoples. The Nepalese economic historian Mahesh C.

Regmi refers to *kipat* as “a relic of customary land control which communities of mongoloid or autochthonous tribal origin established in areas occupied by them before the immigration of racial groups of Indo-Aryan origin (1976:87).”

These “relics” of the former domains of communities, although now officially abolished, had until very recently considerable influence on national decision making. The *kipat* rights of the Limbu, a group neighbouring the Rai in eastern Nepal, was reconfirmed by King Mahendra in 1961 following his suspension of democracy – “an aberration”, Regmi writes, “dictated by the exigencies of the political situation (19976:103)...” Both the Rai and the Limbu, eastern groups brought under Nepalese control more recently than groups in the centre or west of the country, have a continued tradition of resistance to central authority (Bista, 1991:51; Shah 1993:7). King Mahendra’s reconfirmation of Limbu *kipat* was likely a temporary placation of local powers in the east, necessary in the short term while his shaky royal coup extended its authority.

The articulation of land and oral narrative highlights the importance of language to communal identities. The importance of Nepali as a national language unifying the region has often conflicted with local usages. Modern Nepali may have been a lingua franca between Nepal’s linguistically diverse peoples long before the Gorkha conquests, laying the groundwork for eventual political unification of the country (Shah 1993:8). Jang Bahadur Rana made Gorkhali the official language at the outset of the century long Rana regime, and it became “Nepali” only during the 1920s, when the country came to be known by the British reference to it, “Nepal”. Prior to this “Nepal” referred only to the Kathmandu valley region and the indigenous Newar referred to their language as *Nepal Bhasa*, the language of “Nepal” (Gellner 1986:124). The imposition of Gorkhali and later Nepali as national language is currently seen by ethnic activists as an attempt to silence the language of others and subdue the basis of cultural differences. *Jati* activities are currently campaigning to have early primary education in mother tongue rather than Nepali, a move calculated to protect Nepal’s Tibeto-Burman languages from extinction (Country Report 1993:20).

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the same period when Sherpa monasticism began to provide a foci of community identity for Sherpas of all classes, a small but persistent movement among Newars to assert and protect their own language began, also associated with a renewal of Buddhist religiosity (Gellner, 1986:1990). Many Newars were not Buddhist, however. The varieties of local religious affiliation, dialects, and territorial allegiances ensured for a long time that speak of “Newar” as an entity of its own would obscure the great variations between valley peoples. But the

inexorable use of Nepali as a mother tongue among Newars inspired a fear that Newari uniqueness would be lost. For modern Newar activists, the language itself was one of the most important basis of communal identity, for to be "Newar" in the past required only that an immigrant to the valley, whether from the hills or plains, spoke the language of the valley (Gellner 1986:127). While the social hierarchies that both Gellner (1992) and Levy (1992) describe indicate that access to Newari identity was not quite as simple as that, peoples from outside of Nepal did find their way into the social structure of the fertile valley. Prithivi Narayan Shah and the Pahari regimes which followed him into the valley broke with that tradition by imposing their own language and hierarchy. The politicization of Newari identity begins with language, and although still a relatively small movement, it too has the potential for providing a communal foci for Newars in an increasingly volatile contemporary context.

The roots of this volatility are without much doubt the economic poverty and underdevelopment of Nepal with the attendant pressure on agricultural lands and unemployment in the cities. The roots of Nepal's economic "crisis" are often associated with the Rana regime's tenure and its tributary exploitation of the country, David Seddon argues that Nepal's crisis of overpopulation began in the early nineteenth century, when population growth through immigration from other south Asian areas provided the basis on for the growing tributary regime (1987:19). This population base was controlled by a "fundamentally inegalitarian socio-religious ideology and social practice" which was, according to Seddon, predominantly coercive, employing ideological, material and military institutions in maintaining order (Seddon 1987:xi). Central to this unequal social structure was the person of the king, as rulers of Nepal and, from 1846 to 1951, as powerless figureheads dominated by the Rana regime.

State coercion was an important factor in Nepalese (then Gorkhalese) integration, but was it the only one? Seddon, in assuming state coercion as primary, ignores instances where state influence was mediated by local practices. Nepalese hill peoples, who displayed a "low level of political consciousness" (1987:220), brought to a halt an early attempt to double crop middle hill fields by maintaining traditional year-round grazing practices, which the Rana regime could not control. Seddon dismisses this as an isolated case of peasant conservatism, but a closer reading suggests that this may be an example of "everyday resistance" by which rural peoples negotiate and maximize their positions relative to a tributary regime (cf. Scott 1984). Double cropping would have had the effect of doubling rural peoples' tributary ties to Kathmandu and ending the traditional trade patterns of agropastoralism, further isolating hill communities from each other.

The assumption taken by some is that there has been a historical confrontation between a class structured society, mystified and obscured by supernaturally sanctioned *varna* categories, and essentially egalitarian hill peoples (Seddon 1987; Mikesell and Shrestha 1991). The anthropologist Lionel Caplan (1975) modifies this model in his study of the western bazaar town of Belaspur, where he pictures this pre-1951 administrative centre and the outlying rural villages as coexisting almost symbiotically, with little competition over material resources. In contrast to the Newari cities of the Kathmandu valley, which were originally communities of peoples overwhelmingly engaged in agriculture (Levy 1992; Gellner 1992), the bazaar towns of the hill regions, such as Belaspur, were established by centralizing authorities as administrative centres where state tributes were collected. The increasing importance of currency in the local economy after 1951 and the widening access to administrative positions in Belaspur after the Rana style client-sponsor system collapsed, brought the "organic" relationship between town and rural villages to an end (Caplan 1975:5). Castes and ethnicities that had been previously discrete came into competition over access to lucrative government jobs, as rural influence on the polity of the town, and nation, increased (1975:229).

It would be wrong, though to suggest that this was a competition between social equals. Caplan notes that the number of intercaste marriages after 1951 increased dramatically, reflecting the increasing use of marriage as a social institution to cement the kinship ties which had come to replace Rana sponsorship as a means to government employment. The majority of these marriages was between town residents, secondarily between town residents and people from the Kathmandu valley or other regional centres, and only lastly between town residents and people from its own rural hinterland (which were comparatively few because of an enmity between town elites and the rural communities vying for political influence) (Caplan 1975:147). The prevalence of intercaste marriages suggests class affinities among some of the castes, yet caste intermarriages did not lead to a breakdown of caste distinctions as experienced by newlyweds, who continued to maintain the ritual boundaries of their own caste (Caplan 1975:146). Religious identity in Belaspur seem to have withstood changes to the local class structure.

The influence of unequal rural peoples on the policies that so condition their lives until quite recently has been limited to what David Seddon calls the "informal relations" between peoples that provide them with access to means of power (1987:219). These informal relations, enacted through bonds of kinship, caste, and ethnicity, and concretized in land tenure and control, were a means by which relations of power were modified by peoples themselves. The state structures reaching out from Kathmandu and regional

centres such as Belaspur conditioned these “informal relation” by channelling them through hierarchies and institutions that attenuated the influence of the vast majority of Nepalese. The state, however, could not completely silence all opposition, nor contain the aspirations of individuals or communities to press their own claims and maintain their own interests. Many simply used the material provided by the national culture to better their positions; others passively resisted by accommodating the central regime and, at the same time, reducing its disruptive presence through persistent cultural practices. To the three foundations of the national culture, language, religion, and royal hierarchy, I want to add a fourth *bikas* (development), a contemporary aspect of Nepalese national culture that shapes and is shaped by both formal and informal institutions.

Development and Dissonance

Since 1951 the development of Nepal has been a national priority spatialized in the subdivision of the country into fourteen “development zones” which draw boundaries around regions according to a logic that may not take into account local regional affiliations. Development, or *bikas*, has brought international monies, expertise and planning into those regions, providing a glimpse for hill peoples of ways of life presented to them as superior in every way. A disjunction between the perceived potential of developments, seen as something that happens somewhere else, and the basic quality of life experienced in the countryside influences the identity of rural peoples and, as Stacey Pigg observes (1992), acts on them regardless of their religious, ethnic or caste difference. *Bikas* has a levelling effect, rendering Nepal’s rich diversity into two overarching categories; the *bikasi*, or “developed”, or the *abikasi*, the “undeveloped” (Pigg 1992).

Pigg demonstrates how these categories are communicated through social representations, such as knowledge conveyed through school textbooks or information generated by and for development agencies, that construct an idea of a generic “village” which stands in contrast to Nepal’s *bikasi* urban areas in their relative backwardness. Development agencies are slow to take into account Nepal’s social diversity, a function in part of the bureaucratic tendencies I discuss below. Stacey Pigg’s point is that the experience of dissonance, of seeing one’s life in a dichotomous representation as either *bikasi* or not, incorporates the ideal of development into the identities of people themselves (1992:502). The resulting effect of this dissonance on villagers is to generate a desire for the increased social status that goes with getting “a piece of the development pie” (1992:511). That “piece” does not so much mean the tangible products of development (schools, health clinics,

running water) as it means becoming employed as an agent of modernization—becoming then, something more than one already is.

The tangible products of development are often seen as something that comes from somewhere else, addressing the needs not of the village but of distant elites who execute them, a continuance of a pattern established at the time of Rana infrastructural projects (Bista 1991:147). According to Linda Stone (1989), *bikas* is understood by villagers as these tangible edifices, rather than any kind of ethos of self sufficiency (to the chagrin of well meaning western development experts). They experience this dissonance through seeing these projects benefiting village elites who also belong to the highest castes, that is, those with the influence to make these projects happen (Stone 1989:210). Villagers experience *bikas* then either as something they want to get a piece of, or as something doesn't have much to do with their lives. The desire for the former often leads to resigned acceptance of the latter. Development in Nepal is hardly thought of as successful. It is often assumed that the failure of projects is due to chronic mismanagement and bureaucratic corruption that accompanies the informal relations of government decision making (Seddon 1987:Bista 1991). Dor Bahadur Bista describes the cultural processes through which influence is channelled in a recent book that sparked much controversy within Nepal. The argument of *Fatalism and Development* is that the cultural practices and values of Nepal's dominant hill Bahuns, and thus the national culture that they preside over, impedes Nepal's development. According to this view, alliances are formed and decisions are made through a structure of patronage and dependency that is embedded in bureaucratic systems based on western models. Bista describes the practice of *chakari*, meaning literally "to wait upon", which originated during the last century when Rana ministers would assemble their immediate underlings together to pay daily tribute (by means of favours, provision of information etc.), and thus prevent them from organizing competing relations of patronage that would challenge Rana power (1991:80). This practice has carried over to the contemporary Nepalese bureaucracy, those who make decisions pertaining to development projects, which has been, and is to this day, dominated by higher caste Nepalese (see also Gurung 1993). *Chakari*, or more recent forms of patronage relations based more on the influences of kinship than in patron-client relations established by powerful bureaucrats (Caplan 1975:52), comprises a relatively closed system of decision making that comprises the "source and force" (Justice 1986) with which outsiders can influence central decisions.

Because of the isolation of upper castes, separated by a deeply experienced ritual hierarchy from other Nepalese, the Bahun "work ethic" that Bista identifies tends to be "non-reciprocating" and self-preferential, in contrast

with the "reciprocating" practices of Nepal's *jati* peoples, to whom Bista would rather see development efforts directed (1991:181). Work itself is problematic to a Bahun orthodoxy, as it is the reserve of lower caste peoples. Thus educated Bahuns find themselves setting policies on such things as agriculture or health where they have no practical experience (1991:80). The attack on the Bahun ethos that this argument represents has, not surprisingly, inspired a number of criticisms by Nepalese academics and intellectuals who point out that it generalizes and infers too much from the specifics it discusses.⁵ Dilli Dahal points out that Bista is less than clear on what he means by "development", and that the rational, bureaucratic ideal of economic development that Bista borrows from Weber has social consequences in a Nepalese context that he ignores (1990:87). He charges, too that *chakari* as an informal channel of influence probably characterizes every bureaucracy worldwide.

While it is true that a degree of informal influence exists in the most rationalized bureaucratic structure, Bista is accurate when he states that *chakari* is the most influential means by which decisions are made in Nepal. The importance of kinship relations, caste and dependent relations with powerful patrons underlies Nepalese bureaucracy to a degree that Dahal's charge obscures (1990:91). Judith Justice, in her ethnography of Nepalese and development agency bureaucratic culture, notes the prevalence of kin and patron-client relationships in the field of health policy setting. Western development experts, familiar with the more rationalized bureaucratic systems of most donor countries, are often frustrated in their attempts to organize effective developments in Nepal because of what they perceive as the bureaucratic inertia of the Nepalese civil service. But both western development agencies and the Nepalese civil service, already engaged in a powerful tug of war over policies, collide with and often suppress local understandings of health, and how health services can be organized (Justice 1986:152).

Village health posts across the country struggled under the centralized implementation of health goals set by Nepalese elites and western health experts. Health workers, trained in Kathmandu and sent out to hill regions, were often reluctant to remain in the country as this cut them off from opportunities available only in the valley. Policy priorities, more often set according to the whim of western agencies and based on contemporary concerns in home countries or on problematic perceptions of the social and cultural roots of Nepal's underdevelopment, such as an obsession in the 1960s with family planning, abandoned because of its apparent failure as a policy (Justice 1987:62). Neither planning level was able to take into account local perceptions, such as a distrust of vasectomies by men who

thought that it would weaken them (Justice 1986:97). The wider question that frames Justice's study is why both levels resist the kinds of qualitative knowledge in policy setting that cultural anthropology can provide.

The answer to this question was not, for Justice, surprising. As the geography of the country makes travel difficult (particularly to bureaucratic elites, both Nepalese and western), policy setters have come to rely on and trust quantitative data almost exclusively (Justice 1986:33). Getting to know the country at ground level seems impractical. As well, many foreign experts are most comfortable with an understanding of a generic "third world" that, for them show much of the same characteristics. Nepalese elites have presented them with a neat generic "village" in official discourses that satisfies this generalized knowledge of the underdeveloped (Pigg 1992). Policy planners, then, are impatient with ethnographic studies that centre on particular ethnic groups, "cultures" or "tribes". It is too easy, however, for ethnographers to find fault solely in the prejudices of bureaucrats and "experts". Citing a plethora of ethnographic literature on discrete Himalayan cultures, some of which I've discussed above, Justice charges that it is a more historical and integrative ethnographic strategy that would be of use to planners. "Cultures" do not evolve in isolation in Nepal; not enough ethnography takes as its subject the linkages between peoples and with the national regimes in the past and, more important, in the present (Justice 1986:136).

Justice has been criticized elsewhere for failing to ask an even more radically reflexive question – what our knowledge of the "other" means when the "other" is an amalgam of diverse "other", as is arguably the case in Nepal (Pigg 1992:504). The culture that Justice examines, Nepal's health bureaucracy, is in a way similar to Bista's "non-reciprocating" Bahun, or Lionel Caplan's insular town elites. All are in one way or another contrasted to the peoples they govern. This dichotomous representation obscures the degrees of participation both lower caste Paharis and *jati* have had in the formation of Nepalese political structures, whether in the permeability of such dichotomous boundaries by peoples, popular resistances against measures from the centre, or organized efforts to press collective demands. This plays into the representation of Nepal's higher castes that Prayag Raj Sharma and others within the country object to. Pigg's question is a good one, particularly as ethnographic knowledge in aid of development may well be employed to counter these resistances and enforce a modernistic ideology over and against local peoples (cf. Escobar 1991). But it needs to be balanced with another question, one that Pigg raises indirectly: what does sociocultural knowledge mean in view of an integrative structure that seeks to unite social diversity?

Conclusions

There are two complementary views of Nepalese polity, both ideal types which by themselves provide only a partial look at Nepalese political processes. The first one is that of a rigid hierarchy laid down by Prithivi Narayan Shah and codified in the *Muluki Ain*. The subsequent subordination and repression of peoples by higher castes has been characterized as the exploitation of "indigenous" peoples by exploitative Bahuns and Chetris and an alien *varna* ideology imported from the Indian plain (Nepal Country Report 1993; Bista 1991:55). The word "indigenous" suggests parallels with other cases worldwide, such as the political emergence of North America's indigenous peoples and worldwide campaigns of advocacy led by, among others, anthropologists. Recent writing on Nepal indicates that the "sanskritization" of Nepal's *jati* and hill peoples has proceeded at various rates, and that many communities retained their ethnic identity despite, or even because of, their identification in a national order (Ortner 1989; Holmberg 1980, 1989). As among North American first nations, there has recently been an awakening of these Tibeto-Burman identities in Nepal. Unlike the North American case, however, there was never a purely exclusionary policy towards Nepal's Tibto-Burm peoples. Their inclusion in the *Muluki Ain* as lower status *jats* or castes, while subordinating them did not render them as untouchables, completely stripped them of rights and opportunities to maximize their place through the ritual hierachy (Shah 1993, pers. comm).

This leads to the second view, which recognizes not only the variations in religious, linguistic and ethnic identities in the country, but also the agency people had in adapting to far flung political influences. In this view the social variations within Nepalese national society are permeable and emergent. Not only was a degree of tolerance towards religious variation tolerated (Holmberg 1989:15) but peoples actively maintained control over land and resources by influencing the religious orthodoxies of the centre (Clarke 1990). Nevertheless, as the unequal distribution of the benefits of development has shown (Bista 1991, Pigg 1992), ethnic identity is also a potential handicap for peoples of lower cast or *jat* status. To assume a simple picture of the historic relations between Nepalese rulers and ruled as either wholly "organic" (Caplan 1975:5) or coercive (Seddon 1987) obscures the degree to which the other process was active.

In contemporary Nepal ethnic identity is but one of several categories on which political action can be based, others potentially being gender or class. This paper has elected not to discuss in detail the rise of class-based politics seen through the current popularity of Nepal's many leftist parties. The political party system, however, still tends to exclude lower caste or *jat*

people from participation in national decision making, as most party candidates, both Congress and Communist, tend to be drawn from the ranks of hill Bahuns and Chetris (Gurung 1992:20)⁶. Ethnically based actions such as a yearly boycott of the nationally sanctioned *Dasain* festival by urban Rai and Limbu strike more at the heart of Nepal's traditional hierarchy (Shah 1993:7). Ironically, though, the broader multi-ethnic Nepal *Janajati Mahasangh*, a coordinating body to which Rai and Limbu organization belong, excludes participation by untouchables, Muslims and Christian; for them, the structure defined by the *Muluki Ain* remains implicitly accepted as the basis of Nepalese nationalism (Fisher 1993:12).

Raw materials for contemporary reinterpretation of ethnic identities are found in retrospective renderings of "cultural" pasts. As a new relationship between Nepal's people is renegotiated, Nepal's imperfectly understood history may prove ambiguous enough to allow for alternate readings of cultural origins and the rights of one community over another. Cultures and traditions, however, are not the same as ethnicities; the latter refers more to a communal allegiance through identity, based on some sense of tradition, but that somehow reconnects that sense of tradition into something more than it was. Communalism may strike the western reader as an admirable thing, but in South Asia the word carries darker associations. The murderous civil war between "Buddhist" Sinhalese and "Hindu" Tamils in Sri Lanka is perhaps only the most visible example of ethnic conflict in a subcontinent wrought by similar upheavals. I have suggested that the two views above are "complementary", not only because they are often both true at the same time, but because I think that ethnography of Nepal ought to constantly keep one in sight of the other. Nepal's diversity need not be antagonistic; to over determine one view over the other is not only a partial polemic, it is fraught with peril.

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Notes

1. I have chosen the term *jati* here to collectively stand for a number of ethnic minorities in Nepal discussed in this paper which were not, prior to contact by *Paharis*, integrated into a national schema of *varna* and *jat*. These include Gurung, Magar, Sherpa, Tamang, "Bhote", Rai and Limbus peoples. There is an unfortunate tendency in some of the older academic and some contemporary Nepalese literature to use racial terms in describing this group such as "mongoloid" or "Tibeto Burman". I am avoiding these by using the Nepali term *jati* but ultimately am troubled that a paper has to make such a dichotomous distinction at all.
2. Ganesh Man Singh's remarks came at a time when the Congress Party was coming increasingly under attack from the opposition over a number of issues and a degree of dissension within the party. The factors that contributed to the political unrest of July, 1993, are many, and I cannot go into them all here. But the series of national strikes, transportation boycotts, street riots and police retaliations were instigated by the communist opposition to pressure the resignation of the prime minister, Grijia Koirala, whom Ganesh Man Singh accused of *bahunbad*.
3. The translation and explanation of this phrase, well known in Nepal, was made by Radhe Shyam Duwadi, a language instructor in Kathmandu. It is important to point out that this proverb is in Hindi, not Nepali, and although both are closely related sanskrit-based languages, differences do exist. C.A. Bayley argues that cloth (*bhes*) in India not only symbolized social status, it was "an essential component" of acquiring social status itself (1986:286). It is doubtful, though, that Gurung recruits new to Nepali, let alone Hindi, would share this linguistic nuance.
4. A preliminary analysis of the 1991 census of Nepal (HMG, 1993) indicates that the number of peoples reporting religion other than Hindu has increased slightly, predominantly among those who identified themselves as Buddhists (5.32% in 1981 to 7.81% in 1991) and Muslims (2.66% in 1981 to 3.04% in 1991). The number of people reporting Nepali as a mother tongue, that is who were not taught a Tibeto-Buman dialect or a dialect of the Terai Maithili, Bojpuri) at birth, decreased from 58.36% to 53.22% over the same period. While the numbers themselves may seem insignificant, they represent a reversal of a forty-year trend towards what the census euphemistically calls 'an attrition to Hinduism' and the national language. It should be noted that this data comes from a preliminary analysis, based on a 10% sample.
The Nepalese census has patchy reputation for accuracy. Many Nepalese academics expressed doubts as to whether data was properly collected or tabulated. Projections of the total population based on estimates from the

1981 census overshoot the actual figure, leading some to suspect either an overcount in 1981 or an undercount in 1991. The data for the 1991 census may have been gathered before the 1990 change in government and reflect some of the institutional bias of the former regime (Raj Sharma, 1993 pers. comm). As of August, 1993, a full census reporting for 1991 had still not been given.

5. Much of Dor Bista's argument about the nature or dependency in Bahun men is based on child rearing and acculturation practices of high caste groups. Dahal (1990:90) questions the logic behind Dor Bista's statement that "At an early age the male child is taken away from his mother and is encouraged to redirect his attachment to the father" (1991:73). Both Dahal and my partner, Tina Moffat, point out that this social practice is highly dependent on birth spacing. This is also short in rural Nepal, where Dor Bista claims children are gradually weaned from the mother who then form close bonds with their children.
6. Harka Gurung (1992) gives the total percentage of Bahun and Chetri candidates for the ruling Congress party at 79.9% and for the largest Communist party, the United Marxist Leninist, 84.2%. He gives the example of predominantly Tamang electoral regions, where only two candidates of Tamang origin gained any of the 11 seats available. As this was the first election under a multi-party system, however, it would be premature to suggest that this was a trend.

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